

Newburgher Sunday Telegraph
March 4

Quassaick Cr. - mill sites
George Boyd, Jr.
811 Eastern Ave
Phila, Pa. 19115
(215) 856-4579

"AVOCA, THE VALE."

Reminiscences of the Quassaick and Its Industries.

"When I was a boy," is an expression that is not confined to old men. The young man of twenty repeats it among his companions, and the man of forty gathers its associations about him very much as the old man recounts the changes which he has seen "In the long and winding way."

Standing the other day on "Overlook Place," on the brow of the valley of the Quassaick, the landmarks of years ago were recalled—the old toll-gate and its keeper, Rainey; the Trimble mill, the Schultz mill, the cannon foundry, and "The Vale," which were here "when I was a boy." Trimble first lived on the east side of the river road on the point of land immediately north of the Quassaick. The banks of the stream were cribbed to a point west of the Hudson where his mill stood; the creek was a "draw," rising from the centre, and sloops passed up to the mill and their loaded with flour. Before the turnpike was opened and the bridge built, the old road ran from about First street to South William, there diverged to the shore line, passed through "Renwick's city," wound around the "sand bank," passed up the north side of the creek to the bridge on the "King's highway," just opposite the site of the Kilmer works, and climbed the hill to the southwest. The latter section remains, the other has disappeared. "The Vale," as the valley was then called poetically, —more strictly, "Avoca, the Vale," from Tom Moore's elegant song—had its principal point of attraction just west of the Trimble mill. At the base of the upland, a small canal conveyed water from the creek to the mill. Along its side a pathway led through the trees, and here and there open plots of greensward, embowered with trees, supplied picnic grounds in native beauty, where young men and young women held sociables in the moonlight, and danced and sang the hours away. There was history there, too, and old fashioned tales were told of the house in which the attempt was said to have been made by one Col. Ettrick to betray Washington into the hands of the British. It is not necessary to say there

never was a Col. Ettrick. There was a house, however; it stood about where the Pennsylvania Coal Company's office now stands, and was embowered in vines and trees. It was added to and is said to have formed the wing of the residence later of Mr. Hale. Everybody believed the story of the attempt at betrayal and nearly everybody related it, and visitors were taken to the scene, long years before Headquarters was talked about.

Running over some of these points the other day with Charles Estabrook of the City Library, he had an interesting budget to relate. "When I was a boy," he said, of course, "I lived with my father in the old Trimble house on the point. My father worked for Mr. Hale in the old cannon foundry in the '30s. Prof J. W. Doughty, the veteran teacher so many years at the head of our Academy, worked there also, and ultimately became a self-educated instructor—that is, he earned his instruction by delving in iron and brass. Mr. Hale made a specialty of force pumps, and ran a profitable trade. The running of sloops above the bridge I have seen; but the channel or mouth of the creek began to fill up, 'when I was a boy,' and the bar could only be passed at high water. The same cause worked damage to the old house. The ice would dam up and the water would sweep the point with alarming force. The cannon factory was before my day, but the old roadway up 'The Vale' is well remembered."

As a manufacturing centre the valley of the Quassaick was of early note. Its first European resident was the "widow Pletel," who, having lost her husband on the way from the Palatinate of the Rhine, built a cabin here in the spring of 1709; later she was married to George Lockstead and received a free deed for 250 acres of land, or 50 acres for each member of her family, which included, in 1719, herself, husband and three children. Just south of the creek, where the heirs of big Phil. Verplank now own, lived William Chambers, who may have preceded "the widow" in the vicinity, but whose possessions were bounded, in Sept., 1709, on the north "by the widow Pletel and Quassaick creek." Very early, but how early is not known, a saw mill was erected, near the site of the present Walsh mills, and an early grist mill is a tradition. The more substantial record of manufacturing operations begins with the undertaking of Robert Boyd, jr., who erected on the south side of the creek, a forge for the manufacture of guns, bayonets, etc., in 1775. He was a blacksmith by trade, and so was his father, Robert, an early Scotch immigrant (in New Windsor. He obtained a license

in the State, by the terms of which was to receive "three pounds fifteen shillings, New York money for each good musket with steel ramrod, and bayonet with scabbard." In February, 1776, he was able to write that he had "the best gunsmiths' shop in the colonies," but nevertheless its capacity was limited from the difficulty in obtaining workmen. The government offered a large premium for gunsmiths to assist him, and empowered its agents in Europe to secure workmen. A note received in town lately revealed the fact that he has descendants living in Philadelphia, where is also preserved a portrait of "the Colonel," as he was called for some reason. Samuel Boyd, son of Robert jr., sold the privilege to George Reid, the latter to John Barker who made hats. Barker sold to Benj. Carpenter, at which time John H. Waters operated it in the manufacture of woollen goods. George Crawshaw, William H. Beede, and Edward Haigh followed in succession, and the site is still in occupation for milling purposes. Boyd's residence was that known in later years as "the Havemeyer place," it has passed through as many changes as has the old gunsmithery, which, by the way, deserves a monumental mark, not only from its relation as the pioneer of the industries of the valley, but from its relation to the most important period in the

birth of the nation. The price which Boyd was paid for his guns is instructive. Three pounds fifteen shillings was apparently about eight dollars; but eight dollars then would be sixteen in purchasing power now, the pound having been raised from \$2.40 to \$4.80. If one would contrast past and present rates of wages and money values, it would be well for them to remember that \$2.50 a day now was represented by \$1.00 prior to 1750, and \$5.00 a day now about equals \$2.50 a hundred years ago. The purchasing power of money is always the representative of its value.

The Boyd gunsmithery is but one of the things that were "when I was a boy." Its contemporaries in the valley will have to wait a week.

toll gate

Trimble mill

old road

from Tom Moore's song

Ettrick never existed?

- Chas. Estabrook + cannon foundry
- roadway up the Vale (northern side)

Boyd cont.

Phil. descende

to Reid to Barker to Carpenter to Waters to Crawshaw to Beede to Haigh

also Boyd to Havemeyer

(from Crawford House files)

- Pletel 1709
- Boyd's guns, etc. 1775