

A Brief History of Clifford Township

Clifford Township celebrated its bicentennial in the year 2006. When Clifford was declared a township in April of 1806, it was part of Nicolson, Luzerne County, and comprised an area of 108 square miles, over twice its current size. In 1810, it became part of Susquehanna County, when that county was split from Luzerne; then through various divisions and separations to form other townships, Clifford was whittled to its present size of 44 square miles.

When the first European settlers, mainly hunters and trappers, set foot in this area in the eighteenth century, they found no Native American settlements. The Iroquois who lived to the north, and the Lenni Lenape who lived in Wyoming Valley to the south, used this vast unbroken wilderness filled with game as their hunting grounds.

Settlement in this area did not start in earnest until the late 1790s, after the Pennimite Wars settled the claim for northeastern Pennsylvania in favor of Penn's Colony over Connecticut. Three important early highways in and near Clifford Township were instrumental in opening up the wilderness to increased settlement: the Newburgh-Great Bend Turnpike, which ran east and west; the Milford-Owego Turnpike, which ran diagonally across the region northwest and southeast; and the Wilkes-Barre Turnpike, which ran north and south.

Early settlers appeared, circa 1800, building their homes along creeks in three main areas: Clifford Corners, Elkdale and Dundaff. The Village of Clifford (Clifford Corners) grew up along the flats in the valley formed by tributaries of the East Tunkhannock Creek.

The first settler was Adam Miller arriving in the spring of 1799 with his family. At that time the land (now part of the village of Clifford) was covered with a dense forest with few natural clearings. About a year later, Amos Harding bought some of Miller's land and their two families worked well together to improve the new community, establishing the first school (1814) and church (Clifford Baptist Church in 1817).

In 1799, William Moss (Morse) located on the creek a mile below Elkdale. As early as 1806, James Wells had a farm of 100 acres in Elkdale and had put up a small gristmill. The first stores in the township were located in Elkdale, as early as 1814. A clothing mill and distillery in Elkdale also prospered, although some businesses relocated to Dundaff after the Milford-Owego Turnpike was developed in the 1820s. Elkdale maintained some commerce with a general store and different mills (including a woolen factory and saw mill) well into the 1800s. Its first and only church was organized in 1851 (Elkdale Baptist).

The first clearing on the site of Dundaff was made about 1799 by Benjamin Bucklin, who in 1803 brought his family and became the first permanent settlers. Dundaff

soon prospered due to its favorable location at the intersection of the Milford-Owego Turnpike and the Wilkes-Barre Turnpike, the major highways of the day. Commerce serving both travelers and local residents soon flourished. Businesses included taverns, hotels, blacksmith shops, tin shop, a newspaper, post office (1820), general stores, grist mill, physician, distillery, clothing mills, tanneries and the first bank in the county (1825).

A glass factory in Dundaff was probably the most prosperous industry, although it was short-lived (1831-34). Its demise forebodes the decline of the village of Dundaff. When anthracite coal was discovered and mining began to develop in the valley to the southeast, Dundaff's geographical position outside this thriving new industry led to the decline of its influence and the population began to fall. The railroads never made it to Dundaff. Its best and brightest began to migrate to the prospering town of Carbondale in the 1830s and the new town of Scranton in the 1850s.

The Dundaff Academy (1830) offered the area young people a good education. It aimed to teach algebra, geometry, measurements, surveying, civil engineering, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, evidences of Christianity, rhetoric, logic, geology, mineralogy, chemistry and astronomy; also political economy and the art of teaching, if desired. To put this ambitious curriculum in perspective, at the time Dundaff vied with Montrose in population and in commerce. The academy was discontinued when the free schools became popular; the building then became the public schoolhouse.

Meanwhile, the growth of Clifford Corners was slow for most of its first fifty years. While nearby Dundaff prospered, Clifford Corners remained a quiet little farming area. The cluster of homes forming the nucleus of the village of Clifford was referred to as Farmersville, even after the village was officially incorporated in 1847 as Clifford. Other small settlements throughout the township also grew slowly in the first half of the 19th century, including Welsh families farming to the west of Elk Mountain.

The Clifford-Carbondale Turnpike (currently State Route 106, Main Street) was constructed in 1847, the same year businesses are first reported in Clifford Corners: blacksmith shop, tavern and store. In 1851, a post office was established. The first hotel was built by 1852. More businesses, churches, community buildings and fine homes were established as the roadway opened the area up to commerce during the last half of the century. The settlements of Royal and West Clifford, north of Clifford Corners on the Clifford-Carbondale Turnpike, also benefited from the improved roads.

In the spring of 1901, a creamery was opened in Clifford. (The first creamery in the township opened in Elkdale in 1887.) There was a stage line that transported passengers from Carbondale through Clifford to points north. Phone service arrived in Clifford in 1904. Clarence Stephens drove his gas-powered automobile from

Lenoxville to Clifford in June of 1905, no doubt the first car many had ever seen. It would be more than twenty years before Main Street was paved.

In 1929, the businesses included: two grocery stores, garage, hotel, blacksmith shop and wagon repair shop. Electricity came to Clifford in the mid-1920s, although many businesses and homes were not wired until after 1930. Over the years, other small businesses appeared, such as an International Harvester Farm Equipment Store. Clifford had a new airport by 1947 built by Duane Johnson.

New excitement and volunteer spirit centered around the 1947 formation of the Clifford Township Volunteer Fire Company and its fund-raising picnics which began in 1949. The Consolidated Elementary School opened in Clifford in 1950. Prior to this, as many as a dozen one-room school houses met the needs of the elementary students of the township.

A dress factory opened in 1954. It wasn't until Dean F. Johnson built his Automotive Center in Clifford in 1955 and the Big Chief Market grocery store in 1956, that the sleepy little village of Clifford began its transformation into the commerce center of today.

Businesses in the village of Clifford in 2012 include many eating establishments, bars, motel, hotel, hardware store, automotive store, auto sales, auto body repair shops, garage, beer distributor, laundromat, sign store, funeral home, dance studio, karate studio, pharmacy, masonry construction, plumbing, magistrate office, post office, stone supplier, blue stone/quarry business, hair salons, smoke shop, day care, bank, short and long term storage facility, dentist and doctor offices.

Other businesses in the township include farms, stone quarries, ski shops, realtors, mobile home parks, smaller grocery/general stores, golf courses, auto sales and towing, restaurants, veterinarian, bed and breakfast lodging, storage facilities, excavators, small equipment rental, day care, self-employed (carpenters, plumbers, electricians, artists, water well drillers, computer services, truck drivers, etc.), gas stations, garages and automobile sales.

Clifford businesses have benefited over the years from seasonal populations: summer residents from nearby Crystal, Newton, Idlewild and Cottrell Lakes and the winter residents enjoying Elk Mountain Ski Resort, which opened in 1959. There are currently eight active churches within Clifford Township (Catholic, Episcopal, Evangelical Wesleyan, Methodist, Russian Orthodox and two Baptist). All of Clifford Township is part of the Mountain View School District.