

Foreword

My mother must have had a real talent for storytelling. As a youngster growing up, I never gave the idea a thought, but as a grandmother looking back, I find myself so vividly recalling things that happened. I might tell you, "I remember", or "They happened to me," until with a start I realize it was before I was born, or even a generation before I was born. It is from such recollections that I have gathered together this assortment of family folklore. I am the storyteller, but the fabric is woven from the yarns my mother spun.

My mother was a natural born teacher. Coming out of the local three-year high school, she was asked by the school board to take the county teacher examination. Passing it, she began the following year to teach the beginning class in the primary school. Sensitive to the feelings and the needs of the individual child she often spoke of the great joy a teacher feels as she sees the progress a pupil makes in the first few months of beginning school.

Here are the stories I remember. Something is lost in the intervening years. But if I do not record them then you will never have heard them.

May you take some pleasure in this bit of your family past history.

Virginia N. Lane – Wayne, Pa. 1976

The Farm

Some years before Loly came to live with them John and Mary left the Strickler farm on the ridge north of Mount Joy. This farm and more land adjacent to it had been in the Strickler family since 1759 when Henry Strickler the elder and his brother Abraham bought 219 acres from Cairns Sterrett. Loly's grandfather had been the third generation to farm this land. He had built the new brick farmhouse in the early 1860's. It replaced the log house expanded from early days. The original old barn remained standing.

My mother said that Uncle Harry told of lying in the loft as a boy looking at the stars shining through the roof. As a child I questioned this thinking that a roof with cracks must have let water through in a rainstorm. Recently I picked up Eric Sloane's *Reverence for Wood* and read: "there are old barn roofs through which you can see the stars, yet which won't leak in a hard rainstorm. Moss often preserves a roof. It adds to the shingles ability to 'breathe' to swell quickly during a shower closing each crack or hole."

The old grandfather had left the farm only when his grown sons, following the Civil War, had all moved to the West or taken up other careers. He had been considered a progressive farmer in his use of new methods, and in his attitude to community schools and churches. I have wondered whether he was sufficiently progressive in this thinking as an old man to understand the call of opening lands in the West

which beckoned three of his sons, or the desire for new professions which enticed the other two away from the farm to town or city, one to operate a store, the other to become a grain merchant.

Aunt Emmy told a story of Pa when Ma had gone to visit in Philadelphia for several days. Emmy was trying to take care of Pa just as her mother would have done. Men's shirts in those days had fronts with many vertical rows of tucks for decoration, the closing was in back. One morning Pa appeared with the tucks in back and the shirt buttoned down the front. Emmy looked up in surprise exclaiming, "Pa, your shirt is on backward." Pa turned accusingly to his daughter and said, "Well, how could I know. Ma always lays out my shirt just the way I'm to slip into it."

Auntie told of seeing, from her bedroom in the new red brick house, June 28, 1863, the Columbia Bridge burning. Columbia where John Wright had started an early settlement and ferry across the Susquehanna River.

Bishop Christian Newcomer in his Journal for April 1814 writes, "Rode thru Columbia they are building a bridge at this place it is a wonderful undertaking." And Nov. 7, 1814, "Rode across the new bridge at Columbia." This first bridge was 5,690 feet long and 5 feet wide. It was destroyed in 1832 by an ice freshet. In 1834 a covered bridge was built accommodating two railroad tracks, two towing paths, pedestrians, and vehicles.

During the Civil War to prevent Early's division of Lee's Southern Army from passing across, military authorities ordered the bridge to be destroyed. Sunday, June 28, 1863 it was entirely consumed by fire. Southern soldiers crowded the west bank, while men, women and children lined the east bank. The retreat of the troops, the firing of the ridge with shell and shot falling into the river created a panic. The shelling of the town was anticipated.

It was this blaze that Auntie a young woman of twenty saw looking south from the second storey of the farmhouse on the ridge north of Mount Joy. In 1868 the bridge was rebuilt and was reported to be the longest covered bridge in the world. September 29, 1896 a hurricane destroyed all but two spans. This was restored by 1897. Mrs. Clyde Gerberich, Sr. told of walking across the bridge when five years old with her grandmother the afternoon before the hurricane blew it into the river.

The present modern structure was dedicated September 29, 1930. No longer were motorists halted for the slow passage of trains which had competed with the autos using the same roadbed for crossings.

The new highway has now in 1975 again added another crossing of the river with a higher bridge and more lanes for traffic.

Both flax and sheep were grown on Grandpa's farm. There is an old walnut chest brought from the farm. Heavy wrought iron handles strong enough to lift such a weight are more than decoration. A great iron key turns in the lock embellished with the brass key escutcheon. In this were stored homespun linen towels, sheets, and tablecloths. There are coarser grain bags stamped "John Strickler" and bags for bed ticks. As a reminder of the tedious work that goes into preparation of flax straw to linen fibers for spinning I have only the one implement, a heckle. This is a board filled with rows of nails like sharp iron teeth for combing thru the straw. The coarse fibers caught were tow for making coarse cloth or rope, the fine fibers combed out were the line flax for spinning.

The flax and wool were spun on the farm, but I have never heard of them weaving. I believe this was done by the proficient weavers. Harry Stager was a Mount Joy weaver. A newcomer red and green coverlet bears his name and address woven into the border. Spinning wheels were mentioned as dowry for a daughter in Henry Strickler's Account Book but a loom is at no instance mentioned.

One of Auntie's favorite stories told of driving to town with the wool on an icy morning in late fall. The horse had not been rough shod in preparation for the winter. When he came to the icy steep spot in the road, he doubled up his back legs and slid down the hill on his hunkers. This story is associated with the old brown and blue homespun wool plaid blankets of which we had a pair.

Hanging in my Lancaster County guest room is a fine linen homespun towel. The name "Mary * Strickler" is embroidered in a circlet of flowers and date 1836. John and Mary were married in 1830. John's father Henry, Jr. the only son of Henry, Sr. had inherited the homestead. When he died, he left a farm of 140A. or houses in town to each of his children. This land including and adjacent to the original farm of 129A. was then more than 500 acres.

Mary Cecelia Haverstick was born in Philadelphia and had lived in that city and Lancaster. Her father and grandfather had practiced the trade of gold and silver smithing in both cities. Perhaps she brought something of the city to her farm home for a neighbor has been remembered as remarking, "John won't have a farm for each of his boys, he has pictures on the wall."

Thru the years I have clothed my great grandmother in a patchwork of bits of stories passed on to me by her daughters my Aunt Emmy and Aunt Tillie and my own mother, little Loly grown up.

When as hungry children meal time was approaching we would gather in the kitchen expressing our love and devotion to the mother-cook we would hear, "Grandma used to say 'there is great love between the old cow and the haystack.'" From a grandmother on the other side of the family the same idea was expressed in a different simile, "where there is honey, the bees will gather."

Grandma was remembered for various wise sayings. One that always bothered me: "Children, don't put so much pepper on your food. If you would lie out the crows wouldn't eat you." Who wanted to be eaten by the carrion crow! I could visualize a dead child in an open field, the vultures turning away after the first bite.

Has it ever occurred to you that there must have been many pests in earlier times which have been pretty well eliminated in the average home today? Bed bugs for instance, recently in an almanac I read that a house made of logs in February will never have bedbugs. Grandma has been quoted as saying, "It is no disgrace to have bedbugs, but it is a disgrace to keep them."

Grandma had a little brown dog with curly hair, sometimes it would seem possessed and run round and round in circles in the farmhouse yard. She called the dog Brownie; he was her own little lap dog. I have a Bennington ware brown dog with curly hair. It came to me from Grandma's daughter Tillie's home and is standing near me in the room as I write. This dog has always been "Brownie" to me. Whatever the breed of Grandma's little dog, this is my image of it.

Grandma grew impatience in pots in the house in the wintertime. In the evening she would have them standing in the glow of the lamplight. Some folks call them impatience others call them patience. Grandma would say, "Patience or impatience it would try the patience of a saint to try to grow them indoors." I always remember this when I struggle in the fall to keep them alive until the cuttings root or worry with the plant lice that pester them as winter wears on. At my window nearby is a pot of impatience doing nicely at the moment.

In our dining room is a tavern table, or it was a tavern type table from the farm. Two of the four stretchers have been removed and replaced by a wide shelf. I maintain that this is a very old table for Aunt Tillie in whose home I first saw it told me when I was a little girl that her little brothers used to like to take their naps on that shelf under the table. Those little brothers were born in the 1840's. The table by that time must have been so old that the long stretchers worn from many feet resting on them were in disrepair and a shelf was a simple and practical repair job.

Three of these "little" boys went West following the Civil War. This was a time of change, as following the Revolutionary War. New lands were opening up, gold had been discovered in California, there were grants of land, opportunity was knocking for the adventuresome there were fortunes to be made. The westward movement was a restless breeze. Will and Jake settled in Illinois. Sam the youngest kept on across the Rockies ending his travels as a fruit rancher in Oregon.

Over the miles and the years, they kept in touch with Grandma. In 1893 Lola then a young lady found occasion to visit the Columbian Exposition in Chicago and then to visit the cousins in Polo and Lanark,

Illinois. As a child I remember an assortment of Mother's cousins making summer visits to Mount Joy and being taken around to call on relatives and places of interest to them.

One never forgotten incident when Uncle Jake visited. We children piled into the back seat of an open touring car. Uncle Jake sat with Dad in the front seat and chewed tobacco ... and the tobacco juice ... you guessed it!



Uncle Jake

Grandma's oldest daughter married an Erisman from the neighboring farm. I remember visiting Aunt Fannie when she was a very old lady. She had several daughters who were outstanding in their individualistic character in my eyes. Mary was exemplified by a theatrical looking picture from New York City where she was an elocutionist. Frances and perhaps Tillie had married and therefore were lost in anonymity. But Annie the old maid recluse had a sort of weird charm to me as a child. There was always a scary expectancy about accompanying Mother on a visit to Cousin Annie. One never knew where she would peer out at you or how she would be dressed or what interesting things would turn up in her home.

My childhood seems most closely associated with two other great aunts. Aunt Emmy was lump and of a happy disposition while Aunt Tillie was a tiny wizened old lady somewhat soured by a life that would have tried the patience of Job. She had married a young doctor from Lancaster County. He began practice in Shiremanstown, Perry Count. They had two children a girl and a boy. The girl little Ada died in childhood. Uncle Doc the father died early in his career. Her son lived with her and took to drinking in his teen years. Living longer than his mother he used to alternately be a fine weaver at the local silk mill or the town drunk coming home "weaving" along the pavement.

Of Aunt Emmy or Auntie as we familiarly called her, I have many happy memories. She came to help Mother when I was born – the third child in the family. From then on, she continued to make her home with us. Across the years I can recall the comfort of her encircling arms. Auntie was deaf, not completely, but it was necessary to raise the voice to be heard. No mumbling in our family. I fear we all shouted.

Perhaps this is the cause of my lifelong desire to have a soft well-modulated voice. A grandmother now I am still striving for this.



Aunt Emmy at age 4



The Young Man and the Tramp

Perhaps it was in the summer of 1875, that would be about the year, a young man was walking from Columbia on the old road that made a steep curving ascent up and over the rock. Chiques Rock, standing where Chiques Creek flows into the river, is a great outcrop that forms a bold escarpment at the

Susquehanna. The river is known as the long-crooked river in Indian lore and Chiques Rock has its own legend. But it is not of that that I would tell you now.

As the traveler reaches the top of the curving roadway, he is rewarded with a scene below him of fields and farmhouses spread out to the north over the valley of Chiques Creek. A patchwork of fields unified into homesteads by the presence of the big red barn and a brick or frame house, each with its own woodlot of cool green trees, is mapped out before him. The tree lined meandering of the creek marks the boundary of Rapho Township.

The young man sat down on a stump at the roadside to catch his breath and think over the course of events which had altered his life so recently. He had been born on a farm on the ridge north of Mount Joy where his great grandfather, a German Swiss from south of the Zurich See, had in the mid-1700's purchased a 219A farm from the earlier Scotch-Irish owner. He was thinking of his aged father who had been a progressive farmer in his day. Paw, as he called him, had been the first to use the reaping machine in perhaps the whole of Lancaster County. He had used one at the harvest of 1847 and yes, he thought in 1846 as well. That was the year McCormack built his Chicago factory.

My mother, Ella Viola Strickler's mother, Anna Mary Elizabeth Gable Strickler, died when mother about three years old. Annie Gable Strickler had a younger sister Ella. Was Mother named for Aunt Ellie? Where did the name Viola come from? My name, Anna Virginia, has a similar origin. Anna was repeating and honoring my two grandmothers, Anna Gable Strickler and Anna Snyder Newcomer. The Virginia which I chose to carry has a vague origin, perhaps a character in a story which my mother happened to fancy.

To look back into my mother's early history, her father John Strickler grew up on a farm in Rapho Township in Lancaster County. When a young man he chose to leave the farm and with an Erisman cousin from the neighboring farm to go to the riverside town of Columbia looking for work.

Working through Columbia was a "trader", thus he was designated in the 1860 Census Record, Aaron Gable, of Marietta. He was then age 57. This would put his birth date at 1803. The first firm record I find of him in 1841 when he purchased with his wife Cassandra a property on Second Avenue in Marietta. The deal was done through the Justice of the Peace in York County and the mortgage was payable to Farmer's Bank of Lancaster, with a branch in Marietta.

Aaron's wife Cassandra was a Wrightsville, York County girl. Wrightsville is just across the river from Columbia. Her father was George Oberdorff of Wrightsville. Now as I check through York County records, I find Hellam Township was laid out in 1739. In 1783 taxable records list George Oberdorff's 100 Acres of land. In Wrightsville Jan .13, 1816 Revolutionary List s record George Oberdorff as a Private. Other references to the Oberdorff name: Peter Leber learned the milling trade in Oberdorff's mill. In 1841 Peter was in charge of the mill which no longer belonged to the Oberdorffs but was known as Amstine's mill.

Wrightsville Bridge Burned

Before the Battle of Gettysburg began to take shape it was the plan of Confederate General Jubal Early to capture the world's longest covered bridge at Wrightsville and send troops through Lancaster County to attack Harrisburg. General John B. Gordon was sent by Early to Wrightsville on June 28th, 1863 to do this. Union Major General D. N. Couch at Harrisburg had been placed in charge of the Wrightsville Bridge, with orders to destroy it if the enemy attempted to cross into Lancaster County. When the 27th Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers, under Colonel J. G. Frick in Wrightsville, was attacked by Gordon's forces and forced to retreat over the bridge to the Lancaster side—Col. Couch issued orders to fire the bridge behind them. This was done by exploding a large charge of powder at the center of the bridge. The resulting conflagration, a truly spectacular one, was observed from both sides of the river with mixed emotions—the thwarted Confederates on the west bank, and a frightened crowd of civilians, who had fled across the bridge ahead of the Union militia, on the east bank. The bridge burned from end to end, leaving only the piers undamaged.



Now in 1849, George W Oberdorff is Postmaster in Wrightsville. He would have been about 40 years old. Does the W indicate his mother's maiden name? Does he have a sister Helen born in 1813 who was the second wife of Henry Sultzbach, Jr. born 1799. Was Cassandra Oberdorff, who married Aaron Gable, born in 1816 a sister of George W. Oberdorff?

I am convinced of these assumptions. Cassandra Oberdorff as a teenager married Barnitz Stein, son of Daniel Stein. Barnitz died in Windsor Township at an early age and the young widow Cassandra soon married 1840c an older man Aaron Gable. It was at this time that Aaron and Cassandra Gable purchased the property on Second Avenue in Marietta. Their first child Anna Mary Elizabeth, my grandmother, was born 1844. They continued to have children; Zachary Taylor in 1849 and Ella S. in 1856. Cassandra died in 1860.

Anna Mary Elizabeth, named for her two grandmothers but called "Annie" was sent to boarding school in central Pennsylvania. Her dome lid hide trunk initialed AMEG was on third floor hallway at 202 Poplar Avenue and the oil painting of a draped head in a large oval walnut frame hung on the wall beside the trunk. Annie painted this in art class while at school in Juniata Valley in Pennsylvania. Perhaps the school was Tuscarora Academy popular at that time.

This same 1860 Census lists John Strickler ae 23 years, a clerk living at a hotel and his cousin Abraham Erisman also a clerk and living at the same hotel perhaps at this Railroad House in Marietta.



Annie married John Strickler in 1865. There is a small daguerreotype of Annie and one of John taken at about the time of their marriage. A deed is on record about this time with father-in-law Aaron Gable and John Strickler as a firm buying a lot on Third Street, Marietta.

Later John had a little grocery store in Columbia opposite the Opera House. They lived above the grocery store. There are three children, Charles, George, and little Ella Viola (Lola). Lola remembered Mother sitting dividing peeled oranges among the three children. Then the fourth baby arrives, John Aaron, but things did not go well for mother and child and soon both were gone.

Anna Mary Elizabeth Gable Strickler is buried in Fairview Street Cemetery in Marietta near the Sultzbach monument. The tombstone reads: "Annie M Gable, Wife of John Strickler. 1846-1875. And infant son."

I wear today a hollow gold bracelet of hers. There is a silver napkin ring engraved "Annie". A picture in a black and white mourning frame is she or her mother Cassandra. Though I never knew my grandmother it is in the stories my mother told, through looking up official records and in these mementoes that I have this acquaintance with her.