

## Blackwell Is Still The Blackwells' Village

By David Kagan

Donald Hoover Blackwell was delivered in the bar at the Blackwell Hotel by his Aunt Blanche Broughton, a registered nurse, back in 1930. Broughton was the Pine Creek Valley "doctor" back then, from the Village of Blackwell all the way down to the Village of Waterville.

Don Blackwell has spent his life in the community named after his fourth-great-grandfather, Enoch Blackwell Sr. This pioneer settler came to America from England in 1805, at first settling on land located in present-day Pine Township in northwestern Lycoming County (an area known as Oregon Hill now), then in 1811 exchanging that rocky-soiled land labeled the "English Settlement" for 1200 acres of "fine timberland on Pine Creek, above and below the mouth of Babb's Creek."

Pushing Abraham Harris and George Bonnell from the land (they only had "squatters' rights") to resettle further down Pine Creek, Blackwell seems to have prospered at lumbering, "getting out and rafting square pine timber" down Pine Creek to the Susquehanna River until he died at Jersey Shore in 1816 at age 65 while on a business trip. His six children (three sons and three daughters) by his first wife, Mary Perrine, carried on in the settlement that was to become named Blackwells, eventually to be in Morris Township (incorporated in 1824) of Tioga County (already formed in 1804).

Enoch's one son, William, who had seven children with Sarah Morrison, is actually credited with being the founder of the village, after purchasing 120 acres from his father. One of their children, Enoch, married Mary Webster, and they had eight children. William and his son Enoch also made a living from lumbering, with Enoch also into merchandising and farming. Of Enoch it was said that he "followed every department of that business (lumbering), from scaler of logs to mill owner and operator." He was "a staunch Republican," filled various township offices, and was a postmaster from 1862 (when the village post office, given the name of Lloyd, was first established) until 1886.

The post office had been named in honor of Thomas Lloyd, who had been brought to America as a child by the Blackwells. He settled with his wife, Elizabeth Campbell, just south of the Blackwells on Pine Creek, and had 16 children.

In 1825 a sawmill and a gristmill, both owned by Mary Landis, were built on Babb's Creek just above Blackwells. In 1848 another mill (Job Doane's) was built farther up Babb's Creek at the mouth of Stony Fork. The great flood of 1889 destroyed the mills. Landis's gristmill was eventually restored, and Doane had a replacement steam mill "built on higher ground" in 1890.

Along with the extensive lumbering of pine and oak in this area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "large quantities of hemlock bark" were also gotten out. The bark was used at the Brunswick Tannery in

Hoytville (actually at the southwestern end of the Village of Morris) about five miles up Babb's Creek from Blackwells.

Jacob Warren opened the first general store "as early as 1825," located "below the village" of Blackwells. About 1844, Horace Williston opened another in the village. John Chadwick and A. C. Bush were "other early merchants."

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a store owned by Eugene Blackwell and another by Jacob Brodhead were in operation. Dr. William Blackwell (grandson of the original settler, Enoch Blackwell Sr.) ran a drugstore.

Dr. Blackwell, born in 1833, was a Civil War veteran. In 1865, right after the War, he returned to Blackwells and opened an office. He practiced medicine there until his death in 1899.

Before Dr. Blackwell's return, R. H. Archer, a mill owner and lumberman, from about 1850 had practiced medicine in the Morris and Blackwells settlements. And in 1890, a third medical man, Henry Mathews, the "Indian Doctor," began practicing in Blackwell under the name of James McCoshaway, but he died soon after in 1895.

In the teaching profession in the area was Samuel M. Harrison, who taught in a log building on Pine Creek below Blackwell, near the Tioga/Lycoming County line, beginning about 1830. That building was also said to have been used as a meetinghouse. In 1832 a school building (a log structure with a slab roof) was erected on Babb's Creek about a mile above Blackwells. As of 1897, an average of six months of school was conducted each year.

To meet the community's spiritual needs, a Methodist Episcopal Church class was organized about 1859, with meetings held in the schoolhouse until 1892, when a church edifice was finally erected. The first pastor was W. E. Buckingham. In 1897, the congregation numbered 42, with 40 pupils in a Sunday School class superintended by E. J. Mattoon.

Hotels catered to early lumbermen, travelers and visitors, and eventually railroaders, with that of William Blackwell (son of pioneer Enoch) being the first, in operation from about 1825 until his death in 1859. The hotel known as the Gillespie House opened in 1882, run by another Blackwell. And a third establishment, called the Railroad Hotel, was built in 1884, when the Pine Creek Railway (at first called the Jersey Shore, Pine Creek and Buffalo Railway) was completed. This Railroad Hotel is the Blackwell Hotel of today. In addition to riding the railway, travelers arrived at and left from Blackwell on a daily stage to and from Morris.

After the great lumber days ended in the early 1900s, the village of Blackwell endured, mostly as a hunting and fishing paradise. Blackwell descendants maintained a continual presence, although their numbers declined, with many eventually moving away.

Today, Don Blackwell is one of just three Blackwells permanently living in the village. Another is his wife, Martha; the third his brother, Lane Hilborn Blackwell. Don Blackwell's house is the family homestead, built around 1860, situated on Blackwell Square Road, with a large, square field in front.

Don believes that there are only about 25 people living full-time in Blackwell now. "A lot of people have come here through the years and tried to live here, but then leave," he said. "Their wives can't get to a mall fast enough," he continued, somewhat jokingly.

The Blackwell Hotel and Restaurant has been closed since late last summer. Hopefully, it will reopen sometime this year, as there are no other businesses in the village. Near to hotel is the old Methodist Church building, maintained by the village as an historical property, with a community service or two held in it each year, along with a community dinner, with people from Morris usually in attendance. And next to the church is a building (formerly a private residence) owned by the Camp Wide Awake hunting club since the 1950s.

Don remembers growing up in the village in the 1930s and 40s, when there were actually "two fairly decent-sized grocery stores," one in the basement of the Gillespie House (the large house nearest the rail-trail gate leading north from Blackwell), the other up on the bank at the sharp curve before the one-lane bridge on Route 414 leading to Morris.

Up the wooded hill beside their camp house is Blackwell Cemetery, with its numerous Blackwell family stones, along with other 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century interments of Withey, McConnell, Brooks, Briggs, Barton and Bercdott family members. A nicely carved wooden marker serves for four members of the Woodhouse clan.

Original pioneer settler Enoch Blackwell does not rest here; instead, he is buried in the old Pine Creek Cemetery in Jersey Shore. Grandsons of his are buried in clearly marked sites in Blackwell Cemetery, however, including William Blackwell MD, Lt. George Blackwell and Enoch H. Blackwell, the first clearly marked as Civil War veterans. On Lt. George Blackwell's stone (1821-1898), the Civil War battles that he fought in are listed: Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor and Petersburg.

Don Blackwell can see the quiet, wooded, hillside graveyard site from his eastside window. Out front is his large open field, with his garden near to his house. Behind the house, the rail-trail reaches towards Tiadaghton Village and camping area, and the gorge. And on the west side of his house, the waters of Pine Creek ceaselessly descend towards the Susquehanna to the south.

Don appreciates the relatively stress-free and slow-paced life in his village. Asked if anything exciting had occurred in the last few years, he replied, "There really isn't that much happening. We had a motorcycle and car accident down at Woodhouse a couple miles below a couple years ago, and the rescue helicopter landed in my field!"

Retired from his position as chief clerk for the Tioga County Commissioners, Don spends his time reading (he enjoys the books by Western writer Louis L' Amour), gardening, mowing and caring for his field and the churchyard, and fishing (including trips to Canada four or five times a year). His wife, ten years younger, also loves living in Blackwell, walking the rail-trail a lot for exercise and to enjoy nature. According to Don, "I'll bet she's seen five or six bears on the trail; they wander through here all the time."

Of other wildlife in the area, Don said, "My cousin came down from Boston a few summers ago, and he and his daughter walked from here to Tiadaghton. In the first mile-and-a-half, I think he said that they counted nine rattlesnakes, and they weren't really looking for them! There are quite a few in the canyon."

Of two side-notes to Blackwell's history, Don said, "The Lloyd post office here closed in the late 1930s. And I believe the 's' was dropped in the village's name (from Blackwells to Blackwell) because the railroad station sign here didn't have an 's' on it. I know it didn't because I have the old depot sign! The station was torn down in the 1950s."

Don Blackwell, as a fisherman, was happy when Babb Creek was reclaimed from the coalmine acid pollution coming from the Blossburg coal basin operations in the northeastern part of Morris Township. A plaque down at the Blackwell rail-trail and Pine Creek access area honors Robert W. McCullough Jr. as the one most responsible for the successful reclamation.

Although that reclamation didn't return the Blackwell area to its pristine wilderness condition of 200 years ago, the region remains a natural wonder and treasure, carved out by the waters of Pine and Babb's Creeks, surrounded by the woods and mountains of Tioga State Forest, at the gateway to the little grand canyon of Pennsylvania.