



THE EISENHOWERS IN PENNSYLVANIA

BY MARTIN H. BRACKBILL

ON September 29, 1787, a mob dragged two members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly through the streets of Philadelphia to the State House so that the Legislature would have a quorum on the last day of its session and proceed with the calling of a State Convention to ratify the new Federal Constitution.

The two legislators who were roughed up were James McCalmont and Jacob Meily. They were members of the Radical minority in the Assembly which was opposed to "undue haste" in ratification of the new Constitution and had remained away from the Legislature in the hope that their absence would prevent a vote.

The forcible presence of McCalmont and Meily permitted a vote. The State Convention was called, and prompt ratification of the Federal Constitution came the following year.

Jacob Meily, one of these lawmakers, represented Dauphin County in the legislature. He resided at Fredericksburg in what



is now Lebanon County, a place then commonly called Stump's Town, after its founder Frederick Stump.

Three weeks earlier Jacob Meily had transacted some personal business in Philadelphia, the nature of which is preserved in the records of the Land Office of the Department of Internal Affairs. On September 10, 1787, he applied for and obtained a warrant for 280 acres of land in Bethel Township, Dauphin County, for which he subsequently received a patent in January of 1788.

His application, signed by two local justices of peace, said among other things that the land included an improvement started thirty-four years earlier and adjoined Stumpstown. The warrant, granted the same day, was signed by B. Franklin.

Neither Meily's application nor the warrant mentions it, but the "improvement" spoken of in these documents was the first home in America of the ancestors of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the thirty-fourth President of the United States. There is also more than a hint that the wife of Meily was an Eisenhower.

It was on January 20, 1753, that Nicholas Eisenhower obtained a warrant for 100 acres of land on the frontier of Pennsylvania. A resident of Pennsylvania for twelve years, Eisenhower paid five pounds of the purchase price of the land. Although a survey return was made on the homestead on November 21, 1764, neither he nor his son, Peter Eisenhower, ever took steps to obtain final title or patent. There was nothing remarkable about this. The same state of affairs existed for most of the land for miles around.

Nicholas Eisenhower (the name was originally spelled Eisenhauer) came to Pennsylvania on November 20, 1741, aboard the ship *Europa*. The list of the passengers on the *Europa*, preserved in the Pennsylvania Archives, states that Nicholas' age in 1741 was 50 years, and also names three other Eisenhowers—Peter, 25, and two Johns, one, 28, and the other, 16. Only one of the two Johns took the required oath of allegiance with Nicholas and Peter Eisenhower, the fourth man apparently being ill. It is probable that, if he had signed the oath, his name would have appeared as Martin, rather than John, for that was the name of a brother of Peter, who died in Berks County in 1760 and left a will witnessed by Nicholas and Peter Eisenhower and by Jacob Meily. This confusion of first names is readily understandable when it is recalled that it was a common practice to give all sons the name of John with a different second name. The record of the baptisms

of the sons of Peter show that the Eisenhower family followed this practice.

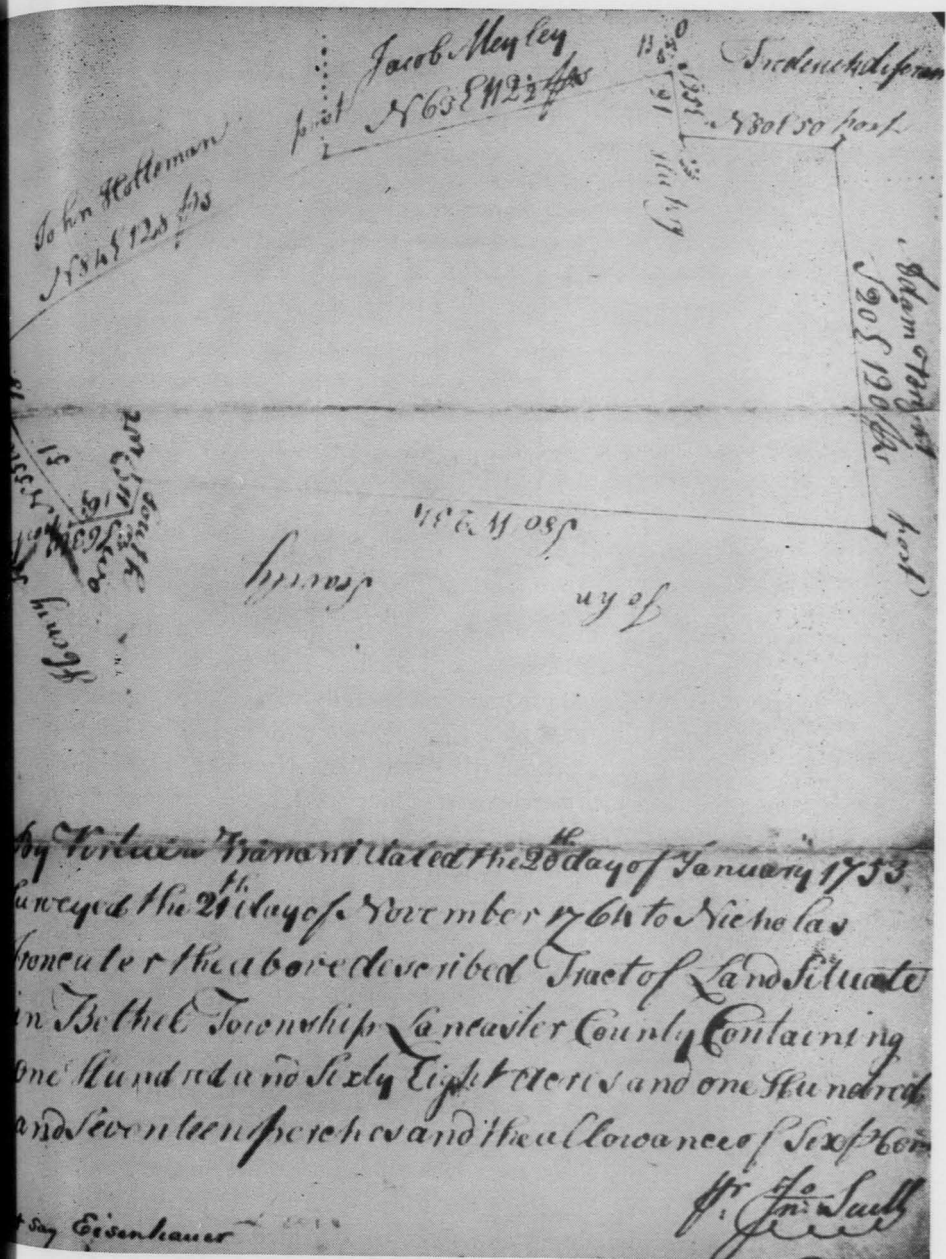
These very baptisms also show that it was only a few years after 1741 when the Eisenhowers began their residence in the Bethel region, even though there was no application for land grants. The Rev. John Casper Stoever, an itinerant Lutheran preacher, recorded the baptism of Peter Eisenhower's eldest son, Peter, on October 13, 1745.

It is entirely likely that the Eisenhowers held off making any attempt to acquire landed property because they were not British subjects. It was in April of 1752 that Martin, Peter, and Elizabeth Eisenhower submitted evidence to the Supreme Court in Philadelphia that they had taken the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on March 29, 1752, in Lancaster County, and had been residents of America for at least seven years, upon which oaths and declarations were administered and they were declared to be "His Majesty's natural born subjects of the Kingdom of Great Britain."

Although it was not until the following year that Nicholas Eisenhower, whose name has not been found in the existing naturalization records, applied for land, there exists evidence of an earlier date that the Eisenhowers possessed property in Bethel. William Parsons, the founder of Easton, was a deputy surveyor in 1748, and had as his district a vast area that included Bethel. One of the surveys he made in this area was for a John Sneeby. The Sneeby survey return, with the usual map, remains in the records of the Land Office, but unfortunately bears no date. This occurred because Parsons left a blank space to be filled in by the clerk of the Land Office with the date of the warrant, which never issued.

Nevertheless, this old paper identifies Peter Ironcutter, an English translation of Eisenhower, as one of the persons holding land adjoining the tract which Parsons had surveyed for Sneeby. William Parsons surveyed land in the same neighborhood for Caspar Sherrick or Sherk and John Grow or Grau on May 30, 1748, and it is likely he made the Sneeby survey at the same time.

A diligent search in the Land Office has disclosed that the land marked with the name Peter Ironcutter was warranted to John Stehli in 1766. Subsequently on February 17, 1777, Peter Eisenhower and his wife, Anna, sold 79 acres located near the same place to Henry Bickel for 150 pounds, Bickel apparently being a

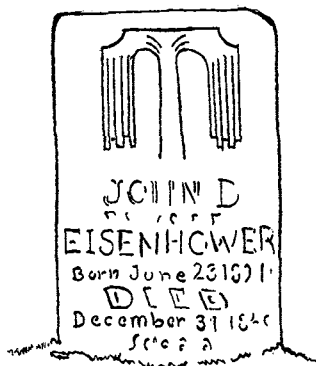


ORIGINAL SURVEY OF EISENHOWER FARM

Photocopy of the original surveyor's map of the farm of Nicholas Eisenhower in Bethel Township, Lebanon County. The map, prepared by John Scull, a deputy surveyor, lists the names of the Eisenhowers in 1764 as John Holteman, Jacob Meyley, Frederick Diferaim, Bright, John Seavely, and Henry Snoterly. Scull wrote the name of the warrantee as "Ironcuter" but a clerk at the Land Office wrote below "say Eisenhower."

Courtesy, Department of Internal Affairs

son-in-law of Peter Eisenhower. The deed, recorded at Lancaster, required Bickel to pay the purchase money, interest and quit rent due on the land. This was done nearly 50 years later by a John Sugar.



Two years later Peter Eisenhower and his wife, Anna, sold the 170 acres surveyed to his father, Nicholas, on the 1753 warrant, the purchaser being the same Jacob Meily, previously mentioned as being roughly handed by a Philadelphia mob in 1787. The deed, also recorded at Lancaster, states that Nicholas Eisenhower granted the land to Peter on September 13, 1759. Peter sold Meily the farm for 2,200 pounds "under and subject to the purchase money to become due and payable."

The same year, Peter Eisenhower purchased 170 acres of land in Lower Paxton Township, Dauphin County, from Abraham Latcha at a price of 3,300 pounds. This farm was located at the foot of the Blue Mountain within a few miles of Harris Ferry, now Harrisburg.

The reason for the move from Bethel to Lower Paxton, thirty miles to the west, is not apparent.

In 1779, Peter Eisenhower was a man of 63 years. One son, Frederick, already had fallen in battle as a soldier in the Pennsylvania Line of Washington's Continental Army, while many of his older children, daughters and sons, were grown and established in homes of their own. Peter's will, written in 1795 and recorded at Harrisburg on July 7, 1802, names seventeen children, the last of these being a second Frederick, the great grandfather of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Peter made bequests to each of his children and then directed that any "overplus" of his estate be used for the "raising, clothing and schooling of my four youngest children." In addition to Frederick, these children of his wife, Anna, were Barbarah, Margaret, and Peter. Strangely enough, Peter was also the name of his first son, but in 1795 the first Peter had been long since dead.

Peter Eisenhower, who in 1741 had come to America with his father and brothers, was still living in 1801. Then eighty-five years of age, he wrote a codicil to his will which provided, first, that nothing, not even "the value of a spoon," should be taken from his wife, Anna, after his death as long as she remained a widow; and, second, that in the event one of his two youngest sons should die before the other, the surviving one should inherit the bequests of both.

When Peter wrote his will in 1795, he also deeded his farm to an older son, John. In return, John gave his father ten bonds with a total value of 900 pounds, to fall due annually up to 1809, later deferred to 1815. He named his wife, Anna, and a friend, Jacob Plank, as executors.

The widow, Anna Eisenhower, soon turned over the management of the estate to John Eisenhower, with whom she continued to reside. In 1806, Peter Eisenhower, Jr., reached the age of 14 years and selected John Shank of Lancaster as his guardian, having apparently been apprenticed to him to learn a trade. Shank immediately asked the court to direct John Eisenhower to give an accounting of his father's estate. As a result, John reported that Peter had left property worth 1,590 pounds, three shillings, and one penny; but that, after various charges had been made against it, the balance was only 160 pounds and 19 shillings. Among the charges was 132 pounds and 19 shillings paid by widow Anna Eisenhower for the school of her young children.

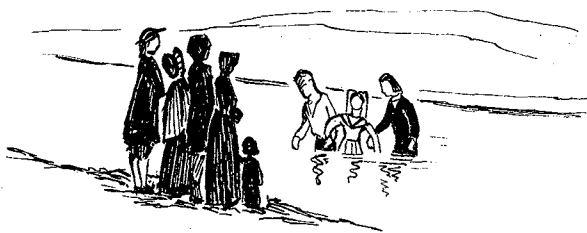
Again, on February 2, 1830, John Eisenhower made another and final report on his father's estate. This account, filed in the Dauphin County Orphans Court, informs us that Peter's widow, Anna, lived for eighteen years after 1806 and that for the last three years of her life, she was blind and completely helpless.

The report also discloses that there was a John Eisenhower, who was the son of Frederick Eisenhower, the Revolutionary War soldier mentioned above, living somewhere in northern Pennsyl-

vania; that Nicholas Eisenhower and Barbara Eisenhower, two of Peter's older children, had gone to live in North Carolina, and that Peter Eisenhower, who was fourteen in 1806, had enlisted, probably during the War of 1812. None of these and the heirs of Elizabeth Wood, another daughter of Peter Eisenhower, Sr., ever came forward to claim bequests.

The younger Frederick, old Peter Eisenhower's youngest child, was the last to receive his inheritance. John reported he had paid Frederick \$266 in three installments ending in 1816.

The life of young Frederick Eisenhower, the great-grandfather of President Eisenhower, took a different turn about 1817, the year it appears that he and Barbara Miller were married. The bride was the daughter of John Miller, a farmer of Lower Paxton Township, Dauphin County, and an adherent of the River Brethren, now officially the Brethren in Christ Church.



Previous to this time, all the available evidence shows the Eisenhowers in America were affiliated with the Lutheran Church.

The River Brethren in the 19th Century were a small body of Christians who lived by the Holy Writ. Like the better known Mennonites and Dunkards, the River Brethren eschewed the military, civil office, and the taking of oaths. They did not believe in infant baptism, dressed plainly, lived humbly, and were ever ready to help the needy or the sick. Their religious meetings were held in homes or barns, and their leaders were elected.

The origin of the first congregation in Donegal Township in Lancaster County near the Susquehanna River about 1779 gave this sect its early name. Its influence spread to other sections of Pennsylvania and America as its members moved into new localities in search of land. Some found homes in Dauphin County near the Swatara Creek in Lower Paxton Township.

Originally settled by the Scotch-Irish, Lower Paxton began to fill up with German-speaking farmers after the French and Indian Wars. Among the first of these was Hans Zimmerman, who settled here in 1763 and then a few years later bought a second farm which he sold in 1774 to Daniel Kieffer. About the same time, Jacob Miller, a son-in-law of Zimmerman, located in the same area, as did Jacob Syder, Jacob Smith, and others. All these farmers lived in a compact group in the rolling hills along Beaver Creek, which joined the Swatara near the village of Hummelstown, and bore names associated with the River Brethren.

Frederick Eisenhower came to this locality with his bride, the



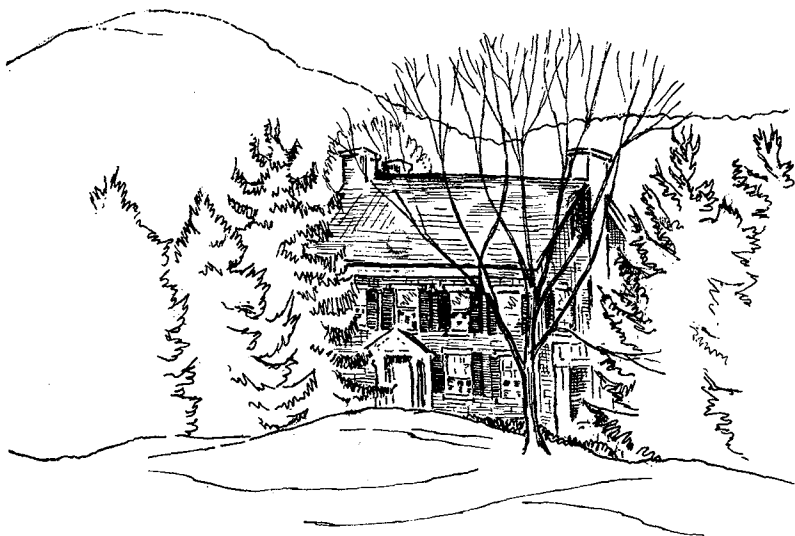
Graves of the Eisenhowers near Millersburg.

granddaughter of Jacob Miller early in the 19th Century. John Miller, Barbara's father, deeded 53 acres to Frederick Eisenhower in 1820, and it was here that Frederick and Barbara Eisenhower's children were born, four miles east of Harrisburg on the Penbrook-Union Deposit Road.

Then in 1824, Henry Landis, an innkeeper of Swatara Township, died and in his will gave to his eldest son, Jacob Landis, lands in the Lykens Valley, a few miles east of Millersburg, Dauphin County. Jacob Landis moved there in 1830 and per-

sued a number of other River Brethren to move with him. Among these were Frederick Eisenhower, Jacob Heineke and Joseph Kieffer, Kieffer becoming overseer, Landis, the preacher, and Heineke, the deacon, of the new congregation.

When Frederick Eisenhower moved to the Lykens Valley in 1830, Jacob F. Eisenhower, the President's grandfather, was a child of three. Jacob grew up there in the shadow of Berry's Mountain, married Rebecca Matter, the daughter of a Lykens Valley farmer, and about 1848 began farming in Lower Paxton where his father before him had established his first home.



The Eisenhower House at Elizabethtown.

Jacob F. Eisenhower stayed there until 1854 when he returned to the Lykens Valley after purchasing from Samuel Baker 80 acres on the outskirts of the village of Elizabethtown. Here he built a sawmill and here he erected a large brick house which is still a show place and in which David Eisenhower, the father of Dwight D. Eisenhower, was born in 1864.

Meanwhile, Frederick Eisenhower had sold his farm near Millersburg in 1853 to his son-in-law, Samuel Pyke, with whom he continued to live, and the farm he owned in Lower Paxton Township to Benjamin Miller, another son-in-law. Frederick was fifty-nine years of age when he sold his lands, but he lived nearly thirty years more before his death in 1882 in Abilene, Kansas.

His son, Jacob, had become a preacher and was the leader of the Lykens Valley River Brethren for many years. Finally, in 1878, he sold his farm in Dauphin County and moved to Kansas, lured west by reports of cheap land and wonderful wheat crops.

When Jacob's brother, Samuel Eisenhower, followed some years later, the last ties of this family in Pennsylvania were broken until they were renewed in our time by Jacob's grandsons, Earl, Dr. Milton H., and Dwight D. Eisenhower.



The Eisenhower farm near Gettysburg. The President had grown fond of the rolling farmlands of Adams County while he was stationed at Camp Colt, Gettysburg, during World War I. At the time he bought the new farm, in 1950, just before assuming command of N.A.T.O. forces, he said, "It is sort of like home." Gettysburgers hope that it may become the summer White House.

Courtesy, Gettysburg Times and News