

IT'S JUN-E-ATA, *NOT* JUAN-ITA!

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Guest Editor

First of all, let's get the name right; as a transcription of a Native American name, "Juniata" is easy to pronounce. There are lots of local names in Pennsylvania that can be a mouthful, but "Juniata" is not one of them!

However the word is pronounced, or mangled, the valley that bears its name—a major transportation route from the earliest times—has not been well served by historians. Like the valley's travelers, historians have studied its east/west terminus points of Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, but have rarely stopped to study the world in between. And some of those who did ignored the rich history for their own fabrications. Two early and widely read writers, Uriah J. Jones and Henry W. Shoemaker, are better categorized as "mythologists" rather than historians. Both newspapermen, they used standard formulae to sell copies rather than facts. It is a shame, as both are now suspect even when they have something of value to contribute.¹

Jones found demonization profitable, for example, in the case of Simon Girty, whose reputation has never recovered, despite the fact that Canada considers him a commendable settler. Jones also portrayed Anabaptist settlers as a cowardly bunch, and African Americans were nonexistent. Few women were present, either.

Shoemaker followed up some years later, in the role of a folklorist collecting traditional lore. When he couldn't find any, he conjured his own, creating, among many others, the myth of the Indian Steps in Huntingdon County, in reality built by the state Department of Forestry and later refurbished by the Civilian Conservation Corps. People today still cling to the fallacy of his story involving a 1676 battle there between the Susquehannocks and the Delaware Indians. He also promulgated the legend of the Nittany Lion and Princess Nita-Nee.

A more contemporary writer of popular historical fiction was Roy F. Chandler of Perry County. He assured his readers of sound historical evidence, yet, for example, his descriptions of wagons loaded with settlers headed “west,” passing the tiny settlement near Fort Robinson in Perry County during the 1740s and ’50s, have no basis in fact as no wagon roads existed in the area until many years later.²

These are the writers whose work is accepted as fact in the Juniata Valley today.

Additionally, early accounts by European Americans are skewed with xenophobia, like the Reverend David Brainerd’s 1745 journal of his missionary visit to the Native American village at Duncan’s Island at the mouth of the Juniata. He portrayed the inhabitants as bloodthirsty savages bent on destroying the European settlers who were fulfilling their Manifest Destiny; his writing is a product of its time.

There were, of course, legitimate historians at work, starting with I. Daniel Rupp and his 1837 *History and Topography of Northumberland, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Centre, Union, Columbia, Juniata and Clinton Counties, Pa.* Professor Abraham Guss, a Juniata County native, wrote large sections of Ellis and Hungerford’s 1886 two-volume *The History of that Portion of the Susquehanna and Juniata Valleys*. In particular, Guss attempted to offer a balanced view of the Native American groups present in the valley (yet pages later, a different writer, George Groff, dismisses that population as having but a “few squalid villages” in the whole area).³ In the upper valley, J. Simpson Africa’s *History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties* offered well researched information. But their potential audiences were swept away by the drama and hyperbole of Jones’s blood and gore, and Shoemaker’s romantic views of gypsy maidens and virtuous Indian lovers.⁴ Harry Hain of Perry County utilized Professor Guss’s knowledge, and added to it for his 1922 *History of Perry County*. He was also a newspaper editor but, more than Jones or Shoemaker, realized the need for a factual history, as did Rupp and Africa.

Early mapmakers considered the Juniata Valley as “terra incognita” and left the area largely blank. The course of the Juniata River was fairly well known and depicted, but its major tributaries are not. Even Reading Howell’s famous 1792 map of the new state of Pennsylvania, made after the last Native Americans left and the region was fairly well traveled, shows great blank swaths in the ridge-and-valley area. The map location of the ill-fated Fort Granville at present-day Lewistown wobbles up and down the river depending on which map is consulted, despite considerable knowledge about this provincial fort.

The Fort Granville Road, a lifeline to supplies and manpower at Carlisle, was nearly forgotten, even though Professor Guss mentioned it several times. His family actually used the road, based on a Native American path, when they relocated from Perry County to the Licking Creek area of Juniata County.⁵

Local historical societies also perpetuated myths. For example, in Perry County Anne West Gibson, widow of Col. George Gibson, killed in the post-Revolutionary Indian Wars, is depicted as a sturdy frontier woman struggling to run a mill and educate her sons. In actuality, she was a slave-owning heiress whose brother lived nearby. She made trips to Philadelphia to replenish her wardrobe, and advertised for a competent miller to operate the Gibson Mill along Sherman's Creek. Dorcas Holt Buchanan of Ohesson (Lewistown) ran the family trading post for some years after her husband's death and might have traveled over the Fort Granville road to buy clothes and supplies in Carlisle, but certainly not Philadelphia! Yet Dorcas Buchanan's sole memorial is one short street and her gravestone in Lewistown. The stories of these women need to be told, and accurately.⁶

Juniata Iron became a byword as the iron industry crossed the Susquehanna and moved into the central mountains. Three essentials were found here: rich ores, plenty of limestone, and the timber needed to fuel the furnaces and kilns. With the prosperity of the forges and furnaces came African American ironworkers, and the Underground Railroad slipped through the hills. Black communities formed at Mount Union, Huntingdon, and Lewistown. This rich heritage needs more research.

Despite Uriah Jones's antipathy, beginning in 1791 the largest group of Lancaster County Mennonites and Amish settlers moved into the fertile limestone valleys of Mifflin and nearby counties, establishing farms and businesses, and eventually Juniata College.

The mining industry came and went, leaving great scars on the mountain sides.⁷ Holiday visitors and boaters replaced miners toiling up the Thousand Steps when the Raystown Dam was built.⁸ It more than fulfilled its purpose in June of 1972. Not quite completed, the reservoir filled within days and alleviated downstream flooding. Thankfully, Sheep Rock Shelter, a major archaic archeological site dating over 6,000 years, was excavated by teams from Juniata College, Penn State University, and the State Museum of Pennsylvania before the site was inundated by Raystown Lake. Today the lake is a major recreation area.

This issue of *Pennsylvania History* is an effort to remedy the long blank years, starting at the local level, with articles written by people who can

only be described as passionate about Juniata Valley history. The variety of topics cover many facets of the region including transportation, education, economic, cultural, and religious history and is intended as a firm basis for further research.

Clark's Ferry Tavern at Duncannon is often regarded as the gateway to the Juniata Valley. Victor Hart and Jason Wilson document the circa 1780 stone building, its importance, and the results of several seasons of fruitful archeological investigation. Audrey Sizelove discusses female education in a seminary associated with the Tuscarora Academy, another historic stone building at Academia. Paul Fagley, well-known historian and interpreter, traces the growth and importance of "Juniata Iron" to the national as well as local economy. Betty Ann Landis details the Mennonite settlements in the area that have become cultural landmarks. All are excellent researchers and writers who worked hard to make this issue of *Pennsylvania History* as success and this editor is grateful to them! They are true successors of I. Daniel Rupp, J. Simpson Africa, Abraham Guss, and Harry Hain.

Where do we go from here? Hopefully to more deeply rooted research. In this age of the Internet and digitalization, primary source information is more easily available. Historians have far better tools to use than ever before. It is no longer necessary to create your own scenarios as Jones and Shoemaker did!

To see it only as a corridor to be trudged through ignores the Juniata Valley's vital place in the history of Pennsylvania. It has always been a vital link between eastern and western settlements, but was a place to settle and live as well.

JANET TAYLOR is a retired schoolteacher and former Army wife, who always found local history fascinating no matter where the family found themselves. Adept at the German language, she has translated cemetery records, tombstones, and taufscheins (baptismal certificates). Her "African Americans in Perry County 1820–1925" (The Perry Historians, 2011) and ongoing research have uncovered new information on the Underground Railroad in the region. She has published in several historical society journals in central Pennsylvania, and is the author of three historical fiction novels set in Perry County, as well as *The Log Kingdom*, a study of log structures in Perry County. Currently she is working on the long-forgotten Fort Granville Road, a 1755–56 emergency road from Carlisle to Fort Granville near Lewistown.

NOTES

1. Uriah G. Jones, *History and Early Settlement of the Juniata Valley* (Harrisburg, PA: Harrisburg Publishing Company, 1889), and Henry W. Shoemaker, *Juniata Memories: Legends Collected in Central Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: John Joseph McVey, 1916).
2. Roy Chandler, *Fort Robinson: A Novel of Perry County, Pennsylvania 1750–1763* (Orwigsburg, PA: Bacon and Freeman, 1981), 105, 110, 208, 210, 212, 227. Chandler makes frequent mention of wagons and seeing wagon tracks beyond North Mountain in Perry County from the early 1750s. For example: “A wagon moving west along Sherman’s Creek was taken. The small family was killed and burned in their wagon” (208), supposedly August 1756. “Wagons still drew to a halt at George Robinson’s but they were stranger-wagons” (212). My research on roads indicates only a bridle path here and not many of these at this time. There is no indication wagons were ever used on the Fort Granville Road between Carlisle and the Juniata during the 1750–60 period. Another example (on pp. 430–31) describes twelve herbs Martha Robinson supposedly found around Fort Robinson for the first settlers to eat and kept them from starving. Nine of these twelve are nonnatives introduced by Europeans and unlikely to be growing in Perry County in 1755–56.
3. *History of the Susquehanna and Juniata Valleys . . .* (Philadelphia: Everts, Peck, and Richardson, 1886). With regard to “Indians,” chapters 2 and 3: chapter 2 was written by Abraham Guss and includes considerable information on Indians of the area during the early contact period, 23–53. Chapter 3 was written by George G. Groff and concerns mainly the French and Indian War period. He makes the “few squalid villages” comment in his introduction on page 53.
4. All of these works are available online in their entirety with a simple Google search.
5. Guss family history: *History of the Susquehanna and Juniata Valleys . . .*, chap. 9, 766. See also Beverly Anderson, *Ancestors of Abraham and Susan Rindlaub Guss* (Published by the author, 1988), Juniata Historical Society Family Files.
6. Ann West Gibson, from John Bannister Gibson, *Memoirs of John Bannister Gibson, Late Chief Justice of Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: Thomas P. Roberts, 1890). This is very much a “born in a log cabin . . . walked miles through snow” effort. Gibson makes little mention of the highly aristocratic West family. He also does not mention that his mother’s brother lived nearby, the family had slaves, and Mrs. Gibson hired a miller to run the mill and tutors for her sons. An undated reminiscence about Ann Gibson is in the Gibson Family File, The Perry Historians, Lenig Library: “Some years ago I took dinner at the residence of Herman Alricks in Harrisburg and there became acquainted with an old lady by the name of Bull. . . . She remembered that Anne Gibson stayed all night with her once when on her way to Philadelphia to *bring up the*

fashions [emphasis added] but doubtless Anne had other business to attend to in Philadelphia besides getting the fashions.”

7. Mining in Juniata Valley: there was, naturally iron ore mining and quarrying of limestone for the Juniata Iron Industry. The main mining around Mount Union and Huntingdon that left great scars visible from US 22 was for sand and a silica rock called “ganister” that was used to produce heat-resistant silica bricks, a very big industry in the area, and likely one reason there are large African American communities there
8. The Thousand Steps are in Jack’s Narrows near Mount Union, a few miles east of the Raystown Dam and accessed from a sign-pointed trailhead along US 22. A good website for this is Trailvista.com.