THE MURPHYS OF MARKET STREET, 1785-1826
OLIVER EVANS

There are in print frequent references — scattered, and often brief — to Patrick Murphy; to Molly, his second wife; and to Patrick’s daughter, Betsey. Available also is information in the records of deeds, and of wills and estates, in Allegheny County. Here, within compass, are stated the circumstances of this family, the proprietors of one of Pittsburgh’s early and celebrated taverns: “The Sign of General Butler.”

The period is from 1785 to 1826, within which the settlement at The Point progressed from a frontier trading post to the status of a city.

Patrick Murphy, “an Irish gentleman of learning,” had volunteered his services to the Continental Army; at war’s end he brought across the Alleghenies his second wife, Mary — commonly called Molly — and his seven-year-old daughter, Elizabeth Antoinette — commonly called Betsey.

In Pittsburgh, Paddy Murphy in the course of eight years took title to various lots or tracts of land, by a series of purchases from local, and from “absentee,” owners. His basic holding became, by accretion, the block frontage on the east side of Market Street, between Third and Fourth Streets. Here came to be built structures of clapboard construction; the name then became common: “Clapboard Row.” Here — one lot south of Fourth Street — Murphy built his tavern: “The Sign of General Butler.”

In this naming, Paddy chose to honor General Richard Butler (the eldest of the five “fighting Butlers”), who died a hero’s death on November 4, 1791, when, as second in command to General Arthur St. Clair, with 3000 troops recruited mainly from this area, he was to witness the crushing defeat of the whites by the Indians, near what is now Fort Recovery, Ohio. Alongside his Market Street inn the resourceful Patrick was to display what must have been a very

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1 A Biographical Album of Prominent Pennsylvanians (Phila. 1888), 170-171.
early example of outdoor advertising, as described by one of the troops, Fifer Samuel DeWeese:

The tavern-keeper had put up a sign on which was painted "St. Clair's Defeat," fully twenty feet in length. On both sides, both whites and Indians were painted; General Butler was represented as wounded, and leaning against a tree. I suppose there were two or three hundred whites and Indians represented. The sign must have cost a great sum of money, but I suppose our soldiers alone more than paid for it, for there were crowds of them to look at it, and most of them spent their money pretty freely in patronizing his house.\(^2\)

Patrick Murphy’s other purchases of land extended his ownership east along Third and Fourth Streets; separately he bought a lot in The Diamond, in the southwest corner of the Market Square; and he bought three lots on the north side of Fifth Street, extending through to Virgin Alley — these were between Market and Wood Streets. Beyond the town, to the east in Pitt Township (in the present Soho area) he acquired various Out-Lots in the Manor of Pittsburgh.\(^3\)

In 1785, the time of Murphy’s first purchase, the town was mainly along the Monongahela, extending inward — north along Ferry (now Stanwix) and Market. One account (an understatement) estimates its population at about 250, accommodated in thirty-six log houses, one stone house, one frame house; a more accurate report, in 1787, set the population figure for the year at 1365. These numbers, swelled by the transient trade of those passing through the Gateway to the West, would account for the presence of Paddy Murphy’s


\(^3\) References to Will Books, to Estates and Accounts, to Deed Books or to court records generally, are all to the appropriate record sources for Allegheny County, in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Murphy purchases: Market Street frontage, also Third and Fourth Streets: Woods Plan, Lots 321, 322, 323 (in part), for 14 Pounds, 17 sh., 6 p., from H. H. Brackenridge, 25 Aug., 1786, D. B. cxxxvi, 144; Lot 324 (and other property), for 65 Pounds, from the Penns, 18 March, 1785, D. B. cxxxvi, 143; Lot 345 (and other property) for 37 Pounds, 16 sh., from Francis de Beyerle of Philadelphia, D. B. i, 45; remaining parts of Lots 322 and 323, by exchange of Lot 345, with H. H. Brackenridge, D. B. i, 107; included with Lot 324 (above) were, Lots 387 and 388, running from Fifth to Diamond Alley, which Murphy conveyed by D. B. i, 120, also included were, Lots 403, 404 and 405, running from Fifth to Virgin Alley, between Market and Wood; the Out-Lots in the Manor of Pittsburgh, Out-Lot 13, for 104 Pounds, 14 sh., 6 p., from the Penns, 28 Sept., 1785, D. B. i, 41; included with Lot 345 (above) were, Out-Lots 14 and 20; also Out-Lots 17, 18, and 19, from the Penns, for 15 Pounds, 3 Oct., 1785, D. B. iii, 329.

competitors. North on Market Street, near Fifth, was Thomas Ferree’s “Sign of the Black Bear”; on Ferry Street near Second (where the Bell Telephone Building now stands) was the inn of a Negro, “Black Charles.”  On Front Street (First), east of Market, was the tavern of Andrew Watson, where also originally were held the sessions of the courts. On Water Street (Fort Pitt Boulevard), farther east, was Adamson Tannehill’s “Green Tree Inn.” Farthest removed to the east, and in the most unusual setting, was the tavern of the Frenchman, John (Jean) Marie, called “Grant’s Hill,” which stood among its gardens on a hill more than eighty feet in height above Grant Street — where the Allegheny County Courthouse now is.

Allegheny County, of which Pittsburgh was the hub, was created in 1788; Pittsburgh became its county-seat in 1791, about the time Paddy Murphy’s purchases were concluded; a year earlier it had a population of 10,309, and it stretched — beyond its present boundaries — to include all the land west of the Allegheny River to what would be the Ohio state-line, and all the land north of the Ohio River to Lake Erie. Murphy’s tavern site was enhanced in value in 1791 when, by legislative action, the construction of a courthouse was authorized, which was accomplished in the Market Square on its westerly side, one block from “The Sign of General Butler.” This was the “first” courthouse designed and used for that specific purpose. Across from it, on the east side of Market, was built the Market-house itself.

The near presence of the courts would, of course, augment the traffic and the trade at Paddy’s tavern, especially in light of the colorful public ceremony of the court’s opening session. No less crowd-catching were the frequent Masonic processions through Market Street, when Lodge No. 45 in full regalia went to meet at William Irwin’s new brick building at the southeast corner of The Diamond. The greatest attraction of that time, however, was the

4 Deed to Charles Richard from the Penns, 1786, D. B. 1, 124. See also, for transactions by Richard and his apparent heirs: D. B. xxv, 258; D. B. xxxii, 439; D. B. xxix, 71; D. B. xxxiv, 367. Charles Richard is noted on a 1795 map of Pittsburgh, “keeps a good inn.”

5 In session, the judges sat in scarlet robes. In going to and returning from Court, they were carefully clothed in black, wearing cocked hats; the procession was led by a drummer, and the judges were preceded by the Sheriff of the County bearing a white wand. Charles W. Dahlinger, Pittsburgh — A Sketch of Its Early Social Life (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 118. Regarding the Ancient York Masons: “On St. John the Baptist’s Day (in June), they met at 10 o’clock in the morning and, after
bustle attendant on the quelling of the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794, when troops ordered out by Washington came under the command of "Light Horse Harry" Lee to the Forks of the Ohio. The Commissioners appointed by the President to settle this dispute were lodged at Murphy's inn; and in Market Street outside the tavern the dissidents raised their protesting Liberty Pole. The year 1794 marked as well the time of Pittsburgh's becoming a borough.

Patrick Murphy lost his life in 1797 in the Monongahela, while trying to save a drowning child. His estate inventory, based on his books of account, reflects the character of his regular trade; his clientele:

General John ("Horseface") Gibson; John Wilkins, Sr.; Colonel Presley Neville; United States Senator James Ross (the greatest individual debit); Colonel James O'Hara; General John Wilkins; Major Ebenezer Denny (later the first Mayor); and the Reverend Samuel Barr, on a debt running from eight years past, when Barr had severed his connection with the Presbyterian Church.

These charges ran from one Pound to 39 Pounds.

Bond in Patrick's estate was furnished in 2000 Pounds. The total of his inventory was stated at 1384 Pounds, about one-half in cash and the remainder in book accounts and other acknowledged debts. The account, filed some three years later, showed receipts of 2592 Pounds. The disbursements were: the equivalent of $5,900 to Joseph Scott, guardian for Betsey (who at Paddy's death was nineteen); $1,645 to various individuals; to settle bonds, notes and book accounts, $2,678; and for a loss on the sale of goods, $145.7

Patrick Murphy's tombstone in Trinity Churchyard was inscribed, "a respectable citizen of Pittsburgh"; the phrase, in common use in those times, applied to those generally entitled to — and readily accorded — respect. A reflection on the status of innkeepers appears

the services in the lodge were over, paraded the streets. The members walking two abreast. Dressed in their best clothes, with cocked hats, long coats, knee breeches and buckled shoes, wearing aprons of the craft, they marched 'in ancient order.' The sword bearer was in advance; the officers wore embroidered collars, from which depended their emblems of office; the wardens carried their truncheons; the deacons, their staves. The Bible, surmounted by a compass and a square, on a velvet cushion, was borne along." Dahlinger, op. cit., 12.

6 The 18th century pickets placed on their Liberty Pole streamers inscribed: "Liberty and No Excise" and "Death to Cowards and Traitors."

7 Inventory No. 13 of 1797, Orphans' Court of Allegheny County. Other references for the Murphy estate: Bond Book iii, 160; Account No. 237, Orphans' Court i, 57; Patrick's estate bond was signed by Mary Murphy, with "her mark," and by Ebenezer Denny, John Irwin, Merchant, and John Wilkins, Sr., Esq. This was in the presence, as County Commissioners, of Nathaniel Irish and Joseph Scott.
in the *Recollections* of Henry Marie Brackenridge (who was eleven at the time of Paddy’s death):

Innkeepers comprised “that portion of my townspeople who possess so much influence in a land of equality and freedom . . . who do the honors of the town, and keep up its reputation for hospitality, although not quite disinterested, . . . who are in reality the only lords we have in Pennsylvania.”

Molly Murphy continued to operate the inn after Paddy’s death, and Brackenridge remembered her:

She was the friend of my boyhood and youth . . . as rough a Christian as ever I knew, yet I verily believe that a better Christian heart, one more generous or benevolent, as well as sturdy and fearless, never beat in a Christian bosom.8

Paddy Murphy’s Market Street block was — before his death and subsequently — the abiding place and center for the Democratic-Republicans, who made up the “Clapboard Row Junto.” Opposed to the originally well-entrenched Federalists, these were (to list the more prominent): Dr. Hugh Scott; merchants William Gazzam, Thomas Baird and Joseph McClurg; Samuel Ewalt, first Allegheny County sheriff; Nathaniel Irish, Revolutionary veteran, merchant and an Allegheny County Commissioner; Adamson Tannehill, another veteran; Alexander Fowler, lately an officer in the forces of the Crown, and a general in the county militia; Dr. Andrew Richardson, Fowler’s son-in-law; and grocer Joseph Davis.9

Pittsburgh was scarcely a forsaken or unknown hamlet; visits by those from the outside, indeed even from Europe, were frequent. The event occasioning the greatest stir probably was that of the three princes of the House of Orleans, the Duke (later to be King Louis Philippe of France), and his brothers.10 Yet the tax levy for the

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9 The occupiers of Clapboard Row (east side of Market, between Third and Fourth) in the years immediately preceding 1800 were (beginning from the north): Joseph McClurg, “The Sign of the Negro,” a tobacco manufactory, also dry goods, hardware, china and glass; Patrick Murphy, “The Sign of General Butler”; William Porter, cut and forged nail factory; Fulton & Baird, “Soal and upper leather”; William Barrett, store; William Gazzam, store; Hugh Scott, doctor. Across Market Street (west side) were: from the north — Alexander McLaughlin, merchant, formerly on Second Street; James Wills, “boot and Bootee legs”; John Wrenshall, storekeeper and Methodist preacher; Joseph Davis, grocer. In a building of bricks taken from old Fort Pitt, Denny & Beelen, ship’s chandlers: “dry goods, hardware, groceries, stationery, perfumery, china, glass, and queensware.” Information gathered from Dahlinger, *op. cit.*, 104-158.
10 Three accounts exist, written by witnesses, though only one wrote contemporaneously. The visitors were “plain, modest young men, whose simplicity of manners was favorably contrasted with those of the showy city gentlemen.” Brackenridge, *op. cit.*, 67-68. They visited with and were
Borough of Pittsburgh in 1799 was $649.44, of which only $300 had been collected by February 1800. In the latter year the population was stated to be 1565; and that year Molly Murphy placed the management of "The Sign of General Butler" in the hands of Richard Hancock. Then, too, John Marie left Pittsburgh, and "Grant's Hill" became the residence of Senator James Ross.

A year earlier, Betsey Murphy — aged twenty-one — had married the rising young merchant (junior partner to Ebenezer Denny) Anthony Beelen. This union, to continue until Betsey's death twenty-two years later, brought a wife of Irish parentage to the son of a Belgian baron, and began an interesting lesser dynasty in Pittsburgh history.11

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entertained by General John Neville, and "on quitting Pittsburgh, left a most favorable impression on the minds of the little circle in which they were received so kindly." Written years later, by the grandson of the General, Morgan Neville (on the event he was thirteen), in Watson's Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania (Phila., 1857, ii), 132-135. Tarleton Bates, aged twenty-two, wrote on the event to his brother Frederick: "Three princes of the house of Bourbon, sons of the late, the infamous Egalite, arrived here from the Falls of the Ohio yesterday. The only one of them that is tolerably looking is almost a dwarf; the others small, crooked legs and knees, round shoulders, hard features. In short, I am not altogether certain that the man who was to say they are deformed would deserve to forfeit his veracity. If their minds are as crooked as their bodies, it is lucky for France that they are no longer to fix the manners of a nation . . . . They travel without state, are illy dressed, and I believe have but one valet between them. Yet though they have lost their paternal estate, their maternal is immense." Mrs. Elvert M. Davis, "The Letters of Tarleton Bates, 1795-1805," WPHM, xii, 35.

11 In 1783, a native of the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium), Baron de Beelen de Berthoff came to America at the direction of the Emperor Joseph II, to act as Resident Minister to the United States. He brought with him his wife, and his only son, aged fifteen, Antonie Constantine, generally called Anthony. The Baron served as Minister until 1787; he never returned to Europe, settling first in Chester, then in Lancaster where he died.

Anthony Beelen came to Pittsburgh about 1794, and first engaged in a partnership — for what was the first attempt at an iron foundry in the area — with the merchant William Amberson and with George Anshutz, a young Alsatian. A Biographical Album . . ., op. cit., 170-171. This enterprise failed for lack of sufficient good fuel (charcoal) and proper iron ore; the site was at the foot of present Amberson Avenue, at Bayard Street. Lois Mulkern and Edwin V. Prugh, A Traveler's Guide to Historic Western Pennsylvania (Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1954), 69.

Deed Book iii, 314 (establishing the partnership); in termination of the partnership, 1 July, 1795, D. B. iv, 398. Of interest also, as to Beelen, a Power of Attorney respecting 1,200 acres of land in Washington County, D. B. xx, 121.

Patrick Murphy was said to have acted as a tutor in an Irish family of title and to have eloped with the daughter, his pupil, emigrating to America, and joining the Continental Army. His wife died in bearing their first child, and in Carlisle, Murphy engaged a young married woman to care for the infant. At war's end, the nurse Molly, herself widowed,
In 1804, Joseph McClurg left his general store and tobacco manufactory — called the “Sign of the Negro,” adjoining Murphy’s tavern at Fourth and Market — to establish the “Pittsburgh Foundry” (the city’s first) at Fifth and Smithfield, the site of the present Park Building. Six years later, Anthony Beelen erected his “air furnace,” the “Eagle Foundry,” just above the mouth of Suke’s Run — near the northern approach to the present Liberty Bridge. And adjoining this, Beelen had a three-story white lead manufactory.

In 1811, Beelen and Philip Gilland received, as “Trustees for the Roman Catholic Congregation of Pittsburgh and vicinity,” a conveyance of property from James O’Hara and Mary Carson O’Hara, noted as “being the land on which the Roman chapel is erected”; this lot — sixty feet on Liberty, in depth sixty-four feet, at the corner of Washington Street — is near present Eleventh Street, in the area of the public approach to the Pennsylvania Station.12 Beelen was elected to town council in 1813; in the first City Directory of 1815 he was listed as a merchant, with a dwelling on Water Street between Market and Wood, and with his business address on south side of the next street, Front (First), in the same block. He was then a director of the Bank of Pennsylvania — on Second between Market and Ferry — of which James O’Hara was President; he was “3rd Chief” of the H.R.A. Chapter of the Masons. He had, in the area of his foundry, built the “Eagle Steam Flour Mill.”

Legal difficulties began to afflict Beelen, to be compounded for him and others later by the after-effects of the War of 1812. In 1814, he was made a defendant, with others, in a Petition to pay a legacy, which came to involve the Market Street properties of his wife’s refusal to part with her charge; thereupon Paddy married Molly. Paddy's granddaughter Elizabeth Antoinette married, on March 21, 1835, Edward Despard Gazzam, a son of William Gazzam of Market Street, and Anne Parker Gazzam. Edward Gazzam, educated both in law and medicine, was to practice both, to be active in civic affairs and in politics, and to serve as State Senator. Paddy's great-granddaughter Elizabeth Simpson married, on April 24, 1849, Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia, the eldest son of Richard and Caroline Murray Rush. Young Rush's grandfather was the celebrated Dr. Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration, prominent physician, writer and educator. Of the children of this young couple, two were to die without issue; the third, a daughter, had only a son who died in infancy, and she — Mary Theresa Howell — died in 1903, aged forty-eight. A Biographical Album... op. cit., 170-171.

12 Deed Book xvii, 368, 4 Nov., 1811. The chapel, the first St. Patrick's, was to be served first by Father William Francis Xavier O'Brien; later by Father Charles B. Maguire. The latter was to act as a witness to the will of Molly Murphy. Sarah H. Killikelly, The History of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, Pa., B. C. & Gordon Montgomery Co., 1906), 340-341.
family, the old "Clapboard Row"; this action was not to be concluded until thirty-seven years later (!), a year after Beelen's death. In 1817, a news report chronicling the difficulties of other businessmen noted the closing-down of "The butt-hinge factory and the curry-comb factory of Anthony Beelen."

The previous year, Pittsburgh with a population of over 9000 had become a city, with Ebenezer Denny — Beelen's early partner — as its Mayor. Patrick Murphy's daughter, Betsey Murphy Beelen, died on June 15, 1821 — survived by her husband and by her step-mother, Molly — and was buried in Trinity Churchyard, where her grave marker may be seen today. Beelen, still attended with legal vexations, on April 15, 1823, deeded to Molly the Ground-rents and his "right of courtesy" in his deceased wife's property. There was being obtained against him at that time a judgment on which he was later "sold out" of his farm (in the present Soho area) on which he had a "neat ornamented cottage." Imprisonment for debt still occurred under Pennsylvanian law; an interesting account exists, related by a lawyer-judge familiar with Beelen's case, of how the process-server was avoided.

13 Petition: Orphans' Court viii, 26; Bond of 7 February, 1814.
14 Orphans' Court xxx, 173. For reference to the judgment, See D. B. LVI, 69, 29 October, 1834. The land was described "a farm in Pitt Township, containing 143 acres . . . on which there is a cabin, a good orchard, a considerable portion of the premises cleared and improved." This land, on Beelen's Run, or Two-Mile Run, on the Monongahela, is in the Soho area, west of Brady Street. Today, above Fifth Avenue against the hill, entered from Mohawk Street, is a short street named Beelen, parallel to Fifth. The Drs. Simpson and Gazzam had developed the wives' real estate inheritances into country estates in Soho. William G. Johnston, Life and Reminiscences (Knickbocker Press, 1901), 294-295, in referring to the years prior to 1850, noted the "rural seats" of these families. The Simpsons' land was "below" the Turnpike (Fifth Avenue) — i.e., toward the Monongahela; the Gazzam property was "above" on the high ground where Terrace Village now is. There was a toll-gate at this point; then, passing westward, was the "rude Bridge" crossing Soho Run (the present Brady Street); and then the farm of James Tustin who, emigrating from London, had memorialized his home city by placing the name Soho on the area. Tustin had established his machinery and tool factory on the pike — at about present Moultrie Street — and his fine stone mansion stood on the hillside above. Tustin's location is bounded on the east by the ravine, and outlined otherwise by Fifth Avenue and by Wyandotte Street. Tustin held this land originally on a Ground-Rent which subsequently was extinguished.

15 "The expedient he (Beelen) resorted to, to avoid arrest. A defendant arrested went to jail to await discharge. But the sheriff could not break the outer doors of a dwelling to make an arrest on civil process, nor could he execute civil process at all on a Sunday. Mr. Beelen shut up and barred his outer doors and windows. The backyard of his dwelling on Water Street was protected by a high wall. In this, he placed a watchman and guard, a tall, strong and vigorous workman taken from his foundry,
On February 17, 1824, Molly Murphy signed her last Will and Testament, appointing as her executor "my faithful friend, Anthony Beelen." She directed that her estate should pay, not only her own debts "which are but few," but should discharge also two specific debts of Beelen's since — she stated — "I have promised that these debts shall be certainly paid." In the equal division of her estate, one-half was to go to Beelen's daughter, Elizabeth Antoinette; the other one-half to go to Beelen's granddaughter, Elizabeth Simpson. Beelen's other daughter had married, on December 26, 1820, Dr. William A. Simpson.

About three years after Betsey's death — on June 17, 1824 — Anthony Beelen, at the age of fifty-six, married Anna Maria Ekin, aged about twenty-nine. Some gauge of Pittsburgh's growth to that year may be found in the statistics: the city revenue was $2,049.15; the city debt, $12,398.28. In January 1826, death came to Molly Murphy. The inventory of her personal possessions (of a total valuation of $176.43) presents an interesting glimpse of the individual, of her times and her circumstances, of forty years of life in "Clapboard Row":

Eight Sheep; one horned cow; one muly cow; two goats; "one lot Chickens — say 21"; silver table service; silver shoe buckles; a number of cloaks, various frocks of varied materials, "eleven gowns and four domestic gowns"; skirts and chemises, stockings and two flannel petticoats; two chests, three tables, six chairs, and four table cloths; one lot of curtains, five sheets, one pillowcase, ten quilts and three "coverlids"; some boxes containing "Bonnetts"; a pair of Morocco shoes; "one Large Copper Kettle, one Gallon measure, and

to prevent surprise by the Sheriff when the family was employed in the yard. On Sunday, his house was thrown open, his friends were dined and wined, and he and his family went to chapel. Thus the officer was held at bay, until Mr. Beelen was either discharged, or in some way appeased his creditors." Address of Chief Justice Agnew before the Allegheny County Bar Association. Four Misc. Pamphlets, County Law Library.

16 Will Book, iii, 115 (No. 63); the witnesses to her signing by "her mark" were Senator-lawyer James Ross; Father Charles B. Maguire; and Isaac Lightner. Isaac Lightner was a partner in the Jackson Foundry, which took over the operation of Beelen's "Eagle Foundry" when business difficulties pressed. Lightner had a fine well-proportioned stone house near Glenshaw (on what is Mt. Royal Boulevard today), which is still in use as a private residence. See: Charles M. Stotz, The Early Architecture of Western Pennsylvania (Wm. Helburn, Inc., N. Y., 1936, Photographs), 120.
one Copper Urn; one Spinning Wheel; one Woman's Saddle, Bridle and Saddle Cloth." 17

The recorded evidence of the career of the innkeeper is here presented. More evanescent yet of greater significance is the rounded picture of the innkeeper's social and political stature and influence in the life of the frontier community. At these inns, the traveler was fed, refreshed and lodged; his mount was baited and bedded. There the citizen was welcome, in the tradition of the "pub"; and in the later tradition of the country-store, he learned the latest news and developed his philosophy or exercised his political judgments. Here important visitors were entertained and, until later official structures were built, the local courts held their sessions. At some inns, town social events were staged — the theater, or a dancing class — or the fraternal orders had their meetings. In all these aspects, the Murphys were early on the scene, and they played a prominent part in the shaping of early Pittsburgh in their proprietorship of "The Sign of General Butler" on Market Street.

17 Molly Murphy was buried in Trinity Churchyard, as had been Paddy and Betsey. There is no valid evidence of Molly's birth-year, and the church records are not clear as to her age at death. In Trinity Churchyard later were also to be buried Anthony Beelen (1850) and his second wife Anna Marie (January 16, 1867). For Beelen's Estate, See: Bond Book No. 13, 137; Inventory No. 24 of 1851; for Molly Murphy, See: Inventory No. 20 of 1826, 9 January, 1826.