



TRENTON IN BYGONE DAYS

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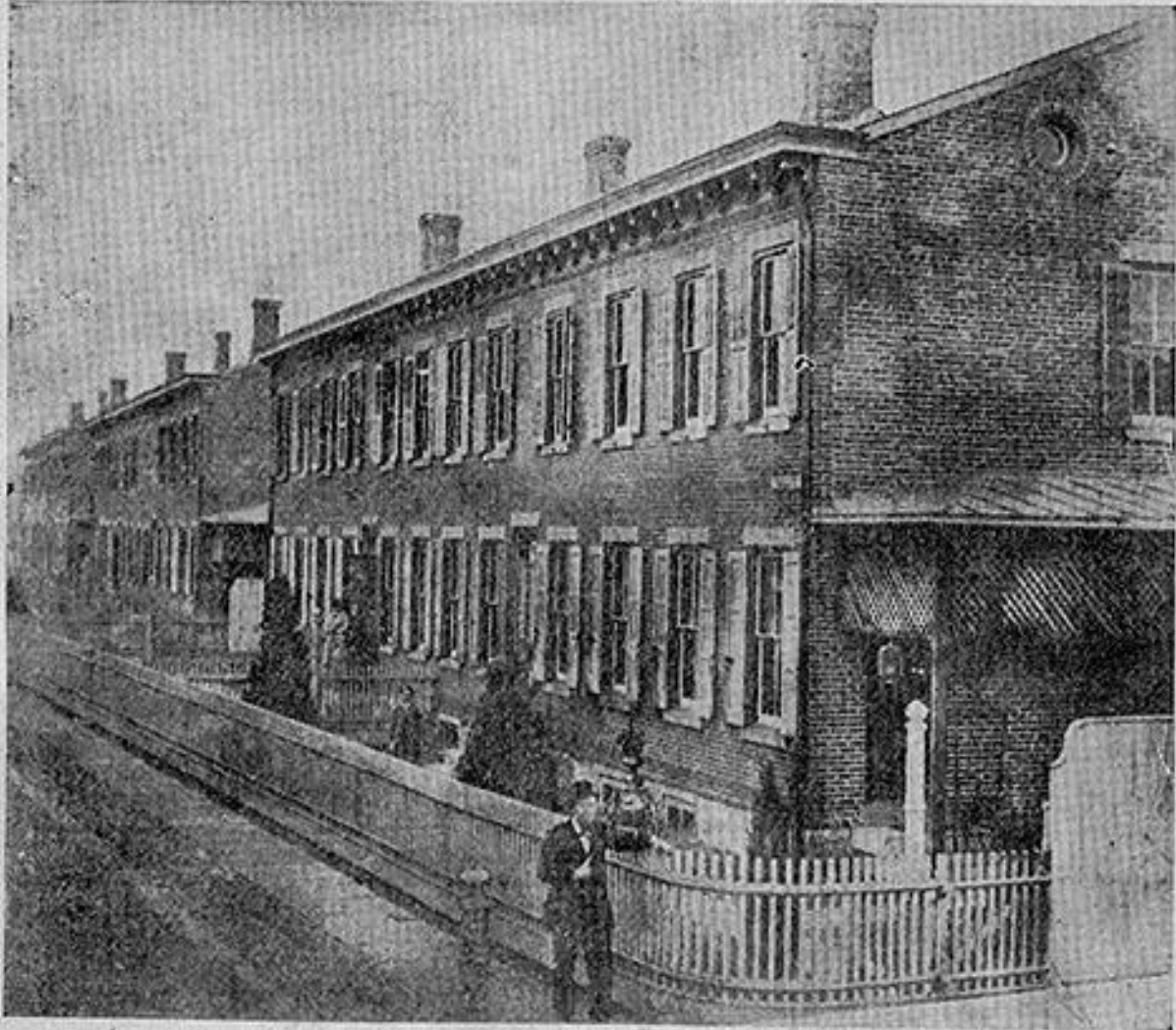
Since mention was made a few Sundays ago of Cosey Place, in the Third Ward, I have been fortunate enough to secure a good photograph of this little residential section through the courtesy of Dr. W. Henley Smith, grandson of William H. Smith. As already told, Cosey Place was designed by Smith, Sr., one of the two distributing agents of the True American long ago. He prospered and invested his savings in the tract of land, then vacant, which ran along the west side of Cooper Street from Market to the property of John Dunphy near Centre Street. Mr Smith sold a number of building lots for home-seekers and built several houses which he disposed of as the years went on. He made his own home on No. 15 Cooper Street, at the corner of Smith's Avenue, a narrow artery which he himself created, opposite the rear of the Sacred Heart Church. It runs from Cooper to Lamberton Street. The late Joseph S. Thorn, the cracker baker, lived in No. 11, the other one of a pair of handsome brick dwellings. Among other neighbors on Cooper Street who gradually built up the extensive vacant tract were Sheriff Benjamin F. Walton, George Cotton, the family of Dr. Gihon, Jeremiah J. Kelly, Harrison F. English, father of the present engineer of streets, Joseph E. English, the Margerums, Anglums, McCaffreys, Rogers and others.

The accompanying picture shows Cosey Place as it looked soon after its erection in 1880. It was a rather pretty little colony of ten homes with grass plots in front facing eastwardly, neatly fenced in and with sidewalks paved.

Mr. Smith, the builder, is seen in the picture his arm resting on the picket fence. Oscar, his son, now deceased, stood in the first yard. Another son, Frank H., now a local newsdealer, stands in yard No. 2, accompanied by his little son, Ernest King Smith. This boy was called for Ernest King, then local editor of the True American. Cosey Place has depreciated greatly in the intervening years, but it supplies an example of what an enterprising landlord could do to improve a piece of land not fronting on any of the streets of the city.

William H. Smith, by the way, was born in Egypt while his father was in the service of the British Government in that part of the world. He came to this country while still an infant.

Cosey Place As It Used to Look



Built out of money saved by William H. Smith, a prosperous local newspaper distributor.

Changes and alterations seem to be the life of a growing city and Trenton has witnessed a generous measure of these mutations. Nowhere is there a more striking evidence of the fact than in the story of Petty's Run. Many a Trentonian would be puzzled to describe the course of what is now an insignificant stream. Indeed it has pretty nearly disappeared from view, having been walled in and arched over like a drain, but it is still there flowing beneath some of our most prominent streets and important public buildings.

I had a chat a few days with John D. Faussett, law librarian at the State Library, about this pseudo-historic waterway, and he gave me his recollections as a boy when the run was open to the vision of all passersby. Mr. Faussett's younger days were spent on North Warren Street, opposite Bank, and he was therefore in a position to note Petty Run's tortuous course. He recalls

among other things which most old Trentonians have forgotten, that at one time it supplied power for a number of local industries.

Starting at the north John Haws, well-known coffee and spice manufacturer of other days, operated his plant on Willow Street above Belvidere Railroad by means of a wheel that drew power from Petty's Run. The run then passed under the canal-feeder and appeared next, harnessed for power purposes, about where St. Mary's High School is located. In this case it served Cowell's turning shop.

Passing across Bank Street and Chancery Lane, the little stream was utilized by Henry Potts for his tannery, and thence it made its way across Tanyard Alley (now West Hanover Street) and under Willow Street and southward to State Street, finally reaching Armstrong's paper mill on West Front Street which also relied on the run for much of its power. It then ran a course to Craft's bow factory located below Front Street and finally made a turn into the Assunpink Creek.

Mr. Faussett's recollection does not exhaust the list of industries which sooner or later drew on Petty's Run for power, but gives an idea of the considerable part that this little stream. (probably larger in remote times), had in the operation of local mills and factories. It has been said on good authority that the run furnished power to operate one of the local newspaper presses for periods of time before the Civil War but that failing occasionally in dry spells, hand power had to be resorted to. The newspaper press was located in a printing shop on West State Street.

Apropos of some recent comments about the disappearance of various old hostelries in the centre of town, I had a conversation last week with the Rev. Henry Armstrong, of Long Island, who has an interesting recollection of the National Hotel on Hanover Street. At the time which was in the 80's, he resided in this house with his father, Colonel Samuel Armstrong, of the Quartermaster-General's office, and with his mother and his baby sister, Katherine. The National was a favorite stopping place with show people temporarily in town and 'Buffalo Bill' Cody was a guest on a number of occasions. The large stableyard in the rear of the hotel was useful for Cody's Wild West cowboys, his live stock and wagons including the famous "Deadwood Coach."

Dr. Armstrong still remembers with a bit of thrill that one evening before the light were turned on in the hotel, he was on his way through an upstairs corridor to the apartments occupied by his family, when suddenly he was confronted by a tall Indian in war dress and to an imaginative boy it looked like there was trouble ahead. He let out a yell which startled his family and Colonel Armstrong came running out into the hall with little Katherine in his arms. The child naturally was terrified by the sight and uttered piercing cries. The records do not say but there is a suspicion that the noble Red Man's iron nerve forsook him and that he sought safety in flight. It was all over in a minute or two but the incident left a lasting impression on everyone concerned.

Among other childhood memories, Dr. Armstrong recalls the presence at the hotel of a small troupe of salespeople engaged in selling "wizard oil." They had a tally-ho coach, drawn by four prancing horses, which was driven from the hotel yard every evening with a flourish of trumpets.

A stand was made at various corners through the city and an alleged “doctor” with lusty lungs cried out the virtues of patent medicine.

The National Hotel was operated at different times by different landlords, but at the period herewith alluded to, the Johnstons were in control – three or four popular young men with their mother who came here from New Brunswick.

Stories of the old hotels being in order, there is one told of the “United States” that is worth repeating. Nowadays there is no more abstemious set of tradesmen than the local printers but in the long ago it was different. The United States hotel in the basement beneath the bar, had an oyster saloon which was well patronized. One evening among the patrons was a typo of the tourist class who occupied a small table and ordered a bowl of oyster soup. Over the appetizing dish the printer fell asleep, having previously indulged rather generously at the bar. Turning the restaurant into a lodging house was “agin the rules” and before a great while he was aroused by a waiter and told to move out.

“Bring me an oyster stew!” was his rejoinder and the order was filled promptly.

The next time the waiter came around, the oysters had vanished and the drowsy chap leaned over the table asleep.

“Wake up” was the waiter’s command, “and get a move on.”

“Bring me a stew of oysters!” was the only response.

The oysters came and were consumed, the fellow then dozing away.

Once more the waiter followed the rules of the house and the customer was about to be ejected, but again he ordered another dish of bivalves. As a matter of fact, four orders were given in rapid succession and dispatched. The story doesn’t go any farther, but it may be presumed that by this time the typo had sobered up on oysters and was able either to sit up straight or to march out into the open. The Trent Theatre subsequently was built on the site of the old hotel.