



Founding family

A look at the history of a founding family in Cranberry.

Page 4

Community History Series

From bog to boom town

Cranberry grows from frontier wilderness to concrete jungle

By BOB SCHULTZ
Staff Writer

CRANBERRY TWP — Two hundred years after their ancestors first settled in Cranberry, descendants of one of the township's founding families joined together to restore a cemetery along Franklin Road where 20 relatives are laid to rest.

On June 22, 1796, Alexander Ramsey settled a tract of land along the Venango Path in what is now northeastern Cranberry Township and Jackson Township. His property straddled the Venango Path, once a forest trail used by Native Americans.

One descendant, Rita Ramsey Schoeffel, still lives along the Venango Path, known today as Franklin Road.

"The deed said Alexander bought the property for \$1,000," said Schoeffel. "That would have been quite a bit of money at that time."

Alexander later married a Westmoreland County woman whose father was killed in the Revolutionary War, Grace Smith and moved her to the family farm.

He carved out a homestead on his 400-acre plantation and raised a family of two daughters and five sons. Ramsey died on Christmas Day in 1840 and was laid to rest on a knoll on the farm.

Eventually, 20 other Ramsey's would be buried at the family cemetery. Both the cemetery and several of the Ramsey family farm houses still stand along Franklin Road.

Over the years, time and the elements began to take a toll on the cemetery markers — and names and dates became harder to read. In 1992, Schoeffel began contacting all other known descendants across the United States, asking them to contribute to the erection of a memorial on the cemetery hilltop.

"The response was tremendous. Donations came in from Ramsey's all over, some I didn't know existed," said Schoeffel.

Late in the fall of 1994, Pat Boylan of Boylan Funeral Homes in Zelienople and Evans City, managed to get two large pieces of granite up the now-overgrown slopes of the knoll and placed them in the family cemetery.

The monuments were dedicated in a ceremony organized by Ramsey descendant Janice Taylor Whittaker of Columbus, Ohio. About 40 of Alexander and Grace Ramsey's descendants gathered at the cemetery on June 29.

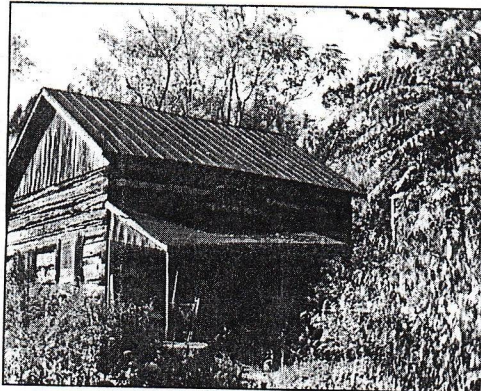
The two new monuments identify each person buried in each plot and other information found on the original stones. Schoeffel said there was enough money raised to pay for the monuments and enough left over to set up a fund for the upkeep of the cemetery.

The Venango Path



Above, members of the Ramsey family attend the memorial dedication to the descendants of Alexander and Grace Ramsey, one of the five original settlers in Cranberry Township. Below left, is one of the original Ramsey log homes still standing on the Nixon Farm near

Route 19. It was moved from its original location in Evans City. Below right, it seems roads have always been under construction in Cranberry Township. Here, state workers get ready to build Route 19 into a four-lane highway in 1952.



The Ramseys weren't the only pioneers to settle along this famous Indian thru-way. The trail was blazed by the early Native American population in Western Pennsylvania.

Early settlers used the Venango Path, which stretched from an Indian town along the Ohio River to the Indian town of Venango at the mouth of French Creek on the Allegheny River, to get to their new homesteads.

George Washington once used the path in 1753 to deliver a letter the French commander leading forces who were building forts in the area.

A well-known story taught in history classes, the letter warned the French troops to withdraw from the territory claimed by both European powers.

Washington was returning from delivering the letter with frontiersman Christopher Gist when a young Indian guide who had of-

COMMUNITY HISTORY

Each month the News Weekly/Cranberry Eagle will explore a historical aspect of a community in southwest Butler County. Look for the series on the first Wednesday of each month.

Next month the series will take a look at Evans City.

ferred help in guiding the party through a terrible winter snow storm turned and fired his musket at Washington. The shot missed, and Washington went on to lead the colonies through the Revolution.

Cranberry's early beginnings

The Ramsey's were one of six original families who purchased land to develop what is now known as Cranberry Township.

The others were William and Matthew Graham, John Henry, Samuel Duncan, Benjamin Johnston, and Paul Vandivort.

All the settlers had bought their land from Revolutionary War soldiers, who in turn had received the land from the new American government as payment for their services during the conflict.

Cranberry Township derives its name from the cranberry bog that once existed in the southern part of the township. Although the township was settled 200 years ago this year, the township wasn't officially created by Butler County officials until 1804.

The rural community was only inhabited by a handful of pioneers and a few Indians who shared the land with a vast abundance of wildlife.

But by the 19th Century, the township had its first development — a tavern. The area

known as Criders Corners became a "boom area" because of its crossroads.

Early farms included grist and saw mills with some early settlers taking advantage of the area's coal and oil resources.

In the early 1900s, the township boasted a population of around 500.

Cranberry remained mostly rural and agricultural until the first connections to Interstate 79 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike were built. Population jumped from 2,000 in the 1950s to more than 5,000 in the early 1970s.

Currently, the township has more than 15,000 inhabitants and is expected to double in the next decade.

The U.S. Census figures indicate the township grew one person per day per year between 1980 and 1990.

