

THE LIFE & TIMES ON RAILROAD AVENUE IN

SAXTON , PA.

THE CABINS

by

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The Cabins

The Raystown Branch of the Juniata River flows in a mile wide arc as it flows around the town of Saxton. In days gone by, this river was clean, cool, and a good fishing and camping area. About a mile from Saxton there was an area next to this river at the foot of a ridge that was level, shaded, and an ideal place for camping. There were two cabins built just for this purpose. One was owned by the Eichelberger's and relatives. The other was the McCahan cabin. Another cabin about one half mile up the river, the Stoler cabin, constituted the entire occupancy of the river front.

The families took turns of several weeks each summer for their family outings at the Cabins, as they were called. The Eichelberger family moved in mass to the Cabins via Rhoades bridge to cross the river, then a drive along a narrow road on the edge of the ridge and then down to the level area of the Cabins. It was rather a hazardous route. After leaving the main road at Rhodes farm, we would often get out of any vehicle and walk behind it on this particular narrow roadway. It did protect the area against an invasion of outsiders.

The trip from Saxton, as the crow flies, was much more direct than the ride by vehicles to get to the Cabins. The only trouble was that you arrived at the opposite side of

the river from the campsite and one had to be transported across the river by boat. We had a large flat-bottom boat which was used for transportation, fishing, and swimming by all of us. My father, J. "Allie" Eichelberger was not a camping enthusiast, and besides, he said he had to work. However, he would walk out the short route through Stonerstown and down through the woods which lead to the opposite side of the river from our camping grounds.

Dad was a cigar smoker, and about dusk we could tell of his approach by the red glow of the tip of his cigar. One of the Eichelberger boys, Bill, Bob, Eli, or Dick, was always ready and eager to row the boat across the river to pick up "Dad" as he was affectionately known to all of us. He became the source of the latest news from the town and would bring out any mail as well as the daily paper, to keep everybody informed of current happenings. He would spend the night with us and after breakfast he would be ferried back across the river and start on his daily walk back to Saxton.

In addition to the boating activities, a canoe was added to the water equipment. It belonged to Aunt Martha Sweet Heckerman. The ability to row a big flat-bottomed boat and the paddling of a canoe were two distinct and separate accomplishments. We took turns learning, and often ended up with the critter unexpectedly turning over and dumping us in the river. The canoe could handle two adults, one on a seat at each end. A child could ride between the

front or back seats by sitting in the bottom of the canoe. One evening Dad was accompanied by some other individual on his evening walk to the Cabins. Surprise, it was Grandfather Eli Eichelberger who was persuaded by Dad to spend a night at the Cabins.

We all rushed to bring them across the river, some went in the boat but I paddled the canoe, which was my latest feat, and urged Grandfather to ride with me. He got in the front of the canoe and we pushed off from the shore and I was proudly paddling the canoe across the river and everything was going fine.

When we approached the opposite bank of the river, Grandfather stood up unexpectedly to help make a safe landing and the canoe quickly tipped over dumping us both in the water. Grandfather, in his nice business suit, was soaked to the skin. He waded ashore. I was soaked too but having only shorts on it was just an unscheduled swim for me. I was chagrined and upset that on my first voyage with a passenger, I had somehow failed.

Grandfather Eli was taken into the Cabin and took off his wet clothing and borrowed some dry clothes to wear until his own suit dried out. When it was all over and we gathered around the campfire, everybody had a hearty laugh over his unfortunate experience.

One of the best swimming spots was located directly

across the river from our cabin. It was called "Cat Fish Hole." A diving board had been erected on the river bank and one could dive into about six feet of water at that spot. Most of the river was rather shallow and one could wade across it if you picked the right spots. But there were some deep and dangerous river "holes." This was one of them.

Mother, while swimming there one day, did not realize the depth of the water and went in over her head and almost became a drowning victim, but was saved by Jim Zink who was swimming nearby at the time.

Another deep hole was the "Carp Hole" which was located about one fourth of a mile below our cabin. It was off-bounds for all of us. However, it was a good place for fishing and many a large bass or carp were hauled in from the river bank. Once or twice during the vacation, there would be a grand migration of carp swimming and splashing up the river, always at night. One could hear the racket they made jumping out of the river and splashing back as they swam along. There were hundreds of them and one could spot them by lantern or flashlight from a boat. It was a rather eerie and thrilling experience. Some fishermen would boat on the river at night and with the use of flood-light would "gig" for fish. This was done with a spear on the end of a stick. I think it was illegal, or did become so later.

There was an island in the river several hundred yards up from our cabin which was called "Buck-Shot" Island. We used to take the safe, flat-bottomed boat and go exploring on this Island. We sort of felt it was put there just for our explorations. It sort of made us feel it was completely our Island. Another favorite spot was "Sun Fish Hole." This was located on the cabin side of the river and was right below a big shade tree. It apparently got its name from the fact that it appeared to be the adobe of the Sun Fish.

It was here that Fletcher McCahan who occupied the nearby cabin, would tell us kids the wildest and scariest stories but would always end up by saying, "maybe!" He was famous for his story-telling independent of everybody when we visited this site. These abilities and he always had an appreciative and apprehensive audience.

Another famous character of the camping days was the daily visit of Eddie Reed who would come by on his daily trip to Saxton. He would walk from the Reed farm, which was about one half mile up the river, to town every day. He would always manage to come past the camping site just about mealtime--either going or coming back from town. Mother always felt sorry for him and would give him something to eat. Often he would bum a ride across the river in our boat to save about a mile of extra walking to get to Saxton. This became an almost daily occurrence.

Rhoades bridge was another famous landmark for us kids. It was a big wooden bridge with plank-bottomed roadway which would accommodate one vehicle at a time. There were large wooden rounded arches built into the bridge for support, which we loved to climb and peep out between the bridge roof and the sides at the river below. That was a real thrilling experience for any kid. This was right near the Rhoades farm, where we would get our daily supply of milk. Mr. Rhoades had a dairy herd and ran the only milk route to our town of Saxton. We took turns walking from the cabin over to his farm to get our daily supply of fresh milk.

The Eichelberger's had a pony named "Colonel." He was a beautiful brown and white spotted animal. We took him along camping with us and his home was a small shed located near our cabin. It was our job to feed, water, and exercise "Colonel" daily. We had a saddle which we would put on the pony and take turns riding him around the area. There was a two-wheeled cart which we could use for a ride, as well as a four-wheel, rubber-tired trap or buggy which would accommodate four people in the front and rear seats.

Over weekends we always seemed to have a weekly invasion of visitors for the day, generally relatives from Saxton. Charlie Weaverling, the driver for the team at the Eichelberger's Store, had a great big coach which had kerosene lamps on the sides, that he would hitch the store

horses to and bring six or eight people out to the cabins. This generally would include "Mid," his wife and Aunt Mollie and Aunt Hallie Eichelberger. The Shannon family were frequent weekend visitors too. That would include Uncle Shannon, Aunt Elsie, and their three daughters--Sarah, Betsy, and Martha. Aunt Martha Sweet generally spent her vacation with the Eichelbergers.

At night the campsite area was lighted with Jack-o-lanterns. Candles were placed in the lanterns, and were strung around the camping area. They were then individually lighted at night. Also kerosene lanterns were available to light one's way around--particularly when one had to visit the "out-house" at night. A camp fire was a nightly ritual. One of our daily duties was to search for fire wood for the evening camp fire. We would scour the side of the ridge and the river banks for fuel. There seemed to a never-ending supply of wood if one looked around enough.

The life of camping out at the Cabins was a care-free, happy experience for us all. We always seemed to have a hundred and one things to do or places to explore. The clay riverside bank offered unlimited sites to build tunnels and roadways for our toy cars. We traveled barefooted, wearing just shorts or blue jeans. We could fish, we could hike, take a boat ride or a swim as we had the urge. The only interruption was the ringing of the "dinner bell" calling us back to the cabin for lunch or dinner. We spent about half the time in the river swimming.

One night after we had gone to bed, a large black snake invaded our cabin. Fortunately, we youngsters slept through the experience, but brother Bill and Dad killed the snake as it crawled along one wall of the cabin. With the shades of night falling, the camp fire lighted, the jack-o-lanterns swinging gayly in the night breeze, the crickets and katydids chirping, the frogs croaking, there was an air of excitement and mystery to the old camping ground. It was a happy and unforgettable experience for us all. I often wonder whether the Cabins still stand.