

## HOW CASPAR REEL, REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER, PUSHED HIS WAY ACROSS THE ALLEGHANY MOUNTAINS.

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By ISABEL NAYSMITH NEWMYER\*  
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How many people passing through West View know that within the sight of the car track stands the old Reel homestead, built in 1792 by Caspar Reel, a young soldier of the Revolution.

It is to be regretted that the old log house has passed into the hands of strangers, also that it has been covered with weather boards, thereby losing its identity and much of its charm. The shrubbery, vines and trees have all been removed, but the old house stands after the lapse of a hundred and eighteen years as firmly as when Caspar Reel, in the flush of early manhood, built it with his own hands. Here he lived and reared his family; and here, after a long and well spent life, beneath the old roof tree, he passed to his reward.

In the Government grant the place was called Reel Hall, and to this day the name remains, though now associated with another house built on the same farm about seventy years ago by Casper Reel, a son of the pioneer, which is replete with treasured belongings of the original Reel Hall.

### Original Home in Lancaster.

We do not know when the Reels came to Pennsylvania, but we find them a thrifty and well-known people, with well stocked farms in and about Lancaster, at the beginning of the Revolution. Caspar Reel, then a mere boy, enlisted with his father, both being among the first to respond to the call of our beloved country, theirs by adoption then, but later by right of service rendered. And today at Reel Hall you can see the watch carried by Caspar Reel through the conflict and looking none the worse for wear, even after the lapse of all these years.

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\*The *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, April 24, 1910.

The war having passed and peace once more having settled over the land, he, like many other young men, was filled with a desire for conquest. His father was glad to resume the peaceful life of the farm, but Caspar, the son, filled with ambition by the wonderful stories of the wealth abounding in the valleys of the Allegheny, Ohio and Beaver rivers, resolved to seek his fortune in the far west, so called at that time.

Accordingly we find in the year 1787 the little borough on the Conestogo much wrought up over the news that Caspar Reel was about to cross the Allegany's in search of fortune.

Like Nimrod of old he was a mighty hunter, and the village was proud of her son, never doubting that he would uphold her honor wherever he might go.

In the midst of the gay round of pleasure, tendered him before his departure, there was one gentle heart that was breaking at thought of losing her stalwart lover—beautiful Elizabeth Wise, to whom he had declared his love.

“I could live in the woods with thee in sight,  
Where never should human foot intrude,  
Or with thee find light in the darkest night,  
And a social crowd in solitude.”

In vain he assured her that soon he would return a rich man to claim his bride and carry her back to the home he would build with his own strong hands. Her cheeks paled at the thought of the dangers in store for him—for who had not heard the awful stories of torture and death at the hands of the terrible red men in the forests surrounding Fort Pitt. But at last came the day of departure, and standing in the doorway of the home he loved, he parted from his mother with tear-dimmed eyes, her blessing ringing in his ears and the high resolve in his heart never to depart from the straight paths in which her sweet teaching had taught him to walk.

Last night in her rose garden he had said goodby to Elizabeth; what was said is not for us to know; 'twas for her ears alone. It was their last goodby, for he would not see her in the crowd that gathered at the entrance of the lane to escort him from the town.

### **Departure for the Wilderness.**

Very handsome he looked as he mounted his horse and rode away with gun over his shoulder and ax strapped across his back.

Laughing and shouting the party galloped along the road past the home of Elizabeth, and there, amid the roses, she waved him a last adieu and gave him a picture to treasure in his wanderings. On they rode, following the windings of the placid river, till they came to the National Pike, where, with ringing cheers and many wishes for good luck on his journey, the party turned back, all save his father, who wished to have his son for a little while to himself. They rode slowly now, his father admonishing him to live peaceably with all men, and deal kindly with the Indians, so as not to incur their enmity. At last came the parting, and the following words of his father he never forgot: "My son, remember always that you came of a family with never a blemish on the name, and I want you to so order your life that when you pass it on to your sons it shall be as clean and honorable as it came to you." With a brief hand clasp and a fervent "God bless and keep you my son," they parted, the father's horse turning homeward, the son's going deeper into the forest.

Caspar had not gone far when he overtook a party going in the same direction, for which he was truly thankful, as his sad thoughts were poor companions. Never had home seemed so dear to him, but the spirit of adventure was strong within him and he had no thought of turning back. At last, after an uneventful journey, we find him catching his first glimpse of the fort at the Point with something of the joy Columbus experienced when he first sighted the land he was seeking. Looking over the forests and rivers, his heart thrilled at the thought of what it might hold for him. He found a place to stay, and after a refreshing meal walked down to the Allegheny River—its rippling waters arousing many tender memories of that other river, so far across the mountains, and the sweet maid who lived within the sound of its laughing waters.

He spent several days in looking around the village and its outskirts, and learned that many people were settling in different sections near the fort. Picketing his horse and gathering some wood, he soon had a roaring fire, and shortly

a savory dish of squirrel, the woods abounding in all sorts of game.

As he sat smoking contentedly after the first meal ever cooked by a white man in this place, with his faithful dog lying at his feet, he felt that here was what he wanted—beside this spring he would build his home, and here in this vast grove he and Elizabeth would set up a family altar that future generations should be proud of!

At last night drew her mantel over the hills and rolling himself in his blanket he lay down to “pleasant dreams,” lulled by the songs of the night birds, and the medley of other sweet sounds, always heard in the forest.

He was astir early in the morning, and when the sun rose majestically over the tree tops, flooding the earth with warmth and beauty, he felt that he was very close to his Creator, and that these green spreading branches formed indeed a tabernacle.

As one in a dream he prepared his breakfast, picturing Elizabeth and himself in the little home which had already begun to assume proportions in his active brain.

Breakfast over he returned to the village, passing several friendly Indians on the way. Arriving there he spent the remainder of the day writing letters home, to be sent by the stage early in the morning, a postal service having been recently established. He then purchased a *Gazette*, and, perusing its pages, he learned much regarding affairs in this section.

Later on he filed his claim, took out the necessary papers, and after paying for his land with the gold he had carefully concealed in a belt worn under his hunting shirt he found himself the proud possessor of a grant for a thousand acres of land on the north side of the Allegheny River in what was then known as Perrysville, some of which remains in the family to this day. Impatient to commence work he hired a stout woodchopper, purchased supplies and once more wended his way to his land.

### **Indians Attack Him.**

He learned much about the Indians from his companion, who feared an attack when the red men should discover he was settling on what they felt was their land. Nothing daunted him, however; sunrise found the two men busy and

night at last fell upon them with a goodly pile of logs ready for the cabin.

The work went forward merrily, as it always will where love and youth go hand in hand, and soon there was a small cabin in the clearing. It was a rude affair, but substantial, made to withstand the attacks of the savages should the need of defense arise. The young woodchopper returned to Pittsburgh after the cabin was finished, leaving Caspar once more alone. He worked industriously, burning out the stumps and clearing and laying out the grounds. Then he planted with great care rows of apple, pear, peach, plum, cherry and quince seeds his mother had placed in his saddlebags, also some hollyhock, sunflower and other seeds given him by Elizabeth, so that when she came there would be something to remind her of home.

These things accomplished, he devoted his time to hunting and many pelts hung in the rafters of the lonely cabin. Returning one evening from a day's hunting he discovered tracks of Indians, and fearing an attack he brought his horse into the cabin and while returning from the spring he narrowly escaped an arrow which flew past him and lodged in the cabin door. Darting into the house he barred the heavy door, not a moment too soon, for peering through the port holes he saw a sight to make the stoutest heart quail.

The clearing was full of red skins, evidently on the war path. Resolved to sell his life dearly, he loaded his gun and firing through the port hole had the satisfaction of seeing his shot take effect on one of the young braves, who was carried into the grove. Then the warfare was resumed. Caspar reloaded again and again, but despair was beginning to enter his heart for his ammunition was running low. Suddenly he heard a commotion west of the cabin. The Indians immediately turned their attention in that direction, and soon our pioneer learned that his life had been saved by the timely arrival of a squad of soldiers who were returning from a scouting expedition through the country in search of that notorious renegade Simon Girty—outlaw and hater of his own race. They camped that night at Reel Cabin, and in the morning Caspar returned with them to Pittsburgh, deciding, as the Indians gave evidence of antagonism, to abandon his land for a while, and devote his time to hunting and trapping.

He now looked about for a companion and soon found an old trapper who was glad to go out with him. Together they procured a boat and other supplies and floated down the Ohio to the mouth of the Beaver River. Here they stayed till their boat was heavily loaded with skins, and then, highly elated over the success of the trip, they started up the river. While rowing past the place now known as Avalon they were hailed by Indians on shore, who asked for food. Knowing the treacherous nature of the red men they paid no attention to their calls, but continued to ply their oars vigorously. Suddenly they heard a ringing English voice give the command, Fire! Ducking their heads the bullets flew harmlessly over them, hissing as they struck the water. Looking back the old scout recognized Simon Girty standing on shore, but discovered that the Indians had no boats at that point and they were therefore safe. They kept a watchful eye for Indians all the way up the river, and only felt safe when they pulled their boat ashore at the Point.

### **His Return Home.**

They at once disposed of their boat, traps, etc., and divided their spoils. Caspar made some further arrangements regarding his property, secured a strong pack horse to carry the pelts and early the following morning started for Lancaster and Elizabeth. He reached home without adventure, and never was a traveller given a warmer welcome. He soon converted the furs into money and found that he had made far more than he had ever expected. He had also surprised his sweetheart at her wheel. They again walked by the river as of yore.

When they came back the date for the wedding was set, and preparations went forward for that happy event, which took place one beautiful autumn day in the quaint old village church.

After much festivity at the Wise mansion the young couple left for a wedding trip to Philadelphia and New York. Returning, they lived for three years at the Reel homestead, waiting for the Indians to quiet down at Pittsburgh. Then, as reports came that hostilities had ceased in that section, they decided, in 1792, to take possession of their little home

in Perrysville. So gathering all their belongings together, they packed them in a heavy wagon—precious bits of china and rare old pewter, the fine old four-poster and dresser, the carved parlor table and chairs, the spinning wheel and reel—for Elizabeth spun all her linen—all these things were securely packed for the long journey. Last of all, tucked in Elizabeth's saddlebags were two brass candle sticks and some roots of her loved roses and peonies, to be planted in the home in the wilderness.

So they rode across the mountains together, each with a child in their arms—for two little ones had come to brighten their home—and after many weary days of travel they arrived in Pittsburgh, where the mother and little ones stayed while Caspar proceeded to make ready for the reception of his little flock. What a sight met his gaze—the tiny seeds he had planted were now finely growing young trees, waiting to be set out, and hollyhocks, sunflowers and morning glories ran riot.

It did not take him long to get the cabin ready, when he returned to Pittsburgh and brought the little family home. Elizabeth was charmed with the place; with loving care they selected the spot whereon Reel Hall—the name chosen for their home—should stand.

### **Old Reel Homestead.**

Men were hired at once, and soon the forest rang with the sound of ax and hammer, Caspar himself working and directing with untiring zeal. At last the house was finished and the family installed; then a huge barn was built, cattle purchased and the Reel homestead was a dream realized.

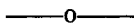
Very soon another little one came to swell their number, Caspar Reel, the first white child born on the Northside. Time rolled on and other children came. The older ones were now large enough to assist on the farm, and soon the Reel place was known as one of the finest in this section. Then came the War of 1812. The two oldest sons marched away to answer the call of their country. One returned when the war was over, but the other marched on to that land from which no traveler ever returns.

Time sped on and Caspar Reel, pioneer, soldier of the Revolution and soldier of fortune, felt the hand of time pressing heavily upon him, "Till, like a clock worn out with beat-

ing time, the weary wheels of life stood still," and he passed to his reward. To his son Caspar came the old home place, and he, following in his father's footsteps, also went a-wooing, his love being Elizabeth Nesmith Miller, a descendant of one of the first families of Maine. When he had won her he built for her reception the fine old mansion among the apple trees. Hither he brought her, and here, within a stone's throw of the parent home, where lived his mother, surrounded by all that life held dear to her, were again enacted the same scenes as in the old house. Little ones came and the house rang with the prattle of their childish voices. They grew to manhood and womanhood, and the fame of the hospitality of Reel Hall was known far and wide, and many of the older generation of Pittsburghers recall with pleasure delightful days spent at Reel Hall.

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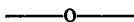
#### A FEW SELECTIONS OF WAR POETRY.



The late war, as has been the case with most modern wars, was responsible for producing a large amount of poetry. Some of it was good, much of it was passable, and more was indifferent in quality. It is too early to publish a complete collection of the best poetry, but until that time arrives, it may not be amiss to reprint a few of the selections that appeared in the newspapers and magazines, and which possess more than a passing popularity or are of historic value. Among the poems printed below is also a translation of Lissauer's "A Chant of Hate Against England."

#### A CHANT OF HATE AGAINST ENGLAND.

By ERNST LISSAUER.



French and Russian, they matter not,  
A blow for a blow and a shot for a shot;  
We love them not, we hate them not,  
We hold the Weichsel and Vosges-gate,  
We have but one and only hate,  
We love as one, we hate as one,  
We have one foe and one alone.

He is known to you all, he is known to you all,  
He crouches behind the dark-gray flood,