

## Bucks village owns extensive history

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The village of Ottsville in northwestern Tinicum Township, Bucks County has an interesting history dating back well over 200 years.

Like many old communities in our region, it has been known by several different names over the years. The village lies at the intersection of Durham Road (Route 611) and the old road to Erwinna. It is one of the oldest villages in this part of Bucks County, north of Tohickon Creek.

The earliest settlers here were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who founded a congregation around 1738. James Campbell, a Scottish immigrant, was the first pastor of the tiny flock. The first church was built of logs but was later replaced by a brick structure. Over the years, the congregation grew so small regular services were stopped and only a Sunday school was maintained in the structure.

Large congregations at Nockamixon and Tinicum drew away most of the Ottsville congregation. In 1843, trustees for the Presbyterian congregation transferred the old church to a German Reformed and Lutheran congregation for worship. The old stone church, erected in 1766, was then rebuilt. It was restored in 1959 and renovated in 1976. The old structure now houses Red Hill St. Luke's United Church of Christ on Durham Road.

The old cemetery adjoining the church has long been a local landmark. At one time the oldest tombstone visible was that of James Blair who died in 1749. Here sleep many of the pioneers of Tinicum, including Revolutionary War and Civil War veterans. The stone wall surrounding the cemetery was erected in 1835 by Daniel Boileau and Stephen Bennet.

For more than 100 years, the village was simultaneously known by two names -- Ottsville and Red Hill. Red Hill was applied because of the large ridge of red shale rock upon which the village stands. The name Ottsville dates from 1814 when, on Jan. 1, Michael Ott was appointed the village's first postmaster. Another reason the name Ottsville was adopted was because there was another post office called Red Hill in Montgomery County.

Michael Ott was a member of the numerous Ott family which for many years were large landowners in this region. Even after the adoption of the name Ottsville, residents still referred to the community as "The Hill." Originally the post office was located in the northern elevated section. Later it was located in the main village. Gradually the names Red Hill and The Hill passed from usage.

Among the early settlers here were the Steely, Shively, Haney, Scheetz, Hager, Fluck, Harpel, Gruver, Boileau and Frankenfield families. They were English, German, Scotch-Irish and French Huguenot. In religion, the earliest settlers were Presbyterian, followed by Quakers, Lutheran and Reformed.

The old hotel atop the hill was a regular stopping place for stagecoaches on the Durham Road between Easton, Bethlehem and Philadelphia. A tall piece of native red stone in front of the hotel was placed there in 1900 by James Emery to mark the spot where the "walkers" of the Walking Purchase of 1737 stopped for a brief rest.

It was atop Red Hill on Sept. 19, 1737, that Solomon Jennings, one of the three whites doing the walk, officially dropped out of the event. When Jennings departed he left James Yates and Edward Marshall to continue the walk alone.

For years the hotel was known as the Landmark Inn. Although the native stone marker remains, the inn was converted to apartments about 20 years ago.

The present Ottsville Inn in the center of the village is of a later date. It was established in 1871 by Thomas C. Harpel, a popular innkeeper for many years.

Later a bypass for Route 611 was built from the top of Red Hill to a short distance south of Ottsville. This new road, as bypasses often do, completely bypasses the old village.

( James Wright

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