

## Presentation Traces Region's History Club Members Research Family Trees

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Harrisburg's most prominent settler was no teetotaler, but he knew better than to give liquor to a drunk person.

So when a group of drunken Indians came to his tavern/trading post and demanded more rum, John Harris refused to serve them.

For his restraint, Harris was nearly burned at the stake by the Indians -- tied to the same mulberry tree in River Front park under which he now rests in peace. His loyal manservant, the slave Hercules, freed him. Harris died of natural causes in 1748.

At least that's how the story goes, and the rest is history, according to Sheldon Munn, historian and founder of Harrisburg Tours.

"A lot of people think of Harrisburg of the land of the Pennsylvania Dutch -- but of course, that is the furthest from the truth," said Munn, 65. He brought a handful of Harrisburg "movers and shapers" back to life yesterday afternoon in a slideshow presentation spanning 300 years for the Capital Area Genealogical Society.

The 25 or so regulars at the genealogy club meetings spend countless hours poring over public records, musty books, genealogy software and the Internet to trace their family trees. Many of them have discovered deep roots in the Harrisburg area.

"If you take out a book on genealogy, the first thing it will tell you is to start with yourself," said **Esther Richwine**, 79, of Chambers Hill, who serves as the club's president. But that tends to become a starting point that can lead down many divergent paths. "You find out you have cousins you never knew you even have."

Munn's biographical sketches retold a history familiar to many in the room, but was punctuated by often-overlooked details that made it worth revisiting.

For instance, George Washington might have slept in Harrisburg the night of Oct. 3, 1794, on his way to quell the Whiskey Rebellion. The president would have been the guest of John Harris Jr., (1727-1791), Harrisburg's founder, and also president and commander in chief of the Army during Washington's time.

The younger Harris set aside land in Harrisburg in hopes of bringing the state

Capitol here -- a wish that came true in 1812.

The boldest figure in Munn's presentation was also the one of the most controversial in his time. Simon Cameron, (1799-1899), was born a penniless orphan in a log cabin in Lancaster County. He made his mark in printing, later catapulting himself to wealth as a self-made entrepreneur and politician.

Cameron made millions in banking, canals, railroading and other endeavors. He also served as a U.S. Senator, playing both sides of the aisle -- as a Democrat and later as a Republican. He served as Secretary of State under President James Polk and briefly as Secretary of War during Abraham Lincoln's presidency.

He could not shake a lifelong reputation for corruption.

"In national politics, he earned the title as the "Kingmaker," Munn said. Cameron once stated, "An honest politician is one that when he is bought, he stays bought."

The genealogy club meets the second Sunday of every month at the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Linglestown, where it maintains a free resource library.

During the meeting, the members, most of whom are older than 60, swap tips for research.

Sometimes the biggest discoveries are just a Google search away.

"I went into Google and I put in Markelville, then a whole list of different sites came up," said Dottie Fox, 61, of West Hanover Twp. She found a Web site that had reproductions of a newspaper from the Perry County community that included photographs of great grandparents, the Bealors, and their extended family.

"They were all in one photograph -- now that was really surprising," she said. But eight years after Fox started her quest, compiling names of some 3,500 ancestors.

Once you've been bitten by the genealogy bug, it's hard to stop digging. "You could spend all your waking hours doing it," **Richwine** said.

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INFOBOX:

MORE HISTORY

\* Inventor William Orville Hickok, (1815-1891), founded W.O. Hickok Manufacturing Co., which is still in business today, with his innovation, the "Perfect Ruling Pen."

\* Mira Lloyd Dock, (1853-1945), a botanist and pioneering preservationist, launched the "City Beautiful" movement and implored residents to "Clean Up Harrisburg!"

\* Mary Sachs, (1888-1960), a Lithuanian immigrant who brought glamour and sophistication to Harrisburg's downtown with her glittering retail store, later spread her wealth through philanthropy.

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**Caption:** FILEART  
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