

A Pretty Picture Is Worth a Great Story

By

M. Lois Huffines and Jack Fisher

While working on a pictorial history of Mifflinburg and the West End, to be published by Arcadia Publishing in 2012, Lois Huffines received word from John Dersham, a former Mifflinburg resident now living in Alabama, offering the use of photographs from the glass plate negatives of photographer William “Grover” Bierly. Bierly was active in Mifflinburg from about 1913 to 1917, and his images of Mifflinburg from the original glass plate negatives were a valuable addition to the images already owned by the Historical Society. The pictures were not identified, and John Dersham had only very sketchy information about some of them through an elderly uncle.

One photograph of family members in their backyard garden was



Photo courtesy of John Dersham, from the original glass negative.

especially appealing. It seemed to epitomize small town Mifflinburg culture of almost a century ago, but all that was known of the image was that it had been taken by Bierly around 1915. Who were the people in the photo, and what story did it tell? Dersham could add only that the picture was taken on Walnut Street, between Sixth and Eighth Streets. Jack Fisher, a volunteer researcher for the Union County Historical Society and expert at locating and interpreting records in the Prothonotary Office in the Courthouse, took a “road trip” to locate the house. The distinctive garage, pictured on the far left background of the photograph, still exists. Using a county map of Mifflinburg, with numbered lots, Jack was able to identify where the garden was located: behind the house at 630 Walnut Street.



The garage as it exists today in the alley behind Walnut Street. Photo courtesy of Jack Fisher.

By searching the 1910 census for Mifflinburg, Jack found living at that address in 1910 the following: John Kistler, head of household, age 22; Hannah

Kistler, wife, age 23; Julia, daughter, age 1 ½ ; Emily Foster, boarder, age 29; Helen Foster, age 4; and Lucretia Foster, age 2. By 1915, when Bierly photographed the group, Julia was 6, Helen 9, and Lucretia 7. John Kistler was a barber, and, given that the man in the photo wears an armband, it was suggested that barbers traditionally wore an arm band to keep their sleeves out of the way. His shop was probably the small, well-kept building in the background of the photograph at the edge of the garden.

By the 1920 census, Emily Foster with her husband John Foster and their children, including Helen and Lucretia, lived in State College Borough. Emily, with Helen and Lucretia, had boarded at the Kistlers while John established a medical practice in State College. By 1920, Hannah Kistler and her daughter Julia, now age 11, had moved in with Hannah's mother, Agnes Guyer. Agnes Guyer was listed as head of household and proprietor of a hotel; Hannah was manager of the hotel. The hotel was the Hotel Hopp at 264 Chestnut Street, the present-day Mifflinburg Hotel and Scarlet D Tavern. The Kistler house at 630 Walnut St. had been sold to George Roger and his wife Jennie in 1920. John Kistler was no longer in the picture, literally as well as photographically.

As we look at the photograph of the family in the garden, an explanatory story comes to mind. On an early summer Sunday afternoon with everyone dressed in their Sunday best clothes, Helen and Lucretia Foster visited the Kistler's, having brought Julia a doll which Julia clutches happily close to her body. John Kistler had Sunday off, and he and Hannah proudly stand in their lush garden with their daughter and her friends.

Only the scenario did not quite work that way.

In the photograph collection of the Union County Historical Society is a photo of the Hotel Hopp kitchen as the kitchen staff poses around a woman holding a pan of roasted chicken. As manager of the Hotel Hopp, Hannah was well-known for her Sunday chicken dinners. We can now devise a second story for the Bierly photograph. Lois and Jack were convinced that the two adults in the garden were John and Emily Foster. They had come to visit Hannah and

Julia from State College with their daughters. The other girls do not have dolls, and Julia is so enamored with hers, that it was surely a gift brought for the



Hannah Kistler and her kitchen staff in the Hotel Hopp.
Photo from the collection of the Union County Historical Society.

occasion. Hannah, wanting a picture of her guests/friends and of Julia with the doll, had Bierly take the photograph.

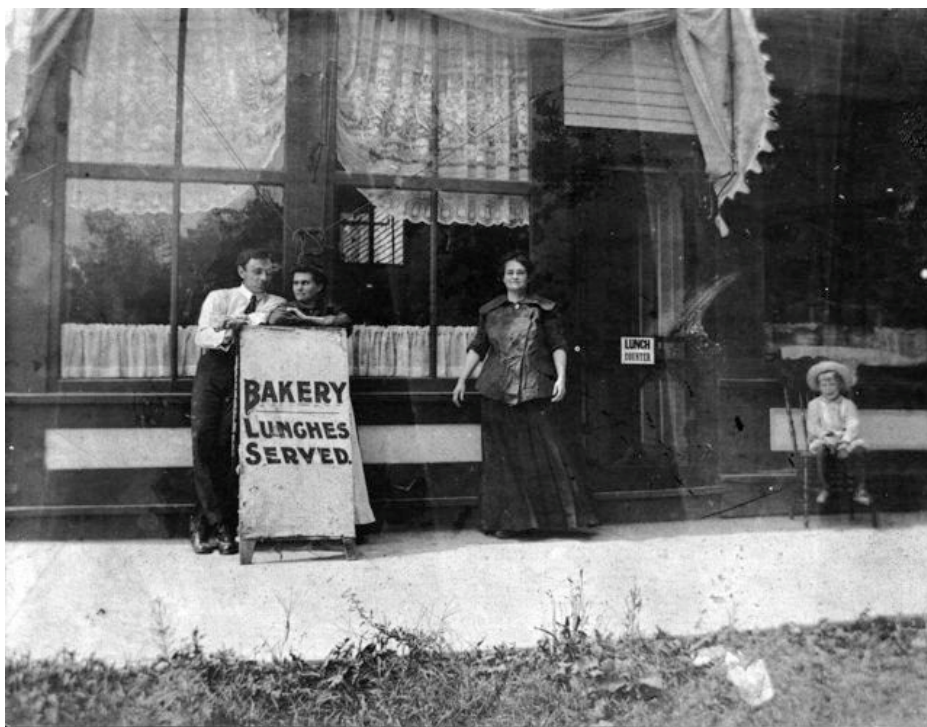
This second scenario is likely, given how the story continues to unfold. Through <ancestry.com>, Jack discovered a granddaughter of Julia, Susan Chlebek of Wyandotte, Michigan, who sent him other family photographs of Hannah and Julia. In addition, Lois discovered two additional photographs in the Historical Society's collection (see next page) that featured Hannah and Julia and the hotel.

Alfred A. Hopp and his wife Sarah sold the Hotel Hopp to Agnes (Baker) Guyer, Hannah Kistler's mother, on August 23, 1920 for \$17,500. Agnes died on July 17, 1923, of a stroke, as was reported by the Mifflinburg Telegraph.

She had first managed the Buffalo Valley Inn at the corner of Fourth and



Hannah Kistler and her daughter Julia.
Photo courtesy of Susan Chlebek.



Hannah Kistler, in the dark dress, and her young daughter Julia in front of Hopp Inn.
Photo from the collection of the Union County Historical Society.

Chestnut; several years later Agnes and Hannah were asked to be the house mothers of Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity in State College, and they were there until 1918, when they moved back to Mifflinburg and bought the Hotel Hopp, changing

its name to Hopp Inn. Hannah became the hotel owner after Agnes died. Hannah died in 1954.

Susan Chlebek sent a few more photographs of Julia Kistler. We see her in one photograph dressed for May Day. Julia graduated from Mifflinburg High



Julia, a 1926 graduate of Mifflinburg High School on May Day.



Julia Kistler and her husband Francis Smith on their wedding day.

Photos courtesy of Susan Chlebek

School in 1926. She married Francis Smith on June 9, 1931. It was quite a social event, and we have photographs of that occasion, also courtesy of Susan Chlebek. Julia and Francis had four children and resided in Kansas City, Missouri. Julia died on February 21, 2001.



Julia throws her wedding bouquet from the balcony of the Hopp Inn to the women below as her husband watches. Photo courtesy of Susan Chlebek.

Francis Smith and Julia sold Hopp Inn after Hannah's death to Albert Scholl and his wife Florence for \$15,000. Susan Chlebek's aunt, Julia's daughter Mary Louise (Molly) Smith, still has the doll today, preserved with only one shoe missing.

With the help of the additional photos and information, we can now tell a fuller story of the Bierly photograph. From left to right, the people are Lucretia Foster, Julia Kistler, Helen Foster, Emily Foster, and John Foster. They are pictured in the garden belong to the Kistlers. The Fosters, having boarded with the Kistlers, return for a visit, bringing young Julia a doll. The doll exists today, and by its presence, connects five generations of the Kistler family: Agnes, Hannah, Julia, Julia's daughter Francis Ann (Sally) Smith, and Susan Chlebek, Julia's granddaughter.



Julia's doll today, almost 100 years old, with only one shoe missing, is a connection to the past that ultimately links five generations. Photo courtesy of Susan Chlebek.

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