

Elias K. Gildner

Businessman and active community member of New Tripoli

By: Bonnie Emmert

New Tripoli Band

This early-1900 photograph of the New Tripoli Band was taken between the New Tripoli Hotel (later named Blue Ridge Inn) and German's Store and Hotel. Elias K. Gildner was a member of this band.

For a genealogist, it is really exciting to actually see where an ancestor lived, then to let your mind go back in time to envision his bygone era. I experienced this recently when I visited New Tripoli in Lynn Township. Elias K. Gildner's father, Jonas, was a brother to my maternal great-great grandfather, John Henry Gildner, who, in 1879, left Pennsylvania with his wife and eight children for the newly opened farmlands of Kansas. His oldest son, Charles H. Gildner, my great grandfather, remained behind after being deeded farmland of his own in Monroe County where he lived to be 100 years old.

Elias K. Gildner was a well known businessman and an active community and church member in the Town of New Tripoli. He was born October 31, 1851, in Lynn Township to Jonas and Mary Ann (Kressley) Gildner. Mary Ann was the daughter of Peter and Anna Margaretha Kressley.

According to the Anniversary History of Lehigh County, by Charles Rhodes Roberts, he was educated in the public school of Lynn township and during his boyhood days worked as a shoemaker before and after school--the trade he maintained from the time he left home at the age of twenty-one until 1890. He established himself in the Village of New Tripoli with a few dollars in cash and one half side of sole leather. Though barely making a living, by saving he was able to purchase a lot in the village in 1873 where he built a work shop. The following year he built a house which formed the main portion of his property that eventually would include a shoe store, a print shop and a barber shop (now the structure at 7209 Decatur Street). The estate records describe the Gildner property in 1919 as a 2 1/2 story frame dwelling and lot and ground 40 x 207 ft., with an appraisal value of \$4,000.00.

Ebenezer Pipe Organ

An active member of the Ebenezer Church, Elias sang in the church choir for years and was instrumental in acquiring this pipe organ for the church through the Carnegie Foundation. Musically inclined, in July 1872, Elias K. became a member of the Lynnville Brass Band, which in its day was considered "quite a good band." He remained a member of this band until 1879 when the organization disbanded. In 1880 he assisted in the organization of the New Tripoli Cornet Band and was its conductor for fifteen years. An active member of the Ebenezer Church, he sang in the church choir for years and was instrumental in acquiring a pipe organ for the church through the Carnegie Foundation.

In March 1874, Elias K. married Mary Louisa Snyder, born April 22, 1855, a daughter of Jonas F. and Maria Snyder who lived near New Tripoli. Five children were born to them: two sons, Francis J. and Charles H., and three daughters, Ella J., wife of Clinton E. Leiby; Laura A., wife of Fred S. Sittler, and Edna Louisa.

Mary died November 2, 1916, and in 1918 Elias K. married Mary "Polly" Heintzelman, the daughter of Joseph and Susanna (Rauch) Heintzelman. Polly was first married to Aaron M. Hausman.

On January 25, 1882, Elias K. received the appointment as postmaster of New Tripoli through his affiliation with Republican politics and served in that office until October 30, 1885.

In 1898 he took up job printing with James A. Miller, another successful merchant of New Tripoli, who, in 1911, began his first term as Pennsylvania State Senator. In 1908, Elias K. purchased Mr. Miller's printing outfit and with the assistance of his son, Charles, was now running his shoe store, the printing business, and a barber shop which Charles managed and operated.

The first Pennsylvania ancestor of Elias K. was John Francis Guldner, a German immigrant who arrived in Philadelphia on September 9, 1738, from Rotterdam aboard the ship Glasgow. In the 1700s, the migration of Palatines to the American colonies entailed a seven-month or longer ordeal starting first with the arduous overland trek from Germany to Rotterdam or Amsterdam in Holland. From there, after a long wait--sometimes

months--they boarded a ship to England. Once in England, they now had to await the return of the merchant ships from America, that, once loaded and fitted, would make the return voyage to America, and carry them on the last perilous leg of their journey. In 1738, John Francis "Franz" Giltner, was one of 6,000 emigrants who crowded into Rotterdam expecting to find British ships to take them to America.

John Francis was born July 29,1716, in Winterborn, Germany, the son of Johann Christian and Anna Marie Gldner. According to tradition, John Francis Giltner married Catherine "Kate" Weber, the daughter of a neighbor, Jacob Weber, and his wife, Anna. They resided in Heidelberg Township, then a part of Northampton County. This is substantiated by 2 land warrants to Francis Gildner, one dated November 28, 1743, for 97 acres, and a second dated November 21, 1766, for 109 acres. John and Kate had 11 children, Bernard, Jacob, Tobias, Magdalina, Catharina, Margaretha, Andreas (Andrew), Frantz (Francis), Johann (John) Christian, Rachel and Albertina. Rachel is said to have died young and, according to John Francis' will, Albertina was a cripple from falling into a fire when she was an infant. Tobias, John and Andrew all fought in the Revolutionary War. Andrew, born February 20,1760, was the progenitor of the Elias K. Gildner line. John Francis Giltner died September 8, 1775; Kate died in 1809. They are both buried in the old section of the Heidelberg Church cemetery near Saegersville.

New Tripoli Band

Elias K. Gildner's grandfather was Peter Gildner, born February 21,1803. Early researchers believed that Peter Gildner was the grandson of the immigrant, John Francis Gldner (as recorded in Roberts' History of Lehigh County), but more current research has shown that Peter was, in fact, his great grandson, and his parents were Andrew Giltner II, born February 20,1782, and Christina Dengler. Interestingly, throughout the now extensive family, the name Gldner had become Americanized to Giltner, with the exception of Elias K.'s line, who, beginning with Peter Gildner, spelled their name with a "d".

Peter Gildner lived and died in Lynn Township where he owned a small tract of land. Early on he was a shoemaker by trade, but later in life a weaver of woolen and flaxen goods. He married twice, first to Catherine "Katie" Werley on October 5, 1820; and second to Katie Straub on August 27, 1843. Peter and Catherine Werley had nine children, five daughters and four sons: Brigitta, m. John A. Reitz; Catherine, m. Samuel Loch; Polly, m. Manasses

Stoudt; Rebecca, m. Henry Allsbach; Lydia, m. Jacob Stengley; Jonas (Elias K.'s father); John H.; Elias; and Gideon.

Peter and Catherine Straub had the following children: Fianna, m. John A. Shiner; Mary, m. Daniel D. Wertman; Matilda, m. Lewis F. Wertman; Madina, m. James Billig; Owen; and David and Nathan, both of whom died young. Peter and both wives are buried at the Ebenezer Church Cemetery (New Tripoli). Peter and Katie Werley's graves are unmarked. Catherine Straub's grave is near the Jonas/Elias K. Gildner family plots and has a marker erected by Wm. J. & J.M. Wertman.

Jonas Gildner was born Sept. 2, 1828, in Lynn Township, 3 miles southwest of New Tripoli, on a farm later owned by Amandus Weaver. At the age of 16, Jonas learned the shoemaker's trade and by 1860 he was considered a "master" shoemaker who taught many others including his sons, Jonas and Elias K., and two of his two nephews, Gideon and Owen. At the same time, he ran his farm and huckstered to the towns of Tamaqua and Summit Hill for 20 years. In 1896, Jonas moved to New Tripoli where he carried on as a cobbler until the age of 84. In 1849, he married Mary Ann Kressley. Mary Ann died in September 1895; Jonas died March 2, 1913. Their children were Jonas Kressely, m. Sarah Amanda Kistler; Elias K. (the subject of this article); James H., m. Ellen Senia Walter; Sarah Amanda; Emmaline; Mary Alice, m. Francis W. Sittler; and Rosa E., m. John F. Smith.

Elias K. Gildner died of cancer May 3, 1926, in Allentown General Hospital. Polly died March 3, 1940. His son Charles Henry Gildner, who apparently never married, inherited the house and businesses. His entrepreneurship was short-lived, however, for on January 31, 1929, he too died from diabetes leaving no heirs. Charles' brother, Francis J. Gildner, administered the estate which, at the time of Charles' death, was appraised at \$6,097.15. Raymond D. Mantz bought the property and printing equipment in April of that same year.

Francis J. (for Jonas) Gildner was a success in his own right. He was born October 21, 1875, in New Tripoli. His early education began in the public school, then, in 1895, he started to prepare for college by receiving instruction from private teachers at his home. In 1900, he graduated from Ursinus Academy of Collegeville, PA. After graduation he registered as a law student with Marcus C. L. Kline and Arthur G. Dewalt. That same year he entered

their law office and continued the reading of law under Mr. Kline after the dissolution of the firm. In 1904, he passed the State Board of Law Examiners exam for the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and was admitted to the bar of Lehigh County. By 1910, he was married and living in Allentown where he opened his own law office.

In June 5, 1905, Francis married Ida Minerva Smith, daughter of Theodore S. and Ruth A. J. Smith of New Tripoli. Ida, an accomplished musician, graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music of Boston, MA., as a violin soloist and teacher in piano, music theory and harmony. She had a rare gift of absolute pitch. Her musical ear was so true that she was able to name as many as twelve to fifteen keys struck on a piano at the same moment. She could play two hundred selections from memory on both the violin and piano and in 1898 played for Eugene Ysayre, who, at that time, was considered the greatest living violinist. Ida died May 28, 1913, from complications after an operation. Francis J. died March 29, 1955. They are both buried at Greenwood Cemetery (Allentown).

Francis J. and Ida had one child, Lorena Olivia Smith Gildner, born May 28, 1913, who inherited her mother's musical ability. In 1930, she graduated from Julliard School of Music. She, too, was a pianist, violinist and private piano teacher in Allentown. Lorena, who never married, died August 5, 1998, at the age of 91. She is also buried at Greenwood Cemetery.