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Playing in the straw tunnel at the Apple Butter Frolic on October 3, 2017.
Photo by Harry Anselmo

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Our mission is to educate, inspire and witness to the church and community by collecting, preserving and sharing the Anabaptist/Mennonite story.

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The Oberholtzer-Bachman family register shown above was recently conserved as part of a federal grant award project. The stabilization and conservation work was done by the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, Philadelphia. This family register is a beautiful example of traditional Pennsylvania German fraktur, with colorful design and calligraphy. It was lettered and designed by the schoolteacher and masterful fraktur artist John Adam Eyer (1755-1837), who recorded the birthdates and marriage date of George and Esther Oberholtzer Bachman(n), along with the names and birthdates of their eleven children. It dates from around 1779. Other rare artifacts conserved by the grant were the 1536 Froeschauer Bible that contained this family register and the Sauter family record. This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services MA-31-16-0539-16.

Letter Writing

Our feature article in this fall quarterly is about the correspondence of Catherine Mensch Stubblebine to her brother Jacob Mensch between 1870 and 1911. The letters are fascinating to me for several reasons. Even though Catherine did not have much formal education and spelled many words phonetically, she was a good communicator. In some ways, her run-on sentences and disregard for spelling and punctuation somewhat resemble the texts that are sent today—just longer and missing emojiis. I also appreciate that the letters are an unvarnished view of life, from the complications of family real estate decisions to dealing with a hired man's impaired state from New Year's Eve partying. Thank you to Mary Jane Lederach Hershey for her research and interpretation of these 170 letters that are part of the Mensch Collection at the Mennonite Heritage Center.

Preserving written and digital communication is an important part of our work as the archival and manuscript collections serve as primary resources for historians to analyze and interpret. The Mennonite Heritage Center archival collections are part of the MHC mission to *educate, inspire and witness to the church and community by collecting, preserving and sharing the Anabaptist/Mennonite story.*

Along with scholarly research, we carry out our mission with events like the 44th Apple Butter Frolic on Saturday, October 7. “We” included board members, staff, and several hundred volunteers who carried heavy tables and chairs, set up farm equipment, cooked food, demonstrated traditional farming, food and crafts, and helped children have a great time playing in the straw tunnel, making pinch pots and shaking cream into butter. The weather was sunny and warm, and an estimated crowd of two thousand people learned about our agrarian heritage. You can see several photos from the event on page 14 and many more on our Facebook page.

Volunteers are essential at all of our programs and events. Members are also an essential part of the Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania. Your interest and support are vital to sustaining this organization. Please consider a generous gift to MHEP when you plan your end-of-year giving.

Thank you for your involvement and support.

Sarah Heffner
Director



Two cooks from the food demonstrations at the Apple Butter Frolic. On the left is Ruth Konrad, 18th century hearth cook, and Sarah Heffner, 19th century fastnacht demonstrator.

Photo courtesy of Ruth Konrad

A Glimpse into the Life of Catharine Mensch Stubblebine through excerpts from letters she wrote to her brother Jacob Mensch between 1870 and 1911

by Mary Jane Lederach Hershey

In the Jacob B. Mensch Papers at the Mennonite Heritage Center are approximately 2000 letters that Mensch received throughout his life (1835-1912). Included are 170 letters from his sister Catharine Mensch Stubblebine (1841-1925).

These letters are Catharine's story. Readers walk with her during the seasons of her life, and engage with her as she works through her seasonal responsibilities. The first letters in the collection are written when she was an energetic 29 years old. The last letter, penned by Catharine during her sixtieth year, relates that she is in good health, that she and Morgan are having "good times...blessed with good health". She ends by sending best wishes "to all inquiring friends".

Many of the letters tell about Catharine and Morgan's health, the health of her parents and her brother Adam and the health of uncles, aunts and neighbors. When Catharine learns of a death in her community, she writes to Jacob and reports the news and the time and date of the funeral. Jacob often received her letters the day after they were written, and on one occasion Catharine posted her letter in the morning and Jacob received the letter that afternoon (letter dated Dec. 29, 1889). Mail service between Pottstown (close to where Catharine lived) and Skippack, where Jacob lived, was excellent. Mail was put on a train at Pottstown, dropped off at Rahns Station and then taken by a horse rider three miles to the post office in Skippack.

The letters were written before the advent of the telephone and easy transportation. Letters tell when Catharine will visit her brother in Skippack and when other members of the Mensch family will be going to Skippack. Today a trip between Pottstown and Skippack seems like an ordinary jaunt. During the years covered by these letters the weather was always a deciding factor, as was the condition of the roads. Were they muddy, full of ruts, or snow and ice covered? And a suitable carriage was needed plus a horse that was well and strong enough for the trip.

Catharine lived with her parents, Abraham (1810-1885) and Mary Bechtel Mensch (1808-1890), on the Bechtel family's Ringing Rocks farm in Lower Pottsgrove Township, Montgomery County. It is unknown exactly when she married Morgan Stubblebine (1856-1940), a non-Mennonite man who was 15 years younger than she. The first indication that Morgan was acquainted with the Mensch family appears in an account book of Catherine's father Abraham who wrote on April 1, 1879 that the 23-year-old "Morman Stubelbine commenced working for me at \$12.50 per month."

The extant letters do not give evidence of when the marriage occurred. Any letters between 1876 and 1885 are missing. The 1876 letters are signed "Catharine Mensch" and the 1885 letters signed "Catharine Stubblebine." However, on the 1900 United States Federal Census, the census taker records that both Catharine and Morgan stated that they had been married for 19 years. This indicates that they were married in 1881. Their child, Harry, was born on November 25, 1880, before their marriage if the census records are correct. Harry lived for only nine months and nine days, dying on September 3, 1881. Sadly, they had no other children. After their marriage, Catharine and Morgan continued to live on the Ringing Rocks farm.¹

Before her marriage, Catharine seems to have been helping her parents manage the farm and their finances. A letter dated March 31, 1876 to 35-year-old "Miss Mensch" from E. S. Reigner, a Pottstown grocer, asked for a loan of \$250 and suggested a day when his brother George will come to her farm to pick up the money. However, the writer includes "if you can make it \$300 instead of \$250, he will be better suited."

Catharine's letters reveal that during the last years of her father's life she was managing the farm, and after he died on January 31, 1885, she continued to be in charge of the farm operation. Morgan worked on the farm, although farming was not his preferred occupation. He was a builder, carpenter and furniture maker.²

In her father's estate file is a document stating that the farm would be sold at a public auction on September 26, 1885. However, the farm was not sold that September. On December 26, 1885, Catharine wrote to Jacob, "i have made up my mind that i will take the farm." Catharine contacts "Gilbert" who writes the deed and she becomes the owner of the Ringing Rocks farm, which had been her mother's Bechtel family farm.³ It seems that she and her brother Jacob inherited the farm. She paid interest to Jacob for his part of the inheritance. Their sole other sibling, Adam (1836-1924), apparently was not a beneficiary. Jacob, writing in his diary on September 12, 1893 notes that he had dinner at his brother Adam's farm, "the place where my grandfather Adam Mensch lived." Perhaps this was Adam's share of the family's equity.

After owning and managing the farm for a few years, contending with a husband uninterested in farming, and grappling with problems retaining hired help, Catharine decided to sell. When a buyer agreed to purchase the farm in September 1893, Morgan immediately began to build a house at 717 N. Charlotte St., Pottstown. Catharine's first extant letter from Pottstown is dated May 19, 1895. Catharine lived at 717 N. Charlotte St. the rest of her life, as did Morgan whose funeral in 1940 was held in the house he built.⁴

Catharine and her parents were members of the Coventry Mennonite congregation. Morgan attended Coventry with her at times. He finally accepted adult baptism at the Pottstown Mennonite Gospel Mission in 1938.⁵

Catharine's letters seem to indicate that she may have had only a few years of school. Her spelling is phonetic and she uses no punctuation. Her brother Jacob was educated at West Chester Normal School. He faithfully recorded his daily activities in diaries that survive from the years 1880 to 1911. In Jacob's diaries he also did not use punctuation. His spelling, however, is far superior to Catharine's.

For ease of reading, four spaces indicate the end of a sentence. As Catharine writes she spells the words using Pennsylvania Dutch inflections, such as "sinks" for thinks, "jeck" for check, "youse" for use.

Following are excerpts from letters that she wrote to her brother after her marriage. A longer version of this article, including earlier letters, can be accessed at mhep.org/catharinestubblebine

The first letter signed Catharine Stubblebine is dated January 12, 1885. "...father has got a week spell today about noon shortly after 12 o'clock he is in bed since he is not able to get up without help he says he feels very bad and talck deranged sometimes..."



Ringing Rocks Farm—circa 1895
MHC collection

January 19, 1885. "...father he is not any better this evening than what he was yesterday when you left...the doctor changed his medicine whe are to give a powder every two ours and a teaspoon of liquer aboud every two ours and greese his stumic aboud every two hours with turpentine and lard mixed."

Catharine's father Abraham died January 31, 1885. During the 18 days after Catharine writes to her brother Jacob on January 12 that their father "has got a week spell", Jacob records in his diary about events leading up to the death of his father. On January 15 he writes that "father is sick Stoffelbein fetch me". The next day, "father is sick strock with pawlsy". On Saturday, January 15, "very stormy mary [Jacob's wife, Mary Bower Mensch (1831-1906)] came up to my parents". On Sunday, "fair cold went home again from my parents father is very sick". On Wednesday of that week, Jacob writes, "took the cars [train] to my father...took the cars at Rahns to Pottstown 65 cts". On Saturday, January 24 he stayed "over night at my father". The next week Jacob goes to his father's bedside on Thursday, stays overnight and observes, "he is very poor". On Friday night he is again with his father during the night and stays with him until he died on Saturday "at half pass 5 o'clock in the evening". The funeral was on Wednesday, February 4 at Coventry Mennonite Meetinghouse, where he was buried. Jacob writes in his diary, "cloudy funeral of my father buried at Coventry Bower preached at the house" Mack at the meeting house⁷ tex Ephesian 3.15 his age 74 6 21 stayed over night rained a little".

March 8, 1885. Catharine's mother Mary Bechtel Mensch is much concerned about a horse and doesn't want it killed. "Mother wants me to write to you about the hourse she sought that mabe you and your Son John⁸ would take him between you she sinks that it is almost a pittty to kill him...has been a good bit worried and talcked and don't know wat to do and i wish you would give an advise wat to do if you any ways can try and come on Sunday Evening before the sale so you could see we have a little time to help to get the sings for sale..."

The sale was held on "Saturday 23th of March 1885". A handwritten document (by Jacob) lists the following items to be sold at auction: "2 cows 1 rockaway carriage 2 set of carriage harness head halter blend halter collar wheelborough crobar crupenhoe and axe square axe cross cut saw a lot of carbenter tools shovels and forks a bushel of barn shovel rakes axe and wedges a lot of blanks corn chains a large scale weighs 500lb a large rope harboon hay hook a wood saw a lot of emty barrels a gun a lare 24 hour clock 1 english watch ½ doz. of chairs sausage grinder rope and pulleys a large lot of other articles in the house and outside to numerous to mention"

June 24, 1885. "Father's tomb stone was put up last weeck but whe wasent over to see it yet and I paid it last Friday..."

October 8, 1885. "...there is no show or sine for selling the farm yet whe have commensed diging for a well they commensed on wensday the biggest part of two days and are between 5 and 6 feet deep..."

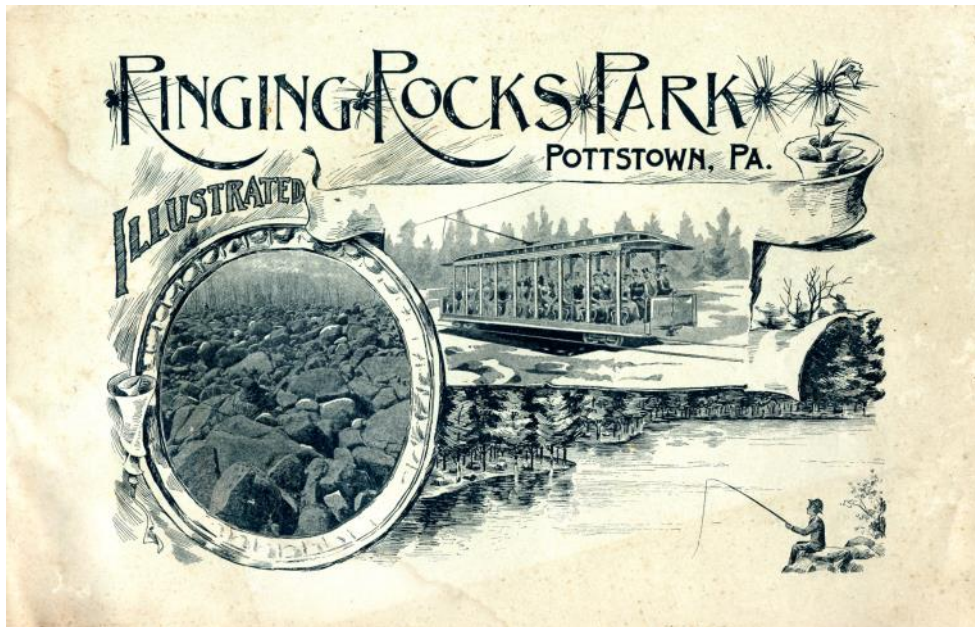
The well was hand dug and took almost a month. At 10 feet the workers needed to stop and blast the hard "rook". Finally on November 5, Catharine writes that "...whe had a good soaking rain on Sunday so that they had to stop of diging at the well It is full of water within a couple of feet to the top..."

December 20, 1885. "...whe was to brother Adams⁹ today myself and mark and mother whe had borrowed gables two seated carriage¹⁰ whe left about 7 o clock this morning and came back at half past 5 o clock this evening whe could stand the cold right good on coing down i wassent a bit cold but coming home I got some wat collar mother could stand it right good..."

December 26, 1885. "i will now write a few Lines to let you know i have made up my mind that i will take the farm i have seen Gilbert this forenoon and he said he would write the deed as soon as he could..." (Catharine signs the letter, "Cath Mensch" and then adds) "i made a mistake in my name"

Catharine buys the farm including the 10-acre tract that contained the field of ringing rocks. Pottsgrove's Ringing Rocks are a glacial deposit. The rocks resonate like a bell when struck with a hammer. When the Bechtel's and Mensch's owned the farm, the ringing rocks field was a local attraction. After the rock field was sold, the area was developed into Ringing Rocks Park and Catharine's subsequent letters discuss how the trolley line was extended to the Park.

May 23, 1886. *Her mother is staying with Jacob and Mary Mensch in Skippack.* "...tell her that she shouldn't worry about home that i am getting along right well yesterday forenoon i was to Pottstown and on Tuesday Mrs. Lightcap is coming to wash to morrow morning i am going to frank Bliems to see how their wash machiene woorchs i have a notion to get a wash machiene if i see one that i believe in..."



Ringing Rocks Park souvenir booklet. MHC collection

June 20, 1886. "i will let you know that whe did move our grandmother on Saturday a weeck or 12 of June the coffin was lifted all together but whe got an over coffin made to take it over to the bering ground morgan ditent do it so i asked Jacob Gable to haul it over i had got two men to do the diging and told Gable to see to it as if it was for himself i and mother was over to see it yesterday and whe are glad that whe got it don it cost me 10 dollars and a half..."

The body that was moved was Catharine's maternal grandmother, Maria Weiss Bechtel (1773-1861). It is unknown where Maria was originally buried; perhaps on the Bechtel farm and Catharine wanted to move the body before the farm was sold. The remains were moved to the Coventry Mennonite cemetery.

June 26, 1887. "...i have sold the ringing rocks with 10 acres of land that is by words there is no agreement made yet it is to be surveried first with 10 per cent cash and the balance to be paid on the 1st of april 1888 the price is 11.50 Eleven hundred and fifty to a man by the name of Calvin Stroll from Pottstown he was here on Thursday for to [] it and on Friday i had went to see Morgan when he left i said that i would sell the place if I any ways could and if he would sine off and the answer was he would make me no trouble and so i sought my best plan was to see if he would give his name or else i could not give a good right to sell but through law i can sell without his name but that i don't want to do but he wouldn't give me no satisfaction for to do so as give his name and so on Saturday yesterday he come back again to stay and he has fetched his cloth again so I guess he will sine it now without any further trouble this is a way of living that ought to be scare and as i suppose it is not often herd of either it gives people more to talek if i cant sell the farm I will have to rent it as i don't like to but farm i will no longer now any more then till next spring if I any ways can help whe aint got our medow hay made yet it goes slow and poor enough and so i will draw to a close for this time..."

This sale of the farm did not go through. The farm was sold six years later in 1893. In this letter Catharine indicates that she and Morgan were having marital problems. Morgan had left her, and did not seem willing to sign a deed to sell the farm. She thought that legally she could be the sole signer for a sale but she preferred that he also sign. She wrote that on Saturday he returned to the farm and brought his clothes with him, so she thought his return would be permanent. Catharine's nephew, Abraham Mensch (1863-1934), a student at West Chester Normal School, wrote to his parents Jacob and Mary on the same date as this letter of Catharine's (June 26, 1887). Abraham's letter referred to Catharine's marriage problems. He wrote, "The case of Aunt Catharine and Morgan is bad. Woe to those that do not learn to know each other before they join in matrimony."

August 7, 1887. "...about selling the rocks is at a still stand I don't know how it will go yet but give up farming i will till spring if i can any ways..."

January 6, 1889. "...whe had a little trouble with our hired man wensil he had commensed going away so much and come home several times with to much wiskey in his head on new years morning he was about half drunk had been out till three o clock in the morning and was very impudent and ugly so Morgan setlet of with him and paid him and he left on the first of the month and on the fourth he came and asked if he could go to work again theat he don rong he knownd that he had no home and he would do better if he could stay so he is hear again now we will see if it holds out his rependence Morgan has something lik a boile in his face last sunday and Monday morning he couldnt take the milk away it had got better and i guess it healed to soon and it is getting soar again as if it was breaking open again..."

February 1, 1889. "...yesterday whe killed one of our cows and sold the half whe are don butchering hochs for this winter whe are milking 12 cows and 3 have calfs whe send 100 and 10 quarts a day it is a slavish worck [] on those cold mornings to start out so early for Pottstown..."

September 25, 1889. "Dear friends, i take my pen to write a few lines this morning and let you know that whe are all well Mother would like to hear if you had heard from Jacob since he had left home if so please write and let us hear... yesterday i cleaned or scoured my tin i ant got any house cleand yet..."

Her brother Jacob was on a preaching trip to Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois, and Indiana. Catharine wrote "I cleaned or scoured my tin." Plates, pots and various kitchen utensils were made from tin and pewter. Elizabeth Slough Garber writing in 1956 described how her great- great-grandmother, Mary Custer Slough (b. 1770) used lye (a residue from soap making) to clean tin: "...tinware, iron pots and other things were first dipped in the lye solution then scoured with ground and the tin ware would gleam like silver." ¹¹ Folk-informant Alan Keyser explains about scouring with ground: "The usual way they scoured tin ware, pewter and cutlery was to have one dish with the bottom layer of the soap kettle and a saucer with fine dry earth. They took a cloth and first dipped in the soap kettle dish and then into the local soil "ground" saucer, then they rubbed the piece to be polished. The ground was a fine abrasive without pebbles and did the polishing. Some people used "pewter sand" as the abrasive but that was somewhat coarser than ground and had to be purchased." ¹²

March 2, 1890. "...i should have answered your last letter but i wassent to Pottstown til to day i was to town on the 22 of february and not sinking of Washington birthday til i got to town and seen the banks and stores all closed and so i was in today and put money what i had in hand of the estate in bank it is every thing paid what was bought by strangers that certicafate comes due on the 6 of April and that will com on Sunday whe can draw it a day sooner on Saturday so whe can appoint Saturday the 5 of Aprill to fix our sings if it suits you and Adam on that day if not any time that it will suit you i don't like to keep the money in the house over night Adam wrote his name on the certificate when he was up to fetch his things..."

Catharine's mother, Mary, died on January 1, 1890, and Catharine is settling the financial concerns of her parents' estate. She intends to cash a certificate and wants to arrange a time when her brothers can come to the farm and get their share of the money. She mentions an auction which was held after her mother's death. There are no extant dated documents relating to this auction. Jacob wrote that the total cash in his mother's estate was \$5,083.44. This included two "town" lots which Catharine and Morgan purchased at the auction for \$300.

February 10, 1891. "...our hired man has left us whe was alone from wensday till Monday evening whe got another hired man again Morgan hired him for till spring if he stays that long whe have nobody yet for next summer whe send 100 quarts and milk 16 cows whe got 4 sents off for last monts pay..."

April 28, 1891. "...Morgan was sick he took sick on Saturday afternoon and was in bed till Monday afternoon the doctor was here 2 times he was soon to rights again he was not so serious as wat the paper had said¹³ or elsece i would have left you know whe are without a hired man...i commenced to clean house i cleand the gahret yesterday i had mrs. Sheffey to help wash and iron to morrow she will help to clean house 2 days i expect to finish this weeck excepting the kitchen..."

Spring and fall cleaning was an important part of housekeeping. Catharine often wrote about these heavy tasks. The farmhouse was heated by a wood or coal stove. The dirt and dust from the stove permeated every part of the house. The "seller" and "gahret" were always included on the cleaning schedule.

July 22, 1892. "...i had been sinking of you every day the several last days mabe you would com for it is the seson of the year that you most always wonst to com to see us and frother i can say that whe are blessed with good health whe was well all summer had nothing to complain and always plenty of worck whe are don with our harvesting but the oats they commensed cutting it this morning...Morgan finished his shed that he build over the water trouf in the barnyard...whe was to coventry meeting on sunday there was nothing said when the harvest meeting would be if whe can whe will com down when the harvest meting is at skippack and what has become of Abraham is he at home and why don't he com up this way or let himself be heard of..."

Morgan, whose occupational preference was carpentry, used these skills on the farm. Here Catharine wrote that he built a cover over the animal's water trough in the barnyard.

Harvest meetings were an important time to thank God for the bounty from fields and gardens.

In 1892 as Catharine was writing this letter, her nephew Abraham was helping his father on the farm in Skippack. During winter months he was a school teacher.

November 30, 1892. "...and about selling every thing is quiet ther wasent any body here since that time when you was here i only hope and wish that somebody would come along soon and bauey it tired i was but i am getting more tired and weary every day if only i was relieved onced of this farming and to sink of the offer that was given but if only i sould have sold it..."

March 13, 1893. "i have taken my pen to write a few lines whe did receive our jeck today this is for January Month non from that time it is unpaid our milk man is so far back if he only don't let us stick it seems if everything is going back on us i am not wel at all i have an awfull coald at the present time i only hope it will soon get better hadent whe a nice spring day onced to day the fields is all bear of snow excepting the drifts along the fence enclosed find jeck for 300 and 10 D 75 cts if it isn't right pleas let yous know with this i will close in giving my best wishes to you all"

Catharine laments that the milk company is behind in paying. It is March and she has just received the payment for January's milk. Because she now has this check, she can pay her brother interest on the mortgage he holds for his inherited share of the farm.

May 20, 1893. "...i white washed my kitchen on Thursday it was all most to cold to put the stove away but i liked so much to have it don..."

*White washing the walls of the kitchen was part of spring housecleaning. Catharine writes about “put [ting] the stove away”. As part of spring cleaning the stove pipe was taken down and cleaned. Before whitewashing the kitchen walls, the area behind the coal/wood stove was scrubbed and the floor under the stove was scoured. Sometimes the stove was pushed back to the wall. After this extensive spring cleaning of the stove area, cooking moved to the summer kitchen which may have been a separate building close to the kitchen door, or an area in the cellar.*¹⁴

September 3, 1893. “...we have sold the farm for ten thousand seven hundred ten hundred and seventy dollars is paid down money it was finished on Saturday evening we are to keep quiet till wensday then it will be publick... whe will have to see about getting a home again i may write to you again in a few days and let you know how things is going...”

An undated newspaper clipping states that the transfer of the Ringing Rocks farm “to the Ringing Rocks Electric Railway Company was made Monday, April 24, 1894 in the office of A. K. Shaner, Real Estate Agent and Conveyor.” The transfer was for 112 acres and 80 perches for a consideration of \$11,000. The article continues, “And now, after having been in the old and well known Mensch family just half a century, the Ringing Rocks farm, with the great natural wonder thereon situated, becomes the property and part of the possessions of the Ringing Rocks Electric Railway Company, and part of the beautiful park and summer resort to which their line of railway, now in course of construction, is to extend.

September 23, 1893. “... i sought you was wandring how whe was getting along with our house the seller [cellar] is finished diging on Monday the masons will Begin at the sellor wall and this morning they will begin at the well Morgan will finish seeding to day then he will Begin hauling stones he has Bought the stones of Gues oak ...”

As soon as the farm was under contract to be sold, Morgan began to build a new home at 717 N. Charlotte St. in Pottstown. This site may have been one of the two “town lots” that Catharine received from her mother’s estate (see note following letter dated March 2, 1890). Catharine wrote that she wanted to begin to pay off the debt to her brother Jacob as soon as they received the down money for the sale of the farm, but that Morgan said she should keep the deposit so that he could immediately begin to build their new house in town.

May 10, 1895 (Gap of 17 months in extant letters. This is the first letter with a Pottstown address.) “...Morgan has finished Gahmans fense they fetched it on Wednesday today he commenced to make a corn morker to mork furrows for Tobias Moyer the trolleys or a running to the porch to morrow it will be two weeks that they started...”

November 27, 1895. “...i sought perhaps you was expeding to see us coming down whe want come down this week whe are getting our hock today and to morrow whe will worck it up it is earlyier than i cared for to have it but the man whe are getting it of would like to have it away and then i want to boil my soap so whe ant coming till the latter part of next week if the wather is favorable...”

*Catharine would combine the fat from the hog with other fats she had saved to make soap. A description written years after soap was not commonly homemade describes the process “...all the fat drippings, ham skins and bacon rinds [were saved] and in the spring [she] made them into soap. She first made the lye from the wood ashes taken from the fireplace, then the fats were boiled in it and when it was left to cool, the soap came to the top leaving a sort of jelly-like substance in the bottom of the boiler...”*¹⁵



The home Morgan built at 1717 N. Charlotte Street, Pottstown.
Source: Google

October 12, 1886. “...Morgan is a kind of yoused up he is still poaltising his one arm and the other arm I think he has strained he cant do much but he is away every day if the weather is nice but he comes home at night you can come to see us any time that it will suite you to for i am at home...”

“[Morgan] is still poaltising his arm.” A poultice consisted of a bandage wrapped around the affected limb. The bandage contained a substance such as mustard or other herbs and spices that the wearer believed would help to bring about healing and would reduce the swelling and pain.

February 1, 1897. "...two weeks ago Morgan had two boiles one on each leg he wasnt out of the house for nearly one weeck it was just all that could get up and down stairs he had to youse a cane to walck he is well now again..."

November 27, 1897. "...i will write a few lines and let you know that Morgan want come down next week yet to put the waiter up...whe received Abram Letter last evening glad to hear that they are pleased with the clock..."

The "waiter" Catharine refers to was an elevator-type device where food cooked in the basement kitchen could be pulled up to the eating area on the first floor. I remember this device in my grandmother's kitchen in Skippack which we called a "dumb waiter". Carpenter Morgan was to install this in Jacob and Mary's house. He had also made a clock case for Jacob's son, Abraham.¹⁶

February 1, 1898. "...today Adam is went to the funeral of Jacob high he took the cars to royersford and cariges are to meet the train their it is a very stormy and cold day for a funeral Morgan took him to the station and this evening he will meet him at the station shortly after 5 o clock the snow is some drifted the sleighs are out since yesterday noon there are sleighs and wagons on the street it is nicest to be inside the house and loock out of the window to see them pass..."

On Thursday, February 3, Jacob wrote in his diary, "very cold went to Pottstown in the afternoon with the buggy were over night at Morgan Stubblebine sleighing is poorly someplaces to much other places the roads are bare the snow is all blowed away"

June 12, 1898. "...the cars commensed running on the 4 of June that was yesterday a weeck they are not very full of passengers..."

The electric trolley cars ran to Ringing Rocks Park during the warm months.

November 9, 1898. "This afternoon there was 12 sick Shoulders Brought to the hospital..."

On April 28, 1898 Congress declared war against Spain. On December 10, 1898, after the United States gained possession of Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam, the war ended. The soldiers that Catharine mentioned may have been casualties from this Spanish -American War.

January 14, 1900. "...i do thank you for that Muck Meal that you send us it is very good and nice..."

Muck Meal was mush meal made from ground corn. The Pennsylvania Dutch made the ground corn into a loaf that was sliced, fried and served with syrup.

January 3, 1901. "...Morgan is at worck every day that the weather is nice he is working at walters ice houses yet..."

No information has been found about the location of "walters ice houses". However, during January the harvesting of blocks of ice was big business in eastern Pennsylvania. A post card from this era shows a large ice storage building adjacent to a dammed-up ice-covered area of the Perkiomen Creek where ice was being cut using horses to drag the ice-cutting saws. The card, stamped and dated in 1910, pictures at least 53 men and 20 horse engaged in the harvesting and depicts a metal structure on which blocks of ice were being moved by a conveyor belt into the ice house. Morgan, like many farmers and tradesmen, earned extra income during ice harvesting season.¹⁷

February 7, 1904. "...about the trolly cars they are runing to day yesterday they did not run till two o clock in the afternoon i think there was somting Broak some times they could not on account of the snow and ice on their track and some time they kept running most of the night to keep their track open if they do run they come as far as our place but they don't always go to the parch..."

The trolley tracks were in front of Catharine and Morgan's house at 717 N. Charlotte Street. Catharine always knew when the trolleys were running, and the unusual noisy night passage of the trolleys in front of her house was worth noting.

June 13, 1905. "...the Sanatoga trolly line had an accident on Saturday afternoon two cars where going one way and the hind car run in the first two cars where badly rected and aboud a dosen passenger where hurt 3 was brought to the hospital the one left after his wounds where dresd the other two was puty badly hurt and will have to stay a wile at the hospital one man got his leg taken of..."



Ice harvesting on the Branch Creek, circa 1903. Photo by Jonas H. Nyce, MHC collection

October 10, 1905. "...today a weeck Morgan comensed to worck at the Aericulture Worcks he leaves before 6 o clock in the morning and in the evening it is most 7 o clock till he comes home to morrow Fred Glare gets buried he lives close hear he had been working at Bechtelsvill he is a mill right and on Saturday morning he had a stroke and at 9. o clock he died in the afternoon they brought him home dead on Saturday night whe had fire not fare from us it was opposite the car barn the two houses end houses in walters row burnt out before it was under control...."

Morgan was supplementing his income from carpentry and furniture construction by employment at the "Aericulture Worcks". This was the Ellis Keystone Agricultural Works in Pottstown. Owned by John Ellis, the business manufactured threshing machines and other farm equipment. Ellis owned patents for certain details of threshing machines, and Nathan Hoffman, associated with the Ellis company, owned patents for a fodder cutter. The business needed extra help during the summer and fall when farmers were bringing in their crops and were purchasing needed equipment.

April 26, 1906. "... received a letter from Brother Adam yesterday he has a cold and has the Asma so he has to inhale smoke morning and evening"

During the 19th century and into the early years of the 20th century, remedies for relieving the effects of asthma included the inhalation of smoke. This was done in several ways: by smoking cigarettes, cigars or pipes and inhaling as one smoked, or by burning a carbolic smoke ball and inhaling the fumes. Smoke balls were advertised during the 1890s and were recommended for coughs, colds, bronchitis, laryngitis and all conditions related to the lungs and breathing. Catharine's brother, Adam, was using this inhalation therapy twice a day.

July 3, 1906. "Dear Brother whe received your letter last evening whe was glad to hear from you foolcks but I must say feel sory to hear the sad news of sickness and short of healp in this buisy season...Morgan is working at

the Aericulture work yesterday two weeks that he commenced he drives down in the morning and back in the evening that is exercise for the horse...today i am going to pick some of my currants i have quite a lot to pick and that is a warm job..."

A currant bush produces small, red, sour berries. Recipes for currant jelly use equal amounts of currants and sugar.

December 10, 1908. "...next week Butchering will begin Morgan is going to help his Brother they are going to kill on Monday and work it up on Tuesday and we are getting a hock from his Brother and so we will be at later on next week and then i will boil my soap after the Butchering and so my time will be taken for next week..."

After butchering the hog, Catharine will use the fat from the pig to make soap. To make "A Good Hard Soap" follow these directions: "Use a specially constructed barrel raised off the ground high enough to allow a tub to be placed underneath. The bottom of the barrel should be perforated with holes. Then filled with wood ashes. Now and then, toss a bucket of water on the ashes. As the water passes through the ashes it dissolves the potash and soda. Take the solution obtained, put in an iron kettle with a quantity of grease fat. Boil the mixture for an hour or longer. Add salt. As mixture cools the soap will solidify on top of the water." Another recipe to make soap uses 1 pound of potash, 5 pounds of grease and three gallons soft hot water. Boil all together for 5 or 6 hours, adding water if needed. "When done, it is a dark, yellowish brown, like jelly, almost transparent. It should taste smooth and pleasant. If sharp and acrid, it is not done...Will be white when hard..."¹⁸

January 29, 1911. *The last extant letter from Catharine.* "Dear Brother i will write and let you hear from us it is a very gloomy Sunday about noon it commenced to snow but later it turned into rain we are well hoping that yourself and all well when received the month of January wasent as cold all through as what December was Morgan is at home most all the time we are having good times nothing to complain if we are bleased with good health i do not know of any impotance to write so i will draw to a close in giving my best wishes to you all inquiring friends Catharine Stubblebine"

Jacob Mensch, the recipient of these letters, died on February 17, 1912. Catharine died in 1925. Their only other sibling, Adam, died in 1924. Morgan lived until 1940. Catharine and Morgan are buried in the Coventry Mennonite Cemetery.

1. For finding the record of Morgan on the 1880 and 1900 census reports, thanks to Joyce Clemmer Munro, a writer and Professor Emerita of English at Eastern University. Joyce provided helpful advice about telling the story of Catharine via these letters.
2. Catharine Mensch Stubblebine was the great-aunt of my mother Mary Mensch Lederach (1898-1980). In our home we had two pieces of furniture made by Morgan, a blanket chest and a library chair. The chair is uniquely constructed in that it can be turned into a small ladder. It is owned by my brother, John Mensch Lederach.
3. The Bechtel farm was known as the Ringing Rocks Farm because of a deposit of boulders which were formed during the Pleistocene Epoch ice ages (10,000 to 1.8 million years ago). When struck with a hammer, the rocks emit distinct tones, a consequence of the iron content of the diabase. The size of the boulder and its contact with adjoining rocks affect the sound.
4. In a codicil to Morgan's will, he gives his brother Hiram the right to occupy 717 North Charlotte St., Pottstown "for the rest of his natural life." The codicil is dated August 3, 1937. However, Hiram predeceased Morgan, dying in 1939. Morgan lived until 1940.
5. Baptismal records of Warren G. Bean. Morgan's brother Hiram was baptized at the Pottstown Mennonite Mission in 1938.
6. Henry S. Bower (1836-1909), brother to Jacob Mensch's wife, Mary. Henry was ordained at Salford in 1865.
7. Andrew S. Mack (1836-1917), preacher at Hereford. Ordained 1863 and as bishop in 1875.
8. Jacob and Mary's son, John Bower Mensch (1860-1940)
9. Catherine's brother, Adam Bechtel Mensch (1836-1924)
10. The Gable's were neighbors.
11. Garber, Elizabeth Slough. "Life on the Farm, A Century Ago." *Bulletin of the Historical Society of Montgomery County Pennsylvania*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1 (2014), 97.
12. E-mail from Alan G. Keyser, October 5, 2014.
13. *The Montgomery Ledger* (Pottstown) reported on April 21, 1891 that "Mr. Morgan Stubblebine, of Lower Pottsgrove, is seriously ill from blood poisoning. About two weeks ago he was kicked on the knee by a horse, and from this injury the disease resulted."

14. E-mail from folk informant Alan G. Keyser. Catharine thinks it may be too cold to stop using the stove (which heated the kitchen area), but she so wanted to get it done. About this, Alan writes, “One old timer put it this way: ‘She had Christmas before Thanksgiving.’ Your woman, it seems, was one of these.”
15. See endnote 11. When I was a child in the 1930’s, I remember my mother using homemade soap for laundry being washed in the wringer washing machine which was in our dark basement. The soap was in solid, dark tan blocks. She would shave the soap into thin strips and put the pieces into the hot water in the washing machine.
16. The clock was inherited by Abraham’s daughter Mary Mensch Lederach. Although Morgan constructed the case, family lore was that the clock works were put together by Henry Bower, preacher at Salford and uncle to Abraham. This tall clock is now owned by James Slagel Lederach, Esq., Scottsdale, PA, a great-grandson of Abraham.
17. Heckler, Aaron M., *Glimpses of the Past: Picture Postcards of the Goshenhoppen Region and Beyond*. Salford, PA, 2007, 47. Heckler includes ten postcards that relate to ice harvesting and records numerous details about this winter occupation.
18. Hutchison, Ruth. *The New Pennsylvania Dutch Cookbook*. New York: Harper & Row, 1958, 112-113.



Library chair made by Morgan Stubblebine.
Photos courtesy of John M. Lederach



Jennie Heckler Mensch, niece of
 Catherine Stubblebine, with family
 heirlooms, circa 1955.
Photo courtesy of Carl Robert Showalter



Apple Butter Frolic 2017



- Scenes from the 2017 Frolic
(clockwise from top left):
- 1) Percheron team at the farm demos
 - 2) Pressing apple cider
 - 3) Threshing grain in the barn
 - 4) Hearth cooking demo
 - 5) Weaving on a tape loom

Photos 1-4 by Harry Anselmo

Photo 5 by Ruth Konrad



Christmas Market Show & Sale

DECEMBER 2–30, 2017

Opening Weekend • Saturday, December 2 • 9:30am–4pm

Sunday, December 3 • Noon – 4 pm



Artisans include:

Baskets: Karen Wychock

Carvings: Donna Genovese Dan Strawser

Framed Work: Dot Bunn • Teresa Hicks

• Louise Hutchings • Julie Longacre

• Gay Brunt Miller • Dave Thomas • Ben Weaver

Furniture: Brad Smith

Glass: Robins Nest Glass

Pottery: Beidler Pottery • Oakleaf Pottery • Denise Wilz

Royce Yoder • Tammy Zettlemoyer

Textiles: Cynthia Baker • Rachel Derstine • Ann Hermes

• Ruth Konrad • Bill Leinbach

Wooden Bowls & Kitchenware: Paul L. Luttrell • John Munro

• Jere Retallack

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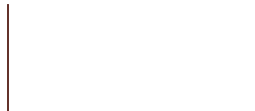
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