

## Geise, Grubb, and Groff Businesses: 33 North Market Street; Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania



### Abstract:

In 1985, Groff's Meats relocated to 33 North Market Street, from 13 Market Street where the brothers, Joseph and John Groff started the business in 1775. This property was originally presumed to be the location of Dissinger and Garman Blacksmiths in 1908. Further research suggests that the blacksmith shop was actually located on the west side of Market Street. Paul and Grace Grubb, purchased the land in 1935. They later added Grace's parents' Henry K. and Cora Ober and the property functioned as a gas station until 1975. Henry Ober was highly involved in the Elizabethtown College and was a professor and a president of the college, and he was a pastor at the Church of the Brethren until his death. Gulf Oil purchased the property in 1966 and sold it in 1975 to the Martins.

### Property Details:

The structure on 33 North Market street stands on 2,036 ft<sup>2</sup> along with a 1,470 ft<sup>2</sup> storage unit, the property is a total of 16,553 ft<sup>2</sup>. The original structure was constructed in 1935 and in 1985 an addition was built for Groff's Meat.

### Deed Search:

The current community of Elizabethtown is situated between the Conoy Creek and the Conewago Creek along the Susquehanna River. In 1534 French King Francis, I (1494-1547) colonized North America establishing New France with Jacques Cartier (1491-1557) as Viceroy in Quebec. As early as 1615 Étienne Brûlé (1592-1633) explored the Susquehanna River and its tributaries in Lancaster County. Pennsylvania was claimed by Sweden in 1638 and then by the Dutch in 1655. The British claimed the former Dutch holdings in 1674. British King Charles, II (1630-1685) granted William Penn (1644-1718) the Province of Pennsylvania in 1681. The French and British disputed control of Pennsylvania between 1688-1763. During this time in 1707 French fur trader Peter Bezaillion (1662-1742) established a settlement between the Conoy and Conewago Creeks along the Susquehanna River. In 1719 Peter Bezaillion invited the Piscataway Indians to move from Maryland and settle with him along the Conoy Creek and Susquehanna River. Martin G. Keller sold the land on

North Market Street to Frank Dissinger in 1907<sup>1</sup>. There was a long held assumption the property at 33 Market Street was owned by Frank Dissinger and Harry H. Garman who owned a blacksmith shop in 1908.<sup>2</sup> According to a deed search conducted on the property and vintage photos of the construction of the Conoy Creek Bridge in 1912 it is evident the shop was in fact located on the west side of Market street.<sup>3</sup>

The first known owners of 33 North Market Street were Paul and Grace Grubb who purchased 33 North Market in January 1935.<sup>4</sup> They later added, Henry K. and Cora B. Ober, Grace's parents and her sister Ruth H. Miller and her husband, James M. Miller to the deed.<sup>5</sup> In October 1939, the deed was transferred to the Millers.<sup>6</sup> In 1966 the Millers sold the property to Gulf Oil Corporation.<sup>7</sup> Gulf sold to John E. and Vera L. Martin in September 1975.<sup>8</sup> Ann S. and Steven L Reinhold bought the property in February 1979.<sup>9</sup> Groff's Meats Incorporated bought the property in July 1985.<sup>10</sup> Joseph Groff owner of the business held the deed in 1987.<sup>11</sup> In January of 1996, when Joseph Groff died, he left the property as well as the business to his children, Virginia S., Nancy S., John S., and Frank S. Groff.<sup>12</sup> The four children still own the property today.

### **Architectural Style Report:**

The building on 33 North Market Street was constructed in a Colonial Revival style. The American Colonial Revival style was strongly influenced by Andrea Palladio, an Italian architect in the 14th century. Palladian architecture which is associated with a temple facade, a symmetrical layout, pitched, gabled and hipped roofs,<sup>13</sup> shutters and unique shapes.<sup>14</sup> On the south side of the building sits a Palladian window, another characteristic trait of Colonial architecture, they are rectangular with a rounded arch top.<sup>15</sup> German stoicism is an archetype of Colonial architecture that is representative of the structure on 33 Market Street, with a symmetric layout, rectangular windows, pitched roof and a centered entrance.<sup>16</sup>

### **Historical Context and Purpose:**

There was a long held assumption the property at 33 Market Street was owned by Frank Dissinger and Harry H. Garman who owned a blacksmith shop in 1908.<sup>17</sup> Before opening the blacksmith shop, Frank Dissinger worked at the Miller Fifth Wheel Manufacturing Company around 1888 to 1896.<sup>18</sup> According to a deed search conducted on the property and vintage photos of the construction of the Conoy Creek Bridge in 1912 it is evident the shop was in fact located on the west side of Market street.<sup>19</sup> As of 1912, the blacksmith shop was owned by Dissinger and Scheetz according to the sign in front of the shop, which reads "*Dissinger - Scheetz, Blacksmith - Wagon repairs Shoeing Specialty.*"<sup>20</sup> Samuel Scheetz, is pictured working with Frank Dissinger in the photo of the blacksmith shop in 1908.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacMaster, Richard K. Elizabethtown: The First Three Centuries. (Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown Historical Society, 2000), 187.

<sup>2</sup> MacMaster, 187.

<sup>3</sup> Lancaster County Recorder of Deeds, Search Online Records, Infodex, Document, Book: K18, Page Number: 3, <http://www.searchiqs.com/palan/InfodexMainMP.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> Book: G, Volume 34, Page Number: 586.

<sup>5</sup> Book: G, Volume 56, Page Number: 623.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Book: S, Volume 56, Page Number: 473.

<sup>8</sup> Book: Y, Volume 66, Page Number: 682.

<sup>9</sup> Book: I, Volume 76, Page Number: 374.

<sup>10</sup> Book: H, Volume 92, Page Number: 1.

<sup>11</sup> Book: 4929, Page Number: 468.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Carol Davidson Cragoe, How to Read Buildings: A Crash Course in Architectural Styles. New York: Rizzoli, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Will Jones, How to Read Houses: A Crash Course in Domestic Architecture. New York: Rizzoli, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> MacMaster, 187.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>19</sup> Book: K, Volume 18, Page Number: 3.

<sup>20</sup> MacMaster, 175.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 187.

The earliest confirmed owner of 33 North Street was Robert Allison dating back to the patent granted to him in 1762.<sup>22</sup> After which Michael Breneman Sr. owned the property until 1765, until he sold it to Jacob Basler.<sup>23</sup> which time the property is then transferred back to the Breneman family. The grandson of Michael Breneman, also named Michael Breneman sells the land to Michael Coble in 1817.<sup>24</sup> In 1822 Michael Coble forms an agreement with the same Michael Breneman to sell to him three large lots, of the original land that Breneman sold to Coble five years prior.<sup>25</sup> Up until this point, according to deed searches, there is no structures or improvements to the land. Upon Michael Breneman's death around 1827, his administrators, John Gish, was instructed to provide a small piece of land to be left to his wife Elizabeth Breneman, and the rest be placed for public auction. Elizabeth Breneman ultimately purchased the entirety of her husband's land by winning the public auction.<sup>26</sup> Upon Elizabeth's death, her son, Henry Breneman receives the land until selling it to John H. Brubaker in 1885.<sup>27</sup> From 1885 until 1905 John H. Brubaker owned the property and leased it to Gish and Brothers Hardware and Farm Implements.<sup>28</sup> In 1905 John Stauffer Geise and John Groff McBride purchased the property from John H. Brubaker and operated Geise and McBride Hardware and Farm Implements.<sup>29</sup> In 1935 John Stauffer Geise, files for bankruptcy on behalf of himself and the late John Groff McBride.<sup>30</sup> Paul and Grace Grubb, purchased the property on 17 January 1935.<sup>31</sup> After Paul and Grace were politically active members of Elizabethtown College and community throughout their lives. In 1950, Paul represented Elizabethtown in the merger of Elizabethtown-Mount Joy-West Donegal and Conoy Schools.<sup>32</sup> He also represented Elizabethtown in the petition against the U.S. War Department during WWII, to place a munition plant in Elizabethtown January 1942.<sup>33</sup> Rooted in the pacifist values of the predominantly Brethren residents of Elizabethtown, they did not want to see acres of the towns viable farmland ruined for the purpose of supporting a war.<sup>34</sup>

The Grubb's turned the property into a gas station in 1935 and it functioned as the family business.<sup>35</sup> They shared the business and land with Grace's sister and her husband, Ruth and James Miller who were graduates of Elizabethtown College Class of 1927.<sup>36</sup> As well as Grace and Ruth's parents Henry K. and Cora B. Ober, who were also active members of the Elizabethtown College and community. The couple was on the board of trustees at Elizabethtown College.<sup>37</sup> Henry was a professor and business manager at Elizabethtown college. In 1909, Ober surveyed the 94 acres of Alwine farmland that was to be annexed to the borough. He composed the plan that divided the farmland into 440 different lots.<sup>38</sup>

Ober was president of Elizabethtown College before becoming reverend at the Church of the Brethren.<sup>39</sup> On January 10, 1909, Ober joined in the commencement service of the Christ Reformed Church.<sup>40</sup> He became elder in charge of the Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren in 1930 until death in 1939.<sup>41</sup> In April of 1932, Ober ran in the republican primary and received significant backlash from the church for it.<sup>42</sup> Ober had to attend

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<sup>22</sup> Book: CC, Page Number: 492.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Book: 12, Page Number: 753.

<sup>25</sup> Book: 24, Page Number: 386.

<sup>26</sup> Book: S, Volume: 7, Page Number: 653.

<sup>27</sup> Book: D, Volume: 15, Page Number: 167.

<sup>28</sup> *Farm Implement News* 27, no. 10 (March 8, 1906): 13.

<sup>29</sup> Book: Y, Volume: 17, Page Number 433; *Farm Implement News* 27, no. 10 (March 8, 1906): 13.

<sup>30</sup> Book: W, Volume: 31, Page Number: 540.

<sup>31</sup> Book: G, Volume 34, Page Number: 586.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 236-237.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 236-237.

<sup>35</sup> Book: G, Volume 34, Page Number: 586.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabethtown Hess Archives Photograph.

<sup>37</sup> MacMaster, 235.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 177-178.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>41</sup> MacMaster, 235.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

a council meeting to request for “forgiveness for allowing his name to be used in a recent election”, as it is fundamentally against Brethren values.<sup>43</sup>

In 1939 the gas station was left to Ruth and James Miller to run the business, they owned it until 1966 when they sold to the Gulf Oil Corporation. They were running the gas station when the Conoy creek flooded in 1945.<sup>44</sup> In 1975 Gulf Oil sold the property to John E. and Vera L. Martin.<sup>45</sup> The Martin’s sold the property four years later February of 1979 to Steven L. and Ann S. Reinhold.<sup>46</sup> The Reinhold’s owned the property until July 1985 when they sold to Groff’s Meats Inc.<sup>47</sup>

Groff’s Meats was founded in 1885 by John and Joseph Groff, sons of Benjamin G. Groff, well known businessman, active member of Elizabethtown community, and significant contributor to the founding of Elizabethtown College.<sup>48</sup> Groff was a devoted member of the Church of the Brethren at the White Oak Congregation.<sup>49</sup> The White Oak Congregation held their services in each others’ homes before they built a meetinghouse in 1859.<sup>50</sup> Groff moved to Elizabethtown in 1868 with Jonathan B. Buch to manufacture agricultural implements, including threshing machines, horse rakes and fodder cutters. In 1869 their business was worth about \$4,500. The power for foundry was derived from the only steam engine in Elizabethtown.<sup>51</sup> Groff’s grist and sawmills were located on the same premises later on. Around the 1860s and 1870s Benjamin was a partner with Jonathan B. Buch at Buch’s carriage factory, foundry and machine shop located on the west side of South Market street.<sup>52</sup> In 1876, the foundry was decimated and Buch rebuilt the business by 1880.<sup>53</sup>

In 1879 Groff was appointed to a committee to draft a petition to the Elizabethtown Borough council to attain signatures for a new fire engine for the Friendship Fire company.<sup>54</sup> Along with Brubaker, Byrod, Hoffman and Kehler, Groff was able to get a loan for \$4,000 to buy a new steam engine.<sup>55</sup> Six years later in February of 1885, Groff was elected by stockholders to the board of directors at the new Elizabethtown National Bank.<sup>56</sup> That same year Groff was chosen as the contractor for a new station for the Friendship Fire Engine and Hose Company.<sup>57</sup> He built a two story brick building including a cupola for the fire bell, this location was the home of the Elizabethtown Fire Company for nearly a century from 1885 to 1976.<sup>58</sup>

Groff donated and sold 10 acres of his farmland towards the establishment of Elizabethtown College and their first building Alpha Hall.<sup>59</sup> In 1899 the land was surveyed and the plans drawn up by George Ness Falkenstein, another benefactor, and the architect A. A. Richter.<sup>60</sup> The construction of Alpha Hall was going to cost \$14,250, and Groff himself donated \$1,000.<sup>61</sup> Groff was hired as the contractor and by 1901, Alpha Hall was complete and functioning as Elizabethtown College.<sup>62</sup> The Brethren institution allowed male and female students alike to obtain an education as well as the ability to dress in plain clothes in coherence with their religious beliefs.<sup>63</sup> By 1906 Groff had constructed the second building, Rider Memorial Hall, and became the Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds for Elizabethtown College.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 238

<sup>45</sup> Book: Y, Volume 66, Page Number: 682.

<sup>46</sup> Book: I, Volume 76, Page Number: 374.

<sup>47</sup> Book: H, Volume 92, Page Number: 1.

<sup>48</sup> Benowitz, Jean-Paul, and Peter J. DePuydt. 2014.

<sup>49</sup> MacMaster, 124-125.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>62</sup> Benowitz.

<sup>63</sup> MacMaster, 164.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 169.

John and Joseph Groff carried on their father's legacy as entrepreneurs. John K. Groff decided to open Groff's Meats in 1875 after buying the Hildebrand butcher shop from the Hildebrand family.<sup>65</sup> Parallel to his father, Joseph K. Groff ran mills until 1877, when he sold them to Jacob Stauffer to join his brother, John, in the butcher business.<sup>66</sup> In 1882, they advertised as "Groff and Brother, dealers in fresh meats of all kinds."<sup>67</sup>

Frank and Wilfred inherited the business from their father Joseph Groff. Frank then passed it to his children Joseph G. and Helen G., the siblings ran the shop along with Joseph's wife Catherine.<sup>68</sup> In 1985, Joseph purchased 33 North Market Street, the property north of his home at 19 Market Street.<sup>69</sup> The building was renovated, doubling the retail space of the previous gas station and became the new location of Groff's Meats, where Joseph ran the business with his children John, Nancy, Virginia, and Frank S. Groff.<sup>70</sup> After Joseph passed away in 1996, he left the business and his home to his children.<sup>71</sup> The children continued to expand Groff's Meats and turned the rear of their father's' home at 19 Market Street to the slaughterhouse and distribution center.<sup>72</sup>

### Appendix Current Photos:



<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>68</sup> Book: H, Volume 92, Page Number: 1.

<sup>69</sup> MacMaster, 139.

<sup>70</sup> Book: 4929, Page Number: 468

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

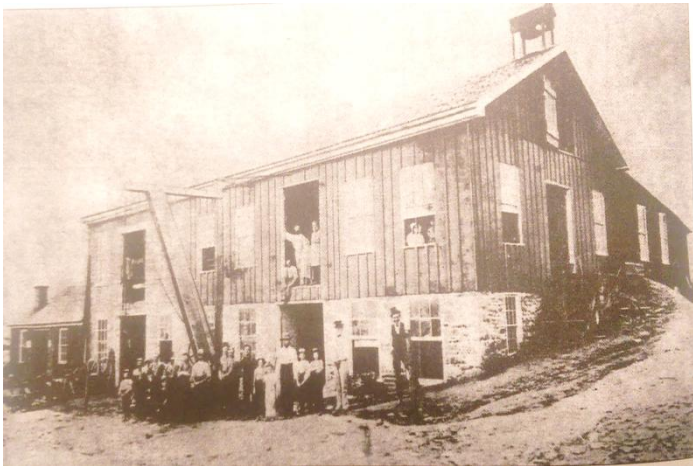
<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



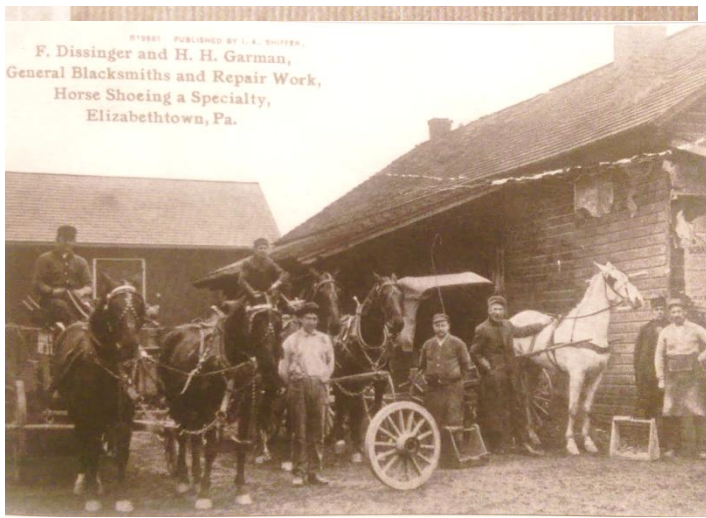
**Appendix Historical Photos:**



Compliments of  
**THE GROFF MEAT MARKET**  
 SINCE 1875



**Buch Manufacturing Company 1874.**  
**(Below) Addison Buch operated with sons, and partners Benjamin Groff and T. Nissley circa 1890.**



**Fifth Wheel Manufacturing Company circa 1890.**  
**Pictured in front row second from left is Frank Dissinger before he started his blacksmith business.**



**Frank Dissinger and Harry Garman's Blacksmith shop in 1908.**  
**Pictured third from the left is Samuel Scheetz and fourth from the left is owner Frank Dissinger.**



**1912 Construction of the Conoy Creek Bridge.**  
**Dissinger and Scheetz Blacksmith sign on the west side of North Market Street.**



**1945 Conoy Creek Flood.**  
**The gas station was owned by the Millers, Obers and Grubbs.**





**Market Street facing North after the 1945 Flood. Groff's Meats at its original location at the left.**

**Groff's Meats 1999 at 33 North Market Street.**



**Joe  
Groff delivering meats in 1942.**