

Back in the Country... Bell Acres Stories

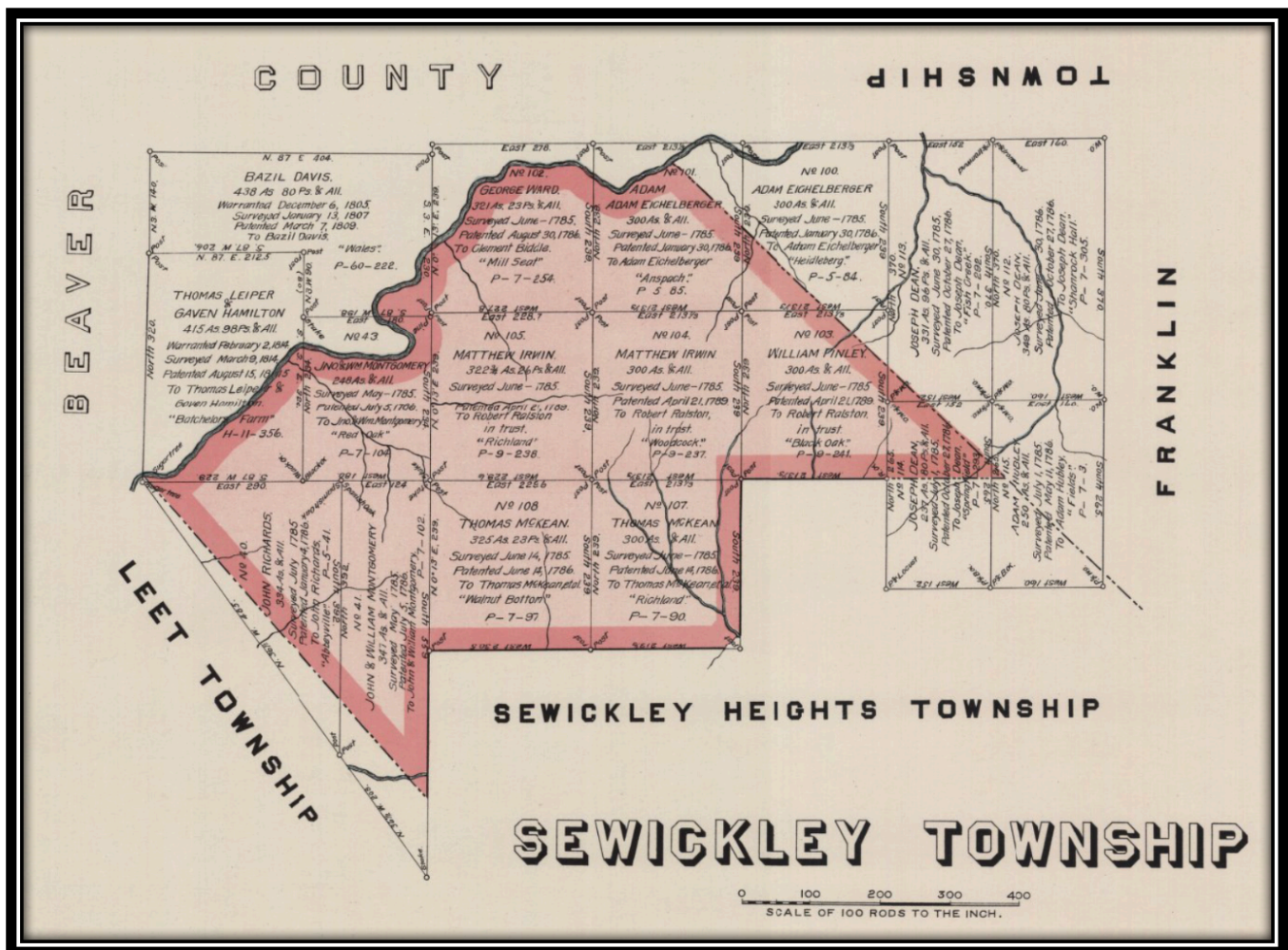
by Debby Rabold

Depreciation Lands

Land North of the Ohio and West of the Allegheny rivers is referred to as the Depreciation Lands. The name dates from the time of the Revolutionary War when Pennsylvania issued certificates to its soldiers that could be used to purchase land in Western Pennsylvania. The certificates were used to replace lost wages due to the depreciated value of paper currency, thus the name Depreciation Lands.

In 1784, Pennsylvania purchased land from Native American tribes that would be divided into lots of between 200 and 350 acres and purchased with the newly issued certificates. Survey teams began their work during the summer of 1785 with the first sales taking place a few months later in Philadelphia.

The Depreciation Lands were divided into five districts. Bell Acres fell within two of those districts, the Leet District surveyed by Daniel Leet and the Braden (Breeding) District surveyed by Nathaniel Braden. Lots within these districts were the first to be offered for sale in November 1795. Because many of those eligible for the certificates lived in the eastern part of the state and were not interested in moving into the Western Pennsylvania wilderness, they instead sold their certificates for cash at less than face value. Land speculators acquired large tracts of land originally intended for soldiers.



NOTICE is hereby given, that by virtue of an act of Assembly passed the eighteenth day of December, 1780, entitled an Act to settle and adjust the Accounts of the Troops of this State in the service of the United States, and for other purposes therein mentioned, and divers other acts of the legislature. and also pursuant to directions given the subscribers by the Supreme Executive Council of the state of Pennsylvania, on the twenty-first day of November next, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, at the Pennsylvania Coffee-House, in Philadelphia, will begin the Sale of one hundred lots of Land, part of the tract of land appropriated for the redemption of the depreciation certificates, and to continue, from day to day, until the whole shall be sold.

These lands are situate in the district of **Daniel Leet**, No. 2. beginning about nine miles below Fort Pitt, on the west side of the river, near to the mouth of Big Beaver creek in the vicinity of Fort M'Intosh, distant about thirty miles from Fort Pitt, and running up the said creek about seven miles including several of its branches, the several mouths of Big and Little Sewickley, Log's-town run Crow's-town run and its branches, and Dutchman's run.—In general, these lands are extremely fertile, and well calculated for Mills, Iron-Works, grazing and other farms. For a more particular description whereof, the public are referred to a map now fixed up in the Coffee-House, made out by the said **Daniel Leet**, to which is annexed his description of said lands.

The payments to be made in gold or silver, or in the certificates aforesaid, one half of the consideration to be paid in five days from the sale, the other half in fifteen days more, or the sale to be void. The surveyor's fees (and other office fees agreeable to law) to be discharged at the same time the purchase money shall be paid.

This stone was used to mark the corner where lots #103, 104, 106 & 107 met in the Braden District. (Courtesy of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society.)



The first auction of Depreciation Land lots took place in a Philadelphia coffee house in November 1785.

Unfortunately, there were often ownership disputes because land could be claimed in two different ways. One was by purchasing the title through the land office, the other was by actually living on the land and making improvements. A farmer might have what he thought was a clear title, only to face an Act of Ejectment from someone intending to claim the farm as his own. For many years, courts were kept busy with ownership cases.