Ludwig Dörr's Town

Ludwig Derr (Dörr in German) was an enterprising Palatinate German who participated in the opening of land on the western branch of the Susquehanna River, witnessed the American Revolution, and designed the town of Lewisburg. He was a miller by trade, operated a store, served on the first grand jury in the newly formed Northumberland County in 1772, as a township overseer in 1779, a constable in 1783, and as a land developed in 1784-85.

Derr came up the west branch of the Susquehanna River about 1769 from Heidelberg Township, Berks County. He had wanted land near what is now New Columbia, however he lost out in the land lottery of 1769. Because many applications were received for the same land, a lottery was held whereby all applications were placed in a big trunk, mixed up, and drawn out one-by-one; the first application drawn for a specific piece of land "won."

In 1770 Derr chose another place to settle, and built a house and mill near the river and Limestone (Bull) Run. The large log house would serve as a meeting place for locals to choose Provincial representatives, elect military officers and hold discussions during and after the Revolution. Derr was a private in John Foster's Company, Northumberland County Militia but did not fight in the Revolution.

Derr added to his original holdings by purchasing land in 1774 from Reverend Richard Peters of Philadelphia, and the Joseph Hudnot tract along Buffalo Creek from John Coxe, also of Philadelphia, in order to build a millrace from his mill to Buffalo Creek.

In 1775 Derr is listed among the area's inhabitants with 30 acres of cultivated land (his total tract was much larger), 5 horses, 4 cows, 2 sheep, a gristmill and a sawmill. He resided with his wife Catherine and only child George.

Derr was neutral in his dealings with the native Indians, to the extent that he and his property were spared during the destructive Great Runaway of 1778.

The Town is Surveyed

In 1784, Derr had Samuel Weiser (son of family friend and explorer/interpreter Conrad Weiser) survey the area that was to become Derrstown, laying out house lots and setting aside land for Lutheran, Presbyterian and Catholic churches.

According to Weiser's survey "the southern boundary commenced at a post at the river, at the corner of the land of said Derr, SW 121 perches to a stone; thence NW 164 perches, to a stone; thence NE about 139 perches to a post or stake, by the north-west side of Buffalo Creek; thence down the creek to its mouth, and thence down the river to the place of beginning, and contained about 128 acres...divided into 355 lots." [excerpted from *Annals of Buffalo Valley*]

From the river westward the streets were named Water, Front, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth. The cross streets from south to north were George, Catherine, Louis, Market, John, Mary and Anthony. The alleys were named for fruit trees and shrubs. Lots are uniformly 66' wide and 155', 157' or 165' deep. Weiser received lot #5 for his survey work. Lots 42, 44 and 46 on Market Street were given to the (English) Presbyterian congregation for a meetinghouse and cemetery. Lots 121, 123 and 125, at St. Louis and S. Third streets, were given to the (German) Lutheran congregation

In 1785, Derr held a lottery for land in the newly surveyed town. Some lots sold,

the first, #351 at Water and Louis streets, selling to William Wilson.. Seeking to promote sales, Derr went to Philadelphia in September 1785. He signed a deed of sale on October 18, 1785 and died sometime thereafter. Ludwig Derr's will was filed December 9, 1785. His wife Catherine died in 1786.

Ludwig Derr's large log house, a private residence, now covered in clapboard and much altered, still stands on Brown Street. An historic marker is at the site.

Derrstown came to be called Lewisburg in the early 1800s, still honoring its founder whose German name Ludwig is anglicanized to Lewis. The surveyed lots from 1784 still mark the property lines in the borough. So much original housing remains that most of the borough is a recognized historic district, easily appreciated with the aid of a self-guided walking tour designed by the Union County Historical Society.

For more information on Lewisburg and the other fine towns in Union County, visit the Historical Society in the county courthouse, S. 2nd Street, Lewisburg, open M-F 8:30-4:30.

Sources:
Annals of Buffalo Valley, John Blair Linn, 1877.
History of Lewisburg, I. H. Mauser.
History of the Susquehanna and Juniata Valleys of Pennsylvania, 1886.
A Town on the Susquehanna, Lois Kalp, 1980.