

Notes and Observations on Doddridge's and Teeter's Forts
By Ron Eisert

After the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, land in what is southwestern Pennsylvania became available for settlement. Land offices opened in Philadelphia in April 1769 for grants up to 300 acres. At that time Washington County and all of southwestern Pennsylvania was considered part of Cumberland County, if you considered yourself a Pennsylvanian. On the other hand, in 1773 Virginia Gov. Lord Dunmore attempted to enforce jurisdiction over this territory claiming it as part of Augusta County. In Dec. 1775 Virginia formed the District of West Augusta and in late 1776, formed three distinct counties out of the West Augusta District. They were Ohio County, Yohogania County, and Monongalia County. The village of Catfish Camp (Washington) stood in Yohogania County. It was cheaper to acquire land through Virginia than through the Pennsylvania land office and in many cases the money was not demanded to secure a land warrant. Thus the incentive to acquire land through Virginia. Many early settlers in this area never actually paid for their land.

John Doddridge was born in Maryland in 1745 and with his first wife Mary settled in the area south of Bedford. He came to Augusta County in 1773 and received a Virginia certificate for 437 acres of land in what would become Ohio County Virginia. However, after the war when the Mason-Dixon line was completed and the western boundary of Pennsylvania was drawn north from its terminus, the Doddridge farm was found to be three miles east of the line and therefore in what is now Independence township Washington County. Samuel Teeter, a relative, also settled here in 1773 on a tract next to Doddridge. To the north, Alexander Wells owned all the land where Avella and part of Cross Creek Park now stands. According to Doddridge's son, the Rev. Joseph Doddridge, a small fort at Sam Teeter's was used "during the first years of the war" until it became indefensible, after which time a larger fort was constructed at his father's house. Joseph Doddridge was born in 1769 and as a young boy grew up in the shadow of Teeter's Fort and Doddridge's Fort. He became an Episcopal minister and wrote one of the most comprehensive histories of early pioneer life on the Virginia frontier.

The "war" referred to can be no other than the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). Teeter's and Doddridge's forts were approximately three-quarters of a mile distance from each other. The dates that these two forts were constructed are debatable since Doddridge gives no dates, and his book "Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars of Western Virginia and Pennsylvania" originally published in 1824 is the only primary source we have concerning them. It is my opinion that Doddridge's Fort would have been built around 1777 or 1778, based on Doddridge's testimony that Teeter's Fort was used for the first years of the war. Doddridge tells us that on more than one occasion his family was forced in the middle of night to gather up the children and run to the refuge of Teeter's fort.

According to Doddridge the year of 1773 was a "peaceful one" on the Virginia frontier and would have been spent building cabins, clearing land, planting and harvesting crops. However, the frontier erupted in the spring of 1774 following the murder of Chief Logan's family at Yellow Creek on the Ohio River by Daniel Greathouse and other despicable characters. This event and the murder of other Indians by whites motivated by the greed for land developed into full-scale Indian war and became known as Lord Dunmore's War ending with the defeat of the Indians at Point Pleasant, Virginia in October. During this time, the settlement around John Doddridge broke up and the families went south to Morris Fort on Sandy Creek just south of present Fayette County, until it was safe to return. Risking their own safety the men returned to tend to the fields so that there would be corn for the winter. Most sources tell us that Teeter's Fort was built around 1773, however there is no reliable source for this date. Most sources also say that Doddridge's fort was built around 1773. If this were true we must assume that these forts were too small for the local inhabitants or that they felt safer fleeing to a larger settlement like Sandy Creek.

Sam Teeter had served in the French and Indian War on the Braddock Expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1755 at the age of 18. He later served as a captain in the Forbes Campaign of 1758. He apparently gained experience fighting Indians and was later placed in command of the defenses of Doddridge's Fort. Teeter located on a tract of land that contained 380 acres, and upon this tract Sam and Mary Teeter and their two sons built a two-story log house. Northwest of the house and adjoining it they built a stockade that

enclosed about one-eighth acre of ground and surrounded the house. The stockade was constructed of "split logs about 16 feet long and set in the ground, with another tier placed over the intersects." This description is based on Boyd Crumrine's 1882 history of Washington County. Doddridge tells us that Teeter's Fort "went to decay, and became unfit for defense". In 1777-1778 Teeter was the captain of an Ohio County militia company of 25 men. At that time there were some nine companies of Ohio County militia consisting of all the male taxables over 16, some 350 men.

Like Teeter's Fort, the Doddridge house seems to have been the focal point of Doddridge's Fort. Earle Forrest's History of Washington County, says "The stockade and all the cabins except the central blockhouse at Doddridge's fort disappeared many years ago. This log cabin, which was the Doddridge home and known as Doddridge's blockhouse, was for many years a familiar landmark." Forrest included a photograph of the site of this structure after it was torn down in 1913, which shows the ruins of it. This exact site was shown to me by Mr. Eugene Painter in the summer of 2003 and this site matches perfectly with the Forrest photograph.

It would appear that Doddridge's Fort was the home of the Doddridge family and that they did not live elsewhere. Therefore, there were probably shuttered wooden windows in the structure and defensive firing ports. Doddridge does not make reference to a "blockhouse" at the fort. He does refer to the "house" during an expected attack in 1782. He also refers to the defensive "port holes" in the house. This suggests that the Doddridge house served as a blockhouse. An unknown number of small cabins enclosed by stockade would have been added on to the rear of the house forming what would become known as Doddridge's Fort. For their own protection neighboring families presumably would have helped in the construction of the fort.

However, apparently it may not have been a very strong defensive structure. Doddridge tells us that during the expected attack in September 1782 that the defenders had to fill all their vessels with water because it was feared that since it was "not well stockaded" that some Indians might succeed in getting into the fort and set fires. If the fort was some four or five years old at that time some of the palisade posts may have become rotten and weak. Therefore, it may be that the fort was in a poor state of repair by late 1782.

A swinging gate in the stockade would have allowed entry into the fort for the families who "forted up" there. We know very little about Doddridge's Fort. We do not know how large the fort was, whether it was square, triangular or rectangular, the number of cabins constructed inside, or the number of families that "forted up" here. A spring existed just outside at the west edge of the fort about 100 feet from the site of Doddridge's house. A springhouse presently exists at the site of this old spring. The site of this fort is in Independence Township along Rt. 844 between Breezy Heights and the village of Independence. Doddridge's Fort was situated on the dividing ridge between Cross Creek and the Buffalo Creek drainages.

An historical marker on the roadside nearby states that Doddridge's Fort was built around 1773. This date cannot be correct for the reasons stated above. In addition, this was not even the site of John Doddridge's first house but was the site of the second house built by Doddridge. The first house erected by John Doddridge in 1773 was more than a half mile to the north (Eugene Painter, personal communication). James Simpson, a 19th century historian from West Middletown, in an appendix in the 1912 reprinting of Doddridge's Notes stated that "the first farm which the Doddridge family settled was where William Leggett resides on Cross Creek, afterwards they removed to the farm where Milton Murdock now lives, where they built Doddridge's fort....."

In 1778 John Doddridge's brother Philip and his family moved into this first house. Philip Doddridge removed from Dunkard Creek after his cabin was burned and his daughters carried off by Indians in the spring of 1778. It is not clear when John Doddridge cleared the land and built this second house at the site of Doddridge's Fort. It seems logical that this second house was constructed several years after his first house, probably around 1775 or 1776. It may well be that about this time the Doddridge brothers and the Teeters got together and constructed Doddridge's Fort. The Doddridge house appears to have been a story and a half with a loft since Doddridge tells us that he "spent the night in the garret loft of the house" in September 1782. The only existing photograph of the Doddridge house was included in the 1912 reprinting of Doddridge's Notes and indicates it was constructed of hewn logs. It was taken in 1911 and shows a 2-story log house and a smaller story and half house attached to it. Therefore, we do not know for certain

which was constructed first. One would assume the smaller house predated the larger 2-story house but again "Doddridge's Notes" are ambiguous and misleading. One place he refers to the "garret loft of his father's house" and in another sentence on the same page he talks about the "second story of the house". Of course, this may have merely been a way of referring to the garret loft. If so, then the two-story house was obviously added at a later date.

In March 1781 Washington County was formed and the area around Doddridge's Fort became part of Hopewell Township. Although Doddridge's Fort was never attacked by Indians, in September of 1782 it was feared that the Indians attacking Rices Fort on Dutch Fork Creek would also attack the settlements here. Thus a number of families from the area "forted up" here for several days. It may be these families "forted up" at Doddridge's on earlier occasions but Doddridge does not relate this to us. Incidentally this is the last time British allied Indians would invade the frontier settlements before a truce was signed shortly after ending hostilities. Both John and Philip Doddridge and Sam Teeter served as privates in Captain Wm. Scott's company of the Fourth Battalion Washington County militia in 1782.

The first Doddridge house was enlarged, sided over and inhabited by a number of different families, including the Leggett family, over the years. Unoccupied it burned to the ground in 1979. According to Eugene Painter, it originally was also a one room, story and half house constructed of hewn logs. No written documentation has been located for the abandonment or dismantling of Doddridge's Fort but probably occurred in the 1780s or 1790s. The Doddridge house at the fort was modified over the years with clapboard siding, windows, and additions. Vacant for many years it was last used for hay storage, and was razed in 1913 by a tenant who lived in the nearby farmhouse. Although no visible trace of Doddridge's Fort exist today, I believe the site of the house and fort is intact and undisturbed by this 19th century farmhouse.

This site would make an excellent opportunity for an archaeological investigation of a frontier fort. Excavations could reveal much about the fort we do not know such as the size and shape of the fort based on postmolds of the stockade. Other subsurface anomalies might include trash pits, foundation stone, and hearths. In addition many artifacts belonging to the Doddridges and other families that fortified there might be recovered. Domestic items may be represented by: ceramics, glass bottles, pipes, utensils, buttons, coins, nails, combs and buckles. Military artifacts one might expect to find include gunflints, lead balls, knives, and rifle lock parts.

The fort and cabin at Sam Teeters was razed by Isaac Manchester who bought the Teeter farm in 1797. Teeter and his family subsequently moved to Ohio and he died there in 1823. Manchester, who was from New England, erected a 15-room brick mansion at the site. The Teeter cabin stood in the front yard of the house where foundation stone can still be seen. The Manchester farm has passed down through the family and is now owned by Eugene Painter Jr. John Doddridge died in 1791 and was buried in a small burying ground near a chapel he constructed just south of Doddridge's Fort. In 1824 his body was reinterred in Brooke Cemetery, Wellsburg, West Virginia.

I want to acknowledge assistance of Eugene Painter of Washington, Pa. for identifying the sites of Doddridges's houses and for information on the Doddridge family. Mr. Painter is a direct descendent of Mr. Manchester and grew up in the area of Doddridge's Fort. The Painter family has owned the land where the original Doddridge house stood as well as the old Sam Teeter farm. This paper is based on my own research from the following resources and reflects my opinions and observations. Since there is not much specific information about Doddridge's Fort, others may disagree with some of this work.

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Earle R. Forrest, "History of Washington County, Pa", S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1926

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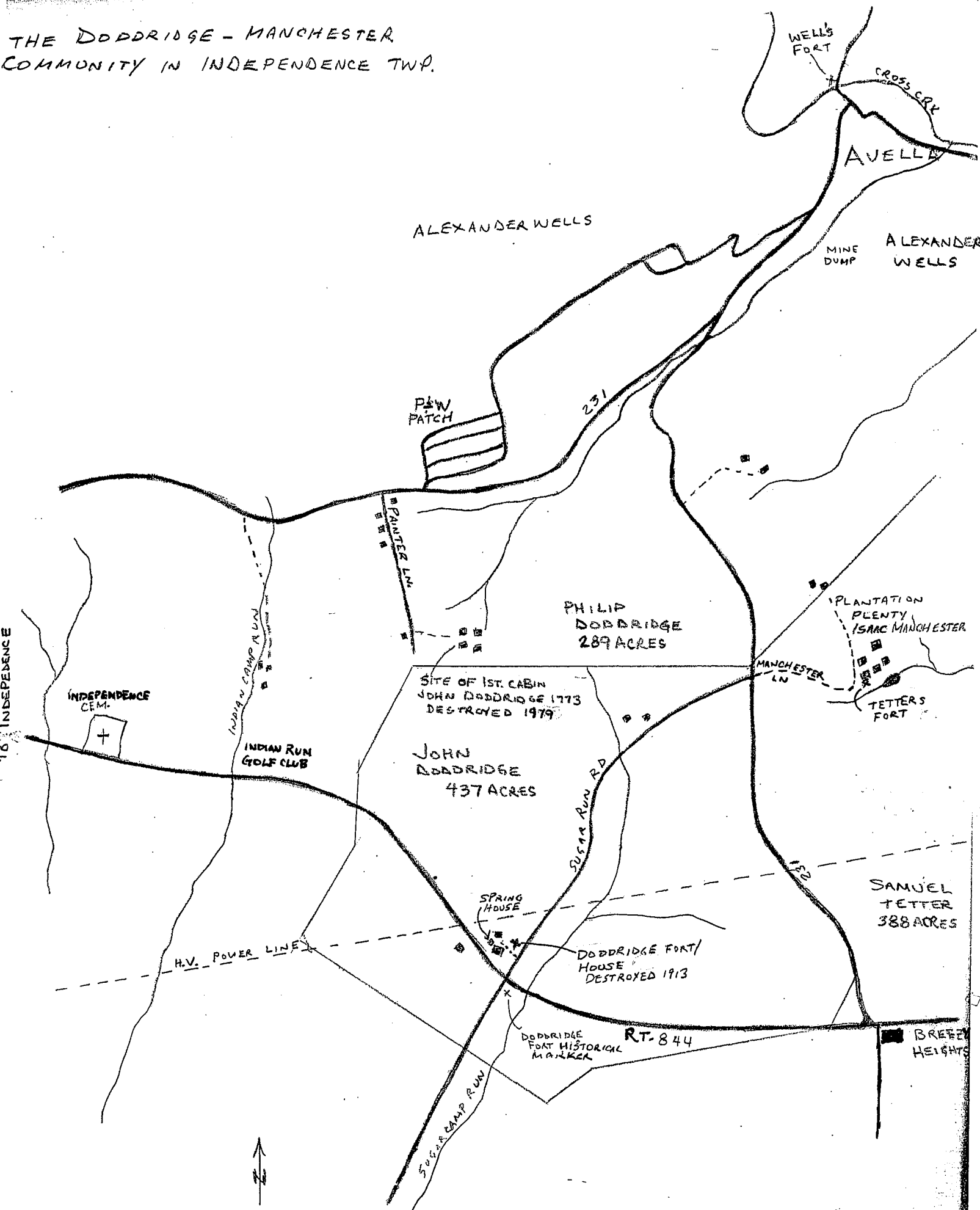
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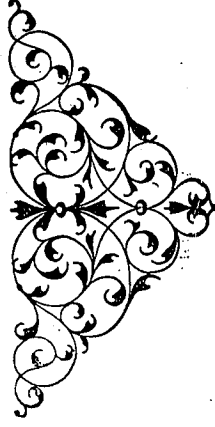
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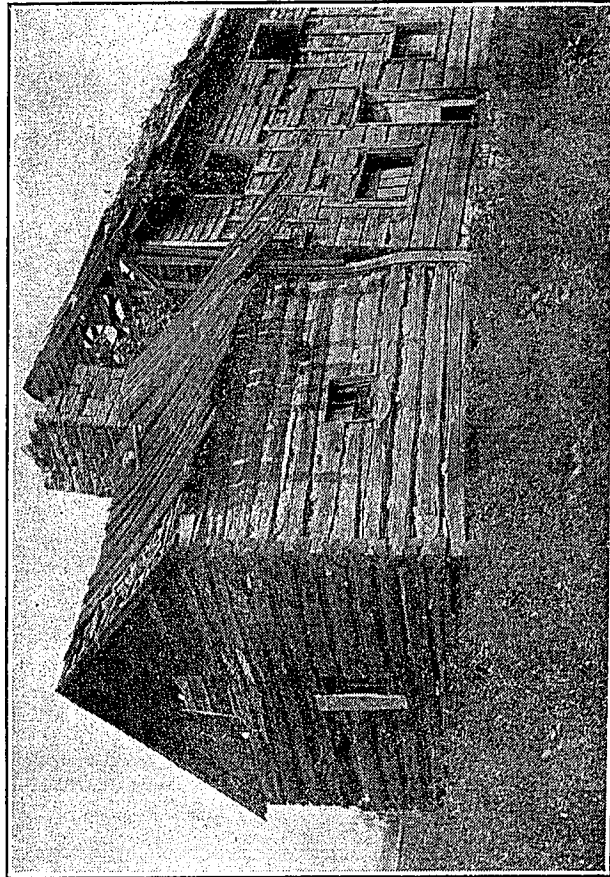
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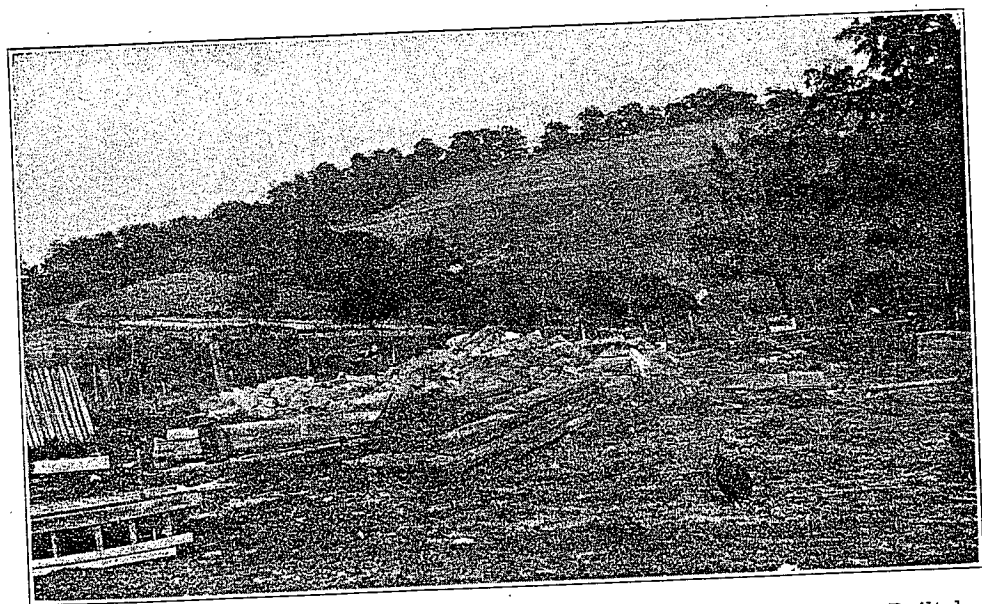


THE EARLY DODDRIDGE HOME IN 1911.

Built by John Doddridge at a date unknown. Probably the first dwelling erected in
Independence township, Washington county, Pa.



Springhouse near Doddridge's Blockhouse, built about 75 years ago from logs of the original stockade around the blockhouse.



Site of Doddridge's Blockhouse, three miles west of West Middletown. Built by John Doddridge in 1772. Torn down in 1913. This shows the foundation stones and a few of the logs.

PHOTOS DATED 1914

