

New Hope Gazette
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Samuel Delucenna Ingham
Solebury's 'greatest son' remembered

By Charles Shaw

The Samuel D. Ingham Democratic Committee will observe the 207th birthday of Samuel D. Ingham, Secretary of the Treasury under President Andrew Jackson, by laying a wreath on his grave in the Thompson Memorial Churchyard and a subsequent memorial service and picnic at the Washington Crossing State Park's Bowman's Hill-Thompson-Neely House park next Tuesday, Sept. 16 at 6 p.m. To help mark this occasion, The Gazette reprints an article on Ingham by Charles Shaw.

He's been called Solebury Township's greatest son, one of Bucks County's most distinguished residents, living or dead.

A spring, a lake and a creek have been named for him. He was active in local, state and national politics, in transportation mining, manufacturing and other business.

Outside of Bucks County, however, his chief claim to fame resulted in his involvement in one of the most ludicrous but also potentially damaging scandals ever to threaten the Presidency of the United States.

It was the so-called "petticoat war" that raged during Andrew Jackson's first term as President, and the son of Solebury who was one of the combatants was Samuel Delucenna Ingham, Secretary of the Treasury in Andrew Jackson's Cabinet from March 4, 1829 until his resignation April 19, 1831. (He actually served until the following June 20 until a replacement took office.)

He's the Samuel D. Ingham who is memorialized on an historic marker along Route 202 a little more than a mile west of the New Hope Borough line. His former home, a stone and frame mansion, still stands, and is occupied by a tenant, on the other side of 202, shielded from view by trees and bushes.

A little farther west are the lake and the spring, originally called Aquetong, which now bear Ingham's name. A little closer to New Hope is a housing development called Ingham Mews, which has no connection with the former Secretary of the Treasury and which is not a mews, which, according to dictionary definition,

is an "area of stables, carriage houses and living quarters for grooms and maids built around a yard, court or street."

Born in 1779

Samuel Ingham was born near the spring and lake which now bear his name Sept. 16, 1779, the son of Dr. Jonathan and Ann (Welding) Ingham, and prospects for a comfortable life were good. His father was a highly acclaimed physician who wanted the best of life for his son. Dr. Ingham himself taught Samuel until the boy was 10 years old, then sent him off to a private school.

But disaster struck the Ingham family. Dr. Ingham volunteered his professional service to the army and labored among the yellow fever victims in Philadelphia during the great epidemic of 1793. Dr. Ingham himself caught the disease and, accompanied by his wife and slave, headed out of the city. But he died in his carriage Oct. 1.

Family finances were low; so Samuel was withdrawn from school and apprenticed (indentured) to a paper maker on Pennypack Creek outside of Philadelphia. Samuel was able to continue his studies in his spare time and finally was released from his indenture after six years. He returned to New Hope to help his mother with the family farm.

A few years later, Ingham became manager of a paper mill near Bloomfield, N.J., where he met and married Rebecca Dodd. Ingham accumulated enough money from his paper mill management to come back to New Hope and

build a paper mill here. At the same time, he took an active interest in local politics and served in the State House of Representatives from 1806 to 1808. He declined re-election because of the pressure of his business affairs.

Elected to Congress

The Dictionary of American Biography picks up the Ingham story:

“In this year, however, he received an unsolicited commission from the governor of Pennsylvania as justice of the peace. After the declaration of war in 1812 he was elected as Jeffersonian Democrat to the Thirteenth Congress, taking his seat at the March session of 1813. He was elected to the Fourteenth Congress by an increased majority and reelected to the Fifteenth Congress without opposition, but on July 6, 1818, resigned his seat, largely because of his wife’s health.

“In that year he became prothonotary of the court of common pleas of Bucks County and, the following year, secretary of the Commonwealth John H. Eaton, the wife of Secretary of War John Henry Eaton and a great friend of President Jackson.”

‘The Petticoat War’

And that brings us to the story of the “petticoat war”.

*The central character was one Peggy O’Neale (also spelled O’Neill), know by many as “a woman of easy virtue”. Peggy, described in Samuel Eliot Morison’s **Oxford History of the American People** as a “luscious brunette with a perfect figure and a come-hither look in her blue eyes that drove young men of Washington wild, and some of the old ones too,” was the daughter of the principal tavern-keeper at the Georgetown end of Washington. She was married at an early age to a purser in the United States Navy, a wastrel named Lieutenant John Timberlake, who was cashiered from the navy because of embezzlement.*

At this point enter John Henry Eaton of Tennessee, a United States Senator from Andrew Jackson’s home state of Tennessee.

of Pennsylvania. His wife died in 1819 and he spent the next two years busied with his farming and manufacturing interests.

“In 1822 he married Deborah Kay Hall of Salem, N.J., and in October of that year was elected to the Seventeenth Congress. He remained in Congress, being re-elected each time without opposition, until he resigned his seat, Mar. 4, 1829, to accept a position in Jackson’s cabinet. In 1824 he incurred the personal enmity of John Quincy Adams through the publication of a pamphlet on Adams’ life and character which is alleged to have had great influence in the presidential campaign of 1828. Adams never forgave him for this attack and recorded much gossip and scandal regarding Ingham in his diary. Ingham was appointed Secretary of the Treasury by President Jackson, and served for a little more than two years. On Apr. 19, 1831, he resigned – though he continued in office until June 20 – ostensibly because he refused to recognize socially Mrs.

Eaton upon coming to Washington, took up residence in the O’Neale tavern and, with Timberlake at sea much of the time, shared his lodgings many a night with the “luscious brunette with a perfect figure.”

When Timberlake was kicked out of the Navy, Eaton interceded for him, perhaps because Timberlake on shore would interfere (sic) with his (Eaton’s) amours. Eaton, named Secretary of War in Jackson’s cabinet, obtained Timberlake’s reinstatement and a position as purser on the U.S.S. Constitution. Timberlake died at sea, in the Mediterranean. Some say he had tuberculosis, others say he died of drunkenness and still others say he killed himself.

Eaton continued to live with Peggy, and tongues wagged all over Washington. Eaton showed no interest in wedlock, but President Jackson finally succeeded in persuading his old Tennessee friend to “make an honest woman” of Peggy O’Neale Timberlake.

Solebury's 'favorite son' Samuel D. Ingham remembered

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Mrs. Eaton shunned

But marriage failed to give respectability to the new Mrs. Eaton. The wives of all the cabinet members refused to accept Peggy Eaton. A real crisis developed in the Cabinet. Jackson stood behind Eaton. Martin Van Buren, then Secretary of State, was a bachelor; so he remained apart from the quarrel.

The issue came to a head at a birthday ball for President Jackson in January 1830.

"All the secretaries' ladies," Historian Morison wrote, *"ignored Peggy and tempers rose so high that cabinet meetings had to be postponed. But the President refused to surrender. He actually held a cabinet meeting re Mrs. Eaton, whom he pronounced 'as chaste as a virgin'. Henry Clay, hearing this quipped, 'Age cannot wither nor time stale her infinite virginity.'"*

The "petticoat war" raged for more than a year. These days, with Watergate, Teapot Dome and the scandals of the Grant administration behind us, it's hard to believe that such a trivial matter would have such impact, but as Morison recalled:

"This 'Eaton malaria', as the gossips called it, was catching and no laughing matter for the Jackson men. It was not only making a breach between the administration and respectable society, but making a fool of the President. The opposition was jubilant; for if the American people can once be got to laugh at, instead of with, a national figure, it is all up with him."

Solebury Township's Samuel Ingham was in the thick of the matter. He was a staunch friend and ally of Jackson. More specifically, Ingham was a close friend of John C. Calhoun, Jackson's Vice President who was considered at the outset of Jackson's first term as his heir apparent. But strife developed between Calhoun and Jackson, as Jackson showed signs of favoring Martin Van Buren over Calhoun. And Ingham's wife was one of the Cabinet ladies who snubbed Mrs. Eaton.

Fateful meeting

A cabinet meeting was held in April 1831. Secretary of State Martin Van Buren offered his resignation. Jackson at first refused to accept Van Buren's resignation, but he soon realized that if Van Buren, the chief Cabinet officer, quit, all the others would follow suit, giving Jackson an opportunity to reconstruct his entire cabinet.

Secretary of War Eaton rose at the Cabinet meeting to say, "It is I who should resign." Finally, after a little more bickering, all the members quit, and the "war" was over.

There are reports that Eaton blamed Ingham for his troubles and that he threatened Ingham's life. I can't find any confirmation of that.

According to Volume I of William H.H. Davis' *History of Bucks County*, "he (Ingham) returned to Bucks County, where his friends gave him a royal reception. He was met at Philadelphia, on the 25th, by Judge John Fox and John Pugh, Esqr., who accompanied him the next day to the Sorrel Horse tavern, Montgomery County, on the Middle Road, half a mile below the Bucks County line. Here he was received by a number of his personal and political friends on horseback and escorted to the county line, where he was welcomed by a large assemblage. A procession was now formed of many horsemen and vehicles with General William T. Rogers and Colonel John Davis as marshals, and the distinguished guest was escorted to the Black Bear tavern, Northampton Township. His carriage was surrounded by outriders, and in that immediately in front rode General Samuel Smith and Captain Francis Baird, revolutionary veterans. A large crowd awaited Mr. Ingham's arrival at the Bear. After a sumptuous dinner in the shade of the trees in the tavern yard, Mr. Ingham was presented with a formal address by Henry Chapman, Esqr., and Captain Baird, to which an appropriate response was made. Thence the committee escorted the distinguished guest to his home in Solebury Township."

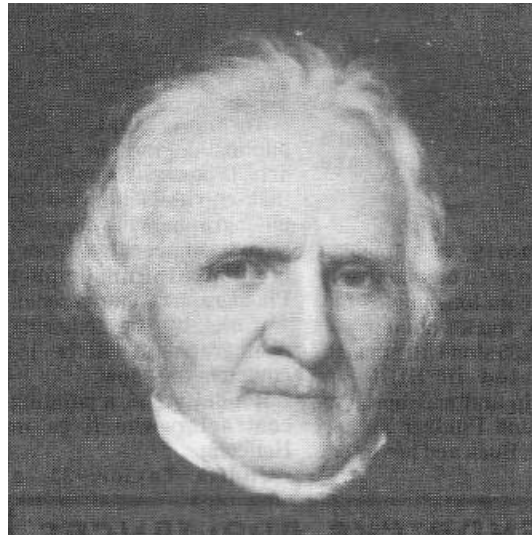
Ingham retired

Ingham was finished with national politics. The Dictionary of American Biography reports:

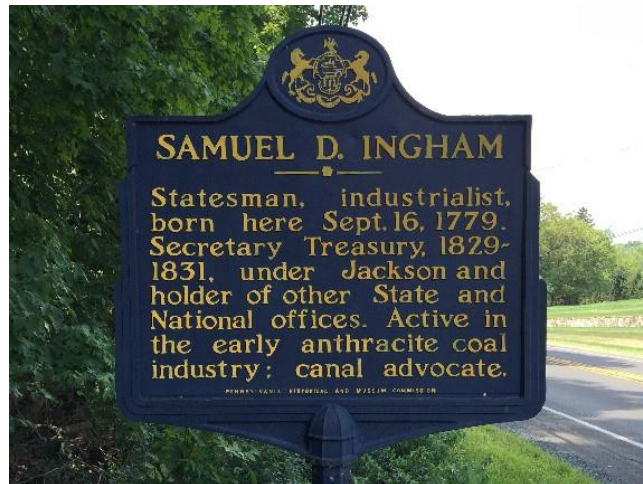
“After he resigned his cabinet post, Ingham retired from politics and devoted himself to business, becoming greatly interested in the development of the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania. He helped found the Beaver Meadow Railroad Company and was president for a time, assisted in forming the Hazleton Coal Company, and at the same time became

interested in the Lehigh Navigation and Delaware Division canals. He spent much time at the state capitol in advocating the improvement of inland waterways. In 1849 he moved his headquarters from New Hope, Pa., to Trenton, N.J., where he became interested in the Mechanics Bank of that city. During his later years he was an invalid. He died in Trenton. He had five children by his first marriage and three by his second.”

Transcribed by Suzanne Crilley



SAMUEL D. INGHAM in portrait by Martin Johnson Meade.



THE INGHAM MARKER near the Solebury statesman’s historic house on Route 202.