

PENNSYLVANIA'S LEANING TOWER

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

John Mason was an eccentric character in the history of the Susquehanna regions near Northumberland--he was known as the "Hermit of Blue Hill"--and he was the builder of the "Leaning Tower of the Susquehanna"--a peculiar building which hung over a precipice opposite Northumberland. Viewed from the river, it looked as if a breath of air would topple it to the rocks below. The tower was built originally as an observatory, and it was 16 by 18 feet in size, octagon in shape and went up two stories in height on the edge of the cliff where you now see the silhouette of "Shikellamy" there on the west side. It stood about where Shikellamy's forehead juts over the river. The tower leaned at an angle of 22 degrees, and for safety, was clamped to the rock upon which it was built, with strong iron rods. Not as high, but a lot more dangerous than the Tower of Pisa. Although there was a railing on the top, to look down from it was said to be a frightful experience, because the river was more than 300 feet below. Visitors who used to come to look at it, almost destroyed it with their knives; carving their initials and graffiti upon everything of wood. The Leaning Tower stood for almost 25 years--then on a Sunday afternoon the spring of 1864, a group of railroaders in a spirit of deviltry, loosened its moorings and the curious tower rolled down the rocky precipice with a tremendous crash and landed on a raft of logs which was being taken downstream. It had been one of the oddest and most conspicuous landmarks along the

Susquehanna River. But no odder than John Mason. He had been a merchant; became a collector of odd English books--some think of erotica--the poor fellow's books were sold for 75 cents a bushel when he died. It appears that when Mason was forbidden to go to sea, he went into the wilderness to engage in merchandising. He would walk to Philadelphia and back for his goods--that's 300 miles! He was said to be able to skate to Harrisburg in winter in half-a-day--that's 50 miles! And he often walked to Williamsport and back, just to see one of the few friends he had in the world. Despite his seclusion--perhaps because of it--he lived to a ripe age of 81. He was buried under the wide spreading branches of a chestnut tree which was a few yards from the spot where he had built his leaning tower. Legend was so great about the man, that his tombstone was gradually removed by curiosity and relic seekers. Part of it still remains, re-dug at a nearby farmhouse, it is said--all that remains to remember of John Mason, the hermit of Blue Hill, and the builder of Pennsylvania's Leaning Tower of the Susquehanna.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.