

Exploring the Cemetery: Businessman Jeff Usner

One of Rothsville's successful businessmen at the turn of the Twentieth Century was Jefferson Usner. "Jeff" was born in the Schoeneck area, but by 1880 was married to Elizabeth Hess, daughter of Joseph and Elizabeth (Weidler) Hess, living in Rothsville, and making cigars.

By 1900 he was operating a successful cigar manufactory behind his house at 2121 Main Street. Aside from his lovely gravestone, I would not have known anything of Jeff Usner if I hadn't found several photos of Jeff and his cars among my dad's things. Jeff was an early automobile enthusiast who could afford nice things due to the success of his business.



Jeff and Lizzie had a single son, Joe, who married Annie Fry, daughter of Elias G. and Lydia (Kilhalner) Fry. Joe and Annie's daughter, Susan, married Paul Ravegum. All are buried in the cemetery.

The photo to the left, which was my dad's, shows Jeff Usner (facing camera) and Joe Usner at the wheel of a 1903 Winton. The woman in the large hat is likely Jeff's wife, and the rather stern woman is probably her mother, who was German Baptist.

Jeff's obituary.

Lititz Record, Nov. 25, 1902, p. 1:

"J. G. USNER DEAD

Self-Made Man — Started Life as Poor Boy

Jefferson G. Usner, a well known person in this part of the county, died at his home on South Broad street, this borough,

yesterday morning at 5 o'clock. His death came as a surprise as his friends did not consider his illness serious. He had been ailing for three weeks, a cold having drawn to his stomach. His age was 65 years, 8 months and 16 days. He was born at Schoeneck and up to nineteen years of age worked on a farm. He started life as a poor boy and by uprightness, perseverance and good business ability worked his way to the top, a self-made man.

He had the respect and esteem of all who knew him. He had a following of friends who found his judgment, in many perplexing problems sound. He lived at Rothsville forty-one years, where he was engaged in the leaf tobacco business and cigar manufacturing. He retired from active business eight years ago, moving to Lititz in 1917. He was a director of the Farmers National Bank since its organization over twenty years ago. He was married twice, his first wife having been Elizabeth W. Weidler, who died six years ago. He is survived by his wife, who before marriage was Mrs. Mary M. Buch, and a son, Joe A. Usner of Rothsville, also the following brothers and sisters: S. G. Usner, Mrs. G. Weachter, Mrs. Henry Pennypacker, Schoeneck; Mrs. Monroe C. Killian, Reamstown; Adam Usner, Lancaster; Jacob Usner, Mrs. William Fasnacht, John Usner, Schoeneck.

By a special request made by Mr. Usner the funeral will be private. Service will be held at 2:30 Saturday afternoon at the house. Interment in the Rothsville Lutheran cemetery. E. P. Beck is the funeral director."