

Pirates of the Susquehanna

One of the early settlers in Lock Haven was James Jefferis III, who purchased 120 acres on November 4, 1833 for nine thousand dollars. He built his house, which still stands, at 400 East Bald Eagle Street. Jefferis was considered a community leader, one of the prominent members of early Lock Haven society, and the father of the mayor between 1883 and 1887.

He was also a pirate.

James Jefferis acquired privateer's papers from the government, and became a privateer, which is a kind of government-licensed pirate. He captured ships owned by other governments, and went on adventures to the Orient, Europe, and other countries.

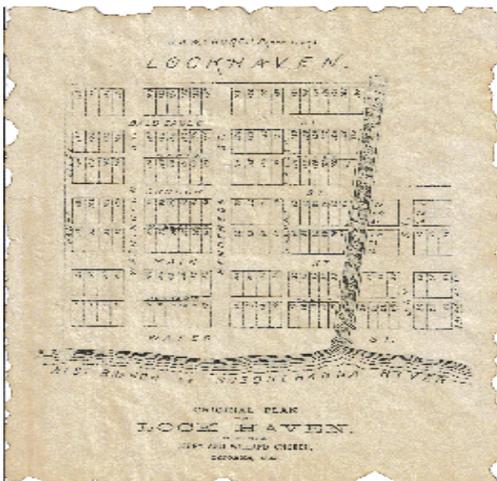
Jefferis got his start as a young man when he was plowing a field near Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania. He had asked his father for some money to start him in life, but was turned down. One day, a schooner anchored on the Delaware River, and a man got off and asked, "Can I get any hands here?"

"I'll go," volunteered James, and he left his plowing on the spot.

As he grew, he became captain of his own ship, the *Neptune*. He went on voyages with his crew, and brought back loot, some of which he gave to his family. This included a set of dishes from China, an elaborate wing chair from England, a sharkskin case filled with nautical instruments, and a decorative map of the Bay of Bengal.

On May 17, 1781, Jefferis married Deborah Hunt, and fathered four children. His youngest, James IV, grew up to be the mayor of Lock Haven. The oldest son, Taylor, begged his father to take him to sea when he was sixteen. Jefferis refused. Taylor then stowed away on the *Neptune*, waiting to reveal himself until the ship was far enough to shore that he couldn't easily be sent home.

Once he revealed himself, he expected to be given special privileges as the captain's son, but instead, he was sent before the mast and treated as an ordinary sailor. His father, however, couldn't disguise a certain pride, and when they reached Holland, he had a portrait painted of his oldest son, skin tanned from the ocean weather.



Jefferis's wife, Deborah, was a remarkable woman, as well. She was known for being kind to her neighbors, and bandaging the cuts of children while she gave them a cookie. In one incident, she had to ride across the river on her husband's horse to fetch the mail. In water deeper than she realized, however, the horse threw her off and swam back. She grabbed it's tail and was pulled safely back to shore.

In one notable adventure, Jefferis was traveling to China when a wind blew him off-course. He dropped anchor close to a visible coast overnight, and in the morning, he found that he was very close to the coast of Japan. At that time, Japan was very hostile toward outsiders, and if the *Neptune*

was caught, he and his crew would all be killed.

A rooster crowed on the shore, and his own rooster answered. He wrung it's neck so that it wouldn't give away their position, and cut his anchor loose, leaving it behind. The *Neptune* rode a wind that had just come up, and sped away to safety.

Jefferis retired around 1810, using his profit from the sale of a captured British ship to build his new life. And in 1833, he moved to Lock Haven, leaving the sea behind.