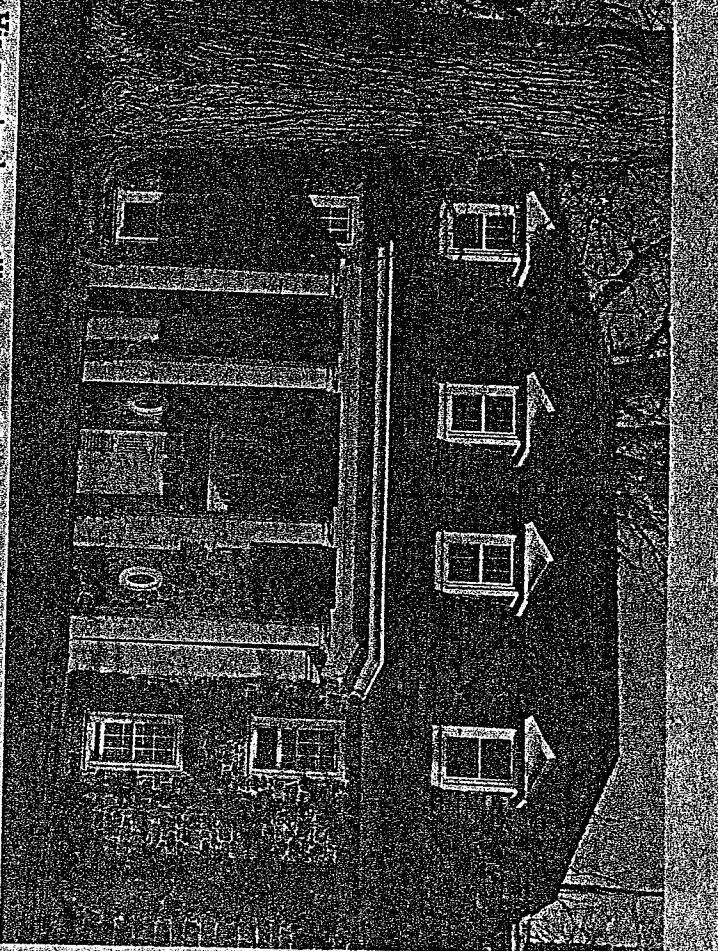


## He Built Railroads

**A**BOUT 1826 the Canals Commission of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania employed Moncure Robinson, a Virginian, to build a network of canals. A brilliant civil engineer, Robinson, then 24, immediately shook up Harrisburg by stating that the era of canal transportation would be short-lived. "I'll build canals," he said. "But, even more, I want to build railroads."

In 1828 Robinson laid out the route that was to become the "Main Line" of the Pennsylvania Railroad some 20 years later. Leaving the employ of the State, he went with the newly organized Philadelphia & Reading Railroad (now the Reading Co.), directed the building of the line which speeded transportation of anthracite from Schuylkill county mines to the tidewater port of Philadelphia. At first Robinson imported English-made locomotives. In 1839 two Philadelphians, Joseph Harrison and Andrew Eastwick, built the Gowan & Marx locomotives.

Robinson laid out route of Pennsylvania's "Main Line." In 1828 he built the Gowan & Marx locomotives.



His country home still stands at Morris Rd. and Penllyn Pike, Penllyn.

motive, which Robinson placed

in service. Its fine performance spurred railroad building throughout the U.S.

The success of the Philadelphia & Reading prompted Czar Nicholas I of Russia to send a delegation to Philadelphia to try to induce Robinson to undertake the building of railroads in Russia.

Robinson didn't accept, but he remembered as the painter of *An* arrangement in Grey and Black.

structured named George Washington Whistler to build a railway from St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) to Moscow. With Whistler went his wife and young son,

John Whistler, popularly known as "Whistler's Mother."

In 1871 Robinson, who long had resided at 319 Spruce St., established a country home at Penllyn,

Montgomery County, by then accessible to Philadelphia by rail-

road. The old Robinson mansion still stands at the juncture of Morris Rd. and Penllyn Pike. Robinson died in 1891.

—Wayne E. Hornung

# Maggie and Harry Rolin's House

By Maggie and Harry Rolin  
Artwork by Becky Huttinger

A towering buttonwood tree, about one hundred and fifty years old, and a spring house make a perfect setting for this fieldstone house, set back from Penllyn Pike across from Boehm's Church. Apparently, it was built in the late part of the 18th century, then added to in 1802, and must have housed two families. Two front doors, and two sets of stairs, all the way to a big attic indicate this.

Low ceilings — some of them with old beams — several fireplaces, one of which is huge, and wide floorboards all add to its charm.

We added, in 1952, a wing of closely matched stone, obtained from a nearby quarry, giving us sufficient room in which to raise a modern family.



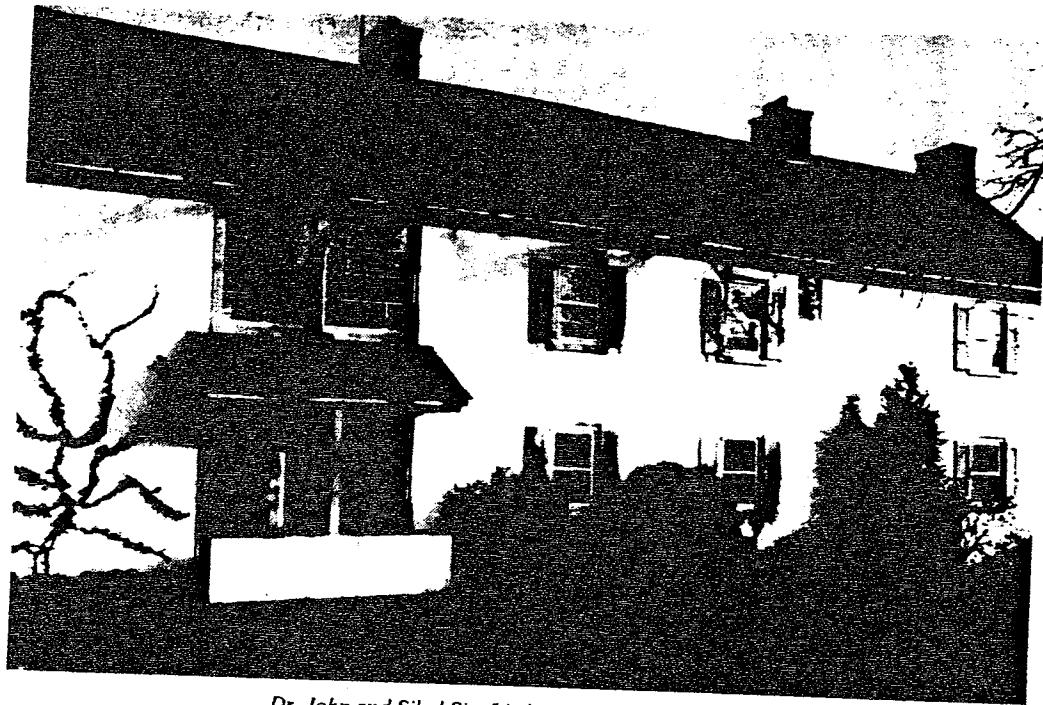
*The Rolin Springhouse*



*The Rolin Home*

*Becky Huttinger*

across from  
571 PBB  
Boehm's Ch



*Dr. John and Sibyl Siegfried's House, Built in 1764*

## Near Custer Station

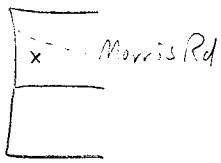
By Agnes Baker Jefferson  
 Photography by George S. Peck

In the northwest corner of the township (North Wales Road and Township Line-West) there grew a little village known as Custer Station. It was Erb's Mill before the railroad made its stop there, but both these labels have a basis for being so-called because of the people that lived there and the events that happened there. The village had two mills, a feed house, and nine or ten dwellings, mostly built after 1875.

### Dr. John and Sibyl Siegfried's House

"Pinecroft" today, borders the railroad tracks and is tucked in on a slope to the Stony Creek. To understand the story of this house one must consider it with Erb's Mill (demolished), now a pumping station next to the Cassel-Tate house.

In 1742, Rees Thomas, Zachariah Whitpain, and Stephen Armite, sold 140½ acres to John Phillips. The land was a long narrow strip 1¼ miles long, but only 960 feet wide. By 1746, Phillips had built a water-grist mill, and it is assumed a small house to live in nearby (old part of the Cassel-Tate house). In 1750, Phillips sold to Jesse Morgan, who died in 1757. Jesse's wife remarried in 1762 to a John Robinson.



## David Greger Property

David Greger's place, adjoining the Carlson's approximately forty-five acres, came to him through his father, Garfield Greger, who was an adopted son of the McCandless family.

If it is assumed that the Owen and Evan Thomas families, who built the dwellings and outbuildings, acquired the land from the early Thomas and Jacob Kurz in 1746 (note found elsewhere), then we can also make the assumption that the property was in the hands of Owen and Evan Thomas until July 17, 1776, because that is the date of the first deed in David's possession.

First Deed: July 17, 1776

Owen and Evan Thomas to Crosdale and Bell

Second Deed: October 7, 1851

Crosdale and Bell to Abram and Isaac Fermer et al John and Jane Jordan

Third Deed: April 5, 1859

John and Jane Jordan to Showaker

Fourth Deed: 1859

Samuel Showaker to James McIntyre

Fifth Deed: April 5, 1865

James McIntyre to David McCandless

In St. John's Cemetery, David and Margaret McCandless, of Scotch-Irish descent, apparently had three sons, according to the tombstone. They were David, Isaac and John; David and Isaac were bachelors and took Garfield MacGreger (later Greger) as their charge. John McCandless married Johanna Von Stutterheim, who had three sons, two of whom died in childhood and the third, Isaac II, died at about 26 years of age. (He was this writer's father's best man in a 1910 wedding.) The John McCandless' resided in the house on the McCandless property that extended in a long narrow strip to Skippack Pike. That house was built in the mid-1850's and is in excellent restoration. The Ferguson family now live there.

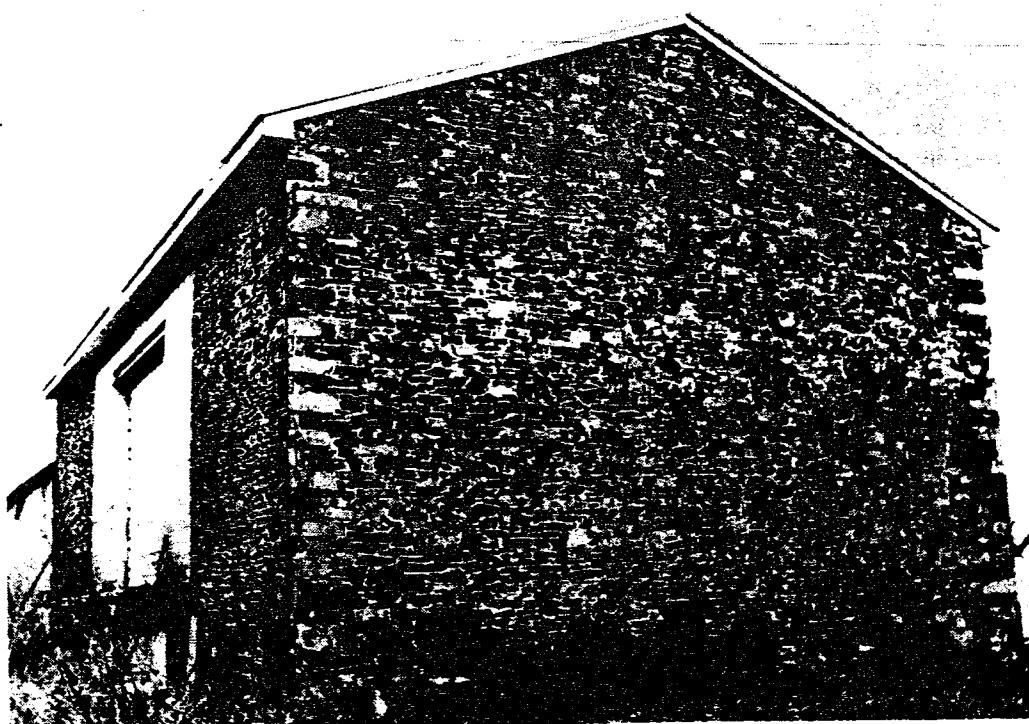
It is evident from the tombstone that the David and Isaac McCandless bachelors lived until about 1930. The writer remembers them farming and marketing their products until their deaths. They willed the property to Garfield Greger. Thus, David Greger, his only son, is now the proud owner of a parcel of land that has had practically only two families who possessed it.

David Greger's main house is virtually the same as when it was built; two rooms downstairs with a large open fireplace and two small bedrooms upstairs with a curving staircase. The outside measurements make it seem nearly square. A pitched roof suggests something that came from an English or Welsh countryside.

David and his family live in what was the quaint little spring house and butcher shed. He has added a two-story wing on either side, and a second story over the main room which is now the living room. A large chimney corner fireplace dominates this room.



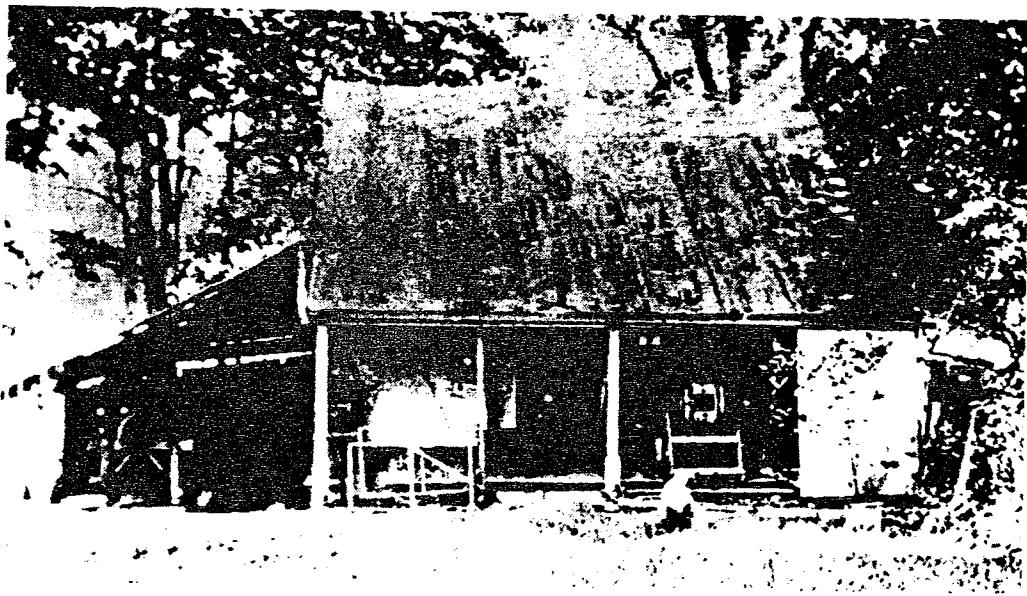
*Greger House Built, c.1734*



*Greger Barn Built In 1815*

A great tall pine tree and many other ancient trees enhance the buildings. David told how his father one day noticed something was disturbing the chickens. Thinking a hawk was lurking in the top of that nearby pine tree, Mr. Greger took aim and shot the nasty bird. To his amazement when it dropped to the ground, he found it to be a bald eagle. Because it was one of the last of its kind in the area, he had it mounted and presented to the school for the children to observe.

The legend of the Thomas' being "Tories" in the Revolutionary struggle stimulates the imagination as to what could have happened here while the neighbors were fighting in the War. There are also colorful stories about an Indian hideaway on the grounds. Later, the Stony Creek Railroad produced many interesting occasions when the trains went by so close to the houses. All these events haunt the visitor as he drives out the long lane to the very different present.



*Spring House And Butchering Shed, c. 1880*



*David Gregor's Home, Formerly Spring House/Butchering Shed*

## “Melrose”

By Dorothy S. Conard  
Photography by George S. Peck

The home of Helene Charon Weiss at 710 Skippack Pike in Blue Bell is part of a 5,000-acre grant by William Penn to George Palmer in 1682. William Palmer, who inherited 832 acres from his father in 1703, sold the acreage to Philip Price. That same year, Philip Price sold part of the tract containing 417 acres of this parcel to Richard Morris. In 1707, Richard Morris sold 100 acres of this parcel to Edward Endehave for forty pounds. Peter Endehave, son of Edward, was owner in 1728. In 1742, Edward Endehave, the second son of Peter, and his wife, Margaret, received fifty-nine acres, part of the 100 acres. In a sale to Jacob Shetz by Edward DeHaven and his wife, Margaret, in 1763, there is mention of a residence included with the transaction of land. Jacob Shetz sold to Joseph Stamper and his wife, Sarah, in 1776, and in 1784 Joseph Stamper sold the messuage and tract of land to John Dehaven and his wife, Elizabeth, for 450 pounds. In 1798, John DeHaven sold to Mathias Wentz who remained there until his death.

Tax records of 1799 indicate that Mathias Wentz owned one stone dwelling house 25 X 15. In 1825, the administrator of the estate sold to Jacob and Jonathan Wentz. The Wentz estate was sold at auction in 1836, after the death of Mathias and his two sons, to Joseph Phipps Conard for \$1,530. The property remained in the Conard family for the next seventy-two years, passing from Joseph to his son, Henry Fasset Conard, who had married Sarah Harper Nice of Whitemarsh. During this period many improvements were made, including the building of a solid cypress porch which is now the dining room. In 1901, Eugene Nice Conard, son of Henry, built an additional small frame house on the property facing Skippack Pike.

Henry Fasset Conard and his wife sold the entire property to May G. Maloney (wife of Phillip S. Maloney) in 1908 for 10,800 dollars. In 1915, twelve acres of this tract were sold

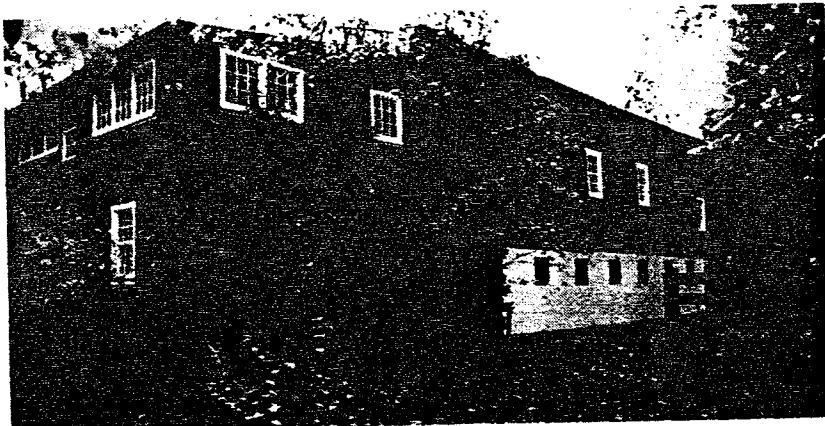


“Melrose”

to John Farber Miller. Mr. and Mrs. Maloney were killed at the Mt. Pleasant Road railroad crossing, leaving two sons, Gordon and Mercer.

Clarence E. Doan and his wife, Marion, purchased the property in 1928, then known as "Canterbury Farm," where they operated a horse breeding farm and also raised black-faced sheep. The huge barn was heated by a large furnace and the metal ducts running through the barn still remain. Horses that were used by Abbotts Dairy, for pulling milk delivery wagons, were brought to this farm for rest and relaxation. Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church was built on part of this property.

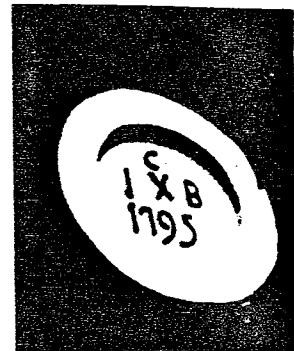
Mr. and Mrs. Doan moved to the smaller frame house on the property and sold the large house, barn and twelve acres of land to Helene and Benjamin H. Charon in 1952. Helene related that when they removed the wall paper from the original kitchen ceiling (now the den) they found it lined with newspapers dated 1807. This was probably a means of insulating. There was also a walk-in fireplace in this room which is now closed. The present kitchen was a chicken coop. The house itself shows signs of the fine cabinet making in the past, since beautiful panelling of solid cypress is in evidence throughout the house. An iron peg and old markers were found in the fields of the property, and it is said that a still was in operation in the far field during prohibition days. A wooden bridge over a stream leads to a beautiful three-level stone springhouse which has a trapdoor to the second floor. The present deed still contains a clause giving trolley-car rights on Skippack Road, in front of the house, which is a remainder that the trolley once ran in Whitpain Township.



*Huge Barn at "Melrose"*



*Unusual Three Story  
Springhouse at "Melrose"*



*Old Stone Springhouse and Backview*



*Side View of Chambers Home With 1795 Datestone*

# History of "Whitpain Farm"

By Adele Rhindress

Photography by Adele Rhindress and George S. Peck

Artwork by Bobby Rhindress

This year is 1977. Thousands of travellers in automobiles, trucks and motorcycles drive along historic Skippack Pike (Route 73) every day — unaware of the fact they are passing a very special property that played an important role in the founding of Whitpain Township.

Just a short distance west of the Broad Axe Hotel lies Whitpain Farm, a lovely 113 acre private estate which is part of a certain 4,500 acre land grant by William Penn. Through leases and re-leases in the years 1681-83, one Richard Whitpain, citizen and butcher of London, England, became a landowner in Pennsylvania.

Whitpain Farm, located on the south corner of Skippack Pike and Narcissa Road, was part of the land known as the "Great Tract" and later as "Whitpain's Creek" situated in Philadelphia County.

Richard Whitpain, for whom the township is named, never came to this country, but many of his descendants and relatives who did make the journey across the Atlantic attended monthly meetings of the Quaker religion in Philadelphia during the late 1600's.

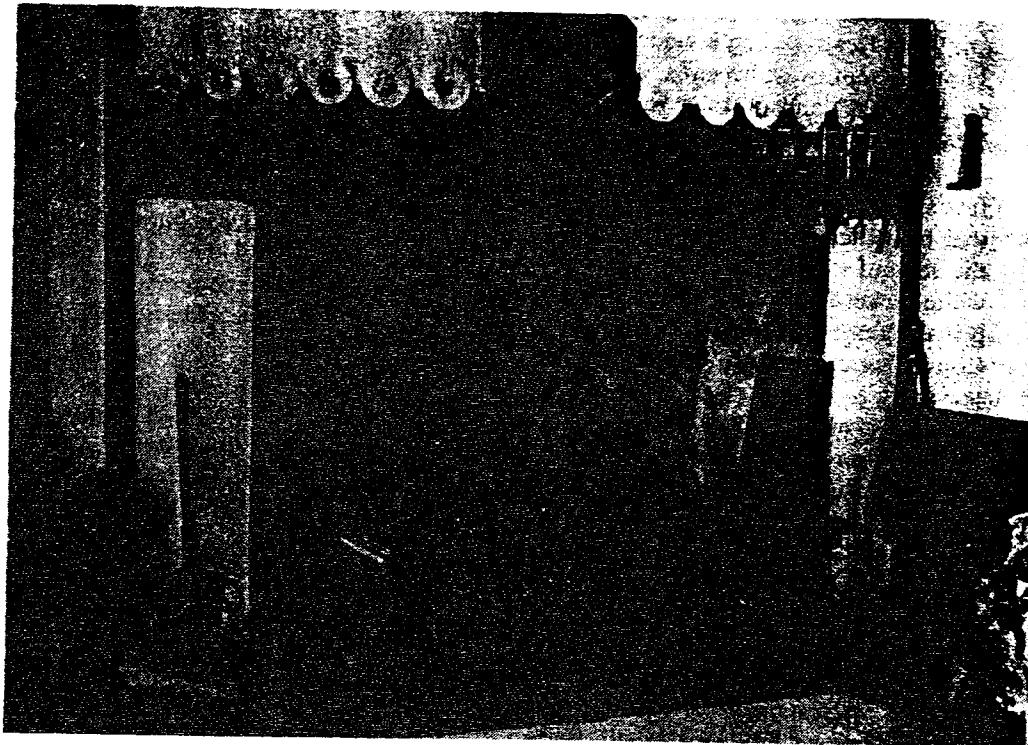
Their presence is recorded along with short family birth-death histories in the *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*.

Richard Whitpain's daughter, Ann, was one of his descendants who came to the colonies. She married Thomas McCarty, a butcher-surgeon from Great Britain, and together they are recognized as the first actual settlers in Whitpain Township.

In 1704, they came into possession of 250 acres of land south of Skippack Pike. It is believed that the original measure of land was 450 acres, but 200 acres on the upper side of the tract north of Skippack Pike were detached before McCarty became owner.

McCarty cleared some of the land where he built a house and barn. The house is made of stone and stands today with its original panelled solid oak doors on either side, multi-paned windows with locks reminiscent of pre-Revolutionary days, and a loft that could very well have been used as a hideout from Indians.

The McCarty house is now used as a living room by the present owners Mr. and Mrs. Morris Cheston. A large table, probably used as a dining room table by the McCarty's, has been handed down to each successive "Whitpain Farm" owner.



*Fireplace at "Whitpain Farm"*

The walk-in fireplace at one end of the living room served as a cooking area complete with bake-oven and a large wrought iron pot dangling on a heavy chain looped over an iron rod. The rod could be swiveled so as to position the pot over the fire for cooking or out over the edge of the fireplace stone floor for serving.

Two huge screens can be stretched across the front of the fireplace as a precaution against snapping cinders. Cleaning utensils, including a hand-made straw broom, stand to the right of the fireplace; and china plates, arranged in a row on the wooden mantel, add an interesting decorative touch. A polished wooden bench, placed at just the right distance from the fire, leads one to believe it was well-used by those who rested as they warmed themselves after coming in from the cold.

At the opposite end of the room stands a wooden hutch of considerable proportion with three shelves of various sized plates, mugs, pitchers and serving trays. On either side of the hutch hangs a reflecting candle sconce.

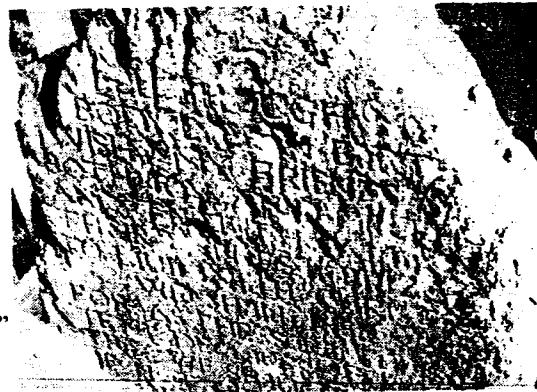
The barn was used to house cattle and feed for the farm animals. Stables for horses were located in the section of the barn which faced the McCarty living quarters. Midway through this current century, fire demolished the original structure, but it was rebuilt and used again for farm animals and riding horses. Today, the barn functions as a garage for family automobiles and equipment to keep the property in prime condition.

Thomas McCarty kept the property only six years, when in 1710, he sold his 250 acres to one John Kendall. The boundaries were described as "beginning at a post in line of Micah Thomas, southwest by same, 225 perches; northwest by part of south tract, 180 perches; northeast by land of John Hart and William Davis, 225 perches; southeast by land of William Robinson, 180 perches to beginning."

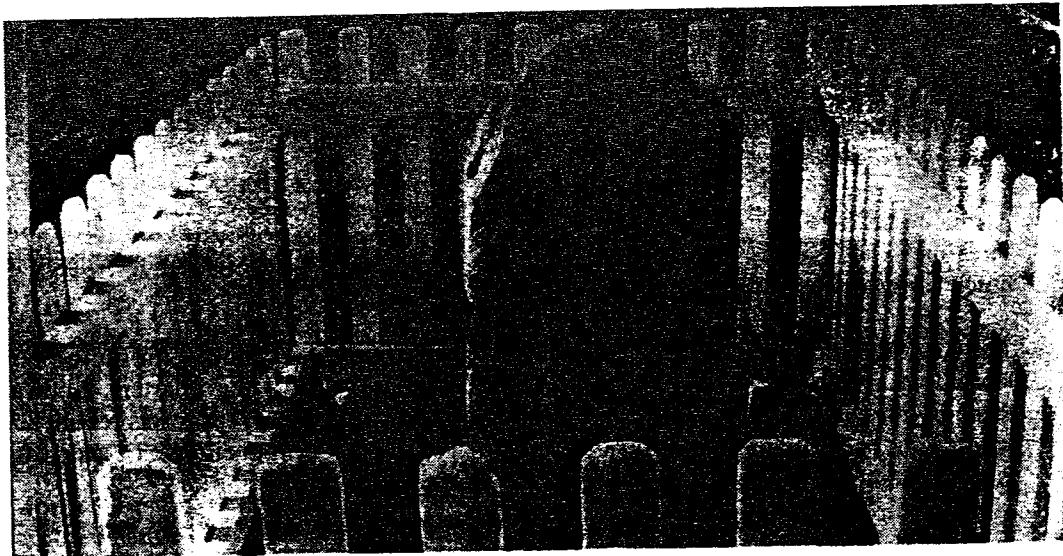
It is supposed that Kendall was a relative of the McCarty family because during the period that he owned Whitpain Farm, Ann Whitpain McCarty died and was buried in a grave on the edge of the property high above Skippack Road. Her grave is neatly enclosed with a white picket fence. The tombstone is made of soapstone and is the remains of the oldest private burying ground in Whitpain Township, and perhaps the oldest in Montgomery County.

The stone monument is an excellent example of colonial memorial sculpture with its winged grim-faced cherub at the top and floral decorations along the sides. The barely visible inscription reads, "Here lyeth ye body of Ann, late wife of Thomas McCarty, who departed this life March 21 ye year of our Lord 1714-15. Age 57." On the back of the gravestone is written:

"Although my body lies in earth,  
I wish my friends both joy and mirth.  
Their interest prize  
To live with Christ we all shall rise;  
For as the Scripture text declares  
That we shall rise; and if not heirs,  
Then woe be to that mortal man  
That in God's judgment cannot stand."



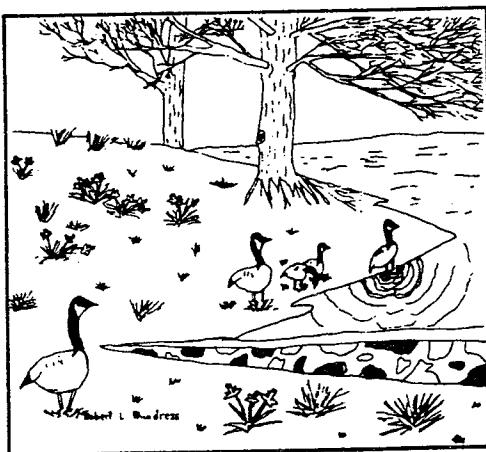
*Grave of Ann Whitpain McCarty*



There may have been fifty or more family graves at one time on that corner of Whitpain Farm and tradition says that Ann prophesied that if she were buried on the property a spring would rise near her grave. Her prophecy came to pass when a spring rose on the lower level of the land. The stream flows through the eastern section of Whitpain Township and is a branch of the Wissahickon Creek. It has been appropriately named "Prophecy Creek."

In 1805, an arched stone bridge was built over the creek which passes under Skippack Road, then a dirt road. The bridge was named Rex Bridge.

Today, the waters ripple between wild violet and daffodil-studded banks and reflect the branches of graceful large-trunked trees that could possibly be several hundred years old. One small section of the stream near the property's entrance serves as "home" for Canadian geese in the warm weather and as a frozen pond for youngsters who don ice skates in winter.



In 1717, Skippack Road was opened and coincidentally, in the same year, Thomas McCarty re-purchased the Whitpain Farm property. This second deed, transacted two years after his wife's death, was witnessed by Nicholas Shull and David Hay before Edward Farmer.

McCarty held possession of the land for seven years, then sold it to a man from Cheltenham, George Reinick, in 1724.

A copy of the Last Will and Testament of Thomas McCarty, dated 1725, reveals that he re-married and moved to Hanover. He bequeathed his earthly belongings, after his funeral expenses and debts had been satisfied, to his beloved wife, Hannah, and their daughters, Mary and Hannah.

The year of McCarty's death is uncertain, however, a story handed down through the years states that he, too, is buried in the grave with Ann Whitpain McCarty.

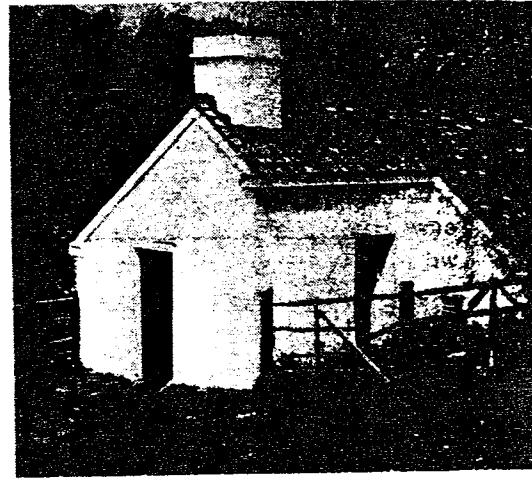
George Reinick sold the property to John Todd, of Kingsessing, in 1731. Todd was not financially capable of buying the estate outright, so he took a mortgage. Six years later, 1737, Daniel Brynes became the new owner.

The Brynes family resided on Whitpain Farm for 33 years, right through the middle of the century to the period of political unrest that led to the American Revolution. There is no information or traditional tales of the Brynes family to tell except that, evidently, they were not outstanding farmers, for any increase in value per acre was credited to the general rise in value of the adjoining farms.

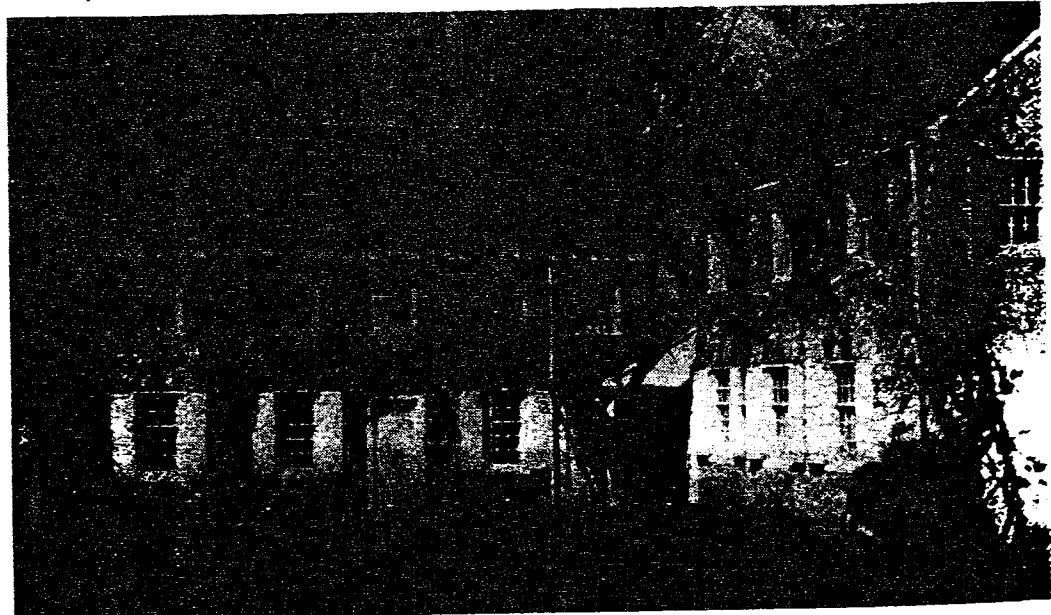
During the 33-year Brynes' ownership, the land was conveyed to and from several family members. Daniel Brynes, Jr., a shopkeeper from Wilmington, and Caleb Brynes, a Whitpain chair-maker, held the property jointly for a number of years. Then, Daniel, Jr. sold his half to Joshua Brynes who in turn sold the property to Caleb. Thus, Caleb became sole owner.



*"Whitpain Farm" House*



*Springhouse*



*"Whitpain Farm" House*

Financial troubles plagued Caleb Brynes, and he found it necessary to sell off portions of the large plantation. In 1763, a mortgage was given to Hugh Roberts of Philadelphia, and sometime between 1753 and 1760, the east corner was sold to Derick Van Pelt. This was the 25 acres which included the site of the Broad Axe Tavern.

In those years, roadways through Broad Axe, over the Plymouth and Upper Dublin Turnpike and some lands including the Whitpain Farm were popular as speedways for horse races. Prior to starting time, all loose stones and other obstacles were cleared from the course and enthusiastic spectators took favorite viewing spots along the fences erected on either side of the raceway. After the race, contestants and onlookers crowded into the Broad Axe Tavern to arrange future races, celebrate victory or drown defeat.

The next recorded owner of Whitpain Farm was George Bisbing. His residency extended from pre-Revolutionary War days, through the war and thereafter.

It was during Bisbing's ownership that history reports a skirmish took place in October, 1777, between some American patriots and a part of British Calvary. The patriots were being pursued by the Hessian detachment and the military scuffle caused quite a commotion in the neighborhood. This all happened after the time of the Battle of Germantown and the period when George Washington and his troops rested in Whitpain Township.

The pursuit ended on the "Whitpain Farm" tract close to the private graveyard and a nearby oil mill. After the combat, the bodies of dead Hessian soldiers dotted the woodlands and cornfields. A burial place was prepared for the soldiers on the hill above Skippack Pike near Mrs. McCarty's grave. Soapstone tombstones were erected on the graves.

It was not uncommon in the years to follow for one to find a cannonball near the battle site. A lead cannonball was found in the field of Morris Jarrett and was preserved as a relic by Charles Berkheimer. Both were owners of properties adjacent to "Whitpain Farm" in the late 1800's.

George Bisbing made the first of three annexations (to date) by adding an authentic English library to the original McCarty homestead in 1776. He is also, at a later date, credited with building a rather comfortable and hospitable looking fireplace at one end of the room. It was a controversial piece of architecture, for the fireplace and bake-oven were constructed of tombstones taken from the family graveyard. Tradition says that Bisbing would sit for hours before a fire built from cornstalks. It is also said that Bisbing's ghost has returned on several occasions to haunt the chimney corner of that fireplace.

(it is reasonable, at this point, to note that those of the successive owners who built extensions onto the original house were careful to preserve the layout, furniture, doors, floor, beams, fireplace and windows of the historic home. The architectural style has been retained and the building stone has been perfectly matched.)

Additional structures were put up on the property. Besides extra living quarters for employees on "Whitpain Farm," a springhouse was erected over the stream's cool running waters. The purpose of a springhouse was to preserve food in all types of weather.

The exterior appearance of the "Whitpain Farm" springhouse conceals the actual size and shape of the interior. The design is bi-level — above and below ground.

A dirt floor forms the base of a stone corner chimney where meat was "smoked" and then reserved for future consumption. Several steps lead down to the lower area where provisions that were to be kept cold were stored in metal containers and placed in about two or three feet of moving spring water.

An air of historic consequence surrounds the "Whitpain Farm" springhouse. Water marks, staggered at various heights, are etched in green algae as reminders of flood stages and droughts over the years. And, a seemingly perpetual shrine to the memory of the Hessian soldiers who fought American patriots during the Revolutionary War (not far from the springhouse) lies underwater in the springhouse. One of the owners (the name of whom is not known, for sure) took the soldiers' gravestones from the hill near the battle site and placed them in the channels. Time and running waters have erased the inscriptions which were visible until little more than a quarter of a century ago.

The "Whitpain Farm" property changed hands a number of times through the years and, to date, there were two additions made to the original stone structure during this century.

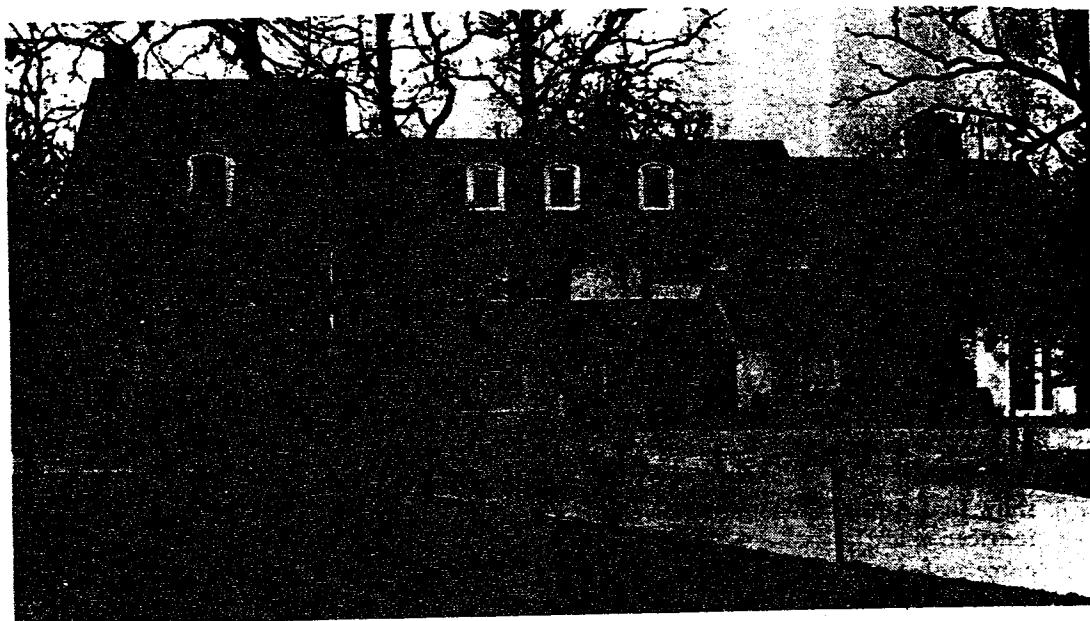
The first was made by Mr. and Mrs. N. McLean Seabrease who purchased the house in 1925. They commissioned architect Brognard Okie the task of enlarging the living area. Okie was well known for his skill in authentically restoring early American homes. The extension was placed at one end of the Bisbing library, so that the floor plan became "L" shaped.

In 1939, another addition which continued the Seabrease wing was made by architect H. Martyn Kneedler for Mr. and Mrs. Morris Cheston who have owned "Whitpain Farm" since 1932. A room and a small greenhouse complete the additions.

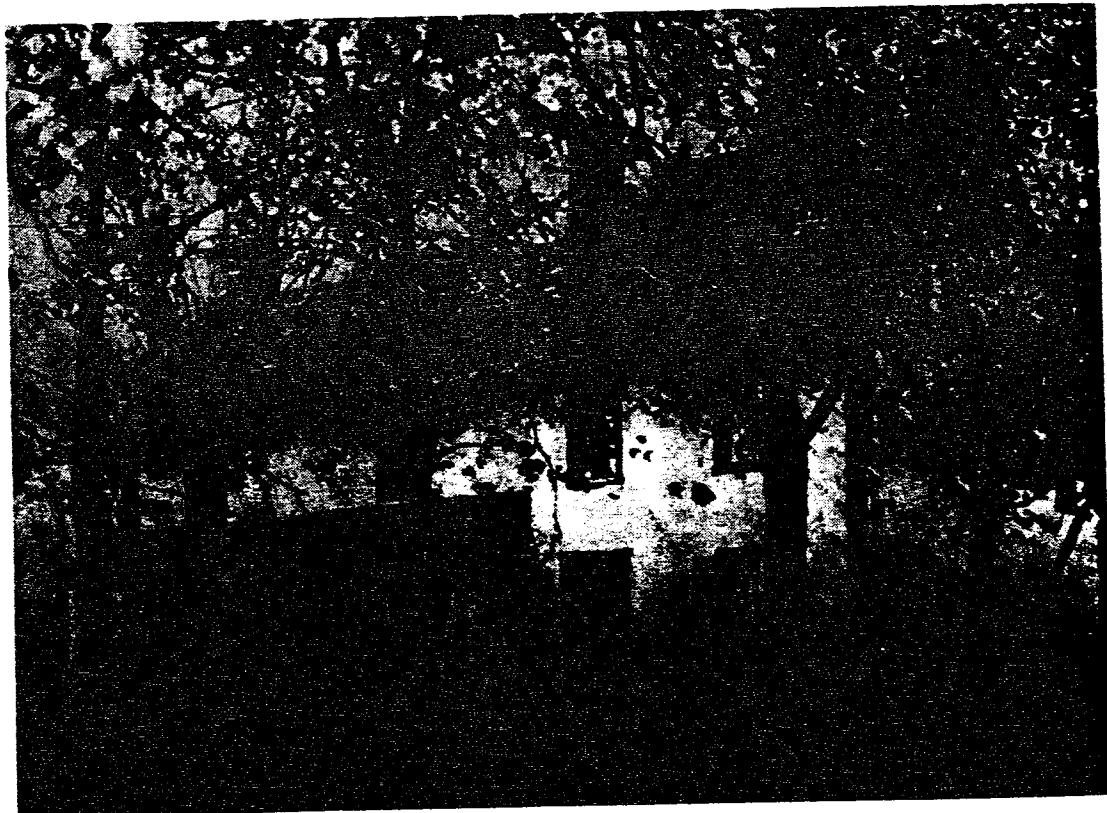
The contour of the land has not been altered through the years, but the utilization of the land has been varied.

A post and rail fence surrounds the property where livestock once grazed. And, there is little doubt that the splendid landscaping of "Whitpain Farm" today contrasts with the cultivated crops and orchards and cornfields and private burial grounds of yesteryear.

Morris Road



*Devereux Home Today*



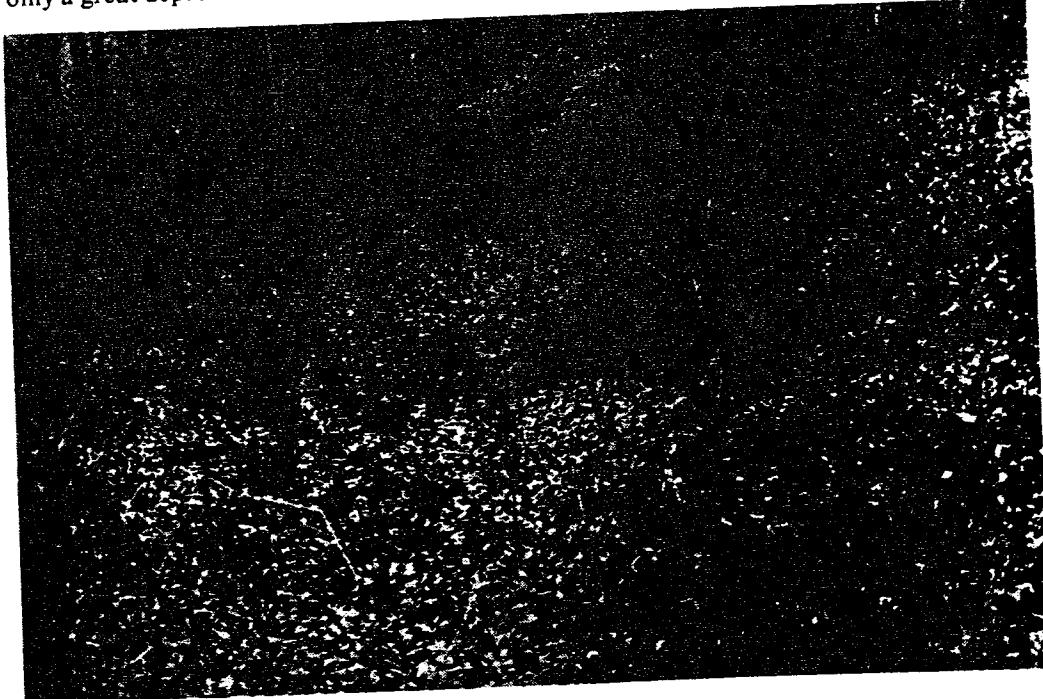
*Copy of Old Photo*

## The Devereux Home

By Marjorie H. Gerhart  
Photography by George S. Peck

The beautiful country-style home, white plaster over stone, on Morris Road that has been owned by Antelo Devereux and his wife since 1946, was once close to the Wertsner Grist Mill purchased with fourteen and three-quarter acres by Adam Wertsner from Elizabeth Morris, widow of James Morris in 1798. The mill, that is no longer there, had been built by James Morris soon after 1777. The house that seems to cling low to the land has been built in sections over the years. The taller structure nearest to Morris Road bears a datestone with 1768.

Windows on the terrace side focus on the mill pond with a few ducks gliding by. The old mill was demolished about 1877; but above the pond a distance, to one side of the house, there is still evidence of the great mill race, once 3,432 feet long. Actually, this mill race, which is mentioned in all the deeds to the property with provisions to keep it clean, is now only a great depression in the earth, overgrown with wild growth.



*Remains of The Mill Race*

Mrs. Devereux showed an interesting picture of a poster that announced that a sale of the house and mill would be held Thursday, November 16, 1876, by order of the Orphans Court to settle the estate of Albert G. Wertsner. That order signaled the end of the ownership of the mill by the Wertsner family. Adam's son, George, had been given possession of the mill property for his lifetime — with the provision that his mother would have the use of the part of the house that had been added to the north side in 1820. After George died in 1867, his son, Albert G. Wertsner who had married Hannah Keisel, purchased the mill property and an additional twelve acres from his father's bordering farm.

# ORPHANS COURT SALE OF VALUABLE REAL ESTATE

In pursuance of an order of the Orphan's Court of Montg. Co., Pa., will be exposed to Public sale,

**ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16, '76.**

413000000.00 on the premises, the following described property, the same being described in the Deed of Trust, dated January 1, 1911, recorded in the office of the County Clerk, in the County of San Joaquin, State of California, as follows:

12 Acres

## THE STORY STONE HOUSE.

**TWO-STORY STONE HOUSE.**  
Calculated for two families, with 6 rooms on the first floor, 6 rooms and entries on the second floor, with divided, cellar under the whole, cup-kitchen back, porch front and back, well of good water with pump therein at the house, spring house over a well, falling spring of water, and other outbuildings. There is on this property an excellent variety of fruit, a large vegetable garden, enclosed; a nice fish pond and other advantages and conveniences for a nice home.

## No 2 A Grist Mill and Water Power,

With about 3 acres of land adjoining the above property and land of H. P. Werner and others. The improvements are a substantial two-story stone mill house with all the mill gearing and necessary attachment thereto, with the advantages of a 3 1/2 foot overshot wheel, all in good running order and in a business location. After the sale of the mill we will sell the one-half interest of the apple pulping machine and apparatus for making cider, now connected and run therewith, also the one-half interest in the room

NO. 3. A Tract of Land Without Improvements.

JAMES KEISEL, C. S. WERTSNER. Administrators.

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According to *The Early History of Ambler* by Dr. Mary P.H. Hough that was republished in 1977, the mill had an over-shot wheel of twenty-four feet in diameter that was replaced in 1870 with a new one that was thirty feet. A cider mill was added to the grist mill, which did fine business because there were no other cider mills in the vicinity.

When the terrible railroad accident occurred near Ambler on July 17, 1856, the engineer of the train took refuge in the mill to escape from the irate people who wanted him arrested, because they thought he was responsible for the several deaths. He eluded the crowd, but later committed suicide at his Philadelphia home. Dr. Hough told that Mrs. Eugene Nice, who was Albert Wertsner's daughter, described this event that occurred when she lived as a child at the mill.

Albert G. Wertsner was the great grandfather of Mrs. Anne Wertsner Wood who told of her family. She has an obituary that related that Albert G. Wertsner died as a result of an accident while carrying a hog. He was praised as a man of civic importance. Unfortunately, he had not made a will and since there was not enough money to pay his debts, the estate was advertised for sale. It was stated that there were no bidders; therefore, the administrators, Clayton G. Wertsner and James Keisel, sold the estate to the widow, Hannah Wertsner, on May 3, 1878. She sold the property on May 16 of the same year to Ann Jane Mercer.

Mrs. Mercer bought considerable other realty on both sides of Morris Road. After she died, about 1886, much of her property by her will went to a corporation to provide a home for Presbyterian ministers to be called "The John C. Mercer Home for Disabled Clergymen of the Presbyterian Faith." There was an agreement before Mrs. Mercer died that S. Wilson Fisher would purchase the mill property for \$1500, which would help provide an income for the home.

Dr. Hough, in her book, stated that the mill stopped operating in 1887. It was soon torn down.

By a deed in 1909, S. Wilson Fisher and his wife, Clara, turned the mill holdings over to S. Wilson's sister, Elizabeth, who also was given possession of the property where Dr. and Mrs. Haas now live. In 1916, Elizabeth Fisher released the mill and its land to Clarence Wilson Fisher, her brother's son. The Montgomery County map of 1916 manifests that the Mill House and 27 acres were held by Clarence W. Fisher. After Clarence died, some of his holdings were sold to pay his debts. Bertha Jenks bought the property in 1933 and then sold it to Charles and Rita Platt in 1935. The Platts did much to restore and improve the house. In 1946, Antelo and Sydney C. Devereux purchased the mill house and the twenty-six and three-quarter acres from the Platts.

It is interesting that the Devereux deed mentions a water grist mill that no longer exists except in a few pictures that have survived from a more tranquil time.

# The South Corner of Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike and Morris Road

By Elizabeth M. DeVincent  
Photography by George S. Peck

## The Davis — Greger Property

521  
Beale Rd

William Davis, a Welsh Quaker, was among the first settlers of Whitpain Township. He purchased two hundred acres of land on Skippack Pike across from what is now the Shady Grove Middle School. Since there is no record or deed it is assumed that he bought the property from John Palmer about 1701.

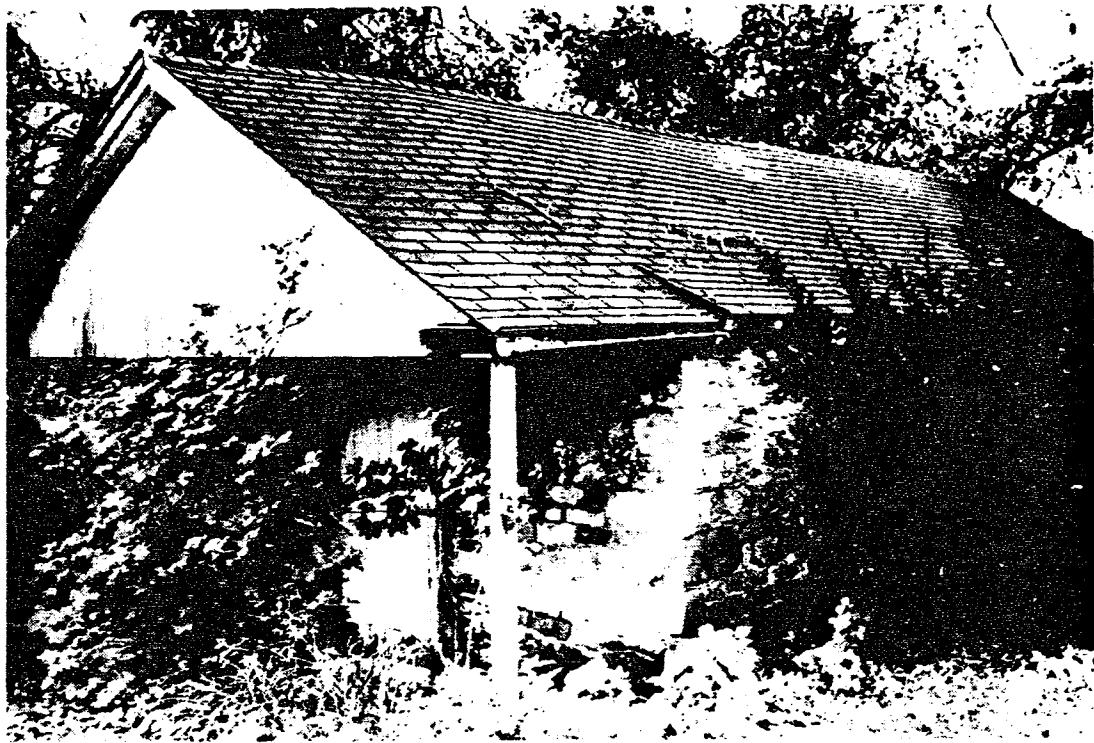
In 1729 he acquired 116 acres of the great Whitpain tract from Rees Thomas, Anthony Morris and Ann Whitpain. This farm was situated on the south corner of Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike and Morris Road, extending from the vicinity of Boehm's Reformed Church to Morris Road, along a slope draining to the Wissahickon Creek. A portion of the property extended over the northwest side of Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike. It is this property of William Davis that this article is about.

It is presumed that William Davis made the first clearing and built some kind of dwelling. In his will dated 1735, he left sixteen acres to his wife Deborah, all his other properties were to be sold. He was survived by five children: David, Thomas, John, James and Margaret who were all under sixteen years of age.

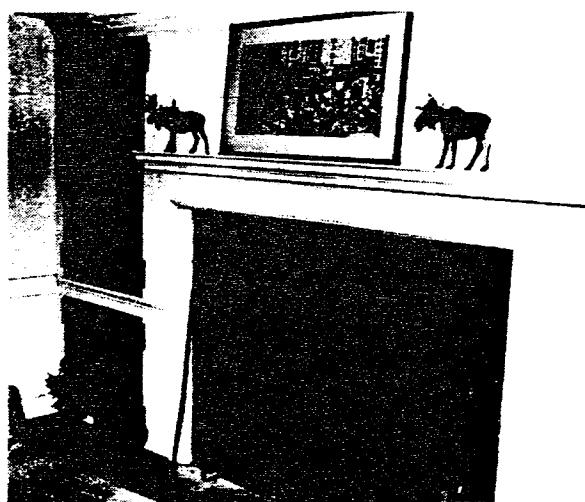
Deborah sold the property in 1737 to William Martin. In 1751 James Brown became the owner. He gained complete title to the property in 1759 only after the sons of William Davis had all reached their majority. The farm was sold for twelve dollars an acre in 1770 to Israel Pemberton who conveyed title to the property in the same year to George Greger.



*The George Greger House*



*Springhouse Built c. 1793*



*Original Fireplace*

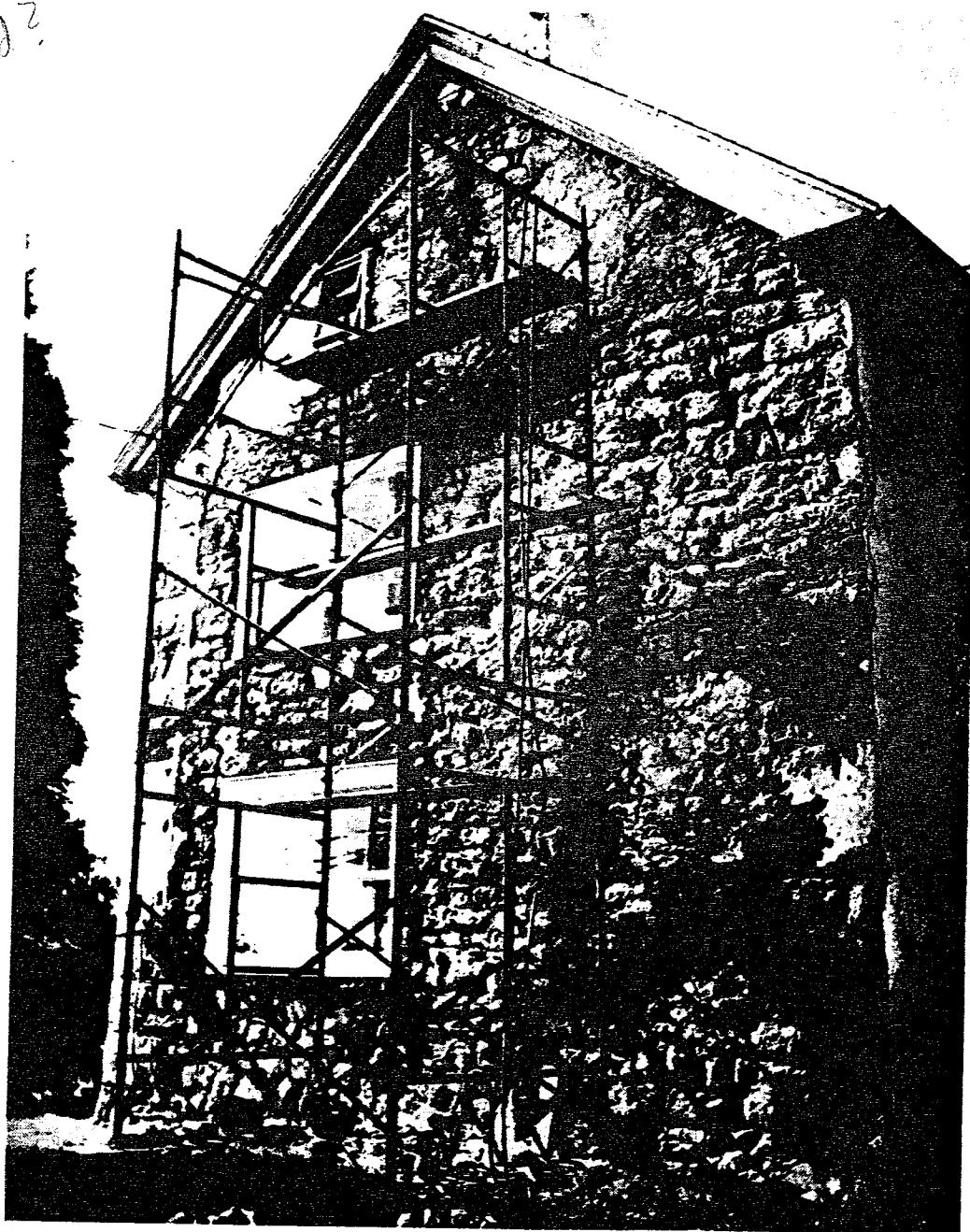


*Corner Cabinet*

## Bonnie and Charles Taylor

Down the Yost Road a few hundred feet on the opposite side, across from the present Stony Creek School, and amid a new housing development, stands the "Taylor" house. Bonnie and Charles have only owned it since February 1975, and they are now in the process of restoring it.

1722 Yost Rd?



*Bonnie and Charles Taylor Home Being Restored*

The house, by method of elimination, is the Randall Osborne house. It is older, more crudely built, and dates almost as far back as the Log Cabin. Instead of all logs, it is constructed with huge logs and beams, and stone and mud plaster. The date is possibly as early as 1720, because it is a matter of record that the Osborne's were here before the Yost's.

The list of ownerships backward goes in this order:

1970 — Gambone Brothers bought from Harvey Rodenbaugh

1947 — Rodenbaugh bought from Mary Estock, widow of John Estock

1924 — John Estock bought from George and Joseph Schirmer

1904 — The Schirmer Brothers bought from Priscilla Dougherty widow of John Joseph Dougherty

Before 1888 — Daniel Dougherty, supposedly J.J.'s father, shuttled ownership back and forth to a John Coats and

Before 1843 — Henry Dotts and several different Osborne names appear

*Mathews Scrapbook No. 91*, on page 170 says; "that the Dougherty farm of 57A. has a very old homestead of unknown age. Randall Osborne, I may have arrived before 1731."

But what happened to the Osborne Family? Clara Beck hints that the "Osborne family became so poor that they divided the land, but could not hold it." One reads behind the words that possibly sickness wiped out many members of the line. Apparently, there was enough money left at some time to buy tombstones, for a Randall Osborne and wife lie buried in St. John's Cemetery.

There are records of land transactions in 1791 to Daniel Yost, to Isaac Detwiler in 1797, another to Daniel Dougherty in 1843, a sheriff sale in 1825, and another to Peter Yost in 1844. The last Osborne exchange appeared in 1888.

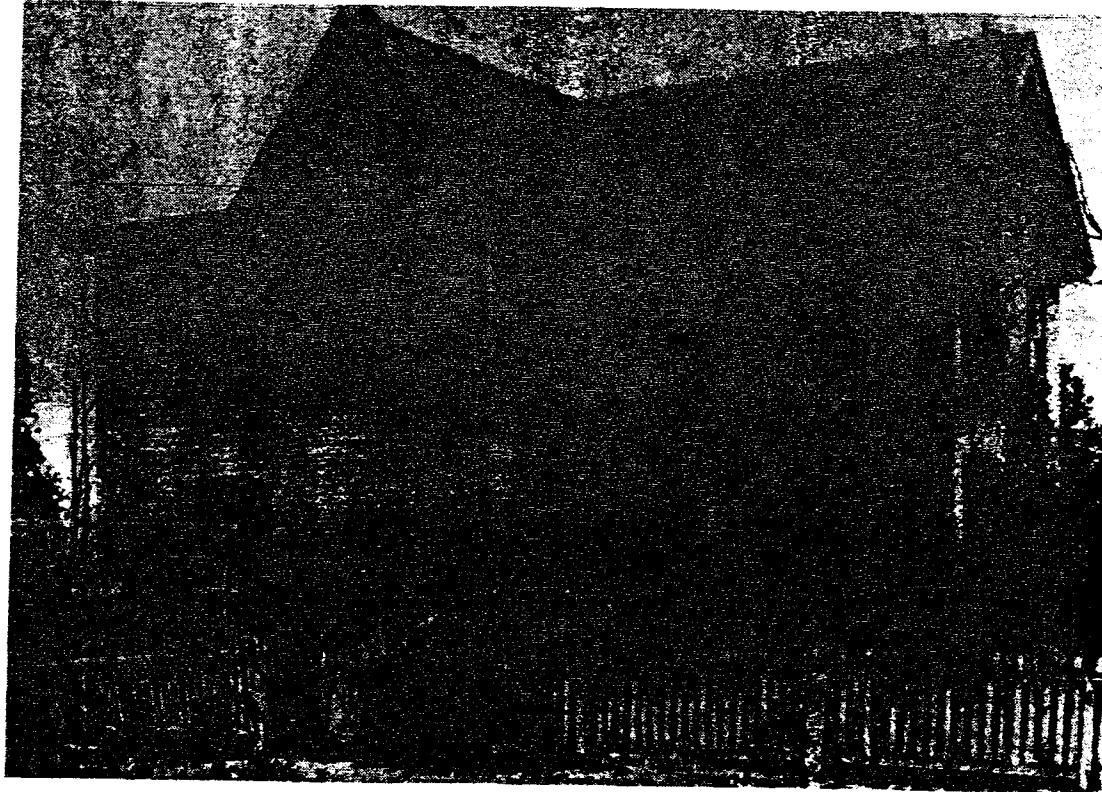
The Daniel, John Joseph, and Priscilla Dougherty's were evidently good farmers, having come from Ireland to find new ways of growing food. One of the accomplishments was the innovation of incubating the hatching of baby chicks by "artificial" heat. For a time this was known as the Chicken Farm.

The colonial house stands facing the southeast on 3/4 acre, all that is left of the original farm. The Taylors are taking time to repair and retain the dwelling as near as it was in the beginning. One noteworthy feature is the brick oven within the stone fireplace. Bonnie Taylor hopes to bake bread in it someday.

Other properties entwined in the Yost area are the John-Ellen Duddy one, and the Detwiler — Gotwals property. The house on the former property was donated to Father Francis Higgins about 1912, and became the St. Helena's Parish Church.



*Former Duddy Home, Now Part of St. Helena's Church*



*Former B. F. Gouger Home Now Sesame Day School*

On the Detwiler — Gotwals property, the old house was torn down to make way for the building of Whitpain Woods and the upper end of Centre Square Greene.

The southwestern part of the Yost farm became the farm of Benjamin and, in turn, Harvey Murphy. Upon the death of Harvey, the Alteman Co. bought and erected the houses now known as Centre Square Greene. Parts of two other farms also make up this development. One is the B. Frank Famous, Sr. — Joseph Burke farm and part of the George and James Chalk farm.

The B.F. Goubler farm south of the Taylors — adjoining the creek — flourished in the 1870 to 1900 period. It is now the Sesame Day Camp

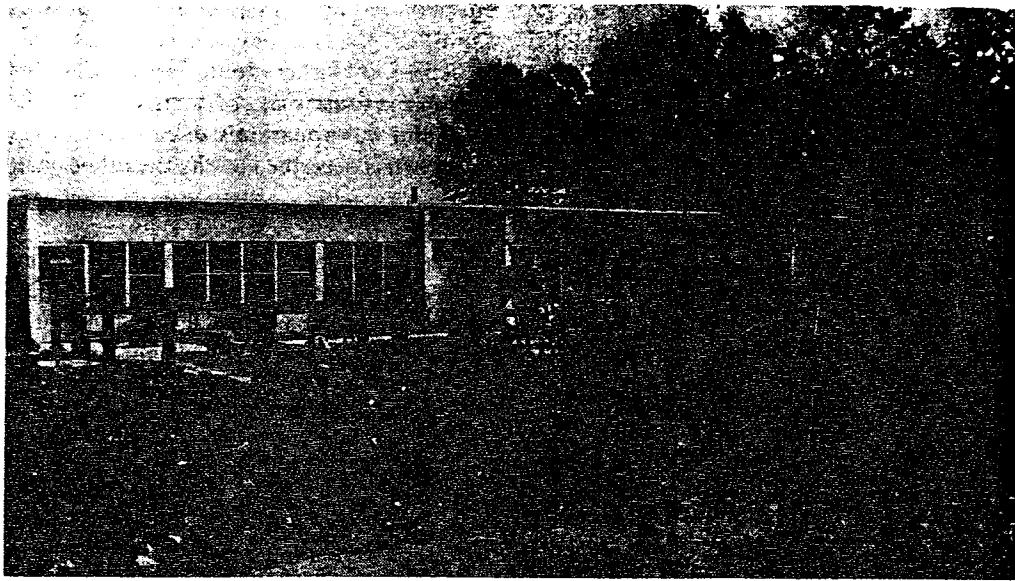
Ida Goubler and Harvey Murphy married. They had two children; Harold, who lived in the Ellis school house, and Ethel Murphy Walker.

It should be credited to the Zoning Board, under the direction of the Reverend Ernest Miller, St. John's pastor in the 1950's, who researched the names, that the streets of the section bear the names of Revolutionary heroes. It is satisfying to hear Lafayette Way, Pulaski Drive, Stirling Drive, Muhlenberg Drive, Daws Lane, and others.

It is the hope of the writer that the residents of this area relish this brief account of how the land they live on played a real part in the history of their country.



*Former Harvey Murphy Home, Now Demolished*



## **“The Oak Lane Day School”**

By Elizabeth M. DeVincenzo  
Photography by George S. Peck

The Cadwalader property now belongs to the “Oak Lane Day School,” which is an independent day school offering children, nursery school age through ninth grade, a unique opportunity to participate in a stimulating educational process, via an individualized curriculum in a culturally integrated atmosphere. The school has a current enrollment of two hundred and thirty children.

Since its inception “Oak Lane Day School” has had two basic commitments — quality of education and diversity of students. The school was among the first of the private schools in the Philadelphia area to admit students without regard to religious, social or racial background and will continue to do so, as long as they have teachers eager to teach, parents willing to be committed to their philosophy and children who like to come to school.

The major classroom building is a one-story unit, built when the school purchased the property. This building contains pre-school through sixth grade classrooms, offices, the library and science room. Each classroom overlooks the school grounds.

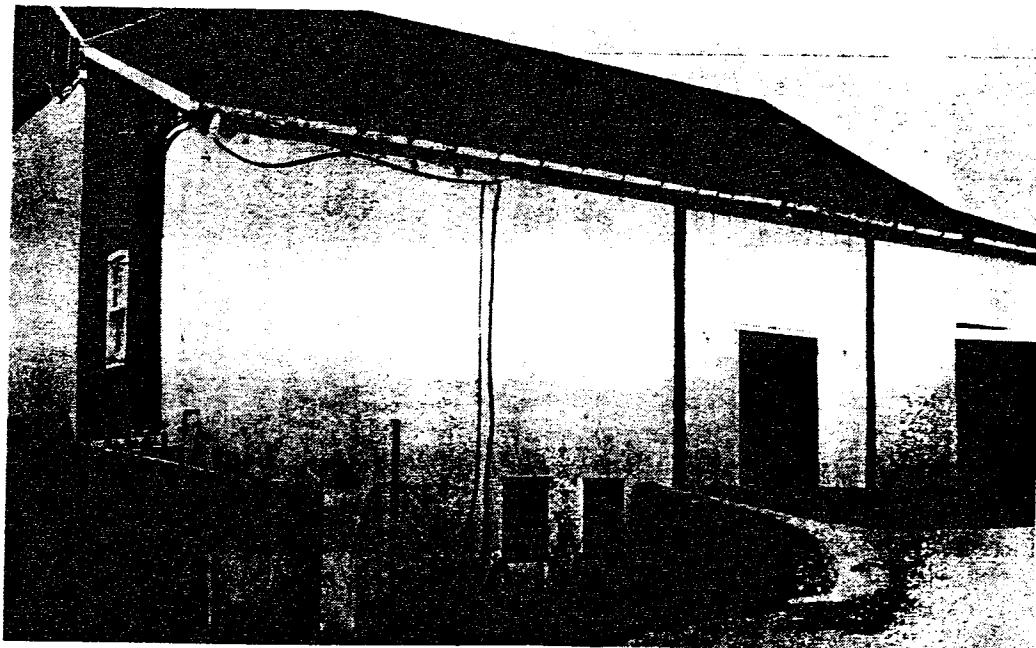
The only change to the outside of the barn is the replacement of doors to the central part of the barn. These doors were brought from the school’s former location. They were designed and crafted by former art students and are very unique. The ground floor of the barn has been converted into an art studio. Water colors, pastels, tempera, charcoal, acrylics, crayons, wood, plaster, ink and clay are available from the three-year level on.

Extensive pottery experiences are provided through the four potter's wheels and large kiln. Macrame, batiking, collage, tie-dying and candle making are also taught here. There is also a photography studio and dark room. The only remnant of the interior barn as it used to be is the trough, which fits very nicely into the surroundings. The central part of the barn is used as a gymnasium and several refurbished rooms are part of the junior high school classrooms.

The old three-story plantation type mansion is used for the music program and the reading laboratory. Entering the hall from the front entrance of the house to the right is the room now called the music room. It is a high-ceilinged room that runs the length of the house and contains the original dark grey marble fireplace. From this room one enters the sun room with three window walls overlooking the beautiful grounds. Here instruments such as the recorder are taught in small groups, while choral work and familiarity with rhythm are introduced through a variety of easily handled instruments such as flutes, autoharps, drums, etc. To the left of the hall are two rooms that are used as the reading laboratory. The laboratory operates outside of the classroom and totally individualizes each child's skill development. A one to one relationship exists between trained volunteers and each student to increase developmental skills.

The headmistress of the "Oak Lane Day School" is Miriam Niebuhr.

The school continues to keep the mansion and grounds in good condition. "Fairview the Homestead of the Weber Family at Sandy Hill," an article written about the property many years ago has a description that is still true today. "The farm takes its name from the elevated position of the land, from which the surrounding country may be seen in every direction for many miles. Few places in Montgomery County offer better facilities in the way of scenery than may be enjoyed from the door of the old stone mansion Fairview Farm."



*Original Barn With Lower Level Converted To Art Studio*

## Edward & Gloria West Property

By Agnes Baker Jefferson

The ownership of this farm, located on Morris Rd. just below Ginkgo Rd., dates to at least 1796.

The present house is not colonial but no allowance has ever been made for a fire destroying an original house in our study of old houses.

The present dwelling appears to be "Victorian." It is conspicuous by the lack of fireplaces or remnants of such. Only chimneys for pot bellied stoves were in evidence when the last renovations were made.

What could have happened, if imagination takes over, is that the first house was destroyed by fire because of the misuse of the fireplaces and when rebuilding the owner vowed not to have such a fire hazard again.

This was once the parcel of land that extended from Gwyndedd into Whitpain that was owned by Nicholas (Raile) Rile. It is important because it helps to place the boundaries of the Robert Trump land and establishes guide lines for the Clayton ground. Nicholas Rile was the patriarch of the Rile family in Whitpain and took an active part in the Revolution!

1796	George Syfert — (fought in Revolution)
1796	Henry Styer
1806	? Dilworth
1817	Stephen Styer
1825	Stephen Styer bought more land
1868	John Styer
1900	Albert Rile
1910	S. Rile, Greger, Henderson, Bernhard, Williamson
1915-?	Stuart Heist
1940-?	Alexander D. Thayer
1962	Edward and Gloria West

## West End of Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike William Coulston Property

1563  
PBB

By Elizabeth M. DeVincent  
Photography by George S. Peck

William Penn Proprietary and Governor of the Province of Pennsylvania by his Deed of Lease and Release, bearing the date February 26 and 27, 1682, did sell and convey unto George Palmer 5,000 acres of land in the Province of Pennsylvania. George Palmer by his last will dated February 4, 1682, willed to his son, William Palmer, a certain share of the said 5,000 acres. In 1702, William by his patent took possession of his portion containing 832 acres. The property was sold July 7, 1703 to Philip Price who conveyed, in August of the same year, 417 acres to Richard Morris.

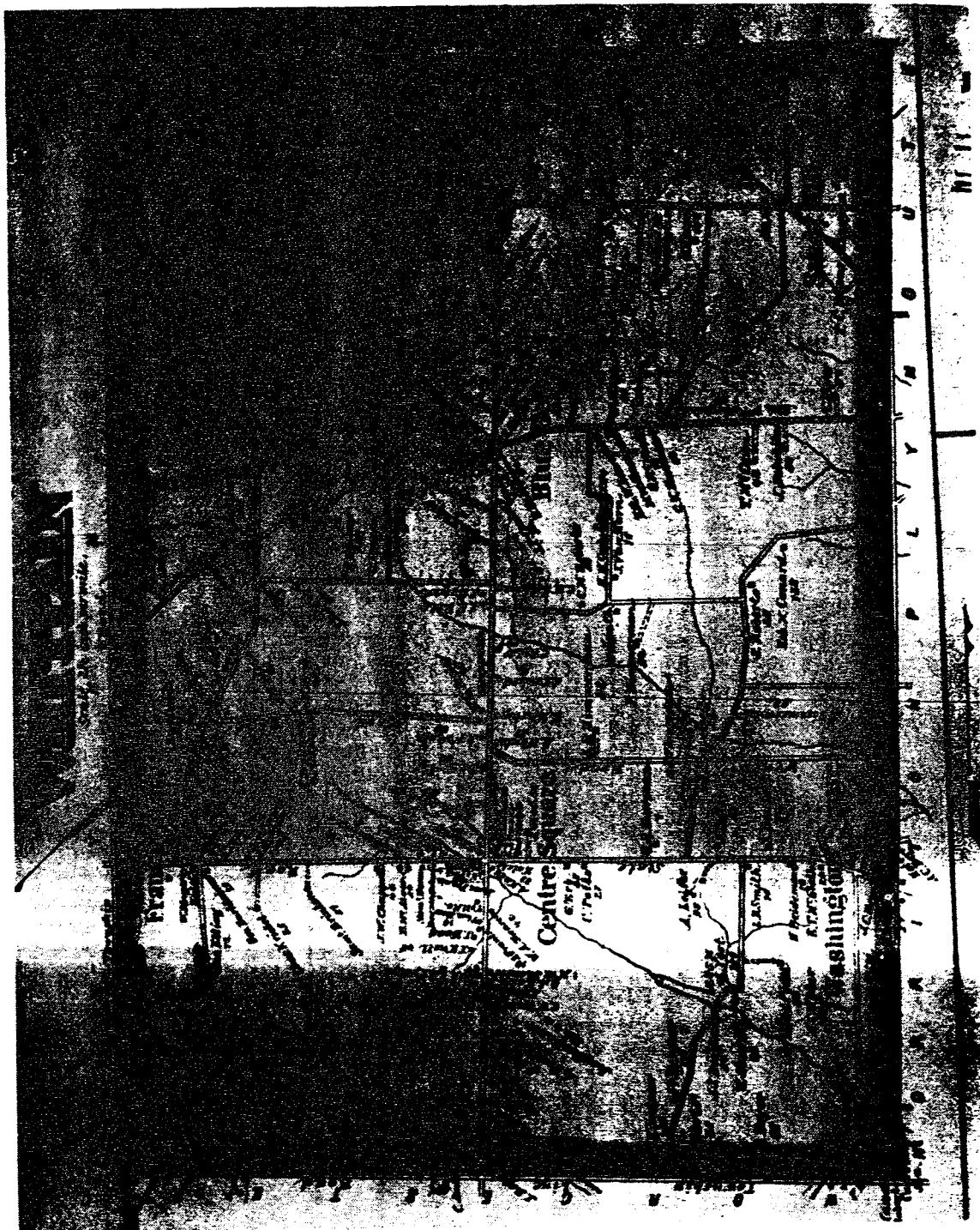
This acreage on the northwest side of Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike extended from the Skippack Pike to the Plymouth line road. Through the years Richard Morris disposed of his property piece by piece. William Coulston Jr., of Plymouth acquired one hundred acres bordering the Plymouth line.

In the enumeration of the taxables of Whitpain Township for the year 1760 Samuel Coulston is mentioned as a carpenter, owning one hundred acres of land. He was the owner during the Revolutionary period but soon after its close he died. By his will dated 1784 his property was bequeathed to his sons, William and Israel. It is known that his wife, Elizabeth, lived here by the tax records of 1785 and 1799. According to these records she was a widow with one hundred acres of land, a dwelling, and an outbuilding. A man named Seth Tredle farmed the land. Elizabeth Coulston passed away in 1802.

By the will of Samuel Coulston, dated 1784, his farm contained one hundred and eleven acres. This figure differs from the tax records but in researching old properties this was a common occurrence. William was bequeathed the upper end of the property containing sixty-one acres. Israel's share of the inheritance was the lower end containing fifty acres. In 1807, Israel resided in Philadelphia and his occupation was listed as carpenter. It was at this time that he sold his portion of the farm to a land speculator, George M. Potts.

William Coulston died in 1813 and his share of the estate was sold to Jacob Wood. Mr. Wood had purchased fifteen acres from George M. Potts the previous year. His farm now contained seventy-six acres. The following year Jacob Wood went bankrupt and the property was sold to John McCann of Upper Merion.

Mr. McCann died shortly after the purchase of the farm and never lived in Whitpain. His widow, Ann, and children; William, James, John, Thomas, David, Philip and Catherine came here in 1816. Thirty acres of the farm were sold in 1819 to Lawrence Egbert. In 1850, Ann was living here with her son, Thomas, and daughter, Catherine, and a young boy of twelve, Allen Kirk. At this time the farm known as "Spring Valley Farm" was valued at \$3,300.00. Ann McCann died September 26, 1875, at the age of ninety-eight. The property then went to her son, Philip.



From Atlas of Montgomery County. Published by J. D. Scott, 1877.

Today there are two remaining members of the McCann family, a Mrs. Flora McCann Boyd of Ambler and her brother who lives out of state. Mrs. Boyd, a woman in her eighties, has fond memories of her childhood summers spent on the farm. She recalls how her aunt would entertain twenty-two children related to the family for several weeks every summer and what a good time they all had. According to Mrs. Boyd the house hasn't changed at all, it is just as she remembers.

In 1932, a Mr. Haines bought the farm and the land opposite, now the "Blue Bell Manor Development." It was a dairy farm but not for long as Mr. Haines went bankrupt. Mr. Edward Rile bought the farm in 1934. He sold the McCann homestead to Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Barclay in 1936.

The original farmhouse constructed of fieldstone like many in the neighborhood was plastered inside and out. This was done to keep the rain from seeping through its porous walls. The house consisted of one room on each floor with eyebrow windows on the third level. It was built similar to a Father, Son and Holy Ghost house. At one corner of the house, an enclosed circular staircase went from the basement to the top floor. When the house was enlarged the staircase was removed from the basement and first floor. The window moldings are all handmade and a drawer fits in the wall under the front window. The fireplace is original. This house has all the signs of the stone houses that replaced the log cabins of the locality's earliest settlers, so it may be assumed that the house was built by a Coulston.

The second part of the house was built as a separate house with one wall joining the two. Later, the party wall was broken through and the two houses became one. A wing was added to the rear of the house. This consists of a kitchen and dining room on the first floor and bedrooms on the second level. This combined house was bought as a single dwelling by John McCann in 1814.



*The Charles W. Barclay House  
1563 Blue Bell Road*

Israel Coulston sold his fifty acres of the estate to George M. Potts in 1807 for the sum \$1,237.50. This included a house and outbuildings. Mr. Potts sold off the property in lots. In 1812, he sold the house and fifteen acres to Daniel Rossiter for \$750.00. Daniel Rossiter acquired thirty acres from the estate of Lawrence Egbert in 1825 for \$850.00. This thirty acres had been part of the McCann farm.

The farm was sold in 1838 to Samuel B. Davis who sold it to Adam Rumer in the same year. In 1850 Adam Rumer was noted as having earned \$776.75 from the produce raised on his thirty-acre farm. He was listed on the tax records of that year as a farmer 45 years old, wife Harriet, 45, children: Sevamia F., 19, and Samuel H., 11, and a labourer. Adam Rumer's real estate was valued at \$3,400.00. He sold the farm in 1860 to Ranson Rogers who went bankrupt in two years. Walter Laing bought it at a sheriff sale and sold it the next year to Reuben Cooper. Jones Detwiler purchased the farm in 1863 from Reuben for \$4,300.00. The property contained a house, outbuildings and thirty acres. According to Mr. Detwiler the original house was a long log cabin situated in what was now his garden.

Jones Detwiler was one of the most prominent citizens of Whitpain Township. He was married twice. His first wife was Hannah Holland and his second wife was Sarah Ann Dull of Hickorytown. His children were Job, Elva and Mrs. Harry Shearer. Elva married a McCann.

Jones Detwiler was indefatigable in collecting the materials for local history and his home was a storehouse of many manuscripts, books and pamphlets. He also wrote many articles for publication, furnishing the history of Whitpain Township for Bean's "History of Montgomery County, Penna., 1884." He compiled the "History of Boehm's Evangelical and Reformed Church, 1740 to 1890" for the church's Sesqui-Centennial Anniversary in 1890.

He was a member of the Montgomery County Historical Society. He was one of their committee appointed to form an organization to celebrate the centennial celebration of Montgomery County in 1884. He was also in charge of Memorials.

Jones Detwiler wrote that the area he lived in was evidently an Indian resort at one time and the Red Man had left abundant evidence in the way of relics. This was evident by the one hundred and sixty-four relics he donated to the Indian Relic Exhibit of the Centennial. They were arrow points, tomahawks, skinning stones, hoes, sling stones, rubbers, and whetstones. He also put on exhibition many of the fine deeds, books, currency, and manuscripts that he owned and also a map of Montgomery County published in 1827. Mr. Detwiler was an Elder of Boehm's Reformed Church and secretary of the Sunday School. He was manager of the "Whitpain Library Company," secretary of "The Blue Bell Live Stock Insurance Company" and served three terms as a school director. He was elected State Senator in 1876 on the Democratic ticket and served two years in this position.

Jones learned the wheelwright trade with Jacob Conard at Center Square but engaged later in farming which was his life long occupation.

He attended the Philadelphia market for many years. Crossing the railroad tracks on his way home from market in 1896 his wagon was hit by a train and he was seriously hurt. He developed pneumonia and was permanently injured from the accident. He died in 1900.



*Reichel Home*

Three houses on the northeast side of Skippack Pike present a real problem. Records on all three are available, but difficult to unscramble. Clara Beck is of the opinion that the period, 1711 to 1760, was considered "a quiet time, being a place of bridle paths through forest type of existance." Even if the records in Philadelphia convey anything, it is still not easy to keep up with the trading of land, doweries of daughters, church-owned properties versus minister-owned properties, and wills of fathers leaving possessions to wives and seven or eight children apiece, or maybe ten children and their spouses.

One also reaches a snag in records from approximately 1838 to 1855. A suggested reason for this is that the writer came upon the fact that Philadelphia County and City government was so "crime-infested, inefficient, and inadequate that records, even if found, were not dependable." The records in Montgomery County suggest the same. One comes across deeds where the deed book numbers and page numbers are left blank. It is because of these garbled records that one has to guess what may have happened, especially if there is no record in the sheriff's office. Sometimes we find the same family owning and occupying two houses at the same time within a mile of each other. It is confusing to find an owner disappeared, and then pick up that somebody "assumed ownership and dwelt therein."

### Alex and Emily McNaught

The first of these old houses is located opposite the entrance to Whitpain Hills. One glance tells any observer that it is an "old house" — but how old? and who built it? If there was a farm in the beginning with sizable acreage, it has now been chopped off, leaving only about five acres adjacent to the house.

Going backwards in time, the ownership-date-list goes in this order:

- 1954 — The McNaughts purchased from Harry and Anna Miller
- 1920 — Harry Miller bought from L. Hollingsworth
- 1920 — Clayton L. Brown, Realtor
- 1912 — Hollingsworth bought from Gottlieb Holgewachs et ux

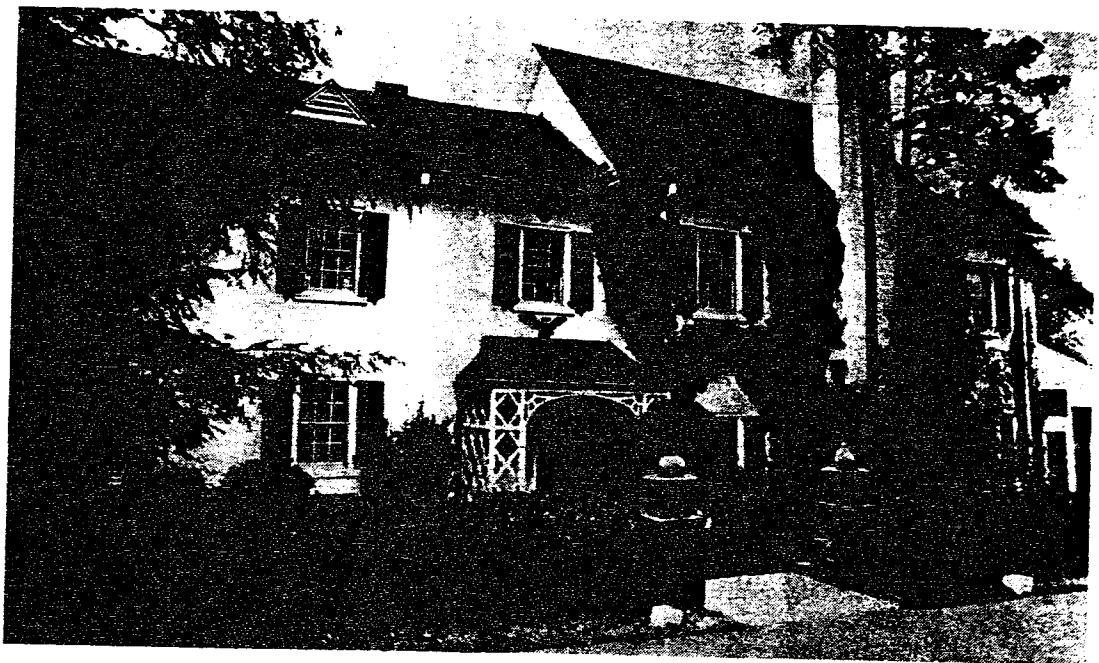
1910 — Jonathan Rawbottam  
 1893 — Richard Roynan name appears about the same time that Richard Roynan's name is on a deed on the house 1/4 mile down the road  
 1893 — Levi Laybold — and heirs — a number of daughters  
 1857 — John Laybold willed it to his son Levi  
 1805 — Charles Hurst transferred to John Laybold  
 1799 — William Hurst had conveyed it to his son Charles

William Hurst, cabinet-maker, carpenter and builder appears on the tax list. George, Charles, Henry, and John were all carpenters as well as farmers. As stated elsewhere, Elias Hurst conveyed some other property to John, Charles, and Adam. One bit of evidence that the inhabitants of these houses were ingenious is the fact that both this house and the one down the road are similar in design and both have windows with four large window-panes. While the McNaught house seems to date earlier (Rush house 1801) like a Betsy Ross plan, nevertheless, both have noticeably large panes. Explanation? It was in 1798-99 that the window pane tax was in effect, i.e., the place was taxed according to the number of panes of glass in the entire house. It is the writer's opinion in this case, that some taxpayers, for example, the Hurst's, if they were adept and fast enough could outwit the tax assessor or collector by quickly changing or installing four large panes where eight or twelve once were used.

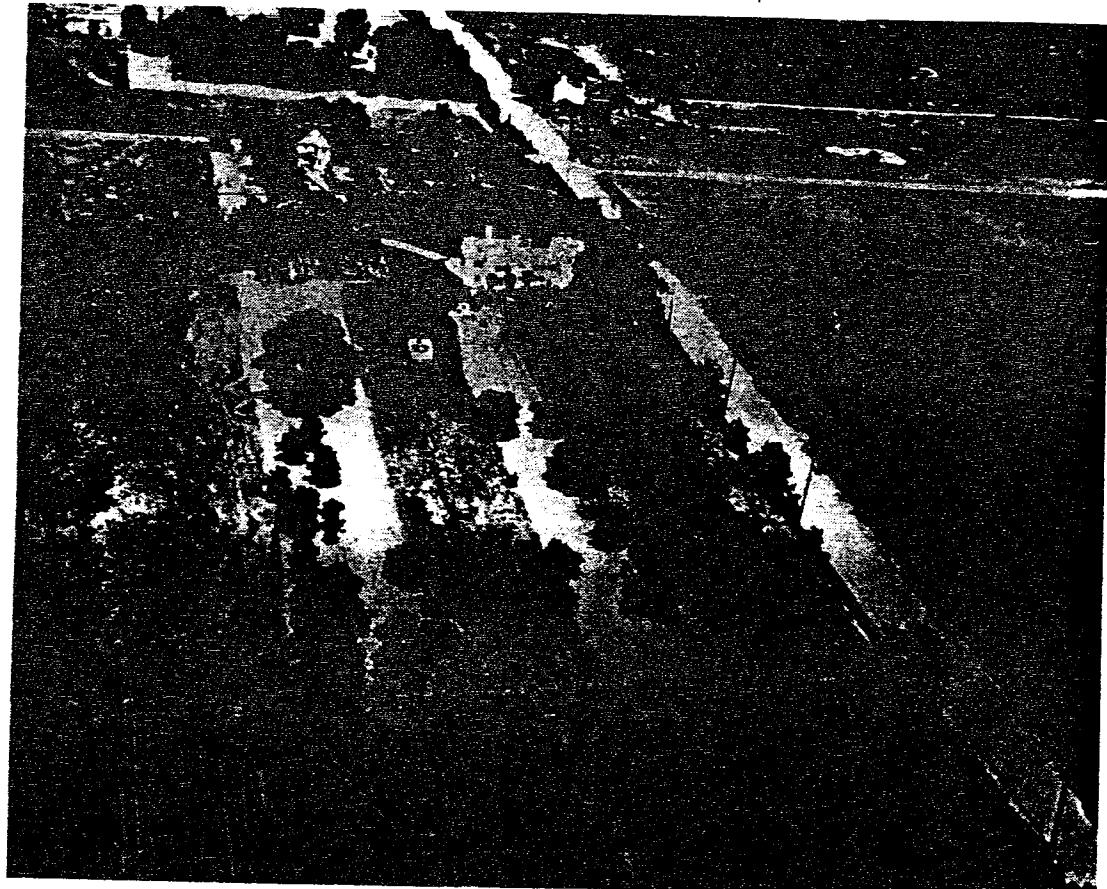
William Hurst, according to Clara Beck, "in 1804 lived on the Roynan farm and helped to rebuild and renovate the 'Waggon' Inn."



*McNaught Home*



*President Pope Residence*



*Aerial View "Barberry Lodge"*

## **“Barberry Lodge”**

By Dorothy S. Conard  
Photography by George S. Peck

Barberry Lodge, located at 460 Skippack Pike in Blue Bell, is part of the original William Davis tract of two hundred acres purchased in 1701 from John Palmer. The tax records of 1734 show that two hundred acres were held by William and John Davis, each having one hundred acres. In 1760, John Davis was assessed for his two hundred acres of which only eight acres were cleared of forest. He had two acres sown in winter grain and was taxed for one horse and two cows, indicating pretty poor farming. John Davis made his will in 1782 and gave his land to his two sons, William and John. The plantation was divided longitudinally giving each one hundred acres with frontage on Skippack Pike, William receiving the upper side.

In 1800, the executors of the estate of William sold seventy-three acres, the main portion of their father's estate, to Richard Duffield who lived here until his death in 1828. After the death of Duffield, his heirs sold to Mary Ann Williams. In 1847, George Berkheimer bought this property and in 1848 it was sold to Jesse Shay. He sold it in 1871 to James McEwen and it was purchased in 1873 by B. P. Sampson. In 1876, Charles Shoemaker was the owner and his son, Joseph Conard Shoemaker, later owned and operated the farm. The next owners were Gerald and Marjorie Deacon. Mr. and Mrs. William Pope bought from the Deacon's in 1935 and Mrs. Pope is the present owner.

The center section of this home is pre-revolutionary and the front section, which is now the kitchen area, was added in 1814. Mrs. Pope related that when insulation was being blown in on the second and third floors, a workman went into a hole and found two high silk hats, dated 1700. One hat was made in Paris and the other in Philadelphia.



## Cadwalader Property

By John Cadwalader  
Photography by George S. Peck

This is the history, as best I can reconstruct it from some old deeds in my possession, of the farm in Whitpain Township on which I grew up. As I knew it, it stretched along Stenton Avenue from Butler Pike to Norristown Road, and comprised 105 acres. The story is incomplete, and someone who is better versed in such records than I am and who would take the trouble to fill in the gaps through a search in Norristown and Philadelphia for the period before Montgomery County was formed, could provide a much fuller account. Anyway, here is what I have found.

In 1761, Robert Greenway and others, of Philadelphia, deeded to Joshua Byrne, tavernkeeper of Philadelphia, for £600, a tract of 200 acres which included what became this farm and other land extending to the Plymouth Township line. The deed states that Greenway had acquired this land in 1744 from a family named Tresse. The deed further states that this 200 acres had been part of a 5,000 acre grant from William Penn to William Standley in 1682, which was subsequently sub-divided into smaller and smaller tracts, the 200 acres which Greenway received having become the property of Thomas Fairman in 1688 and of Thomas McCarty in 1704, the latter selling it to Thomas Tresse in 1712.

The record, as I have it, is sketchy from 1761 to 1833. In 1761, "the first year of the Reign of King George III over Great Britain," and before Joshua Byrne bought his 200 acres, a tract of 25 acres adjacent to the land formerly belonging to Thomas Fairman changed hands, but it was at the corner of Butler Pike and Township Line, as they are now known, and so does not concern us except as part of the pattern of small holdings which prevailed at this period. Joshua Byrne or his successors must have chopped up their 200 acres, for in 1787 two tracts, of 49 acres and 5 acres, were sold at sheriff's sale by Zebulon Potts, high sheriff of Montgomery County.

I cannot completely reconcile the metes and bounds of all these tracts as given in the deeds with those of recent surveys, but Butler Pike, described variously as the road between Whitpain and Whitemarsh and as the road leading to the Broad Axe tavern, is clearly recognizable, though never named. Stenton Avenue is referred to (though not by name) as a "new road" in a deed of 1796, but it appears in the description of the sheriff's sale of 1787 as the "road leading to Peter Robeson's mill." An 18th century grist mill on the Wissahickon near the "Blue Bell road" (as Stenton Avenue was still called in my youth) is referred to in another source as having once belonged to Jonathan Robeson, which seems to confirm the identification of this road with the present Stenton Avenue. Corners are usually stakes, stones, or long-gone trees (a "Spanish Oak," a "forked maple tree," etc.), but the distances (in perches) and compass bearings are close enough to approximate the location of these tracts on a modern map.

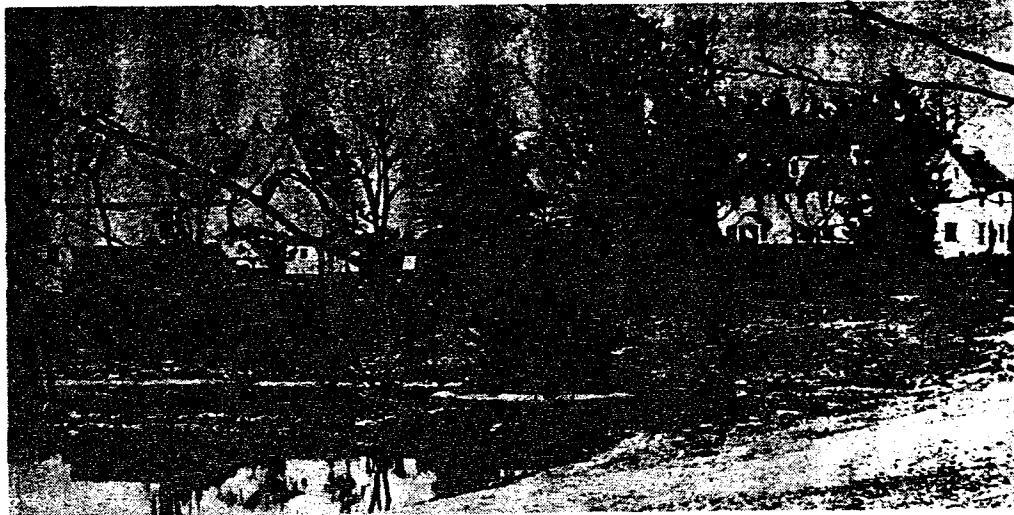
In 1796, Aquilla Tool, "yoeman," acquired from Samuel Hallowell, "tailor," tracts of 14 acres and 7 acres, both on the present Butler Pike. In 1800 and 1810, Jacob Weber, "mason," acquired these Tool tracts and bought a good deal more land besides, reversing the trend towards fragmentation, since his will, dated 1825, left to his daughter a "mansion house" and "plantation" of 67 acres, being only part of his holdings, as indicated in a subsequent deed of 1833. Although previous property transferrals refer to buildings and improvements in the usual standard legal phrases, this 1833 deed contains the first specific mention of any such. This deed, which conveys the "mansion" and 67 acres to William Zorn, referring back to Jacob Weber's will, quotes as follows: "I also give to my said wife during the time she remains my widow . . . the use of the last built end of my house with one-fourth part of the garden with privilege in the springhouse and right to pass to and from them." I am tempted to say that this is where I came in, because although the house as I first remember it was a single family dwelling, old-timers then recalled it as a double house, with one family getting water from the springhouse at the west end, and the other from a well at the east. This had been covered over, presumably when the double occupancy ceased, and nearly forgotten, until some time in the 1920's when my father, digging a hole to plant a tree, came on a big flag-stone about two feet down which rang hollow, and on being lifted revealed the well.

I know of no record of when any house on this land was built. There had been a small house close to Butler Pike which was torn down before my time and I suppose belonged to Aquilla Tool, whose property would not have extended to the site of Weber's house. In the 1920's, a new house was built on the same site. The earliest firm date I know of for any building is 1841, when the big barn, just west of Weber's "mansion," was built by William Zorn, whose initials with this date can still be seen on it. The "mansion" of course was earlier, and was probably preceded by a log house, as in most of the old farms.

Zorn (pronounced Zern, and spelled that way in the text of the 1833 deed) owned and farmed this land until 1876, when he sold it to Edward J. Stannard (signing the deed with his mark). The Stannard family remained there until 1914, when they sold these same 67 acres, accumulated 100 years earlier by Jacob Weber, to my father, John Cadwalader. In 1929, he bought the portion of the Frank Oat farm on the south side of Norristown Road, about 38 acres which adjoined the old Weber farm, and was apparently once a part of it, since the northern boundary of the land Weber sold Zorn is described as "by the other part of my said plantation."

My father died in 1934, but these 105 acres remained intact until my mother's death, in 1963, when they were sub-divided. The main house, barn, other farm buildings, and 28 acres becoming the property of the Oak Lane Day School. My parents had made many additions to the old house, greatly altering its appearance, but it is still essentially the same building that the widow Weber lived in one end of. The springhouse of which she had the use also remains, dug out of the side of the hill which slopes away to the south, and the great old buttonwood by it must have been there in her day. The farm smokehouse remains above the springhouse, but has long ceased to serve its original purpose.

William Zorn's barn was badly damaged by fire in 1933, but the stone walls remained standing, and it was rebuilt exactly as before, except that sawed pine replaced the hand hewn oak of the earlier building. An old stand of white oak still grows above the hole from which stone for house and barn was quarried, and suggests where these old timbers came from. Today, Zorn's building still looks like a barn, but the school has gutted it, removing the mows which used to echo as the teams drew the heavy wagons up the bridge onto the barn floor, and then gradually fill as the over-head fork swung great loads of hay up to the track under the roof peak and over to where the tripping line released them. That kind of hay-making, and the skills which it required, are things of the past, around here anyway, and all the excitement and satisfaction of those long-gone summer days could not come again, but still I hate to look at that hollow shell which was for so many years the center of life on the farm. The stalls on the lower level are gone too, like the horses and cows that lived in them, and though the Zorn's and Stannard's would still recognize their barn from without, I am sure that it would seem to them, as it does to me, a ruin. This then, in outline at least, is the story of a Whitpain Township farm, from its earliest days to its end.



*House, Barn and Farm Pond*

## **William Reinhart Farm**

By Dorothy S. Conard  
Photography by George S. Peck

John Etris and his wife, Dorothy, bought sixty-seven acres of land, with appurtenances, from Joshua Byrne and his wife, Ruth, and in 1776, John Etris sold this property to George Etris and his wife, Nancy. The deed specifies a messuage or residence and sixty-seven acres of land, for which George Etris paid 500 pounds. In 1782, George Etris sold fifty acres of this land, with messuage, to Wendall Keningsfelt and on March 24, 1796, Ulrich Schlater purchased the property and added another two acres which he had purchased from Nathan Shoemaker in 1807 for \$102.50, which gave him a total of fifty-two acres.

Ulrich Schlater and wife, Mary, sold the messuage and fifty-two acres of land on April 9, 1830, to Maurice Kelsen and wife, Susanna, for \$3,695.55 and in 1841, Samuel Streeper bought the property for \$4,684.50. The next owner was a Mr. Mooney who bought in 1892. The executors of the estate of Mr. Mooney sold the entire parcel to Sarah Reinhart, of Philadelphia, and her sister on April 2, 1902, and they used it as a summer residence. When William Reinhart became twenty-one years old, the farm and residence were deeded to him by his cousin, Sarah Reinhart.

This beautiful old property located on the southeast side of Narcissa Road, southwest of Stenton Avenue, was once known as the "Plantation House." A terrible storm in 1930 took the top off the huge old buttonwood tree in front of the house. The ancient tree is recorded at the Montgomery County Historical Society.

William Reinhart related that his grandfather, who lived on the adjoining farm, told him that at one time there was a log blacksmith shop on the property in the vicinity of Five Points. According to old records, Narcissa Road was called North Wales Road and Norristown Road was known as Williams Road, after a family by that name who lived there in early days.

The large pond, which was constructed by William Reinhart, is fed by the many springs on the property. He and others operated the "Happy Acres Day Camp" here over a period of seventeen years. When they were doing the grading for the swimming pool, they found an arrowhead. The remains of a stone springhouse are still standing.

Mr. and Mrs. William Reinhart raised a family of three children: Betsy Reinhart Young, Robert E., and William Reinhart, Jr., and lived there until Mr. Reinhart's retirement in 1971 when he sold the farm.

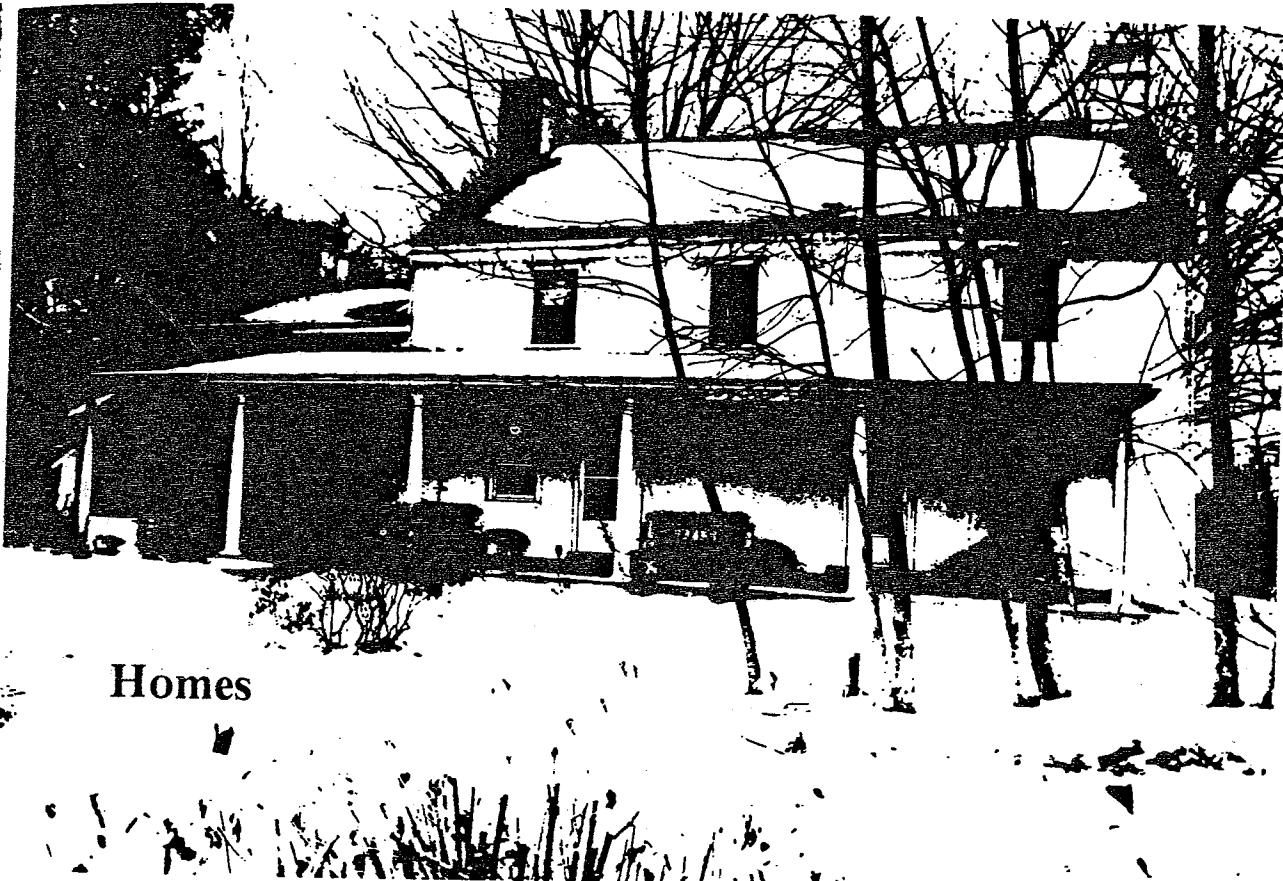
There is another property with two interesting houses still in the possession of different members of the Reinhart family. One of the houses was built for John Reinhart, grandfather of William Reinhart, during the Civil War. The stone for the house was quarried from the hill on the property and there is a free-flowing spring under the house. The other house was the "original" John E. Reinhart property which was built by William Reinhart's great uncle.



*House Built for John Reinhart*

*Original John E. Reinhart Home*





## Homes

*Shoemaker — Mercer Home, c. 1750*

*Demolished*



*The Jensen Farm*

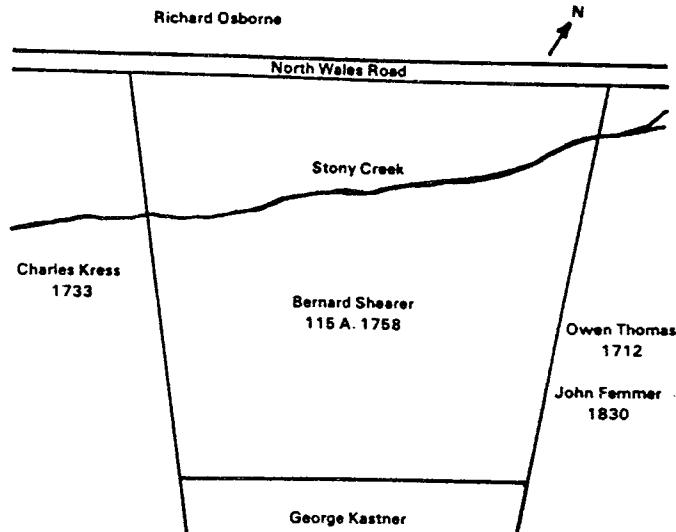
### **Charles and Mary-Ellen Jensen Property (Jensen Sod)**

The third location on North Wales Road presents a unique set of buildings, people and circumstances.

On page 448 of the *Pennsylvania German Pioneers*, there is a list of 132 passengers who arrived in Philadelphia on the ship "Edinburgh" on September 15, 1749. On that list was Bernard Shearer. This man purchased the last unclaimed land in the Penn grant that was to become Whitpain Township. He and his family "became the resident owners of 115 acres of ground wherein they lived in a dwelling which measured 60' X 56'."

Prior to this time the English land speculators, Anthony and Phoebe Morris, John and Sarah Armite, Rees and William Thomas held the land which had been allotted to them from the Ann Whitpain group in 1712. It was in 1758 that Bernard Shearer, his wife, and large family acquired the land from the above speculators and, because of necessity in maintaining the children, he added some indistinct tracts surrounding it.

The acreage looked something like this diagram:



By 1760, "B. Shearer had cleared fifty acres but had left sixty acres still in forests, with thirteen acres of grain, and owned three horses and five cows."

By 1768, Bernard Shearer died leaving six children, the eldest of whom was Lawrence. The five children and their spouses signed the property to Lawrence. The will has a stipulation that a "sizable and ample" house should be built for the mother. It is important to note the names of these heirs because they appear often in the future history of this part of the county.

They are:

Valentine and Mary Shearer  
John and Dorothy Shearer  
Ludwig Shearer  
Barbara S. and George Renner  
Regina S. and Adam Renner

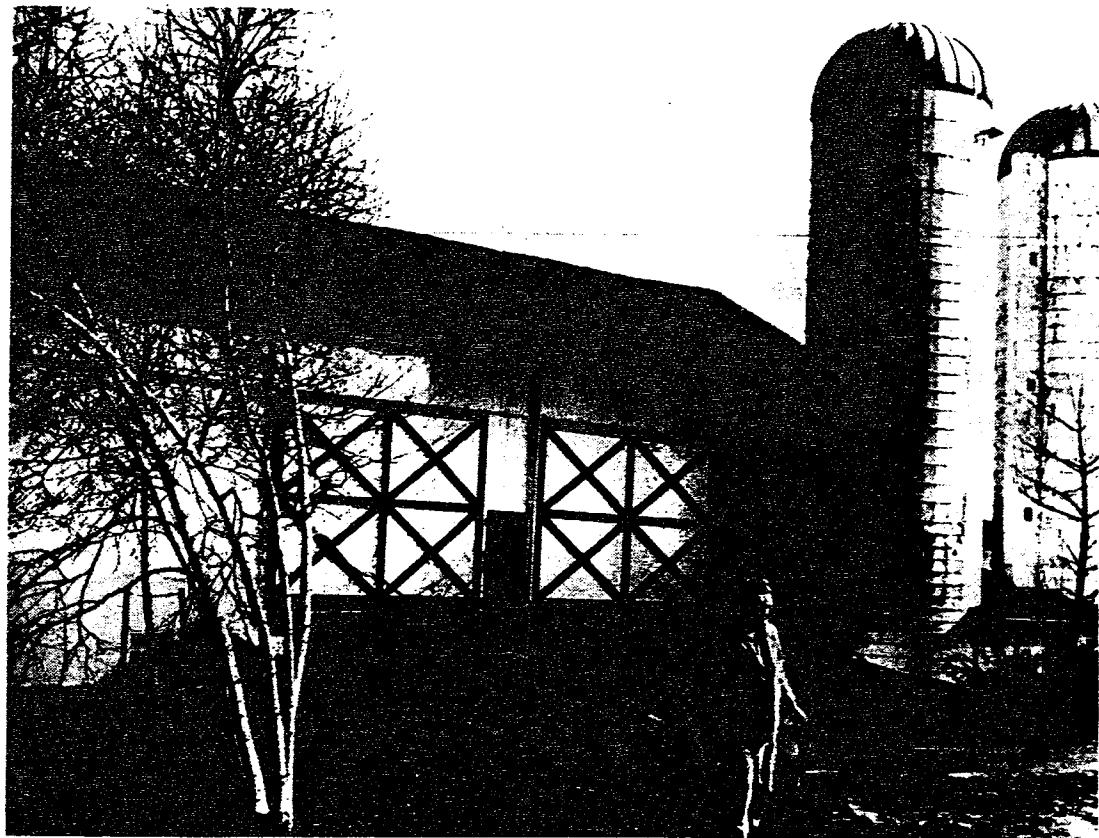
Lawrence Shearer died in 1783 and left the plantation to John's son Jacob. He, in turn, sold his share to another cousin, John, with himself as a trustee. The farm remained in the hands of the Shearer's for over sixty years when, in 1849, it was sold to Henry Frick. Then in 1895, Ephraim Slough, an attorney, transferred it to William and Ida Frantz. Two years later, John and Elizabeth Heilman owned the main tract.

1909 Harry Summers  
1909 Henry Stille and Charles Gotuals  
1916 Rebecca Schultz  
1925 Adam Workheuser

Other tracts and owners confuse the line of succession, but sometime in the 1920's Henrietta Potter James owned six tracts of land, a barn, two houses, and other outbuildings.



*Jensen's Home*



*Jensen's Barn*

In September 1943, having lived in the city all their lives, Charles and Mary-Ellen Jensen decided to try their luck at farming. They purchased the aforementioned property and became the "pioneers of the 40's and 50's." After raising pigs, cows, crops, and restoring all the structures, so that now it can be labeled a show place, the Jensen's now operate it as a Sod Farm.

Unique is the word for this spot. First, it is the only sod farm which supplies much of the lawns for houses that have been built here in the 1960's and 1970's. Its gently rolling slopes of closely cut grass with the Stony Creek flowing through it, with mischievous ducks and graceful Canada geese on its banks, make a pastoral setting unequalled anywhere. Two very old trees are markers on certain boundaries. These sixteen-foot-trunk trees and many arrowheads found as the soil is cultivated, are reminders of the continuity of some land in Whitpain that is unchanged for at least 200 years.

Secondly, the buildings all have roofs of a special cut shingle that resembles the rustic hand-hewn shingles which were used in colonial days.

Thirdly, the white and green-trimmed barn, which is kept in excellent clean condition has the huge beams that have been cut with great care by some outstanding builder. The main house, probably constructed in two sections, is beautifully restored and furnished. It shows evidence that the Jensen family are lovers of handsome and lovely "colonial things." The "little" house retains its quaint charm and overlooks a well-kept real farm garden. To the north of the main house is a grove of formally planted trees which the Jensens call "the park." To the west of the house is a long cave — the kind used for winter storage and summer cooling.

Yes, as one drives out the maple-shaded lane, he feels as though he has visited another era.



## Walter Cassel Property

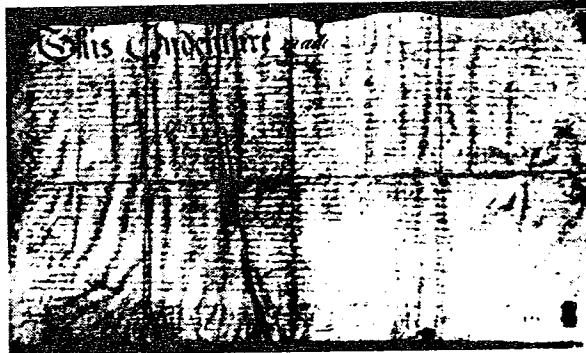
*Demolished*

The Colonel Andrew Knox story is treated elsewhere in this chronicle. The Knox house, as it was, is no longer in existence, but the foundation is still visible in the meadow of the Cassel farm. In the general area, Walter has some relics found on the land . . . i.e., a stone-mortar and pestle type rock which the Indians could have used to grind corn. Arrowheads found in the soil are in his possession, too. He also has some deeds bearing land from David Knox, the immigrant, to his son, Andrew I or the elder. *Bean's History* refers to the colonel as "Andrew II who was the respected citizen." This plantation must indeed have been an active place.

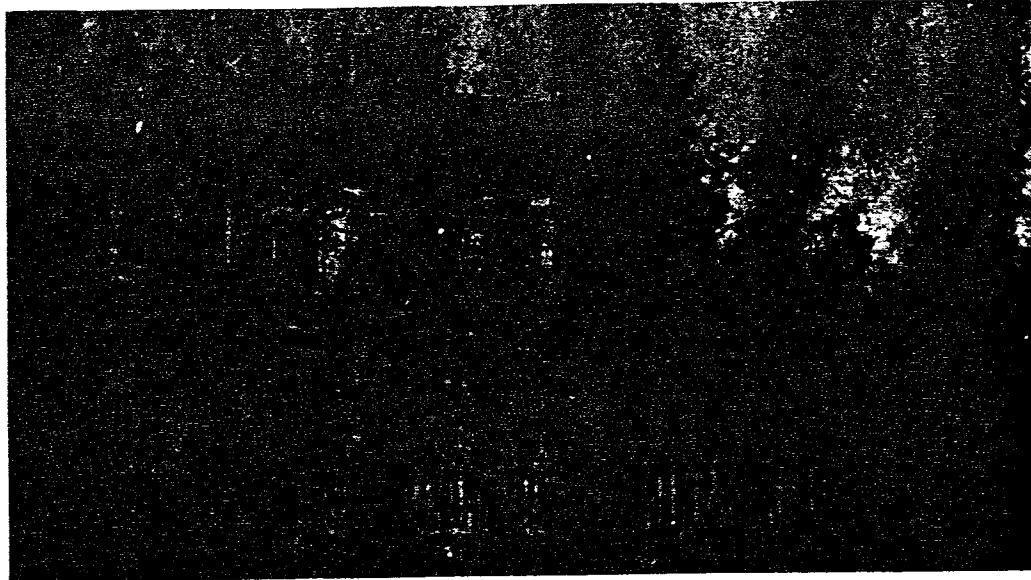
In reference to more recent times, about the Cassel barn, the writer vaguely remembers in the early 1920's, one spring afternoon, Victor Baker and his grandchildren observed a growing darkness. He remarked that it was not time for an eclipse, but as they looked to the west, a definitely angry, funnel-shaped cloud came whirling in their direction. Yes, it was one of those rare hefty tornadoes. It completely twisted and destroyed the Cassel barn. No other major damage was done in the path of the storm.

When viewed the next day, it looked like several of our present-day bull dozers had gone to work on it.

An excellent example of community spirit in time of disaster manifested itself. All the farmers in the upper-end of the township pooled their efforts and rebuilt the Cassel barn!



*Deed Describes Land Transferred  
From David To Andrew Knox, I in 1758*



*Home of Captain Andrew Knox. Built About 1735, Demolished 1855*

## Going South on Dekalb Pike

By Agnes Baker Jefferson  
Photography by George S. Peck

By 1850, Clara Beck observes that "Centre Square had six houses in the village, beside the inns and two stores."

1. A machine shop	4. A blacksmith shop
2. A wheelwright shop	5. A tannery
3. A saddle shop	6. A lumberyard

All these were probably "commenced by the enterprizes of the promoter on the corner — Thomas Fitzwater."

### Two Old Houses in Center Square

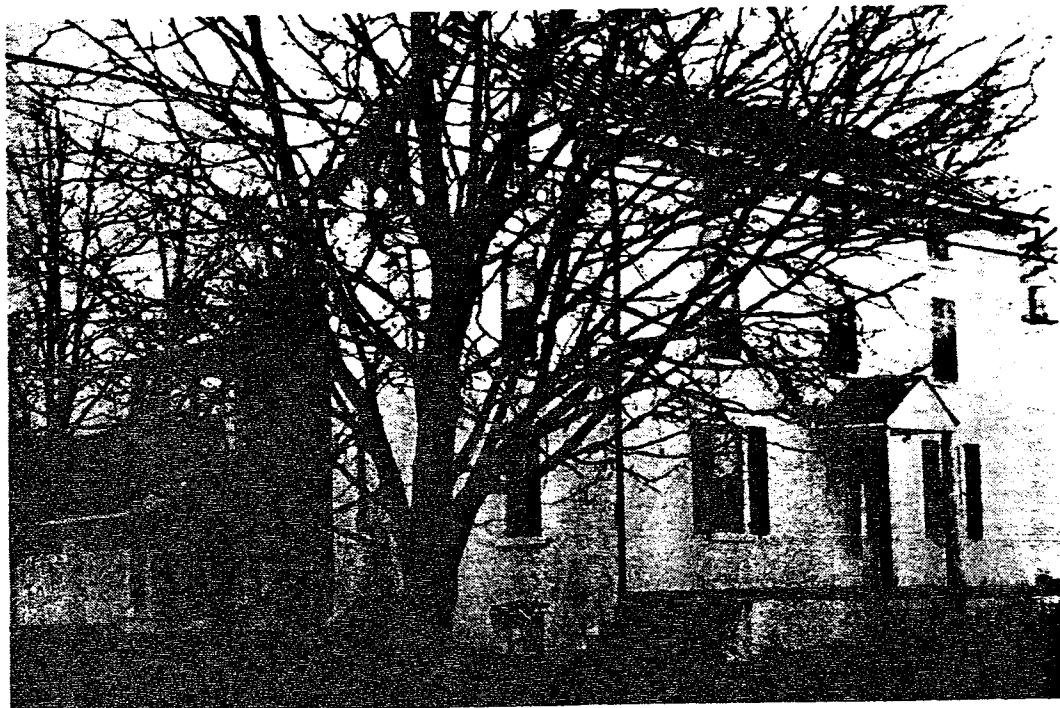
Lentz - 938 Dekalb

After passing the corner going south on Rt. 202, formerly Swedesford Road, two old houses appear immediately on the left. They are the present homes of Florence and Rodman Lentz and Marjorie (Bean) and Richard Strawhacker. On the 1877 map they are listed as being owned by J. Whitcomb and J. Conrad. In separate interviews with Rod and Marge, the writer found that one house was a wheelwright place and the other was a saddle shop. Then, checking the list of taxables in 1785, she found that there was one wheelwright in the township and two saddlers. Isaac Martin was the wheelwright and Joseph DeHaven and Frederick Rodemick the saddlers. It can be left to conjecture which was which house, and which was the saddler who lived here.

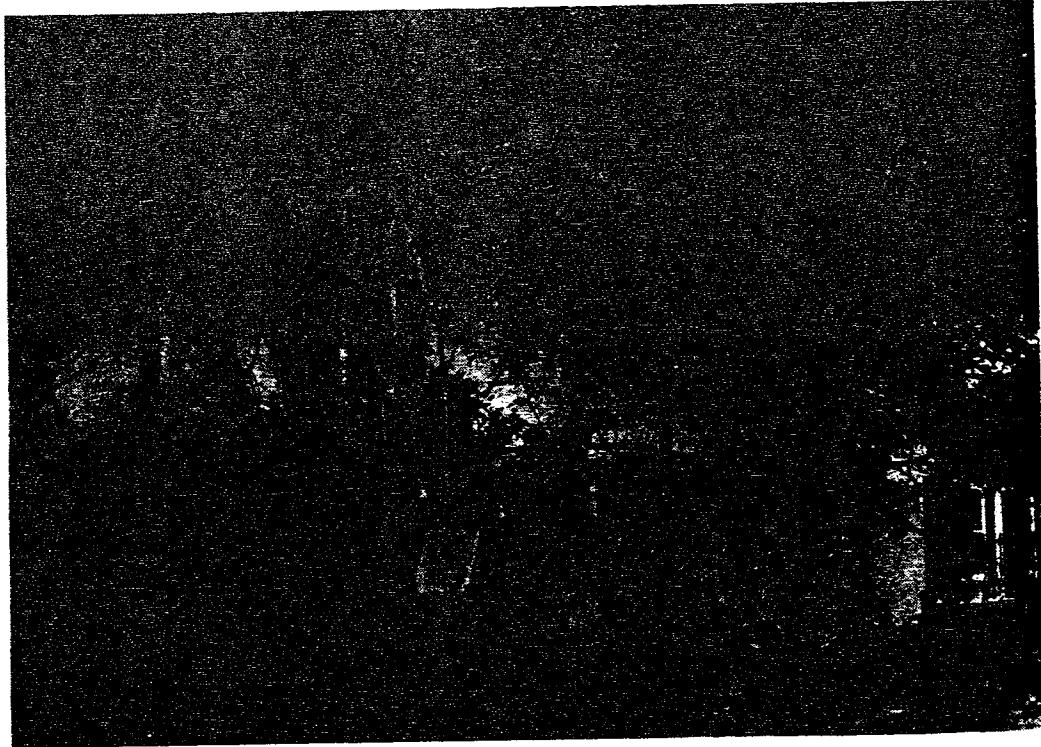
Later, a Jacob Biedeman, (once an owner of Erb's Mill), owned the Strawhacker house. One of his daughters, Mrs. Bertha Rezer, age 95 — still living with her daughter, Evelyn Geiger — told the Lentz' and Strawhacker's that the houses were built about five years after the first St. John's Church building. If the first church was built in 1773, it would place the date of these two dwellings around 1778. When no date-stone is found, this is a fascinating way of arriving at the origin of old houses.

Little more can be said of either one. Rod says there is evidence in the rear kitchen of a huge circular hearth, but it is difficult to say how it was used. Marge and Dick Strawhacker have removed the plaster and pointed the stone between the front section and the kitchen, which lends authenticity to living in this continuously occupied old house. They carry on a "Wagon Antique" business and are decidedly interested in old woodwork and antique furnishings.

956 Dekalb



*Home of Redman and Florence Lentz*



*Home of Richard and Marjorie Strawhacker*

*Demolished*

## Concerning "DeKalb Farms"

One Thomas Fitzwater was the owner of "The Waggon Inn" at Centre Square between the years 1705 and 1761.

Thomas Fitzwater's sister, a widow, named Rose Fitzwater Karn, owned the land adjoining her brother's, there being no road at the time to divide the properties. This area became known later as the H. Dannehower farm in the 1859 to 1900 era, and then the McKelvey land and homestead after 1920.

"Rose Karn achieved fame for herself by introducing the farmerette idea in America. She accomplished the astonishing feat of clearing all her land, except one acre, which she left as woodland. She put the fields under cultivation, tradition charging her with 'fearlessly, recklessly, and extravagantly buying seed wheat enough to plant seven acres of winter grain'."

The Harry Dannehower family, in addition to being farmers, was prominent in the legal, financial, and educational affairs of both the township and county for many years. Harvey Dannehower, an early graduate of Ursinus College, was principal of the Eisenhower High School in Norristown for the greater part of his life.

Laura Dannehower, widow of Harry and mother of Harvey, sold the farm to the John McKelvey family. They, in turn, sold the property in the early 1950's to developers who named the area from Wentz Road to DeKalb and Cherry Lane — "DeKalb Farms."

The streets of this section are named for Civil War Generals and Presidents. For example: Jackson, Grant, Lee, Cleveland, etc., which are good reminders of how the township planners are trying to keep alive the "best of the past."

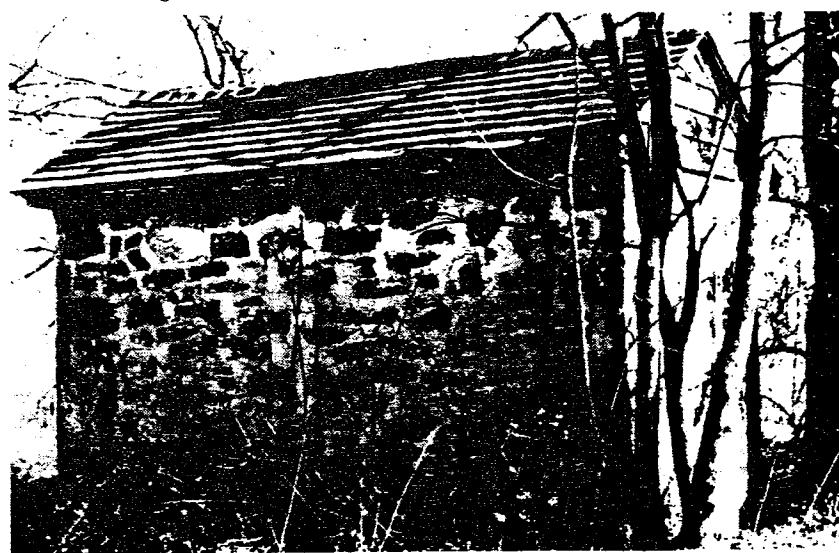
The barn and out-buildings have been gone for a number of years — but the house, in sad gutted condition, was torn down in the latter half of 1976.



*Former McCandless Now Ferguson Home*



*Down Skippack Pike (c. 1906) When A Dirt Road*



*Springhouse Remaining on Bush Tavern Property*

## Down Skippack Pike

By Agnes Baker Jefferson  
Photography by George S. Peck

Entering Whitpain from Worcester, eastward on Rt 73, on the southwest corner there once stood a lovely old house and the remnants of a once prosperous farm. This was the Bush Tavern and later the Jacob Baker farmstead. The house was completely demolished to make way for the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike overpass. Only a little stone springhouse remains to mark the spot.

This land was first acquired in 1754 (86 A.) from the Anthony Morris — Davis — Osborne — George Kastner group. Metz was the owner during the Revolution. Tyson operated it as a tavern from 1833-1857, and then sold to Jacob Baker who cleared most of the land and farmed it.

The Crop Records in the County Newspaper report, in 1860, show that Jacob Baker owned 63 acres of land — 58 in crops and 5 in woodlands. From the sale of products raised and gathered, he realized approximately \$938.00 on this farm.

The house next to the railroad was built for Jacob Baker's daughter Emma, and son-in-law, Theodore Harrar. Here was established the coal, feed, flour and lumberyard business of 1882.

Across the road, the little house was once a general store and post office. Five or six other houses along with the Railroad Station made Belfry a thriving little village. The Ferguson house has already been mentioned in the McCandless account.

The sexton's house, on St. John's Church property, was labelled "a good and comfortable house" in *Bean's History*, page 1169, and was possibly built about the same time as the church. (Circa 1773.)

The parsonage used by the early pastors, if they lived here, was the rear part of what is today Robert Meehan's place. It was rented by the Church for many years. The present "Victorian" parsonage was erected during the pastorates of D. Levin Coleman and Reverend Parks. The attic is entirely "finished" to make room for the large number of children which the pastors had.

The top of the hill was known as "Grog Hill" because of the legend about a group of roistering bullies who would terrify the residents along this road with their drunken marching up and down the hill. They could carry jugs of grog on a stick, each end of which was anchored on the shoulders of two so-called "Grog-Bruisers." Their activities culminated and were eventually curbed by a large law-abiding man named Daniel Rossiter in a final brawl. The force and cry of the public opinion finally put an end to the group, but the name "Grog Hill" remained for awhile.

## Stories of Smallpox, Yellow Fever Burial Grounds

A story surrounding the burial grounds of the highly contagious small-pox and yellow-fever victims during and after the Revolution has two interpretations. The first one was that to keep the remains separate, there were a number of bodies placed in graves on a lot across the road from St. John's Church. The graves are no longer marked, if ever. This story comes down through the church records of 1793.

The other version is that the victims were buried much farther away on the top of the hill in back of what is now Belfry Meadows, where the Greger and Jensen properties meet the community. This account was told by Mr. Garfield Greger to Mr. Stan Smullen, shortly after the houses in Belfry Meadows were built.

It is the writer's opinion that both stories could be correct. There was not just one epidemic. One reads of whole families being wiped out by dread yellow and typhoid fevers and small-pox. One of the curses and causes of death for many years in these early days, was the lack of medical knowledge and doctors. It is well to keep in mind that the "good old days" were full of heart-breaking, tragic sicknesses.

## What Was Once Cream Ridge

All records show that Samuel Castner's relative, George, was a land operator in the early 1700's. He received land in Whitpain on speculation deals from the original Ann Whitpain McCarty-Anthony Morris-Rees Thomas speculator group.

George (K or C) Kastner at one time lived on "Whitpain Farms," but at the same time he owned most of the land on both sides of the Skippack Pike from Centre Square to Belfry. Not much is known of his personal life, but it is known, from church deeds and records, that in 1769 he and his wife donated two acres of land to St. John's Lutheran Congregation. They are listed as members and are buried in the cemetery. The deed book in Montgomery County Court House carries at least twenty transactions on the sale of property to people who lived along this route, between 1740 and 1800. George Kastner was called the Grantor. It is fairly safe to say that of any property along this road, when traced as far back as George Kastner, the origin of the ownership can then be traced to the Penn Land Grant.

The history of what was once Cream Ridge, now Whitpain Hills, began on record in 1776 with George Kastner. "..... a house of considerable size and a small barn were built" and there appears to be "38 acres of cleared land and 5 acres of woodland." The purchase price was \$2,610.00. Phillip and Joshua Richardson's names are on the tax list of 1785 and both are on the list of privates in the militia in 1777.

From 1790 to 1807, John and Mary Slingluff apparently owned it, but the next transfer shows that, in 1813, the Richardson's transferred it to William, the father, George, Henry, and John Hurst. The father and brothers signed off to George, whose wife was Elizabeth Dannehower.

Between 1813 and 1830, George and Elizabeth Hurst and family probably lived on the farm and made a reasonable living on it, developing it to the extent that life was comfortable in that era. Their daughter Sarah inherited the entire holdings when she married Jonathan Baker.

Where Jonathan Baker, born in 1811, came from is open to two theories:

1. The writer's sister found in the Bucks County Historical Society, a Jonathan Baker shipped over on the "Patsy Rutledge" in 1785 . . . from Hamburg, Germany. His wife's name was Anna Maria and they had a son, at that date named Jonathan B. This man could be the father of the Jonathan in this concern. The ship docked in northern New Jersey. In the same book, "*Pennsylvaniæ German Pioneers*," is found other familiar names that are pertinent to this account. John Hurst, in 1749, sailed via Yorkshire, with sons Lucas, William, and Henry. Abraham Dannehower, Benjamin Baker, and Colonel John Baker are also on the list.
2. The writer's theory is; Jonathan's father may have been a deserting Hessian soldier from the Battle of Trenton, who "dispersed himself along with other unwanted prisoners-of-war into the hills of Pennsylvania."

Jonathan Baker's school arithmetic books and account books are in the possession of his great-grandson, Dr. Charles Baker. But to give an idea of how well he farmed, here is an excerpt from a newspaper showing the products he reported. (Approximate date, 1845.)

Upon the death of Jonathan, in 1874, and his wife, in 1890, the farm was left to three children, Emma, Ida, and Victor Hurst Baker.

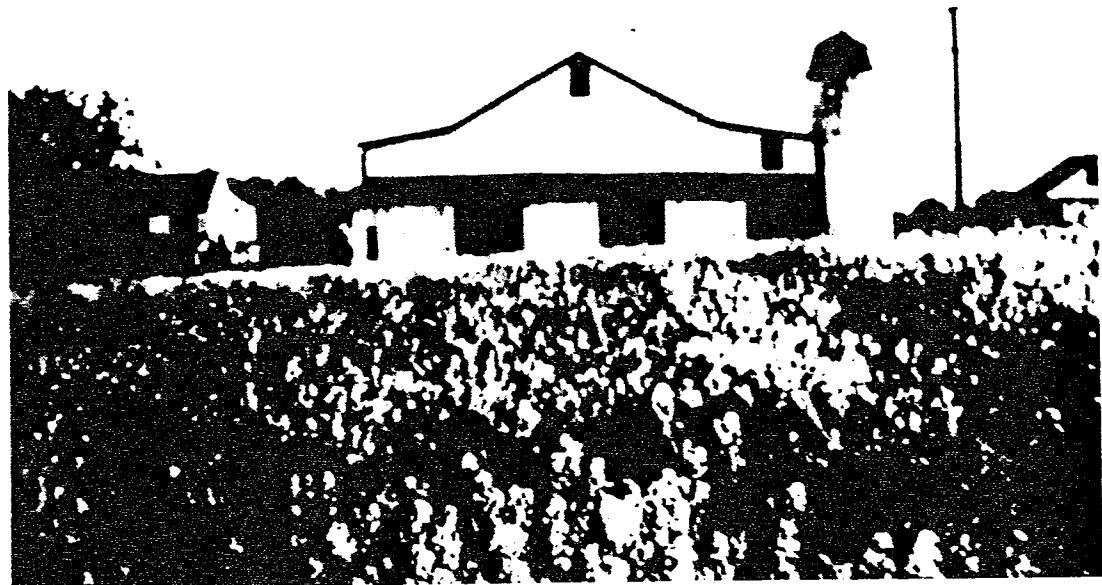
Victor married Sarah Jane Hamilton in 1869. (Approximately, unable to find any trace of Sarah's ancestry.) It was the tragic death of their eleven year old son Frank, in July 1886, that brought about the continuation of the Baker name, for in September of 1887, Howard Levin Baker was born. (Named for Reverend D. Levin Coleman.)

This writer's father, Howard Baker, married Rebecca Walker Bernhard (see Bernhard-Walker-Greenswalt story) in 1910. From that union six children were born — 3 sons, James, Howard, Jr., and Charles, and 3 daughters, Agnes, Rhoda, and SaraAnn. The fifth generation has thirteen children and the sixth generation, to date, has fifteen children.

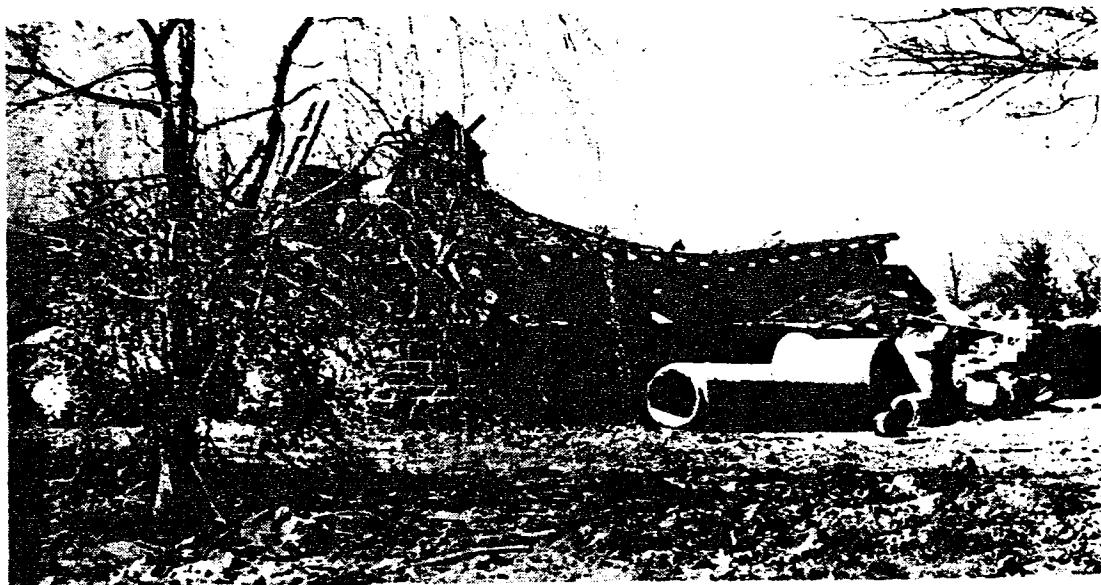
To these six generations — Jonathan to the present — this spot on the side of the hill has been known as the Baker Farm or Cream Ridge

The Cream Ridge name came from John Schirmer, an 1880 German immigrant (and his family of eight children), who was an agriculture specialist in a rich valley in Germany. He said the soil on the top of this hill and the well-watered, well-drained valley was "cream rich."

Mr. Jonathan Baker, who lives on his father-in-law's farm, near the Skippack road, and not far from the line between Whitpain and Worcester townships, containing 37 acres of cleared land and 5 acres of woodland, gave an account of products as follows, to wit:— wheat 80 bus. on 4 acres, amounting at pries sold to \$88; rye 20 bus. on 1 acre and a half, amount \$12; corn 100 bus. on 4½ acres, amount \$60; apples 100 bus., amount \$12.50; hay 15 tons on 12 acres, amount \$180; oats 100 bus. on 4 acres, amount \$30; poultry 150, amount \$60; eggs 150 doz., amount \$21; butter 900 lbs., amount \$198; clover seed 3 bus., amount \$12; timothy seed 1 bus., amount \$3; calves sold 6, amount \$30; potatoes 80 bus., amount \$22.50; pork 1100 lbs., amount \$66. The whole amount arising from the products of Mr. B's farm was \$800.



*Baker Farm, 1943*



*Ruin of Baker Barn Demolished, May 1976*



*Baker Homestead, 1943*

Howard Baker assumed ownership of the farm in 1910. By 1918, he had added the forty acres of the Schirmer farm, built a large barn, silos, stables, and renovated the house. He then added twenty more acres "across the road," thus making a productive farm of one hundred acres.

The Bakers, beginning with Victor, then Howard and Rebecca and all six children, farmed, ran a dairy, raised poultry, pigs, and horses, and produced food for forty-six years. It was during the Depression of the thirties, when Howard could help feed some needy families, that gave him great satisfaction. But, of all the crops he grew and harvested, and all the animals and stock he produced, he was "proudest of all . . . of his six children!"

However, it is Victor Baker who deserves a word here. "Versatile" is the word for him. Born in 1842, somehow, he was not called in the draft of the Civil War, no doubt because he was a farmer and the support of two sisters and ailing mother and father. He was a carpenter by trade, having worked with his uncles, the Hurst's. But he was first, last, and always a farmer. Besides these two full-time occupations, he conducted a music and singing school at Centre Square School on his own time. In addition to all this he was a business man and was versed in law. He was Secretary-Treasurer of the Creamery Association and Justice-of-the-Peace for many years. On reading any Whitpain deed, will, or document in the period 1890-1910, one finds the name and seal of VICTOR H. BAKER.

He was active in St. John's Lutheran Church, serving on the church council, leading the music, and building and repairing church property.

Shortly after his marriage to Sarah Hamilton, he used his architectural skill, and designed and built a house for his bride. It is the white stucco house, No. 1696 Skippack Pike. It is the first variation in design of the houses built up to that time. It looks like it did when it was built except for the gingerbread that has been removed from the front porch.

Apparently Victor Baker was a modest, rather private kind of man when it came to displaying his accomplishments. Nowhere can one find in the historical records anything about his public life, yet church records show how active he was. It is legend that he settled many family quarrels and aided many neighbors to write wills, pay mortgages, and generally help in financial matters. The only recognition that is found was in the *Norristown Times Herald* Yesteryear column on November 21, 1972 under *100 Years Ago*: (slightly paraphrased).

"Taking advantage of the early snow, Victor Baker, of this place, hitched his team to his sleigh and carried his grain to Yost's Mill to be ground for his animals. This made quite a lovely scene and cheerful sound as they drove through the village."



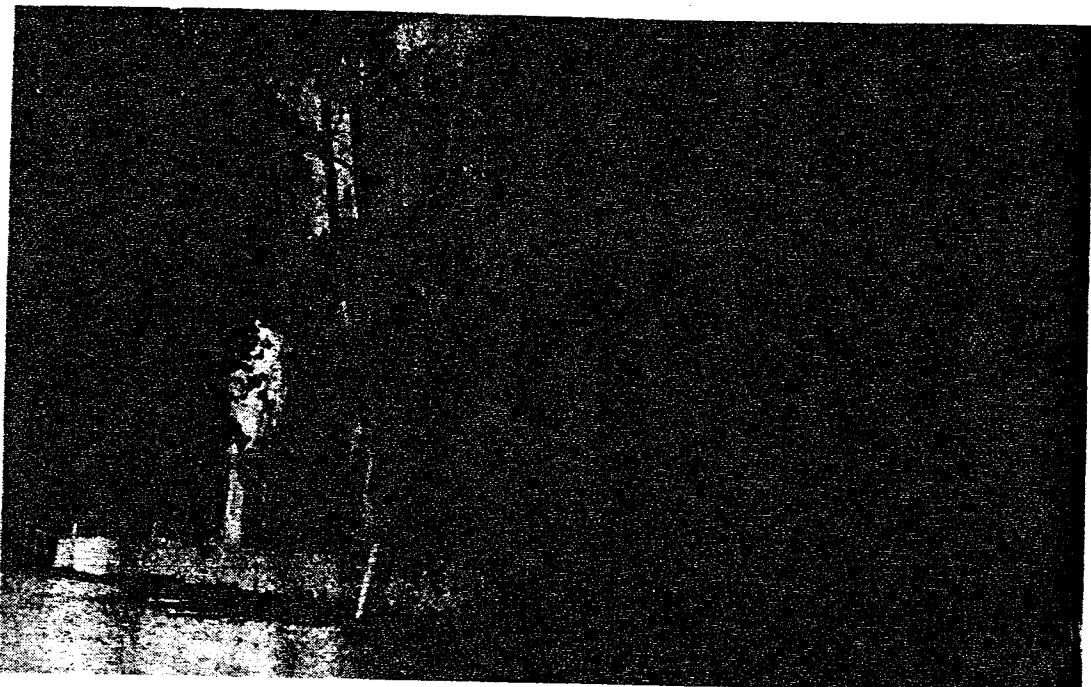
To bring to date Cream Ridge Farm: In 1956, Howard and Rebecca Baker, after selling ground for the Philadelphia Electric tower line, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and giving two acres to St. John's Cemetery, sold the remaining fifty-five acres on the southwest side of the road to J. Franklin Meehan & Sons. The Frank Meehan's lived in the main house and the Robert Meehan's occupied the Schirmer house. Both houses were extensively renovated. The front field contained nursery plantings and a shop called Meehans Garden Center.

In 1973, the Meehan's and J. DiSanto Developers built the townhouse community called Whitpain Hills. The old house and barn were demolished in early 1976!

\* \* \* \* \*

Before discussing the houses down "Grog Hill," let this be quoted from Clara Beck's observation in 1926:

"By 1876, practically all the log cabins that dotted the roadside of one hundred years ago have been removed." From this, one can gather that they either fell down, were torn down or were replaced by more modern building materials. In some cases, an addition enlarged the living space. In other cases, as was the style of the day, a dwelling was enhanced and finished off with a French Style roof. This is the type that makes up most of those in the present village of Center Square.



*Former Tannery and Later Odd Fellows Hall*



*Clara Beck Photo, Looking Up Skippack Pike, c. 1920*

After the death of Mrs. Coleman the farm became the property of her sons Robert and Dawson and her daughter Harriet wife of William Hayward Drayton. The two brothers conveyed their interest to their sister and Mrs. Drayton became the sole owner. In 1868, she sold the northwest side of the farm comprising forty-seven acres to Thomas A. Biddle of Philadelphia for \$26,500.00.

Henry E. Drayton built a house on his parents' property. It faced Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike near Morris Road. Upon the death of his parents, Henry sold his house and moved to the mansion on Morris Road where his parents had lived. His executors sold the farm in 1939 to Leonard T. Beale.

The present owners of the farm are Mr. and Mrs. James S. Armentrout Jr. The grounds attached to this comprise the larger section of the former Greger farm containing seventy-seven acres of its southeast side. A rare treasure, a beautiful old icehouse completely restored by Mr. Armentrout, can be found behind the mansion. The houses and buildings on this property contain much historic interest and architectural beauty and Mr. and Mrs. Armentrout are preserving these land-marks of our colonial days.

### **“Blythewood”**

In 1868 Mrs. Drayton conveyed the northwest side of the farm comprising forty-seven acres to Thomas A. Biddle for \$26,500.00. Mr. Biddle built a beautiful summer house on this property, he called it “Blythewood.” A picture of the original house is in Bean's *History of Montgomery County*. The Biddle heirs sold the farm in 1925 to Thomas Raeburn White. Mr. White added extensively to the house so much so that Mr. Biddle's summer home had now become a mansion.

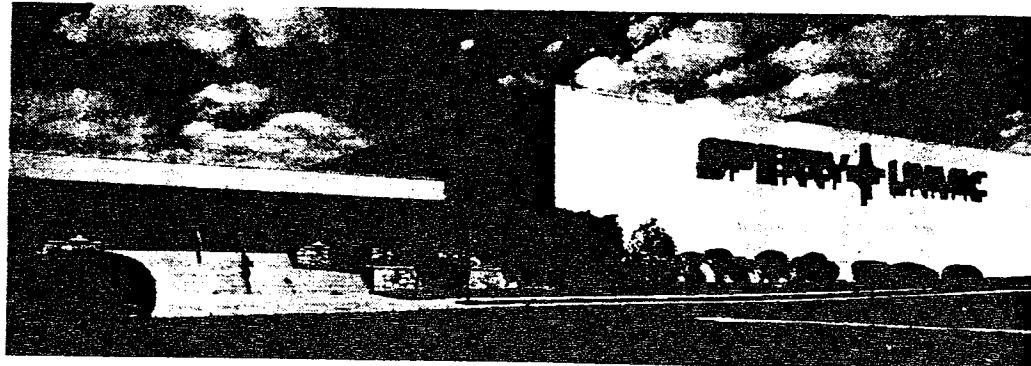
The farm was sold at auction in 1961. Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Ederer bought the mansion and some acreage for \$29,000.00. Mr. and Mrs. Charles McCracken bought seven and some odd acres containing a house, barn, carriage house, chicken coup and corn crib. The rest of the farm was sold in lots.



*William L. Scott Mansion Today*

*Demo*

Demo



## Sperry Univac Land

By Dorothy S. Conard  
Photography by George S. Peck

In 1682, a patent covering five thousand acres was granted to George Palmer who lived in England, never seeing his American land. On April 9th of the same year, he bequeathed by will a share of same to his son, William Palmer. In 1702, a patent of exact boundaries conveying eight hundred and twenty-three acres was received by him from William Penn's Commissioners of Property. This tract was three-fourths of a mile wide by one and a half miles long, extending from Skippack Road to Plymouth Line.

In 1703, the land was conveyed to Philip Price, a Welshman of Upper Merion, who evidently bought it for speculation. The same year he sold the upper half to William Thomas, another Welshman from Radnor. This contained the later Zimmerman, Alfred and Augustis Styer properties. In 1706, Price conveyed to Richard Morris the remaining lower half of the eight hundred and twenty-three acres. This covered the farms that later belonged to the Conrad, Roberts, Detwiler, McCann, Shoemaker, Indehaven and Hoover families. The Conrad farm covered a portion of one hundred and thirty-two acres sold by Richard Morris to John Rees, a Welsh Quaker, about 1733. In 1734 Rees, who previously lived in Plymouth Township, was assessed for this many acres and possibly built the first home on this property for his family. In 1767, his ownership ceased by sale to Henry Markhall (Markley) who was owner for seven years just prior to the Revolution. In 1774, Henry Markhall sold to John Zimmerman and Zabulon Potts who evidently bought the land for speculative purposes. In 1777, a Church Corporation, titled "The Society of the Relief of Widows and Children of Clergymen in the Communion of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America," bought of Zimmerman and Potts the main tract of one hundred and thirty-two acres and a dwelling.

In 1795, the property was sold to Henry Conrad who had married Anne Osborn. He was a descendent of Thomas Kunders (Dennis Conrad) of Germantown who came there in 1683, soon after the arrival of William Penn. Henry, son of John Conrad, was born at the family homestead which is now the Jeffersonville Inn on DeKalb Pike.

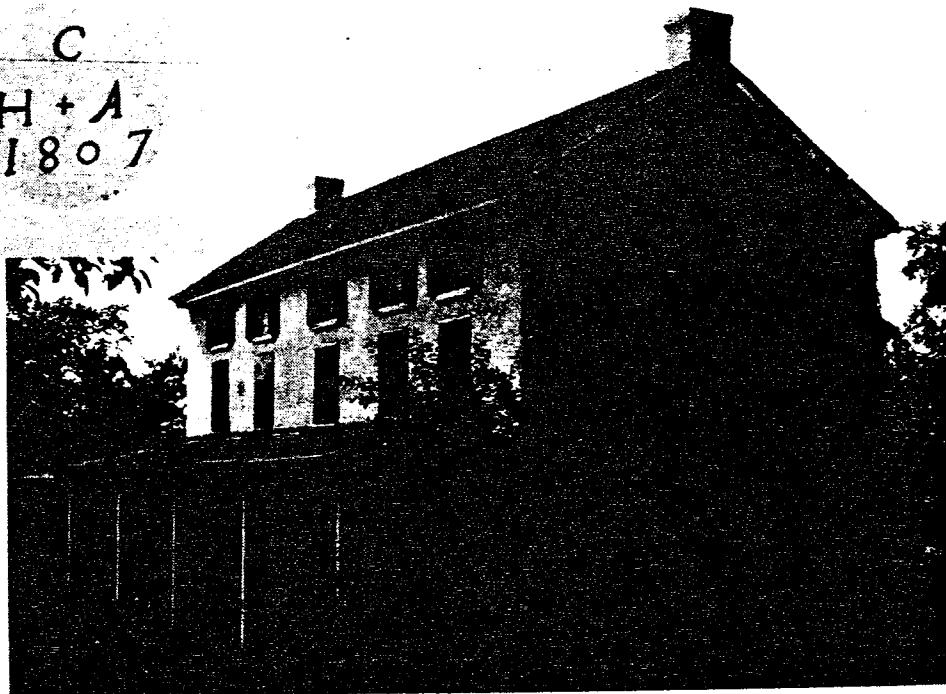
His sister, Sarah, married Enoch Supplee, a Tory, who with her brother, Robert, fled the country because of Tory activities. Henry's son, Benjamin, was quite a local celebrity, having taught school at "North Star" and "Five Points." He died, never having married, in

1843 at age forty-six. Henry died at his home December 2, 1838, at age seventy-six. His wife continued to live at the old homestead with her son, Nathan, until she died in 1852. Henry's estate amounted to eleven thousand dollars. Nathan continued to live on the farm until his death in 1872. Nathan married Martha Meredith, had seven children, only two of whom survived him. He made extensive improvements on the home.

In 1872, the farm where Nathan was born in 1808, was willed to John Meredith Conrad who had married Elma Garrigues. They had five children. His son, Lee Garrigues Conrad, born in 1881, met a terrible fate, losing his life at the burning of The Park Hotel, New York City, February 22, 1902, where he had gone with his relative, Henry C. Conrad. His charred remains were interred in Plymouth Friends' burying ground.

The last occupant of the farm prior to the sale to the Sperry Rand Corporation was Ida C. Conrad who became Mrs. Abel K. Harris after the death of her first husband, Harry W. Myers. Thus, the land passed out of the Conrad family who had lived on the land since 1795.

At the time of the ground breaking, expanding the Sperry Univac facility in 1964, Ida Conrad Harris recalled many memories of her life on the farm for an article in the *Norristown Times Herald*. She related that several big barns were located on the property and one or more was set aside for the circus people who brought horses to be stabled for the winter months. A fire swept through one of the barns one night in the year 1910, which created a lot of excitement and work in bringing it under control. All the cows were lost in the fire and the barn itself was completely destroyed, but all the farm horses and riding horses were rescued.



*Former Conrad Home*

Mrs. Harris spoke about a coal vein on the farm in the hill area. It was of no commercial value and was considered mainly as a curiosity. It did on occasion, provide coal for family needs.

The big farm wagons were well remembered by Mrs. Harris. The hay loads, she said, were hauled to the paper mills of Manayunk for the feeding of the horses of the mill's wagon teams. A special customer was the old Nixon Paper Mill. On return trips from the mills, the Conrad wagons brought fertilizer and manure for cultivation of the farmland.

Along with farming, Mrs. Harris took special interest in Grange affairs and it is said that she was quite an actress with a most beautiful voice, and was known as the "Sarah Bernhart" of the Whitpain area. She was a past president and a founding member of the Cold Point Home Economics Club, a past master of the Cold Point Grange and for thirty-two years, secretary of the Pomona Grange. Earlier in her career she campaigned for women's suffrage as leader of the Women's Rights Movement in Whitpain Township. Mrs. Harris was selected as the first woman juror from Whitpain Township about 1922. She was a Republican in politics, and a Friend by faith, a birthright member of Plymouth Meeting and attended Plymouth Meeting Friends School as a young girl.

The old farm house on the property was torn down in 1973; however, certain artifacts were preserved and given to The Historical Society of Montgomery County.

Ida Conrad Myers Harris recalled bob-sledding and sleigh rides over the farmlands. On winter nights, when snow is on the ground, neighborhood children still have fun with sleds and toboggans on the slope in front of the main building of this great industrial complex which has become the World Headquarters of Sperry Univac.



300 Year Old White Oak Tree at Jolly Road and Township Line Road



*Wertsner's Mill*

B.H.

## Wertsner Corner

By Marjorie H. Gerhart  
Photography by George S. Peck

Three fine homes built on former "Dawesfield" property are associated with the name of Wertsner. Adam Wertsner was the one who bought the grist mill, built following the Washington encampment by James Morris, from his widow, Elizabeth, in 1798. There is a legend that this Adam Wertsner was the Hessian prisoner who was indentured to James Morris for his hospitality to Washington. However, it seems that Adam Wertsner actually came from Hesse in 1790, a number of years after the Revolutionary War.

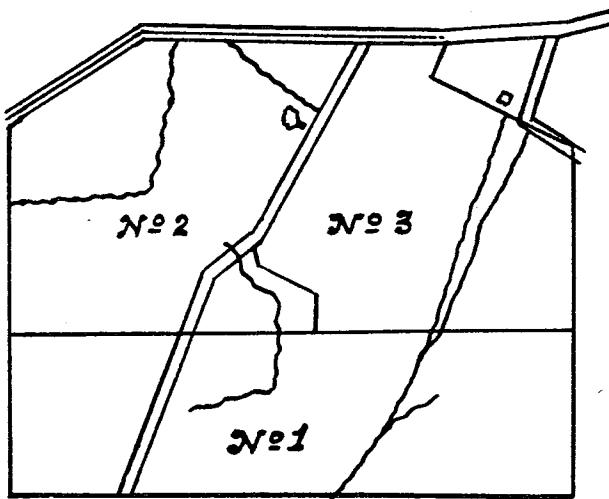
Like the names of Whitpain and Dawes, the name Wertsner has disappeared from this and the Philadelphia area, as the male line has died out. Until the early 1900's, there were prominent members of the family bearing the name. Benjamin P. Wertsner, grandson of Adam, was founder of the First National Bank in Ambler in 1884; the bank is now a branch of the Girard Bank. His father, George, son of Adam, was a member of the Pennsylvania State Legislature during the 1846-47 session.

Today, the blood line continues on the distaff side. Thomas Hallowell, chairman of the board of Standard Pressed Steel, had a grandmother who was a Wertsner. His cousin, Anne Wertsner Wood (Mrs. Harry Wood), who graduated from the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women (now the Ambler Campus of Temple University), is a well-known lecturer in the field of horticulture and has received many honors. It was Mrs Wood who gave information concerning the Wertsner family from an old Bible in her possession.

The Bible's record shows that Adam Wertsner came to this country from Hesse in 1790. He first settled in the Gulph Mills area. More information concerning Adam was obtained from various deeds and from his last will and testament. According to his will probated in 1831, he left a widow, Esther, two sons, Joseph and George, and a daughter, Sarah. Deeds show that Adam had acquired several properties, among them: the mill in Whitpain with fourteen and three-quarter acres of land, another mill in Norriton purchased in 1814, parcels of land in Whitpain, Gwynedd and Upper Dublin. In his will, he made provision that his widow, Esther, would have use of the part of the house in Whitpain (near the mill) "which was last built being the part that is now in the tenure of John Slingluff, Jr., together with the yard...." He left the Whitpain mill to George, whom he stated already lived there, and he left the Norriton mill to Joseph. He also left a certain number of cords of wood each year to his widow and each of his children.

Joseph, who inherited the mill in Norriton died about 1849 and left that property to his two sons, Adam and Charles. Adam sold his interest to his brother, Charles. This mill was sold to Frederick Bushe in 1878. Deeds at Norristown show that Adam, the second, married a woman by the name of Sarah and owned properties in Norristown.

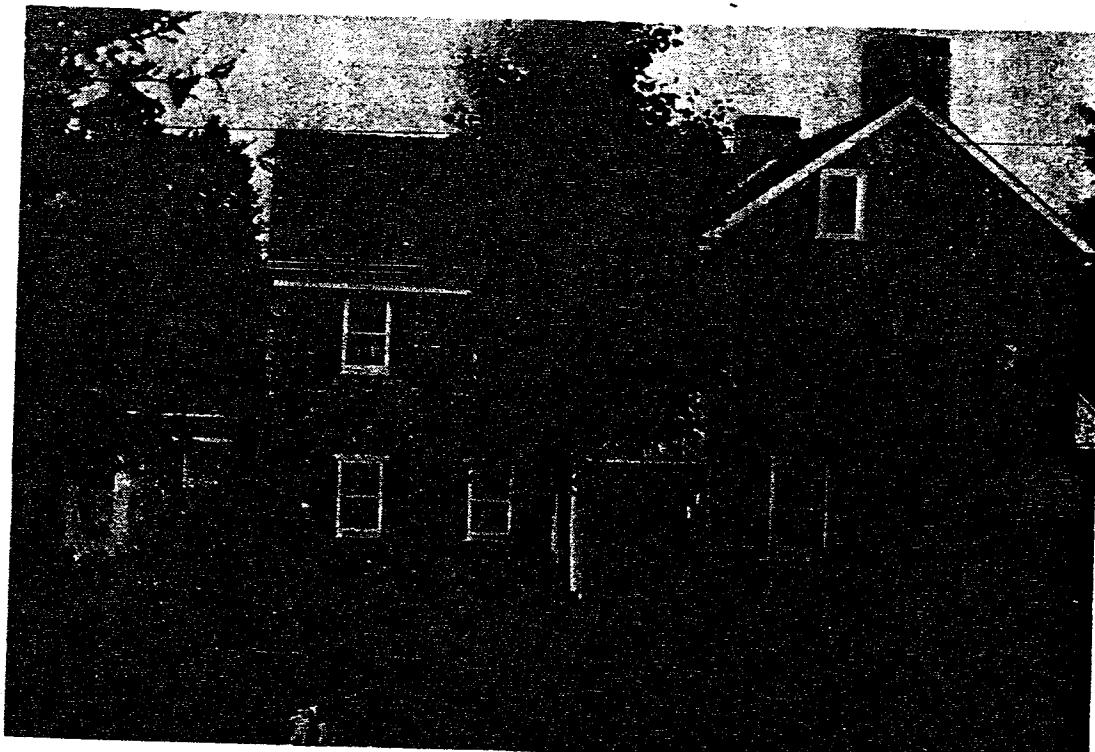
George continued with the ownership of the mill in Whitpain Township. In 1845, George bought a 107-acre tract of land, that had been part of the "Dawesfield" estate, from Rebecca C. James and Elizabeth A. James. The deed shows a messuage, which was probably the tenant house built in 1821 by Dr. James who was then master of Dawesfield. This purchase gave George ownership of the large southwest corner of land bounded by Lewis Lane and Morris Road.



1826 Map For Possible Division and Sale of  
Dawesfield Property. None Sold Until 1845  
Purchase of Lot No. 3 By George Wertsner



*Original House With Ailanthus Tree*



*Frank Peirce Home Today*

## Conversation With Frank A. Pierce

By Dorothy S. Conard  
Photography by George S. Peck

Mr Frank Peirce, a builder in the Township, bought an older home in Whitpain Township and described the house he purchased and the remodeling he did. His conversation with Becky Huttinger and Dorothy Conard is interesting because of his professional insight into the way houses were built in early days and the materials used.

I bought this property about 1948 from a man who was in the real estate business in Chestnut Hill. His name was Eugene Kellner.

I came here after driving to New Hope and all over the countryside looking for a farm site. Then I happened to remember that I had shown this property to possible buyers at the request of Eugene Kellner. He had sent the prospects up here because he owned the property and some prospective buyers wanted a builder to advise them, before they bought, whether the property was conceivable as an alteration and remodeling job and how much it would cost. I had taken several people out in a business way and I didn't give it another thought. After taking this trip to New Hope, I happened to think, "why don't I consider that old place that Kellner's been asking me to look at for others." So I called Kellner and asked him how much he wanted for the property on Morris Road. He told me how much he wanted for that. I believed he might want to dispose of the entire property and when he gave me a price for the whole sixty-one acres, it was only about twice as much as he wanted for just the frontage on Morris Road and I said, "I'll take it." I didn't realize at the time that there was another old house on the property. I had never shown the other house. I had only shown one.

The condition of the main house when I purchased it was not habitable. The windows were boarded up; floors were missing and the exterior was in poor shape. I started to work to make the house shipshape and structurally sound. I put on an addition and I moved in in 1949.

When I started the work the floors were all absent. A person couldn't walk through a room. If he did, he'd fall through. The windows were all knocked out and boarded up. The roof was in bad shape. The house was really a relic, or junk. The people had used the property as a public dump. There were truckloads of rubbish all over the place. I took twenty truckloads of rubbish away from the house. Then I began to tear off the old porch (which was a sham), tore off the frame end, which was asbestos shingles.

This was a typical Pennsylvania farmhouse. It was the kind of house farmers built from the 1700's for many years. The first floor had a door that led into the kitchen which was the general use area, serving as kitchen, dining room, family room. It was separated from the parlor on the opposite end. By going through a doorway in this partition, you could enter the parlor. The parlor had its own door going outside and the kitchen had its own door going outside.

When I tore down the partition, I decided to make this one room instead of two, I decided that two doors on that front wall were wasteful, so I left the door that led to the parlor and I made a window where the door was on the kitchen side. The marble doorsill under the window is still intact. It is worn from the wear and tear of all the action on the kitchen side of the house.

The parlor was used only on special occasions. If there was a funeral, wedding, if the Preacher or other important people were visiting, the door was opened and they were entertained in that room. It was never for the family's general use.

Upstairs there were two-and-a-half bedrooms, reached by a stairway going up 180 degrees. Consequently, one couldn't get furniture up or down and I thought I'd make better use of it so I made it into a closet. There's no stairway there any longer. The stairway that goes to the third floor is still there and it is still a 180-degree winding stairway.

I added an addition to the house. On the first floor I added a dining room, kitchen, den and a powder room. On the second floor, I made two big bedrooms with large walk-in closets instead of the two-and-a-half small rooms. They rarely had closets in those days; if they did, they were only nine or ten inches deep. I built a master bedroom and adjoining bath with a big closet area so that there are three bedrooms on the second floor and two baths.

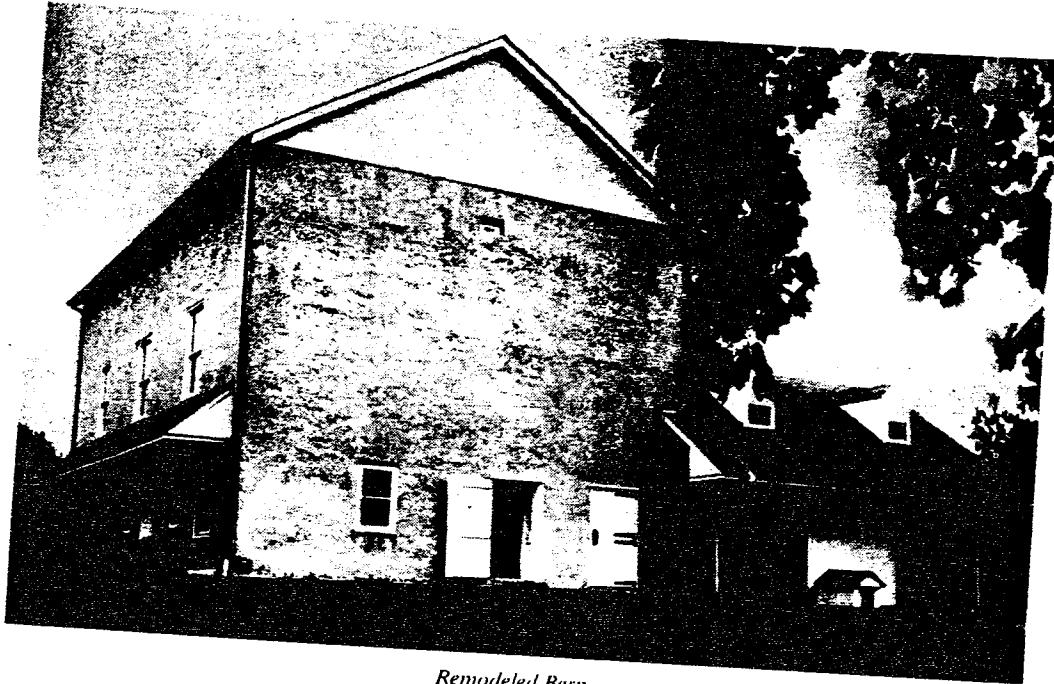
On the southwest corner of the house there was an ailanthus tree growing exactly out of the corner, next to the wall. This tree had started as a seedling and fastened itself around the corner. I wanted to take it down because it was an ugly looking ailanthus but everyone said, "You'd better not take it down because if you do you'll upset the house." I had no worries about that. As you can see by my before and after pictures, we cut around it and cut the tree down and never even had a stone loose in the wall.

**M. & P. A. W.**

**1859.**

I don't know when this house was built, but I would presume, if I were a farmer, I'd build the house before I'd build the barn. The barn does have a date stone carved in marble and it is authentic, and according to Mr. Walker's initials it was built in 1859. The house could have been built after that or before that date. I've never checked any records.

I put a new roof on the stone barn, tore off the framing and put masonry in, made a two-car garage with an apartment over it. Eventually I sold everything off except eight acres, my house and barn.



*Remodeled Barn*

I've mentioned the other house on the upper end of the property. I didn't do anything with that house for a long time. When I came here it was occupied by a man who was known as "The old Russian." He had his son living with him and he paid me ten dollars a month rent for the house. He had a house that had no conveniences. He dug the water out of a well. He had a kitchen range that he used for cooking and heat. The house then had two or three fireplaces but he didn't use them. The kitchen stove was much handier. I don't know how many years he had lived there before I bought the property. I raised his rent and I fixed the roof and made some minor improvements. He stayed there until he passed away at the age of eighty-five. Then I decided I would make something of the house; so I started to fix it up. Later I rented it for a couple of years. Eventually I sold all but eight acres and this house went with the acreage I sold. Sam Trueblood is living there now.

It has about the same proportions as the main house. The one difference is that my house is unusual for a farmhouse in that there was a ceiling in here which was much higher than in the average farmhouse. Most of them are about seven-and-a-half to eight-and-a-half feet high, but this ceiling measured nine-and-a-half feet. I dropped the ceiling — it's a hanging ceiling. It's not against the joists.

We stripped the walls, put in new floors, painted. We blasted the walls outside and put on new finishes, a new roof, new cornices. Everything inside the house is refinished except the windows. The doors are new because there were none, but they are replicas of old doors.

I had to replace everything because everything was broken or missing. Window sash were beyond repair; however, I used the old frame. There was no plumbing or heat. What I started out with was a wrecked building with no conveniences, a well with a hand pump, filth and rot.

I have axed beams in the cellar, about two-and-a-half feet apart, heavy logs, flat on the top, round on the bottom, with the bark still on. They were rotting so I had to put up shoring to hold the ends up. Then I put a new 3 X 10 joist in between every one of these to give it more stiffness. Because the old beams had settled so badly, we had to pad them before we put the new floor in.

I've done a lot of work for architects who restored historical buildings. Most of what we call colonial Pennsylvania homes were built by farmers and people who had little home businesses and industries. They were usually no more than two rooms on the first floor. The typical construction was native stone sometimes taken out of the nearest piece of farmland that showed stone and carted and hauled by sledge or wagon. There were no trucks, trains or bulldozers only horses, wagons, scoops and hard manual labor.

The lime probably came from Corson's Quarry as Corson's goes back earlier than many of these houses. There was no cement until about 1840 or 1850. Before that time, all mortars were made of lime and sand, but not washed or cleaned. In some of the old houses, the mortar is so poor that if the pointing was taken off, the rain would wash the mortar out of the wall in ten or twenty years. Pointing in those early days was made of lime because there was no cement. Some of the old lime pointing is still holding today because the quality of the native lime was exceedingly fine and durable.

The houses inside were plastered directly to the stone wall. Lime, reinforced with camel hair made the brown coat, or the first coat. The second coat, the finished plaster on the interior, was again lime and gauging plaster that went on just like the icing on a cake to make a white finish.

Most of the old houses have fine millwork in doors, door frames and window frames. Most of the wood was taken from the surrounding forest. Early in 1700 and 1800 there was an ample supply of Pennsylvania white pine, which was so popular in those years that almost every tree was cut down. There is no fine quality pine today. Windows were made of it. Some of the timbers were made of it. Shingles and lath were made of it. Most of the timber in the house was white pine and they selected the best for millwork, windows and doors. It is a durable wood; one of the finest woods we've ever had for millwork.

Most of the heavy structural timbers were taken out of the woods. Oak was very popular. They would axe the top of the log off to get a flat surface and lay their flooring down on top of that. On the second floor, they'd axe the top as well as the bottom to get a flat surface because the bottom side was going to be plastered. They cut it off with a broad axe. The introduction of brick came late into this area. Ambler had a lot of the brick imported. It was too expensive to bring brick out here from the city, so the native stone was used. The Marble Hall area is nearby and marble was used extensively and farmers had marble in their houses and even in the stable and barn.