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RADNOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY, 1962 - 1963

May 13, 1962

The Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Society was held at the Harriton Cemetery, following a tour of graveyards in Radnor and Lower Merion Townships. The following Directors were elected to serve until 1965: Mrs. Gertrude Ware Case, Francis James Dallett, Miss E. Dorothy Finley, Mrs. Malcolm G. Sausser. James C. Massey was elected to serve as Director until 1964. After the business was concluded, the members adjourned to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Vaux for refreshments. The Directors then re-elected the following officers to serve for the coming year: Miss Caroline Robbins, President; George Vaux, Vice-President; Robert I. Cummin, Secretary; and O. Louis Ehmann, Jr., Treasurer.

October 13, 1962

One Hundred Years of Radnor Architects was the theme of the Society's Ninth Open House Tour. (See Mr. Massey's article.) Mr. Massey, Miss Robbins, and Mrs. Cummin took charge of arrangements.

The Radnor Historical Society is open to *anyone* interested in the history of our community. Send annual dues of \$3.00 to O. Louis Ehmann, Jr., Treasurer, 123 West Lancaster Avenue, Wayne, Pennsylvania.

November 27, 1962

David J. Kennedy's Views of the Philadelphia Area, 1836-1880 was the subject of a talk by James Rawle at the Wayne Presbyterian Church. Mr. Rawle has recorded on slides much of the work of this expert and versatile water colorist. Nearly all of Kennedy's paintings are owned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Mrs. Westhead was in charge of refreshments.

January 16, 1963

Mrs. C. Higgins of Wayne led a symposium at the First Wayne Federal Savings and Loan Association on **The Changing Taste in Food** at which Miss Robbins also spoke (see article). A number of old menus, recipes, and cookbooks were exhibited by various members. Mrs. Wolfson handled hospitality.

March 20, 1963

Banjotown - Radnor, a Fact or a Legend? was the subject of a talk by Bertram Wolfson who lives there. (See article.) It is hoped that the success of this presentation will encourage additional neighborhood research projects. The meeting was at the First Wayne Federal Savings and Loan Association, and again Mrs. Westhead was in charge of refreshments.

THE RADNOR TOWNSHIP POOR BOOK

by Katharine Hewitt Cummin

At its 1962 annual meeting the Radnor Historical Society received from Mrs. Thornton Oakley the most extraordinary gift of the earliest known book of Radnor Township records. The leather-bound volume had stood in the safekeeping of her family, the Ewings of Woodstock, Villanova, for a century and a half.

Radnor Township's activities did not begin with the date of this book. There must have existed an earlier volume containing records of the Overseers of the Poor and there should be, somewhere, accounts of the activities of the Supervisors of the Highways. This gift inspires the Society to hope that other early records may be discovered and appreciated. The earliest records in the Township Building date from 1885.

Thanks to Mrs. Oakley it is now possible to describe the actions of the Overseers of the Poor for four decades in the eighteenth century and to publish the minutes of one town meeting (all we have) of the many that were held.

The volume bears, now faintly, the title "Radnor Township Poor Book." Inside the cover an early note explains its contents:

"This Book from Page 1 to Page 45 inclusive contains the Transactions of the Overseers of the Poor, Township proceedings respecting the Poor with the Accounts of the Overseers of the Poor from Page 45 forward the Minutes and Proceedings of the Township Meeting. —"

And this is what it does contain.

These records begin December 12, 1765, ending November 23, 1807 when the accounts of the last Overseer, Jacob Gyger, were settled. Following that time the Poor became the responsibility of the County.

The earlier records appear in more detail than the later where often the book shows only the amount spent by the Overseers, the amount received from taxes and other sources and the difference between them. The "overplus" figure is by one clerk called the "overplush."

During this period the Overseers were appointed by the County Justices of the Peace (upon nomination of the outgoing overseers). No records of such appointments occur here. There are occasional records, however, beginning in 1768, of the election of a Committee to Assist the Overseers. From this committee a group of

men, usually three, acted as "settlers" or auditors to review the Overseers' accounts at their term's end. In later years three men were elected specifically as Settlers. The fiscal year ran from March 25 to March 25, the same period used by the English parishes for the same purpose. The "settlement" of accounts fell usually near this date.

The Overseers had several sources of money. They were by law empowered (with the agreement of two Justices of the Peace of the County) to levy their own taxes—and more than once a year if necessary. However these records indicate that the assessment was often (perhaps always) made at a Town Meeting. In addition to tax money the Overseers received one half of the money paid for stray animals found in the township. Over the years they benefited from the sale of a cow, of hogs, of sheep, including 1s. 6d. for a "Stray Ewe Mark'd with a half Crop in the Right Ear and a Crop in the Left Ear Aged four years." (How did they know the age of a stray?)

They received also the proceeds of sale ("Vandue" or "Vendue") of possessions of the Poor. In Radnor, during these years, one third of a field of wheat, two cows, "effects" were sold at Vendue. In 1792 Haverford Township's Overseers paid them one pound ten shillings presumably for costs borne by Radnor for Poor belonging to Haverford.

"Sundry fines" appear as an item in the record with no further definition. An act passed February 9, 1750, states however that anyone selling strong liquor at the time of a Vendue was to be fined four pounds—one half to go to the Overseers of the Poor and the other to the informer! For a second offense the fine was five pounds. The Goshen Poor Records show income from "swearing fines." Perhaps these applied here.

The Overseers spent money for clothes for the Poor, for burials of the Poor, for room and board or "keeping" of the Poor, for "removing" the Poor from the township (presumably people rightly considered the charge of other Overseers) and for the expenses of the Vendues.

Inflation during the Revolution shows clearly on these records and the effect of the law passed February 1, 1781, requiring

taxes to be collected in specie or, if in paper, at the rate of 75 to 1. The accounts were first rendered in dollars in the settlement of April 11, 1801.

Officers, other than Overseers of the

Poor or the settlers for the Poor accounts, received almost no mention. In 1772 John Jones signed the record as Clerk. In 1790 Adam Siter did the same. James Morris is referred to as Constable in 1788.

Date of Settlement	Spent by Overseers during previous Year		
April 7, 1777	£31	16s	6d
April 4, 1778	58	2	11
July 25, 1779	163	16	3
n.d. but c. 1780	245	19	6
March 31, 1781	906	12	
October 19, 1782	22	18	6
April 17, 1783	25	18	10

There follows a list of the names mentioned in the Poor records. It includes names of Overseers, Settlers, Committee members, Poor, people who "kept" the Poor, tradesmen from whom goods were bought, individuals who bought goods at the Vendues, people who bought strays. Since a number of these names appear

several times, only the years of the first and last reference are given. Because spellings vary widely, the spelling used by an individual if he signed the book personally is also given.

The book itself may be referred to by any person interested in more specific information on these people.

Name	Year First Mentioned	Year Last Mentioned	Signature
Abraham, Abrahams, Abram, Abms.	1806	1806	
	Isaac	1785	1807
			Isaac Abram (1785) Isaac Abraham (1805) George Adams (1785)
Adams, George	1771	1785	
Bair, Henry	1767	1767	
Baker, Joseph	1770	1770	
Barry, James	1767	1771	
Bartleson, B.	1798	1798	B. Bartleson (1798)
	Bartle	1805	1805
			Bartle Bartleson (1805)
Bewley, Bewly, Buley, John	1772	1792	John Bewley (1788)
Bittle, Frederick	1773	1773	
	Frdrick	1778	1778
Brooke, James	1800	1800	Jas Brooke (1800)
	Jesse	1791	1807
	John.	c.1780	1807
			Jno Brooke (1782)
Cochran, James	1782	1782	
Conner, Mary	1767	1773	
Connoegg, David	1768	1768	
Cornog, Cornogg,	John	1791	1791
	William	1785	1785

Name	Year First Mentioned	Year Last Mentioned	Signature
Cummins, Susanah	1770	1770	
	sd. Cummins	1770	1770
David, Evan	1772	1777	Evan David (1772)
	Sarah	1771	1771
Davis, B.	1805	1805	
	Benjamin	1793	1806
	Edward	1777	1777
	Isaac	1786	1797
	Mary	1772	1772
	Sarah	1771	d.1772
DeHaven, Dehaven, Deheven	Hugh	1790	1796
			H. DeHaven (1792)
Donnaly, Owen		1787	1787
Elliot, Elliott, Ellot	James	1805	1806
	Robert	1771	1771
Evans, Evens, Daniel		1779	1782
	David	1786	1788
	Griffeth	1771	1771
	John	1771	1771
	Levi	1794	1794
	Mark	1783	1783
	Mathusalah	1766	1766
	Nathan	1797	1797
			Nathan Evans (1797)
Fetterman, George	c.1780	c.1780	
Francis, Thomas	1791	1791	
George, John	1790	1790	
Gager, Giger, Gyger	Jacob	1806	1807
	*Jesse	1773	1801
			Jacob Gyger (1806) Jesse Gyger (1800)
Griff (. . .), Griffith, Hugh		1770	1772
Healy, Margaret	c.1783	c.1783	
Hoofman, Jacob	1788	1788	
Horton, John	1798	1798	
	Nathan	1803	1805
			Nathan Horton (1803)
Hoskins, Jos.	1800	1800	Jos. Hoskins (1800)
Hughs, Hughes, Jonathan	1772	1773	
Hunter, Jams.	c.1780	1781	
James, Evan	1777	1777	
	Griffith	1779	1779
Jerman, Jeremiah	1773	1773	
Jones, David	1768	1779	David Jones (1778)
	Edward	1772	1792
	Isaac	1802	1803
	*John	1772	1795
			John Jones (1772) John Jones (1792)
	M.	1793	1793
	Margaret	1789	1789
Kanady, Kenedy,	Robert	1786	1788
			Robert Kenedy (1786)

Name	Year First Mentioned	Year Last Mentioned	Signature
Kenneday, Kennedy			Robert Kennedy (1786)
Krim, John	1775	1775	
Leedom, Isaac	1802	1802	
Lewis, David	1774	1788	David Lewis (1774)
Evan, Even	1773	1794	Evan Lewis (1773)
Henry	1788	1788	Henry Lewis (1788)
Levi	1781	1796	Levi Lewis (1781)
*Lewis	1773	1804	Lewis Lewis (1804)
Lloyd, Able	1766	1766	
Ruth	1767	1767	
Loyd, Jos.	1767	1767	
Levezey, Luzely, Benjamin	1768	1769	
Marchant, Nicholas	1767	1767	
Martin, Robert	1797	1800	Robert Martin (1797)
Mather, Robert	1781	1800	Robert Mather (1800)
Mathers, John	1767	1768	
Matlack, Matlock, Nathan	1772	1788	Nathan Matlack (1772)
Simeon, Semion,	1788	1806	Simeon Matlack (1788)
Simmion, Simion			
Maul, Maule, Daniel	1788	1793	Daniel Maule (1792)
Jacob	1804	1807	Jacob Maule (1804)
Mawl, B.	1805	1805	
McClelen, J.	1806	1806	
McClure, Wm.	1804	1804	
McGines, B.	1806	1806	
Meredith, Susanah	1769	1770	
Miles, Enos	1786	1786	
Jas	1795	1795	
Richard	1772	1772	
Moore, John	1773	1773	
Morgan, John	1774	1791	John Morgan (1791)
Mordica, Morda	1768	1777	Morda Morgan (1776)
Morris, James	1788	1788	
Phillips, David	1785	1788	David Phillips (1788)
Powell, Jonathan	1790	1790	
Pugh, John	1799	1799	Jno Pugh (1799)
Samuel	1768	1768	
Ratliff, Joseph	1802	1803	Joseph Ratliff (1802)
Read, Reed, Thomas	1771	1792	Thos. Read (1772)
Richard, Richards, Isaac	1794	1795	Isaac Richards (1794)
William	1788	1788	
Roberts, Jasher	1768	1772	
Samuel, Hugh	1767	d.1768	
Sharp	1770	1770	
Siter, Sifers, Adam	1775	1790	Adam Siter (1790)
Jacob	1795	1797	Jacob Sifers (1795)
John	1800	1807	John Siter (1800)

Name	Year First Mentioned	Year Last Mentioned	Signature
Staddleman, Stadelman, Mical, Michal	1768	1772	
Taylor, Taylore, Morda	1785	1785	
Samuel	1801	1802	Samuel Taylore (1801)
Thomas and James	1772	1772	
(business establishment? individuals?)			
Thomas, Amos	1783	1783	
Even	1771	1771	
Jno, John	1774	c.1780	John Thomas (1774)
Joshua	1773	1802	Joshua Thomas (1779)
Philip	1805	1805	
Walker, Jacob	1785	1788	Jacob Walker (1785)
Wayne, Humphrey	1772	1772	
White, George	1785	1785	
Williams, Edward	1775	1775	
wife of Edward	1775	1775	
Jonathan	1772	d.1772	
Margrit	1766	d.1770	
Thomas	1770	1770	
Wills, Samuel	1770	1770	
Wilson, Thomas	1767	1767	
Worrell, Elisha	1789	1789	
Zullig, Georg	1798	1798	Georg Zullig (1798)

* These references obviously refer to more than one person of this name.

THE MINUTES OF THE TOWNSHIP MEETING

The appearance of one set of Town Meeting Minutes in the Radnor Poor Book raises the questions of when town meetings began here, when they ended, and what authority they had. Some research has been done on this and will continue until answers can be given. Some facts, however, do appear.

The only statutory authority for town meetings stands in the Laws of the Duke of York which prevailed here from 1676 until the advent of William Penn. Penn, under the Charter from Charles II, divided his grant into counties and directed his surveyors to lay out land in townships. He gave no definition of the governmental rights of townships; such definition awaited nineteenth century statutes. The Charter did specify that all laws should be in harmony with those of England.

It seems therefore that the holding of town meetings was done simply in accordance with tradition and for convenience. Certain borough charters make provision for them. We have seen primary evidence of town meetings in Radnor, in Goshen, in East Bradford and secondary reference to meetings in Byberry, Chester, Darby*, and Upper Darby townships.

The Darby Monthly Meeting Minutes of the Society of Friends refer to town meetings held in the Friends Meeting House. In Goshen the inhabitants met in individual houses, in inns, in the "stone schoolhouse." We do not know where Radnor met. A 1772 statute requires that

* The Darby Book, containing earlier and fuller records than most, was liberally quoted in Smith's **History of Delaware County**. Its present whereabouts is unknown.

elections be held as near the center of a township "as conveniently can be." If this was followed here, the meetings were held in or near the Radnor Friends Meeting House.

From the scant evidence so far found, town meetings have been seen to elect officers, agree to the levying of taxes, authorize the expenditure of money (from the funds of the Overseers of the Poor or of the Supervisors of the Highways), to grant certificates of legal settlement in a township, to set annual meeting dates (before a general 1772 statute on the subject), divide townships into road districts, authorize the building of stocks (out of Poor Funds!) and settle accounts.

The following minutes, from the Radnor Township Poor Book, are those of the "Annual Meeting," held on the third Saturday of March which by statute was set as the date for the election of certain town officers. The election, the law said, must be held between three and six in the afternoon. There was no provision for the transaction of other business at this time.

"MARCH 16 1810

From this time forward the minutes and proceedings of the Township Meeting of Radnor Township in Delaware County is to be fairly entered in this Book by order of the Township Meeting this day

RADNOR DELAWARE COUNTY MARCH 16 1810

The Inhabitants of Radnor Township met in Town-meeting this day, on due notice Agreeably to Law, for the purpose of Electing Township Officers etc.

Whereupon Isaac Abrahams Esqr and John Brooke were appointed Judges of the Election, and John Siter was Appointed Clerk.

The Meeting proceeded to the Election of Township Officers.

Maskell Ewing Esqr. and James Lewis were Elected Supervisors of the Highways.

Jacob Gyger and James Morgan were Elected Constables.

Davis Brooke was Appointed Town Clerk.

John Brooke, Jesse Brooke, John Siter and George Brooke, were Appointed Settlers for the ensuing year.

Enquiry having been made, whether the Plough which was directed to be procured for the repair of Roads, at the Town Meeting in March last had been made. Benjamin Davis the late Supervi-

or informed the meeting, that he had directed, Jacob Gyger to make one: which Mr. Gyger being present informed the meeting he would have it soon done

A Committee was Appointed in March 1808 to collect all the Laws, that were in the hands of the Different Constables for some time past, which they had drawn for the use of the Township from the Prothonotaries Office, and Mr John Brooke informed the meeting that he was on that Committee, and had procured all they could find and had deposited them as they were then ordered in the Store of Messrs Siter and Brooke for the use of the Township.

Maskell Ewing informed the meeting that he had procured from the Prothonotarie of the County the 6th 7th and a part of the 8th Volumn of the Laws that have been passed since the Publication of Reads Digest which he presented for the use of the Township

Whereupon

A Motion was made by Maskell Ewing and seconded by Benjamin Davis, that some person be Appointed to examine all the Laws that are in the Possession of Messrs Siter and Brooke, with those now presented by Mr Ewing, and as far as complete Volumns can be made up, to get them bound in a neat Manner and Lettered. On the Question Whether the meeting would agree thereto? It was carried in the Affirmative **Nemine Contra Dicenta.** Whereupon

Maskell Ewing was Appointed to procure the same to be bound Accordingly, and that the expence thereof shall be Allowed him in the settlement of his Accounts as Supervisor he having been Appointed to that Office this day.

Whereas it now Appears, that no minutes were ever kept in this Township of the proceedings at the Annual Town Meetings, other than those kept respecting the Poor prior to the year 1808 since which the Poor Accounts have been kept at the Poor House and House of employment A Motion was made and seconded that the proceedings of this Meeting be made up and entered in the Book now before the meeting in which the transactions of the Overseers of the Poor and their Accounts were formerly kept and which book is filled with Township entries Poor Accounts etc from Page 1 to Page 45 inclusive and that the Clerk who may hereafter Attend the Township Meetings as such, be directed to make regular minutes of the Proceedings which may hereafter be had

at Township Meetings in this Township, and cause the same to be fairly transcribed into the sd Book

On the Question, Whether the same be agreed to by the Meeting? It was carried **Nemine Contra Dicenta,** in the Affirmative.

No further business being offered the meeting rose."

There is but one more entry in the book. On one of the last pages there appears in the handwriting of one of the earliest clerks the statement:

"We whose Names are Underwritten Being freeholders and Inhabitants of the Township of Radnor Do hereby certify that we have asses'd the foregoing rates

approvd of them and Desire they may be allow'd by the Justisseees"

It is signed (with a flourish) in another and somewhat later hand by

Timothy Leeg Mutton

Nathaniel Neverpay

Stephen John Overtrott

Leather Weaver

For assistance in securing background material for this article particular thanks are hereby given to the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, the Chester County Historical Society, the Darby Free Library, the Friends Library in Swarthmore, the Pennsylvania State Library and the Law Library of Villanova University.

CHANGING TASTE IN FOOD IN PENNSYLVANIA

by Caroline Robbins

Everyone over twenty-five must be aware of a revolution in our domestic economy; the refrigerator, the freezer and the sale of a wide variety of fresh and cooked frozen foods have combined to change eating habits and household routine. Looking backwards, other revolutions may be seen. Somewhere in mid-nineteenth century, the possibility of convenient ovens in every home meant fewer trips to the baker with goose, beef or pies, but more activity in the kitchen. Medical notions have done as much as technological developments to alter eating customs. The menus customary in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were vastly heavier, richer, and according to our ideas, less "balanced," than those of mid-twentieth century. Old bills of fare illustrate this vividly: the dinner at the Bellevue in Wayne on 12 September 1881 for the Aztec Club (of veterans of the Mexican war of 1846) followed roughly the same sequence from soup to sweet and coffee as we should expect, but offered many more courses and a greater choice or mixture within each, than a modern restaurant would think necessary or desirable. A dinner in 1859 at Bethlehem for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania had some twelve courses, several of which offered, for example, half a dozen different kinds

of game, vegetable and roast. Costs were correspondingly high as the accounts, preserved by the George Vauxes, of a dinner in 1876 at the old Academy of Natural Sciences for Dom Pedro, illustrate, though the service charges seem delightfully low!

The eighteenth century table was startlingly different. In menus suggested in **The Frugal Housewife** (Philadelphia, 1796) the **first** course, placed at one time on the table, included cods' head soup, beef, lamb, boiled chicken, pastries, plum pudding and collops (hamburger, I think); the **second** turkey, smelts, lamb (in case you'd overlooked the first round I suppose), cheesecake, minced pies, lobsters and jellies, these dishes also placed in a circle on the table. William Priest, a musician traveling in the United States in 1793-97, wrote of the enormous quantity of meat consumed three times a day, at breakfast, dinner and supper, noting that to the normal roasts of England were added "raccoon, bear and possum" (**Travels**, London, 1802, 32-34). His remarks could be confirmed many times in the memoirs of his contemporaries. Some differences reflected frontier life, of course, and the inevitable emphasis on game, local fish and on salted food with the lack of fruit and vegetables in any but exceptional farms. Others stem from the more active

way of life and the extremes of climate that were endured. The remote past of the middle ages and the ancient world enjoyed yet more surprising foods with violent flavors to disguise stale taste, and with odd combinations like the fish treated with honey of the Romans.

Early cook books in America were simply reprints of books from overseas.

Genl W.H.H. Davis

MENU

Huitres au Naturel.

Potage.

Tortue Vert

Poisson.

Tete Brebis, Sauce aux Huitres.

Pommes de Terre,

a la Duchesse Concombres.

Bouchees, a la Financiere

Releve.

Filet de Boeuf, aux Champignons.

Legumes.

Casserole de Pommes de Terre,

Avec Petits Pois.

Aubergine, Farcie.

Entrees.

Cotelettes D'Agneau, Sauce Tomate

Supreme de Volaille.

Sorbet en Oranges.

Gibier.

Rale et Ortolans.

Salade de Laitue et Tomate.

Fromage de Roquefort.

Neufchatel.

Dessert.

Glaces. Meringues.

Fruit. Cafe.

Dinner to the Aztec Club at Wayne.

The first native imprint, **The Compleat Housewife**, 1742, was a republication of a famous English work by Hannah Glasse. So, too, was the popular **A New System of Cookery**, by a Lady (Mrs. Marie Eliza Ketelby Rundell), which appeared in Philadelphia in 1807, in New York in 1816, and elsewhere, but which was, with no concessions to transatlantic taste, a replica of an English work. As the nineteenth century wore on, adaptations of French and English books were made. J. M. Sanderson of the Franklin House in Philadelphia did one in 1843. Nowadays there are plenty of Italian, Chinese and other foreign recipes conditioned to our measurements and commodities. Even the food once peculiar to the Pennsylvania Dutch peoples and settlements may now be found in studies by Frederick Klees and others.

The first native author was Amelia Simmons, described on her title page as "an American Orphan," whose **American Cookery** was published at Hartford in 1796. The book is scarce, and little is known about Amelia. Fortunately a good deal may be discovered about Eliza Leslie (1787-1858), our first local authority on food and one of the few culinary luminaries to be found in the **Dictionary of American Biography**. Eliza was the daughter of Robert and Lydia (Baker) Leslie, who came to Philadelphia and opened a shop for watches and clocks shortly before her birth. Robert was a member of the American Philosophical Society and known both to Franklin and Jefferson. His Scottish grandfather had emigrated to Maryland about 1745. In 1792 the Leslies went to England on business, and their son, Charles Robert (1794-1859) the painter, was born there. On their return, after a terrible voyage (1799-1800), Eliza attended Mrs. Goodfellow's cooking classes and became so efficient and inventive that friends relied on her help. Her brother eventually persuaded her to publish instead of constantly copying her recipes and prescriptions. From 1837, Eliza's works on cooking and on household management went into many editions, one into thirty-eight or more. She also wrote a prize winning story for Godey's, "Mrs. Washington Potts" and a novel, **Amelia, or A Young Lady's Vicissitudes** (1848) and other pieces, and she derived a fair income from her pen.

Around 1830-50 when Eliza Leslie was writing, others like Prudence Smith, Fanny Fern and Hannah Widdifield produced cook books. Special studies devoted to Ameri-

can foods like Indian corn, or to areas like New England and Virginia also showed a growing interest in home cooking. By the end of the century, Fanny Farmer in Boston and Mrs. Sarah Tyson Rorer wrote volumes which became classics in the field and in newer editions are still used today. Mr. Sanderson, the hotelier already mentioned, wrote in his introduction: "the American stomach has too long suffered from the vile concoctions inflicted on it by untutored cooks." No one today can blame bad food (if there be any) on a lack of instruction over the hundred and twenty years that have passed since he wrote.

BANJOTOWN-RADNOR

A Fact or A Legend?

by Bertram Wolfson

For over half a century many residents of the Main Line have heard stories of a small community called Banjotown. Does it really exist? Where is it? How did it get its name?

Banjotown is on Newtown Road in Ithan, approximately a quarter of a mile west of the Radnor Friends Meeting House. It was part of the initial land grant of 5,000 acres made to Richard Davies in 1681. In 1726 the land was conveyed to John Jerman. Title to the land changed hands over the years. In 1864 Sarah Jane Matlack purchased 56 acres including the present land of Banjotown, from Elizabeth S. Parke and Mary Ann Jacobs. These 56 acres extended from the present west boundary of Banjotown to the intersection of Newtown Road and Conestoga Road. This included the land on which was subsequently built the Meigs Estate, open to the tour of the Historical Society this past fall.

Banjotown was vacant farm land and woods until approximately 1885, at which time a 10 acre plot was sub-divided into 36 lots by Mrs. Sarah Jane Matlack. Twelve of the lots faced on Newtown Road, and the remaining 24 lots bordered on a dead-end road, now called Matlack Lane.

Why Mrs. Matlack, who owned quite a large piece of property in Ithan, suddenly decided to carve up 10 acres of land into 36 small lots on which were erected small houses for the laboring class, is unknown. Did she need the money resulting from the sale of the land? Was there an

Bibliography. American Cookery Books, by Waldo Lincoln, edited by E. Lowenstein and published in a limited edition at Worcester, Mass., in 1954 by the American Antiquarian Society, is the standard work. I used the copy in the Library Company at Broad and Christian. Our exhibits suggest menus and books lent for the meeting on 16 January 1963. Any old menus and books that members feel they can part with will be gratefully received by the RHS.

increased demand for laborers in the Ithan-Wayne area? These questions are unanswered.

By 1887 there were three houses in Banjotown—one on lot 1, lot 35 and lot 36. The two houses on lots 35 and 36 burnt down in the 1920's. The Radnor Fire Company answered the alarm but due to the frame construction of the houses, and an inadequate water supply, they were quickly destroyed. George Munger's stable now stands in their approximate location. The only one of the original houses that still exists is the house on Lot Number 1 which was then owned by George W. Derrickson, a local auctioneer.

By 1892 four more houses were built on lot number 3, lot number 4, lot number 25, lot number 27. The house on lot 25 was inhabited by George Handy, a Negro, and his son. Mr. Handy was a good natured fellow who did odd jobs around the neighborhood, and collected garbage to feed his pigs. One night Mr. Handy thought he heard a burglar prowling outside his house—he got his gun, waited until he heard the sound again and fired in its direction. The sound stopped—he proudly announced to his wife the fact that he had shot the burglar but would wait until daylight to see who it was. Next morning Mr. Handy went out to find he had shot his horse as the burglar. His house no longer exists.

The remaining frame dwellings on lot 9, lot 21, lot 24 and lot 29 on Matlack Lane were built by 1908.

BANJOTOWN

1885 - 1963

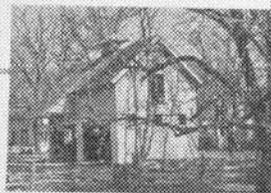


Eleanor Anne
McCalls
Sister -

1940-1943
Cyril & Anita
house



MATLACK LANE



NEWTOWN ROAD

The original eight houses of Banjotown were built of frame, covered with a hard white pinewood siding. Taking our house at 724 Newtown Road as an example, many changes were made over the years. The original house had two rooms downstairs, and two bedrooms upstairs. There was no running water within the house, a privy was outside and the house was heated by wood stoves in each room. Subsequently a shed was added in the rear for the kitchen and a third bedroom added over the kitchen. A porch to the rear of the house was later enclosed to make another room and, still later, a small room was added to the rear of the porch by Davis Whiteman who used it as a cobbler's shop when he retired from his shop in the center of Wayne.

Information as to the early days of Banjotown was acquired from early atlases of the Main Line, and interviews with early inhabitants, Edward Whiteman and Harry Miller of Wayne.

Edward Whiteman was born in our house in 1890. His grandfather was the cobbler in Wayne, and his father worked for the P. R. R. Like most young boys in Banjotown, he attended the Ithan School at the end of Newtown Road, until the third grade. After school he helped around the house, taking care of the ducks, chickens, sheep and pigs kept in the backyard. The ducks and pigs swam and wallowed in the mud of Van Leer's Run, a stream that flowed through Banjotown. The stream is now piped underground, but at the turn of the Century it was open, with a steep bank. The local inhabitants tried to fill it in by using it as the dumping ground for their cans and ashes. "Tin Can Alley" one early resident described it.

There were other children in Banjotown for the Whitemans to play with. When they were older, Mr. Whiteman and Mr. Miller played for the local baseball team, The Ithan Rovers, whose diamond was next to Banjotown, where Harrison Road now is. The Rovers were one of the teams in the Main Line League, made up of Narberth, Bryn Mawr, Wayne, Ithan and Berwyn.

Until 1917, Banjotown was a racially integrated community. Its inhabitants either had a trade or performed odd laboring jobs. George W. Derrickson was an auctioneer, Davis Whiteman was a cobbler, William Short, a Negro, did odd carpentry jobs and ran a horse-powered saw

mill. Jim Shield was a bricklayer, George Willis, George Handy and Jim Patterson were Negro laborers. Matt Edwards was a coachman, and Frank Douglas was an electrician. Some owned their houses, such as the Derricksons, Whitemans and Shorts—others rented their houses at rents varying from \$8 to \$12 per month.

There were other local characters who had no known domicile and consequently were either claimed by, or attributed to, Banjotown. Among these were "Shaky Jim" who cut wood and did odd jobs—for this he received his board. Also there was "Dog John" who never washed or shaved. He collected garbage in his two-wheeled cart to feed the pigs. He lived in a spring house with his four dogs. He only worked enough to eat, and preferred to spend his days playing with his dogs, who were trained to dance and jump, and even smoke pipes.

About the turn of the Century, much of the open land was purchased, consolidated and large estates constructed. William W. Atterbury owned 42 acres on the south side of Newtown Road, running west from the Radnor Friends Meeting House to approximately the present site of Atterbury Road. Mr. Atterbury succeeded Mr. Cassatt as President of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and I suppose it was natural that this land should have been purchased from Mr. Cassatt.

In 1909 or 1910 Col. Robert Montgomery purchased land from Tryon R. Lewis at the far southwest corner of Newtown Road and Darby-Paoli Road, and shortly thereafter commenced the construction of his large mansion. If one can visualize Banjotown at that time as a mixed community, with ducks, pigs and chickens running around, several families living together in some of the houses, and tin cans and bottles dumped in the backyard to fill in the creek, it is no wonder that Col. Montgomery and Mr. Atterbury thought that Banjotown was, or might become, a shanty town. They were not about to spend lots of money building big mansions and have to drive by this shanty town in order to get to their front gates. Col. Montgomery and Mr. Atterbury conspired together to purchase Banjotown. Mr. Atterbury was to be in charge of buying the houses. From my informants I gather that Mr. Atterbury believed in the "bull in the china shop" approach. He succeeded in buying just one house and in antagonizing all the other owners so that no one would sell. Col. Montgomery

purchased the one house from Mr. Atterbury and took charge of the venture. He was successful in purchasing all of Banjotown and was much more subtle in his methods, including the use of strangers who acted as straw parties. The first purchases took place in 1914, and by 1917 the purchases were complete.

During the 1920's Col. Montgomery fixed up the houses and used the community to house the employees of the estate and Ardrossan Farms. A couple of barns or stables were built to house the horses, and a stone duplex tenant house, built in one corner of Banjotown in a design similar to other tenant houses he contemporaneously constructed on other parts of his estate.

In approximately 1929 Col. Montgomery decided to move the personnel who worked on Ardrossan Farms closer to the farms and to earn some income on Banjotown. He wanted to create out of Banjotown a community for young people at a rental they could afford. The property was transferred, in trust, to the Girard Trust Corn Exchange Bank and himself, as trustees.

He made a careful study and decided that the rent should never be more than \$75 per month, per house. According to him there were a great number of persons who would be willing to pay up to \$75 per month, but thereafter the demand dropped sharply. The initial rent in most instances began at \$50 per month. If a tenant wanted certain repairs or improvements, his rental was increased proportionately, but in no case would it exceed \$75 per month.

A prospective tenant first made application to the Girard Trust. If passed by Girard, the applicant was then given an appointment with Col. Montgomery for the second phase of the examination. The applicant was asked two questions:

1. Are you a Democrat or a Republican?
2. Are you wet or dry?

This was the time of Prohibition. If the applicant were a wet Republican he was given his lease.

The relationship of Col. Montgomery and the tenants was a patriarchal relationship, reminiscent of the feudal relationship between the Lord of the Manor and tenant. Col. Montgomery had a great interest in Banjotown. He was interested in the tenants and visited them regularly, frequently bringing gifts of dairy products from his farm. He took great interest in

preserving the feeling of the community by restoring the houses. I should not really say restore, as his improvements, both structurally and aesthetically, were a luxury that the buildings had never known. For example, in our own house there was installed panelled cupboards, bookcases, and dentil moulding along the edge of the wall. If an emergency repair was necessary, it was Col. Montgomery the tenant called, and frequently he would come with the workers to supervise the repairs. In 1955 the Montgomery Estate decided to sell the houses in Banjotown and for the first time in almost half a century, each house was put back in individual ownership. At the present time each occupant is the owner of his house.

There are many rumors as to how Banjotown got its name. In the early days some called it Banjo Alley and others Banjo Row. I think we all have visions of an old darkie sitting out on his back stairs strumming his banjo, romantically in the moonlight. As far as I can determine, it had been known as Banjotown even before the turn of the Century. I am told by early inhabitants that several of the Negro boys had banjos and they would frequently get together in the evenings to sing and dance. From this group the name arose. Possibly the use of the term "Banjo" may have had some reference to the fact that there were Negroes living there. This I don't know. When Banjotown was purchased by Col. Montgomery he tried to change the name to Montgomeryville but the name Banjotown was too embedded, and no one would change it.

Banjotown during the 1930's and 1940's was a remarkably close knit community. Everyone was a friend of everyone else. When a vacancy occurred, another friend was notified and the vacancy quickly filled. This warm relationship and strong community spirit gave rise to many interesting activities over the years. Art shows were held. On the second floor of one stable in Banjotown the tenants got together and constructed the Banjotown Night Club which furnished entertainment and drinks to the community on warm summer evenings. In 1958 and 1959 the 10 families in Banjotown worked together to hold a Banjotown Block Party. The cul de sac of Matlack Lane was closed off and decorated in a circus-like atmosphere. The wives joined together to bake and cook for some 250 guests who danced on the street as the band played, until the early hours of the morning.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF RADNOR ARCHITECTS

Notes on the Ninth Open House Tour

by James C. Massey

The Radnor Historical Society sponsored its Ninth Open House tour on Saturday, October 13, 1962, with visits to several important, architect-designed Radnor Township houses, ranging in date from the 1850's to the present. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, Radnor was a quiet country farming district remote in feeling from Philadelphia. But with the great mid-century expansion of the city, and the opening of the Columbia Railroad along what is now the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line, the township became attractive as a location for the summer residences of wealthy Philadelphians, and by the end of the century, for year-around residences.

With this movement, architect-designed houses came to Radnor for the first

time, and within a few decades it was seldom that an estate was not identified with a prominent Philadelphia architect. Of particular note were two architects who established residences in Radnor—Theophilus Parsons Chandler in Ithan, and David Knickerbocker Boyd in Wayne. T. P. Chandler's house still stands, though altered, on what is now Chandler Lane, off Sproul Road. He was one of Philadelphia's prominent late-nineteenth-century architects (1845-1928) and in addition to an active practice, was the first Director of the University of Pennsylvania architectural department.

Architect Boyd's widow, Elizabeth M. Mifflin Boyd, recently gave to the Radnor Historical Society her husband's scrapbook, and this historic document was on display



"LEIGHTON HOUSE," MR. and MRS. ALEXANDER BIDDLE'S HOUSE.

— photo by Rittase



"THE PEAK," MRS. ARTHUR I. MEIGS' HOUSE.

— photo by James C. Massey

at the Society's Headquarters and Museum, "The Homestead," for the tour. Boyd was a popular local architect in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (1873-1944) and was active in both Philadelphia and the Wayne area. His best-known works here are "Waldheim," at Eagle and Radnor Roads, Wayne, built for William Henry Sayen and now part of Valley Forge Military Academy, and "Walmarthon," the vast Charles S. Walton estate off Chamounix Road, St. Davids, now the Eastern Baptist College.

Open for the Radnor tour were "Leighton House," Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Biddle's house; the Academy of Notre Dame de Namur; "The Peak," Mrs. Arthur I. Meigs' House; and Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Geddes' House.

"Leighton House" is at 926 Cooper-

town Road, near Landover Road, Bryn Mawr, and was built during the 1850's by Michael Erickson for Richard Montgomery, and known then as "Glenays." After passing to the Biddle family, a wing was added in 1925 and extensive garden walls and a pool were added in 1928 from designs of Architect George Howe of Mellor, Meigs and Howe. The Biddle place is a large and handsome Italianate Villa, a fine example of a pre-Civil War Philadelphia's summer house in the country. It is the oldest place in Radnor Township whose authorship is known. "Leighton House" has been furnished with family antiques that have been for the most part bought abroad.

The Academy of Notre Dame de Namur, Sproul and Godfrey Roads, Villanova, was originally known as "Hillsover" and

"Crystal Spring Farm." The house was built about 1895 for Lincoln Godfrey from designs by Architect Theophilus Parsons Chandler. The large stone mansion was later bought by Clarence Geist, who renamed the estate "Launfal." He commissioned the great Philadelphia Architect Paul Cret to rebuild and enlarge the mansion extensively during 1926-27, and had the prominent French planner Jacques Greber design the surrounding gardens. T. P. Chandler was a prominent late-nineteenth-century Philadelphia architect who softened the often cold Victorian style of his day with a pleasing picturesqueness. Of particular note are three of his churches on the Main Line-St. Martin's, Radnor; Christ Church, Ithan; and St. Asaph's, Bala, as well as the Rudolph Ellis Estate on Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr.

"The Peak" on Newtown Road, Radnor, just west of Radnor-Chester Road, reflects decades of loving care by Mrs. Meigs and her late husband, the noted architect of the important Philadelphia architectural firm of Mellor, Meigs and Howe. The house was bought by Mr. Meigs' father, Dr. Arthur V. Meigs, in

1906 from Barklie Henry, who had built it in 1903. Under Mr. Meigs' guiding hand, "The Peak" evolved into a richly appointed Georgian house of great beauty, through a long series of alterations and additions. Of particular note are the "Garden Room" wing, with its fanciful "spider web" door, and the "Sunset Tower" beyond the box garden. Adjoining "The Peak" on Newtown Road is the house built in 1916-17 for John F. Meigs, II, by Mellor, Meigs and Howe. It is the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Tolan, Jr.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Geddes' house at 145 Biddulph Road, Radnor, is an outstanding example of a thoroughly modern house, and was built in 1955 as the architect's own residence. Architect Robert L. Geddes is a member of the firm of Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, and Cunningham, one of the small group of architects whose work has focused national attention on recent Philadelphia architecture. Mr. Geddes has designed a small contemporary house with a great deal of openness, but surrounded by closed courts of brick, which also define his terracing of the hillside. Mr. and Mrs. Geddes have furnished their home in the best modern taste.

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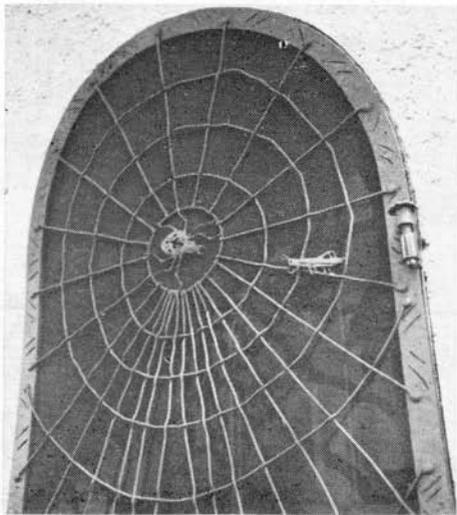
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— photo by James C. Massey