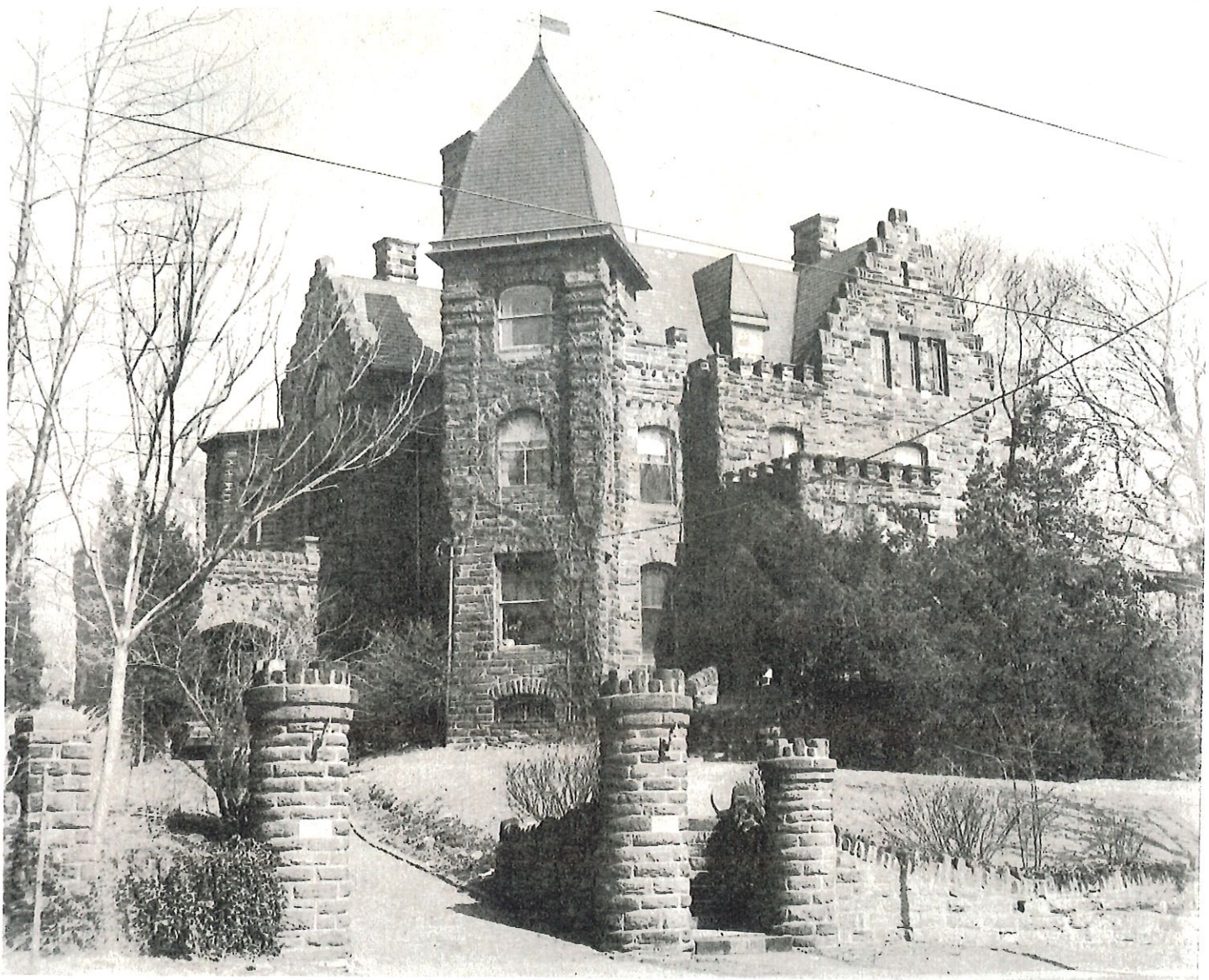


# GERMANTOWNE *CRIER*



1. THE CASTLE—6015 Wayne Avenue, Residence of Mr. & Mrs. Douglas L. Connor

Built in 1887 by Henry Lister Townsend, President of the Philadelphia Stock Exchange. The Mansion is an outstanding example of a castellated stone villa with tower, turrets, battlements and a porte-cochere reminiscent of an old English castle. (See page 64.)



# Historical Relationship of Germantown and the Skippack

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SETTING the scene for his 1856 account of the Battle of Germantown which had been fought 80 years earlier, Washington Irving wrote: "Germantown, at that time, was little more than one continuous street, extending two miles north and south. The houses were mostly of stone. . . ."

"The main body of the British forces lay encamped across the lower part of the village, divided into almost equal parts by the main street or *Skippack* road." He repeatedly called Germantown's main street Skippack Road (1). Dr. Douglas Macfarlan's "Battle of Germantown" published in the Anniversary Issue of the "Germantown Crier" refers to ". . . what was then called the Skippack Road but now known as Germantown Avenue" (2).

The following review of the founding of Germantown and Skippack is intended to recall their intimate historical relationship. Both were settled by the same families, most of Dutch ancestry. "In 1683, 13 families of Crefeld weavers, all until the 1670's members of the Mennonite Church, emigrated to America, 'in order to live an active and God-fearing life with complete religious liberty.' They were for the most part related to each other, and most had become Quakers before they left for America, through the influence of Quaker missionaries. They founded Germantown. . . ." (3). The Germantown Meetinghouse erected in 1686 was a community house of worship, used by both Quakers and Mennonites. The Quakers built their own meetinghouse in 1705; and the Mennonites, on a lot they had reserved in 1702, built theirs in 1708. (4).

In March 1682 three Crefelders each purchased 5,000 acres from William Penn, who was still in London. They were among Penn's earliest purchasers and settlers. One of the Crefeld purchasers, Jacob Telner, had visited New York and Pennsylvania between 1678-81, acquainting himself with the New World even before Penn. Telner was also acquainted with Furley, Penn's agent in Amsterdam (5), and apparently interested other Crefelders in purchasing Penn's land through Furley for personal settlement. Subsequently, the German Society (Frankfurt Company) purchased land for speculation. Pastorius, their agent and the only member of that company to come to America, arrived 6 weeks before the Crefelders who were delayed enroute.\*

In 1708 John Henry Sprogell took over the German Company. "This justly alarmed hundreds of German settlers who by then occupied land in the area or had purchased land there. Sprogell soon announced that many of the titles of the first settlers were not legal and he proceeded to have them ousted.

"The settlers at once enlisted the aid of Pastorius. But when Pastorius went to Philadelphia to investigate, he found that the wily Sprogell had retained all of the four lawyers then practicing in Pennsylvania. He then brought about an inquiry by the Provincial Council. Much that savored of fraud was revealed. But Sprogell kept the lands. For 22,000 acres Sprogell had paid the ridiculously small sum of \$1,333!" (6).

The Crefeld men were "unusually learned and educated" (6). They managed their lands personally, e.g. "On June 18, 1683, Telner was with the thirteen emigrant families in Rotterdam, at which time he sold 2,000 acres to the three brothers Op den Graeff and 1,000 each to three other Crefeld emigrants. He later bought more land there, for he owned a block of land near Skippack which for a time was called Telner's Township." (7). Jan Streppers turned over his 5,000 acres to his younger brother William, another of the first 13 Crefeld families to settle Germantown. When William Penn revisited the Rhineland in 1686 he met Jan Streppers in Wesel and together they went to Crefeld. The following year Streppers came to Germantown. Paulus Custer, who married Streppers' sister, also migrated to Germantown.

In Philadelphia on October 25, 1683 Pastorius, and the 13 men of the Crefeld families drew lots for their homesites in Germantown. All of the Crefelders started to build that winter. "Pastorius moved to Germantown two years later." (8).

By 1690 the population of Germantown was approximately 175, 'of whom all but eight or ten were Dutch' (9).

Professor Dexter Learned in his 1908 "Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius—The Founder of Germantown" states that "without the Crefeld purchasers, the founding of Germantown could scarcely have been effected, as Pastorius had with him neither the purchasers of his German Company or Society, nor settlers to take up the land which the Society had purchased." (10). Crefeld was a city along the lower Rhine, not far from the Dutch border . . . was the seat of an old and large Mennonite congregation, many of whose members were of Dutch extraction and influential in its industrial and civil life.

\*By 1700 the German Company had sent only 3 settlers and Pastorius quit without compensation for his 17 years of management.



The Op den Graeffs were the first known Mennonites to move to Crefeld (1609) (3). They were active in Mennonite Community affairs. Three Op den Graeff brothers were with the original Germantown Settlers.

The Op den Graeffs continued their ideals for personal liberty in Germantown as evidenced by the 1688 protest against slavery signed by Abraham and Derick Op den Graeff, Garret Hendricks and Pastorius. \*\*

Abraham Op den Graeff left Germantown for Skippack sometime after 1704 (13). He is buried in the Skippack Mennonite burial ground with Christopher Dock, the Germantown and Skippack schoolmaster to be discussed later. The Jansens (Johnson), Pannabackers (Pennypacker), Jan Krey from Kreysham (Cresheim) Valley and Kusters (Custers) had already migrated from Germantown to Skippack in 1702.

The Crefelders probably became increasingly uneasy as their Quaker brethren tolerated compromises such as slavery. Also, social discomfort increased as Germantown became heterogeneous, threatening dilution of their cultural identity. Furthermore, Penn's failure to deliver their large purchase in a single tract on a navigable stream as promised in Europe prompted Crefelders to leave Germantown for the Skippack Valley.

The Skippack Creek later powered many mills built by these water-oriented lower Rhine and Netherland artisans who had made Crefeld famous as one of Europe's silk, linen, and wool centers. These Dutch water engineers were renowned for applying their technology to protect their country from military invasion by flooding it when attacked. Water skills, weaving, dyeing, fulling, combined with stone-masonry is vividly reflected throughout Germantown and the Skippack Valley in their early mill industries, water raceways, stone houses and bridges.

William Rittenhouse, the first Mennonite preacher appointed in America (1690), built in Germantown that year the first paper mill in the Colonies. Grandson Matthias migrated from Germantown to the Skippack area where his son David Rittenhouse (1732-96) observed with Benjamin Franklin in 1769, the transit of the planet Venus at the Rittenhouse farm at the 19th milestone on Germantown Pike. David Rittenhouse enjoyed respect as an astronomer, mathematician and scientist. He was particularly acclaimed throughout Europe for his orrery, one of the most ingenious scientific contributions from the American colonies.

In 1702 the Custer family also moved from Germantown to Skippack. Father Paulus, brother-in-law to Jan Streypers (1682 purchaser of 5,000 acres mentioned earlier) was listed in his 1691 naturalization in Germantown

as a stonemason. Skills with stone together with local quarries explains Washington Irving's statement, "The houses were mostly of stone . . ." Such skills were continued in the Skippack. Similar, well crafted stone structures are still standing throughout Germantown and the Skippack Valley. Pictured herein is a thirty foot wide dry stone archway to protect the water raceway in the 1752 Pennypacker grist mill on the Skippack Creek. Despite dry wall construction it is intact over two centuries. Also pictured is the 1762 Custer fulling mill property and pre-1702 farmhouse which fuses Swedish with Dutch architecture (14). The tradition of fine masonry is continued in the eight arch stone bridge carrying Germantown Pike (Rt. 422) traffic over the Skippack Creek since 1792, making it the oldest original bridge in continuous use in the County, if not in the Country.

The Crefelders' skills as stonemasons, weavers, papermakers, and teachers distinguished these "dorf" oriented artisans of Germantown and the Skippack from subsequent "followers of the plow."

Christopher Dock taught at Skippack from 1718 to 1771, during which time he gave two summer sessions at Germantown. His methods of peer tutoring, motivational learning and pen pals were published by the Colonial Germantown printer Christopher Sauer, who persuaded Dock to record his methods, the first book published on pedagogy in America. Dock is buried at Skippack Mennonite Meetinghouse, Sauer at nearby Methacton Mennonite Meetinghouse for reasons explained later. Germantown Academy, founded in 1759, was patterned after Dock's methods by Sauer (15). Margaret DeAngelis' delightful children's book "Skippack School" translated into many languages has called international attention to Skippack and Germantown, and their cultural relationship through Dock, Sauer, and Rittenhouse.

Germantown became famous for its "Mennonite Fine" linens spun from flax grown in home gardens. Later the worn linen lent itself to Rittenhouse's paper making which extensively supplied fine quality paper for the printing presses of Richardson in New York, Franklin in Philadelphia, and Sauer in Germantown.

Publisher Sauer Jr "prospered greatly in Germantown until the Revolution. Then came disaster. He was a true patriot, but he was a Mennonite, and his religion forbade him to take the oath of allegiance to the Colonies. Because of his refusal he was looked on as a Tory, and there were those who wished to make information against him that they might seize his property.

"On May 24, 1778, a party of soldiers took him from bed and started with him to Valley Forge, just as he was, in his night clothes, bareheaded and barefooted. It was a cruel trip. He had been at Valley Forge several days when Washington, who was an old friend, saw him. 'Why, Mr. Sauer! How do you look;' was the General's greeting. 'Just as your people made me,' the Mennonite preacher replied. Thereupon Washington made inquiries, dismissed the charge that he was 'an oppressor of the righteous and a spy,' and clothed him. He would have sent him back to Germantown, but this he was unable to do. So he gave him a pass which read: 'Permit the bearer hereof, Mr.

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\*\* The Mennonites never held slaves in Europe and were officially opposed to slavery in America. The Quakers did not ban slavery until 1775 (11). The Mennonite attitude against slavery is further evidenced by the fact that the first ban against slavery in America was contained in the constitution of the 1663 Mennonite colony established by Plochoy at Horekill on the Delaware River. Plochoy prohibited slavery in his constitution, guaranteeing personal liberty to all. However, his colony was destroyed in the Anglo-Dutch war of 1664. Plochoy's active career ended when he became blind. He and his wife "finally sought and found refuge in the new Mennonite settlement at Germantown, Pa., where they lived as public charges for their last six or more years (1694-1700) (12).



Sauer, to pass to Methacty, not to return to Germantown during the stay of the army in this State.'

"In Methacton, Conrad Stamm gave to Sauer and his daughter a hut in which to live. He was unable to look after his property, which was seized and dissipated, but remained in Methacton until his death in 1784 . . .

"There is a tablet to his memory in Germantown. . . . But his body rests in the Skippack Valley Methacton burying ground. The grave is close to the rear wall, directly back of the meetinghouse. The inscription on the flat stone is:

Time hastens on the Hour  
The just shall rise and Sing  
O Grave Where is thy Power  
O Death Where is thy Sting." (16).

*Addendum:* The Pennsylvania Department of Forests and Waters is currently acquiring through condemnation 3278 acres of the Skippack stream valley. Governor Shafer has signed authorization to construct an 86 ft. high dam which would flood 22 square miles of the historic Skippack with the two sites pictured herein together with over 50 pre-1820 buildings.

The Evansburg Dam and Park is being acquired with Project 70 funds, ironically, voted by the public to preserve historic sites and open spaces while establishing recreational areas. Local government and citizens generally endorse all three goals. However, the Forest and Waters plan is admittedly a 1933 concept, copied by the Army Engineers in 1960, and rubber stamped by bureaucracy ever since.

Recognizing the inadequacy of the State's proposal, Montgomery County Commissioners, led by Chairman Russel Parkhouse, initiated an independent ecological study by regional planner Ian McHarg. Professor Anthony Garvan has been retained for the history. Their report is to be submitted in May 1970.

Both the Goshenhoppen and Valley Forge Historical Societies have endorsed the position the Skippack Historical Society which is to preserve the historical signifi-

cance of the Skippack stream-valley by substituting a series of lower in-channel dams in place of the high dam. Furthermore, the Army Engineers' dam would not only destroy historic sites, it would back up polluted water unfit for swimming. The Citizens To Save The Skippack Valley, believe that for the 25 to 50 millions of tax dollars to be spent 1—a plan which preserves the history common to the founding of Germantown and Skippack Valley and 2—to clean up the pollution and 3—to supply recreational swimming, would better serve the public interest.

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Stone House built from stone found in a nearby field. See first paragraph of article.