



## Winter 2014 Issue

### The Story of New Garden Township

By Dr. Peg Jones



Map of New Garden's first settlers, early 1700s.

The story of New Garden Township began long ago when the land was home to the Lenni Lenape Indians. Located in southern Chester County, Pennsylvania, New Garden was a land of deep woods, tumbling streams and Indian trails until the arrival of William Penn, Jr's land agent in the early 1700's. Within two decades the most level, arable land in the center of the Township was settled by Quaker farmers from County Carlow, Ireland. Mary Rowland's 1708 patent for 700 acres east of Toughkenamon, was the first. Soon she had neighbors, John Miller with 1,013 acres, Joseph Sharp, Michael Lightfoot, Gayen Miller, Joseph Hutton, James Starr and others, all former members of a Quaker Meeting in Ireland called New Garden. New Garden was a name they gave to their log Meeting House built in 1715 on the southwest corner of John Miller's land. Here these Irish Quakers found religious freedom; here they could follow their practice of silent worship without the threat of stoning, fines, loss of property or imprisonment, the persecution which had been their lot in Ireland.

The settlers' first task was to clear their land of the virgin forest trees; they needed lumber to build their log buildings and open land for crops and pasture. Soon, a road to be known as Newark Road was blazed from a mill in Doe Run to the Meeting House. Another road, the Great Road to Newport (Rt 41), cut across the Township on its route from Lancaster to

Christiana, Delaware. Isaac Allen's tavern, originally a log cabin, built at the intersection of sharp road and the great road, served travelers from the early 1700's.

With a growing population New Garden Quakers needed a larger Meeting House. In 1743, on the site of their log building, they constructed a larger brick building which is the southern end of the present Meeting House. Burials took place behind the Meeting House (although no stones were erected prior to 1840) and in 1777, a log school house, with one end a huge stone fireplace, was erected on the grounds. This school would remain in use until several years after the passage of the Public School act, closing in 1856.



*The New Garden Meeting House.*

The Meeting House was the center of the settlers' lives; it was here they gathered to worship, but also to learn news of the community and to provide support and care for each other. By the early 1800's a village had begun to grow west and north of the Meeting House. James Miller, grandson of the patentee, John Miller, directed in his will of 1809, that his land be broken into small lots, some for family, and some to be sold. Soon there was a general store north of the Meeting House; a blacksmith, a cabinetmaker, a brick maker, a lawyer, a dressmaker and a doctor were among those who lived in New Garden village. By 1865, the New Garden Post Office was located in the village store. This store and post office remained in service until 1942. When they closed, New Garden village was reduced to a country crossroads, with a 19<sup>th</sup> century house on each corner bracketing the more than 200 year old Quaker Meeting House.

Almost a hundred years elapsed between the coming of the Irish Quakers and the settlement of the southern part of the Township where the rough, hilly terrain drained by the White Clay Creek was less desirable land for farming. However as soon as capital became available, the White Clay Creek's potential to provide water power, made the area attractive for a milling industry. In 1810 a mill was built in Laurel; then about 1820, Enock Chandler built a grist mill and a saw mill downstream from that first mill. Laurel and Chandlerville were the names given to the mill sites. In 1862, Martin Landenberg purchased the mills, encouraged the building of a railroad to service the



*View of Landenberg sometime between 1899 and 1917.*

industries and gave the valley his name, Landenberg. James Lund, a former employee who hailed from Yorkshire, England, purchased the entire town in 1879. Through boom and bust economies, the mills remained in the Lund family's hands until 1917, when the last mill burned. Workers drifted away, buildings fell into decay and the once booming mill town became a sleepy, country village.



*Broad Run Trestle built for the Wilmington & Western Railroad. Erected 1873 and demolished during WW II.*

One of the businesses which relocated from Landenberg was Strahorn's wheel and spoke works. With the coming of steam power, factory owners had more flexibility about where to build. In 1852, Strahorn learned the route of the Philadelphia and Baltimore Central Railroad would pass through the crossroads later to be known as Toughkenamon, and decided to build his factory there. An enterprising employee of Strahorn's, Isaac Slack, who can be called the "Father of Toughkenamon", saw the possibility for a railroad town. He purchased 132 acres where he

built a saw mill, a flour and feed mill and houses for the workmen's families. To entice the railroad to make a regular stop in the village, Slack built a station, installed a water tank and deeded the surrounding land to the railroad. Through the mid-1880's, Toughkenamon's economy depended on Slack's factories, but by the end of the century the major employer was the Sharpless Creamery. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a mushroom cannery, basket factory and mushroom supply houses provided employment.



*Kaolin clay open-pit mine.*

The coming of railroads also marked the impetus for the kaolin industry and its accompanying workmen's village. As early as 1802, kaolin, a clay used for making porcelain and fire bricks, was known to lie beneath the soil south of the Gap-Newport Pike, now known as Route 41, near the Delaware line. The first pits were opened about 1850, but by 1863, when clay could be shipped by rail to major cities, the industry exploded; New Garden's kaolin industry hit its zenith in the mid-1880's. With as many as 175 men digging in open pit mines, a train car a day loaded with white fire bricks, was being shipped from the Southwood station to Chester iron foundries. Fortunes were made, a mansion built and the kaolin pits provided employment for a generation. However, when richer deposits of clay were discovered in Georgia, the local mines could not meet the competition. Companies went out of business, workers drifted away, company housing deteriorated, the Kaolin post office closed and water filled the clay pits. In 1940, when the Gap-Newport Pike was relocated, most vestiges of the village of Kaolin disappeared; only the water filled pits now called "lakes" remained.



*Edwin Hoopes plants potatoes on his farm, 1930.*

Although the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the growth of industrial villages in the Township, farming remained the norm for most New Garden families. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, New Garden was essentially a rural township. The log houses of the early settlers gave way to substantial brick and stone dwellings; large barns were built to store the harvest of the productive farmland. Typical farm size was between 70 and 100 acres, as much as a farmer and two or three "hands" could cultivate and harvest. Until the coming of the railroads, farmers' crops were intended to feed their families and livestock with a portion remaining to trade at the country store, barter with neighbors or drive/cart to market in Wilmington. Shipping produce by rail opened up new markets and spurred the growth of the dairy industry. Milk could now be shipped to city markets and the term "milk train" became part of the language.



*Gordon Jones dairy barn, 1933.*

In the 1880's creameries to process milk into butter and cottage cheese, opened in both Landenberg and in Toughkenamon. The Sharpless Creamery in Toughkenamon soon was processing about 8,000 pounds of milk daily and shipping hundreds of pounds of butter to Philadelphia. With the development of the dairy industry, farmers had an opportunity to generate a little income; milk became their cash crop. In 1900 there were about 100 small dairy farms in the Township; fifty years later, this number had declined by 90%. Several factors contributed to this decrease. Farmers sold their cows because of the low price of milk during the Great Depression; there was a scarcity of farm labor during World War II and gradually the state increased regulations for the quality

control of milk production. Although the number of dairy herds decreased, the amount of milk produced by the few remaining herd actually increased. With pressure from residential development, however, the early 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the end of the dairy industry in New Garden Township.

By 1900, New Garden Township was known as the “township of glass houses.” More green houses were reported to be in New Garden Township than in any other township in Chester County. Beginning about 1870, farmers has begun to experiment with greenhouse culture. Charles Starr was the first to grow carnations and tuber roses for the Philadelphia market. Soon he was followed by others; Edward Marshall, Joseph Chambers, Lawrence Thompson and Frank Pratt. Samuel Thompson started a greenhouse business which was to remain in his family for 120 years.



*1940s aerial view of Pratt farm showing three agriculture hallmarks of New Garden: dairy, greenhouse and mushroom.*

Often it was sons of rose and carnation growers who experimented with mushroom culture. They were trying to find a use for the empty space under the greenhouse benches; wasted dark space where the air was warm and moist. Soon dairy farmers began to experiment growing mushrooms in their barns, chicken houses and even in the cellars of their homes. Because mushrooms were grown only during the winter months, farmers saw this crop as a way to supplement their incomes. Gradually the number of mushroom growers increased, sending their mushrooms to canneries and growing

mushrooms for the fresh market. Until the 1950’s however, if a crop were successful, it was good luck, if it failed, bad luck. The turning point was the development of scientific culture practices and the use of air handlers to control temperature and air quality. Soon mushrooms were being grown year round in larger and larger farm operations. Today with an average of 4.5 crops a year and a yield of about 200 million pounds of mushrooms, the industry dominates the Township’s agricultural economy. More mushrooms are grown in New Garden Township than in any other municipality in the United States.

Another change came to the Township in the 1950’s. At the same time the mushroom industry was expanding, the first residential housing development was built. In 1955, the first twenty houses, called Pineleigh, were built on twenty acres of the Dutton farm on West New Garden Road. Fifteen years later Pineleigh was followed by Landenberg Manor on Laurel Heights Road and then the building boom was on. The population of the Township grew from 3,027 in 1950, to 11,984 in the year 2010. New Garden Township’s rural character with its farmhouses, barns, mushroom houses and open fields began to be eclipsed by houses and manicured lawns of suburbia.



*Former 19<sup>th</sup> century Herdube Farm (r.) adjacent to the 21<sup>st</sup> century community of Hartefeld.*

Note: This is a reprint of article by Dr. Peg Jones with added photographs from the archives of the New Garden Historical Commission.