SOME ORIGINAL LAND GRANTS IN MILL CREEK HUNDRED

And Stories about the Families and Properties

Walt Chiquoine
Mill Creek Hundred
Early Land Research

• Research gives context for historical preservation
• Almost nothing remains of the 17th century structures
• The early settlers had a difficult life, but they did leave records of their existence
The Earliest Grants

- The Swedes did not grant land
- Dutch grants were along the Delaware River, and came from New Amsterdam
- Likely that early settlers moved further into MCH before 1670
- By 1700, Delaware was a melting pot:
  - Swedes, Finns, Dutch, English, Irish, Welsh, Scots, French, German, and African
Obtaining an English Grant

• A complicated process after 1664, based on English feudal law

• Could take several years

• Over time, any of these could be a legal claim to property in subsequent deeds
Some Observations

• Some land was settled before application for a patent – squatters?
• Surveys were questionable
• Boundaries changed over time
• There were land speculators
• Very difficult to determine the first European settler in MCH
Why Settle in MCH?

• Hilly, wooded, and cut by steep valleys
• Not the most desirable land to farm
• Settlers were already moving into Chester and Lancaster counties late 17th century
• MCH had three strengths:
  • Water power for milling
  • Nearby access to light shipping ports
  • The gateway from interior Pennsylvania
Bread and Cheese Island
Bread and Cheese Island

• Settled about 1656, warranted in 1666
• Thomas Jacobsson and Olle Paulson, Finns
• Jacobsson was renown for his civil protest in 1671
  • The British left the Dutch in charge
  • Dutch justice Hans Block wanted a dike
  • Local labor was conscripted by the court
  • Jacobsson organized a strong protest
  • Block supported by New York, protesters were fined
From Edmund Andros: 1676
Charles Rumsey 1676

- NE boundary became Telegraph Road
- Rumsey and John Watkins petitioned to build a grist mill in 1679, the first in MCH
- Petition offered a site on Mill Creek, but the mill was built on Red Clay Creek instead
- THE MILL WAS NOT ON RUMSEY’S PROPERTY!
- Rumsey sold his interest about the same time
John Nomers 1676

- Johan Ommerson in the 1693 Swedish census
- In 1682, he sold the land north of White Clay Creek to Thomas Wollaston and Joseph Barnes
Peter Thomasson 1676

- Another Finn, son of Thomas Jacobsson
- Sold a portion of the land to Peter “Pecca” Oleson
- Pecca was son of Olle Paulson from BCI
- Pecca Oleson gave us the name for what became Peck’s Creek, now Pike Creek
- Sold off to Broer Sinnexson a couple years later
Broer Sinnexson 1683
Broer Sinnexson

• Another Swede
• Patented a tract named “Waterland” in 1683
• The location of his house was shown on survey
• The stream entering White Clay Creek was known as Muddy Run, and it was the western branch
• The northern creek was known as the middle branch
• Today, it has all become known as Middle Run
Abraham Man 1684
Abraham Man

- Likely settled before 1679, patent in 1684
- Also a man of means, a justice on the court
- A contentious guy, picked fights with other justices
- Later reference mentions the road to Man’s house
- Gave us the name for Ham’s Run
- Lost the property at sheriff’s sale in 1687 to pay a debt
Empson vs. Guest

THE FIRST MILL
Empson vs. Guest

- William Guest bought Man’s property at sheriff sale in 1687
- Meanwhile, Cornelius Empson, a Brandywine miller, acquired interest in the mill
- Guest sued Empson – mill was on Guest’s property
- Guest finally won the battle in 1710
- And William Guest may have been the cuckold of Cuckoldstown
  - He took his first wife, a much younger woman, while in his 60’s
So Where Was the Mill?

Hale-Byrnes House
Thomas Wollaston
Thomas Wollaston

- English soldier at capture of New Amstel
- Originally seated on Muscle Cripple
- Scharf says first settler in MCH, I say doubtful
- Nomers tract 1682, his own tract in 1686
- Four sons and their sons expanded their lands in early 18th century
Three Tracts to the North 1680’s

Wilbourne

Wedgbury

New Design

Stanton
The Robinsons

ROBINSON
The Robinsons

• Guest’s Wedgbury sold to Anne Robinson, widow of George Robinson
• Son James established St. James Episcopal Church
• Built the earliest mill at Milltown, date unknown
• Grandsons rebuilt the mill and sold it
• All of the grandkids gone by 1768
• The original miller’s house survived into the 20th century?
The Ball Family
The Ball Family

- Wilbourne purchased by William Ball in 1689
- Half of New Design purchased for son John Sr., then a tract above Wilbourne
- Wilbourne passed to sons George and Jeremiah
- John Sr. and his family legacy:
  - Favored eldest son William by first wife Mary
  - William got the Mermaid property
  - Several deeds to sons didn’t hold up
  - Built his house on an adjacent tract
  - Sold 60 acres he didn’t own
  - Second wife retained control beyond her dower share
John Ball Sr.’s Ooops
Steyning Manor 1701

WILLIAM JR.’S MANOR

LETITIA’S MANOR
The Dixon Brothers 1715
The Dixon Brothers

- Land purchased by John Houghton, step-father to the sons of William Dixon of Christiana Hundred
- A swap for their claim to William Dixon’s land
- 800 acres split between (west–east, l–r)
  - John
  - Henry
  - William
  - Thomas
- John Dixon purchased additional land, his family remained for many years
Simon Hadley 1717
Simon Hadley

- 1000 acres in William Jr.’s manor
- Another 93 acres in Letitia’s manor
- One of the richest men in northern Delaware
- A Quaker, served as county judge
- Passed his property to sons, sons-in-law, and grandsons
- His timber house, built in 1717, still exists
John Montgomery 1731
John Montgomery

- 800 acres to his three sons
- Die-hard Presbyterians, John fought at Boyne Water
- Grandson John founded the Mount Pleasant Inn
- The Montgomery clan were ardent Patriots during the Revolutionary War
- The house of grandson Moses is on Mitchell Road
So Many Other Early Families

- Rice, Ogle, McDonald…
- Cox, Hollingsworth, Gregg…
- All were social, spiritual, and economic leaders
- Little evidence of pre-1700 in MCH
- Good inventory of 1720–1750 structures
- Tip o’ the hat to sound and reasonable preservation
Preservation 50
1966 - 2016

Our Legacy, Our Future