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by Phoebe Bertolet Hopkins

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The Famous DeTurk House (Photo—Circa 1890)
Courtesy—Schwenkfelder Library, Pennsburg, Pa.

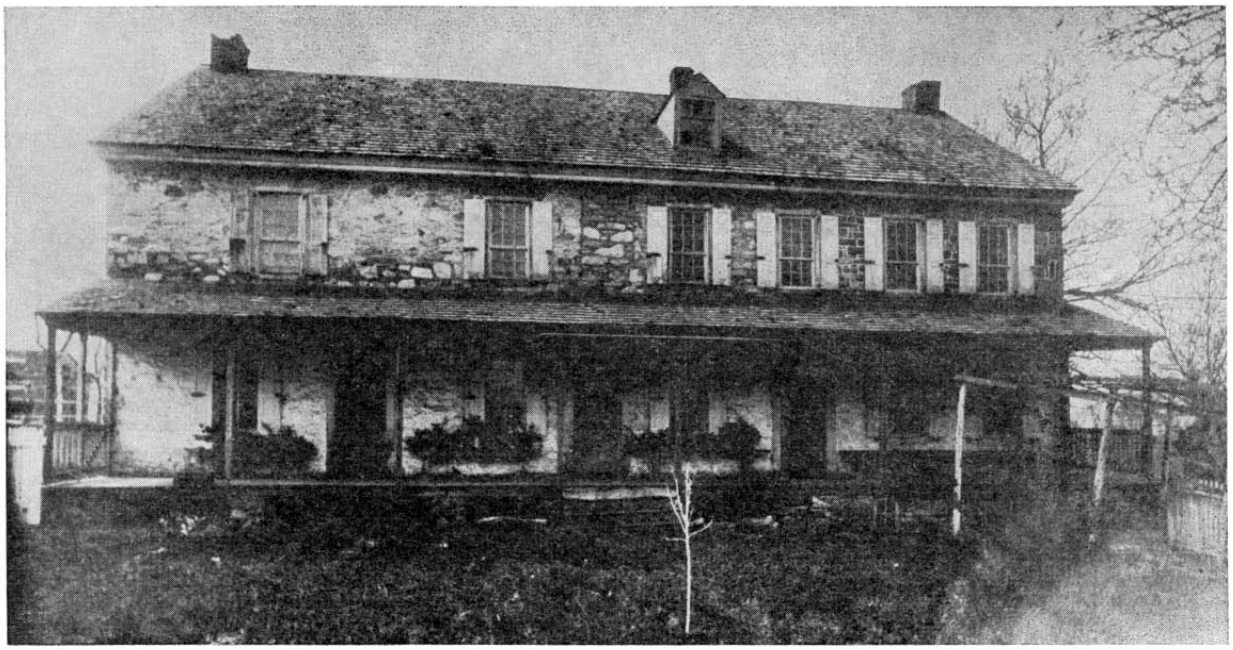
One of the most familiar landmarks of the Oley Valley is a small, steep-roofed stone building that can be seen just across a field from Route 73 where it by-passes the Village of Oley. There, on a bank of the Little Manatawny Creek, stands the old "De-Turk House," ancestral home of the DeTurk (De-Turck) family of America, site of the important Third Moravian Synod of 1742, and one of the few Oley Valley stone cabins listed in the U. S. Dept. of Interior's Historic American Building Survey as a structure of architectural and historic significance.

For the past several decades historically minded citizens of Berks County have been increasingly concerned about the badly deteriorating condition of this little building. On several occasions members of the Historical Society have attempted to interest the owners in preservation efforts. However, since 1933, when the DeTurk Family Association made repairs to the burial ground on the property, the homestead has changed ownership many times and little repair work has been done. An article in the Reading Eagle of Nov. 10, 1935 states that at that time the building served as "a domicile for friendly hogs." Later it was used to house migrant farm laborers. Since then its distinctive pent roof was sheared off by a truck. Shutters, doors, and hardware have been removed. Its slate roof has reached the point of disintegration. But the main threat to its survival is the large crack which rents the rear wall of the building from top to bottom, pulling the whole corner dangerously out of line. The situation has become critical.

During the past year the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks Co. has had several discussions of this matter with the owners of the property, Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Moyer and Mr. and Mrs. William Gotwals. A tentative agreement has been reached whereby the property will be leased to the Trust for restoration and subsequent use as a historic site. The Trust has set up the DeTurk House Council, a group composed of the owners of the house, interested citizens of the Oley Valley, and local members of the DeTurk family, to plan and carry out this project. Serving as Advisor is Dr. Lawrence Thurman, Cura-

tor of the Daniel Boone Homestead. The Jaycees of Oley have volunteered to make temporary repairs to the home to prevent further deterioration. Both the Jaycees and the Women's Club of Oley have voted to support the project and where possible, provide labor, research assistance, and financial support through money raising activities.

One of the aims of the DeTurk House Council is to conduct research into the history of this property. Although quite a bit has been written about this house by historians of the past half century, there are still many questions regarding its origins. Collection and evaluation of the many writings, pictures, and documents coupled with a detailed study of the construction of this and the other DeTurk buildings should provide some of the answers. Anyone possessing pertinent information is urged to contact the DeTurk Council. Anyone interested in participating in this research is encouraged to do so. Through learning and telling the story of this little house its restoration can be made meaningful.



Main House—DeTurk Farm, Oley (earliest photo available)

By far the most comprehensive study of DeTurk history is the volume "History and Genealogy of the DeTurk DeTurck Family," compiled by the late Eugene P. DeTurk of Kutztown, and published in 1934 by the DeTurk Family Association. Assisted by his son, Lawrence A. DeTurk, and other members of the DeTurk family, Mr. DeTurk spent more than ten years of consistent labor in compiling the genealogy. He has explored the origins of the DeTurk family in Europe, the immigration to America of Isaac DeTurk, and the growth of the family in America through ten succeeding generations.

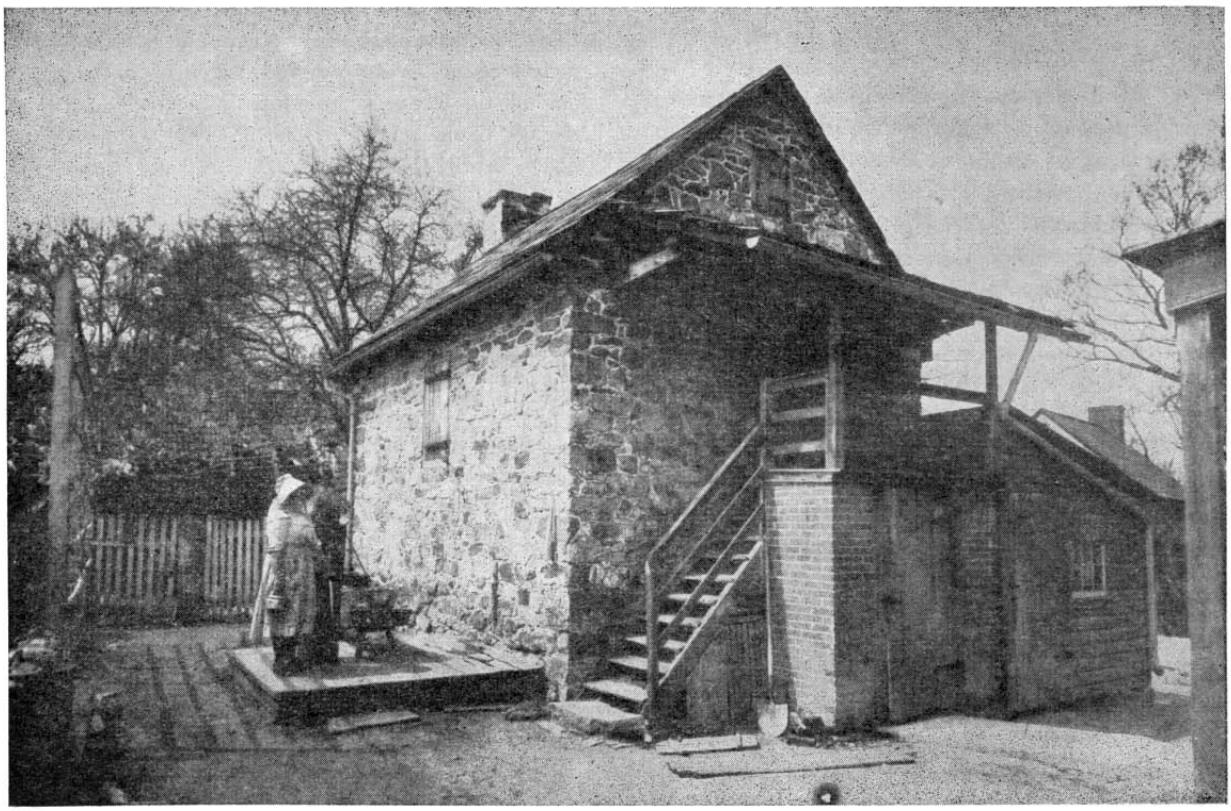
Briefly stated, the DeTurk family can trace its lineage to the year 1105 A.D. when its European progenitor, a Turkish prince, was brought to France as a prisoner, but was later knighted and admitted to the nobility under the name of Arnulph LeTurk. During the Huguenot persecutions in France in the early 17th century, Jacob DeTurk, grandfather of Isaac, fled to Frankenthal in the German Palatinate. Isaac DeTurk, born in 1685, left his war-torn home in Frankenthal in 1708 with a group of 41 persons led by the Rev. Joshua Kocherthal, a Lutheran minister who had petitioned Queen Anne of England for transportation to America. Given the support and protection of the crown of Great Britian they were transported to New York on the ship "Globe" and settled at Esopus, on Quassick Creek in Dutchess Co., N. Y.

In 1709 Isaac DeTurk married Maria DeHarcourt Weimer, a young widow with a three year old daughter, Catharine, who was also a member of the Kocherthal Colony. Disappointed by a lack of harmony in the settlement, they decided to move to Pennsylvania and it is believed they first came to Oley in 1711. Their daughter, Esther, was born September 29, 1710 and was baptised on April 29, 1711, in the French Protestant Church in New York City, probably as the family was en route to Oley. Their

only son, John, was born in Oley, September 23, 1713.

On March 11, 1712 Isaac DeTurk received his warrant for 300 acres of land in Oley. On the same date warrants were issued to John LeDee and John Frederickfull, the first mention of Oley in the records of Philadelphia County. The DeTurks were some of the first settlers in this area, which was soon to become the home of many Huguenot, English, Swiss, and German immigrants. There was a large enough settlement to petition for township in 1720. By 1740 is no record of his having erected a permanent (stone) dwelling. He died sometime between 1721 and 1727, leaving his widow, Maria, and three children to carry on the work he had begun.

Maria DeTurk has been referred to as an exemplary woman, devoutly pious, of refined mind, and well educated for that period. That she was a woman of great courage and conviction is evident by her decision to travel across the ocean as a widow with a two year old daughter, and several years later to leave the colony and settle in the wilderness with



Spring House at DeTurk Farm across the road from the famous architectural structure

when Oley Township was officially erected, most of the land had been patented and a flourishing rural community had developed.

When Isaac DeTurk first settled in Oley, the area was primarily a hunting ground of the Lenni-Lenape. His closest neighbors were Indians and the playmates of his children were the Indian children. There are several tales of a young Indian girl having been buried beside the DeTurk dwelling, an indication of the good will and esteem which the Indians felt for their white neighbors. Isaac DeTurk built a log cabin and a large log barn somewhere in the vicinity of the present home site. Most of his time was occupied clearing the land and developing the plantation. There

her husband and two small daughters, one but an infant. Sometime around the time of her husband's death, her daughter Catharine married Abraham Levan, one of three Huguenot brothers who had come to Berks County in 1717. It was Abraham and Catharine Levan who, in 1757, built the distinctive Levan Homestead, located about two miles from the DeTurk House. In 1735 the second daughter, Esther, married Abraham Bertolet, the oldest son of the Huguenot immigrant Jean Bertolet. They settled on the land that Isaac DeTurk had bought for his daughter in 1721. The tile roofed stone cabin they built as their home in 1736 is still standing, well preserved, next to the old up-and-down sawmill on the

Bertolet Homestead. John DeTurk continued to live at home with his mother and assumed the management of the plantation, which he inherited upon his mother's death in 1761, paying his sisters a settlement of twenty pounds each.

John DeTurk married Deborah Hoch in 1740, when he was 27 years old. They had twelve children, four of whom died in their youth. It was John who developed the property into a prosperous farm. He was an early proponent of the Moravian faith, opening his house and barn to worship services. It was at became an influential citizen of the community and his house that the historic Third Moravian Synod was held on February 9, 10, and 11, 1742.

The Third Moravian Synod was one of a series of seven conferences held in the year 1742 to unite the various elements of the German religious movement into one body called the Congregation of God in the Spirit. Under the leadership of Count Zinzendorf "synods" were held in Germantown, Falkner Swamp, Oley, and Philadelphia, attended by religious leaders representing many German settlements of Pennsylvania. One account of the Oley Conference is given in the interesting volume "Annals of the Oley Valley" (1926), by the late Rev. P. C. Cro'l of Womelsdorf, Pa., who translated a copy of the minutes. Included in this session were: discussion of the New Born, a controversial sect of followers of Mathias Baumann; questions involving the Scriptural phases of Matrimony and the Sabbath day; adoption of rules for the Conference's guidance; the ordination of new ministers; and the baptism of three Indian converts. Although there was much disagreement on matters of doctrine (cause for the Ephrata Brethren to leave on the second day), the conference was notable for its one significant accomplishment: the first Indian baptism by the Moravians.

The Indians were Mohicans, brought from the village of Shecomeko in New York by their missionary, Christian Henry Rauch. At the service in John DeTurk's barn, missionaries Rauch and Gottlieb Buettner were ordained deacons by the bishops Nitchman and Zinzendorf after which Rauch baptised the Indians, naming them Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Of the ceremony, Conrad Weiser has written: "At the Oley Conference three awakened (Indians) were baptised as Christians . . . They were earnest men who sufficiently took to heart the love for truth and the newly-begun work of grace. I discoursed with them before the baptism in their own language, and found so much in them that I began to love them from the bottom of my heart and have not to this time been able to forget them." Count Zinzendorf's dream of church unity was not to be realized, but the records of these synods give some insight into the religious climate of Colonial Pennsylvania.

After the synod at the DeTurk House the Moravian movement gained strength in Oley and a church and boarding school was established on land adjoining John DeTurk's in about 1745. Of the several buildings erected here the best remembered is the Moravian Schoolhouse, a rare example of half-timber construction, standing until about thirty years ago. A boarding school was conducted here for some time but was later abandoned. It is written by Dr. Peter G. Bertolet in "Fragments of the Past: Historical Sketches of Oley and Vicinity" (1861), that one of the reasons the Moravians abandoned their interest in the school was because of the discord that had arisen between John DeTurk and Count Zinzendorf. DeTurk apparently took bitter exception to the use of titles and for this reason had angry words with the Count, withdrawing his support of the project. Since he owned one-fourth part of the property (according to his will) this constituted sufficient discouragement for the Moravians to discontinue their efforts here. This at least is one interesting theory as to why the Moravians lost their influence in Oley.

One of the pertinent questions for us concerning the Third Moravian Synod is just which house is the "John DeTurk House" where the meetings were he'd. The house traditionally associated with this event is, of course, the little steep-roofed building by the creek. It is this building which is pictured in histories and pointed out to tourists as the site of the Indian baptisms. The very aspect of this house—the solid walls rising from the creek bed, the tiny windows, hooded doorways, high pitched roof—characterizes the earliest stone buildings of the Oley Valley. It possesses that feeling of medievalism described by Dr. G. Edwin Brumbaugh in his treatise "Colonial Architecture of the Pennsylvania Germans" (1933), as the dominating spirit of "Germanic Architecture." The interior, too, conveys this spirit. The vaulted root cellar and large open fireplace of the ground floor, the arched fireplace and plain walls of the main floor, the massive summer beams, the great stone chimney, all impart a feeling of strength and substance, simple, well constructed, yet nicely finished with chamfered beams, plastered walls, and even a noticeable bit of decoration. Two decorative details pointed out by Dr. Brumbaugh in his description of the house as "most important," "very rare Germanic features" are the "unique" presence of

painted tulip and rose decoration on the panels of the outside shutters and upon an interior small wall cupboard (no longer there), and the carved inscription in the lintel face of the upper door. Here are seen the painted decoration and use of inscription characteristic of the Pennsylvania German culture applied in a highly original way! The lintel inscription reads: "Iohan DeTirck — 1767 — Debora DeTircken." In the words of Dr. Brumbaugh, "Mark the date well and compare with the date of the Oley Conference. Is the year carved over the door the date of an alteration to the original cabin, as the writer is inclined to believe; or was John DeTurks' house, of the conference, an earlier (possibly log), structure, superseded in 1767 by the stone cabin?"

According to Eugene P. DeTurk (p. 42, DeTurk Family), "The house he (John DeTurk) built is still standing, but it is not the so-called old DeTurk House standing along the stream . . . but it is the western end of the present main stone dwelling, 32 by 38 feet, built prior to 1742 when the Third Moravian Synod met in it . . . It is generally supposed that it was built in the year 1740, or about the time of the marriage of John DeTurk and Deborah Hoch." His source of information was apparently John D. DeTurk of Kutztown who was told of his grandfather making a 21 by 32 foot addition to the original house in 1844, at which time the datestone from the former eastern gable was accidentally incorporated into the new foundations. Also recalled were "loopholes in the western gable end, resembling a fort, as a protection against hostile Indians, until in 1877 when it was remodeled and windows were placed there . . . At the same time the large center chimney with its enormous fireplace was taken down."

There is also a third building that must be investigated; a small, steep-roofed stone structure with a basement spring room, upper living room with fireplace reached by an outside stairway, and an attic reached by a corner stairway.

Which building is the "John DeTurk House"? Or were all of these buildings built by John DeTurk? Certainly our little bank house proclaims to the world its builder. It has the "feel" of an early house and resembles other cabins of the 1730-40 period. It appears to have been raised or otherwise altered in the upper floor, since the inside stairway is not original, and the exterior stonework does not match that of the lower part of the wall. If this is true, the upper doorway, and its lintel inscription, was added in 1767 to an earlier building, possibly to provide a place for grain storage. It does not seem likely that a building of this size or style would have been built by a prosperous farmer, 54 years of age, with a large family, for use as a dwelling. The little spring house, an early type, looks as if it, too, might have been raised. It does seem to offer a more desirable location for a dwelling than the house so close to the creek, where dampness and flooding might cause discomfort. The main farmhouse, a very large structure, might, in fact, have been the meeting place of the conference, but it has been so altered through the years that its original structure is difficult to determine. It might, also, have been built by John DeTurk at a later date when both family and fortune had increased. The reference to loopholes and hostile Indians can hardly be reconciled with the many stories of friendship with Indians and the burial of the Indian girl by his door. It is hoped that during the course of restoration and research some clues will be found to provide the answers.

