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GEORGE DOUGLASS AND HIS MANSION

George Douglass (1726-1799) is one of the more interesting figures in the early history of Berks County, and his mansion (main block built ~~1773~~) is one of our more notable houses. A descendant of Scottish nobility, he spent his formative years in Salisbury Township, in the "Pequea" vicinity of east-central Lancaster County. George's father, Andrew, was one of four Douglass brothers who settled there in the 1720s. This pioneer's tombstone, at St. John's Episcopal Church, Pequea, is inscribed, "Esquire Andrew Douglass, son of Lord Douglass," and his wife's, "Jane, wife of Andrew Douglass, daughter of Lord Ross." (They died within a few weeks of each other, in 1742.) Among the many Douglass family stones at St. John's is a memorial to our George, the inscription of which notes that he lies buried at St. Gabriel's.

1763? ~~1765~~ yes - Doug S.

Dr. Peter Craig Saunders group

Of George Douglass's life prior to his arrival in Morlatton we know little. He married Mary Piersol (1731-1798), daughter of another early Pequea settler, in 1747. According to tax lists, he was still in Salisbury Township in 1750. Lists for 1754 and 1760, however, show him as a renter in Reading. It is likely that Douglass was one of Reading's numerous inn- or tavern-keepers, a potentially lucrative occupation in a bustling county seat and market town. When he bought the White Horse Inn plantation in Amity Township from innholder Samuel Cookson in 1762, Douglass too was referred to as "innholder."

The White Horse Inn was well established by 1762. It had been started by Marcus Huling (1687-1757), Mounce Jones's son-in-law and a fellow Swede. Huling bought the property next to Jones's in 1717. (The lane down to the 1716 Jones house apparently runs along the eighteenth-century property line. Hence the Jones and Douglass houses were both right on the edges of their respective properties. George Douglass Jr. bought the Mounce Jones House property from John Kerlin in 1804.) The White Horse location, the terminus of the King's Road (laid out 1709, now the Old Philadelphia Pike along the river to the southeast), became a major road junction in 1719. Two major extensions of the road network were surveyed with the future tavern site as their common starting point: the Great Oley Road, which went to the Friedensburg vicinity (now Route 662), and Robeson's Great Road, which went along the river to the northwest, originally ending at the Robeson-Lincoln homestead site (familiar to us as the just restored Lincoln House).

Marcus Huling probably built the first tavern sometime between 1727, when it failed to appear on a detailed small-scale draft of the Morlatton neighborhood and its roads created for the Philadelphia County Court of Quarter Sessions because of a dispute over road damages to Anders Lycon's property, and 1750, when the aging settler sold the property to Philip Balthaser Craesman. In 1751, Craesman, already seeking to sell the inn and

the attached plantation, advertised it in Christopher Sower's Germantown newspaper as the "'White Stag,' . . . Amity . . . on the road by the Swedes." Craesman got no takers, however, and in 1754 was still resident there, though renting the inn to Martin Fritz, whose bound servant Valentine Marter advertised in Sower's seeking news of a friend thought to be among recent immigrants. The inn was now called the "White Horse," and by that name it appeared on Nicholas Scull's 1759 map of Pennsylvania as a landmark in a region of the province where landmarks were sparce. In 1757 Craesman sold the place to Samuel Cookson, who ran the inn himself, and in 1762 Cookson sold it to George Douglass.

Douglass thrived at Morlatton. The evidence suggests that he had a substantial financial legacy from his father's estate to invest. If not, George's character must have suggested to successful older men that he was a promising entrepreneur and that a loan would not be a bad risk. We may posit this because he accomplished quite a lot within a few years after acquiring the White Horse property, and this must have taken considerable means. For one thing, it is very likely that he built the oldest part of the tavern building, i.e. the east section, in the mid-1760s. The dating of buildings is almost always a tricky business. We base this tentative assessment on tax documents. The valuation of the property on the 1754 and 1760 lists is not insubstantial, but still modest compared to others in the township. This is despite the fact that it featured two dwellings (the tavern and Marcus Hulings's homestead, shown clearly on the 1727 draft as being right on the river), and that it included a good-sized working farm (with a total of 175 acres) and a going business (the tavern). Matters were different in 1767. The property was now the highest rated in the township. Part of the increase in value was undoubtedly due to the large rent which Douglass was receiving from innkeeper Philip Cole, L 45 per annum (noted in the unusually detailed 1767 tax list). This sum was about four times the typical rent paid by non-landowning craftsmen in the township that year (an average of L 12, ranging L 9-15), and is nearly twice that typical for a substantial farm (an average of L 26, ranging L 12-40). The high rent would not be surprising for a well-constructed and comfortable (by 1767 standards) building of elegant cut stone like the White Horse. Our hypothesis is that this high rent reflects the improved tavern building.

Another indication of George Douglass's early success, and quite likely of an enviable starting position, is his status as a man of affairs. In 1764, just two years after moving to Morlatton, and at the comparatively young age of thirty-eight, Douglass was commssioned a justice of the peace by the governor. He held this post for the next twelve years. The justices of the peace were the effective governmental "powers that be" at the local level in colonial Pennsylvania. Each justice had a loosely defined district, so that they were spread fairly evenly over the landscape. In his bailiwick he saw to it that the king's peace was kept (with the power to issue warrants), and served the

citizens (with profit to himself) by certifying their deeds and mortgages and issuing marriage licenses. Sitting together as the county court, the body of justices of a given county (there were thirteen in Berks in 1764) dispensed civil and minor criminal justice, made administrative decisions for the county such as ordering roads to be laid out and conferring tavern or ferry licenses, and directed the work of the other county and township officers. The justiceship of the peace was an appointive office, at the governor's discretion prior to independence. Two prime qualifications for the post were high local social and economic status, and potential usefulness to the Proprietary government as a local political organizer and exerter of influence for the Proprietary interest. Thus George Douglass had to already "be somebody," or be well on his way, in 1764. It is even possible that he was recruited to move into the area and become justice, as this was sometimes done. In addition to being local J. P., Douglass served Morlatton Church (now St. Gabriel's) as a vestryman from 1763 through at least 1778.

The deed Douglass received in 1762 referred to him as an "innholder," but he did not stay in that line of work for much longer. By 1767 he was renting the White Horse to Philip Cole, and had set himself up as a storekeeper. One can follow the comings and goings of local customers, purchasing a wide variety of goods, in the store's daybook for 1767-1769, which is on microfilm at the Historical Society of Berks County. (Or one can do so for later years in the remarkable and very valuable collection of Douglass Store daybooks and ledgers owned by the Trust, which cover the period 1786 through 1810.) George Douglass's operation, however, was not just the typical colonial local store; he was on to something much bigger, something to do with iron. A glance at the map titled "Ironworks 1760-1775" on page 29 of Lester Cappon's excellent Atlas of Early American History (Princeton, 1976) shows that Douglass sited his business dead center in the cockpit of the colonial iron industry: southeastern Berks County, far northern Chester County and the northwest corner of Montgomery County.

Discernment of the precise role (or roles, for there is always more than one way to make money) which George Douglass and later his son George Douglass Jr. played in the regional iron business awaits the product of a lot of hard digging in the Douglass records and the voluminous surviving records of the various ironworks. A cursory look at the Douglass ledgers a few years ago revealed that the Douglasses were buying and/or handling substantial amounts of iron obtained from local iron-masters. Some individual letters among the other papers yield a little illumination. A settling of accounts between George Douglass and David Rutter (master at Pine Forge) in June 1796 included charges to Rutter for "boating iron" over the preceding two years which totalled L 168, a substantial sum. In June 1801 an ironmaster named Dewees informed George Douglass Jr. that, "I have one load of iron ready for you." A month later George Jr.'s brother Andrew Douglass who had, significantly, gotten into

some branch of the iron-finishing business down in Philadelphia, told him that, "I am in hopes you will send a fine parcel of iron to the mill. . . . Expect you have a few tons of plates for sheet iron."

All this suggests that the Douglasses strove as middlemen to make the marketing of local iron more efficient, no doubt at considerable profit to themselves. During the 1760s southeastern Pennsylvania attained a great general prosperity, as measured by the standards of the world at that time. Although the charcoal iron industry was growing rapidly, this wealth was based on the export to Europe, New England and the West Indies of flour made from wheat grown in Pennsylvania's very fertile soil. Economic historians have recently discovered that a handful of Pennsylvania merchants took a new approach to business in the 1760s, specializing in the gathering of flour from mills all over the province, which they in turn sold to Philadelphia exporters. This introduced a new efficiency for big exporters, who no longer had to do the legwork in the hinterland. The new breed were called "flour factors" by their clients. Amidst the prosperity, these entrepreneurs were attaining a new level of sophistication. In reference to George Douglass, was he perhaps applying the same sort of approach to the developing iron industry at the same time, becoming in effect an "iron factor" ?

Whatever the precise nature of Douglass's business, it evidently paid handsomely, enabling him in 1773 to have a house built which would be suitable for an important local businessman and justice of the peace. This oldest and largest part of the Douglass Mansion is a Georgian house, a type of house characterized by a high degree of symmetry throughout, with a center hallway on both first and second floors and two rooms on each side of these hallways. The Renaissance house, the British form of which is commonly called the Georgian house, had been evolving in Europe for some two hundred years under the influence of European architects' rediscovery and adaptation of Roman architectural forms. By the standards of Berks county in 1773 George Douglass's house was something very progressive, and unusually large. The large size, the numerous rooms, and the center hallway introduced a specialization in room function (e.g. "dining room," "office," etc.), and a degree of privacy, unknown in contemporary substantial Pennsylvania folk buildings such as the Keim House (German) or the house at Daniel Boone Homestead (English). There were only a handful of Georgian houses built in Berks County before the Revolution (largely by ironmasters, incidentally), though quite a number appeared in the decades just following that upheaval. A few of these Berks examples, such as the Hottenstein House (1783) and the Fisher House (1801), can take their places among the eastern seaboard's masterpieces of that era.

The Douglass Mansion, as it stands today, has lost a little something, namely an unfortunately large proportion of its first-floor woodwork. It retains much of its beautiful original

woodwork and hardware on the second floor and in the attic, however, as well as one striking corner cupboard on the first floor and an impressive walk-in fireplace in the kitchen. This last-mentioned feature derives some additional significance from the fact that most later local Georgian houses were built without a kitchen in the main block (instead putting the kitchen in an ell or retaining it in an earlier part of the house), and that in a case where there was originally a kitchen in the main block, the walk-in fireplace was often subsequently removed. Another important surviving feature of the 1773 building is the nicely carved stairway, once open to the attic. On the panelling along the upper part of the stairway old paint (quite possibly original) may be seen. The door at one end of the front of the house, probably original, led into a room which may well have been designated to house the general store. Other outstanding attributes of the mansion include the expensive cut stone of the facade, with which George Douglass announced his status to the world, the very unusual datestone, and evidence of a pent roof. The roughhewn-looking low section of the mansion at the east end was evidently much widened and raised at some point, probably in 1834. It is of great interest here because it appears to have been an early (perhaps 1773) summer kitchen or other domestic work building. At its western end there is a small vaulted cellar and above that, a chamber for smoking meat, an unusual arrangement. Another intriguing and early-looking outbuilding is the rarely seen stone privy to the rear of the house.

All in all, despite the loss of first-floor woodwork, the 1773 portion of the house alone is a very interesting building with a degree of integrity which makes it well worth preserving. In addition, greatly enhancing its historic value, it is one in a complex of early buildings which represents an early crossroads hamlet. Here you can see the basis of the typical rudimentary, only loosely clustered commercial and social center found in rural colonial America. The junction of the King's Road, Great Oley Road and Robeson's Great Road, formed in 1719, was convenient to one of the scarce fords over the Schuylkill. This ford itself may well have been why Mounce Jones, the first settler (and said by many to have been a trader himself), had chosen his homestead site in 1704. Across this ford and down the river a half-mile was Thomas Millard's gristmill, in operation by 1713 and the only one in the whole Greater Oley Valley region for several years. Access to this mill was the highest priority of the early Oley settlers who in 1717 requested the creation of what would be the Great Oley Road. The earliest evidence of the Morlatton Church congregation is the 1719 burial site of Andrew Robeson, and it is likely that the timing and location of the first church building were greatly influenced by the road plans. The church was followed by another gathering place, the tavern. In the 1750s blacksmith John Kerlin purchased the Mounce Jones House property. In the 1760s George Douglass established his store. There you have the classic, loosely strung out colonial hamlet: crossroads, church, tavern, smithy and store, with a mill nearby.

To return to George Douglass himself, he had enjoyed his mansion but two years when his peace and that of his neighbors was interrupted by the Revolution. Douglass was a staunch patriot, but like many Pennsylvania men of business was moderate in general political outlook. He fought at the terrible Battle of Long Island in August 1776 as a captain in the Berks battalion of a special temporary Pennsylvania militia formation called "The Flying Camp." Just two months later he joined the majority of Pennsylvania justices of the peace in refusing to continue in office under the new state constitution (unique among those of the thirteen former colonies for its socially radical implications). So ended his active political involvement.

Douglass's business life was anything but over, however. His success continued. The inventory taken after his death in 1799 shows a very well-furnished house suited to a luxurious life by the standards of the time and place. The Trust possesses a photocopy of this document. Like many eighteenth-century estate inventories, it leaves one guessing as to how they fit all those things into that building.

The Douglass Store business was continued by George Jr., and afterwards by the latter's son-in-law George Leaf. The second generation, at least, was able to maintain very profitable operations. After George Jr.'s demise in 1833, Leaf, evidently anticipating further success, built the large and interesting addition to the house which comprises its center section. Judging from the loft door on the second floor of the facade, and the loading dock on the rear of the addition, the addition was intended to be the new home of the general store. Although it may seem to lessen the "Colonial" character of the overall building, the 1834 addition does evoke the site's long, multi-generational history, as effectively as does the Victorian St. Gabriel's Church standing beside its 1801 predecessor amidst the intermingled tombstones of 270 years.