DHS

The Woman's Club of Oley

— *presents* —

A Day In The Oley Valley

1967



COMMEMORATING THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DeTURK HOUSE
1767

Benefit of the DeTurk House Restoration Fund
Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County



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For many generations the Oley Valley has been extolled for its special beauty. Blessed with rich soil and a pleasantly undulating topography, encompassed by wooded hills that form a protected basin—an "olink", according to the Indian origin of its name—settled during the first half of the 18th century by religious refugees from the Palatinate and the English countryside, it has developed and preserved an identity which is uniquely its own.

Well kept farms with fine old buildings convey the spirit of the Oley Valley. Most of these tracts can be traced prior to the year 1740 when Oley Township was erected. Buildings dating from the 18th century can be seen on most of the old homesteads. Many of the farms are still owned by descendents of the original settlers. Along every road can be seen evidence of the architectural heritage of the founders of this historic community.

In commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the DeTurk House "A Day in the Oley Valley" will try to provide glimpses of the Oley Valley of 1767.

#1. THE DE TURK (DE TURCK) HOMESTEAD

In the year 1767 the DeTurk Homestead was a productive 300 acre plantation owned by John DeTurk, the only son of Isaac and Maria DeTurk. John had been born here in 1713, two years after his parents had come to the Oley wilderness from the Kocherthal Colony at Esopus, N. Y. Both his parents were French Huguenots who had fled their homes in the Palatinate to join the Rev. Kocherthal on his journey to America in 1703. Isaac DeTurk, a bachelor, married Maria DeHarcourt Weimer, a young widow, in 1709, and two years later they traveled to Oley with their infant daughter, Esther, and four year old Catherine, Maria's daughter from her first marriage. John DeTurk lost his father in 1727 and his mother in 1761. His sisters had married and were living on farms not far from his own. In 1740 he married Deborah Heeb.

In 1742 John DeTurk invited Count Zinzindorf to use his home for an important religious conference. This was the Third Moravian Synod, one of a series of seven conferences organized by Count Zinzendorf in the hope of uniting the various denominations of the German church in America. Representatives of most of the German churches of Pennsylvania attended. Three Mohican Indians had been brought here by their missionary from the village of Shecomeko in New York. In a ceremony filled with emotion they were baptized as Christians: Shabath, Abraham; Seim, Isaac; and Kiop, Jacob. After the ceremony in the old log barn, the Indians preached and sang for hours. A large gathering of local Indians joined in the celebration.

Shortly after the conference John DeTurk and others helped the Moravians establish a church and boarding school on the land adjoining his own. In about 1745 they erected a magnificent half-timbered building 41 feet square, three stories high, with a large center chimney. Designated by architects one of the most important examples of early Germanic half-timber construction in the country, this building, "The Moravian Schoolhouse", stood until about twenty years ago. Now it is gone.

In 1767 John DeTurk built the little "DeTurk House" along the bank of the creek. The architectural features of this house have often been cited and it is listed in the Historic American Building Survey of the U. S. Dept. of the Interior. It is now being restored by the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks Co. and will eventually be used as a museum and information center for Oley Valley history. The other small house or spring house across the road may have been built during the same period. It is believed that the original section of the large farmhouse, now completely altered, may have been the house used for the Synod.

On display here are materials obtained in DeTurk House Research. Guides are members of the DeTurk House Council.

2. ABRAHAM DE TURK HOMESTEAD

This was part of the original DeTurk Homestead. Upon the death of John DeTurk in 1781, this half of the plantation was willed to his son Abraham. It is now the property of Harold DeTurck, a direct descendant.

3. PHILIP KUHLWEIN HOME SITE

John DeTurk's closest neighbor was his friend, Philip Kuhlwein, who had obtained this 330 acre tract from John LeDer. His original home has been described by Dr. Peter C. Bertolet in "Fragments of the Past" (1861). It was "two stories high and large, of framework filled out with stones and mortar", in other words, a half-timbered house, possibly similar in design to the Moravian Schoolhouse. The lintel inscription is particularly interesting: P H K W - 1724 - M K W. In 1853 this house was torn down and the present stone dwelling erected by Daniel DeTurk.

4. JACOB AND SARAH KNABB MILL 1835

The Oley Valley in 1767 was a flourishing rural community that provided business for quite a few grist mill's. An earlier mill, the Reiff Mill, existed on this site at that time. A part of the old race can still be seen.

5. REIFF HOMESTEAD

Conrad Reiff settled in Oley some time before 1742. He built the blacksmith shop or forge (the long tile roofed building to the left of the main house) in 1742 and lived there until the two-storied log house nearby, now clapboard and painted red, was completed a year or two later. The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. John Moxon, have restored all of the early buildings on this property, using the traditional clay tile roofs which were once preponderant in the Oley Valley. These roofing tiles were made here as early as the 1730's and were used extensively on steep-roofed buildings, large and small. The main farmhouse was built by Conrad Reiff II in 1815.

6. SACRED OAK

Barely discernible at the far edge of the woods to the left is the large yellow oak tree known as the Sacred Oak. With a trunk circumference of 22 feet and a limb spread of nearly 120 feet, it is one of the largest and oldest trees in Berks County. According to legend this was the "shrine tree" of the Delaware Indians, a place the Indians would go to offer prayers to the Great Spirit. In 1767 it was on Hoch property.

7. KNABB STONE CABIN

In 1737 the three Knabb brothers, Peter, John, and Michael, emigrated from Bavaria and settled in Oley. This was a part of the Peter Knabb tract. On this property are some very interesting buildings. The early steep-roofed stone cabin contains a spring room, kitchen, bake oven, and smoke-house on the ground floor, three small rooms on the upper floor, and a garret above. Half of the original tile roof has been replaced with wood shingles to preserve the building. The small barn is a log barn covered with siding. The farm house was built in 1841 by Peter Knabb.

8. PETER KNABB HOMESTEAD

Peter Knabb chose this spot to build his home. The original house is the front part of the eastern end of the large farm house approximately 35 feet long and 25 feet deep, constructed of logs, but now covered with plaster. The log construction is still visible under the porch roof. At some time a stone addition was made to the rear of the house. The western end of the house was added in 1806 by Peter Knabb II, as can be seen by the datestone in the gable end. Next to the log house was a stone cabin, now newly roofed for preservation, with a large fireplace, bake oven, and smoke-house on the ground floor and two rooms upstairs.

9. SCHNEIDER (SNYDER) HOMESTEAD

In the year 1767 this large farmhouse was built on the Schneider Homestead. Hans Schneider had come to Oley before 1720 and settled on this 300 acre tract, patented in 1733. At this spot in 1809 occured one of the most bizarre tragedies in Oley annals. In February of that year the body of a new born infant, dead several days, was found concealed in the cave or root cellar south of the house along the bank of the creek. Investigation revealed that Susanna Cox, a young servant of the Schneider family who had been "bound out" to them since childhood, had given birth to the child (stillborn, she claimed) and then hidden the body so that her secret might not be known. At the ensuing trial in Reading she was pronounced guilty of infanticide and sentenced to death on the gallows. On June 10, 1809, witnessed by some 20,000 people, she was marched up Penn St. and hung on Gallows Hill.

10 HERBEIN STONE CABIN

Three Huguenot brothers, Johnathan, Peter, and Abraham Herbein, came to Oley from the Palatinate at different times before the year 1733 and settled on adjoining tracts. This is possibly the house of Abraham Herbein who obtained patent to this land in 1733. It is a good example of an early Germanic stone cabin. The steep roof, austere stone walls, small

windows, and center chimney are characteristic of this architectural style whose basic features are medieval in origin. The interior with its huge kitchen fireplace, original stairways, and massive roof framing to support a tile roof are also characteristic.

*11. DE BENNEVILLE HOUSE

Probably the most learned and influential citizen of Oley during its first years as a township was Dr. George DeBenneville. Preacher, teacher, and physician, he ministered to the spiritual, educational, and medical needs of his community. He held classes and worship services at the home of Jean Bertolet, at Moravian Schoolhouse, and at his own home, preaching the doctrine of universal salvation. He has been called the father of Universalism in America.

Dr. DeBenneville had been born in England in 1703, the son of a French nobleman who had served the Court of King William III. At the death of his mother he was made a ward of Queen Anne and was educated both in medicine and theology. While later serving on a British warship he received his first religious awakening and determined that he must return to France to preach to his Huguenot countrymen. He spent several years there, many times jailed for his beliefs and at one time sentenced to death at the guillotine. Just as his hands were bound in preparation for the execution—so the story goes—he received a reprieve from the King. After traveling and preaching in Germany, Holland, and Belgium, he journeyed to America in 1741. Very ill, he was met at the Philadelphia wharf by the Germantown printer, Christopher Sauer, who had envisioned his coming in a dream. At Sauer's he met Jean Bertolet and through his influence came to live among the Huguenots of Oley.

In 1745 Dr. DeBenneville married Jean Bertolet's daughter, Esther, and they built this large stone house. The original house is the southern end of the present dwelling, 36 feet long, 30 feet deep. Now extensively altered, it originally had a large center chimney and an upstairs meeting hall for fifty people entered from an outside stairway. In this hall DeBenneville taught school and conducted church services. He chose this site because of the large spring across the road which was used for baptisms.

Old photographs and sketches of this house reveal the architectural characteristics associated with the earliest Oley houses: the center chimney, the steep roof with a kick at the eaves, the brick arches over the windows. This is a large Germanic (medieval style) home with some modifications such as large twenty pane windows to add spaciousness.

Guides here are members of the DeTurk House Council. There is a display of early photographs showing changes that have been made during the past 100 years.

12. JEAN BERTOLET MEMORIAL

Jean Bertolet, John DeTurk's uncle, had brought his family to Oley in 1726. Born in Switzerland, he had lived in Minfeld, Germany, before emigrating to America. His wife Susannah (DeHarcourt) was a sister of Maria DeTurk and also related to John Keim, Oley's first known settler. His brother Peter had settled here in 1720. Jean Bertolet died in 1757 and is buried in this walled private burial ground, similar to other family plots in the Oley Valley.

13. JEAN BERTOLET HOMESTEAD

Jean Bertolet owned the land along this road. It is written by Dr. Peter Bertolet that he built a substantial stone house with a lintel inscription in 1731 but that it was taken down in 1826. The small stone cabin behind the main house is often referred to as the Jean Bertolet cabin. It is built over a spring.

14. EXETER FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

On this site a small log meeting house was built in 1726 and a larger one ten years later. Anthony Lee, George Boone, Thomas Ellis, and the other Quaker settlers worshipped here. The present stone building was built in the late 18th century. In unmarked graves in the adjoining cemetery are buried the ancestors of two of our most famous Americans, Daniel Boone and Abraham Lincoln.

*15. DANIEL BOONE HOMESTEAD

Daniel Boone, America's greatest frontiersman, was born here in 1734. The log cabin where he was born was still standing in 1767 although a stone addition had been made to it (the present western end of the house) by the Maugridge family. They had bought the property from Squire Boone when he moved south with his family, bound for North Carolina, in the year 1750. In 1770 John DeTurk's son Samuel purchased this farm. On one or two occasions, when Daniel Boone traveled through Pennsylvania, he visited the DeTurk family in his old home. It was the DeTurks who eventually took down the Daniel Boone log cabin to enlarge the stone house. The eastern end of the house is built on the foundations of this historic cabin. A DeTurk cemetery is located on the hill above the picnic grounds.

The Daniel Boone Homestead is now administered by The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. It is being developed as a recreational and historic site where scouts and other young Americans can be taught the story of 18th century Pennsylvania and shown the aspects of frontier life which helped to mold the character of Daniel Boone.

Our host today is Dr. Lawrence Thurman, Curator of the Daniel Boone Homestead. Guides are members of his staff. The beautifuly restored farm house, the barn, and the museum will be open, and there will be an opportunity to see the site chosen for the "Bertolet Log Cabin". This is the log house, Circa 1740, that has been moved here from the Eastern Industries Lime Quarry, located on the original Peter Bertolet tract. Lunch will be served by members of the Woman's Club of Oley.

16. FISHER MANSION

In 1767 this tract was owned by John Lesher, one of Oley's most prominent land owners at that time. The small barn and the tile roofed stone cabin (the building to the left of the mansion, now completely remodeled) had been built before this date. When Henry Fisher came to Oley from Heidelberg Township, Berks County, in 1791, he purchased this 337 acre farm. In 1798 he engaged master carpenter Gottlieb Drexel from Philadelphia to build his home. Working three years the builders produced Oley's finest Georgian mansion, a beautiful house of classic proportions, intricately carved paneling, friezes, and cornices, marble fireplaces, graceful open stairway, and great refinement and dignity throughout. It is owned by a direct descendent, Frank S. Fisher.

17. TREE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD—"HUGUENOT OAK"

This is thought to be one of the Penn Trees, trees that were growing at the time William Penn acquired the province of Pennsylvania and used as line trees in the early surveys. This tree marked the line of a 1000 acre tract granted to John Sheiras of York County, England, in 1682. It later is said to have marked the point where four farms came together. Some references designate it the "Huguenot Oak", named in honor of the early settlers of Oley.

18. JOHN HUNTER HOUSE

In 1733 John Hunter, father of Nicholas and Anthony Hunter, received the patent to this property. This house which he built in 1768, just one year after the DeTurk House date, marks the transition from Germanic to Georgian style homes in the Oley Valley. It has a center hall with open stairway, spacious high ceilinged rooms, and fireplaces and chimneys at the end walls rather than in the center. However it retains the pent roof along the front of the house, a familiar feature on Germanic houses, instead of the classical style doorway and facade of later Georgian homes such as the Fisher Mansion. Now owned by the Director of the Henry Ford Museum of Dearborn, Mich., Dr. Donald Shelley, and his wife, it is being carefully and authentically restored.

19. NICHOLAS HUNTER MANSION

Built in the Federal Period by ironmaster Nicholas Hunter II a grandson of John, this is another fine Georgian mansion. Especially noteworthy is the doorway, one of the most beautiful in Oley. This house was probably built by Philadelphia carpenters.

20. OLEY FORGE SITE

Two hundred years ago this was a busy industrial site where crude iron was forged into bars. In 1744 the Oley Forge had been built here by John Lesher, John Yoder, and John Ross. The forge buildings stood beside the Manatawny Creek and were run by water power supplied by a large dam that covered forty acres. On the hillside overlooking the forge, John Lesher built his mansion, a once proud home, now mutilated by vandals, unique in its hillside setting so that it could be entered at four levels. An interesting swinging bridge now crosses the creek at the forge site.

21. SPANG MANSION

In 1794 Frederick Spang bought the Oley Forge from John Lesher. He lived in the Lesher House until this lovely mansion was completed in 1908. The Oley Forge then became known as Spang's Forge and the village that grew around it, Spangsville.

22. GRIESEMER MILL BRIDGE

The oldest of the five remaining covered bridges in Berks County is the Griesemer Mill Bridge built in 1832. The mill was built in 1817.

23. OLEY CHURCHES

In 1734 John Lesher conveyed this tract of land to Gabriel Boyer and Casper Griesemer in trust for the society of Christian people inhabiting Oley. A small church was built here in 1735. Many different church buildings have occupied this site since then. The second church was built in 1754. This church had a rooster weather vane that is still preserved inside the present building of the Salem United Church of Christ.

*24. KAUFMAN HOMESTEAD

David Kaufman came to Oley from Germantown in 1727. His homestead is now owned by a descendent and namesake, David B. Kaufman of Emmaus, Pa., who will act as our host for this tour of the homestead and who has supplied the following historical information.

In "Colonial Architecture of the Pennsylvania Germans" (Penna. German Society Volume XLI, 1933) Dr. G. Edwin Brumbaugh states that one must go far to see a group of farm buildings so unaltered from their original state and with such a medieval Germanic flavor as on the Kaufman farm. He has determined that the oldest building still standing and possibly the first building erected on this tract is the ground floor Swiss barn, low and small compared with those of a later period. It is the frame building with a tin roof overlaid the original hand split shingles located nearest the house, dated about 1730. The next building was the original stone cabin located immediately adjacent to the spring. Brumbaugh thinks the basement room to the right of the door was originally a spring room but he doubts, as often assumed, that this was a precaution in case of Indian attack. Many of the early stone cabins were built over springs. This building has a cellar kitchen with a huge fireplace, a typical center chimney, and plain, open-beamed rooms above. Directly in front of this building is a separate spring house. The main farm house has been dated, through architectural analysis, as having been built in 1766, when pioneer life had already mellowed somewhat but the Germanic medieval traditions and features were still strong in these parts. Here is a great stone dwelling, plain and austere but of noble proportions, with a high and steep-pitched roof which originally covered a two-story attic. A typical pent roof crosses the gable end. Over the plain front entrance is a typical medieval canopy or hood, heavy, but sturdy enough to need no braces. The steps to the entrance and door sill are of well worn red sandstone. The front door opens directly into the kitchen, which extended originally the full depth of the house, with a monstrous fireplace. To get to the large parlor one must go through the kitchen. Going to the second floor is a large broken stairway from the kitchen. The master bedroom is the most ornate room in the house with a built-in corner closet and nicely paneled fireplace. On one side of the room near the ceiling is a hole of about two inches in diameter extending clear through the wall. It has been suggested by some that this was a porthole for defense against Indians, but the position and size of the opening make this highly questionable. Another theory is that it was a "Seelenfenster" or soul window, beneath which was placed the bed of a dying person so that the soul could pass through it when leaving the body. Other features of great architectural interest in this house are the massively framed two-story attic and the vaulted root cellar, built for the ages.

An addition to the house was built in 1834 by Jacob Kaufman III. As a young man Jacob had hoped to marry Susannah Weidner, but when she accepted the proposal of John Keim instead, Jacob asked whether he might then wait for her daughter. He waited some 27 years and when Susannah Keim was 26 and he was 50 he married her. They lived here 35 years having a family of eight children. Nine years before his death Jacob erected the west wing of the house for Susannah to occupy during her widowhood. She lived there 27 years.

The barn across the road was erected on the site of an early log barn which was used, during the Revolutionary war, to stable a valuable horse that had been captured from a high ranking British officer and presented to General Washington. It was sent here for safe keeping, accompanied and guarded by a squadron of soldiers. The other barns have not been dated but show 18th century architectural features.

25. JACOB KAUFMAN HOMESTEAD 1832

This is the second home site on the Kaufman tracts, also still in family possession. The cannon guarding this house was recovered from a meadow near Warwick where it had been buried since the Revolutionary War and placed on his lawn by Ephraim Kaufman in 1904.

26. BERTOLET GRIST MILL 1841

In John DeTurk's time this was the homestead of the Kerst family who settled here in 1720 and built a grist mill in about 1739. In 1824 Daniel Bertolet bought the property. He erected the present mill over the old foundations in 1841.

27. ABRAHAM BERTOLET HOMESTEAD

Abraham Bertolet, Jean Bertolet's oldest son, married John DeTurk's sister, Esther in 1735. They settled on this tract of land which Isaac DeTurk had bought for his daughter in 1721. They built the tile roofed stone cabin in 1736. There are many similarities between this building and the DeTurk House. Abraham Bertolet was a blacksmith as was his son Daniel. Daniel built the large house in 1772 and the barn in 1787. (Note the lintel inscription above the large doors.) An up-and-down sawmill, built here by Daniel Bertolet II in 1810, has recently been moved to the Daniel Boone Homestead for preservation. This property is owned by a descendent of Abraham Bertolet, Mrs. Lena Bertolet Brumbach.

28. JOHN BERTOLET HOMESTEAD

Jean Bertolet's second son, John, established his home next to his brother Abraham. This land was previously owned by his father in law, Peter Bally. The modern house on the property is the original stone cabin, completely converted, but incorporating original walls, foundations, and fireplace in its structure. The steep-roofed farmhouse behind it is dated 1754. A family cemetery is located at the crest of the hill.

29. ABRAHAM LEVAN HOMESTEAD

John DeTurk's half-sister, Catherine Weimer, married Abraham Levan, one of four Huguenot brothers who settled in different parts of Berks County in about 1715. The main farm house on the property was built in 1757 and of all the Oley Valley's medieval style buildings, this is probably the most imposing. The starkness of the massive stone walls, the irregular placement of the brick arched windows, the high pitch of the roof with its center chimney, and the evidence of an encircling peat roof give a character to this house that has remained steadfast for over two hundred years. Additions have complemented the original style of the house and add to its interest. The present owner, Mrs. Sarah Bertolet Spencer, is a descendent of Abraham Levan.

30. QUAKER SCHOOL HOUSE

This small stone building was one of the early school houses of Oley, having been built by the Quakers. It was here that Sally Boone is said to have conducted her sewing classes, patiently teaching young girls to make lovely samplers. Her nurse has been memorialized in the work of her students.

The Weidner and Hoch family cemeteries are situated on either side of the road just beyond the schoolhouse. The Hoch farm buildings can be seen across the field to the left.

*31. WILLIAM POTT GRIST MILL

William Pott brought his family to America from Holland in 1734. With him came his wife, his sons, John and William, his step son, Peter Lobach, and his brother, Dagenhard. He bought large tracts of land in Oley, now in Pike, District, and Rockland Townships. In about 1745 he built a grist mill on a 70 acre tract which was later divided, the lower half of this tract being the land upon which the village of Lobachsville now stands. In about 1763 he built an iron forge above the grist mill on Pine Creek. During the period between 1745 and 1800 a sawmill, oil distillery, and barn were added to the original gristmill tract. A home for the tenant miller was provided with the early mill. A later owner, Jonathan Grim, built the miller's mansion in about 1817. In 1887 David M. Reinert rebuilt the original gristmill but continued the operation with an overshot wooden water wheel.

The Gristmill and the small house are open for today's tour. Our host is Richard H. Shaner, owner of the property and Director of the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklife Museum. Assisting him will be Nate Reinert, a gristmill enthusiast who has been associated with mills all his life, and members of the Oley High School History Club.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OWNERS AND RESIDENTS OF PROPERTIES OPEN ON TOUR

Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Moyer
Mr. and Mrs. William Gotwals
Mr. Erwin Michelfelder
Mr. and Mrs. Amos Yoder
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Hehn
Mr. David B. Kaufman
Mr. and Mrs. Irvin Willman
Mr. Richard H. Shaner
Dr. Lawrence Thurman
Penna. Historical and Museum Comm.

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