

Early History of Ambler

By Dr. Mary H. Hough

1682 - 1888

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AMBLER, PA.



DR. MARY P. H. HOUGH

The author of the Early History of Ambler was born in Horsham, Montgomery County. She was the daughter of William Y. Hallowell, who tilled three hundred acres of land in Horsham township where her ancestors settled in 1724. Dr. Hough attended the Friends school at Horsham, graduated from Swarthmore College in 1878, and entered the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia where she received her diploma in 1881. For a period of six months after her graduation, the author was an interne at the Staten Island Hospital of New York, and in 1886 married Dr. C. B. Hough of Bucks County. They moved to Ambler immediately, and after practicing for a period of fifty years Dr. Mary Hough retired in 1931. She is a life long member of the Society of Friends.

P R E F A C E

The publication of the Early History of Ambler was made possible through the untiring efforts of the author, Dr. Mary P. H. Hough. She made many journeys to Philadelphia and searched the records in City Hall for information concerning Ambler. At first, her interest was a "hobby," but later it developed into a keen desire to preserve for posterity important happenings in the life of the community. Many of the old residents assisted with important data, but most of the work was done by the Doctor. Early in 1935, the editor and publisher of the Ambler News read a number of her manuscripts and prevailed upon the author to publish her writings in serial form, which covered about one year. Having many requests for the history in book form, it was decided to publish such a volume in 1936. Our contacts with the author were inspiring and refreshing. Dr. Hough, graced her profession admirably, and thoroughly demonstrated her unselfishness by giving her writings for the benefit of every one and proved conclusively that she was a credit to womanhood. Dr. Mary P. H. Hough is loved and held in high esteem by all.

HARRY HELLAR KELLY,

Publisher.

THE HARMER FAMILY

The early history of a part of the locality in Montgomery county now the borough of Ambler is intimately associated with the life of William Harmer who was the first owner of the ground which is now the borough.

He erected on it the first grist mill. He was first to till its soil, and to create within its limits the first industry—a fulling mill, whereby his family and the settlers of the surrounding country could be provided with clothing and blankets for their comfort and protection.

William Harmer was the son of George Harmer, of Mouden, in the Parish of Reborem, Wiltshire, England, who in 1682 with several Quaker colonists emigrated to America for the purpose of establishing a home in a country where religious freedom was tolerated.

It is presumed that he was a man of influence and property judging from his activities and purchases in the new land.

A record of a deed informs that he bought 250 acres of land for 8 pounds "in pensilvania, 12 miles northward of New Castle Towne."

Another record reads that in 1715 he owned an area of 130 acres in Philadelphia in the locality of Chestnut Hill.

It is however his ownership of the land now the Borough of Ambler that interests those who enjoy the study of local history.

This purchase called for 408 acres received by Patent from Wm. Penn in 1682 and covered all the locality now the Borough with the exception of a fraction of an acre at Rose Valley. It extended from the Morris road to Gwynedd line.

In Holmes' map of original surveys published in London about 1682 the locality of the Borough of Ambler is identified by the names of two brothers, George and William Harmer as the owners.

Bean says in his history of the County that of the 13 persons whose names appear on his map, the Harmers were probably the only ones who were not land specu-

lators, but made their purchase for the purpose of establishing a home thereon.

Edward Matthews, a local historian and authority on land titles, tells us that after a short ownership, the Harmers sold their land to the Whitpains. However, the Harmers continued to live on the land and make improvements, and in 1715 the 408 acre tract was bought back from John and Ann Whitpain for 200 pounds.

In the following year, Wm. Harmer was the sole owner of this land by the assignment of his brother's share to him.

We have no record that Wm. Harmer built a "block-house" of defense against the savage Indian, who lived in the locality, nor do we have any record that he was on anything but friendly relations with the Red Man, and undoubtedly the Indian, because of the kindness he received, looked on Mr. Harmer as a new brother.

Wm. Harmer was in quest of abundant food and liberty, and desired to live in peace with all men; his time and energies were not wasted in fighting the native savages or hunting for gold, but instead were spent in cultivating his land and making permanent improvements for the comfort of himself and his family.

The Harmers were members of Gwynedd Friends Meeting. Wm. Harmer's name frequently appears on the records of the meeting. A side-light of his personality is shown on these records in his appointment to various committees. In 1731, he was appointed by the meeting to draw up a certificate for a member who had the prospect of travelling to the Barbadoes on a religious visit.

It is presumed that he was trustworthy and upright as far as character goes; his name frequently appears on legal papers and documents requiring the signature of a reliable person.

William Harmer was one of the first who, after the country was settled, advocated the laying out

of roads or cart-ways in the new land. A petition to the Court, which bears his signature, states: "for want of roads we labor under great difficulties and hardships, for what is more necessary than a convenient road to places of worship and to mills and market?"

It is presumed that he was unselfish by nature and did not seek a monopoly of business, as is evidenced by a petition to the court, asking to have a certain road confirmed. The petition read "in order that the inhabitants might reach the mill of David Williams of Plymouth, the mill was built on a spring which neither the draughts of summer or the winter frosts hindered from supplying the neighbors with grinding when all or most of the other mills are dormant during the aforesaid extremities of weather. Our mill and others being so supplied in times of such necessity lays under great difficulties too frequent at said mill and desires that convenient roads to the mill might be settled by authority."

In the year 1716, William Harmer's signature again appears on a petition to the Court for a road from Gwynedd Meeting House to Plymouth Meeting that the same might be settled by authority. The road was laid out, but some inhabitants continued to plow it up and use the land for farming.

Wm. Harmer died shortly after making his will in 1731. He mentioned in his will his eight children, but little or no information concerning them or their descendants is known. However, from a deed dated 1733, now in the possession of Anne Detwiler, we learn that his entire property of 408 acres was sold to Morris Morris. He and his sons, Daniel and Samuel Morris, held title to this property from 1733 to 1759, when Daniel Morris died.

One of the large tracts sold was that of 94 acres, on which was the mill erected by William Harmer. This tract was in the Southwestern part of the Borough near the Wissahickon Creek, and was sold

in 1771 to Joseph Morris, who held title until 1775, when he sold the land to Joseph Detwiler, from whom the present owner is descended.

Will of William Harmer

I give unto my wife, Ruth, my best feather bed and furniture, my two best pewter dishes, two pewter plates, two spoons, brass kettle. I also give to my said wife a black walnut chest, with drawers under it, whereof she shall be possessed during her life only.

I give the same chest after my wife's decease unto my daughter, Ruth Thomson, and I give and devise to my son John Harmer and his heirs and assigns forever all that tract of 100 acres of land and improvements whereon my son John is seated in Upper Dublin aforesaid, and I give and bequeath unto my son John, the sum of 25 lbs. pennisylvania, to be paid one year after my decease towards completing the house already begun on the same land. And I will that out of my other estate the same 100 acres of land shall be cleared of all encumbrances it now lies under in the general loan office. And I also give and bequeath unto my son my servant lad, named John Mackleway, and I hereby nominate my trusty friends Richard Martin of the city of Phila., and Matthias Aspdin of the Co. of Phila. a merchant, my executor and trusty friends and neighbors John Jones carpenter. and John Bartholomew, my trustee and for the better payment of my just debts, funeral expenses and legacies, I do hereby authorize my said executors with the assistance of my trustees to sell and convey and sell all and every part of my lands to any person that may purchase the same and to put the overplus money at interest, the yearly interest of which shall be paid to her for her support. I give and bequeath the principal sum aforesaid to be equally divided among my eight children, share and share alike.

And whereas my son-in-law Philip Williams, fuller, hath heretofore had the use of my fulling mill

3 years and 6 months, for which there is justly due me the sum of 58 lbs. pensylvania money, now my will is that if the said Philip Williams shall after my decease make any demands against my estate and demand payment of such demandable debts or debt, then and in such case the 58 lbs. rent shall be demanded and insisted upon or otherwise if the said Philip Williams shall not make any such demands that then the rent shall not be demanded of him.

Much confusion has arisen concerning the Morris family, who were the owners of this large acreage of the Borough in its early years.

No relationship existed between Morris Morris and Joseph Morris, the later owner. The former was the son of Evan Morris, who emigrated from Wales and settled in Richland, Bucks County. Joseph Morris was a descendant of Anthony who was of English descent, and settled in Burlington, N. J.

Valuable records exist of the descendants of both Anthony Morris and Morris Morris, many of whom are residents of Ambler Borough and the surrounding localities in Montgomery County.

The history of the two branches and their descendants is an interesting story in itself and the part they played in the life of this community will be the subject of a future article.

During these early seventy-five years, from 1682 when William Harmer first took possession to 1759 when the sons of Morris Morris sold it to various purchasers, the 408 acres were one tract, sparsely settled and undivided by roads.

There is no record of any structure on this tract, excepting the grist mill located near the Wissahickon Creek, on the present Butler Pike, and a fulling mill, located on a tributary of the Wissahickon near the present intersection of Reiff's Mill road and Main street, both of which were erected by William Harmer.

However, various needs arose, which led to the laying out of roads which cut up this tract. One road William Harmer himself erected in order to connect his mills with the Bethlehem Pike, which was on the East of his land. The other road was established for the benefit of the Quakers who wanted a convenient road to their place of worship which they had established at Plymouth Meeting in 1712.

Another road came at the request of John Burk, who owned a mill on the Wissahickon to the South of the Harmer tract. He, like William Harmer, also desired access to the Bethlehem Pike.

These three roads exist today as streets in the Ambler Borough. They are: Mt. Pleasant avenue, Butler Pike, and Church street, all of which are connected with the Bethlehem Pike, then known as the North Wales Road.

Mt. Pleasant Avenue as now called, antedates by nine years the present much travelled Butler Pike. It was confirmed by the court in the year 1730 as a public road in order that the Harmer fulling and grist mills might be conveniently reached. Its course as then laid out by the court is practically the same as it is today with the exception of the abandonment of a portion of Reiff's Mill Road, a name by which a part of it was later known.

Butler Avenue follows the line of the Butler Road laid out in 1739. It is still known by its original name, although it is called by various names in many of the old deeds.

Church Street, as now called, was known as Burk's Road in the early days. Through the petition of John Burk it was placed under the jurisdiction of the Court as a public highway in the year 1744.

MILLS

In the early years of the settlement of the country, the grains which the inhabitants cultivated on their plantations were converted into a form suitable for food at mills called Grist Mills, erected in

the locality where the people lived. The settlers were entirely dependent on the grinding of the mills for most of their food, because there was no shipment from distant points as exists at the present day.

In addition to these grist mills which provided food, there was need of saw mills to convert the timber of the surrounding forests into lumber for building operations, and of fulling mills to provide blankets and clothing for the comfort of the people.

Until steam power came into use, the only way known by the settlers by which these mills could be operated was by means of water, a power available only on creeks, or near strong springs of water. In such localities one or more mills were to be found. The location now the incorporated Borough of Ambler was therefore a place well suited for the erection of these mills due to the existence here of the Wissahickon Creek with four tributaries. In addition to several strong springs of water. Owing to these favorable conditions, nine mills, including saw mills and a clover and fulling mill, were erected within the limits or on its boundary line. These mills were in active operation for nearly 200 years, and they brought settlers from far sections of the country and provided them with three necessities of life: food, shelter, and clothing. These mills were known far and wide during the Revolutionary War and helped to supply the American army with food.

No one thing has given the Borough the charming experience like the romance associated with these nine mills. The old water wheel is sung in song and told in story and will ever be held sacred because of its associations.

The man who brought the grain to be ground would be asked by the miller whether he would pay for it or toll it, and the answer given would depend upon the amount of money he possessed. This custom made the following song very popular:

"Happy is the miller that mills by himself,
Happy is he who is the gainer of his wealth,
Hand in the hopper, and other in the bag,
The wheel goes around and he calls out 'grab'."

The trip to the mill was usually made on horse back when the bag of flour would be thrown over the horse in front of the rider and similarly placed on the return journey. One record reads, "a man had a tame bull which performed this duty." Another record reads "a man was in advance of the time in his method of carrying his grain to be ground, for he made a wheel from a tree by means of a saw and then made a good support for logs, and a large amount of grain could thus be carried."

During the years of their operation there were few occupations open to women. Often however, they could get work at the grist mills. Mrs. Thomas Kenderdine, a long time resident of the Borough, frequently earned \$5.00 at the local mill while laboring for two weeks at odd times. For this amount of money, she was required to shell 100 bushels of corn, equivalent to two hay wagons full, a labor which required her to feed the sheller and at the same time turn its wheel. The same amount of money was earned by her in preparing the bolting cloth for sifting purposes at the mill. This work was most tedious because the cloth was made of silk being 24 yards in length, and required intricate preparation for its work.

There is romance in the races with which the locality was dotted. They were indispensable for operating the mills, but aside from their usefulness they added an additional charm. Dams had to be built to convey the water into these races. These races ended in what were called forebays, the part of the mill race where the water fell upon the wheel. At the forebay was a sluice gate made like a big paddle, with a lever to raise or

lower it. When it was raised, the water would be released and fall upon the wheel which had large cups in it. The force of the water in these would start the big wheel which was connected with the shaft which turned the mill grinder. By means of the power thus obtained from the water, the grain would be pulverized into flour by the force of one stone upon another.

When these mills were in active operation there was but one road, known as Reiff's Mill Road, which gave an outlet to the section of the country north of Butler avenue. It was extensively used because it led to the fulling mill. It was frequently in deeds called "Fulling Mill Lane." It was also at one time called "the Dam Road" because the dam of water was located on it. An amusing experience of Mrs. Reiff has been handed down to us: she said she never recovered from the humiliation she felt when she was accused by a stranger of using profane language when he wished to be directed to the fulling mill and she told him to take "the Dam Road."

Samuel Shoemaker, a life long resident, says that this dam was very large and covered a piece of land in extent as large as the present Asbestos works and property of Craft's coal and lumber yard. It was surrounded by willow trees and was cleaned out once in three years. As a child, Samuel enjoyed watching this performance of cleaning because of the many varieties of fish and animal life visible when the bottom was reached.

Wallace Mammal, a resident at this time, relates his experience with this dam. A considerable waterfall was formed where it overflowed the race and made considerable noise. Beyond the dam were two rickety bridges, one covering the race on Reiff's Mill road and the other a small creek, the waters of which were continued to the mill at the bridge. He said that the noise of the waterfall and of the two rickety bridges, which he was obliged to cross every time he came

to the village, unnerved his horse so much that he was scarcely able to get the horse under control in time to pay his toll at the toll gate located on Butler Avenue between Chestnut and Maple streets.

The return journey was even more hazardous owing to the necessity of crossing the tracks of the railroad especially since the road took a diagonal course across them.

Although nothing remains today to mark the places where these nine mills once stood, their locations are accurately determined by the wills of the owners, deeds of the properties, and memories of the oldest inhabitants. To later generations, they are generally known by the name of the latest owner.

Their locations as designated in present day, and later names are as follows:

1. Plumly Mill, first owned by Wm. Harmer, located on the triangular lot at the intersection of Morris Road and Butler avenue.

2. Fulling Mill, at the intersection of Main Street and Tennis Avenue.

3. Thomson Mill on Mt. Pleasant Avenue.

4. Clover and Chopping and Saw Mill at the northeast corner of Butler Avenue and Spring Garden Streets.

5. Reiff Mill, now 302 Butler Avenue.

6. Wertsner Mill, on the Morris Road, near Butler Avenue.

7. Hague Mill, on Bethlehem Pike near Hague's Mill Road

8. Known as the Burk Mill on the Morris road near the terminus of Church street.

9. Erected a short distance beyond the Burk Mill which "had gone to decay," later converted into a silk mill.

PLUMLEY'S MILL

The first grist mill in the locality now the Borough of Ambler, stood on the triangular lot at the intersection of the Morris road and Butler avenue. This piece of land was originally a part of that on its north from which it was detached when the authorities gave

Butler avenue a straight route at this location in place of a former curve which those travelling on the highway were obliged to take. This mill was erected by William Harmer as his will informed us. We may query why he selected this site as the most suitable one for its erection. We presume that soon after he made his purchase of the tract of 408 acres, he took an outlay of his land in order to find the best site on it for his home and a mill, and that he was quick to perceive the advantage offered at Butler ave. and Morris road for three reasons: First, because a spring was discovered here which would give him an abundant supply of excellent water. Second, as assurance of power whereby he could operate his mill because of the close proximity of the Wissahickon creek and its tributary on the north. And third, the site was chosen because of the hill-side, later known as Detwiler's Hill. This elevation of ground with the southern exposure would give his mill and home some protection from the wintry blasts.

His first effort was spent in the erection of his grist mill so that he could be provided with food, and in the meantime or until he could build a suitable place for his home, he lived in a cave carved in the hillside, as was frequently done by the early settlers. The diary of a contemporary said "We settled in a cave on ye bank of ye hill till we could build." We can picture in our minds the gratification of Wm. Harmer and his family when they chose this location for their home and grist mill because of these desirable features.

Evidently William Harmer's children had no desire to possess this land since at his death in 1733, the entire tract passed to the Morris family. It was held intact by Morris and his sons, Samuel and Daniel, until the latter's death in 1759. In these intervening years, the grist mill was operated by

Samuel Morris and the Fulling mill by Daniel Morris.

One can almost live in the social atmosphere of the Harmer mill during its occupancy by Samuel Morris. We can picture the frequent visits here of his sister, Sarah, the third wife of James Paul, who owned the grist mill less than a half mile south on the Wissahickon, and of his niece Susanna Morris, the wife of Thomas Mifflin, the first Governor of Pennsylvania. We can imagine the thrills they felt in those family gatherings when their mother, Susanna Heath Morris, took a day off from her home duties at Hope Lodge, the famous historic mansion in Whitmarsh, built, some authorities say, by her son Samuel, and retold again and again, her exciting experience in a ship wreck in one of her three voyages made to foreign countries, which she as a Quaker minister took for the sake of her religion. Undoubtedly these family gatherings were held often at the old mill. Samuel was a Royalist during the Revolutionary War and had lost many friends and needed the sympathy of his family and their companionship. Samuel, having been jilted by the one he cared for, remained a bachelor. He never returned to Hope Lodge where he intended to reside after his marriage, but lived alone in the mill, leaving the mansion to the care of his parents.

In the year 1759, on the death of Samuel Morris and his brother Daniel, the owners of the 408 acres purchased by Wm. Harmer in 1682, the land was divided and sold to various purchasers; and from this time, the history of the locality becomes the history of numerous individuals who owned parts of this tract. Eighty-four acres of the land with the grist mill were sold to John Stevens of Upper Dublin, for which he paid 1000 pounds, or \$5,000.

Steven's owned the 84 acres for fifteen years, or until 1771 when it was sold to Joseph Morris who bought it for his son who intended

to reside on the land after his marriage to Elizabeth Dawes.

In 1775, Joseph Detwiler bought for \$10,000, from Joseph Morris, the 84 acres on which the grist mill was located. A short time after Detwiler made this purchase, he detached eight acres, the portion on which the mill stood, with no dwelling house included, and deeded the same to "Owen Smith," who had married his daughter, Eliza. Smith was unfortunate in his business transactions, and in the year 1845, made an assignment to his creditors, Addison May and Lewis Jones who advertised the property for sale on December 1 of that year.

This sale bill which is in possession of the writer gives a good description of the mill as it was at that time. From this description, it is not likely to have been the one erected by Wm. Harmer on the same site, because the early settlers did not build their mills with three stories. However, it gives us a good description of the mill as it was over one hundred years ago. This sale bill reads as follows:

"A valuable merchant and grist mill situated in Upper Dublin Township, Montgomery Co., at the junction of the Norristown and Morris roads, one mile north east of the Broad Axe tavern, and propelled by the waters of the Wissahickon creek, together with 8 acres and 29 perches of land.

"The mill house is a large and commodious three story stone building 39 x 48 ft., 2 water wheels, with 12 feet head and fall, 4 run of French burr mill stones, patent smut machine, 4 bolting cloths, hopper boy, flour and grain elevators, hulling stones, and all other necessary machinery, in good order and repairs, for doing an extensive merchant or grist business in an excellent location for procuring grain.

"A part of the mill house is finished for a dwelling, affording 2 comfortable rooms on the second floor, and 4 on the 3rd floor; stone barn (nearly new) 25 x 30 ft. with stabling for 3 horses and 3 cows.

Adjoining the mill house is a never failing spring of water and other out buildings."

Sheriff Wells sold the property of Wm. Earnest and his wife, Lucy, who remained the owner for 10 years. In 1856, Abraham Fuller, from Doylestown Township bought it but was only a temporary owner. It was in the possession of the Reiff and Detwiler families until 1871 when Edmund Plumly bought it. By this time, it was shorn of all the attached lands but the 31 perches—the triangle between the roads together with the dwellings on the Southwest corner of the cross roads. In the year 1880 during its ownership by Plumly, it was still doing a good business as we are informed from an item published in a Lansdale newspaper which says "E. Plumly, the proprietor of the Ambler flour mills, removed the old style hopper and replaced it with a fan and separator, connected with it which allowed nothing but pure wheat to pass through"

In 1887, Anna Jane Mercer, a resident of Philadelphia, invested largely in real estate in the locality and among her purchases was the land on which the grist mill was located together with a tract on the north and opposite to the mill on which there was a barn. She made the purchase for the purpose of demolishing these two buildings which to her mind were detrimental to the beauty of the surroundings. The loss of the old grist mill which possessed "a beauty that was a joy forever," was greatly lamented by those who appreciated the charm possessed by these historic sites. In 1902, Ann Detwiler, a descendant of an earlier owner, purchased the lot on which the grist mill had stood, having made the purchase for the purpose of destroying the water right.

The race which supplied the mill was from the Wissahickon and a small stream of water which crossed the Morris Road about one eighth of a mile above its intersection with Butler avenue. The out-

line of this old race can be traced at the present day.

The history of the old Harmer mill would be incomplete without reference to the part it played in the past in the establishment of the well known route of travel known as the Morris Road, on which it was situated.

The Road was confirmed by the Court in the year 1763 as a public highway. As its course was laid out, it extended from Garret Clement's Mill in Salford Township to Samuel Morris' in Upper Dublin. Between the years 1734 to 1763, the Court refused several times to grant it, due to the petitions of other inhabitants who offered many objections. One outstanding objection made by those who opposed the laying out of this road was that it was unnecessary because the Skipack and Bethlehem Pikes were sufficient to meet the needs of the people. This protest sent to the Court was as follows:

"Whereas the petitioners of sd. Twp. hath here set our hands craving the honorable Court to see into it concerning a Rd. that is lightly to go through our township: Whereas we think it needless and very troublesome to our township, for ye said Samuel Morris hath already a road laid out from his mill to ye great road of guined, and this not exceeding a mile and a quarter from ye great road of Skipack which run on the same course given, or 12 miles."

This protest had twenty-seven signatures and was dated March 1734. In all the protests for this road which were sent to the Court in the years between 1734 and 1763, the end of its route was given as at Samuel Morris' mill. Although the road was not confirmed until after the sale of the mill to John Stevens, it was named for Samuel Morris because of the efforts he made to have it laid open to meet the needs of the inhabitants.

The following incident occurred at the Plumly Mill in the days when slavery was a burning question. It was authenticated by Thomas Bit-

ting, a resident of the Borough when it was incorporated and later its Postmaster. It has been told in articles on local history in the following words:

"By the side of the race of the Plumly Mill, there was a hut occupied by a negro named Black Bill. In this hut a fugitive slave had secreted himself. When it became known, the officer of the law arrested him and took him before the Squire for commitment to jail or safe keeping, until his master should come for him and prove his property. It became noised about and quite a number of people collected there, among them some abolitionists. While the magistrate was preparing the commitment, the slave, who was lying on the bank outside of the house, was urged by the abolitionists to run for his life and pointed out the direction for him to take. He at once put off with all the effort he could make toward the Wissahickon Creek, which was covered on its side with forests, adding to his safety and freedom."

FULLING MILL

Eight of the nine mills which once existed in the locality now the Borough of Ambler were operated for the purpose of grinding the grains, which, from the standing of mastication and flavor, could be greatly improved for food for the inhabitants and their domestic animals. However, the mill known as the Fulling mill was operated for nearly 150 years, for the sole purpose of converting the sheep's wool into blankets and materials for wearing apparel. This prominent mill was located at the intersection of Main Street and Tennis Avenue as designated at the present day on the property now owned by Mrs. Arthur Richard Iliff. The mill stood at the rear or about fifty feet east of the house which her family now occupies. It was erected by William Harmer some time previous to the year 1728 as we are informed from the following

clause in his will written in the year 1731:-

"Whereas my son-in-law Phillip Williams, having heretofore had the use of my Fulling Mill for three years and six months, there is due me the sum of 58 pounds."

William Harmer's keen insight in business matters can be seen, as in the case of his grist mill, in the selection of this site for his Fulling mill. He found here one of the strongest springs of water on his land—a pivotal point to the early settlers in their selection of locations for their homes and mills. This spring was very near the largest tributary of the Wissahickon which flowed through his plantation. This tributary gave him unusual advantages for the successful operation of the process of fulling. First it was fed on its route by several springs and thereby gave a guarantee of freedom from surface water, one of the essential requirements for washing the wool. Secondly it had a rapid descent in its course, and gave a fall of 15 or 16 feet of water from the dam to the mill. From this fall he was at all times assured of power to operate the mill, although much of the work was done by looms.

We feel confident of the happiness and comfort enjoyed by Wm. Harmer and his family of eight children with the assurance of food and clothing as provided by his grist and Fulling mill. We have no information in regard to his possession of the necessities required in the cultivation of the soil, the sowing and reaping and the clearing of the forests.

From the following record, however, given in James Logan's letters and papers to Wm. Penn, and signed by his Secretary, we are told that he became possessed of a horse in a manner as therein related. This record reads as follows:-

"Being informed by Wm. Harmer that a certain stray horse has been at his plantation about 4/3 of a year without having any owner for ye same, I hereby order that William Harmer keep the said horse till the

right owner should claim him, or till he becomes forfeited by the Prop."

We doubt if the owner was ever found as the rider and owner of the horse was possibly killed by an Indian. With this addition to the possessions of Wm. Harmer, we can truthfully say, as proved by available records, that the hum of industry in the locality of the Borough began with a grist mill, a Fulling mill, and a horse.

Wm. Harmer's executors carried out the provisions of his will and sold the entire tract to Morris Morris. The latter's son, Daniel, operated the mill until his death in 1759, referring to his fulling mill in his will. His wife, Tacy Owen Morris, was his executrix; and she sold the mill and 24 acres of the original tract of 408 acres to Arthur Bradis, who is listed as the owner in the tax list of the year 1776.

Arthur Bradis willed the mill and the 24 acres on which it stood to his daughter, Mary, the wife of Isaac Davis. In 1793, she bought 55 additional acres from the heirs of Daniel McVaugh, who was a member of the Burk family who owned an adjoining plantation. This tract of 55 acres joined the 24 acres which she had inherited from her father.

The tract of land bought by Mary Davis extended to the Bethlehem Pike, and Isaac Davis took advantage of the opportunity offered for business by the road side on this much travelled highway and opened a tavern, or house for the accommodation of the public, which later became the private home of Isaac Ambler, owned in the present day by the Hogan family. Matthews says that a public house existed here between the years of 1758 and 1772. We do not know whether this house, the first one erected in the Borough for public use, was a stage tavern, which held the same place in the community as the large hotels of the present day, or a wagon stand where teamsters excluded from the stage tavern, frequently stayed over night

and slept on a bag of hay on the floor of the bar room.

A portion of this house shows evidence of considerable age. During the days of its popularity as a stopping place for the public, the house was situated close to the Bethlehem Pike, but when the authorities changed its course as exists today, its value as a business location was damaged and we presume it was at that time that Davis retired from the hotel business and gave his whole time to the interests of his Fulling Mill.

In the year 1832, Andrew Ambler became the owner of the Fulling Mill and the eighty-three acres on which it was located. He operated it until his death in 1850. When he purchased it, the building was very much out of repair as it had been in use over 100 years, and he was obliged to practically rebuild it. His wife, and son, Lewis, continued the business after his death, but due to more improved methods of weaving, the amount of work became limited. A Mr. Bringham owned the mill next, and it was during his ownership that it was destroyed by fire on December 31, 1869.

During the years of the Civil War, many blankets were shipped from this mill for the use of the soldiers in the Union Army. Henry C. Biddle and Thomas Gillin, lifelong residents of the locality, are in possession of blankets woven in the Ambler Fulling Mill. The mill was considered an important item of industry in the community and the work usually required the labor of five men. At all times, even in the dullest seasons, two men were employed to operate the looms.

The race, which run parallel and very near the street known as Belmont avenue, supplied the mill with water. A dam as a reservoir for the race was located in the meadow a short distance east of the mill on land later the property of Dr. R. V. Mattison, belonging at an earlier day to the Hart family. The breast work of this dam is still in existence and is a famous centre for the

congregations of the boys of the Borough for their recreations.

The mill was reached from Butler avenue first by a lane extending only to the mill and was called the Fulling Mill Lane. Later, when the Reiff family became prominent in the locality and the country became more thickly settled, the inhabitants desired a road to enable them to reach the country beyond the mill and the lane, the terminus of which on Butler avenue was a short distance east of the bridge, then became a public road and was called Reiff's Mill Road. In 1865, Jonathan Lukens began his real estate operation in the land now the Borough and laid out Main street. This road gave access to the country north from Butler avenue, and from that time, the people had little need for travel on Reiff's road, and in the year 1902, when the railroad built a subway for a crossing at Maple street, it was closed entirely for travel from Butler avenue to the latter street.

For some years, even when the Newtown mill, owned by the Jenks family, was closed for business, the Ambler Fulling Mill served the people of the surrounding country.

Undoubtedly of the six Fulling mills which Bean's history tells us were in existence in Montgomery County in the year 1795, the one located in Ambler was the last to survive this important industry; an industry which for nearly one hundred and fifty years, brought to the locality, the Borough of Ambler and to inhabitants living many miles distance, daily essentials for their comfort.

MARY AMBLER

The Fulling Mill is so closely associated with Mary Ambler for whom the Borough is named, it is appropriate that in connection with its history some reference be made to her life and activities in the community.

Mary Ambler was the daughter of Abigail and Benjamin Johnson of Richland Township, Bucks County. She married Andrew Ambler on May 14, 1829. They resided at the



MARY AMBLER'S HOMESTEAD

Located at the intersection of Main Street and Tennis Avenue and understood to be the oldest house in Ambler. A Fulling Mill was in operation on the land prior to 1731 and it is presumed that Philip Williams, (son-in-law of William Harmer) lived in the home while operating the mill. Arthur Broades bought the property and made extensive alterations in 1765. Andrew and Mary Ambler came into possession of the homestead in 1831 and it is now the residence of Mrs. Arthur R. Iliff and her daughters, Lucinda and Cynthia. The house still contains the large fireplaces, dutch oven for baking and arched vaults in the cellar for the storage of root vegetables.

**Petition of 43 Inhabitants for Laying Out
Mt. Pleasant Avenue In 1730**

Petition in the year 1730 for the road from North Wales road to William Harmer's mill and into sd. road at Dr. Stroghitz.

To the justices of the Court, the humble petition of William Harmer and several other inhabitants using William Harmer's mill, sheweth:—

That there is occasion for a road to be laid out from the great road leading to North Wales through the lands of said William Harmer to the said William Harmer's mill thence down the lines between White Marsh and Dublin thence to the road by Dr. Stroghitz.

Will be pleased to have proper persons to lay out ye said road that it may be confirmed at the next Court.

Dec. 1730. Whereas an order of Court was granted to William Harmer and others for obtaining a road to and from his mill and was ordered that any four of them should view and lay out ye same and in pursuance thereof we whose names are given have viewed and by help of survey laid out ye same. To begin at ye North Wales road through the lands of William Harmer south on ye lines of Whitmarsh and Dublin thence to ye creek to ye same course to ye road above Sandy Rup, by Dr. Stroghitz.

43 signature.

Road docket, M. 37, City Hall. Phila.

**PETITIONERS FOR FIRST ROAD FOR PUBLIC TRAVEL IN AMBLER, PA.
ROAD DOCKET CITY HALL M 37 687**

George Lewis	Abraham Lucken	Wm Harmer
Isaac Jones	Hugh Evans	Joseph Taylor
William Stony	John Edwards	William Ruel
Francis Dawes	William Jeanes	Ronard J. Hs
Thomas William	Daniel Morgan	Robert Humphrey
Thugh Griffith	John Morgan	Robert Roberts
Thomas Davis	Joseph Morgan	Hugh Jones
Lewis Williams	Edward Morgan	William Nash
Dick nona	Owen Thomas	Cadwalader Jones
John Robert	Cadwalader Robert	John Jones
	Griff Ellis	Owen Evans
	Benjamin Griffith	Joseph Luckens
	Joseph Enlon	Jan Goodall K
	David Jeanes	Henry Hendricks
	Simon Butler	Jacob Goodall K
	Joseph Ambler	
	William Morgan	

home of his parents in Montgomery Square until Andrew completed his three year apprenticeship with his father who followed the weaving trade for many years. At the expiration of the three years, Andrew purchased the Fulling Mill and eighty-three acres in the locality now Ambler, and operated the same successfully until his death March 7, 1850. His wife survived him eighteen years, her death occurring on August 18, 1868.

During the years of her widowhood, she operated the mill with the help of her son, Lewis, who was married and lived in the house still standing at the forks of the road at Main Street and Tennis Avenue. The Fulling Mill and home of his parents was in the same locality on east side of Main Street, now the home of Mrs. Arthur Richard Hiff.

Mary Ambler had seven sons and one daughter. The names of three of these, Andrew, Isaac, and Lewis, appear in the military list of 1864; Lewis is listed as a manufacturer, Andrew as a carpenter and Isaac as a farmer.

She held strictly to the formalities of the day as held by some of the members of her religious sect. Samuel Shoemaker says that, when a small boy in company with his cousin, Tacy Acuff, he spent an enjoyable afternoon visiting Mrs. Ambler's boys. When it came time for their departure, Tacy, the first to give the final greeting, said, "Good-bye," and received a severe reprimand from her hostess who said, "Don't thee know that all good little Quaker girls say 'farewell'?" Samuel had advantage of his cousin and was made wise in the good usages of the Society and with the air of one who was well trained in such, said, "Farewell, Aunt Mary," and received a favorable compliment from her.

The experience of another cousin has been told by the late Isaac Sheppard. This cousin, at a frolic of the children at the Ambler home on a certain first day of April, succeeded in trapping Aunt Mary and thereby said "April fool!" She, too, receiv-

ed a reprimand from Aunt Mary who replied, "Don't thee know that it is wrong to say 'April fool'? Thee should say, 'Fourth month dunce'." All of which goes to prove that she was a woman strong in her convictions and felt that it was not in conformity with the worship of the true God to honor the heathen gods by naming the months for them.

She was a frail woman and in weight never exceeded ninety pounds. She was much interested in the care of the sick, and for that reason made her home a temporary hospital at the time of the railroad accident in 1856. Her friends and neighbors always found her willing to help in times of sickness among them. These frequent aids which she rendered to those residing in the community and her response to the Macedonian cry for help at the time of the said accident, prove her worthy of the honor conferred on her by the officials of the railroad company, who, on July 20, 1869, one year after her death, changed the name of the station from Wissa-hickon to Ambler in her honor, a name later adopted by the village and post office.

THE CLOVER MILL

The mill usually designated as the Clover Mill, located at the northeast corner of Butler Avenue and Spring Garden Streets, was erected about the year 1810, as we are informed from the will of Arthur Bradis which is as follows:

"I devise to my daughter Mary all that tract of land comprising 24 acres which I purchased of Daniel Morris, and all that other land, adjoining the above mentioned tract containing 56 acres purchased of the heirs of Rachel M. Vaugh, and it is my will that my daughter Mary and the owner of the tract of 24 acres devised to her shall have the privilege of damming the water 16 poles on the adjoining lands, devised to my son Peter Bradis, and also the privilege of the ditches now fixed on the sides of said land for watering of the meadows 3 days a week, till the mill shall be built on

the adjoining lands devised to my son Peter."

Peter Bradis died in the year 1831. In the following year the tract of eighty-three acres was sold to Andrew Ambler, and in the deed given, a grist mill is mentioned. The children of Andrew Ambler and their contemporaries always spoke of it as "The Clover Mill," one to which the inhabitant brought their clover grass to have the seed separated from the chaff. The business was not a profitable one and was of short duration, however the name has always clung to it.

Evidently the Bradis family were thrifty people because they added a saw mill to the land, and for a period of time this mill had a triple duty to perform: grinding grain, sawing timber, and culling clover seed. Because of this, the mill was distinctive in that it was the only one of the eight which were in the locality that did any work except grinding grain and sawing lumber.

THE CLOVER MILL

The saw mill served Andrew Ambler a useful purpose. He purchased the land for the purpose of getting possession of the Fulling Mill which had to be rebuilt because of its many years of service. Therefore, because of the saw mill which would convert the timber on his land into lumber for use in his building operation, he was saved considerable expense in rebuilding.

The following letter will give later generations some insight into the activities that existed in these early years in this location:

Dear Cousen Sue:—

Our farm is situated about two miles from the station of Wissahickon. My father is in business in Philadelphia, and I take him to the station every morning. I drive a quiet horse called Bess. I drive "quiet" but if you could see her when she gets about 2 city squares from the station you would say that she was anything but quiet, for it is all I can do to keep her on her feet. It is all because of a saw mill

which stands at the corner of two roads here. It is not the noise which she seems to mind, but that which she does not see right which frightens her so terribly. The bank is piled high here with great logs—enormous ones, which the people have hauled here to have sawed into lumber. Another part of the bank is piled high with lumber which is ready to be hauled away by the owners. For a distance of at least two city squares, this lumber, logs and parts of trees fill up the whole bank higher than my head on the side of the road.

I wish I could put spectacles on Bess for I know that if she could see that all this was just trees cut down, she would not be so scared. One day I hitched her to a post at the station and walked back to the sawmill in order to have a good look at all that was going on and I can tell you it was a great sight.

Several teams came to unload their logs. One person had oxen instead of horses to haul them there. I got acquainted with the sawyer. His name is James Allen. He has a little railway built from the road to the mill, and on this a truck loaded with heavy timber was run by gravity to the mill. The sawyer is a little short man. Oh, my! but how strong he is to handle such huge logs! He takes a big hook and without any help swings them on this railway and right to the saw's teeth they go.

While there I was reminded of a poem I read some time ago which was as follows:

"With watchful glance he goes,
Slow moving down the road,
The low, long, wagon, oxen drawn,
And creaking with its load,
He grasps the tollsome kant hook
tight,
With horny hands and brown,
And with the teamster's added
help,
The logs come thundering down."

They say that since 1800, a mill has been here, and that it was once a clover mill, but I do not know what that means. You can see

where it is some times used for a grist mill.

At the present time they are shipping some of the lumber from this mill to the armies in the South. The man who owns the house on a high hill east of the mill is named Wilson Childs of the firm of Wilson Childs and Co. of Philadelphia, and he gets his wood turning or some thing done here so that it can be made into wagons for the use of the Union army. He has a contract with the Government. Johny Lukens is the name of the man who runs the mill. They say that he bought the mill so that he could supply this Philadelphia firm with the lumber they needed. Lukens bought it from Isaac Thomas who owns the store and post office on the pike. I guess Thomas would not have sold it if he knew how much money could be made by it on account of the war. When I got tired of looking at all the excitement here I walked back of the mill and wasn't there a big orchard! Just full of apple trees, all the limbs hanging with apples every color but blue. I took one to Bess. I wanted to tell about a party I went to last night, but my candle is about burnt out so I must stop.

Good-bye,
KITTIE.

A short time after Andrew Ambler purchased the mill and had rebuilt his Fulling Mill he wished to be relieved of some of the cares attached to the ownership of so much land in order to devote his whole time to his trade of weaving. He therefore detached thirty-six acres on which the mill stood and sold the same to Isaac Thomas, who operated the mill until the year 1865 when it was sold to Jonathan Lukens.

In the deed given, it is specified that the race shall be kept clean in width the space of ten feet and also the channel of the stream passing from the chopping and saw mill located on said creek in order to prevent the rising and swelling back of the water, which would other-

wise impede or obstruct the work of said mill.

The race built to provide a flow of water to supply the mill with power to run its wheels ran parallel with the present Race Street and the creek which flows along its banks. This race extended from near the bridge, which crosses the creek on Butler avenue, to the mill. This race was also supplied with water from a never failing spring which existed on the hillside of its route. The race ended in a forebay at the mill. The distinct outline of this is still seen in the curve of Race street at the Spring Garden street intersection.

The old race was gradually filled in. A large part of its course was obliterated when the houses on Race street were built. Here it saved the owners considerable expense, as its existence obviated the necessity of digging cellars. It served double duty because it also supplied the railroad with water as we are informed from an old deed. This right was reserved in a deed which Jacob Reiff gave Jonathan Lukens in 1869, when he sold him 5 acres, a part of which was later deeded to the railroad.

Lukens was granted the use of a certain street (later known as Race street) intended to be opened to a depth of fifty feet parallel with Butler avenue and the privilege of laying a pipe six inches in diameter of sufficient depth underneath the soil south westerly from the mill as the same is constructed at the forebay at the saw mill on the adjoining lands of Jonathan Lukens for the purpose of supplying the water for the use of the locomotive of the railroad but not to cause any overflow from the premises whenever the pipe may need repairing. The mill dam at the creek and the mill race were to be maintained for the purpose of supplying water for the use of the locomotive as well as for the use of the saw mill.

In 1879, the lot on which the mill stood was purchased by Joseph Levis. At this time, the only house near-by was at the northwest corner

of Spring Garden and Race streets. The sawyer resided in this house, but as the sale to Levis did not include it, he built one for his home on the southeast corner of Race and Spring Garden streets. In 1885, Franklin Sheppard bought one acre and 113 perches on which this house stood for which he paid \$1825.00. This property is still owned by his son, Harry Sheppard. A barn built by Levis was demolished in 1897.

Except for a short time after its purchase by Lukens, the mill was never used for sawing lumber. There never has been, however, a discontinuance of business on the lot on which it was erected. The land on which the other mills stood which once existed in the locality are at the present day devoid of any habitation on them; the historian has no visible markings whereby to locate them. The Clover Mill on the other hand has had a monument erected to its memory: in the uninterrupted years of business activities conducted where it stood, its location has never failed to contribute to the prosperity of the community and the maintenance of a family.

A short time after Jonathan Lukens discontinued its use as a saw mill, the second floor of the building, which was a stone structure, was used by Paul Jones as a manufacturing plant on a small scale. At that time, the game of croquet was very popular, and with his turning plant, he made among other articles mallets for use in that game and it was a popular saying "be sure and get that new game at Jones' shop."

When the walls of the old mill were demolished and used in the locality for numerous purposes, a small building was erected on the rear portion of the lot which was used for a time by George Biddle who carried on a butcher business. When he retired, a small industry was conducted here by one named Cole who made a specialty of making wheelbarrows. It was said that every farm for several miles distant

was supplied with a Cole wheelbarrow.

When Cole retired, he had no successor. It was considered the best location in the village for business. John Reed opened a tin-smith shop on the second floor of the building and rented the first floor to B. F. Meyers, later to Arthur Hayden, as a black smith shop. The gas from this latter business ruined the tin, and Reed was obliged to move elsewhere. He opened a place of business on Main street known for many years as Reed's Hardware Store, later successfully managed by G. M. Deck and Co.

The lapse of years did not disturb the opportunities for business which this location now offered. The mill for grinding corn, sawing lumber and culling clover seed had gone to decay and many great changes had taken place in the locality. The intersection of two country roads was displaced by paved streets in an incorporated Borough. There was a rapidly growing population and real estate valuations were increasing. For some years previous, in 1873, a life long resident, Abram Stillwagon, with business instinct, saw the possibilities of this location on which the mill had stood and purchased 50 x 200 feet for \$500.00. Abram's friend, David Ambler, said to him, "Thee must be crazy, Abram, to pay such a price."

For a while Abram was discouraged and thought that David was right, and that it might not be worth what he had paid for it. A duck pond, as it was called, was in the rear portion, and for protection he was obliged to erect a wall which cost him \$300.00. In addition, he was compelled to dig a well of fifty-four feet which necessitated an expenditure of money.

Mr. Stillwagon's spirits were, however, later revived, for in the year 1894, his property was chosen as the Post Office site and he himself as the Post Master. As a sideline, he opened a bakery and established a good business. When his

term expired, he sold the property to Emanuel Vogt, who continued with the bakery. During Vogt's ownership the building erected on the lot was destroyed by a fire. A substantial house was later erected. The large business created by the American Stores of the present day, attest to the reputation of the location for business which it has held for so many years.

"THOMSON'S MILL"

Thomson's mill was located on the south side of Mt. Pleasant avenue near the terminus of Maple Street between the bridge and the railroad crossing. It was originally built as a saw mill, by the Taylor or Schaeffer family who were the owners of the mill and thirteen acres which went with it in 1809. In 1838, Samuel Davis was the owner who sold it to Thomas Thomson who added a grist mill to the saw mill.

When Thomson died he had been the owner fifty years. It was inherited by his son, John, who also controlled the mill for fifty years. At the end of his ownership, it was sold in the year 1890, to Dr. R. V. Mattison for the Ambler Spring Water Co., a sale which included the dam and race, and in that year, Dr. Mattison demolished the old mill.

The dam was repaired to act as a reservoir and a twenty-four inch pipe was laid to the Keasbey and Mattison buildings. Several feet of this pipe was laid twenty feet under a house on Butler avenue. In the summer months the K. & M. Co. would have a shortage of water, but with this additional supply they had unlimited quantities.

The water supplied by this dam was not used by the Ambler Spring Water Co. to furnish water to the inhabitants, but only as a reservoir for the requirements of the Keasbey and Mattison Company.

The dam which furnished the race with water used by the Thomson mill, when it was operated, was located about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile above the site of the mill, and was called "Tommy's Dam" by the boys with whom

it was a favorite swimming pool in summer and skating pond in the winter season. It was frequently much damaged by muskrats which were numerous on its banks.

Near the location of the mill, a small frame building was erected in the year 1891 by the Independent school district, in pursuance of a decree of the Court to provide a meeting place for its directors and a polling place for the electors until such a time as the District could be dissolved.

In the year 1872, an item in the Lansdale paper said that Thomson's mill was one of the best flour mills in the locality. It completed its many years of service to humanity twelve years later, and its former existence is almost forgotten in the present day.

WERTSNER MILL

The mill known in later times as the Wertsner Mill was located near the locality of the boundary line of the Borough, on a creek which crossed the Morris road about one half mile north of its intersection with the Butler Pike. This mill is the only one in the locality of which the exact year of its erection is known, owing to the fact that it is of comparatively recent date. It is, too, the only one which is outside the boundary line, for which reason the Borough might not claim it as her own. Definitely defined lines of a boundary can be laid aside, however, owing to the close proximity of the mill to this line.

The urge is felt to include the history of the mill in our list, that we may never forget the part the locality, very near the Borough, played during the Revolutionary war; an event of much historic interest, and one that gave James Morris the occasion for the erection of his grist mill, known to later generations as Wertsner's Mill.

The tract of land on which this mill was later erected included ninety-four acres, and was purchased by Joseph Morris soon after he sold the land adjoining on the South, on which stood the mill erected by

William Harmer, later called the Plumly Mill.

James Morris, the son of Joseph Morris, inherited this land soon after the latter's death. He was interested in agricultural pursuits, and had no interest in the grist mill business, as there was no mill for grinding in existence on his property.

The following incident, as told in history, occurred however very soon after he became the owner of the land with the result that he built a mill of such nature:

Brigadier-General Weeden's regiment of Virginia troops was encamped on James Morris' farm from October 19 to November 2, 1777. During their stay the season was very rainy and they met with many discomforts, due to the weather condition. This fact and many other greater discomforts which were possible in the coming winter season, were grave dangers to be met. In this emergency, they lost no time in preparing a way to meet them. They saw the necessity for places of shelter. To provide these, they felled the timber in the surrounding forest and began to erect structures which would give them a more favorable out-look of comfortable living, and relieve their minds of future dangers of sickness due to the exposure to the elements.

The Regiment vacated the farm soon after they felled the forest and a record says that on their march from their encampment towards Fort Washington, they went past Edge's Mill. As this mill is one included in the list which at this time was within the Borough limits, we may say that two of her historic mill sites are a part of the Revolutionary War.

This was in the year 1777. Very soon after the army had vacated, James Morris saw the opportunity afforded for the erection of a grist mill. The timber felled by the soldiers was sufficient for its erection; a stream of water and a strong spring, near the felled forest, would provide the power to operate it. He

took advantage of all the favorable opportunities thus offered and built his mill.

James Morris died in 1796 and in 1798 his widow, Elizabeth and daughter, Hannah, sold to Adam Wertsner for 1000 pounds sterling, the grist mill and fourteen and three-quarters acres of land. The deed mentions the dam, mill pond and mill race 3432 feet long.

James Magee, Jr., in a historical paper on this mill, tells us "that the Morris estate placed certain restrictions on the property." The water gate from the mill race was to be kept in good order, and any excess of water required for running the mill, was to run over the meadows of the Morris property. A small notch was cut in a corner stone on the west side of the mill and the water was never allowed to rise above that point.

During the time that the mill was owned by Adam Wertsner, in the year 1856, an exciting event occurred at this mill, an event which created much excitement among the inhabitants of the surrounding country. In July of that year, a railroad accident occurred near Fort Washington which resulted in the death of several persons. The arrest and conviction of the engineer of the train was demanded by members of some of the surviving families, who thought that as the cause of the accident, he should receive the punishment due him. It was learned that he was secreted in the Wertsner Mill. He escaped however, and the large number of people who had congregated there in the hopes of securing his arrest were much disappointed in their failure to apprehend him. He later committed suicide at his home in Philadelphia. Mrs. Eugene Nice, a daughter of Adam Wertsner, frequently related this event which occurred at her home in her childhood.

During the ownership of this mill by James Morris, through his petition to the Court, a road was granted by that body to be built from Morris' Mill to Skippack Pike.

It was never used very much except to go to and from this mill, and when the mill ceased operation in the year 1887, traffic on the road was very sparse.

The mill had an over-shot wheel twenty-four feet in diameter. This was replaced by a new one in the year 1870, when it was increased to thirty feet.

The charm and beauty of this mill which was demolished in 1887, is fortunately preserved for us in a photograph which is reproduced in Moon's history of the Morris family and in a photograph done by a local artist at the request of Mrs. Eugene Nice, and now is in the possession of her descendants.

Adam Wertsner added a cider mill to the grist mill and as it was the only one for many miles, it did an extensive business.

A large addition was made in the year 1820 to the north side of the dwelling. This house located near the Morris road at the intersection of a small creek, and this route of travel stood a few feet front of the mill.

REIFF MILL

With the exception of the one known as the Reiff Mill, of which the present article is a history, every vestige of the walls of the nine mills which once stood within the limits or on the boundary line of the Borough, have disappeared. Their wheels ceased running fifty years ago, their walls were demolished, and nothing exists in the present day to designate their locations; locations which for two hundred years were hives of industry.

Reiff's mill stands today as a private house, 302 Butler avenue, near the crossing of the highway with the Wissahickon Creek. It, too, served many years of grinding, and due to these long years of service it needed to be entirely rebuilt when purchased by Joseph Reiff in the year 1843. He loved the old mill and to show his reverence for it, he put on it the initials J. A. R. which stood for Joseph and Ann Reiff.

The first mill was erected here between the years 1731 and 1747.

We get this information from the will of William Harmer, in which he gives his son, John, one hundred acres and twenty-five lbs. towards finishing a dwelling house already begun on the same land. No mill is mentioned in this bequest. We know, however, that a mill was erected on this land during John Harmer's ownership, for it is mentioned in the deed given when in the year 1747, he sold this tract and moved to Springfield Township.

The ownership of the mill to 1766 is unknown. From 1766 to 1768, Lewis Reyner was the owner. John Wise held title to it in 1804, the year of his death which was the result of an accident at his mill in Roxboro. His son, Joseph, inherited the mill and eighty-nine acres on which it was located.

Joseph Reiff purchased the mill in 1843. He married one named Ann whose surname is unknown. They had five children. Their eldest son, Enos, married Elizabeth Weaver and bought the mill after his father's death. He resided in a new house built for him on his marriage, which has been converted into a double dwelling house, now 117 Butler avenue. His parents, Joseph and Ann, resided in a house which stood very near the one built for Enos, located near the corner of Reiff's Mill Road and Butler avenue as it existed in that day. This house was of fine colonial architecture and in a fair state of preservation, with the date 1797 on its wall, all of which was demolished by a later purchaser.

Jacob Reiff, the second son of Joseph and Ann, had no interest in the mill property. He resided in the house at the Southwest corner of Butler avenue and the Morris road, participating in large real estate interests in the vicinity. Five acres of his land were purchased in the year 1856 from the executors of his father's will for \$2000.00. This tract extended to Main street and included the ground on which the present National Bank and also Craft's Coal Yard stand. When the railroad tract was laid in the vil-

lage, he gave them a right of way and also five hundred feet of ground for a station, all free of charge.

Enos Reiff, who held the mill property, died in the year 1870, and at his death it was sold to William McClean. Eventually it came into the possession of Dr. R. V. Mattison, who converted it into a private dwelling.

Although this mill stood very near the Wissahickon Creek, its water power did not come from that stream since in those days they had no way to utilize water so situated near a mill for power. The waters from the creek known as Rose Valley Creek in the early days, which also supplied the Fulling Mill at Tennis avenue and Main street, ran the wheels of this mill. This creek and the race of the Fulling Mill were tapped near the latter mill. From there, a race was built which ran parallel and very near to the present railroad tracks. A dam was built for a reservoir on the location of the present Asbestos Works, and from this dam the race was extended to Butler avenue crossing it near the mill. Three bridges were erected on the route of the race. One was built over the creek which ran parallel with Butler avenue and emptied into the Wissahickon; the second covered the race; and the third bridge was erected where the race crossed Butler avenue.

The Reiff's did not own the land where the race was tapped near the Fulling Mill at Tennis avenue and Main street. They did own, however, the water right for the purpose of getting water for their race, and also for the purpose of repairing beyond their own land.

Samuel Shoemaker says that this mill at one time did an extensive business and was usually in operation day and night. While most of the mills did only a limited amount of work and had only a local trade, the Reiff Mill shipped their flour to distant points, carried in special barrels labeled "Rose Valley Mill." At this time the creek which emptied into the

Wissahickon near Main street and Tennis avenue and supplied the Fulling Mill and Reiff's Mill with water for power, was called the "Rose Valley Creek," owing to the number of rose bushes which grew on its banks.

The "Hatboro Spirit" of 1878 says, "McCleans are running their mill night and day as they have plenty of water, while some of the mills have to stop on account of its scarcity."

When the mill stopped running about the year 1884, the disposition of the race was a serious problem to the residents of the village. For the long distance that it extended, it was ten feet deep and twenty feet wide. Later generations can hardly realize that it ever existed since in the present day no trace of it is visible.

At this time, the firm of Keasbey and Mattison was established in the Borough and was in need of building stone for the erection of their factory and homes for their employees. They found stone suitable for this purpose at the southwest corner of Butler avenue and the railroad tracks, where the Opera House is now situated. There was an elevation here of several feet and before the stone which was found here could be quarried, it was necessary to remove the top soil. This soil was used for filling the excavation of the old race. In a short time, the bridges on the race were abandoned, the race filled in, and its former existence forgotten by a majority of the inhabitants.

Eight of the nine mills which once stood in the section of the country now an incorporated Borough, have been demolished. The passing of time and the great changes which have taken place in the lives of the people have rendered them obsolete. Few signs of their existence are visible today. Uneven contours of the land in some cases can be traced, which mark the courses of the mill races. An occasional breast-work of a dam can be noted by one who is

familiar with the history of the mills, but otherwise their physical remains are gone and they exist only in the memory of some of the oldest inhabitants, or in the records of local historians and antiquarians.

The walls and foundations of the Reiff Mill, however, stand today, although a passer-by would not recognize it as a former mill, for it has been converted into a private home, and the builders made no effort to preserve the character and qualities of the old mill. New windows have pierced its walls; an asbestos roof replaced the original shingles, and a coat of stucco hides the lovely stone work of the early craftsman; a front porch and other modern accessories have replaced the water wheel and sluices. The initials placed thereon by Joseph Reiff and the year he rebuilt the mill were also defaced by the spoiler and but for the memory of those to whom these inscriptions have a touch of sacredness, their existence in the present day would have been forgotten.

HAGUE'S MILL

The mill known as Hague's Mill was located at the intersection of the Bethlehem Pike and Hague's Mill road, approximately one-half a mile north of Rose Valley. It was built by the Burk family who were the owners of a large territory in the locality in early years.

In 1775, John Burk gave a deed of sale to Lewis Stannart in which he mentions a mill and thirty acres. From this record we know that a mill was in existence at that time, and undoubtedly it had been built many years earlier. In 1797 Lewis Stannart, a miller of Germantown, and probably a son of the former owner, sold the mill property to George Hague.

George Hague was born in 1764 and died in 1824. He had two sons and three daughters, Christine, Mary and Margaret, who are mentioned in his will. The three daughters were highly esteemed mem-

bers of St. Thomas' Church in Whitemarsh. Two of them lived to be 89 and 92, and the third one died in her seventy-first year. The three daughters were unmarried and the sons left no children; the name however is perpetuated in the road known as Hague's Mill Road, which was opened for travel to enable the inhabitants who resided in the section of country north of its terminus on Butler avenue to more conveniently reach the mill.

The old Hague home is still standing near the former location of the mill. It was remodelled three times, but in its construction is still interesting to those who love the homes as constructed by the early settlers.

The heirs of George Hague sold the mill and eleven acres to Robert Pollard. For ten years or until 1844, it was known as the Pollard Mill. From 1844 to 1864, it had several owners. In the latter year, the mill and 10 acres were purchased by John L. Heist for \$6000.00 from the executors of Jacob Acuff.

It was eventually purchased by Albert Beck, who was a well-known builder of Ambler, and who made the purchase in order to get possession of its stones for his building operations in different parts of the country. Its walls were completely demolished a short time after it had stopped grinding in the year 1887. In 1908, J. Watson Craft purchased from Beck the land on which the mill had stood, and later sold the same to Robert Griffith.

The mill had no forebay but got its power directly from a dam situated on a near-by elevated piece of ground. The wheel was an over shot one and was thirty feet in diameter. Wallace Mammal, a former resident of Ambler, remembers the operation of the mill in its later days. He tells us that on account of the large wheel with which it was equipped for getting power, and the location of the dam, he has seen the mill in good work-

ing order on a test of as little as a bucket of water. The other mills in the same locality were frequently obliged to shut down in the cold seasons or times of draught, but the old Hague Mill was never idle; its wheels never stopped for climate or season. The inhabitants could at all times depend upon it for their grinding.

BURK'S MILL

For many years, one of the most prominent industrial sections of Montgomery County was the East-side of the Morris road, between Fort Washington and Ambler stations at the terminus of Church street. Looking at this location today, where there is no human habitation, where it is overgrown with shrubs and underbrush, one can hardly realize that here once stood a thriving industry. The story of this spot is truly the conversion of a wilderness into a thriving industrial center and its decline and return again to a wilderness, due to the fluctuations and destiny of man.

In the year 1689, John Burk, who emigrated from England, purchased several hundred acres in Upper Dublin Township. In those days, the settlers who purchased large tracts of land availed themselves of the power afforded by streams on their property, for the erection of grist mills. Burk had two locations on his tract suitable for this purpose and on each he erected a mill. The one situated at the intersection of Hague's Mill Road and the Bethlehem Pike was operated by his son Hugh, and was known later as the Hague Mill. The second mill of which the present writing is a history, was located on the Morris road on the west bank of the Wissahickon, and here his son, Edward, dwelt.

John Burk died in the year 1744. His executors were his sons, Edward and Hugh. Thirty acres of his land, on which the grist mill on the Morris road was located, were sold to James Paul, who added to his possessions by purchasing

fifteen acres adjoining this land from Archibald McClean, a Horscham squire, and eight acres farther down the Wissahickon Creek. James Paul held this land for two years only. In the year 1753, he gave a deed for all of the same to Jacob Edge. It is thought that James Paul never lived here; he was a life-long resident of Abington Township. In the tax list of 1724 in that township, he is the largest individual land owner. His father-in-law, Morris Morris, who succeeded William Harmer as the owner of the mill on the triangular lot, and the four hundred and eight acres of land on which it was located, was the next largest owner in the same township.

The purchase of the grist mill and the tract of land on which it was located was made by James Paul as a gift to his daughter, Margaret, the wife of Jacob Edge to whom the title of the land was given. Jacob Edge was supervisor of Whitemarsh Township and according to many authorities a member of the family for whom the locality of Edge Hill was named. Jacob Edge resided here and operated the mill until his death in 1784. The executors of his will were his wife, Margaret, his brother-in-law, Jacob Paul, and friend, Jonathan Thomas. We are told in his will that the original mill built by John Burk was at this time unfit for grinding. To use the expression given in Edge's will, it "had gone to decay." From this we would infer that it had been built many years before John Burk's death in 1744.

Jacob Edge's executors followed the instructions of his will and sold the property which was purchased by Joseph Detwiler and his son-in-law Jacob Reiff. The deed of this transfer said that "this sale included three tracts of ground with water, grist mill, and apertances, one of them containing fifteen acres and the other thirty acres upon which was the mill "now gone to decay" and another containing eighty acres upon

which the new grist mill had been built.

The second mill built to replace the one which "had gone to decay" was erected farther down the stream in order to get the better water fall located on the west bank of the Wissahickon creek, near the terminus of Scheaf's Lane on the Morris Road.

Joseph Detwiler died soon after this purchase and Jacob Reiff, his son-in-law, became the sole owner. In 1838, it was sold to Joseph Lukens who had married Jacob Reiff's daughter.

Jacob Lukens, a son of Joseph, operated the mill for a time. During the gold fever of 1849-50, Jacob went to California in search of riches, where he died, and in 1864, the property was sold to Amos Heller. A short time later it was purchased by Eberhard Flues, and converted into what was called a "Silk Mill" and its history from that time is a history of that plant which was known as Flues Silk Mill until the year 1874.

Much sentiment is attached to the mills at this location because of the many years the same family held possession. In a period of 160 years, the land on which they stood was held in a line of succession by three families only. John Burk and his son held it for forty years; James Paul and his descendants held possession until 1784, when it was sold to Joseph Detwiler. It was owned by the Detwiler and Reiff family for the same period of time as the Paul family—forty-three years.

The romance of this mill is centered about the life of Jacob Edge who resided here nearly all his life. Our memory clings here to the days when his four daughters, Mary, Susanna, Rachel and Ann, beautiful in face and character, created a hospitality which brought to their home relatives and friends living many miles distant. Here, on a little island which once existed in the Wissahickon Creek near the mill site—a gem of nature known as Edge's Island—

they frequently met for social intercourse, for boating or fishing, fishing especially for shad when in season, a sport which was once greatly indulged in along the Wissahickon Creek.

To know that this army of men, to whom we are much indebted for the liberties we enjoy in our land, touched the hem of our garment—the Borough land—gives a touch of reverence to the mill site of Jacob Edge which can never be effaced from our memory. It is to be regretted that a portion of the walls of the old Mill was not left on its site as a monument and as a guide in the historical landmarks of the locality.

Another thing, however, more momentous than the Island which once existed in the Wissahickon, from the banks of which the people fished for shad, is the event of great historic interest which was associated with battle of Germantown, for Washington's soldiers, who were encamped at James Morris' mill in Whitpain Township for thirteen days, left their encampment on October 19, 1777, at 7 o'clock in the evening and took their line of march down the Morris road past Edge's mill to the Bethlehem Pike.

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Although the walls of Burk's Mill were in a good state of preservation and its water power was unimpaired, it did little grinding except that of a spasmodic nature after Jacob Lukens went to California in search of wealth. While there is no record of the exact year that the mill stopped grinding, it is known that it was much

earlier than any other in the locality, due, as records show, to unfavorable conditions of the mill site; the two dams which were made in the course of the race often "broke with the floods," as it was said, at such times when the Wissahickon would be swollen with heavy waters. The repair of these in addition to the loss of time in grinding entailed much expense. Again the work was frequently handicapped, owing to the small fall of little over six feet of water on the wheel, as a result of the grade of the race. The greatest handicap in the operation of the mill was, however, the necessity of frequently cleaning out the race.

The races of the old grist mills were kept, as a rule, to the depth of ten feet, and did not require cleaning out oftener than once in two or three years. Burk's Mill, however, could never go without being cleaned out at least every year, owing to the contour of the land through which it flowed, which favored surface washings of the soil into the racebed especially after the fields on its route were cultivated. The long extent of the race from Butler avenue to the mill site also materially increased the expense of this work. To save the expense of the labor to accomplish this work, it was often the custom of a mill owner to invite eighteen or twenty neighbors to do the work—a labor given by them gratuitously in exchange for a good dinner.

Jacob Reiff tried another plan to get this work done which has been handed down to us by authoritative sources. He hired several foreigners, who were then flocking into the country, to make the race deeper by the removal of the accumulation of dirt in its bed. He made a contract with them for the payment of a certain sum of money for the work and he was to board them. Nothing was said about the amount allowed for their board, but the laborers were under the impression that this was included in the contract. When it

came time for a settlement, the bill Reiff presented for their board was quite large, and instead of receiving money for their work, they were in debt to Reiff. For many years when anyone in the locality would make a close bargain they would say "that is equal to Jacob Reiff's race deal."

All the mill owners in the locality desired access to the Bethlehem Pike. The road known in the present day as the Morris road, which was confirmed by the Court as early in 1730, gave Burk an outlet to this highway. However for some reason, he desired another road, possibly a shorter route, or with an outlet further north, and in 1744, petitioned to the Court saying, "That he had recently erected a mill, and was in need of a road about one-half a mile long to enable people to reach it." In the same year, this road which is the present Church street which forms the southern boundary line of the Borough was granted by the Court as we are informed by the following record:

"John Burk has been granted a road to his mill, at a point on the corner of the land of Andrew Bradford on the great Highway to the Morris road, 6 poles (90 feet) south of John Burk's mill."

This road was undoubtedly a great convenience to his patrons, and they did not object to being required to ford the Wissahickon in order to reach the mill, as bridges were almost unknown, and the people were accustomed to crossing the streams. However, in the year 1763, during Jacob Edge's ownership of the mill, the method of travel had changed, and instead of travelling on horseback, they rode in wheeled carriages, and went to mill in a cart or similar conveyance. To cross the creek in a conveyance, especially when it was swollen with rains, was a venture the patrons of the mill did not care to take in order to reach the mill, and Burk's road was seldom used.

Jacob Edge had little use for

Burk's Road since the Morris Road met all his needs and therefore paid little attention to its repair, notwithstanding John Burk's promise to be responsible for its good condition, and that the Township would be at no expense for keeping it fit for travel. Owing to Jacob Edge's neglect to repair this road, the inhabitants made an effort through a course of law to compel him to do so and in 1763, among the inhabitants of Upper Dublin Township, one Valentine Puff, who together with thirty-seven others petitioned to the Court to know whether the Township or Jacob Edge should bear the expense of keeping the road in repair, made the following complaint:

"Now the said road being laid a little below the breast of said dam across Wissahickon Creek, the dam breaking with the floods, hath torn and swept away all the timber and all other materials whereby ye said road was supported so that it proves very expensive, and it is almost impossible to repair the said road and now, may it please Your Honor, and take it into consideration, that the said Jacob Edge hath removed a certain wing of his dam which confined the waters in a narrow channel where the said Jacob Edge hath extended the dam to a considerable length beyond the limits in which the said dam was bounded when the road was laid out and never made that part that was added any way sufficient, but generally when a breach is made by the floods, it is in that very place where the addition was made and turns the current down the said Road so that it is impossible to repair and keep good the said road; and further Jacob hath fenced up a piece of high, dry land where carriages and horses used to shift out upon, for safety when the bottom was cut and washed so by the waters as to make it at times both dangerous and impassible and refuseth any assistance to support and mend ye said rd when John Burk at time of laying out the said road did promise to maintain and

keep good that piece of bad road, from said road to the fast land. Your petitioners craveth the sentiments of your Worships, whether the Township should bear the expense of the damages done by the insufficiency of ye said dam, especially the addition since the road was laid out."

The Court compelled Edge to repair the insufficiency of the dam and the damage done by the water course of his mill. He was, however, under no obligation to repair the road beyond his property. From this time, the close relationship which had existed for so many years between the grist mill on the Morris Road and the road laid out by Burk, known in the present day as Church Street came to an end and passed into history.

THE DECADENCE OF THE GRIST MILLS

The years between 1870 and '80 marked the decadence of the grist mills which were so closely interwoven with the early history of the land now the Borough of Ambler. Steam power supplanted water power, and the roller system of grinding replaced the primitive method of crushing the grains with stones.

Not only the great flour mills of Minneapolis, but the local ones of Hartzell's at Chalfont and A. B. Godshall at Lansdale, were distributing throughout the country, by means of the railroad, a superior brand of flour of their manufacture. By means of the markets, the inhabitants sold the grains they had cultivated to these mills equipped with machinery for large production, and then purchased at the local store, the flour which was produced at these mills.

The mills run by water power were compelled to submit to the inevitable changes of time and were totally abandoned for grinding. As a result, the mill which in the '50's had a valuation of \$3000.00 was twenty years later, valueless, its walls were demolished and only its historic background survived. We love the memory of the old

grist mills, which now is past history; we breathe in their atmosphere the life of the first settler. We cherish in our thoughts, the rich history they have given our Borough land, and the distinctive features which each possessed, making that history endure.

A resume of these features which still linger in our minds may be summarized as follows: The Hague Mill on the Bethlehem Pike, which ceased to grind in the year 1887, claims the honor of having been in operation two years longer than any in the locality; a long service possible because of its location on the Great Highway, and the less expense incurred in operating it because of the short race and fall of sixteen feet of water on its wheel.

The Burk or Edge Mill on the Morris Road, which ceased to grind twenty-five years before the Hague Mill, was the first to stop operating due, on the other hand, to the expense incurred in operating it because of its long race and short fall of six feet of water on its wheel—a height which was the minimum requirement.

To the Reiff Mill which was operated two or three years longer than the Wertsner and Thomson Mill, credit must be given for the prominence it gave the locality. It alone of the several mills, distributed flour beyond its own territory. The label "Rose Valley Mills" on the barrels distributed by this mill throughout the country, gave the locality the well deserved prominence as a mill centre.

The Clover Mill is distinctive in its history because of its location. With the exception of this mill, the soil on which the others were erected is, at the present day, barren: a blade of grass or twig of shrubbery exists where they stood. It alone has a monument erected to its memory in the large business created on its site.

To the Plumly Mill we bow our heads in reverence: it marks the location of the first home in the Borough land. On its soil the first industry was created, the first play-

ground for the children was planned. William Harmer, whose life shines forth as a beacon light from that far-off day, dwelt on its site. Through his petition to the Court, the first road for public travel in the Borough was laid out; he was the first to show us the joy to be had from work, the first to teach us the lesson to dwell in love with all mankind by his life of living in harmony with the Indians; and the need of honesty in true living as proven in his report to William Penn of the stray horse which was found on his plantation.

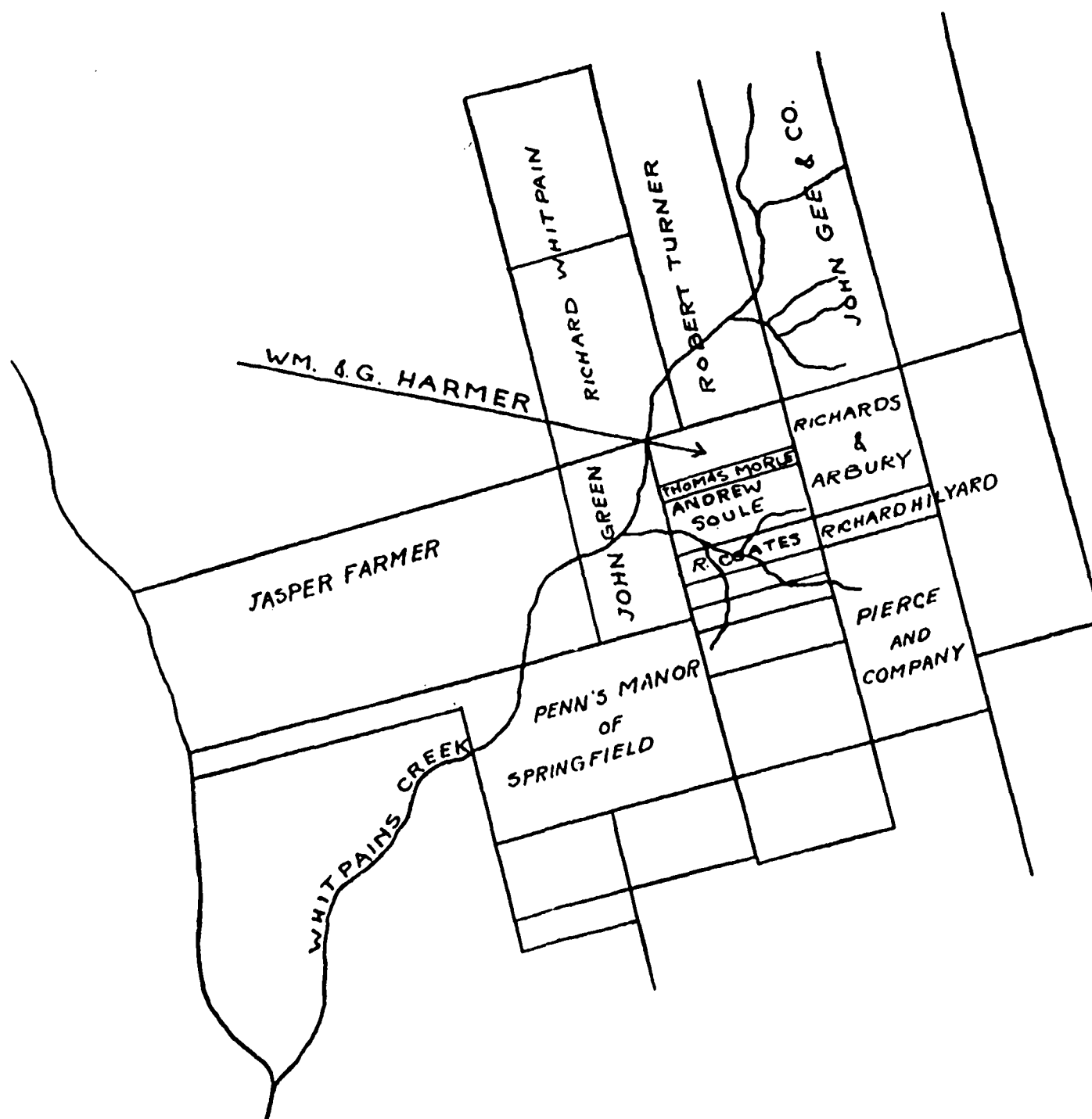
The Fulling Mill, the Wertsner, Edge, and Clover Mills all deserve equal honors for the part they made as historic land marks in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. The Clover Mill played its part by supplying the Union Army with materials needed for its equipment; the Wertsner Mill provided comfort and protection for Washington's soldiers who were encamped on its ground; and beside the walls of the Edge Mill, these soldiers marched for future war duty; finally the Ambler Fulling Mill, to which the soldiers were indebted for the supply of blankets, gave them bodily comfort.

A history of the grist mill brings back to us a picture of bygone days. The controversies over dams, water ways and road-ways leading to the mills make those living today realize what an important part the grist mill played in the economic and social life of the 18th and 19th centuries. Today we struggle with problems of capital and labor, monopolies and interstate commerce. Did not our forefathers have economic problems equally insurmountable to contend with in their day?

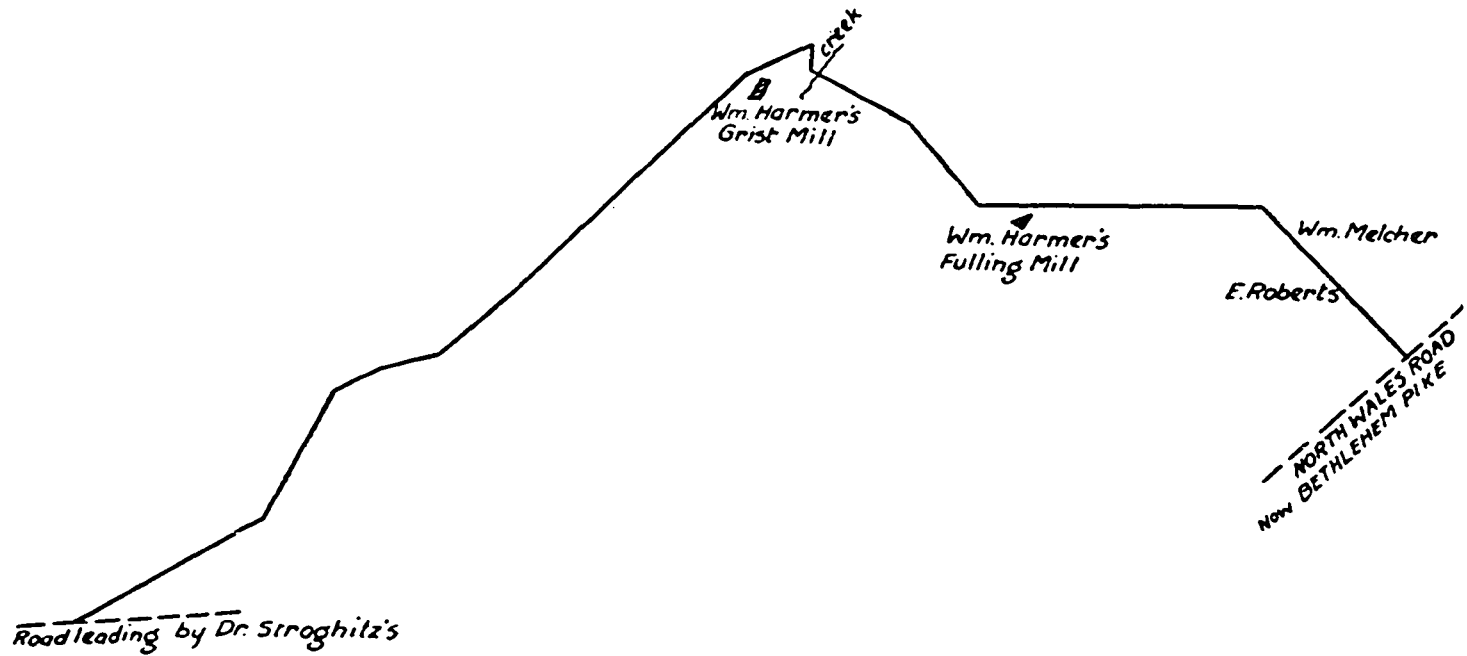
How little did they realize that a new era was about to dawn, making their dams, water wheels, and mills obsolete; their controversies futile, and their investments worthless. As we have previously stated, in the year 1887, the last wheel turned in Hague's Mill and the nine grist mills of Ambler be-



First post office in Upper Dublin Township located on south side of Bethlehem Pike at terminus of Euclid Avenue. The building was owned by Isaac Thomas who conducted a general store. In 1870, the post office was moved to Main Street and Butler Avenue and the name changed to Ambler. The above building was demolished in 1896.



The above map represents the original grant of land from William Penn to William Harmer and comprises four hundred and eight acres, the size of the present Borough of Ambler. Map taken from the original which was published in London by Holmes in 1682.



FIRST ROAD IN AMBLER BOROUGH

*North Wales Road to Wm. Harmer's Mills and
then to road leading by Dr. Strogitz's.*

came like the bow and arrow, the flail, the ox-cart, and the buggy—symbols of ages past.

In the '80's, the machine age had dawned and the full morning of a new industrial era was in the sky; new steam and electrical power, vast farm areas in the West, new frontiers opening up, relegated the old grist mill to oblivion. The children of the millers along the Wissahickon entered new vocations; and the stone walls and rock banks of the mills like Burk's Mill on the Morris Road had "gone to decay."

In 1881, a new influence arrived along the Wissahickon. In that year, a Philadelphia firm composed of Henry G. Keasbey and R. V. Mattison, M. D., found that in order to meet the requirements of their chemical plant it was necessary to remove it outside the city limits. They sought a place that possessed the fundamentals for industry, viz: water, transportation facilities and a labor market. The little village of Ambler with its decaying mills, appealed to their keen business instinct, and in a modest way, started again the spinning of wheels along the Wissahickon banks.

The story of this renaissance of Ambler industry, which will be the subject of a later article, is the story of the momentum of those turning wheels—wheels which created a revolution in the locality and made that locality known in all quarters of the globe through the purchase and sale of the products of its manufacturing plant.

FLUES' SILK MILL

The abandoned grist mill of Jacob Edge and the Reiff and Lukens families, situated on the Morris Road at the terminus of Church St. between Fort Washington and Ambler stations, was the nucleus of the first manufacturing plant in the locality of the borough of Ambler. This plant was established by a firm of commission merchants of New York com-

posed of Charles Hieronius, Eberhard Flues, and Charles Spielman, importers of fancy silks and woolen goods.

in the year 1861, under the name of Flues and Co. they leased of A. T. Stewart for three years to carry on business purposes, the premises 96 and 98 Reade St., New York, for \$4000.00 a year. With offices in Vienna, Paris and London, their business was very prosperous. However, the firm decided that it would be to their advantage to manufacture their own goods, and sell them in the house leased of A. T. Stewart. The plant on the Morris Road was therefore established with that object in view.

The selection of the site of the abandoned grist mill was suggested as a location for their manufacturing plant by Eberhard Flues, the executive head of the firm, who was familiar with the location thru frequent visits to Dr. Elliger, a relative who resided in the nearby locality of Ft. Washington. The property was owned by Amos Heller and was advertised for sale. Its purchase was made in the year 1867 by Eberhard Flues, representing the firm. The deed called for a tract of 89 acres, including the grist mill. For the entire area he paid \$22,500. Soon after the purchase, the walls of the mill were demolished and on its foundation a large frame structure was erected to meet the needs of the manufacturing plant. A building in proximity to the mill was also erected for a dyeing establishment.

Looms were placed in the building and by means of the water power, the business was started. A well trained weaver, Ewald Reetz, who had learned his trade in Germany, was employed as foreman for a period of three years. In addition to his salary, he was given a house, rent free, in Fort Washington, which dwelling was demolished in 1934, six acres of ground and a barn. At the expiration of his three year con-

tract, he was succeeded by Adolph Mantel.

It was later found that the water power was insufficient and that it was necessary to have control of the water rights of the nearby dam. To secure this, Flues was required to get possession of forty acres farther north on the Morris Road. This tract did not join his first purchase of eighty-nine acres, but was in the same section, only farther north, partly in Whitpain and Upper Dublin Townships. In this deed, he was given the right to a mill pond, mill race, and dam.

A thriving business was then started for the manufacture of dress goods, hair cloth, and materials for covering furniture, hat linings, etc. The firm made a specialty in the weaving of a certain pattern of shawl which was very fashionable, worn as an outer garment in place of the coat of the present day. Mrs. Elizabeth Plumly of Race street, Ambler, was employed in the mill in her early teens and distinctly remembers this shawl which was worn by women of all ages. It was 2½ yards long and 1 yard wide, with fringed tassels knotted to form designs. She informs that much of the work connected with the knotting of the fringe was done at their homes outside of the working hours of the firm, and the money earned by the girls was thereby considerably increased.

The name "Silk Mill," and the mulberry bushes which were numerous near the building gave many the impression that these plants were cultivated in order to raise cocoons for silk culture. They were, on the other hand, only planted for adornment, being of the white variety and unsuited for this purpose. A few bandanna handkerchiefs which they once manufactured were made from cocoons they had received elsewhere.

These mulberry bushes, coupled with the name made some think that the factory was identified with the multicaulis craze of 1839 which struck the Eastern part of Pennsyl-

vania and especially Montgomery county—a speculative mania for the cultivation of silk which had a short existence, the glowing attraction of which allured so many to financial ruin. This venture collapsed after one year. Flues did not make his purchase until 30 years later, so that the two cannot be connected in any way.

For three years the firm was most successful and had a profit of \$80,000 a year, through the operation of twenty looms and the labor of one hundred employees, nearly all of whom were Germans. Ewald Reetz, a son of the foreman, in his 18th year made \$35.00 a week, and all who were employed made proportionally good wages.

During the time that water was the power used to operate the factory, a bell 24 inches in diameter, tolled the hours to end the work of the day. Steam power was finally substituted for the former water power and a steam whistle supplanted the tolling of the bell. This bell is at present in the possession of Zebedee Comly, and is on his farm in Whitemarsh Township.

The plant was operated until the year 1874, when the business was closed out. There were several causes which contributed to the firm's decision to close the plant: First the firm of Doland and Co. of New York began to manufacture a cheap imitation of the superior materials for garments manufactured by Flues and Co.—a competition which ruined their sales. Added to this was the expense incurred by the shipment of the goods to the N. Y. sales house—they were unable to compete with similar manufacturing plants more favorably located. The greatest loss to the firm, however, was the result of the sudden change of fashion in women's dress. The fringed shawl was no longer in demand. This was the deciding factor in the closing of the business which for three successive years had operated with enormous profits.

The late Eberhard Luttgen, a son-in-law of Eberhard Flues, is au-

thority for the information that when the firm closed their plant, a large quantity of the warm garments they manufactured were donated to Admiral Peary who was at that time preparing for his expedition to the North Pole.

Fortunately Flues was able to sell out his interest in the business to his partners at a fair price, who operated later a similar factory in New York.

Flues then lived a retired life on his estate until his death in 1896. During the years that Flues resided in the locality, he took great pride in a small factory near his dwelling house where he made German cheese and in a dairy on his plantation, fifteen acres of which was a meadow suitable for grazing. The first Jersey cows in this country were imported by him and placed on his farm. They were named Buttercup, Talle and Pink. All his business cards which he issued relative to his manufacturing plant were adorned with their photographs. One of these cows was sold for the price of \$3000.00 to a member of the Sharpless family who was in the butter business.

When Eberhard Flues bought the eighty-nine acre tract, he resided in a house on the East side of the Morris road which stood near the mill. Later when he bought the forty acre tract, he vacated this house and moved in the new home on the forty acres on the west side of the Morris road, and his old home was taken by his farmer. This last tract of land was purchased in the year 1911 by Edwin Vare for \$14,000 and ten years later was sold to Alice Roberts for the same price or \$350.00 an acre.

The house and barn on this tract are still standing. The latter has on it the inscription J. R. 1809, which informs us that it was built by Jacob Reiff, the owner, in that year.

George Wallace purchased the eighty-nine acre tract in the year 1923 for \$22,000, slightly less than Flues paid for it in 1864. He filled

in the tail race of the former mills which was 1200 feet long, 12 by 14 feet deep and 20 feet wide, at a cost of \$7,000. He was at no expense for the dirt needed to fill in the race as it was supplied to him free of cost by the North Penn Railroad, when they made their excavation for the tunnel below Fort Washington. The buildings of the factory and the nearby farm house were in ruins for many years, and in 1901, a fire destroyed the last vestige of the old land mark.

Fortunately we have a photograph of the factory and nearby buildings preserved for us in Scott's Atlas of Montg. Co., published in 1877 in which it is called "Flues" Worsted Mills," a name more appropriate because of the character of the goods they manufactured.

ELLIGER PARK AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH FLUES' SILK MILL

Elliger Park, situated on the Bethlehem Pike north of Fort Washington, has been developed within the past ten years by the Ambler Realtors, Potts Brothers. This tract of eighty acres had been known for many years as "The Elliger Estate;" and so, in choosing a name, the Potts Brothers called it "Elliger Park" realizing that because of its situation, and the many and beautiful old shade trees, a picturesque and park-like residential section could be developed.

There are now many fine and handsome homes in this section. Standing apart from these, and facing the Bethlehem Pike is the old summer home of Dr. George Elliger, bearing the date 1795, which he purchased in 1855 in order to have a summer home about half-way between his offices in Allentown and Philadelphia. In recent years, this old homestead has been attractively remodeled to its original style by Mrs. Henry B. Bartow, the present owner.

Dr. Elliger was closely identified with this locality, where he made his summer home. His second daughter, Natalie, married Eb-

erhard Flues, who conducted the silk mill on the Morris road.

In 1857, Dr. Elliger purchased six acres of land in the same section as the eighty acre tract, but on the west side of the Bethlehem Pike, and it was in the house on this property, which was demolished in 1934, that the foreman of the silk mill lived.

Dr. Elliger's reputation in his career as a physician was not confined to the localities where he practiced. His indefatigable and earnest labors for the Homeopathic School of Medicine had made him known in the country at large. He was born in the German Kingdom of Saxony in 1802, and received his education and medical degree in the German schools. He emigrated to America and opened an office at 1112 Spring Garden street, Philadelphia, and also in Brooklyn, N. Y. He shuttled between these two cities and in both became well-known as a physician of the new school. His enthusiasm in his work coupled with his charming personality gained for him a high position in the field of medicine in which he was interested. He died suddenly in his Brooklyn office, February 22, 1878..

FAUST'S TANNERY

The locality situated at the intersection of Bethlehem Pike and Butler avenue, has been called Rose Valley since 1878. Before that year it was known as Gilky's Corner, named for Andrew Gilkeson who kept the Inn and corner store. The reputation of this corner as a live business center, which it has held for many years, is due to a large extent to a tannery established here, an industry which produced leather, made later by the local saddler into harness.

This tannery was established by Jonathan Thomas in 1790, in which year he purchased from Andrew Gilkeson and his wife, Edith, $\frac{1}{2}$ an acre for 22 pounds and 10 shillings, the tract on which the tannery of the present day stands.

Thomas was the owner of two

tracts of 22 and 25 acres of land in the locality, which he bought from John and Elizabeth Burk. He desired, however, a location near a stream of water and having a frontage on the Bethlehem pike and since the land he owned did not give him these advantages, he purchased the $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in order to be provided with the good business opportunities this location offered.

Jonathan Thomas, we presume, operated the tannery until his death in 1808. Two years later his oldest son, David, who in the deed is called "a store keeper of Abington," sold the property to James Rutter of Pottstown. The house in which Rutter resided after the purchase of the tannery, stood by the Bethlehem pike, a route taken before the days of the railroad by many farmers and tradespeople to reach Philadelphia. Many people who took this route were residents of Lehigh County and owners of tanneries which they operated in connection with their farms, and among these farmers was John Faust who lived in Macungie Township in Lehigh County eight miles from Allentown. During each trip he made, he never failed to stop at James Rutter's home where he would stay over night to rest, that he might continue his trip to Philadelphia more comfortably on the following day.

Mutual business interests and congenial tastes resulted in a strong friendship between these two men and when John Faust's son, Alvin, became of age, he made the decision to learn the tanning trade with James Rutter, his father's friend, in whose home he would be given the opportunity to learn English while he was learning the business. For this privilege he was to work for his board and was to receive no wages. The time for this contract was one year.

At the expiration of the year, young Faust was much surprised because Rutter voluntarily gave him \$6.00 a week for the whole period of time that he had lived with them. This was repeated the

following year. When the second contract expired, Alvin Faust decided to purchase the tannery and make his home in this locality, so in the year 1850, he purchased of James Rutter seven acres on which the tannery stood for \$3000.00. He brought his family here the following year and made his residence in a house on this tract, a home far from the choice of the good wife who came from Lehigh County; a portion of the house had been used for a cocoonery when the multi-caul's craze of 1839 struck Montgomery County and much labor was required in order to make it the home to which she had been accustomed. It was torn down in 1867 and on its site a substantial brick house was erected, now 928 Butler avenue.

In 1855, Alvin Faust bought another tract of land from James Rutter which comprised 28 acres for which he paid \$4400.00. The house on this tract was the home of Rutter, and was reached by a lane which in the present day runs parallel with Argyle avenue. Alvin Faust lived in this house until his death, having removed here when he vacated the house on 928 Butler avenue. An addition was made to this house in 1857 and in 1862 he built on the property a distinctive Lehigh County barn to replace one which was in need of much repair. In 1865 he bought the double house and about five acres back of the tannery. The corner house was bought in 1871 from the heirs of Andrew Gilkeson.

Alvin Faust died May 10, 1884; his wife Catherine, was his administrator. They had five sons; Alvin, who managed the farm; Milton, Samuel and Edwin, who operated the tannery at Rose Valley, and Richard, manager of the tannery located on the Juniata River, which was purchased in 1873 by the Faust family for the purpose of being assured of an abundance of Oak bark, needed in the process of tanning for their mills.

The Faust's produced at the Rose Valley tannery, the finest

leather made in the United States and with great difficulty were able to fill the demand for russet leather for which they received sixty-five cents a pound. Their hides were obtained largely from the packing houses of Chicago, but a few were imported from Germany, France and Switzerland. They made on the average of three hundred hides weekly.

Four hundred sides were received every week from the Mt. Union plant they owned in Huntingdon County, and finished at Rose Valley. The process of the work, which required from eight to eleven months, was a most interesting one. One hundred vats in the tannery contained bark liquors. There were six large ones called "leeches" in which the liquor was made and from these it was drawn as required in the other vats. The hides were soaked in the vats two days to soften them then were hung in lime water six days to loosen the hair, after which they were cut, making two sides, and passed through revolving knives that removed the hair and surplus flesh. The hair was disposed of to plasterers, and the flesh used to make a fine brand of glue. They used from forty to fifty carloads of bark for their tanning every year and in 1912, their output of sides was six hundred every week. Owing to this heavy demand, they were sometimes unable to fill all the orders they received. Later, when they were unable to obtain the large quantities of oak bark needed, they resorted to the barreled extract. In 1896, their old drying room was insufficiently ventilated for the increase of business, and they were required to add a second floor to the building.

When Alvin Faust bought the tannery in 1850, it was operated by water power. In 1862, steam power took the place of water, and in 1903, a 125 horse-power engine supplanted the steam-power. In the years of the Civil War, they ground their bark by means of horse-power through a construction which re-

quired the horse to walk on a circular track about five times a minute. At first, they had no fire protection, but in 1899, they installed a complete fire extinguishing apparatus, including a pump capable of forcing five hundred gallons of water per minute, which was placed in a fire-proof boiler house. With a supply of five hundred feet of hose, and a stream of water in proximity to the mill, they were well equipped against the outbreak of fire.

In the Centennial exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876, Faust's displayed a tan hide measuring ten feet each way, which was sold before the close of the exhibition to a firm of belt manufacturers of Lowell, Mass., known as Josiah Gates & Son. An advertising sign displayed by the Faust firm at this memorable exhibition is still in the possession of the family and occupies a prominent place on the walls of their building at Rose Valley.

The Tannery was not equipped with any machinery whereby they could split leather and when they wished to have this work done, they were required to go to Philadelphia to a man named Edward B. Ritchie, who made belting for driving machinery. During the time of the Civil War, a visit was made to Ritchie's place of business, who asked Mr. Faust if the leather he brought to him was for war purposes. Ritchie was a Quaker and opposed to war, and when Faust replied in the affirmative, Ritchie said to him, "I will do the work for thee this time, since thee has brought it to me, but I will not do any more for thee, if thee uses it for such a purpose."

Another story tells us of Alvin Faust's experience with Joseph Howell, of the same religious faith, who was a leather commission merchant to whom Faust sold leather. Howell had purchased Faust's leather, and when the latter asked for a settlement of their transaction, Howell, replied, "The leather I bought of thee

the last time was better than thee represented, and I allowed thee extra on this sale." The incident is typical of the high standard of business relations of the Rose Valley Tannery.

The plant at Rose Valley continued in a prosperous condition until the advent of the automobile. The horse-power was displaced by the motor; the heavy teams by the truck; the pleasure carriage by the automobile; thus creating a much less demand for leather. As a result, the passing of many tanneries throughout the country is one of the many changes the present generation has witnessed.

The tannery at Rose Valley was operated by Jonathan Thomas twenty years; by James Rutter forty years, and the Faust family eighty-five years. Its history would be incomplete without a backward glance at the personality of these worthy residents who operated this important industry in the locality.

Jonathan Thomas was the son of Abraham Thomas and was born in May, 26, 1750. He married Alice Jarret, a member of one of the thirteen families who settled Germantown under Pastorius. They had eight children. Their son, George, was the first physician to have an office and practice medicine in the locality of the present Borough of Ambler. Isaac, another son, was for forty years its postmaster. He purchased a large tract of his father's real estate holdings in Upper Dublin Township, and some of his descendants are residents of the Borough in the present day, residing on some portion of their ancestral land. These include the children of Dr. Albanus Styer and Samuel Shoemaker. The children of the former, whose wife was a daughter of Isaac Thomas, are Samuel Styer, now retired and living in Philadelphia, and Mrs. Tacy Acuff, nee Styer, who is residing at Langhorne, Pa.

Jonathan Thomas' daughter, Rebecca, married George Fitzwater, and we are told in the genealogy of the Fitzwater family that Jon-

athan Thomas was a cabinet maker and undertaker as well as tanner, and that it was his custom to have a large stock of coffins on hand to meet any emergency that might arise in case of a calamity in the country or epidemic that would make an occasion for their need.

The sight of the porch of their new home, filled to its full capacity with ready made coffins, which met the gaze of his wife, Alice, when she arrived as a bride to the new home Jonathan had provided for her, filled her with awe, but with tact and good judgment, she influenced her husband to find a better way.

James Rutter, the second owner of the tannery, married Mary Good. Her home was the store opposite the tannery. Her parents were much opposed to the frequent visits of James to their home and kept Mary under close observation in order to prevent their meeting. James and Mary, however, found a way. Mary had a sympathizing friend who resided with the family, and we are told, that with her help, on a stormy night, with the wind howling outside, in spite of locked doors and watchful attendant, Mary was safely landed from the second story window to the ground beneath by means of an improvised rope. James, by a prearranged plan, was ready to meet her.

The elopement of James Rutter and Mary Good, we feel sure, was the topic of conversation for many a day beside their neighbor's fireside. They lived happily together in the house up the lane, which in the present day runs parallel with Argyle avenue, until Mary's death, when James sold his real estate holdings of forty years and lived a retired life in Philadelphia with his two daughters, Ruth Ann and Jane.

The second of the Faust family who succeeded James Rutter as the owner of the Tannery is well known in the present day. The superior quality of their products and the high standard of their bus-

iness methods gained for them a reputation for integrity that was recognized by all the residents in the community. As time went on and the little village became an incorporated Borough, there was a call for trustworthy citizens to fill responsible positions in its management. The borough was most wise in the selection of members of the Faust family to fill these, as the close of its history almost fifty years later has demonstrated.

In 1887, Edwin Faust was appointed treasurer of the Independent School District, which was established in 1881. He resigned from this office in 1895 to become treasurer of the Borough schools, an office he holds in the present day. His son, William Faust, served faithfully and honorably the locality for forty years as a trustworthy official of the local bank; and Samuel Faust, the son of Alvin and Catherine, his wife who purchased the tannery in 1850, at his death in 1933, had been the Borough treasurer for 37 years.

TOLL GATES IN AMBLER

In the early history of the country, the bad conditions of the roads made traveling from place to place very difficult, and especially hazardous in the spring when quicksands were frequently encountered. There naturally arose a demand to improve these conditions and through-out the country, turnpike companies were formed by the citizens, who rebuilt and kept in repair the more important highways. The roads most frequently traveled were "plked," that is, a bed of stone was built on them, which in time as a result of the travel, formed a foundation or road-bed on some solidity. The stones used for this purpose were crushed on the roadside itself, by hand, with the use of a large hammer. When these highways were thus changed or "turned" in their character, they were called "turn-pikes."

Since money was required for the upkeep of these pikes, toll had

to be collected for that purpose. Therefore, to stop the travellers and collect their toll, gates were placed generally every 2½ or 3 miles on the pikes. These gates could be raised or lowered as the occasion demanded to let the travellers come and go.

Some shelter had to be provided for the convenience and comfort of the man who collected the toll, so a small house attached to the gate was built by the turnpike company as a place of residence for him and his family. All hours of the day and night, the keeper of the gate was on duty to collect the pennies from the people who passed by.

The road for public travel known in the present day as Butler Pike or Butler avenue, was incorporated by an act of Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a turnpike on January 15, 1853. On this route of travel, which extended from Plymouth Meeting to the Limekiln Pike, two toll gates, one at Broad Axe and the other near Three Tuns, were erected.

Three years later, in 1856, the railroad was built through this section of the country and there arose a new problem.

The station at Ambler was located on the highway which passed through these two toll gates and as there was no toll gate in its vicinity, the Directors of the Turnpike Co. thought that it would increase their toll revenue if one was placed near it, so they built one on Butler avenue near the terminus of Maple street as it exists in the present day. This location was chosen in order to collect toll from those who came to the station by way of Reiff's Mill road. We are informed by Samuel Shoemaker that the railroad took advantage of the proximity of the gate to the station and in its early years employed Samuel Shull, the gate keeper, as agent for the sale of passenger tickets.

After the building of the railroad there was a large shipment of milk from the Ambler station, surpassing that of any other station

between Phila. and Bethlehem. This meant that there was a corresponding increase of travel on the highway leading to the station in the early mornings as the farmers from near and far brought their milk for shipment. An equal number of shippers came to Ambler from both sides of the railroad. Toll could be collected from those who came from the West side, at the gate located near Maple street. The farmers from the East side however, could reach the station without paying toll. This the farmers from the opposite side objected to as it gave their competitors an advantage.

The Directors of the turnpike listened to these objections, and anxious to see justice done and also increase their revenue, they erected on the East side, a gate with a small unpretentious building for the gate keeper and collected toll in the early morning hours only. The location of this gate was at the present intersection of Main street and Butler avenue. Main street was not laid out at that time and when it was opened for travel later, the gate stood in the center of the intersection of these two streets.

Due to erection of creameries throughout the country, a large part of the milk shipped decreased, and the toll revenue diminished accordingly. The house and gate at Maple street began to need repair, but the Directors decided to discontinue this gate because of its proximity to the one on the opposite side; so in 1878, the West gate was closed permanently. The remnants of the old building were sold to a farmer who resided on the Skippack pike and the "Hathboro Spirit" of November 16, 1878 said, "The Turnpike Company has taken out the old pump that went with the toll gate and filled up the well where the toll house formerly stood."

The two gates were from this time on consolidated into one, and a substantial house was erected for the gate-keeper at the inter-

section of Main St. and Butler avenue, where toll continued to be collected.

The time came when an effort was made to have the gate abandoned. Little was accomplished, however, until 1888, when the locality was incorporated as a Borough. In that year, one hundred and twenty-one residents petitioned the Court to abolish the gate, and on January 20, 1890, that body decreed that "the portion of the Plymouth and Upper Dublin Turnpike within the limits of the Borough of Ambler shall be condemned for public use; made free from tolls and toll gates, and maintained thereafter as other roads in the Borough are required to be maintained."

One month later, February 9, the toll house was destroyed by fire together with the store property at the northeast corner of Main street and Butler avenue, and the nearby hotel sheds. This event marked the end of the forty-four years that toll was collected in the locality.

Much regret was felt by those who loved the old land-marks when this fire took away the little toll house which had so many interesting associations. In a small room on the second floor, public meetings were often held for the discussion and deciding of local affairs. The Independent School district rented the same for \$1.25 a month. The gate-keeper, Frederick Huffnagle, had a shoe repair shop in a small room on the first floor, which he managed in addition to his duties as toll collector. The public, however, whose objections to paying toll on a busy highway, outweighed these sentiments hailed with delight the decision of the Court and the destruction of the gate by fire.

The following letter was written by Thaddeus Kenderdine of Newtown, Bucks County, who had rented the coal yard of George Knight, where the freight yard of the Railroad exists in the present

day, gives us the personal opinion

of a business man of the day as it refers to the toll gate.

HISTORY OF 36 ACRES

"In this year of 1875, I say good-bye to Ambler and my place of business in that village. I took a three years lease of a coal yard which is owned by George Knight. This place of business before I took it was operated by 2 men of the singularly appropriate names of Cole and Wood. Even that facetious name could not make the business go, and how glad they must have been when they unloaded it on me.

"No one should be blamed for their efforts to unload when the first easy goer comes along. It is on the edge of a village, and there is no way to reach it without being held up by a toll gate man, whose coin of vantage is at the end of my lane. The other coal yard can be reached without being obliged to pay any duty. Ambler is noisy enough by the going of the trains on the railroad night and day, but as none of the passengers stop off to buy my stock in trade, noises avail me nothing. The railroad has even ceased to make the town grow. There are twenty-five scattered houses all of frame but five, all of which, with the exception of three, are on the East side of the railroad, and that is all there has been of it for some years they tell me.

"I guess Mr. Knight will have a hard time to find another sucker like me. It might be a good location if some one would set fire to that toll gate. It is queer I never thought that might hurt my business. My! but some people are stingy; would not come near me because they would have to pay two cents!"

Twenty-five years later, Thaddeus Kenderdine was still living when the toll gate was abandoned, and undoubtedly, shared his joy with that of the residents of Ambler when toll was no longer collected from those travelled on the main highway of the Borough of Ambler.

In the year 1832, Isaac Thomas

purchased forty-six acres that were detached from the tract of eighty-three acres which Mary David had granted to Andrew Ambler for the sum of \$1581.00. This piece of land was situated in the section of the first ward, in the present Borough, with the approximate boundary lines of Main and Hendricks streets on the east and west, and Butler and Forrest avenues on the north and south. There was included in this purchase, as we are informed in the deed, a chopping and sawmill, located at the northeast corner of Spring Garden street and Butler avenue, and a house for the sawyer, still standing at the northeast corner of Race and Spring Garden streets.

Isaac Thomas was a prominent man in the locality. He owned fifty-three acres of ground, which was held by the Thomas family since its purchase early in 1700. For forty years, he kept the Post Office in his general store situated in Upper Dublin Township on the Bethlehem Pike, at the terminus of Euclid avenue of the present day. He owned the thirty-six acre tract purchased from Andrew until the year 1865, when radical changes began in the locality. Isaac Thomas was then seventy-two years of age and his interest in the business affairs was beginning to wane.

Jonathan Lukens, a well known builder and woodsman of Gwynedd, saw a chance for prosperous development in this region because of the sawmill on Thomas' tract, which could be used to advantage in his building operations, the abundance of timber, and the proximity to the railroad, which after ten years of its existence was beginning to make the locality attractive for homes. Seeing no risk in the purchase of the thirty-six acres, Lukens bought them for \$7125, with full confidence in himself and his ability to carry through successfully the project of forming a town and realizing considerable financial results.

It was a beautiful spot. The two

streams of water which coursed their way through the grounds before entering the Wissahickon, made the valley very picturesque and inspired everyone to think of goodness and loveliness.

The Board of Managers of Swarthmore College, who, a short time previous to the sale of this site to Lukens, were in quest of a place on which to erect their College, recognized this location as the most beautiful in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Here was an ideal situation: the Wissahickon and its tributaries, and a valley with a great variety of scenic effects. By a very small majority of votes, the choice of the Board fell to the location in Philadelphia, near Media, and the sale of these acres was made instead to Lukens, who had in view only the financial advantages with no thought of its preservation for its romance and beauty.

James Kiesel, a competent surveyor, was employed by Lukens at once, and ten acres were laid out into building lots. Streets were planned, and the orchard, even though laden with luscious fruits, was destroyed, as was all other grown greens. Fortunately, however, a small section between Forrest and Butler avenue, near Ridge and Hendricks street, was sold to Charles Childs, who built an elegant mansion on the most elevated portion and who preserved there its original beauty which was still evident many years later during its ownership by the Hart family.

Lukens, planning his town, first laid out Main street, and erected on it four houses. He planned the parallel streets of Walnut, Forrest avenue (then called Harts avenue) Race street (Water street), Ainsworth street and Spring Garden street. Several lots were sold for which he realized \$50.00 for fifty feet front. Many sales were made, but he could find no one to purchase the north side of Butler avenue which was very discouraging; he thought it good business policy to dispose of the less desirable

ones first. These lots were then thought objectionable locations for homes because of the steep decline of their banks and the stream of water which ran through their center.

Jonathan Lukens was very anxious to dispose of these lots as financial reverses were beginning to creep upon him. It is related by Samuel Shoemaker that at this time, Lukens approached his father, Charles Shoemaker, hoping that he could induce Mr. Shoemaker to make the purchase, as Isaac Thomas, the former owner of the land, was Shoemaker's father-in-law, and that he might be interested because of the sentiment attached to it.

Shoemaker was a Quaker, therefore, Lukens, in order to get into closer contact with him, diplomatically used the language of that sect when he said, "I will sell thee, Charles, all the tract of ground lying on the north side of Butler avenue between Spring Garden street and the bridge near Hendricks street for \$200.00, with a depth of 250 feet." Charles thought that it had no future prospect, hence he asked, "What could I do with it?" Lukens replied, "Pasture thy cows in it." "Pasture my cows! If I ever put my cows there I would never find them again." . . and the sale was not made.

Much discouraged, Lukens tried to make up this loss of valuable land by purchasing five acres of the Reiff estate in the section of the railroad front with the intention of starting a coal yard. He secured the front, but the Railroad Company refused to run in a switch, giving as an excuse that there would be no business. However, through the influence of Charles Shoemaker, a close friend of Frank Comly, president of the railroad, the delayed switch was laid, and Lukens began the establishment of a prosperous coal business. The revenue, however, during his ownership was not enough to meet expenses, and only added to his financial reverses. Later,

David Knipe, rented the yard for a short time, selling it to Joseph Stackhouse in 1873, who, in turn, sold it to J. Watson Craft.

The saw mill owned by Lukens, also resulted in financial loss owing to the large amount of money he was obliged to spend when he put Race street on his map, Race street, was so called because it ran parallel with the race which supplied the mill with water. In order to get an outlet at Spring Garden street, the contour of the forebay there had to be changed, giving the street at this location a distant curve, still evident today. Later, he realized that this work was a loss of time and money, for great changes had come in a short space of time. The standing timber in the surrounding section of the country, on which he was dependent for the successful operation of his saw mill, was getting scarce. His mill was primitive in its construction; he was unable to compete with the great mills farther west, which were equipped with machinery of modern type and located where there were still vast forests. This change of events, unforeseen by Jonathan Lukens, spelled the doom of the saw mill in Ambler and its existence soon became only a memory to the oldest residents.

In 1873, nearly ten years after he purchased the thirty-six acre tract, the outlook for the sale of his holdings on Butler avenue became more encouraging through the sale in that year of a vacant lot to Thomas Hulschizer for which he received \$850.00. This enormous price was paid by Hulschizer in order to encourage Lukens, who was his personal friend. The same lot was sold fifteen years later for \$350.00, less than half the price paid for it.

Notwithstanding this sale, Lukens' dream of making a town and replenishing his financial resources now began to vanish. The failure of his coal yard, the disaster of the mill, the great expense incurred in operating it, the les-

sening of the number of lots sold, put him heavily in debt and brought the need of money to meet his financial obligations.

In this crisis, he sold some lots for as low as \$35.00 in order to satisfy his creditors. This resulted in the loss of some friends who thought that he had not dealt fairly with them for the great price they had paid for the land which they had purchased from him. The loss of these friendships, the financial loss he met, the realization of his failure, undermined his health and caused his untimely death. It would seem as though the irony of fate had been almost cruel to this worthy citizen. A man of most exemplary habits, filled with the spirit of honest endeavor, died with remorse and humiliation because of his failure in life.

The future history of this thirty-six acre tract proves, on the contrary, that his life was not a failure. The well paved streets, which he planned in the heart of the Borough, filled with many happy homes and their increased valuation from time to time are the monuments of Jonathan Lukens. Others of his own time and generation lived to see his colossal dreams of the future of the locality become a reality. They lived to see it teaming with life, happiness and prosperity. These could bear witness to the truth of the saying, "One man reaps what another sows," as evidenced by the later history of the holding of this property. These lots, almost worthless and unsaleable during his early ownership, a few years later, or in 1933, with but a meagre pretension of a building thereon had an assessed valuation of \$40,000 for forty front feet.

Jonathan Lukens ventured and lost; others reaped the harvest.

10 ACRES IN THE BORO OF AMBLER

In the year 1868, Isaac Thomas sold a tract of ten acres of his real estate holdings in the locality

now the Borough of Ambler to his son-in-law, Charles Shoemaker, for which the latter paid \$2500.00. This land had a frontage on Butler avenue from Lindenwold avenue, to Spring Garden street, and in depth extended to Poplar street. The time of the purchase of this tract corresponds approximately to the period when Jonathan Lukens was planning to transform the undeveloped thirty-six acres lying on the opposite side of Butler avenue into a community with building sites and street.

Unlike Lukens, however, Shoemaker was not an adventurer. He purchased the land, not for speculation, but for the purpose of erecting one house on it for his permanent home, and holding the ground, which was at this time a field of wheat, for cultivation.

Shoemaker had only recently moved into the locality. He had but a short acquaintance with it made through visits to his friend, Dr. Albanus Styer, who resided in the nearby locality. This friendship began when the latter visited the drug store of Shoemaker's father, located at 2nd and Buttonwood streets, in Philadelphia, where Charles Shoemaker as a young man assisted in the business. As a result of this friendship, Shoemaker later made frequent visits to his friend in the country, and at such times, social affairs were arranged by Dr. Styer for the entertainment of his city visitor. On one of these occasions, Charles made the acquaintance of Susanna, the vivacious and gracious daughter of Isaac Thomas, whom he later made his wife.

There was much sentiment therefore, attached to the purchase of the ten acre tract of the ancestral land of his wife. The proximity of the railroad station enabled him to readily take his daily trips to Philadelphia where he had business interests; the convenience of the village stores and Post Office also appealed to him

as a suitable place for his future home.

The house Charles Shoemaker erected is in the present day 60 Butler avenue, now occupied by William Hough. It is of frame structure, with sixteen rooms and, with the exception of the porch floors which were made of North Carolina pine, was made of lumber sawed at the saw mill of his father-in-law, Isaac Thomas. The mill was located opposite to the house where the American store is now located. The house was built by day's work and the carpenter who did most of the work on it, walked every day to Ambler from his home in Hatboro. This daily walk of 12 miles did not prevent him from giving a full day's service to his job.

The house was distinctive in its day because it was furnished with a bath room. A home supplied with this modern necessity was at that time considered a novelty, and it was quite usual for persons who travelled on the highway on the roadside of which the dwelling stood, to have their attention directed to the "house which had a bathroom."

Another distinctive feature of the house was the masonry vault built below the level of the cellar and opening into a well at its side, which was used as a cool chamber for the preservation of perishable foods. At the time of the erection of the house, Pasteur's discovery of bacterial invasion was not then known, the modern methods of refrigeration was not yet adopted, and the housewife, in order to keep her butter from melting, her meat from spoiling, and her milk from souring, had recourse to one of three methods: the spring house, cellar vault, or outside vault.

In the Borough, two of these constructions still exist in the present day to the delight of the historian. The outside vault on Mt. Pleasant avenue near the Railroad crossing built by the Thomson family near their grist mill, and the cellar vault built by Charles Shoemaker of which the present sketch is in

part a history. The third method, the spring house, also existed in Ambler until recent years. This interesting structure stood over the spring of water near the home of J. J. Radcliffe on Mattison avenue. This latter medium was the preferred one for securing a slight refrigeration.

As stated previously, Charles Shoemaker bought his tract of ten acres for farming purposes, and not for speculation. However, very soon after his purchase, he was approached by James Wampole, who had recently sold his hotel near the Ambler Station, at this time called "Ambler Park Hotel," who asked him to sell a lot for the erection of a house thereon, as he wished to make his home in the locality. Notwithstanding Shoemaker's intention to keep his ten acres intact for agricultural purposes, he could not resist the temptation of a good sale. He sold Wampole sixty feet at the southeast corner of Butler avenue and York street, for \$500, and Wampole built a substantial house on the lot. This was the second house built on the ten acre tract.

This lot extended to Poplar St. and was later sold to Henry Jones. It was purchased by John S. Buchanan in 1884, who moved the house to the rear portion of the lot with the intention of erecting a more substantial structure on its former location. Owing to failing health and his death a short time later, his intention was never carried out, and the vacant lot was sold to J. M. Haywood who has been the owner for many years.

Real estate operations were dull for some time; and in the meantime Shoemaker continued to farm the unsold portion of the ten acre tract. Encouraged by his success in this field of work, he increased the extent of his real estate holdings and purchased twenty additional acres extending from Lindenwold avenue on the east, Popular street on the north and joined his former line on the west. The Meehan Nurseries, at that time on

the south side of Poplar street were situated on this tract.

Until 1878, the whole portion was cultivated intensely. The time had now come when there were many changes in the borough: the Post Office was moved from Thomas' store on the Bethlehem Pike to Butler avenue; Jonathan Lukens' real estate operations had created many homes; the railroad attracted many people, especially the farmers, whose shipment of milk from Ambler, exceeded the exports of any other station on the line between Bethlehem and Philadelphia, often exceeding in amount the capacity of a car. These attractions made a demand for homes and Shoemaker found a ready sale for lots on which buyers desired to erect houses. Very soon his ten acre farm land became the nucleus of a prosperous village.

Third house on the ten acres was built in 1878 by Henry Slutter, who purchased 100 feet on Butler avenue, for the sum of \$1000. This was the lot on which the Warner theatre stands in the present day. Two years later, Dr. Albanus Styer bought the house on this lot, and opened an office to continue his practice.

After this sale to Styer, Slutter bought more ground from Shoemaker for \$500. On this land, he erected a home and a business place. He was experienced carriage maker and employed eight men throughout the year. He usually made twenty-five new carriages a year, in addition to doing a large amount of repair work. Henry Martin, the first real estate operator in Ambler, had his office in Slutter's house. This property was sold to Gernard Meyers, who, after its purchase, converted the carriage factory into a dairy and milk shipping establishment.

In 1886, there was a decided boom in real estate because of the evident prosperity of the Keasbey and Mattison Company, an industrial plant established in 1881. The sound business policies of this

firm were giving proof of continued prosperity and as a result, there was a demand for the unsold portion of his real estate. In this year, John S. Buchanan bought 320 feet of land extending from York street to Lindenwold avenue. He cut this into six building lots which he sold to different individuals, and on these a row of Queen Anne houses were erected by the purchasers.

The first house was built by J. J. Houghton, the cashier of the local bank. Henry C. Biddle, the present owner, purchased it in later years.

A second house was erected on the adjoining lot by Dr. C. B. Hough, and John Buchanan erected houses on the remaining lots for speculative purposes.

The last building erected on the ten acre tract was the Hotel Wyndham on the southeast corner of Butler avenue and Spring Garden St. This was built by John D. Cooper at an approximate cost of \$35,000, on a lot 140 feet in length for which \$5600.00 was paid. The house contained forty-five rooms, twenty-eight of these bedrooms. A well 150 feet deep was dug which gave a flow of water to supply the hotel at the rate of fifty gallons a minute.

Cooper secured a hotel license in the year following the erection of the building. A stable for forty horses was built on the rear portion of the lot, laid with plank flooring and underground drainage. This building also contained an apartment and a section for the storage of furniture. It was destroyed by a fire of unknown origin on November 2, 1922, and was not rebuilt.

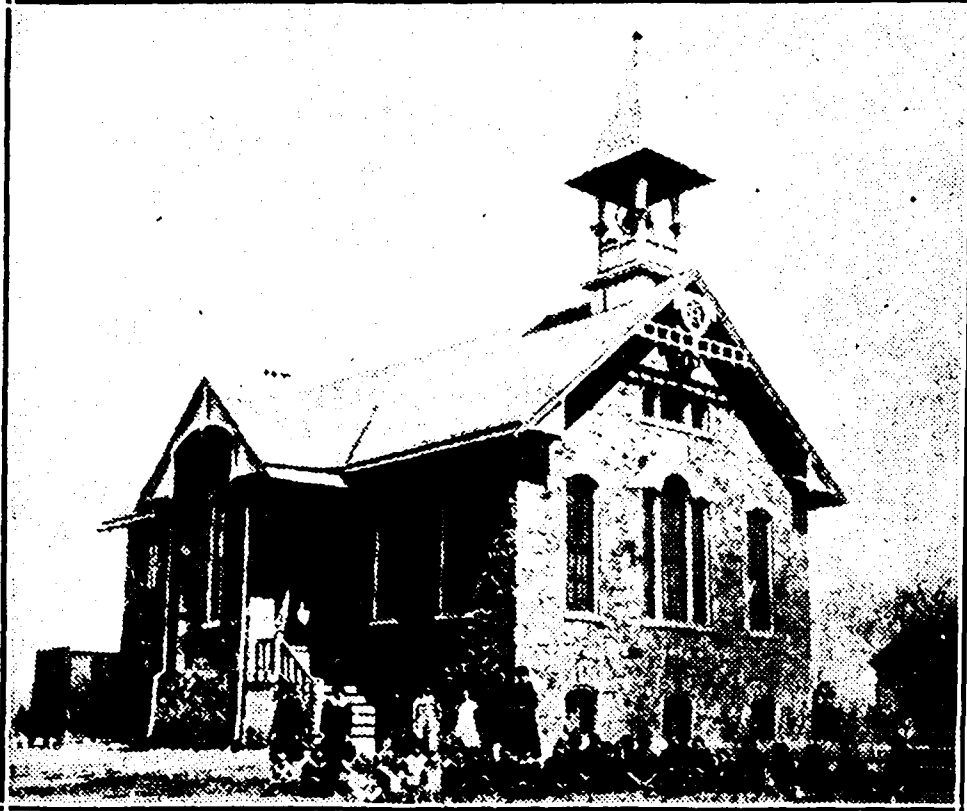
The property, now owned by Mrs. Lydia Kerns, has served the public for many years. The Post Office was located in it from July 1, 1928 to June 30, 1932. It has been used as a polling place for the second ward of the Borough in election times. Places of business and professional offices located within it have been patronized by



AWFUL ACCIDENT

on the North Pennsylvania Rail Road on Thursday July 17th 1856

The above illustration is an exact duplicate of an old, authentic painting. The accident occurred near the present Borough of Ambler, which was chronicled in all the newspapers of the time as the most disastrous of any known in railroad history. The name of Mary Ambler was heralded far and wide due to her heroism in relieving the suffering of the dying and wounded at the scene of the disaster. Her home was used as a temporary hospital and sometime later officials of the railroad named the present station, Ambler, in recognition of her humane work in an emergency.



First Public School erected by the Independent School District in 1881 on the ground where the present Forrest Avenue school stands.



An Ash tree on Poplar street in Ambler Borough on the property the estate of Samuel Shoemaker 18 feet in circumference. Horace Evans of Gwynedd Valley, an authority on Forestry, claims that it is approximately 250 years old.

It has the honor of being nominated in Wildman's book published in 1933, entitled "Penn's Woods" as one of the oldest trees in the State.



the public to their convenience and satisfaction. Travellers under the necessity of visiting the locality for purposes of business have found within its walls the rest and comfort they desired.

Charles Shoemaker, who purchased the ten acre tract, and his wife, Susanna Thomas, had one child, Samuel Shoemaker, born in the old Thomas home (demolished in 1896) on the southside of the Bethlehem Pike near the terminus of Euclid avenue. When the house, now 60 Butler Avenue, was completed, he moved into it with his family. Here on ground owned for generations by the Thomas family, Samuel, the son, spent his youth, childhood and old age. At the time of his death, December 22, 1935, in his eighty-third year, he was in possession of 232 feet frontage on Butler avenue which was a portion of the ten acre tract purchased by his father in 1868. He was a man of intrinsic worth, friendly and unassuming, typical of his forbears who for generations had tilled the soil, and directed many business activities in the locality now the Borough of Ambler.

The Independent School District of Ambler

The following history is compiled from the valuable historical papers of Edward Hocker and from the minute book of the Secretary of the School now in possession of the Ambler Borough High school.

The Ambler Independent School District was incorporated in the year 1881 in this locality, later known as the Borough of Ambler on the north Penna. railroad.

The residents saw the necessity of forming such a school district to overcome the inconveniences to which the thirty-five or more children living here were subjected. The locality was at the converging point of four townships, viz: Lower Gwynedd, Whitpain, Whitemarsh, and Upper Dublin; and the school district was the outgrowth of the need for the children living

in these particular parts of said townships. According to the law, each child was compelled to attend the school in his or her respective township: in Lower Gwynedd, the Dager School on the Bethlehem Pike, one mile above Rose Valley; in Upper Dublin, the school on Butler Pike near Puff's Lutheran Church; and in Whitemarsh township, the school on the Bethlehem Pike one mile below Fort Washington, where school sessions are still held.

As these schools were not centrally located in the townships, a considerable number of children were subjected to inconveniences of transportation. For this reason, a movement was inaugurated, principally through the influence of Dr. S. J. Schrawder, for the establishment of an Independent School District which the Court granted May 2, 1881, through a petition signed by fifty tax-payers and residents citing the facts. The total cost of the organization of the district was \$208.07.

An election was held at the public house of A. S. Acuff two weeks later, May 19, 1881, when the following residents were designated to serve as school directors by the one hundred or more male electors of the district: William Walker, president; Dr. J. S. Schrawder, secretary; Albert Beck, treasurer. The latter resigned after serving six months and was succeeded by David Ambler, who, in turn, was succeeded in 1887 by Edwin Faust, who served until 1895 when he resigned to become treasurer of the borough schools.

The Board of Directors of the School held their meetings in a room on the second floor of the toll house, known as Huffnagle's Hall, which they rented for \$1.25 a month. In accepting their office as directors, they were obliged to take the following oath, affirmed and ascribed before the Justice of the Peace, and placed on file: did solemnly swear that they would support the constitution of the United States and the constitution

of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the laws thereof; and that they had used no unlawful means to procure their election to the said office of school director, and that they would discharge the duties of said office faithfully and impartially, and to the best of their understanding.

The first business of the Board was the purchase of ground for the erection of a school building. The site of the present Forrest Avenue School building was selected. Three lots were bought from Nathan Hall for \$635, and two lots from David Ambler for \$400, affording a frontage of 250 feet on Spring Garden street and 150 feet on Forrest avenue. In the deed, Forrest avenue is called Lehigh avenue.

The contract for the building of the school, which cost \$2683, was awarded to Albert Beck, July 16, 1881. This contract called for the erection of a school building of one room, one story 14 feet high, inside blinds, cellar wall 20 inches thick, and to the attic 18 inches thick, roof of Chapman slate No. 1. The room to be wainscoted and the walls rough coated. It specifies that the front of the building is to be 60 feet from Hart's lane. In this specification, Forrest avenue is called Hart's Avenue for Mary Hart, a prominent resident who owned much property in the locality. In addition to the contract for the building, \$395.00 is granted for 500 feet of iron fence, 3 feet 6 inches high, to enclose the building, with two large posts at the corner of the fence for two double gates with the cost of freight included. The architect, M. B. Bean, of Lansdale, gave a bill of \$5.00 for his services.

This building served the purpose for which it was erected until the year 1884 when the number of pupils exceeded forty in number. Since it was necessary to provide room for this increase, the property committee was authorized "to employ a mechanic to divide the room into two rooms, at least possible expense, and to include a book

case." We are later informed that the upper portion of this partition was made of glass as requested by the Principal, "that he might see for himself any misconduct on the part of the scholars."

The school board applied to the Court in September 1881 for authority to issue bonds under the regular school laws, which was granted to the extent of \$5000. Application had previously been made for a share of the State's appropriation which was awarded through the treasurers of the townships from which the district was constituted. According to the legal requirement with the organization of the Independent School District, the four townships in the district were obliged to pay to the treasurer of the newly created district sums of money proportionate to the area of the assessed valuation of land taken and amount of taxes realized therefrom.

The principals employed were: James Keisel from 1881 to 1882; Lizzie Magee from 1882 to 1885; A. H. Manderbach from 1885 until the school was discontinued. Kate Ambler was in charge of the primary department established in 1884. She served six months and was succeeded by Fanny Sagebeer (Mrs. James Bartleson) who taught until 1888, when Hannah Bean was appointed. The latter served until the school was discontinued.

The salary granted the principal was first \$40.00 a month, later increased to \$50 for a term of 10 months, or "as long as he does justice to his pupils." He was allowed \$10 a month for "sweeping and keeping the room clean." It is recalled by one who was an eye witness to these occasions that he always wore a wet sponge over his nose and mouth.

The secretary and treasurer were each granted a salary of \$30 a year, later reduced to \$25. The supplies for the school for the year ending 1882 cost \$35.95 and the fuel \$45.37, coal costing at that time \$4.75 a ton.

The school tax of the District

started with 2½ mills, increased in 1891 to 4 mills.

In 1884, Mrs. Mary Hart, a highly esteemed resident, interested in education, made a gift of \$25.00 to the school with the proviso that the Directors expend that amount in the purchase of books as Christmas gifts to the children. The Patriotic Order Sons of America, at their request, were granted the privilege of placing two National flags in the school room.

In the year 1889, the following was adopted in regard to the admission of children to the school: "No pupil shall be admitted to the school after one week of date of commencement of school except by written consent of one of the Board of Directors; and any pupil who is absent for two consecutive weeks (absence from home and sickness excepted) shall not be re-admitted without the written consent of one of the Board of Directors."

Evidently the directors were not in sympathy with Teachers' Institutes when they were first organized, attendance to which was optional on the part of the teachers, for in 1883, the motion was made and carried "not to allow teachers for the coming year time out of school to attend Teachers' Institutes, but to teach the full ten months, otherwise their salary would be decreased for time of attendance at the same." In 1887, an act was passed by the Senate and house of representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania authorizing and requiring Boards of School Directors to pay the teachers employed in the various districts for attendance at the sessions of the annual County Institutes in their respective counties.

The locality in which the Independent School District existed was incorporated as a borough in 1888. The geographical lines of the school district and Borough, however, were not identical, and complications and confusions were for a time constantly occurring in re-

gard to school matters. As a result of the close relationship of the two, legal advice was frequently required for their settlement.

The first controversy was in relation to the ownership of the school building. The Independent District had built it and claimed its ownership. It was on Borough land. The District appropriated \$25.00 in order to get a ruling from the Court in regard to its ownership. The opinion was filed July 7, 1890, and this decision gave the school building to the Borough, but it also provided for the payment of the latter of the bonded indebtedness, and interest of the Independent District. This sum amounted to \$3504.94, the Borough issuing its own bonds.

When the Borough was assured of its ownership of the building as a result of the Court's decision, it took immediate steps to have it enlarged in order to accommodate the increased number of children who were now residents in the locality. In 1891, they expended \$7875 in the erection of an addition, with the second floor unfinished until the following year, which required an additional expenditure of \$1073. In 1896 an addition was made which cost \$4975. These additions to the one-room, one-story building erected by the Independent School District together served the Borough as its graded school until it was completely destroyed by fire February 20, 1926.

During the time that these alterations and additions were made to the building, the sessions of the school were held in a house on Greenwood avenue rented for that purpose.

December 9, 1891, the following settlement of the adjustment of the decree of school property, moneys was made between the Borough of Ambler and the Independent School District being com-

pleted to the satisfaction of both parties:

Dr.	
Bonds against the District	\$3100.00
Interest on Bonds	111.24
	<hr/>
	\$3211.24
Cr.	
School Bonds	\$3504.94
	\$2.46
	<hr/>
	\$3587.40
	\$3211.21
	<hr/>
Due to adjustment	\$376.16
Balance in the treasury Dec. 1	

The area of the Independent School District which the Borough did not include was small in comparison to the area of the Boro; nevertheless its value was comparatively very great, and when the Court appointed appraisers to secure the assessed valuation of the two in order to get the amount of taxation the District owed the Borough the difference which as we see from the above statement, was only \$376.16 because the VARE estate was in this small area, the valuation of which in the year 1895 was increased from \$35,000 to \$100,000.

The Court decided the ownership of the school building and adjusted the money matters between the two districts. But again it had to be appealed to, and this time it was in regard to the education of the thirty-five children living within the area of the Independent School District.

The Borough refused to admit these children to its school for several reasons. The controversy between the two could have been settled at once if the District could have been dissolved or discontinued, but this could not be done; it was in existence and had to be recognized until it was dissolved by law. There was a law to create it but as yet there was none enacted to discontinue it. They therefore appealed to the Court for a decision. This took time, and in the meantime, the controversy continued in

regard to the ways and means of educating the children residing in the District which was outside the Borough.

The latter district claimed that legally they belonged to the school in the Townships from which the area was taken, or otherwise, the District should erect its own building. The residents of the area were unwilling to do this because of the expense for such a small locality, and favored the convenience and facilities of the Borough school.

The Borough claimed that it did not have the power to admit these children until they could make satisfactory arrangements with the citizens of the area in regard to the rate of tuition, etc. The Independent District was not in a position to do this because it had no directors. It had no treasurer to collect taxes; all the former ones were residents of the Borough. Not one resided in the area which the Boro left out.

During the time required to get the decision of the Court and get these matters adjusted, the children had many amusing experiences. The parents would insist that the Boro admit these children to its school and the children, in obedience, would make the attempt, meeting only with remorse and humiliation when the Borough refused. In a few cases children were taken to other localities and boarded with relatives in order that their education might not be interrupted.

The decision of the Court was finally received and this decreed that until such a time as the District could be dissolved, the Boro must admit the children living in the District to its school; that the District must continue to hold its meetings, select its own directors, and pay over to the Boro its school taxes. It also decreed that the District must provide a suitable place for its Directors to meet, which also should be used as a polling place for election, etc.

On June 6, 1891, in pursuance of the decree of the Court, a building

was erected on the south side of Mount Pleasant avenue, on the property of John Thomson, between the bridge and the railroad for the use of the directors of the District and as a polling place, at a rental of \$15.00 per month. At the following election, and until the District was dissolved, this building was used, as was the custom with Townships, for the purpose of electing members of a school board for the remaining District from which the Boro was taken.

In the articles of agreement between the Independent School District and the Boro, Dec. 7, 1891, the latter agreed to admit the children of the District, thirty-five in number, to its school for the consideration of \$1.25 a month for those of the grammar and secondary department. In 1908, the tuition was raised for pupils under High school grade to \$20.00 a term, and for those in the High school, \$40.00 per pupil. At the opening of every school term, the child would get a permit from the Independent School District signed by the secretary. This permit would be given to the Borough School Board to show they were children of the District and to indicate number of bills to make out for their tuition.

On January 30, 1911, the legislature passed a bill to dissolve the Independent School Districts in the State as the necessity arose, and on that date, the Ambler District was dissolved and passed into history.

The following residents served as Directors of the Ambler Independent School District.

Wm. C. Walker, Dr. J. S. Shrawder, Albert Beck, Joseph L. Reiff, David Ambler, David Knipe, Edmund Plumly, E. H. Johnson, Edwin Faust, Mary Acuff, Harrison Ryneer, S. T. Godfrey, H. W. B. Reed, Louis Gusman, John S. Cressman, Hillery Vandegrift, B. W. Mammel, Newton Myers, Jesse Berkheimer, Wm. D. Lewis, Thos. Scarlet, John J. Thomson, Robert Cameron, Wm. R. Hallman, George Shoemaker, A. H. Camburn, E. W.

Markley, George Bowers, Wm. Hedrick, E. S. Landry, Richard Ford, Morris Walker, Jacob Smith, Stephan Gano, Lewis Valentine.

Montgomery County Agricultural Society

The Fair of the Montgomery County Agricultural Society, which was held annually in Ambler for ten consecutive years from 1870 to 1880, holds a prominent place in the historic events of the County. It brought together, during the week it was held, thousands of people, and made the little village well known in far sections of the county.

The Society had been in existence and had held a Fair many years before it came to Ambler in 1870. It had a humble beginning in the year 1845 when a few farmers, residents of Norriton Township, met once a month in the village school for sociability, and discussions of subjects in which they were mutually interested, especially in the line of agriculture. These meetings soon developed into occasions of a public nature and the attendance became very large. A Society was organized which they called "The Jefferson Agricultural Society." The proposition made to this body to hold a Fair and exhibit the products of their farms met the approval of all the members.

They held the first Fair in the barn of a hotel near Norristown called, "The Fox Chase Inn." For a few years following the first exhibition, it was held alternately at Penn Square and Jeffersonville. As a result of the large attendance, these events were very successful financially and warranted the purchase of land for the erection of buildings thereon as a permanent location for holding their Fair.

Four acres were purchased at Spring-town near Norristown, at the intersection of Germantown and DeKalb Street Pike, where every provision was made for an agricultural exhibition. In 1850, they changed the name to "The Montgomery County Agricultural Society." In the year 1859, the

attendance at the Fair was very large, as we are informed from an item published in a paper circulated at the Fair. The following item appears in an issue dated October 7, 1859; "On the third day of the exhibition, the attendance at the Fair was immensely large, estimated from 13,000 to 15,000. We would think the number was nearer the latter. At all events there was a living sea of humanity all day moving to and fro."

A split then arose in the organization and as a result two societies were formed. One retained the name of "Agricultural Society of Montgomery County" and continued to hold an annual Fair at Spring-town until it moved to Ambler in 1870. The other took the name "East Pennsylvania Agricultural Society" and organized July 4, 1865, purchased twenty acres in Norristown at the corner of Stanbridge and Marshall Sts. and held an exhibition at this location every year until it disbanded in 1877.

On October 8, 1868, all the property at Spring-town was sold at a public sale, which included, according to the advertisement, a large frame building, comprising the hall and its wings, Secretary and Treasurer's office, music stand, judges stand, sheds, floral tent, and 10,000 feet of lumber. In the meantime, plans were being made for the purchase of land in Ambler where the future Fairs of the Society were to be held. Efforts were made to have it held in Lansdale or North Wales. However, influential members interested in Ambler real estate won their cause.

Thirty-five acres were purchased in Ambler, April 1870, and included all the section in the second ward when the town became a Borough. It was bounded by Rosemary Avenue, Lemon, Church, and Spring Garden Streets, as these streets exist today.

After the first exhibition, which was held in the fall of the same year, they realized they had no outlet to the Bethlehem Pike or the railroad and that the public and pat-

rons of the Fair were obliged to trespass on private property in order to have access to the enclosed grounds. It was vitally necessary to have an outlet to these two main arteries of travel. For this purpose, they purchased 88 perches of land from Alexander Niblock at a cost of \$440.00 the following April, 1871, thus gaining an outlet to the Bethlehem Pike. But the railroad had to be reached, also, and in September, they bought an acre and forty perches from George Knight for \$162.00.

The second exhibition was held September 21 and 22, 1871. The "Hatboro Spirit" in an issue of the previous month stated "the grounds in Ambler were being put in order for the coming fair which will be held there," and in the same paper a week after it was held said, "Although the grounds were unimproved the fair held in Ambler was a great success, and had an attendance of 5000 to 6000 persons."

The advertisement in the newspapers was as follows: "The 25th anniversary of the Montgomery County Agricultural Society will be held in Ambler. This gives credence to their recognition as the original society which was organized in Spring Town in 1845."

The village of Ambler now showed much prosperity; three good houses were built near the station; Wampole bought the hotel near the railroad which had been built the previous year by William Lugar. He advertised "that he was getting ready to accommodate the people who came to the fair and that he had sheds to shelter forty horses. Also ample room for any number of carriages." He named the building "The Ambler Park Hotel" and provided a hall on the second floor of the sheds, which held 200 persons. Its entrance was on Short street. "Yerkes Hall," as it became known, was named after a son-in-law of Lugar. For many years it was used for lectures and public gatherings and is distinc-

tive as the first public hall in the borough.

The home life of the residents was materially affected in anticipation of the coming event, "the Exhibition Week." Great preparations were made by them many weeks preparatory to its grand opening for the entertainment of friends and relatives who resided far away and were expected to visit them during the week of great excitement.

It was a great event—this County Fair held in Ambler—bringing thousands of people. It is of interest to us of the later generation to recall some of its associations.

A large part of the 35 acres purchased was enclosed with a board fence six feet high, nearly all of which was whitewashed. There were two entrances, one on the Bethlehem pike and the other one on the west side. This latter entrance was a short distance north of Orange avenue where the station was at that time located. In this enclosure, a race tract of one-half mile was provided for the races. On the location of the present Church street, box stalls were erected. The stables, blacksmith shop and carriage sheds were on this street from Rosemary avenue to the Knight property.

There were several houses erected in the enclosed grounds for exhibition purposes. One, called the "Blue House" because it was painted blue, was the administration building. It contained all the paraphernalia connected with the races and offices for the managers' business transactions, and bedrooms for the caretakers.

A grandstand was built 144x34 feet to seat those who witnessed the races. Opposite the stand was the main building, "The exhibition building," the main feature of the fair outside of the races as it contained innumerable exhibits. In 1873, they erected a building 200 feet long and 24 feet wide in which they exhibited the machinery.

The second floor of the exhibition building contained the exhibits of the women. There was keen

competition among them due to the large premiums in money offered for the best baked cake or loaf of bread, or preserved fruit. The display of needlework was especially attractive. A patchwork quilt of 8400 pieces, the work of the mother of Dr. A. D. Markley of Hatboro, won great praise.

Many articles used by us in our every-day occupation were exhibited for the first time at the Ambler fair. The bicycle in those days was a novelty and the offer of \$100 for the winner in a bicycle race brought a great crowd on the day it took place. Machinery attracted people from far distant sections of the country. They could not be convinced that the machine they saw at the Ambler fair could thresh grain and at the same time throw the straw into bundles, and another that would mark two rows and drop the corn at equal distance and at the same time cover it with soil sufficient for its growth.

The scarcity of timber was a serious matter to the farmers in these days of the Fair, and a correspondent once said, "The barbed-wire exhibited, a substitute for rails for fencing, was well worth a trip to the Ambler Fair."

There was also a flower show equal to similar shows of the present day held in suburban sections. A record says, "There was an elaborate stone grotto built at great expense and in the midst of the opening surrounded by a wall, a fountain threw up great jets of water to the ceiling, and on the side of the wall there was an artificial spray which was most beautiful." An attractive feature close to the fountain threw up great jets of water to Liberty, three feet in height, dressed magnificently in the three national colors, "stunning in loveliness" the record said.

All the sports known at that time were to be seen at the fair grounds. Four carrier pigeons were noted and then tossed in the air. Running races, broad jumps, and track meets were held with prizes for the winners. A prize of \$7 was given to a boy not over 17 years who

could prove in a plowing contest that he was capable to do that work.

Premiums were offered for pet animals exhibited. A rabbit one year old valued at \$200 won a prize. Quantities of fruit and vegetables were exhibited in the effort to win a premium in money.

The fair was a popular event in its early years. Special trains from Philadelphia with the reduced fare of fifty cents for the round trip brought great crowds. The railroad company laid a double track on its road as far as Ambler in 1873 in order to accommodate the patrons of the fair.

The gate receipts for one day were \$2000, and the grandstand took in \$300 from witnesses of the races. The usual attendance was from 5000 to 6000. In 1873, it was claimed to be 13,000, which made possible the payment of \$14,500 in premiums. The large attendance on two occasions was attributed to the presence of Governors Hart-raft and Beaver, who were enthusiastically received.

The horse racing was the attraction to many. In 1872, the advertisement read as follows: "The Montgomery County Agricultural Society on its grounds in Ambler has the best race track in the State and the coming exhibition will be without exception the highest toned one ever held in Pennsylvania, and competitions will be opened to the world."

In that year 140 horses were exhibited, 70 of these of the best trotting stock. A premium of \$900 was given to the best four-in-hand trot of high bred horses to a drag carrying four persons.

The fair was a financial success until 1876 when the interest began to decline, due in part to the attractions offered by the centennial held in Philadelphia in that year. Vital causes, however, were the dissensions which arose among the officers and active workers, and the resignation of many of these from the organization because of their objection to the introduction of the sale of intoxicating liquors

on the grounds, the prominence of gambling in the racing field, and disapproval of the method of awarding premiums.

The last exhibit of any merit was in 1879. The local press at that time said, "The fair at Ambler was not a financial success. Few were present either from indifference or lack of interest."

An exhibit of small pretensions was held in 1881. The last thing chronicled as a part of the fair was in 1882 when an advertisement read: "A great event will take place on the fair grounds in Ambler between some of the greatest race horses in the world."

The sensation of that day was the discovery of a local horse capable of trotting a mile in 2.31 the first time he was put on the track. The story goes that Black Frank had recently been bought at Isaac Tyson's horse sale for \$167.00. His owner had no knowledge of the speed of which he was capable, but put him on the track in a race with a pony in hopes of winning a wager on the race, when the discovery of his record was made. As a result of this, he was at once purchased by a well known race horses trainer for \$3500. However, a few days later, Black Frank died of lock jaw as a result of having picked up a splinter on the track. His death was a great loss, financially, to his owner and a disappointment to the racing world.

In this year, the grounds ceased to give the public entertainment as sponsored by the Agricultural Society. It served however, to be a public factor for the community because of other events held there.

On June 10, 1886, the Historical societies of Bucks and Montgomery Counties held a joint meeting on the grounds, bringing together 800 people. On this occasion, twelve papers were read and an elaborate musical program was presented.

The grounds were a favorite place for Sunday school picnics from Philadelphia and elsewhere. On August 13, 1874, a memorable event of this nature took place when the Baptist Church of Ambler held

its annual picnic which 2000 people attended. The Ministerial Union of Ambler and vicinity, which was promoted by Rev. Lyman Powell for good fellowship and discussion of topics relative to Christian work, first organized at meetings held in the Blue House. The Wissahickon Grange No. 760 held its meetings in one of the buildings, which it rented from June 5, 1881 to Dec. 5, 1884, a few weeks after it was organized at the home of Jacob and Sarah Rex. An event held on the grounds which rivalled the attendance of any day of exhibition was a combined meeting of the Granges from several adjoining counties.

The Ambler Country Club leased the Blue House and after extensive interior alterations, involving an expense of \$1260, utilized it for their meetings which were principally of a social nature.

During the years the grounds were used for these popular events, every effort was made by the stockholders of the company to make a sale of the property in order to recover the money they invested for the operation of the Fair. A sale was finally made to John Turner at the expiration of a five year lease he previously had on the property. While the amount of money realized from this sale was ample to pay off the bonds of first mortgages held by a few individuals against the land, it was not sufficient in amount to make any returns to the stockholders for their investment.

Turner was a well known trainer of race horses, and the one-half mile track which was included in his purchase, served him a good purpose in his business career. He went out of business in the year 1904. During these intervening years there was a gradual disappearance of all the landmarks of the Ambler Fair Grounds.

One of the buildings was sold to Albert Shaw, who moved it to his own property on Park avenue where he conducted a business for the repair of carriages, machinery, etc. During the later ownership of the

building by Harvey Dager and Chas. Gerhart, it was utilized for the sale and storage of furniture.

The blacksmith shop became the property of Clifford Martin which he also removed to his own land on Lindenwold avenue near Greenwood. The Blue House and the one in which the trainer of the horses lived were converted into modern dwelling houses, later owned by Richard Murfit and Walter Wentz, on Trinity and Rosemary avenues.

The administration building—standing for many years, was the last one to disappear. Turner took out the ground floor, removed the partitions and used it for sheltering his horses. The upstairs was used as a play house for his children. A large portion of the building and part of the sheds used for sheltering the horses, which extended on Church street from Rosemary avenue to the Knight track, were almost completely destroyed in the cyclone of 1896. The remaining portion of the building was later struck by lightning and completely consumed.

Thomas Gillen purchased a large portion of the old lumber at a sale of the Turner property. A sale of the ground was gradually made by Turner when he went out of business. Dr. R. V. Mattison bought the portion known as the centre field because it was the enclosure around the race track later used as a ball field.

The portion unsold at the time of Turner's death in 1912 was cut into building lots and divided among his eight children.

The following were the officers of the Fair in its later years: Pres., Dr. Miltor Newberry; vice president, Charles D. Norton; treasurer David Dunnet; rec. sec., Jos. Rex; sec., Daniel Williams. Home Department: Pres., Hannah Jones, Jarret-town; vice pres., Mrs. Dr. Newberry; rec. sec., Miss Annie Kiesel, Ambler; corres. sec., Mary Streep-er, Broad Axe. Managers: Eliza Ambler, Ambler; Mary Stackhouse, Chestnut Hill; Lizzie Walmsley, of

Hatboro; Sally Styer, Norristown; Sally Conard, Whittemarsh; Miss Zell, Conshohocken; Mrs. George Wolf, Plymouth; Mrs. Lee Garrigues, Jarrettown; Miss Emily Hetrick, of Whittemarsh.

**Chronological Table of Events;
200 Years of History of
Ambler 1682 - 1888**

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|------|--|------|--|
| 1682 | Territory later Ambler Boro bought by William Harmer. Built grist mill and fulling mill on his tract of 408 acres. | 1790 | Jonathan Thomas established a tannery at Gilky's Corner and also the first undertaking business in Upper Dublin Twp. |
| 1730 | First road, now Mt. Pleasant Avenue, laid out for public travel to reach Wm. Harmer's mills. Later extended to present Fort Washington locality. | 1799 | Dr. Archibald McClean drowned while fording the Wissahickon creek at the Butler Avenue intersection. He was the first physician in Upper Dublin. |
| 1733 | William Harmer died. All of Harmer's tract bought by Morris Morris. | 1800 | Dr. George Thomas opened an office in Ambler. |
| 1739 | Butler avenue confirmed by the Court as a public highway. | 1810 | Tannery at Gilky's Corner sold to James Rutter. Bradis family built Clover Mill at Butler avenue and Spring Garden St. |
| 1744 | Church St. confirmed by the Court for public travel to reach Burks Mill on the Morris Road. | 1832 | Tract of 82 acres, owned by Arthur Bradis, on which the fulling mill and clover mill stood, sold to Andrew Ambler. Clover Mill and 36 acres later sold to Isaac Thomas. |
| 1758 | First house in Borough land opened for public accommodation by Isaac Davis, on the Bethlehem Pike. | 1843 | Jos. Reiff bought grist mill on Butler Ave. at intersection with Wissahickon. |
| 1759 | Original tract of 408 acres divided. John Stevens bought 84 acres and grist mill. Daniel Morris, son of Morris Morris, took title to the fulling mill and 89 acres at the death of his father. | 1850 | Tannery at Gilky's Corner sold to Alvin Faust. |
| 1763 | Morris road confirmed by the Court for public travel through a petition of Samuel Morris and others. | 1853 | Butler Avenue incorporated as a turnpike by an act of Assembly. |
| 1771 | Grist mill bought by Joseph Morris, no relative of M. Morris, from John Stevens. | 1855 | Formal opening of the Railroad through this section, July 2. First impetus to the prosperity of the locality. |
| 1775 | Joseph Detwiler bought grist mill and 84 acres from J. Morris road. | 1856 | July 17, the great railroad accident near Fort Washington. George Knight purchased land from Church St. to Butler Avenue on both sides of Railroad. Sold land for a bank, coal yard, and store for sale of general merchandise. First to develop the locality of the Borough where he made his purchase. Barn on this property, built by |
| 1778 | Wertsners Mill on Morris road erected. | | |
| 1784 | Mill built by John Burk on Morris road "gone to decay." New mill built by Jacob Reiff on Morris road. | | |
| 1789 | Jacob Ulrich deeded 79 acres | | |

- John Everart, dated 1789.
- 1858 Toll gate placed on Butler Avenue, west side of railroad, for collection of toll.
- 1860 Toll gate erected on east side of Railroad.
- 1862 Burk's Mill on Morris Road ceased grinding. Long race and fall of but 6 feet of water on the wheel made it expensive to operate. All other mills in locality operated more than 20 years more.
- 1867 Eberhard Flues started a woolen factory in the abandoned grist mill built by John Burk on Morris road.
- 1868 Mary Ambler died August 8.
- 1868 First real estate development; Jonathan Lukens on West side of Butler Avenue, and Charles Shoemaker on East. Jonathan Lukens started coal and lumber yard on Main St. near the station.
- 1869 July 20, name of station changed from Wissahickon to Ambler.
- 1870 Post office moved from Isaac Thomas' store on Bethlehem Pike, to Joseph Wilson's store, corner of Butler avenue and Main St.
- 1870—1880 Montgomery County Agricultural Society held in Ambler.
- 1872 The Methodist Church of Jarrettown organized a mission in Ambler.
- 1874 Flues woolen mill closed.
- 1878 The toll gate on West side of railroad abandoned and the two gates consolidated on East side. Toll gate on east side closed by the Court for collection of toll January 20, 1890. Burned one month later. Gilky's corner changed its name to Rose Valley. Baptists built a chapel on lot purchased in 1873. An attempt made by the Presbyterian Church to start a mission.
- 1881 Era of grist mills began to decline. A renaissance of industry; Keasbey & Mattison moved their plant to Ambler from Philadelphia. First copy of Ambler Gazette published, December 1. Independent School District organized.
- 1882 First drug store in Borough opened by Mr. Reickard at corner of Main and Walnut Sts.
- 1884 Thomson's Mill on Mt. Pleasant Avenue ceased grinding. Reiff's Mill on Butler Avenue closed.
- 1885 J. Watson Craft bought coal yard on Main St. near station established by Jonathan Lukens in 1865. Board walk laid from Main St. to station. Locality provided with lights. Residents organized "the lamp association" supported by voluntary contributions. Unsatisfactory. After one year the following report of expenses was given:
For new lamps, matches, posts, payment of wages, \$128.75; received by contributions, \$109.95; by credit for empty barrels, \$4.85; overdrawn, \$13.95.
Emmanuel Methodist church (colored) moved their house of worship on wheels from Penllyn where it was located to Ambler, in a section later Poplar St.
Methodist Episcopal church organized in James Morris house on Race St.
Edmund Plumly opened his new store at corner of Race & Main St. Employed four clerks. Hall on second floor to accommodate 400 persons.
- 1886 Corner stone of St. Anthony's church laid April 11.
- 1886 Presbyterian church and Sunday school organized in Plumly's Hall. First fire in Ambler, July 8th. In one hour, the home of Theodore Quinty on Chestnut St., as later located, was completely consumed. The residents called a meeting to con-

sider ways whereby in the future the residents could be protected from a similar disaster.

Ambler connected with the outside world by telephone. The Delaware & Atlantic telephone Co. placed an exchange in Reickard's Drug Store. Five subscribers.

1887 Hague's Mill on Bethlehem Pike, the last of the nine in the land later the Borough, to cease grinding.

Meeting for fire protection held. 100 residents subscribed \$5.00 each which gave a working capital of \$500. With this they purchased hose and pipe connected with Keasbey & Mattison Co. works which had an adequate supply of water.

Meeting of lamp association held Nov. 1. Decided to merge with a company about to organize to light the village with electricity through a current supplied by Keasbey & Mattison.

Anna Jane Mercer purchased the grist mill erected by Wm. Harmer and demolished it later.

Meeting held in April to discuss incorporating the locality as a Borough. First definite step taken Nov. 22. Following call addressed to the people:

"A large number of the residents of the village are desirous of having some proportionate return for the taxes

paid out annually and believe the most economical plan would be to incorporate our village into a Borough, which under conservative management would not materially increase our present tax rate, and yet would yield lasting improvement and give our town many permanent advantages, and add greatly to the value of property throughout the place.

"A meeting will be held in Buchanan Hall at the corner of Main St. and Butler Avenue Tuesday evening, Nov. 22, 1887 when a proposed plan will be submitted for which your advice and endorsement is asked. Believing such action necessary for the best interests of our community."

Very truly,

J. J. Houghton,
R. V. Mattison,
H. G. Keasbey,
J. S. Buchanan.

Dec. 1 Borough association met in Buchanan Hall with H. G. Keasbey in chair. Motion made that the committee be authorized to take legal steps to have an incorporated Borough, by a petition to the Court, and that a survey be made.

1888 Ambler incorporated as a Borough June 16. First meeting of Council held Sept. 7 in office of Wertsner & Buchanan on Main St. between Butler avenue and Race St.

Facsimile of

Wm Harmer.

Signature