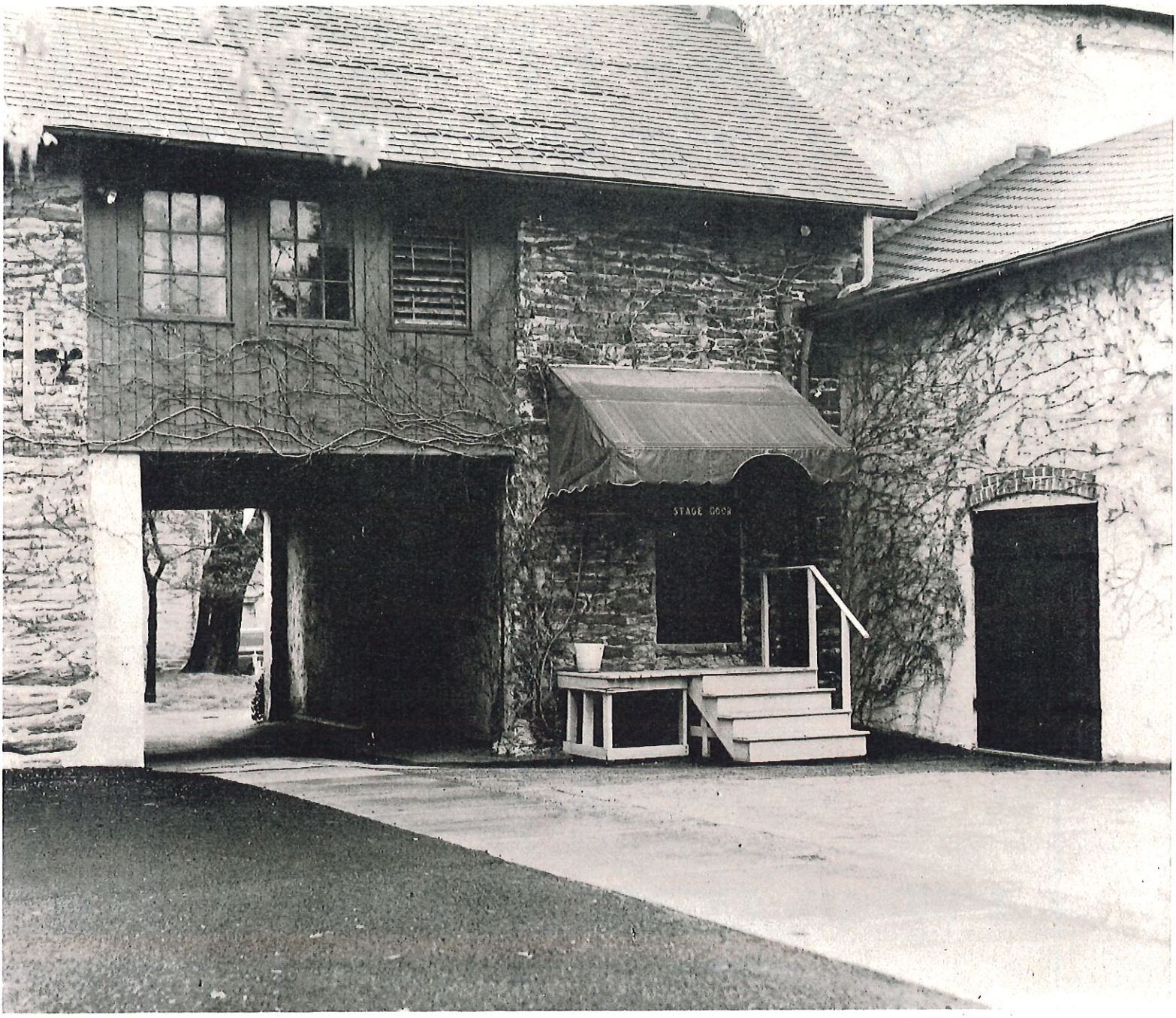
GERMANTOWNE CRIER



The Stagecrafters (see story on page 41)

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The Great Road out of Philadelphia

By CATHARINE MACFARLANE

Text and pictures from a lecture given by Dr. Macfarlane at the March meeting of the Society.

TRADITION tells us that Germantown Road was once an Indian trail. We can picture a group of Lenni Lenapes, in the spring of the year, leaving their camp at Chestnut Hill and walking single file through the woods to the Delaware River to fish for shad. They left no records. Both Indians and shad have disappeared.

Three thousand miles away, on March 4, 1681, Charles the Second, King of England, granted land in the New World to his friend, William Penn and named the vast tract "Pennsylvania."

On September 1, 1682, William Penn set sail from Deal on the *Welcome*. Two months later, he arrived at Upland—now Chester—on October 7, 1682. From there the Proprietor proceeded by barge to Philadelphia, the capital of his colony. It was a village of ten houses.

The news of Penn's colony had spread over Western Europe. In 1683, thirteen men of the Rhineland sold their homes and possessions in Crefeldt, a town near the border of Holland and bought lots on the outskirts of Philadelphia.

From Rotterdam they crossed over to London and on July twenty fourth, 1683, they sailed from Gravesend on the *Concord*. After a pleasant voyage they arrived in Philadelphia on the sixth of October and proceeded to the lots assigned to them on the outskirts of Philadelphia. There they founded the "German Township." Industrious and God fearing people, they brought skills that the young colony sorely needed.

Many of the Germantowners were weavers. They wove linen for men's ruffled shirts and women's pretty dresses "as fine as any brought over from Europe."

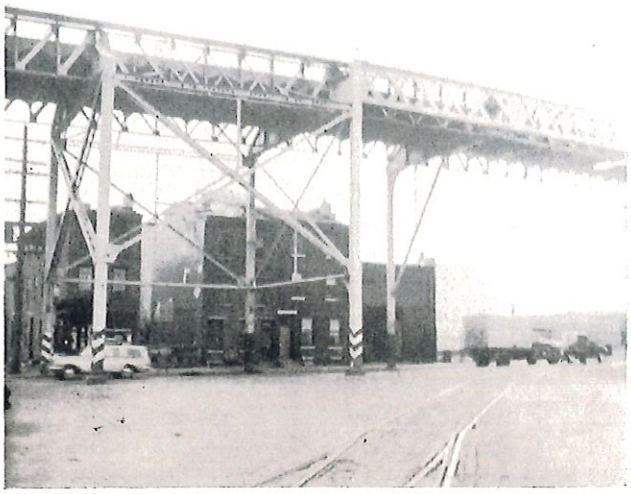
At first, paper and linen were carried on men's backs over the Indian trail which became a well worn path. Soon it was inadequate. In 1709, fourteen men petitioned the Assembly for a plan for laying out a "Publick Road." The Assembly ordered that this be done.

In 1754, Governor Thomas Pownall, after telling of the Lancaster Road to Harris Ferry on the Susquehanna, told of "another great road which goes from Philadelphia to the same ferry but keeps on the Northeast side of the Schuylkill and runs through Germantown to Reading."

In 1802, The Germantown and Reading Turnpike to Reading was incorporated.

After one hundred and nineteen years, the Indian Trail had become a turnpike.

Today, Germantown Road extends from Front and Laurel Street to the Forks of the Road at Chestnut Hill. Laurel Street, near the Delaware River, is lined with neat two story, red brick houses. I doubt if many people know where it is except those who live there. For the rest of us, Germantown Avenue begins near Front and Poplar, under the Frankford El and ends—eleven miles and almost three hundred feet higher—at the Forks of the Road.



Germantown Ave. starts at Front and Laurel Streets.

Below Broad Street, both sides of the road are lined with small stores and small businesses. Some of these look very prosperous, others quite the reverse.

At Second Street, stands Schmidt's Brewery—a fine office building in front, large brewery buildings behind. William Penn would have approved of this, for the first building to be erected at his Manor of Pennsbury was a "Brew House." It is the only original building standing to-day.

Near Fifth Street is the imposing Stetson's Hat Factory with nearby hospital and Savings and Loan Building. I am sure President Johnson would approve of Stetson's for most five gallon hats are made there.

At Ontario Street, York Road and Rising Sun Lane branch off.

At Cambria Street (2900), we find Fairhill Meeting and Fairhill Cemetery. The meeting was established in 1703. There have been several buildings. Many first Philadelphians are buried in the Cemetery.

Nearby there was once a beautiful mansion "Fairhill," the home of Isaac Norris, leading Quaker and city official of colonial days. This and a dozen other mansions were burned by the British after the battle of Germantown.

Near Somerset Street we find a Porto Rican colony. The movie house shows Spanish films, Cantinflas etc. A good place to brush up your Español.

At 3256, the corner of Westmoreland Street, is a building that is not very old but certainly is imposing. Now Carmen Hotel and Cocktail Bar, it was once a Seventh Day Adventist School, and during World War II was occupied by a German Bund.

Above Broad Street, I found no old buildings until at 4126 Germantown Avenue, above Hunting Park Avenue, we found "The Oldest House in Nicetown." No one in the neighborhood knew anything about it, except that it was "the oldest house in Nicetown."

The oldest house in Nicetown.

At Wayne Junction, historic Germantown begins. The Naglee house, 4518, is one of the oldest houses in Germantown. John Naglee lived in it, 1727 to 1752 and James Logan occupied it while his mansion, Stenton, was being built—1727 to 1734. It is a quaint 1½ story house now occupied by Mr. Kulp, a florist who was born in the house sixty some years ago.

On the left as we climb Naglee's Hill we come to Loudoun, a beautiful mansion built by a wealthy merchant—Thomas Armat—about 1801. His Granddaughter married Gustav George Logan and the house remained in the possession of the Logan Family until 1939 when the house and its five acres of ground were bequeathed to the City of Philadelphia by Miss Maria Dickinson Logan. Standing on the front porch, Miss Logan told how on a clear day she could see the ships on the Delaware six miles away.

Across the road, at the top of the hill, are two interesting and well preserved old houses. The Mehl House, 4821, stands on ground that was in possession of the Mehl family from 1763 to 1865. A converted barn, at the rear of the property, houses the Germantown Theatre Guild—a great asset to our community.

The Ottinger House, 4825, was built by Christopher Ottinger, and remained in the family until 1929. Too young to be drafted, he volunteered, fought in the battle of Germantown and through the war being listed as a noncommissioned officer at its close. After the war, probably 1781, he built this house and became a coach builder—a popular occupation in Germantown at that time. His son, Douglass Ottinger, a Captain in the U. S. Navy, invented a life saving apparatus called the Life Car.

At the Northeast corner of Logan Street, is the Lower Burying Ground or Hood's Cemetery. The ground was conveyed to the Community of Germantown in 1692 by Leonard Arets for one pound Holland gold "provided that it shall be used in no other way than as a burying place." The oldest tombstone is that of John Coulston, dated February 1, 1708. The imposing wall was the gift of William Hood, a former resident of Germantown. He died in Paris in 1850 and was buried here.

On the opposite side of the street, 4908, is the Wachsmuth Henry House. It was built in 1760 by Gottfried Wachsmuth. It was sold in 1828 to John Snowden Henry, whose son Alexander Henry was born here. He served as Mayor of Philadelphia from 1858 to 1865. Many alterations have been made to the house.

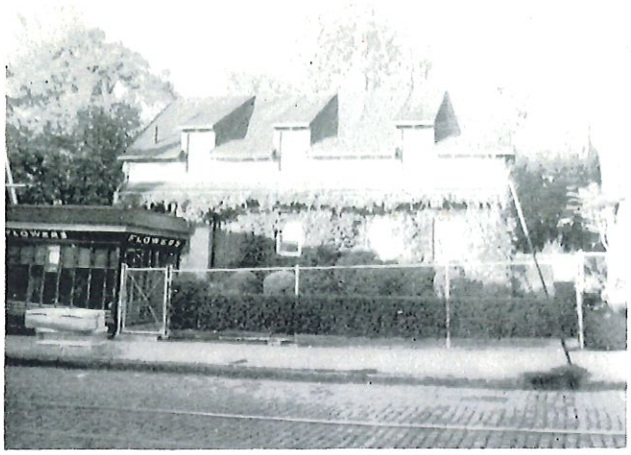
In 1683, Thones Kunders, one of the thirteen original settlers of Germantown, lived where 5109 Germantown Avenue now stands. Friends Meetings were held in his house. In 1688 a protest against slavery was passed. The protest was sent to the Monthly Meeting in Frankford, from there to the Quarterly Meeting in Philadelphia and from there to the Yearly Meeting in Burlington, New Jersey. There it was "adjudged not to be so proper for this meeting to give their positive judgment in this case."

Until last year, a plaque on the wall of 5109 told of this protest. It is not there now. The present owner told me the plaque had been taken down by the Germantown Historical Society and placed in their museum.

Gilbert Stuart, the portrait painter, came to Germantown in 1793 to escape the yellow fever in Philadelphia. He lived in a little house on the grounds of 5140 Germantown Avenue where he painted his famous portrait of General Washington, who was living in the Morris House at the time. The house has been torn down and a large supermarket occupies the area.

St. Stephen's Methodist Church (5207) was built in 1857. The Church House (5213) is older, probably built about 1809. It has a lovely fan doorway.

On the west side of the road is a group of old houses. The Baynton House (5208) a brick house built about 1800, houses the Library of the Germantown Historical Society. The Conyngham Hacker House (5214), probably built about 1750, was given to the Historical Society by its last owner, Isaiah Hacker "provided it be used for historical purposes." It houses the very interesting museum of the Historical Society. The Bechtel House (5226) with a date stone marked 1742, is now used as a costume museum by the Historical Society. The Howell House (5216) is privately owned.



The Naglee House where historic Germantown starts.

Across the street (5219) was the home of John Bringhurst, Carriage Builder. He built a very handsome coach for General Washington. Years later, his successors built the popular Germantown wagons. They were high, with black bodies and yellow wheels. They had no cut under and had to be carefully backed if you wished to turn around.

Grumblethorpe (5267 Germantown Avenue) was built in 1744 by John Wister for a summer residence. Before long, he occupied it all the year round. During the battle of Germantown, it was the Headquarters of the British Commander General Agnew. Mortally wounded by a sniper's bullet, he was brought back here and died in the front room. The blood stain on the floor *was* a bit of history familiar to the children of Germantown. The blood stain is not there now—the floor has been varnished and is covered with a rug.

The landmark at the corner of Queen Lane is Trinity Lutheran Church with its very beautiful steeple, built about 1837. The Parish House is almost a hundred years older. It was the home of Christopher Sauer, who in 1743 printed America's first German Bible and later a newspaper. Many of his books and papers have been preserved and can be seen in the Parish House.

"Jimmie Joneses" whose boast "in business continuously since 1844" may be seen at the corner of Coulter St. (5301). This emporium was Germantown's first drygoods store.

Nearby on West Coulter Street is the Friend's Meeting House. Erected in 1871, this is the fourth Meeting House building. The first one was built of logs, probably about 1693. The Coulter Street Friends School adjoins.

Above "Jimmie Jones" is the very beautiful St. Luke's Church—the first Episcopalian Church in Germantown. The Congregation was organized in 1811. The Church was built in 1876.

At 5418 is the present building of the Friends Library, which has made an important contribution to the culture of Germantown for almost one hundred years.

5427 Germantown Avenue is the site where Louisa May Alcott—author of our childhood's favorites, Little Women and Little Men—was born.

The Ashmead House (5430) was built in 1796 by John Ashmead, another carriage builder. The carriage factory was at the rear.

At Market Square, we are surrounded with history.

The Market Square Presbyterian Church stands on the site of the first church in Germantown. This was the German Reformed Church, built in 1733, to serve German Reformed members from Skippack, Chestnut Hill, and Germantown. General Washington attended services here in 1793.

The Fromberger House, corner of Church Lane, probably built about 1795, was the first brick building in Germantown. Once occupied by the Bank of the United States, it is now occupied by the Germantown Fire Insurance Company.

The Deshler Morris House (5442) was built shortly before the Revolution by David Deshler, a West Indian merchant. During the Battle of Germantown, it was the Headquarters of General Howe. In 1793, during the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia, it was the Capitol of the United States. General Washington, Lady Washington, and her son Charles Custis lived there. Seated in the breakfast room, General and Lady Washington could watch young Custis on his way to the Germantown Academy at the end of the long yard. Beautifully preserved by succeeding owners, the house is now a National Shrine. It is a *must* for everyone who visits Germantown.

For many years, the National Bank of Germantown and the Saving Fund Society of Germantown have occupied opposite corners of Germantown Avenue and West School Lane. According to my Mother's records, one Mary Ottinger was the first depositor in the Bank. In this day of mergers, the Bank is now the Germantown Branch of the Girard Trust Corn Exchange Bank.

At the Northeast corner of School Lane, the Fidelity Philadelphia Trust Company built a replica of the De La Plaine House. The original house was built by James De La Plaine, a French Huguenot who settled in Germantown about 1691. The revivalist, George Whitefield, preached from the balcony when he visited Germantown probably about 1764.

Fairhill Meeting

In the center of the Square is the Civil War monument. I have been told that the soldier on top was modeled from a Germantown man named Roop. The metal scrolls bear names of men of Germantown and Chestnut Hill who fought during the war.

Leaving history behind us, at the corner of Price Street, we find the old Reading Railroad Depot. At first, there was train service only to Germantown but later it was continued to Chestnut Hill. Some trains ran to this depot as late as 1900.

Opposite the depot is Vernon Park and Vernon, the beautiful mansion built by another John Wister about 1812. When the house was first occupied there was a meadow between the building and the street, through which ran a little stream with a spring house.

Opposite Town Hall, there was once a beautiful mansion—Butler Place. The last owner sold it to the City of Philadelphia provided the trees would be preserved. So, the Germantown High School overlooks these beautiful old trees.

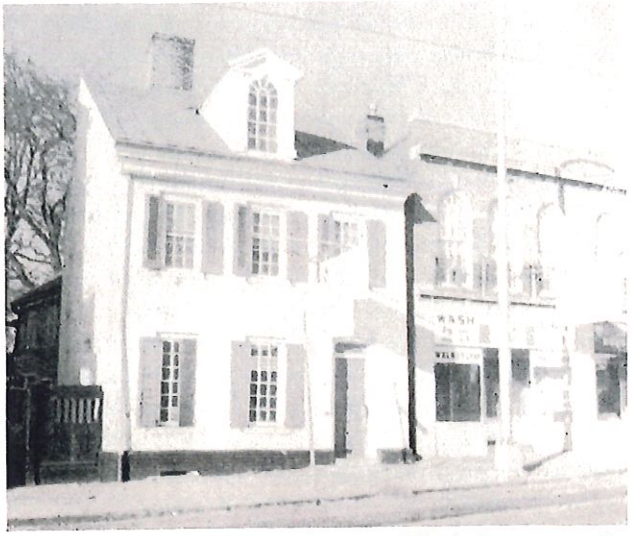
Haines Street was once called Methodist Lane because the first Methodist Church in Germantown was built there. The present beautiful church stands upon ground once occupied by the home of David Rittenhouse, America's first great astronomer and the grandson of William Rittenhouse who built the first Paper Mill in the colonies. The house was moved back a short distance on Haines Street, and at the turn of the century was occupied by Dr. William Rush Dunton, one of Germantown's medical triumvirate. Unmarried, he took a great interest in helping young doctors—including me. He never had office hours, believing that if a patient were sick enough to need a doctor, he should stay at home. At the front door hung a slate and slate pencil. If one of his patients wanted to see him, someone came (there were few telephones) and wrote the name and address on the slate. During the morning, Dr. Dunton would be driven to the door and make the call.

The Green Tree Tavern (6019) was built about 1748. It was a busy hostlery for many years. In 1793, when Germantown was the Capitol of the United States, Thomas Jefferson was quartered there in a room with three other men. The Virginia aristocrat did not like this and consequently later was quartered in a house near Market Square.

Opposite the Green Tree Tavern (6026) is Wyck, one of Germantown's most beautiful homes. It was built by Dirck Jansen in 1690 in two parts with a large connecting room. General Lafayette was entertained here on his return visit to America in 1825. The house and its beautifully cared-for grounds has remained in the possession of Dirck Jansen's descendants—the Haines family—to this day.

The Laurens—6043 Germantown Avenue, corner of Walnut Lane—was the first three-story house in Germantown. Dr. Christopher Witt, Germantown's first physician lived in it, as did Dr. William Shippen, who purchased it in 1789. Recently it has been purchased by the Historical Society.

The Dirck Jansen House (6112 Germantown Avenue) was built about 1690. That is where I started in the practice of medicine in 1900. It is a lovely old house built in two parts with connecting rooms in between. Two cellars with two heaters to take care of made life a little difficult at times. But its most serious drawback were two marble steps at the front door. In every well-regulated Philadelphia household, marble steps had to be scrubbed every day. If there was a maid in the kitchen, she took care of that. If there was an interregnum, the Doctor had to get up early in the morning and scrub those steps *from the inside*. It was not exactly professional.

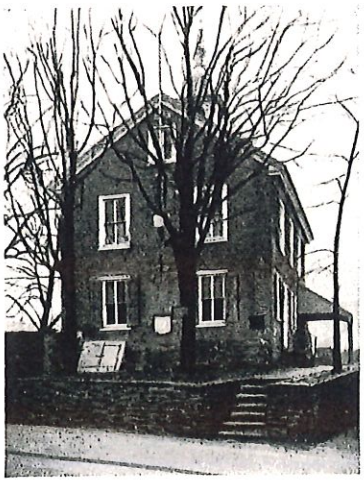


The Dirck Jansen house where Dr. Macfarlane started the practice of medicine.

On up the road, on the opposite side (6119) is the Menonnite Meeting House. Built in 1770 to replace a log building built in 1708, it is still in active use.

At the corner of Washington Lane (6306) is the old Johnson House, now the home of the Woman's Club of Germantown. It was built in 1765 by Dirck Jansen for his son and remained in the Johnson family until 1920 when, through the efforts of the first Mrs. Thomas Raeburn White, it was purchased by the Women's Club of Germantown.

Across the street is the Concord School House built



Concord Schoolhouse

The Upper Burying Ground.

in 1775 by residents of upper Germantown, because it was too far to send their children to the Union School, now Germantown Academy. Instruction was in English.

Adjoining the Concord School, is the Upper Burying Ground, known to some as Axe's Burying Ground. Though their graves are unidentified, Indians and some soldiers from the Battle of Germantown are buried here.

The Sproegel House (6358) built about 1710, was also constructed in two sections with connecting rooms. It is now occupied by Mrs. Bradford Ritter, whose late husband had the distinction of being descended from Governor Bradford of Massachusetts who came over on the *Mayflower* and from William Bradford, the Philadelphia printer, who came over on the *Welcome*.

The pride and glory of historic Germantown is Cliveden. Built in 1763 by Chief Justice Benjamin Chew, it is owned by his descendant Samuel Chew today. A stately mansion set in beautiful grounds, Cliveden was the seat of active fighting during the Battle of Germantown, October fourth, 1778. The British in possession of the house, resisted all efforts of the Americans to dislodge them. General Washington watched the battle from the Bensell House at the corner of Upsal Street.

Opposite Cliveden is Upsala (6340)—one of the finest examples of Regency architecture in Germantown. Dirck Jansen bought the ground in 1755 and the original house may date from then. The front part was built by John Johnson, 1786 to 1801. Upsala remained in the Johnson family until 1941, and was purchased by the Upsala Foundation in 1944. The house is beautiful, inside and out. I once counted sixteen fireplaces and one bath room. The owners probably agreed with my great grandmother who thought too many baths were weakening.

At 6613 Germantown Avenue is the Dunkard Church, built probably about 1770.

St. Michaels Lutheran Church, corner of Philellena Street, was the first Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germantown. Founded in 1728, the cornerstone of the original building was laid in 1746. The present building was erected in 1897. The cemetery is a mine of gold for students of Germantown history. Among others, Christopher Ludwig, the baker of the Revolution is buried there.

The Gorgas House (6901) was built by Joseph Gorgas on land bought in 1798. I asked my friend and contemporary, Miss Anna Gorgas, to tell me something of its history. She said "that is not a historic house. It was built by the third generation." The house remained in the Gorgas family until 1851.

Above Mt. Airy Avenue (7301) is the Lutheran Theological Seminary. The ground was once owned by Judge Allen who eventually moved up the Pike and founded Allentown.

Chestnut Hill begins where Cresheim Creek runs under Germantown Road. The property on the East side of the road was bought by Martin Painter in 1795. His deed to Israel Gilbert in 1819, lists "a public tavern and three acres of ground." Some nostalgic Britisher probably called the little tavern "Mermaid Inn." I do not know when the present building was built.

The log cabin—Yeakel's Cottage—that once stood in the triangle opposite the Inn was torn down in 1900. It may have been the oldest house in Chestnut Hill. A beautiful Gaelic Cross stands there now, placed there by Dr. and Mrs. Woodward in memory of the men killed in World War I.

Up the hill, near Abington Avenue is the eighth milestone. Near here, 901 East Abington Avenue, is Chestnut Hill's oldest house. Built in 1742 by Hermanus Groathausen, it is lovingly cared for by Lieutenant Commander Joseph Hoffman and his wife. The fireplace is of such a size that an adult could walk around inside it!

At 8031 Germantown Avenue stands the building that was once Abram Rex's store, Chestnut Hill's main emporium in the latter part of the eighteenth century. It remained in the Rex family until the late 1850's.

At 7921 is the Melchior Newman House probably built by Wigard Miller, one of Chestnut Hill's early citizens. On the barn is a date stone marked 1812.

Up the hill is the Water Tower, 125 feet high, erected in 1859. We really did get our water from that tower when I was a child. The tank on top held 40,000 gallons of water that came from a well and springs. There was a reservoir at the base which we carefully

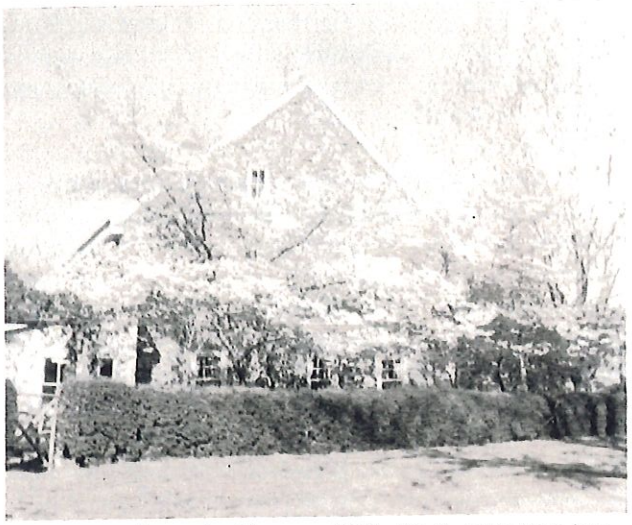
The Sproegel House, built about 1710.

avoided lest we fall in and be drowned. Today Water Tower Park is a playground for young and old, the Tower a dejected relic.

The Jacoby House (8327) built on ground purchased by Wigard Jacoby in 1794 remained in the family until 1905.

Robertson's Store (8501) was once the Cress Hotel, a stopping place for stage coaches. American soldiers, wounded in the Battle of Germantown, were cared for here as the Army retreated to Skippack.

The Artman Miller House (8607) purchased from Jasper Scull in 1757, was owned by those families and their descendants until 1915.



The oldest house in Chestnut Hill, 901 E. Abington Ave.

The Hill House (8517) was owned by Wigard Miller and his heirs from 1750 to 1844.

Next to these houses is the Chestnut Hill Baptist Church situated on ground given by Israel Gilbert. The congregation was organized in 1834, the first building was erected in 1835, and the present one in 1857. The tower with its clock and bell was added in 1874. The first minister, Reverend Robert F. Young said the religious condition of the people of Chestnut Hill was "very poor." My grandmother told how she and her brothers and sisters would walk to the church Sunday School from the farm on Paper Mill Road—half way to Oreland. In summer, they carried their shoes and stockings so they would not get dusty. Nearing the Church, they sat down by the side of the road, put on their shoes and stockings and appeared as properly dressed children.

Here the Great Road to Germantown ends. To the right is the Bethlehem Pike over which Washington's army retreated to Skippack. To the left, is the Reading Pike, old Stage route to Plymouth Meeting, Norristown, Reading and Harris Ferry on the Susquehanna.

How fitting that this should have been named the Great Road. I'll wager there's not another eleven mile stretch of road anywhere in this country that equals the Great Road for historical, religious and social significance. It's well worth travelling.

A Sliver of Silver

By Elizabeth Reeves Humphreys

The moonpath, a sliver of silver,
Lay across the room
Luring me out doors where lilies
Blended the fragrance of their bloom
With the moon's pale brilliancy.
I lifted my eyes and saw
A glowing pendant in the sky,
And I heard the wind hum softly
As though singing a lullaby
To little hidden winds,
Making perfect this night,—
Music in magic light.

We hear the wind and know its moods,
When it is angry
And when it broods
Tho we cannot see it.
We see the moon
But cannot hear it,—
And yet it tells us
Of the everlasting verities,
Down from long-dim ages
No man has lived who has not felt its spell
From battle-scarred warriors
To bent and venerable sages,—
All have stood awestruck
Before the wonder of its radiance,
And felt its divine order
Which lifts the bruised and bewildered spirit
And comforts it.
Arrogant is he
Who does not bend the knee
Before its sublime serenity.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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Annual	6.00
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