



Andrew Miller House — Dewees Tavern

The drama of the Andrew Miller House-Dewees Tavern can be told in three acts, a prologue, and an epilogue. And like any good drama, the story contains an element of mystery and fosters a desire at the end to know still more.

Prologue

The history of the present headquarters of the Historical Society of Trappe, Collegetown, and the Perkiomen Valley, Inc., begins long before the first mortar was applied to the first few stones of the foundation of the building. The commonly-held history of the Miller-Dewees House claimed the possible date of 1769 or thereabouts for the erection of the first of the three sections of the present house. Research by Henry Schuler, a direct descendant of Andrew Miller and a thorough student of history, suggests that there may have been an earlier house on this property, or that the present house is built around and upon an earlier house.

According to the genealogical research of Dr. Ralph L. Johnson and Dr. David H. Bergey, published in *The Perkiomen Region* in 1934, the part of the Trappe area under consideration was part of the Streeper Tract and the Arets Tract. William Penn conveyed 500 acres to William Streeper in 1705. Half of that descended to his son Peter Jansen. Jansen sold part of that to Herman IndeHaven, who on December 20, 1722, sold 42 perches by 4 perches to Nicholas Cressman, Frederick Marsteller—Church Wardens of the Dutch Lutheran Congregation and their Society. The other half was inherited by his son Leonard, who sold a tract to John Nicholas Kressman, who in turn sold on March 14, 1744-5 81½ acres to Henry Melchior Muhlenberg and his wife Mary Weiser.

Penn granted to Lenart Arets 1000 acres adjoining the Manor of Gilberts, land of Jacob Telner, and land of Edward Lane. Lenart Arets was married to a sister of William Streeper. In 1749 139¼ acres of that land was sold to Johan Jacob Miller. A connection between Johan Jacob Miller and Andrew Miller has not been established.

In 1706 Gerhard and Herman Indehaven moved out from Germantown into what was once called van Bebber's Township (later Skippack and Perkiomen Township, now Skippack Township), having purchased 440 acres on the upper side of the Skippack Creek, one mile long along the Lower Salford township line and 220 perches wide on both sides of the Skippack Road. On May 2, 1723, Gerhard and Herman Indehaven sold 200 acres at the upper end of their tract to Peter Janson. Gerhard Indehaven, or DeHaven, built a saw mill and a grist mill on the Skippack Creek near the present Skippack Village and also kept an ordinary, or inn, for which he received a license in 1734. Herman Indehaven went to New Providence near Evansburg and settled on 200 acres in 1734. Herman DeHaven died in April 1752.

Henry Schuler encourages us to heed a first-person account of life in the 18th century recorded by Frederick Sheeder (1777-1865) in something entitled "East Vincent Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania." Sheeder's rendition is not edited here but quoted directly from an earlier publication: "My grand

mother had her wedding dinner at garrit Brumback's Tavern and would be now 125 years of age if alive her father's name was Dehaven built the house at the Trapp that Devise now owns and she carried the victuals to the masons and working folkes an aunt of mine Margaret Davis." Margaret Davis was a daughter of Herman and Annekin Op de Graef DeHaven and was born in 1721. She later married William Davis. Others think that the child who "carried victuals" was Katherine DeHaven,, born in 1713, who also married a Davis.

In 1746 Herman IndeHaven sold 31 acres of land to John George Krissman, sadler, a deacon at Augustus Lutheran church. The tract adjoined land of Henry Muhlenberg, Henry Hawks, other land belonging to DeHaven, and the church. At that time Father Muhlenberg lived on what is now 7th Avenue, north of the Lutheran Church. Herman DeHaven died in April 1752. His will, witnessed by several leaders of the Reformed Church, in 1749, was probated April 23, 1752.

On September 1, 1761, Edward DeHaven and his wife Anen (Anniken) sold 3/4 acres 6¼ perches to Abraham Sailer, Conrad Rubell, and George Mayer, trustees of the "Dutch Presbyterian Meeting," that is, the German Reformed Church, that was already erected on that part of Edward DeHaven's land.

With no further evidence for an earlier house on the Trappe Historical Society property at the northwest corner of Main Street and Route 113, we are ready to raise the curtain on the First Act.

Act One, Scene One: Miller-Dewees —Home of Andrew and Mary Miller

On January 26, 1750, Andrew Miller and his wife Mary purchased a lot of 168 acres 126 perches from Michael and Eve Hawk. This lot included both the present Miller/Dewees land and the Wismer farm directly behind. Andrew Miller was described variously as a joiner and as a bellows-maker, servicing the 30-foot long bellows for all of the furnaces and forges in the area, including those owned by the Rutter and Potts families. On February 5, 1747, he was married to Anna Maria Ewaldin, the daughter of one of the founders of the Reformed Church in Providence, Ludwig Ewald and his wife Agnes Mary. Ewald died March 16, 1760, at the age of 65 years. "Lodwick Evalt" is buried in the cemetery of the Reformed Church, which adjoins the present Miller-Dewees House. His is the oldest legible stone. Anna Maria Ewald Miller inherited her father's Sermon Book. According to Philadelphia Deed Books H-1-27 and G-8-320, Andrew Miller, joyner, of Providence, bought 110 acres by Telners' Townships for £230 in 1748. The Miller and Painter farms were adjacent and contiguous to that of Ludwig Ewald and by the Augustus Lutheran Church. The daughter of George Painter was married to Lawrence Miller, Sr., a son of Andrew Miller.

Andrew Miller served as a deacon of Augustus Lutheran Church and occasionally played the organ. According to Henry Schuler, the Millers did not live in Trappe for many years but moved instead to a house in the center of Reading in 1754. Miller sold the Reading house on June 11, 1764, and moved to Trappe, where, Schuler proposes, he transformed the DeHaven house from an old-style Germanic house into a quasi-Georgian house with an entrance hall and staircase.

Architectural consultants and Historical Society researchers have determined that the first section of the house, the most eastern portion, was built between 1769 and 1774. The 1774 Philadelphia tax listed Andrew Miller with a dwelling and 150 acres of land. The original house consisted of the first three easternmost bays of the present structure. There were two rooms at the east end of each story, separated at the summer beam, plus a hall on each floor, running from south to north. There also was probably a small room over the front entrance on the second floor. The present fireplace is not in its original position, and traces of the original stairway cannot be seen.

Andrew Miller and the Rev. Henry Melchior Mühlenberg became neighbors when the Lutheran patriarch purchased the home just east of the Miller property on the main road in January 1776. Miller and his sons often helped the old Mühlenbergs. A journal entry for December 6, 1776, indicates that Mühlenberg paid 5s to the mason and helper for setting up a stove in Andreas Müller's house for Mr. Andreas Burghardt, a former deacon. Just a few days later, on December 11, wagons arrived from Philadelphia with Mr. Burghardt, his wife, five children, two maidservants, and their belongings. Some of Mühlenberg's children and grandchildren also arrived to stay with the old folks, but presumably the Burghardts moved in with the Millers.

Mühlenberg and the Millers had been acquainted for many years. Dr. Frederick Martin had rented Mühlenberg's earlier Trappe home north of the church and then purchased it in 1764. In 1768 Dr. Martin married as his second wife Maria Wilhelmina, the daughter of Andrew and Mary Miller. Dr. Martin frequently visited and treated members of the Mühlenberg family.

Andrew Miller did cause his neighbors concern at times, however. Father Mühlenberg recorded on July 31, 1781, that "Last night our neighbor Müller behaved wretchedly and drove his family out of the house. They sought refuge with us. We were disturbed three times today by our drunken neighbor, Andreas Müller. This frightens my wife and stirs up her convulsions."

Andrew Miller died in the fall of 1792 and was buried two graves away from the final resting place of Father Mühlenberg. His will directed that his widow Mary be allowed to continue living in their house and 20 acres. After her death son Joseph would inherit the property. On March 7, 1794, Joseph Miller and his wife Elizabeth sold the house and 20 acres to Peter Mühlenberg, but Mary Miller was allowed to remain there. Another deed indicates that Peter Mühlenberg sold that property to his brother-in-law, the Rev. John Christopher Kunze of New York, in 1802. Mary Miller, the widow of Andrew Miller, died in 1808. Indeed, the 1808 Providence Township tax list indicates that "Mary Miller - for Coons estate 20 A & D" is crossed off. In June 1808, according to Esther Keller's research,

the widow Margaretta Kunze sold the house and 21 acres to Israel Bringham. Mary Bringham, Israel's widow, sold the house and 7 acres 140 perches to Enos Lewis in 1817, and Lewis sold it to Abraham Everhart, a Norristown innkeeper, in 1825. In March 1827 Everhart sold the tavern and lot to Dr. Jacob Dewees.

The 1798 "Window Pane Tax" listed Mary Miller with a two-story stone house, 30 x 25, 12 windows, 12 lights, and a separate one story stone kitchen, 15 x 12. Elsewhere in the Window Pane Tax of Providence Township were listed the Miller estate, with Frederick Place, tenant, consisting of a two-story stone house, 30 x 20, with six windows and 12 lights; a stone house owned and occupied by Peter Mühlenberg, 33 x 28, with 15 windows and 15 lights; and a one story stone house, owned by Peter Mühlenberg, with James Wells, tenant, 30 x 15, with 3 windows and 6 lights.

Act One, Scene Two: Duke of Cumberland —An Important Tavern

While all of this was going on on the north side of the Great Road, there was parallel activity on the south side. For many years there was a tavern known as the Sign of the Duke of Cumberland. It appears on Scull's 1758 map. On the same side of the road heading southeast are "Schrock" and "Lane's." Across the road heading northwest are places marked on the Scull map as "Dutch Meet" and "Lutheran Church." On March 21, 1797, Anthony Weachter (Wachter) of Providence, innkeeper, and Mary his wife, sold to David Dewees of Tulpehocken, Berks County, storekeeper, a message and tract of 36 acres of land adjoining lands of Andrew Jack, Anthony Crothers, Matthew Brooke, Philip Delacoeur, and Henry Boyer, Sr., the same house and land which Henry and Mary Boyer of Bucks County had on April 4, 1795, sold to Wachter. One of Dewees' early tavern licenses is now on display in the Dewees-Miller House, although it predates that latter-day Dewees Tavern.

Local Trappe historian Esther Keller states that David Dewees kept a tavern until he became incapacitated about 1820. She believes that Dewees suffered an incapacitating illness and for the rest of his life was considered mentally incompetent. Henry Hunsicker states that "for some reason I cannot explain, her husband, David, took no interest in the hotel business after the family left the "Duke of Cumberland." Col. Thomas Swenk, who was born in 1812, wrote in *The Perkiomen Region* in 1889 that David Dewees "was a very fine-looking old-style gentlemen, universally respected by his friends and neighbors. In his later days his mind was somewhat impaired."

By an Act of the Assembly passed in 1802, Providence, Limerick, and Perkiomen townships were assigned to the Seventh District, with the place of elections to be at the house of David Dewees in Trap. David Dewees was elected High Sheriff of Montgomery County in 1807 and served through 1810.

Much of what we now know about the Dewees family comes from the recollections of the Rev. Henry A. Hunsicker, published in the *Collegeville Independent* of 1906. Hunsicker, born in 1825, was instrumental in the Reformed Mennonite Church, later Trinity Christian Church, now Trinity Reformed, UCC, and Freeland Seminary as well. He wrote, "The Dewees family, one of the oldest and largest in the village of Trappe,

came here from near Womelsdorf in 1783. They kept a better class hotel on the location where Philip Willard's dwelling house is now. Before the revolution it was called the 'Duke of Cumberland.' Here were born 10 of their twelve children and two were born in Berks county. They were born as follows: Mary, in 1788 she married a Jeffries, whose son, Dave Jeffries I remember; Jacob, in 1791, known as Dr. Dewees, later wrote a book outlining a scheme for the colonization of the American Negro in Africa to avert the coming storm of the Civil War in consequence of the existence of human slavery in our country. In 1793 Catherine married Henry Prizer, founder of the Trappe Boarding School. He was the grandfather of Mrs. Abraham D. Fetterolf, to whom I am indebted for the information of the dates of birth of the members of the Dewees family, she having the Family Bible; Margaret, born in 1795, married Enos Lewis; Elizabeth who in 1797 married Hon. Joseph Royer; Sally, born 1799, remained single; Anna, in 1801, remained single; Davis in 1803. Hetty in 1805 was later married to Frederick Prizer; Daniel Seltzer, born in 1806; Frederick in 1809; and Percival in 1818."

Act Two, Scene One: Miller-Dewees—A Home

On May 27, 1802, Jacob Miller, bellows maker of Upper Milford Township, Northampton County, and his wife Elizabeth sold to David Dewees, innholder of New Providence Township, most of the property formerly belonging to Jacob's father Andrew Miller, now considered part of the present Wismer Farm. It was some time after the death of Mary, Andrew's widow, that the widow's house and 7 acres passed through a number of brief ownerships until Norristown and Skippack innkeeper Abraham Everhart sold it to Dr. Jacob Dewees in March 1827. The deed for the Everhart-Dewees transaction was not recorded but is referred to in mortgage records.

Architects and researchers believe that some time after the death of Mary Miller in 1808 the middle section of the Miller-Dewees House was built. The middle section includes the present society office and a small modern kitchen. When the original building was remodeled, the fireplace and cupboards which are now in place were added, and the original fireplace, a corner arrangement in the northeast corner, removed. The front door was moved to the present hallway and replaced by a window, and the staircase was added. The original west wall was completely torn down to the cellar level and replaced by the partitions now in place. The present attic windows may have been added at this time. This middle section has no cellar below.

Act Two, Scene Two: Duke of Cumberland—Tavern and Polling Place—David Dewees and Dr. Jacob Dewees

David Dewees' tavern on the south side of the Great Road, at the old Sign of the Duke of Cumberland, was a locus of county business. After 1802 it became the official election place for the Seventh District. The county commissioners met there in 1807 for the purpose of receiving proposals for the purchasing of land for the poor house. In May 1810 contractors met at Dewees' tavern to bid on the making of sections of the new Perkiomen & Reading turnpike road. Commissioners of the Bank of Montgomery County sold subscriptions for stock at Dewees' tavern in Trappe in the summer of 1815. In a published notice

concerning a Direct Tax in 1816, David Dewees was the only tavern-keeper listed in Providence.

But, as indicated by Esther Keller's research, financial troubles befell the Dewees family. Jacob Miller, the son of Andrew Miller, sued David Dewees, presumably for the recovery of a \$4,000 debt, and in 1822, according to an advertisement in the *Norristown Herald and Weekly Advertiser*, Sheriff Philip Sellers was offering a Tavern Stand and 40 acres of land in Trappe. The improvements included a large and commodious two-story stone house, large stone barn, sheds and other out-buildings, and three wells. Dr. Jacob Dewees purchased the property on May 20, 1822.

Dr. Jacob Dewees, son of David and Mary Dewees, was one of the physicians who treated both out-paupers and paupers in the poor house. Public meetings were being advertised as being held at the Public House of Dr. J. Dewees in the Trap as early as February 1826. In the September 20, 1826, *Norristown Herald and Weekly Advertiser*, the election place for Upper Providence, Perkiomen, and section of Lower Providence west of Skippack Creek was at the public house of Dr. Jacob DeWees in Trap. In the September 12, 1827, issue of the *Norristown Weekly Herald*, the tavern of Dr. Jacob Dewees, Trap, was listed as an election place.

Following a lawsuit by the executors of Jacob Johnson, dec., against David Dewees, the tavern and 36 acres on the north side of the road were again put up for sheriff's sale, and Dr. Dewees paid a total of \$3,856.14 for the property.

Act Three, Scene One: Miller-Dewees—Sign of the Brig Holker—Dr. Jacob Dewees - Mother Dewees' Hotel and Boarding Home

Henry Hunsicker wrote, "In 1829 the [Dewees] family moved to the northwest corner of the Gotwals Mill Road and the Perkiomen and Reading Turnpike, opposite the Bringhurst Mansion, and there long conducted a hotel known as the Dewees Inn. Mother Dewees, as she was familiarly called, was a most estimable and energetic woman, who conducted the hotel business admirably. For some reason I cannot explain, her husband, David, took no interest in the hotel business after the family left the 'Duke of Cumberland.' Mother Dewees was an elegant provider. She had the deserved reputation of keeping a first-class hotel. She was patronized by the best class of the traveling public. She accommodated her son-in-law, Henry Prizer, who conducted the Trappe Boarding School, by taking some of his scholars to board when he became crowded for room. Knowing of the well kept table, young men were eager to board with her. Brother Benjamin and his cousin Christian Hunsicker, while at school there, strained a point to board with Mother Dewees."

Township tax records listed his son Jacob Dewees as an innkeeper until 1835 and Mary Catherine Dewees as an innkeeper from 1835 until 1855. *Gordon's Gazeteer* of 1832 listed two taverns in Trappe.

On January 4, 1832, the Sheriff advertised the sale of two properties at the public house of Jacob Dewees in Trap. The first property included a large and commodious stone house recently occupied as a tavern house, a large stone barn, stone sheds and other out buildings, three wells of water, and 36 acres.

The other property included a messuage, tavern stand, and 7 acres and 140 perches of land, adjoining lands of Jacob Heebner, the Presbyterian burying ground, and the junction of the public road leading from the Trap to Doylestown, with the Reading and Perkiomen turnpike. The improvements were a large and commodious stone tavern house, with five rooms and a kitchen on the first floor and seven rooms on the second, a good cellar, and a well finished garret, sign of the "Brig Holker." There was also a large stone shed sufficient for 36 horses, two wells, and a good orchard. There was an additional tract of 152 acres 140 perches, now the Wismer Farm.

Enos Lewis, Philadelphia gentleman, and his wife Margaret nee Dewees purchased the Brig Holker and the surrounding land and conveyed it to Mary Catharine Dewees, widow of David Dewees in 1838. She continued to run her boarding house until 1855. It was the site of polls and presidential rallies, according to Keller, and the Philadelphia and Harrisburg Stage Line stopped there for many years.

Architects and researchers cannot agree on when the third section of the Miller-Dewees House, a three-story Federal-style addition, was built, but estimates range from 1825 to 1840, that is, before the 1832 sheriff's sale or after the sale, the argument focusing on whether or not the advertised tavern had two stories or three. The newspaper advertisement indicated that the tavern building had "five rooms and a kitchen on the first floor, seven rooms on the second, a good cellar, and a well finished garret." The "well finished garret" and the number of rooms is consistent with the present configuration. It is conjectured that the original separate kitchen may have been absorbed into the larger ca. 1825-30 wing. Traces of the original bar were found in the front room.

Henry Hunsicker wrote of a "notable event that occurred at the Dewees Inn in [his] boyhood. It was here in 1840, during the Old Tippecanoe Campaign of Gen. William Henry Harrison's, a Campaign of Log Cabins, Hard Cider and Raccoons, that I was present to hear political speeches and campaign songs. I remember that one of the songs commenced: 'Old Tip's the boy to swing the flail, And make the Locos all turn pale.' It was here I heard the celebrated Buck Eye Blacksmith of Ohio Speak. James A. Pennypacker, an uncle of the present Governor Pennypacker, also spoke, as did some others. The meeting was held in a spacious yard in front of a large open shed that ran out from the barn towards the turnpike, in which hard cider was freely dispensed to thirsty patriots. Badges bearing miniature pictures of Log Cabins and Raccoons were prominent."

Act Three, Scene Two: Duke of Cumberland-Trappe Boarding School

The property across the way, site of the former Duke of Cumberland, was bought by Jacob Dewees' brother-in-law, Henry Prizer, husband of Catherine Dewees. For a few years Prizer housed his Trappe Boarding School in that building. Henry Hunsicker wrote, "It was here that he opened the Trappe Boarding School in March 1830 and continued the same up till the time of his death in 1838. He had contemplated tearing down that older house and re-building a larger one better

adapted to the requirements of his school. He had brought on the grounds some of the material needed in its erection before his death. For want of room he had, several years before, converted the stone sheds one time used for hotel purposes, into a dwelling, part of which he used for a schoolroom and part for sleeping apartments. This building still remains. A good many families have lived from time to time in this house, among others. Rev. J. R. Kookken, once pastor of St. Luke's German Reformed Church lived there at one time. At the time Hunsicker was writing this (1906), Philip Willard's dwelling house was standing where the "Duke of Cumberland" had once stood.

Epilogue

Mary Catherine Dewees bequeathed her boarding house and land to her son Frederick (will proved September 1857) and then it passed on to children Ann, Sarah, and finally to Percival. On February 2, 1892, Percival Dewees sold the tavern and two tracts of land to a Dewees grandson, Lewis Royer. On July 6, 1899, Royer sold the house to St. Luke's Reformed Church. The church remodeled the building into three rental units. It was known for many years as "the Cemetery House" or "the Church House." In 1964 the newly established Historical Society of Trappe, with the advice of antiquarian Fred Grimison, rented two rooms and a kitchen on the ground floor of the northwest end of the building for use as a museum. In 1975 St. Luke's negotiated a 99-year lease with the Historical Society for the entire building, and renovation began, with the assistance of the borough of Trappe, businesses, and members and friends of the Society. The renovation of the Dewees Tavern became part of the area's celebration of the nation's Bicentennial. According to the Rev. Dr. John C. Shetler, "the stucco was removed, the stone walls were pointed, the roofs repaired, and the principal first floor beams and joists replaced with oak timbers." Frank Eld, a shop teacher in the Collegeville-Trappe Schools, directed the restoration. The Society took possession of the entire building for Society purposes, with the first floor devoted to museum space. Most of the second floor, containing several exhibit rooms and a research library, is now open to the public. The third floor, closed to the public, is used for storage of museum artifacts and the significant collection of local newspapers.

During the summer months the museum is open each Sunday afternoon. Private tours may be arranged by appointment at other times.

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