

## A History of the Dewees Museum

by The Rev. Judith A. Meier, Historian, The Historical Society of Trappe, Collegetown, Perkiomen Valley

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On January 26, 1750, Andrew Miller and his wife Mary purchased land from Michael and Eve Hawk that included both the present Miller-Dewees land and the Wismer farm directly behind. Andrew Miller was a joiner and 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 married Anna Maria Ewaldin, 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.

Andrew Miller served as a deacon of Augustus Lutheran Church and occasionally played the organ. According to Henry Schuler, the Millers moved to Trappe about 1764 and transformed the house from an old-style Germanic house that may once have served as a tavern into a quasi-Georgian house with an entrance hall and staircase. Visual inspection of the outside of the house as well as the basement supports this suggestion. One can see where a door and a window originally were placed and where the house was extended a bit on the western side, perhaps by the Millers when they moved in.

In the 1970s architectural consultants and Historical Society researchers determined that the first section of the house, the most eastern portion, was built between 1769 and 1774. 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 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 Father Mühlenberg's resting place. His will directed that his widow Mary be allowed to continue living in their house and 20 acres. The house passed from son Joseph Miller to Peter Muhlenberg to the Rev. John Christopher Kunze. Mary Miller died in 1808. Once again the house went through a number of hands, from the widow Kunze to Israel Bringhurst and his wife to Enos Lewis, to Norristown innkeeper Abraham Everhart, and finally, in March 1827, to Dr. Jacob Dewees, son of David and Mary Dewees, who for many years

had owned and operated The Duke of Cumberland across the road.

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.

In the mid-1970s shop teacher Frank Eld and four of his students, John H. Shetler, John Warren, Dominic Martorana, together with Walter Sauer, made a careful study of the middle section and wrote this report:

"The second section is about 18' x 30', the longer being depth. It is also of stone, the front cut and dressed, the rear rubble. There is no cellar under this section, just a very shallow crawl space. Pent eave remnants were found here also and it has been restored. There is a chimney on the west wall with fireplace on the first and second floor. The first floor has one large room in the front with two windows and presently a kitchen in the rear. The rear of this portion may have incorporated an earlier detached kitchen; the second floor rear is sloped roofed and not full two stories high as in the front. The second floor has one room in the front and a second loft type room in the rear that is several steps lower than the front room and is reached by three steps cut into the stone wall from the stair landing. There are two full sized windows in the front of the second floor, two over two replacements and one small window in the rear, six small panes. Attic is one room with dormer; roof beams pegged and slated."

In 1979 Esther O. Keller, John H. Shelter, Walter Sauer, Kenneth Smith, and Latimer Hoopes made a audio-taped walk-through before any remodeling and restoration work was begun on what they called the headquarters side of the building, or the third section. They said of the "Rented Quarters, West room" (dining room), "The cupboards on the left of the fireplace was (sic) built by Frank Eld to enclose a heating duct, to match the one on the right which was here when we started to restore. The older closet is plastered on the back wall and board on the right. The fireplace was bricked in when we started. The mantel in this room was also made by Frank Eld, built to original dimensions from markings discovered on the chimney breast and wall. The closet in the corner towards the wall was plastered over when we took over. Frank and I had an idea that this was where the original bar used to be because on the floor joists, on the floor, there were markings where the partition would have been. It ran out even with the wall where the sink is today (in the kitchen) and it ran out to include where the cooking section

is today and the markings on the walls went on two sides (stairway wall and the wall towards the back) as for shelves.”

Elsewhere in that walk-through report the observation was made that they thought that, in the front west room; that is, in the third section, a bar used to run on the east wall beside the doorway and on the north wall there was a hinged apparatus to get into it (between the closet and the doorway to the middle room.

Architect Bruce Dodd, A.I.A., remarked in 1980 that “the (B) section of the house shows no indication that it had served earlier as a kitchen; however, there is the possibility that the present fireplace, unusually small for a first floor fireplace ca 1800-1810, is an alteration resulting from the removal of a cooking fireplace at the time of the ca 1840 construction.

David Dewees had operated the *Duke of Cumberland* from 1797 to 1820, when some kind of incapacitation forced him to relinquish his duties to his wife and physician son. Dewees had served as High Sheriff of Montgomery County from 1807 through 1810, and for many years his tavern was the polling place for the Seventh District. County officials met there to receive proposals for the purchasing of land for the poor house and for accepting bids on the new Perkiomen & Reading turnpike road. This kind of activity continued when Dr. Jacob Dewees continued the family business.

After Dr. Dewees’ 1827 purchase of the Miller house and lot, the Dewees family moved across the road. As Henry Hunsicker tells it: “In 1829 the [Dewees] family moved to the northwest corner of the Gotwals Mill Road and the Perkiomen and Reading Turnpike, opposite the Bringham 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.”

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 Duke of Cumberland*].

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 neé 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 election 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.”

*This information has been adapted from a paper on the history of the Andrew Miller House-Dewees Tavern by The Rev. Judith A. Meier and from documents used in the restoration and remodeling of the Dewees Tavern in the archives of The Trappe Historical Society. To read more, visit our Website: [www.trappehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.trappehistoricalsociety.org).*