

Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust's Fourth Annual House Tour September 20, 2008

Pattye Benson

Old houses tell wonderful stories, and the houses of Tredyffrin Township have many tales to tell. On September 20, 2008 the Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust's 4th Annual Historic House Tour will highlight tales of eight historic houses that span 4 centuries. Starting with the earliest home from 1720, the selected houses on this year's tour will showcase special places from the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. You might ask why a 21st century house should be showcased on an historic house tour. The reason: this 21st century house was created using materials from five different antique barns, with the master bedroom housed in a barn silo. The addition of this special modern gentleman's farmhouse gives new meaning to 'historic house'.

The historic homes and gardens will be open from 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday, September 20, rain or shine. Each historic home on the tour will be staffed by knowledgeable guides, and house tour admission will include individual house history with map and parking details. Tickets are \$35 and must be purchased in advance as there will be no tickets sold at the door. Tickets are available online at www.tredyffrinhistory.org using your credit card, or download an order form and mail with your check to Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust, PO Box 764, Devon, PA 19333-0764.

Proceeds from the 4th Annual Historic House Tour benefit Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust's ongoing mission to preserve and protect historic and cultural resources in Tredyffrin Township and to educate the public about the preservation and protection of historic and cultural settings. The current project of the Trust is the rebuilding of the historic Jones Log Barn as a regional history education center.

For additional information, consult the Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust Web site: www.tredyffrinhistory.org or call Pattye Benson, Trust President at 610.644.6759. You can also email questions to pattye@greatvalleyhouse.com or info@tredyffrinhistory.org

Sycamore Hill c.1736

Sycamore Hill in Malvern consists of a 1736 stone farmhouse, a barn built around 1798, an 18th century spring house, and a 19th century carriage house. Sycamore Hill was once part of a larger property that included the Thomas Jerman House and Great Valley Mill. The two properties were separated in 1948.

In 1710, Thomas Jerman established a log grist mill across the road from the Mill's current location. In 1726, he built his primary house just north of the Mill. Jerman erected a second fieldstone house in



All photographs by Allen Barol.

1736 on what is now called Sycamore Hill for his daughter Mary and her husband Enoch Walker, the Mill foreman. The Jerman family ran the Mill until 1755 when John Rowland leased it. The Mill provided flour to Washington's troops during the Valley Forge encampment. It is alleged that Washington visited the Mill complex. It is also recorded that one of Washington's aides, Thomas Boones, married the miller's daughter, Susannah Rowland. There are also reports of a British spy being hanged in the springhouse after being caught snooping around the Mill to see where the troops were obtaining their supplies.

The Mill was run by the Rowland family until the death of John's son Thomas in 1818. The status of the Mill is unknown from 1818-1856. The executors probably leased the property until sold to Joseph Jeanes in 1857 for \$11,500.

In 1859 Jeanes erected the Great Valley Mill on the other side of the road where it stands today. Jeanes expanded the Sycamore Hill residence in the 1850's. The renovation is architecturally significant, redone in the vernacular Gothic Revival Style. The seams adjoining the core and the addition are still clearly visible on the front and back façade. In the 1940's the Mill was commercially operated and leased to Pepperidge Farm. Richard Toland purchased Sycamore Hill in 1962 and added a third bay of stone and clapboard siding and a greenhouse.

Gentleman's Farm c. 2001

Building materials from five historic barns were collected by the owner to create a home reminiscent of our country's struggle for independence as a renovated gentleman's farmhouse on Valley Forge Mountain. His cousin, architect Charles Capaldi, who helped design the Science Center at the Franklin Institute Museum and Emanuel's studio and showroom in the MetLife Building in NYC, was mindful of this and the history of Valley Forge Mountain.

As one walks onto the front patio, see the hand hewn lintels above the basement and dining room windows and "middle-centuries" plinth (stone ledge). Notice how each of the field stones (supplied from barn number one (#1) of five— which, also, supplied the floor planks), is faced to display the veins. Meticulous attention was necessary to not remove the original white wash on the stone, which is seen intermittently. To the left of the foyer, treads and risers on the steps to the sunken living room are from barn beams of a documented 200-yr. old barn (#2). Leftover beams were used for the living room's entertainment cupboard and family room's console, coffee table and end tables by Chester Spring's Brian Lord, along with the fireplace mantles.

The steps going upstairs were taken from barn #3 because barn #1's beams were not wide enough to produce stair treads. Different from the first floor's boards of white and yellow oak, they have the distinct red hue of red oak. Seen through the second floor windows are three barn beams with hand scribed Roman numerals from the Strawbridge estate barn (#4).

In the kitchen, the cherry cabinets and rough finished granite countertop were designed by the owner and inspired from frequent visits to a friend's Amish home. Walking through the breezeway, one sees the two, 26' long frames (barn #5) that support the breezeway cedar roof structure. Notice the 150-year-old stone dry wall (made without mortar) seen in the backyard. It was likely constructed by a farmer while first plowing an adjacent field. In keeping with this tradition, five 'dry walls' were created throughout. This house is truly another take on 'historic'!



Berwyn Victorian c. 1895

This year marks the first time that Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust has included a home outside of Tredyffrin Township. Representing Easttown Township is “Berwyn Victorian”, a lovingly restored Victorian home. The house sits on part of the property that included a farm owned by Joseph C. Smith. Charles Thorpe, president of the Keystone Watch Case Company in Philadelphia and his wife, Mary Warren Thorpe, purchased the property in 1885. They immediately developed the part lying west by opening Warren Avenue (the name perpetuates the family name of Mrs. Thorpe) and erecting five dwellings. The current owners have started to research the history of the house at the Chester County Historical Society. They believe the current house was built by Joseph Dyson after purchasing the property from Charles Thorpe in 1891.



This house has been updated and modernized throughout and creates a delightful blend of old and new construction. The previous owner, a local architect, designed and built a 2-story addition onto the existing historic structure, greatly increasing the living space of the home. The first floor of the addition houses a large family room with an adjacent flagstone patio, while the second floor includes a large master bedroom suite. The current owners have updated the kitchen and master bath as well as installed new wooden windows in the original portion of the house. The owners have retained the original hardwood floors and architectural moldings throughout the 19th century part of the home. This house was recently featured on HGTV’s “My House is Worth What?” after the owners were contacted by a local realtor that was familiar with the house and the changes that had been made to it over the years.

Duportail House c.1740

The original section of the Duportail House in Chesterbrook was built in 1740 by John Havard, Jr., a Welsh farmer, on a tract of land given to him by his father. The house was used as quarters by General Chevalier Louis LeBègue dePresle Duportail, chief engineer of the Continental Army under General George Washington. He planned defensive positions for Valley Forge during the encampment of 1777-78, and left a map documenting those plans. The original map of General Duportail’s plans was found in the rafters of the attic nearly a century and a half later. This map served as the basis for Valley Forge National Historical Park as it is today. From 1969 on, the planned community of Chesterbrook gradually grew around the Duportail House.



In 1972, the house was designated a historic site and placed on the National Historic Register. Restoration work on this historic house was completed in 1985 and it was opened to the public as an educational and tourist center with provisions for protection and preservation. The Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust would like to thank the Trustees of Duportail House for their support, and for the use of this beautiful historic property as a starting point for the 4th Annual Historic House Tour. Duportail House, Inc. has created an ongoing partnership with the Trust to celebrate historic preservation in the community through education. Duportail House is the location for the Fall and Spring Lecture Series of Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust.