

21 M to P A Milestone Event

K. Varden Leasa and D. Lowell Nissley



The 21st Milestone of the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike.
Photo courtesy of K. Varden Leasa.

Reported for *The Quarterly* by Bonnie Haughey

As I parked in a field and walked through the grass towards the event area, splashes of color crisscrossed the Chester County sky and a coolness settled over the evening air. Here, on August 8th 2008, the repatriation ceremony for the 21st Milestone of the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike, near the intersections of Routes 30 and 401, was about to

begin. Guests mingled amongst easels, exhibits and souvenirs as the Brandywine Friends trio played early-American music. Looking out on the autos and asphalt of today's Lancaster Avenue, I saw nearby the guest-of-honor, the Milestone itself, and paused. I thought about those whose hands had crafted it so long ago, as well as those to whom it had signified either many more miles to go or a few more miles home. Now, finally, after over 40 years and a sojourn to America's heartland and sunbelt, number 21 was "home" at last.

At 7 p.m., Master of Ceremonies, K. Varden Leasa, began this late-summer evening's program. Nodding thanks to the Brandywine Friends, he started by noting that this was a celebration of history and preservation.

Mr. K. Varden Leasa:

I'm delighted by the return of this beautiful milestone, which told travelers they still had 21 miles to go to the Schuylkill River ferry and Philadelphia (there was no bridge there until 1802) [see The Permanent Bridge sidebar on p.135]. Originally the stone was planted in 1794 during the construction of the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike, America's first modern road, but in 1967, listing to one side and almost invisible from the highway, it started its long sojourn away from East Whiteland. With its return, all of us who live in this beautiful valley now have a regular reminder of the world as it used to be! We've changed the face of the land so much in the past half-century that we need something like this to facilitate our memories.

While this is something in which East Whiteland will take particular pride and pleasure, it is really a part of the history of the Main Line, indeed of that entire stretch of Penn's Woods between the metropolis of Philadelphia and the great inland city of Lancaster.

Joining us to record tonight's events are members from the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society. For over 70 years, they have preserved local history with a purpose of "Keeping Main Line History Alive." Fortunately for us, the members aren't exclusively devoted to Tredyffrin and Easttown, as you can see in a recent issue of *The History Quarterly* where East Whiteland is prominently featured on the cover.

Yesterday a long-pursued dream of mine was realized when the milestone was returned to the Lancaster Pike roadside. The support for this project has been so strong from the beginning and I'd be remiss if I didn't thank my brother-in-law, Brad Warren, for the actual labor of replanting the stone. We had to plant it a few feet east of its original position or it would have been in the middle of a concrete retaining wall. I love historical accuracy but don't consider this a problem, since this is the only milestone visible along Lancaster Pike between the 15th (beside the Berwyn train station) and the 29th (just east of Downingtown).

In keeping with this evening's historical flavor, I've decided to appear before you now as Joseph Malin I, the man who owned and farmed this land for 42 years, from 1785 to 1827:

I, like all my family for the past four generations, am a member of the Society of Friends, which people call the Quakers. We try to live in peace with everyone as Christ taught us and believe we should not use force or violence to settle our human differences. I am an elder in the Whiteland Preparative Meeting, which is organized under the Goshen Monthly Meeting. Here in East Whiteland there are a lot of us Quakers, but we live agreeably alongside neighbors who are Presbyterians and Episcopalians—and even some Roman Catholics and Amish-Mennonists. I'm a farmer, of course, but I'm also in the tanning business. We're lucky that the wind isn't out of the north this evening!

My great-grandfather, Randal Malin I, was a Quaker living in Chester County (or Cheshire) England in 1681 when he purchased land in Pennsylvania from William Penn and the following year brought his family over, settling in what's now Delaware County. My grandfather, Isaac Malin, who was a baby on that ocean voyage, inherited this farm in Whiteland in 1709 through his wife's



Mr. K. Varden Leasa, speaking as Joseph Malin. Photo by Mike Bertram.

family. Grandpa Isaac conveyed this "Milestone Farm" to his son, Isaac Jr., in 1735. Isaac, Jr., soon pulled up stakes and left Chester County, and this farm went out of our family for almost 40 years.

My father, Randal Malin II, who was Isaac Malin, Sr.'s youngest son, wanted to provide his three sons with farms. My two older brothers were taken care of: John got the Malin house that still stands near the intersection of Swedesford and Conestoga Roads. Brother Randal III was to inherit Dad's place, which most of you know as Malin Hall, on Malin Road – about 75 yards south of John's house. Dad and I were delighted when his brother Isaac's old farm came on the market in 1774. He bought it for me, and the farm belonged to the Malins once more.

That allowed me to go forward two years later with my marriage to Lydia, daughter of George Ashbridge of Milltown (now called Downingtown). Right after our wedding in October 1776 we moved into the beautiful new manse on this wonderful farm.

I'm sure you history buffs recognize the year 1776 as the year of America's independence. We Quakers here in Chester County didn't feel much affected by the war against Great Britain at first. Life was good for Lydia and me. In August 1777 she gave birth to our first son and we named him George (after his grandfather, not General Washington). Right afterwards came the British army's campaign to seize the rebel capital of Philadelphia, beginning with the Battle of Brandywine on September 11.

A couple days later we heard that Washington was coming our way and intended to confront the King's army once more – right here in East Whiteland. About midday on Monday September 15, a large party of soldiers and officers came riding down the Lancaster Road (the same road that you call Rt. 401 today) and turned into our lane. They looked over my farm and asked to inspect the house. Liking what they saw, they informed me that my home had been chosen for the headquarters of General Washington. We Quakers are people of peace, but we are not unmindful of the bless-

ings of liberty and we believe in submitting to the authorities God has placed over us. In those days, though, it wasn't easy figuring out who God wanted in charge. Other officers quartered with my brother John (at the Malin-George house) and my father Randal (at Malin Hall). But my house was General Washington's headquarters and his stay filled us with memories that we'll cherish forever, especially since the next day is remembered for the famous Battle of the Clouds.

It was a relief for us when the War finally ended. In later years, while living in Philadelphia, President Washington would sometimes travel past us on official business and he would occasionally stop in to say hello. Once he even brought Martha along and they stayed for supper!

Then in the 1790s, this great new road was built through my farm on the south and I had to cut a new lane up the hill so we could use it. The law establishing the Turnpike allowed us to use the road without paying tolls if we were just traveling locally or to meeting. We used to have a long ride to Goshen for meeting. Then in 1816 my brother Randal Malin III, of Malin Hall, donated a parcel of land just west of here by about a quarter of a mile. We built our own Whiteland Preparative Meeting. Someday my bones will rest beside the meetinghouse in the Whiteland Friends Graveyard.



Aerial view of the Malin's "Milestone Farm", from the 1960s. *Courtesy of K. Varden Leasa.*

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I now turn the program back to Varden.

I'm proud to say that East Whiteland Township has supported this project wholeheartedly from the beginning, especially Terry Woodman, township manager, Virginia McMichael, chair of the Board of Supervisors, the Honorable Duane Milne and Supervisors Bill Holmes and John Mott, who presented me with this plaque tonight, commemorating the repatriation of the milestone. Special thanks to the East Whiteland Fire Company for providing tonight's electrical power and traffic control. And I couldn't stand here this evening and not express my appreciation to Brian O'Neill for all the resources he put at our disposal. The successful repatriation of the 21st Milestone is in great measure due to the hard work and support of everyone at O'Neill Properties including Tom Coyne and Brian Finnegan, who is standing in for Mr. O'Neill tonight.

Another special guest surely needs no introduction since he is well known throughout the region for his constant and indefatigable work on behalf of his constituents. As many of you know, State Senator Andy Dinniman is a professor of history at West Chester University and a supporter of historic preservation throughout his constituency area. Let's give a warm East Whiteland welcome to Senator Dinniman!

Ms. Haughey:

I watched as the Senator came to the microphone with Henry (his French poodle) in tow. Presenting Mr. Leasa with a citation, he expressed gratitude and congratulations for accomplishing this daunting task: "...exceptional events ... bring about a greater understanding of the history of this Commonwealth ... and [of] East Whiteland's role in the Revolutionary War and transportation history of the U.S. ... there were once more than 60 of these stones placed at one mile intervals. Now no more than one third remain – although we know where one went. In conclusion,



Above: Sen. Dinniman congratulates Mr. Leasa. Photo by Mike Bertram. Below: The text of Sen. Dinniman's Senate citation.

In the Senate,

Whereas, the Senate of Pennsylvania is always pleased to recognize those exceptional events which bring about a greater understanding of the history of this Commonwealth; and

Whereas, on August 8, 2008, the Twenty-First Milestone of the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike will be unveiled and dedicated in a program commemorating the Lancaster Turnpike, the families who lived on the Milestone property and East Whiteland Township's role in the revolutionary and transportation history of the United States; and

Whereas, marking twenty-one miles to or from Philadelphia, the Twenty-First Milestone was placed along the road soon after the Lancaster and Philadelphia Turnpike opened in 1794. The simple granite milestone stood at the edge of the Lincoln Highway on the old Brackbill-Haldeman-Malin farm, now the Malvern Executive Center. There were once more than sixty of these stones, placed at one-mile intervals. Today, no more than a third remain.

Now therefore, the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania pays tribute to the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike and East Whiteland Township upon the commemoration of this momentous occasion; notes its commitment to preserving its natural gifts;

And directs that a copy of this document, sponsored by Senator Andrew E. Dinniman, be transmitted to the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike.

the Senate of Pennsylvania pays tribute to Varden's commitment to preserving ... history."

Upon accepting the citation, Mr. Leasa introduced Jim LaDrew and the Brandywine Friends trio who played *The Silent Sentinel*, a beautiful and solemn poem Jim wrote and set to music as a ballad. Afterwards, Mr. Leasa continued the program by remembering local resident, Julius Sachse:

Mr. Leasa:

Julius was a historian who lived in Berwyn in the late 1800s and early 1900s and left us a work titled: *The Wayside Inns on the Lancaster Roadside between Philadelphia and Lancaster*. This book has lots of great detail on both the earlier Lancaster (or Conestoga) Road (now Rt. 401 and Swedesford) and the Turnpike that replaced it in the 1790s, including a little vignette on the 21st Milestone itself!

"In connection with the French war excitement of 1798, there is a curious anecdote. Early in the year, envoys were appointed to France by President John Adams. One of these, Callender by name, instead of promptly embarking for France left Philadelphia westwards. Why or what for was not known at the time. He got as far the General Warren Tavern (just south of here) and remained there several days, until the morning of July 13th, when he was found by a teamster a little after day-break laying over the 21st milestone dead-drunk."

You know, now that I think about it, the milestone seems to have been at the center of more than one quirky tale. In 1907 my great-grandparents purchased the Milestone Farm and, as a boy growing up on the farm, I remember that the north side of the roadbed on Lancaster Pike had subsided radically away from the highway and the old stone ended up sticking crookedly out of the ground, scarcely visible from the highway.

Then, in the late 1960s, my relatives made the painful decision to sell the farm. My uncle Lowell Nissley, married to my mother's older sister Miriam Brackbill, thought the old stone shouldn't be left behind to

The Silent Sentinel

Written and set to music by Jim LaDrew, 2008

I am a silent sentinel
They've done a clever thing
They've graded over, leveled out
The Highway of the King
From here clear through to Lancaster
It's free from muck and mire
With inns in towns along the way
If travelers should tire

I am a silent sentinel
I've watched them come and go
In changing forms of transport
And countless numbers flow
I mark one mile of distance
As human progress rolls
And, as with life in general,
This turnpike takes its tolls

I am a silent sentinel
I've been gone for a while
But now I'm back and planted well
And honored in good style
And, my! How things have changed so much!
I'd hardly know the place
But, isn't it just like them all?
Just like the human race?

I am a silent sentinel
A quarried mile post
This road, once sixty-two miles long,
Now runs from coast to coast
I am a silent sentinel
A lesser rock of age
A witness here as history
Turns page upon each page

who knows what fate. Uncle Lowell knows the Bible much better than I do, but I suppose he may have momentarily forgotten Proverb 22: verse 28, which says: "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set." But history is funny this way – if not for him, we might not be standing here this evening and I'd like him now to tell you his story of the 'stone.

Mr. D. Lowell Nissley:

Thank you, Varden. Today is such a great day. As many of you may know, for a long time—decades

even—Varden has breathed and dreamed of this moment. He has prodded, pressured, probed, twisted arms, written letters, and researched records and archives to make today happen. This is the moment! Varden, you pulled it off!

Now I have a confession to make. I wasn't sure if I should show up here. Varden has already introduced the subject. You see, I was the one who kidnapped the 21 M to P about 40 years ago. This farm was where my wife grew up. The lane to the house was just beyond where the marker has been replanted. We drove in that lane hundreds of times and looked at the 21 M to P often. Where the marker is now is probably in the former driveway of the Brackbill Market. This house and market were for decades the epicenter of life for the Brackbill-Haldeman families and relatives. As happens with most families, children grow up and follow other drummers and move away, and as Varden has said, it was a painful decision to make to sell the property. No one knew what the future held, so I had the thought that a little bit of history, as a reminder of our past, would be an excellent thing. We lived in Indiana at the time but were back for one last visit. So, early on the morning that we planned to leave for home, my son, Dale, and two cousins, helped me dig up the marker, with great difficulty. It was heavy, maybe three or four hundred pounds, and was surrounded by a guardrail which was a series of three cables strung between posts. We managed to manhandle the marker over those cables and into the back of our station wagon. However, some locals driving past on their way to work saw the marker going into the back of an Indiana-plated car and called the police. As you can imagine, it didn't take long for a policeman to arrive. Here's a special note: just a few years before, I had taught his wife in the high school class of the Frazer Summer Bible School.

My son ran down the lane to get Grandpa and, standing out here close by Lancaster Avenue, we negotiated a decision that the marker would rest in limbo at the Brackbill home and if no one claimed it within a year we could have it. One year later we took it to Indiana, where it looked wonderful in our rock garden. Then when we moved to Florida, 21 M to P went along, and it has graced our front door for the past 33 years.

Before we came today, I wondered if it was a good idea. Varden had told me that the Fire Department,

the Police Department and every other authority figure would be here. Would it be safe for me to show up? Perhaps the statute of limitations has run out by now. However, it gives me great pleasure, in spite of the blisters, to bring the marker back home. It has been 208 years since travelers first drove by and knew they had 21 miles yet to Philadelphia. Hopefully it will be here for another 208 years. In any case, I'm sure Varden will be keeping watch.

If the marker could talk, how many stories could it tell? How many "Henry's" (Senator Dinniman's dog) have paid a visit? Varden already told one story. Another tells of a family driving by and a kid in the car saying, "Hey, that sign says 21 miles to P--- and I can't wait that long."

Many of you already know the history of the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike, but for those of you who don't, it was in January of 1730 that a petition was presented to the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania to provide a paved road between Philadelphia and Lancaster to facilitate the transportation of goods to the Philadelphia markets. In 1772 Governor Mifflin formed a study committee and in 1795 (65 years after the petition) the first paved road, the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike, was open to the public. (Bureaucracy is not a modern invention.)

An Irish engineer named McAdam along with Thomas Telford devised a method to cover the road with coarse rock and then top it with finer crushed stone, and a crown to make the road passable year 'round. It was 20 feet wide and graded so it would drain. That worked fine for horses and buggies, but when cars came along around the turn of the century, the tires tended to churn it.

One hundred and thirteen years later, in 1913, this road became the Lincoln Highway which is famous for playing a significant part in our country's economic expansion. That same year it became America's first coast-to-coast highway, stretching from Times Square in New York to San Francisco. If someone would make a core drill in the center of this road today, he or she would find samples of the various versions of the Lincoln Highway, and even some of the stone of the first paved road in America—the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike. I can remember when, in 1928 or '29, the first (I think) two lanes of concrete were laid—at least from Exton on east.

My own connection to the Lincoln Highway is strong. I grew up around here and in 1915, on April 1st in a snowstorm, my father went into Philadelphia and bought a Little Giant truck. He was a photographer of children, so he loaded all his equipment into his truck and headed for San Francisco over the Lincoln Highway. To help finance his trip he would go door-to-door, take pictures of children, rent a local theater, and show the little darlings on the screen before taking orders.

We knew he made this trip because occasionally he would say something about it. It wasn't till just a few years ago, while rummaging through a box of pictures looking for a memory, that I came across a small brown leather diary. My father kept a diary! A diary of his trip! My wife and I had been saving our nickels and dimes for a land trip to Alaska. Instead we decided to travel my father's diary route from Frazer to San Francisco. It was so fascinating that we did the same thing the next year and interviewed dozens of people—even a policeman. The results of this I put into a book, entitled: *Lincoln Highway-The Road My Father Traveled* [see Book Review on pp. 138-139].

This piece of road right here, right now, in 2008, has vastly more importance than just here in Malvern, Frazer or East Whiteland Township. It is a part of the first coast-to-coast highway and still today contributes to the economic health of our nation, as well as to the traveling pleasure of all of us, to say nothing about the social values and the way it unites us as a people from sea to shining sea. Today, we are all standing near a piece of a great national treasure.

Thank you, Varden, for your keen vision and persistence!

Ms. Haughey:

Accompanied by the Brandywine Friends, Mr. Leasa and guests sang *America the Beautiful*. Afterwards the Reverend C. Ralph Malin, a life-long East Whiteland resident, Mennonite minister for 60-plus years and fittingly Joseph Malin I's great-great-grandson, gave a moving benediction.

It was an unforgettable moment, and following the celebrations, I was able to meet Mr. Nissley whom, I think, can rightfully be called the "Keeper of the Post." It was safe while it traveled with him and his family from state to state, gracing more than one gar-

den and serving as a bench to weary passers-by. His fears about "kidnapping" the stone should be put to rest forever. For those who ask themselves if history was well served by his appropriating the stone, we only need to look to 1967 and realize that our society didn't have the same regard for historic preservation that we now have. Mr. Nissley's long and caring stewardship of this important relic has made today's ceremony possible. To the Lowell Nissleys of the world, who recognize history long before others do, we are exceptionally grateful.

This was a wonderful evening spent in the company of fellow history-lovers. Before I left for home, cousins Ruth King and Miriam Nissley kindly invited me to stop by the Frazer Mennonite Church the next day for the weekend-long reunion of the Brackbill/Haldeman/Malin families, which I did. I was warmly received by many family members, and am marveling still at their collection of artifacts, diaries, scrapbooks, scholarly papers, genealogical and other research, as well as documents and records from their many successful businesses. A family tree - with pictures - spanned the walls of the gathering room - 3 feet high and 40 or 50 feet long - one of the most impressive I've ever seen. What lineage. These three remarkable families have preserved literally thousands of photographs since the invention of the camera. Was it lost on me that here, near Lancaster Pike and the milestone, where their histories began roughly 300 years ago, that these families had come together once again? Not in the least.

This was a ceremony that I feel lucky to have witnessed, only regretting that I hadn't brought other friends and family with me. Although Mr. Leasa thanked many people for their help and cooperation, the event would not have happened without his determination and efforts. On behalf of the Historical Society, I thank Mr. Leasa for the enthusiasm and professionalism he brings to his passion for history. Now whenever I drive past the 21st Milestone, I, too, will feel like I am a small part of its long and interesting history.



The repatriated milestone. Photo by Mike Bertram.

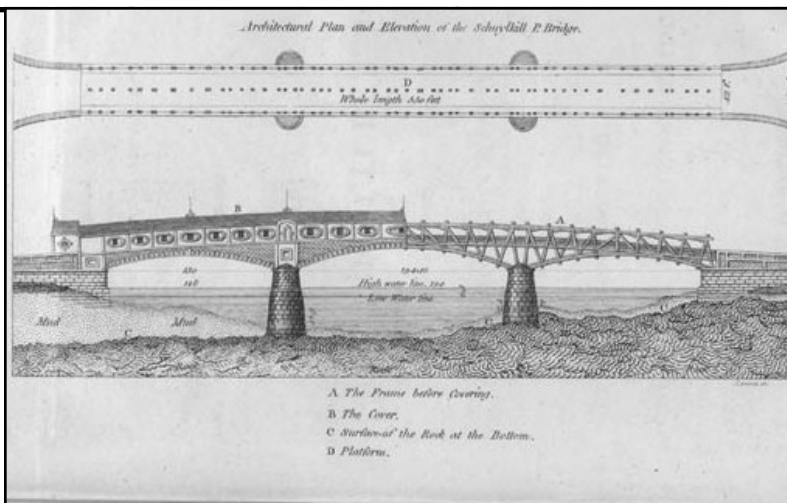
The Permanent Bridge

The first covered bridge built in this area was the so called "Permanent Bridge", located at the west end of High [Market] Street at the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. The bridges erected there up to 1786 had been of a temporary nature, and the community was demanding that the Schuylkill be spanned by one that would withstand storms and freshets. Scharf & Westcott, city historians, say, "Philadelphia's Councils resolved that a permanent bridge should be built, but as the city treasury was much depleted, they applied to the State for aid, suggesting that the ferry tolls, the floating bridge receipts and the auction dues be donated to the bridge fund."

The undertaking was dormant until the Legislature passed the act of March 16, 1798 incorporating a bridge company and constituting Richard Peters, John Perot, Godfrey Haga, Matthew McConnell and William Sheaff to organize the "President, Directors and Company for erecting a permanent bridge over the River Schuylkill at or near the city of Philadelphia." Five years were allowed for the construction of the bridge. The capital for the company was fixed at \$150,000 with the provision that when toll receipts should exceed 15% of that amount, the surplus was to go toward freeing the bridge of toll charges. The Legislature also reserved the power to make it free after 25 years on the payment of its appraised value.

The cornerstone of the eastern abutment was laid on October 18, 1800. Engineer William Shank notes that a stone arch bridge was originally planned. Apparently the complexity of work required in constructing the two piers in the river led to a decision to complete the bridge with a wooden deck. The Eastern pier was first erected in a depth of water of 21 to 24 feet inside a coffer-dam. The Western pier, say Scharf & Westcott, "attended with greater difficulty, constant hazard and unavoidable expense," required a coffer-dam in which 800,000 feet of timber was employed, in a depth of water of 41 feet. No pier of regular masonry in so great a depth of water was known to exist anywhere else in the world. The masonry of this pier was begun on Christmas Day, 1802, and completed in 41 days and nights, after seven months had been occupied in preparing the dam and retrieving its misfortunes. The height of the Eastern pier from its rock foundation was 40 feet, and that of the Western pier was 55 feet 9 inches. The resulting cost pushed the total expenditure to near \$300,000.

When the directors of the Schuylkill Permanent Bridge Company of Philadelphia elected in 1801 to complete the



Alexander Lawson's engraving, "Architectural Plan and Elevation of the Schuylkill P. Bridge," illustrates *A Statistical Account of the Schuylkill Permanent Bridge, Communicated to the Philadelphia Society of Agriculture*, 1806 (Philadelphia: Printed by Jane Aitken, 1807). Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture Records, 1785-1982, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania.

bridge with a wooden superstructure, they hired Timothy Palmer, the best-known wood bridge builder in the country at the time, to complete the job. Palmer (1751-1821), a native of Newburyport, Massachusetts, had patented his bridge design in 1797. He was one of the most ingenious of the pioneer bridge builders and had made his mark building roofless, long-span wooden bridges over New England rivers and also a span over the Potomac in Maryland. Palmer and his workmen completed the structure using the two piers built earlier. The bridge had an overall length of 1300 feet. The center span was 195 feet long and the two side spans each were 150 feet. It was sufficiently completed to open for traffic on January 1, 1805. Mainly through the efforts of Judge Richard Peters, president of the bridge company, a protective wood cover was added that same year. (Peters lived across the river at his estate, Belmont, in what is today's Fairmount Park.)

The covered highway across the river was embellished with two carved wood statues by William Rush, "Commerce" at one end and "Agriculture" at the other. A marble obelisk at the western approach bore a long inscription recording the history of the bridge and praising those "who by enterprising, arduous and persevering exertions achieved this extensively beneficial improvement." The bridge is said to have been the first covered bridge built in America.

This is an excerpt from an article "Covered Bridges", written by Karl Klingelhoefter, in Volume 36, Issue 2 (April 1998) of *The Quarterly*, available in digital form on the Society's web site.