

# The Diamond Rock Octagonal Schoolhouse

Susanna Baum

*This article is adapted from a presentation given by Ms. Baum at the Society's meeting on September 18, 2011. The audio recording was transcribed and subsequently edited by Heidi Sproat. There are responses from then president Roger Thorne, as well as some comments from the audience. A question and answer session followed the presentation. Unless otherwise noted all images are courtesy of the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse Preservation Association.*

## Background

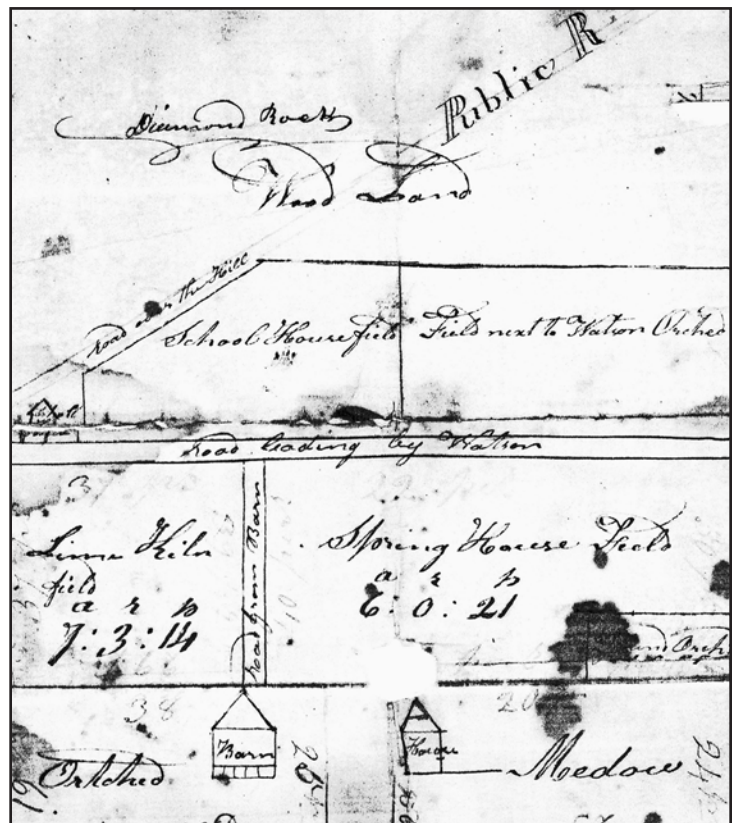
Before the advent of public schools in the Great Valley area, in 1818, a small community of local Mennonite families decided to pool their labor and money into building a one room schoolhouse and to hiring a teacher. Common in Southeast Pennsylvania at the time, an octagonal architectural plan was selected. [1] The schoolhouse was built at a cost of \$260.93 [2], and erected on land leased for a term of 999 years. [3] The schoolhouse was used until the Spring of 1864 when the ever-expanding population required larger school facilities which were erected - the Walker and the Salem Village schools. The schoolhouse subsequently fell into grave disrepair. In 1869, executors of the will of George Beaver then transferred the Diamond Rock Farm – on which the schoolhouse was erected – to George Wersler, his son-in-law.

In 1909, however, Emma Wersler, daughter of George Wersler, rallied neighbors for donations to make structural repairs to the schoolhouse and “Diamond Rock Old Scholars’ Association” was formed. Restoration took place from 1909-1918. The Association’s mission remains the same today, to educate others about early education in Tredyffrin Township at the Diamond Rock Octagonal Schoolhouse site and to preserve a local landmark and its history and heritage for future generations. [4] Today’s trustees of the Schoolhouse continue their work supporting preservation efforts for this remarkable structure.

## Presentation

I was attracted to the school when my neighbor, Pauline Midgley, who no longer lives here, and I saw an advertisement on the lawn for an annual meeting. We decided to attend the meeting to see what it was all about. A sign-up sheet for hostesses was passed around and we volunteered to hostess in the summertime when the school was open. It was a wonderful chance to visit. While Pauline had a high-powered job and I was a stay-at-home Mom, we enjoyed talking about things of mutual interest between greeting wonderful people who came to visit the schoolhouse. When I became President of the Board of Trustees, I inherited two or three boxes full of papers. I put them aside and eventually I went through them all and read some very interesting early minutes. I began to really absorb the history of the schoolhouse and “The Valley” because the two are intertwined.

This is our landmark, the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse, built in 1818. It was in operation until 1864. While you see the schoolhouse with a façade of stucco, the schoolhouse is a structure made of stone. I like to think that the schoolhouse history is not set in stone but is a living history. Also, you’ll see that as the landscape changes over the years, so does the schoolhouse.



(Figure 1) The Diamond Rock School is shown on the middle-left of this drawing of the Beaver Farm from John Beaver's survey book, c. 1830s. Courtesy of Chester County Historical Society.

There is a really wonderful early map (c. 1830) of the George Beaver Farm (see Figure 1). The farm is located on Yellow Springs Road, across from the schoolhouse, and the property goes up Diamond Rock Hill. In about 1818 thirty families in the Valley decided they really valued education and wanted to build a schoolhouse for their children. It was the first free school in the Valley and it was free in the sense that anyone could attend the school. The school wasn't associated with a church or a private family, and the families contributed money and their labor to build the school located on the corner of George Beaver's farm. From the map you get the sense of what the land was like; an orchard, a lime kiln, the springhouse field. The schoolhouse field is shown. Yellow Springs Road is shown, but marked, "the road leading by Watson." Watson's house was the first house east of the schoolhouse. Later you'll see some photographs of the house. Notice up the road is all woodland, Diamond Rock Hill.

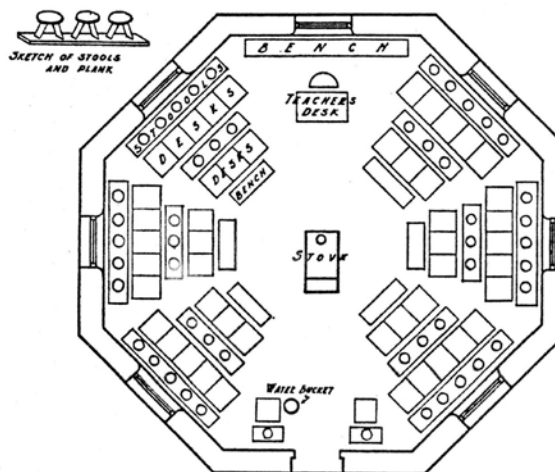
Figure 2 is a wonderful floor plan of the interior of the school. You can see it's an octagonal shape which maximized light, and at one time, it was reported sixty students attended the school. This floor plan shows how sixty could fit in the school. A ten plate stove was located in the center along with the teacher's desk. The students would face the windows and the smaller children would sit around the fire. As the teacher would address a certain section, the students would turn to face the teacher. Children weren't divided by grades as we know today but by subject matter. The students would learn by osmosis; the older students teaching the younger ones. The larger boys probably did not attend school in the fall because they were needed on the farms and the younger students stayed home in the very cold months. So most likely sixty wouldn't attend all at once; however the building could hold sixty. Some teachers liked to hold classes outside in warm weather.

Figure 3 is one of the earliest photographs we have of the school. It's a wonderful photograph because you can see it prior to the installation of telephone poles. The photograph shows the steps that go along Diamond Rock Hill and Yellow Springs roads. These steps provided a resting place for the horse and buggy as they went up the hill together. Each little step was called a "thank you ma'am."

One of the speakers at our annual meeting was Dave Wilson accompanied by his wife, Ginny. Some of you may know and remember Dave Wilson. Dave lived most of the 20th century. He was born in 1902 and was very close to his 100th year when he died, so he was wonderful source of information and loved meeting people. He told the story of sledding down Diamond Rock Hill all the way to North Valley. He was courting Ginny and with Ginny on his back, he went down Diamond Rock Hill over one of these "thank you ma'am's," landed hard, and broke his ribs.

Notice the landscape prior to the stone wall that's around the school now and the walkway. Notice faint evidence of a short by-road that cut from Diamond Rock Hill to Yellow Springs Road and the beginnings of the woods. We still have these two oak trees; they've grown up quite a bit. This is one of the photographs by Lucy Sampson?

**Roger:** Yes, it's a Sampson.



FLOOR PLAN OF AN EIGHT-SIDED SCHOOL HOUSE

This plan intended that pupils face the center of the room but in most school houses of this type the desks and benches were arranged so that pupils faced the walls and windows.

(Figure 2) Sketch of octagonal design. Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction, *100 Years of Free Public Schools*, p. 11.



(Figure 3) Looking northeast from the intersection of Diamond Rock (left) and Yellow Springs Roads, Berwyn. Photographer Lucy Sampson took this photograph about 1901. Notice the stucco and stone architecture, and the new growth trees behind the school.



Figure 4 is a really wonderful photograph. You can definitely see the short by-road here, and off in the distance there is a horse and buggy coming up Diamond Rock Hill. It's a little bit later than that first photograph we saw because you can see now the beginnings of the installation of the telephone system.

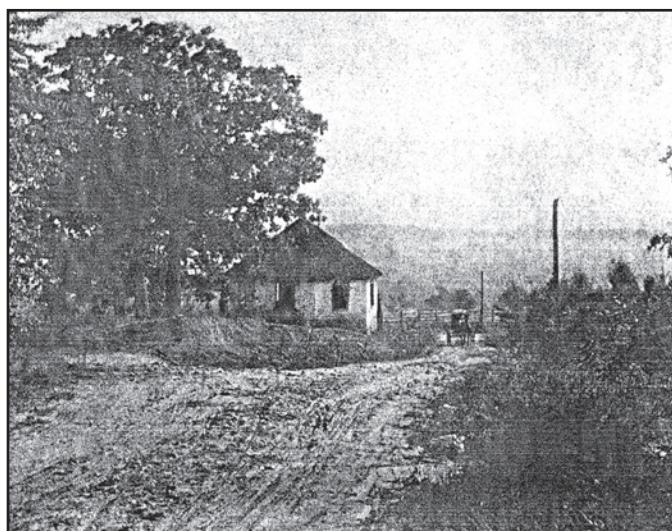
We don't have a lot of photographs of the back of the schoolhouse and this is a particularly good one. What I love about this photograph is the pile of rocks here. We don't really know a whole lot about what they were used for so I'm just guessing this might be about the time the restoration began and perhaps these stones were used for the first section of the rock wall. Even though the schoolhouse appears in such bad condition, it looks as though the stone walls remained intact. You can see they were plastered with stucco and you can also see the farmland in the distance. The whole Valley was farms.

We discovered several early photographs of people having their photograph taken by the school. There are three unknown women posing in one photograph. Another is of an unknown man maybe the same day. Perhaps they were together. Another early photograph shows the schoolhouse before the restoration.

In the photograph of the unknown man, Figure 6, and about the same year as another of three women from early 1900 or 1910, a name that comes up quite often in the early minutes is George Detwiler. This unknown man is in his work clothes. George Detwiler did a lot of stonework in the Mennonite Cemetery across the road, stonework at the schoolhouse, and at the Mennonite Meetinghouse. He made the stone walkway and was responsible for the stone wall. I don't know if actually he did all the work on the stone wall, he may have hired someone do part of it. So this man in work clothes could be about thirty-five years old which matches the age of George Detwiler who lived in the house where Sue Andrews lives now, down the road on Yellow Springs. Although it's just a guess, it's a great photograph. And again looking through the back, there is a pole either a street sign or a telephone pole.

This is a great picture, a close up. Roger Thorne, who has an eye for detail, noticed there is a lot of graffiti on the windowsills. We imagined the people who came to have their photograph might have left their initials as well. At first glance this man could be in clothes men wear today, khakis and a white shirt, but with this close up the fabric appears to be woven linen, right Roger?

**Roger:** Yes.



(Figure 4) A view south down Diamond Rock Road toward the ruined school and the Great Valley beyond. Notice the by-road to the left of the rutted road to connecting Yellow Springs Road, thereby making the schoolhouse property a self-contained triangle. Circa early 1900s. Note too the horse and buggy coming up the hill.



(Figure 5) View of back of schoolhouse



(Figure 6) Unidentified man may be George Detwiler. Photo courtesy of Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society and the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse Preservation Association.



And now the building, Figure 7, is in the worst shape ever. So we believe this dates close to 1909 when the restoration began. Look all around you can see the trees that are still there...but not the vast woodland there today; these cedars are no longer here. But as you drive along, there still remain few of those cedars on Yellow Springs Road.

Miss Emma Wersler lived on the Beaver Farm that we saw in the earlier map. She was a descendant of the Beavers, and Emma's mother, Ann Beaver Wersler, and Emma's sister, Ella, attended the school. Emma did not; she was born after the school was closed. Obviously she loved the school because she rallied the neighbors in the Valley to restore the school. She had a vision that it would be a wonderful place for the community. It took several years to raise the money; they had bake sales and dances and continued to pay for the restoration well into the 1920's. Emma was the first President of the Old Scholars' Association that was established in 1918.

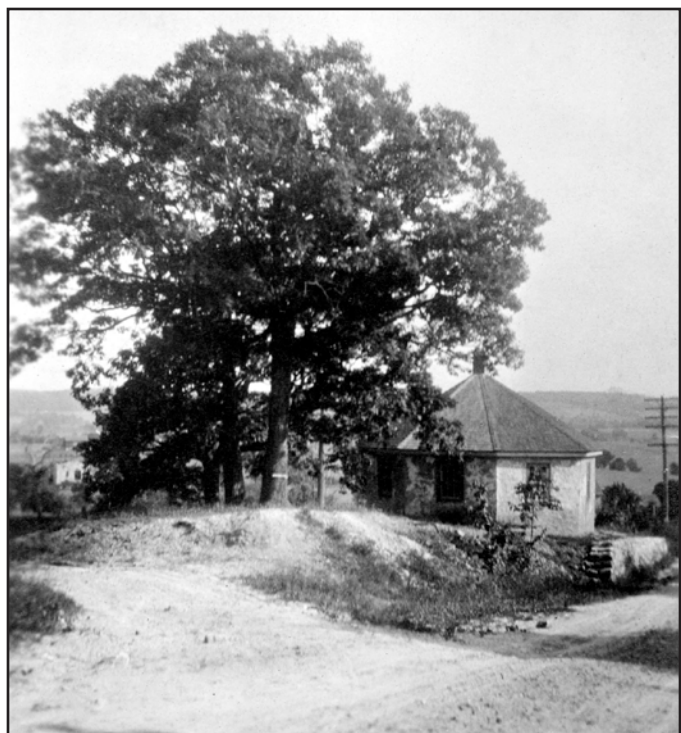
Now here we are at a later photograph, 1916, in Figure 8. There are unknown men here but their dress is so interesting. These two men are more formal and then this guy looks like a trapper. But what's interesting about the photograph is the progress the restoration has been made since 1909. Later on an overhang and shutters were added, but by now the building is well on its way to completion and it has a new roof.



(Figure 7) In 1909, the schoolhouse was in grave disrepair and crumbling. *Courtesy of Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society and the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse Preservation Association.*



(Figure 8) Image taken around 1916 during the restoration process. Note the crude road sign on the post, and the appearance of the first telephone poles along Diamond Rock Road.



(Figure 9) Looking south over the newly-reconstructed school, and the Great Valley, from Diamond Rock Road near its intersection with Yellow Springs Road, sometime after the opening of the restored building - September 21, 1918. On the left is another view of the by-road connecting to Yellow Springs Road. Notice the beginnings of the stone wall flanking Diamond Rock Road. Compare this photo with Figure 4.

This might have been the pole that we saw through the window in an earlier photograph, the one with the street sign, "Diamond Rock Hill." And notice there are telephone poles. And there is evidence here of a stone wall which we'll see later in another photograph. The trees are growing but are not as tall as today. Look at the sky; today we can no longer see sky as we go up Diamond Rock Hill.

Figure 9 is a back view of the schoolhouse with a good view of the short by-road, the Valley and the farmland beyond.

Now here we have the stone wall, and it doesn't appear as though shutters have been added. I can't tell from this photograph if the shutters are closed or these are just windows, but I'm guessing they are just windows.

There are several photographs of the annual meeting in 1920, one of which is represented in Figure 10. Notice the old cars along the road. The restoration appears complete with a definite stone wall, the street sign, and additions of the door overhang, the trellis and shutters. By the way, Wharton Esherick who had a studio on Horseshoe Trail, used the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse as his studio during 1916 to 1918. Wharton was responsible for these little diamonds in the shutters and some of the ironwork.

Another group photograph of former pupils was taken the same day in 1920 as the photograph of the annual meeting. Among those pictured are Ella Wersler, sister of Emma, who was a former student and also President of the Association, and Jay Elwood Snyder, whose father Isaiah was also a teacher. Also seen is Wilmer Thomson, Editor of the Daily Local for about fifty years. His father and his brother were teachers at Diamond Rock Schoolhouse and Wilmer was their student. Wilmer wrote an interesting article about which we'll talk later. All these people loved the school.

As time goes on the plantings around the school change and by now the wisteria is really overgrown. These little plants are boxwoods, taken from cuttings of Diamond Rock Farm and they were propagated by George Pennypacker and later stolen by passersby. In another photograph, the stone wall was extended. The stones for this wall were taken from the meetinghouse across the road on Yellow Springs. When it closed the building was torn down, and George Detwiler had the stones used for the wall around the schoolhouse.

George Detwiler also put in steps and built a stone walkway to the school. Notice some of these boxwoods are missing. See Figure 12. The trees are growing; they are getting bigger and bigger.

The schoolhouse is a popular subject for artists and photographers. I often see people sitting with their easels on the pull-off across from the school or people with their cameras taking photographs. A good example is the painting by Adelaide Cilley of Paoli (see Figure 13).

**Roger:** There is an interesting article in an issue of our Quarterly about her.

With the trellis still here, this painting probably dates prior to 1950.

We use this sketch (see Figure 14) as the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse logo but Dave Wilson drew it in 1932. He was commissioned by his mother to sketch the school to be used as a postcard for announcements. Later the sketch was used on stationery and now it is our logo. Dave was an artist and went to the Academy of Fine Arts but he didn't talk about his art much because he was modest.

(Figure 10) The 1920 Annual Meeting of the 'Diamond Rock Old Scholars' Association.'

Note the recent addition of a door overhang, window shutters, and trellises on either side of the door. This image was taken prior to the construction of a front walkway and stone wall.



(Figure 12) Boxwood cuttings, propagated from Diamond Rock Farm owned by the Wersler family, had been planted in the front of the Schoolhouse in 1928. Regrettably, the cuttings were stolen. Note the difference between the two photographs (see Fig. 4) – a difference of some thirty years.



(Figure 13) Undated painting by Adelaide Cilley



(Figure 14) Poster design sketch of the Diamond Rock School drawn by David Wilson c. 1932 to be featured on postcards sent as announcements for annual meeting days.



There is a photograph of the 1940 annual meeting (Figure 15). Some of the artifacts inside can still be seen at the schoolhouse. The chairs were purchased in the 1920's for annual meetings, and one can see an original bench. In the background are some photographs of the teachers including Wilmer Thomson and his father Aaron Thomson; Wilmer was the student and Aaron was the teacher. There are woodcuts by Wharton Esherick that were a gift from him. Harriet Thomas gave us a wonderful handwritten history of the school. Annie Dunlap wrote the early minutes where I learned so many of the facts.

There are some later photographs of an annual meeting in 1955 (Figure 16). The name of the Association was changed a second time to "Old Pupils' Association of Diamond Rock." Some of you may recognize the people. I think Penny (Stanger) may help ... Dave Wilson, Uncle Buzz Wilson ... and I know there is a Doctor Robert Hughes. And Harriet Thomas, Corresponding Secretary with her little granddaughter.

**Audience:** The man next to the man to the right of the man in the white jacket is Ralph Davis. He was my neighbor when I was a very little girl.

Ralph Davis...he was your neighbor. And where was that?

**Audience:** In Paoli.

Unfortunately our annual meetings are very small now. Over the years attendance has dwindled. There is another view of the 1950 meeting. I remember Libby Weaver; she is the only woman in the photograph whom I met. In the background again are some of the photographs of the teachers, but the lamp isn't there anymore. The schoolhouse has no electricity or bathroom facilities and it's not handicap accessible.

In another photograph from the 1950's, Figure 17, one can again notice how the plantings have changed and the wall doesn't look quite in the same shape. In 1950 the association decided to open the schoolhouse in the summertime on Sunday afternoons. There is a photo of one of the early hostesses and some of the children. Also, the schoolhouse was open for Chester County Day. As with any building there is always a need for repair; for example the windows are broken and the glass needs to be replaced. The trees have certainly grown higher and higher.

In 1950 the trellis was removed. The trellis holding all that wisteria was causing a lot of problems for the roof. Again there has been more attention to the landscape, bushes have been cut back.

(Figure 18) Octagonal School in the summer of 1958. The trellis on either side of the door had been removed in 1950. Notice the growth of the surrounding trees.



(Figure 15) 1940 Annual Meeting



(Figure 16) Two photos of the 1955 Annual Meeting



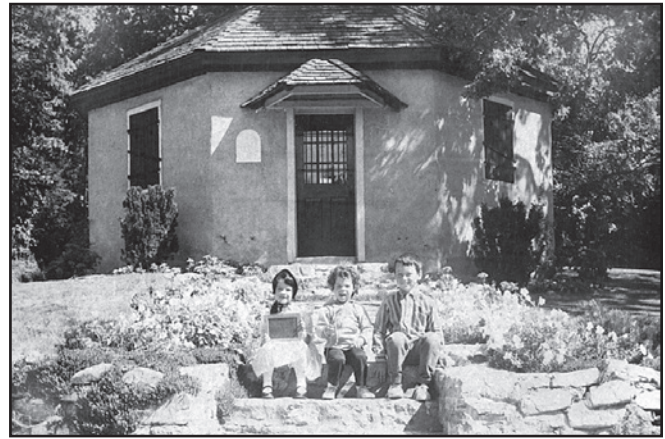
(Figure 17) A Sunday afternoon Open House at the Octagonal School, with hostess and children, from the mid 1950s. Notice the broken windows, caused either by vandalism or wear and tear from opening and closing.







(Figure 19) 1960s photo.



(Figure 20) 1970s photo.

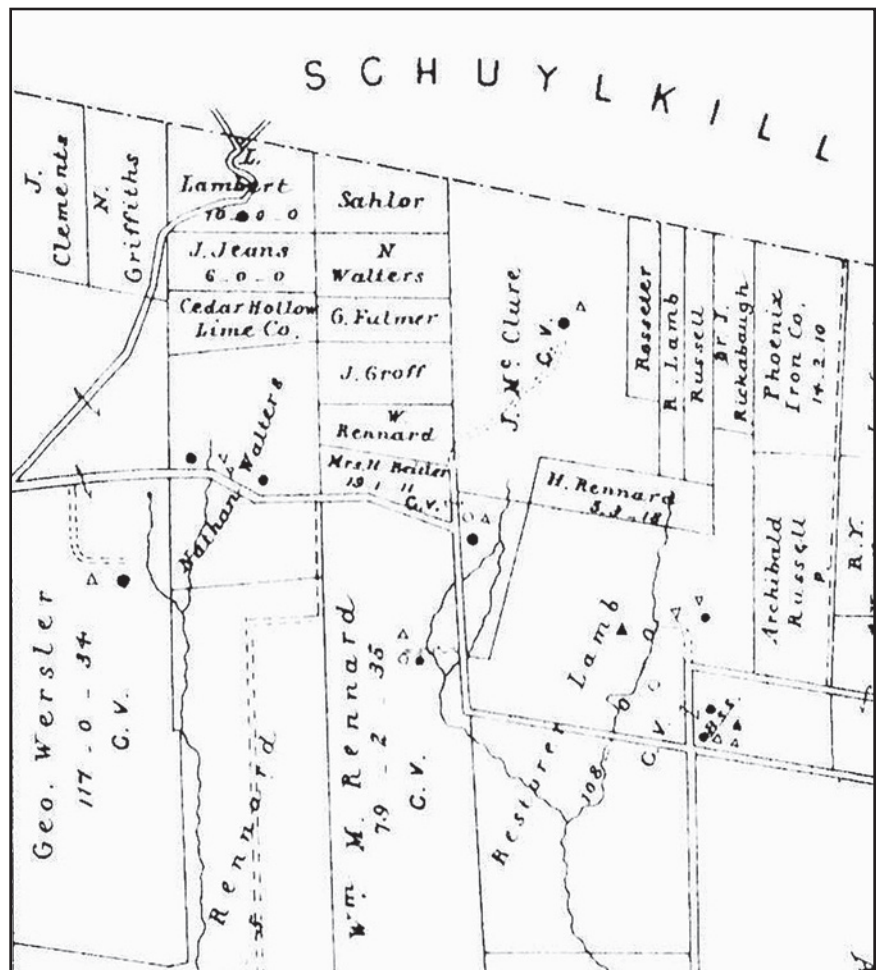


(Figure 21) Image taken in the 1980s. Note how the evergreens are taking over the property.

For a while the stone wall was constantly being damaged by motorists hitting it with their cars. In this photograph the wall looks good. This photograph dates in the 1960's and right over here there is a house built in 1980. In the 1970 photograph, the little girl is in period costume and she's holding one of the slates in the schoolhouse collection.

In the 1980s photo observe that new bushes have been planted but they've grown larger. Look at the growth of the trees, this is winter but now in the summer there isn't the sky that we saw in those early photographs.

The 1883 map, Figure 22, shows names of the property owners. Notice there is no indication of the schoolhouse anymore. In 1830 this was the "Road leading by Watson;" by 1883 it was Nathan Walter's property. Where it was George Beaver's property; it's now George Wersler's. His wife Ann was a Beaver, so the farm was passed down through the family.



(Figure 22) The 1883 Breou Atlas shows the confluence of Yellow Springs and Diamond Rock Roads... and the boundaries of the Beaver/ Wersler farm, and the Nathan Walters farm. There is no notation of the old Octagonal School in this atlas because its use had long ceased and the schoolhouse property reverted to the Werslers. After the schoolhouse was restored, Ella Wersler and her brother deeded the property on which the schoolhouse stood to the *Diamond Rock Old Scholars' Association*.





(Figure 23) This late 19th century image is of the Nathan Walter farmhouse, which, along with its barn, is still located east of the Schoolhouse on Yellow Springs Road. Shown is Mr. Walter (seated), his daughter, and another woman.

When the school closed in 1864, the deed reverted to the Werslers. After the school's restoration, Ella Wersler and her brother, George Wersler, deeded the property to the Old Pupils' Association of the Diamond Rock School in 1932. The name of the association was changed officially from Diamond Rock Old Scholars' Association in 1925.

Examining the 1883 Breou Map, note that at the end of Yellow Springs Road where it takes a bend, is the home of Hannah Beidler. Jacob Beidler, Hannah's father, was the first preacher of the Mennonite Meetinghouse, which we'll talk about later.

Another early photograph we found in our collection is of the Nathan Walter farmhouse. See Figure 23. It was the former Watson property that we saw on the early 1830 map of the Beaver farm. The photograph is identified as Nathan Walter and his daughter. It's the first old property east of the schoolhouse. This house today belongs to the Salvucci family. Across the road on Yellow Springs are remnants of an old springhouse. If you recall on the 1830 map (Figure 1) there was the springhouse field. Looking closely, I discovered this old ruin (Figure 25).

I showed you Hannah Beidler's home on the 1883 map, and here is a picture of the Beidler home at the end of Yellow Springs where it takes the bend, and most likely the photograph dates about 1900. See Figure 26. I believe this is Hannah Beidler who died in 1902. A lot of children and grandchildren went to the school from this house. Remember seeing the picture of Wilmer Thomson in the 1920 photograph of old scholars? Thomson wrote a detailed article reminiscing about the schoolhouse and families of the Valley in the 1850's. In the article he told about his brother, Addison, who led a procession from the schoolhouse to the Beidler home because one of the grandchildren, Mary, died of fever. They processed then to the Mennonite Cemetery to bury her.



(Figure 24) Recent photo of the same house.  
Courtesy Roger D. Thorne



(Figure 25) Ruins of the old springhouse across Yellow Springs Road from the Walters farm house, and located just several hundred yards east of the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse.



(Figure 26) The home of Jacob Beidler on Yellow Springs Road was located one-half mile east of the Schoolhouse. Many Beidler children attended the Diamond Rock School, and two granddaughters taught at the School. The Beidler home, shown about 1900, was razed about 1940.



This is the Mennonite date stone. See Figure 27. I've talked about the Mennonite Meetinghouse that is located just west of the schoolhouse across Yellow Springs Road, built in 1835 by Jacob Beidler. He was an early subscriber to the schoolhouse. He died in 1864 and that was the beginning of the end of the meetinghouse. It had a few brief revivals but then completely closed in the early 1900's.

There is a photograph of the meetinghouse (Figure 28) that we found recently, and you can see the date stone on the building. After the building was torn down, the stone was saved and inserted into the rock wall. The building was taken down in 1927 and the stones from this building were used to build the stone wall around the school. Probably some were used to repair some of this wall too.

In the cemetery, see Figure 29, are some of the headstones of the German, Mennonite families in the Valley, including Jacob Beidler who built the house on Yellow Springs, the meetinghouse. And there are other families: Rickabaughs, Haldemans, and many more. Unfortunately the graveyard has been neglected over time, but it's still very full of history and interesting. There are also some photographs of the other stones.

**Audience:** Is this part of someone's line now?

No it's just a little piece of property across from the school and we really don't know too much about it. At one time there was a connection with the schoolhouse. For a period of time the Association maintained the cemetery because a lot of the people who were on the early Board of Trustees had family buried there. They took over the care of the cemetery when the meetinghouse was dissolved. Over time, it began to be neglected and our Association then turned the care of the graveyard over to the Frazer Mennonite Church. But it's sort of in no man's land right now.



(Figure 27) The date stone of the long-gone Diamond Rock Mennonist Meeting House.



(Figure 28) Photo of the former Mennonist Meeting House. Note the date stone above the semi-circular window.



(Figure 29) The graves of early Great Valley families now lie forgotten in the long abandoned graveyard on Yellow Springs Road. Several Schoolhouse pupils lie buried within the graveyard.

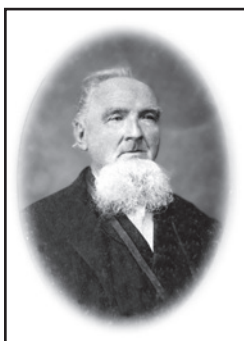


(Figure 30) Within the abandoned Mennonite graveyard can be found the grave of Jacob Beidler, born in 1778, whose home on Yellow Springs Road was located one-half mile east of the Schoolhouse.

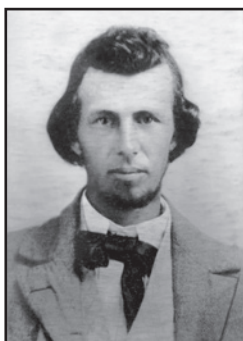
We have a few pictures of the early teachers and some students. There is one of Hannah Ogden who may have taught around the 1840's. She lived in the house known as Washington's Headquarters. [5] Imagine her traveling to the schoolhouse and arriving early in the morning to get it all ready for the children. Aaron Thomson, the father of Wilmer, and father of Addison Thomson who was a teacher too. Aaron probably lived just west of the school in a yellow house located across from the cemetery. [6] Isaiah Snyder, whose son may be seen in the Old Scholars' photograph. There is Wilmer Thomson, the man who wrote the wonderful remembrance of the 1850's and who was the Editor of the *Daily Local* for over fifty years. Wilmer went to school when he was four years old, taught by his father and his brother. The photograph of a woman is not labeled but looking closely I feel she may be Ella Wersler, possibly her sister Emma. But I believe she is most likely Ella, who was one of the pupils in the 1920 group photograph, who lived across the road on Diamond Rock Farm, and who was one of the Presidents of the early Association.



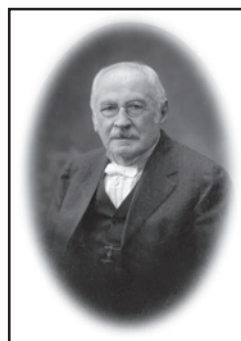
Hannah M. Ogden was a teacher at the schoolhouse during the late 1840s. She later owned the former Pott's farmhouse that served Gen. Washington as his headquarters during the Valley Forge Encampment.



Aaron Burr Thomson, teacher at the schoolhouse from 1846 to 1852. His son Joseph Addison Thompson, succeeded his father as teacher in 1852-53.



Isaiah Snyder was teacher at the schoolhouse from 1860-61. His son, Jay Elwood Snyder, later attended the school.



Wilmar Worthington Thomson entered Diamond Rock School as a student in 1846 at age 4. He was the younger son of the then-current teacher Aaron Thomson. For over 50 years, Wilmar served as editor of the *Daily Local News* in West Chester.



An unknown portrait hangs today on the Schoolhouse wall. It is felt that the image depicts either Emma Wersler, or her elder sister Ella, as an old woman.

Here again is a photograph of the school taken in September 2011 by Roger Thorne. See Figure 31. This is the school today with faint evidence of the "thank you ma'am's" on Diamond Rock Hill. As I said the schoolhouse is a living history and the landscape will continue to change particularly with the expansion of the turnpike bridge. Plans are underway and you can see survey marks in the road. Construction will definitely be underway in a year or so. The schoolhouse is a wonderful landmark and it is a joy to be associated with it. Certainly if anybody has an interest in volunteering, we welcome volunteers. I thank you so much for inviting me today to talk with you. This is the end of our program and I'm happy to answer any questions.

### Question and Answer Session:

**Question:** Approximately when was the last year that the children went there to school?

In 1864 the school closed, and at that point the children were divided between two one-room schools, each about a mile away – one to the west and one to the east; Salem School and Walker School.

**Question:** I think you solved the problem for us Easttowners. One of the very early Easttown schools was named The Ogden School. And I have no idea where they got that name but now I do.

The Ogden School, from Hannah Ogden...you know that's what Roger and I were finding as we were assembling these photographs....more and more things were newly discovered. So it's a living history, a puzzle always evolving.



(Figure 31) A quiet September 2011 evening. Visitors can just imagine what an important role the Diamond Rock Octagonal Schoolhouse played in the development of the Valley.

*Courtesy Roger D. Thorne*



**Question:** Where did you get the photographs, were they just something in the school over the years?

We had some in the schoolhouse collection and some from the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society collection. As I mentioned, I inherited a few boxes. I became really worried that they could be lost. As I was reading through the minutes, I realized there were references to artifacts I had never seen. So I went to the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Review Board and spoke to the board about my concerns. This man, Jim Garrison, suggested I take all the archive material to the Chester County Historical Society where there is room to store it. So I've done that and now it is in a safe place and we all have access to it. I made copies of the things I felt were important and put them in a notebook so I have them for easy reference at home or in the schoolhouse. The originals are at the Chester County Historical Society. The Society has a great collection too, and it has been wonderful to work with Roger. A few years ago Roger and I talked about preserving the collection. Now, between the Schoolhouse and the T/E Historical Society, we have multiple copies of everything including a disc of this program as well.

**Question:** Pete Melchior said he went to school there, but he couldn't have done that.

**Roger:** No Sue, Pete went to Salem school.

**Question:** I have a practical question: If one wants to visit the school, where would one park?

We have plans for parking after the program today. However, if you visit on a Sunday afternoon when the school is open from June through the end of August, there is a pull-off for three spaces on Yellow Springs Road and there is room under the turnpike bridge.

**Question:** You mentioned that there were two schools when that one closed; one was called the Walker School. Is that where the current Walker Road Elementary School is?

No, it isn't the current elementary school on Walker Road. The old Walker School is now a private residence. About a mile or so east of the schoolhouse on Yellow Springs is Mill Road; turn right on Mill Road and go over the turnpike bridge and the road immediately to the left leads to the Walker School, a private residence now.

**Question:** Does the building still exist?

The building still exists but it's a private residence. [7]

**Question:** You mentioned David Wilson, is that the same David Wilson that the Wilson Farm Park in Tredyffrin is named after?

That's his cousin...Dave Wilson was raised in the house on Swedesford Road that has the mansard roof. It's on Swedesford Road going towards 252. As an adult Dave had a farm on North Valley. You can see remnants of the farm but there is a modern house on the property. He was a dairy farmer. What he really loved most of all in life was being a docent at the Wharton Esherick Museum. He and Wharton were friends. Wharton would come to his farm for eggs and Dave would deliver manure to his farmhouse on Diamond Rock Hill. They exchanged little drawings back and forth. They had a very nice, warm friendship. I hate to divert but Dave did love the schoolhouse and his mother and his sister were very involved with the schoolhouse, raising money and keeping it open. But the wonderful thing about Dave... although he lived 100 years and knew times in the Valley when people didn't lock their doors, he was never looking backwards. He was always right in the moment and happy about embracing the future. He was just so positive and fun to be around.

**Question:** Is it possible that today's East Whiteland Mennonite Church has any connection with this earlier development in Tredyffrin?

It's a good question; you know I'm not an authority on the Mennonites. The only connection I know is through the Frazer Mennonite, so I don't know about East Whiteland.

**Roger:** The answer is actually yes. In that article that you loaned me it states that there is a primary connection of the Yellow Springs Mennonite Church to the Frazer Mennonite Church.

**Question:** That's the one I was referring to.

**Roger:** But in that article they also refer to two different places so it wasn't clear to me that they were one and the same.

## Postscript:

As of March 2012, the official name of the association responsible for the schoolhouse is the Diamond Rock Octagonal Schoolhouse Preservation Association... or more simply the *Diamond Rock Schoolhouse Preservation Association*.

## Notes:

- [1] A wonderful anecdote as to the reason for the shape of the building into an octagonal design is recounted in Walter J. Lutz's article, "Diamond Rock School," *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly*, Jan. 1980, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 4-6
- [2] McNeill, Linda, "Diamond Rock School: A Picture Portfolio," *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly*, Apr. 1983, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 51-52
- [3] Deed Histories, William Mordant Patent, Matthew Neely Tract, Table C.2.2, wherein George Beaver donated land on which the schoolhouse was erected for a 999 year lease term
- [4] Diamond Rock School website: [www.diamondrockschool.org](http://www.diamondrockschool.org)
- [5] Joyce A. Post, "Early Photographs of Valley Forge," *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly*, Summer 2004, Vol. 41, No. 3, p. 87
- [6] The yellow house was torn down in preparation for the Turnpike expansion in 2013.
- [7] The Walker School, later a private residence, was recently demolished.

## About the Author:

Susanna ("Susy") Baum has been a volunteer with the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse ("DRS") since 1995. On September 18, 2011, Ms. Baum made a presentation covering just some of the intriguing history she discovered in her role as a volunteer and later as the President of the DRS Association. As a history "buff," her interests were piqued when she began to review some of the oldest minutes and found some priceless materials which she has since turned over to the Chester County Historical Society for safekeeping. She, in concert with Roger D. Thorne, former TEHS President, located a series of sketchings, maps, artist renderings, and photographs which were then digitally scanned for this presentation. A selection of those scanned items is included in this article.

## References:

Other *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* articles that discuss the Diamond Rock Octagonal Schoolhouse include, in chronological order:

- Lutz, Walter J., "Diamond Rock School," Jan. 1980, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 3-14
- Goshorn, Bob, "When Wharton Esherick Had His Studio in Paoli," Jan. 1980, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 15-20
- Cook, Anne H., Notes and Comments, July 1982, Vol. 20, No. 3, p. 102
- McNeil, Linda, "Diamond Rock School: A Picture Portfolio," Apr. 1983, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 51-60
- Ligget, Frances, "Reminiscences of the Great Valley," Oct. 1987, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 136-7
- Cook, Anne H., Notes and Comments, Apr. 1988, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 80
- Winthrop, Grace, Barbee, Mary Whitworth, and Perry, Janet, "Readin', 'Ritin', and 'Rithmetic Schools Before the Public School Law," Apr. 1989, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 62
- Goshorn, Bob, "Public Schooling in the Nineteenth Century," Oct. 1989, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 132-4
- Alderfer, Joel D., "Mennonites in the Chester Valley," Oct. 1991, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 161-7
- Ward, Robert L., "Public School of Easttown and Tredyffrin Townships – Part I," Apr. 1997, Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 62

## Additional references:

- Deed Histories, William Mordant Patent, Matthew Neely Tract, Table C.2.2 which refers to a Survey of George Beaver's farmland, c. 1930, referring to George Beaver donating land for the Diamond Rock Schoolhouse for a 999 year lease; and George Beaver Land Survey
- "Lifelong Volunteer Hopes Diamond Rock Can Continue," *The Malvern Patch*, Aug. 31, 2013