

# 2018 Historic House Tour

Patty Benson, with photos by John O. Senior

On Saturday, 29 September 2018, from noon until 5 pm, the Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust (THPT) held the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Historic House Tour. Nine properties were featured, none having been visited before in previous years.

This annual event provides a rare opportunity to visit some of the area's most beautiful historic residences, and to imagine the life of a home—not only the lives of those who live and once lived there, but also the life of the house itself. Historic homes, in particular, have a vivid story to share. It is wonderful to live in a community that has people who cherish their historic homes, and allow others the opportunity to enjoy them! The generosity of owners who open their homes to us is what makes this annual event such a success.

Proceeds from the House Tour benefit the Jones Log Barn rebuilding project in Chesterbrook. This year marked an important milestone for the Trust. Through the generosity of many individuals, local companies and other nonprofit

organizations, the final phase of the rebuilding of the Jones Log Barn at Duportail House is fully underway. THPT invites the public to stop by and see the ongoing work!

Joining the other two historic structures—General Duportail's Quarters and the Federal Barn, both on the National Register of Historic Places—the Jones Log Barn will be the centerpiece of the Living History Center at Duportail. Preserving our past gives us more understanding and hope for the future. With the help of the community, the Living History Center will welcome visitors and provide a glimpse into the stories and experiences of our past.

For historic preservation to matter, and for our local history to be meaningful, it needs to be supported. A community that respects its history respects itself. The Trust is dedicated to preserving and protecting our historic resources and educating the public on the preservation and protection of its historic buildings. House Tour ticket purchases help the Trust in carrying out its mission. — *Patty Benson, THPT President*

The following house descriptions, in many cases provided by the property owners, were included in the House Tour guide booklet, and have been made available here courtesy of organizer Patty Benson.

## Ardwyn, c.1870

421 Conestoga Rd, Berwyn

Located on Conestoga Road in Berwyn, Ardwyn was built in 1870 amongst a community of Welsh settlers. The Welsh name Ardwyn means "house on a hill."

A perfect blend of yesterday and today, Ardwyn is a beautifully restored and maintained property offering a blend of modern upgrades and old world charm, including a front wrap around porch, arched doorways, high ceilings, incredible millwork and thick stone walls.

Harkening back to its historic roots, Ardwyn has a fireplace in the foyer with a sweeping staircase up three flights of stairs. The formal living room/parlor offers another set of doors and opens to a classic dining room with a second fireplace and hearth. The wood floors are original in this part of the home and offer an in-laid pattern that is timeless in style and design.

The current owner of the house has restored a newer more modern kitchen with a farm sink and island to enjoy daily and for entertaining. Beyond the breakfast room is a beautiful private courtyard for alfresco candlelight dinners. Completing the first floor is the master bedroom suite and bathroom. Continuing to the second floor are three more bedrooms, a study and two baths. On the third floor you will find two more bedrooms and a hall bath.

The original carriage house has been restored and now functions as a guest house with full kitchen, living room and bedroom. The guest house overlooks the swimming pool and stone hot tub and cascading waterfall. Ardwyn is a remarkable blend of the 'old' and the 'new'.



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## The Culver House, circa 1887

221 Warren Ave, Berwyn

This beautiful Victorian house was designed by architect Newton H. Culver in 1887 and built for Culver and his family to live in. For the past 130 years, it has been the home for nine different families.

The current family, The DiMarinos, have lived here for the past 50 years, having purchased the home in August of 1968. Their children grew up in the house and their grandchildren all still spend lots of time here, being lovingly spoiled by “Mom-Mom.”

The house didn’t always have good days. In 1932, during the great depression, the house was sold for \$1 at a sheriff’s sale.

One owner, Henry French, made what has to be considered a great financial deal when he bought the house for \$10,500 in May of 1950 and sold it for \$13,600 in November of 1950 ... realizing a profit of nearly 30% in just 6 months in what may have been an early version of “flipping.”

The little house in the rear of the property has been occupied off-and-on since it was built with the main house. In the early years, we are told it was used by a blacksmith. It was not lived in from the end of World War II until 1970, when the current owners renovated it for family members to live in. Grandmother Francione lived there until she passed away in 2010. The house is called “Gram’s House” in her honor.



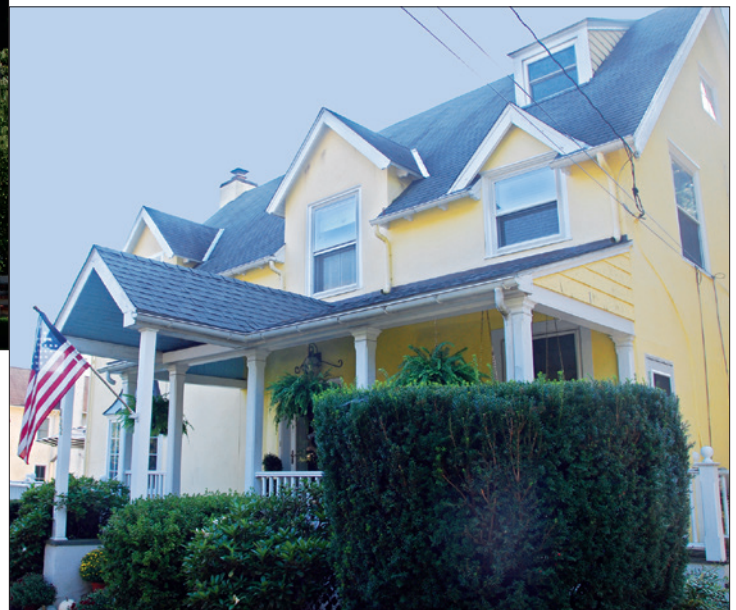
The most obvious feature of the main house is its sweeping wrap-around porch which extends around the side and partially across the back of the house. The steep roof and several gables, along with the strong porch columns, give this late Victorian house its unique appearance. Sitting on approximately ½ acre of land, the house enjoys a beautiful setting on what some refer to as the “prettiest street in Easttown.”



## Sunnyside, c.1886

222 Warren Avenue, Berwyn

Constructed in 1886, this beautiful Victorian house ‘Sunnyside’ was the original farmhouse on Warren Avenue. The exterior of the house was a combination of Victorian clapboard (lower half) and painted cedar shakes applied in a decorative “diamond” shaped pattern. A former owner made this discovery beneath the stucco when the addition, consisting of the sunken living room on the first floor and the master bedroom on the second floor, were added. With the addition, the former living room became the new entrance foyer, with a window becoming the front door and the old entrance becoming a little mud room/side entrance. Make sure to see that original extra wide front door, made to accommodate the ladies dresses of the Victorian era.



*Warren Avenue in Berwyn is blessed with a wonderful collection of architectural gems that are lovingly maintained with pride by their owners.*

A former owner of the home explained that this home, “like many other houses of its era, was built as a ‘summer cottage,’ to escape the heat (and smells) of Philadelphia in the summertime. With the Berwyn train station just a block away, it would have been a relatively easy trip out from the city.”





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## Foxmead, c.1910

212 West Valley Road, Strafford

Foxmead was originally part of the large Wentworth farm, known as “Strafford”. The original Strafford farmhouse remains standing on Homestead Road, but the farm’s 100-plus acres were sold off in smaller parcels in the early 1900s. The Wentworth’s daughter, Martha Wentworth Suffren, and her husband, Charles G. Suffren, sold the property located today at 212 West Valley Road to Frederick S. Jiggins on July 27, 1910.

Jiggins built a “speculative” house on the property, which was advertised for sale in *The American Contractor* of May 21, 1910. He employed the prolific Philadelphia architect, Charles Barton Keen to design the home. Keen was nationally recognized as a promoter of the Colonial Revival style and designed many other local landmarks, including MillBrook, Rose Garland (now known as the “Willows”), Aronomink Clubhouse, Greystone Hall in West Chester and the St. David’s and Valley Forge Golf Clubs. One of his most famous Colonial Revival designs was “Reynolda,” the North Carolina mansion built in 1913 for R.J. Reynolds. This style of architecture became popular after the Centennial International Exhibition held in Fairmount Park in 1876 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The event sparked Americans’ nostalgia for their colonial past.

Foxmead’s stucco construction, lattice work, and arbor are all characteristic features of the Colonial Revival style, which was meant to evoke the simpler colonial country lifestyle, but not imitate it exactly. The side of the house facing West Valley Road was originally intended as the service entrance, with the

columned veranda facing the pond and Woodland Road as the façade. Saunders L. and Isabel D. Meade expanded the footprint of the house with the walnut-paneled, vaulted library during the roaring 1920s.

The house’s architecture also reflected the growing trend towards suburbanization geared towards the middle class. The “Main Line” branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad and paved road infrastructure improvements in the 1800s gradually transformed the sleepy farming community of Strafford (formerly known as Eagle) into a community easily within commuting distance of Philadelphia. Charles Barton Keen designed 212 West Valley Road, along with the two houses next door (one of which was Keen’s own residence), as a small integrated development “with the idea of uniformity of style and harmony of line and composition...each house practically the same type and color treatment, yet with its own note of individuality.”

The three houses on West Valley Road were featured in the 1913 Christmas edition of *House and Garden* magazine. In the article, Keen described the design of the three homes as suggesting “an answer to some of our suburban housing problems ... a plan for the treatment of a generous lot to contain several houses placed thereon to the best advantage.” The article went on to say that, while the homes appear to be in the mode of early farmhouses, they have “unique improvements and well planned modifications.” The book, *Low Cost Suburban Homes*, published in 1916, also included a photo of the back of the house and described it as “[a] typical, comfortable, commodious type of suburban house, built substantially, of good lines and lasting satisfaction.”

## Wayne Bed & Breakfast, c. 1885

212 Strafford Ave., Wayne

We welcome you to join us and enjoy the warm and comfortable elegance of our inn. The Wayne Bed & Breakfast Inn provides the perfect get-away for your special occasion.

At the end of your day, enjoy reading by the fireside before you settle in for a comfortable night’s rest in your elegant quarters. The next morning a lovely homecooked ‘made to order’ breakfast in the elegant dining room, or you can take your coffee and meander out to the porch, pool, gazebo or tranquil gardens.

The inn was built in 1885 during Main Line’s Golden Age by the McElroy family as a summer “cottage.” Like many visitors during that era, the McElroy family came to escape the summer heat of

the city. In 2003, the current innkeepers purchased this historic cottage. Renovation was performed to meet the needs of today’s discerning traveler.

In 2009, we decided to turn our home into a bed and breakfast. After a deadlocked meeting before the Radnor Zoning Board, we appealed to the County of Delaware and were granted our appeal in 12 hours. However, Radnor Township chose to appeal at the Commonwealth Court of Appeals. Again we won!

The Radnor Historical Society awarded the Inn a historical plaque to recognize the home built in 1885 by a Civil War Veteran, Joseph McElroy. Today, the Wayne Bed & Breakfast Inn welcomes guests for exactly the same reasons the McElroy family came almost 130 years ago.





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## Samuel Bittle Store, c.1816 757 Upper Gulph Rd, Strafford

The “Samuel Bittle Store” was built in 1816, likely as an investment property, by its first recorded owners, Isaac Morris (1770-1831) and his wife, Sarah Paschall (1772-1842). Morris was the 10<sup>th</sup> child of Samuel Morris, a founder of Philadelphia’s First City Troop, who captained the unit at the battles of Trenton and Princeton during the Revolutionary War. The family was long involved in sugar importing, brewing and real estate.

Isaac and Sarah Morris lived in the Frankford section of Philadelphia, in a house called Cedar Grove, which was moved to Fairmount Park in the 1920s. It is unlikely that they ever lived here and, in 1824, they sold the 14-acre property—including this house and the one next door, 749 Upper Gulph Road—to Robert Kennedy.

Over the following 120 years, the house was used as a residence while the land was farmed. Henry Hogentogler, a carpenter who owned the property from 1866 to 1886, lived next door at 749 Upper Gulph, and rented this property to Samuel Bittle for use as a store. The house is shown on the 1873 A.R. Witmer Atlas as the “Samuel Bittle Store” (hence, the name). Benjamin Streeter, who bought the property in 1886, used part of the house as his butcher shop, with the current garage reportedly serving as an animal pen.

Over the years, the house acquired three additions. The first was built in the 1880s, likely by Streeter. The second was added in 1942 by Jerome and Violet Whitney, whose contractor was Samuel Kirk whose other work included—among other things—stables at the Devon Horse Show grounds. Kirk was also the uncle of Cynthia Pyle Dixon who, with her husband, Mark, bought the house from the Whitneys in 1989 and built the third addition in 2000.

Over time, the acreage steadily diminished. Of the 14 acres included in 1824, Streeter bought nine; the Whitneys, three; and the Dixons, three-quarters of one acre.

The Dixons bought the house “as-is.” The original section had been coated with a lime-based stucco which wasn’t supposed to be painted, but nevertheless had been and was flaking. The frame sections were covered with aluminum siding. The Whitneys’ 1942 kitchen was untouched, and its galvanized plumbing was clogged. The basement had not been emptied. But it had “good bones.”

Mark Dixon cleaned the stucco with a pressure washer and, where necessary, a masonry hammer, then recoated it with a compatible finish and its current “Belmont Blue” paint. The aluminum siding was sold by the pound to a recycler, yielding just enough to pay for the paint.

Other projects—kitchen (2000), bathrooms (2001, 2013, 2015), porch (2008), patio (2016)—continue. At this writing, the owners are waiting for a landscaper to begin work around the rear patio.

Front view from the street.



Side view from the driveway.







## The Tiffany House, c. 1928

1141 Lafayette Rd, Wayne

Designed by well known Philadelphia architect, Brognard Okie, and built by J. Howard Mecke Jr. in 1928. “Okie” as he is commonly known, is noted for his Colonial-Revival homes and his sensitive restorations of historic buildings. Some of his most well-known works include the restoration of Betsy Ross House, alterations to Bolingbroke Mansion, as well as the design of other local historic properties like Appleford and Beechford.

The Tiffany House was originally built as the model home for the newly established Colonial Village. The original brochure for the development boasted private intercommunicating phone to servants’ quarters, master electric switch from main bedroom, individual built-in phone booth, random width 7/8-inch oak floors 5-12” wide with round wood plugs, hand-forged iron hardware on all external doors, and an automobile gasoline tank and pump with 280 gallon capacity. Some of these features can still be seen in the home today.

According to the brochure, Colonial Village was originally developed for those “who realize that the finer things of life are only to be found in the beauty, ease, and quiet of such an exquisite spot—and where one is very sure, indeed, of one’s neighbors. ...the ideal location for those who want to live in the country and yet keep in close daily touch with their business. The famous Devon

Horse Show grounds are but a few minutes’ ride by motor, as is the town of Wayne, featuring numerous fine stores and a brand new motion picture theatre of 1,500 seating capacity.”

The home is named after its second owners, the Tiffany Family, who called 1141 Lafayette Rd home for more than five decades. Purchased by the Tiffany’s in 1962, the home went through several renovations, including converting the covered porch into a den (now used as an office), a large vaulted-ceiling family room addition, and conversion of the original servants’ quarters into a master bedroom suite off of the back stair case.

As a family of six, we absolutely fell in love with this home and quickly made an offer to Mr. Tiffany barely minutes after walking through the front door. Since we purchased the property in October of 2016, we have been in constant renovation mode. Our goal has been, and will continue to be, preserving the original charm and character of the home, while updating it with modern amenities to suit our growing family.

We have completely renovated the original master bedroom and master bathroom, restored all of the original hardwood floors, renovated the family room addition, put on a new roof and all new siding and shutters, moved the driveway and front walk, built an expansive patio and in-ground pool, and conducted a complete landscaping overhaul. We look forward to spending many wonderful years in The Tiffany House.

## Conestoga Carriage House, c.1910

215 West Conestoga, Devon

Built in 1910 as a carriage house for the adjacent home, converted to a single-family residence in the 1960s, and completely renovated in 2012—taken down to the studs, everything from the roof to the windows was meticulously updated with the best fits and finishes, while attempting to maintain the distinctive character of the building. From the beautiful stone wall that surrounds the front of the property to the gracious front porch that spans the entire front of the home, and a small barn and deck in the back yard, this property is everything that a Main Line Carriage House should be.



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## The William Clark House, c.1890

226 Old Eagle School Rd, Strafford

We have been proud to call this late nineteenth century, Wendell and Smith, Queen Anne Victorian our home for the past twenty-one years. It has been an honor and a privilege to be part of the long history of this multi-gabled house that stands out structurally among the many turn of the century homes in the area.

In 1997, we were looking for a larger home for our family, which included two young boys, and were told emphatically that this house was a poor choice as it needed a lot of work and upkeep, was on a postage stamp lot, and was near the train station.

We distinctly remember entering and standing in the large front hall, and being captured by the spell of the house—the elegant three story staircase, the stained glass window, the parquet inlay floors, the charming vestibules with the doors hanging for the most part on the original hinges, the crystal chandeliers and most enchantingly, the elegant formal living room with an elaborately carved mantle.

My sister once said it was a house where a magical story could take place. Her young son now deems it haunted—an honor he reserves for gothic buildings and, apparently, old houses with crystal chandeliers and back staircases.

Given the choice, my sons might not have chosen this house had they known it would be largely not air-conditioned and would be so cold at times in the winter that they would sit on the old kitchen floor vent with their large sweatshirts acting as heat capturing tents. Or had they known about all the well intended projects that would be attempted and left slightly unfinished due to scale and time constraints. On the other hand, there was the lovely natural temperature drop upon walking into the house on a hot day, the day to day life living on a historic road, in a piece of history and art and the many happy and beautiful holiday celebrations and family gatherings.

We soon discovered that we are the kind of people who like old houses before the renovation. Like our predecessors, we appreciated, respected and hoped to preserve the magnificent, but slightly cracked and chipped original features of the house. With no real practical thought, we lived with the history and made changes very gently and gradually, doing full scale restoration as we could, but leaving the artistic features intact wherever we could.

We appreciated the natural wear as a record of the prior families who had lived in the space, and the gradual study of the beautiful architectural features a constant source of wonder and artistic inspiration.



TREDYFFRIN HISTORIC PRESERVATION TRUST

# 15th Annual Historic House Tour

Saturday, September 28, 2019



**Tickets: \$35**  
**Info: 610.644.6759**  
**12pm-5pm**  
 (rain or shine)  
[tredyffrinhistory.org](http://tredyffrinhistory.org)

**HOUSE TOUR  
PREVIEW PARTY**

## Jazz it Up

**Sunday  
September 15  
6-9pm**

**Tickets: \$30**  
[tredyffrinhistory.org](http://tredyffrinhistory.org)

**PREVIEW PARTY**

- Get a sneak preview of the beautiful historic homes featured on the Tour
- Join us at the Duportail House for an evening of music, drinks & hors d'oeuvres
- Classical jazz music by award-winning "Jazz Mavericks" from the Center for Performing & Fine Arts of West Chester

**TOUR**

- Self-guided tour of historic private homes
- Tour at your own pace, no set order
- Ticket proceeds support historic preservation and the Living History Center at Duportail

"Our Local History and its Preservation Matters!"  
 Pattie Benson,  
 President, THPT

The 15th Annual Historic House Tour will be held on Saturday, 28 September 2019, from noon until 5 pm. More information and advance tickets may be found on the Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust website at [www.tredyffrinhistory.org](http://www.tredyffrinhistory.org)