Gifts Received by the TEHS Archive in 2019, 2020, and 2021

Cheryl Leibold





In the years encompassing 2019 to 2021 most of us experienced times of crisis, fear, and even loss. Fortunately, the TEHS received many excellent additions to its research collection during this stressful time. A complete list of all donations is available from the Archives.

Selected 2019 gifts

An important gift in 2019 was related to Wilson Farm Park. The Society received four portrait photographs depicting the first and second generations to own the property that we know today as the "crown jewel" of the Tredyffrin Township park system.

David Wilson, Jr. and his wife Eliza Siter Wilson established the farm in 1836 using money he had earned as a cattle drover and livestock merchant. Then in their mid-forties, they chose "Elda" as the name for their farm, combining the first two letters of both of their first names. The oval photographs are typical mid-nineteenth century albumen prints, now faded due to light exposure. The prints would have originally been deep brown in color. Both sitters would have been about eighty-years old at the time of the portraits. [1]

A family history for Elda Farm was published in the *History Quarterly* in 2004 by David and Eliza's great-great-grandson Conrad Wilson. From it we can obtain the following brief historical overview of the property after the first-generation owners. [2]

Elda farm stood to the east and south of Chesterbrook Farm, and comprised about 90 acres. In the 1870s it was inherited by David Jr. and Eliza's youngest son Winfield Scott Wilson, and his wife Emma Jane Walker (who was part of the Walker family that owned hundreds of acres in the area). Winfield was a successful railroad executive, and he and his wife operated Elda Farm for the remainder of the nineteenth century using managers and hired hands. Conrad Wilson wrote: "Judging from [Emma Wilson's] diaries, now scattered among her descendants, Elda Farm was a lively household… bursting with visitors and social activity." [3] The portrait photographs of Winfield and Emma date from the 1890s and both sitters (born the same year) would have been about seventy years old. These photographs have also been damaged over time; their color would have been a dark black-gray.

By 1907 both Winfield and Emma had died, and the farm went to their oldest son David Wilson (1860–1925). He and his wife Ruth Anna West Wilson (1859–1929) became the third generation to live and work there. Like his father, David was a railroad executive who loved the farm but had an independent source of income. Because of his professional success he was able to make significant physical improvements to the property including a huge milking barn, telephone service and electrical power.

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(LEFT) Portrait photographs of David Wilson, Jr. (1791–1873), and his wife Eliza Siter Wilson (1789–1870), 1860s, 8 x 6 inch oval (WIL02, WIL01). David and Eliza Wilson founded Elda Farm in 1836. (ABOVE) Portrait photographs of Winfield Scott Wilson (1825–1905) and his wife Emma Jane Wilson (1825–1907), 1890s, in elaborately carved frames. Frame size: 28½ x 25, inches, image size: 16 x 13 inches (WIL04, WIL03). Winfield and Emma Wilson were the second generation of Wilsons to own Elda Farm. All four sitters in these photographs are buried in the cemetery at Great Valley Presbyterian Church. The four photographs were donated by Joy Oakey, of Media, Pennsylvania; Ann Tyson Wilson of Tacoma, Washington; and Winfield Scott Wilson III of Beaverton, Oregon. (BELOW) Portrait of third-generation Elda Farm owner David Wilson (1860–1925). (WIL05)



Impressions on the Early Wilson Family Portraits
by Liz Willow

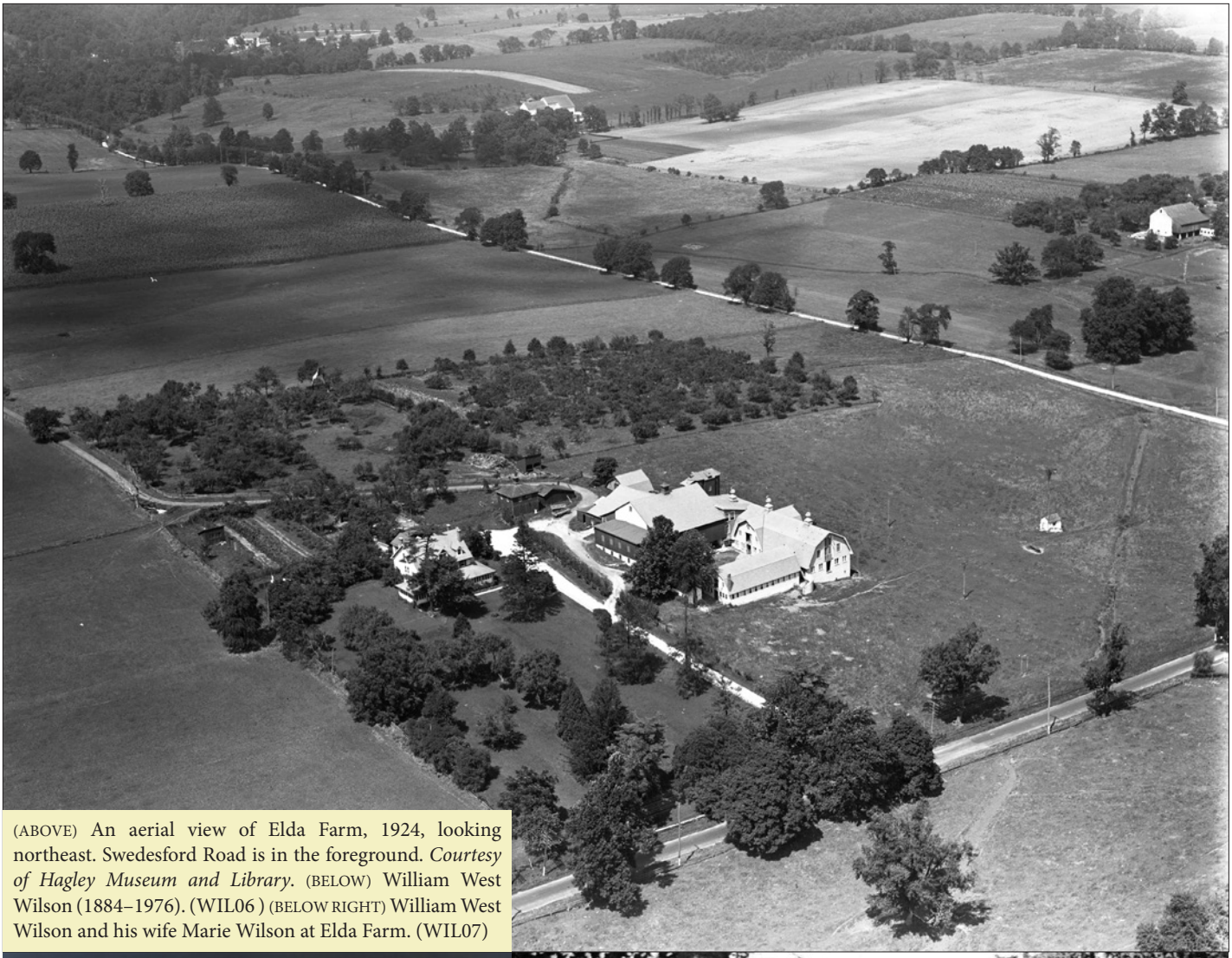
Once upon a time in early Tredyffrin Land, on a beautiful spring day, young Winfield and two fellow railroad executives from up north decided to walk the line he recently surveyed and laid out to become the Chester Valley Railroad, from Bridgeport to Downingtown through the Great Valley. Good and hungry, the long walk put them near the home of the Walker family about the time of the noon meal. The Walkers were known to prepare great quantities of food and had a "brood of beautiful daughters."* Apparently the rest of the evening went well because, as the story goes, all three of the young gentlemen eventually married three of the Walker daughters. Almost a century and a half later, the old rail bed has been converted to the Chester Valley Trail and is used daily by many "walkers."

The last open space adjacent to the huge Chesterbrook development, Elda Farm, was later converted to the Wilson Farm Park, dedicated in 2004. Fifth-generation William F. Wilson expressed his gratitude by saying "This land molded the character of five generations of Wilsons and their friends. Now this land through its open space, athletic fields, historical displays and other uses will play a significant part in molding the character of future generations of Tredyffrin residents. We will always be grateful to those who made this park a reality."*

Portraits are created to memorialize the image of a person for the future, so here's Eliza, David, Winfield and Emma, looking at you, kids, as if to say: "enjoy the park and the trail."

* *Tredyffrin Easttown History Quarterly*, Vol. 41 No. 4 (Fall 2004): "Elda Farm History and Recollections" by Conrad Wilson pp. 111—117; "Memories of Elda Farm" by William F. Wilson, p. 118.

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(ABOVE) An aerial view of Elda Farm, 1924, looking northeast. Swedesford Road is in the foreground. *Courtesy of Hagley Museum and Library*. (BELOW) William West Wilson (1884–1976). (WIL06) (BELOW RIGHT) William West Wilson and his wife Marie Wilson at Elda Farm. (WIL07)

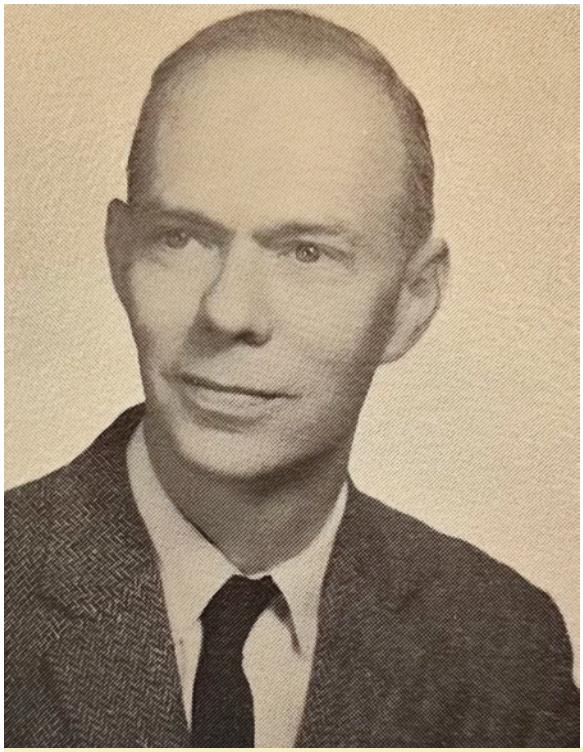




The fourth generation to own the farm was Ruth and David's oldest son, William West Wilson (1884–1976) and his wife Marie. He was a civil engineer who lived away from the farm in Bridegport, until the stock market crash of 1929 ruined him financially. He then moved to the property with his wife and four children, and everyone pitched in with the farm chores to raise food for the family and employees.

William West Wilson's two youngest children Conrad (1920–2005) and David (1918–2001) spent many happy years on the farm after 1929. They were just boys when they arrived, and were the last Wilsons to

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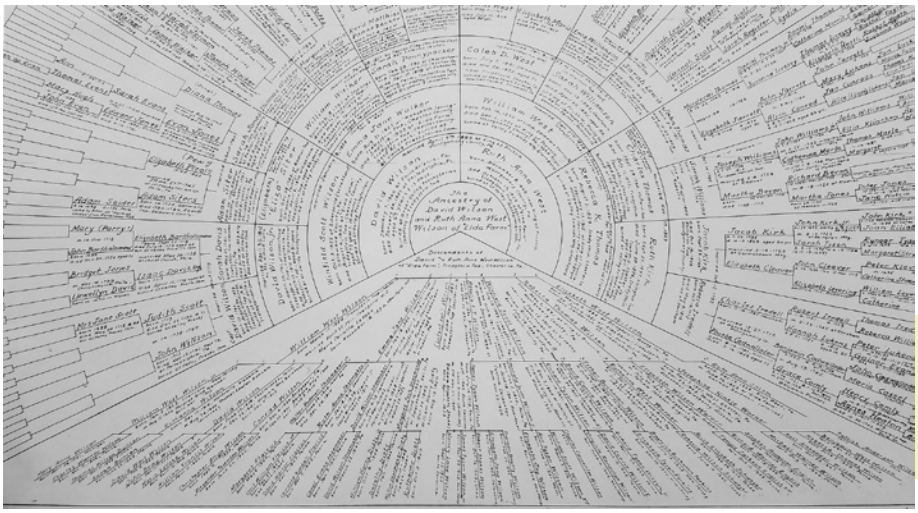


(ABOVE LEFT) Faculty photograph of Conrad Wilson from the Conestoga High School Yearbook, 1961 (p. 16) *Courtesy of Lydia Lieb*.
(ABOVE RIGHT) One of Conrad Wilson's major local achievements was the restoration of the Van Leer log cabin on Irish Road on the grounds of Conestoga High School. He proposed and taught an American Heritage course at the high school, and between 1960 and 1966 advanced students from the school researched and restored the cabin. Shown above is the finished cabin with Conrad Wilson and students who worked on the project, c. June 1966. Photographer unknown. *Courtesy TEHS Image Collection* (VLC02)

enjoy the land, as well as work the farm to keep it going. In the post-WWII years, the farm became less and less profitable. Both Conrad and David became teachers. Their father and his brother Winfield ("Windy") owned the farm jointly, and they sold the land in 1959, after years of war, as well as social and economic change, made it difficult to continue farming. [4]

Thus, Elda Farm was owned by four generations of the Wilson family from 1836 to 1959, and then by a succession of property developers before the Township acquired the land in the late 1990s. Years of development and planning led to the creation of a beautiful public park, and on October 2nd, 2004 the Tredyffrin Supervisors cut the ribbon and opened the new Wilson Farm Park to visitors. Conrad Wilson, a fifth-generation Wilson, lived to see the park dedicated.

In 1964 Conrad Wilson, the great-great grandson of David Wilson, Jr., the first owner of the farm, compiled a massive ancestry chart for his family. A copy of the chart was received along with the four portrait photographs. The large upper part shows the ancestry of both his maternal and paternal ancestors going back to the early 17th century! The lower part shows the "Descendants of David and Ruth Anna West Wilson," Conrad's grandparents. These descendants are recorded up to 1964, so Conrad himself is on it, and so are the three donors of the portrait photographs. Conrad Wilson was a historian and genealogist. He taught a local history course at Conestoga, and later worked at both the Chester County Historical Society and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. His greatest passion was genealogy which explains the length and breadth of this *tour de force* of family research. He is also remembered as the guiding hand behind the restoration of the Van Leer cabin, a long-abandoned structure on the grounds of Conestoga High in the early 1960s. He was a charter member of the TEHS and served as its vice-president from 1958 to 1963, and its president from 1964 to 1965. [5]



The Ancestry and Descendants of David Wilson (1860-1925) and Ruth Anna West Wilson (1859-1929) of Elda Farm. Size: 3 x 3 ½ feet, drawn by Conrad Wilson in 1964. A remarkably detailed graphical depiction of Wilson family genealogy.

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The demolition of Rubins Discount Carpet Center ca. 1970, formerly Ottey's Garage, and now the site of the Paoli West shopping area. Photo from the Donna Waldeyer Collection, TEHS Image Collection (BUS64).

Continuing with the 2019 gifts received, Donna Waldeyer, a former *Wayne Suburban* reporter, keen supporter of the *History Quarterly*, and longtime cashier at the Paoli Hardware Store, donated thirty-six photographs of Upper Main Line people and events. The subjects include aerial views of the Devon and Frazer areas, groups of businessmen, Tredyffrin police officers with local children, the Devon Horse Show, and several individual buildings. Only a few people in these photos are identified. The image of Rubins Carpet Center during demolition provides a historic look at a Paoli location well known to all residents of the area. Today the former site of the building is occupied by the small strip of stores just east of Spring Street bearing the name Paoli West, but for much of the early twentieth century it was the location of several automotive service garages, a Packard car dealership, and from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the Paoli Post Office. [6]

Selected 2020 gifts

In 2020 Angela Scully donated the *Strafford Village Design Album*, produced in 1939. As described by TEHS member and architectural historian Greg Prichard: "This album documents the architectural vision of the developers of Strafford Village, a housing development which stands northeast of the Strafford train station in Tredyffrin Township. Builder Stephan Schifter built several homes before the start of World War II, and continued construction at the war's conclusion. The designs of these homes are presented in the pages of this scrapbook, along with other loose drawings prepared by architect Harold Edward Williams. The homes depicted are examples of the revivalist styles popular in the 1930s era." The designs are titled with names such as "Cotswold House," "English Cottage," "Georgian," or "French Manor." The album contains a total of 58 sheets of renderings and floor plans, and one overall plot plan of the development pasted to the inside cover of the disassembled scrapbook.

The residents of Strafford Village take pride in its history as well as its visual integrity. Encompassing the streets to the east and north of the outbound side of the Stafford train station, the area boasts a residents' association, and a beautiful continuity within its boundaries. [7]

George W. Pyle, Jr., of Crown Point, Indiana, and a former resident of the Main Line, donated over fifty digital images of photographs related to his grandfather William T. Comer (1886–1967). Mr. Comer moved to Paoli in 1924, and for a time was the Treasurer of the Howellville Quarries.[8] From 1932 to 1956 Comer's haberdashery and dry goods store in the Supplee Building in Paoli sold a variety of items. Toys and clothing are featured in one image showing the shop window dressed for the Christmas season. Mr. Pyle also donated digital images of William T. Comer's activities as a Tredyffrin Township supervisor, as well as shots of the rain-drenched dedication of a Paoli war memorial, and the 1949 parade celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Paoli Fire Company. [9]

In December of 2019 the Society lost its former president and well-loved member J. Michael Morrison. Gifts from his estate included almost 150 photographic images, either postcards or prints, of local buildings and businesses in



The Strafford Village Design Album allowed prospective buyers to select from among twelve model-home styles for their future residence. These homes can be seen by driving on Crestline Road from the Strafford Station to N. Wayne Ave. (UPPER) English Manor House (LOWER) French Villa (STR38, STR44)

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William T. Comer in front of his Paoli store, ca. 1955. (CMR02) The TEHS also received a printed flyer advertising "Comer's Department Store Going Out of Business" sale, featuring men's khaki pants for $3.65, reduced from $4.25.

Tredyffrin and Easttown, as well as many other Chester County sites. A little over half of these were transferred to the Radnor and King of Prussia Historical Societies as being most appropriate for their collections. The donation also included a group of six photographs by Morrison from the 1970s depicting the exterior of the Chesterbrook Shopping Center. Another eight photographs show us the Warren Tavern (as it was called in the 1970s). In May 2013 and again in April 2016, Michael organized memorable wine tasting dinner events for the Society at the General Warren, which now looks more like a sophisticated restaurant and country inn than it did in his photograph. Also, twenty-five printed pamphlets were received and filed into the relevant TEHS research folders.



The Warren Tavern, as it looked in the 1970s. Many additions to the building that we now know as The General Warren Inn have been constructed over the years. Photo from the Michael Morrison Collection. (GWI16)

The Garber-Pyle Collection

One of the largest donations to the TEHS in recent history came to us in 2020 from Spencer Matthew Pyle of Downingtown, Pa. His great-grandfather, Henry Oscar Garber, was well-known to residents of Berwyn throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Henry Garber (1862–1943) owned Garber's Store on Lancaster Avenue in the heart of Berwyn. He was often referred to as "Harry," and his store was a



(ABOVE) Henry Oscar Garber, probably 1920s. (GRB08) (BELOW) Elizabeth Garber at about age ten, in front of Garber's Store, about 1910. (GRB04)



community gathering place, as well as for many years, the village post office. He was active in various civic endeavors, was a keen game hunter, and manager of the Berwyn Baseball team. Garber and his wife Mary Patton Garber (1863–1931) had two daughters, Sarah Elizabeth (who was called Elizabeth or "Lib") and Edna. Sarah Elizabeth ran the store for about five years after her father died. Thus, the store was family-owned for about sixty years. Dozens of photographs of Garber, his family, and Berwyn events arrived with this collection.

Both of Garber's daughters married and remained in Berwyn. Sarah Elizabeth Garber (1901–1981) married Abram Pyle (1902–1985) and their son Henry Grove "Zeke" Pyle (1930–2008) was, like his grandfather, an active member of the Berwyn community.[10] In 1995 he wrote a recollection of his grandfather and the store, one of dozens of *History Quarterly* articles that have appeared relating to Henry Garber.[11] Edna Garber and her husband Raymond Dyson Burns are seen in several pictures taken in the 1960s, and his graduating class of

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Continue to Part 2