

DELAWARE COUNTY HISTORIC
RESOURCES SURVEY

REPORT AND FINDINGS
FOR
TRAINER BOROUGH

Delaware County Planning Department
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Prepared as part of the Comprehensive Historic Resources Survey being conducted by the Delaware County Planning Department in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Bureau for Historic Preservation.

BRIEF HISTORY OF TRAINER

The Borough of Trainer was incorporated March 1, 1919 from Lower Chichester Township. It fronts on the Delaware River and includes part of Hook and Stoney Creeks within its boundaries. As part of the "river tier", it is now heavily industrialized; its development follows a 300 year course of European settlement beginning with the Swedes in the 1650's.

Although Trainer never became more populated, the present Southern Post Road (Queen's Highway laid out in 1704), was instrumental in encouraging development of this area during the colonial period. A grist mill was built on the West bank of Marcus Hook Creek by John Price in 1752. In 1806, David Trainer, Sr. purchased the gristmill. A sawmill was built just upstream of the Trainer property by John R. Trainer, Sr. and Gideon Jacques. The water from the sawmill race discharged into that of the gristmill and helped to turn the latter's overshot wheel. The logs supplying the sawmill were generally floated to the point near the building, so it was necessary that the creek be kept free of obstructions. In 1817, "Lower Chichester Creek" was declared a "public highway" from its mouth to the Trainer-Jacques sawmill.

In 1837, David Trainer, Sr. converted his gristmill into a cotton mill. At the National Fair, at Washington, D.C. in May 1846, the goods made at Trainer's Mill received special notice. During the mid-19th century, Delaware County produced more cotton and woolen goods than most of New England. The Trainer-owned "Linwood Mills" was one of the largest textile factories in the region, combining adequate water to power the mills with easy transport by rail, road or steamer.

In 1851, Trainer Mills was destroyed by fire, but by 1852 it was replaced by a new 3 1.2 story mill. Mill #2 was built in 1869 and mill #3 was built in 1873. At the Paris Exposition in 1879, David Trainer and Sons were awarded a bronze medal for superior tickings manufactured at their mills. The increase of cotton manufacturing in the borough led to the construction of several blocks of planned millworkers' housing such as "Calico Row" on Fourth Street, the western section of Seventh Street and "Trainer's Bank" on Ridge Road.

The proximity of Trainer to the river and Philadelphia was important during the War of 1812. A militia encampment, referred to as Camp Gaines and later Camp Snyder, was located near Ridge Road on either side of Marcus Hook Creek. In the fall of 1814, the Pennsylvania militia, strengthened by a few regiments from Delaware and from the regular U.S. Army, were called to arms by the President. This force numbered between 8,000 and 10,000 men and encamped above Marcus Hook to help prevent an anticipated British attack on Philadelphia. A formal review was held October 12, 1814, in the area adjoining the Trainer mills. The departmental commander, Major General Gaines, had his headquarters in the nearby Widow Price House. The fear of attacks following the sack of Washington, D.C. subsided and the troops were dispersed into smaller garrisons at Wilmington, Chester and elsewhere.

Several churches were built in Trainer during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century including Trainer Methodist Church, Price Street Methodist Church, and Trainer Wesleyan Church. The Trainer Wesleyan Church was reputedly built by David Trainer as a community Chapel and was purchased by the Wesleyan Methodists in 1929. Trainer Methodist Church was organized in 1893 as the result of cottage prayer meetings held in homes throughout the mill village. The first frame church was erected in 1895 on the south side of Post Road opposite Main Street. The present church and parsonage was completed in 1928.

The Trainer School was built in 1880 on the South side of Post Road opposite Main Street. Classes were held there until 1923 when the property was sold to Sinclair Refining Company. A new school was erected on the North side of Post Road in 1923. After WW II, rooms and an auditorium and gymnasium were added.

A fire company was established in Trainer in March of 1912, after a fire broke out in some frame houses on "Calico Row," Fourth Street. At that time the nearest fire company was in Chester City, and the residents who could not wait for the fire company to arrive improvised their own method of combatting the fire; namely, a spontaneously organized bucket brigade. Shortly after the fire, Trainer Fire Company No. 1 was organized. Within the year, the company had secured a hose, a horse-drawn chemical wagon, and a frame fire house (N.E. corner of Third and Price Street). The present first house was built in 1939 by its members. Another brick and block building to house the ambulance and the first truck was built in 1948.

By the turn of the century, the production of Trainer's Mill was on the decline. In 1901, the N.Z. Graves Paint Company bought Trainer's Mill. Within two decades, another industry, oil refining, had begun on the Delaware River. Sinclair Refining Company's subsidiary, Union Oil, purchased a 242-acre track located primarily on Trainer's waterfront in 1921. This refinery had a capacity of 10,000 barrels a day and was a major factor in Sinclair's market development. Since its first year of operation in 1925, the plant has been enlarged and has changed hands many times. Its present owner is B.P. Oil, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Standard Oil Company of Ohio. It has an increasing refining capacity of 150,000 barrels of crude oil a day. The variety of industries in the area today include the Universal Container Steel Drum Corporation, the Wilkinson Electronics, Inc., International Scrap Iron and Metal Company, Inc., the Witco Chemical Corporation and Congoleum Company.

Trainer was cited as Bicentennial Borough in 1976.

