

DELAWARE COUNTY HISTORIC
RESOURCES SURVEY

REPORT AND FINDINGS
FOR
UPPER CHICHESTER TOWNSHIP

Delaware County Planning Department
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BRIEF HISTORY OF UPPER CHICHESTER

Part of the “Chichester Liberty” established in 1683 by William Penn, this area originally included Upper and Lower Chichester Townships and Marcus Hook and Trainer Boroughs. The terms “Upper” and “Lower Chichester” were in use as early as 1722. In 1735, the two areas were taxed as separate districts, but the first record of Upper Chichester as an organized entity does not appear in Court records until 1759. The municipality became a first class township on December 30, 1941 and is 6.8 square miles. It is named after a market town and seaport in Sussex, England from which many of its settlers came.

The Lenni Lenape (Delaware) Indians erected several semi-permanent villages in the area; occupancy was seasonal, tied to fishing or hunting cycles with some farming. The sachem Naaman headed a large settlement along the creek which still bears his name. A network of trails utilized the ridge lines to connect these villages and the main “Swedes’ Path” (now U.S. Route 13) and “Minquas Path”. The European settlers adapted these routes to be the first roads surveyed in the Township, and they still are the principal local highways. The “Old Chichester and Bethel” (now Larkin Road, “Old Concord Road” (now Chichester Avenue) and Poulson (now Blueball) Road were laid out in the first decade of English settlement.

The Upper Chichester area was claimed both by the Swedes (1643) and by the Dutch (1654), but both nations were primarily interested only in trading with the Lenape. Although some settlements were built in the river tier, there is no firm evidence of European occupation in Upper Chichester until Penn’s grants under his 1681 from King Charles II. The “First Purchasers” under Penn’s authority were fourteen English and Welshmen, most of them Quakers. Many of the original grantees were speculators or commissioned agents who immediately sold their holdings, but some of the first landowners settled and have descendants still in the township – Bezer, Buffington, Garrett, Kingsman, Marten, and Willer.

The regional pattern of independent family farmsteads was followed in Upper Chichester, which retained its rural atmosphere well into the twentieth century. McCaysville, a small crossroad town at Chichester and Meetinghouse Roads, predates the American Revolution and was the only major concentration of structures for 200 years. Other major intersections also were named after nearby settlers – Pennell’s Corners (Bethel and Larkin Rds.) and Larkin’s also known as Hanby’s, Corners (Larkin and Chichester Rds.) being extant examples. IN 1769, there were only thirty-nine voters in the township. As last as 1900, the population was only 601 persons.

In addition to farmsteads, several early mills were established along the swift-running creeks. The 1753-1860 Dutton sawmill (later run by Joseph Talbot, then by Benjamin

Elliott) the 1756-1884 Talbot grist mill and then 1843-1875 Larkin traces remain. In 1895, Clark Hance and Clark Baldwin had a grist mill and coal yard at Ogden Station.

Despite the scattered settlement pattern, churches and schools grew up. the first house of worship in the present township was the Old Chichester Friends' Meeting, which originated in 1682. After meeting in members' homes, a log house of worship was constructed in 1688 on land given by James Brown. The congregation was comprised of the Quaker settlers of Aston, Bethel, Birgmingham, Concord, Chichester, Thornbury and Westtown Townships plus north and wets indefinitely. A 1768 fire destroyed the log structure, which was replaced in 1769 by the present stone structure and the white oak wagon sheds. This meeting and the Brown farmstead across the road served as temporary hospitals following the battle of Brandywine (Sept. 1777) and casualties from both sides were interred in the Friends burial ground. The ancestors of many regionally prominent families and of two American Presidents (Lincoln and Nixon) worshipped here. Old Chichester remains the only "unimproved" (i.e. modernized) Quaker meeting in the area.

Following the division of Friends, an Orthodox Meeting was built in 1831 just south of Larkin's Corners; in 1883, both meetings merged with Concord Monthly Meeting. The Orthodox structure has been severely altered for commercial use, while Old Chichester meeting is still used for worship once a month.

In 1885, the Memorial Presbyterian Church was erected, followed by the Twin Oaks Mission (now St. Matthew's AME) in 1921, Mount Please Baptist Church in 1926, the Church of God in Christ in 1928 and the Bible Presbyterian Church in 1943. Immaculate Heart Cemetery was established in 1892 and expanded in 1913.

Religious philanthropy extended beyond the construction of churches. The Baptists established the "Home Mission, Inc." in 1905 which served as a fresh air farm for the disadvantaged children of Wilmington. After many years of active service, the mission folded, the farm was razed and the modern condominiums of "Naamanswood" occupy the site.

Upper Chichester citizens have been conscientious in providing schools for the township long before required to do so by state law. A private school existed in the Twin Oaks section prior to 1775, while the members of the Old Chichester Meeting ran a grammar school from 1793 on. The Orthodox Friends' School was started in 1834 and a private academy operated briefly during the 19th century in the Pierce homestead in McCaysville.

School #1 (McCay's) was started by Quakers prior to 1825 and has remained in operation to the present day, converting to a public school following the Pennsylvania Education Act of 1834. School #2 (Twin Oaks) also predated mandatory public education. School #3 (Larkin's) operated from 1842 to 1859 before relocating in 1860. It still stands, having been converted to a private residence in the 1920s. The Dutton Schoolhouse, 1870-1929, was demolished when the Conchester Highway was built. School #4 at Ogden was in use from 1919 to 1970, when it was the last one room school in Delaware

County. Today it serves as a community center. The 1929 Locust Hill school is now used for the school district's administrative offices, while the 1927 Boothwyn School was expanded in 1935-36 and now serves as the district's elementary school. The new Hilltop School was built on a 1950s former NIKE missile site.

The post offices of Upper Chichester have been consolidated into the Boothwyn (formerly Okiola) one established in 1887. Former post offices for the municipality include Twin Oaks (1884-1936), Hance (1887-1908) and Ogden (1887-1917).

Developments in transportation radically affected Upper Chichester's economy and settlement patterns. The coming of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1883-84, with the local stations built several years later, provided area farmers with a much wider market and permitted specialization of crops. The area was noted for its dairy products, bottled spring water, cherries (the crop came in June and July yielding up to 30,000 lbs. shipped per day), ice (earthworks for the ponds & breams are extant) and beef. Unfortunately, the devastating Japanese beetle blight of the 1920s destroyed almost all the fruit orchards.

At first, the stations were just loading platforms but they became actual buildings with popularity of the region as a resort area. Summer hotels and boarding homes proliferated from the 1880s to the 1920s only to decline when the automotive boom made vacationing farther afield possible. Thus freight and passengers for the township declined, and the railroad reduced the line to one track following World War II.

The growth of the Delaware Riverfront industries, especially the boom caused by World War I, led to subdivisions and residential speculation in Upper Chichester. Willard T. Galbreath was the only contractor and builder in Ogden until 1920; thus, he virtually erected everything in that area that was built between 1900 and 1920. His work included "Ogden" (1900-1910), "Boothwyn Farms" (1913), "Ogden Park" (1914), and Boudwin's "Cherry Tree Ridge" (1917) which was formed from the bulk of the Broomall farm. This farm had previously been noteworthy for the purity of its spring water, which was sold commercially, and for its rich mineral deposits. Columbite (the finest grade of iron), yellow beryls, garnets, flint, amethysts, feldspar building stone and copper ore all had been mined successfully on this one property.

With this boom in population and new settlement, Upper Chichester began to move out of its rural character. For many years the road of this area, although main arteries, had remained dirt. In 1922, Chichester Avenue was paved from Marcus Hook to the B&O Railroad. Naaman's Creek Road was paved from its southern terminus to Route 202 in Concord, while all of Meetinghouse Road and Bethel Road from the B&O to Foulk Road were paved in 1926. According to Peters, the 1919 electric lines did not extend past Hewes Avenue and Chichester Road, but were extended that year throughout the Boothwyn area. In 1922, electric lines were constructed linking the Ogden area. Local landmarks became obscured as a side effect of the boom – for example, the old ford and swimming hole at McKay's Bridge was partially filled in, although it was still used occasionally.

The community of Ogden was created, with its own school, a 1914 Ogden Athletic Association (members from this organization formed the local fire company) and a newspaper called the "Weekly Progress" (1925-1927). Excelsior Village was built near the 1875 brickyard of Matthew Boyd, while the influx of black factory workers led to the 1920 subdivision of Worth City, now called Twin Oaks. Anti-German sentiment led to the dropping of the local name "Kaisertown" and its main street became "Keystone Road".

The township has boasted a number of prominent citizens and colorful local characters. John C. Ogden was one of Upper Chichester's earliest settlers, being one of four men to have property surveyed here in 1685. His descendents have always been influential locally, becoming politicians, sheriffs and pro baseball players. The Clayton and Broomall families have also been politically notable, both producing a succession of lawyers and judges while the latter claims John M. Broomall (1850s-1902), U.S. Congressman and Head Judge of Delaware County for many years.

Salkeld Larkin (ca.1824-1870) was a regionally prominent Quaker leader and educationalist. A descendant of Signer John Morton, farmboy Pierce Crosby grew up to become the admiral commanding the U.S. naval operations during the Mexican War. Another farmer's son amused himself sketching the family barn and tools. These drawings attracted attention to his talent and led Joseph Pennell on to international fame as an etcher in the early 20th century.

In 1900, Upper Chichester had only about eighty-five dwellings in the township and a population of 601 persons. Today, the population is 14,377, housed in 5,071 units.

The 1930s Depression caused a stagnation in the rapid development of the township and led to scattered, individual construction on random lots. The growth of the river refineries led to the creation of tank farms and a crisscross network of pipelines. The Read-Boyd farms (71 acres) were acquired by Sun Oil Co. for a chemical dump and other business corporations began purchasing tracts.

Recent developments include the construction of the Conchester Highway (U.S. Route 322) in 1949 and I-95 in 1965-1969, both of which make the township more attractive to commercial investors. Subdivisions continue to be erected, whether single family structures like Meetinghouse Acres or apartment/condominiums such as Meetinghouse Apartments on the old Beeson farm. In 1941, the three area fire companies (all founded in the 1920s) combined to form one Upper Chichester Company.