

The Old Pickering Schoolhouse

(Part 8 of a series of Articles)



The Old Pickering Schoolhouse (on the corner of Valley Park and Clothier Spring Roads) is one of the oldest historical buildings in Schuylkill Township, even though it is not listed on the National or State register of historic edifices.

It was built in 1840 by Isaac Anderson, the most distinguished resident of the township (Member of Congress 1803-1807, signer of the Louisiana Purchase, Presidential Elector: member of the Electoral College, 1816), direct descendant of the first white settlers of the township. Shortly before his death he built and established the Anderson Cemetery on Valley Park Road (see Township News, Spring 1999) as well as this one-room school house for the children of the township, on the western edge of his property, Anderson Place.

The school was the only elementary school in the township until the early 1920's when Schuylkill Elementary was built. It functioned until 1929. The original schoolhouse bell still hangs in the wooden belfry atop the building. (The inscription painted on a lunette underneath the belfry is incorrect.)

In 1947 Lemuel Braddock Schofield, descendant of the Andersons, put a new roof on the building, preparing to convert it into a dwelling for his brother, Rear-Admiral Albert Schofield, USN, who was suffering from Parkinson's disease. Further building plans were then abandoned, since the Admiral and his family decided to move him into Bethesda Naval Hospital for the rest of his years.

In 1954 a horrid tragedy, with reverberations that lasted for many years, occurred on the grounds of the abandoned schoolhouse. About one hundred feet north of the schoolhouse there was a wooden privy, half in ruins, used by the children before 1929. A young girl from Phoenixville was murdered in March 1954, dragged to this outhouse, where her body was found a day or so later. Neither the cause of the murder nor the identity of the murderer were thereafter found.



Later that year Professor John Lukacs, then recently married to Mr. Schofield's oldest daughter, acquired the ruined schoolhouse and its surrounding acre, in order to rebuild it into a dwelling. They moved into the still uncompleted house in May 1955, hardly a month before Mrs. Helen Lukacs' father suddenly died, where after Anderson Place no longer remained a property of James Anderson's (the earliest settler, 1713) descendants. After 1955 the Lukacs family added to the house, building, among other things, a stone wall protecting it from the road, a terrace, a library wing, etc. In 1973, on a tour of historic houses in the

Phoenixville area, the house was opened to visitors. Among the large number of them there were three older ladies who had been students in the schoolhouse before 1929.



Mrs. Lukacs died in 1970, in the same year when her husband was appointed to the Planning Commission of Schuylkill Township, where he continues to serve. Both before and after his first wife's death the Old Pickering School House had a number of distinguished visitors from here and abroad, recorded in a guest book. In 1984 he and Mrs. Stephanie Lukacs his present wife, built another house about 1,500 feet north of the schoolhouse and sold it to the first of three owners who have occupied it since. There have been no significant structural changes of the building during the last thirty or more years.