

The Establishment of Maple Shade Township

On November 14, 1682 land was surveyed in the "Indian town of Pemisoakin" between the north and south branches of what is today called the Pennsauken Creek for the Roberts, Matlack, and Hancock families. These families were members of the "Society of Friends," or "Quakers." In 1684 they met with the Indians and purchased the land, even though they already owned it. A memorial on East Main Street was erected by the Roberts family descendants on the same day of the survey in 1898 because one found a cave dugout nearby, thought to be where John and Sarah Roberts first lived at.

These families were soon followed by several others notably the Rudderow and Stiles families, who were not Quakers but of the "Church of England."

On November 6, 1688 the Burlington County Supreme Court formed Burlington's townships and the area now Maple Shade, Moorestown, Cinnaminson, Palmyra, Riverton, and Delran was called Chester Township. In Court records, June 5, 1690- February 22, 1699, Chester Township was called Cropwell, presumably after William Matlack's hometown of Cropwell Bishop, Nottinghamshire, England. The south branch of the Pennsauken Creek was also known as Cropwell River.

The first "roads of travel" were the waterways. In 1682, the Kings Highway between Burlington and Salem was laid out. A portion passes through the township of Maple Shade. As the Kings Highway became more established a lot was bought in 1700 at the location of the Friends cemetery in Moorestown for a Friends Meeting House. Nearby, in the 1730s, Thomas Moore owned a tavern and subdivided his land into building lots. This area became the village of "Moore's Town."

In 1682, William Penn began the City of Philadelphia. In about 1762 there was laid out the "Old Ferry Road" or "Market Road" starting at the Kings Highway at Schoolhouse Lane and ending at Cooper's Ferry which crossed the Delaware River to Market Street in Philadelphia. This road was used by farmers to take their produce to market. The area at Cooper's Ferry would in time become the City of Camden.

In 1794 a straight road was laid out between "Moore's Town" and "Cooper's Ferry" replacing the Old Ferry Road. Today it is Main Street in Maple Shade, Camden Avenue in Moorestown, and Maple Avenue in Cherry Hill and Pennsauken. In 1849 it became the "Moorestown and Camden Turnpike," owned and operated by local farmers collecting revenue by several toll gates along it.

During this time period, there was several Stiles family farms in the vicinity of what is today Maple Shade. The area gained an identity by 1860 as "Stiles Corners."

In 1867 the Camden and Burlington County Railroad went through. In 1869 land at Forklanding Road was purchased for "Stiles Station." In 1874 the train station was renamed "Maple Shade" after the nearby Maple trees on the Patterson farm.

Maple Shade-

The Benjamin J. Stiles farm went through several owners and then was bought by Charles F. Shuster, who began the development of Maple Shade with the "Shuster Tract" subdivision in 1887. Soon to follow were two more subdivisions- the "Zane tract" and the "Maple Shade Land & Improvement Co." land which was along the north side of the railroad tracks. The latter one had an artesian well owned by Dr. Alexander Mecray which supplied water to the homes.

The Village of Maple Shade increased little in population as evidenced by the lack of Victorian houses. It was a rural "Country Town." Nearby the Frech Wagon Works were several stores along Main Street which was Maple Shade's first business district. There was the Klinger's shoe store, Fahr's store, Mennel's Dry Goods store, which had the Maple Shade Post Office, and William Myers' barber shop. These families were of German descent and related to one another. Later on, on a Horace Roberts owned subdivision, a street was named "Germantown Avenue."

The Edward H. Cutler Company of Philadelphia took over the handling of the Maple Shade Land and Improvement Company and the Shuster tract in 1905.

Thomas Barlow moved to Maple Shade in 1908. He was President of the Maple Heights Land Co., which purchased the John R. Mason farm for the plan of Maple Heights. He formed Barlow & Company with his two sons, Thomas Jr. and Frederick and began developing Maple Shade with a will. Some of the subdivisions were "One Acre Farm" lots. The Barlow Building was Barlow & Company's real estate office and the bungalows were sold as "Barlow Built Bungalows."

The population of Maple Shade grew from a few hundred, when the Barlows arrived, to about 5,000 in the mid-1920s. Much of Maple Shade's growth was through the efforts of Thomas J.S. Barlow. In the 1920s he was referred to as "the Founder of Maple Shade," or as "the Father of Maple Shade." He had the honor of laying the corner stone at Maple Shade's first Municipal Building in 1927 before a large gathered crowd.

The "Maple Shade Progress" newspaper was issued for the first time on November 4th, 1916. William Brown, who had a small printing press in his home, was the original owner and publisher. Brown later sold the paper to Frank Gerkins Sr., and his son carried it on after his retirement. Later the paper was continued by a newsgroup publisher.

Part of getting the "progress of Maple Shade" involved telling Moorestown we needed more street lights, better roads, and wanted to be hooked up to the Moorestown Water Works.

Cinnaminson had separated from Chester Township in 1860 and now there grew an awkwardness of Moorestown, Lenola, and Maple Shade in Chester Township, the latter two a result of real estate interests around the train stations. Maple Shade was growing fast and needed improvements.

Moorestown wanted to divide the township of Chester. Maple Shade opposed this idea. Moorestown and Lenola tried separating by election in 1917 as "East Chester," but didn't get the votes. In April of 1922 they voted without Maple Shade and separated from Chester Township as "Moorestown." Maple Shade then formed its own Chester Township committee.

Maple Shade soon went to work on a Water Works at East Main Street and the Pennsauken Creek which was completed in 1925. The sewer system was put into operation in 1927. Most of the roads remained as dirt roads for a while.

Maple Shade was the last remaining part of Chester Township. On November 6, 1945 the voters of the Township of Chester, also called Maple Shade, by a vote of 1067 to 74, voted to change the name from the Township of Chester to the Township of Maple Shade.

Written by Dennis Weaver
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