

Places In Time

LAWRENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2008

Old Brick and the Mershon Family by Jacqi Haun

Of all the historic homes in Lawrenceville, one may hold the title for both the oldest and the most strangely located: the colonial Hunt-Mershon house, commonly known as Old Brick, which is located in the middle of the Lawrenceville School Golf Course on Route 206. The highest part of the multi-level brick home is believed to have been built by pioneer Ralph Hunt in 1706, making the house commonly accepted as the oldest residence in Lawrenceville, known in Hunt's day as the village of Maidenhead. Hunt is believed to have imported bricks from overseas for this earliest part of the house, but when the house was expanded on the east side in 1742, builders used bricks fired on the Henry Dye farm, located just outside the village on the Pennington Road. As prominent members of the Maidenhead community, the Hunt family often hosted "towne meetings" in their home.

In 1755, Ralph Hunt's son Samuel Hunt, having inherited the home from his father some 20 years before, sold the house and 144 ½ acres of land for £730 to Henry Mershon III. Henry Mershon III was a son of Henry Mershon II, who in about 1700 moved his family from New York to what is now the Lawrenceville area, where he is recorded as a land owner as early as 1702. Having raised five sons and five daughters with his wife Ann, Henry II died in 1738, and is buried in the Upper Cemetery. In 1763, Henry Mershon III gave the former Hunt house to his son Benjamin Mershon as a gift.

The house was then passed down through the Mershon family, most notably to Samuel Davies Mershon, who was born in the house in 1804. Upon the death of his father when Samuel was ten years old, the house was temporarily rented to other locals, until Samuel could take full possession of the property at age 21.



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5th Annual Mary Tanner Lecture



On Sunday, October 12, the society presented the 5th Annual Mary Tanner Lecture. This year's lecture was given by Dr. Harold M. Tanner and featured a fascinating discussion on Chinese-U.S. relations over Taiwan. The lecture touched upon various military, political, and cultural aspects of the Taiwan issue in an historical context. Dr. Tanner is seen above, describing the various military boundaries between China and Taiwan. Below, Dr. Tanner is introduced by Mary Tanner. Dr. Tanner's latest book, *China: A History*, will be published in March.



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Old Brick and the Mershon Family

Samuel Davies Mershon was the first of at least 19 Mershon family members who would eventually attend the nearby Lawrenceville School. A mere week after his graduation from the academy in 1825, Samuel Davies married Mary Stockton Shreve, a descendant of Declaration of Independence signer Richard Stockton. During the Civil War, Samuel Davies Mershon was well known for drilling new recruits in his fields.

With the house's close proximity to the Lawrenceville School, it is not surprising that Samuel Davies became a close friend of Dr. Samuel Hamill, who was head of the school from 1837 until 1883. Under Dr. Hamill, three of Samuel's sons, Jasper Mershon, Caleb S. Mershon, and Joseph Mershon, attended the school. Samuel's oldest son, William Mershon, known in the family as "William of Rahway," did not attend Lawrenceville, but did send his own sons to the boarding school in the last years of Dr. Hamill's long tenure.

In 1888, the house passed on Samuel's death to his youngest son, Joseph Mershon. Joseph would be the last Mershon family member to live in the house, dying in 1891. The following year, the house and 76 acres of property were sold to the Lawrenceville School. Since it came into the ownership of the school, Old Brick has served many different purposes. From 1892 until 1907, the property was leased by dairy farmer Richard Cook, who provided fresh milk to the school as part of the lease arrangement. In 1897, a portion of the property was converted into the nine-hole golf course that surrounds the house today.

The building's relative isolation from the rest of Lawrenceville's campus made it an ideal location for the school's "contagious infirmary" in 1911. A temporary infirmary built near Old Brick in 1922 then allowed the school to transform the Colonial building into a residence and commissary for the infirmary's nursing staff for several years.

Beginning in 1930, the house began to be used as faculty housing or, from time to time, as a student residence. In 1935, Old Brick became the home of Oscar McPherson, the school librarian.

At that time, an extensive renovation of the house took place, in part to accommodate McPherson's need for a wheelchair following a childhood illness. Today, the light switches and electrical outlets from that period remain at a handicapped accessible height as a reminder of McPherson's tenancy.

While McPherson lived in Old Brick, he renamed the dwelling "Brook House," but over time, the original name has resurfaced as the more common one. While it has been more than a century since the last Mershon lived in Old Brick, the Mershon family connection with Lawrenceville has stayed strong. A family association, The Association of the Descendants of Henry Mershon, was formed in Trenton in 1923 and has continued to meet annually, most recently in September 2008 in Lawrenceville. According to current Association President, Clare Mershon of Portland, Oregon, all Americans with the surname "Mershon" can trace their ancestry to Henry Mershon II (1672-1738) because Henry II changed the spelling of his name from the original "Marchand" to "Mershon." The family association of more than 800 members manages a Mershon genealogy database containing over 32,900 names of Mershon descendants and spouses going back to 1685.



Credit: Paloma Torres/The Lawrenceville School



Genealogy Program Set for Nov. 16

The society and the Friends of the Lawrence Library will present a program on genealogy on Sunday, Nov. 16 at 2:00pm at the Lawrence Branch of the Mercer County Library System. The featured speaker is renowned professional genealogist Casey Zahn, who will give a 90 minute presentation on resources for getting started on your family tree. Both online and print resources will be featured and attendees will be able to see what local resources are available at the library. Refreshments will be served.



Brearley Family Bible on Loan to Society

Members of the Brearley family gathered at Brearley House on September 4 for a tour and the presentation of a Brearley family bible to the society. Candice Brearley, who played a pivotal role in the house's restoration, made the presentation to the society on behalf of herself and the children of the late Purvis Brearley, owners of the bible. Members of the family and society look on as Candice points out some of the rich genealogical information contained in the bible. The bible can be seen on tour dates at the house, which are the first Saturday of every month.

Historic Photos Online

The society is working with the Lawrence Township Historian's Office to bring the township's collection of historic photos and slides to the web. The collection contains over 2,000 slides and 500 photographs, with new ones added to the website weekly. We can always use help identifying the subjects, so feel free to leave a comment on the website or contact the society if you can help. There is a link to the collection on the society's website, www.thelhs.org.

Emery Perkins

It is with much sadness that the society learned of the passing of Emery Perkins in September. Emery was the society's first photographer, detailing the transformation of the Brearley House on film. After the restoration, Emery remained a good friend and volunteer for the society. Owner of Photo Haven in the Lawrence Shopping Center, Emery was very gracious in giving the society banners, posters, photo books and other professional grade items that enriched society events. Emery will be greatly missed for his talents, but more so for his warm personality that was always welcome at Brearley House.

2008 Membership Picnic

In August, the society hosted its first membership picnic at the Brearley House and a good time was had by all. The menu featured fried chicken, salads, fruit, and pie. Attendees were able to mingle, take part in a volleyball game, watch the WZBN produced Lawrence history film or just enjoy the grounds and house. Many thanks to Terhune Orchards for donating the pies and Matt Metcalf of WZBN for sharing the video.

2009 Calendar of Events

The society is getting ready for 2009. Our tentative schedule of events has been posted to our website, www.thelhs.org. 2009 features our continued monthly Brearley House tours, the Mary Tanner Lecture, Port Mercer Garden Party and of course, Hogmanay. New proposed events include a lecture on baseball history in the spring and a photo preservation workshop in the fall.

Community Day

As usual, the society set up a table and had a good time at Community Day on October 5. Manning the table for the afternoon shift were Paul Gatterdam, Laura Nawrocik and Jim Williams. Yup, we finally caught Jim on the other side of the camera. Ruth Barringer also helped out by setting up and taking the early shift.



Hogmanay

Fall is here and that means we have entered the last part of 2008 and are just a few months shy of our most popular event, Hogmanay. As usual, the society will be building a huge bonfire in the meadow to light at 6:00pm on New Year's Eve. Fire typically burns until 8:00pm, so plan on arriving close to 6:00pm to see the best fire. This event is fun for the whole family, but is rather large so we need extra volunteers. Anyone interested in helping out can call 609-895-1728 or e-mail us at webmaster@thelhs.org.

Join the Lawrence Historical Society!

Join the society today or renew your membership! Members receive the society newsletter, and notice and discounts of society events. The society is a non-profit, charitable organization. Membership fees are tax deductible.

Name: _____ Tel (____) _____

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Student/Senior (62+)	\$5
Individual	\$15
Family	\$35
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Lifetime	\$250
Benefactor	\$500

Mail to:
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Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

I am enclosing a special contribution to commemorate:

**Lawrence-Hopewell Trail Open**

Lawrence Township recently finished construction on the portion of the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail that runs behind Brearley House. The new trail connects an existing portion of the LHT with the Gretel Gatterdam trail that runs between Brearley House and the D&R Canal towpath.

Places in Time is published quarterly by the Lawrence Historical Society. Back issues and color editions of our award winning newsletter are available at the LHS website—www.TheLHS.org.

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www.TheLHS.org