

BROADSIDE

SPRING 1995

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GROVER'S MILL: PART II

Part II of the Grover's Mill article was written with information, advice and corrections from the following: Elise Bruno, Robert W. Craig, Mrs. C. Lawrence Dey, Luci & Edward DiPolvere, Cynthia Koch, Vivian MacPherson, Ronald Rogers, Ralph Vierno, David O. Wright.

Historic Houses of Grover's Mill

In its heyday, Grover's Mill was a company town. All the property in the village was owned by the Grover family. The millowner lived at 175 Cranbury Rd. and rented 148, 152 and 160 Cranbury Road.

429 Clarksville Rd. "Ladyfair"

But before the Grovers, one of the first families known to have settled in the Grover's Mill area was the Schwenger family who bought acreage from an Indian woman known as "Ida." The Schwenger's original farmhouse and its barn still stand just across the millstream behind the mill.

According to David O. Wright, who owned and restored the house in 1984-85, it was built in three stages. The first section was a one-room farmhouse with a bedroom above. This section is located close

est to the Clarksville Road. The middle rooms were added in the mid-1700s, and the third section in the early to mid-1800s. The farmhouse (shown on next page) was designed to be used by both the owner's family and his tenant farmer and family.

Wright's restoration kept as many original features of the house as possible. For example when the original front door was changed to a window, it was then used to make a mantel for that room's fireplace, with its latch left in place.

160 Cranbury Rd.

It is difficult to recognize this house in early photos. In the photo on page three (probably taken early 20th century since electric poles appear), the house was a frame, two-story building with about five rooms and a porch across the front.



Aerial view of Grover's Mill pond & village. Mill on right; millowner's house (175 Cranbury Rd.) on left. Photo courtesy of Rossmoor News.

According to Vivian and Ron MacPherson (owners in 1986), the house dates back to the mid 18th century. During the Revolution, Hessian soldiers are said to have hidden in a carriage house once located behind the house. Walter S. Grover was born in the house.

In the 1960s, the MacPhersons had the old porch removed and had local mason, Charles Aversano, add a brick facing and Colonial slate and brick entry to the front door. The house had been stuccoed by Charles Dey in the 1930s.

The original living room has wide floor boards and many original window panes. Lawrence Dey assisted his father, Charles Dey, in finding the fieldstone for the fireplace from their farm on Rabbit Hill Rd. The kitchen has hand hewn beams.



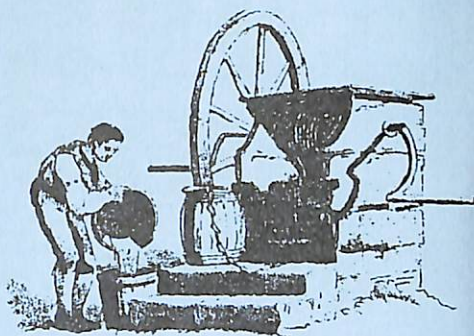
429 Clarksville Road, "Ladyfair."

148 Cranbury Road

(Many thanks to Cynthia Koch for writing and updating the information about this house.)

Cynthia Koch and Eliot Werner still own the house at 148 Cranbury Road known to some long-time

West Windsor residents as the "old Snedeker place." The Snedekers lived there from the 1920s through the early 1970s. The house first appeared on tax records in 1879 and is said to have been built as a tenant house for mill workers.



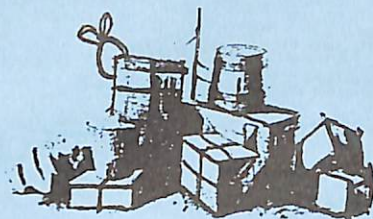
In style it is typical of plain folk houses of the late 19th century, built throughout the northeast from the 1850s until well into the 20th century. In urban areas, these tall and narrow houses — with their gables facing the street — were built close together on narrow lots. In rural areas such as Grover's Mill, it was



148 Cranbury Road.

not unusual to add a second gabled wing off to one side. With its peaked front facing the street, this type of house was descended from the more stylish Greek Revival houses of the 1830s-1850s, which had pedimented fronts supposedly reminiscent of Greek

temples. But the later folk houses were simple wooden balloon frame structures built with lumber shipped on the nation's expanding railroads.



The little building that serves as the garage is older than the house itself and probably dates from the early 19th century. It has wide plank floors and interior walls of vertical bead boards,

some of which are still filled with sawdust, lending credence to the tradition that this building was originally located closer to the pond and served as an ice house at the mill. More recently, Russell Snedecker used it for his lawn mower repair shop.

The front porch was the principal architectural feature on these houses. Originally the porch on the Koch-Werner house was of the spindlework style common on "Stick" and Gothic style houses of the 1860s-1880s. The exposed rafter ends and prominent corner boards are virtually the only other expression of style on this house and they too were borrowed from the more elaborate Victorian house types of the period. The supporting columns for the original front porch on the Koch-Werner house were recently found under the wooden floor of the garage. The porch was enclosed with the present colonial revival fan-light windows in 1930.

152 Cranbury Road

This double house probably dates from the mid 19th century. The present owners, Ann and Ralph Vierno, removed the porch and added a breezeway and garage. (The house is shown to the right of the former MacPherson house in the photo below.)



160 (left) and 152 (right) Cranbury Rd. c1900. Photo courtesy of Historical Society of Princeton.

In 1945 the wing was added to the house; it originally included an open porch on the first floor that was later enclosed. Earlier in the 20th century a one-story shed-roof addition was made to the rear of the house, and was extended to the second floor in 1993.

175 Cranbury Rd.

The millwright's house at 175 Cranbury Road was probably begun as a mill office in the late 1700s. This building is now a room in the house with the original fireplace and fireplace crane.

Elise and Spencer Bruno, owners in 1986, provided the following information and description of the house's interior. (There have been renovations made since then by the present owners.)

“The porch entrance contains fine, sturdy detail work. The columns were made by the ‘barrel’ method: tapered bands of wood were hand-bent around a core to form the columns. The spindles and decorative work were hand-worked. The shutters are all pegged with wooden dowels and each weighs about 25 pounds.

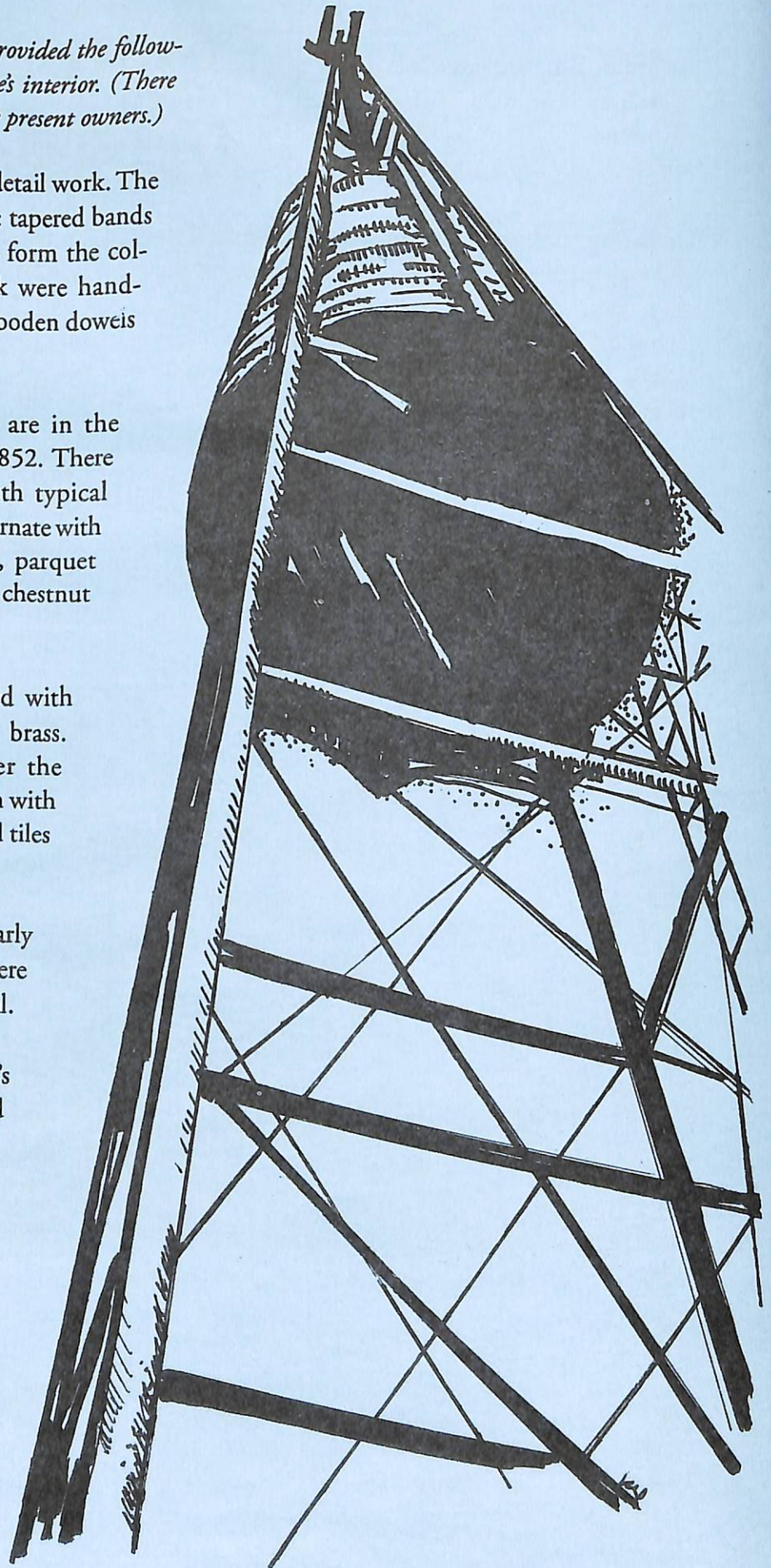
“Entering through the front door, you are in the Victorian section of the house, added in 1852. There are two front rooms and two above, with typical Victorian detailing: substantial woodwork, ornate with some Greek details around the fireplaces, parquet flooring in the entry hall and hand-carved chestnut stairway and panelling.

“In the living room, the fireplace is faced with marbled tile. The firebox is lined with brass. The original bevelled mirror hangs over the fireplace. Upstairs is the Victorian bathroom with cast iron tub, stained glass windows and wall tiles original to the house.

“The two back bedrooms are late 18th or early 19th century with original pine floors. There are back stairs, curving and steep, but useful.

“According to family legend Walter Grover’s grandmother, Sarah Schwenger, was forced to feed Hessian soldiers from the original kitchen during the American Revolution.”

To those interested in the “War of the Worlds” broadcast, the water tower (shown at right) on the mill owner’s property was the one shot at during the confusion caused by the broadcast. Someone thought it was a Martian!



Grover's Mill Pond

Grover's Mill Pond has been called by several different names since 1776: Bergen's Pond, then Bear Pond, Schwenger's Mill Pond and finally Grover's Mill Pond, which it remains.

The pond has always been an active recreation area in addition to providing power for the mill wheel. Fishing, boating and ice skating were popular through the years. Ice was cut from the pond until 1934.

Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson are said to have fished in the pond. Both men were friends of Walter Grover.

In 1988 C. Lawrence Dey donated the pond to West Windsor. The Township plans to restore and improve the pond as a recreational resource, wildlife refuge, and nature study area.



Skating on the pond, 1948: Linda, Alan, and Charles Dey, Grant Chamberlin, Jean Reed. Photo courtesy of Mrs. C.L. Dey.



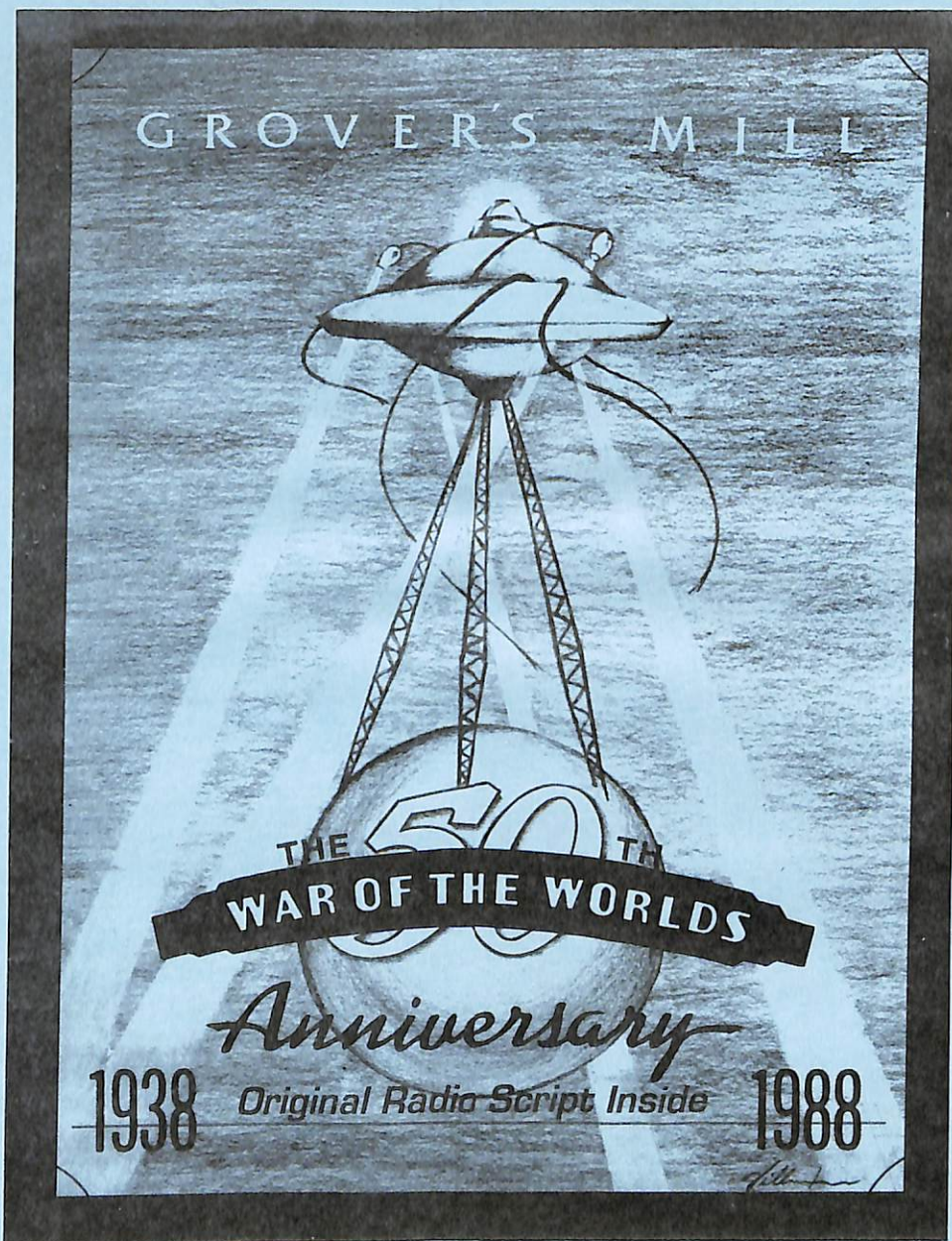
Grover's Mill pond: the sluice gates. Photo courtesy of Joan Parry.

War of the Worlds - October 30, 1938

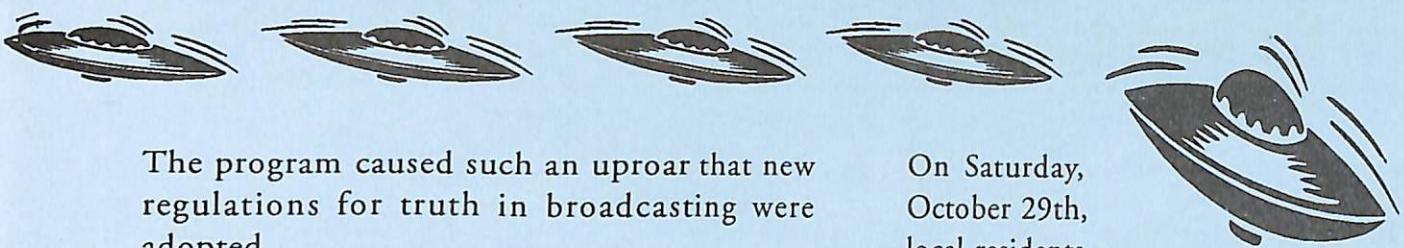


On October 30, 1938, Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre broadcast Howard Koch's freely adapted version of H. G. Wells' novel War of the Worlds. The docu-drama was so realistic that many people believed they were hearing a news broadcast and not a play. People around the country reacted, preparing to flee their homes.

The broadcast gave Hadley Cantril, Professor of Psychology at Princeton, a wonderful opportunity to make a survey of mass hysteria. Interviews of 135 people affected by the broadcast resulted in his classic study of panic, The Invasion from Mars, Princeton University Press, 1940.




Poster/logo designed by Bill Kokas to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the War of the Worlds Broadcast.



The program caused such an uproar that new regulations for truth in broadcasting were adopted.

In 1988, it was time for West Windsor to host a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the broadcast. The WOW Festival, held October 27-30, 1988, included a costume contest, rides, games, entertainment, fireworks and laser show; recollections by long-time residents; a dinner dance; house decorating contest; bike and foot races; masquerade party and Panel Discussions on "Could It Happen Again?" and "Should We Go to Mars?"

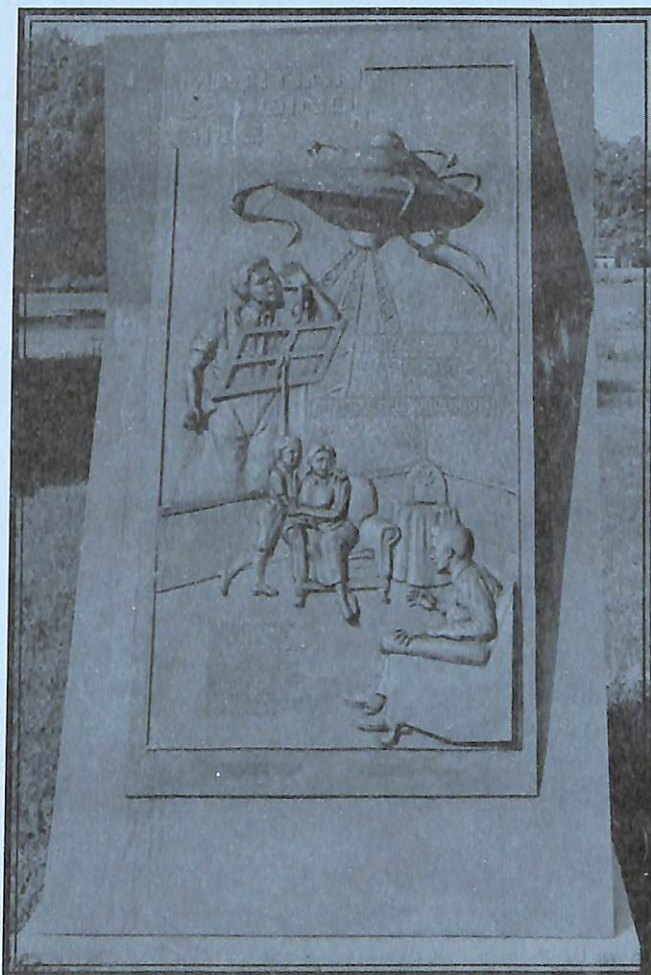


On Saturday, October 29th, local residents, dressed as Martians, took part in a parade which marched from Penns Neck to the high school. A special plaque was erected in Van Nest Park to commemorate the broadcast and its 50th year celebration.

Though articles in newspapers and magazines make Grover's Mill famous every Halloween, the village ignores the uproar and retains the tranquility that only a 200-year existence can provide. 🖱

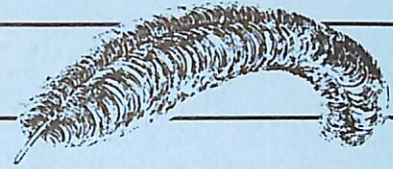


Orson Welles' infamous broadcast, Oct. 30, 1938.



Commemorative plaque in Van Nest Park sculpted by Jay Warren. Photo courtesy of Sandra Shapiro.

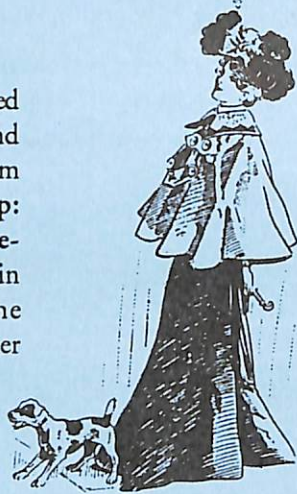
Gifts to the Society



It is time once again to acknowledge and thank the donors to the Society of material for use in the Zaitz-Schenck House, for exhibits and for our research library. We are truly grateful.

Artifacts

China Bowls: Blue decorated English pearlware c1780 and Chinese Export c1790 Hiram Tindall. **Cranberry scoop:** Ruth Finkelstein. **Home-spun bed sheet:** woven in 1800s by women of the Williamson Family - Esther Engelke.




Clothing

Woman's capelet and hat, two muffs, kimono and morning cap, two-piece black dress, plumes: c1890s - the Family of J. Franklin Pierson.

Photographs & Research Material

Deeds and hand-written material: Bergen Groendyke. **Letter:** to George C. Bergen, Dutch Neck, from his nephew, George D. Bergen, May 14, 1863 during Civil War - Hiram Tindall. **Photograph:** Mull Farm, Old Trenton Road - Flora E. Mull via Mrs. Ramona Bertles and Mrs. Joan E. Lup. **Photograph:** Class of 1894 at Parsonage School - Fred Stives. **Photographs:** Class photos from Penns Neck and Dutch Neck schools - Maurice Hawk School via Mildred Moomaw. **Photographs:** Various photos in connection with the First Presbyterian Church - Norman Hulick. **Post Card:** Wyandotte Dairyman's Cleaner and Cleanser, stamped F.R. Adams, Dutch Neck (Mr. Adams was general store owner.) - Martin Winar.

Miscellaneous

Wooden bar from the Edinburg Hotel and **Air conditioning unit:** 5 ton - Leonard Anklowitz
Light Fixtures: from Sunday School/Chapel/ Library at Dutch Neck - Joan and Tracy Eddinger 

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