

BROADSIDE

Spring 2002

THE SCHENCK FARMSTEAD

In 1991, Max Zaitz donated to the Historical Society of West Windsor the 1790-1830 farmhouse on Southfield Road on two acres. The barn was donated later to West Windsor Township when the 115 acres were given as part of the purchase between Max Zaitz and Garden State Land. Now this entire 117 acres includes the farmhouse, three car garage, wagon house and barn that is being restored. Although the Township holds the deed, the farmhouse and garage are leased to the Historical Society of West Windsor for use as its headquarters. The Society has been in charge of the restoration of the farmhouse and garage.

In 1991 the farmhouse looked like what real estate agents call "a handyman's special." The framework of the house was sound, but it needed everything

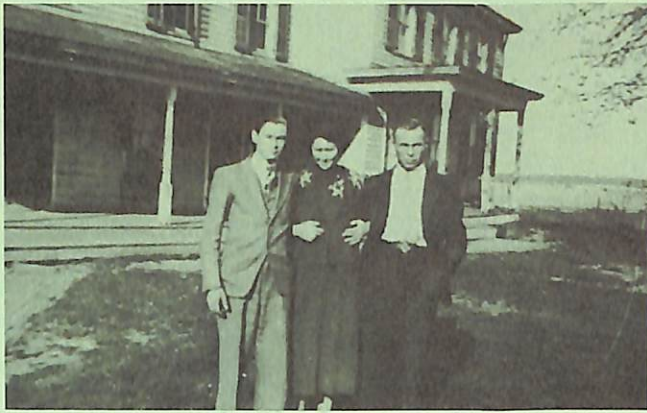
else repaired or replaced. It has taken a great deal of effort and work, but eleven years later the house is ready to be open to the public.

An Opening Celebration is scheduled for Saturday, May 18th between 1 and 4 p.m. Self-guided tours of the house will be the focal point of the celebration. Demonstrations of colonial crafts will take place, as well as explanations of the farm equipment on display on the grounds. Refreshments will be served. There is no charge for the event, although donations will be most welcome

Some background on the house

We are not absolutely certain who built the house, nor the exact date of its construction. The 1849 map of West Windsor shows the name S. Fisher located in the area. In 1899 John and Anna Schenck bought





*Warren Schenck with his parents, Mabel and Walter Schenck c1938.
Photo courtesy of Mary Schenck*

the 104 acre farm, its farmhouse, barns and out-buildings. They had rented and worked the farm since 1888, but had not purchased it until 1899. In 1922, John and Anna's son, Walter, and his wife Mabel purchased the farm. The Walter Schencks had two sons, Wilton and Warren. Walter Schenck died in 1959. In 1963, Wilton purchased the farm from his mother and subsequently sold the farm in 1971 to Max Zaitz, who rented it to various tenants.

The house was built in three sections: the earlier wing was originally one story with loft and only raised to two stories in the early 20th century after the second section was added, probably in the 1830s-40s. The original house was only one room, the kitchen, with a loft above. The second room, dining room today on the first floor, with one large and two small bedrooms above, were probably added in the early 19th century. The double parlor and above it two bedrooms and two small rooms, together with basement, were added around 1840s. There are fireplaces in the kitchen, dining room and twin fireplaces in the double parlor as well as in one upstairs bedroom. The kitchen and dining room fireplaces are working fireplaces.

The Schenck Farm consisted of 104 acres. Crops grown on the farm included hay, wheat, rye, potatoes, tomatoes, corn and beans. There was a large kitchen garden behind the house. Cattle, pigs, chickens, and cows were raised.

From 1947 to 1951, Walter Schenck's younger son, Warren, married to Mary Pierson, lived in the three room apartment on the second floor of the house while their own house in Dutch Neck was being built. Mary and Warren have been able to give us a

great deal of information about the house as it was during the time Warren's family owned the farm.

The Restoration

The house was in need of major repair and replacement when we began. The first thing we needed was a Construction Supervisor to see that the work was done in the proper order, that bids were sent out, the proper craftspeople chosen and their work supervised. We were very fortunate that Malcolm Roszel, former mayor of West Windsor and retired vice president of Lewis Bowers Construction Company, was willing to take on the job.

At our first meeting with Malcolm in June 1991, he gave as priorities: 1. Chimneys and flues replaced and restored; 2. Electricity brought up to code; 3. Porch redone and painted and 4. Removal of bees from under the bedroom floor. Clifford Reed and Warren Schenck worked with Malcolm on these projects. Clifford and Stanley Reed repaired and restored the chimneys and the foundations of the house. Warren did painting on the porch. Bill Neff volunteered to remove bees from under floor boards.

The roof was next. We chose imitation slate rather than real slate, but it was a false economy since the imitation slate shingles came loose. The company chosen went bankrupt, leaving the roof in need of replacing. The Township replaced the roof in 2000.

By 1993, the electrical service replacement was completed. The asbestos shingle siding was removed. The new beaded clapboards arrived. Warren, Mary and Donald Schenck gave them a prime coat.

Three projects were planned for 1994: Repainting the front of house, window trim and soffits replaced and painted and roof on kitchen and front porches replaced. In 1995 siding on west side of house was completed; east side partially done; rear side of house being worked on. Warren continued to do a prime coat of paint on all the clapboard. A picket fence was installed around the house and yard by the Township. Brick walks were redone. Sewer and water pipes were run to the house foundation.

Next step was to begin heating/air conditioning the house. Two systems were installed. One in the attic for the second floor; the other in the basement.

Malcolm began work to cut down old shutters to fit the windows of the house, which were not uniform in size. Some shutters were donated by Tom Carson and Betty Zaitz. Painting of the shutters was done by Kathy Kapp, Malcolm Roszel, Warren and Mary Schenck. The double parlor was plastered and painted in time for the 1997 Bicentennial Celebration for West Windsor Township. Outdoor lights operated by photo-electricity were installed, as well as a security system. The rear porch was repaired. Water line was hooked up to the house. Double parlor and hall floors were sanded and refinished.

The downstairs lavatory was turned into a modern working kitchen. Charles Stines of KitchenQuest, provided kitchen cabinets at cost and also made the necessary drawings and recommendations. Clifford Reed installed the cabinets, counter tops and appliances. The Historical Society purchased the appliances for the kitchen.

In 1998, the furniture donated to us by American Cyanamid from the Estate of Amelia Doherty had to be removed from storage. This meant some fast work in the bedrooms into which some of the furniture was to go. The parlor was ready by then and its furniture could be moved right in. A group of volunteer members spent several days helping Clifford scraping woodwork and painting.

In May 1998, Malcolm Roszel told us he could not continue in his job as Construction Supervisor. Clifford Reed agreed to take over the job and continued his work painting and plastering the other rooms in the house as well.

By March 2001, Clifford reported that the little, working kitchen was now complete. Work now began on the 1790 kitchen. The bead board ceiling was removed and the original beams exposed. All but one of the beams was painted. One beam was left untouched to show where the original kitchen wall ended. The beam shows its origin as a wall joist with hand-hewn and mortised markings for the horizontal beams.

The linoleum and plywood sub-floor were removed exposing the original floor joists. There was no basement under this portion of the house, only a dirt crawl space. Concrete was poured under the joists to keep out groundhogs and other animals.

Interestingly, the original log joists were simply logs with just enough bark planed off to make them flat enough to install the original floor boards. Clifford was able to obtain enough recycled wide boards to replace the plywood. The recycled boards had different types of tongue and groove styles which made the job difficult. However, Clifford prevailed and the "new" floor was then refinished.

The kitchen fireplace had been made workable during the earliest portion of the restoration and a new crane (the iron "arm" that held cooking pots in place) replaced to fit the supportive "eyes" which were still in place.

Outside the house the Township provided bushes and perennials. Bulbs were planted by Boy Scout Pack 66, and the fence lined with daffodils by Mary and Warren Schenck and Roberta Smith. The 4-H Four Leaf Clover Club, directed by Lois T. Stuller and Claudia Sutton, planted a flower garden at the side of the house. In 2002, a vegetable garden will be planted behind the garage. Home Depot Manager Franc Gambatese will donate picket fencing for both the flower and vegetable gardens.

The farm bell located to the left of the farmhouse was donated by the Zaitz Family and a name plate fastened on a stone foundation designates Max Zaitz as the donor of the Schenck Farmstead.

A flag pole, flood lit at night, has been installed in the field between the barn and Parsonage schoolhouse to fly the American flag. Also floodlit at night is a sign, mounted between fieldstone pillars, located at the entrance. The sign, donated by the Zaitz Family, reads, "Schenck Farmstead, Southfield Road



Clifford Reed and Mary Schenck working on the house.

at Zaitz Park of West Windsor Historical Society.” Restoration of the Schenck Farmhouse took over ten years. We are very proud of its appearance and even prouder of those whose labor went into it.

The Future- With the Schenck House completed, the rest of the farmstead beckons. In January 2002, the West Windsor Township Council approved budget money for work on the Dutch/English barn.

The Parsonage Schoolhouse -In September 1994, the one-room schoolhouse, once located next to the Maurice Hawk School on Clarksville Road, was

moved onto the farmstead. When the building is restored back to the late 1800s, visitors will have the feeling of what it was like to attend school then.

What Else? Thinking ahead, we may consider adding farm items, or small farm buildings, such as a corn crib, chicken house, outhouse, etc. The three-bay garage is used presently as storage. Its new concrete floor was donated by Mershon Concrete. We might consider turning one bay into a general store or perhaps a place for on-going craft demonstrations. The future is open.



The Dutch Neck one-room schoolhouse now a home on Village Road West

The Historical Society of West Windsor

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