



Jacob Wisner House
Chester County
Zone 18 E450990 N4435800

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

The Jacob Wisner House
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

R.D. 1, Yellow Springs Road

CITY, TOWN

Malvern

STATE

Pennsylvania

VICINITY OF

CODE

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

5th

COUNTY

Chester

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. & Mrs. E. Baker Pyle

STREET & NUMBER

R.D. 1, Yellow Springs Road

CITY, TOWN

Malvern

VICINITY OF

STATE

Pennsylvania 19355

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Chester County Court House

STREET & NUMBER

High Street

CITY, TOWN

West Chester

STATE

Pennsylvania 19380

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Pickering Creek Valley: A Preservation Opportunity. Prepared for the
French & Pickering Creek Conservation Trust by Hartzog, Lader & Richards.

DATE

June 1976

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, Inc.

CITY, TOWN

R.D. 2, Box 360, Pottstown,

STATE

Pennsylvania 19464

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Although it has suffered extensive vandalism and a fire which destroyed a portion of the roof, the Jacob Wisner house remains structurally sound. Most important, it has retained, unaffected, the integrity of its architectural character.

Although the Jacob Wisner house was built in two different sections of quite different dates, it presents a unified appearance. It was constructed throughout of a reddish-tan quartzite.

To the north end is the original dwelling, said to be standing in 1761. A date, located just below the north gable, was plastered over sometime prior to 1936. The addition, to the south end, is of much later construction, possibly of the 1840's.

The earlier structure was built as a two-story-and-attic dwelling, with three bays across the front and two in back, only one room deep, with a massive internal chimney at each end. The smaller number of windows in back are due, no doubt, to the northeast orientation. The windows which remain are double-hung, and converted to two-over-two. The roof is a gable.

In this older part of the house there are two rooms on the ground floor, three on the second, and a well-lit attic. The entrance is over a porch and directly into the room to the south. Here there is found the huge "walk-in" fireplace and mantel characteristic of early farmhouses in the locality. Alongside are twisting staircases to floors above and to the cellar. The only access to the ground floor room at the north end is through this room. In the room to the north is found a smaller, parlour-type, fireplace with a simply beaded mantel and with a fitted cupboard along the wall.

The joists in this original part of the house are exposed throughout and carefully beaded. There are many other evidences of unusual care and craftsmanship throughout the house. Surprisingly these details are found, also, in the attic. Ground floor window-sills have shallow drawers. Some of the original hardware remains on doors.

With the later addition the house was extended to five bays across the front and three in back. This part of the house is without porch. There is no chimney in the addition; a public sale advertisement of 1897 mentions "workshop stove." Plaster and lathe were used in second-floor ceilings. In general, the addition is of rougher construction than the older house.

There is no connection at ground floor-level between the two parts of the house. A separate twisting stair in the addition gave access to two small upper floor rooms. Here, on the second floor, both sides of the house were connected through a former exterior window converted to a passageway. The new addition has a small loft, reached from the older house.

Continued

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Initially a saddle and harness-maker's shop, the addition was adapted in 1897 for use as the Sidley Post Office. Wood work and fittings of that period are in the collection of the Chester County Historical Society.

A small stone barn once stood to the south of the house. It was torn down in the late nineteenth century after the Rapps acquired the Carter property on which, at that time, stood a larger, more convenient barn. The Carter property lies adjacent, along Hollow Road. The Carter house and barn are, also, now gone, and all that remains at the site is a small frame well-shed where the Rapps cooled their milk.

For twenty years, since the death of Ben Rapp in 1957, the house has stood vacant. Now, shrouded in vines, partly roofless, it appears beyond repair. Closer inspection, however, reveals the solid construction, the fine materials and the carefully crafted work which has stood up to time and weather.

The Jacob Wisner house stands today, at the head of the still-rural valley, a monument to the industry and skill of its bygone builders.

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In 1703 and subsequent years, John Budd, a Philadelphia brewer, obtained patents to the land in the western portion of Charlestown Township. The land on which the Jacob Wisner house now stands was originally part of John Budd's tract. Budd sold off his property in smaller lots. The purchasers of these lots included many second and third generation Welsh settlers who were spreading out from the Welsh Tract which lay on the southern border of the township.

Among these Welsh families were various Thomases. By 1757 a tract of 101 1/2 acres, of which the present Rapp property forms part, was under cultivation by a William Thomas, yeoman. As seen through their wills and transfers, the Thomas families were practical, thrifty and protective of dependents. In 1771, Mary Thomas, widow provides for her granddaughter, by will, her best "chince dress" and orders for the care of one of the five slaves on her long and prosperous-sounding inventory:

"...my Negro Wench, Hagon...if said wench should become pregnant, that then my son, Benjamin Thomas, shall receive her to leg in and nurse for one year with suitable nescsaries, then return her to my daughter..."

Her grandson, William, dying before his time, provides in 1792 for his young son as follows:

"I do order that my son, William, when he arrives to the age of 16 be put to such trade as he will make choice of...I do order that he... be taught ... to read and write a legible hand and cypher all vulgar arithmetic through the rules of three and inverse..."

In 1792 the 101 1/2 acre farm was purchased by Nathan McVaugh, yeoman, and in 1834 McVaugh's heirs sold off six acres to a cabinet maker and farmer, Jacob Wisner (also Wisener).

At the time of the Revolution, Wisner, then sixteen years of age, enlisted in the army as a fifer. He served in the Fourth Regiment of the Pennsylvania Line and survived the battles of Brandywine and Germantown and the Winter at Valley Forge. He is most noted for having escaped from the Paoli massacre under the cover of darkness.

Eliza, the daughter of Jacob Wisner and his wife, Sarah Olwine, married Benjamin Rapp who lived in a house nearby. The two families then lived

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together. At Wisner's death the house passed to his son-in-law.

Benjamin Rapp, 1808-1896, was a saddle and harness-maker with a flourishing business - 250 customers in 1835. His well-kept account books portray the range of his trade. Among his manufactures are listed

"...best saddles...second-best saddles...sidesaddles...
spring straps...sulky lines...ploughlines...straps for kicking
mares...calf muzzles...riding whips...sleigh lines...tops for
dearbournes..."

In 1848 Benjamin Rapp moved his business to his home; perhaps the workshop addition dates from that time.

Benjamin's son, William, 1844-1930, married Hannah Snyder, the daughter of a prosperous neighboring farmer. Through Hannah, 23 acres were added to the farm. This property had originally formed a part of the 101 1/2 acres owned by the Thomases and by McVaugh, as had the six acres William Rapp inherited from his father.

William Rapp was described in his day as a hard-working and successful farmer. He was known also as an "intelligent, enterprising, progressive and popular citizen." He held various offices in township government - supervisor, auditor, school director. William was active in church affairs and took part in the social and cultural life of the day. He was secretary of the Charlestown Lyceum and Library which flourished ca. 1871 and whose members held debates on such subjects as

"...Resolved: The works of Nature are more pleasing to
the eye than the works of Art."

"...Resolved: That Fire is a greater destroyer of human
life than Water."

From 1897 to 1903 William Rapp was Postmaster of the Sidley Hill Post Office, which was located in the workshop-store end of the Jacob Wisner House. With the advent of Rural Delivery this Post Office was closed.

Married late in life, William and Hannah, had but one child, Benjamin, who inherited all their estate. Benjamin Rapp (1878-1956) continued his father's farming operations, maintaining several acres of strawberries and of asparagus. He grew oxheart cherries and other produce and kept a few cows.

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In his youth Benjamin worked for a graphite mining company at Chester Springs nearby. His interest in mechanics and engineering was lifelong. He completed many correspondence school courses in engineering. Older residents of the township recall him as a "genius" at repairing farm machinery. He did welding and blacksmithing work and during World War I erected a shop on his property where he devised hard-to-get parts.

Like his father before him Benjamin Rapp held many posts in township government. He was active in church associations and lodges. "Ben", as the older residents of the township recall him lived a life of cooperation with the interrelated farm families of the vicinity. H never married. In his later years he was much aided by his lifelong friends the E. Baker Pyles, whose larger farm lay just to the north. At his death he left his property, including his house, "to my good friend, E. Baker Pyle..." and today the two farms are together.

No one, today, remembers the date high on the north wall of the Jacob Wisner house. "Ben" Rapp plastered it over years ago in an effort to discourage antiquarians and would-be buyers. Today there are greater forces felt as intrusive in this rural valley. The E. Baker Pyles, owners of one of the last two working farms in the township, ponder the pressures of encroaching development as they look over their well-kept acres to the Jacob Wisner House.

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Primary

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Breou's Original Series of Farm Maps: Chester County, Pennsylvania Philadelphia, W. H. Kirk, 1883.

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Deed Books L-p.341; H v.30 p.22; M-15 p.484; C-10 p. 197;
Q-3 p.50; I-4 p. 227; F-21 p. 257; T-2#2 p.660;
z-8 p.157; Y-5 p.513; B-5 p. 177

Will Books 72 p.21; E-5 p.275; H p.52; 9 p.69; 9 p.292;
10 p.57; 19 p.159

Estate Papers; Administrators records; Proceedings of the Orphans' Court.

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Deeds Books F-p.401; F-p.405

Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Miscellaneous Papers; Tax Records; Records of the Rapp Family; Account Books of Benjamin Rapp.

Charlestown Lyceum and Library, Minutes Book, 1870-1881. unpublished.

Interviews with Mr. and Mrs. E. Baker Pyle, Mr. Harold Pyle.

Secondary

Cope Gilbert and Henry G. Ashmead. Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical and Personal Memoirs of Chester and Delaware Counties, Pennsylvania. Chicago, Lewis, 1904. 2v.

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Linn, John Blair and William H. Engle. Pennsylvania in the War of the Revolution: Battalians and Line, 1775-1783. HARRISBURG, 1880.

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unpublished.

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Beginning at an iron pin near the intersection of the westerly side of Legislative Route 15009 with the southerly side of Yellow Springs Road, a corner of lands of John D. Miller; thence along lands of Miller and the first mentioned road, North 45 degrees 30 min. East, 298.65 feet to an iron pin; thence crossing to near the center line of the road, South 44 degrees 30 min. East, 16.50 feet to a spike; thence North 28 degrees 45 min. East, 80.19 feet to a spike; thence South 47 degrees 55 min. East, 184.38 feet to a limestone; thence North 44 degrees 33 min. East, 345.47 feet to an iron pin in line of lands now or late of one Engle; thence along the same, recrossing the road and along lands of Harry Peck, North 37 degrees 5 min. West, 564.96 feet to an iron pipe; thence still along lands of Peck, North 54 degrees 55 min. East, 446.59 feet to a limestone, a corner of lands now or late of Edith A. Cantrell; thence along the same, the two following courses and distances, North 45 degrees 36 min. West, 565.76 feet to an iron pin, and North 45 degrees 00 min. West, 33.00 feet to an iron pin, a corner of lands of E. Baker Pyle; thence along the same, South 45 degrees 30 min. West, 1234.20 feet to a spike in Yellow Springs Road; thence along the same, South 44 degrees 30 min. East, 914.10 feet to the place of beginning.

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Jacob Wisner house, untouched, and in an original state, stands at the head of a valley in a setting of unspoiled natural beauty.

A mile to the south lies the Great Valley, now suffering intensive industrialization. North of the Great Valley begins the series of ridges, plateaus and valleys which characterize Charlestown Township. Screened from intrusion by a wooded ridge, the Jacob Wisner house is situated on a plateau which slopes off in a long view to the still rural north. Of the land's character the present owner has said, "You could plow all day and never turn up a stone."

The Jacob Wisner house surpasses other structures in the locality in craftsmanship and in painstaking detail of construction. Although, for some years now it has stood partly roofless, following vandalism and a fire, it has ridden out the weather with remarkably little damage.

The Jacob Wisner house is of further interest for its location on historic roads and for the continuity of ownership and use. It is significant, too, as an 18th-19th century structure, which stands, thirty miles from a major metropolis and has never been modernized or restored.

Above all, the Jacob Wisner house is important for the character of the sturdy, intelligent, industrious family who have made it their home - the eighteenth-century Thomas families, Nathan McVaugh, Jacob Wisner, (1761-1846), the first Benjamin Rapp (1808-1896), William Rapp (1844-1930), and the later Benjamin Rapp, (1878-1956).

The Jacob Wisner house is situated at the southeast intersection of two old roads of major interest, the old Post Road to West Chester and the Yellow Springs Road. The Yellow Springs Road, on which the house fronts, begins at the dam at Valley Forge and runs northwards through Charlestown Township to the mineral springs and former site of the Revolutionary War hospital at Chester Springs. The Post Road, now vacated, ran through the township from east to west, connecting Upper Egypt Road (Charlestown Road) with the King's Road or Lancaster Highway and connecting, too, with the later-constructed (1809) Connestoga Pike.

Continued

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 23.728 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	_____	_____	_____	B	_____	_____	_____
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____	_____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Priscilla B. Crowell and J. Kelly Murphy, III

ORGANIZATION

French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

R.D. 2, Box 360

CITY OR TOWN

Pottstown

DATE

TELEPHONE

(215) 469-6287

STATE

Pennsylvania 19464

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

