

## *Cultural and Historic Resources*

From the earliest human inhabitants, the cultural history of the Upper Perkiomen Creek watershed has been characterized by a unique legacy of human interaction with natural features. This legacy extends from the Lenni Lenape people who inhabited the native woodlands for thousands of years, to European settlers who established farms and villages in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, to today's 21st century mix of towns and suburban and rural communities. While the Lenape were the longest inhabitants of the area to date, the most tangible influence on the local landscape resulted from the steady stream of German immigrants and their descendants who settled the Valley starting in the early 1700's. It was these settlers who named the Valley "Goschenhoppen", with "New Goschenhoppen" pertaining to areas north of Green Lane, and "Old Goschenhoppen" referring to areas from Green Lane to Schwenksville.

*To this day the legacy of Goschenhoppen can be experienced as an intact folk region -- in the character of the farmland, the architecture of the buildings and layout of villages, and the family names and social institutions that define the area. The Valley is dotted with local place names such as Shimerville, Seisholtzville and Kleinville that reveal the roots of the area as a Pennsylvania German farming community. Schwenkfelder and Lutheran churches have long been religious and social centers of the community.*

Early farmsteads, churches, mills and villages provide an important visible record of the heritage of the Upper Perkiomen Valley. The scenic landscape of gently rolling farmland, hedgerows, historic trees, woodlots and wooded ridges also stand as testimony to this 18<sup>th</sup> century Pennsylvania German heritage. *To the extent that these features can be catalogued and understood as the defining features that set the Upper Perkiomen Valley apart from other areas, they can be retained through conservation, preservation, and innovative municipal land use planning even as growth continues.*

### **Lenni Lenape/Late Woodland Period (to 1680)**

The Unami clan of the Lenni Lenape means "the original people, those who live along streams." The Lenape were the oldest of the Algonquian tribes of the northeast. Their totem was the turtle. The Lenape were truly a woodland people who lived as part of the native hardwood forest by deriving most of their foods, medicines, and materials from the diversity of plants and animals.

With early Dutch and Swedish settlers settling in the region by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century, the Lenape became caught up in the fur trade. The Schuylkill Valley and tributaries such as the Perkiomen became known as major sources for commodities such as fur, tobacco and shad.

Though the Lenape did not view land as a commodity, by 1684, the Perkiomen Valley had been purchased in a deal between William Penn and Chief Maughousin. Chief Tamenund was Chief of the Unami, and of all the Lenape at the time of European settlement. Tamenund lived in the adjacent Neshaminy Creek valley, and it was he who negotiated the famous treaty with William Penn under the treaty elm. The Perkiomen Valley was included in a 1685 sale to William Penn, which included an amount of land that was measured “as far as a man can ride for two days”. The purchase price included guns, knives, beads, tobacco boxes, bells and other trinkets.

### **Early European Settlement Period (1680 – 1800)**

The majority of the land in the Upper Perkiomen Valley was conveyed to European settlers in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century (1730-1770) by patent by the heirs of William Penn or later by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The average size of parcels in the Upper Perkiomen Creek watershed were surveyed in the range of 100 to 150 acres, though some were smaller (30 to 50 acres). The earliest settlers belonged mostly to Lutheran Church or Reformed Church, with Schwenkfelders establishing the New Goschenhoppen Reformed Church in 1727.

Catholic settlers had established a Roman Catholic Chapel in Bally by 1741, which was known at the time as Churchville. Mennonite settlers established a meeting houses in Hereford and Upper Milford.

The early history of the Valley is defined by the combination of natural features and the social and economic forces of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Settlers cleared timber from the broad, forested valleys along present day Route 100 (“the Road to Boyertown”) and Route 29 (Gravel Pike) to establish farms on the productive soils that define the area. The steeper topography of headwaters valleys along the Unami, Hosensack, and West Branch Perkiomen Creeks provided suitable volume and velocity of streamflow to power literally dozens of mills, including sawmills, gristmills, (linseed) oil mills, and powder mills which provided gunpowder to the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. The ingredients for making gunpowder, including saltpeter, sulfur and charcoal, were readily available in the wooded areas of the Valley.

Early powder mills were established on the Unami Creek by 1740 and along Indian Creek in the Hosensack shortly thereafter. Indian Creek was one of the earliest mill locations in the Valley, starting with its first mill in 1737 and expanding soon to include over 10 mills that include grist, fulling, oil, saw, and powder operations. The earliest millstones in the Valley were actually brought over from Germany by the settlers, who preferred those from Andernach on the Rhine River. During the Revolutionary War, French burr stones were brought over from the Marne River. Do any of these imported Colonial-era millstones survive in the Valley today?

The Indian Creek supported so many gunpowder mills it became known locally as “Powder Valley”. The Hosensack Creek also supported at least 10 mills in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, dating to 1740. The Dubbs Mills and Schantz Mills were two of the largest operations, with Dubbs expanding to include an iron forge and a tannery that ground tree bark and treated hides. Schantz was the first in the area to develop a vertical pit saw mill before 1765. Downstream millers complained that the larger upstream mills monopolized the water power and left them with “tired water”. It is said that Funks Grist Mill on the Hosensack ground flour that was used by the Continental Army at Valley Forge.

The importance of mills to the early social and economic fabric of the Valley cannot be overlooked. “People from miles around came to have their grain ground into flour or their logs sawed into beams, joists or boards. Teams were lined along the roads leading to (the mill) and patrons had to wait in order to be accommodated. It was almost a community center, for here people would meet and exchange bits of news and ideas while waiting to be served.” (Kline, 1934)

The natural resources of the Perkiomen Valley attracted business-minded settlers who developed the area as an Early American center for iron production. Iron forges and furnaces dotted the ridges and narrow valleys that define the headwaters areas of the Upper Perkiomen. The reason: a combination of water power to operate the blast furnaces, a ready source of iron ore, limestone, and charcoal (local oak, hickory and ash) in sufficient quantities and close proximity to overcome the poor road systems, and close proximity to the Schuylkill River where barges could transport iron to markets in and around Philadelphia. Forges produced utilitarian implements such as household tools, farm tools, hinges, and some munitions for the Revolutionary War. The iron furnaces required vast tracts of forest (several thousands of acres per year per furnace) to generate enough charcoal to provide fuel to smelt the ore into pig iron. The necessary “iron plantations” were established on many wooded slopes in the headwaters areas.

“The Perkiomen is the first stream of any size on the East Bank of the Schuylkill after the traveler leaves Philadelphia. The headwaters emerge from steeply rising hills of Hereford and Washington Townships, Berks County. It is here along the picturesque West Branch that most of the old iron works on the Perkiomen were located.” (Gemmell, 1949)

Early maps and records of the watershed document that iron furnaces and forges were operated at Green Lane Ironworks (c. 1733), Mount Pleasant Forges near Barto, Dale Ironworks and Hereford Furnace in Hereford (formerly Treichlersville), Colebrookdale Iron Works near Boyertown, Forgedale Iron Furnace and Forge, Hampton Ironworks on Furnace Hill, and forges at Salford, Wellers, and Dub’s Forge along the Hosensack Creek.

### **19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a period of great industrial growth in the nation and the Upper Perkiomen Valley. The villages in the eastern portion of the Valley were conveniently located at the intersection of three main roads or “turnpikes”, with the “Sumneytown and Springhouse Pike” (Route 63), “Green Lane and Goschenhoppen Turnpike” extending to Berks County, and Perkiomen Turnpike (Route 29) linking the area to Colledgeville. The Perkiomen Railroad reached Green Lane in 1872 and helped to spur the growth of the major villages of East Greenville, Pennsburg, Red Hill, and Green Lane that define the Route 29 corridor. These villages became manufacturing centers and commercial hubs, with general stores, hotels, rail road stations, school houses, blacksmith shops, carriage works, and breweries.

This was also a period in which the growing number of settlers coming into the area were forced to settle more remote and rugged sections of the Valley, and smaller farms were established in the steeper wooded headwaters valleys in the watershed. “In the middle of the nineteenth century, there seemed to be a marked influx of people from Philadelphia. Among these were people of English, French, Irish, German and other nationalities. They were probably attracted here by tales of wealth from farming and other achievements, told them by land speculators. Many did not remain here long, soon returning to the city from whence they came.” (Kline, 1934).

The success of mills in these areas spawned a generation of mill families that established small farms. Powder mills were a strong presence in the Unami Creek valley, and even the E.I. duPont deNemours Company operating a mill in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Over the years, the volatility of the gunpowder caused explosions in many of the mills. In 1829, the Kemperer gunpowder mills along Indian Creek were struck by lightning and exploded, killing a number of workers. By the late 1800’s, as the children of the mill families left home to find work, the mill industry declined and the forest returned. Second and third growth forests were maturing by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and spurred the growth of saw mills, which were eventually replaced by portable gasoline saw mills.

Today, the remnants of these mills and small farms can found throughout the headwaters areas of the Valley. Stone walls, stone foundations and ornamental plantings in the second or third growth woodlands along places like Ridge Valley Creek provide clues of past history. The stone walls indicate that sheep farms may have been established at the time. The presence of remnant mill dams and ponds, mill races, mill foundations and standing mill structures can be seen throughout the upper reaches of the watershed.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century**

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the towns of the Upper Perkiomen Valley was in the midst of an industrial boom and its farms were part of an expanded dairy industry throughout the region providing milk products to urban areas. The towns along Route 29 became manufacturing centers, providing factories and a stable, skilled work force to produce a wide variety of goods. There were clothing and hosiery plants, broom factories, cigar factories, breweries, furniture manufacturers, printers, metal stampings and wire factories, greenhouses. This manufacturing hub attracted many settlers to towns in the area. For example, in the 1920's the local hosiery companies hired many East German immigrants as knitters. The majority of these industrial facilities utilized the water resources of the Valley in some way, either as part of the manufacturing process or as a means of disposing the wastewater they generated. Many of these red brick factories are still in use today. The growth of residential neighborhoods and commercial shopping districts in the towns was closely linked to the jobs provided by local businesses.

The dairy industry growth meant that farms throughout the Valley, particularly the "Butter Valley" along Route 100, were heavily focused on providing pasture and fodder crops for dairy cattle. Creameries in the area processed and bottled and milk products for distribution (via road and rail) to urban markets. The early aerial photographs (dating to the 1930's) reveal that the economics of this period placed great pressure on the landscape – with few woodlots and hedgerows in areas heavily devoted to grazing and cultivation, and sizeable woodlands limited to the steepest areas of the hills. This pattern is still evident today, although there has been much regrowth of woodland vegetation in the Valley over the last 70 years as dairy production and distribution shifted throughout the region.

In the Unami Creek area, some of the same land that was used for powder mills was converted to use as summer camps where those weary of the city could retreat to the fresh air of the woods within a day's drive. Other forested headwaters areas were discovered as summer home communities where urban residents build summer cabins and bungalows to enjoy the woods and streams.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, city-based organizations began to buy land in the area to establish summer camps for inner-city children. In 1910, the Christian Association of the University of Pennsylvania's camp on the Unami Creek where "children and mothers with their babies could come for a week or two to enjoy and be refreshed by the warm sunshine, the cool and invigorating nights, listen to the ripple of the Swamp Creek, hear the rumbling of thunder and see the flashes of lightning, listen to the gentle patter of the rain and be inspired by the songs of the birds and at night sleep in God's great tent studded with the millions of stars and the moon flooding everything with mellow light." (Kline, 1934)

By 1916 the Delaware and Montgomery Counties Council of the Boy Scouts acquired the land along the Unami for Camp Delmont. Philadelphia County established Camp Hart in 1930, and the area was used by the Philadelphia Troops of the Boy Scouts “..for here in this tract are found some of the rarest orchids and ferns, trees in endless variety, immense rocks, wild animal life of all sorts...”. Both camps are today part of the Musser Scout Reservation. Further downstream, Camp Unami was established by the Baptist Conference in the 1930’s. (Kline, 1934)

Unlike other communities in the Philadelphia region, the Post World War II period in the Upper Perkiomen Valley did not generate a large-scale shift toward suburban development. While many smaller custom homes were built, these tended to be on individual rural lots and small subdivisions. In addition, the majority of commercial and industrial development during this period was still concentrated in or near the existing towns and villages rather than sprawling onto productive farmland or important woodlands.

### *Planning Implications*

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Upper Perkiomen Valley is still a place where the historic landscape of farms and villages and the cultural institutions and descendants of early settlers can all still be experienced in a very tangible way. The homogenizing effects of suburban sprawl have not yet taken their toll on this cultural/historic landscape and the communities it supports. It is still possible to see working family farms, a thriving creamery, preserved mills, historic inns, churches and downtown areas. The remnants of the extensive network of mills, forges, furnaces and railroads that defined the early industrial uses of the watershed can still be found. The historic towns along Route 29 are perhaps the most tangible legacy of this era. This intact pattern of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century villages and farms, and the people who inhabit them, is increasingly rare, and should be maintained. The importance of being able to experience and interpreting these qualities all in one place cannot be overestimated – it helps us to understand where we came from, and where we can be headed. Once it is gone, it cannot be reproduced.

The current combination of Zoning and Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances that govern land use in the municipalities of the Upper Perkiomen Valley are designed to generate an overall pattern of residential and commercial development that will erode the experience of this unique cultural/historic landscape. Without more flexible development approaches and standards that require careful consideration of historic resources and landscapes, conventional development patterns will prevail. Historic structures may gradually be cleared to accommodate more profitable land uses or to avoid the cost of maintenance and restoration. Historic landscapes will be lost to development plans that space buildings and roads evenly across the land. Historic downtown areas of villages will be subject to piecemeal alterations that take away from the overall character that keeps them vital places to live, work and shop.

The municipalities of the Upper Perkiomen Valley take a page from other historic landscapes in the region – places like the Oley Valley of Berks County and the Brandywine Valley of Chester County that have fought hard to guide development around the most treasured areas, through combinations of private incentives and public programs. The villages of the Valley can adapt historic downtown renewal strategies used in communities like Doylestown, Bucks County and West Chester, Chester County to keep businesses thriving and maintain liveable neighborhoods.

A variety of land use planning and conservation strategies are available to communities who wish to proactively work with landowners and developers to retain valuable historic resources. Agricultural Land Preservation programs can be used to purchase development rights on concentrated areas of historic, productive farmland. Transfer of Development Rights programs can be designed to preserve clusters of historic farmsteads as “sending areas” and to renew and expand historic villages as “receiving areas”. Innovative zoning strategies can be used to generate “conservation design” plans that shift the layout of residential and commercial development to retain historic resources and landscapes. Local Historic Districts can be created to further strengthen the protection of key resources, and initiatives can be launched to nominate historic structures and landscapes to the National Register of Historic Places as a means of protecting these features from the impact of Federally-funded projects such as highway construction.

The Montgomery County Planning Commission prepared an Inventory of Historic and Cultural Resources (1975) that listed the following resources in the Upper Perkiomen Valley as worthy of preservation.

Douglas Twp:

Schultz Mill (Niantic and Miller Rd.) along West Branch

Catholic Farmstead and Mill (house c. 1730, mill c. 1800) originally a Catholic settlement

East Greenville Borough:

Mill on Bank St. c. 1897

Green Lane:

Redmen’s Hall, rt. 29 c. 1880 (was a PA Dutch village hall)

Marlborough Twp.:

9 sites (Hoppenville Road, Gerryville Pike, Sumneytown Village, Upper Ridge Road, Nyce Mill c. 1850

Pennsburg:

Perkiomen School

Heilig House c. 1750

Upper Hanover Twp.:

7 sites, New Goschenhoppen Reformed Church (c. 1857), Perkiomen Heights Hotel,  
Hosensack Meeting House, Log House

Upper Salford Twp:

17 sites

Hereford, Berks Co.:

Cemetery and site of Washington Schwenkfelder Meeting at County Line and Kutztown  
Rd.

Dubbs Home, Niantic Road, Washington Twp. (c. 1740)