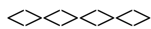


RESEARCH OF

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“SHARON”

AND THE INDIAN LEGEND CONNECTED THEREWITH

Miss Belle Van Sant, Newtown, Pennsylvania; read at the meeting at “Sharon” near Newtown, Pennsylvania, October 4, 1904. (*Published in “A Collection of Paper Read Before the Bucks County Historical Society,” Volume 2, pages 369ff; printed for the Society by B. F. Fackenthal, Jr., Riegelsville, Pa. Marx Room, Easton Public Library, Easton, Pa., H 974.821 B 926-c*)

In 1813, James Worth, a Philadelphia hardware merchant purchased the property which he subsequently named “Sharon” at public sale from the estate of Dr. James Tate, who had owned it since February 17, 1782, when it was conveyed to him as part of the estate of his father, Anthony Tate, who had purchased this particular tract in 1756.

It had for nearly half a century previous to this been the property of the Nelson family, and comprised originally 450 acres. It was divided in 1744 to his son, Thomas, and soon after, through various conveyances, practically the whole tract, as well as several other tracts, became the property of Anthony Tate, who owned at the time of his death nearly 600 acres of land in and around Newtown, which descended to his son, Dr. James Tate, and to his five daughters.

Dr. James Tate was an officer in the Continental army during the Revolutionary War, and was a physician of more than ordinary ability.

Tradition has it that when the farm was “knocked down” by the auctioneer, Mr. Worth took out of his pocket a goose-quill and out of it drew one bill sufficient to pay for the farm, \$20,000; but John Wildman, formerly of Langhorne, tells the story somewhat differently. He says that his father was one of three men asked to come to Newtown to see Mr. Worth count out the twenty-thousand dollars; instead of which he took from his pocket a goose-quill with which he signed a check for the whole amount, an unusual sight in those days.

Soon after the purchase, Mr. Worth moved from Philadelphia to his farm and lived there until his death in 1844. From that time his widow, Margaret Worth, was in possession of the property until her death, when it came into the hands of her daughter, Mrs. Willimetta C. Thornton.

On February 13, 1892, the trustees of the John M. George bequest purchased of Mrs. Thornton 227 acres of the “Sharon” property for \$38,000 for a site upon which to locate a school. The main building was erected on this site in 1893, and other buildings necessary for the growth of the institution have since been added.

Mrs. Thornton retained 60 acres including the mansion, barn and tenant house. After the sale was completed she presented to George School an avenue 100 feet wide leading from the road to the farm house - this is now known as Sharon avenue.

The mansion, a fine old colonial structure, was built by Dr. Tate in 1804, the glass for it being brought from England. The original building consisted of a large open hall with rooms on either side, the kitchen being in the basement under the back parlor where remains of an open fire-place may still be seen. The back buildings were added by Mr. Worth in 1814, since which time no material changes have been made. Dark closets extended under the eaves with doors leading into other closets, and concealed doors entered the loft that extends over the back part of the house, a favorite place for bats and flying-squirrels and uncanny sounds.

The barn and tenant house were also built by Mr. Worth. Dr. Tate had fine imported horses, but they were kept in sheds, and the grain was stored in the house.

The lawn as laid out and planted by Mr. Worth was quite different from what it is at present. The bank in front of the property was walled, with a spruce hedge on top. Two gateways, one on either side of the lawn, with square wooden posts surmounted by large urn-shaped knobs, were connected by a semi-circular drive leading to the front porch; and in a straight line from the front door to a small gate at the road was a foot path with box-bush on either side, the same that is now in front of the lawn. At that time the lawn was a perfect jungle of rare trees and shrubs, many of which were destroyed by a cyclone about forty years ago; and those familiar with the place mourn for the grand old magnolia grandiflora, and franklin, the fringe trees, laurels and Scotch broom.

In the early part of the past century Mr. Ridgley, a son-in-law of Mr. Worth, became much interested in silk-worm culture. Mulberry trees were planted and a culture-house was erected in the meadow between Newtown creek and the Neshaminy, on the Campbell Bridge road. The enterprise was fruitless, but many still remember the low shackling building long known as the "cocoonery."

For a period of 15 years, from 1870 to 1885, the mansion was unoccupied, and during that time it was the proverbial "haunted house" of the neighborhood, and not without reason too; for the story goes that at one time Dr. Tate dissected the body of a Hessian soldier, and buried his remains in the cellar, and that for years afterwards in the dead of night his restless spirit might be heard tramping up the stairs and along the halls; and it is a well-authenticated fact that if you walk on the spot where he is buried with a lighted candle the flame will immediately be extinguished.

About 1880 the woods and meadows along Newtown creek were leased to a party in Newtown, and for four years, "Sharon Park" flourished.

In 1891, the Thornton family returned a second time, repaired the house, and lived there until Mr. Thornton's death in 1901.

In the spring of 1902, Mrs. Thornton sold the property to Miss Elizabeth Roberts, afterwards Mrs J. Herman Barnsley, and Mr. and Mrs. Barnsley resided there for about nine months, when it was again sold to Mr. John J. Tierney, of West Virginia, by whom the Historical Society is being so beautifully entertained to-day.

It would hardly seem proper to give an account of Sharon and leave out the Indian legend which is so closely associated with the open space in the woods near the George School farmhouse, long known as the "Indian Field."

AN INDIAN LEGEND

Here dwelt in years long ago the Indian chieftain, Mahpeah, the Sky, with his beautiful daughter, Ottawanda, the Deer-footed, so named from her fleetness of foot as she bounded over mountain and dale, running streams or from rock to rock along the banks of the Neshaminy, on the borders of which her tribe pitched their wigwams.

The residence of the chief was mounted upon this open knoll, where the beautiful springs of clear water nearby and the woods surrounding his tepee (sic) afforded drink and shelter for his family. Here he hunted and fished, while the lovely Ottawanda cooked his venison and made moccasins with her own fair hands. Many braves had sought her favor and wished to take her to their own wigwams, farther up the banks of the stream, where most of the tribe dwelt; but Ottawanda was glad to remain with the old chief. The most ardent of her lovers were Ojewaba (The Fox), and Katinda (The White Cloud), and their canoes were often stranded upon the bank below the bluff where the beautiful Ottawanda lived.

One day the old chief called his daughter to him and said: "Ottawanda, thy father is growing old and will soon pass beyond the clouds to the eternal hunting-grounds. Who will hunt the deer for thee when I am gone? The Cloud and the Fox would both take care of thee - which wilt thou follow?"

Now, Ottawanda loved neither the White Cloud nor the Fox, but a white hunter from the north, who had smoked the pipe-of-peace with Mahpeah, and who came down the Neshaminy from above the Forks to see his daughter. "Father," said Ottawanda, "when the maize is gathered and the full moon rises, I will run like the deer to the Rock of the Sun, and he who overtakes and passes me, him will I follow to his wigwam." Many were the young braves who were ready to strive for the prize. The white hunter came down from the north, but none knew but Ottawanda how swift of foot was the young stranger.

The Rock of the Sun was a huge boulder that hung over the bank of the Neshaminy about two miles above the Indian field, and below it the water was deep and black. It jutted out from the bank and seemed to catch the first rays of the sun as he peeps above the opposite horizon, from which its name, "The Sun Rock" was given.

Ottawanda was to start from the mouth of the Newtown creek where it empties its waters into the Neshaminy, and she well knew who could outrun her Indian wooers. The first bend in the stream had scarcely been reached before the white hunter had passed his fleet-footed companions, but as Ottawanda turned to slacken her speed the white lover, followed by the Fox, fell to the earth pierced by an arrow from behind. There was no wavering from Ottawanda; on she sped, pursued by the Indian, who seemed to fly through the air, and almost to gain her as she reached the rock

Swiftly she glided upon it. Her light figure, like a zephyr swaying upon the ragged point in the moonlight, was sharply defined against the dark background. As she poised upon her nimble feet she looked to the south, where the Indian field with her father's wigwam lay, then waved her hand in farewell and leaped far out into the deep black pool below.

And now they say that when the moon is at its full, her spirit rises from the water and she paddles her canoe down the Neshaminy until she reached a point just opposite the Indian field, where she moors her phantom bark and wanders silently for an hour in the little enclosure encircled by trees.

Of late years a few straggling bushes have encroached upon the spot, but it has never taken kindly to cultivation. The former owners of Sharon introduced it to the plow and planting of barley and buckwheat, while the present authorities made every effort to enrich it with rare botanical specimens, but like its first proprietor, the Indian, it refuses to be civilized or to respond to the touch of the white man. But here in constant succession may be found the most beautiful wild flowers, from the modest little "quaker-lady" and the deepest blue violets of the early spring to the asters and golden-rods of the late autumn.

Now when the spirit of the fair Indian girl turns her phantom vision northward and beholds the electric lights of George School illuminating the woodlands of her tribe, it is not possible that she longs to enter its portals of learning and with a saddened gaze silently steals away to her home beneath the rocks at Schofield's ford.

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