

Pennsdale's 'House of Many Stairs' Inspired Legends of Highwaymen

PENNSDALE — Shade trees form an arch across the main street of this tiny historic village. At one end of the throughfare is the Friends Meeting House — Lycoming County's first house of worship — and at the other is the House of Many Stairs and the quaint Country Store.

In the days of the early settlement, the village was a haven for Quakers who moved here from Philadelphia, attracted by the rich soil and other natural advantages for farming.

Many eminent Friends visited here from time to time during the 18th century, including James Wilson, a Pennsylvania signer of the Declaration of Independence who also played an important role in the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Direct communication was carried on between the settlement and Philadelphia as the little band of Friends-in-the-wilderness were watched over zealously by the parent body in the City of Brotherly Love.

It was here that Lycoming County's first public library was established in the historic Carpenter-Mendenhall House with Susie M. Mendenhall as custodian and librarian.

The Friends arrived in this area before 1790, according to the journal of James Kitely, a Quaker schoolmaster from York who taught in a log structure on his 50-acre farm.

The settlement originally was called Pennsville, then Hicksville, later Penn's Dale, and finally Pennsdale.

It is characterized by old Quaker fieldstone houses that have been restored and remain today as hallmarks of the village heritage.

One of those is the House of Many Stairs, now the residents of Mr. and Mrs. Elwood F. Brant. It

was constructed first from hand-hewn logs sometime between 1784 and 1790. Later limestone and fossilstone were added.

By 1790 the structure was converted into a tavern known as "Bulls Head Tavern," and it became a stop for the stage coach line. According to village lore, it later was used as a hideout for highwaymen. Its jumble of seven stairways and exits provided ideal routes of escape.

Over the doorway is a keystone with the initials of John and Eva Stryker and the date 1807. The

Strykers converted the building to a private dwelling from that of a tavern. Later, it was changed to an inn once again, and then into a tearoom before being purchased in 1936 by the Brant family.

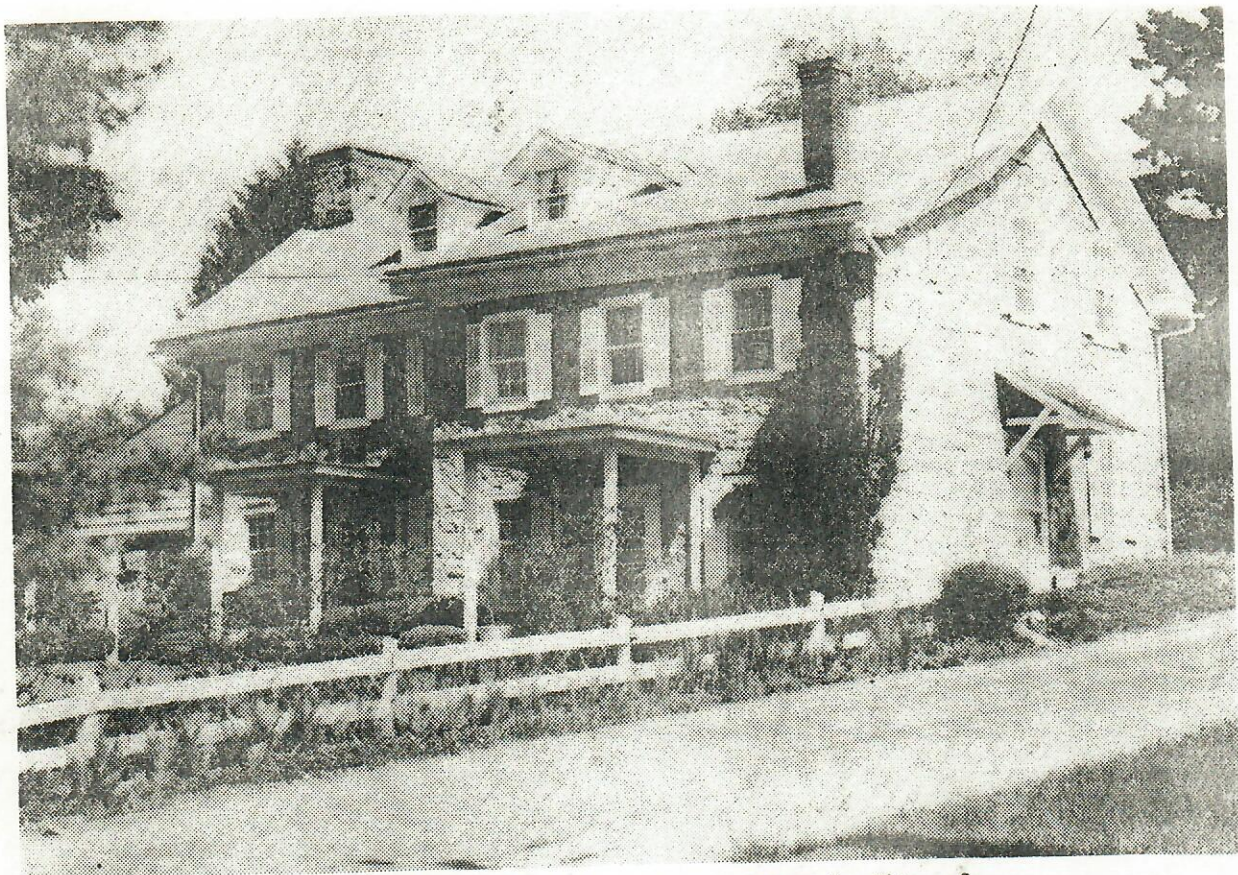
Architecturally, nothing has been changed by the present owners. The shutters are original, as is most of the window glass. Intricate designs in the nailheads on the inside of the doors were believed by the Quakers to ward off evil spirits.

About 1829, Job Packer started an industry in the village called the Elizabeth-Town Pottery. It stood

between the present-day Country Store and the House of Many Stairs.

Other old Quaker fieldstone houses which have been restored are "Edgend," sometimes mistakenly called Wishing Well House, which was built in 1799 and named for the Ecroyd family home in England; the Adlum House, built by Major John Adlum, the first associate judge of Lycoming County; and the Carpenter-Mendenhall House.

Adjacent to the 179-year-old Friends Meeting House, which was built in 1799, is a graveyard, parts of which date back to the 1760s.



'House of Many Stairs' . . . Escape Routes for Thieves?



POTTERY HOUSE
BUILT 1826
WEST OF MAIN HOUSE