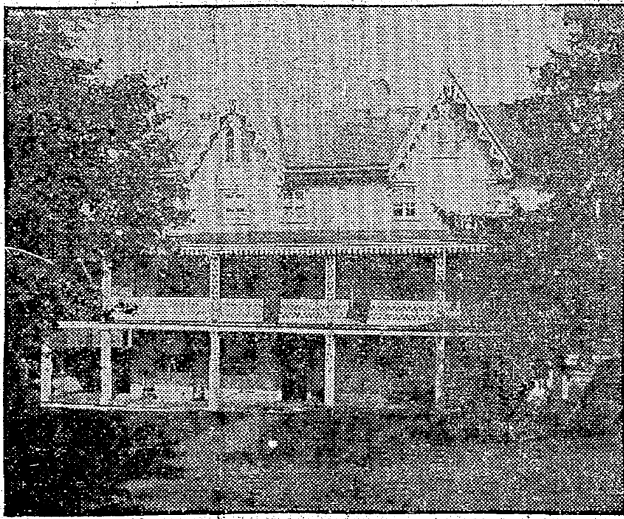


Recalls Colonial Days

"Nelsonthorpe" at Washington's Crossing and Its Interesting History

(Written for the Sunday Advertiser by MISS M. M. BROWER.)



THE NELSONTHORPE HOMESTEAD

"Nelsonthorpe" is a familiar and pleasing structure at Washington's Crossing. This prominent and attractive homestead (the name being a combination of the family surnames) is undoubtedly the site of the oldest building in the locality, but it needs familiarity with its construction to realize its antiquity. The heavy stone foundation of the original part testifies to an early Colonial period.

This was banked up on two sides by the grading for the feeder, in 1832, and is exposed only on the side facing the river, where it is on a level with the ground.

In this part are doors and windows closed up by the embankment, and a great open fireplace and cupboard in one of the rooms indicate its use as living quarters at one time.

A Dutch door opens out toward the river, and another opened toward the South, before which was a well with a well-sweep, where now a maple tree stands.

In Colonial times this foundation part, now used as a cellar, was the ferry house, and was occupied by those who ran the ferry.

At the time of the "Crossing" in 1776, William McConkey was the ferryman, and aided Washington's army in crossing the river, and also as one of the guides to Trenton on that eventful Christmas's eve. He was also host at the "Inn," now known as the "Old Washington House," on the hill.

And old oil painting in the possession of the Misses Nelson, bears this inscription: "Washington crossed here on Christmas eve, 1776, aided by Generals Sullivan, Lord Sterling, Mercer and St. Clair," which although not in strict accordance with the approved historical facts, is an interesting relic. This may have been used as a sign for the hotel into which the ferry-house was enlarged by the addition of another story sometime after the Revolutionary period.

There is an old picture of the house about the year 1825. It was then called the "Washington House" and was a stopping place for stages running between Lambertville and Trenton. The property was bought in 1846 by Alexander Nelson, of Pennsylvania, from Bernard Taylor, who owned large tracts of land on both sides of the river and from whom the name, "Bernardsville," was derived. It was after the Belvidere railroad came through, in 1851, that the present name was given to mark the historical spot.

The ferry was also in operation for the transportation of passengers and produce, and a connection of the family, a lady now living in the West, remembers crossing on the flat bottom Durham boat when a young girl, about the year 1831. There is a story in connection with the ferry that the ferry-horn was hung in a tree nearby so that those "who wished to cross," so the inscription read, could "blow their own horn."

A story is also told of a traveler stopping at the hotel who had been

making himself noticeable by his pompous manners, and who, before retiring, left particular word to be called for an early start, as he had "very important business on hand." A fierce storm set in during the night, and when the hour arrived it was raging severely. The landlord rapped at the guest's door, at the hour set, and was answered by a sleepy voice, inquiring about the weather: "Bad, very bad; hardest storm ever known," responded the landlord. "Well, then, I guess I won't go," came from within. "Won't go! Well, I just guess you will go. Haven't I sat up all night to get you off? Now, you've got to go," and tradition states that he did go.

After coming into the possession of Mr. Nelson the house was enlarged to its present proportions and adorned with the porches and verandas which make it so attractive.

A large family was reared in this commodious house and grew up in the enjoyment of its comforts and its delightful location along the river—that almost living thing that winds itself into the lives of those living near it, like a human friend.

There is also quite a tract of land about the homestead so that there were fields and a garden to cultivate and the lawn along the river with its fine old trees and well kept grass, so that every foot of ground is endeared by association and sentiment to those growing up amid its surroundings, with memories never to be effaced.

As the years rolled on, one after another, they left the seclusion of the home life—some settling in distant States—but there have always been some remaining to keep the fire burning on the hearth and the lamp lighted in the window of the old home to welcome them whenever they could return to it.

The addition in the rear to the main building is a quaint little house in itself. There is a good sized room with a large fireplace, tiled in blue and white, a pantry on one side, a cellar beneath, two rooms above and a garret over all with a little window looking out toward the "Old Washington House." From the outside this is suggestive of "The Window in Thrums," in Barrie's familiar story.

A little brook, wandering through one of the fields on its way to the river, was a favorite resort to search for wild flowers and ferns, which grow in great profusion along its banks. The name, "Donnybrook," was given to this little stream by one of the family.

The beautiful spreading beech tree on the river bank along the road is a landmark on the place, and its smooth bark is decorated with the initials of those who have lingered in its shade in the happy days gone by and confided to the old tree the honor of bearing their names, sometimes linked with another within a lop-sided heart, until the passing years should enclose them into the great trunk's own heart.

And if one should look high up on the tree they may discover a skull and

crossbones carved over the initials "A. N.," a premonition of the profession of a member of the family that was carried out in later years.

In 1896 at the dedication of the monument commemorating the Crossing of the Delaware, in 1776, which is located on ground given by the Nelson family, little Ada Byron, daughter of Dr. Adonis Nelson, and Master Jack Hillver, of St. Paul, performed the unveiling.

As the national anniversaries came around through the year, it has been the custom of the family and some friends to decorate the stone and to float a flag over it, while some of the children of the neighborhood hold exercises about it.

There are also reminiscences of the stirring days of the Civil War, when the family rendered willing aid to the volunteers who had been gathered from the neighborhood and had gone to the front, sending boxes of clothing, medicines, dainties, lint, etc., and it was so modestly carried out that no one realized the trouble or expense. They were repaid by the knowledge that good was being done.

If the National Park is ever realized this landmark should be preserved as a link between the Old and the New, and also for the rarity of the possession and occupancy for so many years by the same family.