

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP

THE SMITH HOMESTEADS

by
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Among the earliest settlers to come to Maidenhead were two brothers, Jasper and Thomas Smith, arriving about 1696. Like so many other pioneers they came from Long Island, searching for fertile land and pleasant home sites. By 1698 they had settled on their chosen lands for in that year their names were among those who had signed the land grant for "The Town Lot" in Maidenhead, which was located off the Carter Road, near the old stone quarry.

Jasper Smith made his early land selection along the "Great Road" (now Lawrenceville Road). His property ran from the vicinity of the Franklin Road west to a point just below the Town Hall. This early land purchase was made from the Colonial Proprietors but due to land title complications (with Dr. Cox) the title was not cleared until years later. By 1762 the senior Jasper's land holdings are believed to have been about 200 acres. In his will of 1769 he called this property . . . "the land whereon I dwell." It is not definitely known, however, where his dwelling house was located.

It is known that Jasper Smith had at least five children, John, Jasper Jr., Samuel, Thomas, Ralph and Joshua. In 1708 the senior Smith sought to provide his sons Jasper, Jr., and Thomas with farm lands. From the heirs of Mahlon Stacy he purchased suitable acreage. Thomas' portion "lay along the left side of the 'Great Road' as one passes toward Trenton" and the home now occupied by the Staller family on Darrah Lane is believed to have been the dwelling house of Thomas Smith.

Jasper Smith, Jr.'s, portion of his father's purchase of 1708 included the present Rudolph Ribsam property (near Benjamin Franklin School) and considerable added acreage along the Princeton Pike. A small separate plot of about twenty-five acres near the Lawrence Road Fire House was also included as a part of Jasper Jr.'s share. Thomas and Jasper Smith, Jr. took possession of these farm lands in 1739-40.



Ribsam property (Princeton Pike) dates back to early 1700's



Amos Rogers, Jr. home (1517 Lawrence Road) built in early 1700's

When Jasper Jr. died suddenly in 1754 his homestead (the present Ribsam property) passed to his eldest son Waters Smith, Sr. In 1820 Waters Sr. died, apparently childless. His land holdings went to several nephews. One nephew Waters Smith, Jr., inherited the bulk of the homestead property and the Jasper Smith, Jr., dwelling (Ribsam property) became his residence. The property remained in the possession of the Smith descendants until about 1917 when the farm was purchased by Howard Green. Some years later it was sold to the Ribsam family.

In 1730 Jasper Smith, Sr., purchased a tract of land fronting the "Great Road" and extending from about Eggerts Crossing Road to St. Ann's Church. He deeded about 240 acres of this land to his eldest son, John, in 1747 and confirmed it in his will of 1769. This homestead occupied by John Smith remained in the family ownership for many years. In 1881 it was purchased by Thomas B. DeCou. Located at 1517 Lawrence Road it is now the home of the Amos Rogers, Jr. family.

At the corner of Darrah Lane and Princeton Pike stands a white clapboard homestead of considerable age. The date of its erection is uncertain but it is believed to have been built upon lands formerly owned by Jasper



Smith, Jr. It descended through the years to the wife of George Washington Johnston, who was a descendant of Jasper Smith, Jr. Part of this old home was a tavern in the 1800's, known as the "Rising Sun". Among others accommodated at the tavern were the drovers who passed through the countryside with their flocks of sheep. The large front room in the smaller part of the dwelling was the bar room. The quaint cupboard which served as storage space for the innkeeper still stands in this room. The home has many other quaint and interesting details. It is presently occupied by the Harmon family. Mrs. Herbert Harmon is a direct descendant of Jasper Smith, Sr.

One hundred acres of Jasper Smith, Sr.'s early holdings (just west of Franklin Road) were inherited by his grandson John, son of Samuel Smith. The acreage is believed to have been in the vicinity of the Morris Hall property. Just where John's old house stood is not known. The balance of the homestead property of Jasper Smith, Sr., was left to another son, Joshua. This acreage was soon purchased by Jasper, Jr's second son, Jasper III, an eminent lawyer. He was a man of considerable means and education. He died childless leaving his property to the Maidenhead Presbyterian Church. His legatee received the site of the present Municipal Building and considerable acreage on both sides of the highway. His will (considered by many to be a masterpiece) stipulated that no portion could be sold by the church without litigation with existing heirs, however remote. The church however, in later years earnestly desired to dispose of the property and finally managed the extensive legal procedure to culminate the sale.

The Jasper Smith III homestead stood on the approximate site of the present Town Hall. (A picture of the quaint old home may be found in the History of the Lawrenceville Presbyterian Church). It was destroyed by fire in 1904. A new structure replaced the old home and the property continued to be leased by George R. Cook. The present Town Hall was the home of George R. Cook and his family for many years.



A Smith homestead that once stood near the present Town Hall was destroyed by fire in 1904.

Joshua Smith, son of Jasper Smith, Sr., purchased acreage in 1757 from John Ely running westerly to the "King's Highway" and south to Shabbukunk Creek. This piece of land had once belonged to Mahlon Stacy, pioneer Trenton miller, who had settled along the Delaware about 1680. This land purchase of 1767 descended through the years to the late Charles H. Smith who with his family lived in the old homestead for many years. This home still stands on the original site (128 Gedney Road). J. Russell Smith, a long term Committeeman, Lawrence Township's first Mayor and currently serving as Chairman of the Township's Planning Board is a direct descendant of Jasper Smith, Sr., and Joshua Smith.

We note that Jasper Smith, the pioneer, chose most of the farm sites for his sons and grandsons along the "Great Road" or "King's Highway" in Maidenhead. He had many reasons for so doing. The "Great Road" of 1698 which had once been the "Old Indian Trail" connected the fording place in the Raritan River with the Falls of the Delaware. Jasper, a wise man, may have realized that both of these river locations were destined to become commercial centers in due time. The road connecting them, he reasoned, was bound to be an important avenue of travel. Very early the road became a significant stage coach route. The lands he selected were for the most part fertile and well drained. They sloped gently to border on small creeks or runs. The sites chosen for the homes of his children are fully as desirable now as they were when he chose them so many years ago.

Miss Titus a vice chairman of our Tercentenary Committee is a native Lawrentonian. She is the authoress of many articles on early Township history. She has recently retired from the Lawrence Public School system where she taught for forty years.

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