

King of Prussia Gazette

Preserving Upper Merion's Past to Enlighten its Future

Volume XIII, Number Two



Fall 2024/Winter 2025

President's Message

Greetings Faithful Members!

It is with a heavy heart that I will be stepping down as President of the King of Prussia Historical Society. Family obligations are now taking up a large part of my time and it's becoming more and more difficult to keep up with the daily tasks that keep the Society going.

I am, however, happy to announce that our current Vice President, George Brusstar, will be taking up the mantle. George has been involved with the Society not only during the post-2012 re-awakening of the Society, but also as a young man in the 1980s and 1990s. His detailed knowledge of that time has been invaluable as we have moved into this new era. He is humble, knowledgeable and wise, and I am sure he will take the Society to new heights.

This may be a good time to reflect on the growth of the Society since I took office after the passing of Michael Morrison in 2019. Although I never felt that I could quite fill Michael's considerable shoes, I am quite proud of how far we've come. We have added an online digital archive to our website, consisting of over 350

items including maps, aerial photos, postcards and artwork. We also now have a physical archive currently housed in the Sunday School Building of the First Presbyterian Church of Port Kennedy. We increased our visibility by being a presence at the Upper Merion township Farmer's Market and Fall Festivals. We also undertook several large-scale research projects, including the history of the Moore-Irwin House and a factual timeline of tragic murders of Susan Reinert and her children, and Stephanie and Edward Hunsberger.

Although I am stepping down as president, I will remain on the board of directors and will continue to be the point person on some of the ongoing projects, and of course I'll still see you all at meetings.

Once more, I thank you all for your support. Membership support enables us to continue to preserve Upper Merion's past. If you have not renewed your membership yet, I would encourage you to do that as soon as possible. We can't do it without you!

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Scan this QR Code to contribute to the GoFundMe to help save the Moore-Irwin House or to learn more about it.



Scan this QR Code or go to kophistory.org/membership to join or renew.



EARLY HISTORY OF THE MOORE-IRWIN HOUSE

The Moore-Irwin House is a multi-part mansion in King of Prussia with a complex history. Currently owned by Upper Merion Township, Moore-Irwin is located off Moore Road, behind the American Heritage Federal Credit on Eighth Avenue. The beautiful 4.8 acre Silas Burgess Arboretum, also owned by the township, surrounds the house (fig. 1.) This article is the first of two detailing the house's history.

The house has two historical connections, the evidence for which we will explore later in the course of this article: that it was the quarters of General Peter Muhlenberg during the Valley Forge encampment 1777-1778, and that it was the site of a visit in 1787 by George Washington in company with Gouverneur Morris during a break from the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

We believe the house began as a log structure built sometime between 1752 and 1774 by John Moore (1726-1778). John's grandfather had acquired land from David Powell. The land was part of Letitia Penn's *Manor of Mount Joy*, almost all of today's Upper Merion Township. (Moore-Irwin House: Architectural Survey and Assessment, p. 2.1; Biographical Annals of Montgomery County, p. 497)

The original land purchased was subsequently divided between John and his brother, Mordecai Moore (1735-1802). The 1774 tax records show that Mordecai owned 100 acres, while John owned 275 acres. This uneven division could be explained in two ways. John may have bought out his other siblings, or it may have been the case that Mordecai was given less land because he inherited the family house. Indeed, later tax records show that Mordecai had a stone house, while John's two sons had log dwellings. When brothers are separated by many years as John and Mordecai were, the likely scenario would be that the older brother would have already moved out, built a house, and started a family by the time the father had died, thus leaving the younger brother to take possession of the original house. In the case of the Moore family, John's first child was born in 1746, while his father died sometime around 1756. This pattern of the younger son inheriting the house seems to have been repeated, as we shall see later.

It seems quite likely, then, that John built a log dwelling before the division of the property in order to have a place



Fig. 1. The Moore-Irwin House. Photo Credit: David Montalvo

to live and raise his family. At the time of this writing, we don't know the exact date that John married his wife Jane, or even what Jane's maiden name was, but we do know that their first child, Ann, was born in 1746. Thus, possibly as early as 1746, but almost certainly by 1774 when the land had been divided, the log dwelling must have existed. The Moore Family tree is shown in fig. 2 (owners of the house are highlighted in yellow.) Of John and Jane Moore's ten children, only six survived to adulthood: Ann, John, Reese, Richard, Rachel and Jonathan.

John is believed to have died on January 1, 1778, during the time of the Valley Forge encampment (*The History of Valley Forge* by Henry Woodman). The 1779 State Tax records for Upper Merion, John's brother Mordecai Moore is still listed. However, Jane Moore is listed as a widow. John's oldest son, John (1752-1823) is listed as "p.h'd," which is an abbreviation of "per head." That would mean that he was over 21 years of age but didn't own any land, presumably because ownership of the land had passed to Jane, his mother.

Local tradition has it that the house was the quarters of General Peter Muhlenberg, commander of the Virginia troops at the time of the Valley Forge encampment. Many of the houses traditionally considered to be general's quarters did not have documents written at the time connecting them to specific generals during the encampment. In the case of the Moore-Irwin house, there

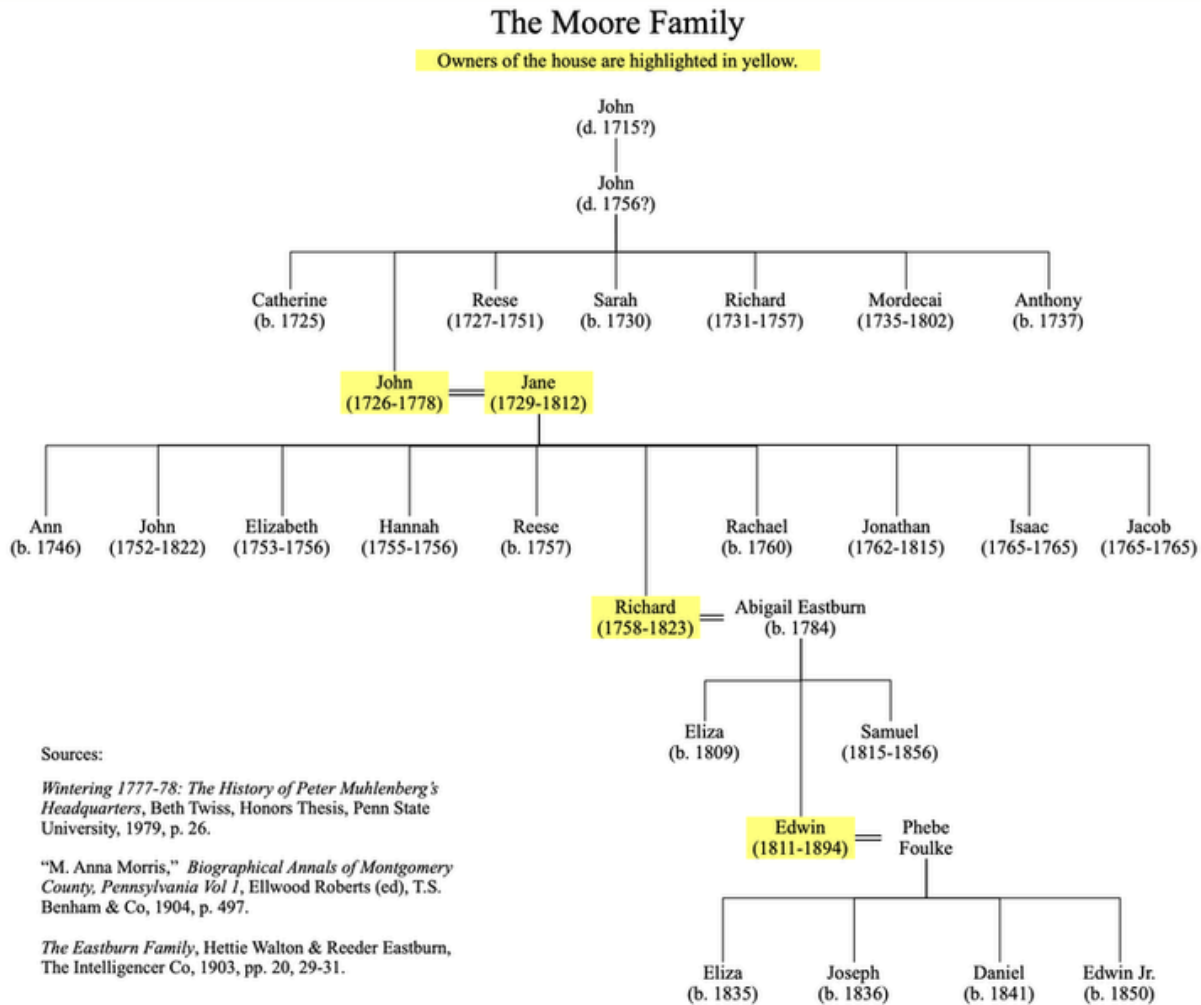


Fig. 2. The Moore Family Tree.

are at least two sources after the encampment that connect the house to General Muhlenberg.

The first is an 1833 map drawn by William Davis who is said to have lived in the encampment during 1777-78, as attested to by General Anthony Wayne's son, according to the Valley Forge Historical Research Report III, p 17, commissioned in 1980 by Valley Forge National Historical Park. Although done 55 years after the encampment, it is the only known rendering of the encampment done within living memory. Muhlenberg's Quarters are shown in the approximate location of the current Moore-Irwin house (fig. 3.)

The second source for the current house having been Muhlenberg's Quarters is more specific, although written after the time of the encampment. Around 1850, Henry Woodman (1795-1879) wrote a series of letters about the history of Valley Forge, mainly based on the stories told to him by his mother and father. The letters comprising this oral history were collected in book form and published in 1920 as *The History of Valley Forge*. Woodman's father,

Edward, was a soldier in Washington's army during the encampment, and his mother, Sarah, grew up on a farm on the periphery. Henry Woodman grew up in Valley Forge and was considered to be an expert in its history. Woodman writes:

"At John Moore's, which was the furthest from Headquarters, Muhlenberg was quartered in company with a number of inferior officers; and at the house of Mordecai Moore, the Commissary General of the army was stationed, and General Morgan was occasionally quartered at the place. [...] The farm or rather farms of John Moore will now claim our attention. As noticed in a former letter, John Moore, the owner of them, at the time Muhlenberg took up his headquarters at the place, died soon after, on the first day of the year 1778. Two of his sons, John and Richard Moore, took possession of the property. The mansion where Muhlenberg was quartered was taken by Richard Moore, and was the farthest extent of the lines of encampment in a northeastern direction, and nearest to the city of Philadelphia." (Woodman, pp. 124-125.)

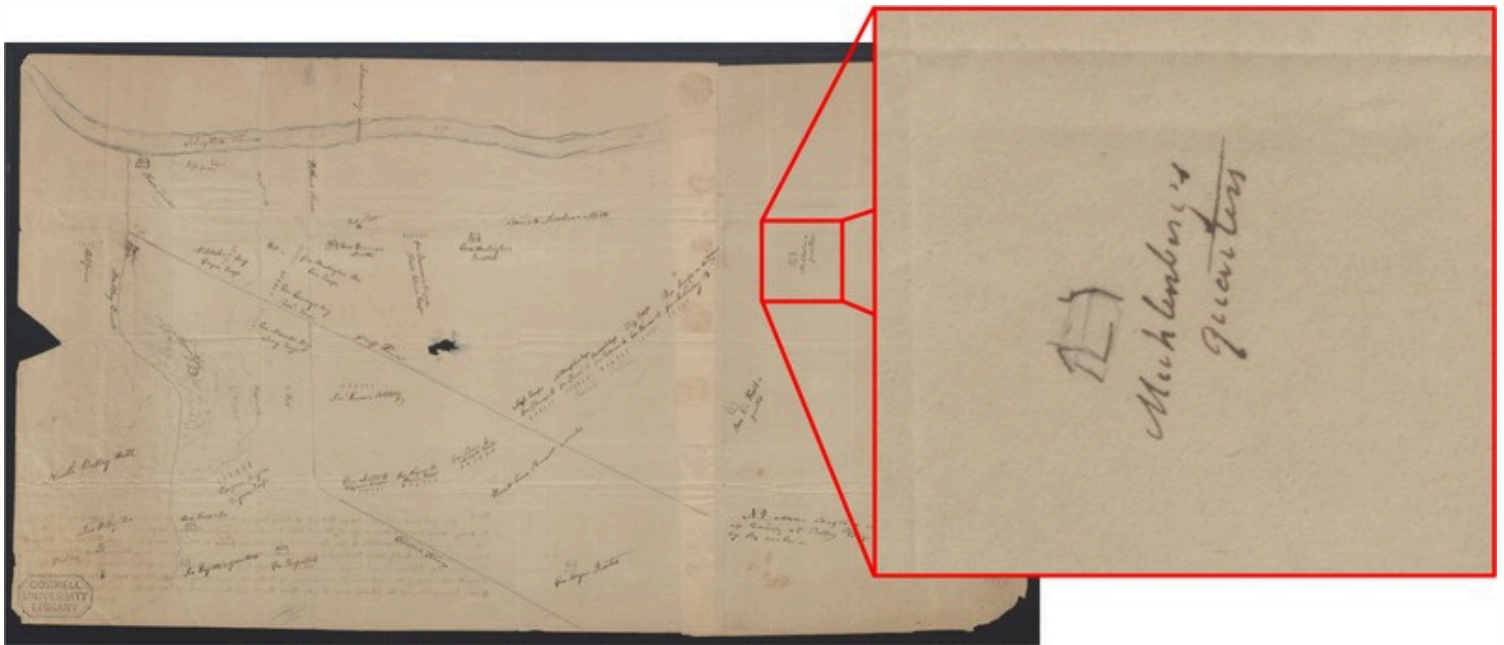


Fig. 3. The Davis-Armstrong-Sparks Map, 1833. Cornell Digital Collections.

Woodman also recalled Jane specifically as one of the women who provided for the soldiers despite the scarcity of the time:

"If necessary I could give the names of many benevolent females, at the houses of whom some of the general officers were quartered, preparing for the hungry guards, after exposure during the night, a comfortable breakfast in the morning, and furnishing them with stockings and other necessary articles, in their tried situations, to protect them from the cold; but to particularize them and their charitable acts would exceed the limits of the design I had in view in the commencement of the work. I shall, therefore, pass by the most of them. Among them there are a few that I shall slightly notice. These are Sarah Walker, Elizabeth Stephens, Priscilla Stephens, Margaret Beaver, Elizabeth Moore and Jane Moore. The two first were dead before my time; the four last all died between the years 1812 and 1820. I mention these not because there were no others worthy of a place or notice here, but merely to inform my readers that I once remember to have seen the four last meet together, about thirty years after the campaign, and although they fought not their "battles o'er again," yet they found much exercise for their conversational powers in discoursing of the events at the time of the campaign; and although nearly forty years have elapsed since that time, yet the lively interest I took in listening to them is still fresh in my memory." (Woodman, p. 83.)

Of interest is the fact that although Woodman is for the most part passing on the stories of his father and mother, he did have direct contact with Jane Moore, listening to her and some of the other women recount their stories of the time. This fact makes it more likely that Woodman had the facts correct.

The Valley Forge Park Commission, based on their own research considered the Moore-Irwin house to be the quarters of General Muhlenberg in all its publications and reports, an example of which can be seen in a map of the encampment produced by the Commission in 1897 (fig. 4.) The division of the land between Mordecai and John after their father's death can also be seen on this map. Mordecai's land is currently part of Valley Forge National Historical Park, and his home, shown on the map as "COMMISSARY GEN'L'S HEADQRS" is now the ranger station not far from North Gulph Road. The current Moore-Irwin House is marked on the map as "GEN'L MUHLENBERG'S HEADQRS."

Returning to the history of the Moore family, the Federal tax records of 1783 list Jane as owning 270 acres of land while her son John, who would have been 31 years old, is listed as owning some livestock but no land, and Richard who would have been 25 years old as owning neither land nor livestock. By 1785, however, Upper Merion tax records show that John and Richard had split the land,

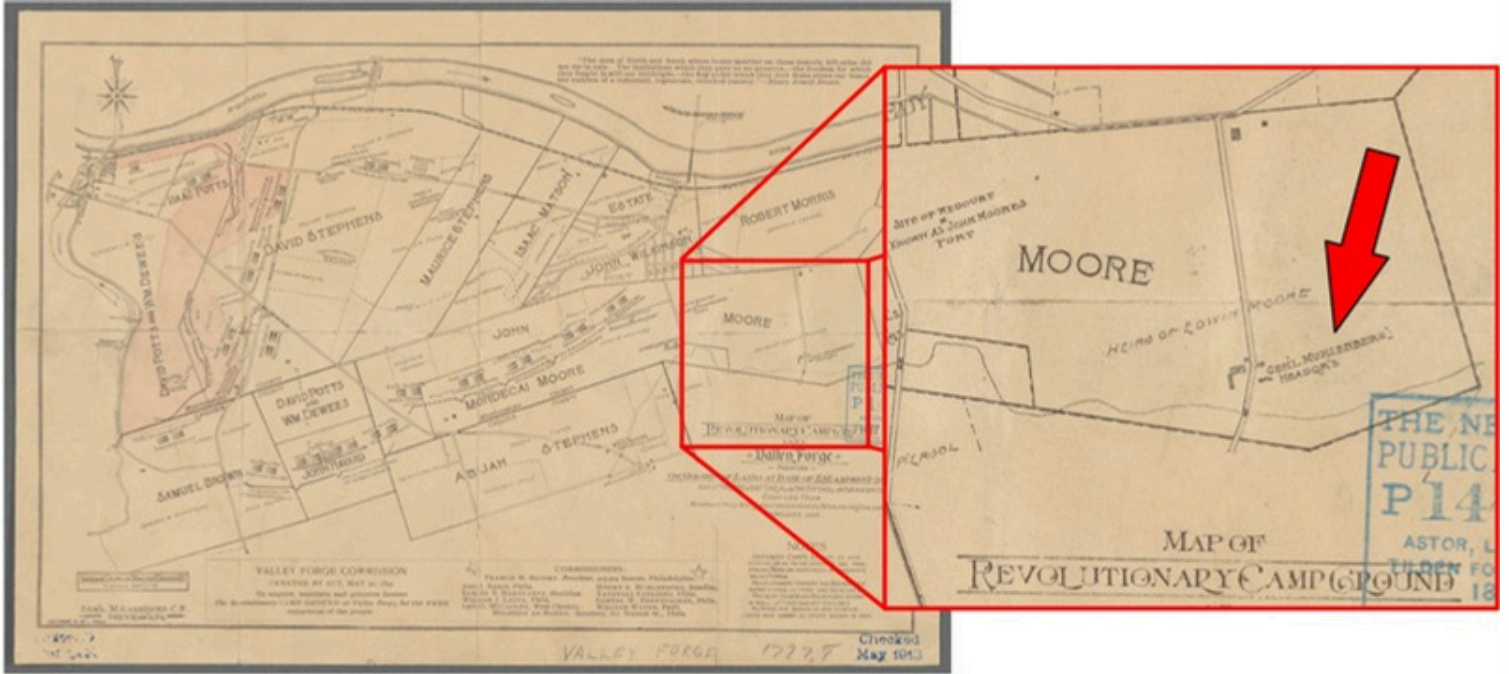


Fig. 4. Map of the Revolutionary Campground, Valley Forge Park Commission, 1897. New York Public Library.

each owning 135 acres (fig. 5.) By this time, John and Richard were likely living separately, but we can't be sure because the first Federal record of dwellings in the history of the United States, sometimes called the Glass Tax, did not occur until 1798. It is called the Glass Tax because the decision was made to tax houses based on the number of windows and panes in each window, which was thought to be a good proxy for the value of the house.

The 1798 tax records show that Mordecai Moore, uncle to John and Richard, owned a two-story, 18 ft by 26 ft stone house, while John owned a two-story, 20 ft by 24 ft log house, and Richard owned one-story 20 ft by 35 ft log house (fig. 6.) (Mordecai Moore's house sits on Gulph Road and is currently used as a ranger station by Valley Forge Park.) If we theorize, as before, that the family pattern is for the older son to move out to start a family leaving the younger son with the family dwelling, then

Fig. 5. Upper Merion tax records for 1785. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

		£			£
(104)					
Peter Wells, farmer			John Moore		
100. acres Dwelling	300		135. acres Dwg	405	
3 horses	30				
3 Cows	12				
Occupation	20	362	Richard Moore		
			135. acres Dwg	405	
Proy Mhinsey			2 horses	20	
2 Cows	5		5 Cattle	20	
Occupation	20	25	Occupation	20	465

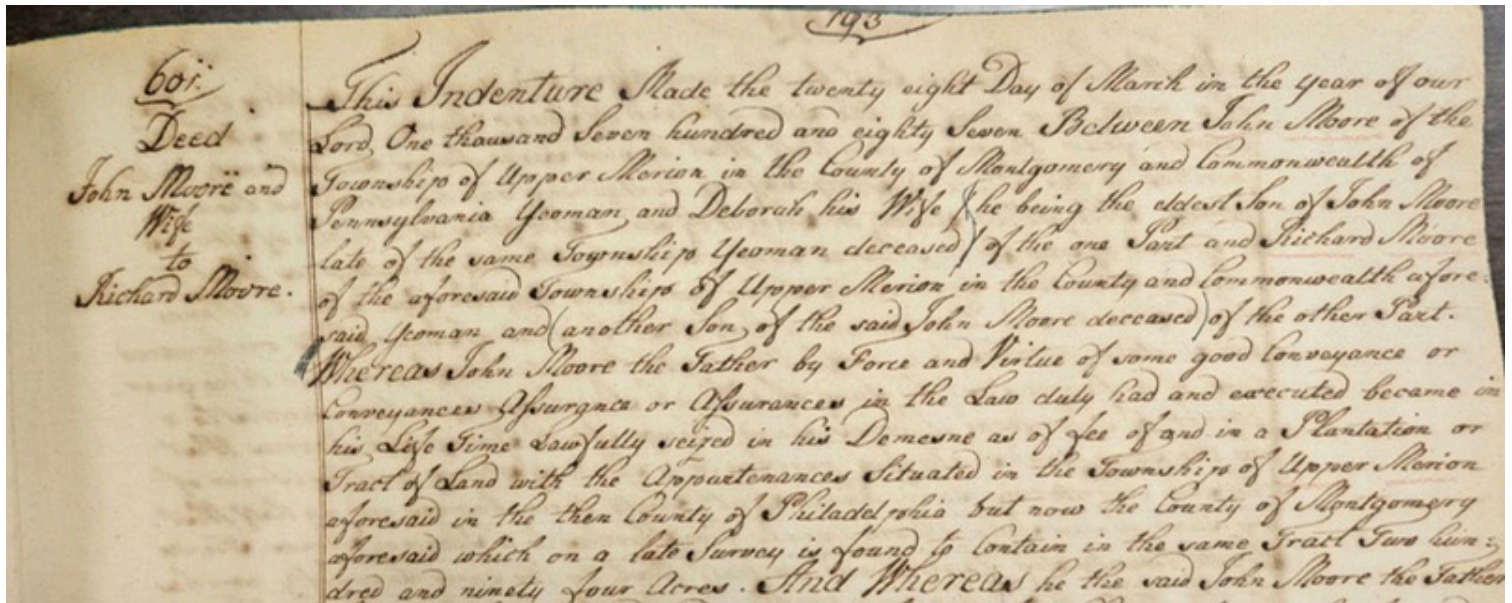


Fig 8. Part of a 1787 indenture between John Moore and his Wife and Richard Moore. This is one of three indentures which were executed early that year to settle the estate. Historical Society of Montgomery County.

The 1787 indentures mentioned previously is one of three settling the estate of their father who had died without a will. (Part of one of the indentures is shown in Fig. 8.) The long delay in settling John and Jane Moore's estate may have been caused by the devastation of the Valley Forge encampment of 1777-78. The indentures codify the split of the land already noted in the 1785 Upper Merion tax records. The first indenture, dated February 10, 1787, is from Jonathan and Rachel to Richard, where for the sum of 400 pounds Jonathan and Rachel relinquished their inheritance to Richard. The second and third indentures, both dated March 28, 1787, make legal the equal split of the land between John and Jane's sons, Richard and John. Reese is not mentioned at all in the indentures. Possibly, he was deceased at that point.

In the second indenture, which is from Richard to John, we find two other important details. The first is that Ann, their married older sister, had previously relinquished her rights to John for an unnamed sum of money. The second is that John is guaranteed access to water through Richard's land. This would make sense if Richard's land includes Trout Creek, where the Moore-Irwin house stands today. Richard's house likely stood close to the creek for easy access to water, much as the Moore-Irwin house does today.

From these primary resources, we know that Richard

owned a one-story log dwelling. From secondary sources, we surmise it was built by his father sometime between 1746 and 1774, that it stood on the land where Trout Creek ran and was close to Trout Creek. Richard's mother, Jane, likely lived with her son in this dwelling that she and her husband built.

In 1787 the next major historical connection for the house occurs. In late July and early August 1787, during the Constitutional Convention, George Washington and Gouverneur Morris traveled from Philadelphia to visit the Valley Forge encampment site of 1777-78. From George Washington's diary, we read:

Monday. 30th. In company with Mr. Govr. Morris, and in his Phaeton with my horses; went up to one Jane Moores in the vicinity of Valley-forge to get Trout."

"Tuesday 31st. Whilst Mr. Morris was fishing I rid over the old Cantonment of the American [army] of the Winter 1777, & 8. Visited all the Works, wch. were in Ruins; and the Incampments in woods where the ground had not been cultivated.

[...]

On my return to Mrs. Moores I found Mr. Robt. Morris & his lady there." (Founders Online, National Archives:

founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/01-05-02-0002-0007.)



Fig 9. Joists in the basement of the Moore-Irwin House. King of Prussia Historical Society.

Why Washington and Morris chose Jane to visit remains a mystery, although Washington's use of "one Jane Moores" suggests that it was Morris who knew Jane. It is possible that Morris had met Jane when he visited the encampment in 1778 as a New York delegate to the Continental Congress. Morris afterward had lobbied congress for better supplies for the army and had kept up a correspondence with Washington during that time. While we do not have space here to investigate the mysterious connection between the Moore family and Gouverneur Morris, we would refer any interested readers to an article written on the subject for the summer 2024 edition of the *King of Prussia News*.

Although local tradition has it that the Moore-Irwin house was the house that was visited by Washington and Morris in 1787, doubt was cast on both this and on the Muhlenberg connection in 1998 when Westfield Architects & Preservation Consultants (WAPC) published their Architectural Survey and Assessment of the house in 1998. It was the Westfield survey that revealed that the 1798 Federal tax listed Richard's house as being a log dwelling, while their research into the records and corroborated by an examination of the joists under the house showed that the oldest part of the house is constructed of stone and was most likely built close to 1810. The joists show even, vertical saw marks indicating that they were sawed by

machine, and not hand-hewn or hand-sawed as we would expect for a house built in the mid-1700s (fig. 9.) According to WAPC:

"There is no documentary evidence to indicate that a stone dwelling existed on the Moore-Irwin property at that time. Physical evidence, as revealed by preliminary investigation only, indicates that the first section of the house was built in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, but nothing yet identified points to a more specific construction date. Given the documentary evidence and the lack of physical evidence to the contrary, it must be assumed that the first two sections of the existing Moore-Irwin House were, in fact, built by Richard Moore after 1798." (Moore-Irwin House: Architectural Survey and Assessment, Westfield Architects and Preservation Consultants.)

Based on several lines of evidence, we believe that there is evidence that the 1810 stone section was an addition onto the original log dwelling, and connected at the fireplace wall. An expansion of the house at that time would make sense, given the fact that Richard married Abigail Eastburn in 1807, and that their first child Eliza was born in March of 1809. Eliza was followed by Edwin in November of 1811 and Samuel in October of 1815.

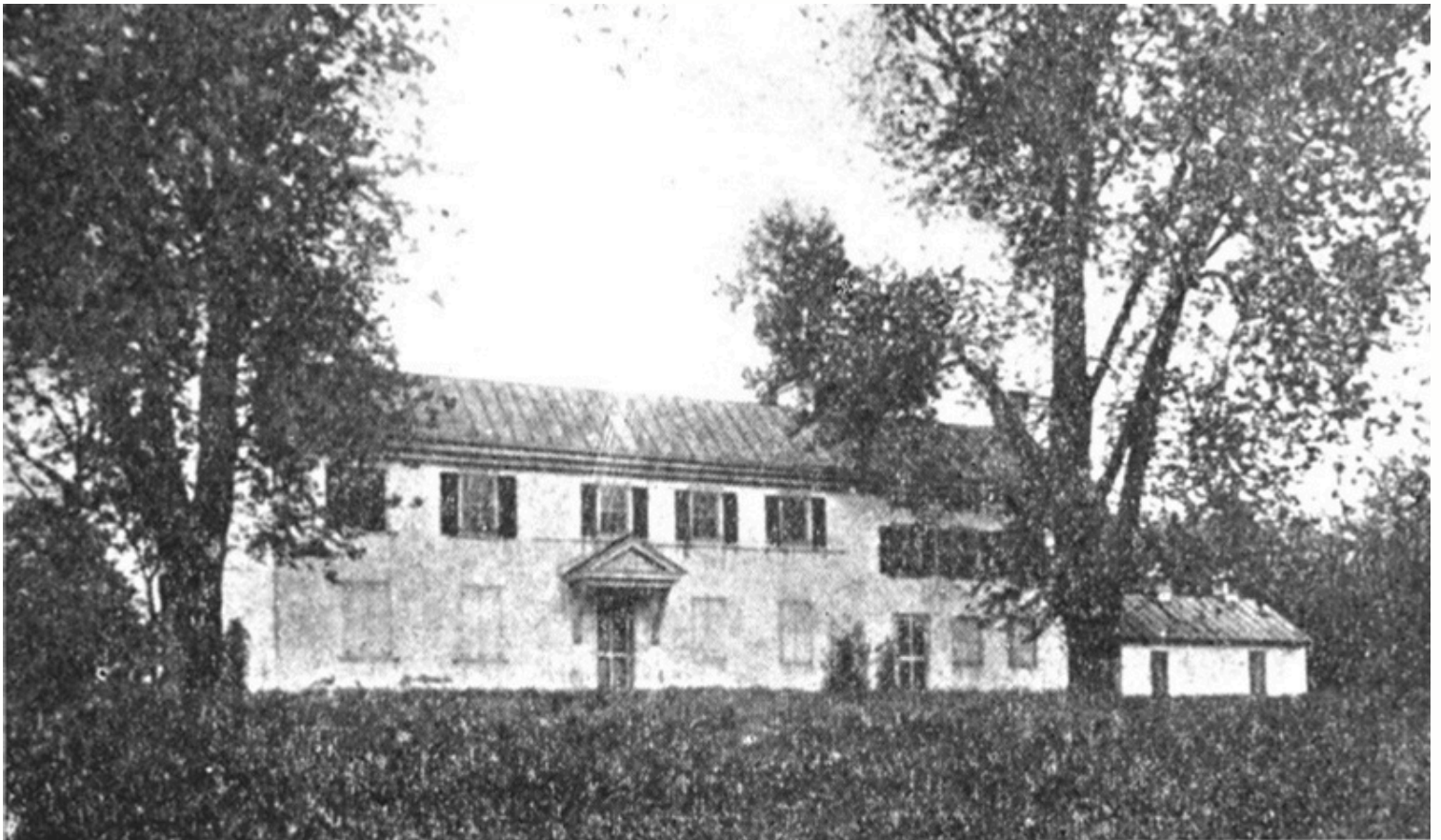


Fig. 10. The house circa 1900. *History of Valley Forge*, Henry Woodman, p. 123.

The dates of Richard's marriage and the births of his children are known from a published history of the Eastburn family. We now consider the evidence that the log dwelling was the origin of the present house.

The first line of evidence is that there was a previously unknown section of the house, adjacent to the 1810 section, whose dimensions match the dimensions of the log dwelling from the 1798 Glass Tax. The photo in fig. 10

shows the house circa 1900; note the one-story section on the right-hand (eastern) side.

The second line of evidence consists in the oddness of the fireplace wall on the east-side of the 1810 section, where we believe the log dwelling connected. That wall is very deep - much deeper than fireplace walls in the 1820 section, built only ten years later (figs. 11 & 12.)

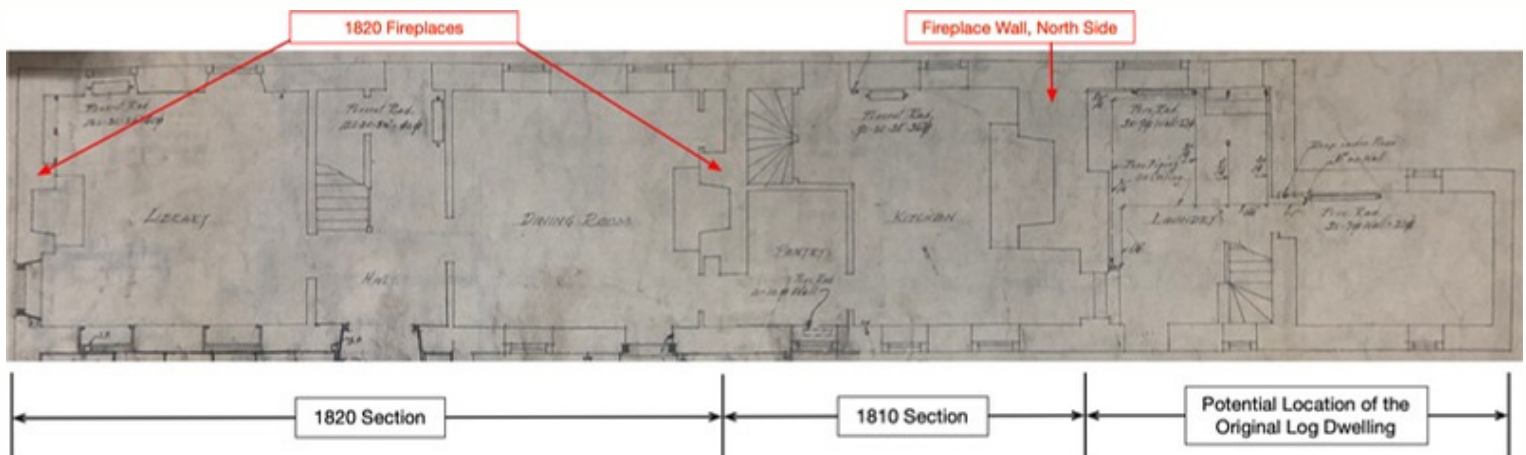


Fig. 11. Floor plan of the house showing the dated sections and the potential location of the log dwelling. Note that the orientation is the same as the photo in figure 10, but that the portion of the house where the log dwelling may have been located had been modified in 1918, before these floor plans were drawn by Richardson Brognard Okie in 1932. Thus what is shown in these plans for that eastern section don't match what is shown in the photograph. Pennsylvania State Archives.



Fig. 12. The fireplace wall, as seen from the 1810 section of the house. King of Prussia Historical Society.

The third line of evidence is that the fireplace wall created a noticeable asymmetry in the north face of the house. A house built in 1810 would fall squarely in the Federal Period, one of whose main hallmarks was symmetry. According to the National Park Service:

“The Federal style was prominent in the United States and Britain between the 1780s and ca.1840s. [...] The design of the Federal style emphasizes balance and symmetry. This may be seen in the arrangement of windows, chimneys,

doors, porches, and balustrades.” (Federal Style Architecture: Hamilton Grange National Memorial: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/federal-style-architecture.htm>)

The south face of the 1810 section of the house certainly shows the symmetry we would expect. However, the north side does not match the south side and is very asymmetrical (figs. 13.) If the 1810 section had been



Fig. 13. North and south elevations of the 1810 portion of the house. The north face of the section does not match the south face. The asymmetry consists of a large blank space where the fireplace wall is.

If the 1810 section had been constructed on its own, it certainly could have been built symmetrically, however connecting to the existing log dwelling at the fireplace wall would present constraints that could have resulted in the asymmetry.

The fourth line of evidence consists in the rough-hewn wood that has been discovered in the fireplace wall, as seen in the basement (fig. 14.) Rough-hewn wood would be consistent with a log dwelling built in the mid-1700s. We are currently trying to raise funds to test the wood to find out how old it is.

Our current hypothesis is that the 1810 stone section of the house was an addition to the original log dwelling, which was built by John and Jane Moore in the mid-1700s, and was used by General Muhlenberg as his quarters 1777-78, and was visited by George Washington

and Gouverneur Morris in 1787. Dendrochronology tests of the wood seen in the foundation of the 1810 stone addition would provide primary source proof of our hypothesis.

Richard expanded the house again in 1820 before he died in 1823, and the house remained in that form until the early 20th century as seen in fig. 10. The east side (on the right) occupies the footprint of what may have been the original log dwelling and may well be that log dwelling enclosed in the walls. The central portion is the 1810 stone addition. On the west side (the left of the photo) is the 1820 addition. Figure 15 shows our proposed chronology of the house up to 1820.

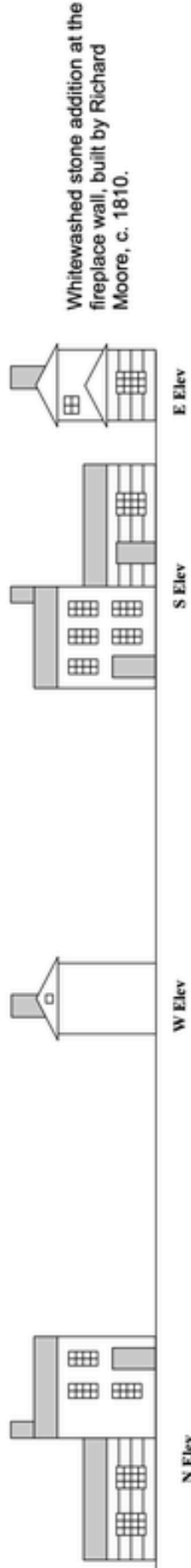
The house then passed to Richard's son Edwin who lived in it until his death in 1894. Edward's children sold the house soon after he died. The rest of the story will be recounted in another issue.



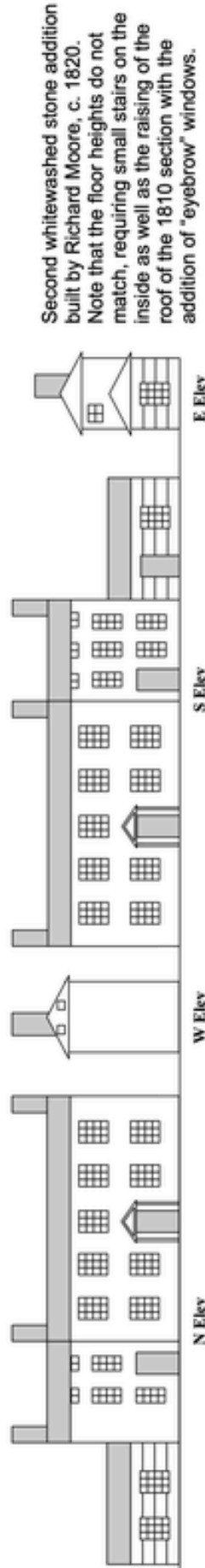
Fig. 14. Rough wood in the fireplace wall, as seen in the basement. King of Prussia Historical Society.



Log dwelling built by John Moore, c. 1750.



Whitewashed stone addition at the fireplace wall, built by Richard Moore, c. 1810.



Second whitewashed stone addition built by Richard Moore, c. 1820. Note that the floor heights do not match, requiring small stairs on the inside as well as the raising of the roof of the 1810 section with the addition of "eyebrow" windows.

Fig. 15. Our proposed history of the house up to 1820

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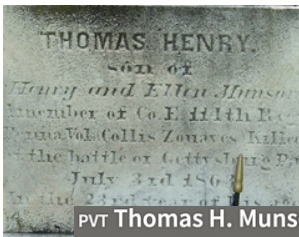
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Photos from Grave Tales at Christ Church Old Swedes October 27, 2024



Captain George W. Bisbing (David Montalvo) served in the Civil war. He enlisted in the storied 51st Pennsylvania and fought in over a dozen battles. At the Battle of Antietam, after several regiments failed to take what is now know as Burnside’s Bridge, the 51st famously successfully captured it, and drove the Confederates back towards Sharpsburg. On May 12, 1864, Bisbing was fatally wounded at the Battle of Spotsylvania (VA). He lingered with his wife, Elizabeth Holstein Shainline Bisbing, at his side until June 7, 1864. Mrs. Bisbing escorted his body home, and he was interred in the cemetery of Old Swedes Christ Church on June 12, 1864.

Captain Benjamin Eastburn (Laura Maggio). Even before George Washington called a mandatory Militia Act in Pennsylvania in March, 1777, Eastburn stepped into action. He first served as First Lieutenant in Colonel Paschall's regiment in a company of foot. He was later made Captain of the 7th company, 7th Battalion, of the Philadelphia County Militia. This regiment was what was known as an “associator’s group.” Affluent patriotic citizens and merchants often joined Associators groups, in part of in part to protect their own assets and land, remaining near their own communities. Even so, Eastburn farm was raided by British soldiers in Philadelphia to supply their troops late in 1777. Records show that damages caused by the British troops in all of Upper Merion Township totaled over \$316,000 (in today's money). Later, Eastburn was granted about \$24,000 to compensate for the damage done to Eastburn Farm.



PVT Thomas H. Munson	
BIRTH	1842 Pennsylvania, USA
DEATH	2 Jul 1863 (aged 20–21) Gettysburg, Adams County, Pennsylvania, USA
BURIAL	Gettysburg National Cemetery Gettysburg, Adams County, Pennsylvania, USA
PLOT	Burial Location Unknown

Source: [FindaGrave.com](https://www.findagrave.com)

Private Thomas H. Munson was brought to the attention of the Historical Society by a researcher who was documenting the final resting places of Gettysburg’s fallen. Because – interestingly – Thomas Munson is listed as being buried both here at Old Swedes and in Gettysburg. It is likely that Munson would have been buried initially, like so many others, near where he fell at Gettysburg. These soldiers would later be interred either at what is now the Gettysburg National Cemetery, or transported home to be laid to rest in a family plot or at their home church. While the records here at the church state that this is Thomas’s burial plot, there is still a chance that this is just a cenotaph, or a monument to someone buried elsewhere, and his body does still lie in Gettysburg.



Other stops on the **2024 Grave Tales** tour included the graves of Civil war nurses Anna Morris Holstein (r. Pat Jordan) and Sarah Priest; **Benjamin Hughes** and his wife **Mary Rambo Hughes**; **Hannah Holstein Hughes Clay** (Benjamin’s Grandmother); and a tour and history of the interior of Christ Church Old Swedes. The core of the church building dates to 1760, and its windows which depict early Swedes in America and scenes from the Old and New Testaments were done by artist Paula Balano in the late 1930s-1940s. We hope you will join us in October 2025 for more tales of the lives of residents past.



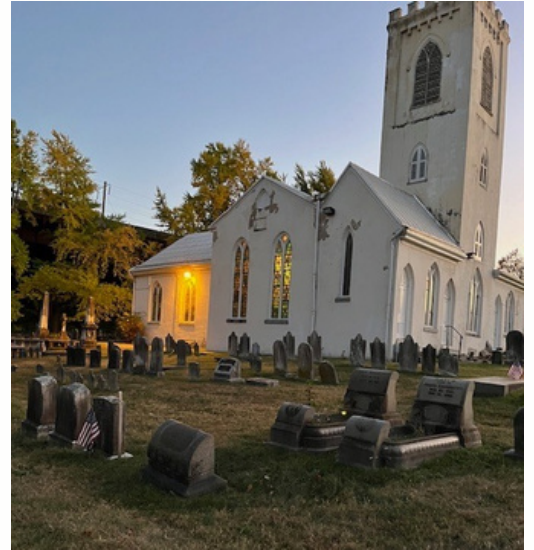
St. Lucia Festival at Christ Church Old Swedes

Each year on December 13, Christ Church Old Swedes celebrates the Feast of Saint Lucia. The Old Swedes' version is just a bit different because it includes a reenactment of the legend that while Washington and his men were camped at Gulph Mills, that they stopped in at the church's celebration of the feast day of St. Lucia. The event is portrayed by church members along with volunteers from the public, the King of Prussia Historical Society, members of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution and reenactor Noah Lewis who portrays African-American Revolutionary War Hero Ned Hector.

The Swedish celebration of Saint Lucia's Day, or Lucia, takes place each year on December 13th. It honors Saint Lucia, the patron saint of light, and symbolizes the return of light after the long winter. Lucia is portrayed by a girl with a wreath of candles atop her head.

Photos from the 2024 St. Lucia Festival are (clockwise from left):

- Christ Church Old Swedes
- Ned Hector (*Noah Lewis*), part of General Washington's Advance guard, makes sure that there are only Patriots in attendance.
- General Washington (*Fred Fonseca*) and his fellow generals along with Ned Hector.
- Some members of the choir and cast including Pat Jordan, Dave Furman, Marianne Furman, Sandy Davis and Tina Smith.
- The Tomte or Swedish Farm Elf (*Laura Maggio*). These charming and sometimes mischievous creatures are described as having an active hand in the caretaking of their homes and farms. But, if the farmer's chores are not done, and he hasn't been nice, the Tomte are known to play tricks! (The Tomte is sometimes said to resemble present day the "Elf on the Shelf.")
- The 2024 St. Lucia with a crown of candles on her head and holding a tray of tea and cookies brings to mind the story that St. Lucia to have brought food to persecuted Christians in Rome while wearing a crown of candles to light her way.



est. 1953

KING OF PRUSSIA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PO Box 60716

King of Prussia PA 19406-7016



Upcoming Events . . .

Saturday, February 8 at 2pm
Historical Marker Project
Presented by Neil Sardiñas
at the Upper Merion Township Building
Valley Forge Room

Sunday, March 9 at 2pm
Author Sheila Vance
Threshold to Valley Forge:
The Six Days of the Gulph Mills Encampment
at the West End Civic Center