



Chapter 1 ~ History

*“History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time...” – Cicero,
De Oratore II, 36*



Marshallton Streetscape in 1863

Historical Context

West Bradford Township has a long and rich history. Located in one of the first three counties that William Penn established when he came to Pennsylvania, it was incorporated in 1731. The Township was poised for settlement because of its ideal landscape of lush meadowland, strong waterpower, and abundant timber.

This early combination of farms, mills, and timber lots soon grew large enough to foster supporting commercial areas. The villages of Marshallton and Romansville grew up along Strasburg Road – one of the main routes between Philadelphia and Lancaster. “It was a road lined with split rail fences, stone walls and brush hedges set against rolling fields of different shades of green.”²

Being a “free” market road, it not only became West Bradford’s “Main Street,” but was also bustling with miller’s wagons and drovers. These drovers would herd their sheep, cattle, pigs, and turkeys to Philadelphia for sale stopping each evening at an inn along the road. By the 1760’s, Marshallton was a leading village servicing local and market traffic. Its first inn opened in 1741. Express goods and passengers would usually detour around the Township and travel along the flatter and quicker Lancaster Pike toll road in the Great Valley through the middle of the County.

In the mid 1700’s, “West Bradford was a harmonious place with fathers and sons living peacefully on adjoining properties, and there were enough industries to occupy those who did not have land.”³

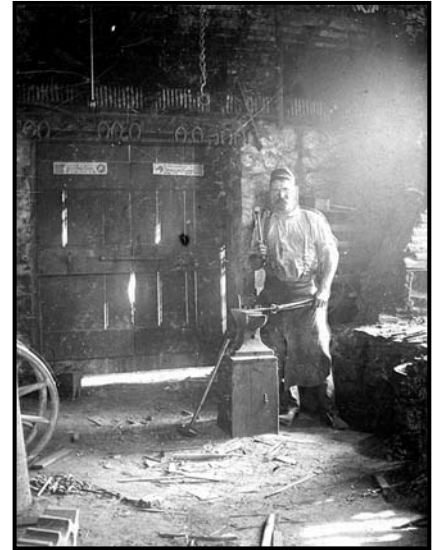
² p 141, *Between the Brandywines*, Quillman, 2005, West Bradford Press

³ p 111, *ibid*



Having a good central location in relatively easy reach of main markets and population centers, it was known early on as a place of prosperous farms and prominent middle class craftsmen. It had 25 residents in 1715; growing to 81 residents by 1760. During this time its original log homes gave way to the stone and brick structures of the Colonial era. At the time of the first Census in 1790, the Township had 725 residents: growing to 1,739 in 1820. The Township's population then stabilized for a century beginning in the 1850's at between 1,500 to 1,600 inhabitants.

West Bradford has always had a diverse economy. In its early period the economy was still overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, but also had pockets of rural industry – especially along its watercourses which were used for power. The Broad Run powered much of this activity. It is only six miles long, but because of its surrounding topography it was a very potent power source. At one time the Broad Run had five different operating mills powering a good portion of the local economy. The rural industries included lime kilns, blacksmith forges, a spinning wheel factory, tanners, and mills (grain, lumber, wool, cider). The town industries included general stores, taverns, a carriage painter, and a cigar factory. Additionally, artisans, weavers, and shoemakers could be found in the Township.



John E. Cunningham, Marshallton Blacksmith 1898

Through the late 1800's, West Bradford Township was a fairly active community - dominated by farmers, craftsmen, and passing travelers. By the turn of the 20th Century, during the beginning of the trolley and auto age, its regional prominence receded somewhat. The Township became less traveled: primarily because of its topography, better power sources for manufacturing elsewhere, and changing economic patterns. Marshallton became "peaceful and dull" especially when compared to the "surging, clanging, ringing borough (sic) of West Chester."⁴ During the early 1900's roads were improved in the Township, but the main County thoroughfares bypassed the Township and no trolley or train service was ever established.

For a more detailed account of the Township's history please see "*Between the Brandywines: A History of West Bradford*," Catherine Quillman, West Bradford Press 2005.

Historical Resources

Not surprisingly, because of the Township's 275 years of life, many historic resources remain to this day. Many residents take these pieces of our heritage for granted, especially if they have lived here for a long time. Other residents are just unaware of the hidden resources scattered throughout the Township. Many other communities in the United States consider a structure built in the 1920's to be a significant historic resource. We are lucky enough to have many remaining structures that were built before the Revolutionary War.

⁴ p 193, *Between the Brandywines*



Although many Pennsylvania communities possess numerous resources that are 50 years of age or older, not all can be preserved, nor do they all represent particular historical significance. While all historic resources should be valued, not all have the same significance to the nation, state, or local community. Concentrating on the highest value resources allows efforts to be concentrated where they are most valuable and effective.



*1959 photo of “East side 1804 barn” architecture
(unknown West Bradford location)*

There is a hierarchy of importance for historical resources established by convention and also by Federal and State law. This hierarchy from the most important to least important is:

- 1. *National Register Landmarks;***
- 2. *National Register Historic Districts;***
- 3. *National Register Historic Sites; and***
- 4. *Local Historic Resource Designations***

This is not to imply that locally designated resources are not as valuable to the local community as nationally designated ones. Local historical resources may in fact be more important to the fabric of a community. The Federally designated resources highlight the scarcity of a particular type of historical resource or its importance to the nation’s heritage as a whole.



A **National Register Landmark** designation is the most selective and accepts only properties of exceptional national significance. They designate a historical structure, place, or event that has had a profound impact on our culture. Since 1969, less than 2,500 of these landmarks have been designated in the nation.

It is a great source of local pride that the Township contains one *National Register Landmark* - the Humphrey Marshall House. Humphrey Marshall was an early botanist who was born and lived his entire life in Marshallton. He was the first person to categorize and describe the different species of trees and shrubs in America. His key work, a book entitled *Arbustrum Americanum: The American Grove*, became renowned in the United States and Europe.



1800's Postcard of the Humphrey Marshall House

The second level of importance is a **National Register Historic District**. This is a grouping of historic resources that “possesses a significant concentration or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development. Districts may include several contributing resources that are nearly equal in importance, as in a neighborhood, or a variety of contributing resources, as in a large farm, estate, or parkway. National Register properties classified as districts include college campuses, business districts, commercial areas, residential areas, villages, estates, plantations, transportation networks, and landscaped parks.”⁵ Districts greatly vary in size, some having hundreds of structures while others have just a few.

West Bradford Township is fortunate to contain portions of four National Register Districts – Marshallton, Trimbleville, Northbrook and Worth/Jefferies (see Historic Resources Map 1-1). There are over 80 contributing historic resources contained in the four National Register Districts in West Bradford.

Marshallton National Register Historic District and Village – Listed in 1985, consists of a village of approximately 65 contributing principal buildings located along Strasburg Road. Noteworthy buildings include the Humphrey Marshall house (1773), Bradford Friends Meeting (1765), Center House {aka Martin’s Tavern} (1760), Blacksmith’s Forge (1785), Marshallton Inn (1760), and Martin Farm (1750). Marshallton is historically significant as a center of commerce and cottage industry, the home of the early botanist – and village namesake – Humphrey Marshall, and the location of two religious congregations with historic cemeteries.

It is important to note that the Township has established Traditional Neighborhood Zoning within this Historic District and prohibits the demolition of historic structures without approval from the Township Zoning Hearing Board.

⁵ National Register Bulletin, *Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties*, Seifert, Donna J., 1995, revised 1997, p 12



Trimbleville National Register Historic District – Listed in 1985, is a hamlet of six contributing principal buildings along the West Branch of the Brandywine Creek. Handsome stone buildings dating from the 18th Century include a mill seat, blacksmith’s house, boarding school, and a five-generation Quaker family farm. Trimbleville was the site of the first, flanking crossing of the Brandywine Creek by British troops during the 1777 Battle of the Brandywine. The district includes lands and buildings in neighboring Pocopson Township.

Northbrook National Register Historic District – Listed in 1985, is a village of 12 contributing principal buildings along three sites next to the West Branch of the Brandywine Creek. The Marshall family erected a number of buildings in the 18th and 19th Centuries, among them Derbydown (birthplace of Humphrey Marshall), Moses Marshall House, Indian Rock Farm, Samuel Marshall House, Lewis Marshall House, and the site of the cabin of Indian Hannah – Chester County’s last resident Lenni-Lenape native American. The district includes lands and buildings in both Newlin and Pocopson Townships.



Northbrook Station – Wilmington & Northern Railroad

Worth/Jefferies National Register Historic District – Listed in 1995, is a district of 47 structures that straddles the East and West Bradford Township line. Located primarily in East Bradford Township, the district has three contributing structures on the “Baldwin Farm,” along Camp Linden Road. The district is characterized as a “rural historic landscape that exemplifies the settlement and agriculture of Chester County in the early eighteenth century.”⁶ Much of the land is under conservation easement, a majority of the land continues to be used for agriculture, and many historical farm structures remain. The land was held by members of the Worth/Jefferies families for many generations.

⁶ Worth/Jefferies National Register Nomination Petition.



The final level of national significance is a **National Register Site**. A *National Register Site* is a single historic resource that, “possesses a quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- That has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.”⁷

There are only about 80,000 National Register Sites within the United States. Eight of these national register sites are located in West Bradford Township. The Historical Resources Map shows the sites. A description of each site can be found in the appendices.

**Figure 1-1
National Register Sites in West Bradford Township**

Site #	Historic Name	Address	Tax Parcel
1	Humphry Marshall House & Landmark	1407 W. Strasburg Road	50-6-66.1
2	Baily Farm	1580 W. Strasburg Road	50-8-12.2
3	Bradford Friends Meeting	521 Northbrook Road	50-9-8
4	Como Farm	1520 Tattersall Way	50-5-164.6
5	Derbydown Homestead	206 Northbrook Road	50-9-34
6	Gibson’s Covered Bridge	Downingtown Pike & Harmony Hill Road	n/a
7	Marshalton Inn	1314 W. Strasburg Road	50-6P-59
8	Temple-Webster-Stoner House	685 Broad Run Road	50-8-22.1

Many people have the misconception that a nationally listed resource is fully protected from disturbance. This is not the case. The listing provides merely an honorary status. Federal listings do not prevent the demolition of, changes to, or encroachments on the historical setting of these resources. The designation provides national recognition, limited tax benefits to the owners, and triggers an additional level of review by agencies when federally funded projects affect them.

⁷ www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/brochure_6/29/07



The Township has the ability to recognize its local historic resources. It can also provide for the limited protection of them as long as it balances public welfare and private property rights. This ability is based upon its authority to regulate development, provide for public welfare, and administer local building codes. Towards these ends, the Township has recently enacted restrictions on demolition within the Marshallton National Register Historic District. It has also provided a limited density bonus to developers who maintain, rehabilitate, and adaptively reuse historic structures on their properties.



*Temple~Webster~Stoner House on Broad Run Road
painting by Richard Bollinger*

The most important object in the historical section of this Comprehensive Plan is to identify the Township's historic resources, evaluate their significance and integrity, and to establish realistic priorities for preservation. A balance must be achieved between new development and property rights and the preservation of historical resources and settings that contribute to the fabric of West Bradford.

To achieve this balance the historical resources in the Township have been categorized into three tiers:

- Tier 1 – Are the highest level resources worthy of significant protection efforts. These include our National Register Landmark and our National Register Districts.
- Tier 2 – Are important resources worthy of protection. These include individual National Register Sites and the historical Village of Romansville.



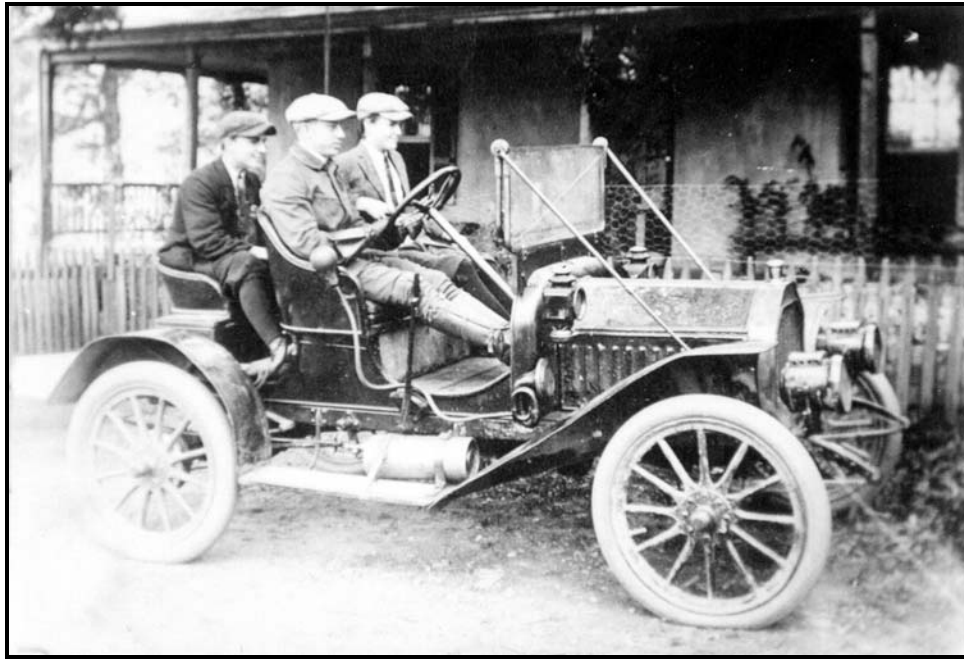
*Marshallton Ghost Walk celebration 2008
Martin's Tavern - Marshallton*

- Tier 3 – Are historical resources of local importance that have been identified in this plan. These individual local resources, selected and catalogued by the Township Historical Commission, include surrounding areas of historical landscape that provide site context that contribute to the viability of each resource.



Tier 3 historical resources have been further defined by the Township as local “Sites of Historical Significance.” The following objective characteristics are utilized to determine whether a resource (building, structure, site, object, or landmark) qualifies to be listed locally:

1. An age of seventy-five (75) years or older containing features of general historical, architectural, cultural, archaeological merit, or
2. An age of fifty (50) years or older containing particular historical, architectural, cultural, archaeological merit significant in that:
 - a. It can be identified with a historical personage or event;
 - b. It is representative of a period style of architecture;
 - c. It is a notable work of a recognized master architect, designer, or builder who influenced his/her era; or
 - d. It has particular significance for any reasons of local, state, or national history.



The Young Family, circa 1920's

