

**HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE “CREBILLY FARM” PROPERTY**  
**Prepared by the Westtown Township Historical Commission**  
**October 2016**

This report is intended to inform the Westtown Township Planning Commission, and other township officials, about historical aspects of the tract of land known as “Crebilly Farm.” This tract is about 320 acres in size and is bounded by S. New Street on the west, Street Road (Rte. 926) on the south, W. Pleasant Grove Rd. on the north, and Wilmington Pike (U.S. Rte. 202) on the east. There are two small separately owned parcels within these boundaries: that of Westminster Presbyterian Church at the corner of W. Pleasant Grove Rd. and Rte. 202, and another owned by the Moscharis family along Rte. 202. A preliminary plan presented by a developer, Toll Brothers, shows two additional small parcels (about six acres in total) to be carved out along S. New Street. The Crebilly tract currently has several residences; however most of it is used for agricultural purposes. Toll Brothers has announced plans to construct a 300+ home residential community on the tract.

There are three historical aspects under consideration:

- A. Involvement in the Battle of Brandywine, Sept. 11, 1777
- B. “Westtown Inn” structure dating to early 1800s
- C. Other 19<sup>th</sup> century structures

This report is not meant to be all-encompassing as various historical aspects may be brought to the Historical Commission’s attention at any time. Less is known, for example, about the other 19<sup>th</sup> century structures on the tract. Additional facts may be provided by newly sourced journals, photographs, maps and military or architectural research.

**A. The Battle of Brandywine**

Overview:

At the end of August 1777, a British army of approximately 17,000 men, under General Sir William Howe, landed at Head of Elk in Maryland. Their goal was to capture the city of Philadelphia, which was the capital of the new United States of America.

General George Washington, commander of the U.S. forces (Continental Army), moved his 15,000 soldiers, including Pennsylvania militia called up from Chester and Delaware Counties, to place themselves along the Brandywine Creek to block the British advance.

On Sept. 11, 1777, General Howe split his forces at Kennett Square, with about 9,000 soldiers under General Lord Cornwallis marching north and east around the right flank of Washington’s army. Howe’s remaining force marched east to the Brandywine at Chadd’s Ford as a “demonstration” to hold Washington’s defenses in place.

Cornwallis, using un-guarded fords on the upper Brandywine creeks, managed to arrive on Washington's thinly held right flank largely undetected. After a brief rest on Osborne Hill, along what is now Birmingham Road in East Bradford and Westtown Townships, Cornwallis' men briskly advanced on the Continentals occupying the high ground around the Birmingham Meeting Place. Continental skirmishers were in place along what is now Street Road. The British were victorious in this largest land battle of the American Revolution.

Advance of the Hessians across Crebilly Farm:

At the extreme left flank of the British advance were about 300 Hessian Jaeger mercenaries under the command of Lt. Col. Ludwig von Wurmb and Captain Johann Ewald. According to military historians, the British flank extended some 1,500 feet to the east of Birmingham Road. This fact places the Hessian troops just to the east of where South New Street is today (said road did not exist in 1777). Elements of the British Light Infantry advanced along the west side of today's South New Street.

Lt. Col. von Wurmb wrote a description of the advance of the Hessian Jaegers under Capt. Ewald:

"I saw that the enemy wanted to form for us on a bare hill, so I had them greeted by our two amusettes, and this was the beginning of General Howe's column's (participation.) We drove the enemy from this hill and they positioned themselves in a woods from which we dislodged them and then a second woods where we found ourselves 150 paces from their line which was on a height in the woods and we were at the bottom also in a woods, between us was an open field." *Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association, Inc. Vol. 6, Page 10*



Hessian soldier firing an amusette (light cannon mounted on a swivel that could fire a large ball) at Battle of Brandywine. Painting by Pamela Patrick White

The Hessian attacks on the Continental skirmishers, and then their main defense line at Sandy Hollow, were instrumental in winning the British victory. The distinguished conduct of Capt. Ewald won him the Hessian Knight Order pour la vertu Militaire, given for the first time to someone at the rank of captain. Upon leaving America, General Lord Cornwallis wrote to him: "I cannot leave this country without desiring you to accept my best thanks for your good services during the two campaigns in which I have had the honour to command the Hessian Chasseurs (Jaegers)."

"Campaigning in America: Captain John Ewald's Hessians in the American Revolution"

By Gregory Bereiter, Illinois Wesleyan Univ., 2001.

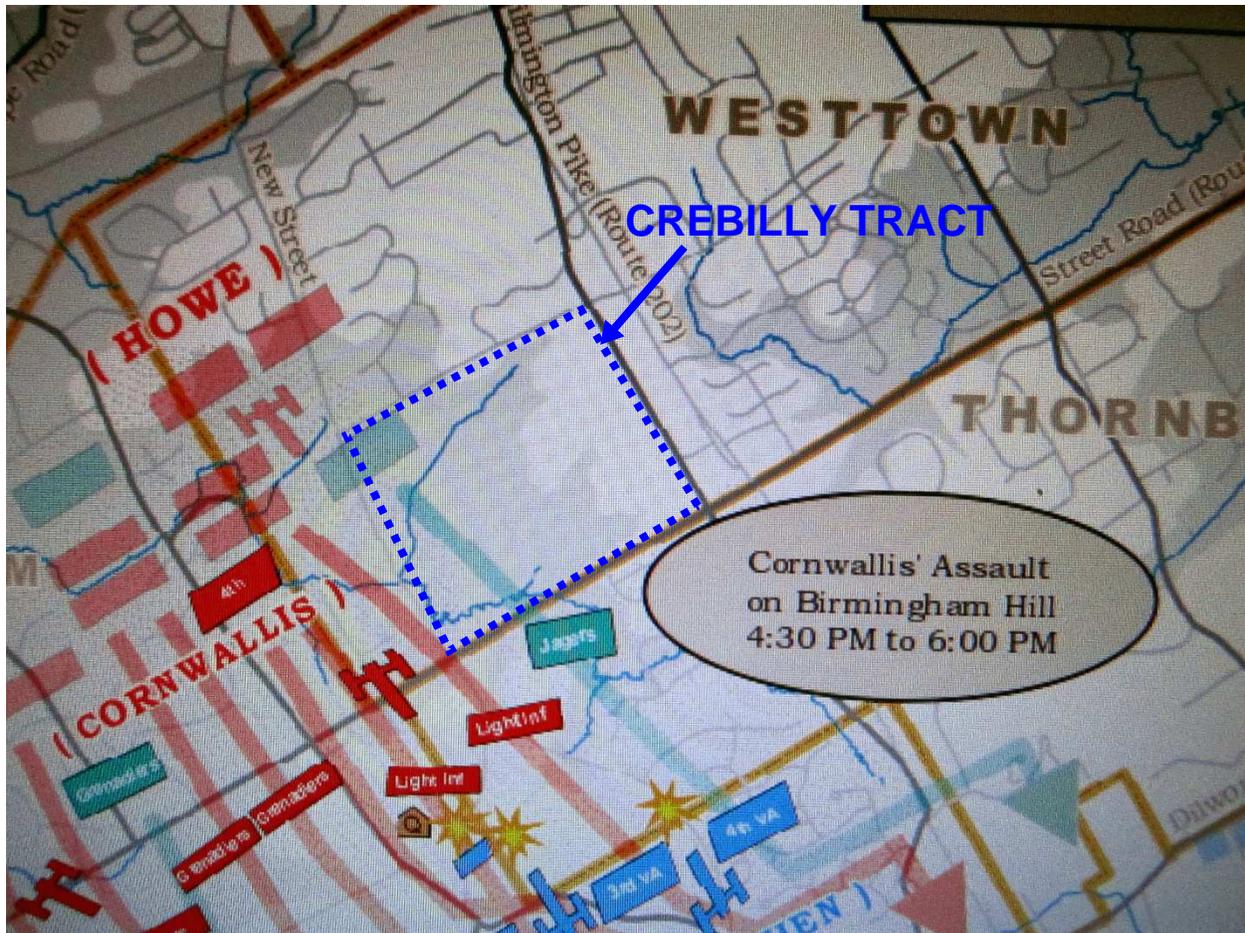


Col. Ludwig von Wurmb

Portrait c. 1788, from Wikipedia

Western Heritage Mapping, under sponsorship by the National Park Service and the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPPP) developed a number of maps — based on knowledge of the geographical features, terrain, and contemporaneous reports of troop movements — for the Battle of Brandywine.

These maps (reproduced below) show the Hessians' advance across the land that is today's Crebilly Farm. Military historians believe that the firing of the "amusettes" occurred on Crebilly Farm near today's Pleasant Grove Rd. and were aimed at Continental skirmishers situated on the Farm near what is now the intersection of Street Rd. and S. Concord Rd.

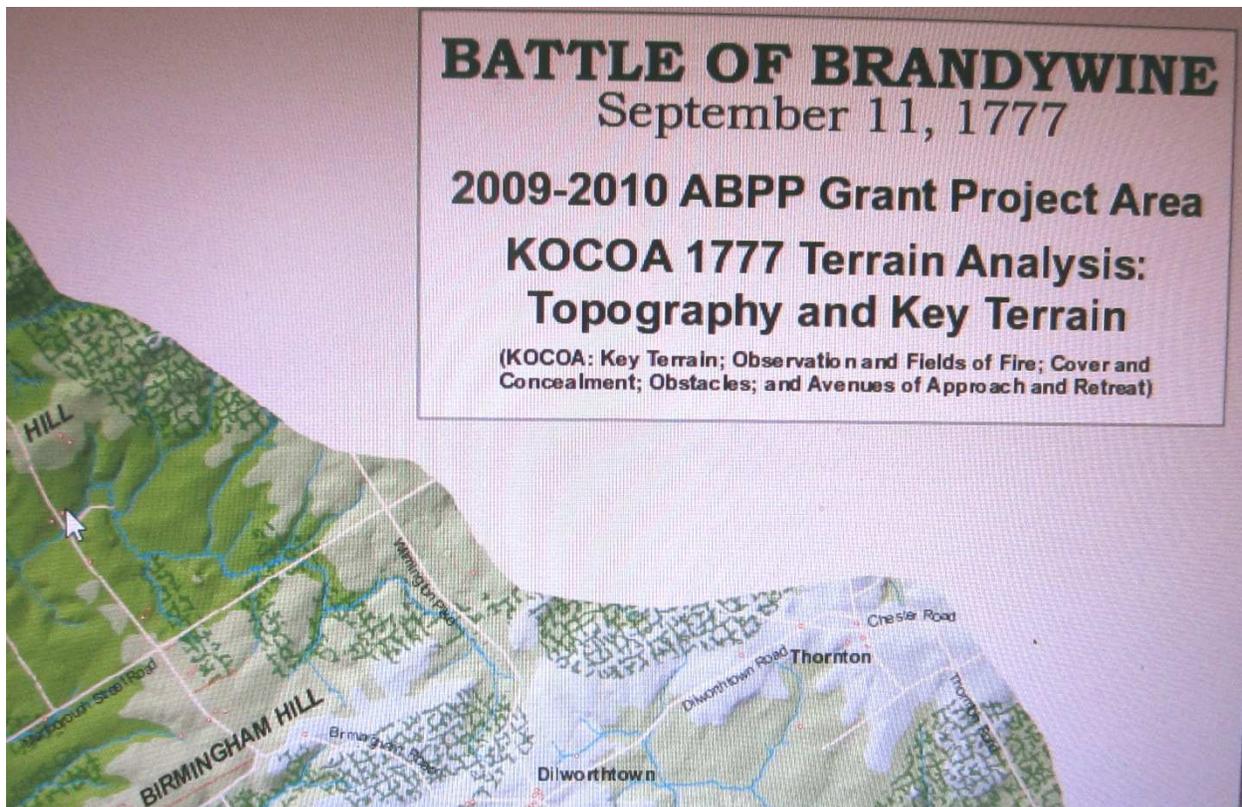


Sources: Archibald Robertson Map, 1777; Brandywine Battlefield Map, 1989;  
Tom McGuire, 2001, 2007

Produced by: Chester County DCIS-GIS and Chester County Parks and Recreation  
with cooperation from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

Copyright (c) October 2010. County of Chester, PA. All Rights Reserved

This map illustrates the path taken by the Hessian Jaegers (in light green) as they advanced across the "Crebilly Farm" to attack Continental positions.



This map illustrates the key terrain features showing “Crebilly Farm” as bare of trees and other cover, which allowed the Hessians to observe the forward-placed Continental skirmishers along Street Road.

In just the last year, the efforts to preserve the Brandywine Battlefield have, according to the Brandywine Battlefield Task Force, preserved a total of 17.1 acres through conservation easement and acquisition in Birmingham and East Bradford Townships. A total of 88.1 acres is a currently pending conservation easement in Birmingham and Westtown Townships.

The Planning Commissioners may benefit by obtaining additional details about the importance of the Crebilly Farm tract in the Battle of Brandywine through interviews with knowledgeable military historians, map makers, and representatives of the Brandywine Battlefield Task Force.

### **B. Westtown Inn**

At the southeast corner of the tract at Street Road and Rte. 202, stands a two-story stone structure now leased as a private residence. There is significant history attached to this structure.

In 1803, a log cabin tavern was built and carried the name “Sign of Count Powlaskey,” which honored Count Casimir Pulaski, a Polish nobleman who volunteered for U.S. service in the Revolutionary War, was the “father” of the U.S. cavalry, and whose charge saved the retreating

Continental Army after the Battle of Brandywine. By 1807, the tavern was known as the “Sign of the King of Prussia,” after Frederick the Great who had signed a treaty of commerce and friendship with the new United States. The tavern was a stopping place for drovers who were driving stock to market in Philadelphia or Wilmington and to local farms where the stock would be fattened before going to market.

In 1823, the log tavern was replaced by a two-story serpentine stone house, owned by Thomas Darlington. The stone was quarried about half a mile to the west (at Brinton’s Quarry). The crossroads of Street Road and the Wilmington Road became known as Darlington’s Corner. It remained popular with drovers and bore several names: Darlington’s Corner Hotel (1830) and Westtown Inn (1873).



The Westtown Inn circa 1930.

Photo: collection of Chester County Historical Society

The house is five bays wide and two rooms deep; it originally had a slate roof (later metal, and presently asphalt shingles). It is built on a rectangular plan with chimneys at both gable ends and, at one time, had a hooded porch over the front entrance. The windows on the first and second floor consist of six-over-six wood double hung sashes. The basement has a well and, at one time, outbuildings included a barn and smokehouse. A more recent garage has a serpentine stone façade facing Wilmington Pike.

At the peak of the Inn gable facing Wilmington Pike is a small date stone that reads “823,” the “1” having weathered away.

It is known that in 1843, the Thornbury Post Office was housed at the hotel and through the years the postmasters had familiar local names such as Taylor, Darlington, Brinton, and Highfield. (It is curious to note that the Thornbury Post Office was in Westtown Township while the Westtown Post Office was – and still is – in Thornbury Township.) Darwin Highfield was appointed postmaster in 1894 and the post office closed in August 1900. Highfield had a blacksmith shop on the east side of Wilmington Pike (where Lukoil gas station is today). A wheelwright shop, just west of the Inn, is shown in the Breou's 1883 Farm Maps.

The Inn was also the scene of political rallies. In 1844, it was owned by David Taylor, a member of the Whig Party, whose candidate was the noted Kentuckian, Henry Clay. Taylor sculpted the profile of Clay on the southeast corner wall a few feet above ground level. In 1860, he chiseled a black dog in the stone near the Clay profile. In his "History of Westtown Township," published in 1973, author Arthur James says the dog was named "Lincoln" after Abraham Lincoln, the Republican Party's candidate for president in 1860.

The crossroads, Darlington's Corners being, essentially, Westtown Township's only village, was a busy place in the 1870s. According to the county directory in 1882-83, the population was 75, and listed an agricultural implements manufacturer, a wagon maker, a barber, a wheelwright shop, and a livestock trader among its establishments. By 1899, commercial activity had decreased.

While the Inn was converted into a private home around 1908, and has been modernized throughout the years, the exterior remains extensively as it looked in 1823. The structures of Darlington's Corner have been eliminated one by one until, today, only three remain: the Inn, one c. 1850 house (Moscharis' residence) and a former house in Thornbury now housing a dentist office.

In a letter to the PA Department of Transportation, dated Sept. 9, 2015, the Chief of the Division of Archaeology and Protection for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, stated: " (I)t is the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Officer that the Westtown Inn (Key No. 067408) is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, under Criterion C in the area of architecture. The property is locally significant as an important example of Chester County Colonial-era style and the regional use of serpentine stone, and it retains integrity sufficient to reflect the period of significance, the c.1823 construction." (See Appendix 1)

### **C. Other 19th century structures**

*1129 S. New Street:* This serpentine stone house has a date stone for "1803" facing Radley Run to the south. An addition was added in 1985 and is sheathed with the same serpentine stone quarried across S. New Street. It is reported that the floor plan in the original section is unchanged, except for an indoor bathroom and insulation. The exterior façade and chimneys are believed to be largely original. There are several mid-20<sup>th</sup> century out buildings on

the property: a two car garage and a modern 4 stall horse barn. This house shows on the 1873 Witmer Atlas as the house of David McClure.



Photo by David Walter



Photo by Jim Guterl

*19 W. Street Road:* This is a two story frame house with a porch running the entire length of the front facing Street Road. A structure at this location appears on the Witmer 1873 Atlas of Chester County as “Joseph H. Brinton’s Store.” The 1883 Breous Farm Atlas indicates a second structure, a Wheelwright Shop, also at this location. The structure currently is unoccupied.



Photo by David Walter

*Tenant House, Wilmington Pike:* From what can be seen from the road, it appears to be a two story frame house. The 1873 Witmer Atlas shows a structure at this location, owned by M. Brannon. The structure currently is unoccupied.



Photo appearing on Crebilly Farm website

*Barn:* The 1883 Breous Atlas shows a barn and other structures on the John McClure property. The structures there currently, by the pond, appear to be in the same location.



Photo appearing on Crebilly Farm website

*Springhouse/Chapel:* the 1883 Breous Atlas shows a structure by the driveway and pond precisely where the springhouse/chapel is located. It is reported the springhouse roof was destroyed by a fallen tree and rebuilt as a chapel in 2005. It can accommodate about 20 people. At least one wedding (6/2/2012) and one funeral service (7/22/2016) have been held there.

*Other structures:* there are several other structures visible toward the Pleasant Grove (north) side of the property for which historical information has not been collected. The 1873 Witmer Atlas shows a number of structures existing at this location on the David McClure farm.



Photo appearing on Crebilly Farm website



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
**Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission**  
**Bureau for Historic Preservation**  
Commonwealth Keystone Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
400 North Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093  
[www.phmc.state.pa.us](http://www.phmc.state.pa.us)

9 September 2015

Brian Thompson, Director  
Bureau of Project Delivery  
Attn: Monica Harrower, District 6-0  
PA Department of Transportation  
P O Box 2966  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Re: ER No. 2014-8073-029-J (MPMS No. 95430)  
S.R. 202, Section CNM, SR 202 @ SR 926  
Thornbury and Westtown Townships, Chester County  
**Determination of Eligibility: Westtown Inn (Key No. 067408)**

Dear Mr. Thompson:

Thank you for submitting information concerning the above referenced project. The Bureau for Historic Preservation (the State Historic Preservation Office) reviews projects in accordance with state and federal laws. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and the implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800) of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, is the primary federal legislation. The Environmental Rights amendment, Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution and the Pennsylvania History Code, 37 Pa. Cons. Stat. Section 500 *et seq.* (1988) is the primary state legislation. These laws include consideration of the project's potential effects on both historic and archaeological resources.

### **Historic Structures**

We disagree with the findings of the agency regarding the eligibility of the Westtown Inn. Based on the information provided and available in our files, it is the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Officer that the **Westtown Inn (Key No. 067408)** is **eligible** for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, under Criterion C in the area of architecture. The property is locally significant as an important example of Chester County Colonial-era style and the regional use of serpentine stone, and it retains integrity sufficient to reflect the period of significance, the c.1823 construction. Please note that the recommended period of significance may extend beyond the original construction date (c.1823) if further research shows the house was adapted and evolved in a significant manner following local vernacular and/or stylistic trends of a period. The recommended boundary would follow the vegetative buffer, field patterns, and roadway network that surrounds the building, as illustrated on the attached map. The garage post-dates the construction of the house, and based on the area of significance currently defined, would be considered a non-contributing resource; the retaining wall is considered an uncounted landscape feature.

Our determination of eligibility is based upon the information provided and available in our files for review. If National Register listing for this property is sought in the future, additional documentation of the property's significance and integrity may be required to both verify this determination of eligibility and satisfy the requirements of the National Park Service (36 CFR Part 60). Thus, the outcome of the National Register listing process cannot be assured by this determination of eligibility.

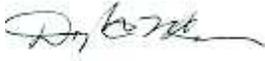
2014-8073-029-J

B. Thompson

Page 2 of 2

If you need further information concerning this review, please contact Emma Diehl at (717) 787-9121.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. McLearn", written over a light grey rectangular background.

Douglas C. McLearn, Chief  
Division of Archaeology and Protection

DCM/ekd

ATT: Proposed National Register Boundary Map, Westtown Inn (Key No. 067408)

PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY  
WESTTOWN INN (KEY NO. 067408)



Imagery Date: 10/7/2011 39°55'11.49" N 75°34'38.59" W elev 379 ft eye

**Site Map**

Westtown Inn, 201 W. Street Road (Key No. 067408)  
Westtown Township, Chester County

Source: Google Earth  
Image Date: 10/7/2011

Prepared By: Lotus Environmental Consulting, LLC

Not to scale

