

# WHITE CHIMNEYS: 1807-1957

*A Brief History of the Home and Those Who Lived There . . . . .*

*by S. R. Slaymaker II*

A writer of note — I believe it was Macauley — said that the study of one's family history constitutes "a rather harmless form of snobbery." Speaking of history in general, Sir Charles Firth says, . . . "it seems the record of the life of societies of men, of the changes which those societies have gone through, of the ideas which have determined the actions of those societies, and of the material conditions which have helped or hindered their development."

Compared with either of these definitions this cursory sketch cannot measure up — either as family history or as history in general. For snobbery largely presupposes judgment by externals with invidious comparisons. Certainly there is nothing in this story of family and home unusual or exemplary enough to warrant vanity on the part of the writer. On the other hand there is nothing here about ideas which determine events or visa versa. But there is something else in this story which should interest a group such as ours — concerned as it is with the recording of the social history of a specific region — Lancaster County. We have the development of the county and country in nucleus — namely one family devolving year after year in this locale. Our source material is all here in Lancaster County. There is much of interest yet to be dug up and examined. When it is, the lives of these people in this spot can better illuminate our perspective as regards the larger scene so that our study of history can more nearly measure up to Sir Charles Firth's excellent definition.

Among the country homes of southeastern Pennsylvania, White Chimneys is of singular interest to the lover of Americana.

While it was not completed and named until 1807, its beginning as a home dates from the 1750's and from this time until the present it has been the dwelling place of eight successive generations of the Slaymaker family of Lancaster County. Since this span of years covers every phase of the country's cultural development, the home is unique in that it reflects, in different ways, these varied periods — Colonial, Revolutionary, Victorian and Modern. Of interest also are the various historical facts connected with White Chimneys and its inhabitants — for example, the stage coach line, the Brandywine battle, the visit of Lafayette.

One of the most fascinating features is the collection of paintings; all of which are intrinsically associated with the ongoing life of the home. They have been catalogued and reprinted by the Frick Gallery and are well known by leading art critics.

Altogether then, the home, in its development represents a blending of historical periods — colored by the unbroken continuity of a single family's existing — generation after generation — within the house itself.

Mathias Slaymaker was born in Hesse Castle Germany; he emigrated to the city of Strasburg, which was then part of the French Empire, located on the left bank of the Rhine in the Province of Alsace.

About 1710 Mathias Slaymaker, along with the Ferrees and the Lefevres came to this country to escape the persecution which Huguenots had experienced almost continuously since the Reformation. One of his brothers, a clergyman, remained in the Emperor's dominion and was later appointed secretary of legation from that government to the court of St. James, and afterwards he was charge d'affairs.

Another brother stayed in Germany and his descendant was Frederick Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, the noted German theologian and writer.

Mathias Slaymaker and his wife Catherine received land from the Penns and settled in "London Lands" — adjacent to what is now Strasburg Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. It has been stated that he named Strasburg for the place from which he emigrated. He died in 1763 and is buried in the old Leacock Churchyard in the Slaymaker row.

#### COLONIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

Mathias Slaymaker had seven children, and his will stipulated that three of his five sons were to receive "all that tract of land that now he respectively dwells on."

Henry Slaymaker, fourth son of Mathias, was born in Lancaster in August 1734 and died September 25, 1791. A farmer, merchant, statesman, and a conspicuous Whig, he saw active service in the Revolutionary War. However, his war record is not so well known as were those of his three brothers and his son, all of whom had been in the New Jersey Campaign and some of whom fought at Brandywine. For example, his brother, John Slaymaker, was a captain of militia in the Revolution, and he had seen action previously during the French and Indian War, when in charge of wagons for the Braddock Campaign of 1755 which ended in the disastrous British defeat on the banks of the Monongahila.

Henry Slaymaker was a delegate to the convention which met in Lancaster July 4, 1776 to elect three brigadier generals for the Pennsylvania battalions. He was a member of the convention which met in Philadelphia July 15, 1776 for the framing of a constitution for Pennsylvania. In 1784 he was elected chief Justice of the Court, but his health began to fail and he died while in this position.

In 1754 he married Faithful Richardson, whose family were large land owners around the village of Gap, near the land that Henry had inherited. The old part of the White Chimneys house had been built by a Welsh Quaker yeoman named Samuel Jones. Samuel Jones' daughter married a Richardson and their daughter was Faithful — who married Henry Slaymaker.

Faithful and her husband lived in her grandfather's house — the rear part of the present White Chimneys. The fact that the old and the new sections are separate and distinct houses is born out by the stairs between the hallway and the dining room, by the lower ceilings in the rear section and by the two separate garrets, or attics, in both parts of the house. Stairs separate the two houses on the second floor as they do on the first.

The tombstone of Henry Slaymaker in the old Leacock churchyard is inscribed in an oddly picturesque way — the wording is crude and clumsy but the epitaph displays the charm often evident in rural colonial writings. The inscription is as follows:

"In memory of  
Henry Slaymaker  
who departed this life the 25  
of Sept. 1791 age 57

A patriot most firm, a saint without disguise,  
Has took his unknown flight above the Aerial skies,  
O Slaymaker, the sage, the wise, the good, thou are gone  
To sit forever with the Saviour on his throne."

Henry and his wife then, had been living in this home since 1754, and there they had ten children, the oldest of which was their son Amos who built the present day White Chimneys.



"White Chimneys," a painting in the primitive style, by **Hannah Slaymaker.**  
*(Slaymaker Collection)*

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Amos Slaymaker was born March 11, 1755 and died June 22, 1837. As has been said, he saw active service in the Revolutionary War. He was an ensign in the command of his uncle, Captain John Slaymaker, and when on furlough met Isabella Fleming of Salisbury Township, whom he later married in 1780. Henry bequeathed his lands to Amos, and presumably Amos lived in the old house with his father — until he built "Stage House", in the early 1790's.

This is the large stone house immediately to the west on the north side of the road. Amos and his brothers were the proprietors of a stage line which extended from Philadelphia through Lancaster to the west. The house — a large stone tavern — was considered one of the best on the road, and here horses were changed while passengers stopped to eat and sleep. The house was later acquired by the Himes family and is now the home of the family of the late Dr. J. R. B. Martin.

In 1807 he retired as actual manager of "Stage House" and built the mansion house, "White Chimneys." The house like the original structure to which it was added, is of stone 21 inches thick, plaster covered.

Changing architectural styles are clearly reflected when this mansion house is viewed as an addition to the old house. The old home is typical of Colonial farm houses. It was small and the present kitchen served as a living and dining room as well. The present dining room was originally two rooms. The partitions were torn away about fifty years ago at which time the marble fireplace was put in.

The upstairs, as is the case today, had three bedrooms. In contrast, the 1807 building was more than a farm house, being fashioned in the Classical Revival or Federal style common during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Most of the woodwork in the 1807 house is original. The mantle pieces are good examples of Classical Revival work (except for the tile in the fireplaces which was a late Victorian addition). The ceiling braces in the one room were also added at a later date. The large mirror in the front room is an original and interesting piece. When it was built glass makers could not construct a large enough sheet, hence the two pieces were used and one can note the seam at the point of juncture.

The house was then very much as it is today except for the west wing which was added by S. R. Slaymaker in the 1920's. The west wing comprises entirely the large room on the first floor which bears the architectural characteristics of that period. On the second floor a hallway leading to two bedrooms make up the later wing. The front garret on the third floor was correspondingly extended to the west. The opening in the wall at the base of the front staircase had been a west window before the addition was added. Such is the case also on the landing between the second and third floor, although the opening has been sealed. When viewed from the exterior, it can be seen that the western part was carried out along the same lines as the 1807 structure so that the addition is scarcely perceptible as such.

The famous jurist, Jasper Yeates, lived on the farm directly behind White Chimneys to the North. He was a close friend, as well as Amos Slaymaker's attorney. The two had large land ownings in common. These holdings were outlined in an indenture of 1795 (now in the White Chimneys collection of papers).

A story to the effect that the division of the Yeates-Slaymaker holdings was based upon the results of a card game has been accepted over the years as fact. There is no word of this in the correspondence between the two men and they were always close friends. The tale seems unreasonable also because of Amos' disposition. He was conservative and exacting as it proven by estate settlements (particularly the Boyd estate) which evidently represented a sizeable source of income for him. He also settled many bankruptcy cases, a very large number in 1799 as is evidenced by the White Chimneys papers. Also, the stage line was successful so long as he was involved in it.

The village, previously known as Salisburyville, became known during Amos' time as Slaymakertown.

Amos was magistrate in Salisbury Township for many years, County Commissioner for 1800 a member of the Pennsylvania State Senate 1806-10, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives 1810-11 and the U. S. Congress 1814-15.

Thus Amos' father, through inheritance and marriage, had acquired the original dwelling place and lands; his son completed the home itself and generally set the boundaries of what is the present day farm.



Portrait of Henry Slaymaker by John Hesselius.

*(Owned by S. R. Slaymaker)*

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#### LAFAYETTE'S VISIT

Dr. H. M. J. Klein's admirable history of Lancaster County describes Lafayette's visit to White Chimneys as follows, "This hamlet (Slaymakertown) was the scene of a high festival in 1824 when Lafayette revisited America and received the homage of the grateful people he had served so well. Enroute from Philadelphia to Lancaster,

a cavalcade of Chester Countians escorted him to the borders of Lancaster County, where hundreds of troopers rode to meet him. They dined 'a la fresco' in the fragrant shade of the orchards of Slaymakertown."

Unfortunately, there are no records of details relating to the event — at least none have been uncovered as yet. But "mores the pity" should the historian allow his love of "fact" writ large, to enfeeble his imaginative facilities, so that the plausible, the possible, the likely, are ruled out and fancy has no play.

Indeed it must have been a colorful event. Surely the great Marquis thrilled to the adulation bestowed along the route and manifest here. The occasion must have represented a landmark in life to the owner of the home. For he had trod the heart-breaking paths of retreat across New Jersey under command of the Frenchman, his uncles had been with him also on the sunny day in September 1777 along the banks of the peaceful Brandywine when Sir William Howe's scarlet Juggernaut swept the country boys before it with cold steel and hot volleys, which in fact could have almost been heard here, for the battle was barely thirty miles away. Howe took Philadelphia as a result of the battle and there he rested. Although the British were active as far up the road as Paoli — where British General Gray carried out his bloody night attack against General Anthony Wayne — there was no predisposition on their part to come further west. They might well have done so — perhaps under a more aggressive command they would have — because Lancaster County was not only rich in food-stuffs but was a rifle manufacturing center. Had this been the case, it is not unreasonable to suppose that confiscation would have been the order of the day so far as Amos Slaymaker's family holdings were concerned, for his father had clearly demonstrated his espousal of the revolutionary cause.

Perhaps those here for the Lafayette reception thought of the many wagons of Brandywine wounded which passed nearby, leaving the worst cases in surrounding farm houses, while they made their way to the hospital in Lititz and other towns. This was only forty-seven years before, during the Country's worst time of troubles.

So it should be safe to surmise that a feeling of satisfaction was prevalent at this reception — thankful satisfaction born of solid achievement against terrible odds, by a people, as Edmund Burke said, "yet in the gristle — not yet hardened into the bone of manhood."

Certainly this home in 1824 epitomized the national achievement.

#### VICTORIAN

Amos Slaymaker died on June 22, 1837 and White Chimneys passed to his seventh son, Henry Fleming Slaymaker, who was born on August 20, 1789 and who died February 8, 1860. He lived here with his parents before his father died.

Henry F. Slaymaker was educated at Robert Elliots Classical Academy in near-by Strasburg and later at Dickenson College where he was active in literary societies.

There was no architectural changes made with respect to the home during the time that he lived and farmed here and while he engaged in various business ventures in Lancaster. He was postmaster and Justice of the Peace for Salisbury Township during 1810-11-12. At the time of the War of 1812 he was commissioned a captain in the 28th Regiment, Second Brigade, Fourth Division Lancaster County Militia.

Henry F. Slaymaker married his cousin Rebecca Slaymaker Cochran on February 20, 1816.

Throughout his life, he was prominent in Lancaster social and civic activities. Upon his death White Chimneys was inherited by his son, Samuel Cochran Slaymaker, who was born here April 22, 1828. He died in Lancaster on February 2, 1894.

Samuel C. Slaymaker was a well known civil engineer who had worked on the survey of the Honduras Interoceanic Railway. His diary of the voyage on a sailing vessel is a particularly interesting account and is in the White Chimneys collection of papers. Later he was connected with many large railways and was appointed Colonel by Governor Pollock on whose staff he served. During the Civil War he was not in action, as was his cousin, a Captain Jonathan Slaymaker, who was killed in the charge at Fort Donnelson.

Also in the collection of papers are other diaries by S. C. Slaymaker. He evidenced a pronounced penchant for recording the minutes of details relating to any activity with which he might be associated. For example, when working for the New Jersey West Line Railroad of New Providence, N. J. during the year 1871 he kept a complete account day by day of any and all of his activities. Thursday, April 27, 1871 is recorded as follows — "went in morning train to N. Y. Spent day at Hanford's office — going up Broadway shopping and going over to Mr. Jackson's office at Jersey City. Left in 3:20 P.M. train for home. Dull and rainy all day and raining very heavily this evening."

His preoccupation with weather is attested also by his diary "Memorandum of Weather and Work" of 1851-52. This was written when he was a young man, farmed White Chimneys for his father at a time when his cup did not exactly run over — eleven years before his economically fortunate marriage to Jane Elizabeth Cameron Redsecker\* on May 28, 1862. An entry dated September 22, 1851 reads "Thermometer 64 degrees, quite cool, cloudy. Wind in the N.E. every appearance of being cold. N.E. stormy. Rolling the field north of hedge and hauling Aunt Susan Cochran's furniture to railroad to go to Philadelphia." And so goes the diary, a day by day recording of Lancaster County farm life one hundred and five years ago. In those days the tenant farmer lived in the old house and meals were prepared in the cook house — now the play house on the east lawn. During his time the home was a study in Victorian furnishings, according to this writer's late grandmother, who was responsible for changing this state when she moved in, although the two settees in the second living room were his.

Samuel Cochran Slaymaker was from all accounts a kindly and placid person as is born out by his inscription in his daughter's autograph book in 1891 — "Health, Honor, Happiness, Health to all the world, Honor to those who seek for it, Happiness in our homes—Papa S. C. Slaymaker."

Difference in temperament could not be better demonstrated than by an autograph in the same book by his son "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune, neglected — all the voyage of life is bound in shallows and in miseries" Aug. 18, 1891, your brother S. R. Slaymaker."

\*Jane Elizabeth Cameron Redsecker was a daughter of Samuel Redsecker (son of George and Susanna Ream Redsecker) and Jane Cameron Whitehill (daughter of John "Jr." and Elizabeth Cameron Whitehill). Elizabeth Cameron either was an aunt or was a cousin of Senator Simon Cameron of Donegal. John Whitehill's parents were John and Mary Middleton Whitehill, and his maternal grandparents were John and Mary Moderwell Middleton.



Portrait of Barbara Slaymaker, wife of Samuel Cochran Slaymaker, painted by Jacob Eichholtz.

*(Owned by S. R. Slaymaker)*

His many interests necessitated his living in Lancaster in his later years, but he and his family used White Chimneys as a summer home.

#### MODERN

S. R. Slaymaker was born in 1866 in Donegal Township and died on November 28, 1940 in Lancaster. He was very active throughout his life in business circles both in Lancaster and elsewhere, and in 1888 founded the Slaymaker Lock Company in



As has been noted in the 1920's he built the west wing of the house. Later he purchased in Italy the marble benches and fountain. He had the garden laid out in a fashion common on the continent and set it off in the rear with the pergola.

He had married in 1895 Mina Louisa Cohr of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The four children all grew up at White Chimneys. They are Samuel C. Slaymaker, II of Lancaster, Helen E. S. Rambo, Falls Church, Virginia, Jane C. S. Zimmerman, Pittsburgh and William F. Slaymaker, Hartford, Connecticut.

During S. R. Slaymaker's life time many improvements were made — additional tenant houses were built, the lawns were landscaped, trees were planted, the present barn and tobacco sheds were built (the old barn, close to the house, had burned down), and the stream was diverted to provide a pond with a waterfall in the lawn.

After S. R. Slaymaker's death in 1940, S. C. Slaymaker, II managed the farm for his mother, and upon her death in 1955 it passed to his son, the writer of this pamphlet.

#### PAINTINGS

Adolf Ulric Wertmuller was first painter to the King of Sweden, a member of the French Academy, and an artist of talented parts — well known throughout Europe. According to his biographer, Franklin D. Scott, he had painted Marie Antoinette, George Washington, and "other notables of America, France, and Spain."

With the seeming collapse of the "old order" during the French Revolution, Wertmuller made his way to America in 1794. He was well known in Philadelphia and it was probably there that he became associated with Amos Slaymaker. Amos Slaymaker was an executor of his estate and a close friend, and he left Amos certain of his paintings done in Europe. There is correspondence between Wertmuller and the Slaymakers in the collection of papers presently being catalogued by Mr. S. E. Dyke and the writer.

Later Wertmuller farmed in Delaware about twenty miles from Philadelphia where he died in 1811. He is buried in old Swedes Church in Philadelphia. The editing of his diary is now being carried out by Franklin D. Scott of Northwestern University assisted by Rosamund Porter. Preliminaries of this work have already been published.

An excellent description of Wertmuller paintings in White Chimneys has been compiled by Michael M. Bensovich in a booklet with reproductions of his works entitled "Portraits de la famille Wertmuller aux Etats-unis."

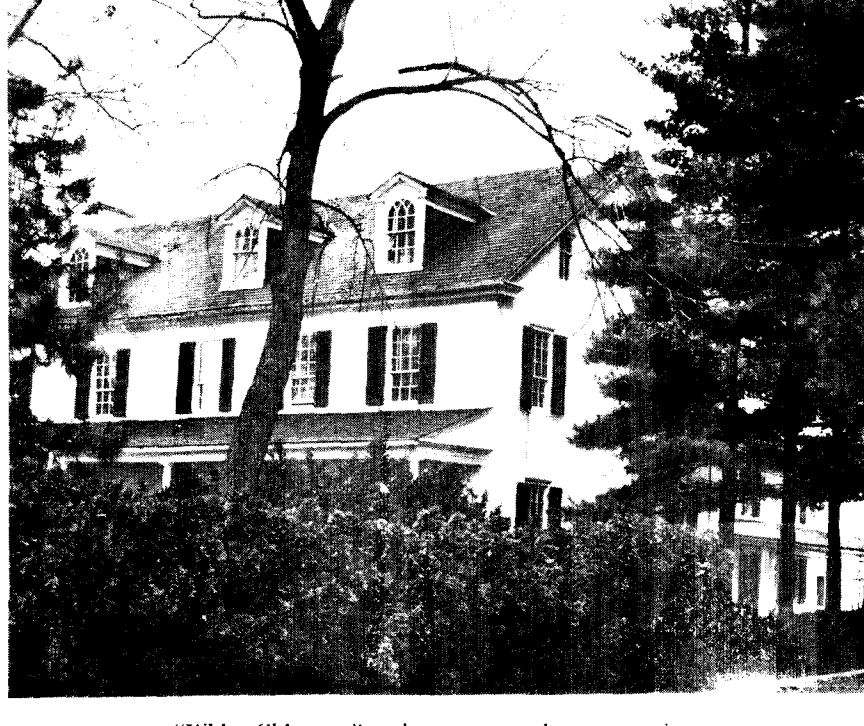
The Wertmuller paintings are all (except one) in the dining room. Two self portraits are on the west wall (one a miniature) and his paintings of his mother and father hang over the fireplace, while his sister, done in miniature are on the southeast wall of the dining room. The other miniature on the west wall is listed as "A Portrait of a Lady." Another Wertmuller self-portrait, done in later life, is on the west wall of the second living room.

It could have been more than coincidence that brought Wertmuller to White Chimneys. He married the grand-daughter of another famous Swedish expatriate painter, Gustaf Hesselius, whose son John was equally gifted and well known as a portrait painter. John Hesselius knew the first Henry Slaymaker, father of Amos, and had painted both Henry and his wife Faithful, — these two paintings hang on the east wall over the fire place in the second living room.

The connection between Hesselius and the Slaymakers might well have been responsible for the Wertmuller-Amos Slaymaker friendship.

Hannah Slaymaker, a daughter of Amos, is believed to have done the small painting of the White Chimneys farm on the east wall of the dining room. More refined and polished than primitives of its period, it is considered by critics an excellent work — done about one hundred years ago.

In the front living room (to the right on entering) on the south wall facing the highway, is a portrait of Amos Slaymaker, a copy of the original which was also painted by Hannah Slaymaker. The original is in the home of S. C. Slaymaker II in Lancaster, thanks to the generosity of the Lancaster County Historical Society which presented it to him. On the same wall there is a portrait of Rebecca Cochran (Henry Fleming Slaymaker's wife) painted by an unknown artist.



“White Chimneys” as it appears at the present time.

*(Courtesy of the Sunday News, Lancaster, Pa.)*

The noted Lancaster County artist Eichholtz is represented by the following works — Henry Fleming Slaymaker and his above mentioned wife, on the north wall of the second living room — adjacent to the dining room, the miniatures in the hallway (listed by the Frick Gallery as a gentleman and lady of the Slaymaker family) and the portrait of Samuel Cochran over the desk in the front living room. The two minatures have not been better identified as yet, but it is generally believed that they are of the same Samuel Cochran and his wife — parents of Henry Fleming Slay-

maker's wife Rebecca. A marked resemblance can be noted by comparing the one miniature and the portrait of Samuel Cochran.

A fine painting by Danner of Samuel Redsecker is in the center hallway over the closed fireplace. He was the father of Jane Elizabeth Cameron Redsecker who married Samuel C. Slaymaker, and their portraits are in the front living room over the fireplace. These were done by Baron Von Osko, well known around Lancaster at the turn of the Century. He also painted Samuel C. Slaymaker, II as a child, in the same room, as well as the later Amos Slaymaker (Samuel C's cousin), in the second living room on the east wall and the late Mrs. S. R. Slaymaker to the right of the desk in the front living room.

S. R. Slaymaker was painted by John Miller, and the portrait is on the wall at the end of the hallway — immediately in front of the dining room.

Miller's daughter, Mrs. Lucy Wellens, painted all of the portraits in the west wing — Mrs. S. R. Slaymaker and children, Helen as a child and both Helen and Samuel C. Slaymaker, II in later years. The well known contemporary Lancaster County artists, Vernon Newswanger and Mrs. Josephine K. Foltz, are represented by a portrait by the former of Jane Slaymaker (Mrs. Zimmerman) and a painting by the latter of the house. Both of these paintings are on the second floor.

#### RESTORATION

The different periods represented by the architecture and paintings are not as well highlighted in the case of the furniture. While many of the pieces have always been here, some have been taken away by members of the family and others have been lately acquired. Therefore no mention will be made in this sketch on subject of furnishings.

In October 1955 restoration work was begun by the writer together with the caretaker, Lloyd Homsher, with the helpful advice and guidance of the late Robert Locher, internationally known interior decorator and art critic. The downstairs, excluding the kitchen and modern west wing, was done in colors common to the period in which the house was built. The oak flooring in the front house was refinished as was the fine maple flooring in the old house (dining room).

Plans are in progress for complete restoration of the kitchen. This work will consist of opening the old fireplace, refinishing walls, ceilings, and floors with the placing of dough trays, a sausage maker, spinning and yarn wheels, rifle and powder horn — all objects which have been stored in the attic and have always been here.

Work is contemplated for the preservation of the portraits.

#### CONCLUSION

In his paper for the Lancaster County Historical Society entitled "A Centennial Event" the late W. U. Hensel in 1907 described a visit to White Chimneys by society members of that day. (See L.C.H.S. Papers, Vol. II, pp 277-280)

Now a half a century has passed and the Historical Society has come back. Professors, philosophers, politicians and moralists spend hours on expositions about these last fifty years and the multiplicity of questions which they have wrought, — the problems of nationalism and internationalism, utilization of scientific discovery, the increasing trend toward governmental centralism — all of which leads to an enlivened revival of the age old question — "what is the meaning of progress?" — (a question, which like Pilate's, will probably remain unanswered.)

So witless is the man who cannot sense the magnitude of these changes. In the

light of them indeed, Mr. Hensel's statement to the effect that this family "has illustrated the tenacity of Lancaster County landowners . . . by remaining residents and owners of real estate in this locality ever since their original settlements "becomes, after half a century, more germane. For whatever their faults, the proificacy of this family has only been exceeded by its permanency. And, as was mentioned, the family's permanency is the *raison d'être* of this sketch.

A long life has also been the part of the Historical Society, and what a useful one it has been, too. Should the past foretell the future, as we all hope it will, the Society's work will go forward — driven by renewed vigor and purpose with inspiration drawn from the knowledge that the new building represents the optimum in facilities — and atmosphere — for historians, professional as well as amateur.

It only remains then for me (the tenacious Lancaster County landowner!) to welcome the President, Officers, and members of this long lived society to the old home. I do so with real pleasure because I can think of no group whose presence here would be more fitting, now that White Chimneys is one hundred and fifty years old.

#### SOURCES

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Slaymaker Papers at White Chimneys
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#### THE AUTHOR

S. R. Slaymaker, II, was born in Lancaster in 1923. He was educated in the public schools of Lancaster, Franklin and Marshall Academy and Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, New Jersey. Interrupting his education, he served during World War II as a radio operator-gunner, flying combat missions with the 8th Air Force in England, and receiving an Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters, a European Combat Ribbon with four stars. His group, the 487th, received the coveted Unit Presidential Citation. He resumed his schooling after the war at Cambridge University where he majored in American History, receiving second class honors in 1947 as a member of Corpus Christi College.

Mr. Slaymaker lives at White Chimneys and operates the farm, as well as being associated with Slaymaker Lock Company as Advertising Director and Assistant Sales Manager.

He is a member of the Board of Directors, Sales Executive Club of Lancaster, Lancaster Manufacturers Association; and is an active member of the Hamilton Club, Lancaster Country Club, and the Bellvue Presbyterian Church, Gap, Pa. Mr. Slaymaker's historical and patriotic interests are evidenced by his participation in the Sons of Colonial Wars; and the Lancaster County Chapter, Sons of the Revolution, of which he is past secretary and treasurer. He is a member of the Lancaster County Historical Society.