

The Marietta-Lancaster Turnpike

by Lynn Peterson

PREFACE

This paper is the result of several months of driving and walking the Lancaster-Marietta Turnpike as well as research at the Lancaster County Historical Society. In time the exploration of this route became more than an academic exercise to fulfill a course requirement: it became something I knew and appreciated. The following study embodies this personal feeling for the future of this route as I believe the direction of development along this route typifies the prospects for the whole county.

L. Petersen
March, 1971

The Lancaster, New Haven and Waterford turnpike was incorporated about the year 1805 and built soon afterwards. It is now a two-lane road known as Route 23, and this study begins in the center of Lancaster heading west to Marietta.

[Editor's Note: Strictly speaking, the turnpike began at the intersection of President and Marietta Avenues.]

0.0 The busy intersection of West Walnut and North Duke lies about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the center of the city and its corners are evidence of a delicate blend of past and present which alternately enriches and inflicts this route. The southern corners are sites of two elegant old homes¹ whose present inhabitants include the American Cancer Society and a real estate agency. The practice of converting old residences into business establishments is fairly common and in this location it enhances the charm of downtown Lancaster. This arrangement greatly contributes to the visually and functionally interesting mix of old and new that brings a human, dynamic flavor to a city.

The northern corners reach back into the American Revolution when horses were stabled in the building which now accommodates an answering service and a private residence. Across the street, a large Methodist church was once the site of military barracks for Continental soldiers guarding British and Hessian prisoners.

The tone established by this intersection stands as a model of

what "can be" created in the older city and forms a significant contrast to the intersection at Rohrerstown Road.

0.0 - 0.3 This stretch begins with rather plain row houses accompanied by scattered business toward the corners of the intersections of Queen, Prince and Water. The core of the central business district with its primary emphasis on dispensing goods lies one block to the south while service-oriented enterprises are more prevalent toward the fringe of the CBD*. Therefore, along this route one may find such establishments as a travel center, parking lots, an auto center, etc.

Large storage facilities characteristically surround the Penn Central railroad tracks at 0.2 miles. The soot-covered red brick freight station with its weather-beaten sign reading "Outbound" is deserted now as is a tiny gas station of late 1920s vintage on the opposite corner.² To the south are the tall concrete grain elevators of the John W. Eshelman feed company, which have been immortalized by Charles Demuth in his painting, "My Egypt," in the Whitney Museum.

The nondescript structure of the Ready-Mix Concrete plant is located west of Prince Street at the corner of Water Street.³ Perhaps Andrew Wyeth would find the neighboring establishment, the "Little Dutch Cafe" a study with its proudly pathetic sign boasting "Since 1823" on the shabby door and its anachronistic separate door on the side street for a ladies entrance.⁴

As one might surmise from this description of business scattered along this small section of the route, the bland row houses at 0.0 miles become increasingly slovenly and unkept in the areas of the railroad and concrete company. Although it is difficult to assign neat, precise reasons as to the cause-effect relationship between two physical structures with different functions (housing and business), it is reasonable to conclude that the sight and sounds of the railroad and manufacturing fostered only the poorest in row housing.

0.3 - 1.0 As with many other moderate-sized cities, it is possible to get a visual grasp on the transition between land-use zones. Middle class residential housing is characteristic of this stretch of the route. The row houses are obviously cleaner and substantially larger than those closer in town. There are still scattered businesses such as television shop, art shop, Center for the Blind and corner grocery, but they are tastefully nestled among the houses and do nothing to detract from the pleasant tone of the surrounding environment. There are also several old homes along this stretch (one converted into a fraternity house for F & M) as well as two churches, a junior high school and the complex of St. Joseph's Hospital. As may be expected, there are numerous doctors' offices surrounding the hospital and a boutique and clothing shop to serve the needs of F & M stu-

dents. This area draws its strength and vitality from its diversity, intricately mingled in mutual support.

1.0-2.6 In order to avoid inaccurate generalization to the entire city, it is wise to limit the application of the concentric zone and sector theories of urban growth to the route under consideration. With this stipulation, these theories comprise a relevant explanation of the influence of this major route on the wedge-like expansion of residential areas. The combination concentric zone and sector theory applied to Route 23 West would be represented graphically with the following distinctive land uses: (1) CBD; (2) Low-class residential; (3) Medium-class residential; (4) High-class residential.

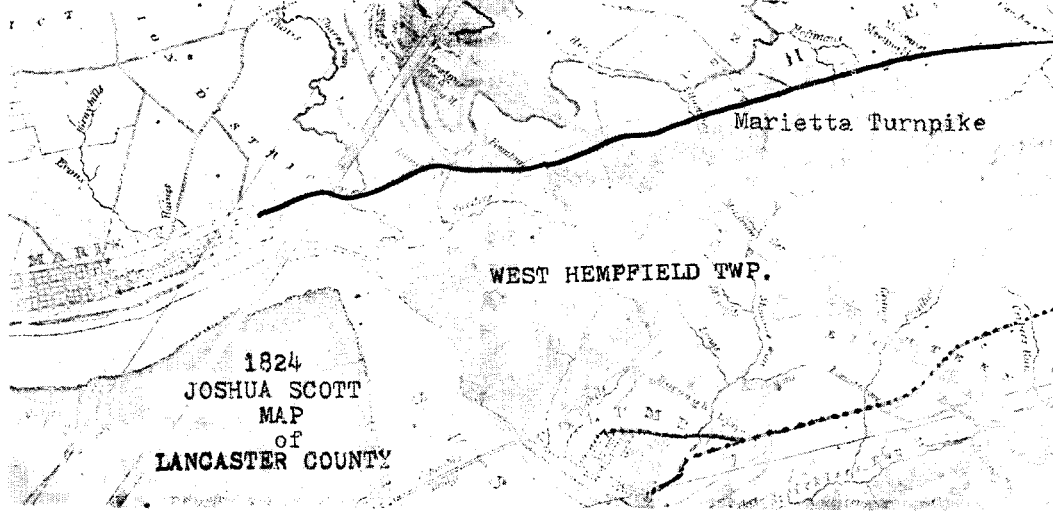
In the chapter entitled "Planning for the Future: 1871-1881" in **Lancaster County 1841-1941** by Professor Frederic Klein, it is written that

The residential section of the city was beginning to expand toward the west and the northwest. Large new residences were being built . . . and the Marietta and Columbia turnpikes were cut up into building lots and sold for "homes for happy people." "Chestnut Street has been opened by legal proceedings and soon the fences and side gutters will show us that the public highway is a straight one from the depot to the Marietta turnpike . . ." ⁵

As well as the theories of urban growth place a perspective on the growth along this route, there are even finer distinctions to be made between high-class residential homes of large proportions on a sizable piece of property and those residences which are part of estates containing several buildings. Outstanding examples of the latter are the former residence of P. T. Watt (of Watt and Shand) with its turreted stone house and carriage house and the Steinman estate on the Little Conestoga with its stables of championship thoroughbreds, green house, and other buildings whose function is unknown to the uninitiated.

Perhaps the most distinguished estate along the Pike is Wheatland, home of President James Buchanan. It was considered to be located "in the country" when it was built in 1828 by ironmaster William Jenkins; Buchanan became its owner in 1848.

As with the first intersection (0.0 miles) described in this study, there is a blend of the present with this magnificent past of majestic homes from the previous century. Today Wheatland's neighbor is the Wheatland Arms Apartments on the north side of the Pike and appropriately secluded off the road yet nevertheless providing an interesting and rather sharp contrast in the density pattern of the surrounding area. It occupies the site of the Straub mansion. The 20th Century is also evident in the School Lane Hills development flanking both sides of the Pike. The homes are obviously of recent construction ranging from 1929 to the present with a modern elegance and ample property. Beyond the last 19th Century estate on this route is still more evidence of the inevitable future rudely announced by bulldozers and a roadgrader on open land as it prepares



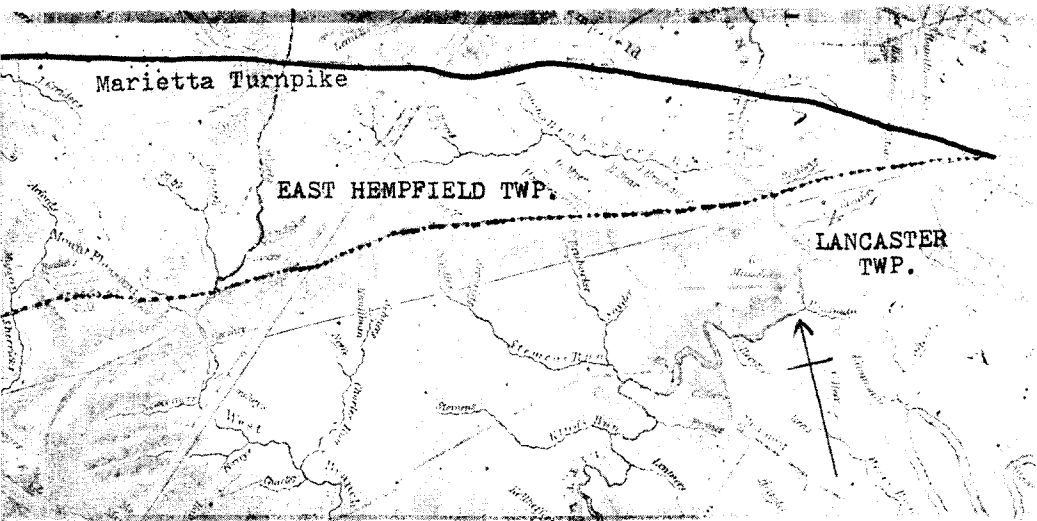
itself to receive the Barrcrest Residential Subdivision, once a site of a prosperous horticultural nursery.

2.6 East Hempfield Township. The history of Lancaster County written in 1883 affords us a concise and accurate statement of the natural features of the area:

The township is well adapted for cultivation . . . The land upon it (Chestnut Hill) has generally been divided into small farms, which produce per acre, perhaps as much grain as is grown in the rich limestone valleys upon either side of it. The land in the valleys is gently rolling and easily cultivated. A number of small streams . . . supply an abundance of water to every farm.⁶

2.6 - 3.1 This simple description of the natural assets of the township suggests a significant dimension to the discussion of the following portions of the Pike. It is not difficult to envision a bountiful past of lush farmland that preceded the small residential homes that now line the Pike as it passes through the township. During this study, I was able to witness that strange phenomenon called "progress" in its various stages of evolution. It has already been observed at 2.3 miles that a road was being built to provide access for forthcoming residential development. One-half mile further down the Pike a simple sign proclaimed that still more of the past was about to succumb to the pressures of present demands of a growing county. It boldly announced the sale of 7½ acres zoned with a designation of "R-2", indicates a single family land use potential. By the completion of this study, the land had been sold for approximately \$26,000.⁷

3.1 Rohrerstown Road. This busy main intersection of small town U.S.A. leaps into the 20th Century scramble for the "good life" with three gas stations, a Minit Market, bank and discount shoe center. When Rohrerstown was laid by Christian Rohrer on March 9, 1812, it was admittedly "an adventure in land speculation as were



so many villages of the 1812 period.”⁸ The motivating principle of speculation is as strong a force today as it was then yet it is not the similarity but rather the difference between the term as applied then and now that is most striking and significant.

The speculation of the 20th Century has justly acquired a mercenary and tainted connotation because it devours our most precious and finite resource—land—with an almost insatiable drive to fulfill the mindless demands of the future in the most expedient and profitable manner. This form of speculation is not that of Christian Rohrer and the past generations which regarded speculation as an “adventure” of relatively simple proportions. The modern brand of speculation which purposely produces three gas stations where one is sufficient cannot be condoned by evoking the sacred American belief in free enterprise. To explain “why” a situation exists need not in any way exclude the potential of what “could be” with careful planning.

I focus on this point as it so accurately and painfully represents thousands of intersections across the country which are so enmeshed in the strangle hold of private speculation that they fail to even recognize the dynamic potential of a crossroads that accomplish an intricate mix of functions with creativity, design and dignity.

3.3 The railroad crossing just .2 miles from this intersection has acquired the characteristically nondescript tone that one might expect on the fringe of town. On the north side of the Pike near the tracks, is an old wooden church prophetically accompanied by the blight of an adjacent tire dump. Once again there is visual evidence that the mere sight and sound of the railroad fosters the lowest forms of land use, i.e., a tire dump and dilapidated houses with the obligatory abandoned cars.

3.3 - 6.7 Settlers in Lancaster County were fascinated by the ownership of property which offered the status of becoming landed gentry. Fanciful names were attached to some of the properties particularly those along the Pike in the vicinity of Centerville Road and Oyster Point (5.1 - 6.7 miles). Oyster Point is located on what had been Peter Sweigart's "Coventry" while other names along the Pike were "Merryfield," "Blooming Grove," "Fairfield," "Smiths Delight," etc.⁹

The three miles of this stretch now alternates between residential development and open farm fields. The residential element includes a variety of housing types such as new ranch houses, an apartment complex with its convenient grocerette, older homes, some with discreet signs indicating that its occupant deals with plumbing, watch repair or hairdressing, and a sprinkling of unkept homes or shacks with abandoned automobiles and parts strewn about the property.

The open farmlands remain for now in defiance of real estate speculation. However, when the farm can no longer make the capital investment necessary to keep pace with technological progress and becomes taxed at increasingly higher rates in accordance with the surrounding commercial/residential/industrial base for taxation, it will be as vulnerable as the land which already yields not food nor beauty but numerous depressingly identical residential and business establishments. However, this parceling off unproductive farmlands is not to be mourned simply as the passing of a romantic era when man reaped a bountiful harvest. The process itself is a realistic response to the evolutionary demands of progress and as such it is necessary to meet the needs of an expanding population. What is to be deeply mourned is the absence of a healthy relationship between man and the new uses he seeks for the land. There is no direction or plan that will yield to the future a rich harvest of creative land uses which will effectively fulfill the needs of future generations. Speculation without a regional plan for development will undoubtedly result in haphazard misuse of a very valuable asset.

6.7 West Hempfield Township

Natural Features: A long high ridge of quartzite and quartz slate crosses the township from a tremendous rock arch called Chiques Rock, near the mouth of Big Chiquesalunga Creek to Crow Hill near Oyster Point. Along the northern slope is the Marietta Pike, and near the foot of the southern slope, running parallel with the ridge and the Marietta Pike, is the Columbia Pike. Broad Limestone valleys lie south and northeast of the ridge.¹⁰

In History: In many ways, West Hempfield is a study of contrasts; it is filled with the romances and legends of the past. Though an agricultural township, West Hempfield, for a century, was the county's most industrialized area. Five blast furnaces and five rolling mills once furnished employment to its residents; many others

toiled under Chestnut Hill, hauling out thousands of tons of iron ore to feed the furnaces.

The ridge folk and the miners were a sturdy lot; they worked hard, lived hard, played hard, and too often drank hard. Unimportant arguments occasionally became a matter of life and death. . . Local inns were well patronized, and a few of them provide folklore with many tales of violence. Essentially, however, the Chestnut Hill people were devout and friendly folk, close to the soil which was their economic sustenance. Certainly the drunken brawls were not truly representative of the activities of most West Hempfield residents.¹¹

6.7 - 7.6 Silver Spring, named for a beautiful spring near the village, was an ambitious bit of land speculation by Jacob Hiestand in 1811. For many years it was a mere hamlet which grew around Gamber's Tavern and consisted of a blacksmith shop, wagon-makers shop, a store and 3 small tenement houses. The Reading-Columbia railroad completed around 1863 crossed the turnpike $\frac{1}{4}$ mile east of the tavern and the village gradually grew in that direction until the whole distance was taken up with comfortable homes surrounded with fine gardens and yards. From a history of Lancaster County written in 1883 the following is significant about the role of Gamber's Tavern in the development of Silver Spring:¹²

Fifty years ago [meaning 1823] a very large business was done there. After the construction of public improvements, like other rural taverns, it went down and has never entirely recovered its former prosperity. The village of Silver Spring is growing rapidly and the tavern will doubtless in the near future do a profitable business.¹³

This statement describing the demise of one of our early social institutions has significant ramifications for understanding the tone of life as it now exists along the Pike. Silver Spring might have been "growing rapidly" by 19th Century standards, but it is now a rather sleepy village all but forgotten by the 20th century except for a tiny post office attached to a small "Mom-and-Pop" grocery store. The similarity of the fate of Gamber's Tavern and the village is appropriate in that it appears that neither "entirely recovered its former prosperity."

If Simon and Garfunkel's classic ballad "Sounds of Silence" speaks the truth of our time with the thought that "the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls" then one is tempted to transfer this image of the city environment to its rural counterpart in Silver Spring. The "writing" on Gamber's Tavern takes the form of splattered Halloween-type painting on the once proud stone walls and an unsightly billboard at the foot of the broad steps leading up to the main entrance. These marks of neglect and commercialism are clearly prophetic in their comment on the un-aesthetic, uncaring, haphazard "progress" that inflicts the present upon a remembrance of the past.

7.6 Ironville Pike. Ironville, one mile south of the Marietta pike, derived its name from its nearness to the Chestnut Hill Iron Ore Company's operations. The description of the extent of mining oper-

ations and the people who inhabited this type of hamlet is best read about in the introduction to the township (see footnotes 10 and 11). As with so much of this region along the Pike, the total withdrawal of the main economic base severely retarded further growth and drained the vitality and sense of community which a flourishing economy fosters in an area. And, as is often the case, reliance on a single economic base proved fatal when the life-line was severed and there was no sound foundation upon which to build self-sustaining economic diversity.

7.6 - 9.5 This stretch contains some of the best examples of the hilly, sloping farmland which is the heart of the township. The southern view from the Pike is wonderfully panoramic, especially at 7.9 miles where one passes sheep grazing, an orchard and wide open space down through the valley. [In spring of 1972 the orchard was uprooted and several small homes built on the site.] The Chestnut Hill Mennonite Church is in precisely the same location as is shown on the map dated 1820 reproduced on pages 132 and 133. Only its location gives continuity to history as the church is now totally refaced in modern red brick, a cosmetic attempt to integrate a new addition with the old structure.

9.5 - 9.6 As was previously mentioned, agricultural activities dominated the economic effort of West Hempfield. That activity which could be regarded as industrial was concerned chiefly with iron. The Chestnut Hill ore banks were the largest of these operations, with its huge open pit and shafts. Other ore banks in the township were Sherk's, operated by Musselman and Watts, on the south side of the Marietta Pike about 3 miles east of Marietta and now the site of a depressing 20th Century phenomenon—a vast automobile junkpile. Tunnels were dug into the bank, and at its peak approximately 9,000 tons of ore were removed annually. This ore was then used in Musselman and Watts furnace at Marietta. On the north side of the Pike and directly across from the latter mine was Copenhaver's Ore Bank operated by James Myers and about $\frac{1}{4}$ the size of Sherk's. Today this rural setting is blighted by a huge auto graveyard surrounded by a high metal enclosure and located just .1 mile west of Dr. George Brett's handsome old stone house on the Pike. Once again the influence of shabby commercial buildings, shanties, unkept trailers and other lamentable signs of progress are cluttering the valley, ruining the beautiful rural settings and the fine old stone mansions and grist mills.

9.6 - 10.7 This mile is sprinkled with isolated trailer homes, homes with junked cars on the premises and farmland. At 10.7 miles one mile south of the Pike is the hamlet of Kinderhook which harbors an interesting bit of local history in its origin.

Kinderhook is said to be named after the home of President Martin Van Buren, the Democratic party choice in 1840. George Cline, a distinguished resident and the hamlet's only Democrat, named the settlement much to the dismay of Whigs and latter Republicans who lived



Brick Tavern on Marietta Turnpike

there. According to legend, the naming of the short-lived township around Mount Joy, "Harrison" was done chiefly to avenge the neighboring Kinderhook.¹⁴

11.2 Throughout the township are many old homes which, though now decayed or in disrepair, show the marks of having been handsome residences 130 to 200 years ago. Quite a few are to be found off the beaten path, but a remarkable number are holding their own along the Pike. At Kames Hill Road is a brick mansion of magnificent proportions and elegance.

... although it has long been abused as a county warehouse, its 1810 architecture remains relatively unchanged. George Snyder, a great and unsuccessful speculator in town lots, built the structure as a hotel to serve the Marietta turnpike traffic, particularly the teamsters on their East-West runs. With the coming of the canal and railroad the turnpike business decreased and the hotel with its adjoining distillery came upon hard times (as did Gamber's Tavern in Silver Spring). Later, the inn business operations furnished customers with a variety of services.

the local population increased in size and mobility, the hotel prospered." ¹⁵

However, in the 20th Century the tavern ceased operations and was boarded up. It is only to be hoped that someone will realize the significance of the role played by such establishments in the history of the county and restore it to its former state.

11.8 Chiquesalunga Creek. This is the site of the majestic Fountain Inn two miles east of Marietta. It was built by Philip Snyder around 1808 and is hailed as one of the largest old wagon taverns in the county. Generally known as Boyd's Tavern, it was owned and operated by Samuel Boyd for many years. Its magnificent proportions are ample evidence of the importance of the Pike and the role of the inn during the early years of this country. The shell of the once great Inn is a poignant reminder of those early, bustling days.

11.9 East Donegal Township. This township acquired its name from a county in northern Ireland and its pioneer settlers located near the aforementioned Chikis Creek. The 1883 history of Lancaster County records Peter Allen, a trader and trapper of furs, as the first settler in 1718. His one story house of stone can be seen from the Pike and may be approached by turning onto the Donegal Creek Road. The house is still standing today beside Donegal Creek and will hopefully be restored as a county historic landmark. The tremendous growth this country has experienced since this house was built over 250 years ago is most deeply realized as one is able to stand before the actual home of such a pioneer. This humble home is very precious to our heritage for even the most expert 20th Century techniques of replication would be unable to capture the authenticity of the original house.

12.0 - 12.3 One comes upon the town of Marietta rather suddenly since the traveler's only warning consists of about .2 miles of small residential homes on its fringe.

12.3 River Road (Route 441) . This intersection provides a wonderful vantage point from which to view the Susquehanna as it makes the mighty curve upon which the town of Marietta was born. The extraordinary increase in river business at the turn of the 19th Century started a number of new towns along the river a few years before the War of 1812 and each became the rival of the other. History relates an interesting account of the role of planning in the formation of the town:

On the second day of April, 1813, John Peder, James Mehaffey and James Duffy purchased . . . 61 acres of land adjoining the Anderson farm on the west and laid out the entire tract into 562 building lots. The town plan was distinct and separate from Waterford, and the streets did not connect in a straight line from those of the latter place. In the centre of the plan ground was reserved for a "market place" and also for public buildings. In their advertisement to the public announcing that they had laid out a town they designated the place as "Marietta." ¹⁶

Among the list of taxables the following year were 38 carpenters which gives some indication as to the speed with which buildings were being erected. The list is also filled with taverns, storekeepers, merchants and tradespeople.

History records that the first half of the 1820's was one of wild speculation followed by economic disaster throughout the nation. It was within this burst of speculation that the Marietta Turnpike acquired its charter as well as a myriad of other enterprises such as banks, bridges, trading companies, etc. This extraordinarily stimulating pace of business took its toll on Marietta as it simply grew too fast and without sufficient controls.

A large class of disreputable persons followed the stream of speculators who overflowed the place and like birds of prey lived off the earnings of others. When the final crash came but few were able to weather the storm. The recovery of business prosperity was gradual but assured.¹⁷

It is evident from the dismal appearance of the town in the latter half of the 20th Century that Marietta once again suffered great economic loss with the decline of iron operations in the last half of the 1800's. Only shabby mansions serve as a reminder of the wealth of a small town which once boasted seven millionaires among its inhabitants. Perhaps the most significant point to be remembered from this cursory glance at the effects of business cycles upon a small town is that the town is doomed if at the height of a boom, it fails to seize the opportunity to diversify its economic base which will then provide a substantial middle class which will be able to carry the town forward.

The Marietta Pike deadends into the new Armstrong plant whose employment capacity possesses some of the potential necessary for the restoration of Marietta. The town council must be thoughtful yet bold in planning for a dynamic and progressive future for the town. Its location offers it the opportunity to attract more industry as well as provide a potentially powerful counterpoint to the thriving city of Lancaster which lies only 12 miles east.

[Editor's Note: In the late 1960s, a group of Marietta residents, mostly persons who had moved to Marietta in recent years plus a sprinkling of "old residents" determined to have their town recapture some of its proud heritage, formed the Marietta Restoration Associates, Inc. In a few years its efforts have been remarkably successful. Within the last two years more than half of the fine old properties suited for restoration have been purchased, and are being carefully rehabilitated by their private owners. Property values have risen, and a new pride is being felt in Marietta, at least among its more civic-minded residents.]

NOTES

¹ The large structure on the southeast corner is the Hamilton Apartment House, Lancaster's first building erected specifically for that purpose around the beginning of the twentieth century. (JL)

² The southeast corner of Prince and Walnut streets, now occupied by an abandoned filling station, was once the location of the Relay House, a stone hostelry of distinctively eighteenth century architecture. It was so-named because the tracks of the early Columbia and Philadelphia Railroad, later the Pennsylvania Railroad, ran along the eastern boundary of the property. The stop was a "relay" station for horse teams that were used before steam locomotives were used. (JL)

³ The 1920-vintage commercial building on the southwest corner of Prince and Walnut streets was erected for an automobile showroom and sales garage. In the mid-1930s the structure became Lancaster's first "supermarket," the Giant Leader, a self-service food market. It was a far cry from today's glass and stainless steel supermarkets; the floor was oil-stained and pitted concrete, the shelving and food bins were green-painted home-made contrivances of second-grade lumber, and the walls and ceiling contained many drab and dusty reminders of the motor car business after the Great Depression. With the arrival of Food Fair markets about 1940 the Giant Leader abandoned its store, and during the war the structure was leased by Armstrong Cork Company for storage of wrapping materials. After the war Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co. remodeled the building for the selling and warehousing of paint and glass products.

The entire neighborhood around Prince and Walnut streets, and northward along Prince Street, contained numerous coal pockets, warehouses, and manufacturing establishments that required railroad sidings. Many of these structures have been destroyed by fire, or have been razed because they were disused. (JL)

⁴ The "ladies entrance" was a common feature of most saloons and taverns. Gentler folk have been somewhat reluctant to reach the dining rooms by walking through the loud, boisterous, and profane bar section. Separate doors were provided to eliminate that nuisance. Of course, it will be recognized some men, and family groups preferred the ladies entrance for one reason or another including the element of appearance. It may also be understood some females preferred to enter saloons by boldly pushing through the barroom door. (JL)

⁵ Frederic S. Klein, *Lancaster County: 1841-1941* (Lancaster, Pa., 1941) Lancaster County National Bank, p. 71.

⁶ Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans, *History of Lancaster County, Pa.* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1883), p. 866.

⁷ East Hempfield and West Hempfield township supervisors, zoning commissions, and citizens have been engaged in numerous heated debates during the last year or two over the rights of farmers to hold their land for higher return from commercial, industrial and apartment developer purchasers as opposed to the rights of residential property-owners to restrict adjacent farmland through zoning to protect their investments in homes and to preserve the suburban-rural environment. In a recent hearing in East Hempfield Township one supervisor stoutly maintained the rights of the farmers owning land for development must be considered over the desire for homeowners to preserve their property values and way of life because the farmers cannot look forward to retirement on large pensions as it was suspected the homeowners (mostly of the executive and professional class) can do. (JL)

⁸ J. W. W. Loose, "East Hempfield," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society*, 1963, p. 24.

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ J. W. W. Loose, "West Hempfield," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society*, 1963, p. 73.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹² Ellis and Evans, p. 880.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Loose, "West Hempfield," p. 74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁶ Ellis and Evans, p. 625.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 627.

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