

Birchard Homestead Farm
Birchard Family
By Dayton Birchard

Welcome to Birchard Homestead Farm and to the “Old” farm house. The restoration of the old farm house has been in progress for three seasons. It is presently far from complete. A definite milestone has been achieved as of Christmas 1975. The Christmas party in the parlor for the Birchard families is, we trust, the first of many enjoyable occasions to be experienced in the future.

The old house is located on a piece of land purchased from the Connecticut-Delaware Land Company of Connecticut and deeded to Jesse Birchard prior to 1799. The original grant of land was a rectangular area bounded by lines one mile long running north and south, and by lines two miles long running east and west. The deed called for twelve hundred eighty acres. The original deed from the Connecticut Land Company may be seen at the Susquehanna Historical Society rooms, Montrose, PA.

After a decade of controversy between the states of Connecticut and Pennsylvania regarding sovereignty over the area, Pennsylvania was declared to be the rightful claimant. Jesse Birchard then bargained to purchase a smaller area, 159.4 acres, from Dr. Robert H. Rose, who had become the owner under Pennsylvania laws. This deed is dated May 16, 1814, recorded in Deed Book 2, page 261 at the court house at Montrose, PA. The original deed is in the Birchard Safety deposit boxes.

One of the original corners to both the Connecticut grant and to the Pennsylvania deed, which was co-terminus, is located on the hillside west of (the) old house. It can be clearly seen from the roadside windows. It is at the apex of the “three cornered lot” of land.

The reason for the controversy between Connecticut and Pennsylvania regarding claims to land in Northern Pennsylvania arose from the following circumstances: “The charters granted by English sovereigns to Connecticut and Pennsylvania were based on the assumed right of possession in virtue of the discovery of it shores by Sebastian Cabot, who first sailed from England under commission of Henry VII, May 1497.” Blackman Page 2

November 1620 James I incorporated

Read page 2-3 Blackman

In 1681, the same King Charles II granted to William Penn lands bounded on the north by the 42nd parallel. Thus the claims overlapped.

Under the Connecticut claim the land was surveyed and townships laid out in what was generally referred to as “Westmoreland”. The area of “Ruby” about 23,000 acres, included the present Birchard farm. Under the Pennsylvania claim the land was surveyed and laid out what was referred to as Northumberland, and later subdivided into an area call Luzerne County. The areas were laid out in irregular amounts from 388 to 425 acres. These areas were sold to warrantees at the rate of \$26.66 $\frac{2}{3}$ per hundred acres. Land investors, few of whom had any intention of living in the area, purchased the land.

These original purchasers of warrants sold them to land speculators. The original purchasers of warrants from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in areas now occupied by “Birchardville” were: Elizabeth Chandler, Stephen Pascall Jr, Mary Ashton, William Gray.

These four persons, along with many others, sold their claims to Trench Francis. Upon his death Trench Francis willed all his lands to Anne Francis, his wife. By deed, dated Feb 18, 1809 Anne Francis conveyed all these tracts of land in northern Pennsylvania, over 100,000 acres, to

Robert H Rose. Richard Penn (?), on Feb 25, 1809, ratified and confirmed this deed. A record of which is filed in Luzerne County Courthouse, Wilkes Barre deedbook II, Page 161.

Jesse Birchard's brother, Jabez, purchased a similar tract of land, 1280 acres from the Connecticut-Delaware Land Company. This joined the Jesse Birchard tract on the north. (The present Charles Burr farm is a part of that area.) A brother-in-law of Jesse and Jabez, by name of Israel Birchard and also their cousin (?) had married their sister Lydia. He located on the next tract of land on the north in the neighborhood of Fessenden Curves called at the time Gordonville.

Late in the summer of 1799 a party of prospective settlers came to Pennsylvania. They cut down trees enough to construct rude cabins, girdled additional ones, and prepared the soil to plant winter grain. They returned to Connecticut that fall. The following spring they migrated to Birchardville. Therefore in the summer of 1976 the 175th crop of farm products will be harvested.

Three routes of trail have been identified. Some prospective settlers were crossing the New York State line from Massachusetts and Connecticut, and coming to the headquarters of the Susquehanna River near Cooperstown. They were rafting down the river following the Clinton route of travel during the Revolutionary War. Settlers along the Susquehanna running from Binghamton to Wyalusing followed this route.

A second line of travel was a route which crossed New Jersey from New York State and from point on the Hudson River to the Delaware River. From Dingmans' Ferry or Milford through Lord's (?) Valley, Blooming June (?), and Hamline. As early as 1762 settlers were following the old Connecticut Wyoming road to the Wyoming Valley and Wilkes Barre area. From there the Sullivan expedition route was open northward to the Tunkhannock, Meshoppen, Wyalusing areas. Up the Wyalusing creek as far as Camptown, Stevensville and Rushville settlements were made by people who had followed these two routes.

A third route of travel was improved for travel in 1800. It was a continuation of the turnpike from Newbury on the Hudson River to Cochection on the Delaware River. Former trail and ox-cart path was in that year incorporated into the Cochection-Great Bend turnpike road. It crosses the rugged terrain of Wayne County through Reileyville, Cold Spring, Mount Pleasant, Belmont and on into Susquehanna County through the present towns of Herrick Center, Gibson and New Milford (Pennsylvania Legislative writs (?) 945)

In all probability this was the route followed by the early residents of Forest Lake Township as they came from Long Island and Connecticut areas. From New Milford they followed a wood road southward (a primitive road leading in the valleys from Great Bend on the Susquehanna River to Tunkhannock on the Susquehanna River.) This semi trail-road was bisected by an equally difficult route to travel which lead over the ridges in an east-west direction from Nine Partners (Harford in Susquehanna Co) to Bridgewater (well known in Connecticut and settled before Montrose). This route of travel came down over the ridge onto the headwaters of the East Branch of the Wyalusing Creek. (This would be located in the valley between Montrose and South Montrose). From there an Indian trail, later an ox-cart road, lead to the settlements on the lower Wyalusing Creek – Rushville, Stevensville and Camptown. It is along this general route or its improvements that, in all probability, the Birchards, their relatives and their neighbors traveled back and forth to Connecticut from 1799 until 1820.

Why would people living in comfortable New England houses housing their animals in large, long barns, by occupation working in well fenced fields, worshipping in white spired churches

decide to undertake the hardships of migrating to primitive living conditions to work in rock strewn hillside fields, to live in isolation cursed forests surrounded by log cabins? Why?

The answer is simple. With their system of technology the available ways of making a living were filled up. Unemployment, inflation of prices, depreciation of currency, over population, these were the economic conditions.

Stories of the available, fertile land, of streams teeming with fish, of plentiful game and of future markets for farm crops fired the imagination. Cheap land; Love of Adventure; A place to make ones mark in the world; the planting of a finer (?) Connecticut culture in Westmoreland. These were the impelling reasons for migration.

Jessie Birchard and his wife Harriet Smith Birchard came to "Ruby" in 1801. They had married on the fourth of November 1797. Ashael Wright Birchard was born the 15th of August 1800. He was a baby in arms when the family made the long trip from Connecticut.

Jesse Tracy Birchard was born the 26th of November 1802 and the third son was born the 5th of April 1805. The sixth member of the family was the mother of Harriet, Alethea Tracy Smith. She had been a widow since the 7th of January 1796. Her husband, Ashael Smith, who was a sea captain had been lost at sea on that date. (In the historical room of the Montrose Library is a beautiful china bowl which Ashael Smith brought home from one of his sea voyages. It was loaned to the library by Levi Birchard.) It is uncertain at what time Alatheia came to Birchardville. She died June 4, 1819.

The following statistics are newer (?) figures:

	Total	Living
1. Jesse and Harriot	2	0
2.	3	0
3.	13	0
4.	21	0
5.	28	14
6.	38	33
7.	60	59
8.	19	19
9.	4	4
	188-2=186	129

The first dwelling place of the family upon arrival was a log cabin. It had been constructed in 1799 or 1800 on occasion when the men were in the area locating their farms. Clearing land preparatory to migration. The cabin was located between the present house and the small creek and perhaps some 50 to seventy feet farther from the highway.

On the day of arrival carts were unloaded, a fire was built. The family went to Jabez Birchards (Charles Burr farm) for dinner. Sparks from the fireplace chimney fell on the roof. Log cabin and household goods were consumed. Pieces of an old dish, broken in the flame, said to have been in the Mayflower, were recovered from the ruins and are still in existence.

There is no information handed down with regard to living arrangements between 1801 and 1818.

The "Old House" was built in 1818. The same year the Warner house, now owned by Bert and Lois Everett was constructed. Loam Mott was the master carpenter who supervised the framing of both buildings. One story of interest has been told of its construction.

The Warners and the Birchards traveled together with their oxen to Wilkes Barre to purchase windows for their newly constructed houses. This trip would have required several days of travel time. Upon their return trip, having come within a mile of home, the oxen “took off” and ran to get home. The ox cart was overturned. The windows were destroyed. Due to financial circumstances and privations it was necessary to wait an entire year before another load of windows could be purchased.

The house is planned like and resembles very closely those homes which were already very old in Connecticut. The house located at or near Norwich, Conn. from which Jesse Birchard departed is not known. Those persons who have visited at New Preston and the home from which the Stone family sons of Stone Street came have been astonished at {the} similarity of both the exterior appearance and the interior planning of the two buildings.

The exterior dimensions of the house is roughly a rectangular shape in proportion of 3 to 5. The footage being 24 by 40 feet. The type of architecture is Salt Box. The entire structure is planned around a massive chimney, the cellar foundation of which is a pile of native stone, 10 ½ by 9 feet and approximately 8 feet in height. The framework of the building rests on beams, exposed for view from the cellar floor, which rest on exterior foundation and the chimney foundation. There is a passageway around the entire chimney foundation, which stands free from the exterior walls.

Some interest and inquiry has been made with regard to the use of the rooms of the house as it was arranged. Prior to the occupancy of the house by the Levi Birchard family the use of individual rooms must be conjecture.

Harriet and Jesse Birchard in 1818 had three sons living at home, Ashail, Jesse T. and John A. Alethea Tracy smith died in 1819 and may not have occupied a room in the house very long. Ashael purchased the Frank Fessendan farm before 1830 and lived there until his death in 1835. Jesse T. married in 1828, purchased the Henry Flynn farm and lived there until after 1861 when he moved to Montrose, PA. John A. Birchard married Mary Griswold the 23rd of September 1831. His father Jesse Birchard died the 14th of December 1840. During the period of 1831 to 1840 two families occupied the house. Perhaps it was at that time that the low roofed addition was placed on the south side of the building. Just when the exchange of occupied areas took place is unknown. However, with the rapid increase of the number of occupants fo the house it is presumed the younger family came into the larger part of the house rather early in the period.

Charles	1832 – 1832
Levi	1834
Sarah	1835 – 1857
Payson	1838 – 1855
Harriet	1840
Abigail	1843
Jesse	1847 – 1858

John Birchard’s wife Mary preceded his mother in death on the 5th of October 1858. Grandmother Harriet died the 14th of May 1859. Hers was the 5th death from that household between the years 1855 and 1859. The responsibility for care of the family fell upon Harriet, age 18, and Abigail, age 15, John’s daughters.

Levi Birchard married Martha Maryler (?) Nov 10, 1859. No information remains as to the division of the living quarters of the house during the next four years. Martha's declining health was such that she was unable to manage the household. Her death occurred the 18th of June 1863.

Levi Birchard was remarried to Jerusha Tracy on Thanksgiving Day, Nov 24, 1864. The household was set up in Smithfield, Bradford Co, PA. It was not until the spring of 1867 that they moved from Bradford County to Birchardville. John Birchard erected a house in Towanda having drawn ?? from Birchard. ?? The location of the house is unknown. Hattie and Abigail attended the Collegiate Institute. Later still he moved to Stevensville where he died in 1870 following a 12 year widowhood.

Levi Birchard had arranged in 1860 to purchase and was deeded ½ interest in the farm. In 1867 he completed the entire purchase. Levi and Jerusha came into possession of the main part of the house in 1867. It was following her death in 1898 that May Birchard became the housekeeper.

The big front rooms were used, the more southerly, as the parlor, the one toward the cow barn as a setting room. The kitchen also served as a dining area. The other room with a northern exposure was used as a bedroom by Levi and Jerusha. On the second floor the north bedroom was the "girls" room where May and Mattie slept. The room at the head of the stairs was a bedroom for D. Fred and Ray. Prior to his marriage Selden had occupied the room with D. Fred.

After their marriage in 1904, D. Fred and Urania Dayton Birchard occupied the "old house". Levi Birchard and Mattie, his daughter, had moved up into the village and lived in the house now owned by Don Birchard. They used the north room toward the cow barn as a dining room and the "parlor" room as a bedroom. D, Fred Birchard moved to the store in 1910.

Several interesting facts regarding the construction of the old house may be observed. A fire place opening into the parlor, another into the setting room, a third with its adjacent baking ovens into the kitchen, and on the second floor into the boys room a fourth one. All opening into the central chimney. All the original plastered areas of the walls were plastered with mortar made of lime, sand and horsehair. The lath were at least six feet in length and had been sawed in an up and down saw as contrasted with a circular one.

In the areas where the walls were unplastered that is in the dining room, the front hallway and the two upstairs bedrooms, the interior wall boards are placed in a vertical position while the exterior ones were attached to the framework horizontally. In the kitchen the ceiling was originally given a coat of whitewash to cover any disfigurement from smoke from the fireplace and cooking activity. In the original construction sawdust was packed between the interior walls and the exterior siding of the house. This furnished an insulation from the cold of the winter and summer heat. The exposed beams of the framework of the building on the second floor show the ingenuity of the carpenters of the time of construction. Note the fine sided ridge beams, hand hued, are forty feet in length. The original siding of the house may be seen on the back porch exterior.

Don Birchard and Crescence Birchard became the owners of the farm and the "Old House" in February 1959. After occupancy by several renters the house has stood vacant for about ten years. Three years ago a lifelong interest has resulted in a restoration program. Clifton, Don and Dayton Birchard have contributed money, materials, hours of planning and labor to promote improvements thus far completed. As available time and materials are provided further restoration will proceed so that this fine example of early rural architecture may be preserved.

Note: Dayton Birchard's account (above) was transcribed from his notes prepared for a public presentation celebrating the nation's bicentennial in 1976. The 1818 Birchard farmhouse that Dayton Birchard described, was destroyed in two fires occurring in June 2016 and an earlier one in 2014. Both fires were described in news accounts as arson by persons unknown.