The Whitall-Van Sciver House

By Sandra White-Grear

Presented before the Haddon Township Historical Society
on December 18, 2004 at the William G. Rohrer Memorial Library
Haddon Township, New Jersey
Introduction

N.B.: The subject house and property have had many owners and names connected with it including Davis, Sharpless, Blakey, Merrick, Whitall, Hacker, English, Doyle, Bodine, Van Sciver and Jarvis; it has also been called "Springhill Farm," and "The Cedars" among other names.

Long-time Haddon Township residents, as well as those from neighboring communities, will remember this house as "The Van Sciver Mansion" or, perhaps, "The Jarvis Place." It sat on the hill now occupied by the Superfresh supermarket, its rooftop cupola offering a westerly vantage point to the Delaware River and Philadelphia. The property, which in 1864 included 114 acres of farmland, woods, orchards, streams and buildings, encompassed what is presently the grounds of the Haddon Township High School and Middle School, the Haddon Twp. branch of the Camden County Library, the Haddon View Apartments, the Westmont Shopping Plaza, the woods along MacArthur Boulevard up to Saddlertown, the Paul VI High School property, and the Van Sciver Elementary School grounds.

The Whitall Family

This house was owned from 1864 to 1880 as a summer residence by the John Mickle Whitall family.

There are several sources of information on the Whitalls. Foremost is a memoir written in 1879 by John Mickle Whitall's daughter Hannah Whitall Smith titled John M. Whitall, the story of his life. A second book titled Memoir of Mary Whitall by her
granddaughter, Bessie Nicholson Taylor published in 1885 also contained valuable information. There is a reference book on the glassmaking industry titled The Glass Gaffers of New Jersey by Adeline Pepper (1971) containing photographs of the Whitall glassmaking factory and examples of the bottles they made, and, the Philadelphia Seaport Museum's library has a John M. Whitall collection of documents, and Bryn Mawr College has a collection of Whitall family documents in the M. Carey Thomas collection. M. Carey Thomas was John M. Whitall's granddaughter and became the second president of Bryn Mawr College. There is another Whitall collection at Indiana University called the Hannah Whitall Smith collection.

The Whitall family ancestors came from England, possibly Litchenfield, Stafford County, during the 17th century, and settled in and around the Philadelphia area. John Mickle Whitall was born on November 4, 1800 in a house on Main Street in Woodbury, Gloucester County, NJ. His parents were John Siddon Whitall and Sarah Mickle Whitall. Sarah was the daughter of John Mickle and Elizabeth Estaugh Hopkins. John Mickle Whitall's grandparents were James Whitall and Mary Cooper owners of the Red Bank, Gloucester County home which served as a shelter and makeshift hospital during the Revolutionary War's Battle of Red Bank (Fort Mercer). The family belonged to the religious Society of Friends, sometimes called Quakers.

At the age of 16, John Mickle Whitall began a seafaring career as an apprentice on board a ship called the William Savery. His many voyages, which spanned a 13-year period, took him from the port of Philadelphia down to ports in Savannah, Georgia or Charleston, South Carolina, and then on to Liverpool, and India and China. According to his daughter Hannah's memoir, he experienced a personal religious conversion at age 17 as he described to her: "On one of my voyages from Charleston to Liverpool, there was a

![Shipping Document, 1824](Shipping%20Document%2C%201824%20(Courtesy%20of%20The%20John%20M.%20Whitall%20Collection%20at%20the%20Philadelphia%20Seaport%20Museum%20Library))

---

1 Robinson, William. Friends of a half century: Fifty memorials with portraits of the members of the Society of Friends, 1840-1890. London: Edward Hicks, 1891.
passenger named Hay. He took a fancy to me and to a young man a little older than myself, and, one day gave us a Bible... it quietly remained until our return passage, when the thought struck me that it would be a nice thing to tell at home that I had read the Bible through..." And so he did just that and went on to say: "I found my inclinations totally changed." Hannah Whitall Smith wrote: "Our father's religious life was so interwoven with his every day human life in the world, that it seemed impossible to separate them." 

By age 23 John became a chief mate, and by age 25 in 1826 became Captain of an East Indiaman (which is the generic name given to ships sailing to India). This ship, called the New Jersey, was described as the largest ship then in the port of Philadelphia. His last voyage was in 1829 and went from Philadelphia to China. After the ship's owner, Mr. Whitton Evans, died the ship was sold and Whitall lost his job.

Invoice, 1827 (Courtesy of The John M. Whitall Collection at the Philadelphia Seaport Museum Library) The collection contained journals he kept while at sea, which were largely entries of weather conditions, ship positions at sea, the cargo, and expenses. Their cargo was cotton, fabrics including silk from China, tea, pottery, and metal. The museum's collection also contained letters written by members of the Whitall family to John while he was on his voyages. One is a letter dated 1822 from his father. This letter sadly describes the illness and death of John's sister Ann. Another letter written in 1823 is from both his sister Hannah and his mother Sarah Mickle Whitall.

---

2 Ibid., p. 311.
When John Mickle Whitall finished his sailing career in 1829 he had saved $4,000 from his earnings. He paid $1000 to settle a debt his father owed, and put the remainder into the opening of his next venture – a Dry Goods and Wholesale business. In 1829 he purchased a store on the north side of Market St., above 9th, in Philadelphia. At this time he also asked Mary Tatum of Woodbury to be his wife. According to his daughter Hannah’s account they had been betrothed for 6 years. He was 31 years old and she was 28 years old when they married on November 5, 1830. After their marriage they lived with his father at the SE corner of Race & 7th St. in Philadelphia for 2 years, then moved to 9th and Race St. The Whitalls had 4 children (Hannah, Sarah, James, and Mary) and 20 grandchildren.

Unfortunately, John Mickle Whitall was not successful as a Dry Goods merchant, and in fact it is written that by 1837 he was $105,000 in debt and forced into bankruptcy. So, in January 1838, along with his brothers-in-law William Scattergood and G.M. Haversick, John entered into a new business partnership in the glass manufacturing business. The company they took over was then known as the Phoenix Glass Works located in Millville, NJ. When Mr. Haversick retired from the business, the firm was renamed Scattergood and Whitall. Then John Whitall's brother Franklin joined the firm in 1845 and the business was called Whitall, Brother, and Company. When Edward Tatum became involved the firm name changed again to Whitall Tatum and Company.

Whitall Tatum and Company produced bottles, fruit jars, chemical and pharmacy bottles, and perfume bottles of various colors and styles. The bottles are marked "W.T. &
Co." on the base. They were "famed for the extraordinary high quality of their moldblown ware." 4 Along with the manufacturing facilities in Millville, the company had a Philadelphia office and store at 410 Race St., and a New York office was opened in 1852 at 96 Beekman St. Whitall Tatum brought high-quality, washed sand in by rail from Ohio for use in the manufacture of their flint glass, but for most of their colored glassware and greenware they used Jersey sand. The firm "shipped its glassware, packed in salt hay, to Philadelphia and Baltimore via their sloops Ann and Franklin and to New York via their schooners Caroline and Mary and their steamboat Millville." 5 The factory remained in continuous operation for 193 years, owned and operated by a succession of companies and individuals, and closed in 1999.

Whitall's glass manufacturing business prospered. John Whitall was able to pay off all his debts incurred during his failed dry goods business. By 1850 he bought a new house in Philadelphia at 7th St. above Noble, then moved again to 1317 Filbert St., his Philadelphia home until his death.

During these prosperous years the Whitall family would spend their summers in Atlantic City. But then, in 1864, they traded in the ocean breezes of Atlantic City and began to spend the summer months on their farm in Haddon Township. John's daughter Hannah writes:

> In 1864, a change was made in the summer home of our parents. We children had begun to think that we would like a variety from the sea-side house, and winning our mother over to our views, we persuaded our ever indulgent father to sell the house at Atlantic City and purchase a place called "The Cedars," situated in New Jersey, about 6 miles from Philadelphia, and about one mile from [the house called] "Linden," the home of our sister Sarah [Nicholson] and her family. [NOTE: "Linden" was located between Vassar and Yale Roads in Audubon.] Our father always looked upon this place with... interest, because he believed he was... guided in the purchase of it. As his custom was, he asked the Lord to direct him in the matter, and was answered, he believed, by an impression that if he could obtain the property for a certain specified sum of money, he might safely buy it. This sum was less than the owner of the property declared was the least he would take, and we all tried to move our father from his position. But believing he had heard the Lord's voice in the matter, he was immovable, and in a very little while the owner agreed to his terms. 6

---


5 Ibid.

Samuel Vaughn Merrick

That sum of money that Whitall paid Samuel V. Merrick for the property in 1864 was $25,500. Merrick, the first President of the Pennsylvania Railroad and a founder of the Franklin Institute, had purchased the property in 1853 from Blakey and Mary Sharpless for $22,240.

The Sharpless property appears on the 1850 "Plan of the Townships of Union and Newton, County of Camden from original surveys of J.O. Sidney," published by Richard Clark. Blakey and Mary Sharpless called the farmstead "Springhill Farm." The 1850 map indicates several buildings on the farm. It appears that the original deed for the property was conveyed on November 12, 1796 from Isaac Burrough to Samuel Eastlack. On May 30, 1825 the property was conveyed from the estate of Samuel Eastlack to Joseph Myers.

It then passed from Joseph Myers and his wife to Nathan Davis, then from Nathan Davis to Blakey Sharpless on December 13, 1843 for $6,700. The 1843 deed mention "buildings" which may mean that the house was on the property from at least 1843, and probably earlier.

Memoirs of Hannah Whitall Smith and Bessie Nicholson Taylor

This descriptions of the farm came from the memoirs of Hannah Whitall Smith and Bessie Nicholson Taylor. Hannah writes:

*The Cedars was from this time the summer home of our parents until our father's death, and the summer resort of children and grandchildren in large parties for weeks at a time. A bowling alley on the lawn was altered into a little cottage for the accommodation of the children. Our father named it "The Barracks," and there my sister Mary and I spent many happy summers of free and easy housekeeping together. It was a great*
delight to us all to gather thus every summer at the home of our beloved parents; and "to go to the Cedars," became the crowning point in the year of the grand-children, as one after another grew old enough to enjoy it. The place contained over one hundred acres, besides the house and private grounds, and was a genuine Jersey farm, with its orchard, a watermelon patch, and hay fields, and corn-fields, with cows to milk, and horses to ride to pasture, and farm wagons starting off to market at two o'clock in the night, and all the untold delights of farm life, which were ever fresh pleasures to children from the city. There was a beautiful piece of woods down at the end of a shady lane, with a stream running through it, and two ponds large enough to sail a boat on; and there were endless joys to be found in the daily drives to the village of Haddonfield, about a mile and a half off, to get the mail, and to do family errands. Then there was the unfailing love and kindness of grandpa and grandma in the large, airy house, and the supply of good things in grandma's pantry that seemed almost as unfailing as her love. 

Hannah continues:

So inseparably was the thought of The Cedars connected with the thought of something good to eat, that the very name would seem to call up a smile of satisfaction, and I remember once when I was driving my children along the road towards the dear old place [probably Cuthbert Rd.], on our way to make a visit of several weeks, my [daughter] Mary, catching a sight of the house-top through the trees, exclaimed, "Oh, mamma, it looks very caky!" I do not believe there were ever happier children anywhere, than roamed the lawn, and woods, and fields of "The Cedars during all those lovely family summers. The meeting together of the cousins from all their various homes was of itself most delightful, and the sources of enjoyment in boating, swimming, blackberrying, riding on horseback, driving, climbing trees, building dams, paddling, going to the mill [Note: most probably the Newton Grist Mill], and pic-nicking in the woods, were almost endless. Our dear father especially enjoyed it all, and always felt that it was a most successful purchase, although he never found it very profitable... The farm was a source of almost constant outlay, but upon each fresh evidence of this he would console himself with a joke… In one of his letters he says concerning it: "My having a farm, is like the man who had an elephant given to him, and did not know what to do with it. Only I have leased mine to a good farmer, who is to give me half of the produce. James says it will take all the profits of my glass business to pay my farm losses! Hope he may be mistaken." 

In the Memoir of Mary Whitall written by her granddaughter Bessie Nicholson Taylor there are also several passages describing the family's summer experiences at "The Cedars." In one she writes:

14 Ibid., p. 118.
...[O]ur grandparents bought a farm near Haddonfield, N.J. called The Cedars, which became another paradise for their grandchildren. In the summer time, it seemed literally to overflow with young people. In the cherry trees and around the swing, reading in the shade or making mud-pies in the road; everywhere there were groups of different sizes and ages, engaged in the pleasures best suited to their tastes. On the piazza, in two large rocking chairs, with daughters and sons gathered around them, might be seen the loved heads of the family group, to whom gratitude was due for all the pleasures provided. I can see the dear grandma at other times, in her cool lawn wrapper and snowy cap, moving along the piazza with a plate in her hand, and the grandchildren swarming from all sides, like bees, to share the welcome lunch which she bore... She much enjoyed having visits from her own personal friends at this summer home, and often found it difficult to get a time when children and grandchildren were not too numerous to permit it. If [Quakers] from a distance were in the city during the summer, they would be invited to spend a few days at The Cedars and partake of its bounteous cheer.¹⁵

Bessie Nicholson Taylor describes The Barracks (the guesthouse on the property occupied by the children and grandchildren):

The Barracks, which held so prominent a place in the life at The Cedars, was quite a unique building. When the place was purchased there was a long bowling alley on the lawn, which our grandfather thought might be put to better use, and be transferred into a cozy cottage to receive the overflow from the large house. He accordingly arranged a nursery at each

end, and a dining-room and parlor in the middle, the latter enlarged by a bay window. He added a roomy kitchen and, over all, built another story, with bed-rooms. When completed it was found to be very comfortable, and quite large enough for two of his daughters, with their families, to live in. They called it The Barracks because of the delightfully free and unconventional life they lived there, and neither children nor grandchildren can think of it without many pleasant recollections of the home thus provided by the loving care of the dear grandparents. At its familiar name, pictures rise before our mental vision of the parlor, overflowing with children, books and toys, kittens, dogs and parrots; the piazza shaded by apple, pear and cherry trees, which, at the expense of a few missiles from "the boys" furnished lunch near at hand; the surrounding lawn, worn bare in many places by the constant tread of little feet; the hammock, the croquet ground and the grape arbor, all near by, where we passed many a delightful hour.  

A letter to Hannah Whitall Smith in Memoir of Mary Whitall describes a scene where one of the grandchildren, Mary Smith (Hannah's daughter), is believed missing:

...[A]fter about an hour I inquired for Mary. No one had seen her, or knew anything about her...Sallie thought she had gone over to Linden, and she and Logan concluded to walk over and see. So off they started, and at the gate they were screaming "Mary," and I was sitting on the piazza, when up walked Mary from toward The Barracks, with her face all aglow with her quiet enjoyment of gathering flowers, and her hands full. She ran a few paces and called them back. She said she had no thought of going out of the lawn, but she sauntered down and went past Dobbs' and the mill, and on to the railroad, and to Cuthbert's corner, and gathered wild flowers, and had a good time generally. They all concluded then to go to the woods, and have just come home with ferns and Autumn leaves, and insects and things... Hannah also wrote: "At The Cedars, where there was generally every summer a re-union of children and grandchildren, grandpa was in his element with the little ones. If he went out for a drive he would pile them into the carriage...the more the merrier...filling every inch of room. I have no doubt there has been many a hearty laugh from the spectators of these nondescript loads, as the carriage went back and forth to the railway station near The Cedars."  

John Whitall was a successful glass merchant and summer resident of Haddon Township during the Civil War years and the Lincoln presidency. And, in fact, John Mickle Whitall met Abraham Lincoln. It was on October 26, 1862, writes Quaker Scholar David Elton Trueblood in his book Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish, when President Lincoln "was visited by Eliza Gurney and a few others."  

---

16 Ibid., p. 140.
17 Taylor, op. cit. p. 142
widow of the English Quaker leader Joseph J. Gurney, was "deeply wounded by the sorrows of the Civil War and felt especial sympathy for President Lincoln in his position of awesome responsibility. Accordingly she was led… to try to pay what she called a 'religious visit' to the President, being accompanied on this visit by three other [Quakers], John M. Whitall, Hannah B. Mott, and James Carey. Not one of these sought anything for himself or herself, and none came either to criticize or to offer unasked advice. Because they came only to give spiritual support to one who sorely needed it, the President responded with unusual warmth. Consequently, he encouraged his visitors to stay much longer than the [usual] fifteen minutes." 19

John Mickle Whitall and Mary Tatum Whitall undertook many charitable and humanitarian pursuits during and after John retired from his glass manufacturing business. According to the Memoir of Mary Whitall, Mary "instituted a Mother's Meeting among the poor colored people in Bedford Street [Philadelphia], to which she gave a great deal of attention, endeavoring to elevate and instruct them spiritually, while giving temporal assistance. This led, at her suggestion, to the foundation of the St. Mary Street first day school [in 1862], in which she, for many years, acted as joint superintendent with [John M. Whitall]." 20 The "First Day School" (a Quaker term for Sunday school) was attended largely by "contrabands of war," African Americans who had migrated from the southern States. According to the booklet, The Starr Centre – History of a Street published in 1901, this school originated on Shippen Street [now Bainbridge] then moved to a mission church on St. Mary Street between 6th and 7th, owned by George H. Stuart but rented by John M. Whitall. The church was called the John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Church or the St. Mary Street Mission School. Whitall bore all the expenses of running the school and he and Mary were its superintendents for 14 years. Average attendance was from 150 to 200. At these Sunday meetings, a chapter from the Bible would be read aloud and then explained and discussed. A silent prayer would follow, then the next week's Bible text would be given out, and different class lessons would commence. A Mother's Meeting was also held at the Mission School where women attended and spent 3 hours making clothes to sell at very low cost. Other times they distributed free coal and also gave $1.00 to anyone who attended the meeting 24 times. 21

The Memoir of Mary Whitall also notes that Mary Whitall was also, for many years, a manager of the "Widow's Asylum," in which she worked faithfully and with great interest." 22 From 1851 through 1867 John Whitall was a trustee of the Pennsylvania Hospital, and in 1861 was appointed a Guardian of the Poor in Philadelphia until 1867 when he became President of the Board of Guardians who managed the Almshouse in Philadelphia. A friend described John Whitall by saying, "What we admired in John M. Whitall was his bold, firm, decisive character, while what we loved was his warm, sympathetic nature; and when any were in need we found these qualities so beautifully fused together as to make him a most valuable and comforting friend and counselor." 23

By 1868 John Whitall lost sight in one eye and lost most sight in the other. It is said that he never complained and continued to read his Bible and other books. He had

---

19 Trueblood, op. cit., p. 43.
22 Taylor, op. cit., p. 121.
his first stroke in 1874, and by 1875-6 his health was failing, but he and his wife still continued to go in the summer to The Cedars.

**Doyle - Hacker-English - Bodine**

John Mickle Whitall died June 12, 1877. He is buried in Friends Southwest Burial Ground, 12th St. Meeting in Philadelphia. In the Friends tradition, no costly monument is there. Mary Tatum Whitall died on February 1, 1880. After Mary died, The Cedars, their beloved retreat, was sold to Mr. John Doyle of Camden on October 4, 1880 for $18,000.  

(Note: In 1867, John M. Whitall had sold a small tract of his land to Hiram Smith, and in 1868 sold 4 acres to Sarah Webster. This may account for the decrease in value of the property.) A sale announcement from the West Jersey Press, June 23, 1880 reads:

"The farm and country seat known as "The Cedars" belonging to the estate of John M. Whitall. 15 minute walk from the railroad station...16 rooms, neatly furnished, ground well shaded 4 to 5 acres, including a large vegetable and fruit garden. 10 room tenant house, ice house, carriage house, and stables."

On February 7, 1896 the property was sold at a Sheriff's Sale to Sarah E. Hacker and Susanna H. English.  


---

24 Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 99, p. 49. Gloucester County Historical Society Collection, Woodbury, NJ.


Susannah H. Bodine and S. Lawrence Bodine sold the property for $15,000 to Joseph Bishop Van Sciver.  

Van Sciver - Jarvis

Joseph Bishop Van Sciver, born May 14, 1861 in Lumberton, Burlington County, NJ established the JB Van Sciver Furniture Company at Delaware Ave. and Federal Street in Camden. He never lived on the farm in Haddon Township, instead he rented it out to Ambrose Jarvis, his wife Anna, son Clarence, and Ambrose's brother George and his wife. Anna Jarvis was Van Sciver's sister. Clarence Jarvis and his mother Anna, lived for quite a while in the Van Sciver house and farmed the land. Clarence Jarvis sold corn and other produce at a stand on the Cuthbert Blvd. side of the property. The land was actively farmed until 1961.

By 1970 the property size was down to 34 ½ acres, portions having been sold off as follows: Haddon Township Board of Education (nine acres, April 16, 1956 which became the Van Sciver Elementary School 29), John J. Hegar (A real estate developer, 103.46 acres, February 24, 196130), the Diocese of Camden (35 acres, August 9, 1961 purchased from John Hegar 31 for St Vincent Pallotti church and Paul VI school, and 34.2 acres from Saxony Development to V. S. Associates on February 27, 1970 for $545,000.32 The house was dilapidated but occupied in 1967 by Mrs. Helen Brenner who may have been a daughter of Watson Van Sciver and Mary Higgins. Brenner may have worked as a housekeeper for Jarvis, and had her son Lyman was living with her. Mrs. Brenner described the house as 16 rooms with six on the third floor, and two kitchens. She said she and her son used three rooms on the right side of the first floor. Brenner said the kitchen stove in was 75 years old and there was electricity, plumbing, and heat on the first and second floor. By 1967 all the fireplaces were bricked up. The basement was divided into two sections, with a brick wall down the center, and two vaulted arches. The house was described as a center hall, with a narrow shallow stairway leading upstairs. The house had officially been condemned and assigned no value; only the property carried an assessed value.33

The house was destroyed by fire on October 11, 1967, which also took the life of Westmont Firefighter Daniel DiPaolo. 34

---

28 Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 386, pp. 325-328.
31 Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 2466, pp. 69-70.
32 Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 3144, pp. 517-518.
33 Information was collected by a person seeking inquiring to purchase the property. Notes indicate as sources: a conversation with Mrs. Brenner, a conversation with a former farm worker who stopped working on the farm about 1961, and calls to the listed owner/developer.
Bibliography
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book D4, Gloucester County Historical Society Collection, Woodbury, NJ
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book P.P. Gloucester County Historical Society Collection, Woodbury, NJ.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book S. Gloucester County Historical Society Collection, Woodbury, NJ.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book W.W. Gloucester County Historical Society Collection, Woodbury, NJ.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 99 Gloucester County Historical Society Collection, Woodbury, NJ.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 212.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 302.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 386.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 2424.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 2466.
Camden County, NJ. Clerk's Office. Deed Book 3144.
Camden, NJ. Camden County Historical Society Map Collection. Plans of the Townships of Union and Newton, County of Camden from the original surveys of J. O. Sidney. Richard Clark, Philadelphia, 1850.

Courier-Post, October 11, 1967. (Camden, N.J.)
Federal Census, State of New Jersey, Haddon Township, 1900, April 27, 1910.
Federal Census, State of New Jersey, Newton Township, Gloucester City PO, Camden County, NJ, August 19, 1870.

West Jersey Press, June 23, 1880. (Camden, NJ.)

http://www.saddlerswoods.org