

In the Spotlight

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LIVING HISTORY



by Gene
Pisasale

The Mansion House at Radley Run: A Brandywine Valley icon

By Gene Pisasale
Contributing Writer

If you have spent much time in and around West Chester, you likely have at least heard of the Radley Run Country Club.

Popular with local residents for decades, the club holds a treasure which is part of our local history. The Mansion House at Radley Run, constructed in the late 18th century, has seen its share of events, standing as soldiers clashed nearby at the Battle of the Brandywine. Like many historic structures, the Mansion House is showing signs of wear after

former Mather estate, a tract of land which extended into four different townships of Chester County.

The land they chose has ties to many early settlers. According to the Mansion House Foundation, the parcel presently comprising the Radley Run Community was originally part of a 1,000-acre tract purchased from William Penn in 1686 by John Comwell and William Hudson. In 1722, two smaller tracts were divided off, with 312 acres purchased by Samuel Painter, Sr. and 250 acres purchased by John Collier. In 1747, the Collier tract was again divided after

Nearby was a one-story log cabin where the indentured servants lived. The log cabin today is a two-story stone house. The main house measured 30 feet by 30 feet and had a stone kitchen.

Over the ensuing century and a half, the property remained in the Painter family's possession until 1897 when Charles E. Mather, an insurance broker from Philadelphia, purchased it from William Thatcher Painter. Mather changed the two-story building into an elegant establishment for entertaining hunting parties. He was a Master of the Radnor Hunt and imported



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Popular with local residents for decades, the club holds a treasure which is part of our local history. The Mansion House at Radley Run, constructed in the late 18th century, has seen its share of events, standing as soldiers clashed nearby at the Battle of the Brandywine. Like many historic structures, the Mansion House is showing signs of wear after more than 250 years. One group dedicated to historic preservation has taken a keen interest in refurbishing it and is hoping that citizens will help maintain an important part of our heritage.

According to the Pennsylvania Golf Association, more than 60 years ago, Z. Edmund Prince, a Kennett Square real estate developer, approached Nicholas R. du Pont with an interesting idea: developing a country club community in the Brandywine Valley, near West Chester.

Du Pont was interested, and in 1963, the two men purchased approximately 1,200 acres, most of it in the

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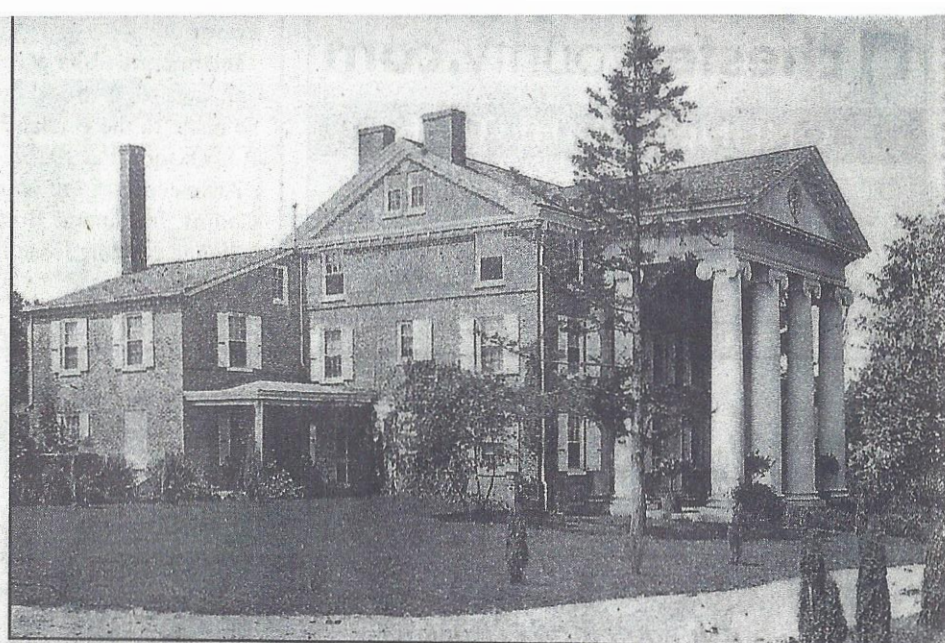
The Mansion House was constructed in several stages, with the original house built in 1770 by James Painter (one of three sons of Samuel Painter, Jr.) and his wife Jane. The structure was a two-story brick house constructed with "ballast brick" which came from England in the holds of vessels. His grandson, also named James, expanded and greatly widened the structure to include a third story in 1847.

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Over the ensuing century and a half, the property remained in the Painter family's possession until 1897 when Charles E. Mather, an insurance broker from Philadelphia, purchased it from William Thatcher Painter. Mather changed the two-story building into an elegant establishment for entertaining hunting parties. He was a Master of the Radnor Hunt and imported a pack of 65 hounds previously owned by the Duke of Rutland in England. Mather transformed the Painter property into a hunting establishment which was known as "Brandywine Meadow Farm."

Around 1900, Mather built a three-story portico with huge Ionic columns on the south façade of the building. He later added a 42 foot by 24 foot brick ballroom to the east gable end. Changes to the property included the introduction of formal gardens and landscaping, the conversion of one structure into a hunting stable and the building of an elaborate kennel.

The Mansion House served as the headquarters of the Mather Hunt until 1963, when the estate was sold and turned into the Radley Run Country Club (RRCC). The Mansion House today still shows the impressive white



Courtesy photo
Charles Mather's Brandywine Meadow Farm house—Radley Run Mansion, circa 1903.



Photo courtesy Phyllis Recca (2016)
The old stone house (circa 1700s) which is adjacent to the Mansion House at Radley Run.



of these four, including the Mansion House, are owned



Photo courtesy Gene Pisasale

One of the recently refurbished rooms inside the Mansion House.



Photo courtesy Gene Pisasale

Wrought iron Brandywine Meadow Farm sign.



Photo courtesy Gene Pisasale

The fulling mill (foreground) and the serpentine Collier House.

shows the impressive white columns out in front of its entrance, their elegance an invitation to come inside. Walking around the interior, visitors can sense the beauty of bygone days in the ballroom and adjacent bar area, but can see that the structure needs a bit of work.

Through the windows one gazes back through three centuries of time looking at several historic buildings nearby, including the serpentine Collier House dating to the mid-1700s and a stone fulling mill used in wool making operations.

Many homes surround the open space of the Country Club, but only about 35 percent of area residents are members. Some of them may not be aware of just how historic a setting this is. Within the center of the Radley Run community are eight significant structures. Four are designated as historic buildings. Three

Mansion House, are owned by the RRCC.

Historic sites require ongoing preservation and periodic restoration. The high cost for this is beyond the revenues of most country clubs. Recognizing that additional funds were needed to restore the buildings, local residents and RRCC members formed the Mansion House Foundation (MHF), a registered 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the structure which has been an important part of the legacy of Chester County. The focus of the MHF is restoration of the Mansion House and education of the public regarding its importance along with the nearby historic structures. Approximately 25 percent of the Mansion House and the surrounding gardens have been restored. Four educational/fundraising events have already occurred, and



Photo courtesy Gene Pisasale

The stately columns at the entrance to the Mansion House.

more are expected in the future. The MHF is seeking a listing on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Radley Run Historic District. Current plans include continuing the restoration and having it serve as an ongoing place for community education.

The Foundation team is working to restore the Mansion House to its former glory, establishing it as an educational landmark and a setting for tours (available by appointment) and public gatherings. They welcome inquiries and support from people around the region interested in maintaining a vital part of our heritage. The MHF can be reached at via e-mail at mansion-housefoundationatrrcc@

gmail.com to schedule tours and other activities. Visitors can see the building and adjacent structures at 1100 Country Club Road in West Chester. The website is www.mansionhousefoundationatradleyrun.org.

Gene Pisasale is an historian, author and lecturer based in Kennett Square. His ten books focus mostly on the Chester County/mid-Atlantic region. His latest book is Forgotten Founding Fathers: Pennsylvania and Delaware in the American Revolution. Gene's books are available on his website at www.GenePisasale.com and on www.Amazon.com. He can be reached via e-mail at Gene@GenePisasale.com.



Photo courtesy Phyllis Recca

Date stone at the Mansion House at Radley Run.