

There is a long-held misunderstanding about the early particulars of this house. An apparently incorrect traditional account holds that this house was erected in 1717 (according to a date supposed to be lodged in the west wall, but never found) on a 345-acre tract that William Green Sr. bought of Daniel Coxe in 1712. It is believed to have been the first brick house to be built in Trenton (now Ewing) Township.<sup>1</sup>

The story appears to have been recounted in the mid-nineteenth century by a member of the Green family, to Eli Field Cooley, author of Genealogy of Early Settlers in Trenton and Ewing, published in 1883.<sup>2</sup> The family storyteller was probably Henry P. Green, for he was living in the house while Cooley was preparing his book and he was a great-great-grandson of the alleged builder, William. Reuben Pownall Ely lifted the story from Cooley, added a few embellishments of phrase, and used it in his own genealogy of the Ely family, published 1910.<sup>3</sup> The story partly reappears again in Henry Charlton Beck's Fare to Midlands, published in 1939, but this time the source is an oral one once more -- Reeder Green, son of Henry P., who was born and raised in the house.<sup>4</sup> From here the story has appeared in a number of newspaper articles, and a plaque on the house that was erected in 1929 from the contributions of school-children identified as the "Lanning School Pupils." None of these sources offers convincing evidence. It appears that Cooley was not unlike many other local antiquarians of his time. He was a competent genealogist and an incompetent historian.

Cooley's account, although inaccurate, is suggestive of the truth. The William Green house stands on a piece of ground that Daniel Coxe did sell in 1712. It was part of Coxe's large "Hopewell" tract, but the buyer was not Green, but one John Severns. This estate lay from the west to the east branches of the Shabakunk Creek, straddling both sides of "the high road from the Falls of Delaware commonly called Roger Parks Road."<sup>5</sup> This road had been laid out in 1700 and was resurveyed in 1741. It was the "Middle Road", that came to be known later as the Trenton-Pennington Road or Rogers Road.<sup>6</sup> John Severns evidently sold to William Green Sr. the land east of this road, shortly after his purchase in 1712, although no deed is recorded. In 1714 he sold the property on the other side of

the road to Robert Lanning. In this deed, fortunately recorded, Lanning's purchase was bounded on the east side "by the said (Roger Parks) road upwards about sixty-five chains more or less by the land of William Green and the said John Severns."<sup>7</sup>

This William Green, William Green Senior since he was the first of several Williams to reside on this farm, had gained something of a local standing as a justice in 1714 when Hunterdon County was set off from Burlington. He became a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas shortly thereafter.<sup>8</sup> His will, dated January 11, 1721/2 is the earliest evidence of a house on or near the site of the present structure. Green bequeathed to his second and third oldest sons, Joseph and William Jr., "That House and Plantation that I bought of John Severans . . . to be Equally Divided by them."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the earliest house on this property was already standing by 1714; it could not have been built in 1717. William Sr. gave to his oldest son, Richard, his "New Dwelling House and Plantation." It is quite plausible that this "new" house was built in 1717. It was new compared to the older house of John Severns. However, this cannot be, as has been assumed, the house on the Trenton State College campus. Richard lived out his life on the plantation he inherited, including the new dwelling house and his will, dated 1741, indicates clearly where that house was. His plantation lay, "Joyning on the King's road next Delaware." (River Road, three miles away.)<sup>10</sup>

The subject of this report, the house on the Trenton State College campus, stands on the northern part of the plantation that William Green Sr. bequeathed to his sons Joseph and William Jr. It is possible that William Sr. lived on this farm, in the house formerly of John Severns, before the completion of his new home by the Delaware. It is not known when William Jr. and Joseph Green divided the land between themselves, or which one received the house already on it, but William received the northern half of the farm and Joseph the southern half. Green Lane (formerly Bull Lane) was laid out in 1832 as "Bull Alley" along the boundary between these two properties.<sup>11</sup>

The house under investigation here, that will be called the "William Green house", stands on the land that was devised to William Green Jr. William Jr. was just reaching majority when his father died.<sup>12</sup> He was born in 1702 and married Lydia Armitage, probably about 1730. A reference in the minutes of the Ewing Presbyterian Church reads,

"Nov. 25, 1733 Lydia Green, wife of Willm."<sup>13</sup> Lydia and William had four children, their first born in 1734.

Enoch Green, born 1734, was the oldest child of Lydia and William and the only child raised in the Green house to achieve a measure of distinction in later life. He was graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1760 and became a missionary for the Presbyterian church. The collections of the New Jersey Historical Society and Rutgers University Library's Special Collections contain journals of two of his missions. He became the pastor of the Presbyterian church at Deerfield, New Jersey in 1766. Cooley relates that he subsequently served as a chaplain in the Continental Army during the Revolution; he contracted camp fever and died in 1776.<sup>14</sup>

William Green Jr. moved from the house sometime before 1779. In his will, written that year, he gave the house and land to his son, William Green III, who was already occupying the same. Again, a key phrase in the description identifies it as the William Green house and farm. "I give unto my son William Green all my other land and plantation with the appurtenances, whereon he now lives Together with that part lying and adjoining thereto situate in the Township of Maidenhead."<sup>15</sup> When the will was written the boundary of Maidenhead (now Lawrence) Township was the Shabakunk Creek as it passes near the house. Part of William Green's farm did lie to the east of the creek in Maidenhead Township.<sup>16</sup>

William Green III was born at the house in 1743. He may have served in the Hunterdon County militia during the Revolution. (There is a rejected pension claim for him.) He married Phebe Moore, daughter of Samuel Moore, probably about 1775. (Dates of birth and marriage seem to be very elusive for this family. Perhaps Cooley's<sup>e</sup> genealogy does not give precise dates because he did not find them either.) Seven children were born to William III and Phebe, Elijah, the second son being born in 1782. This increasing family size may have served as the motive for erection of the frame enlargement to the original brick house.

William Green III died on the farm in 1815, leaving his entire real and personal estate to his wife, Phebe, in trust for their children, to divide the estate equally among them.<sup>17</sup> Phebe was still in possession of the property when Green Lane was surveyed

in 1832. A map of this road includes no reference to the Green house or any related buildings.<sup>18</sup> Phebe's son, Samuel M. Green, purchased the house and farm in 1833. The 251 - acre farm, together with the piece of land on the east side of the Shabakunk was described.<sup>19</sup> Phebe Green died in 1837, aged 84.

Samuel was born about 1791. He married Mary Perrine, daughter of Henry Perrine, perhaps a few years before 1815. No doubt they lived at the house before Samuel purchased it in 1833. They had nine children. Their second son, Henry P. Green, was born in 1819. He married Virginia Reeder, and they had six children, two of whom died in childhood or adolescence. For one dollar and an agreement to support his father, Henry purchased the house and farm from Samuel in 1848. However, the farm now included only 197 acres on the west side of the Shabakunk. Samuel had sold in 1840, all of his property adjoining on the east side of the creek to another son, William A. Green. This William was Henry's older brother, born 1816. His initials, found in a stone on the grounds outside the house, must date from the interval between 1816 and 1840. Samuel may have ordered the building of the western addition to the house, the second alteration of the original building. His household was the largest of any of the generations of the Green family to inhabit the house. Beside his wife and nine children, there was his mother, Phebe, and her black indentured servant.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, the mortgages that Samuel entered into offer no clue whereby to date the western addition.

Samuel's son, Henry P. Green, was apparently curious about the old house. Beck says that it was Henry who found the "antique tombstone" of William Green Sr. (died 1722) and had it repaired. If, as the traditional story goes, there had been a date stone in the west wall of the original house, Henry may have seen it as a boy, before the western addition probably put up by his father obscured the stone permanently. Even when Henry was a boy there was no one still living who remembered when the house was built. His grandmother, Phebe, was still living, had resided for her entire married life in the house, since circa 1775. She could have retold whatever her husband, William III, had passed on about the house, but it is unlikely that even he was yet born when the house was erected. Therefore, any tales that Henry told to Cooly<sup>e</sup> are suspect.

Henry sold in 1879 to Lydia Ann Moore, who may have been a relative. The trustees of her estate conveyed the property to Willis P. Bainbridge in 1910. The acreage of the farm was shrinking continually. From 251 acres in 1833 to 197 in 1848, to 155 when Henry Green sold in 1879. After a series of transactions, A. Jewell Blackwell bought the house with 125 acres in 1915. He held the house and most of the remaining farm until the State of New Jersey bought him out to create the site for Trenton State College. The occupation of the campus was completed by 1934, and the William Green house has been in its possession ever since.

The available documents shed very little light on the house itself, its size, number of rooms, type of construction, or dates of erection or alteration. The house that John Severns had owned before 1721 may or may not have stood on the site of the present house. William Green Jr. was residing elsewhere when he died in 1786, so that his inventory of that date is not relevant. The inventory of 1815 is relevant but not helpful. The 1832 survey map of Bull Lane makes no note of any buildings. There is only enough documentary evidence to establish chain of title, and little more.

## NOTES:

1. Eli Field Cooley, Genealogy of Early Settlers in Trenton and Ewing, "Old Hunterdon County", New Jersey, (Trenton, N.J.: 1883), p. 78. Pp. 78-91 contain the genealogy of the Green family.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Reuben Pownall Ely, An Historical Narrative of the Ely, Revell, and Stacey Families Who Were Among The Founders of Trenton and Burlington . . ., (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1910), p. 163. Cooley is listed as one of the authorities on p. 20.
4. Henry Charlton Beck, Fare to Midlands, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1939), pp. 108-9.
5. New Jersey State Library (NJSL), Book of Deeds H-H, pp. 442ff.
6. Edwin Robert Walker et als., A History of Trenton, 1679-1929, Two Hundred And Fifty Years of A Notable Town With Links In Four Centuries, 2 vols., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929), pp. 245-6, 250.
7. NJSL, Book of Deeds H-H, pp. 442ff.
8. James P. Snell, History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey, (Philadelphia: Everts & Peck, 1881), p. 258, 191. See also John Warner Barber and Henry Howe, Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey, (New York: 1844), p. 284.
9. NJSL, Hunterdon County Wills, 31J.
10. NJSL, Hunterdon County Wills, 144J.
11. Hunterdon County Clerk's Office, Flemington, N.J., road survey file 20-1-1.
12. Cooley, p. 87.
13. "Presbyterian Church Records of Hopewell, Maidenhead, Trenton First Church -- Church of Ewing of the State of New Jersey," (three books in one volume, transcribed), presently kept in the Special Collections Room, Trenton State College Library.
14. Cooley, p. 87.
15. NJSL, Hunterdon County Wills, 1342J.
16. John P. Snyder, The Story of New Jersey Civil Boundaries, 1606-1968, (Trenton, N.J.: 1969), pp. 163-7.
17. NJSL, Hunterdon County Wills, 2742J.
18. Hunterdon road survey file 20-1-1.
19. Hunterdon County Clerk's Office, Flemington, N.J., Vol 56 of deeds, p.32.
20. NJSL, Hunterdon County Wills, 4364J.