

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In the gently rolling Southeastern corner of fertile Chester County, Pennsylvania lies the small quiet village of Unionville, a community that dates back to the middle of the eighteenth century.

Unionville Village today is a blend of mid to late eighteenth century dwellings, early to mid nineteenth century townhouses, plus many variations of the Victorian style of architecture. Though locally manufactured brick is the predominant mode of construction, fine examples of stone and frame buildings exist. In addition, there are several barns and carriage houses (Figure 50A) that complement the early atmosphere that the village has been able to retain in the face of progress.

Unionville, or Jacksonville as it was formerly known, was founded by John Jackson who built a log cabin at the northeast corner of Doe Run and Wollaston Roads. This building was superseded by a large brick house which Jackson built in 1751 on the southeastern corner of these crossroads. (See Figure 25) Jackson's home was later to become the Cross Key Inn where it provided food and lodging for travelers between the years 1808-1833. In 1834, it was replaced by the Union Hotel (See Figure 23) which Isaac Smith constructed directly across the street. The new inn also provided a drovers barn to accommodate the horses and cattle which were brought to the village to be sold or traded. According to tradition, General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson sold some of his livestock at the sales in Unionville. Located on the Doe Run-Wilmington, Delaware road, Unionville provided an excellent stopping off spot for travelers going from upstate Pennsylvania to this major Delaware city.

Between 1759-1900, Unionville Village played a vital role as the nucleus of a large thriving agricultural community. Farming families steadily looked to Unionville for the goods and services that could not be supplied on the farm. Some of

those who provided special services were C.W. Lawler, a tinsmith, J.R. Pugh who built a tannery, and cabinetmaker and undertaker, James Chalfant who worked in town from 1825-1858. In addition there was a town blacksmith, a cobbler, a wheelwright, a doctor, and a local post office which was started in 1820. Besides this Unionville also had a small library founded in the early 1800's as well as several churches and schools. (See Figures 3, 46, 63, 65) Some of these early business structures remain today as reminders of the past and serve as homes for many of the citizens of the village.

In addition to goods and services, Unionville played an important role in the education of Chester County students. During most of the nineteenth century, several private schools were in operation in the village, the most important of which was the Unionville Academy founded in 1834. (See Figure 3) Three years later a boarding house was constructed to house a large enrollment of some 125 students who had come long distances to avail themselves of the quality education offered at the Academy. (See Figure 4) Bayard Taylor, later Ambassador to Germany and noted American author, was one of the more prominent people who attended the Unionville School. His The Story of Kennett, published in 1866, used Unionville as the setting for its story.

The religious needs of many of the local citizens were satisfied in the village by the Unionville Presbyterian Church. Though formed in 1829, the congregation did not have a permanent home until the present structure was built in 1844. This building has remained in continuous service since that date. (See Figure 63) Many Quakers also moved to Chester County early in the eighteenth century and settled in the Unionville area. As a result of the large influx of "Friends" a meeting house was constructed in 1845. The Society of Friends used the one story brick house as a place of worship until well into the twentieth century when the congregation diminished to the point that the meeting was closed. (See Figure 46) Subsequently in the 1950's the edifice became the home of the East Lynn Grange which had been founded in 1904, but had not had a permanent home. This organization still provides a bonding force within the community.

Social life from the middle of the nineteenth century focused around the Unionville Hall (See Figure 39). Upon its completion in 1850, it became the community center for lectures, debates, dances and musicales. In 1879, an organ made by Horace Waters and Sons in New York was installed, a welcome addition to musical needs of the village. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows bought the building in 1894 and maintained it until they merged with the West Chester lodge and no longer needed it as a meeting place. Although designed as a public building, the Unionville Presbyterian Church held services here while their edifice was being redecorated. As late as 1947, the second floor of the Hall was still being regularly used by the East Lynn Grange for their activities.

As railroads and major highways chose to bypass Unionville in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the village lost its competitive position in relation to other neighboring towns and as a result the small businesses of the once almost self-sufficient village were unable to grow. As goods and services became less expensive in other areas, Unionville was slowly transformed from a commercial into a residential village.

The fact that this country village has basically been unaltered with the passage of time, coupled with the restoration that is currently taking place, makes Unionville an area worth preserving for future generations to study and enjoy.