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EVIDENCE OF ETHNICITY AND STATUS IN THE ARCHITECTURAL LANDSCAPE
OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY COVENTRY TOWNSHIP,
CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

by

Cynthia Gayle Falk

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

Spring 1996

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Coventry Township is located in the northern extremity of Chester County, Pennsylvania. It was originally settled by people from both the British Isles and Continental Europe. Throughout the eighteenth century, many of these individuals continued to express their disparate ethnic backgrounds in the traditional British and German houses they chose for themselves and their families. As late as 1798, for instance, two traditional German houses were still under construction in Coventry Township.

By the late eighteenth century, however, many prosperous young men from established British and German families began to distance themselves from these traditional, and often meager, "ethnic" dwellings. They chose to manifest their common elite status by constructing large, durable houses based on widely accepted academic models, which incorporated design ideas founded in the Renaissance. Yet in the German community, even within these formal buildings, ethnic differences often became apparent.

Seven of the fifteen surviving eighteenth-century dwellings in Coventry Township utilized the academic side-passage, double-pile plan. Four of these houses incorporated distinct traditional German characteristics within their symmetrical facades and carefully proscribed floor plans. The principle German attribute was a large, prominent first-floor parlor, which was designed without a fireplace. This room, which would have been heated by a stove, harked back to the stube, or "stoveroom," in traditional German dwellings. It symbolized a marked difference in ancestry between the elite German and British
owners of side-passage, double-pile structures.

The four surviving, uniquely "German," side-passage, double-pile houses, together with extant traditional German dwellings, indicate that Germans in Coventry Township did not readily accept British architectural conventions. Although many individuals embraced the closed plans, segregated work spaces, and orderly facades of formal academic, or "Georgian," buildings, they did so not to become "English." Rather, side-passage, double-pile plans were utilized as a way to express elite status. Although German and English houses may have looked similar from the exterior, on the inside, in their most formal room, German houses preserved distinct German qualities.
Chapter 1

ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

"The inhabitants of Pennsylvania are principally descendents of English, Irish, and Germans, with some Scotch, Welsh, Swedes, and a few Dutch."

Tench Coxe, 1794

Three townships, known as North, South, and East Coventry, occupy the hilly terrain of the northern extremity of Chester County, Pennsylvania. Bounded to the northeast by the Schuylkill River and Montgomery County and to the northwest by Berks County, these three townships were unified as a single township, known simply as Coventry until the 1840s (see figure 1.1). According to tradition, Samuel Nutt, a prominent eighteenth-century settler, named this one large township after his native town of Coventry in Warwickshire, England. However, based on the number of non-English, and particularly German, individuals who settled in the area, the name Coventry is a deceiving title for what was an ethnically diverse township.

Much of the evidence pertaining to eighteenth-century Coventry Township suggests that its British and German populations remained separate throughout the eighteenth century. Written histories of the area emphasize the English and the ironworks they established in the southern portion of the township. Histories of German religious denominations, on the other hand, focus on eighteenth-century German Brethren, Reformed, and Mennonite congregations in more eastern and northern parts of the township. However, all of these accounts deal
with only limited aspects of eighteenth-century life. It is by turning to more universal data about the landscape, the built environment, and particularly the dwelling houses of Coventry Township that a better understanding of ethnicity can be reached.

By the late eighteenth century, almost two hundred heads of household lived in Coventry Township. The dwellings these individuals chose for themselves and their families were clear statements about how they wanted to be perceived. Most surviving houses, whether based on traditional ethnic or new widely-accepted European models, fit clearly into German or British categories. However, based on their size, construction materials, and floor plans, these same domestic structures also served as symbols of wealth and rank. Prosperous Germans, for example, used their dwellings to align themselves with their elite English-speaking neighbors. The houses many successful Germans built allowed them to express their affluent status without sacrificing specific traditional German features.

Coventry Township’s ethnically diverse eighteenth-century population was quite unlike that in many other townships located in more southern portions of Chester County. Townships such as Pennsbury, in the extreme southern part of the county, were settled almost exclusively by English families and remained undisputedly English throughout the eighteenth century. Others, such as Oxford Township, in the southwestern part of the county, and Willistown Township, in the eastern portion of the county, included English individuals, but were also home to other British groups such as the Scotch-Irish and the Welsh.

Yet Coventry Township, and several other northern Chester County townships such as Vincent, Pikeland, and Nantmeal, were populated not only by British Islanders, but also in large part by Continental Europeans. The majority of this segment of the population hailed from the regions of Europe that would become part of Germany in 1871. However, Germanic immigrants also arrived in America from France,
Holland, and Switzerland. In the case of Coventry Township, many first made their homes in or around Philadelphia, and later they or their descendants moved further west to Chester County.

When, in 1724, Coventry Township was first designated as a separate entity on local taxes lists, roughly half of its 34 landholders had clearly German surnames. By the end of the eighteenth century, over sixty percent of the 179 heads of household living in Coventry Township fit into the same category. By that time, roughly a quarter of the population had British surnames, while the remaining percentage had surnames that could not easily be categorized.

In other northern Chester County townships, although proportions of German settlers were not as high, they did continue to increase throughout the eighteenth century. Even in Charlestown Township, which was located between Pikeland Township and the traditionally Welsh township of Tredifferin, Germans accounted for at least a quarter of the population by 1782.

Yet Coventry Township and other northern Chester County townships should not be regarded as fundamentally German. Scott Swank, in his book The Arts of the Pennsylvania Germans, suggests that the "epicenter of Pennsylvania German folk culture" was nowhere near Coventry Township. Rather, it was located in the part of Pennsylvania where present-day Lancaster, Berks, and Lebanon counties intersect (see figure 1.2). There the overwhelming majority of the population was German in background, and Germans had only limited communication with British Islanders.

In Chester County's Coventry Township, although Germans may have represented a majority of sixty percent by the late eighteenth-century, the German segment of the population was in constant contact with its British neighbors. Unlike core German townships in Lancaster, Lebanon, and Berks Counties, Coventry Township was on the periphery of the Pennsylvania-German region. The Germans who lived there had access not
only to German forms and ideas but to British conventions as well.

Still, the northern townships of Chester County were so unlike their southern neighbors that in the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century there was an attempt to establish a new county including northern Chester and parts of Montgomery and Berks Counties\(^\text{13}\) (see figure 1.3). Like Coventry Township, the townships that were to form the new county had mixed German and English populations. They were not primarily English or British like most Chester County townships, nor were they overwhelming German like many township further north and west.\(^\text{14}\)

From an ethnic, geographic, and economic standpoint, the formation of the proposed county would have been sensible for the people of Coventry Township. With few exceptions, they had always been more closely connected with their northern neighbors and with the trade route along the Schuylkill River than with the people of southern Chester County. Even today, the majority use a Pottstown, Montgomery County, mailing address; have a Pottstown telephone exchange; and read the Pottstown newspaper.

Early inhabitants of Coventry Township, without the United States Postal Service, the telephone, or widespread newspapers distribution, also left indications of both their background and relationships on the township's rolling terrain. While British landowners like Samuel Nutt may have provided many of the place-names that distinguish Coventry Township on printed maps, surviving physical manifestations like buildings symbolize not only British but also German elements of the Coventry Township community.

Based on Scott Swank's analysis, it can be presumed that Germans in America took one of three avenues in adapting to life on a new continent. The majority, Swank claims, followed the path of total assimilation and abandoned their German identity. A small minority chose rather to reject British culture and maintain their German
traditions. A somewhat larger minority, however, practiced what Swank calls "controlled acculturation" or "accommodation." This last group was able to employ elements of British culture while still maintaining its German identity.¹⁵

Because Coventry Township was so far removed from the core of Pennsylvania-German culture, it would seem that the township's German settlers could easily have chosen the first option and accepted the ways of their British neighbors. Unfortunately, because this alternative often involved Anglicizing names,¹⁶ individuals who chose assimilation are often difficult to identify. However, since over sixty percent of the surnames of Coventry Township's late eighteenth-century householders can clearly be identified as German, complete assimilation does not seem to have been an overly common practice.

Rather, members of Coventry Township's German population, who encountered individuals of other ethnic backgrounds on a regular basis, often differentiated themselves by preserving particular German elements within their dwellings.¹⁷ By examining surviving eighteenth-century houses, it becomes obvious that even by the end of the century, Germans in Coventry Township were building structures that clearly expressed their ethnic heritage. Some of these new buildings were based solely on traditional German house types. Others were prompted by a new trend among elites toward Renaissance design in domestic architecture. Yet, unlike contemporary British-occupied houses, even Renaissance-inspired German houses often incorporated distinctly German elements.

On a whole, surviving houses in Coventry Township indicate that in northern Chester County, on the fringes of both German and British settlement regions, individuals inhabited houses that clearly identified their national origin and associated them with distant cultural centers. Germans, whether they owned traditional "ethnic" or more widely accepted formal houses based on Renaissance ideals, clearly occupied "German" dwellings. Although prosperous Germans in Coventry Township accepted
house forms that would ally them with elite British families, they did not embrace affluent models to the extent that they abandoned their own traditions. If Coventry Township's German population was moving toward acculturation, even at the elite level, it was making the shift very sluggishly.
Figure 1.1 Map of Chester County Pennsylvania, 1790. (Based on map in James T. Lemon, The Best Poor Man's County, A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972], p. 8).
Figure 1.2 Map of the Counties of Southeastern Pennsylvania.
Figure 1.3 "Map of a New County to be Called St. Clair," c. 1835. Coventry Township is located south (left) of the Schuylkill River across the river from Pottstown. (Pennsylvania State Archives, Map Collection, MG-11, 393).
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 1


2. In using the term "German," I am referring to those immigrants who came to America from Continental Europe. Many came from the principalities that would become Germany, while others hailed from regions that are now part of France, Holland, or Switzerland.


5. The 1798 Federal Direct Tax lists 179 heads of household in Coventry Township. The 1798 Federal Direct Tax records for Coventry Township, Chester County, are available on microfilm through the National Archives, Washington, D.C. I was able to use a copy of that microfilm, which is available at the Center for Historical Architecture and Engineering at the University of Delaware.


7. Ibid.

8. Based on 1724 tax list as transcribed in Futhey and Cope, p. 172. At least 16 of the 34 landholders had clearly German surnames.

9. This figure is based on the 1798 Federal Direct Tax records for Coventry Township. Of the 179 individuals who occupied a house in the township in 1798, 110 had surnames that were clearly German.


12. Lemon, p. 81, 82, and 83; and Gabrielle Lanier, "Ethnic Perceptions, Ethnic Landscapes: Material and Cultural Identity in a Region of Regions," paper presented at the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies meeting at the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1 December 1995. In Warwick Township, Lancaster County, Lanier found 92 percent of the population was German.


15. Swank, p. 4-5.

16. Ibid., p. 4.

17. Ian Hodder came to similar conclusions when he studied the borders between ethnic groups in Baringo, Kenya. For a brief explanation see: Ian Hodder, Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 2.
Chapter 2
THE DIVIDED LANDSCAPE

"The forge at Coventry stands in a narrow valley, running east and west. There are three hearths and three hammers...Mr. Pott, the owner of the forge, was absent, but we were received by his family with particular courtesy and our wants met with an obliging readiness."

Johann David Schoepf, 1783

It would be a mistake to believe that the eighteenth-century German and British populations of Coventry Township were physically integrated. Although prosperous Germans may have had more in common with elite British Islanders than with other Germans of the lower sort, Coventry Township was divided into distinct British and German regions (see figure 2.1). The British tended to locate themselves in the southern portion of the township around Coventry Forge, while the Germans occupied land in more northern and eastern parts of the township. The little mixing that did occur took place along the fertile banks of the Schuylkill River and in the impoverished region that formed the mid-section of the township.

Permanent European settlement began in Coventry Township in the early eighteenth century with the founding of the Pennsylvania iron industry. In 1710s, Thomas Rutter built the first iron forge in Pennsylvania just north of the township. Within a few years, Samuel Nutt founded the province's second iron forge in the southern portion of what would become Coventry Township. Like the township, Nutt named his
new forge "Coventry," and the village that grew up around it became known as Coventry or Coventryville.

After erecting the forge, Nutt and his partners William Branson and Mordecai Lincoln went on to build an iron furnace, and, in 1732, Nutt opened the first steel furnace in Pennsylvania. When Samuel Nutt died in 1737, he was in the midst of building yet another furnace, called Warwick, in neighboring Nantmeal Township. This furnace may have been designed to replace the earlier iron furnace in Coventry Township, since neither the Coventry Township iron nor the steel furnace seem to have been long-lived enterprises.²

In his will, dated 1737, Samuel Nutt passed his share in the Coventry and Warwick ironworks through his interwoven family tree to his wife Anna Nutt (who was the daughter of ironmaster Thomas Rutter and the widow of Samuel Savage), his step-daughter Rebecca (Savage) Nutt, and his step-son-in-law and nephew, Samuel Nutt, Jr. Unfortunately, Samuel Nutt, Jr. passed away in 1739, just two years after his uncle. The following year, widow Rebecca Nutt married Robert Grace of Philadelphia. Grace, whom Benjamin Franklin later remembered as "a young Gentleman of some Fortune,"³ had descended from Irish nobility. Together with Rebecca's mother Anna, Robert and Rebecca Grace continued as partial owners of the Coventry and Warwick ironworks. By 1742, Grace, who had befriended Franklin and was given the model Franklin Stove, advertised that he was selling "new iron fire places" in Philadelphia.⁴ Presumably, these were made at Grace's Chester County iron furnace.

When Anna Nutt wrote her will in 1744, she left her interest in the ironworks to Rebecca's sister Ruth and Ruth's husband, John Potts. Several years later, in 1765, Robert Grace sold the Graces' rights to the ironworks, as well as most of his property "Situate lying and being in any part of the said Province of Pennsylvania or Elsewhere in North America,"⁵ to John Potts's eldest son, Thomas Potts. The latter Potts had married Rebecca Grace's daughter Anna Nutt in 1757. With John
Potts's death in 1768, his son Thomas became the sole owner of Coventry Forge.

Six years after Thomas Potts's death in 1785, his executors sold Coventry Forge to his son-in-law Robert May. In 1796, May sold the forge to Thomas Church and Jonathan Judson (or Hudson), who in turn sold it to Thomas Davis the following year. In 1807, Davis, who had relocated to Bedford County, Pennsylvania, conveyed the forge to George Chrisman, Jr. Although Coventry Forge was last operated in 1871, the forge tract remained in the Chrisman family into the twentieth century.

The presence of a forge in Coventry Township greatly influenced the type of people who would settle in the area. Primarily, it attracted individuals of English ancestry to an area that had the potential to become overwhelmingly German. Samuel Nutt, Sr., for instance, left his home in Coventry, England in the spring of 1714 with a certificate from his Quaker monthly meeting. On arriving in America, he first settled in a more English part of southern Chester County and joined the Concord Quaker meeting. It was only when Nutt decided to build a forge that he headed for the northern part of the county. Later, when he was in need of more skilled workers for his forge, rather than rely on the local predominantly German work force, Nutt is thought to have traveled back to England to enlist new recruits.6

From an ethnic standpoint, the draw of Coventry Forge contrasted with that of Coventry Township's churches. In a Pennsylvania township with a significant eighteenth-century English population one would expect to find evidence of a Quaker meeting. Yet Coventry Township had no official Quaker congregation. When John Potts and Ruth Savage married in Coventry in 1734, their Quaker marriage certificate read that they "Declared their Intention of taking Each other In Marriage by a paper fixed on the publick Meetinghouse of Uwchlan [Uwchlan Township, Chester County] and Coalbrook Dale [Berks County], where they Usually meet to worship."7 Presumably John Potts, who was "of Coalbrook
Dale, 8 attended the Colebrookdale Meeting, while Ruth Savage and her family made the eleven mile trip from southern Coventry Township to Uwchlan. This oft repeated journey explains why, as early as 1727, there was a need for a road that traveled from "Samuel Nutts Iron works in Coventry township" by the "conviniontest way way [sic.] to Youghland [Uwchlan] Meetinghouse." 9

Some Quaker individuals who lived in Coventry Township simply refrained from the long trip to meeting. Abel Thomas, who later became a Quaker minister, spent most of his childhood in Coventry Township. The Thomas family had come to the area from Upper Merion in Philadelphia County, where they lived in close proximity to other Welsh Quakers and the Merion Quaker Meeting. In Coventry Township, the situation was quite different. An early nineteenth-century memoir of Abel Thomas's life describes his sequestered experience: "The meeting being about ten miles distant, although he [Abel] had a desire to attend it...it does not appear that he ever was at a place of worship until he was about fifteen." 10 Perhaps because of the extended journey necessary to attend a Quaker service, by 1801, most of the Thomas family had left Coventry Township for Exeter, Berks County, where they could attend the Exeter Meeting. 11

Coventry Township's first formal, British-based religious assembly was not Quaker at all, but Methodist. The Methodist congregation that developed near Coventry Forge can trace its history to 1774 when Chester Circuit preacher William Watters visited the area. 12 Rebecca Grace became one of the township's greatest proponents of Methodism. In Benjamin Abbott's narrative of his life, the Methodist preacher recounts the role Mrs. Grace played in protecting him from angry iron workers when he evangelized at Warwick Furnace in 1780s. 13 Furthermore, in her will, Rebecca Grace bequeathed 93 perches of land "for the Use of the Religious Society called Methodists...to erect a Meeting-House thereon and such other Buildings as the said Society may Judge necessary.
for the accommodation of a meeting place." It is also commonly believed that during her lifetime Rebecca provided a building on her property to be used for Methodist meetings.

However, long before the Methodists came to the southern part of Coventry Township there were already three distinct German congregations scattered throughout the northern and eastern portions of the township. The earliest of these was the Brethren Church (also referred to as a Dunker, Dunkard or German Baptist church), which was officially organized in 1724. Eighteenth-century Coventry Township could also boast a Mennonite Church, which was formed in 1739, and a German Reformed Church, which was organized in 1743. All three of these congregations erected meeting houses by the end of the eighteenth-century: the Brethren Church in 1772, the Mennonite Church first in 1751 and again in 1798 (see figure 2.2), and the Reformed Church in 1744. With their durable buildings and adjoining cemeteries, these three congregations asserted themselves on Coventry Township's landscape in a way no British church would until 1813 when the Methodists built their first chapel. The Reformed Church, known as Brombach's or Brownback's, became such an important feature that it was included as a major landmark on Nicholas Scull's 1759 map of Pennsylvania (see figure 2.3).

From surviving communion and baptismal lists, it is clear that the congregations of the Brethren, Mennonite, and Reformed churches in Coventry Township were primarily composed of German and Swiss individuals. The inclusion of a British Islander was so rare that it deserved special notice. In the baptismal lists of the Reformed Church, for instance, an entry dated September 14, 1766, specifies that "Thomas Owen, an Englishman, was baptized in living conviction of the truth." Due to the continued use of spoken and written German in Coventry Township's German churches, eighteenth-century sermons and songs would not have been comprehensible to those who spoke and read only English.
Although by 1830, the Reformed Church was alternating German and English-language communion services, the last Brethren minister to use German did not die until 1842. Furthermore, when the Mennonite Church closed its doors in 1914, the retention of the German language was blamed for its demise. If the Coventry Mennonite congregation followed the lead of the neighboring Vincent Mennonite Church, German may have been used in services as late as 1878.

The presence of multiple German churches may have specifically drawn some German families to Coventry Township. Between 1724 and 1770, for instance, the township's Brethren Church saw its numbers more than triple. Additionally, by 1837, members of the Reformed Church were able to start a second Reformed Church in the township. Even in real estate advertisements, it was often asserted that property held by Germans was convenient not only to stores and mills but also to places (in plural form) of worship.

Whether the absence of a Quaker meeting or another English church discouraged English settlement is another issue. When the late Jonathon Davis's property was sold in 1766, his administrators did not hesitate to advertise that it was "convenient to Dutch and English Churches of different Societies." In 1818, after the establishment of a Methodist meeting, Priscilla Townsend also stated that her southern Coventry Township property was "convenient to places of worship." However, by the early nineteenth century, several Quaker families had left Coventry Township for more devout communities. Perhaps because of the lack of spiritual leadership for English families, Methodist preacher Benjamin Abbott described the iron region of Chester County as being "for wickedness...next door to hell."

Even without taking the institutions of religion or the iron industry into account, individuals' settlement preferences indicate ethnicity did divide eighteenth-century Coventry Township. In the 1798 Federal Direct tax, for instance, only twelve percent of the township's
German population was described as having a British neighbor. Furthermore, by combining the 1798 tax's lists of "adjoining Proprietors" with information gleaned from title searches, it is evident that certain parts of Coventry Township were populated by particular ethnic groups. The southern part of the Township was almost exclusively British. In 1798, British surnames like Meredith, Pugh, Townsend, and McEheney joined those of the Grace, Potts, May, Church, Judson, and Davis families who all owned land around Coventry Forge.

Further north and east, the overwhelming balance of Coventry Township remained predominantly German. With the exception of Edmund and Samuel Wells, who owned land along the Schuylkill River, names like Frick, Harley, Titlow, Brombach, Urner, and Reif filled the far northern portion of the township. The area between the two extremes, which assessors often differentiated because of its impoverished soil, was slightly more contested. Although German individuals made up a majority of the population, they shared the land with people such as Jacob Thomas and William Posey. Like the Wells and Thomas families, many of the British Islanders who permeated the German part of the Coventry Township were Welsh. Others were of mixed ancestry. The Poseys, for instance, were French Huguenots, who had left France and lived in England before coming to America. When William Posey arrived in northern Chester County, however, he did not accept the culture of his adopted English homeland but rather settled in a German part of Coventry Township, built a German house, and joined the German Reformed Church.27

The separation of Coventry Township into distinct German and British regions was a discernable, visible part of the landscape. The division may have been sparked by the presence of an early English community around Coventry Forge. When there were only 34 families in Coventry Township in 1724, it would not have been difficult to stake out separate territories. However, by 1798, when the number of householders in Coventry Township had exploded to 179, the township was still
segregated. As people came to the area throughout the eighteenth century, they made the decision to live among individuals with backgrounds similar to their own. Generally, the British, and particularly the English, stayed to the south while the Germans filled the more northern and eastern parts of the township.
Figure 2.1 Map of Coventry Township showing settlement by ethnic group, 1798. Based on the identified location of 58 householders and the "adjoining Proprietors" list from the 1798 Federal Direct tax for Coventry Township.
Figure 2.2 Coventry Mennonite Meetinghouse. Constructed 1798; remodeled, 1890.
Figure 2.3 Detail from William Scull's "Map of Pennsylvania," 1775. Based on Nicholas Scull's "Map of the Improved Part of the Province of Pennsylvania," 1759. Coventry Township's German Reformed Church is labeled a "Dutch Presbyterian Meet.[ing]." (Chester County Historical Society Library, map file).

2. The steel furnace does continue to appear in provincial tax records for much of the eighteenth-century. In 1767, it is in the possession of Thomas Potts; in 1787, Potts and Jacobs; and in 1791, John Evans. See provincial tax returns at the Chester County Archives and Records Center, West Chester, PA. The steel furnace does not appear in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax returns.


5. Chester County Deed Book S, p. 459, Chester County Archives and Records Center, West Chester, PA.


8. Ibid.

9. Chester County Road Paper, 2-15 (1727), Chester County Archives and Records Center, West Chester, PA.


12. "170th Anniversary of Methodism, Coventryville, Pa., October 22-29, 1944," Chester County Historical Society Library, 30B 5.7; and Futhey and Cope, 280.


14. Rebecca Grace's will (1799), Chester County Archives and Records Center, West Chester, PA, #4848.

15. "170th Anniversary of Methodism."
16. For Brethren Church see: Martin Grove Brumbaugh, p. 289; and Futhey and Cope, p. 273. For Mennonite Church see: Wenger, p. 204. (Futhey and Cope use the date 1728 [p. 299], but this is incorrect. It was based on a date stone on the Mennonites' second meeting house, which actually read "1798"—see Wenger, p. 205, note 4). For Reformed Church see: Glatfelter, p. 277; and Futhey & Cope, p. 296.

17. "Kirchenbuch vor die Gemeine in dem Coventry Township," partial copy of original record made by William J. Hinke, c.1900, Chester County Historical Society Library, 29B 10.5.


20. Wenger, p. 115 and 208.


22. Futhey and Cope, p. 298.

23. Chester County Historical Society Newspaper Clippings File, Coventry Township Lands, American Republican 11 November 1828. Samuel and Christopher Halderman's advertisement for the property of the late Christian Halderman.


25. Chester County Historical Society Newspaper Clippings File, Coventry Township Lands, American Republican 1 December 1818. Priscilla and David Townsend's advertisement.


27. For the history of the Posey family in America see: Chester County Historical Society Family History Files, Posey heading. Other evidence from William Posey's house and gravestone in Coventry Township.
Chapter 3
ETHNICITY AND HOUSES

"From the exterior appearance, especially the plan of the chimneys, it could be pretty certainly guessed whether the house was that of a German or an English family—if of one chimney only, placed in the middle, the house should be a German's and furnished with stoves...if of two chimneys, one at each gable end there should be fireplaces, after the English plan."

Johann David Schoepf, 1783

Eighteenth-century travelers often commented on perceived differences between the various ethnic groups that settled Pennsylvania. They compared personal characteristics, farming practices, property values, and even buildings. Well-to-do German doctor Johann David Schoepf was especially observant in contrasting Germans in America with their English neighbors. He claimed that by looking at the exterior of a dwelling, for instance, he could "pretty certainly guess" whether it was German or English in design. By noting chimney locations, Schoepf insisted houses could easily be divided into German and English categories.

In Coventry Township, architectural evidence suggests that ethnic distinctions were not always as clear as Schoepf might have thought. In some cases, British and German houses were very different. In others, distinctions were less clear. In many surviving eighteenth-century, German-occupied dwellings, uniquely German characteristics were manifested only in interior spaces away from the eyes of the public. Ideally, some of these internal differences may have been captured in
room-by-room household inventories taken when original owners died. However, few detailed probate inventories exist for eighteenth-century Coventry Township. As a result, to examine ethnicity as it related to interior features, as well as exterior differences in house design, it is necessary to turn to architectural evidence. Fortunately, surviving houses in Coventry Township have much to say about the subject.

Within the boundaries of present-day North, South, and East Coventry townships, at least fifteen eighteenth-century houses survive today. The basic components of the original floor plans and front facades of twelve of these fifteen buildings are still discernable. This architectural evidence helps to illustrate how the people of Coventry Township both inwardly organized their domestic lives and outwardly expressed their status and beliefs. Surviving dwellings speak of rarely verbalized ideas about order, ethnicity, and the relationship between public and private spaces. Major differences can be seen not only between those houses inhabited by elite and less-elite members of the community but also between those occupied by German and British families.

More than half of the intact eighteen-century dwellings remaining in Coventry Township represent a shift in the mid to late eighteenth century from traditional "open"-plan houses to more modern and fashionable "closed"-plan dwellings. In the newer closed-plan buildings, access to any room (with the possible exception of the kitchen) could only be achieved through a formal unheated stair passage or entry. This arrangement contrasted notably with that in open-plan houses where access was directly into one of the principle heated rooms of the building. The introduction of the unheated entry in closed-plan dwellings created a buffer or "meeting point" between the interior domain of the family and the exterior world. Some twentieth-century scholars would go so far as to suggest that the entry, which was usually the same width as an eighteenth-century roadway, both "literally and
symbolically extended the road into the house."4 Visitors, for instance, could be screened in the entry and may or may not have been allowed into a more formal, almost-public parlor or a private family area.

In America, closed-plan houses are often identified as "Georgian" buildings. However, as historian Cary Carson suggests, eighteenth-century Georgian houses were Georgian only to the King Georges of England.5 Throughout the western world, they represented an international, academic trend toward Renaissance design in domestic architecture. They symbolized a "revolution in basic planning and design," which corresponded to Renaissance breakthroughs in science, geography, and technology.6 In England, the movement was manifested through a revival of the designs of Italian architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80). In the principalities that would one day become Germany, Renaissance ideas were expressed in the buildings of court architect Georg Wenzeslaus Knobelsdorff (1699-1753).

Generally, Renaissance-inspired houses reflected desires to both rethink the functions of interior space and to create orderly outward facades.7 On the interior, the most drastic development was the creation of the entry. Other changes could include an increase in the number of rooms and in the specialization of room use. Bedrooms, for example, were often removed from the main floor of the house and relocated on more private upper floors. Additionally, service functions, such as cooking, were usually transferred from the first floor of the main core of the building.

On the exterior, formal closed-plan houses became more substantial looking: they were often multi-story buildings constructed of masonry. The configuration of openings for windows and doors, particularly on the front facade, was usually balanced both vertically and horizontally. As a result of this bilateral symmetry, "Georgian" houses reflected a sense of control and order.

27

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The most popular type of closed-plan dwelling in eighteenth-century Coventry Township was the side-passage, double-pile house. The seven surviving examples of this type were all constructed as stone, two-story buildings with gable roofs. The principle, front facade of each dwelling was divided into three vertical bays (see figure 3.1). Each bay had both a first-floor and a second-floor opening. At the first floor level, one of the outside bays was fitted with a door. The remaining first and second-floor openings were equipped with windows. In the majority of cases, the window and door openings were spaced evenly across the front facade. Often, the first-floor windows were slightly larger than the second-floor windows.

On the first floor level, the inside of Coventry Township's side-passage, double-pile houses was usually divided into three principle spaces: an entry, a front parlor, and a rear parlor. The entry, which averaged about seven feet wide, ran from the front door down one of the side, gable-end walls. It provided access to all of the rooms on the first floor, as well as to the second floor and the cellar. The open staircase leading to the second floor was the most notable architectural feature in the entry (see figure 3.2). To one side of the entry, the remainder of the first floor was given over to two parlors arranged back-to-back, or in a "double pile." The front parlor was usually the larger and more formal of the two spaces.

By the late eighteenth century, kitchens that were separate from the core of the main house were utilized by the occupants of all the side-passage, double-pile houses that survive in Coventry Township today. In many cases, a one-story stone or log kitchen was attached to the entry side of the dwelling. Although the kitchen could be stepped back from the front of the house, it was often left flush with the front of the building (see figure 3.3).

In Coventry Township, side-passage, double-pile houses were owned by prominent British and German families in the community. Roughly half
of the occupants of surviving buildings owned a commercial enterprise such as a mill or tannery. Male heads of household were often active in the military or held political positions, and several identified themselves as esquires. Two of the most formal, academic expressions of the side-passage, double-pile form were owned by individuals with personal or family connections in Philadelphia. The earlier of the two was built about mid century for ironmaster Robert Grace and his wife Rebecca (see figure 3.4). It was located in the southern part of the township, near Coventry Forge. The building may have been modeled after Robert Grace's house on Market Street in Philadelphia. On Nicholas Scull's 1759 map of Pennsylvania, the Graces' Coventry Township house was the only building in the township identified as a "Gentleman's Seat" (see figure 3.5).

After the publication of Scull's map, a larger example of the academic side-passage, double-pile type was built for John Heister (see figure 3.6). This house was situated in the northern part of the township along the Schuylkill River. Both the house and John Heister's costly tannery served as reminders of his elite status. Like many who had achieved his level of economic success, in the early nineteenth century, Heister followed his father and brother into state government. His cousin Joseph went on to become governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Although Heister's Coventry Township house was not constructed in time to be included on Scull's 1759 map, his family's residence in Upper Salford Township, Philadelphia County (now Montgomery County), was listed as a "Gentleman's Seat" (see figure 3.7).

The Grace and Heister houses were similar to fashionable urban town houses of the period (see figure 3.8). The two-story front facades of both buildings were composed of three evenly spaced bays. A front door, located in one of the outer bays, provided access to each house's unheated side-passage. A single off-center chimney protruded from each roof. At both the Grace and the Heister house, this single chimney
served back-to-back fireplaces in the two first-floor and two second-
floor heated rooms. On the first floor of the Grace house and the first
and second floors of the Heister house, in both of the larger front room
and the smaller rear room, these fireplace walls were fully paneled (see
figure 3.9). On the first floor level, each fireplace opening was
roughly centered with a cupboard to one side and a pass-through between
the two rooms to the other (see figure 3.10).

As in most closed-plan houses, at both the Graces' and the
Heisters', service areas were removed from the main part of the house.
Cooking actually took place in a separate structure, which was attached
to the passage side of each dwelling. At both residences, this kitchen
was set back from the front of the main portion of the building. As a
result, it did not interrupt the polished image created by the front
facade. Because of its location, the kitchen was accessible from both
the exterior and from the main house's side passage. For the slave-
holding Grace and Heister families, the idea of a kitchen that
allowed for separation without sacrificing proximity was an important
feature.

In part, the Grace and Heister houses differed from other side-
passage, double-pile houses in Coventry Township because of their strict
adherence to geometric floor plans and fenestration. Still more
separation was achieved through the use of materials and the level of
finish. The front facade of the Heister house, for instance, was
constructed of coursed stone. Each of the front first-floor windows was
capped with a decorative jack-arch lintel (see figure 3.11). In the
1798 Federal Direct Tax, the Heister house was the only building in
Coventry Township described as being in "good Repair." It was one of
only two houses to receive the highest assessment of $1000. Perhaps
as early as the eighteenth century, the front facade of the other $1000
house, which was owned by Caleb North of Philadelphia, also received a
refined exterior finish. Its random fieldstone facade was coated with a
layer of stucco that was scored and penciled to resemble blocks of stone\textsuperscript{12} (see figure 3.12).

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, even the front facade of the older Grace house had been covered with coursed ashlar stone.\textsuperscript{13} Rebecca Grace's grandson Robert May had also built a stone wall in front of the buildings (see figure 3.13). This combination of exterior finish and stone fencing both visually and physically separated the Grace house and its new owner from other neighboring householders.

Not all side-passage, double-pile houses in Coventry Township were as closely related to academic or urban models as the Grace and Heister houses. The five other surviving side-passage, double-pile dwellings in the township negotiated the extremes represented by these formal buildings and other more traditional structures. German inhabitants of Coventry Township, for instance, often incorporated elements from traditional German buildings in their side-passage, double-pile residences. British families also dealt with their interior spaces in traditional ways. As a result, in addition to academic versions, Coventry Township's remaining side-passage, double-pile buildings could also be divided into more conservative German and British types. Four German examples—the Henry and Elizabeth Benner, Jacob and Mary Landis, Ulrich Switzer, and Abraham and Catherine Zigler houses—and one British example—the Samuel and Priscilla Townsend house—exist today.

Surviving German models of the side-passage, double-pile type incorporated characteristics from three-room traditional German dwellings, known as "flurküchen" or "Continental floor plan" houses. Having originated in Central Europe, the flurküchen house has been documented throughout the German parts of Pennsylvania and further south in German areas of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina.\textsuperscript{14} In America, the three-room plan seems to have been the most common variation of the flurküchen type. In Coventry Township, one surviving two-story stone house, originally owned by the Jacob Downhouer family,
and one recently demolished two-story stone building, formerly owned by the John Imhoff and Conrad Miller families, were of this variety.

The principal distinguishing characteristic of this traditional German house type was a single large fireplace located near the center of the dwelling and oriented perpendicular to the front facade (see figure 3.14). A narrow küche, or kitchen, was located to the front side of the fireplace. This room served as both a work space and an entrance to the house and gave the flurküchen, or entry/kitchen, house its name. The küche generally sat on unexcavated ground and was fitted with enclosed staircases (see figure 3.15), which provided access to the upper story or stories as well as to the cellar underneath the remaining portion of the building.

In the three-room flurküchen manifestation, to the rear side of the fireplace was a large, well-lit, usually square room to the front and a smaller, often unheated, rectangular kammer, or chamber, to the rear. The larger front room, referred to as a stube, or "stove room," did not have a fireplace but rather was heated by a closed jamb, or five-plate, stove (see figure 3.16). This stove was fed through the back of the küche fireplace (see figure 3.17). Throughout most of the eighteenth-century, the idea of heating with stoves, particularly closed stoves, would have been foreign to the British inhabitants of the American colonies. To Germans, however, the stove was a familiar, meaningful feature.

Because of the layout of its central chimney stack, which accommodated both the küche fireplace and stube stove, the German flurküchen house could be identified from the exterior. As Johann David Schoepf noted when comparing German and English houses, if a dwelling had "one chimney only, placed in the middle, the house should be a German's and furnished with stoves." In addition to the central chimney, the shape of the flurküchen house also distinguished it. Rather than being explicitly rectangular in plan like many British
houses, the three-room flurküchen house tended to be square. Additionally, its front door was customarily pushed off to one side of its principle facade (see figure 3.18). This, coupled with the frequently irregular spacing of window bays, created an asymmetrical appearance.

In Coventry Township, flurküchen and related houses were built right up to the turn of the nineteenth century. The Jacob Downhouer house, for instance, was described as "unfinished" in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax records. From the limited information provided by the township's assessor, it would seem there was still much work to be done before the house was complete.18

Despite its very late construction date, the Downhouer house included all of the spacial features of earlier flurküchen houses. The first floor plan was composed of the usual küche, stube, and kammer (see figure 3.19). On the second floor, although the Downhouers preserved the same room arrangement, they (or perhaps later owners) departed from tradition enough to include a small, distinctly British fireplace in the space above the küche (see figure 3.20). This fireplace was framed with concave quarter-round cheeks, which have come to be associated with the British inhabitants of southeastern Pennsylvania and the surrounding region. Perhaps because this fireplace contrasted with the overtly German character of the rest of the house, the Downhouers located it on the private, less-accessible upper floor of their dwelling.

Like the first-floor plan, the design of the lowest subterranean level of the Downhouer house was unquestionably German. The cellar itself was located only under the stube/kammer side of the building; the küche sat on unexcavated ground. The large cellar room, which incorporated a natural spring, was accessible from both the rear of the house and from a stone staircase originating next to the küche fireplace (see figure 3.21 and 3.22). The cellar ceiling, which separated the cellar work area and spring from the formal stube and kammer above, was
well insulated with continual joists (see figure 3.23). Like the center chimney and the use of a stove, the Downhouers' cellar spring, stone cellar staircase, and well-insulated cellar ceiling differentiated their house from traditional British dwellings. In Coventry Township, even 1798 Federal Direct Tax returns noted that cellar springs existed only under German-occupied dwellings.¹⁹

Evidence from earlier traditional German houses in Coventry Township suggests wide-spread use of the German cellar characteristics displayed at the Downhouer house. The cellar of the now demolished Imhoff/Miller house, for example, had both a stone staircase leading to its küche and a well-insulated cellar ceiling. Rather than incorporating heavy continual joists for its cellar ceiling, however, at the Imhoff/Miller house insulation was achieved through the use of paling (see figure 3.24). Here, lighter, more widely space joists were laid, and before the first-floor floorboards were applied, a series of short, thin wooden "pales" were wedged between each pair of joists. A mud mixture was then layered over the pales and finally covered with the first-floor floorboards.

Although the Imhoff/Miller house did not have a cellar spring, other surviving eighteenth-century houses did. The Christopher Holderman house, which was designed as a two room küche-and-stube structure, was just one example. As at the Downhouers', the Holdernans' cellar was located only under the stove-heated stube side of the house. Although the Downhouer cellar was one large space, the Holdernans' was divided into two rooms (see figure 3.25). The smaller of the two rooms incorporated both a spring and a stone staircase leading to the yard just behind the house. The Holdernans' cellar does not appear to have been accessible from the inside of the building. Such limited cellar access was not uncommon—the cellar of the only known extant one-room log house, which was occupied by Philip Seltzer in 1798, could only be entered through a stone staircase which originated in the house's side
At least one other küche-and-stube house like the Holdermans' still exists in Coventry Township. Like the Downhouer house, this two-story stone house, which was originally owned by William Posey, was built as late as 1798 (see figure 3.26). A cellar may or may not have existed under the entire house as originally constructed. However, it is fairly clear that a spring was not incorporated in the cellar design, and that a staircase leading from the first-floor to the cellar was in place.

Despite these design changes, the Posey house did exhibit important German characteristics. In the late eighteenth century, both the Holdeman and Posey houses were composed of just two first-floor rooms (see figure 3.27). Each of these rooms was accessible from the exterior through the houses' two front doors. The smaller of the two interior rooms served as the küche, while the larger was the stube. Unlike the more often studied flurküchen house type, both the Holdeman and the Posey house had end chimneys (see figure 3.28). In the stube, probate inventories and some surviving physical evidence suggest that the chimney provided only a flue for a stove. Originally, as in three-room flurküchen houses, there does not seem to have been any fireplace in the largest first-floor room.

The Germans' propensity for a uniquely German version of the side-passage, double-pile plan may have been partially based on its similarity to the three-room flurküchen house floor plan. In the newer side-passage, double-pile scheme, the three principal spaces retained the same arrangement and proportions as in the older plan (compare figures 3.14 and 3.29). Although both the küche and kammer were significantly altered in the side-passage, double-pile plan, the stube retained the same prominent position. This single feature linked side-passage, double-pile houses; three-room flurküchen houses; and two-room küche-and-stube houses.
On the interior, the most notable change between the three-room flurküchen house and the newer side-passage, double-pile house involved the relocation of the cooking facilities and fireplace. The massive central fireplace was eliminated from the küche, and the narrow küche was converted into an unheated passage (or gang) with an open staircase at one end. This open, usually dog-legged staircase replaced the enclosed, winding staircase of the flurküchen house. With the introduction of the passage, cooking and other work functions were moved from within the main core of the house to a separate building. Often this kitchen building adjoined the passage side of the house and was flush with the front wall of the dwelling. However, at the Abraham and Catherine Zigler house, the kitchen was located in a detached structure located behind the main house (see figure 3.30).

To the side of the new passage, the stube remained a square, stove-heated room. The kammer, however, was significantly modified. What used to be an unheated first-floor chamber became a more formal room with a fireplace (see figure 3.31). Without the adjacent kitchen fireplace, it was this gable-end fireplace that provided a flue to vent the stube's pipe (rather than jamb) stove (see figure 3.32).

In all of the surviving eighteenth-century German side-passage, double-pile houses in Coventry Township, the stube was located to the front of the house, while the modified "kammer" was situated in the rear. The fireplace in the latter room could take one of two forms. It could be rectangular with one of its short sides butting up to the interior partition between the front and rear rooms, or it could be a triangular corner fireplace.

On the exterior, although the front facade was usually more symmetrical and the chimney had been moved to a gable end, the German side-passage, double-pile house could still be compared with the three-room flurküchen house. Both types of houses, for example, had off-center front doors, and they were both roughly square in plan.
Additionally, the use of materials provided a common link. All four surviving German side-passage, double-pile houses were constructed of the same native, red stone that was used for traditional buildings (see figure 3.33). None utilized coursed ashlar blocks to further refine their front facades. Additionally, the front facade of one of the four surviving German side-passage, double-pile houses preserved the asymmetrical character of a traditional German flurküchen facade. At the Zigler house, there was a notably large space between the first bay that housed the door and the two other bays that were fitted with windows (see figure 3.30).

For the English-speaking inhabitants of Coventry Township, the side-passage, double-pile plan was a more drastic deviation from traditional open-plan British houses. In Coventry Township, two extant dwellings represent these earlier British house-types. One, a two-story log structure, which was owned by Thomas Church in 1798, has been significantly altered in the ensuing years (see figure 3.34). The other, a two-story stone building, remains as an example of the British hall-and-parlor plan. The principle floor of this house, which was originally owned by the Jacob Thomas family, was composed of just two rooms. These rooms were arranged side-to-side in a single-pile plan (see figure 3.35). Access from the outside was into the larger of the two principle-floor rooms, known as the hall. This room was heated by a fireplace located on the exterior gable-end wall opposite the parlor.

In hall-and-parlor houses without another cooking fireplace in the cellar or in a separate building, the hall served as a kitchen, entry, and general multi-purpose room. However, since the Thomas house had a cellar kitchen underneath its hall, cooking tasks were removed from the main floor of the building. An enclosed winding staircases in the hall provided an outlet to this cellar kitchen as well as to the second floor.

An interior partition separated the smaller and more private
parlor from the hall. Although in New England, parlors, or "inner rooms," were often unheated, parlors in southeastern Pennsylvania usually had their own fireplaces. The additional parlor fireplace necessitated the placement of a second chimney on the exterior gable-end wall opposite the hall fireplace and chimney. This arrangement prompted eighteenth-century traveler Johann David Schoepf to note that if a house had "two chimneys, one at each gable end there should be fireplaces, after the English plan."22 One of the two chimneys led to the fireplace in the hall, while the other led to the fireplace in the parlor.

The Davis family's 1766 real estate advertisement in The Pennsylvania Gazette, which described "a good Log House, with two Stone Chimneys,"23 serves as a reminder of how important house types were in eighteenth-century Coventry Township. By noting the Davis family's Welsh surname and their description of a two-chimneyed house, prospective buyers would know that the structure was of the hall-and-parlor type.

In addition to their two chimneys, other characteristics helped to identify a hall-and-parlor house from the exterior. As a result of the side-to-side arrangement of the two first-floor rooms, hall-and-parlor houses like the Thomas house were rectangular in form. Their two chimneys were located on their shorter gable ends, and, in the mid-Atlantic, were normally flush with their outside walls. Because of the space needed by the two chimneys, the gable-end walls of early hall-and-parlor houses usually had no windows24 or had small, unevenly spaced windows to light closed staircases or cooking fireplaces.

The principle front facade of a hall-and-parlor house was also noticeably different than that of a traditional German house. The first floor level was usually composed of three bays or openings, which were equal or almost equal in size. The left and right bays housed windows, while the center bay provided space for a door (see figure 3.36). If a
second floor existed, as at the Thomas house, the spacing of the two or three second-floor windows usually corresponded with that of the first-floor openings. As a result, hall-and-parlor houses often had symmetrical, or almost symmetrical, front facades with central front doors.

At least one eighteenth-century British side-passage, double-pile house preserved some of the characteristics of traditional British hall-and-parlor dwellings (see figure 3.37). The building, which was occupied by Samuel and Priscilla Townsend in the late eighteenth-century, incorporated a dog-legged passage and three rooms in its first floor plan (see figure 3.38). Two of the rooms were arranged back-to-back to the side of the passage as would be expected. The wider front room served as a parlor, while the narrower rear room, with its sizable fireplace, functioned as a kitchen. Although the Townsends later added a separate kitchen to the passage side of their dwelling, originally they were able to incorporate service functions on the first floor of the main core of their house. Rather than copy the most formal side-passage, double-pile houses where cooking was relegated to a separate building, the Townsends reflected back to traditional hall-and-parlor houses by including their kitchen as an integral part of their dwelling.

The presence of a third first-floor room further deviated from the predicable, geometric plan of most side-passage, double-pile buildings. In the Townsend house, this third room was located behind the staircase and was directly accessible from the rear of the house. As a result of its location, the passage stair was situated closer to the front door than was customary. The staircase itself was also more traditional in form than most passage stairs. It began on the first floor like the open staircases at more formal side-passage, double-pile houses. However, rather than being of the refined dog-legged variety, the Townsend's staircase rose straight up and terminated in a series of winding treads.
What the Townsend houses illustrates is that even after the closed plan was introduced, British Islanders incorporated traditional elements in their formal dwellings. They were able, for instance, to include kitchens within the main portion of their houses. Other features, like winding staircases, also remained quasi-traditional.

This same type of retentiveness was manifested by the owners of Coventry Township's surviving German side-passage, double-pile dwellings. However, rather than including simply traditional elements like winding stairs, these houses made use of distinctly German characteristics. In three of the four surviving buildings, enduring German qualities were purely internalized and limited to just one room.

In most cases, elite Germans in Coventry Township accepted the international trend toward symmetrical facades. They used side-passage, double-pile houses to assert themselves on the landscape just as the Graces had done in the mid-eighteenth century. From the outside, their houses were very similar to more academic "Georgian" buildings. Even on the inside, Germans used the closed plan with its unheated entry and segregated service facilities to assert their authority and position in society. In was only in the front parlor, where British families would have centered their lives around a fireplace, that Germans manifested their German-ness. In their most formal, almost-public front room, Germans opted for a stove. In doing this, they preserved the tradition of a stove-heated stube from both German flurküchen and related küche- and-stube houses.
Figure 3.1  Jacob and Mary Landis house, three-bay front facade.
Figure 3.2 John Heister house, passage staircase.
Figure 3.3 Jonas Urner house and kitchen, front facade. Constructed 1802. Originally, the Urners' attached kitchen (to the left) would have been only one story tall. However, as at many houses of this type, the kitchen has been extended to include a second story.
Figure 3.4 Robert and Rebecca Grace house, front facade. A massive addition was added to the passage side (right) of the Grace house in the early nineteenth century.
Figure 3.5 Detail from William Scull's "Map of Pennsylvania," 1775. Based on Nicholas Scull's "Map of the Improved Part of the Province of Pennsylvania," 1759.
Figure 3.6  John Heister house, front facade. Attached kitchen is the white building to the left.
Figure 3.7 Detail from William Scull's "Map of Pennsylvania," 1775. Based on Nicholas Scull's "Map of the Improved Part of the Province of Pennsylvania," 1759. The Heister or "Heester" residence is shown near the Perkiomy Creek.
Figure 3.8 Charles Stedman/Samuel Powell house (Philadelphia), front facade. The Stedman/Powell house was constructed by Stedman on Third Street in Philadelphia in 1765. (Photo courtesy of Jim Layton).
Figure 3.9 John Heister house, panelled fireplace wall in first-floor front room.
Figure 3.10 Robert and Rebecca Grace house and kitchen, first-floor plan. (Based on field work by Bernard Herman, Gabrielle Lanier, and Cynthia Falk).

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Figure 3.11  John Heister house, jack-arch over first-floor front window.
Figure 3.12 Caleb North house, stucco-work on front facade. In 1798, this building was owned by Caleb North, of Philadelphia, but occupied by George McEheney.
Figure 3.13 Chester County Road Paper showing Robert May's stone fence.
(Chester County Archives and Records Center, road paper 181-199 [1807]).
Figure 3.14 Conrad Miller house, first-floor plan. The Miller house was originally constructed for Conrad Miller's father-in-law John Imhoff. (Based on drawing by Norman Glass).
Figure 3.15  Jacob Downhouser house, enclosed stair in küche.
Figure 3.16 Jamb stove. Manufactured in 1766 at the Mary Ann Furnace in York County, Pennsylvania, this stove represents the five-plate type that was used in German flurküchen houses. The stove is currently displayed in the Kershner Parlor (or stube) at the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum (Winterthur Museum, #60.773).
Figure 3.17 Küche fireplace with opening to stube stove. Kershner Kitchen, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. The interiors of the Kershner house were moved from Wernersville, Berks County, to the Winterthur Museum in the 1950s.
Figure 3.18 Jacob Downhouer house, front facade. The attached building to the left is a later kitchen addition.
Figure 3.19 Jacob Downhouser house, first-floor flurküchen plan. An additional door may have provided access between the stube and the kammer. (Based on field work by Bernard Herman, Gabrielle Lanier, and Cynthia Falk).
Figure 3.20 Jacob Downhouser house, small second-floor fireplace.
Figure 3.21 Jacob Downhouser house, cellar plan.
Figure 3.22 Jacob Downhower house, stone staircase leading from cellar to küche.
Figure 3.23  Jacob Downhouer house, continual joists of cellar ceiling. Originally, the spaces between the heavy joists would have been packed with mud, straw, and other materials.
Figure 3.24 Conrad Miller house, paled cellar ceiling. (Photo courtesy of Estelle Cremers).

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Figure 3.25 Christopher Holderman house, cellar plan.
Figure 3.26 William Posey house, front facade. Attached structure to left is a later addition.
Figure 3.27 William Posey house, basic components of first-floor plan. Unfortunately, there is still much to be learned about how the Posey and the related Holderman house functioned. This drawing only begins to lay out some of the principle features of küche-and-stube dwellings. (Based on field work by Carol Borchert, Gabrielle Lanier, and Cynthia Falk).
Figure 3.28 Christopher Holderman house, front facade.
Figure 3.29 Ulrich "Wooley" Switzer house and kitchen, first-floor plan. An additional door may have provided access between the *stube* and the rear room. (Based on field work by Bernard Herman, Gabrielle Lanier, and Cynthia Falk).
Figure 3.30 Abraham and Catherine Zigler house and kitchen. The Ziglers' detached, one-story, stone kitchen (now two-stories and covered with stucco) can be seen to the right of the main house. Its roof ridge runs parallel to the roof ridge of the main house. A later addition currently connects the main house and the kitchen.
Figure 3.31 Jonas Urner house, first-floor fireplace. This house dates to 1802.
Figure 3.32 Ten-plate stove. Although this Warwick Furnace stove dates to the nineteenth century, it is similar to the type of stove that would have been used in eighteenth-century German side-passage, double-pile houses. (Winterthur Museum, #83.75).
Figure 3.33 Ulrich "Wooley" Switzer house and kitchen, front facade.
Figure 3.34  Thomas Church house, front facade. Behind the awnings, the Church house has a slightly off-center front door flanked by a single window on either side.
Figure 3.35 Jacob Thomas house, first-floor hall-and-parlor plan. (Based on field work by Bernard Herman, Gabrielle Lanier, and Cynthia Falk).
Figure 3.36. Jacob Thomas house, front facade. Attached structure to right is a later addition.
Figure 3.37 Samuel and Priscilla Townsend house and kitchen addition, front facades. The kitchen addition is located to the left of the front door. Originally, the kitchen would have been only one story tall.
Figure 3.38 Samuel and Priscilla Townsend house, original first-floor plan.
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

1. Schoepf, 1:125.
2. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. The side-passage, double-pile type has previously been referred to as "two-thirds Georgian." This name is based on the type's similarity to what are known as "full Georgian" houses. The "full Georgian" house is a center-passage, double-pile building. On the exterior, its front facade is divided into five bays. Its interior space is usually divided into an entry and four rooms. Because the side-passage, double-pile house has a side rather than center passage, three rather than five bays, and only two rooms in addition to its entry, it is often thought of as a degeneration of the "full Georgian" house. However, in Coventry Township, surviving buildings and tax records suggest that side-passage, double-pile houses were not lesser examples of a larger, "complete" type. They represented the most highly valued houses in the township. Even larger dwellings, which may have been of a center-passage, double-pile plan, were not valued as highly as the most refined side-passage, double-pile buildings.
9. Most likely, "Coventry House" was built by the Graces sometime after their marriage in 1740 and before his death in 1766. Some believe that the house was actually built by Rebecca Grace's father or first husband. This, however, seems a chronological impossibility. A third alternative was suggested by Paul Chancellor in A History of Pottstown, p. 14. Chancellor writes, "'Coventry Hall,' it is believed, was built by Robert Grace, in 1757, for the marriage of his step-daughter to Thomas Potts (III)." Since the house was listed as the home of Robert Grace on Nicholas Scull's 1759 map of Pennsylvania, this also seems unlikely.
10. Robert Grace sold nine slaves to his step-son-in-law Thomas Potts, of Philadelphia, in 1765 (see Chester County Deed Book S, p. 460). In 1790, the Federal census indicated John Heister was the only individual in Coventry Township who owned a slave (United States Bureau of Census, Heads of Family at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790 [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907-08]). In 1800, Heister was one of several individuals who owned slaves (United States Census Office, Population Schedules of the Second Census of the United States: 1800, Pennsylvania [Washington, D.C.: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1957]).

11. 1798 Federal Direct Tax, Coventry Township, entry for John Heister.

12. Unfortunately, the Caleb North house has been significantly altered since 1798. Currently, the front facade of the portion of the house that corresponds to the measurements listed in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax is coated with stucco. This stucco has been tinted red to resemble Coventry Township's native stone and has been scored and penciled to look like cut and coursed stone. This may or may not have been the way the front facade was treated in the eighteenth century.

13. The Grace house may have originally been constructed of cut stone. However, between 1802 and 1805, Chester County triennial tax records indicate a significant ($100 or 67%) increase in the value of the house, which cannot be explained by the construction of an addition. Furthermore, by the time an addition was made circa 1826, physical evidence indicates that the cut stonework was already in place.


17. Schoepf, 1:125.

18. The assessor for Coventry Township described the Jacob Downhower house with only four windows. When complete, the houses would have had more than four windows on its front facade alone. The assessor also had some difficulty in determining whether the houses would include a kitchen. Furthermore, the Downhower house was valued at only $400. Even the much older Imhoff/Miller house, which was roughly the same size as the unfinished Downhower house, was assessed at $480.
19. Two cellar springs were enumerated in the 1798 Federal Direct tax records for Coventry Township. They were under the houses of Jacob Downhower and Martin Urner. At least one other cellar spring existed under Christopher Holderman's house.

20. Unfortunately, a fire destroyed much of the original fabric of the Posey house. Under the rear part of the küche, there is a large masonry block that runs from floor to ceiling. It is unclear whether this portion of the cellar was originally excavated.

21. Inventories are not clear as to whether individuals were sleeping in either of these first-floor rooms.

22. Schoepf, 1:125.


Chapter 4

RECONSTRUCTING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: THE 1798 FEDERAL DIRECT TAX

"To study architecture by merely measuring walls and recording the externals, is to miss all the romance, and most of the charm that surrounds it like a halo."

G. Edwin Brumbaugh, 1930.

The fifteen eighteenth-century houses that currently survive in Coventry Township constitute less than a tenth of all the houses that stood in the township at the end of that century. They embody an even smaller percentage of the total number of eighteenth-century buildings that were once part of the township's landscape. In early America, dwellings were usually part of larger complexes that often included other domestic structures, like kitchens; buildings related to household production, like still houses and springhouses; agricultural buildings, like barns and stables; and trade and commercial buildings, like workshops and mills. Returns from the 1798 Federal Direct Tax help to place surviving houses not only within the context of other dwellings but also within this larger context of the entire late eighteenth-century built environment.

For Coventry Township, both an "A" and a "B" schedule from the 1798 Federal Direct Tax survive. The "A" schedule lists houses valued at over $100 and indicates who owned and who occupied each building. It
also describes listed dwellings in terms of materials, dimensions, and number of stories, windows, and "lights" or window panes. Furthermore, it notes whether a kitchen was included in each house, and enumerates separate kitchen buildings, springhouses, and other domestic structures such as bake houses and wash houses.

The "B" schedule of the 1798 tax provides limited information about dwellings valued under $100. It also lists and describes agricultural and trade buildings such as barns, still houses, mills, and workshops. Additionally, the "B" schedule registers how many acres each individual owned and usually provides the name of at least one of each entrant's neighbors. Both the "A" and "B" schedules also assess the value of the property that has been described.

The 1798 Federal Direct Tax indicates that the division between traditional open-plan dwellings and more formal closed-plan dwellings was recognized in the eighteenth century. In addition to materials and condition, floor plan played an important role in determining the value of a building. The seven extant side-passage, double-pile houses, for example, were all valued over $600. Larger examples of traditional houses, like the surviving Jacob Thomas, Christopher Holderman, and Jacob Downhouser houses, were valued between $201 and $600 dollars. Smaller traditional houses, which were often only one room in plan like the Philip Seltzer house, were usually valued at $200 or less.

In addition to assessed house value, the type of house an inhabitant of Coventry Township possessed also influenced, or was a direct result of, the other buildings on his or her property. People living in lower-valued houses, for instance, tended to have fewer additional domestic, agricultural, or trade buildings than those living in more highly valued houses. Those who occupied side-passage, double-pile buildings, on the other hand, represented the elite of the community. They were much more likely to own several domestic buildings, as well as structures associated with agricultural, trade,
and commercial enterprises.

When comparing the German and British populations of Coventry Township, such distinctions in the built environment are not always as obvious. Although surviving houses point to specific German characteristics, often these were not captured in the 1798 tax. Both German and English-speaking inhabitants of Coventry Township lived in meager one-room houses as well as opulent side-passage, double-pile dwellings. Although Germans did tend to own many of the more highly valued houses and much of the highly valued land, they did not monopolize trade, agricultural, or the commercial enterprises in the township.

What extant houses only begin to illustrate is that economics, as much as ethnicity, divided Coventry Township's late eighteenth-century population. The 1798 Federal Direct Tax shows that differences abounded between those who lived in houses valued up to $200, between $201 and $600, and over $600. Houses assessed at $200 or less, for instance, were occupied by more than half of all the heads of household in late eighteenth-century Coventry Township (see figure 4.1). However, only one of these structures survives today (see figure 4.2). Like 79 percent of the 97 houses included in this lowest value group, it was a one-story log building. Like almost half of the houses valued at $200 or less, this house was occupied by a tenant. Although the building was owned by the affluent Abraham Brower, it was occupied by Philip Seltzer.

Seltzer's house measured only 16 by 22 feet on its exterior. At 362 square feet, the building was somewhat below the average for lesser-valued houses in terms of both area and total usable square footage. On the interior, the house's principal floor was composed of just one room, which was lit by two four-pane windows. A ladder in one corner of the room lead to a loft above. Below, a one-room cellar was accessible from the exterior of the house. Although Seltzer's house was probably in good condition, almost a quarter of the houses valued at $200 or less
were described as "old" in 1798, while three were "unfinished," one was "poor," and one, which was made out of mud, was "cracked."

Very few people with houses valued at $200 or less had multiple outbuildings. In fact, almost a third of the individuals in this group possessed no domestic buildings other than their dwellings. Brower's tenant, for instance, had none. His kitchen was incorporated in his one-room house. Overall, only six percent of the people with lowly houses were described as having a separate kitchen building. A third did, however, have a springhouse. In terms of agricultural buildings, 45 percent owned or leased a barn. However, only seven percent could boast of a barn constructed of all or part stone.

Despite their little-valued dwelling houses, some of Seltzer's more prosperous neighbors did possess other notable buildings. These included: a forge, gristmill, fulling mill, still house, wagon house, two sawmills, several trade shops, and numerous stables. Six entries also included a second house valued under $100, and two included a second and third house together valued at $80 and $100. Some of these people also owned a more highly valued house. However, this was either located in another township, occupied by another individual, or unfinished and uninhabited.

On average, people with houses valued at $200 or less occupied 57 acres of land. Their acreage, together with agricultural and trade buildings, was assessed an average value of $593. However, Rutter and Company's 1150 acres valued at $4720; Evan Pugh's 140 acres, barn, gristmill, sawmill, and fulling mill, together valued at $4250; and Thomas Davis's 144 acres, forge, stable, sawmill, coal house, and two additional houses, valued at $3100, significantly elevated both overall land and land value figures. The 28-acre median property figure and $340 median land value figure provide a better indication of what was common for people in this category.

Among the third of Coventry Township's householders who lived in
houses valued between $201 and $600, there was more variation in house size and materials. Houses could be one, one-and-a-half, or two-stories tall and could be constructed of stone, log, mud, or some combination of the three materials. However, 47 percent of this group of houses were two-story buildings, and half of the two-story houses were constructed of stone.

A person who lived in a house assessed between $201 and $600 was almost two times as likely to have a springhouse than a person living in an inferior house; he or she was also over two times as likely to have a separate kitchen building. Only seven percent of the people who lived in a house valued between $201 and $600 had no additional domestic, agricultural, or trade buildings. Eighty-eight percent of these householders possessed a barn, and 42 percent had at least one other occupational building. These included: five mills, one tanyard, one still house, four stables, one group of sheds, eleven wagon houses, and five shops. On average, houses valued between $201 and $600 were situated on 116 acres of land. This acreage, together with agricultural and trade buildings, was assessed a mean value of $1744.

The majority of the buildings valued between $201 and $600 represented traditional German and British houses like the surviving Jacob Downhouer, Christopher Holderman, and Jacob Thomas houses. On average, they contained a little over 900 square feet. As a group, they differed from lower-valued buildings in terms of their more durable construction materials and their larger and often taller proportions. They also tended to be located on larger plots of land where they were often one of several buildings comprising a landscape of domesticity, agriculture, and trade.

Houses ranging from $201 to $600 did not, however, represent the highest-valued dwellings. Twenty-three houses, representing 13 percent of the total number of houses, were assessed over $600. These buildings were all two-story structures. Twenty of them were constructed of
stone, while one was brick, one was mud, and one was a combination of stone and log. On average, these dwellings took up close to 900 square feet of land and averaged 1739 square feet of usable space.

Only one of these very highly valued houses was described as having no other domestic, agricultural, or trade buildings. However, this house, which was occupied by the widow Sarah Pugh, was part of a larger complex of Pugh family buildings that Sarah's late husband had bequeathed to her son Evan. Included in the Pugh family holdings were: five houses, a barn, a gristmill, a sawmill, and a fulling mill. Eighteen of the other 22 houses valued at more than $600 did have a separate kitchen, and one additional house had a separate bake house. Springhouses or milk houses were also associated with eighteen of these dwellings.

In the agriculture sphere, every householder but Sarah Pugh had a barn. Seventy-three percent of these barns were constructed of all or part stone. Furthermore, thirteen of the houses were associated with at least one other occupational or trade building in addition to a barn. Eight of these included a mill, tanyard, or workshop that indicated a commercial scale of production. When these agricultural and trade buildings were combined with acreage and assessed, the mean value for this group of householders was $2716. This staggering figure can partially be explained by the large lots, averaging 160 acres, that people with costly houses possessed. However, in order to receive such high valuations, both the land and the agricultural and trade buildings on it also had to be associated with high yields and extensive production.

Houses in the highest value group were clearly different from lesser-valued houses on several levels. Because their formal closed floor plans favored the division of service from the main core of the house, dwellings in this group tended to be associated with separate kitchen buildings. People with houses valued above $600 were more than
five times as likely to have a separate kitchen than those with houses valued between $201 and $600, and thirteen times more likely than those with houses valued at $200 or less.

Outside of the domestic sphere, highly valued houses were situated in complexes where extensive agriculture and production were part of everyday life. While less than a quarter of the people with houses valued at $600 or less had durable stone or part stone barns, seventy percent of those with houses over $600 fit into this same category. Additionally, individuals with houses valued over $600 were more than three times at likely to own a mill, tanyard, forge, or trade shop, than those with lower-valued dwellings.

In Coventry Township, 16 percent of the Germans and nine percent of the British lived in houses valued at more than $600. While roughly the same percentage of German and British families occupied houses valued between $201 and $600, a slightly greater percentage of British families inhabited the lowly houses assessed at $200 or less. Such subtle differences are apparent in many of the calculations comparing the German and British populations of Coventry Township. In terms of materials, for instance, 51 percent of both the Germans and the British lived in log houses, while 36 percent of the Germans and 32 percent of the British occupied stone buildings (see figure 4.3). Because a slightly higher percentage of Germans occupied highly valued houses built of stone, a slightly greater percent of their dwellings were stone buildings.

In terms of house value, the chief discrepancy between the two ethnic groups occurred in the specific range from $701 to $800 (see figure 4.4). In the British sample, as house value increased from $200 to $1000, the number of houses in each $100 range either decreased or remained roughly the same. For example, while there were twenty-five houses in the $101 to $200 range, there were four in the $401 to $500 range, and only one, the Townsend House, in the $701 to $800 range.
Among the German element, the same trend was apparent in all of the value groups except the $701 to $800 range. In this group, there were twelve houses, constituting close to eleven percent of all the German-occupied dwellings.

All of these twelve houses were two-story stone buildings. Ten were valued at $800, and two at $750. Although only one of the twelve houses was described in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax as being "nearly new," all twelve had probably been built in the second half of the eighteenth century. Only two of these houses had integrated kitchens, while nine had separate stone kitchens, and one had a separate log kitchen. The twelve houses varied in square footage from 1456 to 2600 square feet.

Included in this group were the four previously discussed surviving German side-passage, double-pile houses. With just one exception, the recorded dimensions of the remaining eight buildings suggest they were also of the side-passage, double-pile variety. Based on probate inventories, which include stoves with other objects suitable for a front parlor, it can be presumed that at least three of the remaining seven buildings were also German manifestations that incorporated a stube. Unfortunately, inventories that could confirm the existence of a formal stove-heated room do not survive for the other four examples.

These twelve highly valued houses, the majority of which were of the distinctly German side-passage, double-pile plan, significantly affected many of the overall averages for German and British-occupied dwellings. The mean value for German-occupied houses, for instance, was $348. This figure contrasted with the $284 mean value of British-occupied houses. Likewise, German-occupied houses averaged 832 square feet, while British-occupied houses averaged only 700 square feet. Germans were also five percent more likely to live in a two-story house than British Islanders. Additionally, only eleven percent of the
German-occupied houses were described as "old" in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax records, although 20 percent of the British-occupied houses were.

Because of their propensity for formal side-passage, double-pile dwellings, German householders in Coventry Township were more likely to have a separate kitchen building (21% compared with 13%) than their British neighbors. British Islanders, who did not build as large a percent of closed-plan dwellings, were more liable to have a kitchen included in their house (80% compared with 73%).

When compared with the British population, Germans living in Coventry Township were also more apt to possess the buildings associated with extensive agricultural and commercial enterprises. They were more inclined, for instance, to have a springhouse that could be used in dairying (51% compared with 38%). They were also more likely to have a barn (72% compared with 53%). In fact, two German residents had two barns on their property.

Of the barns that were built, roughly half of both the German and British samples were of at least part stone. The Germans, however, were more inclined to have exclusively stone barns (see figure 4.5). German barns also averaged almost 100 square feet larger than British barns. This fact seems to correspond with the observation that Germans "always provide large and suitable accommodations for their horses and cattle." It also suggests that numerous Germans had the financial ability to build large, durable structures.

While British Islanders possessed the only forge, wheel shop, and fulling mills in Coventry Township, Germans held more sawmills, gristmills, smith shops, and carpenter's shops, and the singular oil mill and weave shop. Only tanyards were split evenly between the two ethnic groups. In 1798, merely two percent of the British population of Coventry Township possessed the elite triad of a house valued over $600, a barn, and a trade building. In the same year, five percent of the
Germans had reached the same plateau.

On average, Germans' land and agricultural and trade buildings, when taken together, were assessed higher values than British Islanders'. Although Germans in Coventry Township averaged 90 acres per landholder and British Islanders averaged slightly more at 104 acres, the Germans' average assessment was $1398, while British Islanders' was only $1164. This difference in value seems to confirm the old and widely held stereotype that Pennsylvania Germans "always prefer good land...[and] often double the value of an old farm in two years, and grow rich on farms." However, it also reflects the numerous German commercial enterprises that dotted the landscape of Coventry Township.

Overall, the 1798 Federal Direct Tax shows that numerous Germans in Coventry Township had achieved economic success by the late eighteenth century. They built imposing stone barns, mills, and other buildings related to large-scale production. The also constructed formal closed-plan houses that often had separate kitchens. A specific group of these, which were assessed between $701 and $800, tended to be of a distinct "German" side-passage, double-pile type.

Because the 1798 tax recorded measurable characteristics like value, size, and materials, it carried very little evidence of the texture that would have distinguished a German house from a British house. As architectural historian G. Edwin Brumbaugh noted in the early twentieth century, "To study architecture by merely measuring walls and recording the externals, is to miss all the romance, and most of the charm that surrounds it like a halo." In addition to romance and charm, external measurements rarely provide a sense of ethnic texture. Even when using 1798 Federal Direct Tax records to examine a characteristic like the shape of a building, ethnic differentiations are not as clear as might be expected.

Square dwellings, for instance, could represent one of three floor plans: the traditional German flurküchen plan, the one-room plan, or
the side-passage, double-pile plan. Although both Germans and British Islanders built one-room and side-passage, double-pile houses, only Germans utilized the square *flurkuchen* plan. Germans also built many more side-passage, double-pile structures than the British. Therefore, the preponderance of eighteenth-century square buildings should have been German-occupied dwellings. Additionally, it would seem that the majority of German-occupied houses should have been square.

In searching the 1798 records for square buildings, however, only 27 percent of German-occupied houses and 16 percent of British-occupied houses were square. Of the seven square British-occupied buildings, four were assessed meanly enough to be considered one-room dwellings. Only two, the Samuel Townsend and Sarah Pugh houses, were valued highly enough to be square side-passage, double-pile buildings. The one remaining British-occupied house, which was a two-story stone structure owned by Isaac Thomas and assessed at $500, may have been a very lowly valued side-passage, double-pile house or an architectural anomaly for Coventry Township. Among the Germans, thirteen of the thirty German-occupied square houses were valued at more than $600 and were probably side-passage, double-pile buildings. Six were valued lowly enough to be considered one-room houses. Thus, at the most, only eleven German-occupied houses in Coventry Township could have been square *flurkuchen* houses.

Fortunately, the surviving Christopher Holderman and William Posey houses suggest that Germans in Coventry Township also made use of a related two-room, rectangular, open-plan dwelling. These houses incorporated a stove-heated *stube* like the *flurkuchen* house, although they were constructed without a center chimney. With the exception of the surviving examples, it is almost impossible to determine how many of these traditional rectangular *küche-and-stube* structures were built in Coventry Township.

In the case of both the *küche-and-stube* houses and the German
side-passage, double-pile houses, knowledge of ethnic texture comes not from the 1798 tax but from surviving buildings and household inventories. Both of the latter forms of evidence suggest that stove-heated stubes were important parts of German houses. It is the 1798 Federal Direct Tax, however, that places these buildings in their proper context. Küche-and-stube houses fell in the same value group as traditional German flurküchen houses and British hall-and-parlor houses. German side-passage, double-pile dwellings, on the other hand, clearly united prosperous Germans in Coventry Township with a larger heterogenous community of elite individuals. These people, be they German or British, occupied highly valued houses, owned large tracts of land, and often were engaged in large-scale agriculture as well as other commercial activities.
Figure 4.1 Assessed value of houses in Coventry Township, 1798. (See endnote #4 for a discussion of buildings that were included.)
Figure 4.2 House owned by Abraham Brower and occupied by Philip Seltzer, photo c.1885. (Photo courtesy of Thomas Batchelor).
Figure 4.3 House materials by ethnic group, 1798.
Figure 4.4 House value by ethnic group, 1798.
Figure 4.5 Barn materials by ethnic group, 1798.
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 4


3. For Coventry Township, "A" and "B" schedules survive as well as two summary schedules labeled "D" and "E."

4. When more than one house was listed for in a single entrant, only the highest valued house was used to compute the following statistics. As a result of this decision, a total of 16 houses were omitted. In every one of these cases, the "primary" house was enumerated on the "A" list and the "secondary" house or houses were described on the "B" list. In general, very little information was provided about the "B" list houses. However, if a "B" list house was the only residence enumerated for an individual or company, it was included in the following statistics.


6. Ibid., p. 56-57.


9. As I defined the term "square," a square building is one where the difference in width and depth is no greater than twenty percent of the length of the shorter of the two dimensions.

10. British Islanders in the Delaware Valley did use a square three-room open plan, which has been referred to as a double parlor or "Quaker plan." Basically, the space that would have constituted a parlor in a hall-and-parlor house was divided to create two rooms. See: Pendleton, p. 169 for an illustration. Although no building of this type survives intact in Coventry Township, the dimensions and valuation of the Isaac Thomas house suggest it may have been an example of this floor plan.
Chapter 5
THE ACCULTURATED GERMAN?

"The first dwelling house upon this [German] farm is small, and built of logs. It generally lasts the lifetime of the first settler of a tract of land; and hence they have a saying, that 'a son should always begin his improvements where his father left off,'—this is, by building a large and convenient stone house."

Benjamin Rush, 1789

Houses that incorporated the distinctly German stube within their side-passage, double-pile plans communicated two key messages. Primarily, these buildings were representative of certain families' wealth and elite status. On the exterior, their symmetrical facades were unmistakable symbols of authority and control. On the interior, their closed plans and segregated work spaces attested to their owners' supremacy. However, these same buildings were also explicit statements about ethnicity. Many surviving side-passage, double-pile houses in Coventry Township announced that in order to be elite, one did not have to be British. The most formal front parlor of a side-passage, double-pile house could remain "German" without jeopardizing the meaning of that room or the rest of the building.

In Coventry Township, the families that constructed side-passage, double-pile houses, whether German or English, represented a specific group of individuals who had achieved economic success. Most of these householders were fairly young and often newly married. They represented established families, acquired much of their property
through inheritance, and participated in extensive commerce and agriculture. The Robert and Rebecca Grace house, which predated other side-passage, double-pile houses by at least ten years and served as an ironmaster's "mansion" for half a century, may seem an exceptional case. However, the Graces and their offspring followed patterns that were repeated over and over again by later owners of side-passage, double-pile dwellings.

Robert and Rebecca Grace, who were married in 1740, both came from prominent families. Robert Grace was an elite "Gentleman" of Philadelphia. He was a member of Benjamin Franklin's Junto and provided a "little Room" in his Philadelphia house where, for a time, the Junto met and members' books were housed. His wife Rebecca was the granddaughter, daughter, and step-daughter of Chester County ironmasters. When she married Robert Grace, she was described as "an agreeable young Lady, with a Fortune of Ten Thousand Pound[s]."

In 1745, Robert and Rebecca Grace left their house on a fashionable section of Market Street in Philadelphia to come to Coventry Township. There, Rebecca had inherited considerable property from her step-father and her first husband. Included in her (and through marriage his) holdings was a partial interest in Coventry Forge. It was near this forge that the Graces replaced Rebecca's family's older hewn log house with a side-passage, double-pile dwelling.

As Robert Grace neared death in the 1760s, he sold the Graces' house and most of their property to his step-son-in-law Thomas Potts. Like the Graces, Potts had also come from an established Pennsylvania family. Thomas Potts' grandfather had been a member of Benjamin Franklin's Library Company; his father had founded Pottstown; and he, in addition to being Coventry Forge's new ironmaster, was both an assemblyman and an original member of the American Philosophical Society. During the Revolutionary War, Thomas Potts, whose brother Isaac provided housing for George Washington in his own side-passage,
double-pile house at Valley Forge, was promoted to Colonel.6

After Thomas Potts's death in 1785, Rebecca Grace purchased her former house and 110 acres of land from her deceased son-in-law's estate. Rather than occupy the house herself, by 1798, she had turned the building over to her grandson-in-law, Robert May. May had taken the place of his father-in-law, Thomas Pott, as ironmaster until 1796 when he sold Coventry Forge. In the meantime, he had come to be identified as "Robert May, Esquire."7 Included among his late eighteenth-century holdings was a multi-storied stone barn, which measured 20 by 30 feet (see figure 5.1).

The Grace, Potts, and May families conformed to the standard profile for Coventry Township's side-passage, double-pile house owners. Other male heads of household also acquired property on which to build their side-passage, double-pile houses through their own or their wives' families. Ulrich Switzer and Henry Benner, for instance, both inherited land from their fathers. John Heister bought his property from his parents, and Abraham Zigler purchased his from his father-in-law, John Baugh. Jacob Landis, on the other hand, received a quarter of his father-in-law's estate in 1789 after he married Mary Cochenhour. Samuel Townsend, who married Priscilla Yarnall in 1787, was also able to occupy his father-in-law's Coventry Township property.

Many of the individuals who would build side-passage, double-pile dwellings came from families that had been established and prospering in Pennsylvania for years. Jacob Landis's in-laws, for instance, had purchased the tract he would inherit in 1760. By 1771, this property incorporated two "messuages" and a gristmill. Abraham Zigler's father-in-law also owned a mill—in his case a sawmill. In Upper Salford Township, Philadelphia County (now Montgomery County), John Heister's father operated a tannery. When a horse was stolen from the elder Heister in 1755, he was able to advertise in The Pennsylvania Gazette and offer a three pound reward for the capture of the horse and thief.8
After individuals built their formal closed-plan dwellings in Coventry Township, they continued to possess other buildings that would support their families' elevated positions within the community. Some of these structures were trade shops like Jacob Landis's carpentry shop and Samuel Townsend's workshop. Others, like Ulrich Switzer's sawmill and John Heister's tanyard, were larger undertakings. Often, these commercial buildings occupied a limited number of desirable lots that incorporated waterways and mill seats.

These same tracts also represented much of Coventry Township's arable land. Significant portions of Coventry Township were not suitable for cultivation. According to the 1798 Federal Direct Tax, large areas of the township were hilly, rocky, or simply had "poor" or "bad" land. Johann David Schoepf noted that the area could not "boast of any particularly fertile soil...[except] the narrow low-grounds along the Schuylkill." However, Jacob Landis, Abraham Zigler, Henry Benner, John Heister, and Samuel Townsend possessed the large stone or part stone barns that suggest extensive farming. Their choice, highly valued land allowed them to participate in extensive agriculture in an area where fertile soil was at a minimum.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, many of Coventry Township's side-passage, double-pile house owners had gained positions and titles that expressed their standing in the community. Samuel Townsend, for instance, became a justice of the peace, and Jacob Landis acquired the title esquire. John Heister joined numerous family members who served in high-ranking political and military positions. In the 1790 census, Heister was listed as "Col. Jn⁰," and before his death in 1832, he became a general.

Like their titles, the houses, barns, and commercial structures these individuals possessed distinguished them from less affluent inhabitants of Coventry Township. However, to some extent, their dwellings also distinguished them from each other. The Grace and
Heister houses, for instance, achieved a level of finish and formality that is unique among surviving houses in Coventry Township. Other dwellings, such as the Townsend house, incorporated more traditional elements like winding staircases. When houses were owned by Germans, they often included features that were not only traditional but also distinctly German. The construction of a side-passage, double-pile house that incorporated a stove-heated stube was one way Germans could express economic and social success without conforming to English conventions.

In late eighteenth-century Coventry Township, Germans clearly expressed their ethnic background in the dwellings they occupied. German side-passage, double-pile houses employed elements from formal academic closed-plan structures without abandoning traditional forms. Stove-heated stubes, and, in one case, front facade fenestration harkened back to traditional German flurküchen houses. Open-plan dwellings, both old and new, further represented a continuation of traditional German aesthetics. While aging flurküchen and related houses remained occupied, newly constructed buildings, like the Downhouer and Posey houses, duplicated their old-fashioned open floor plans and distinctly German characteristics.

Among Coventry Township's surviving domestic buildings, there is very little evidence of complete German assimilation. The John and Catherine Heister house, with its coursed stone facade and fully panelled fireplace walls, is the only example of a suspension of traditional German design. Other surviving German-occupied, side-passage, double-pile buildings incorporated elements from both formal academic models and more traditional German structures. At the Henry Benner, Jacob Landis, Ulrich Switzer, and Abraham Zigler houses, a closed plan with an unheated side passage and a separate kitchen became standard symbols of elevated social status. However, the inclusion of a German stube without a fireplace served as a reminder of these families'
German heritage. Houses of this type bridged the gap between the very academic house of the Heisters and more traditional German flurküchen houses.

In probate inventories for dwellings of the German side-passage, double-pile type, the ten plate stove and stove pipe are often one of the first items enumerated in the house. They are usually immediately followed by a clock and case. Part of the reason that stoves and clocks took such prominent positions in household inventories was because of their high monetary value. In addition to beds, they were often among the most expensive items in the house. However, both stoves and clocks served other important psychological functions. Scott Swank describes the Germans' "passion for clocks" and includes them among "traditional and highly expressive Germanic symbols." The stove was another such symbol. In 1792, when a group assembled to write a will for the blind Sebastian Root, for instance, they met at Root's Coventry Township house in the stube with Root himself "Sitting by the Stove." The stove and its owner became the focal point of the room.

The fact that side-passage, double-pile houses incorporated pipe rather than jamb stoves does not make them any less German. From inventories, it is apparent that in the late eighteenth century Germans in Coventry Township were replacing their old closed stoves with newer open, free-standing stoves. In Abraham Brower's inventory, for instance, "Some old Stoveplates" and "a Six Plate Stove" had been relegated to a barn or other secondary area, while "a ten Plate Stove and Pipes" were housed in the "Stoveroom."

By placing their ten-plate stove in a parlor-like room, the Browers were still differentiating themselves from the British. In late eighteenth-century Coventry Township, members of the latter group were still using stoves primarily as convenient, work-related items. Although stoves were apparently good enough for British meeting halls, schools, and churches, they were not overly common in formal front
parlors. In 1785, the bias among British Islanders against stoves prompted Benjamin Franklin to complain of individuals "so bigotted to the fancy of a large noble [fireplace] opening, that rather than change it, They would submit to have damaged furniture, sore eyes, and skins almost smoked to bacon." 16

Although both British and German settlers may have come to America with "a common western European background and similar goals," 17 when they got to Coventry Township, on the fringe of both Pennsylvania-German and Pennsylvania-English regions, they verbally and visually communicated disparate traditions. In German churches, for example, the German language was spoken and scripted on grave stones several decades into the nineteenth century. In German houses, contrasts in language and aesthetics were also apparent. The inclusion of a stove in a formal room was one uniquely German feature.

Surviving houses in Coventry Township do more than suggest discernable differences between British and German domestic buildings. In Coventry Township, separated from more overwhelming German communities further north and west, Germans manifested their German-ness right into the nineteenth century. In 1798, Germans like the Downhouers were still building traditional German flurkuchen houses. Other Continental Europeans such as the Poseys were designing related houses with stove-heated rooms. Even when they opted for new closed-plan dwellings, Germans more often than not included distinctly German elements. With the exception of the Heisters, they did not copy strictly academic, widely accepted models. Rather, they devised houses that negotiated the extremes between the overly formal and the traditionally German.

When, in 1783, Benjamin Rush noted that Germans in Pennsylvania often occupied "large houses built of stone, and many of them after the English fashion," 18 he was probably looking at a building like the Henry and Elizabeth Benner house in Coventry Township (see figure 5.2).
From the exterior, perhaps Rush could mistake this dwelling for one designed after English taste. In most cases, German side-passage, double-pile houses did make use of the symmetrical front facades that indicated "Georgian" plans. These buildings certainly linked prosperous Germans with elite British families. However, if Rush had entered one of German side-passage, double-pile houses in Coventry Township, he would have found that Germans were not copying the English. They were actually creating their own distinct German house type.
Figure 5.1 Barn at the Grace/Potts/May house. Constructed before 1798.
Figure 5.2 Henry Benner house and kitchen, front facade.
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 5


2. Franklin described the Junto as "a Club for mutual Improvement." See: Franklin, p. 65.


4. In September of 1745, Robert Grace advertised the Market Street house in which he was residing for rent. By April of 1748, Grace was described as being "at Coventry Forge." See: Accessible Archives, The Pennsylvania Gazette, Folio 1 (1991), 5 September 1745 and 5 April 1748.


6. Chancellor, p. 8 & 26; Franklin, p. 76-77.


12. Cross examination of Samuel Hockley in a deposition, dated 1793, regarding the will of Sebastian Root. Probate records for Sebastian Root, Chester County Archives and Records Service, West Chester, PA, #4333.

13. Probate inventory of Abraham Brower (1805), Chester County Archives and Records Services, West Chester, PA, #5236. The English word "stoveroom" is the translation for stube.

14. See probate inventories for Ruth May (1820), Samuel Townsend (1816), and Thomas Hockley (1780). Chester County Archives and Records Services, West Chester, PA, #6737, #6371, #3277. In all three cases, a stove is located in the barn, the kitchen, or a secondary domestic area.


17. Lemon, p. 23.

Many of the primary sources that I consulted are difficult to cite in a traditional bibliography. Surviving eighteenth and early nineteenth-century buildings in Coventry Township were my most important form of evidence. Grave markers at Brownback's Reformed Church (now Brownback's United Church of Christ), Shenkle's Reformed Church (now Shenkle's United Church of Christ), the Urner Cemetery (associated with the Coventry Church of the Brethren), the Mennonite cemetery (currently used by the Coventry Church of the Brethren), the Oak Grove Cemetery (also known as Brower's or the Union Meeting Cemetery), and the Grace/Potts family cemetery (owned by the French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust) provided valuable information about ethnicity, aesthetics, and religious affiliation.

Other sources, which are part of the public record, consisted of state and county tax records, tavern licenses, probate records, road papers, orphans' court records, and early Chester County deed books at the Chester County Archives and Records Center (Chester County Government Services Center, Westtown Road, West Chester, PA). Later deed books at the Recorder of Deed's Office (Dague Building, New and Market Streets, West Chester, PA) also provided valuable information. The 1798 Federal Direct Tax records for Coventry Township were accessed on microfilm housed at the Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering at the University of Delaware.

"170th Anniversary of Methodism, Coventryville, Pa., October 22-29, 1944." Chester County Historical Society Library, 30B 5.7.


Chester County Historical Society Library Family History Files: Posey----Miso. heading.

Chester County Historical Society Library Newspaper Clippings File: Coventry Township, East Coventry Township, North Coventry Township, and South Coventry Township headings.

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