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A dynamic look at material life: The Charles W. Roberts family, 1848–1890

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A DYNAMIC LOOK AT MATERIAL LIFE:

THE CHARLES W. ROBERTS FAMILY, 1848-1890

by

Tracey Rae Winters

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

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ABSTRACT

The Charles and Martha Roberts family of Chester County, Pennsylvania, lived in a time and society which put great emphasis on the home, its management, and its decoration. They were prosperous, respected Quakers and active members of the community. They have left a legacy in the form of household account books which provide us a complex picture of their material life.

Martha, and her daughters after her, faithfully recorded the family's expenditures for a forty-two-year period (1848-1890), beginning soon after Martha's marriage to Charles and ending a few years before his death. An analysis of these records reveals how changes in the family's lifestyle were reflected in their spending patterns. Some of these changes include moving from a farm to a small, but growing town and generational differences when the daughters take over the management of the household. These documents identify what cannot be found in probate or archaeological studies--a cross-section of domestic life at the time of each purchase.

This study provides an in-depth look at one family's response to their material needs and how that response was shaped by economic, social and ideological factors. Their story can provide us with information about life cycles and the personal circumstances that influence family life and choice of material goods.

INTRODUCTION

Households, the way they function, and the goods they possess have long been topics of interest to material culture scholars. People have used a variety of sources to try to understand these issues. Probate inventories have been among the most frequently used documents. These records, which list all of a decedent's possessions, have been analyzed on an individual basis, but have also been studied as groups in order to track changes in consumer behavior, identify furniture types and determine room use.[1] They are particularly good documents to study for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries since they are a detailed, relatively consistent source of information. The disadvantage of inventories as a source is that they provide information for households at one point in time,

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[1]Good studies based on inventory analysis are Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Standard of Living in The Colonial Chesapeake," William and Mary Quarterly 45 (January 1988): 135-159 and Kevin Sweeney, "Furniture and the Domestic Environment in Wethersfield, Connecticut, 1639-1800," in Material Life in America, 1600-1860, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 261-290.

often at a time when a household is declining; give no information whatsoever about how or when these things were acquired; and give subjective values for the goods listed.

Inventories of the late nineteenth century, however, are often only lists of a person's assets and, therefore, do not provide the rich source of information that they do for earlier periods. The source nineteenth-century scholars often use instead is the popular and prescriptive literature of the period. To learn how people might have cleaned or cooked one need only look at the large body of literature written for housewives. Domestic economy manuals and women's magazines gave explicit directions for recipes, cleaning techniques, health care and decoration ideas. However, these sources do not indicate how many people followed the advice that authors were more than willing to write.

Archaeology is a rich source of information about the past since it uncovers physical evidence of people's lives which is both space and time specific. The shards and land-use patterns can be linked to specific people. The Old Sturbridge Village study of Emerson Bixby's family of Barre, Massachusetts, is a wonderful example of the information about lifestyles that can be gained from a

combined use of documents and archaeology.[2] However, without good documentary sources, archaeologists can only determine when things were disposed of, which may or may not have a direct relation to when they were acquired, and cannot account for objects which people retained.

The defects of these sources can be circumvented by using other documents such as store sales records.[3] Store account books hold information about consumption patterns over time since they contain meticulously kept records of all daily transactions; however, they provide information from the perspective of the storekeeper, not the people purchasing the goods. This perspective creates the difficulty of not knowing what other sources people may have had for goods and can be used to study general trends, but does not illuminate the role of individual choice.

One source which has not been widely used is the household or personal account book. These accounts are similar to store records in that they usually contain a

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[2]John Worrell, Myron Stachiw, and David Simmons, "Archaeology From the Ground Up," paper presented at the Winterthur Conference, "Historical Archaeology and the Study of American Culture," Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library, October 1992.

[3]For a study using store records see Ann Smart Martin, "The Role of Pewter as Missing Artifact: Consumer Attitudes Toward Tablewares in Late 18th Century Virginia," Historical Archaeology, 23 (1989): 1-27.

daily record of transactions, but are different in that all of the entries relate to a single household. This type of document has the advantage that it shows acquisition patterns and individual choice over time. In addition, they often contain evidence of use through entries which specify repairs made. They can give a glimpse into the cycles of family life and the idiosyncrasies of individuals.

In general household account books contain expenditures for items such as food, nails, stoves, carpet, soap, wallpaper, and servants' wages. The systems people used to record these purchases were as varied as the individuals themselves. Some used a simple debit-credit system—debits on the left page, credits on the right. Most people, however, seemed to keep debits and credits either in separate sections of the same book or in separate books altogether. One of the most common systems uses daily debit entries which are totalled weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly, or some variation thereof. Some people also listed a breakdown of totals for specific categories at the end of each year.

Other accounts are arranged in ledger form, having different pages for particular categories. One such account book, dating 1850-53, has twenty-nine categories. Twelve of these categories are for food, cleaning items

and fuel. Another eight categories are people's names, presumably people in the family. Other categories include "Things Purchased for us by Charles," "Dry Goods for House," "Household expenses," "Expenses for children including school and traveling also for self," "Carpentering," and "Extra Usages". Although it also has a section for repairs, this section remains blank.[4] A simpler variation of this system uses a multiple column system on each page to sort entries into a few categories.[5]

The ways that people kept their accounts give some clues as to why they may have kept them. Margaret Roberts Eastburn kept an account book of her personal expenses on trips she took between 1901 and 1924. These probably helped her stay within the amount of money she had for her trip as well as serving as a journal of places she went and things she did.[6] John T. Troth of Philadelphia kept an expenses book for the years 1849 to 1854. He was a

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[4]Amelia Donnell, household account book, 1850-1853, 91 x 120, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur.

[5]Examples of this system are the Charles A. Cutting family account book, 1848-1858, 90 x 16, Downs Collection and Augusta L. Westwood's cash book, 1890-1899, 91 x 51, Downs Collection.

[6]Margaret Roberts Eastburn, account book, 1901-1924, Record Group 5, Eastburn Papers, Series 5, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore.

young man at the time and only used two pages per year, his credits and debits for the year ranging from ten dollars to twenty dollars. It is likely that his parents, possibly his father who was a druggist, encouraged him to keep these accounts as training in good personal habits and business skills.[7]

Some people may also have approached their personal expenses with the conscientiousness of habit that they did their professional lives. This may be the reason that a bank teller, Charles Coffin, kept a personal account book.[8] The organized and meticulous dispositions that led people to choose these sorts of positions may have led them to organize their personal lives similarly.

Although this may be the case for some people who kept accounts, it is certainly not the case for all, since personal and household account books are frequently less than orderly with bad handwriting, ink spills, etc., and are not always totalled regularly. Instead, for some, account books may have been a way to manage a very tight budget or fixed income. By recording all of their purchases, they were less likely to exceed their means. People on the other end of the economic spectrum might

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[7]John T. Troth, cash book, 1849-1854, 91 x 26, Downs Collection.

[8]Charles Fisher Coffin, account book, 1848-1851, RG 5 Coffin, Friends Historical Library.

have had as much reason to keep accounts. Large households with many servants may have used household accounts as a way to regulate expenditures and ensure that the servants were being honest.

While the physical appearance and organization of these records offer some clues about the individuals who kept them, they cannot provide substantial evidence about what motivated these individuals to do so. The opinions of contemporaries who wrote about domestic management help illuminate some of the motivating factors. There were many books published in the second half of the nineteenth century which provided advice for women about running a household. Catherine Beecher, one of the most widely read authors on these subjects, acknowledged that housewives should know how much their current income and expenses were in order to be sure that they kept a proper balance between them, and that this was difficult to do without keeping accounts. She realized that it was often husbands who controlled the family expenses, however, so it was hard for a woman to keep a record of them. In order to help women learn to keep accounts, she provided three examples of systems women of her acquaintance used. The first was one used by a woman whose household was also her business, a boardinghouse keeper. She wrote down all of the day's expenses each evening, and at the end of the

week she took an inventory of stores on hand and bills that were due her. The second example was of a friend who had a fixed salary. She kept a weekly account of rent, fuel, wages, and food, which she subtracted from her income. At the end of the month she used whatever was left for clothing, furniture, books, travelling expenses, and charities. Mrs. Beecher's third suggestion was that accounts be kept and totalled quarterly, never using income from the next quarter ahead of time. Hence, Mrs. Beecher recommended different systems for women with different needs—one for a business woman to whom keeping record of what was due her as well as what she owed was imperative, another for a woman with a fixed income, and a third, more general system.[9]

The variety of accounting systems women actually used corresponds to the lack of consensus in prescriptive literature. William A. Alcott wrote in 1838, "It may excite a little surprise that I should insist on the necessity, in a young housewife, of keeping accounts." He goes on to say that everyone is capable of doing it, but "Not always in a way, perhaps, which would be perfectly intelligible to others, but in a way which would be intelligible to herself." He did not set forth a system

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[9]Catherine E. Beecher, A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1848), 186-187.

of accounting in the book; he merely suggested that everything should be "carefully and regularly entered" and from time to time reviewed.[10]

Other authors also implied that there were questions about whether women had the ability to keep accounts. The author of The Bazar Book of the Household stated that women complain that they do not have the ability to "do sums" but asserted that

> All the arithmetic essential to ordinary housekeeping requires no special genius for the science, and every mistress of a household should be able to keep its accounts accurately; and this she is emphatically commended to do.[11]

Though all of these sources recognized the need for a regular accounting of expenses, few provided practical help for the housewife. The editors of the magazine The Continent saw a need for a useful system and published The Housekeeper's Yearbook in 1883. This small book contained a fully articulated system for keeping accounts and served as the account book. The author claimed that it provided the three things most needed by a housewife: hints for housework and marketing, an accounting system, and an inventory of household

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[10]William A. Alcott, The Young House-Keeper or Thoughts on Food and Cookery (Boston: George W. Light, 1838) 71-72.

[11]The Bazar Book of the Household (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1875), 166.

belongings. Each left-hand page of this book contained a weekly quote, the "order of work" (recommendations for the week's work by day), a hint usually pertaining to cleaning, and a sample meal plan. The left page was a blank form with debit and credit columns on which to record the week's transactions. The book also contained an expense summary page, an inventory page of supplies for each month, and a yearly inventory of the house by room. Mrs. Campbell stated in the preface:

> It has not been our purpose to present a scientifically accurate system of book-keeping, but one which an ordinary housekeeper can understand and practice with only reasonable care and attention.[12]

References to account keeping are sporadic in advice literature and contain conflicting implications about whether or not women were actually keeping accounts. In an issue of The Friend from 1873 an author explained, "In Continental Europe book keeping is a part of the education of a well-taught farmer's daughter, and the wife presides over the finances of the establishment,"[13] thereby implying that women in America were not so

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[12]Helen Campbell, The Housekeeper's Year-Book, (Philadelphia: Our Continent Publishing Company, 1883). It is debatable whether or not they achieved their goal, since the copy of the book that Winterthur's library owns has no markings in it.

[13]"A Sphere for Woman," The Friend 46 no. 37(3 May 1873): 293.

educated. In contrast, a book from the same year implied that girls are taught how to keep accounts: "few branches of female education are more useful than great readiness in figures. Accounts should be regularly kept, and not the smallest article omitted to be entered."[14] The author went on to say that some people budget a specific amount of money for various expenses, and that the woman should keep an account book and a "common-place book" for observations. The author admonished that whatever system a woman chose to use she should follow it well.

Although many periodicals and domestic economy manuals do not mention keeping accounts, the ones that do so seem to encourage giving more control over the expenses of the household to the wife. She is admonished to keep diligent account of all expenditures in order not to exceed the family's resources. Most authors did not endorse any particular form of accounting procedure, but only specified that it should be easy to follow. All seem to agree that "it is not so much the amount of income, as the regular and correct apportionment of expenses, that makes a family truly comfortable."[15]

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[14]Elizabeth Fries Ellet, The New Cyclopedia of Domestic Economy, and Practical Housekeeper (Norwich: Henry Bill Publishing Company, 1873), 17.

[15]Beecher, 188.

Martha W. Roberts of Chester County, Pennsylvania, was one woman who kept a close watch over her family's resources. She diligently kept account of her family's expenses for the years 1848 through her death in 1877, at which time her daughters took over and continued to keep them until 1890.[16] The accounts are contained in eight volumes and were kept by calendar year. They contain six categories: "Family Expenses," "Taxes," "Women's Wages," "Men's Wages," "Proceeds," and "Sundries." (Some years do not contain every category.) Martha recorded all purchases of food (including expenses relating to the garden) and most furnishings as family expenses, as opposed to sundries, which were expenses related to the farm, buildings, and transportation vehicles.[17] The family's proceeds were mainly from the sale of animals and grains. Martha listed who they paid for washing, ironing, and cleaning in "Women's Wages." They sometimes paid men for mowing and shaking and laying carpets, but usually Martha merely recorded paying them "for work."

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[16]Roberts Family Account Books, 1848-1890, Coll. 55, Downs Collection. This statement is an oversimplification in that the accounts contain multiple handwritings, with one being more frequent than the others. The accounts may have been kept by both Martha and her husband or were possibly used to train Martha's daughters once they became old enough for the responsibility.

[17]The division between these categories is not completely clear. When the family moves off the farm, she begins recording most household furnishings as sundries.

Martha recorded the entries daily and totalled each page. The running total stops at the end of the year and for many years she listed the yearly totals of all sections on the last page of the "Family Expenses" section. While the books seem to have been very regularly kept, there are indications that Martha did not record purchases every day, but might have recorded a few days' purchases all at once. Occasionally, she writes an entry and then says "a few days back." Her handwriting is not particularly neat, but her totals are almost always accurate. In 1877, when her daughters take over, the handwriting and general appearance of the accounts is much neater and more consistent in format.

Although we have no way of knowing how many people in the nineteenth century kept household or personal account books or what inspired them to keep them, enough account books still exist to indicate that it was not a particularly uncommon practice and was certainly recommended by those who encouraged a more scientific, business-like approach to the labors of a housewife. It is probable that many more people kept accounts than are actually represented by the surviving documents, since the books were likely to have been viewed by succeeding generations as fairly worthless. On the contrary, those that survive can give us a clearer, more detailed picture

of the daily lives of ordinary individuals and families and the ways in which household composition, location, and personal choice impacted spending patterns.

This study is based on an analysis of the household accounts of the Charles W. Roberts family. It specifically considers changes in the accounts at two important transitional points for the family—their move from a farm into a town, and their lives after Martha, the female head of household, dies. Change was documented in two ways. The first and most frequently used was through noting the first occurrence of an item in the accounts. The second was through a quantified analysis of the amount spent on categories of purchases.[18]

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[18]The years for which I quantified information are 1848, 1851, 1854, 1857, 1859, 1860, 1863, 1866, 1870-72, 1876, 1879, 1883, 1887, and 1890. I entered the records for these years onto a computer database and placed them in the following categories and sub-categories:

Food
Farm-related and vehicle expenses
Taxes, charitable contributions, and insurance
Household goods—food preparation and storage,tablewares, furnishings, textiles (carpet, curtains, towels, sheets)
Household maintenance—housekeeping, maintenance (of goods, as well as wall surfaces), fuel, lighting, gardening, soap, oil, and textiles with unspecified uses
Health and Personal—travel, health, personal care, postage, education, clothing, leisure
Wages—men's and women's
Miscellaneous

I did not do a major statistical analysis of the categories because many of the entries were impossible to categorize with certainty.

THE HOUSEHOLD ACCOUNTS OF CHARLES AND MARTHA ROBERTS

Setting the Scene, Pre-1848

Charles and Martha Roberts were married in 1845 at the ages of thirty-eight and thirty-seven, respectively. Martha was a Cresson, a family of long-standing prominence in Philadelphia. She was a descendant of Richard Humphreys, an eighteenth-century silversmith. Her first marriage had been to Enoch P. Walker on December 27, 1837. To prepare for this event she had acquired two bureaus, a washstand with a marble top, two large looking glasses, two card tables (fig. 1), a center table, sewing stand, sofa, and twelve wall chairs with caned seats (fig. 2). This furniture complemented what was probably a substantial dowry that also included a wool mattress, pillows, and silver.[19] Her marriage was short, however. Enoch died only six months later on June 5, 1838. In November Martha had a son and named him after his father. The child died within the year. This tragedy left Martha

[19]This information comes from family manuscripts which list these items but do not specify who purchased them. They were probably part of Martha's dowry and, therefore, purchased by her father.

alone with only the material remnants and memories of her short marriage.

Martha may have continued to live at the house of her deceased husband, but must have changed residences in December of 1842.[20] Martha may have moved back into her father's house at this time; he died on June 16, 1843.

Charles was born and raised in Plymouth, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. His ancestors had come from Wales in 1698.[21] He was trained as a marblecutter and worked in Philadelphia until his marriage.[22] Information about Charles's early life is scarce and difficult to find, complicated by the fact that Charles Roberts was a fairly common name. In fact, there was even another Charles W. Roberts in East Goshen Township, the rural area in Chester County, Pennsylvania, where Charles and Martha lived after their marriage.

Charles and Martha were both Quakers. Quaker doctrine required plainness in living. This plainness was meant to encompass all aspects of the Friends'

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[20] A family manuscript records that in December of 1842, Martha deposited a great deal of furniture, bedding, and tablewares with Jane Johnson for safekeeping. She retrieved these belongings on July 24, 1843.

[21] Roberts Family Genealogy, Chapter 14, p. 197. Fragment of a larger work, date and author unknown.

[22] Charles W. Robert's obituary, The Ledger, 6 June 1893.

lives--their speech, actions, dress, and the appearance of their houses. Chester County, where the Roberts lived during their married life, was a rural area with a large population of prosperous Quakers. The architecture and household furnishings of this area tend to be fairly conservative in design, and it has been a topic of much scholarly debate whether this conservatism of design can be attributed to Quaker plainness, or whether it is merely rural conservatism. The objects which survive from the Roberts family are of good quality, but relatively plain. They certainly had exposure to high style goods, since the account books indicate that they made shopping trips to Philadelphia and did not seem to have financial constraints. This might indicate that their choice of goods was based largely upon a personal taste which was influenced by Quaker standards of plainness.

Aside from their membership and marriage in the West District Monthly Meeting, there are many indications that Charles and Martha were active members of the Society of Friends. August Edouart included Martha's silhouette in his copybook titled "Friends,"[23] which contained the silhouettes he made of many prominent Philadelphia Quakers in 1843 (fig. 3). The few personal notes from the Roberts

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[23]Helen and Nel Laughon, August Edouart, A Quaker Album: American and English Duplicate Silhouettes, 1827-1845 (Richmond: Cheswick Press, 1987), 155.

family which survive contain the words "thy" and "thou," evidence of plain speech. Martha also used the Quaker manner of writing dates, i.e., 1st month 5th day.[24] After their marriage, the Roberts made yearly contributions to the Monthly Meeting, which are listed in the account books. They purchased alcoholic beverages such as whiskey, brandy, gin, sherry, and wine infrequently, which was not contrary to Quaker discipline as long as they were used in moderation. They subscribed to the Quaker periodical The Friend and purchased it for their son James when he was no longer living in the same house. They also made efforts to instill Quaker beliefs in their children by sending them to a Quaker school. These bits of evidence indicate that the Roberts followed the Quaker guidelines for plain living.

However, it is difficult to measure inner conviction and the writings of the Society of Friends acknowledge this. There are a few details about the Roberts' lives which might lead one to believe they had some worldly impulses. Martha had her portrait painted in 1843 which at that time was considered an excess of vanity by most Quakers, who objected to paintings because they were contrived images of people. Instead, they preferred

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[24]For ease of reading, all dates in this paper will be written using the standard days of the month.

likenesses in the form of silhouettes, and later photographs, which were considered natural because they resembled shadows.[25] However, the portrait may not actually have been in the family's possession until 1885 (after Martha's death).[26] The most serious deviation from the Quaker disciplines by any member of the family was committed by James, their son, who married a non-Quaker. However, he admitted his error and requested to retain his membership, which was granted. His wife and sons became members in 1882.[27]

After Charles and Martha were married, they moved to a farm in East Goshen Township of Chester County, Pennsylvania (figs. 4-5). Martha had purchased the farm in trust a month before their marriage, in order to retain control of the property until her death.[28] There they

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[25]Anna Cox Brinton, Quaker Profiles: Pictorial and Biographical, 1750-1850 (Lebanon: Pendle Hill Publications, 1964), 1.

[26]On March 6, 1885, there is an entry in the account books which reads "To I Watkin to pay for boxing portrait &c, 3.00" which is followed six days later by an entry for the cost of the freight. A family manuscript dated March 6, 1885, confirms that the portrait was of Martha W.

[27]Minutes of the Birmingham Monthly Meeting, 29 May 1872, 31 July 1872, 27 Sept. 1882, 1 November 1882, MR-PH, Friends Historical Library.

[28]Before 1848, any property a woman had at the time of her marriage went under the control of her husband. One can speculate about her motives for buying the property in trust, but there is no evidence of what they may have been. It is interesting to note that the

lived in a large stone house with ten rooms on 119 acres. The farm also contained a two story stone and frame barn, two tenant houses, a spring house, and other farm buildings. There was a large meadow, watered by Chester Creek, which they used for dairy farming and raising cattle.[29] Their account books indicate that they also raised chickens, turkeys, pigs, and sheep and sometimes pastured horses. In addition, the farm had two pieces of woodland. They had two tenants, Samuel Mason and Frederick Fraley, who also lived on the property. The Roberts family had an average-sized farm for Pennsylvania in 1850.[30]

Farm and Family, 1848-1870

Charles and Martha had their first child, Martha Cresson Roberts, whom they called Patty, on January 4, 1847. Their second child, James Cresson, was born in the next year, on February 22, 1848. Mercy Anna was born on

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property was listed as belonging to Charles, not Martha, in the census of 1870.

[29]This description is based upon that in the advertisement for sale of the property in the Ledger of September 30, 1893. Since the account books do not indicate that any of the buildings mentioned were built during the Roberts' residence there, it is likely that all of these buildings were standing when Martha purchased the property.

[30]Jeremy Atack, and Fred Bateman, To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), 112-113.

November 5, 1851. This period in their lives was characterized by concerns relating to raising the children and running the farm. Most household purchases at this time seem to be made in order to replace aging household goods.

Establishing the Household, 1848-1860

In the early years of their marriage, the Roberts made substantial improvements to the farm. They regularly added trees to the orchards—apple, peach, crabapple, and pear. In 1848 they invested in a threshing machine. In 1853 they bought a bee hive. In 1854 they were most likely one of the first people in the area to purchase a mowing machine, or McCormick reaper.[31]

In December of 1851 Charles bought a tract of land in West Whiteland Township from Joshua Hoopes. It contained almost five acres, for which he paid $567.75. The land was mainly chestnut timber, which the advertisement for sale of 1893 suggested would be suitable for fencing or telegraph poles.[32] Woodland areas were

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[31]The Chester and Delaware Agricultural Society claimed in 1853 that the mowing machine "was partially tested during the last harvest, and will, no doubt, grow in favor as its merits become better known." Stevenson Whitcomb Fletcher, Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life, 1840-1940 (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1955), 54.

[32]The Ledger, 30 September 1893.

important to farms because the timber provided a source of fuel and income in the winter.

Because only one-third[33] of the entries for farm related expenses specify whom they purchased from, it is difficult to determine with whom the Roberts did business. The Roberts sold a great deal of livestock, slaughtered meat, and animal hides. However, they purchased beef, veal, ham, and mutton for their own consumption even though they raised cows, pigs, and sheep. They may not have processed their own meat because they did not have the time, manpower, or facilities to do so.

They had two male farm laborers who lived with them and probably did a great deal of the work on the farm. One, John Pharaoh, a young man from Pennsylvania in his twenties, stayed with them for at least ten years. They also had an Irish farmhand, Samuel Harrison, who was succeeded by Timothy Booklay by 1860.

In the house, work was done by Martha and one or two live-in servants, one of which was a cook.[34] In the first years on the farm they had a relatively high turn-

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[33]All statistical information in this paragraph is based on the analysis of the entries for 1848, 1851, 1854, 1857, 1859, 1860, 1863 and 1866.

[34]The account books specify what tasks some women are paid for, but only specify "wages" for others. Censuses indicate that those being paid "wages" live with the family. The census of 1880 describes Matilda Gale, the Roberts' only servant at the time, as a cook.

over rate for servants, compared to how long servants stayed with them later. Each live-in servant stayed at most 2 1/2 years. It is possible that servants stayed shorter periods of time in this period because of the nature of work required of them with small children in the house. These servants were sometimes local residents and sometimes Irish immigrants. In addition, the Roberts paid a woman to come in and do the washing and ironing and help with the spring and fall cleaning, April through May and October through November. The account books also indicate that they paid Jane K. Woodward to do their sewing. During these early years on the farm she may have lived with them eight to twenty weeks per year and sewed for them while she was there. After 1853 she spent twenty to thirty weeks doing their sewing and after 1858 she lived with them for most of the year.[35] Martha depended upon these women to help her with the enormous amount of work to do in running a farm household with three small children.

It is difficult to tell very much about the children's lives from the account books. They did not seem to celebrate the children's birthdays with gifts, but did periodically purchase toys for the children including

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[35]Jane K. Woodward is listed in the censuses of 1860 and 1870 as living with the Roberts family.

china, wax and linen dolls; a toy cow; agates; a wagon; a monkey toy; toy dishes and tumblers; toy pea fowls; a Britannia tea set; a sled; and a menagerie. However, they mainly purchased stockings, shoes, bonnets, and fabric for the children, because the rest of their clothing was made at home either by their mother or Joan Woodward.

The children's education started young. Martha bought primers for them in 1849 and continued to buy slates, pencils, and books. However, they received another kind of education simultaneously. Patty received a thimble in 1849, at the age of two, and two pairs of scissors in 1852, evidence that she was learning to sew. She made a sampler five years later. James, on the other hand, received farm implements such as a spade in 1857 and an axe, knife, and spade in 1859. Mercy Anna was most likely also learning to sew, although there are no entries for sewing tools for her specifically recorded in the account books.

In the early years on the farm, the Roberts made mainly small purchases for the house, with the exception of a carriage and adding on a kitchen in 1850, parlor and cook stoves in 1852, a one-seated carriage in 1856, a sofa in 1857, and carpet for the entry, stairs, and parlor as well as a stove and washing machine in 1859. Instead,

they invested money and energy in the farm and in raising their children.

School and War, 1860-1866

The year 1860 brought changes in the Roberts' home. In November, Patty left for Westtown, a Quaker boarding school only a few miles southwest (fig. 6), and was there through the spring of 1864, except during breaks. James entered in May of 1863 and stayed until the spring of 1864, possibly beginning but not finishing the next term. Mercy Anna began in the winter session of 1863 and completed three terms, then returned in the winter of 1866 and completed an additional three terms.[36] Westtown was flexible in that students began there at varying ages and most did not formally graduate. Beginning in 1863, the family had only one live-in servant, possibly because Patty and Mercy Anna, then in their teens, took on more responsibilities around the house. They also seem to have had a hard time keeping servants in this period; they had up to three different individuals per year.

In Patty's first year at Westtown she studied etymology, English grammar, geography, arithmetic, United States history, physiology, botany, natural history,

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[36]These dates are extracted from A Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Westtown Boarding School (Philadelphia: William H. Pile) for the Winter Session 1860/61 through the Winter Session 1867/68.

linear drawing and Latin. Eventually she added intellectual philosophy, geometry, and bookkeeping to this list. Mercy Anna and James most likely studied the same things.[37] All classes were taught to the sexes separately; even the business records for boys and girls at Westtown were kept in different volumes.

Patty seems to have been the most avid reader of the Roberts children—she checked out a book from the library nearly every week. James checked out four books in his first session and Mercy Anna seems to have checked out only one book while at Westtown, Fredrick Douglas, Narrative of the Life of an American Slave, in the summer of 1867.[38]

Students at Westtown felt very removed from the events of the war and longed for letters telling them of what was going on. Charles (fig. 7) and Martha (fig. 8) may have written to their children and included information about the war from the newspapers they purchased frequently. Concern about the war peaked in the spring of 1863 as the southern army approached Gettysburg.

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[37]This listing of courses is drawn from both the catalog previously cited which contained a published curriculum and the tuition ledgers of Westtown which list all the books that were purchased for students. Tuition Ledgers, Westtown School Archives, Westtown, Pennsylvania.

[38]Library Register, Westtown School Archives.

There was also a great deal of controversy caused when Nathan Edgerton, one of the teachers, enlisted in the army on June 21 of that year.[39]

It is difficult to say how deeply the Civil War affected the Roberts family. As Quakers, they were almost certainly officially opposed to the war, since Quakers are committed to pacifism. However, many Quakers did have sympathy for the aims of the war since they had a long tradition of being abolitionists. The Friend contained no articles which acknowledged the existence of the war during this time, but did contain many articles about the evils of war in an abstract sense, especially after 1865.

The Roberts family account books do not give many indications that the family's daily life was changed much by the war. They continued to work on and expand the farm, building a corn crib and cart house in 1864. The accounts indicate that their income during this period was as good or better than it had been during the war. They purchased almost all the same kinds of food they had before. One exception was that the family's consumption of coffee went down dramatically during the war—from eighty-two pounds in 1857 to forty-three pounds in 1863.

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[39]Helen G. Hole, Westtown Through the Years, 1799-1942 (Westtown: Westtown Alumni Association, 1942),230-251. She bases her information about how the students felt upon surviving letters from the students at this time.

They were buying "essence of coffee" alternately with coffee, perhaps to stretch their supply of coffee or give coffee flavor to a beverage made with something else, perhaps rye. Either coffee was very difficult to obtain or it was cost prohibitive since the price of coffee rose from $.18 per pound before the war to between $.42 and $.50 per pound during the war. They were still able to purchase spices, so some traded goods were available. In general, though, since most of what they ate was produced locally, neither the price nor the availability changed. The only other exception was some fresh produce like apples and peaches that they had gotten out of season in 1857, which they only purchased in season in 1863, indicating that these fruits had previously been shipped in from the south.

There were some large changes in the household during this time which were not related to the war. In 1862, the Roberts purchased a clothes wringer which made the task of washing much easier. On October 17, 1860, they purchased a lamp, shade, wicks, and coal oil. Coal oil was another name for kerosene, a new fuel for lighting which became widely available in 1858-1859 after oil was discovered and a kerosene burner was invented.[40]

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[40]Roger W. Moss, Lighting For Historic Buildings (Washington, D. C.: The Preservation Press, 1988), 90.

The Children Come of Age, 1866-1870

The years after the war were busy ones for the Roberts. Mercy Anna attended Westtown from November of 1866 until the spring of 1868. Charles was appointed director of the Chester County Poor House in July of 1867 when the current director died. He must have been a respected community leader, since he was elected again in 1868.[41]

Martha continued to regulate the household's expenses, which was probably increasingly important in the years after the war, since it was a time of high inflation. For instance, the account books show that brown soap increased from seven cents per pound to thirteen cents per pound between 1859 and 1866. The price of coal doubled and the cost of glass jars almost tripled. Even though inflation was high, the Roberts' income had also increased and enabled them to make some large purchases such as a sewing machine[42] and stove in 1866,

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[41]J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope, History of Chester County, Pennsylvania with Genealogical and Biographical Sketches (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), 405. It is impossible to tell how much time this position required of Charles. However, the account books do mention that he took trips to the poor house during this time.

[42]Sewing machines had been marketed since before 1849. On page 489 of their book, The Philosophy of House-Keeping (Hartford: Goodwin and Betts, 1867), Joseph B. and Laura E. Lyman described the Empire sewing machine which

carpet for the dining room in 1867, and a large piece of ingrain carpet in 1869, which indicates that they were comfortably off.

The children were fast becoming adults (fig. 9). They seem to have been contributing substantially to the workings of the farm. James received many more farm implements in the 1860s, indicating that his duties were increasing. By 1870, there were no farm hands living with the family, perhaps because the children had taken over more of the work.[43]

Mercy Anna received a trowel in 1868, indicating that she was doing some gardening. The girls were also most likely doing a great deal of dairying. The Roberts had purchased butter-making equipment throughout their time on the farm. However, in 1866 they made renovations to the spring house and seem to have stepped up butter production.[44] In 1869 the accounts begin to note that food and household goods were purchased on account of butter and this continues up to 1871. In the spring of

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the Roberts purchased as "an excellent machine for family sewing." The prices of other machines they described ranged from fifty-five to eighty dollars.

[43]The account books do not record any wages being paid to farm laborers.

[44]Beginning in 1867, the accounts show the Roberts selling large amounts of butter. For example, in August, they sold thirty-nine pounds. They continued to produce a great deal of butter through 1870.

1870, they purchased scales for weighing butter, ten milk pans, and they traded in an old churn for a new, quite expensive ($22) one. These objects were only some of the equipment they purchased that year. What is notable however, is that they were listed in the "Sundries" division of the account books. Previously, the only butter-related expenses listed in "Sundries" were churns and spring house renovations. This may indicate that butter-making equipment was seen as a capital improvement that they were making either because they were increasing their butter production or because they were improving the farm in anticipation of James taking over in January of the following year.

In 1867, the account books begin to have a new handwriting more frequently. It is possible that Patty began to help keep the household accounts in 1867, since she had finished school.[45] Patty's help with the account books indicates that she was moving from a dependent child

[45]At the end of the "Women's Wages" section for 1867 there is an entry written in very flowery script which says "Mistake in adding 2nd Page, 1.00," indicating that Patty was also checking her mother's addition. The "new" handwriting may actually have been either Patty's or Mercy Anna's, since they probably learned to write from the same teacher and their handwriting would have been difficult to tell apart. After Martha's death, the accounts do seem to have been kept by both daughters; however, the variations in handwriting are very slight.

to a family member responsible in some way for the management of the household.

In the same year, Matilda Gale, a mulatto woman (either forty-seven or fifty-seven years old—the censuses conflict), became their cook. She lived with them until 1884. They seem to have had a good relationship with Matilda. They paid her sporadically, between four dollars and two hundred dollars at a time. Sometimes, especially when they were paying her large amounts, they deposited her wages directly in the bank for her.

They also had a boarder, Ann Bradford, during this period. Although she was young (thirty years old in 1870) her personal property was valued at about the same amount as Charles', ten thousand dollars. Boarders in the nineteenth century often provided income for a family, and also helped with housekeeping duties.

The Roberts' years on the farm were characterized by hard work and a growing family. They employed help for both the house and farm until the children had finished school and were old enough to assume more duties.

Life in West Chester, 1871-1877

In 1871, each member of the Roberts family took on new roles in the family unit and community. James married

Elizabeth L. Garrett on January 19, 1871.[46] They took over the management of the farm in East Goshen and began a family. They had two sons, James Cresson (born May 29, 1873) and Isaac G. (born October 26, 1875) (fig. 10). Charles had been elected to a three-year term as borough auditor on October 11, 1870. This position was the beginning of an active involvement in the Republican party in West Chester.[47] Charles, Martha, Patty and Mercy Anna moved to West Chester in 1871. Since Martha, Patty and Mercy Anna no longer had farm duties, they probably began to do much more of their own sewing and washing.[48] The

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[46]Elizabeth was not a member of the Society of Friends, so the couple was married by a magistrate. Although this was cause for James to be disowned by the society, he admitted his error and requested to retain his membership, which the Society granted. Minutes of the Birmingham Monthly Meeting, 29 May 1872 and 31 July 1872, Friends Historical Library. However, the newspapers reported James as having had a Quaker ceremony. The Chester County Village Record, 1 Feb. 1871 and The Jeffersonian, 4 Feb. 1871.

[47]Chester County Village Record, 12 Oct. 1870. The account books also note that Charles had stayed overnight on Oct. 11 because of the election. Charles had held the position of election judge in East Goshen Township previously. (Manuscript 11535, Chester County Historical Society.) Although he did not hold office again until 1879 and again in 1882-83, he was nominated for positions in the intervening years.

[48]After 1871, the family no longer paid Jane K. Woodward to do their sewing. They rarely paid someone to do the washing between 1871 and 1877, but continued to pay for help with the ironing.

focus of their household activities changed from running a farm to setting up a new house.

James carried on the management of the farm in East Goshen, but he never owned it. It was put up for sale when Charles died in 1893. Charles also seemed to be paying for many of the improvements to the farm such as painting and papering the dining room and parlor of the house in April of 1871, constructing a fence and purchasing a butter box in 1873, and buying a wagon in 1876 (for $150). There is no record of whether or not Charles was receiving any proceeds from the farm or if his only compensation for the money he invested at this period was in the improved value of the farm. The family in West Chester may have received meat and produce from the farm, although it is not recorded.

It is difficult to get a clear understanding of the relationship between James and his parents. His parents still paid his monthly meeting subscription which would seem to indicate that he was still part of the household. As grandparents they made purchases for James's sons, such as a "coach"[49] in 1873, which can be found in the accounts. James may never have gained enough

[49]Considering its price of twelve dollars, this was probably what would be called a baby carriage today.

economic advantage to really forge out on his own or purchase the farm from his parents.

The Roberts moved to West Chester, the county seat of Chester County, in a time of great growth. In 1858, West Chester had been connected to Philadelphia and Baltimore by railroad, which stimulated the founding of brickyards, lumber yards, a foundry, and wheel and spoke works in the 1870s. All of these industries located in West Chester because the railroad enabled them to export and import goods.[50]

The railroad and West Chester's location caused it to have other connections with Philadelphia. By the 1850s, many prominent Philadelphians had second homes in West Chester.[51] The Roberts participated in the exchange of urbanized culture between Philadelphia and West Chester. Nearly every month at least one of the family members[52] made a trip into the city, where they made major purchases for their home such as furniture and carpeting. Some of the records in the account books suggest that Patty and Mercy Anna were doing the purchasing for the

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[50]Alice Kent Schooler, Liveable West Chester: An Architectural Overview (West Chester: Chester County Historical Society, 1985), 16.

[51]Schooler, 14.

[52]Charles, Patty, and Mercy Anna went to Philadelphia frequently; there are no entries that specify that Martha went.

household. For example, there is an entry on May 4, 1772 for "dinner in Phila for MCR and MAR when they Bought Parlor Carpet." Patty made a smaller purchase of damask napkins in Philadelphia in January of 1877.

The increased interaction with Philadelphia was part of what was likely a change in the family to a more social lifestyle. Charles's work was now community-focused and probably gave him greater contact with his peers than he had had on the farm. The sheer proximity to neighbors must also have had some effect on the Roberts and their lifestyle.

In 1876, it seems that some of the family members joined a Reading Circle. The account books list entries about twice a year for paying someone to move the chairs or for renting chairs. This reading circle was likely the type described by a resident of Wilmington in The Friend on November 4, 1876. The writer extolled the advantages of the reading circles which had been established the winter before in that by "reading the approved journals of ancient and modern friends" as well as "the writings of some who were not members of our society but whose spiritual views in religion were nearly...in accord with our own," they acquainted the younger members of the Society with the history of the Friends and strengthened the members' faith. The gatherings "have also the

tendency to bring Friends in more harmonious feeling and social intercourse with each other in spiritual and in external matters."[53]

The Roberts built their new house in the North Ward of West Chester, at 217 East Washington Street (fig. 11-12). This was a highly desirable location at the time because it was close to the highest point in town, but also because it was close to Marshall Square Park. This park was a popular place to take walks but was also an indicator of modernity since it was the site of the borough reservoir which supplied water to the town for indoor plumbing. The Roberts also lived near other embodiments of progress, the coal yards and railroad. Even though this location probably meant that they endured a great deal of soot and noise, they may have born these inconveniences willingly, knowing them to be part of modern life.[54]

The Roberts's home (figs. 13-16) was similar to others in West Chester, including those at 325 and 327 South High Street. It had the ornamental iron piazza which was very fashionable in the 1870s, but otherwise had

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[53]W. A., "Reading Meetings," The Friend, 50, no. 12 (4 Nov. 1876): 92.

[54]I am grateful to Alice Kent Schooler for explaining the importance of this site to me in her letter of 27 March 1992.

very modest decorative detail. Like most houses in West Chester, it was fairly conservative architecturally. Their house was set apart in that it was a single family home when many new houses in West Chester were duplexes.[55]

During the first few years in West Chester, the Roberts paid special attention to the exterior appearance of their house. In 1871 they cemented[56] the east end of the house and painted the iron fence. In 1872 they built a grape vine arbor and put in stone steps. The next year they put in the curb along the road. In 1874 they painted the house, put up lattice work, and worked on the grapevine arbor. In 1876, they built a carriage house at the back of their property, so they no longer had to pay stable rent. This attention to the exterior of the house was probably a natural part of having a new house, but may also have been influenced by the public nature of town living.

Since Charles was relatively old, and James no longer lived with the family, the family began to employ

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[55]Alice Kent Schooler, letter, 27 March 1992.

[56]Bernard L. Herman, Associate Director, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering, University of Delaware, explained to me that cementing was the application of a stucco-like material over the bricks, something people commonly did to protect the east side of the house from hard weathering.

men to perform tasks both inside and outside the house.[57] These men dug up flower beds and the garden; mowed, cleaned and cut the stubble in the yard; washed the carriage; whitewashed the fence; cleaned the snow; took out the ashes and shook and laid the carpets. Occasionally the Roberts also paid someone (boys and a lame man) to clean out the grass between the bricks. By 1875 they began paying Wilson Downing regularly to perform these tasks until 1886.

Inside the house, the bulk of the Roberts' furnishings were now over thirty years old; in addition, they may have left belongings at the farm for James and Elizabeth. The year the Roberts moved to West Chester they purchased a cook stove, window shades, carpet for the stairs, and some new furniture, including a walnut bedstead, sofa, wash stand, and towel rack. They probably also purchased a rocking chair, hat rack, and umbrella stand.[58] In the following years they purchased a water cooler and parlor carpet (1872), a new sewing machine and a walnut bookcase (1873).

In addition to buying new household goods, the Roberts did a lot of refurbishing of old furniture in this

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[57]They created a "Men's Wages" section in the account books in 1871. The first entry was for May 27.

[58]They only paid freight on these items.

period. They "did up" a wardrobe in 1871 and a sofa and rocking chair in 1873. The next year they had a high chair repaired and painted for Charles Cresson, James's son to use. In 1875 they had a table leg and mahogany chair repaired. In 1876 they sawed off the legs of three bureaus and a bed and put castors on them. They also repaired the water closet, fixed the furnace and varnished and put a new seat in Martha's rocker. It seems that not only did their aging household goods require upkeep, but so did the newer technologies in their home which they had had for only about five years.

One of the greatest changes in the Roberts' expenses from farm to city was the cost of fuel. When they moved to West Chester, they had bills for water, ice and gas which they had never purchased before. Even though they had gas lighting, the Roberts continued to buy candles at the same rate as they had before the Civil War, but no longer purchased significant quantities of oil[59] or kerosene. Also, their consumption of coal rose from an average of three tons per year on the farm to an average of sixteen tons per year in town. All of this additional fuel caused their expenses for lighting, heating and

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[59]It is virtually impossible to determine what sort of oil the Roberts were purchasing. It could have been for cooking or lighting.

cooking fuel to rise by over six hundred percent.[60] Many factors could have played into the Roberts' increased consumption of fuel. They may have desired a warmer living environment once they had the convenience of a central heating system. They probably spent more time inside the house in West Chester than they had on the farm since most of their daily work was now done inside. Another factor which may have come into play is that the newer house and heating system may have been considerably less efficient than the old one had been.

The family made some changes in diet after they moved into town.[61] The family purchased a greater variety of items in town than they had on the farm. There are several possible explanations for this difference. One is that more goods were available to them, either because they were closer to stores which had a more direct link with Philadelphia, and therefore the world, or that in general a greater variety of goods was available as

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[60]To tabulate this percentage I averaged the amounts spent per year for the years 1848-70 and 1871-90. I dropped the highest and lowest figures from each of these periods since the Roberts did not always pay for things on a regular basis, causing some years to be exceptionally high or low which does not necessarily reflect the amount of coal or candles used. Even when including the highest and lowest figures, the cost of fuel increased 507 percent.

[61]The conclusions in this paragraph are based upon a comparison of the years 1854 and 1872.

horticulture, canning industries, and transportation systems developed. The increased variety in their diet may indicate that they were doing more entertaining. Some items which they purchased, like curled salad, olives, and sherry might suggest that they had acquired a taste for more extravagant foods. Of course, another reason the account books reflect a change is that since the Roberts no longer lived on the farm, meat and vegetables that they used to produce themselves they now had to buy.[62] They also began to buy bread instead of baking it themselves. Another noticeable difference in their spending patterns with regard to food was an increase in impulse spending on incidentals like ice cream and single oranges and a tendency to buy items in smaller quantities which was probably a factor of their proximity to stores in town. These four factors—accessibility of goods, increased interaction with neighbors, lack of farm-produced goods, and proximity to stores—affected change in many areas of the Roberts lives.

A New Generation, 1877-1890

In January of 1877, the handwriting in the account books became increasingly difficult to read. By February 16 all of the entries were written in a new, neater

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[62]However, the Roberts continued to raise chickens and have a garden in town.

handwriting. The reason for the change in recorder becomes evident as there were more fees recorded for medicines and doctors' visits, until finally on September 9 there is an entry for notices placed in the Ledger, Press, and Inquirer, and an entry for an amount paid to Joseph B. Smith, a local furniture maker and undertaker.

On that day, at quarter before three in the afternoon, Martha died. The family hired extra help on the tenth, eleventh and twelfth to help polish the silver, wash the windows, clean, cook and wash the dishes for the funeral. Patty (fig. 17) and Mercy Anna (fig. 18) were left to run the household.

The changes which occurred in the Roberts' household after Martha's death can be attributed to a variety of causes. Martha's daughters were raised in a different world than she had been. They were "modern women" in the sense that they had received a broad formal education. They were also raised in a time when the Society of Friends began to relax its standards of plain living.[63] They were part of a consumer society dominated by new technologies. Items which would have been luxuries

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[63]For a good discussion of this transformation see Philip S. Benjamin, The Philadelphia Quakers in the Industrial Age, 1865-1920 (Philadelphia: The Temple University Press, 1976), especially the chapters, "Worldly Ways and the Guarded Education" and "Response to the City."

or new conveniences to their mother, such as commercial soap and carpet, were commonplace to Patty and Mercy Anna. The new technologies resulted in more and cheaper goods and the means to transport them to new markets.

Many of these inventions directly influenced how one kept house. The refrigerator[64] which the Roberts purchased in 1878 made storage of food safer and easier, especially since they lived in town and no longer had access to a spring house. The Roberts did not buy their refrigerator as soon as these machines came on the market. The first refrigerator to be made and marketed was shown at the International Exhibition in 1862 by Daniel Siebe.[65] By 1876 there were so many refrigerators and ice boxes available that Mr. Archdeacon wrote in his book, Archdeacon's Kitchen Cabinet, "there is at present such a variety of ice boxes and refrigerators on the market... that it seems almost superfluous to mention them here."[66] They were also slow to purchase a carpet sweeper, waiting until 1890, even though they had been invented in 1876.

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[64]Refrigerators were also called ice boxes during the period.

[65]Edward De Bono, Eureka! An Illustrated History of Inventions from the Wheel to the Computer (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), 113.

[66]William Archdeacon, Archdeacon's Kitchen Cabinet (Chicago, 1876), 270.

The Roberts were a little faster in purchasing new inventions which protected them from the burden of insects. In 1877 the Roberts had four window screens made. The next year they added a wire front door. In 1888 they purchased five more window screens. Window screens had been available since the 1830s, but Americans did not seem to use them extensively until the 1870s and 1880s when they were manufactured in factories.[67] Even with their new screens, the family purchased fly paper, also a relatively new product, to catch the flies which still plagued them.

Hence, just because products, inventions, and "improvements" were available and the Roberts had the means to purchase these things, did not mean that they did so immediately or ever. Thomas Edison invented the incandescent light bulb in 1878, but there is no evidence in the account books to suggest that the Roberts used this technology before 1890. They did believe in the technology enough to invest in it, however; they owned stock in the Edison Illumination Company by 1893.

As celebrating holidays became both more secular and more commercial, many products were marketed to enhance these celebrations. While Martha was keeping the

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[67]Gail Caskey Winkler and Roger W. Moss, Victorian Interior Decoration: American Interiors, 1830-1890 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 43-44, 158-161, 178.

account books, she made no explicit mention of purchases made for any holiday. In fact, there were even few purchases around Christmas or birthdays which might be out of the ordinary. However, in 1878, the account books show the Roberts purchasing torpedoes and fire crackers for James's son Charles on the Fourth of July and "Christmas balls for tree" on December 23. They also purchased a cake for Ann Bradford, their boarder, on her birthday in 1884.[68] By the 1880s, the Society of Friends had relaxed its stance towards observing "special days," at least in regards to private celebrations.

The family continued to entertain and be entertained. They continued to host the Reading Circle and both Patty and Mercy Anna attended Quarterly Meeting dinners. They also had dinner at the Concord Hotel and hosted a festivity on August 11, 1887, which included chinese lanterns. Mercy Anna took a few trips on her own and the family seems to have kept up regular correspondence with friends and family who lived out of town. They also supported local institutions like the library in West Chester, to which they paid dues (and

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[68]They might also be a result of availability since glass tree ornaments from Germany were not imported until the 1870's. Phillip V. Snyder, The Christmas Tree Book: The History of the Christmas Tree and Antique Christmas Tree Ornaments (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 87.

fines), and contributed to the drive to build a new school and library building with donations in 1889.[69]

The account books do contain evidence of a change in attitudes and practices within the house after Martha's death. One simple example is that Patty and Mercy Anna did not purchase vegetable seeds or plants after their mother died[70]; instead, they purchased flowers and flower seeds. Apparently, they no longer kept a vegetable garden, but preferred to cultivate flowers instead.

One significant and noticeable change between mother and daughters was in the way they recorded purchases of soap. Martha had usually recorded the type of soap she bought (e.g., brown, palm, castile, hard, soft, or cream). Beginning in 1868, she purchased "McKeone VanHaagen & Co. Patented Chemical Olive Soap" and recorded the purchase with great specificity, often taking up three to five lines in the account books. After Martha's death, the entries for soap became much less specific. The diminished detail or specificity probably indicates that to Martha's daughters new soaps or soap in general was not a novelty, but something they took for granted.

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[69]The account book records Charles as giving five dollars, and his daughters as giving ten dollars each.

[70]In 1890 they did purchase tomato plants and mignonette.

Patty and Mercy Anna's seeming disregard for soap does not mean they had a disregard for cleanliness. In fact the account book indicates that under Patty and Mercy Anna's supervision, the household cleaning became more regulated. In February of 1877, the family began to have someone (usually Ann Taylor) come in regularly to do the washing on Mondays and the ironing on Tuesdays.[71] This was much more systematic than it had been previously. In earlier years, someone came in to do washing and ironing two to four times per month, and not necessarily on a specific day of the week. In the 1870s the family had hired help even more sporadically, as they seem to have been doing their own washing.

Patty and Mercy Anna also seem to have paid a great deal of attention to the surfaces of the walls, floors, and even furniture in their home. Nearly every year between 1878 and 1890 they either painted, papered, or carpeted at least one room of the house. They also varnished, re-caned, painted, cleaned, or "did up" at least thirty-one pieces of seating furniture in the last eight years of that period. This high incidence of

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[71]Susan Strasser in Never Done (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 106-108, suggests that Monday was the traditional washday and Tuesday was the traditional ironing day, especially in towns. She says it was not unusual to see a whole town of women outside on Mondays, and that it was a way to socialize, but also a way to show off one's skill.

surface treatment is a contrast to the earlier periods when they made more structural repairs to furnishings.

While the Roberts were certainly active members of West Chester society in the 1880s, they did not necessarily participate in all aspects of late nineteenth-century popular culture. The accounts give no evidence that they purchased any products from the new mail-order catalogs. They did not purchase every new invention (electricity, the phonograph, the stereoscope) as soon as it was marketed. In their purchases, they exercised choice both as individuals and as members of groups (the family unit and the Society of Friends). These choices were functions of many influences—religious belief, personal preference, which member of the family was making the choices, and availability and marketing of new products.

Afterword

The eighth account book ends in 1890. There may have been a ninth, and many more that followed. The family continued to grow and change. Charles died in 1893 after a long illness. The farm was put up for sale, and James's family moved into town. James died in 1895 after five years of illness and Patty died two years later. Most likely at this time Mercy Anna's nephew Isaac moved into the house at 217 East Washington Street to keep her

company. Mercy Anna kept close watch of her household, making frequent inventories of the silver and attaching sheets of genealogical information to many pieces of furniture and pictures. Isaac was a cabinetmaker and avid bird-watcher. His brother, Charles C., married Elizabeth Savery in 1902 and they had three children, James, Arthur and Marian, by 1914. Isaac got married at the age of forty-six to Ella N. Swayne in 1921. They lived with Mercy Anna until she died December 14, 1923. After this time, there were no more entries in the Family Record section of the Bible given to Charles and Martha on their wedding day. Two generations of a family had gone, leaving their legacy to a third.

CONCLUSION

The Roberts family lived in a time of great change. The United States was moving from a primarily agricultural country to one whose population was increasingly concentrated in cities. There was great social unrest over issues of slavery, which divided the country, and economic turbulence, which touched each person's life. It was also a time of prosperity when new technologies and an abundance of goods were available to "improve" the lives of individuals. There were changes within the Society of Friends, whose membership was becoming less active and whose control was loosening. The Roberts' were only one family of many to live in this time of change, but their household account books provide concrete information about how and when these changes affected their daily lives.

Household account books are important sources of information about the minutiae of people's everyday lives. The information they contain about a family's purchase and use of their belongings is more detailed than any other source for the same information. The opportunity they provide to study the same family over time is not

available through most other sources. Unfortunately, the information is only as complete as the author made it. Therefore, the accounts may contain evidence of what a family purchased without specifying from whom they purchased it or even what it looked like. It is also difficult to determine what the family did not record because they produced it themselves or because in their own mind it did not qualify as a family expense. In the case of the Roberts' accounts, they recorded very little information about how they got their clothing and little or no information about what it looked like. In addition, the usual matter of fact listing of items and costs gives little or no feeling for the personality of the recorder, except for the few entries like "purchased a new horse blanket for Madame Belle" which one can imagine Patty or Mercy Anna writing with a smile on her face.

One of the difficulties in working with these documents is the sheer abundance of information. The Roberts made between five and twelve hundred individual entries per year in the account book. These entries are often difficult to classify by usage since items like baking soda, alum, alcohol, and brushes, to name a few, could be used for any number of diverse functions.

The strengths of these documents lie in those aspects of it which remain constant, such as the recorder

and the people making the purchases. These constants allow us to make observations about how changes in the family's composition, location, and society impacted the expenses of the family. This information provides a view of a few aspects of the many experiences which compose life.

A larger study of many account books from this period could use the evidence gained about individual family choices to form a picture of larger trends. Such a study might pose the following questions. When was there a substantial shift towards paying for services instead of goods? How did living in a town rather than the country affect the proportion of income spent on food? Did people in towns and rural areas spend equal proportions of income on household goods? Did people respond to advertising by buying name-brand goods? How and when did children influence spending decisions?

Although household account books cannot answer all questions about family life, they do provide a source of information about the lives of ordinary people and contribute to the assemblage of primary sources. Whether studied individually, or considered as a group, household account books provide a valuable glimpse into the lives of people like the Roberts, whose choices were both a product and a producer of their times.

Figure 1 Card Table, c. 1820-1837. Mercy Anna Roberts, in a manuscript dated October 16, 1914, claims this table (one of a pair) was made for her mother Martha in 1837.

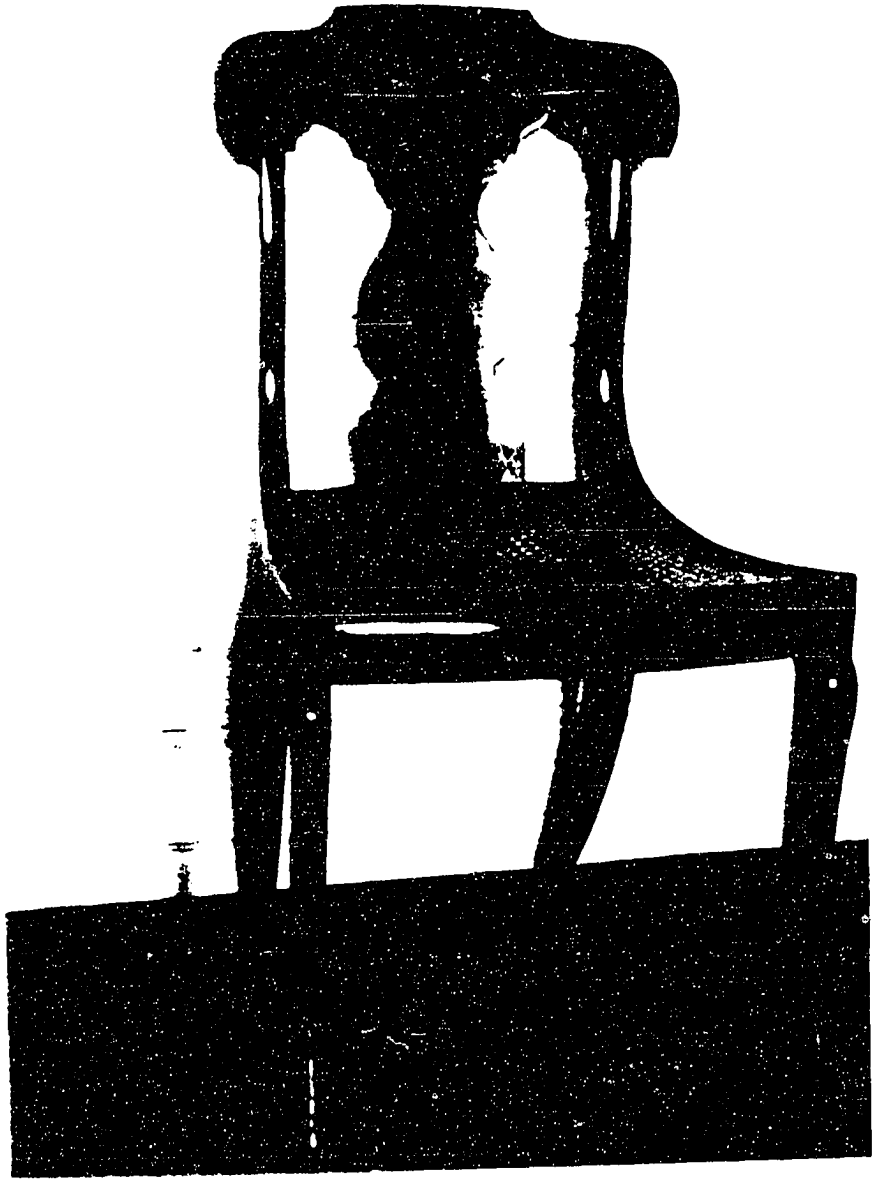

Figure 2 **Side Chair, c. 1830-1837.** Mercy Anna Roberts, in a manuscript dated October 16, 1914, claims this chair (one of twelve) was made for her mother Martha in 1837.

Figure 3 Silhouette of Martha W. Walker (Who Became Martha Roberts) and Other Family Members. This is page 155 of August Edouart's copybook "Friends" which is reprinted in Helen and Nel Laughon, August Edouart, A Quaker Album (Richmond: Cheswick Press, 1987).

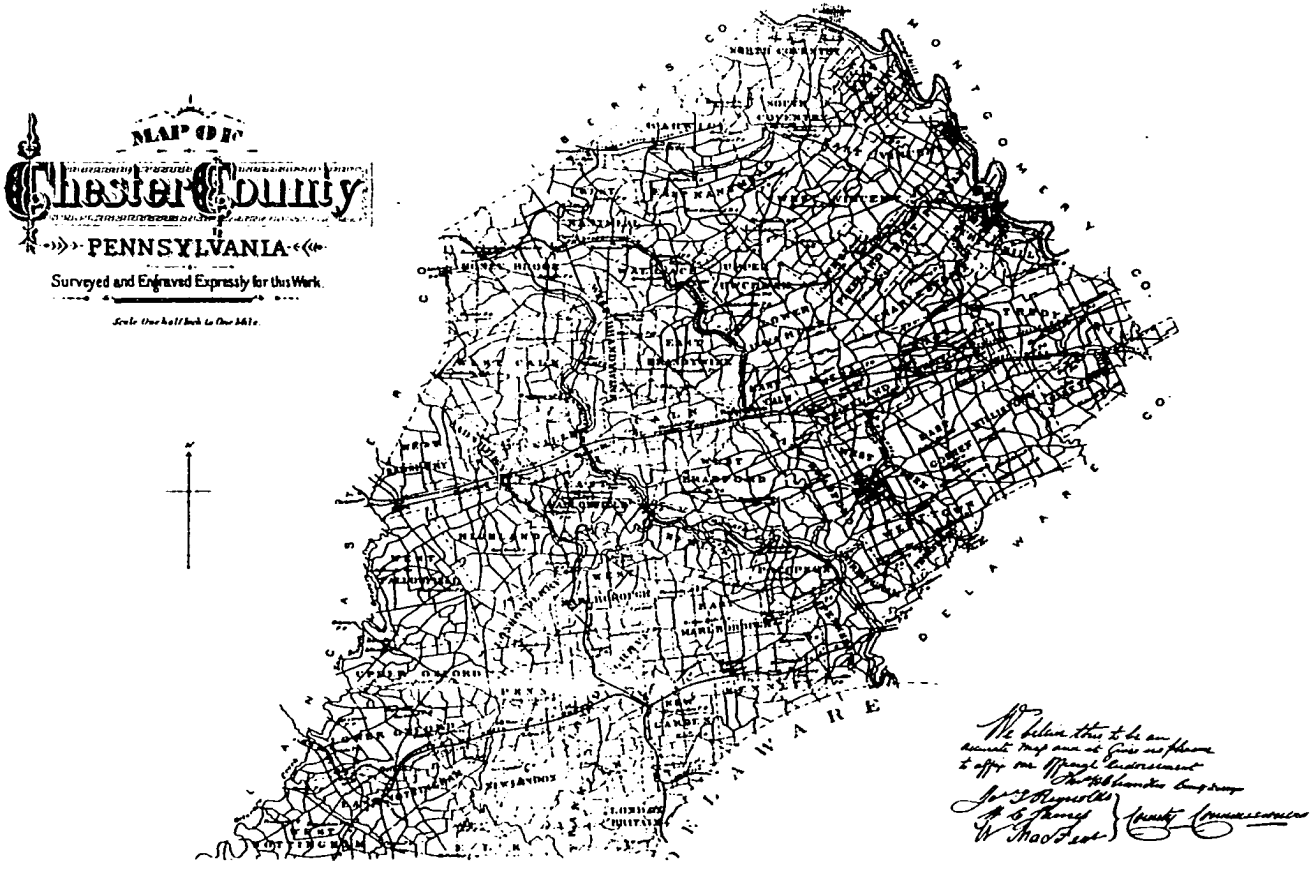

Figure 4 **Map of Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1883.** Breou's Official Series of Farm Maps of Chester County Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: W. H. Kirk & Co., 1883) reprinted as the Historical Atlas of Chester County Pennsylvania (West Chester: Chester County Planning Commission, 1971).

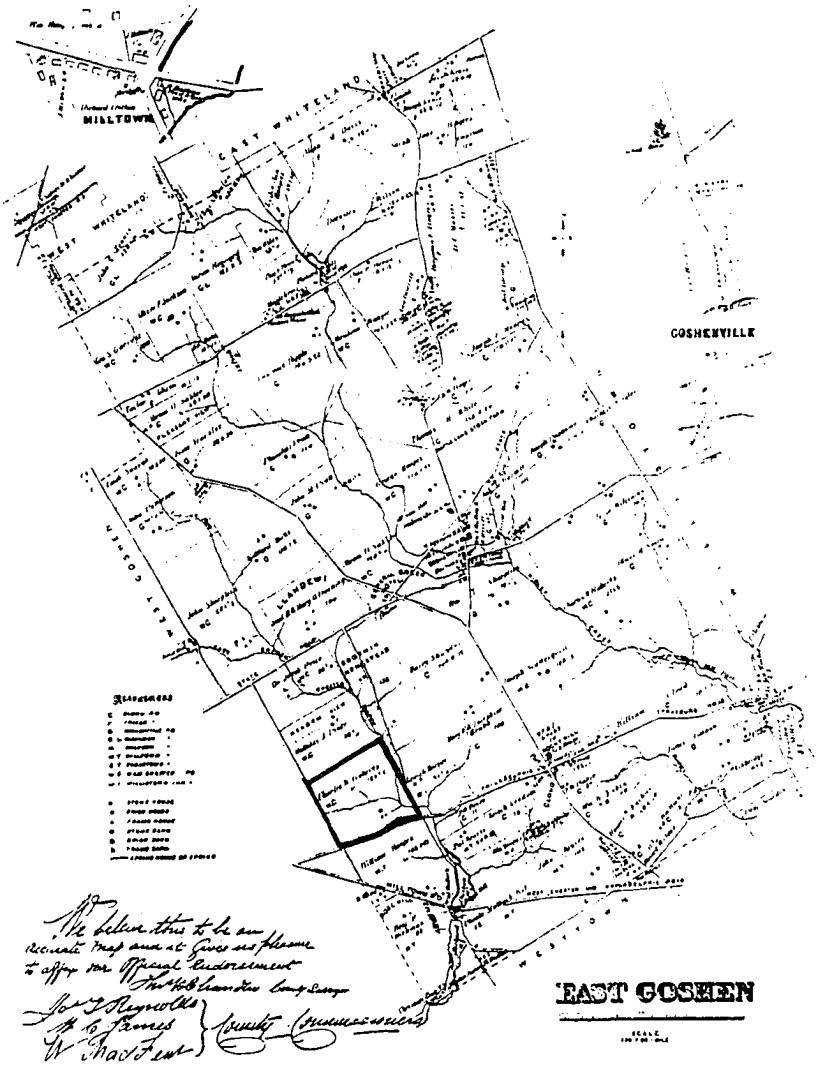

Figure 5 **Map of East Goshen Township, 1883.** Breou's Official Series of Farm Maps of Chester County Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: W. H. Kirk & Co., 1883) reprinted as the Historical Atlas of Chester County Pennsylvania (West Chester: Chester County Planning Commission, 1971).

Figure 6 Westtown Boarding School, 1864. Private Collection. This card photograph belonged to Mercy Anna Roberts.

Figure 7 Charles W. Roberts, September 1863. Card Photograph. Private Collection.

Figure 8 Martha W. Roberts, September 1863. Card Photograph. Private Collection.

Figure 9 **James C., Mercy Anna, and Patty (Martha C.) Roberts, November 1, 1867.** Card Photograph. Private Collection.

Figure 10 Charles C. and Isaac G. Roberts, 1877. Card Photograph. Private Collection. Inscribed, "Charles and Isaac for Grandfather for Christmas 1877."

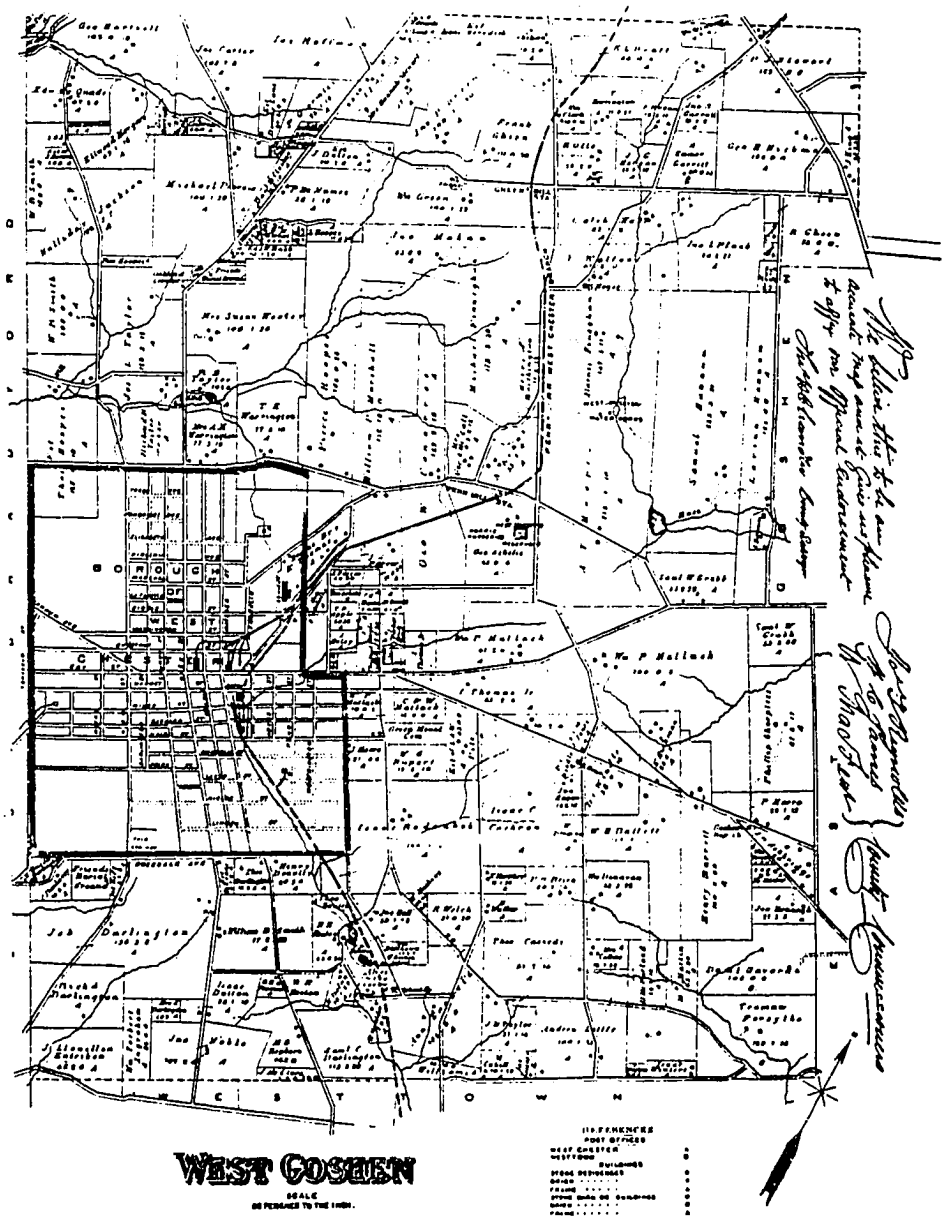

Figure 11 Map of West Goshen, 1883. Breou's Official Series of Farm Maps of Chester County Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: W. H. Kirk & Co., 1883) reprinted as the Historical Atlas of Chester County Pennsylvania (West Chester: Chester County Planning Commission, 1971).

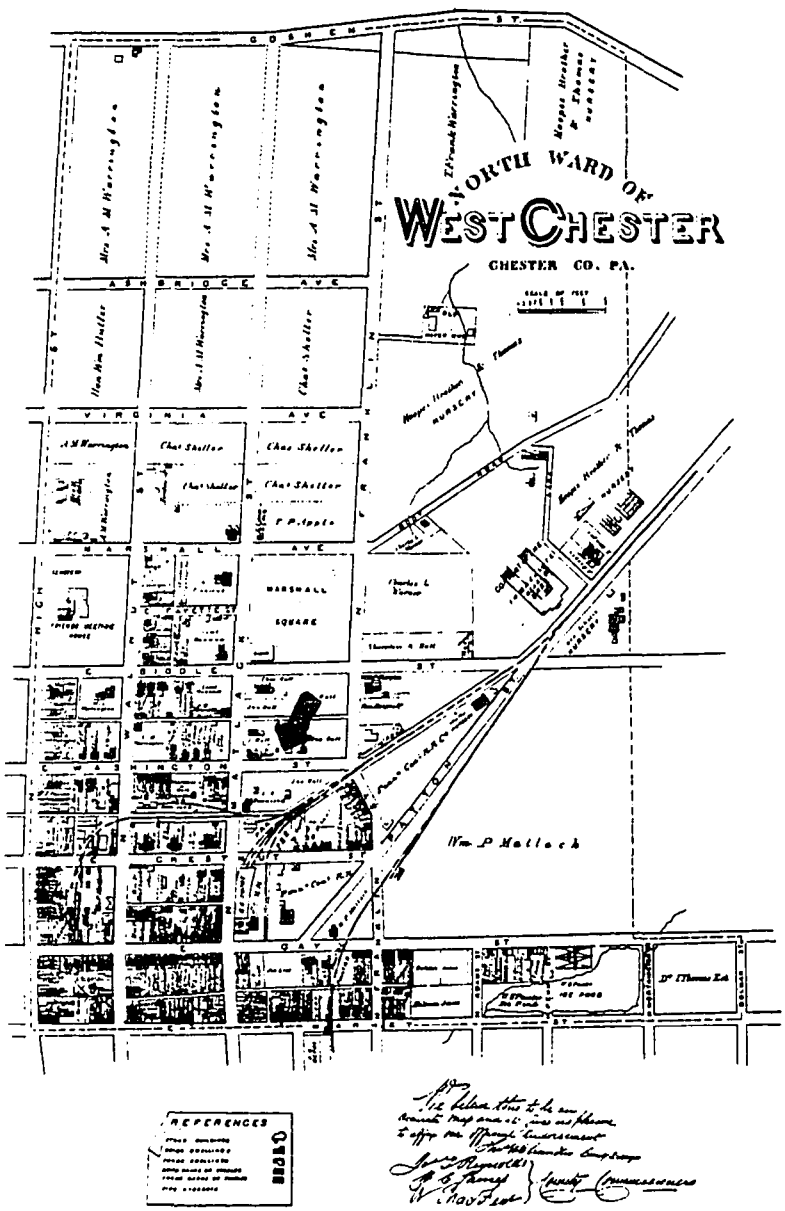

Figure 12 Map of the North Ward of West Chester, 1883. Breou's Official Series of Farm Maps of Chester County Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: W. H. Kirk & Co., 1883) reprinted as the Historical Atlas of Chester County Pennsylvania (West Chester: Chester County Planning Commission, 1971).

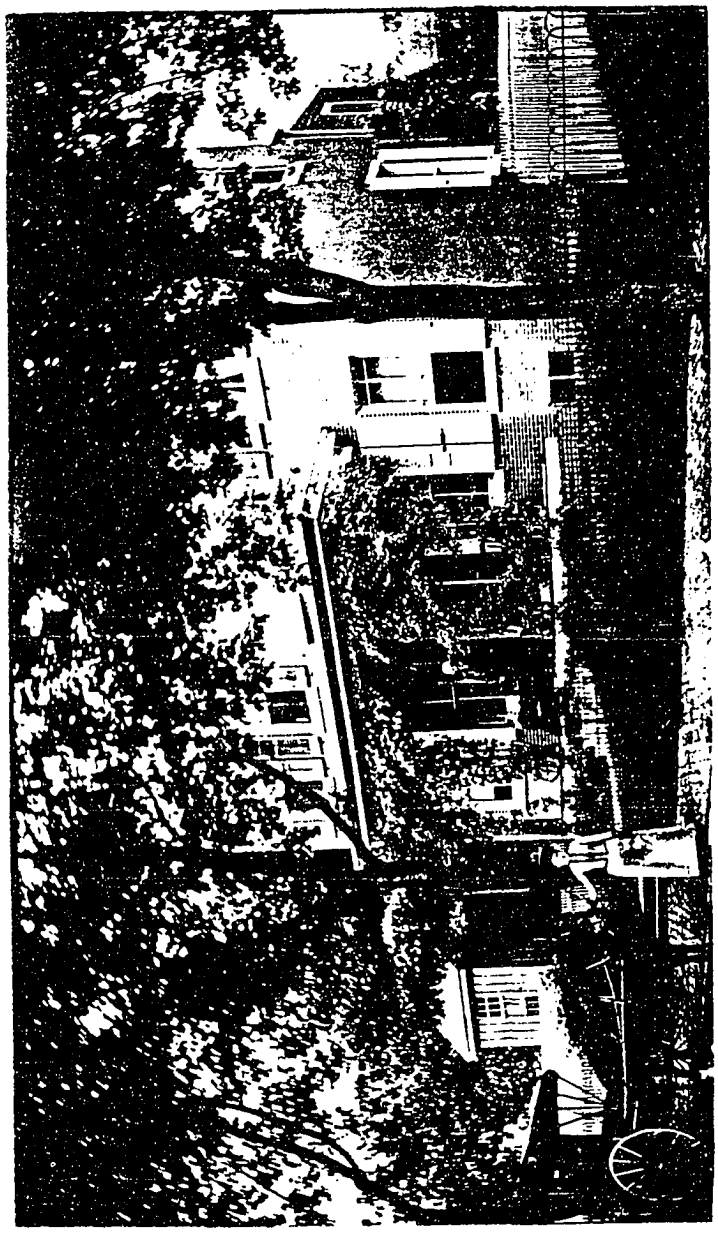

Figure 13 The Roberts' House in West Chester, c. 1871-1893. Cyanotype. Private Collection. "Charles W. Roberts and daughter-in-law Elizabeth Garrett Roberts" written on reverse.

Figure 14 The House at 217 East Washington Street, 1991.
Photograph by Kathy Z. Gillis.

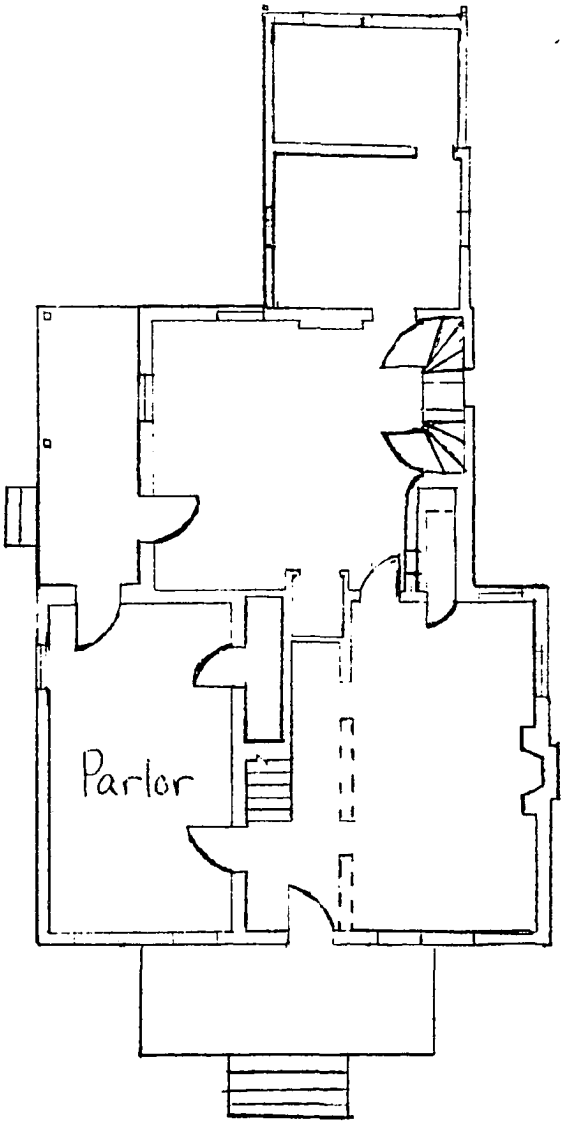

Figure 15 Floor Plan, First Floor.

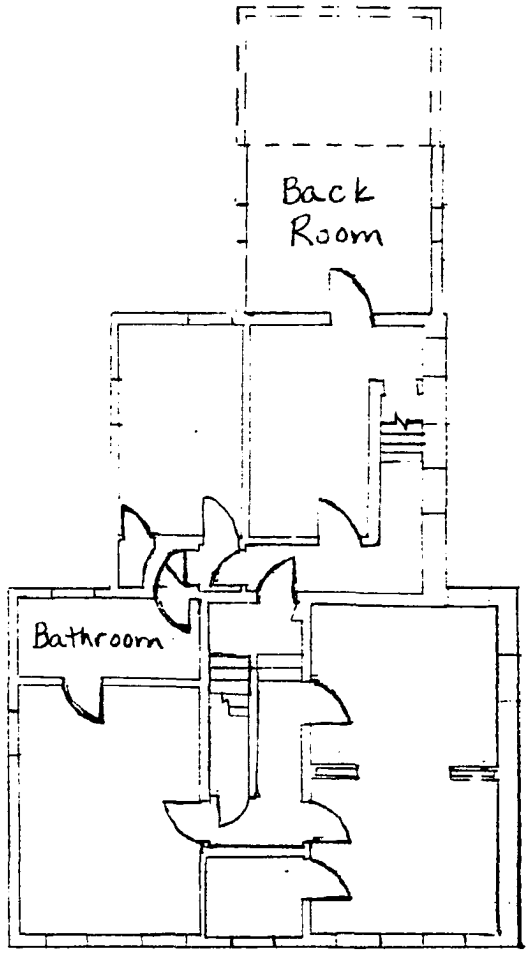

Figure 16 Floor Plan, Second Floor.

Figure 17 Patty Roberts, 1879. Card Photograph. Private Collection.

Figure 18 Mercy Anna Roberts, December 1879. Card Photograph. Private Collection.

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