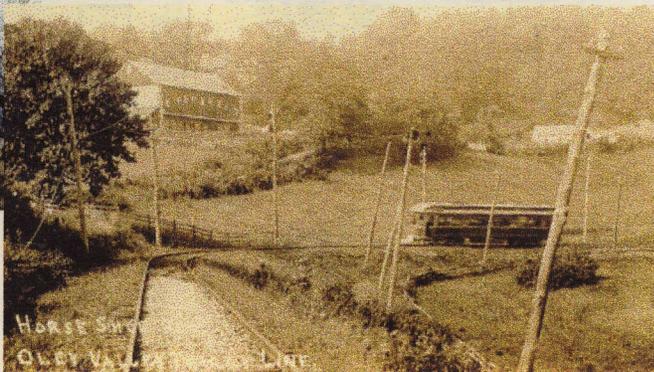
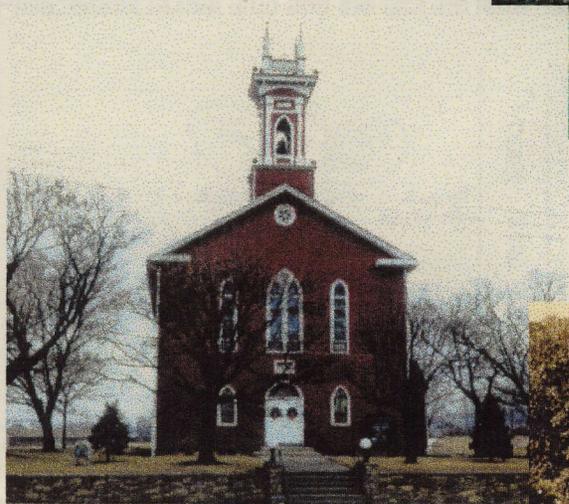


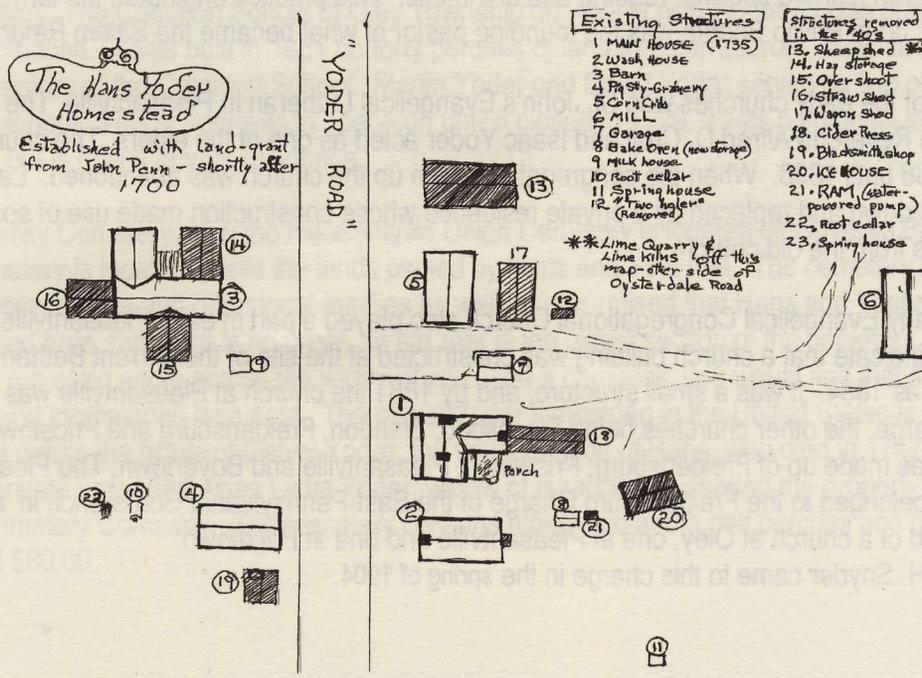
THE FIRST SETTLERS

# PLEASANTVILLE FROM THE PAST



# THE FIRST SETTLERS

1. The Johannes (Hans) Yoder settlement was on the original 461-acre tract granted in 1714. Hans built a log house on what is now known as Yoder Road. It was situated across the street from the present residence. In time the farm had several buildings to meet its needs in such a rather desolate region. It had a wash house, also known as the itinerant house; a bake house, a spring house which housed a double-acting ram pump; an ice house; an open front barn housing a vertical saw mill powered by a water wheel and a dam to harness the power from Oysterdale Creek. Across Oysterdale Road was a limestone quarry and two lime kilns. The farm also had a sheep barn, a pigsty and in the 1800's they even had a legal still. As a final note, for years there were persistent stories about Jonathan Chapman, also known as Johnny Appleseed, spending several summers in the itinerant house. The Oley Yoder Historian, Richard H. Yoder, took this more seriously when a letter appeared in the Yoder Newsletter in 1990. The author of the letter said her grandmother stayed at the farm and commented about Johnny Appleseed. About the time Johnny was traversing America, Daniel Yoder and his wife, Margaret, lived here and they made numerous trips to Philadelphia with casks of linseed oil which they had produced. One way for travelers to move about was with farmers going to and returning home from the markets in Philadelphia. While there is no actual proof that Johnny Appleseed stayed here, when you tie together the letter concerning his stay, the local stories, Daniel's trips to Philadelphia at that time and the fact the farm had a cider press, it could very well be true.



2. The Yost Yoder homestead was adjoining his brother, Hans' tract. It was a beautiful tract along the Manatawny Creek. A local story tells of Yost meeting with a surveyor while working on the boundaries to his property. The surveyor suggested to Yost that he include a nearby spring, which would add value to the tract. Yost told the surveyor not to include the spring, but to leave it for the benefit of others. Much of the history of the Yost farm is still undiscovered. The two hundred acres were purchased in two parcels in 1731 and 1737. The actual position of the first cabin is unknown, but is believed to be near the site of the present residence on Tollgate Road or possibly between the house and the road on the elevated ground. Yost is also connected with a ghost story published back in 1770. He is supposed to have returned twice to visit and speak with his eldest daughter, Elizabeth.

## SPIRITUAL AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

3. One church that was important to early settlers of Pleasantville was the Spangsville or Salem Reformed Church. The settlers placed a high value on their spiritual needs and also on the education of their children. At first the families met in someone's home but, as their numbers grew, it became clear that to accommodate everyone they would need to build a log structure in a central location. The site selected was what is now the corner of the church parking lot. They divided the structure in two, the one half for the spiritual needs of the adults and the other half was for their children's education. The children learned spelling, reading and arithmetic. This practice originated the term "Sunday School". John Phillip Boehm was the founding pastor of what became the Salem Reformed Church.

4. One of the early churches was St. John's Evangelical Lutheran in Pleasantville. The original pastor was The Reverend Alfred D. Croll and Isaac Yoder acted as one of the elders. The church was active from 1868 until 1898. When the congregation broke up the church was abandoned. Later the church was torn down and replaced by a private residence whose construction made use of some of the materials from the old church.

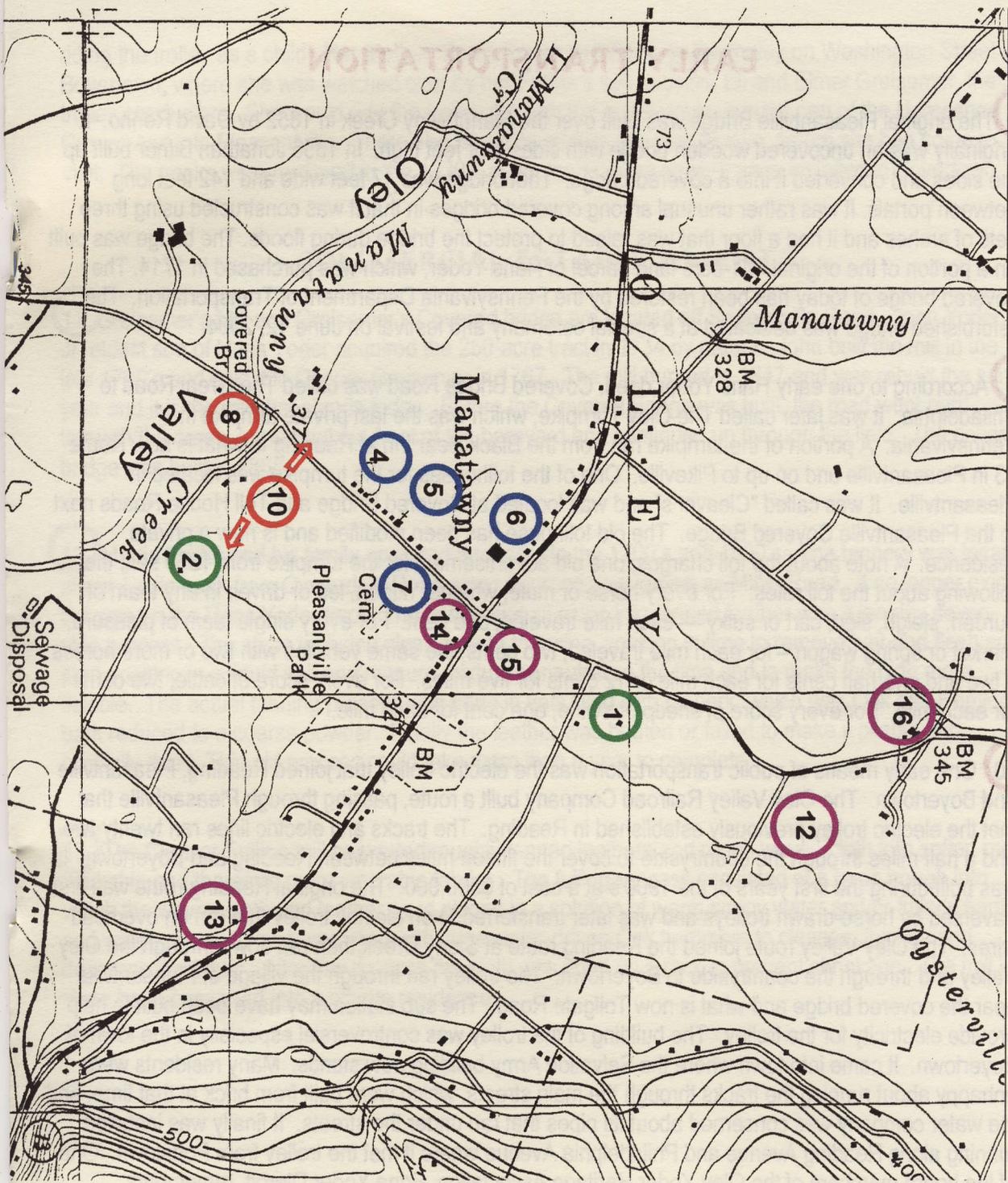
5. Bethany Evangelical Congregational Church also played a part in early Pleasantville. Early church records indicate that a church building was constructed at the site of the current Bethany E.C. Church as early as 1864. It was a small structure, and by 1881 the church at Pleasantville was part of a five-point charge, the other churches being Fleetwood, Blandon, Freidensburg and Pricetown. In 1897 the circuit was made up of Freidensburg, Pricetown, Pleasantville and Boyertown. The Pleasantville Church belonged to the Freidensburg Charge of the East-Pennsylvania Conference in 1904. It consisted of a church at Oley, one at Pleasantville and one at Pricetown. Rev. W.H. Snyder came to this charge in the spring of 1904.

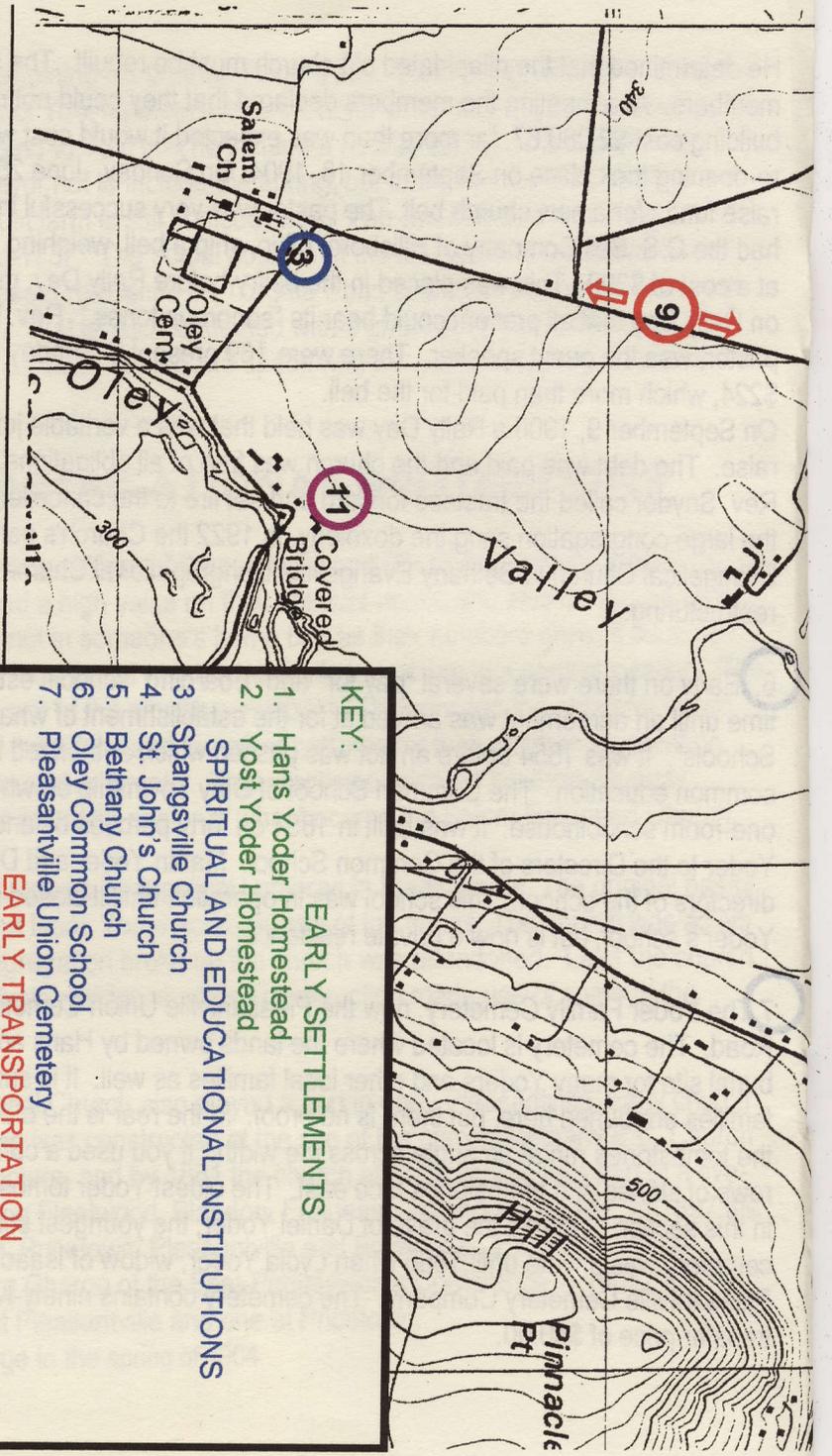
He determined that the dilapidated old church must be rebuilt. The society was small and had no rich members. At a meeting the members declared that they could not raise more than \$100. The re-building cost \$2,080.87, far more than was expected it would cost when the construction began. The re-opening took place on September 18, 1904. On Sunday, June 25, 1905 cash Rally Day was held to raise funds for a new church bell. The pastor was very successful in soliciting for this purpose, and thus had the C.S. Bell Company of Hillsboro, Ohio, ship a bell, weighing 1,790 pounds, including mountings, at a cost of \$200. This was placed in the belfry before Rally Day, making it possible to dedicate the bell on Rally Day that all present could hear its "sonorous tones." Rev. H.L. Yeakel of Pottstown, a former pastor, was the guest speaker. There were 169 present in Sunday School that day, with an offering of \$224, which more than paid for the bell.

On September 9, 1906 a Rally Day was held that was a veritable jubilee. There was no money to raise. The debt was paid and the church was free of all obligations. At the close of the evening service Rev. Snyder called the trustees forward and set fire to the cancelled mortgage. While it was cremated, the large congregation sang the doxology. In 1922 the Church's name changed from Bethany United Evangelical Church to Bethany Evangelical Congregational Church, as a result of denominational restructuring.

6. Early on there were several "pay for" and "Boarding" schools established in the area. It was some time until an agreement was arrived at for the establishment of what were to be called "Common Schools". It was 1854 before an act was passed which authorized a school tax to be levied for common education. The Common School of Oley Township on what is now Route 73 was originally a one-room schoolhouse. It was built in 1851 on forty perches of land transferred from Isaac and Lydia Yoder to the Directors of the Common School. Martin Yoder and David Yoder served as two of the six directors of the school. This school was in operation until it closed in 1929. It was commonly known as Yoder's school, but is now a private residence.

7. The Yoder Family Cemetery, now the Pleasantville Union Cemetery is located off Covered Bridge Road. The cemetery is located where the lands owned by Hans and Yost met. The cemetery is the burial site for many Yoders and other local families as well. It is surmised that Hans and Yost and their families are buried here, but there is no proof. In the rear is the oldest section of the cemetery. Here the tombstones run at an angle across the width. If you used a compass, you would find that the old rows of stones and tombstones face east. The oldest Yoder tombstone in the United States is located in this section. It marks the grave of Daniel Yoder, the youngest son of Hans, who died in 1747. The cemetery was private until 1886 when Lydia Yoder, widow of Isaac Yoder deeded the property to the Pleasantville Cemetery Company. The cemetery contains ninety-two and a half perches and had a transfer price of \$80.00.





- KEY:**
- 1. Hans Yoder Homestead
  - 2. Yost Yoder Homestead
- SPIRITUAL AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**
- 3. Spangsville Church
  - 4. St. John's Church
  - 5. Bethany Church
  - 6. Oley Common School
  - 7. Pleasantville Union Cemetery
- EARLY TRANSPORTATION**
- 8. Pleasantville Covered Bridge
  - 9. The Oley Turnpike
  - 10. The Trolley
- COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS**
- 11. Greisemer Mill and Covered Bridge
  - 12. Martin Yoder Tannery
  - 13. Cleaver Fulling Mill
  - 14. Pleasantville Inn
  - 15. Odd Fellows Hall
  - 16. Cheese Factory

## EARLY TRANSPORTATION

- 8 The original Pleasantville Bridge was built over the Manatawny Creek in 1852 by David Renno. It originally was an uncovered wooden bridge with sides four feet high. In 1856 Jonathan Bitner built up the sides and converted it into a covered bridge. That bridge was 17 feet wide and 142 feet long between portals. It was rather unusual among covered bridges in that it was constructed using three sets of arches and it had a floor that was raised to protect the bridge during floods. The bridge was built on a portion of the original 461-acre land parcel of Hans Yoder, which was purchased in 1714. The covered bridge of today has been restored by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. The refurbished bridge was dedicated at a special ceremony and festival on June 12, 2004.
- 9 According to one early Hans Yoder deed, Covered Bridge Road was called The Great Road to Philadelphia. It was later called The Oley Turnpike, which was the last private turnpike in Pennsylvania. A portion of the turnpike ran from the Black Bear Inn at Reading to what is now Route 73 in Pleasantville and on up to Pikeville. One of the tollhouses for the turnpike was located in Pleasantville. It was called "Cleaver's" and was located at Covered Bridge and Toll House Roads next to the Pleasantville Covered Bridge. The old tollhouse has been modified and is now a private residence. A note about the toll charges: one old advertisement for the turnpike from 1869 said the following about the toll rates. "For every horse or mule, whether ridden, led or driven in any team of burden, sleigh, sled, cart or sulky — each mile traveled, one cent. For every single team of pleasure, market or spring wagon — for each mile traveled, two cents; the same vehicles with two or more horses — two and one-half cents for each mile or 12 cents for five miles. For every score of cattle, two cents for each mile. For every score of sheep or swine, one cent for each mile."
- 10 One early means of public transportation was the electric trolley that joined Reading, Pleasantville and Boyertown. The Oley Valley Railroad Company built a route, passing through Pleasantville that met the electric trolley previously established in Reading. The tracks and electric lines ran twenty-two and a half miles through the countryside to cover the fifteen miles between Reading and Boyertown. It was built during the first years of the 1900's at a cost of \$500,000. The original Reading route was first traversed by horse-drawn trolleys and was later transferred to an electric trolley that ran on overhead wires. The Oley Valley route joined the Reading route at Stony Creek then ran down through the Oley Valley and through the countryside to Boyertown. The trolley ran through the village of Pleasantville near the covered bridge and what is now Tollgate Road. The sub station may have been built to help provide electricity for the trolley. The building of the trolley was controversial especially in the town of Boyertown. It came into town where the Salvation Army building now stands. Many residents were unhappy about running the tracks through the main streets, which were built from brick at that time, and the water company was concerned about its pipes that ran under the streets. It finally was installed running along Reading Avenue and Philadelphia Avenue where it met the trolley from Pottstown. One of the board members of the Oley Yoder Heritage Association, Edna Yoder Dierolf, remembers

riding the trolley as a child. Her Mother, Sarah Yoder, put Edna on the trolley on Washington Street in Boyertown, where she was watched over by her Father's two cousins, Eli and Elmer Greisemer, the trolley conductors. She would ride the trolley through the countryside, around one of the Horseshoe Curves and into Pleasantville. There she would be met by her Aunt Mamie, whom she had come to visit. The tracks were removed in the 1930's about the time the sewers were installed in Boyertown.

## COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

11. Greisemer's Mill and Greisemer's Covered bridge are located off Spangsville Road. John Yoder, Jr. eldest son of Hans Yoder acquired the 250-acre tract in 1734 by patent. John built the mill in the late 1730's and sold it to Casper Greisemer in 1767. The mill burned in 1847 and was rebuilt the same year and it is the mill that stands today. Before the Covered Bridge was built, the road went right through the creek, turned right in front of the barnyard and continued up through the field. The covered bridge was built in 1868.

12. Martin Yoder and his family operated a tannery in the 1700's and 1800's. The tannery was located about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile back from Oysterdale Road along the road now known as Miller Road. It no longer exists but was on the Hans Yoder tract. The conversion of hides into tanned leather was a lengthy seven-step process. The steps included cleaning and trimming, soaking in lime to remove hair and flesh and then soaking in a liquid salt and manure mixture to neutralize the lime and to make the hide more flexible. The actual tanning process was done in vats filled with tanbark, which was Oak and Hemlock bark reduced to a coarse powder. Finally the leather was beaten or fulled to make it pliable and carefully dried. This old process could take more than a year to complete.

13. The Cleaver Fulling mill converted roughly tanned leathers and rough woven cloth into softer, more workable and therefore more wearable fabrics. The fulling process consisted of a large trough into which the woven cloth and leather were placed in a solution of warm soapy water and/or fuller's earth and water. Then it was hammered with large water-driven Oak hammers to cleanse, thicken and degrease the fabric. After this process the cloth was dried on a rack to prevent shrinkage. The mill has since been converted into a private residence.

14 The Pleasantville Inn located at the corner of Route 73 and Covered Bridge Road, was built prior to 1848 by Isaac Yoder. On March 19, 1853, Isaac and Lydia Yoder sold the property to Ruben G. and William G. Weidner. The land tract contained 8 acres and 57 perches at that time. An 1876 map shows the Inn as the Mensch Hotel. The Inn is still in use and a mainstay of today's Pleasantville.

15 Across Route 73 from the Inn is the building known as the Odd Fellows Hall. On November 2, 1856 David and Hannah Yoder transferred to Isaac Yoder, Amos Molet and Jonathan Cleaver 42 perches of land. On that tract was built Oley Lodge #318 of Odd Fellows. The Odd Fellows sold the building to Benneville Cleaver in 1873. An 1876 map shows the building housing the Pleasantville General Store and the Manatawny Post Office with a third portion belonging to a Herbine. In 1873 Benneville Cleaver sold the building to Mary and Ammon S. Hartman.

16 The building that housed the "Cheese Factory" dates back to 1883 and was established as a collection point for local farm milk. At that time the road was known as Covered Bridge Road all the way to Pikeville. When the trolley line was completed through the Oley Valley, the milk was taken from the creamery to the trolley for shipment to Reading and Boyertown. The business expanded to produce butter and cheese and was a source of substantial employment in the area. The building was added onto as needed and became a mixture of different sized rooms and construction materials. At one time the structure had seventeen different roof levels. World War II was a growth era for the business with butter repackaging being a major effort. A sizable portion of the business was under government contracts for CARE and other programs. The last addition to the building was the tower portion in the rear and it housed a large hammer mill and cooker system to start the processing. Cooling rooms were set up using the three garages in the rear and also in the basement. A large-coal fired boiler was housed in a separate building and had a 75-foot steel smokestack that blew over in 1978. Cheese production ceased in 1978 and the boiler was removed in 1994. The building is now home to four Pleasantville businesses.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The information provided in this booklet is the result of over thirty years of research by The Oley Yoder Heritage Association's Historian, Richard H. Yoder of Bechtelsville, Pennsylvania. Other contributors include Fred Moll, covered bridge expert; Stuart Kern; The Reverend William W. Weiser of Bethany Evangelical Congregational Church in Pleasantville; and members of the Oley Yoder Heritage Association, especially Edna Yoder Dierolf. As you reflect on the information provided here, we hope that you will become more aware of your own history and that you will pass that knowledge on to your family and the generations yet to come.

14. The Pleasantville Inn located at the corner of Route 73 and Covered Bridge Road was built prior to 1848 by Isaac Yoder. On March 11, 1853, Isaac and Lydia Yoder sold the property to Hubert G. and William G. Wadner. The land tract contained 2 acres and 57 perches of land. An 1878 map shows the inn as the Mensch Hotel. The inn is still in use and a remnant of today's Pleasantville.

15. Across Route 73 from the inn is the building known as the Oley Fellows Hall. On November 2, 1856 David and Harriet Yoder transferred to Isaac Yoder, Amos Moist and Jonathan Cramer 40 perches of land. On that tract was built Oley Lodge #316 of Oley Fellows. The Oley Fellows sold the building to Benneville Cleaver in 1873. An 1878 map shows the building housing the Pleasantville General Store and the Manastevy Post Office with a third portion belonging to a Harbison. In 1873 Benneville Cleaver sold the building to Mary and Ammon S. Harbison.

16. The building that housed the "Cheese Factory" dates back to 1823 and was established as a collection point for local farm milk. At that time the road was known as Covered Bridge Road on the way to Pleasantville. When the trolley line was completed through the Oley Valley, the milk was taken from the creamery to the valley for shipment to Reading and Boyertown. The business expanded to produce butter and cheese and was a source of substantial employment in the area. The building was added onto as needed and became a mixture of different sized rooms and extensions. At one time the structure had seventeen different roof levels. World War II was a great time for business with butter repackaging being a major effort. A sizable portion of the production was for government contracts for GAFB and other programs. The last addition to the building was the rear portion in the rear and it housed a huge hammer mill and cooker system along the processing. Cooling rooms were set up using the three garages in the rear and also in the basement. A large coal fired boiler was housed in a separate building and had a 75-foot steel smokestack that fell over in 1978. Cheese production ceased in 1978 and the boiler was removed in 1994. The building is now home to four Pleasantville businesses.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The information provided in this booklet is the result of over forty years of research by The Oley Area Heritage Association's historian, Richard H. Yoder of Berks County, Pennsylvania. Other researchers include Fred Mull, covered bridge expert, Stuart Yoder, The Pleasantville Inn, Weaver of Oley, Evangelical Congregational Church in Pleasantville, and members of the Oley Yoder Heritage Association, especially Edna Yoder Dierolf. As a result of the information provided here, we hope that you will become more interested in the history of the Oley area and the generations that came before.



**OLEY YODER HERITAGE ASSOCIATION**