

The Beginnings of Skippack Pike's "Tall Oaks" Plantation

BY CAROL KALOS, WISSAHICKON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESIDENT

As Blue Bell Country Club residents drive east on Skippack Pike, on their left, they pass School Road and Symphony Lane. Then the first building they see is a real estate office at 731 West Skippack Pike. For centuries, the residents of this old stone structure have called it "Tall Oaks."

The lovely house was once the centerpiece of a sizable property that extended back to School Road. No wonder its owners called it a "plantation," a common name in the early 1800s for any substantially-sized farm that grew commercial crops. *Whitpain... Crossroads in Time* (1977) shows the expanse on an 1877 map as belonging to William Dannehower, once an indentured servant.

The first owner of this precious land, the deHavens, arrived in Pennsylvania in 1682 and bought their acres from William Penn himself. The family came from Alsace-Lorraine, an area sometimes ruled by France

and sometimes Germany, so the family name was "in Hoffe," or "Indehove," or something else.

And they were sometimes Protestant and sometimes Catholic. Once in Whitpain, the large family married into "other prominent families," and they all became members of the nearby Boehm's Church, which still stands on Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike.

The first mention of an oak tree on the land appears in a deed description from 1742! The November Stroll will describe more about the residents who tended the "Tall Oaks."

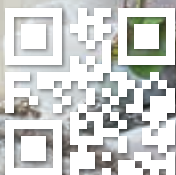
The author, Carol Kalos, is president of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society, which preserves the history of Ambler Borough, Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township. Visitors are welcome at the society's program of monthly speakers (Sept-June), and details are available at www.WValleyHS.org



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