

27 Annie's House



Annie's house in 1931 (left) and 2006 (right)

Serendipity in Blawenburg

Sometimes we learn things intentionally, and at other times, learning is serendipitous. I learned the story of Annie's house through a serendipitous connection a few years ago.

One summer day in 2014, Nancy Curtis, who was the administrator at Blawenburg Church at the time, called me with a curious question. "A woman emailed the church and asked if I knew where the Cyrenius Voorhees house was in Blawenburg. Do you know where it is?"

"I sure do," I replied. "I live in the house that Cyrenius built." I wondered why someone would want to know about the original builder of my house.

Thus, began the story of Annie's house, a story that taught me so much about my house and its past residents. The email had come from Marty and Dan Campanelli, residents of Quakertown, NJ. Marty and her late husband, Dan, a nationally known watercolor artist, were co-curating an exhibit at Morven Museum in Princeton of embroidered samplers that had been made by girls throughout New Jersey from 1726 to 1860. In those days, needlework samplers were known as schoolgirl samplers because learning to make samplers was a way to teach girls essential sewing skills.

As Marty and Dan searched for samplers, they came across a sampler made by Annie Voorhees in 1846 in a village called Blawenburgh. (Originally, Blawenburg was spelled with an H at the end.) Realizing it was a sampler of New Jersey origin, they immediately bought it from the Antiques Associates of West Townsend (CT). While the sampler was not included in the exhibit, the Campanellis wanted to know more about its creator, Annie Voorhees.

I replied to the Campanellis to tell them that Evelyn and I lived in Annie's house and invited them to visit the house where it was created. Marty wrote in an unpublished article, "We were thrilled with the news (that we had found Annie's house), and even more excited to be able to visit David and his wife Evelyn to see the Voorhees house in person. This experience made the sampler even more dear to us, after walking through the very rooms where Annie grew up and then resided in after her parents passed away. We could just imagine the twelve-year-old stitcher

taking her sampler home to work on and sitting in the parlor as her fingers executed the precise stitches with colorful silk thread.”



This photo of the sampler that Annie Voorhees made in her Blawenburg home to commemorate her 12th birthday on January 8, 1846 was given to us by the Campanellis, and it hangs in our dining room.

Annie's House and Family

Annie Elizabeth Voorhees was born in 1834 in Hillsborough. She was the daughter of Cyrenius Thompson Voorhees and his first wife, Catharine. Cyrenius made his living as a carpenter. He likely learned his skill from his father who was one of the carpenters that built Blawenburg Reformed Church.

Catharine died in 1840, and Cyrenius married Elizabeth Whitenack in 1842. Cyrenius and Elizabeth decided to move to Blawenburg to be near relatives living in the fledgling village. They purchased an acre of land on August 15, 1843 from Henry Duryea, the owner of Washington Well Farm east of Blawenburg. The lot was on the north side of Georgetown-Franklin Turnpike across from the Covenhoven Farm, and it was the first house east of the Reformed Dutch Church at Blawenburg. The lot allowed Cyrenius and Elizabeth to live within Blawenburg but removed from the heart of the village. Cyrenius had Voorhees relatives who lived on the Covenhoven farm and Elizabeth Whitenack's mother and brothers lived near the church. It is believed that Cyrenius built where he did for economic reasons. It was probably the cheapest lot he could find in Blawenburg at the time.



From Beers map of Philadelphia and Vicinity, 1850

Note the location of early buildings on the north side of Georgetown-Franklin Turnpike. From west to east from Blawenburg crossroads are: Blawenburg Tavern (not named on map), B.R.Ch. (Blawenburg Reformed Church), C. T. Voorhees house, and S.H. (School House). In 1853, a new Blawenburg School was built next to the church.

Annie had three brothers, John, William, and Abraham as well as a step-brother Charles through Cyrenius's marriage to Elizabeth. Abraham and Charles died at ages 5 months and five years, respectively. William died in the Civil War in Spotsylvania, VA, and John survived to live with Annie later in their lives.



The large monument for Cyrenius Voorhees (1806-1883), his first wife, Catharine Height (1803-1840), his second wife, Elizabeth Whitenack (1819-1882), and Annie Elizabeth (1834-1922) are in Blawenburg Cemetery. The small stones on either side of the large monument are for Cyrenius's sons Abraham (1839-1840, 5 months), and Charles (1860-1865). The larger monuments to the left are for William (1834-1861) and John (1831-1907).

Annie's sampler foreshadowed a career as a seamstress. We don't have good records of when Annie left her house, but we do know that she was working as a tailoress in Plainfield, NJ when she was 26 in 1860. She worked for and lived with tailor David Banyon and his wife. By 1870, she was living with the John H. Van Zandt family in Brooklyn. John was a bookkeeper, and the family had migrated to New York from New Jersey. Annie returned home to Blawenburg sometime before 1885, possibly when her father and step-mother passed away. Elizabeth Voorhees died in 1882 and Cyrenius died a year later in 1883. Annie and her unmarried brother, John, inherited and lived in the family home in Blawenburg.

All these years, Annie never married. That would soon change. Another carpenter, Joseph Van Horn Reid lived next door, just east of the Voorhees house at the head of Mountain View Road. The 1870 census showed that Joseph and his wife, Adeline, had six children and two other people living in the house which is believed to have been built in the 1860s. Adeline passed away in 1892. Joseph and Annie had known each other as neighbors, but a relationship grew stronger after Adeline died. In 1899, when they were both 66 years old, they married.

Following their marriage, Annie and Joseph lived in Annie's house, which still has elements of Joseph's craftsmanship in the original kitchen. At some point, a porch was added to the front of the house, and it has a tongue-and-groove oak ceiling in the Joseph Reid style.

A Connection to Blawenburg Church

In 1892, William Brownlee Voorhees, the beloved pastor of Blawenburg Church, passed away. In the same year, the church needed to replace the original ceiling in the sanctuary. The church hired Joseph Reid to construct a new ceiling in the church in Pastor Voorhees's memory. It was the Victorian era, and Laura Fetter designed a contemporary oak, patterned tongue-and-groove ceiling that was attractive despite being different from the Federal/Georgian design of the rest of the church. By 2006, worshippers noted that the Voorhees memorial ceiling was weakening, and subsequent inspections showed that it needed to be replaced. In 2007, the ceiling built by Annie's husband was replaced with a plain white ceiling.

Joseph passed away in 1916, and Annie had a caregiver in the final years of her life. She died at the age of 88 in 1922 under the care of a servant/nurse named Lawrence Sortor.

Residents After the Voorhees

Annie's estate was settled, and neighbors Stanley and Mabel Dorey bought the Voorhees property on August 17, 1922. Stanley was one of the first rural route postal delivery people in the area. One of Stanley's contributions to the Annie's house was indoor plumbing. He built a two-story addition to the house, creating a bathroom on the second floor and an eat-in area in the kitchen on the first floor.

Stanley's wife died in 1941, and he hired a housekeeper, Mrs. Esther Terhune, to help him with cooking and household chores. Esther and her son, Donald, lived with and cared for Stanley until his death in 1960.



The house did not remain empty for long. In 1860, George and Muriel Stephens moved in to Annie's house. George had a distinguished military career. When he became ill, Muriel converted a section of the kitchen pantry to a powder room to minimize the need to walk upstairs

to the bathroom. If you go to the house today, you will see a big letter S on the fireplace that was placed there by the Stephens.

In 1972, George passed away, and Muriel decided to sell Annie's house. That's when Evelyn and I came along to become the fifth owners of the house on January 3, 1973. We couldn't afford the selling price, so Mrs. Stephens loaned us the shortfall to consummate the deal over a glass of wine. Those were different times!

Evelyn and I put a large two-story addition on the back of the house to accommodate my parents, and a master suite upstairs. Unfortunately, my father, Walter Cochran, passed away in 1979, and six months later in April 1980, my mother, Martha Cochran, also died. After a few years, we completed the master suite. We now have a family room with a full bath which is our primary living area downstairs and a large bedroom with lots of closet space upstairs. We raised two daughters, Jennifer and Andrea, in Annie's house. Now when they visit with their husbands and our five grandchildren, the old house continues to be a source of adventures and memories for a new generation, as it has been for so many others over the past 173 years.

When the Campanellis Visited Annie's House



The Sycamores by Dan Campanelli

Dan Campanelli (1949-2017) was a fabulous artist. Ironically, we purchased one of his prints, *The Sycamores*, a year before we met him, not knowing anything about him. We just liked the picture. When he stepped into Annie's house, Dan immediately pointed to the picture and smiled. "Would you like me to sign it?" he asked.

"That would be wonderful," I replied as I scrambled to find a marker.

He signed it on the back and on the front on the glass. It remains a special work of art in our home.

Dan left a legacy of beautiful art for future generations to enjoy. The world is a better place because of Dan Campanelli.

Blawenburg Fact

The Voorhees house was considered more modest than the other houses in Blawenburg when it was built. It is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places as part of the Blawenburg Historic District.

Looking Ahead

Next month, we take a look at the history of the fire department in Blawenburg. It moved a couple times before it found its present home just east of Mountain View Road.

Sources

Marty Campanelli. Marty did an incredible amount of research for the sampler exhibit and the other samplers in her collection. She generously shared the research on Annie's house with me, and her effort made this blog much more comprehensive than it otherwise would have been. Thank you, Marty.

Notes. I have gathered many snippets of information about my house from a variety of sources including the late Ursula Brecknell, Van Harlingen Historical Society publications, and newspaper articles about Blawenburg.

Photographs

Pictures of Annie's house – Ken/Dot Dorey, David Cochran

Annie's Sampler – Marty Campanelli

Map of Blawenburg - Beers map of Philadelphia and Vicinity, 1850

Cemetery monuments – David Cochran

Dan Campanelli painting, *The Sycamores* – David Cochran