

OUR GERMANTOWN STORIES



"WYCK," Joseph Pennell, lithograph in Our Philadelphia, 1914.

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Germantown Community Members
Interviewed by Julie Rainbow

with

Tess Frydman, Wyck Historic House, Garden & Farm
&
Drexel University Lenfest Center for Cultural Partnerships

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THE FUTURE OF HISTORIC SITES

HOW CAN A SITE BE MEANINGFUL TO ITS COMMUNITY?

In 2018, Drexel and Wyck began a collaborative project exploring the future of historic sites, using Wyck as a model. In 2020, a group of Wyck Community Fellows engaged in this conversation. They participated in workshops—virtual as we navigated the pandemic—to test and discuss ideas about how Wyck can better connect with the community, particularly through storytelling. Common themes emerged between Wyck and community stories, thanks to the Fellows: **Catherine Brown, Chantel Carden, Ann Doley, Lurie Forney, Maleka Fruean, Robert Platt, Julie Rainbow, Zendra Shareef,** and **Steven Taylor.**

Following from this work, we have gathered the stories in this booklet as part of an ongoing collaboration between Wyck and the community. **Julie Rainbow**, an oral historian, interviewed a diverse group of community members about their past and present experiences living and working in Germantown. Alongside, we share related history from Wyck. This is a celebration of the people of Germantown and their rich, diverse history.

A MORE INCLUSIVE STORY

Wyck has been a house museum since the 1970s, but the Germantown history told here has not historically reflected the diversity of the neighborhood, then and now. Wyck believes its resources belong to everyone and is working to ensure this is reflected in practice. Our goal is to provide a sample of how community stories—from a range of perspectives—relate to this historic site.



Wyck's conservatory doors from the rose garden, 1913. Wyck Collection.



CONTRIBUTORS

These Germantown community members shared their stories with Julie Rainbow as part of this collaborative project.



Catherine Brown is a children's book author and third-generation Germantown resident.



Felicia Coward was born in Chicago and moved to Philadelphia when she was 21; she lived in Germantown in the 1980s and returned around 2005.



Mindy Flexer is an artist born in Colorado; she began teaching in Germantown in 1996.



Terrill Kevyn Johnson is an artist born in New London, CT; he moved to Philadelphia as a child and then to Germantown as an adult.



Daniel Kaplowitz is a musician born in Hopewell, NJ; he moved to Philadelphia in 2010 and to Germantown in 2017.



John Lewis and **Regina Robinson** have known each other since 1974. They married in 2002 and in 2004 moved to Germantown, where John was born and raised. He is an elevator inspector, and Regina is an adult educator.



Trapeta Mayson was born in Liberia, settled in Philadelphia as a child, and has lived in Germantown 20 years. She is an artist and Philadelphia Poet Laureate (2020–21).

Ed Cunniff



Roya and **Massoud Mohadjeri** are Iranian immigrants, architects, members of the Bahá'í Faith, and Germantown residents. They also run an architectural business in Germantown.



Paula Paul, native Philadelphian, has lived in Germantown since 1968. She is a lifelong public school educator and advocate, cofounder and coordinator of the Germantown Artists Roundtable, and coproduces the weekly radio show Creative Voice of Germantown (92.9 FM).



LeRoi Simmons's parents moved from South Carolina to Philadelphia, and in 1978 he settled in Germantown, where he has owned a full-service salon for 40 years.



James Tichenor was born in Germantown and grew up in a carriage house behind an apartment house his parents owned. His family dates back to the 1750s in Germantown, while his maternal grandfather came to the United States from Italy in 1905.



Germantown resident **Julie Rainbow** interviewed and photographed these community members. She is a research-based cultural creator who uses oral histories, multimedia, and research/archival materials to interpret and amplify voices in modern society.

The interviews were transcribed by **Roman Golebiowski**, Drexel University Arts Administration & Museum Leadership Program.

Representing Wyck Historic House, Garden & Farm, **Kim Staub**, **Tess Frydman**, and **Sandy Lloyd** have participated in collaboration with Drexel.

This project of the Drexel University Lenfest Center for Cultural Partnerships was made possible by a Drexel Areas of Research Excellence (DARE) grant from Drexel's Office of the Provost and Office of Research & Innovation. The following Drexel faculty have participated in collaboration with Wyck: **Troy Finamore**, **Aroutis Foster**, **Alan Greenberger**, **Scott Knowles**, **Elizabeth Milroy**, **Glen Muschio**, **Alex Poole**, **Gabriel Rocha**, and **Neville Vakharia**; along with Lenfest Center staff: **Rosalind Remer**, **Page Talbott**, **Bruce Melgarey**, and **Melissa Clemmer**.

WYCK HISTORIC HOUSE, GARDEN & FARM

At Wyck, traditional Quaker culture blended with a passion for innovation. The people who lived and worked here expressed these values through their commitment to education, horticulture, equality, natural history, and preservation. Wyck is a remarkable survival of historic Philadelphia life in a 21st-century urban neighborhood. Today, Wyck seeks to engage learners of all ages—through its house, landscape, and objects saved over 300 years—and strengthen its community.



*Colonial house with innovative 1824 alterations
by William Strickland*



Robert Hazzard

Bird's-eye view of Wyck rose garden.

2.5-acre National Historic Landmark in Germantown, Philadelphia.

Oldest rose garden in its original plan in the United States.



Plan of rose garden, Jane Bowne Haines, 1821. Wyck Collection.



Benjamin Carlson



Wyck, Henry Troth, c. 1900.



Rose Hips.

Watercolor view of Wyck, Thomas Harrison Wilkinson, c. 1875-90.



TH Wilkinson



Researchers explore the curiosity cabinet on the second floor of Wyck.

Collection of 10,000+ family objects, furniture pieces, historical curiosities; 100,000 family papers.



Visitors touring Wyck.



Wyck's Front Parlor.

Ancestral home to one family for nine generations (1690–1973; Wistar and Haines most prominent names)



Neighbors preserve historical agricultural traditions while working on Wyck's vegetable farm.



A New Year's cake is pressed in one of the historic cookie molds in the Wyck collection.



A colonial candle maker explains his process at the Philadelphia Honey Festival.

GERMANTOWN GENERATIONS

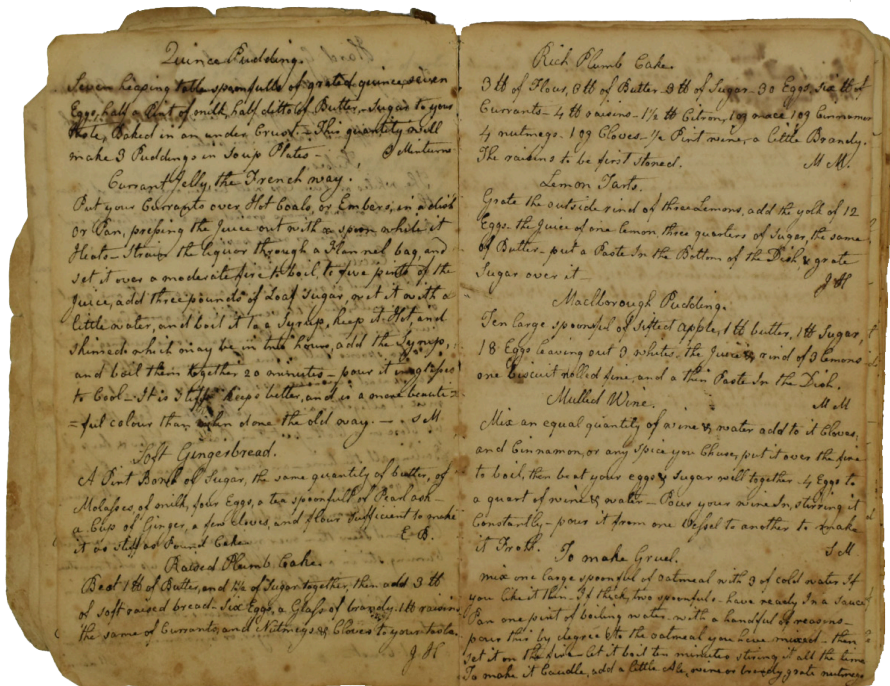
NEIGHBORHOOD RECIPE SHARING IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

Germantown's historic homes, towering trees, local businesses, and dynamic arts scene are the result of the families and individuals who live in, engage with, and invest in the neighborhood. Some have been here for many generations. Together these "placeholders," to borrow a term from community member Catherine Brown, have transformed a geographic area into a community.

Breaking bread together is an important way family and neighbors bond in community. Family and friends frequently share recipes for favorite foods, which get passed down through generations. This recipe book, which belonged to Wyck resident Hannah Marshall Haines (1765–1828), reveals a network of recipe sharing in Germantown in the early 19th century. Each entry is attributed to a different friend of Hannah's who broke bread with her. For example, the "Rich Plumb Cake" is attributed to someone with the initials "M.M.," while the "Mulled Wine" recipe came from "S.M." The "Lemon Tart" recipe, among various others in the book, came from "J.H.," likely Hannah's daughter-in-law Jane Bowne Haines, who lived with her at Wyck.

Wyck still makes the "almond mackaroons" and "New Year's Cakes" found in this book. Neighbors and friends savor them together at events such as the Rose Tea, where Friends of Wyck gather to enjoy historical and modern treats, and each other's company.

—Wyck Historic House, Garden & Farm



Hannah Marshall Haines's recipe book, 1810-11.
Wyck Collection.



Steven Taylor
THE TIME TRAVELER

The New Year's Tea Table, 2020.

Steven Taylor



Catherine Brown's cast iron pot.



Friends of Wyck sample treats at the annual Rose Tea.

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

My grandmother always had something on the stove—the gas stove and the two illegal potbelly stoves, one of which was literally in the dining room in the middle of our house in Germantown. We were never cold...even in the summertime when we wanted to be.

One of our family's heirlooms is our cast iron pot. It was responsible for many Soul Food cooked meals for our family. When we were young, every night was a sit-down dinner experience. As we grew and life got busy, it faded away for a bit, but when I was grown and with my own family, my mom prepared Sunday sit-down dinners every Sunday! At some point Mommy felt we were not appreciating her Sunday meals and threatened to stop cooking every Sunday. We weren't having that! So even if my husband and I had snuck out on a Sunday afternoon date and weren't very hungry, we ate. Most Sunday dinners were done in our family cast iron pot. Her turkey wings were amazing! What she knew is that eating together as a family is what creates your bond. That's where you get to look eye to eye to make sure everybody is okay. The cast iron pot was passed down to my mom from my grandmom, and to me from my mom. Every time I think of this pot, I remember, this is us!

—*Catherine Brown*

A NEIGHBORHOOD FOR GENERATIONS

There were a lot of families like mine—that lived in close proximity to one another, if not in the same house. Great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, children, and cousins. Generations of us, born and raised; "placeholders." Back then our grandmothers were very serious about keeping our blocks and community clean. The families thought about one another. Germantown has this "you belong to me" type feel to it. Even during the bad times. The reason why we can come and talk about the historical value now is because we (the African-American families) didn't allow Germantown to die. The families kept it alive.

—*Catherine Brown*



*Walnut Lane Bridge, 1998.
Historic American Engineering Record,
Library of Congress.*

FREE TO EXPLORE

My parents bought the house in Germantown in 1953. As a child I felt safe. Everyone knew everyone. I belonged to the Boys and Girls Club; going there it was like exploring the neighborhood. There used to be a place called Model Raceways, where they had slot car tracks—it was huge. You could venture. Your parents would let you go. Me and one of my friends would go over to Roxborough to get CO2 cartridges, because his father gave him a BB gun. We would walk all the way. We did go-carts too; we would ride around Awbury Arboretum. Your parents didn't worry about you as much...at least they didn't show it.

—*John Lewis*

BICYCLES ON PARADE

They used to have parades for the Fourth of July. We would decorate our bicycles in red, white, and blue crepe paper, and then take baseball cards and clothespins, and put them on; so when we went down the street, it would "BBBBBB."

—*John Lewis*

ADVENTURES IN THE WOODS

My brother Harold and I had built a treehouse. We used to go up there and just be by ourselves, and eat lunch up there, and just do all sorts of stuff. You could walk everywhere. I knew the Wissahickon Creek and the woods that you could get to. There is a path that's still there. We would explore all over. One of the things we explored was, there was a very large mansion, and right across from there was a very large building. It was closed down for years, all boarded up. We would go in, go on the roof... (That became Settlement Music School.) That was the kind of adventures that we would get into that were highly inappropriate—but fun.

—*James Tichenor*

A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

There was still an ice wagon that would go by in the summer that was drawn by a horse (1949–50). You would hear that clop, clop, clop. They would sell ice, and chip off a block and give you ground-up ice—whatever you wanted. There were the usual vendors that have disappeared over the last 50 years or so. A guy that was a knife and scissors sharpener. Meat hucksters would come by in a truck.

—James Tichenor

TROLLEY MEMORIES

My grandmother would keep all her money as cash, and then once a month she would go down to Germantown & Cheltenham and would pay the electric bill there, gas, phone... So she would take us with her. In the winters she would take the streetcar, she called it. It was a trolley where you would get on in the middle doors. Somebody else there would take your ticket. In the winter they actually had a heater, a charcoal heater, around 1948. The driver would have to get out and turn the switch in the street. It would make this horrible shrieking sound as the metal went around the corner.

—James Tichenor



Germantown Avenue, 1966.

THE FABRIC OF HERITAGE

I came to America from Liberia in 1975 in my youth. I am an immigrant, and also one who is connected to this local story and history. When we came to Germantown, my view of it was very much from an outsider lens. Now as an adult it is sort of the other way. I am very much proud of coming from Africa, and this is an African cloth, fabric. It represents what most of the people in West Africa are wearing. I am African American, and for me the cloth represents that too. It also ties me to my Black brothers and sisters here, because you know we are all rocking this stuff now. We wear our little cloth, and we see each other in the street, and there is affirmation. The fabric tells a story. And it says our story is important. We value it and adorn ourselves in it, in a place that has devalued it for so long.

—Trapeta Mayson



Trapeta Mayson's African cloth.

LOCAL BUSINESSES

THE GERMANTOWN BREWERY

When William Penn sold Daniel Pastorius the tract of 5,700 acres that became Germantown in 1683, the land was densely forested. A path cut through the oak and poplar trees was an important colonial highway, often called “the Great Road” and today known as Germantown Avenue. Germantown Avenue was laid over an Indigenous American footpath that ran from the Delaware River as far west as Reading, PA. It is this path that the first German settlers traveled to reach their new home in the dense Pennsylvania forest.

Since before European settlement, the road has been a site of commerce. And from the 1790s to the 1840s, Wyck was the site of the Germantown Brewery. The Germantown Brewery/Germantauer Brauerrey sign hung on Germantown Avenue, inviting visitors and neighbors to purchase ales and porters from the brewhouse that stood next to Wyck’s rose garden. 1794 was a momentous time for the Wistar-Haines family. Wyck’s fifth-generation resident, Caspar Wistar Haines (1762–1801), had just moved his family and business to Germantown from the city, to escape the miasmas of yellow fever, which had claimed the lives of both his parents.

Made of wood and iron, and painted in German and English, the sign speaks to the bilingual residents of the area at the turn of the 19th century. Even the two types of fonts target different audiences. In Germantown, the brewery prospered until the 1840s, when the temperance movement pressured its closure and demolition. Receipt books from the brewery reveal the names of many neighbors who ventured down the Avenue to purchase their brews from Wyck.

—*Wyck Historic House, Garden & Farm*



Germantown Brewery sign, c. 1794.

Wyck Collection.



5300 Germantown Avenue, Parker & Mullikin, 1948.

Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Print and Picture Collection

GERMANTOWN DEPARTMENT STORES

People would come in from the suburbs to shop at these department stores. It was easier than Center City. Rowell's was a great department store. One of my mother's close friends worked there for many years as a salesperson. Down the street you had Jimmy Jones; they sold fabric. We had two Woolworths. Anything you wanted, you could get in Germantown—it was unbelievable. When I got out of the Army in 1966, I had to go get bedding at Allen's, and I walked home with it. I had no car—I didn't have anything. That whole strip was extremely busy and was supplied by two train lines. The collapse was yet to come. Germantown was an extremely busy place with a lot of activity—very bustling activity.

—James Tichenor

WALKING AND SHOPPING THE AVENUE

We made trips out to “the Avenue” every weekend. Even though I lived right there, it still felt like a trip out, because we had such major stores. Germantown & Cheltenham Avenues used to house major department stores—J.C. Penney's, two Woolworths, Sears, and more. I remember getting my picture taken at Woolworth's every year. Also located on that corridor was every utility in your home—Bell Telephone, the Gas and the Electric Company. For every utility you had in your house, you could go pay your bill in person. We could do all of our shopping there—food shop, school shop, and clothes shop, right there! We were able to take care of our whole life within a few blocks of our doorstep. There was a McDonald's on Germantown Avenue back then, and it was new, so people got dressed and went there for an Easter treat. That is how hyped it was! It was an atmosphere of fun—you sat in your chair and spun in place, and you felt content and happy. That whole corridor brings back great memories of what it felt like to live in a real community and a loving neighborhood. We looked forward to getting up, getting dressed—to go handle our business, or to go shopping, or to have fun, or to just have lunch on “the Avenue.” This was our Germantown!

—Catherine Brown

CONTINUING A CREATIVE TRADITION

I learned to make soap with my daughter's grandmother Almena Monteiro. I didn't truly get back to soapmaking until I retired, while living in Germantown. The village feeling of Germantown reawakened the creative domestic side of me, so I decided to go back to soapmaking. I talked to my daughter about continuing the family soapmaking business since it was started by her grandmother. My daughter is a psychologist and teaches at Chestnut Hill College, but she is really an entrepreneur. So now we have added soapmaking to my granddaughters' slime, jewelry, and potholder projects at Gogo's (that's me, grandma) house on Haines Street in Germantown.

—Felicia Coward



Felicia Coward's handcrafted soap.



LeRoi Simmons's salon chair.

GATHERING AT THE SALON

I had the unique experience of running a large salon chain. When I separated from that, I went to Africa in 1976, and it changed my mind about working for somebody else. I came back and opened up a small shop. I really benefited from the diversity of people who came in. They would explain where they were coming from. We spent a lot of time calling the library...because of course arguments will come up—it was like the Google of the day. I wasn't the fastest stylist, but it was wonderful interaction. The shop allowed me to set my own time and hours, to volunteer. We all want to have the same things. We want to raise our children, we want to be able to survive, we want to be happy... The thing I found most uplifting here is that it offered me an opportunity to open up a business, and to present ideas and thoughts that would help folk—to be able to sustain ourselves as we helped in this community.

—*LeRoi Simmons*

NO PLACE FOR REDLINING

My parents bought a little apartment house. It was originally a mansion that had been built in the 1850s, and we lived in the carriage house. We had an eight-unit apartment house, and one of my first experiences there was, I would have to answer the phone when we rented a unit. Apartments then were rented for 35 to 45 dollars a month, about 1955. I was in my early teens. Racial discrimination was still legal. People would ask, do you rent to color? Yes, we do. My parents held very strongly that was the position they should take. That was the kind of outlook they had.

—*James Tichenor*

MUTUAL AID

I am very active with the Germantown Mutual Aid Fund, a great group of neighbors who raise funds to help other Germantown neighbors survive the financial hardship brought on by the impact of COVID-19. The GMAF is a newly formed self-help and mutual aid group that is part of a larger network, organizing alternative economic projects in Germantown.

—*Felicia Coward*

POWER AND TRUST

The building I am living in now was once an Urban Outfitters factory, among other things. I remember walking up the street with my dad and my sister, and getting a little bit of money to go through the bins in here—see what was available. The Avenue at the time was extremely vibrant. Here was this African-American community, a working-class community filled with pride, and it seemed there was a lot of caretaking going on—care for the community.

From the Germantown of my youth to today, it seems there has been very little investment in the community overall. Now I see shuttered stores on the Avenue and new development that doesn't seem to make room for the people who are presently here. The community on the surface is very liberal, open, accepting...but I have learned firsthand this isn't always the case. There is a power relationship at the core of the issues. It is very much about race and class, just like most places in America. You are not getting equal partnership, nor equal revenue, resources, funding, or anything tangible or sustainable that will help. This community can be what we want it to be—you really have to put the power in the hands of the people who live here. But it is also about trust. The current dynamic seems to say, we don't trust you (the residents) enough to make decisions about yourself, so we will make them around you. The superficial view is that everybody gets along...such a great community...it's diverse—but underneath it, there is very little equity in how resources are distributed and who is actually at the real decision-making tables.

—Trapeta Mayson

THE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF CHANGE

Living in the Greene Street Artists Cooperative here in Germantown is very affordable, and my live-work loft is big enough that I was able to start my little art school here in my studio without having to find a second space. But now our neighborhood is getting so much more expensive. Germantown is changing. One of the special things about it has been that it is in reach for so many different kinds of people. I am concerned about Germantown getting swept up in the goal of creating wealth, rather than creating the things people who live here need. I worry it's going to get harder and harder to live here. For some people, that seems like a win, because their property values are going up. But we all lose so much human richness. On the positive side, now there are coffee shops, restaurants, and a bike shop I can walk to—so apparently it is still affordable enough for people to create small businesses. But I do really worry about those small businesses getting priced out.

—Mindy Flexer



Detail Map of Pennsylvania, Thomas Holme, 1687.

Library of Congress.



LIVING IN A HISTORIC COMMUNITY

THE WYCK ROSE GARDEN

Visiting Wyck is a bit like traveling back in time. In addition to the house that was built up over time from 1690 through the 1820s, the coach house (1794), smoke house (1797), ice house (1836), greenhouse (1914), and rose garden (1824) still stand as they have for centuries. These incredibly rare survivors of history are almost common in their Germantown context, where they are nestled in the landscape mere blocks from the Johnson House, Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion, Cliveden, Upsala, Grumblethorpe, Historic Rittenhouse, and other historic sites.

Each spring at Wyck when the old roses bloom, their unique aromas and bright colors captivate the senses. The rose garden here is now widely recognized as the oldest rose garden in the United States. Home to over 50 cultivars of historic roses, the garden contains the original rose plants from the 19th-century design, as well as plants from the 18th-century kitchen garden and later 20th-century additions. Multiple generations found peace tending plants here. Jane Bowne Haines I (1790–1843) designed the garden in 1821. Her daughter, Jane Reuben Haines (1832–1911), and granddaughter, Jane Bowne Haines II (1869–1937), lovingly tended the garden after her. Jane Bowne Haines II went on to found Temple Ambler—originally the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women.

This layered garden, tucked beside Germantown Avenue and Walnut Lane, is a rare wonder for rose lovers and an important repository of plants that have disappeared from other historic gardens. Two roses that still grow here, the *Elegant Gallica* and *Lafayette Rose*, are no longer found anywhere else in the world.

—*Wyck Historic House, Garden & Farm*

*Opposite page:
'Elegant Gallica' Rose*



Antique roses bloom at Wyck.



SHAMANS AND ROYALTY

John Lewis: This is an African shaman or medicine man's breastplate. It is leopard skin and other skins, and it looks like it has maybe pockets for amulets or herbs. It was given to us by the person who owned our house. It represents a connection to my ancestors from our motherland, and to the knowledge, culture—all of the people it may have come in contact with.

Regina Robinson: Our home—The Queen's House—was built in 1851 for the Regent Queen of Spain. It and the ladies-in-waiting house across the street were two of the first houses on the street. When she no longer needed our house, it served as the office for an investment she had in the Wissahickon Water Works. I grew up right outside of Philly, in Darby, which was settled by Quakers in the late 1600s, so living around this early history seemed familiar to me. Before I lived here, I didn't know a lot about Germantown—except that this is where John was from. When we met in 1974, he introduced me to the area, and I loved the energy here. It was historic, hip, and artsy! We were living in Montclair, NJ, when we married in 2002 and started looking for a house in that area. No luck! We decided to go home to Philly. I like to say we looked at 100 houses before our realtor called about this house. We love old homes, and this one seemed especially suited for us since my name means "queen"!

Germantown is a historically rich place to live, and that history is diverse! Whether it's our Native American, African-American, Revolutionary, religious, or more current history, this community has much to offer. Luckily, most folks who choose to live here are committed to the preservation of important sites. This is especially important now that the area is grappling with an explosion of new construction. I know we can achieve that balance so our community can thrive while remaining a great place to live.

—*John Lewis and Regina Robinson*

*Opposite page:
John Lewis and Regina
Robinson's breastplate.*

THE MAGIC OF GERMANTOWN

Germantown has so many surprises in terms of the housing stock. You can walk around the corner into a neighborhood and see beautifully preserved buildings, original woodwork, flooring. You can open a gate and just enter this magical world. There are not too many neighborhoods like that in the city. Germantown will give you that magic.

—*Trapeta Mayson*

A TREASURE FOR GENERATIONS

A lot of us have lived here a long time. Some have even inherited homes from the generation before. It's the beauty of the people that are here that has stayed the same. There has always been a lot of interesting and fascinating architecture—hope that won't disappear. And wonderfully you can still discover little side streets you haven't been on before if you take frequent walks in the neighborhood. And of course, the Wissahickon is still beautiful and wonderful. It's like a miracle that you can walk into a park like that. So close by. It is a real treasure.

—*Paula Paul*



ITALIAN LEGACY

My grandfather Rev. Joseph Panetta came to this country around 1905. He was raised in Italy. He was a street teacher of religion in South Philadelphia, stabbed in the leg for teaching religion. In Germantown he got the backing of the Old Market Square Presbyterian Church (where George Washington worshipped). He founded the Italian Mission Church. Eventually several hundred families were involved. By 1908 or 1909, he was able to build a church, 327 E. Price Street. My mother and my uncle lived there with my grandparents. The Italian community had skilled masons and woodworkers, so they might have built it from scratch. It doesn't look quite the same today, but it's still obviously a church.

—*James Tichenor*



James Tichenor's grandfather's church.



Julie Bot



Jack E. Boucher



Dennis



Julie Bot

Johnson House.

LASTING A LIFETIME

I came across this house in 1987. Everything is authentic, lasting a lifetime. At that time the Philadelphia Bahá'í Community needed the space, so the side office on Tulpehocken was used for the Assembly meeting. Henry Houston actually lived here, before 1920. (The original mansion burned.) The school my kids went to is named after him. He was a developer and very instrumental in the expansion of this area—the first suburbs of the city. This house was built in 1920. The first recorded resident was Sears, and after that was the Dr. Finkelman residence and dental office. I am the third owner.

—*Massoud Mohadjeri*



chrisphilly5448



chrisphilly5448



Dennis



Robert Shenk

Settlement Music School.

Cliveden.

STRENGTH AND STYLE

As I stayed here longer, I learned more. It becomes more and more interesting to me—the history and how it has some character to it. The architecture. People from Europe came here and settled. The Spanish style, Victorian style, and all kinds of styles of architecture are here. Fairmount Park is really attractive. Some of the buildings there are interesting; there are old mills. I am also attracted to stone buildings—they show a kind of strength of the structure.

—*Roya Mohadjeri*



Eli Pousson

Johnson House.

HISTORY AND COMMUNITY

Having been the executive director of the Germantown Historical Society, it was an interesting thing. Although I have encountered all these historic sites for a number of years, now I had the opportunity to reimagine them along with the community. Black people in the community had not always had the invitation to feel like this history was part of theirs. Although these are mostly colonial sites, the stories embedded in this community includes these Black people in Germantown.

I never knew much about these sites, except for the Johnson House. My mission was how to raise awareness. When I look back, I don't think it was enough. The artist that is in me probably would have taken the push to raise awareness and maybe challenged—provoked more. Why are we still having these conversations about inclusion in this community in 2021? As a Black person or a person of color who might work in a predominately white institution in a predominantly Black community, you run the risk of being tokenized, and you really have to kind of fight against that too. I don't want to be in a space simply because it checks a box. I want to be a contributor, but not just to fill a quota, because I am just a small representation of the wishes and desires of the greater community.

—*Trapeta Mayson*

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

Don't all roads lead to Germantown? There are trees, beautiful buildings and fences, and things you can tell were made at a time when people really cared about making things. There are so many worlds within this small world. I feel very hopeful that the people in these worlds can come to know each other. Getting in the same geographic space is a great start. All the things are here together: nature and culture, history and present-time cutting-edge stuff, equity and inequity, all of the wonderful things and all of the crushing things. They are all right here, and we all get to work on them together.

—*Mindy Flexer*



Mindy Flexer's artwork.



*Reuben Haines III's childhood
nature journal, 1798.
Wyck Collection.*



*Reuben Haines III's nature suit.
Wyck Collection.*

GREEN SPACE

EXPLORING THE WISSAHICKON

The tree-lined streets, backyard gardens, and the accessibility of the woods surrounding Wissahickon Creek have long attracted settlers to Germantown. Many of Wyck's Quaker residents were ardent horticulturists and naturalists who were captivated by the fresh air and beautiful landscapes surrounding their Germantown home.

When Jane Bowne (1790–1843) and Reuben Haines III (1786–1831) married in 1812, they moved into a townhouse at 300 Chestnut Street. During the summers they would visit Reuben's family home, Wyck. Reuben was the corresponding secretary of the Academy of Natural Sciences (and one of the first members of the Franklin Institute and Pennsylvania Horticultural Society), and he wanted to be closer to nature. So, in 1820 they left their townhouse and settled full-time in Germantown.

At Wyck, Reuben enjoyed exploring the Wissahickon and collecting specimens, and his family enjoyed making Wyck their home. By 1824, Wyck featured an interior designed by Philadelphia architect William Strickland and a splendid rose garden. This beautiful setting inspired family friends and naturalists such as John James Audobon, Charles LeSueur, and Charles Willson Peale to visit frequently.

Among the many artifacts left by the family, one speaks clearly to their love of nature. Reuben's nature suit is made entirely of buckskin, complete with intricate foot coverings. He wore it on his specimen-collecting journeys. The heavy material and full coverage protected him from thorns, ticks, and poison ivy, and helped him engage more intimately with his natural surroundings in Germantown.

—*Wyck Historic House, Garden & Farm*



Wissahickon Valley Park.

Kristina Dymond



THE AIR FROM THE PARK

I grew up in North Philly. One of our exciting trips was to come to Fairmount Park and get spring water. I couldn't believe there was such a beautiful park so close to my home that I did not see every day, so most of my life I have spent around the Park. (I moved to Germantown in 1978 or 1979.) It was like a babysitter when I was coming up. As long as my mother saw me on the bike going into the Park, she knew I was okay. I loved the air. I could feel it. I could smell it, just coming up the Drive, it gets cooler when you get over near the Park. It gives a good vibe. And this is a nice, quiet, tree-lined street. It was so quiet and seemed like you could feel the trees interacting with us, and the air was good—just felt good.

—*LeRoi Simmons*

COMFORT AND JOY IN THE TREES

Germantown at that time (1966) had lots of trees. It was such a beautiful place. I had now been to different places in the world—Germantown is a really wonderful place. One of the main things was feeling Fairmount Park right there. So much of Germantown is right at the edge of the Park—just kind of verges into the Park...which is why I dread these thoughts of selling off the Walnut Lane golf course and putting condos there. That would destroy it. When you go down to Wissahickon Valley, all you see is trees—basically that's what it is. It is preserved, and it comes back in the most wonderful ways on Lincoln Drive. I always prized that. This is where we would always go—to the Wissahickon.

—*James Tichenor*





Mindy Flexer's artwork.

NATURE IN THE CITY

I am trying to get closer and closer to nature, but still be close to the city—to a musical community and artistic community. I grew up around farmland. To find a balance between those two worlds is really important to me. Germantown has the Wissahickon. I come out here, and the air is a little cleaner. It is not as hot and sooty in the summer. People have the ability to set aside some time to just talk to their neighbors. I like nature and art, and I think the world needs to do a good job of bringing those two together, making spaces for both of them at the same time.

—Daniel Kaplowitz

CREATING AND COHABITATING

I've painted a lot of urban landscape in Germantown. I like the combination of buildings and plants and other things that are growing. It is visually so pleasing, the way the contradictory halves come together. A whole that included just the regular and the linear wouldn't be complete, and a truth that included just nature and plants and wildness wouldn't be complete either. But together it's the whole picture. They are able to cohabit—our buildings, our plants, and our trees. They are here together, getting along and also not getting along: the trees threaten to fall into the houses, and the houses threaten to encroach upon the trees. Enough of the time, we get to have both things. When I am in places that don't have both, and then I come back to Germantown, I just feel this breath of relief.

—Mindy Flexer



Neighbors harvest fruits and vegetables at the Wyck's Home Farm Club.

PEACE IN A PANDEMIC

At the beginning of the pandemic, I would go walking every day at the end of the day because I would be so antsy from being indoors. There were so many beautiful gardens. It was such a beautiful present that all these people had taken the time, love, thought, and care to cultivate a little piece of nature in front of their houses. I had never noticed the flowers the way I noticed them that spring. There were beautiful tulips. Just even that tiny little bit of nature for a half an hour really made all of the difference for me.

—*Mindy Flexer*

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Germantown reminded me of a small town or a village. I am from Chicago; I was an urban child. I didn't have a lot of walkable places in my neighborhood. When I first came to Germantown, there were trees, lawns, gardens, nice shopping areas—it was like I had come to a little village. When I decided to buy a home, Germantown was the place I decided to settle.

—*Felicia Coward*

GARDENING IN A COMMUNITY

The community gardens that are all over Germantown are an incredible asset for all of us. Each is distinct. The one I helped in its early stages—and continue to garden in and serve on the coordinating committee of—is the Mastery Pickett Community Garden, a City Harvest garden. That means in part of our garden, we grow vegetables for our local food cupboard. Garden members volunteer to take care of those plots in addition to their own. We're proud that our garden contributes 800 to 1,000 pounds of produce a season to the cupboard. It is pretty special, beautiful really, how much we can grow there. We have about 32 families that garden. We don't always know exactly how to do all garden things, but we are growing food.

—*Paula Paul*

ART & ACTIVISM

THE ANTI-SLAVERY PLATE

Activism is abundant in Germantown, and this is nothing new. In 1688, the Germantown Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends put forward the first protest against the enslavement of Africans in the Thirteen Colonies. Quakers believed that all people were equal in the eyes of God; however, not all of them practiced what they preached. Some Quakers were also enslavers.

At Wyck, the Wistar-Haines family was passionate about justice and equality. The family actively supported various social reform movements, including prison reform, education reform, and anti-slavery causes. This plate in the Wyck collection, with its elaborate curved edges, is printed at the center with the “Am I Not a Man and a Brother” symbol of the anti-slavery movement, designed by Josiah Wedgwood. Piled with food the symbol would be obscured. The pleading figure would emerge as one consumed their meal, reminding them of their privilege and the values of their host.

The Wistar-Haines family’s desire for social reform was not unique in Germantown. Down the street, family relatives at the Johnson House used their home as a vital stop on the Underground Railroad. This spirit of social justice is alive in Germantown today.

—*Wyck Historic House, Garden & Farm*

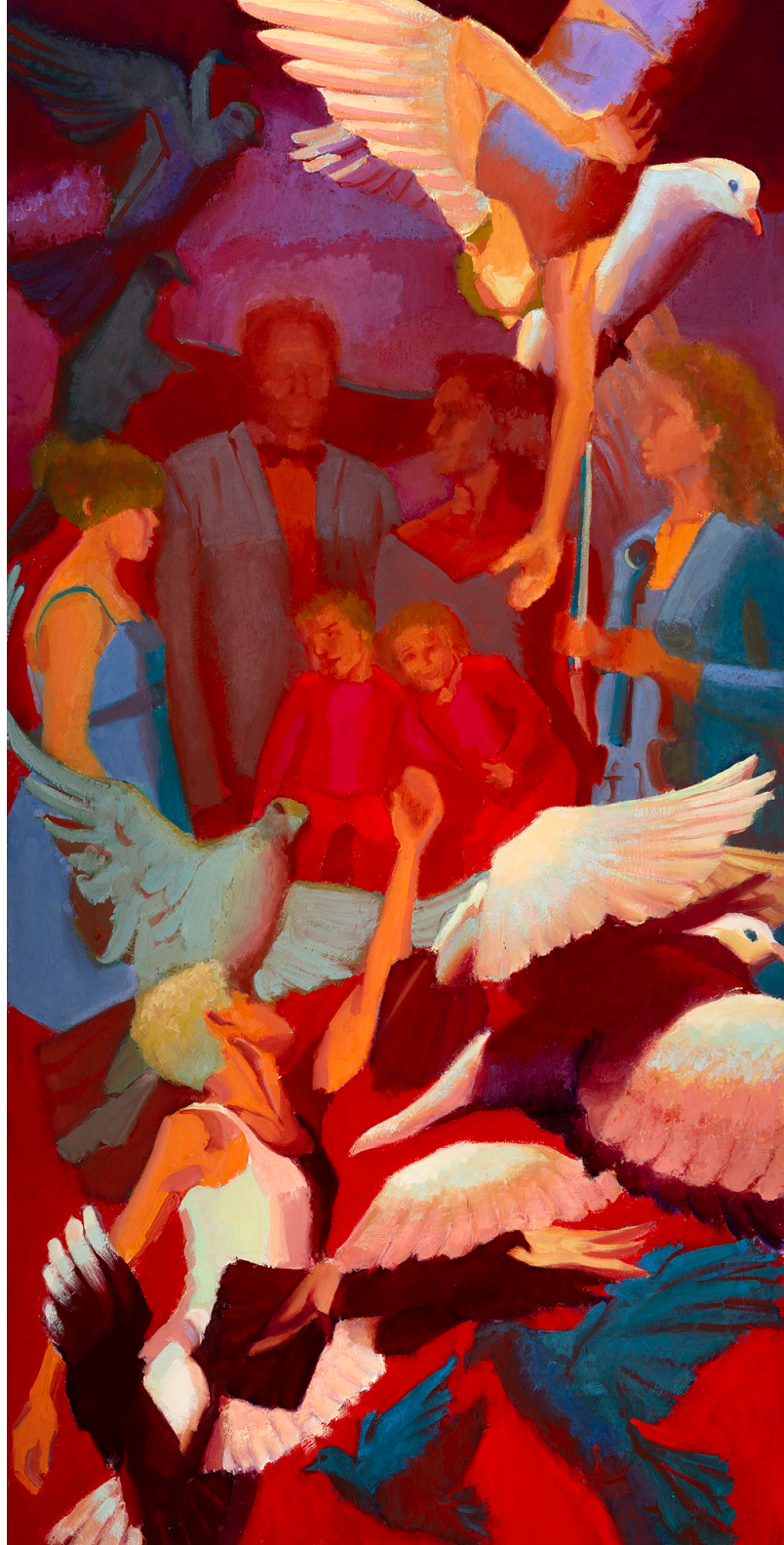


*Anti-slavery plate.
Wyck Collection.*



Festival in Germantown.

Gary Reed



A TRADITION OF ART AND ACTIVISM

As long as I have been here, there have been activists, and the activism has taken many forms. We had people that really rose to the occasion to work with the gangs in the community in the 1960s and 1970s. We've always had a peace community and anti-war activists. We've always had groups of parents and educators fighting for quality public education. We've always had people leading the way in our struggles for racial and gender justice. It goes on and on that way. There are a number of artists who see activism as an important part of their artform. The Germantown Artists Roundtable grew out of a desire to honor and highlight the importance of our artists—a kind of art activism. There is a tradition of activism here; maybe that's true in many communities, but Germantown for sure.

—Paula Paul

MAKING A PICTURE

I happened to be painting landscape on the sidewalk in front of my old apartment one day, and someone walked by who lived in the Greene Street Artists Cooperative. That's how I heard about this building. Eventually I got a live-work loft here, and then I started teaching art in it. So many of the people I have met, I met because I taught them art or did an art project with them. A lot of people meet each other at my studio too—people who have nothing at all in common, except that they want to make a picture. You can't create community, but you can definitely create the conditions for it to be able to grow itself—it's like sourdough starter. You get different kinds of people in a room, and they realize they like being together as much as they like making art.

—Mindy Flexer

*Opposite page:
Mindy Flexer's artwork.*



AN INSPIRING PLACE

I love Germantown. It is a very healing space, and there are a lot of creative people here. I love being able to bring my sketchbook and go out and do walks and runs, and sometimes take photos and use it as inspiration in my artist practice. It is all right there. I have been doing a series of elders living in Germantown—drawings and paintings of people. They tell me so many wonderful stories about their life here. It is such a beautiful neighborhood. It is one of those treasures that people don't really know exists.

—Terrill Kevyn Johnson

A MAKER PLACE

I consider myself a cofounder of the Germantown Artists Roundtable. Years ago we started having monthly gatherings to share resources, and at each of these meetings, an artist would share their work with all of us. Over time it just grew. Everyone was thrilled to discover each other, and the artistic talent and diversity that existed here. We have had many artistic events in the community and now have a weekly radio show called The Creative Voice of Germantown (92.9 FM). We have hundreds of artists living/working in Germantown. Visual, literary, performing artists. We also have at least four buildings filled with artist studios. Everything from fabric design to furniture making to photography to papermaking. It is astounding. We are such a fortunate community to have so many gifted and generous artists as our neighbors.

—Paula Paul

Opposite page:
Terrill Kevyn Johnson's artwork.



FINDING A HUB

My guitar is what has brought me anywhere in my life. It's brought me to all my close friends, all my communities. It has given me a direction in my life. If I didn't have that, I wouldn't be here; I wouldn't be in Philly. I probably would be living on a farm somewhere. It really is the anchor with what I do with my life—how I pursue it.

I felt when I first moved here, there are a lot of artists, and there are a lot of social people and interesting people here, but no one really knows that they are here, because you have your own space and creative zone. We need to build some hubs—culture hubs. I just think it is super healthy to have some creative event that everyone can come to and hang out—have a spot. I am trying to do that now. I have been playing at Milo – The Meeting House, a bar that has a full stage and everything, full sound equipment, and from what I am getting there, it is a really good vibe and good mixture of people, and a lot of artistic appreciators. I think that they do exist, they just need that push.

—Daniel Kaplowitz



Gary Keed

Opposite page:
Daniel Kaplowitz's guitar.



THROUGH THE LENS OF AN ARTIST

I am currently the City of Philadelphia Poet Laureate (2020–21). I am a poet, I am a clinician, I am a social worker, a wife, a daughter, and although not a biological mother, a mother to many in all. And for me, I heard you should not call yourself an activist, and you should let other people call you an activist. When I think of what I stand for, and things that I believe in and work for, it's in that realm. Things like highlighting immigrant issues, women issues, poverty, children, youth. Those are all of the things that surface in my work and in my life, and make up who I am. But no matter what I have done or what I do, it is always with that lens of an artist—how can I contribute to a community, a world, a space in a way that I can leave it better than how I found it.

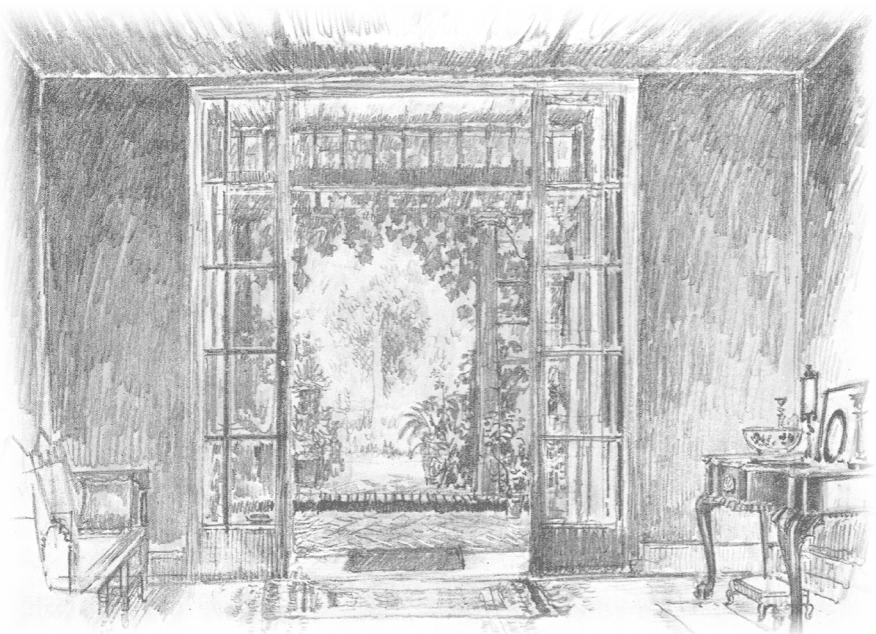
—*Trapeta Mayson*

THE ENERGY OF CREATIVITY

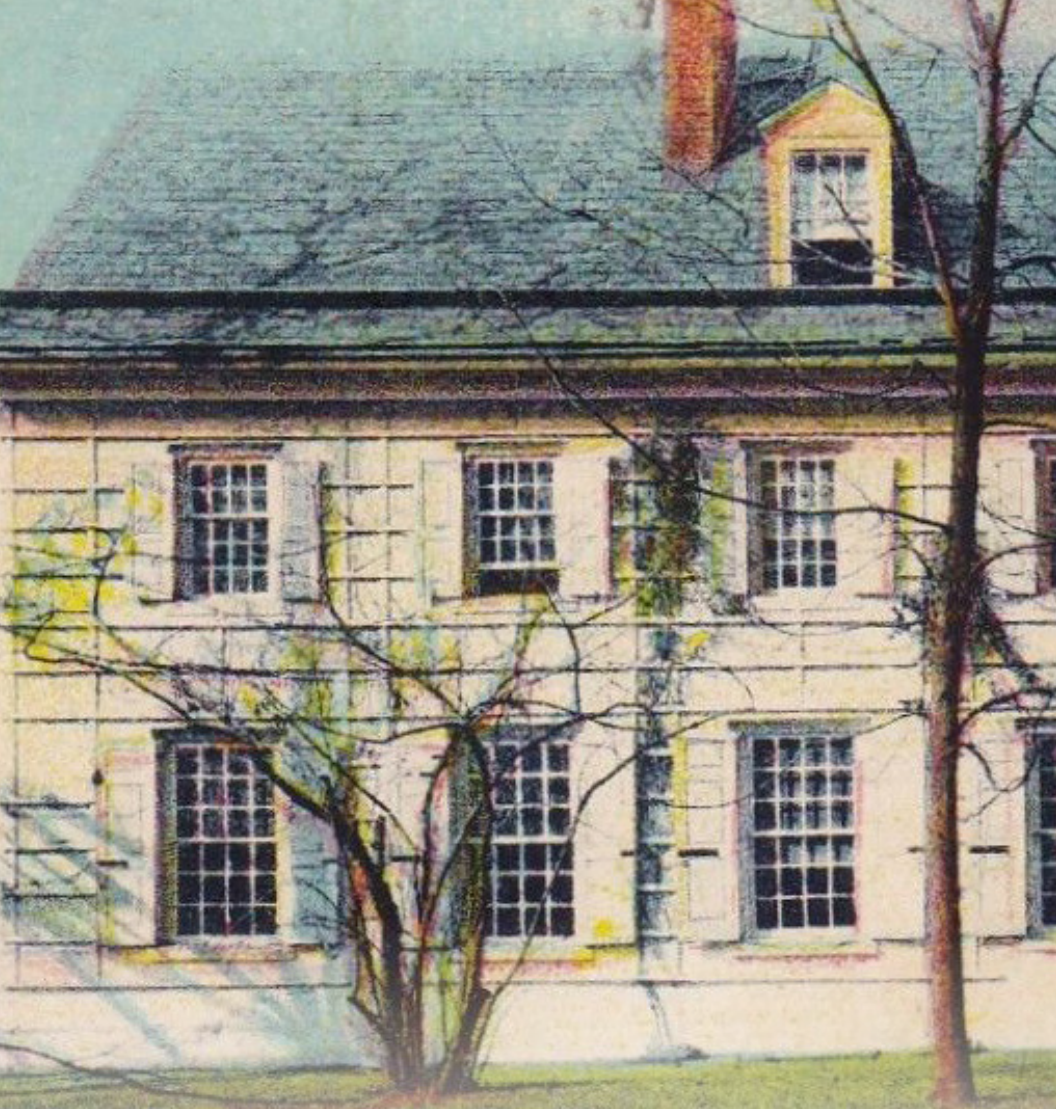
Germantown has supported me as an artist because of the community, and the sisterhood and brotherhood. I live in an artist cooperative, and there are really fine artists, and that energy of them being involved with their work—there are so many artists that are in Germantown that are constantly creating. That just gives you that energy to be able to want and continue to be part of that.

Germantown offers places for respite, peace, calm. At this stage in my life, I am trying to be creative, and get more poems out and more artistic work out. I have to silence some of the other stuff and be able to be open to just the organic beauty that is already here. I look for the peace in the place. This place offers a lot of beauty. If you take advantage of it, it will feed you spiritually; it will feed you artistically. This is a magical place.

—*Trapeta Mayson*



"WYCK The doorway from within," Joseph Pennell, lithograph in Our Philadelphia, 1914.



WYCK

HISTORIC HOUSE | GARDEN | FARM



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