

# A Home Called Serenity

by Stephen Wahrhaftig, Historical Commissioner

Nearly 250 years ago a stone house was built in Westtown and is still standing and lived in by a couple dedicated to preserving this historic property. It was completed between 1781 and 1783 by members of the prominent local Darlington family, Thomas, and Hannah. The current owners, Craig and Mary Harlyvetch, bought it in 2000. Their name for the house is Serenity, named on a plaque beside the front door.

Located at 203 Oakbourne Road, "Serenity", was originally a one-room structure and cellar. When Craig and Mary moved in, the basement had the original dirt floor. Researching this historic property, the Harlyvetches learned how the house had been enlarged over the centuries. A dining room (now the family room) was added around 1800; the laundry room, built over an old cistern, was added around the same time.

The current kitchen was added around 1900. When members of the Westtown Historical Commission visited Serenity recently, Mary told us, "We think we have found evidence of an old 'beehive' oven in the cellar, which had long-since collapsed." She showed us the possible wall outline of the old oven.

Craig and Mary spent years carefully restoring the property, taking care to preserve original materials, designs, and looks. Sometimes they had custom hardware created to maintain the authentic feel of this historic building. Rooms that had been illuminated by gas lamps, old plaster walls, and wooden joists that had been damaged by fire all needed renewal. In the cellar, they removed the long-unused coal bins.

Several rooms still have their original chestnut flooring. Other floors were renovated using beautiful, reclaimed wood. The couple themselves did as much of the work as possible and brought in professional help when required. Sagging floors were made safe, and old plaster was repaired and painted in authentic period colors.

During the decades of renovation, they uncovered many artifacts of historic interest. These objects were cleaned and handsomely displayed in a glass-topped table in the dining room. This mini-museum features crockery, coins, and marbles. Most interesting is a perfectly preserved glass patent medicine bottle that once contained, among other ingredients, the opioid laudanum.

Serenity still contains its share of unsolved mysteries. Nooks built into the cellar walls might have held colonial-era candles. The 2nd floor rooms are built at different floor heights, while a bedroom door hides a steep stair that mysteriously leads nowhere anymore.

The members of the Commission who visited Serenity were amazed at the dedication and care taken by the Harlyvetches to restore this property with as much authenticity as possible. The home has a wealth of amenities including a potting shed and several flower gardens. The yard features 13 raised beds protected by a custom fence inspired by a Williamstown visit. The couple also maintain an extensive history of the property, including a list of owners from the 1700s until today. Based on our visit, the Historical Commission is pleased to announce that Mary and Craig will be given the 2023 Good Steward Award for historic preservation. The award will be presented at Westtown Day on Sunday, Oct. 8th at Oakbourne Park.



Craig & Mary Harlyvetch



Artifacts found on the property

Nov

04

## 10:00 AM | Township Building History Talk - Camp Elder/Camp Parole

David Walter of the Historical Commission will discuss the curious history of Camp Elder, where nearly 2,000 Civil War Union prisoners of the Confederacy were housed in Westtown in 1863.

We would like to invite all Westtown residents to the free talk, which will last about an hour. We expect to have the presentation available on YouTube as well.