Jacob Vernon Farmstead
The Terraces
The Glen Mills School
Glen Mills Road
Thornbury Township
Delaware County
HR #106

Mary Sue Boyle and Company LLC
West Chester, PA
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The tax parcel numbers recorded for the Thornbury Historic Resource Inventory for this resource were not sufficient and do not link to the parcel. Due to fire, the original tax parcel records have been lost. The parcel chain of title ownership has been created with sufficient anecdotal information to accurately portray ownership from the Penn Patent to the acquisition of the property by The Glen Mills School.

**Ownership Chronology**

June 22, 1709 a tract of 500 acres is patented to Jacob Vernon. The parcel was part of the original 5000 acre Patent belonging to John Simcock, land speculator from Philadelphia, received from William Penn on March 15-16, 1681. 1500 acres were surveyed in 1684 and then partitioned to Randall Vernon December 12th 1699. In 1709 the 500 acre parcel was divided, giving 250 acres to Jacob on the southern portion and 250 acres to Abraham on northern portion; both sons of Randall Vernon of Middletown.

1848 Ash Map of Thornbury shows James Hickman owner of the Jacob Vernon parcel 130 years after Jacob took possession. The parcel had acreage partitioned off of the 250 acres to three other property owners, each with a messuage.

1875 Atlas of Thornbury shows a J. F. Smedley owner of 126 acres.

1870 Map of Thornbury shows Jesse F. Smedley owner, no acreage recorded.

1892 Map of Thornbury shows Jesse F. Smedley owner, with 125 acres. The Glen Mills School is noted as House of Refuge with 385 acres adjoining the Smedley farmstead.

1911 Atlas of Thornbury shows The Glen Mills School as owner of the parcel, with a total of 535 acres comprising the campus.

2017 the property is still under ownership of The Glen Mills School.
Anecdotal History of Property Owners of Jacob Vernon Farmstead

Randall Vernon and wife Sarah Bradshaw, resided in Nether Providence at the time of his death in 1715. He and his wife came from Sandyway, Cheshire, England. Randall, along with George Peirce, Isaac Taylor, and others, were charged with laying out several roads in the area by the courts in 1700.

Court records of 1693 note Randolph (Actually Randall) Vernon’s significance in several Chester Court trials, one saving a slave girl form a master that beat her; Vernon was charged with finding a kinder master for the slave. He served on the jury in the Provincial Court in Chester in 1683 with 3 others by the last name of Vernon. The presiding judge was John Simcock. Arnoldus Delagrange claimed ownership of Tinicum Island, as it was purchased from Armgard Prince of Sweden. Armgard Prince was not fully paid. The Plaintiff challenged Otto Ernest Cock on validity of title. The plaintiff was a child at the time of partial payment to Armgard; but later learned his father owned the land. The jury found for the Plaintiff, Delagrange, as no records of other payments could be proven.

At Randall Vernon’s death his entire estate was left to son Jacob, which included his 500 acres in Thornbury Township. Jacob was born 1678 in Cheshire, England. He married Elizabeth Anne Yearsley May 26, 1701 in Chester County. They had 12 children. Jacob was a signer of the 1732 letter to King George II petitioning the king to remain firm in supporting the boundary between Lord Baltimore’s lands and crown lands of Pennsylvania. The unrest continued for quite some time and over 50 farm owners were turned out of their houses during the dispute with the Governor of Maryland.

Jacob was listed in the 1715 Thornbury tax list, and noted again in 1735 tax list with Elizabeth as well as his son Abraham. In 1737 3rd month, second day Jacob was complained in meeting for going with Francis Hickman to Philadelphia where Francis went to get married by a priest.

Jacob died May 5th, 1740 in Thornbury Township. Jacob and his wife most likely built the farmhouse circa 1740. In his will of June 5th, 1740 he leaves to son Jacob, Jr 150 acres. To his wife he leaves 150 acres with messuage and tenement; 50 acres purchased from Richard Arnold, and 100 acres which was part of the 500 initial family parcel. Son Abraham received 150 acres of his mother’s land. His estate was a total of 550 acres. Caleb Peirce was executor of the will.

Jacob Vernon, Jr who was born Sept. 27th, 1708 in Thornbury, married Elizabeth Woodward Hickman Cheyney, widow of Thomas Cheyney (not Squire,
he was son of Squires’ brother) who died in 1722. They had seven children. Son Jacob III married Persifor Frazer’s sister, Sarah Frazer. Jacob III’s brother, Joshua, married Persifor Frazer’s sister, Anne.

Quaker Jacob III did not enlist in the Continental Army to serve during the Revolution but assisted Persifor Frazer during the Brandywine Battle. The day of the battle, Persifor’s wife, Mary Taylor Frazer, sent their children to Sarah and Jacob’s house for safety, as they rightly anticipated the arrival of British Troops at the Frazer home. Jacob rode out with Persifor the same day to Concord Township and when Persifor was captured and sent to prison in Philadelphia. Jacob was captured as well but was released when the British noted he was not enlisted with the troops.

In later years, Persifor Frazer, in his will, leaves his mother’s china of 1 dozen plates to his sisters, Sarah Vernon and Ann Vernon. In 1787 Jacob Vernon dies without a will.

Jacob’s sister, Mary, married the Squire Thomas Cheyney in 1769. Their daughter, Elizabeth Cheyney, born 1771 and died 1847; married James Hickman, born 1776 and died 1855. They inherited or purchased the Vernon farmstead (Ash Map 1848 show James Hickman). James is shown on Thornbury Census record of 1850 at 76 years of age, widowed and living with son James and wife, Susan Hickman and their 8 children, 3 laborers and Elizabeth Wise aged 80, mother of Susan. 1855 James Hickman the elder, dies in testate and son executes the estate, paying a fee of $500.00.

In 1856 James Hickman exhibited at the Pennsylvania Agricultural Society Show and won second premium for this 6 sheep and third premium for his 11 pigs. Little is found of these two generations of the Hickman family other than their descendants that settled Westtown and married into the Cheyney family. James Hickman died in 1868 and he probably held title to the farm at the time of his death.

In 1870 Jesse F. Smedley is noted on the Thornbury Atlas as well as the census of 1870. The author found no familial connection between Hickmans and Smedleys. In 1870 Jesse, wife Ellen and their 4 children, as well as brothers Franklin, George and Jesse were living on the farmstead. The 1886 US Tax Assessment lists Jesse’s business as cattle and maintained a Middletown post office box.
The Smedley family originated in Darby in the early 1680’s and remained in Willistown, Middletown, Thornbury and East Goshen. In 1886 Jesse ran unsuccessfully for Delaware County Commissioner. Jesse Smedley died in 1906 in Middletown, having moved there in 1880, leaving family to run the farm. His will directed his executor to sell at auction all real estate. He provided monies to family members but no land transfers. On April 10th, 1910 a news clipping notes “the pretty country place of Jesse Smedley at Village Green,” (a Thornbury Post Office address) near Chester, was destroyed by fire of unknown origin. The house had been unoccupied for some time and the loss was estimated at $7,000, partially insured.

The 1892 Map shows the House of Refuge, 385 acres, adjoining the Smedley property of 125 acres. In 1826 the House of Refuge was incorporated in Philadelphia. In 1892 the school relocated to its current location in Glen Mills, Thornbury Township as demonstrated on the Thornbury 1892 map. One would surmise that the school purchased the farmstead from the estate of Jesse F. Smedley at some point between 1906 and 1911. The Thornbury Atlas of 1911 illustrates the school ownership of the Vernon farmstead. In 1911 the name of the school was changed to The Glen Mills School. The school has served troubled youth for over 190 years. There are extensive records of the school in the Glen Mills School library and archives. This author met with a representative of the school and he noted that the records for the sale of this property were destroyed by fire on campus in the 1950s. The anecdotal history is compiled through factual records of ownership and genealogical research. We were not able to generate a plot history due to lack of metes and bounds derived from title transfers of ownership.

**Jacob Vernon Farmstead Architectural Chronology**

Ownership of the lands comprising the farmstead are documented back to 1709 when the sons Jacob and Abraham Vernon receive lands from Randall Vernon. Jacob Vernon is taxed beginning in 1715 until 1748. His widow, Elizabeth is then taxed on the land until 1785 when the Vernon name no longer appears on tax records. In 1764 widow Elizabeth is taxed on a Dwelling and 72 acres as well as John Hickman with 118 acres and dwelling. This confirms a dwelling circa 1740’s as described, due to the family being in place in Thornbury. The 1798 Glass Tax notes two properties owned by Vernon Family. First is Wm. Vernon: 1 Stone House 22 x 18 ft. Stone Kitchen 24 x 16 and Log Springhouse 14
x 12 ft. The house was 2 storey, with 6 windows and total of 15 window lights. The second, Heirs of Joshua Vernon, was occupied by Ann Vernon. The house is Stone and Log 48 x 18 ft. two storey with 12 windows and 12 lights and a Stone Kitchen 16 ft. square. Both properties are on the Chester Road.

These two properties are from the division of the 500 acres. So we have a good description of their materials and size. Joshua Vernon owned the lands to the north and his widow was Anne Frazer Vernon. Jacob owned the lands to the south and the lands were probably in son William Jacob’s ownership at the time of the Glass Tax.

In 1798 there was a stone house, stone kitchen and log springhouse. The farmhouse faces south west, but will refer to the front façade as south and so on, for simplicity of architectural description. Viewing the front façade it is apparent that the eastern portion is the earliest structure and was a simple two bay, two storey stone house. In the basement of this section, there is a fireplace with log lintel; not a fireplace support as seen elsewhere in the basement. To the west of the core structure is a three bay addition which is actually in-fill which matches the core construction; an obvious break in the stonework front and back of the structure notes such. To the west is a small addition to the main house. This “addition” was the original stone kitchen which was later incorporated into the main structure by in-fill construction. Another storey has been added to the original kitchen and the fireplace system removed. Later dormers are added to the front roof line. A shed roof porch runs the southern façade of the house and wraps around to incorporate the entrance to the kitchen to the west. The design of the structures remains a true Georgian vernacular stone farm house construction. The fireplace/chimney system on the original core’s east wall has been removed. A later fireplace/chimney system was built in the infill addition to the core and appears as a center chimney. An arched fireplace support in the basement exists under this system, as noted in the photos. On the north façade of the house a tower was added, most likely in the mid 1800’s for a water pump system for the farmstead. The tower has been modified, all machinery has been removed and a fireproof staircase has been built in the interior, giving access to second floor apartments.

As noted in 1909 the house burnt and was considered a total loss. The interior was gutted and the structure was modified into 5 apartments for employees of The Glen Mills School. The basement speaks of the early history of the house. The upper floors do not.
A parking area to the north west of the property leads to the stucco over stone entrance walls with gates to the west; which open on to the original north south road, now abandoned. The walls hold a metal plaque “The Terraces, Number 17” and another stone plaque noting “Built by Family Number 17 1911” located at the entrance to the house.

To the west of the gates, across the road is a small stone early English barn, most likely a granary, with early hand hewn beam construction. The doors open to the south. On the eastern interior wall is an elevated loft for hay or grain storage. It was noted by the representative of the school that in this area there had been large hog pens. The school had farmed the land as part of the curriculum for the students which made the school self-sufficient for food, as well as providing marketable product for income.

Down the road to the south west of the barn is a partial brick structure completely over grown. One could not access to determine what the structure had been at one time. As the tax parcel maps note, there were several agricultural outbuildings on the property over the centuries of farming conducted on this land. There remains a large spring house located on the south side of Glen Mills road that has been attributed to the farmstead and has been restored by the township.

The stucco over stone wall runs north and south of the house entrance. In some areas the wall is over grown but the outline apparent. There had been hinge pinned gates on the entrance to the house and at the northern end of the wall, the iron pins are still seen jutting from the wall. The view to the south and north of the main house is breathtaking open farmlands, remaining much the same as the view was in the late 1600’s when the Vernon family cleared for farming. The farmstead has fed the nation through the Revolutionary War, World War I and II and sustained a community of youth therapeutically, a wonderful contribution to the history of Thornbury Township.
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Barbara Rutz, Title search and wills research and plotting

Ancestry.com

Interview and tour with Donald A. McNeal, Director of Support Services, The Glen Mills Schools.