

## The Pickering Reservoir

By Dr. John Lukacs

### (Part 5 of a series of Articles)

Pickering is a small town in the East Riding of Yorkshire in England. (Until very recently, Yorkshire was the only county in England divided into a West, East and North Riding. The word "Riding" derives from the extent of the county that a rider of the King's Justice could cover within a certain time. (A variation of this term exists until this day in the American usage of a Circuit Court.) I could not ascertain whether Charles Pickering was born in Yorkshire. In any event, few of Schuylkill Township's earliest settlers had come from the East Riding of Yorkshire. Yet, by an interesting coincidence, one or two of them had- the Schofield and the Walmsley families who were related to the Andersons, the very first white settlers.

Charles Pickering was a friend and associate of William Penn. Shortly after their arrival in what would soon become Philadelphia, Pickering trekked up the Schuylkill (meaning in Dutch: Hidden River) valley. Around what would be the western end of the present Township he thought he had discovered marks of silver in the ground. He reported this to Penn who gave him a charter for several hundred acres, along the present creek that carries Pickering's name. Pickering then allied himself with another Penn immigrant from England, Tinker, who knew something about mining. (His name lives on in Tinker Hill and Tinker Hill Road, on the southwestern edge of the Township).\* Pickering was there after being wrongly accused by a group of jealous Quakers in Philadelphia of illegally mining and counterfeiting silver coinage. He paid a large fine and was acquitted. He was an honorable man who came to a sad end: on his return to England his ship founded and he was drowned. He seems to have had no direct heirs, and his chartered land, Tract, was divided between sixteen known as the Pickering friends of his in Philadelphia. Whether Timothy Pickering, George Washington's Secretary of State, was a lateral descendant of Charles, I could not ascertain.

There are three other names in the that relate to Pickering. A portion of his "Charlestown", the name of the present Schuylkill was a part before 1827. from the Manavon Tract (an Indian name), granted to other people on the north side of the Pickering Creek. There is also the Pickering Schoolhouse, donated by the Andersons to the Township in 1840 (which the present writer rebuilt and where he lived from 1955 to 1984). For awhile people called the Pickering Tract the Mine Hole Tract, because around Williams' Corner mining for lead and other minerals went on intermittently throughout the late 18th & 19th centuries.

When the British army (General Howe) chased Washington's troops north after the Battle of Brandywine and the Battle of the Clouds (near the present Immaculata College), a large portion of it forded the Pickering at the end of a dirt road through Anderson Farm which still exists. This was one of three westernmost points where the British appeared in the Middle Colonies.

The creek continued to flow through beautiful and unspoiled lands for a long time. A primitive version of the present bridge at White Horse Road existed for many years. At a point where the creek had begun to widen, the present Pothouse Road (now ending at White Horse Road) reached it and a stone bridge crossed the creek leading towards Valley Forge. The pillars of that bridge still stand. Further north, at an inlet, a descendant of the Reeves family (founders of Phoenixville and the Iron Company) built a beautiful house in 1914, crossing the inlet on an elegant wooden bridge that unfortunately no longer exists.

In 1928 the Philadelphia Suburban Water Company built a dam at the northern reach of the creek, opposite Moore Hall, along Route 23. The company also bought a continuous strip of land, approximately 50 feet wide, from landowners along the creek east of the White Horse Bridge. Thereafter, a sheet of water came



history of our Township tract carried his name, township, of which Manavon Street derives

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into existence, many times wider than the original Pickering Creek. Along its western end, the Pickering Reservoir has now silted up considerably, forming large islands, which the company plans to dredge.

\*Footnote: In Ireland a “tinker” is a gypsy. This Tinker was an Englishman.

*Dr. Lukacs, a retired Professor of history, Pulitzer Prize nominee, author of 22 books, is a 35-year plus member of the township Planning Commission.*

*The Township will continue to run this series of articles on various points of interest throughout the Township. Submittals are welcome for upcoming newsletters. Please submit articles to the Township Secretary.*