

## Preface

Established in 1738, Charlestown Township is a small portion of approximately 45,000 square miles of land granted to William Penn by King Charles II. Located about 35 miles west of Philadelphia and originally bordering the Schuylkill River, Charlestown Township was reduced to approximately 8,000 acres in 1826 through subdivisions separating out what is now the Borough of Phoenixville and Schuylkill Township. The name “Charlestown” honors Charles Pickering, a friend to whom William Penn granted land along a creek subsequently named Pickering Creek.

The Charlestown Historical Society was established in 1973 as a non-profit, non-political organization whose aim was and is to provide future generations with a small "window on the past" - showing through artifacts, records and writings what life was like in this quiet farming community in the 19th Century. The society's goal of publishing a history of Charlestown Township is long-standing, and the publishing of Harman Rees's 1943 manuscript *Historical Sketches of Charlestown Township* is a step toward that goal.

Harman D. Rees (1873 – 1964) was born on March 27, 1873 in Mont Clare, PA, across the Schuylkill River from Phoenixville. Harman's father was in the coal and lumber business. Shortly after Harman's birth the family moved to Phoenixville. When 15 years of age his father hired him to Mr. John Conway who had a greenhouse and florist business in Phoenixville. Mr. Conway sold the business because of poor health in the fall of 1889.

In 1890 the Rees family moved to a farm in Charlestown Township where Harman remained for 18 years as a farm hand. In the spring of 1908 Mr. Rees married Mary Jacobs, and purchased the farm, which was the family homestead. Here he farmed for 19 years. In 1927 he sold the farm and moved to a home nearby. Mr. Rees served on the school board of the township for 28 years, a period during which several one-room schools in the township were consolidated. Mr. Rees also served for many years on the township's board of supervisors and as roadmaster, his total service in township administrative positions totaling 52 years. Mr. Rees's many other contributions to the community through the Grange and other affiliations are chronicled in his biography, which follows this Preface. Many people who have read his *Historical Sketches of Charlestown Township* believe his 1943 manuscript to be Harman Rees's most enduring and endearing contribution to residents of Charlestown Township. Harman Rees died January 1, 1964.

There is ample proof from his own writings that the spelling of Mr. Rees's first name is “Harman”. However, it was common for others tasked with writing his name to spell his name “Harmon”. (Less frequently his last name was misspelled “Reese”.) Readers of this publication will find many exhibits provided by Mr. Rees in his original manuscript that include his name spelled “Harmon”. One of the most glaring examples of this is in his biography written at the time of his retirement from township service. The biography is typed on township letterhead, in the heading of which both his first and last names are misspelled – “Harmon D. Reese”. The very first words of the biography below the heading are “Harman D. Rees has served...”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Even at the end of his life the mistaken spelling was common. Mr. Rees's death certificate spells his name “Harmon”. His tombstone spells his name correctly as “Harman”.

One cannot help but be impressed with Harman Rees's approach to writing such a lengthy manuscript encompassing so many aspects of local history spanning more than a century. Given the original document was a bound book with pre-numbered pages, the author had no opportunity for rearranging his thoughts or altering the organization of his material after the fact. Mr. Rees must have devoted a considerable amount of time and thought outlining the structure of the book before he began writing.

Harman Rees's manuscript offered many challenges to the Charlestown Historical Society in the organization's efforts to publish the document. Mr. Rees wrote the original text in script in a bound, legal-size book with lined, pre-numbered pages, often writing from edge to edge, ignoring the pre-printed margins. His writing instrument was the lead pencil, supplemented in his many hand-drawn maps and sketches with red and blue pencils. Interpretation of his handwriting was hampered by, among other things, the yellowing of the paper with age, offering low contrast with the gray impression from the use of pencil.

Additional challenges to those reading the original manuscript are presented by Mr. Rees's concept of the rules of punctuation, grammar, spelling and capitalization, combined with a lack of standardization of these elements of his writing. It was not uncommon for him to leave out commas and periods and to begin a word in mid-sentence with a capital letter. While his handwriting was quite good, there were many instances where the reader could easily interpret Mr. Rees's script in different ways. Much as his own name was misspelled by others, Mr. Rees was sometimes inconsistent in the spelling of individuals' names in his manuscript. For example, he would often refer to the family name "Manovan" as "Monavon".

A very different challenge in publishing Mr. Rees's manuscript was the accuracy of his statements. There are a few instances where he contradicts himself, generally having to do with the date of events. More significant, however, is the inability in terms of time and available resources (including independent confirmations) for the Charlestown Historical Society to authenticate every statement made by Mr. Rees.

After a great deal of discussion, the Society chose to print the manuscript essentially "as-is", but to use various notational instruments to correct or clarify inaccuracies and misconceptions as they were identified by reviewers of the work in progress. Guidelines were established for addressing problems in the manuscript. Specifically –

- Misspelled words are left misspelled, but the correct spellings are presented in square brackets immediately following the misspelled words.
- Missing words are inserted in square brackets.
- Missing periods at the end of sentences have been inserted, mostly without brackets.
- Known inaccuracies are clarified via page footnotes. Mr. Rees's text itself is not altered. Footnotes are numbered independently for each page, starting at "1" for the first footnote on a page.
- Confusing sections of text are clarified via page footnotes. Mr. Rees's text itself is not altered.

Given the limited resources available for the publication of Mr. Rees's manuscript, it is important for the reader to understand the following disclaimers -

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- This publication presents the work of one man who drew on resources available to him at the time, including previously published or otherwise written material and most importantly, his own perception of local history as represented by his memory and what he had been told by others. The Charlestown Historical Society takes no responsibility for inaccuracies, whether insignificant or profound.
- No claim is made by the Charlestown Historical Society that all misspelled words, including names, are identified and corrected.
- No claim is made by the Charlestown Historical Society that clarifications in footnotes are complete and accurate.

This publication contains a wide variety of images. Harman Rees himself inserted materials ranging from his own hand-drawn maps and sketches to photographs, newspaper clippings, booklets and bulletins. Mr. Rees's many maps are drawn directly on the pages with his corresponding text. Other materials Mr. Rees pasted in the book in line with his hand-written script. In some instances, the images illustrate something he had written about many pages prior. These images vary widely in quality. Some were of poor quality at the time he wrote the manuscript, while others were adversely affected by the passage of time.

In preparing materials for this publication, all images in the original manuscript were digitally scanned in color. In most cases, scanned images that were originally monochrome (black and white or shades of gray) were converted to true grayscale, removing the sepia tone that crept in with age and reducing the cost of printing the publication. Many of these gray images were newspaper clippings, correspondence or printed matter from other books and materials. In a few cases, these tinted black and white images were left in color. The sepia tone is apparent in these images.

Other images were not originally monochrome. When drawing maps in the manuscript, Mr. Rees often used a red or blue pencil to highlight an attribute of the map. All of these maps are reproduced in color in this publication. Other images reproduced in color are color illustrations or photographs from books or magazines that Mr. Rees inserted in-line with his hand-written text.

In producing this publication, none of the images from Harman Rees's original manuscript are captioned or assigned a figure number by the Charlestown Historical Society. This is in contrast to images from various sources included by the Charlestown Historical Society as supplementary material. These images comprise mostly old photographs of scenes in the township and images of paintings of scenes in the township. Several of these supplementary images are from the Society's archives. These supplementary images, not part of Mr. Rees's original document, and not part of contributed articles in the *Additional Sketches* section, are captioned, assigned a figure number, and listed in the "Table of Figures", immediately following the "Table of Contents" of this publication.

Supplementary images appear in two types of places. Many appear in otherwise blank space at the end of chapters in the Rees manuscript. Others appear in the special section *Scenes of Charlestown*, immediately following Mr. Rees's manuscript.

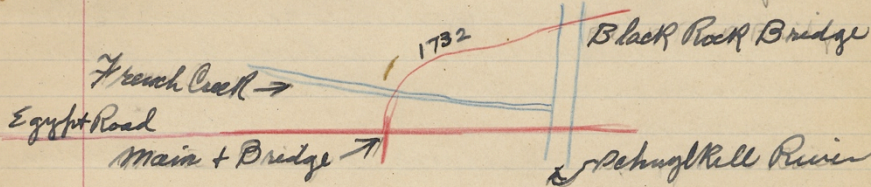
As noted above, Harman Rees's *Historical Sketches of Charlestown Township* is one man's interpretation of the history of Charlestown Township. The Charlestown Historical

Society elected to incorporate a section titled *Additional Sketches* in this publication of Mr. Rees's manuscript. The purpose of the *Additional Sketches* section is to clarify and expand upon a number of aspects of the manuscript based on memories of residents living at the time of publication and upon other materials available today for those who are willing to "dig" for information. As a result, this publication includes a series of 38 brief, illustrated articles written by current members of our community about multi-generation Charlestown families, events occurring in Charlestown history, and other memories and aspects of life in the township. Many of the people and topics discussed in *Additional Sketches* are cross-referenced with Mr. Rees's manuscript through footnotes.

Harman Rees provides a great deal of detail in some sections of his *Historical Sketches of Charlestown Township*. Specifically, Mr. Rees identifies an incredible number of individuals by name. Knowing that a publication such as this may be of interest to persons researching their own family history as well as historians focusing on southeastern Pennsylvania, the Charlestown Historical Society made the effort to provide a comprehensive index for Mr. Rees's manuscript. While undoubtedly less than 100% complete, the Index includes (almost) all individuals listed alphabetically by last name, as well as many place-names and topics of interest to the reader. The Index also includes entries from all of the sketches in the *Additional Sketches* section. Together with the Table of Contents, this publication is "research-friendly" for those looking for specific information and not reading the book from beginning to end.

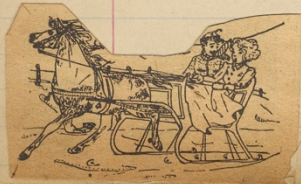
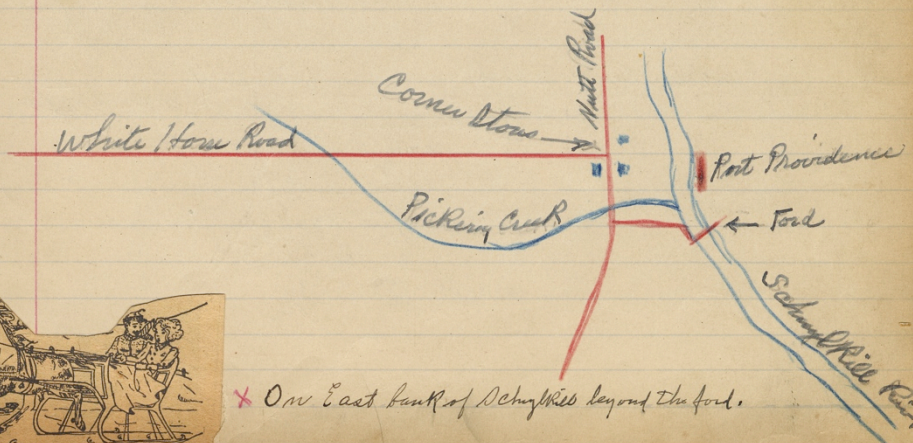
The following two pages illustrate samples of Harman Rees's manuscript. Needless to say, it was an adventure involving many hours of work by many dedicated people to convert approximately 200 pages similar to the following into the publication you hold in your hands.

The road from main + Bridge Sta. in Phoenixville to Black Rock was laid out 1732. It was along this road that Joseph stow built his home and mill ~~two~~ <sup>one</sup> year later. The road forded the Schuylkill at Black Rock till 1859 when an inter county bridge was built.



The White Horse Road also known as Longford road also as More Hall Road was originally laid out as an accomodation for the people an access to the fisheries on the Schuylkill the days of building the Schuylkill Canal was brought from Chester and Canal building. This was in 1825 and a road was laid out as a continuation of Horse road to the Schuylkill but it for Road to where it crossed Pickering creek said Creek to a ford on the Schuylkill below where Pickering empties into the a Canal freighting Sta. was located just below the village. 1758 known as Jacob Lumberville, then Post Providence, there and 3 or 4 houses till the Canal was built. a thriving village and a number houses were built, a dry dock was built and Canal boats were built and repaired here. also an important freight station

This sample page from Mr. Rees's manuscript (corresponding to portions of pages 20 and 21 of this publication) exemplifies his handwriting, edge to edge, as well as his own "in-line" color drawings of maps, and finally his propensity to paste images into the manuscript as shown by the horse and sleigh at the bottom left corner.





St Peter was the Center of direction during the Campaign in the valley before and after the Paoli Massacre. Its Commanding position on the hill makes it visible for miles up and down the valley. It has weathered many a storm but it still holds its head above the tree top as a beacon of Eternal Life.

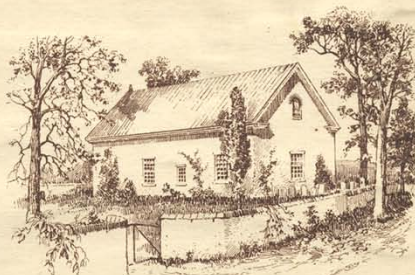


The original congregation \* of St Peter's Church in the Great Valley held its first services in a log church built about \*\*\*

1700



1744



1856



St Peter was in plain view rode to the Army hospital over It no doubt reminded him of Treuro Parish where he first vestryman for 22 years, and as Mrs Washington worshiped at the banks of the Occoquan River Washington was a devoted missed Church, wither at home and many old churches host attended its services.

Of the families from Charciated with St Peter, some of Wm Moore, Patrick Anderson, B Little, Nathan McVeigh, Jacob

This page again exemplifies Harman Rees's making use of every square inch of the page as well as one of his methods of attaching clippings in-line with his handwritten text. Several other images in his manuscript are attached with the aid of postage stamps in the corners.

This page corresponds to portions of pages 57 and 58 in this publication.