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# 01 Transcribing the Everhart Deed

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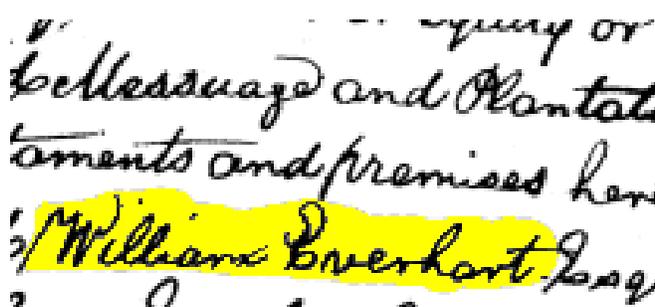
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## ***Transcribing the Everhart Deed***

By Jim Jones

When many people think about history, they think about famous documents like the Declaration of Independence, Gettysburg Address, or various treaties, surrender papers and military orders issued over the years. Although not as famous as any of those, there are a number of documents associated with crucial moments in the history of West Chester. In 1788, the state issued a charter that still exists -- Borough Council member Bill Scott was instrumental in bringing it to the Borough for display during the 1999 Bicentennial. More recently, Judge John Stively's 1987 decision that at-large council elections were unconstitutional changed the way Borough government operated.



... or  
Bellesuage and Plantations  
and premises here  
of William Everhart Esq

Although it's not as well known, the 1829 deed of sale of William Wollerton's farm to William Everhart was probably just as significant in the history of West Chester. That sale enabled shopkeeper William Everhart to create building lots on 102 acres of open farmland next to the town, and sparked the first major expansion of the town since it was founded in 1799. The transaction also made Everhart a rich man, enabling him to dabble in local politics and even serve a term in the state legislature. It may have also stimulated other men of wealth to invest in the West Chester Railroad, which arrived in 1832, and it inspired other investors to build houses and start industries that laid the foundation for the Borough's transition from market town to manufacturing town. Within ten years the town's population more than doubled, and it continued to grow rapidly for decades afterwards.

Historians describe the Everhart Tract as the land west of Church Street and south of Market Street (although it was called South Street at the time). At the time of Everhart's purchase, West Chester consisted of the crossroads at Gay and High Street plus four blocks surrounding it. Church and Market Streets formed the western and southern boundaries of the town respectively (Chestnut and Walnut Streets framed the other two sides). Although a few people had constructed buildings on lots lining the Wilmington Road (High Street) and the road to Jefferis' Ford (Gay Street), the town was overwhelmingly rural and surrounded by farms.

Wollerton's farm lay southwest of town. He acquired most of it -- just over one hundred acres -- from John Rankin in 1808. According to Douglas Harper, he tried to sell it in 1817 and in 1818 without success, but in 1828, his agent William Work convinced a storeowner named "William Everhart, Esquire" to take it. [see Harper, West Chester to 1865: That Elegant & Notorious Place (West Chester: Chester County Historical Society, 1999), 308.]

Harper called Everhart "the consummate West Chester outsider." He was born in West Vincent, ran stores there and in Tredyffrin, West Whiteland and West Goshen before buying a store on Gay Street in 1824. By then, he was no longer a complete outsider because he married Hannah Matlack, the granddaughter of one of the Borough's first farmers, in 1814. His adopted community was still dominated by families who had been in the area for nearly a century, however, so Everhart had to make his own fortune.

By 1829, he had earned enough from his store to finance the purchase of the Wollerton farm on February 19, 1829. The deed was recorded in Chester County Deed Book B 4 on pages 135-137, and the original is still in the collection of the Chester County Archives on Westtown Road. A microfilm copy is available for public inspection which gives the sales price, the history of Wollerton's purchases, the surveyor's description of the property and a list of witnesses to the transaction.

The deed is handwritten in early 19th century Pennsylvania legalese, so it is not easy to read. If the following example were translated into simple, modern English, it would say that Everhart got all of the rights to Wollerton's land by paying him and his wife \$16,000. In fact, it reads:

*Now this Indenture witnesseth that the said William Wollerton and Rebecca his wife, for and in consideration of the sum of sixteen thousand Dollars lawful money of the United States to them in hand, well and truly paid by the said William Everhart, Esquire, at and before the unsealing and delivery here of the Receipt whereof they do hereby acknowledge, and thereof acquit, exonerate and forever discharge the said William Everhart, Esquire, his heirs, executors, and Administrators, by these presents have granted, bargained, sold, aliened, estopped, released, and confirmed, by these presents do grant, bargain, sell, alien, estopp, release and confirm unto the said William Everhart, Esquire, and his heirs, and assigns.*

The surveyor's description of the property is equally arcane.

*Beginning at a corner of Patton's orchard in a line of Nathan L. Sharpless and hence by said orchard north thirty- five degrees and an half west nine perches and [illegible: one?] tenths and north fifty-three degrees and three quarters east twenty-seven perches to the Wilmington Road or High Street, thence along the same north thirty-six degrees west eleven perches and nine-tenths to the corner of Jesse Green's lot. Thence by said lot south fifty-four degrees and one half west ten perches and eight tenths to the southwestern corner of said lot, thence by the same and sundry other lots North thirty degrees West thirty-two perches to a corner of Olaf Stromberg in a line of John Babb's lot, thence by said Babb's Lot South fifty-four degrees west two perches and north thirty-six degrees west ten perches and two tenths to a corner of said lot in the south line of South Street, thence along the same South Street sixty-two degrees and a half west twelve peaches and one tenth to the westerly line of Church Street, and along the same North thirty-two degrees and a quarter West five perches and two tenths to the corner of James Hutchinson's lot, thence by the said Lot South sixty-four degrees and a half west ten perches, South twenty-six degrees and a three quarters East one perch and nine tenths, and by the same and sundry other Lots south sixty-two degrees and three quarters West*

*forty-one perches and six tenths to the Southwesterly corner of James Tillum's Lot, thence by said last mentioned lot, north twenty-six degrees and three quarters west ten perches, south sixty-two degrees and three quarters, West six perches and one tenth, and North twenty-six degrees and three quarters west nine perches and sixty-five hundredths to the middle of the road leading to Jefferis' ford on Brandywine, thence along the same south sixty-four degrees west one hundred and twenty-five perches to a corner of William Bennett's land in said road, in a line of John C. Townsend's lands, thence along said line twenty-eight degrees and three quarters East, ninety-one perches and two tenths to a corner of Nathan H. Sharpless' lands, and thence by the said Sharpless' lands North sixty-two degrees and three quarters East one hundred and eighty-nine perches to the Beginning.*

To make sense of this, it is handy to know that a "perch" is equivalent to sixteen and a half feet, and that the north-south streets in the Borough actually run from northwest to southeast about 30 degrees counter-clockwise from true north-south. In the following "translation" of the surveyor's description, High Street is treated as if it runs from north to south, and Market Street as if it runs from east to west.

The property description starts at "a corner of Patton's orchard" along the boundary with Nathan L. Sharpless's farm. Sharpless' farm was located south of Dean Street -- the house still stands next to Burger King -- and continued south to Rosedale Avenue. The starting point must have been about 450 feet west of High Street and 150 feet south of the point where it reached High Street, placing it along Dean Street in the middle of the 100-block (midway between Church and Darlington Street).

The line ran north a half block, turned east towards High Street, running parallel to and between Dean and Union Streets. At High Street it went north for 196 feet to the corner at Union Street, then turned west along the southern edge of Jesse Green's land. Green owned the southernmost of a series of 180-foot deep lots that faced the west side of High Street. Everhart's property line ran to the rear of Green's property, then turned north behind the High Street properties until it reached John Babb's property a half block south of Market Street. Babb's property, which included the corner where the Farmers & Mechanics Building now stands, extended 211 feet back from High Street, so Everhart's property line turned west for 31 feet to the western edge of Babb's land, then ran north until it reached Market Street about midway between High and Church Streets.

At Market Street, the property line went west to the far side of Church Street, then turned north to what is now Courthouse Alley. It followed the alley west for half a block, then turned back towards Market Street in order to pass along the south end of the lots facing Gay Street. Everhart's line continued west to New Street through the middle of the properties that now face Market Street on the north side. One result is that most of the deeds for the north side of Market Street east of New Street refer back to at least two different properties.

At New Street (which already existed in 1829), Everhart's property line turned north towards Gay to the middle of the block, then west to Potter Alley and north to Gay Street. From there, it continued along Gay Street for more than 2,000 feet to the East Bradford line, then followed that

line south for more than 1,500 feet to W. Union St. From there, it ran over 3,100 feet back to the starting point in Patton's orchard, a half block west of Church Street.

All in all, the Everhart Tract contained nearly 700 of the roughly 4,000 properties in the Borough today. The deed of sale shows that Everhart was not the first person to subdivide a West Chester farm, since the process was already underway along High and Gay Streets. In addition, his gamble led to more than the commercial zone along Market Street and blocks of brick residences to the south. The blocks north of Market Street and west of Potter Alley provided the site of West Chester's first factory, Enos Smedley's pottery, plus blacksmiths, metal dealers and even the first Lasko factory.