

The Bergey Mill Farmhouse

This house was probably built in 1859, on property which came into the Bergey family's hands in 1850. The date of construction is not recorded, but the year 1859 is inscribed in the plaster on the attic wall at the west gable end along with initials we have not yet deciphered. The house does not appear on an 1848 map of this area, but it does turn up on the 1877 map of Lederachville, so 1859 seems like a reasonable first trial at dating. Counting one son-in-law as a Bergey family owner, the house and property stayed with the family for 120 years, until the last private owner, Alice (Bergey) Weirman, sold it to Lower Salford Township in 1970.

Dating of the property transactions from the original William Penn grant onward is still uncertain, but we might begin with the passing of 60 acres from Daniel and Margaret Prise to Abraham Zeigler (note the spelling) in 1811 (recorded 1819). In 1840 Abraham Zeigler built a flax-seed oil mill down at the foot of the hill, on the Branch Creek, where the bridge is now. The modern home on that site is built around the shell of the mill. In 1845, Abraham and his wife, Barbara, sold a tract of 9 acres and 75 perches and some other pieces of this land to their son, Jacob, who added a sawmill. Then in 1850, Jacob's wife conveyed this property to Christian Bergey, probably the grandson of Hans Ulrich Bergey, the ancestor of most of the Bergeys in this area. The house may have been built by/for Christian Bergey ca. 1859, and the whole property then passed to his son, David K. Bergey, on July 23, 1867. David was the father of Alice Weirman and Irvin Bergey, and from his tenure here the steep hill running up toward Lederach became known as "Davy's Hill." David deeded the property to his son Irvin in 1919, and then from Irvin it passed to Alice's husband, Elmer A. Weirman, and later to Alice and Elmer jointly. Alice and her brother Irvin lived on here together after Elmer's death in 1959.

As you can see, it's a very simple, unpretentious house which started out as a four-cell unit: two rooms over two (not counting a non-bearing panel wall which divides one room upstairs). It's in keeping with the lifestyle of the Kleinbauer, or small farmer-laborer, which we're celebrating in this restoration. Without running water or indoor toilets, the rooms were really undifferentiated, and until the flax-seed mill trade began to fall off some time in the late 19th century, the kitchen was on the west end of the house (now the living room, to your left as you enter), because the focus of attention was the mill, down the hill and within sight from that part of the house. In the summertime the kitchen moved into the attached shed at that end. At some point the mill business declined, and after Alice took control of the household, the kitchen was shifted to where it is today, the room to the right as you enter, oriented toward the barn (torn down in the '70s) and the activities of the small farm. In this kitchen and the summer kitchen Alice "put up" hundreds of jars of food every year, using produce from her garden and the orchard on the east side of the house. Her only stove was the woodstove still in place there; it was also the main source of heat for the house in the winter. Washing was done by hand with water heated over the built-up fireplace in the wash shed just downhill from the house.

The photos on the walls inside show the rooms just as they were when Alice Bergey Weirman last lived here, in 1972, after the sale of the house to the township. We think this shows the place furnished pretty much as it was back to the early 1900s. Each photo is on the wall which it depicts. In the west-bedroom upstairs we've begun to tear off the modern drywall ceiling, but we're not yet sure whether these joists/beams were exposed or not in the original condition of the house. In a historical restoration, you have your choice of what period in the life of the house you want to "interpret": we've selected the time ca. 1900 when certain changes were made—the addition of the slate shingles on the exterior walls and the wainscoting in the parlour, among other things. We may restore one or two rooms to their original (ca. 1859) state to show the progression.