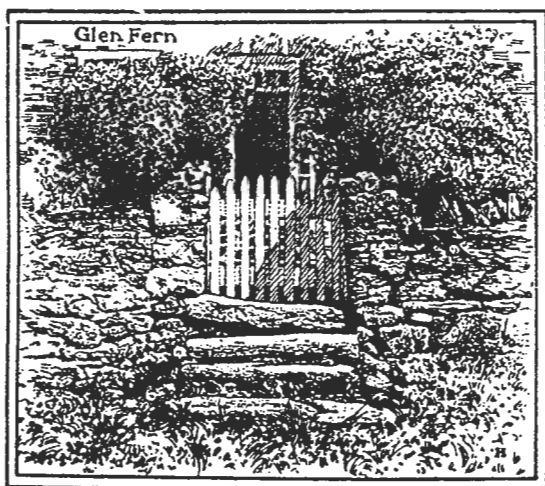


A
COLONIAL HOME
OF PHILADELPHIA



Glen Fern



Llwynnwg



GATEWAY AT GLEN FERN
Since restoration

GLEN FERN

WISSAHICKON CREEK, GERMANTOWN
SHOEMAKER—LIVEZEY



HERE Wissahickon Avenue ends at Allen's Lane, in Germantown, Livezey's Lane runs down toward the Wissahickon Creek in a northerly direction. The creek is but a short distance away and on its banks stands Glen Fern, more commonly known as the Livezey House, surrounded by numerous dilapidated buildings which originally served as mills, granaries, and cooper shops. The mill was built by Thomas Shoemaker, who conveyed it to Thomas Livezey October 10, 1747. He was probably the son of Jacob and Margaret Shoemaker as this was the only Thomas Shoemaker of a possible age in the country at this time. Jacob was the first to arrive in Germantown, coming with Pastorius in the ship *America* which sailed from Gravesend, England, June 6, 1682, and arrived August 16, of the same year. He gave the land upon which the Germantown Friends' Meeting now stands at Coulter and Main Streets and was sheriff of the town in 1690. The son Thomas married Mary Powel in 1775.

The progenitor of the Livezeys was Thomas, who came from Chester, England, about 1680, and settled on the Pennypack Creek in Lower Dublin Township. He also had a house on the south side of Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, midway between Fourth and Fifth Streets, where he lived for the first three years. He served on the first grand jury of the first court held in the Province,

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January 2, 1681. His land consisted of seven hundred and fifty acres and the original house is still standing about a mile east of Fox Chase in the thirty-fifth ward of Philadelphia. A son, Jonathan, married Rachel Taylor and of the six children born to them, Thomas, who married Elizabeth Heath, was the father of Thomas, Jr., born January 23, 1723, who bought the property on the Wissahickon Creek.

Thomas Livezey was a many sided man; he lived beside his mill on the Wissahickon and cultivated a large farm on the hillside and adjacent country. His house stood on a terrace with stone steps leading up to the door with seats on each side, over which there is a balcony. The hallway is rather small with a winding stairway leading to the second storey. The rooms are wainscotted in white panels and there is a fireplace in each room surrounded by dark marble. In the kitchen there is a fireplace of huge dimensions, large enough for several people to sit in, with a window alongside the seat in the inglenook which they called the "courtin corner." In front of the house the old box-bushes denote the presence of a garden.

A spring sparkles forth at one end of the house and the whole is surrounded by the virgin forest.

Thomas Livezey was somewhat of a wag and given to expressing himself in verse at times. While interested in the law itself, as his mention of Blackstone's Commentaries in his will indicates, he enjoyed an opportunity to cast aspersions playfully upon its practitioners. He was a fellow-trustee of the Union School of Germantown, now the Germantown Academy, with Joseph

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Galloway, a prominent Friend, lawyer, and politician. They seem to have been very close friends and Galloway was wont to poke fun at his friend Livezey for living in such a hidden place as the wilds of the Wissahickon, so far removed from the busy world and so inaccessible. This gave him the occasion to describe his abode in the following lines:

DEAR FRIEND

Dec. 14th. 1769.

As thou hast often concluded from the lowness of my situation, that I must be nearly connected with the lower regions, or some infernal place of abode, I have sent thee the following true description of the place of my residence in order to convince thee of that error.

Near Wissahiccon's mossy banks, where perling fountains glide,
Beneath the spruce's shady boughs, and laurels blooming pride,
Where little fishes sport and play, diverting to the sight,
Whilst all the warbling winged race, afford the ear delight.
Here's evergreens by nature set, on which those songsters sing,
And flowery aromatic groves, form an eternal Spring.
Refreshing breezes round me move, which with the blossoms play,
And balmy odours on their wings, through all my vale convey.
Those charming scenes, didst thou dwell here, would all thy care
beguile

And in the room of anxious fear, would form a harmless smile.
Here's innocence and harmony, which raises thoughts sublime
Little inferior to the place, call'd Eden in its prime.
Thus situated here I dwell, where these sweet zephyrs move,
And little rivulet from rocks, add beauty to my grove.
I drink the wine my hills afford, on wholesome food I dine,
My little offspring round me are, like clusters on the vine.
I, hand in hand, with second self oft walk amidst the bowers,
Whilst all our little prattling ones, are gathering opening flowers,

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In this low station here I'm fix'd nor envy courts nor kings,
Nor crave the hon'rs statesmen crave nor cares which riches bring.
Hon's a dangerous tempting thing, which oft lead men astray,
Riches like insects from them wing, and quickly flee away.
My meditations here are free from interrupting strife,
Whilst different ways aspiring men pursue indifferent life.
I see what art the clergy use, who will be paid to pray,
And how poor clients are abused, by Lawyers long delay;
I see what cunning artifice, the busy world employ,
Whilst I this lonely seat of bliss, unenvied here enjoy.
This is the place of my abode where humbly here I dwell,
Which in romantic Lawyer mood, thou hast compar'd to hell
But paradise where Adam dwelt, in blissful love & ease,
A Lawyer would compare to hell, if thence he got no fees.
Canst thou prefer heaven on earth, thy fee the root of evil,
To this my lonely harmless place, my hell without a devil?

Permit me from my low situation to thine of eminence, to do myself that justice as to say, I am with much respect thy sincere friend.

THOMAS LIVEZEY.

I shall conclude with the words made use of by Zacheus of old, "Come down, Come down quickly, for I want thee to dine at my house."

Besides being a founder of the Union School House of Germantown in 1759, he was a justice of the peace and a Provincial Commissioner in 1765. Being a Friend, he took no part in the struggle for independence, but at the time of the Battle of Germantown, hearing the roar of the cannon, he ascended the hill back of his house and climbed onto a fence to get a view of the fighting. But a stray bullet broke off a limb of the tree under which

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he was, and he concluded it was best to return to the house.

The house has capacious cellars and during the troublous times of the Revolution the girls of the family together with all the eatables and drinkables were locked below stairs for safety. Upon one occasion during the British occupancy of Germantown some red-coated soldiers came to the house and demanded food. The women folk said they had been cooking all day and were too weary to prepare it. Whereupon one of the soldiers drew his sword and smote off one of the women's ears. An officer entering at the time demanded to know who had done such a foul deed and when the soldier was pointed out to him he clave the culprit's head in twain with his sabre.

Livezey cultivated a fine vineyard on his hillside and his wine, indeed, brought him a little modest renown, for his friend, Robert Wharton, sent a dozen bottles of it to Benjamin Franklin from whom he received this reply:

DEAR FRIEND—

February 20-1768.

I received your favours of November 17th. & 18th., with another dozen bottles of excellent wine, the manufacture of our friend Livezey. I thank you for the care you have taken in forwarding them, and for your good wishes that accompany them.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

An interesting description of the troubles these early Colonists had to meet is contained in Elizabeth Drinker's *Journal* under date of October 24, 1793, in which she states that Thomas Livezey's mill was on fire and that

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crowds of people with buckets went on foot and on horse-back together with the fire engine commonly known as the "Shag Rag," now in the museum of the Mutual Fire Association, Main Street and School House Lane. The mill was burned down and six hundred barrels of flour, five hundred bushels of wheat, and a quantity of salt and ginger were lost, amounting to three thousand pounds sterling, indicating that Livezey did no inconsiderable business at that time. Elizabeth Drinker adds that "the sufferers were pretty well and much composed considering."

Even in his trade Livezey broke into verse, as this to Thomas Wharton shows:

Respected Friend I've sent thee bran
As Neat & Clean as any Man
I've took Great Pains for fear of Loss
To thee in foundering of thy Horse
It's Ground With Bur and Ground so nice
It Looks t'was bolted twice
But that's No matter Since it's Such
thy Man Can't ever feed tomuch
I mean Can't founder if he would
I've took Such pains to Make it Good.
Nor will it Ever Dust his Cloaths
Nor Give thy horse a Mealy Nose
And further in its praise I'll Say
t'will Never Make him Runaway
but if on this alone he's fed
a Child may hold him with a thread
feed freely then Nor be in Doubt
I'le send thee More when this is out.

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It is 30 bushels I have sent thee, and Notwithstanding the Labour & Care I have taken to oblige thee which the bran itself will testify to anyone Who is a Judge I have Charged only 15 pr bushell—Lower than Can Well be aforded but I shall not Regard that as it is to a friend—it May appear to thee perhaps that I have Said Rather tomuch in praise of the bran yet upon Examination I think it will appear . . . (illegible) . . . for if it Don' fully answer the Description I have Given it I should not be unwilling to make some abatement in price—this from thy Most Respectful & Sincere friend

THOMAS LIVEZEY.

Thomas Wharton was cousin to that Thomas Wharton whose father, Joseph Wharton, owned Walnut Grove in Southwark where the "Mischianza" was held. He was a prominent merchant in Philadelphia, a friend of Galloway and of Goddard the printer, and a partner with them in the establishment of the latter's newspaper, the *Chronicle*. He was on the King's side, as was Galloway, was arrested as a Loyalist by order of Congress, exiled to Virginia, and his estates confiscated.

From these examples of his writings we must not think of him as an illiterate man. He came to dwell in Germantown from well out in the country near the present Fox Chase, and the schools in that early day were purely elementary. We see, however, his gentle spirit, fair in his dealings and appreciative of the beautiful things he found in nature.

In these early days the Wissahickon Creek was more than twice its present size and volume, the cutting of the forests along its banks and near its source having decreased it since then. It was a favourite course for the

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Indians of the Delaware tribe and for some famous hermits. Here it was that the learned Kelpius had his cave and nearby Glen Fern, on a hill above a woody romantic dell through which the creek meandered, was the Monastery built by Joseph Gorgas, a Tunker-Baptist, who intended it as a branch of the brotherhood established at Ephrata in Lancaster County.

The entrance to Glen Fern was secured by the purchase of a private right of way from the property owners from the Cresheim Creek near the present Allen's Lane station of the Pennsylvania Railroad about a mile distant. This followed the line of Allen's Lane named for Major Allen, whose great house stood where the road joined the Main Street.

There was no means of refining the grist which was brought to the mill and often garlic became noticeable in the flour. This flour was not marketable in Philadelphia and so there arose a large foreign trade, for Livezey found a ready sale for the flour in the West Indies and countries of the south. To the profits he added Spanish dollars diligently gathered from the country round and so back in the ships came silks and delicate shades of crêpe and handsome chinaware. Thus the son John became a great merchant in the city and rode thence and back each day upon horseback.

Thomas Livezey married Martha Knowles April 2, 1748, the year after his purchase of Glen Fern. Five sons and five daughters were born to them. Rachel married John Johnson, Martha. Peter Robeson, and Ann, Isaac Williams, all of prominent Germantown families.

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The sons, John and Joseph, inherited Glen Fern and carried on the business.

John married Abigail Ridgway and had two sons, John and Thomas. John married Sarah Marshall and had no issue; Thomas married Ann Louise Phillips. They lived at Glen Fern and there were born their children, John, Joseph, Anna, and Sarah.

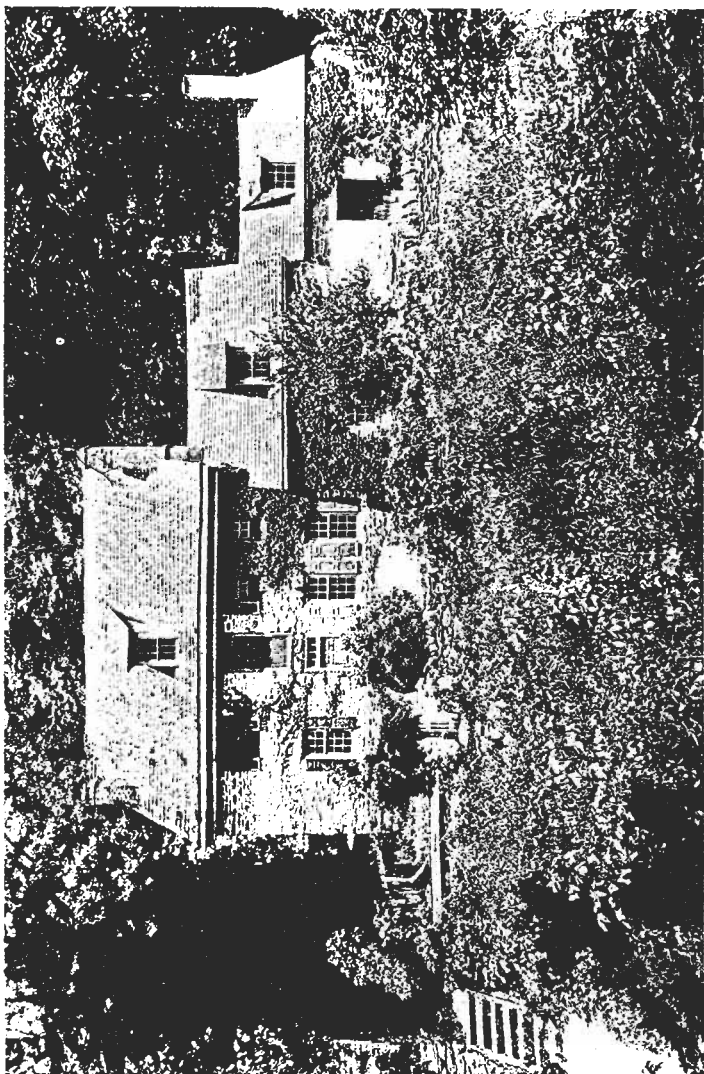
The mill continued to prosper and in the autumn the farmers brought in their grain. Often their waggons formed a solid line from the mill to the Main Street a mile distant, waiting to be unloaded. Thomas was the last to operate the mill and, about fifty years ago, it was turned to the manufacture of linseed oil for thirty years or more. The property was purchased for Fairmount Park in the year 1869, and the mill was continued for a couple of years as a grist mill by J. Wagner Jermon and then torn down. It was the second mill on the place, having been built after the fire already described, and stood under the present pier of the recent bridge over the creek. The road along the banks of the creek was built in 1826 from the Ridge Road to the Rittenhouse Mill down toward the city. It was continued and completed to the Montgomery County Line in 1856, being owned by the Wissahickon Turnpike Company, who collected toll from travellers until the road, with the remainder of the ravine, became part of Fairmount Park in 1869.

On the hill back of Glen Fern just outside the park limits, John Livezey and Sarah Livezey Firth live in an ancient house on part of the original tract. The house is filled with fine old furniture and bric-a-brac from the

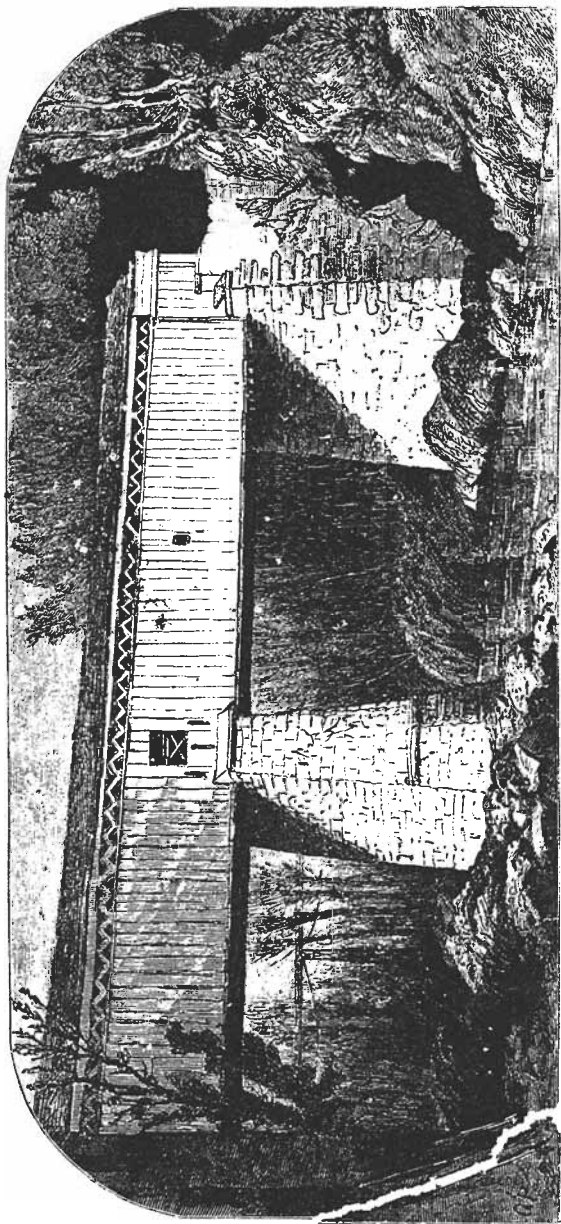
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early times. Here also is a painting of Glen Fern by Peale and a portrait of the first John Livezey by Sully.

Glen Fern is now occupied by the Valley Green Canoe Club, which has restored it, with the help of John Livezey, the former owner, and which keeps it in excellent condition.



GLEN FERN, ON THE WISSAHICKON CREEK
Built by Thomas Shoemaker, c. 1747; enlarged by Thomas Livezey



Old Bridge on the Wissahickon.

