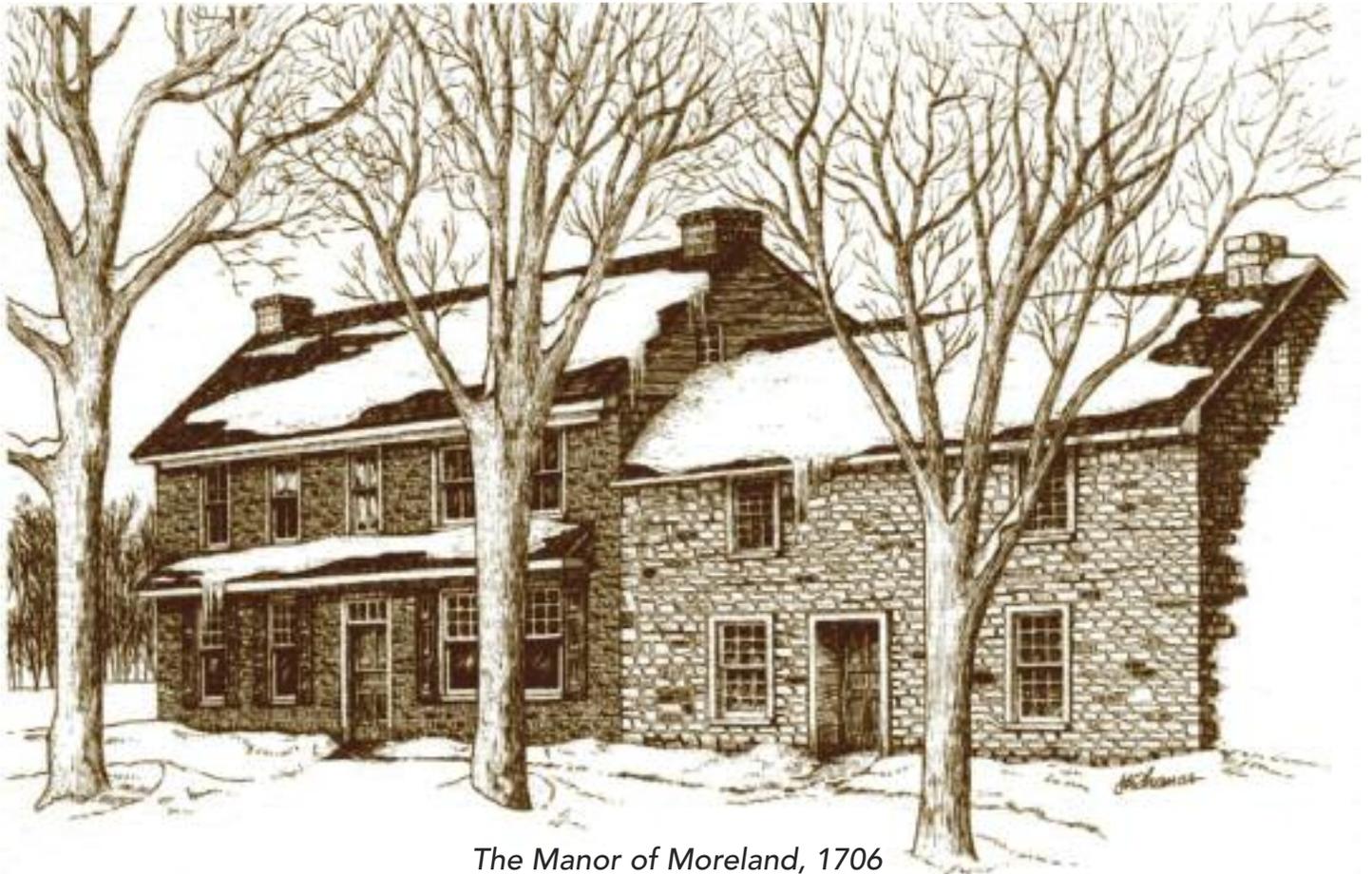


A BRIEF HISTORY OF WILLOW GROVE

By Edward Momorella



*The Manor of Moreland, 1706
Willow Grove, Pennsylvania*

The area we know today as “Willow Grove” was part of a land grant from England’s King Charles II to William Penn in 1681, to repay a debt to William’s father, Admiral William Penn. Penn then granted a warrant for 9.815 acres north of Philadelphia to physician Nicholas More. This tract of land was known as the Manor of Moreland, and later, Moreland Township.

More’s heirs sold much of the land to speculators, who in turn sold parcels to a handful of early settlers.

The area was about a one day’s ride by carriage from Philadelphia and on the route of an old Lenapi Indian trail to New York. As a result, the village that developed was a typical colonial crossroads, with inns, stables, blacksmiths, and wheelwright shops.

In 1711, the Old York Road was laid out from Philadelphia to New Hope where the Delaware River was crossed at Coreyell’s Ferry. This is the

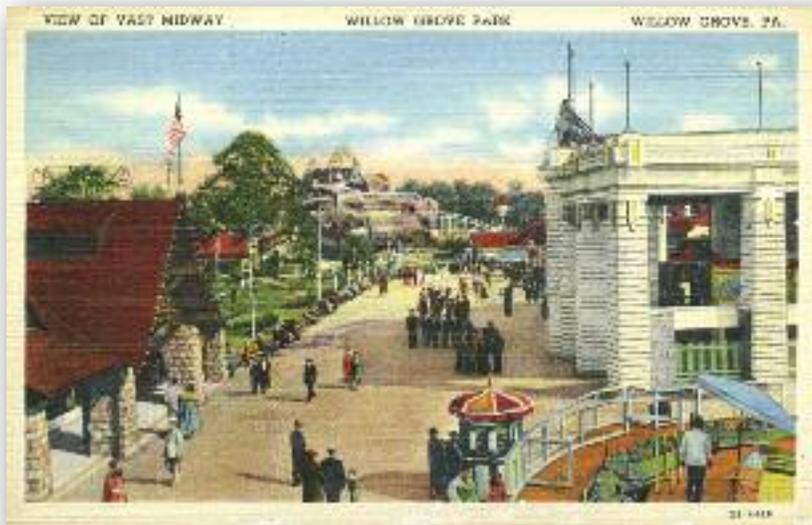
date commonly used as the founding of the village, although the name “Willow Grove” was not associated with the town until 1792 when mapmaker Reading Howell so marked the village because of the abundance of willow trees in the marshy land. Prior to that time, several names were associated with the area including Round Meadow, named after the tributary of the Pennypack Creek which ran through the marshy land and under the Old York Road at the center of town.

During the Revolutionary War, Willow Grove played a key role as a major route for both American and British Armies to advance to and from Philadelphia. In the 1777 Battle of Edge Hill, to the southwest of Willow Grove, it was reported that wounded American soldiers were taken to the Red Lion Inn and tended to by inn keeper Joseph Butler. Butler was later arrested by the British and held prisoner in Philadelphia during the

occupation. In 1778, British troops under Lt. Col. Abercromby marched through Willow Grove to the Battle of Crooked Billet in Hatboro.

By 1850, the village was beginning to take shape as a major crossroads and stage coach stop with five stage lines a day passing through. The largest establishment by far was the Mineral Springs Inn which boasted many rooms, stables for 100 horses, a recreational park with walking trails and gardens, and mineral spring water baths.

Undoubtedly the most important milestone in the development of Willow Grove was the establishment in 1896 of Willow Grove Park by the owners of the



Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company. At the terminus of several trolley lines from Philadelphia and Doylestown, and the recent opening of the North East Branch of the Pennsylvania & Reading Railroad station in Willow Grove, the Park provided an excellent weekend retreat from the summer heat of Philadelphia. Popular band leaders such as Arthur Pryor, Victor Herbert, Conway, and John Phillip Sousa would book two-week engagements each year and draw as many as 50,000 people a day to the concerts. The park added amusement rides in following years to increase attendance even more. For approximately 50 years, the Park's famous concerts would give Willow Grove the title "Music Capital of the World".

The Park changed ownership several times over the years, but with the advent of automobiles and television, attendance dwindled until it finally closed in 1976 to make way for a multi-level regional

shopping mall with the same name.

After World War II, Willow Grove was a prime suburban target for real estate developers and the housing boom that followed. Combined with the opening of the Pennsylvania Turnpike and the Willow Grove interchange, the town was now considered a desirable crossroads to live, easily accessible to all areas. From 1950 to 1960, the population grew from 10,000 to 20,000.

Like a number of similar villages in Pennsylvania, Willow Grove is a "postal" designation and map site, but not a political subdivision. The center of Willow Grove is in Upper Moreland Township.

Moreland Township was originally located in both Philadelphia and Montgomery County. In 1784, Moreland Township was designated completely in Montgomery County. In 1916, a line was drawn through the Pennypack Creek to create Lower and Upper Moreland Townships. The Willow Grove Post office serves several surrounding townships.

Through the years, Willow Grove has served as a colonial crossroads for travelers, a summer retreat and world-class concert center, a suburban bedroom community for nearby Philadelphia, and a regional shopping area with big name anchor stores and light industrial buildings and offices.

Willow Grove today is rich in history and historic sites. Many of the older homes display a variety of period architecture and residents are encouraged to preserve the older housing stock through the Township's Historic Preservation Commission.

