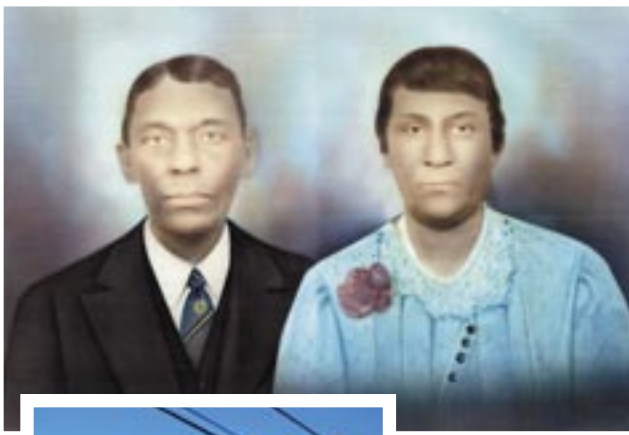


East Linden Street

A History

Abolition, industry & diversity in Kennett Square, Pa.



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THE BEGINNING

East Linden Street in 2008 is bustling and full of life, quite a contrast from the wilderness Charles II granted William Penn in 1681, to repay a debt. Penn had asked for the land, in lieu of pounds owed by the crown, so he could found a home for his persecuted Quakers. This settlement of Friends, peaceful and hard working, was largely responsible for the growth of the area that would become Kennett Square.

In 1846, nine years before Kennett Borough was incorporated, Joshua and Mary Taylor, owners of Fairthorn Farm, sold several tracts of land around what is now East Linden Street to Samuel, Morton, and Jesse Pennock. Both Taylors were prominent citizens in the community and staunch abolitionists. He was instrumental in the incorporation and growth of Kennett. In selling to the Pennocks, they were dealing with enterprising Quakers and like-minded abolitionists. The Pennocks were important in Kennett's and East Linden Street's history, as they established factories in town that required nearby housing for their workers.

In 1844 there were thirty houses in the village. In three years, the number had doubled. An 1883 map showed thirty houses on East Linden Street alone! Many of the names on this map belong to Quakers, active abolitionists who helped many runaway freedom-seekers on their perilous journey north to freedom. Kennett was just over the Mason-Dixon Line and the area has more than thirty documented sites where women, men and children were hidden, fed, and sent or accompanied to the next "station." Some of the property owners and residents on Linden Street were active "conductors" who had helped liberate slaves. Other residents were free African-Americans and a few fugitives.

An 1889 article in the *Daily Local News* said, "With the exception of Oxford, Kennett Square is the largest town in southern Chester County. It is on the Philadelphia and Baltimore Central Railroad, in the midst of one of the richest farming districts in Chester County. Originally, it was a settlement of Friends, and that denomination continues to have a preponderating influence on the community, although the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians and Roman Catholics all have established themselves there as have two small congregations of colored people. The community has maintained a reputation for industry, thrift, intelligence and morality. The people are ever ready to take an active part in whatever benefits the community." Wonderful words which can also apply to the area today, except that it has grown even more diverse.

DR. ORVILLE RUSSEL WALLS

“Your doctor...my doctor...and everyone’s doctor”

Dr. Orville Walls died more than forty years ago, but so strong is his memory that his house, 219 East Linden, is still pointed out as “Dr. Walls’s house.”

In 1937, four years after his graduation from Meharry Medical College in Tennessee, Dr. Orville Walls and his wife Thelma bought this comfortable home. It had been built in 1889 as a parsonage for the Methodist church next door, which is now an apartment house.

A Lincoln University graduate, Dr. Walls had grown up at Lincoln and taught school for a while before entering Meharry. He and Mrs. Walls had one son, Orville Russel Jr., now a veterinarian in Philadelphia.

Dr. Walls was a member of several medical societies and was active with the Boy Scouts, the Kennett Planning Board, the board of Cheyney State College, and other civic organizations. He was a staff member at Chester County, West Grove, and Rush Hospitals, and his practice included patients of both races.

For many years Dr. Walls’s office was in the east side of his house, but in 1958 he bought the apartment building next door, the former Methodist church, and as his son says, “He’d have breakfast and then walk across the yard to the back steps of that building, where he had his office.”

Less than a year before Dr. Walls’s untimely death at sixty, the Frontiers International Club gave him a testimonial banquet, honoring his years of service. “A large overflow crowd [at the American Legion Building] thundered their approval as [the speaker] said, ‘Your doctor...my doctor...and everyone’s doctor.’” At his death in 1964 there was a huge outpouring of sympathy and he was praised for “his knowledge of the community, his willingness to serve in any capacity, and his desire to see that individuals receive fair and helpful consideration regardless of their economic status or social position.”



Dr. Orville R. Walls in 1964, courtesy of the Walls family.



East Linden St., summer 2008.

EAST LINDEN STREET LOOKS BACK AND FORWARD

In 2008 East Linden Street is both a reminder of how life used to be and a vital community that looks to the future. Its traditions strengthen and guide residents—traditions of neighborliness, diversity, perseverance, and grit.

Grit was required at times when the economic news was less than upbeat. Just as Kennett Square has had its ups and downs, so has East Linden. There were sheriff's sales and sales to pay debts, yet people persevered. Many of the street's early names are still familiar around Kennett, as descendants, black and white, have continued to live and thrive in the area.

In a part of Chester County with many neighborhoods of large homes, where residents are rarely seen except coming and going, East Linden is clustered and vibrant. Neighbors are near enough to know when someone needs a hand, a pat on the back, or just a wave and a smile.

There is much to be proud of in East Linden Street's past and in the present time, when people of good will work together to make their home part of a true community.