

Pleasantville lives up to its name with rural charm

BERKS PLACES

By SusanMiersSmith

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Berks Places is a recurring feature that will focus on the small villages and census designated places throughout the county. History, nostalgia and local voices will shed some light on the quaint nooks and crannies of our area.

A martini bar, daily cow parade, chocolate factory and covered bridge — not many unincorporated places can boast all of those within a half-square mile, but Pleasantville in Oley Township can.

“Really, truly, it is pleasant,” said Dr. Jennifer Schlegel, who is the director of Kutztown University’s honors program. “It is really a wonderful place to live in terms if you prefer living in the country.

“One of the things I really appreciate about living in Pleasantville, and the Oley Valley, is that people around here know that around any corner that they could encounter horse and buggy, cows, cyclists, runners; they know to always be on the lookout for what’s around the corner.”

Schlegel, 52, has lived in Pleasantville for 14 years with her family, and she grew up just 6 miles away in Amity Township.

“I’m literally a stone’s throw away from a cemetery that has one of my ancestors buried in it from nearly 250 years ago,” Schlegel said. “I’m deeply rooted, you could say.”

Schlegel said she enjoys the nightlife at The Bridge Inn’s martini bar, at the corner of Covered Bridge Road and Route 73, along with the natural beauty of the babbling Manatawny Creek.

“I think it’s kind of cool we have nightlife at the traffic light and a quarter-mile away is the covered bridge where you can go fishing,” Schlegel said.



26, who used to live in Oley and recently stopped by the Covered Bridge Farmstand in Pleasantville for some premise-made cheese from Valley Milkhouse.

She and Janelle Adams Ervin, 52, Exeter Township frequently visit Covered Bridge Farmstand for the variety of locally made goods offered.

“Once I was out of high school, I started getting connected with

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The former Odd Fellows Oley Lodge No. 218 is on the northeast corner of Route 73 and Oysterdale Road in Pleasantville, Oley Township. It is now home to the Village Shop Sheepskin & Leather on the street level. The building had been owned by the Lichtenstein family for nearly 70 years when it was sold in

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September to Stellar Homes LLC.

The beautiful scenery and country roads of the Oley Valley are a draw for many.

“I love running on the backroads, driving on them; it was fun. I had a good time going to Oley,” said Kimberly Lessig,

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Oley Valley Organics, then they gotme connectedwith the cheese lady here and you just start hearing of all these local businesses that are around kind of byword of mouth,” Lessig said.

“It’s a village that lives up to its name,” Schlegel said.

History

Thevillagewasfoundedby brothers Johannas “Hans” Yoder and Jost “Yost” Yoder in the early 1700s. The Yoders were born in Bern, Switzerland, and lived in the Palatinate region of Germany for several years before coming toAmerica, accordingtofamily research. They had a land grant fromWilliamPenn.

The area became known as Jotterscheddel, or Yodersville. The spelling of the family name in Switzerland was Jotter, which became Yoder in America as folks wrote down what they heard pronounced.

Yost Yoder was a renowned huntsman in Berks and Schuylkill counties. A 1940 Reading Eagle article by Robert Bamford that is included in Volume 16 of “The Passing Scene” by George M. Meiser IX and Gloria Jean Meiser says that the wolf pits he created were still visible until around 1910.

“Yost Yoder used to dig pits, cover themnightly and put bait there,” Bamford wrote. “In the morning he sometimes found as many as five wolves in the hole.”

The village also has been called Manatawny, for the creek that runs through it. Manatawny is the Leni Lenape Indian word for “place where we drank.”

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Golden Eagle in 1940, according to Berks County property records. Village Shop Sheepskin & Leather has been operating on the street level for a number of years.

Reppert’s Own Made Candies is just one block up on Route 73/West Philadelphia Avenue from the main intersection and only traffic light in the village. The store was founded in 1945 by Floyd and Dorothy Reppert and has been owned by the Schell family since 1978.

Covered bridge

Just a quartermile from the intersection’s hustle and bustle, such as it is, the wooden Pleasantville Covered Bridge still carries drivers, bikers and runners over Manatawny Creek. It is one of five remaining covered bridges in Berks County and among the four that still carry traffic. It is one of two covered bridges in Oley Township and was built between 1852 and 1856.

While there no longer is a toll to pay to cross it as there oncewaswhenitwaspart of theOleyTurnpike, traffic has taken a toll on the bridge. Just about once a year for the last several years, it had to be closed for repairs after a truck too large tomake it attempts to pass through.

It is constructed from Burr arch trusses andmeasures 126 feet long and 20 feet wide. The roadway through it is 16 feet wide.

“The Pleasantville bridge has the unusual distinction of being built in two stages because of the shortage of lumber following the Great Flood of 1850,” reads a 1980 application prepared by the Berks County Conservancy for the bridge to be list on the National Register.

In 1851 the Manatawny Post Office was established in the Pleasantville Hotel, which is now the The Bridge Inn, owned by Brian Favinger. The hotel also was home to a Gulf gas station and, even earlier, cattle bazaars were held in the yard, according to the 1940 Bamberg article.

Across the street from the hotel was a large building that still stands today.

The Odd Fellows Oley Lodge No. 218 was erected in 1856. A general store operated on the street level and the upper floors were used for public gatherings. At some point, the brick structure was added on to the left side as a residence for the man who conducted the store business according to Volume 7 of Meiser's "The Passing Scene."

The book also states Clarence P. Yerger ran the general store there for a number of years and was the last postmaster for the Manatawny Post Office, which closed April 12, 1968. A general store last operated in the building in the 1970s.

The lodge building had been owned by M. Edwin Lichtenstein from Oct. 2, 1951, until it was sold to Stellar Homes LLC on Sept. 10. Lichtenstein had purchased it from the Manatawny Home Association, which had purchased it from Manatawny Castle No. 461 Knights of the

It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on Feb. 23, 1981.

Life today

The history of the area and the quaintness that remains is part of the allure of the area.

"There are sorts of little things: you can tell what season is by what type of farm equipment is on the roads; it's the only place in the county that I know has a daily cow parade," Schlegel said. "There's a strip on Oysterdale Road, on the other side of the traffic light, where the cows come to pasture in the morning and go home at night. You get stuck in the cow parade and you just wait for the ladies to do what they're going to do."

It is an area of diverse beliefs too.

"If you want to get political, you can drive around and see there's an awful lot of signs supporting the president, but there are also pockets of progressive people in the valley," Schlegel said. "Because I think one of the things that so many people have in common is concern for the environment, green spaces and agriculture."