

The History of Aston Township

The Township of Aston originally was called Northley, and the first known resident was William Woodmansey, whose home was named 'Harold.' In 1682 Aston was settled as a municipality and was finally incorporated as a township in 1688. Edward Carter, who was the constable of the township, changed the name from Northley to Aston in remembrance of his old home in Oxfordshire, England. In 1906, Aston became a first class township.

In 1870, the population of Aston, according to the census of that year was 1,845, of which 1,536 were native born and 309 were foreign. In 1910 the population had grown to 2,139. Today, Aston covers approximately seven square miles, and has a population of about 17,000.

On July 30, 1842, an act of legislature was passed annexing to Thornbury township all that part of Aston lying north of a line beginning immediately south of Stony Bank churchyard, and extending east and west from Chester creek to Concord township,

Along Chester Creek there were many mills in the early part of the 19th century. Among them were:

- Peter's Grist and Saw Mill on the west branch of Chester Creek, near the Concord Township line.
- Tyson's Mill, also known as Llewelyn Mills or Rhodes Mill at Aston Mills.
- The Old Forge at Rockdale, which today is King's Mill.
- Thatcher's Tilt mill, near Wawa Station.
- The Lenni Mills on Lenni Road, later becoming Aldon Rug Mill.
- Crozerville Mills at the foot of Hollow Hill. This Mill later was known as Yorkshire Worsted Mill, and today is Container Research.
- Wes Branch mills, which later was operated as Victoria Plush Mill. And then, Aldon Rug Mill. Today it is the Rockdale Industrial Center.

Further down Chester creek to Bridgewater was the Pennelton Mill, which later was the American Rendering Plant. Over the years, these mills produced cotton, wool, paper, with gristmills grinding wheat and corn grown in the local area. These mills operated as long as they had a water supply. Low water and winter freezes cause operations to cease.

On September 2, 1831, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was chartered at the Seven Stars Hotel.

The Hotel was the only voting place in Aston for several years, and also played a prominent part in one of the most famous murders in the nation, which eventually involved many well-known people in Delaware County.

Among the well-known people who attended school in Aston are David Glascoe Faragut, who became an Admiral and naval hero in the Civil War. Also, John Drew, the American stage actor, as well as Dr. James Gassoway, who became a United States Marine Surgeon, and Ex-Governor, Powell Clayton, of Arkansas.

For many years, the Rockdale area was the center of interest, as they had just about everything a person would need, including doctors, dentists, churches, bakeries, a movie house, grocery stores, dry good stores and a town hall for dances and minstrel shows. They also had a newspaper, ambulance, a hotel, and schools, as well as bus and train service.

The flood of the century, which occurred on August 5, 1843, had done considerable damage to the mills, destroying some along Chester Creek, as well as the dams and races, which they depended on for power.

Among those killed by the floodwaters was John Rhodes, an aged man, along with his daughters Hannah and Jane, and his granddaughter Mary Ann Collingsworth, who were swept away along with their house.

The first licensed house in Aston was the Seven Stars Hotel, locate at Pennell and Concord roads. The hotel was built in 1738. In 1740, Thomas Vernon presented a petition to the court for a license for a 'House of Entertainment', alleging that there is no tavern for twelve to fourteen miles from where his house is located. The court denied the petition. However, in 1762, James Johnson was licensed to be the Seven Stars Hotel. The Seven Stars Hotel became a stagecoach stop and a stop for watering horses, as well as changing horses.

The first church building of record in Aston was Mount Hope Methodist Church, which was built in 1807, on land donated by Aaron Mattson, a paper manufacturer in the township. The first church building was of stone and measured thirty by forty feet. Since 1807, there have been many additions made to the church. On September 3, 1860, the church was incorporated and in 1877, the parsonage was erected near the sanctuary.

In 1833, Richard S. Smith, an active Episcopalian, came to Rockdale and established a Sunday School in a vacant room in the upper story of his nail factory. His wife and daughters were teaching scholars. The success of the Sunday School was so great that it was resolved to form a congregation of Episcopalians, that eventually Bishop Onderdonk laid the cornerstone for the church and on Christmas Eve, 1836, the first service was held.

St. Thomas the Apostle Church was first started with services in St. Mary's Church, the noted chapel in the mansion of the Willcox family at Ivy Mills. On August 26, 1852, ground was purchased and on August 29, 1852, the cornerstone was laid for the church. The edifice was finished in 1856, and Rev. Joseph Maugin was appointed the first pastor.

On November 18, 1851, John P. Crozer donated a lot of ground to a number of members of the Mount Hope circuit residing in the Rockdale area, who felt that the cause of Methodism could be advanced by the erection of a church edifice at Rockdale. In the spring of 1852, a petition was presented to the Philadelphia Conference that the Rockdale church, known as it was, should be separated from Mount Hope. The request was favorably considered and the Rev. George W. McLaughlin was appointed the first pastor. The edifice was completed the summer of 1852. Prior to this, services were held in Temperance Hall in Lenni. Other churches in the township include:

- The Chester Heights Camp Meeting Association, which purchased a farm in 1872 on the line of the Baltimore Central railroad.
- St. Francis de Sales started as a mission church of St. Thomas the Apostle in the 1880's. The church was dedicated in 1894, with Rev. Edward J. O'Reilly as the first pastor.
- The Crozer Chapel at West Branch.
- The Blue Church.
- The Baptist Church at Village Green, and
- The Baptist Church at Bridgewater.

In Aston, during the 1800's, many of the towns had their own post offices, such as Aston Mills, Village Green, Rockdale and Ivy Mills.

In 1945, the residents of the Chester Heights area, not happy with the high taxes in Aston, seceded and formed the Borough of Chester Heights.

About 1960, the residents of the section of Bridgewater Farms seceded from Chester Township and became residents of Aston Township, although many still had to send their children to Chester Township Schools for several years.

The first police force was started in 1935. Charles “Pop” Kelly was named Chief, and Robert Curry was named Constable. Part-time officers assisted these men. They had to use their own cars for patrol, and the Township paid for 12 gallons of gas per week. Uniforms and other equipment were obtained through fundraisers, such as corn boils. The Police Station was located on Mount Road, where the ‘Country Press’ is now located.

In 1954, Richard Tipton became Chief of Police, at a salary of \$3,300. The population of Aston at that time was 3,100. In 1955, Bob Williams was named as the first full-time officer, and the Township had approximately 30 auxiliary officers. By 1969, the Police force rose to 9 full time officers.

“An Old School House”

Village Green School House
Sits by the road.
Within its walls,
Are memories untold.

In its prime,
The town’s young it had held.
To face the future,
So they would do well.

Then came the day
The young were heard no more.
This cherished old school
Had to close its doors.

So silent it stood,
Down through the years.
Those who’d been in it
Would shed a few tears

Along came a group,
And preserve it they did.
Excited to find
All the treasures it hid.

Now it stands
With a new coat of paint.
This wonderful old school
That is oh so quaint.

- Ruth M. Ross, July 24th 2002