

Haldeman Brothers Store and Livery, Frazer Hill. The store later became the Frazer Post Office. *All photos courtesy of the author, with thanks to Ruth Brackbill King, daughter of Harry Brackbill.*

Our family story on the Main Line begins when a Mennonite family, Cornelius and Fannie (Shirk) Haldeman and their three daughters, Grace, Myrtle and Ruth, moved to Frazer in 1904. They shared a house with Cornelius' brother Charles and his family on Frazer Hill next to the busy railroad station. The Haldeman Brothers ran a general store and livery stable from their home. In addition to that, they both worked in the family business, J.G. Haldeman and Bro., a poultry, butter, and eggs wholesaler operating in the old Farmers Schuylkill Wholesale Market at Thirtieth Street in Philadelphia.

On January 17, 1907, Cornelius and Fannie Haldeman purchased the 42.5-acre heart of the farm owned by Joseph Malin I in 1777 (see Washington's Headquarters article in the Spring 2008 issue of the *Quarterly*). Their daughters graduated from the Frazer Two-Year High School (tenth grade), the oldest, Grace, constituting half of the first graduating class in 1908. Grace graduated from the West Chester State Normal School in 1910, then worked as a teacher at one of the local one-room school houses (the Warren—at the junction of Routes 401 and 30) until her marriage in 1915 to George Griffith Malin. George was the other half of the 1908 graduating class at Frazer High School.

George G. Malin, the son of Joseph IV and Elizabeth (Griffith) Malin, lived on a farm on Swedesford Road less than a mile west of the Haldemans. His mother had lived in the Brackbill-Haldeman-Malin house as a girl (see Levi Griffith in the Appendix to the aforementioned Headquarters article) and it was George's great-great grandfather who hosted Washington in 1777.



Grace S. Haldeman, 1910
Yearbook Portrait, West
Chester Normal School

At this point, we must introduce the Brackbill family. B. Frank Brackbill and Hettie Good were Mennonites from eastern Lancaster County. Frank, a skilled finisher of carriages and buggies, moved his family of three

boys (Harry, Charlie, and Milton—later joined by a sister, Elsie) into Philadelphia in search of better employment. He found it with the Pennsylvania Railroad (“PRR”). From 1896 until 1909 the Brackbills lived in West Philadelphia. Early in February, 1909, mother Hettie came down with blood poisoning and influenza, which, as it often did in the days before antibiotics, ended in death. The two youngest children, Milton and Elsie, were sent to live with their paternal grandparents in Soudersburg, Lancaster County. The older boys, Harry and Charlie, stayed with their father in the city.

The Brackbills had an old family friend named Samuel Eby, who had grown up a neighbor to Hettie near Gap, and who also worked in Philadelphia for the PRR. About 1911, Sam Eby, his wife Mollie, and their four children moved into a house on Broad Street in Malvern. There they often opened their home to the Brackbill children, who, thanks to the Paoli/Malvern Local, became quite regular visitors. The Ebys were also Mennonites and in 1910 had joined with the Haldemans and the family of Jacob S. Bowers (who had a general store in White Horse, Willistown Township, until his death in 1914) to start a Mennonite meeting (or mission) in Frazer. The date of the first service, May 10, is considered the founding of the Frazer Mennonite Church, which will celebrate its centennial in 2010.



The Frazer Schoolhouse

This one-room schoolhouse (nicknamed the “Black Maria”) was built about 1870 and was originally located at the corner of Church Road and the Lancaster Pike in Frazer. Sometime before 1900, it was moved west about half a mile to where the Speakman Apartments used to be. In 1906 the schoolhouse was moved back from the road to make way for the new Frazer High School (two-year). In addition to being a school for students from grades one to eight, this building served as the polling place for the township. In May 1910, the area’s Mennonites began to use it on Sundays for their place of worship and continued to do so until they moved in 1917 into their new white frame church across the highway and just to the east of the school. The Frazer Schoolhouse was torn down in the 1980s.



The wedding portrait of George G. Malin & Grace S. Haldeman.

On August 10, 1915, George Malin and Grace Haldeman (who had made up the entire first graduating class of the East Whiteland High School in 1908) were married on the Haldeman farm in East Whiteland Township. They were married by Mennonite minister John B. Senger, of Lancaster County, who was a bit reluctant to unite a Mennonite (Grace) and a Baptist (George). Not heeding the minister’s entreaty that he consider changing his church affiliation, George remained faithful to the (Malvern) Baptist Church all his life. (It is said that, during this time period, photographers posed husbands seated and wives standing to keep the brides’ long dresses in pristine shape.)

This new church was quite small. For seven years they held their services in the afternoons in the old Frazer Schoolhouse, which, in 1910, stood behind the High School building, built about 1906. The members organized their own Sunday School, but until 1924, when they ordained their first minister (Marcus Swanenburg), preaching was provided by ministers who traveled from Lancaster or Montgomery Counties.

As small as this group was it was nearly inevitable that the Brackbill brothers and the Haldeman sisters would be drawn to one another, and indeed, that is the story. Harry, who had been spending weekends with the Ebys in Malvern since 1910, got his younger brother Milton to move from Lancaster County and join him in the Brackbill Brothers General Store, opened in 1913 in Planebrook, on the northwest corner of Swedesford and Bacton Hill Roads.



A picture of the front of the Brackbill Brothers General Store in Planebrook about 1915. It became the local “hangout”, as this shot depicts.

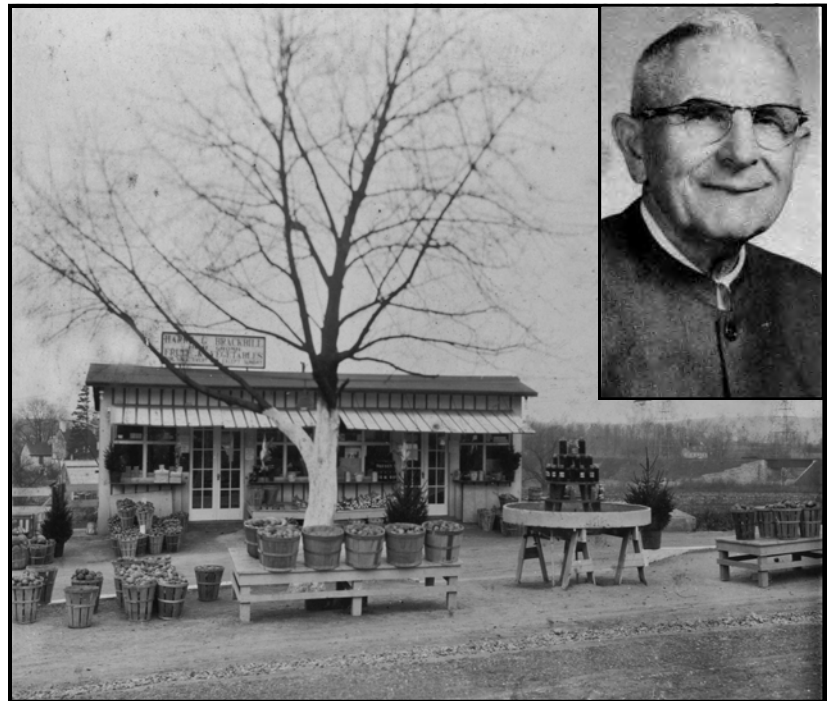
On May 19, 1915 Harry Brackbill married Myrtle Haldeman and they moved into the store building in Planebrook with Harry’s brother Milton, 19, and sister Elsie, 10. A year and a half later Milton Brackbill married Myrtle’s younger sister Ruth.

Milton went into farming on the Schofield farm (earlier owned by Lapps and Fetters) between Sidley Road/Mill Lane and Lapp Road. When Harry’s rent was raised on the store building at Planebrook, he sold their stock and moved into the tenant house (over the spring) on the Brackbill-Haldeman-Malin farm. In 1919 Harry began selling homegrown vegetables on the Lincoln Highway in front of the farm, and was so successful his Brackbill Farm Markets thrived there and at four additional locations on the Main Line until soon after his death in 1966.

Milton and Ruth Brackbill and their five daughters moved around in Chester County several times before moving onto the Haldeman farm with Ruth’s parents, Cornelius and Fannie, in 1935. In 1938 they began running a motel on the farm. For the next thirty years, Brackbill’s Motel stood along the Lincoln Highway beside Brackbill’s Farm Market. Both businesses provided employment for many family members as well as others in the com-



Setting out in about 1914 in their delivery wagon are brothers Milton (left, holding the reins) and Harry Brackbill of Brackbill Brothers General Store in Planebrook, East Whiteland Township. This store venture began in 1913 and ended in 1917 (a year after Milton married and left to work as a farmer on the old Fetters Mill -Schofield place between Sidley and Lapp Roads). The Planebrook Store gave them the experience upon which they built their Brackbill Markets partnership in 1920s and 30s.



Taken about 1930, this photo shows the first Brackbill Market building on the Lincoln Highway (Lancaster Pike) in East Whiteland Township. In the background on the left is the Brackbill-Haldeman-Malin mansion and on the right is the railroad bridge that once ran across Conestoga Road (now Rt. 401, next to the present-day Peoples Light and Theater Company), carrying the spur line from the Trenton Cutoff to the Knickerbocker Quarry. The sign on the market roof says “Harry G. Brackbill—Fruits and Vegetables” and states the market is closed on Sundays. See p. 111 for another view of the market. Inset: Harry G. Brackbill (1892-1966), proprietor of Brackbill’s Markets.

munity. And both offered their proprietors an opportunity to model and share the most important thing in their lives: their Christian faith.

The Brackbill, Haldeman, and Malin families were all active and dedicated members of the Frazer Mennonite Church.¹ Until the 1960s this church (like most others in the Lancaster Mennonite Conference) selected its deacons and ministers by lot. In line for the appointment of a second minister in the congregation in 1933, the three candidates were the three Brackbill brothers, Harry, Milton, and their brother Charlie. The lot fell on Milton and he was ordained on January 15, 1933, preaching his first sermon the following Sunday on Galatians 6:14.



After 1930, Harry G. Brackbill started branch markets all down the Main Line: Berwyn, Wayne, Villanova and Ardmore. This is a view of the Ardmore Market on Suburban Square, in the shadow of Strawbridge and Clothier. Left to right: John E. King, Moses Slabach, Henry Fietz and Milton Brackbill.

Harry Brackbill was a never-failing supporter of his brother's ministry, teaching responsibilities (at Mennonite colleges) and evangelical work (across the country in hundreds of Mennonite churches). Harry led in many other faith-based projects, such as Gideons International and, above all, the Frazer Summer Bible School, begun in 1936 and by the early 1960s enrolling six to seven hundred community children in its two-week course of Bible instruction. "Mr. Bible School" was how many people knew him.



This picture, taken about 1945 at the front door of the Brackbill-Haldeman home, shows how the tourist business has changed in the last sixty-some years. The signs tell guests to just "occupy. Register in morning," and give their rates as "\$10 per adult (i.e., children free)." Three generation portrait: (left to right:) Miriam (Brackbill) Nissley, Fannie (Shirk) Haldeman, and Ruth (Haldeman) Brackbill.

This has been no more than an overview of how the Brackbill, Haldeman, and Malin families were interconnected and the historical role they played in the twentieth century history of the Main Line. Much has been left out, such as the individuals of the third generation and what they have meant to the community. I'll end with one more family story. The Brackbill brothers' younger sis-

1. All except for George G. Malin, who remained faithful to the Baptist church of his youth, serving as a deacon at Malvern Baptist Church, where he was honored by the naming of the highest point of the church building as the "George Malin Steeple." His wife and children all attended and were dedicated members of Frazer Mennonite.

ter, Elsie, grew up with her brothers' families in the Frazer area, joined the Mennonite church and graduated from the denominational college - Eastern Mennonite - in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She was not destined, however, to be a lifelong Mennonite.

About 1920 a Texas Quaker family sent their son, Francis Harvey, to Pennsylvania to attend Westtown School. His uncle and aunt were Quakers John and Louella Nolan of Malvern. The summer after Francis' first year of school, John Nolan approached Milton Brackbill and asked if Francis could board with the Brackbills and work on the farm. Milton agreed, and during that summer Francis fell in love with Milton's sister. Francis Harvey and Elsie Brackbill were married in the Washington Chapel at Valley Forge on June 20, 1928. It was a marriage that was to last 77 ½ years, broken by Francis' death in December 2005 at age 100. Elsie followed him two years later at the age of 103. For many years the Harveys lived in Malvern, where Francis was a town councilman and local "character."

According to the Main Line Shopping Service, a paper serving City Line to Paoli, in its issue of Sept. 19, 1929: "Brackbill's Roadside Market, on the Lincoln Highway just west of Malvern, is one of the show places of the country. No matter what hour of the day and even into the night one chances to visit this outdoor emporium, it is alive with interest and a hum of business prevails. It has been the privilege of this family, long residents of Chester County, to offer to their fast increasing patronage 'Only Home Grown Products.' An unusual feature is the service one receives six days a week and it has the unique distinction of never transacting business on Sunday.

First establishing the desire for tendering such service in 1920, Mr. Harry Brackbill, who is the genius of the business, informs us that the demand has been so great for Home-Grown Products that the producing acreage has been increased from five to ninety acres. Every acre is fully manned so as to properly grow the fruits and vegetables sold. Sixty-five acres of this ground is under the direct supervision of Mr. Brackbill, while twenty-five is tilled by nearby farmers.

All the poultry sold is raised and dressed on the place. The most scientific methods are used in producing and the eggs sold are always fresh. You are cordially invited to visit this modern producing acreage and acquaint yourself with any attendant who will gladly show you about the place. Brackbill's is noted for their special strain of Bantam corn, and Washington asparagus. There will also be found potatoes and apples in abundance. Everything to please the most fastidious shopper can be purchased at a price that is a real saving. Furthermore the ride out Lincoln Highway is delightful. In making your purchases, Mr. Brackbill wishes to assure his patrons that it is the aim of Brackbill's Roadside Market to please you, to gain your confidence, and to appreciate your patronage."

The Suburban and Wayne Times (about 1950) ran an article headlined: BRACKBILL FARM MARKETS STARTED WITH GIFT OF TWO SEED PACKAGES: A childhood hobby was the beginning of a life-long interest for Harry G. Brackbill, owner of the well-known Brackbill Farm Markets on the Main Line. At the age of ten, Mr. Brackbill's father gave him a small plot of ground in the back yard of the family's Philadelphia home, in which he could grow vegetables, and the youngster's first crop of radishes and lettuce led to a fascination for the soil and vegetable-growing. When he was 16, the Brackbill family moved to a small farm in New Jersey; young Harry left his job with a Philadelphia firm and began farming in earnest. In 1917, Harry Brackbill and his wife planted five acres of vegetables, which they sold through wholesale channels. Two years later, they planted two acres of sweet corn, only to find the market oversaturated with corn.

After a particularly discouraging trip to a nearby wholesale market, Mr. Brackbill decided to sell some of the corn in front of his home on the Lincoln Highway. It didn't take long for customers to discover they had

found an exceptionally fine-tasting brand of corn, and soon the entire crop was sold. The Brackbills now sell more than one-hundred acres of corn each season, 60 to 70 per cent grown on their own farm, and contract for the balance. Lima beans, tomatoes and green beans make up the rest of their major crops. This year's lima bean crop was virtually destroyed as a result of hurricane 'Diane', although the corn remained intact.

BUSINESS EXPANDS — The little stand in front of the Brackbill home was followed by the erection of a small building, which has been enlarged three times. About 14 years ago, the Brackbills opened a second store in Ardmore. The stores in Villanova and Wayne are outgrowths of the Ardmore market, which was so popular that the people in those areas created a demand for a Brackbill store closer to home. Mr. Brackbill has been asked to open more markets in various neighborhoods, but says he would not be able to keep up his firm's high standards if he did so. 'It is our aim to provide the public with fresh, farm-to-market produce, carefully grown and harvested. If we expand any further, we would not be able to devote as much time and energy to the products as is needed,' he added. Limited amounts of other foods are sold in the markets, and one can obtain such delicacies as imported candies, cookies and health cereals, as well as dairy products from nearby farms. In the winter, the firm sells dried beef, sausage, smoked ham, scrapple, and other pork products from Chester and Lancaster counties.

CIDER IS POPULAR — About 15 years ago, the Brackbills began making their own cider from sound apples, which are washed twice before going into a 500-gallon per-day capacity press. The cider-making process begins early in October and thousands of gallons are sold during a three-to-four-month period. Mr. Brackbill said that the cider is recommended by many doctors as a health drink, and many customers are sent to Brackbill's by their physicians. Mr. Brackbill, a great advocate of organic farming, told us that his firm uses as much 'green cover crop' as possible each year. He explained that wheat is spread over the planted crop in the fall. The cover crop protects the soil, and in the spring, when it is knee-high, the resultant humus is plowed under. 'This makes for a better harvested crop,' he stated, adding, 'the more we can turn under, the more we like it.' Mr. Brackbill feels that chemicals are necessary in some aspects of farming, but deplors their indiscriminate use. 'The more organic material we put back into the earth, the better it will serve us,' he said. Mr. Brackbill believes his farming methods, combined with the firm's policy of purchasing the best strain of seed possible, has been responsible for much of the success it enjoys. A strongly religious family, the Brackbills decided not to open their stand on Sunday when they first went into business, although many friends and neighbors told them they would not succeed in their venture if they did not. Mr. Brackbill is sure one of the reasons they have done so well is because of their conviction against being open on Sunday. Indeed, Harry Brackbill viewed his business as simply an avenue to fulfill his main purpose in life — which was to spread the good news of Salvation to everyone.

