

# Down Memory Lane with Bertha Golder Kirkner

Compiled by Frances H. Ligget

*This article was recently discovered in the Society's archives, and apparently was never published. The date it was originally written is unknown.*

**B**ertha E. Golder Kirkner, widow of Joseph Kirkner, was 86 years old in 1960 when we asked her to stroll down memory lane and point out some of the interesting milestones of her long life here in the Great Valley, where she lived for all but her first four years. The Golder family had owned the blacksmith and wheelwright shop on Yellow Springs Road (mentioned in Lillian Frank Bovell's reminiscences "Hills of Home,") and her grandparents had a pre-Revolutionary stone house on Yellow Springs Road close by the Octagonal School House, now the home of the Franklin B. Wildmans. Mrs. Kirkner well remembered her grandparents spinning wheel and wondered in later years why she hadn't asked questions about it. Possibly, she mused, because she was of the age when children should be seen and not heard, or else she was too busy playing with "smooth-headed dolls," a far cry from the modern version, which were a joy to her heart.

Bertha Golder's first few years of ABC's were spent at Salem School on Yellow Springs Road, now the dwelling of Mr. J. W. Farra and his family, next to



The Salem School. *Photo from the archives of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society.*

the old Salem Methodist Church. She later attended the one room Walker School on Parson Currie Road (now on the R. C. Ligget property) where be-



The Walker School. *From the TEHS archives.*

tween 25 to 30 pupils under the guidance of one teacher (may she be given an extra star in her crown), conquered the perils of writing, arithmetic, and grammar plus the Sixth Reader. At recess, the boys played a rollicking game of "tickly-hi-over" consisting of throwing a ball over the roof of the little school house with a pious hope on the part of the teacher, no doubt, that the windows would be spared. Baseball was played with a rubber ball; a shingle served as a bat. The Cassatt Woods adjoining the schoolhouse property rang with the merry voices of children playing hide and seek. The Christmas entertainment stood high on the list of excitement. For weeks in advance, the teacher and her fledglings practiced for the great moment. Amazing how vividly some memories stand out, whereas something that happened last week is a faded pastel in comparison. It was with much interest, too, that Bertha Golder Kirkner spoke of an Indian School some few miles distant, near what is now the Colonial Village Swimming Club of Wayne. It was located on a hill and had tales of its own to tell.<sup>1</sup>

During the long cold winter months, there were many sleighing and sledding parties. Starting on a bob-sled at the top of Diamond Rock Hill could take the merrymakers down the snow-packed road past the eight-sided school house and onto Yellow Springs Road. A well-managed curve would bring the sled hissing

down North Valley Road with a possible terminus at the old Wedge place. This type of exercise was guaranteed to shake down the heartiest of Christmas dinners, which, according to the narrator, starred duck or goose as its main feature, rather than turkey.

The months rolled by as months have a way of doing, and spring made way for summer. Soon it was time for strawberry and peach festivals at the local churches, wading in the meadow pond at the Philip TenBroeck (later Woolman, now Zink) farm on Yellow Springs Road, and watching for the gypsies to make their annual appearance. At times there were 15 to 20 of them in a band, telling fortunes and trading horses with the local farmers, usually to the latter's regret. Gypsy and haunted house stories, which never ceased to grow more and more exciting with each telling, took the place of today's television chillers with their scary results.

As for the houses on Yellow Springs Road, Bertha Golder Kirkner knew a number of them exceedingly well. She had lived in six between Salem Church and the Knox Covered Bridge. Three of her four children were born in these houses. It must have thrown the stork into a state of confusion figuring out the correct chimney, as the Kirkners lived in one house three times, and two houses twice!

Regardless of the change of abode, the routine of the head of the family was the same. Up at five o'clock in the morning, he fed the live-stock and milked the cows. Mother Bertha started breakfast, and at six roused her sleepy young'uns from their beds in the winter, fed them and started them off to school. On

sunny summer Mondays, the back porch was the center of activity, where two wash tubs and a washboard were in constant motion, and with the drying yard flying the family pennants. Winter brought the customary butchering time: hog meat made into sausage, scrapple, and lard. Other meats were prepared for smoking. Children's clothes to be cut and sewed and a thousand things that go to make up a housewife's daily grind.

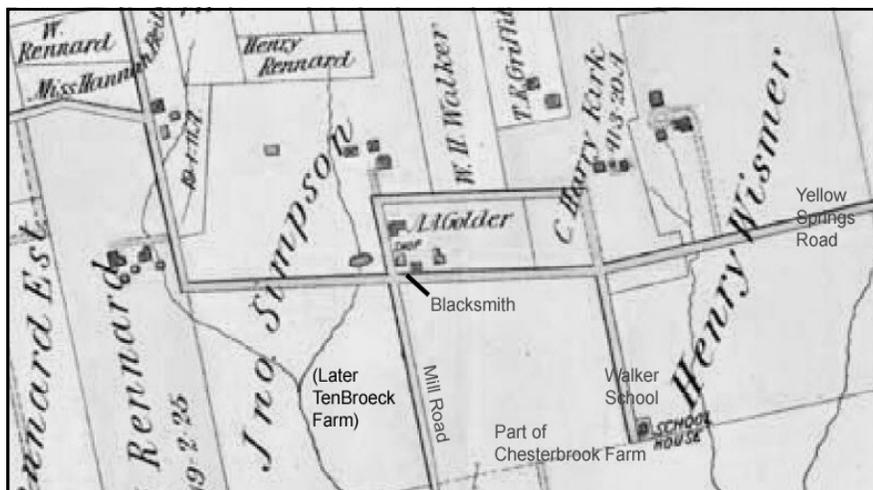
Food supplies, other than what the Kirkners grew for themselves, came from Phoenixville, whither they trotted with their horse and wagon, as much as once a week or month depending upon their need. If the weather warranted it, a stopover would be made at Valley Forge Park for a moment of relaxation and to let the horses rest.

The Salem Church's Ladies Aid Society was one of the highlights in Bertha Golder Kirkner's life. Since 1908 she had been secretary of this group. Their quilting parties met in various members' homes, where much stitching and a goodly slice of woman's talk was the order of the day. Patches were cut and sewed at home, then put in frames and quilted. Orders were taken for the coverlets to help raise money to keep the Salem Cemetery mowed and in good condition. A fine example of the work of this group is at Stirling's Quarters. Ordered in 1926, it is still in excellent condition. Today, a group of twelve women continue to meet once a month, in the evening, under a new banner "The Chester Valley Sewing Circle," but no longer can quilts be ordered.

Bertha Golder Kirkner, widow of Joseph C. Kirkner, passed away February 2, 1961 at the home of her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Walter T. Weaver, Jr., Swedesford Road, Exton, Pa.

Mrs. Weaver is continuing the family tradition, as she has been elected secretary of the Chester Valley Sewing Circle in her mother's stead.

<sup>1</sup> Bob Goshorn, "Ponemah: Land of the Hereafter", *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly*, Vol. 25, #1 (January 1987)



Location of the Golder homestead and environs. *Courtesy Mike Bertram.*