

# Birchrunville Historic District



Originally part of the 30,000 acres that became Pikeland and Vincent Townships, West Vincent was first settled by the Welsh. Morris Evans built a small stone cottage above the Birch Run and grazed sheep in the meadow. The first vestiges of a village appeared in 1796 when Major John Evans purchased 50 acres on the south side of Birch Run in the center of 'The Hollow', so named because of the topography of the Nantmeal Hills of which it is a part.

In 1803, the 50 acres were sold as eight separate woodlots with no buildings, save the occasional woodman's log hut. At the same time, the higher land surrounding "The Hollow" was being developed into farms with small, but substantial stone houses and log barns. But it was the Birch Run and its tributaries, Rocky Run and Friday's Run, known as reasonably swift and dependable streams, which spurred development. As early as 1776, a gun powder mill had been built on Rocky Run and by 1803, several saw mills were operating in the valley. A clover mill and an even earlier grist mill were operating a short distance upstream from 'The Hollow' on Birch Run. In 1811, a grist mill was built below the 'Evans-Rogers' house, and an axe factory and a tilt forge were advertised for sale in 1821. By 1823, an edge-tool forge, a wheelwright, a blacksmith, and a weaver were at work. Then came a tinsmith, a store in 1832, a school in 1833, and several houses along the road used by the stage coach on its way from Yellow Springs to Potts' Grove (Pottstown). In 1844, a linseed mill and distillery appeared.

After Kinzie's grist mill began full-time operations in the 1840s, Jonah John built a new general store building at the nearby intersection of Hollow and Flowing Springs Roads, creating the future hub of the village. In the 1840s and 50s, the number of businesses increased to include a shoemaker, house carpenters, plasterers, masons, carriage and wagon makers, a temperance hotel, harness and saddle makers, a patent medicine maker, and a nearby doctor. In 1847, Rev. J. Wilson Griffith erected his Greek Revival house, farm buildings and cordwainer's shop in the meadow. By 1856, there were enough mechanics to organize the Order of United American Mechanics and a union hall was under construction. Since the village was settled by mechanics, the younger folks wanted the name to be 'Mechanicsville'; however, in 1868, a post office officially opened under the name of Birch Run Ville and after 1882, the name was spelled as one word - Birchrunville.

In just a few short years, Jonah John's general store had generated a lot of business for itself and was a magnet for other trades and businesses. Between 1840 and 1870, the number of houses grew from 10 to 22. William W. West operated his tailor shop in part of the store building and his photography wagon was located just behind. In 1860, the Vincent Baptist Church built a meetinghouse at the confluence of Rocky Run and Birch Run. A Union Sunday school was held every week and church services twice a month until attendance dwindled and it closed in 1929.

In 1863, a new and larger school was built at the corner of Schoolhouse Lane and Flowing Springs Road. A 2<sup>nd</sup> floor was added in 1898 to accommodate high school grades 9, 10, and 11. The high school was closed in 1923, however the first floor, which accommodated grade school children, operated until 1953, when due to consolidation, all township schoolhouses were closed.

Francina Sturgis, a dressmaker, worked from her home on Schoolhouse Lane and Ida V. Rowland, the storekeeper's wife operated a "fashionable millinery". The Birchrunville General Store built in 1898 by Thomas B. Dewees, Jr., added Victorian details to the more common village architecture.

"Birchrunville is unique as a collection of village architecture with a concentration of commercial services and a surrounding agricultural area - a rare vignette where the workmen's houses created a village atmosphere of uniformity and singularity of purpose. It was unique among villages in northern Chester County due to its feeling of community and sense of identity. Isolated by geographic nature, the integrity of Birchrunville is high and takes an observer back in time. It provides a much forgotten pattern of a rural, commercial-oriented village where families of widely divergent economic bases lived in close proximity to each other with mutual respect and dependence."

(adapted from the Birchrunville National Register Nomination form written by Estelle Cremers-1991)