

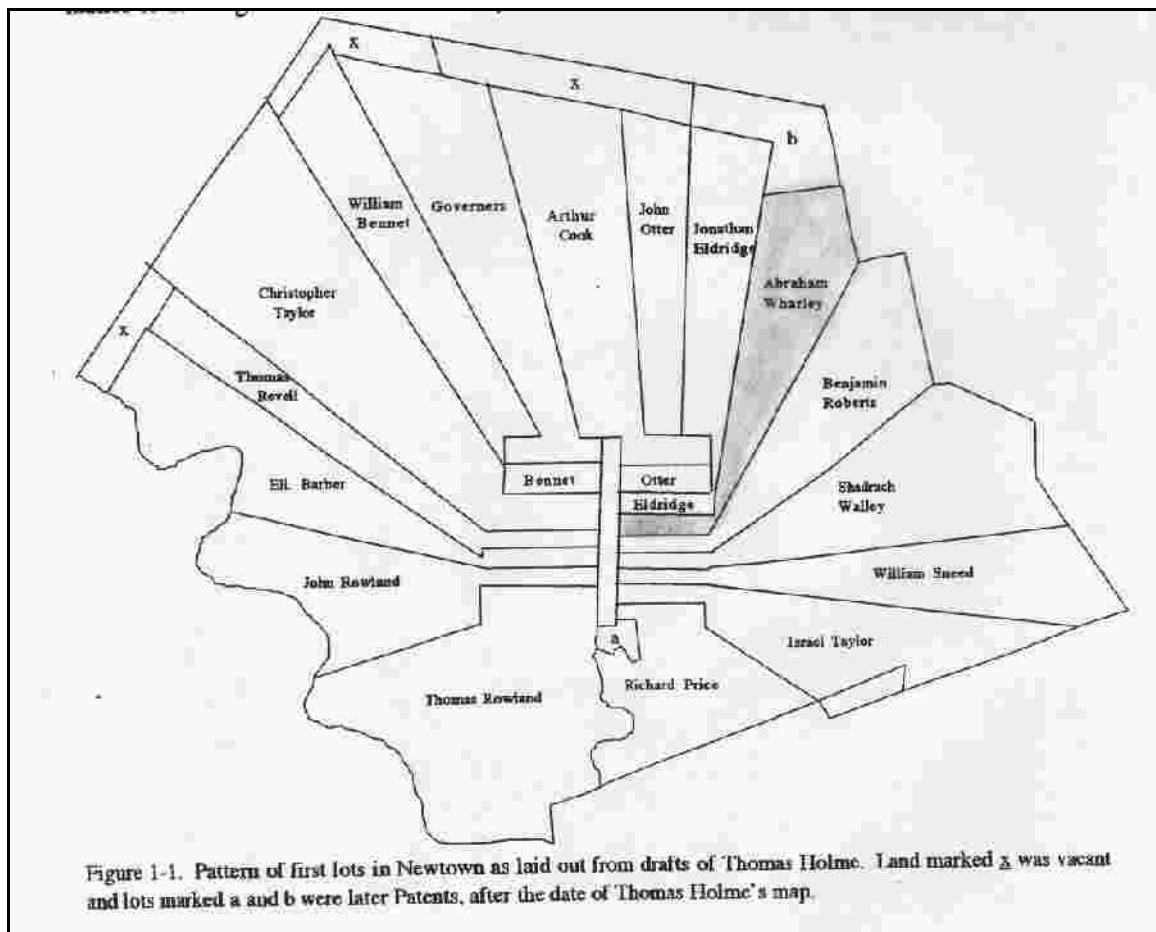
A Brief Land History of the Woods of Saxony

Compiled by Brian E. Rounsavill with the permission of the Newtown Historic Association

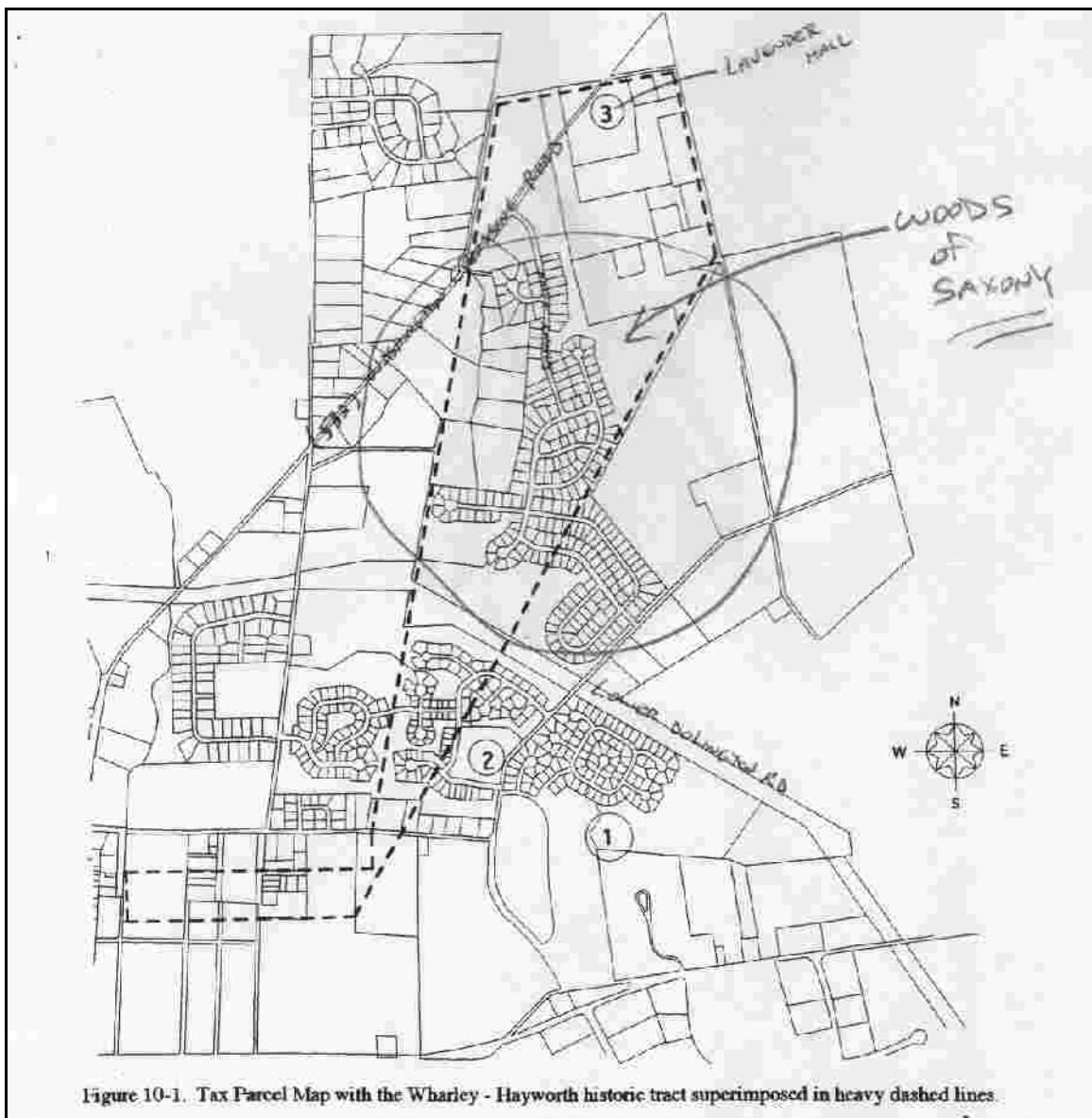
The 5,000 acres originally comprising Newtown Township and the Townstead were part of the vast tract purchased by William Penn from the Indians by William Markham, Penn's agent, on July 15, 1682. Penn originally called this area his "New Township" which eventually evolved into "Newtown." The town was patterned to resemble an open fan surrounding a narrow rectangular piece of property called the town common. The plan of the township and townstead were surveyed by Thomas Holme in 1684.

When Newtown was initially planned, each owner was provided a Town Lot of from 20 to 40 acres that had frontage on the Newtown Common and access to Newtown Creek. Town Lots faced both the east and west sides of the Common, and it was expected that houses would be built at the head of each Town Lot. Country Lots were, with one exception (Otter), physically connected to the Town Lots, thereby providing the owners free passage between the two.

The names recorded by Holme were the first owners of record; that is, a survey was returned in their names. Some never carried through the process of acquiring the land by Patent, and most neither saw, nor settled their property. They sold their land right to others. Shadrach Walley was the only original purchaser to have actually settled and improved his land. The original pattern of Newtown as laid out by Thomas Holme provided an historic division of the area into 16 parcels, each representing the land of the First Purchaser.



The *Woods of Saxony* development is situated on what is known as the Abraham Wharley / Benjamin Taylor Plantation tract. Although this historic tract is not bounded by any major roads today, the location of the Country Lot can easily be identified by existing property lines that have remained undisturbed through over 300 years of existence. The Country Lot, together with a triangular shaped parcel extending to the east along Frost Lane, 403 acres, was purchased by Benjamin Taylor in 1730 and a major stone mansion house was constructed at the extreme northern area of this tract. Washington Crossing Road originally followed the upper boundary, but the road location was changed and consequently a portion of the Taylor land was cut off, bringing the road in close proximity to the Taylor mansion house, previously known as Lavender Hall [most recently known as the “Stonehouse Bistro”].



The following is a brief description of the historic residences located on the Wharley – Hayworth tract (the numbers below correspond to the numbers on the preceding figure):

1. Stone house situated north of the old Frost Lane, probably built by Silas Cary soon after he acquired the land in 1815. It is located in the *Ridings of Newtown* development and is used by the Homeowner's Association. The building is not located on the Wharley – Hayworth tract, but became associated with that land through the ownership of Benjamin Taylor who purchased the majority of the Hayworth tract and combined it with the other land from Walley.
2. Stone house was not on Wharley – Hayworth land. This property is probably on the site of the original Timothy Taylor homestead, circa 1754. It is situated northwest of Lower Dolington Road and is part of a retirement village next to the *Country Bend* development.
3. Benjamin Taylor purchased 403 acres in 1730 and is reputed to have built a house on the property. However, other oral history accounts claim that the house was built by Benjamin's son Bernard Taylor in 1747. Whatever the case, the property remained in the Taylor family until 1891 and today the house is the dominant stone building on the southeast side of Washington Crossing Road. It has been remodeled and enlarged many times and has long been a well known restaurant and inn, known locally for many years as "Lavender Hall" and most recently known as the "Stonehouse Bistro".

Evidence of Wharley's ownership of land in Newtown comes from the Thomas Holme map where a tract, Abraham Wharley, was shown between Jonathan Eldridge and Benjamin Roberts; however, there is some question regarding the exact spelling of his name. The 1688 survey of the adjacent Roberts tract refers twice to the owner of the neighboring tract as being Abraham Whearly, while the 1702 Patent of the Eldridge tract refers to Abraham Whorley.

It appears that these several early references were to Abraham Wharley, who was Sheriff of Bucks County, 1686-89. No records exist today to indicate that Wharley ever applied for a Warrant and a Survey. The warrant to Hayworth, first legal owner, describes the tract as "vacant," meaning that it was officially unseated. This does not preclude the possibility that it might have been occupied previously by settlers who had neither the desire nor means to buy the ground, a situation not uncommon in the early development of the Province.

The Taylor land in Newtown was in the family from 1730 to 1891, and the homestead buildings appear to have survived to the present day, although extensively changed. In the early days the road leading to Washington Crossing followed the Taylor boundary line, and therefore took a route that avoided the farm buildings. When the road was given a more direct route and cut across the northern portion of the Taylor land, it also divided the farm buildings, and no doubt the value of the property suffered a loss. The mansion house was in a deteriorated state in 1891 when it was sold to Colonel James Boyd, President of the Philadelphia, Newtown and New York Railroad, who renovated it as a summer residence. After Boyd died, the Newtown Enterprise reported on September 23, 1911:

"Lewis S. Amonson of Philadelphia, who recently purchased the Boyd farm north of Newtown, on the road to Dolington, has acquired all the farm of William V. Kessler, adjoining. Mr. Amonson will have about 300 acres in one tract, and will improve and beautify the property in various ways. He will make the place his summer home. It will be stocked with a fine heard of Guernsey and Holstein cattle, some of which have already been purchased. The 'newcomer' to Newtown Township is a prominent in the financial circles of Philadelphia, being a director in the Quaker

City National Bank, Franklin Trust Company, and Central Trust and Savings Company.”

The farm was called “Nos Noma” [his name, “Amonson” spelled backwards] and Amonson is said to have put the large columns at the front entrance of the mansion house, which can be seen in many old photographs of “Lavender Hall” but have since been removed in subsequent renovations.

The following is a list of landowners for the property on which the *Woods of Saxony* development is currently situated:

- Abraham Wharley, c. 1690 – c. 1702
- Mary Hayworth, 1702 – 1705
- John Hough, Jr., 1705 – 1705
- Shadrach Walley, 1705 – 1721
- John Walley, 1721 – 1730
- Benjamin Taylor, 1730 – 1747
- Bernard Taylor, 1747 – 1789
- Benjamin Taylor, 3rd, 1789 – 1826
- Benjamin Taylor, 4th, 1826 – c. 1860
- Henry Taylor, c. 1860 - 1891
- Col. James Boyd, 1891 - 1911
- Lewis S. Amonson, 1911

Individuals interested in tracing the land ownership records from 1911 up to the present day may do so either at the Bucks County Courthouse in Doylestown or at the Newtown Historic Association in Newtown.

The author wishes to thank the Newtown Historic Association (www.newtownhistoric.org) for allowing this information to be reproduced from the referenced works. Copies of the publications listed below may be obtained from the Newtown Historic Association and are available via their website (<http://www.newtownhistoric.org/pub.html>). All proceeds benefit the Newtown Historic Association.

References:

- “*Historic Newtown (Images of America Series)*” by C. David Callahan, Paul M. Gouza and Brian E. Rounsavill, 2001, p. 7.
- “*A History of Land Ownership, Newtown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, 1683 – 1850*” by Thomas C. Mayer, 1999, p. 1-4, 128-140.