



RESIDENCE OF COL. THOMAS FORREST, at Township Line and Haines Street.
From an original drawing by John Richards, now for the first time published by permission of
Horace F. McCann.

POMONA GROVE

BY MARY W. SHOEMAKER

Read at a meeting of the Site and Relic Society.

ABOUT the middle of the eighteenth century some of the finest country seats of the wealthy citizens of Philadelphia, were located along the Germantown Road. Nearest to the city was Fairhill, the home of Isaac Norris; a little further north was Stenton, the home of the Logans; then the Wister homestead, since called Grumblethorpe; followed by the subject of our sketch; while just above was Cliveden, the residence of the Chew family.

Pomona Grove is its best designation, for while the name was not given to it for more than half a century after its erection, still it is the name by which it is best known. It consisted of a tract of seven acres of land lying on the east side of Germantown Avenue above Abington, now Washington, Lane. On its lower side it joined the Axe Burying Ground for part of its way, and on its upper the old Keyser homestead. While Pomona has disappeared, the Keyser house and the Burying Ground remain just as they appeared a century ago.

Pomona Homestead built in 1755, was large and spacious. During the Revolutionary War it was owned by Christopher Huber. There is a tradition that at one time during the war, its rooms were filled with tailors and shoemakers, hard at work making clothing and shoes for the American army.

During the Battle of Germantown, the hardest part of the fight occurred right in this locality and partly on these grounds. In the rear of the house was an extremely fine spring, which has only recently been filled up. Around this spring the Virginia troops bravely rallied in the vain effort to turn the fortunes of the day. A number who fell,

were buried on the spot and in unmarked graves. It is said that an officer named Blackmore was killed and, after the battle, was buried there by Jacob Keyser who lived nearby. An interesting incident of the battle was that regarding William Dolby who had a comrade killed by his side at this place. The event impressed him so forcibly with the wickedness of war, that he left the ranks, sought work with Thomas Livezey, the miller on the banks of the Wissahickon, and became a convert to Friends' views. He removed to Delaware and became a prominent and approved minister in the Society.

From the Hubers the place, soon after the battle, passed into the hands of the Shoemaker family. The title was vested in the name of William Shoemaker, hatter, but it was always understood that the real owner was his brother Samuel.

Samuel Shoemaker was a great-grandson of George Shoemaker, of Cresheim, Germany, who came to this country on invitation of William Penn in 1685. He was the son of Benjamin Shoemaker, who was a Provincial Councillor in 1745-46. Father and son were among the most prominent men of their times, both of them holding many and identical offices, in some cases the son succeeding the father. Benjamin was Mayor in 1743, 1752, and 1760, Samuel in 1769-70. Benjamin was City Treasurer from 1751 to 1767, Samuel from 1767 to 1775. Benjamin was Justice of the Orphans' Court in 1745, Samuel in 1761. Benjamin was Associate Justice of the City Court in 1741, Samuel in 1766. Benjamin was a Justice of the Court of Common Pleas in 1741, Samuel in 1761, 1773 and 1774. Benjamin was a Justice of the Peace in 1741 and 1752, Samuel in 1761, 1764, 1770 and 1772. Benjamin was a member of the Common Council in 1732, Samuel in 1755. Samuel also served two terms in the Assembly of the Province. During the British occupation of Philadelphia Samuel was "First Magistrate of Police, by the King's Authority." Besides holding many offices he was a successful merchant.

Like many Friends, Samuel Shoemaker disapproved of the Revolutionary War, and, as a consequence, his property was confiscated, this no doubt being the reason why Pomona never appeared in his name. He went to New York when the British evacuated Philadelphia. Sir William Howe advised him to return and make his peace with the Americans, but he declined to do so. While in New York he was of much service to American prisoners. A portion of his time he spent in England, and he had an interview with King George under the auspices of his friend Benjamin West, who was under obligation to Samuel for encouragement in his art while a boy. The account of the interview with George III, as given in the *Papers of the Seventy-six Society*, is as follows: "In his first interview with the King, the King inquired 'How is it, Mr. Shoemaker, that Pennsylvania is so much in advance of the other provinces, though many of them were settled before it?' 'May it please your Majesty,' responded the Quaker, with great courtliness, 'I presume it is because so many of the inhabitants are Germans or of German parentage,' bowing at the same time to the Queen, who was a German by birth. The King showed by his manner that he was gratified by the compliment paid to his wife, and said 'No, Mr. Shoemaker, it is no doubt because they are Quakers,' thus as Mr. Shoemaker subsequently remarked, fully returning the compliment."

William Shoemaker and his wife (Martha Brown) conveyed the property to Colonel Thomas Forrest, in 1788.

Col. Forrest was born in Philadelphia and had a common school education. He was always a prominent man, and must have possessed a superior mind, for, although most of what we know of him, we get from anecdotes, yet his character, veiled as it often was in eccentricity of dress and manner, exhibits a basis of shrewd wisdom and clever methods of expression.

It is stated that he began his military career by equipping a company like Indians, with feathers and plumes and painted faces. This company, however, was soon dis-

banded, and Forrest was made Captain in Colonel Thomas Proctor's Pennsylvania Artillery, August 14, 1776. Col. Proctor was second only to General Knox in the artillery service and was one of the most efficient officers of the Revolution, much of Knox's reputation depending on the intelligent support and valuable suggestions which he received from Proctor.

Many anecdotes are told of Forrest. He once advertised for a gardener. While walking about his grounds he saw an applicant approach with an umbrella under his arm, an unusual sight at that time. "What is that under your arm," asked the Colonel. "An umbrella." "What is it for?" "To keep off the sun and rain." The Colonel moved the man gently out of the gate, saying "Colonel Forrest does not need a gardener who is afraid of sun and rain." When the army was encamped at Valley Forge, a great dread of smallpox existed in a newly-arrived New Jersey regiment. Forrest, in the night, wrote on the doors of all the huts facing the Jerseymen, "Smallpox here." As each man came out in the morning and saw the notice, he slipped away so that at roll call none responded. For this, Washington gave Forrest a public reprimand which the latter never forgave.

Colonel Forrest resigned from the army in 1783, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. After the war he was elected to the sixteenth Congress by a majority of one vote, and served from December 6, 1819, to March 3, 1821. He was defeated for the seventeenth Congress by Henry Baldwin, but was elected to fill a vacancy caused by the resignation of William Milnor, and served from December 2, 1822, to March 3, 1823.

When Coloned Forrest purchased Pomona he enlarged the house and planted a large number of fruit and ornamental trees, among them, it is claimed, the large yew tree which became so identified with the place. He was a regular attendant upon Friends' Meeting and used the plain dress.

After the death of his son and the marriage of his only daughter to Dr. Samuel Betton, father of Dr. Thomas Forrest Betton, and grandfather of Samuel Betton, he sold the place to James Duval in 1811 and retired to a farm at Township Line and Haines Street, where he died March 20th, 1825, in his 84th year.

James Seraphim Duval was born March 3d, 1766, at Mante, Department of the Seine, France. He came to this country when a boy and began his mercantile life as a ped-



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lar. He subsequently opened a dry goods store on Market Street, where he rapidly acquired a competency. He was fond of horticulture and devoted his leisure time to improving and beautifying the spacious grounds which soon justified the name he gave them of Pomona Grove. His constant intercourse with France enabled him to gratify his tastes, and for years scarcely a vessel arrived from that country or her colonies without bringing rare, and for this country, unique plants, for his garden, or ornaments to beautify his house.

Mr. Duval died March 24th, 1842, and is buried in St. Luke's Protestant Episcopal Churchyard, Germantown. His daughter Sarah married the Rev. John Rodney, rector of St. Luke's. The Rev. John's son, the late James Duval Rodney, was a well-known lawyer of Philadelphia, and his daughter Louise still lives in the Rodney House, which now stands on the corner of Main and Duval Streets, and which immediately adjoined the ground of Pomona Grove.

The next owner was Isaac Baker, of the gas fixture firm of Cornelius & Baker. Mr. Baker's ideas of improving the place were very extensive, including an entirely new house and stable. He started with the stable, the old wooden one having been destroyed by fire, and erected a new brown stone building, which, at the time, was the finest in the town. He never began the new house, but he enlarged the old one.

Thomas W. Evans, a Philadelphia merchant, succeeded Mr. Baker as owner of the property and lived there until sometime in the early seventies, when he sold it to Amos R. Little.

During Mr. Little's time Pomona was at its zenith. The grounds were handsomely kept up, and everything that money and taste could do to make it attractive was lavished upon it. The grounds were laid out by William Saunders, nurseryman who had originally been a Presbyterian clergyman, but who did not like his profession and came to this country and started in the nursery business. He afterwards removed to Washington, D. C., and died there.

The Arion Society, a musical organization of Germantown, gave one of its annual open air concerts here, and it was enjoyed by throngs of people.

Mr. Little was very active in public life and entertained many noted persons. During the Centennial Exhibition he was one of the men connected with its management, and at the close, was tendered a pyrotechnic display on his lawn by the manager of the displays given at the exhibition.

About 1887 Mr. Little decided to give up Pomona and travel. As he expressed it, he was "tired of keeping a boarding house." Most unfortunately for Germantown, the small parks idea had not taken root in the minds of Councils, as it afterwards did, or they might have purchased it for that purpose. Mr. Little would have aided in carrying out the idea, and would have sold it to the city for a park at a much lower price than he was asking for it, as he was anxious that the estate should remain intact. As we know, however, it was sold to a syndicate and cut up into building lots and the old home torn down, after having been for more than a century and a half the residence of men distinguished in their various walks of life.

No account of Pomona would be complete without mention of the grand old English yew tree, said to have been the finest specimen of its kind in America. The Germantown Horticultural Society, through Thomas Meehan and Edwin C. Jellett made earnest efforts to secure the tree for replanting in Market Square, but the lack of public spirit on the part of the representative of the syndicate, frustrated their efforts, and the tree was chopped down.

Some Notes on Pomona Grove

BY EDWIN C. JELLETT

DEED BOOK The tract which became known as Pomona
No. 22 Grove was composed of 7 lots or parcels of
Page 362 ground, of which 3 lots were owned by William

Shoemaker, hatter, of Germantown, and Martha, his wife. The tract contained 19 acres, 82½ perches, and bordered on Germantown Road, Upper Burying Ground, Abington Lane, and lands of Dirk Keyser, Peter Leibert, Adam Holt, Jacob Knorr and David Sator. To above tract was also added lot purchased of Matthias Reser, of Germantown,

DEED BOOK tanner, as per Deed Book No. 35, page 232.
No. 22 The original tract was conveyed to Thomas For-
Page 362 rest, gentleman, November 12, 1788, by William Shoemaker, and Martha, his wife.

DEED BOOK March 28, 1811, Thomas Forrest, gentleman,
I. C. 27-533 sold the tract to James S. Duval, merchant.

DEED BOOK December 6, 1855, Samuel Wagner, George B.
A. D. B. Rodney and Rev. John Rodney, Trustees under
No. 45 James S. Duval's will, sold to Isaac F. Baker.

WILL BOOK James S. Duval's Will. Recorded March 18,
No. 15 1842: "Item. To my daughter, Sarah Rodney,
Page 488 I bequeath the house in Germantown in which she, with her husband, John Rodney, now resides, the aforesaid property to be held by her husband, John Rodney, whom I hereby appoint Trustee, in trust for her children."

DEED BOOK
M. R., 22
Page 521

Property above referred to was purchased from Abraham Keyser by James S. Duval, February 27, 1819. (House 1 and lot of 1 acre of ground.)

DEED BOOK
A. D. B.
No. 45
Page 144

December 6, 1855. Pomona tract was as above recorded conveyed to Isaac F. Baker, and Ann E., his wife.

DEED BOOK
A. D. B.
No. 50
Page 73

December 6, 1858. John Rodney, and Sarah, his wife, sold to Isaac F. Baker the Abraham Keyser house and lot of 1 acre.

DEED BOOK
A. C. H.
No. 102
Page 24

Isaac F. Baker got into financial difficulties, and the place passed into the hands of Robert C. Cornelius, and Harriet, his wife. (See Sheriff's Deed Book S, Page 613.)

DEED BOOK
A. C. H.
No. 102
Page 27

May 1, 1863. Robert C. Cornelius, and Harriet, his wife, sold to Thomas Wallis Evans, and Anna D., his wife.

DEED BOOK
F. T. W.
No. 207
Page 183

May 12, 1875. Thomas Wallis Evans, gentleman, and Anna D., his wife, conveyed the property to Amos R. Little (\$64,500.00).

DEED BOOK
G. G. P.
No. 195
Page 331

December 10, 1886. Amos R. Little, merchant, and Anna P., his wife, sold part of Pomona, a tract of 11 acres, 1 rood, 18 72-1000 perches, to John R. Read, attorney; Silas W. Pettit, attorney; Edwin T. Coxe, conveyancer; T. Ellwood Potts, conveyancer, and George Dermuth, builder, for \$70,000.00.