Echoes of the Past: The History of Stone Cottage Woods
Stone Cottage Woods is a magical place, a country retreat that feels worlds away from the bustle of busy lives, yet easily accessible to New York City and Philadelphia. It’s a fine example of the quintessential “Bucks County stone farmhouse,” steeped in 18th century history, yet expanded and modernized with every convenience.

It’s a beautiful place to call home for many reasons, not the least of which is its story. From humble beginnings as a home to blacksmiths who serviced the farms and later, the stagecoaches traveling the Old Philadelphia Road to Easton, through its 21st century transformation as a country oasis, the history of Stone Cottage Woods is rich with texture and human interest, most of which has been hidden from history, till now.
For thousands of years prior to the arrival of the first European settlers, this area was the home to the Lenni Lenape Indians, in whose native language “Lenni Lenape” means “original people.” At the time the colonies were being settled, there were more than 8,000 Lenni Lenape from southeastern New York through eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey, down to the coast of Delaware. The local tribe hunted the virgin forests and cultivated the rich lands along the Delaware, Tohickon and other local rivers and streams, with a thriving settlement at Nockamixon.

After William Penn received the land that was to become Pennsylvania from King Charles II in 1681, he set about establishing 3 major sub-divisions: Philadelphia to the south, Bucks County to the north, and Chester County to the west. Upon settlement of his estate in 1732, ownership passed to his sons and to the newly formed Commonwealth of PA in 1776. Throughout this period, tracts of land were sold to settlers and investors. Original purchasers bought blocks of 5,000 acres, location unspecified, which were surveyed later at the request of the purchaser or buyers to whom the purchaser had sold his rights. Often times there were already settlers squatting on the lands, farming and running businesses, prior to surveys and deeds establishing rights of ownership. Many early settlers believed that if they worked and farmed the land, they’d eventually gain title to it.

Logging, mining and farming

Taking in the rolling hills and verdant open spaces of this area today, it might be surprising to learn that early farmers weren’t the first European settlers. The first European settlers were woodsmen. In 1700, Franklin and Charles Richard were sent from Philadelphia to the wilderness of what would later become Williams Township by the Company of Free Traders. They established the earliest logging operations to supply wood for the housing boom in Philadelphia, using the Delaware River to float the logs to their destination.
Sawmills were rare in the early part of the 18th century, which supplies an important clue when dating homes like Stone Cottage Woods. The rocky fields of the area supplied field stones hand gathered and mortared with lime and clay, a caustic mixture providing far greater elasticity than today’s Portland-cement based mortars. Homes constructed of wood at this time were either constructed of unsawn logs, or pit-sawn logs. Pit sawing was an extremely labor intensive process in which men standing in a pit and those standing above sawed lengths of boards from felled trees by hand. It was not until the late 1700’s that the first local, water-powered sawmill was established in Coffeetown along Fry’s Run by George Kleinhans. A second followed in 1833, and many more were established in the township thereafter.

Other settlers in the early 1700’s were drawn by a nascent mining industry. As early as 1698, settlers became aware of the value the native Indians placed on a crude iron ore called magnetite, found in the Durham Hills. Recognizing its commercial value, William Penn’s secretary James Logan began to search for wealthy investors to commercialize these iron ore deposits. The Durham Company was established 1727 to develop an iron furnace just southeast of here. The Durham furnace and mine provided work for many local farmers, who sold wagon loads of low grade iron ore to the furnace to supplement their incomes.
A 1,472 acre tract, that contains the land of Stone Cottage Woods, was purchased by The Durham Company from Penn’s heirs in 1749. The Company eventually owned some 8,500 acres of land, including today’s Durham Township (now Bucks County) and the southern part of Williams Township (now Northampton County). By 1750, Durham was a thriving community.

Farmers also began working the land in the early part of the 18th century. Prior to the first official Penn land-grants following the infamous Walking Purchase of 1737, scattered settlers farmed and set up shop throughout the area, essentially squatting on land to which they had no legal claim.

The Walking Purchase

As the City of Philadelphia began growing, the Penn’s began looking for ways to expand. In the 1730’s, the Penn’s began talking to the Lenni Lenapi about an old treaty, supposedly signed in 1686, in which the Indians agreed to sell the lands north of present day Wrightstown into the woods as far as a man could walk in a day and a half. There was no proof of the treaty or of money exchanged, but the Penn’s, needing money to pay their creditors, persisted with the help of attorney James Logan. Logan tried various tricks – deceptive maps, a reproduction of a falsified treaty and finally an agreement in 1737 to reproduce the terms by sending a man out to walk the land as supposedly stipulated. Logan proceeded to hire the three strongest and fittest woodsmen he could find, trained them, chose, cleared and marked a path, and had pack horses and supplies accompany the men as they sprinted the distance. Two collapsed en route and the third covered 60 miles from Wrightown to Lehighton – claiming 330,000 acres for Penn and opening up the area for official land grants and settlement.
The earliest official landowners in the area are memorialized in the naming of streets, rivers and villages: William Fry received a land grant in 1740 and is memorialized as Fry’s Run; George Raub received his land grants in 1748 and became the namesake of the thriving village of Raubsville; large Penn land grants and improved roads soon brought Unangsts, Deemers, Stouts and Bachmans to farm the land.

Between 1752 and 1770 a narrow trail between Williams Township and Durham was widened and improved to handle stage coaches and wagons and became known as the Old Philadelphia Pike. Travelers changing their horses at the inn run by the Transue family on Durham and County Line Road would have had easy access to their blacksmith shop on Stouts Valley Road, just over the hill.

The process of back-dating the oldest of homes and buildings is complicated by the fact that the early deeds seldom mention the exact nature of buildings, simply referring to an early structures as a “messuage,” because it was the land that was of prime importance. Many of the landmarks referred to in property descriptions are impermanent by nature – an old chestnut tree, for example, or the corner of a neighbor’s property. While it isn’t possible to precisely date the structure itself, building clues from renovations in the 1940’s and 1980’s point to an early 18th century origin, making it one of the older surviving structures in the area.
The house is comprised of two parts – the main building perpendicular to the slope of the bank, and a
the northern part which fronts the road. The wall between the two halves of the house is the same as
the exterior walls that is, built with field stone, and over one foot thick. A doorway, with a wooden sill,
existed at the center of the wall connecting the two halves. Evidence supports the main building as
predating the street frontage, which may have originally been a one story summer kitchen
subsequently joined to the main house later in the 18th century.

The most telling clue as to the dating of the house is its primitive architectural design. The main
structure is long and narrow, with floor joists that ran perpendicular to the front door in a single run,
thus constraining the width of the house to the length of the logs and ability to support the weight of the
structure without a center beam. This style of architecture can be found in surviving medieval
buildings in England and Scotland; it predates the style of stone houses which appeared in this area
with the German settlers who predominated in the mid 1700’s. Most of these later century stone
homes of German origin have a central door and, in the case of two story structures, a central
staircase. The off-center door and winder staircase to the left of the fireplace point to a more
primitive origin, and further supports dating the building to the time between 1717 and the American
Revolution, when the Scotch-Irish first immigrated to Pennsylvania as a result of severe hardship in
Ireland.

In the late 1980’s, Peter Thompson undertook a massive restoration, taking the building down to a
shell to rebuild as a period home. When he removed what he could salvage of the original white pine
flooring in the process of renovating the house, he noted that the size of the boards and lack of knots
would indicate a first growth harvest. The width of the planks (nearly 3 ft wide at the widest part, and
tapering down to 30 inches or so) also support this theory. The hand-hewn, hand-planed, tongue and
groove planks were placed alternately – the wider end of one board against the narrower end of the
next board so the floor came out even. The flooring was pit sawn, with the rounded edges slightly
planed. This could imply that the construction pre-dated the advent of the sawmills established in the
late 1700’s, because there was no other way to square off the boards at that time. Other historic
stone farmhouses in Williams Township dating from the 1750’s and later have 12-16 inch floorboards
that are more even, indicating they were squared at a sawmill.

When Peter removed the plaster covering the stone fireplace wall, he found hand-split oak lathing.
Like pit sawing, this was a labor-intensive manual process, and is another clue that either sawmills
were not affordable or else unavailable to the laborers who constructed the house.
Across the street from the house was a blacksmith shop. References to the shop exist in some of the deeds, as well as 19th century maps of the township. Unfortunately, nothing remains of the shop today. However, the property has a long history of ownership by blacksmiths, beginning with the first recorded deed holder in 1800, who came to the area in 1756.

The Transue Family

Johann Abraham Transue was the son of Abraham Transue and Anna Margaretha Miller, who came to America in the summer of 1730 aboard the ship, “Thistle.” Abraham, as he was called, was born a year later, on June 6, 1731, in Salisbury Township, Bucks County (which is now a part of Lehigh County, southeast of Allentown). He trained to be a wheelwright, and married a local girl, Maria Magdelena Lang, in 1755. According to genealogical records, in 1756 the couple moved the Durham Tract, in the newly formed Williams Township, taking up residence at the stone house at the intersection of County Line and Durham Roads, along the bustling stage coach route. His property holdings extended just north of Stouts Valley Road and included the parcels upon which the blacksmith shop and Stone Cottage Woods stood. In 1785, he paid a Federal tax on 200 acres of land, three horses and three cattle. In 1786 and 1788 he was assessed for the same amount, and also paid a tax as a Tavern Keeper.

Abraham and Anna’s tavern was one of the stopping places along the route connecting Easton to Philadelphia, where travelers could secure refreshment and a change of horses. The couple had eleven children, beginning with Elias, born in 1756, and ending with Mattheis, born in 1780. Three sons, and two grandsons worked as blacksmiths. Abraham and seven of his sons enlisted in Col. Philip Boehm’s Company of the 4th Battalion of the Northampton County militia in 1782.
Although he spent his adult life building his business and raising his large family on this property, it was not until Feb 5, 1800 that Abraham received a deed for his land from John Thompson, one of the Durham Company investors, and the post-Durham Company legally recorded history of the land begins.

At this point, four of his sons – Elias, Johann Philip, Johannes, and Jacob, had moved north to Smithfield Township, Monroe County. Between the years 1800 and 1806, Abraham divided his land into seven parcels, some of which were sold to neighbors, and several of which he deeded to two his sons, Anthony and Peter.

Anthony was a blacksmith, and Peter, a farmer in Lower Saucon, who received his deed on March 28, 1806. Abraham was predeceased by his wife Anna in 1810, and he died on April 30, 1813. They are buried in the old Williams Churchyard in Williams Township.

At this point, it appears likely that the blacksmith shop, on the north side of the road, was part of Anthony’s holdings, and the house on the south side of the road would have gone to Peter.

The next few transfers of property are challenging to follow. Peter (born 1777) and his wife Mary (born Maria Elizabeth Grube, 1782) sold off tracts of this land to neighbors and relatives.
On April 19, 1815 they sold a messuage and 93 perches (a small lot, potentially the Stone Cottage Woods house) to Peter’s nephew, Abraham, Jr (b 1788) who was a carpenter and a farmer.

Abraham Transue Jr and his wife Margaret Ann Neihardt had 9 children between 1811 and 1831. Geneological records point to him moving to Illinois around 1830. If they had been living at Stone Cottage Woods between 1815 and 1830, and/or had sold the property to Jacob Deemer is unknown.

On April 2, 1823, Peter and Mary sold nearly a hundred acres and a messuage to a neighbor, Andrew Ruth, who lived in the stone house at the intersection of Durham and Stouts Valley Road. Since the acreage contained a messuage, it’s quite possible that a Ruth owned the house and/or the Blacksmith shop now.

They sold another 16 acres to a neighbor, Jacob Deemer (b 1797), around the same time. The Deemer family makes a reappearance later in history.
On April 4, 1848, the house was back in Transue hands. Isaac Transue (b 1800), grandson of Johann Abraham and a blacksmith by trade, and his wife Sarah B Call (b 1803), purchased the 93 perches back from Jacob J. and Catherine Deemer. Andrew Ruth also sold them 5 acres 5 perches to add on to their 93 perches, providing for a small but comfortable homestead. They raised 7 children, at least the last two in Stone Cottage Woods: Christine (b 1826), Jeremiah (b 1827), Isaac Synder (b 1827), Sarah (b 1829), Joshua (b 1832), Ellemanda (b 1842) and Anna (1849).

Although he did not appear to own it, the blacksmith shop would have been an ideal location, just as it had been for Isaac’s uncles and cousin.

In their late 60’s, Isaac and Sarah died at home just days apart in 1869; Isaac on November 14 and Sarah on November 18. They are buried in Old Williams Cemetery. The administrators of their estate were their eldest son Jeremiah, and their eldest daughter Christine’s husband, Francis Sloyer (remember that name). The two tracts – the 5 acres and the 93 perches plus the house, went to auction to settle the estate.

The Steinbach Family

Jacob Steinbach/Stonebach who lived in Williams Township, had a grandson William, b 1819. William was a blacksmith who, on May 29, 1870, bought another tract of what was likely Anthony Transue’s land that had previously been sold off to Jacob and Harriet Steely. While difficult to follow the trail, evidence points to a small lot of 1307 square feet across the road from the house, potentially being the site of the blacksmith shop. It would appear that William needed a new place to practice his trade.
At the age of 51, William had already been through a lot. His wife Mary Anne (b Lee, 1819) had trouble with the last two of her six pregnancies. Their son Richard (b 1851) died within a year, and Mary Anne died within 16 months of giving birth to their youngest, Jacob Lee, in 1853. In the 1860 Federal census for Williams Township, William is listed with a property value of $300, and a household comprised of his daughter Catherine, age 11, and son Jacob Lee, age 7. The older children would have grown and moved away by this time. There is a reference to a second wife, Lucy Ann, who appears in both the 1860 and 1870 census.

The Mystery of Lucy Ann Steinbach

Lucy Ann Steinbach is a bit of an enigma. The Williams Township Federal census records would put her birth at about 1820, but based on her marriage record to William Steinbach on January 13, 1857, it is likely she was a bit older, having actually been born on November 29, 1815. That marriage record indicates that her full name at time of marriage was Louisa Ann Huber; at 42 she was likely a widow when she married William.
By 1870, William was doing well financially, according to census records of 1870. Daughter Catherine was married and living in Bethlehem, and Lucy Ann and Jacob Lee were at home.

The plot thickens when the Stone Cottage Woods house (the 5 acres 5 perches and 93 perches) went to auction upon the death of Isaac and Sarah Transue. Lucy Ann went to the auction, and placed the winning bid of $625 to claim title to the property on March 4, 1871 for her husband, the blacksmith working across the street, one of 12 practicing blacksmiths in Williams Township (according to census records of 1880. By 1900, there were only 2 remaining blacksmiths in the township; William Steinbach was the last blacksmith to work across the street from Stone Cottage Woods).

It must have been an unusual move for a woman of that time to purchase property independently of her husband, and it stayed in her name for eleven years. In 1882, the property flipped at a net cost of $25. On March 23, Lucy Ann and William sold the house to Milton L. Deemer for $625. Four days later, on March 27, Milton L. Deemer sold it back to William Steinbach for $650. Lucy Ann's name was not recorded on this deed with her husband.

There's no census listing for either Lucy Ann or William Steinbach after the census of 1870; Lucy Ann passed away on January 23, 1887 and is buried at Durham Cemetery. Five years later, on March 20, 1893, at the age of 74, William sold the property to Robert Shimer (a descendent of the Shimers of Williams Township, who lived across the valley in the area between Buttermilk Road and Raubsville Road; by the 1860's there were several Shimers along Steeley Hill Road as well).

William died 3 years later, and is buried at Durham Cemetery.

It's not clear whether Robert and Sabilla Shimer purchased the property to live there or rent out, as they only kept it for 1 year. They were in their 50’s at the time. On March 30, 1894, they sold the house and now 3 tracts (5 acres 5 perches, 93 perches, and 1307 square feet) to George J. and Ida Sloyer.
The Sloyer Family

In 1860, Christine Transue, daughter of Isaac Transue and Sarah Call of Stone Cottage Woods, married Francis Sloyer. He was a widower, having previously been married to Maria Ann Hatter, who had borne four children: Catharina Amanda (b 1852), Anna Maria (b 1854), Caroline (b 1855), and Peter (b 1858). A year after giving birth to Peter, Maria Ann died; Francis wed Christine Transue a year later, and they had two daughters.

Francis's nephew George (b 1862) was a furnace laborer hailing from Springfield, Bucks County. He married Amanda "Ida" Rodenbach (descendant of another Williams township family) on Sept 23, 1893 in Durham, and they moved into Stone Cottage Woods in 1894. Here they raised two girls, Sadie Viola (b 1897) and Laura May (b 1898). The Durham furnace would have been the closest workplace for a furnace laborer like George; after it shut down operations in 1908, George may have sought work at the Glendon furnace. On February 12, 1917, George sold the property to E. Frank Sobers.
E.F. Sobers and the Deemer Connection

Remember Milton L. Deemer, who flipped the house and property for the Steinbach’s in 1882? Milton was the grandson of Jacob J. and Anna Catherine Deemer, prominent farmers and land-owners in Williams Township, who had sold back some of the property the family had acquired from Peter Transue in 1823, to Isaac and Sarah Transue in 1848.

Milton was also “engaged in agricultural pursuits” and active in the Evangelical and Reformed congregation in Hellertown, according to his obituary in 1941. Milton’s older sister, Anna Belle Deemer, or “Annie” was widowed just 5 years after marrying Stewart Melvin Reichard in 1895 and giving birth to daughter Naomi in 1897. She met Eugene Franklin Sobers, ten years her senior and twice widowed, and they married in 1903. It is this E.F. Sobers, connected to Stone Cottage Woods through his wife Annie, who purchased an additional 17 acres (tract 4) from Milton L. Deemer on March 2, 1916, and the 5 acres 5 perches, 93 perches, and 1307 square feet from George Sloyer on February 12, 1917. The property now consisted of 23 acres, plus the 98 perches and 1307 square feet.

The Sobers lived in Bethlehem, so it’s not clear what their intention was with respect to the property, which they owned up until 1926.
The Worman & Rush Families

On August 5, 1926, E.F. and Anna B. Sobers sold the property, by now a total of four tracts, to Charles T Worman. Three years later, on March 30, 1929, Charles Worman purchased a tiny tract of 7.41 perches, tract 5, from William B. and S. Valeria Gross for $50. This land appears to have been connected to the 1307 square foot property across the street from Stone Cottage Woods, possibly adjacent to where the blacksmith shop had once stood.

William Beidler Gross was born in 1874 and married S. Valeria Helms on September 24, 1898 in Springtown. They had 2 children, Warren L. (b 1899) and Clara O. (b 1900). Their residence in the 1910 and 1920 census is Williams Township, where William is listed with the occupation of farmer, and in the 1930 census it appears they moved to Riegelsville. He died in 1953 and his wife passed in 1957.

Charles T. Worman was born circa 1860, but few genealogical references exist. A possible connection with the area is the farm across Stouts Valley Road, which at some point between 1891 and 1927, was owned by E. Frank Sobers and then Samuel S Warman [sic].

Was there a connection between Samuel and Charles? Did Charles live in Stone Cottage Woods for a brief time? And what became of him? The census of 1930 provides a clue: he is listed as a widower living with his daughter Louella Rush (b. c.1894), her husband, Charles S. Rush, and his grandsons Robert B. and Norman C. Rush in Palmer Township, just outside of Easton. Both Louella and her husband are listed as being from New Jersey; a large Rush family hailed from Montana Mountain, aka Scott’s Mountain, in Warren County, NJ, about a 30 minute drive on today’s roads from Stone Cottage Woods. In the 1920 census, a 26 year old Louella is married and living with her son Norman and her husband Charles in Williams Township.

On October 30, 1934 Charles Worman sold the 5 tracts and adjoining blacksmith shop to his daughter Louella. She didn’t hold onto it for long. On August 10, 1936 she proceeded to sell all five tracts to Florence Smith, “widow, of Jersey City, NJ” who turned around and sold it for $2200 to another New Jerseyan, Louis G Copes in what appears to be a consecutive transaction.
The Copes Family

Louis Copes purchased the house and property in Stouts Valley in 1936. His wife Helen had passed away in 1930 and he thought that living in the country was healthier for his children than living in the city. The Copes family originally used the Stouts Valley house as a summer home, but it soon became their permanent residence. Louis died in 1938. Joe was attending college, but he quit college, got a job, and supported his younger sisters. He also met Anna Thaler, whose family owned the farm across the road in the valley.
A Brief History of the Thaler Family

Anna Thaler was born on July 12, 1920 in Shepton, PA (near Hazelton) to Johann and Stephanie (Alber) Thaler. Her father Johann (b 1885) immigrated to the United States in 1911 from the Tyrolean village of Proveis, Austria, with his wife Maria, pregnant with their first child. They settled near Hazelton, where there was a church and active Tyrolean community who worked in the coal mines. In 1915, Maria died giving birth to their fourth child, a daughter, leaving him with four small children. In 1918, he married Stephanie Alber (b 1883), originally from Vienna and trained as a chef. Shortly after his marriage, the Thalers moved to a farm in Kintnersville, but the quality of the soil was poor, so they sold it and returned to Shepton in 1919.

Their daughter Anna was born in 1920. In 1925, he decided to try farming again, and purchased a farm about two miles west of Riegelsville, Pa and on the east side of Stouts Valley (with an address of 175 Durham Road, Easton). He chose that farm over another because his wife Stephanie liked the house so very much, though much of the land was boggy. In 1927, Stephanie died in childbirth and was buried at Saint John the Baptist Church, Haycock Run, Pa, with the baby. In 1927 he moved the family to the adjacent farm across the street from Stone Cottage Woods where the soil was richer.
The farm most likely belonged to Isaac Stout Sr (b.c 1749), who sold it to Isaac Jr (1787-1857). The Stouts, for whom the valley was named, owned several of the farms and homes in the area, and likely ran this property as a tenant farm, employing Daniel Beidelman (b.c 1818). Daniel passed the farm onto his sons Robert and William, neither of whom had any interest in farming. William was a Civil War soldier, a lawyer, district attorney, politician, author and mayor of Easton from 1890 to 1894. He immediately sold his half to Robert, who in turn sold it to a cousin, Jonathan Beidelman (b 1852). Jonathan sold it to Richard Deemer in 1891, and it then passed to E. Frank Sobers and Samuel S. Warman [sic], before it was purchased by Johann Thaler.

Here, Johann raised his children and enjoyed the company of his grandchildren, whose father John worked the land and enlarged the farm, while raising eight sons with his wife Helen. Johann’s daughter Mary chose a career as a medical technician in St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York City, and his daughter Clara worked for Bethlehem Steel during World War II. His daughter Anna married Joseph Copes in 1942. He was the boy across the road, a WW II veteran and chemist, and they settled into life at Stone Cottage Woods, across the street from her father’s farm, and next door to her husband’s sister Mary Elizabeth.

The Copes of Stone Cottage Woods

The Copes raised 6 children at Stone Cottage Woods. Their recollections include colorful stories of family life. Joe Copes was by all accounts an interesting and inventive man, with several patents filed with the US Patent office and a passion for modernizing the home. Bearing in mind the home’s advanced age, he bought grates and installed a coal furnace in the front cellar that provided steam to the steam radiators throughout the house. He wired the house for electricity, plumbed the house for running water and installed a hot water tank.
The “back cellar” was originally just a crawl space under the main part of the house. He broke through between the two parts of the house, and dug the crawl space out by hand; together with some of the Thaler boys, he cemented the walls and floors up to the point where the walls met the original foundation stones at the ledge. His son recalled that his father loved to work with cement; at one point he rewired part of the house by taking off interior plaster, running conduit & cementing over it – definitely safe from mouse damage. To the left of the steps leading from the road to the front of the house is an old well. One year, during a drought, it failed. Joe set up a swimming pool in the basement and had water trucked in, until he dug a line from the spring on the hillside to provide a steady water source until the new well behind the house was put in.

The main house consisted of a first floor kitchen on the side closest to the street, a living room and the second story bedrooms. A porch spanned the front of the house, and three exterior doors opened onto the porch, one each to the north and south portions of the house, and one to a small room at the north end which extended from the family’s kitchen. Eventually, this became the primary entrance to the house. The staircase, fireplace, and cabinets on the south wall of the living room were all enclosed. To the left of the fireplace was a wooden door (now a coat closet) that hid the staircase, except for the first step, which remained visible. The centered fireplace had doors which could be opened or closed off. On the right side of the south wall were two doors that opened to upper and lower cabinets. A round patch in the plaster centrally located above the mantle was all that was left of the potbelly stove used for heating before Joe Copes added central heat. There was also a round hole in the living room ceiling for heat circulation to the second floor bedroom. On the second floor, a metal plate with vent holes covered that opening.

When the Copes family purchased the house, two sets of stairs extended from the main floor to the upstairs bedrooms, one at the north end and one at the south end. One of the Copes children vividly recalls her father using a hammer and chisel to make a hole that broke through the top of the stone wall between the kitchen and living room. Joe Copes took out the north end stairs to enlarge the kitchen/dining area and the upstairs bedroom floor space. His master plan was to build one central staircase, and then take out the stairs at the south end of the house by the fireplace. He started in the front basement, as originally, there were no interior stairs between the basement and the first floor.
He created an interior set of cement stairs from the basement to the kitchen, at the base of the wall separating the two halves of the house, and covered the opening with two long planks of wood hinged together, which made a folding door. He used a hammer and chisel to break through the thick stone wall at the middle of the house to create a base for the central staircase. He also cemented in the base steps, using the remaining wall as a foundation, and winding the final steps around in front of a kitchen window seat.

Joe also got timber from the property and had it cut to form the stair steps to sit on top of each cemented base step and to form a spiral staircase. He drilled two holes in each wooden step so that each could be affixed to a cement steps with two large bolts. The staircase was spiral, and the wood steps varied in shape to fit, but the straight wooden blocks were approximately 3 feet x 1 foot x 1 foot. Those large blocks of wood had to season, and they were not installed during Joe’s lifetime.

The kitchen evolved over the years. Early recollections of the Copes family are of opening the exterior door to the kitchen and seeing a large wall cabinet with a counter, base cabinets, and upper cabinets flush against the middle wall of the house. The exterior door and the large hutch were both removed, and the front space was used for the kitchen table. Joe built an area for the sink, stove, and refrigerator toward the far kitchen wall and bordered the area with knotty pine. He also added floor-to-ceiling knotty pine cabinets.

To create more space for the second floor bedrooms, Joe Copes opened up the crawl space behind the drywall, so that the bedroom extended to the outside walls. He cemented the top of the east stone wall to form a ledge, and installed a few small windows between the wall and the eaves. The upstairs bathroom was originally a room, with doors, between two bedrooms. Joe put in the tub and walled off the bathroom so that it was only on the west side of the middle room, much like it is now. The remainder of that area then became a hallway and a small bedroom.

Although the blacksmith shop had been dismantled over the years, the Copes parked their car in a barn used as a garage at the site where the shop once stood. Although it is unknown if parts of the blacksmith shop were incorporated into the construction of the barn, there is one clue that ties the structure to the house. On the left side of the barn was a doorway that opened to a set of stairs that led to the second floor. The existence of an exterior door to each portion of the building was similar to the construction of the stone house. It was Joe Copes in the 1950s who connected the street level of the house with the main level of the house by means of an interior staircase from the basement to the main floor.
The second floor of the barn/garage had windows and a smokestack or vent. Its location central on the roof edge indicates it might have been for a potbelly stove used for warmth on the second floor only.

Joe Copes began building a cement block garage to replace barn, which was a big project for just one person to undertake in his spare time. But then the embankment on which the rear of the building stood eroded, and the building collapsed into the field in a mud slide.

After Joseph Copes died in 1976, Anna continued to live at Stone Cottage Woods until around 1987, when she sold the property to Peter Thompson of Williams Township.
1900’s – Stone Cottage Woods

The Thompson Restoration

Peter Thompson is a historian, horticulturalist, and noted expert at dating and restoring period architecture and building materials. He’s both pragmatic and fanatically perfectionist about restoring and preserving historic buildings, or recycling their materials if the structure cannot be saved. He immediately saw the potential in Stone Cottage Woods, and aimed to restore property while remaining sensitive to its long history and character. There were several challenges, as the property had deteriorated over the years.

His unique blend of pragmatism and perfectionism is evidenced in his construction and materials. For example, in installing the cedar shake roof, he used only galvanized nails and a heavy felt lining lapped over and under every course of shingles. The materials and technique ensures a rain-proofed seal. Most modern roofers simply lap shake over shake, with the result that a single split shake can expose the roof to leakage. “I wanted the roof to outlast my lifetime, and I certainly didn’t want to ever have to redo it myself,” he joked. Similarly, in re-pointing the stonework, he created a historically authentic mix of lime, clay and sand with a light Portland cement to create a strong, yet elastic mortar. It’s what makes old stone homes so much more durable than those of the modern era, pointed using regular Portland cement as a mortar which is subject to cracking. The old stone masons knew that lime was key to a strong yet elastic bond, but the challenges of working with lime has caused it to fall out of favor today.

The log joists in the front part of the house were bowed and sagging more than seventeen inches at one end, and the roof was deteriorating. He removed the joists and roof, and was able to salvage enough of the existing joists to use them for the first floor ceiling. The second floor was basically the size of an attic, divided into tiny rooms, with the only light coming from little windows. Pete created the knee wall and set the new roof pitch with dormers, to let in more light and provide more usable space. He added a dramatic two story gable window on the street side, re-pointed the stone and installed a cedar shake roof.
The original old pine floor was removed, and a Southern heart pine floor taken from an 18th century granary was brought in to replace the original flooring. Pete installed a modern septic system and dug a new well, created the bluestone patio and stone retaining walls. When early plans to live on the property changed, Pete subdivided the 20 acres (he had thought he’d bought 25 acres, but when he had the land surveyed, it turned out to be 20) into 4 lots, giving the subdivision the name “Stone Cottage Woods.” The old farmhouse was given 2.1 acres and the bit of land across the street where the blacksmith shop once stood, while the three other lots climbed up the hill through the woods at the southern end of the property.

The Blomstrom Restoration

Lori Blomstrom was raised in Lower Saucon Township and had explored the back roads of Williams Township as a child. At the time she purchased Stone Cottage Woods from Peter Thompson, on November 15, 1993, she was working for PPL Electric Company but also running a small home repair service, ShePaintsEtc as a side business, having learned carpentry and construction from her father Rudy. Rudy was working for a real estate agency in Hellertown at the time, and Pete often consulted with the agency on historic properties. When she saw the stone farmhouse, it was love at first sight.

Undaunted by the work required to complete the renovations started by Pete, she and her father set to work modernizing the electric and plumbing, installing a kitchen and bath, and doing all the finish work on the interior, a process which took 8 months till the house was habitable. More than that, it had once again become a home.
The Blomstrom-Mazzola Family

It was the summer of 2001. Shortly after digging the koi pond at the front of the house, Lori met Donnamarie Mazzola. Two years later she sold her house in Perkiomenville, moved to Stone Cottage Woods and put her digital marketing background to use handling marketing and operations for a small ecommerce company in Easton.

They made plans to build an addition to enlarge the house to its present size of 3442 square feet and chose Peter Thompson to design the addition and oversee the project, which was completed in May 2005. It was important that the addition gracefully wrap around the existing structure but not dominate it, such that character and scale of the old cottage character was maintained. The addition exposed interior stone walls, while adding the drama of expanded space and light.

Inspired by their trips to Italy, Lori began training in Venetian plastering in the US and Italy. They did the tiling, painting, and plastering themselves, and over the years created the gardens and landscaping, pergola, garage, studio and other improvements. After the addition was completed, Lori left her job at PPL to go into business as Veneshe Venetian Plastering, and the beautiful wall and ceiling finishes in the house are examples of her creativity and artistry.
During this time, Stone Cottage Woods became home to several dogs and cats, all rescues. The most ‘famous’ of these were two stray puppies Lori and Donnamarie found while vacationing just outside of Sorrento, Italy. With four dogs at home already, it seemed crazy to entertain the idea of rescuing two more, but they were smitten. After days of searching for an airline approved crate to no avail, all seemed lost, and they were forced to return home without the dogs. Once home, Donnamarie got quotes for services to transport them to the US, and realized it would be less costly to simply return to Italy herself. Two weeks later, with her own airline approved carrier as the only checked luggage, she returned to Italy as the crazy American woman coming back for two stray puppies, all three of whom were treated to a royal send-off by the village gathered in the villa to witness a Disney-esque puppy reunion.
The Next Chapter

The next chapter of Stone Cottage Woods is yet to be written. As a witness to American history, a home to generations of blacksmiths, farmers, craftsmen and families, and one of the historic homes still watching over Stouts Valley, this gracious house awaits new caretakers to honor its past and create its future.