

THE CHESTERBROOK DEVELOPMENT

Audrey Baur

(additions and amendments by Herb Fry)

Historical research leads to the discovery of information which can be used to interpret life in earlier times. That said, we also need to issue a disclaimer. It is hazardous to research recent history because much of it is not yet documented, and more hazardous yet to attempt to interpret it for contemporaries who have witnessed the same events. Opportunities for differences of interpretation abound.

As a resident of neighboring Easttown, the Chesterbrook development was more or less of academic interest, and much of the debate took place during a period when employment demands did not allow extra time for hands-on involvement. In retrospect, however, it becomes increasingly clear that what was perhaps the single most important event in the history of Tredyffrin Township took place on November 5, 1969 when the Richard Fox interests bought Chesterbrook Farm.

There is no dismissing the fact that Chesterbrook Farm, together with the adjoining University of Pennsylvania and Yohn parcels which comprise the 865-acre Chesterbrook development, is a vast assembly of land, over a square mile in size, more land than the entire railroad corridor reaching across Tredyffrin. It took from November 1969 to

November 1977 — eight years — until the first Chesterbrook home was finished. Speaking at a business seminar in 1993, just after the entire development was completed, Richard Fox said about getting it started, "It was a six-year fight." The legal battle went all the way to the state Supreme Court. Hundreds of residents of Tredyffrin and nearby communities flocked to hearings and meetings. According to the only poll taken of more than 2000 residents, they opposed Chesterbrook by a 9-to-1 ratio. But Fox finally got the go-ahead, and the development was started. In all, it took 23 years from the purchase of land to final completion.

One of the biggest mysteries was assignment, by post office officials, of a Wayne, PA 19087 mailing address to the homes in Chesterbrook. Wayne is in a different township, in a different county, with different demographics, a good six miles away. That post office address is not a good indicator of geographic location. It has proved a big problem for direct-mail advertising firms, as well as the home owners themselves.

Let's begin, then, with the date December 28, 1906. Alexander Johnston Cassatt, owner of the showplace Chesterbrook Farm and president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, died unexpectedly that day at his Philadelphia residence, 202 West Rittenhouse Square, less than a month after his 67th birthday. He died of whooping cough which he had contracted the summer before, and which could not be contained with medicines then available. His eldest son, Captain Edward Buchanan Cassatt, inherited the farm.

Edward Cassatt was 38 years old when he became the owner of Chesterbrook. He was a West Point graduate, a cavalry officer, a dashing person with a Type A personality. He lived life with all the gusto his money could buy (which was a good deal).

He was fortunate in his selection of the farm's general manager — Richard Colgan, who had been the right hand man of A. J. 's manager, R. Penn Smith. Captain Edward (and we have not been able to figure his true rank over the years) gave instructions that the number of animals should be kept, and the farm should be maintained, in the same condition as it had been during the time of his late father.

