

A History of Pen Ryn

And they shall build houses and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat.

Isaia 65: 21-22

## The Bickleys

Pen Ryn's story begins with a family named Bickley. This aristocratic Bickley family was anciently seated at Bickleigh on the river Ex in Devonshire, England in great style according to English custom. In the sixteenth century, they left Bickleigh and took up residence at Chidham, Sussex, England. Then sometime around 1682 William Bickley and his wife Susannah came to America. Of their four children, at least their two sons, Abraham who was then nineteen and William Bickley Jr., were left behind to live with their uncle in Limerick, Ireland. William and Susannah settled in New York. They were both strict Quakers, and William soon became prominent in Quaker affairs. As time passed, they adapted themselves to American ways; William became an active member of the colony and a merchant of some means.

In 1692, Abraham Bickley and his brother William followed their parents to America. They sailed from London for New York but were driven by adverse winds to the Barbadoes. It was not until much later in the same year that they reached their destination.

Abraham first set himself up in Burlington, New Jersey, and was collector for that town in 1695. It was in this same year that he married his first wife Elizabeth Gardner. During the time of their life in Burlington, Abraham was active in the quaker monthly meeting. He and his wife lived

there for four years and had three children: Elizabeth, William, and Thomas. After the birth of Thomas in 1699, Elizabeth Gardner died.

Abraham now removed himself and his children to Philadelphia. He apparently had begun to establish himself as a shipping merchant in Philadelphia during the years beginning about 1695, and after his removal there he entered into the public life of the city. He was now a widower with two babies to care for- Thomas having died soon after his mother - and on January 3, 1700 he married Elizabeth Richardson, prominent socially and the daughter of Samuel Richardson who was one of William Penn's counsellors. Fourteen years and nine children later, Elizabeth Richardson, the second wife of Abraham Bickley died. Abraham was left a widower again, this time with eight motherless children including the two by his first marriage. Three of his nine children by his second wife, Elizabeth Richardson, had died at birth, this apparently not being uncommon for those times.

Although two of his youngest children were under four years of age, his eldest daughter Elizabeth had reached the age of eighteen. Abraham refrained from marriage for several years as he could amply afford competent care for his family. However, after five years and at the age of 56, he married again for the third time at the Evesham, New Jersey monthly meeting of Quakers to Dorothy Smith. There were no children from this marriage.

During the course of his life, Abraham became an extremely prosperous Philadelphia merchant and prominent public figure. He was a common councilman in 1712 and an alderman for several years beginning about 1715. He was also a member of the Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania in 1708, 1709, 1717, 1721, 1724, and 1725. William Penn is reported to have been one of his friends. Their properties adjoined as both Penn and Abraham Bickley held vast tracts of land in and adjacent to Philadelphia and Burlington, New Jersey. Abraham's holdings also included property in Elizabethtown and New York as well.

In 1718, Abraham imported Philadelphia's first fire-engine. A minute of common council for December 8, 1718 reads:

"This council having now agreed with  
Abraham Bickley for his ffire Engine At ye  
Sum of L50....it is order'd that the  
Treasurer pay ye Sd Sum out of ye money  
raised for chimney ffiring, with all  
expedition possible."

The fire-engine was purchased by Abraham from Loud's of London and shipped to Philadelphia where he stored it in his establishment. The engine was finally presented to the city by Abraham as the council had been unable to raise sufficient money to pay for it in 1719, a year after its purchase. Because of this, the engine was always referred to as "The Bickley Engine."

Abraham Bickley died in 1726, and it is through his remarkable will that one gets an insight of his large real estate holdings. Altogether his lands were listed at a total of 6313 acres. Among the properties mentioned was a 250 acre tract of land extending along the Delaware River known at "Belle Voir." It was on this tract many years later that Pen Ryn would be built.

Of his eight surviving children, Abraham Bickley had four sons, William- the eldest, Samuel, Abraham II, and Isaac. It is now with the second eldest son, Samuel Bickley that the story continues.

Samuel had been born in Philadelphia of Abraham's second wife, Elizabeth Richardson, on September 9, 1704. He married between 1725-1729 a Margaret Clayton of West Jersey and lived for a time in Burlington. They had three children. Samuel followed in his father's foot-steps and became a leading shipping merchant of his day, amassing his own fortune and building upon that left by his father, Abraham Bickley. From October 1742 until October 1746, he was sheriff of New Castle County, Penna. (now Delaware). He died in 1749 and his estate which included lands and money he had inherited from his father, Abraham Bickley, went to his son, Abraham Bickley III.

Here, in the person of Abraham Bickley III, is the first key figure in the history of Pen Ryn. Abraham III was born in 1731. His fortune having been made for him

before he was born, he avoided all business in life, living as a country gentleman and "Rentier". He later imbued in his children and their life at Pen Ryn a taste for ease and retirement which afterwards in a domestic point of view, as you will see, rendered them so remarkable.

It was circa 1754 that Abraham Bickley III built Pen Ryn on the tract of land known as "Belle Voir" on the Delaware River. The house was built for his intended bride Mary Shewell, daughter of a prominent Philadelphia colonial family. Abraham and Mary were married on Sept. 28, 1758 at Christ Church in Philadelphia and went to make their home on this country estate. Abraham III had changed the name from "Belle Voir" to Pen Ryn - "Benrin" having been the birthplace of one of his ancestors in England.

The house was similar in general plan and character to the majority of country homes of that period in the neighborhood. It consisted of three floors with four rooms on each, placed around a central hall. It was staunchly built, spacious, and possessed quiet dignity. On the grounds of the estate were formal gardens laid out in the English manner, three barns, stables, domestic quarters, and farm houses. Among the crops raised on Pen Ryn's fields were hay, corn, wheat, oats, and potatoes.

Shortly after his marriage, Abraham III purchased the famous Bickley coach, having it imported from England. Living so far from Philadelphia, a coach would be needed to

carry him and his wife between that city and their country-seat; and Abraham III made sure that the conveyance matched the elegant style in which they resided at Pen Ryn. It was a most ponderous and magnificent affair hung on C springs and painted a dark olive-green with green hammer-cloth upholstery. On the doors, the Bickley crest was painted. It was drawn by four horses with a coachman and groom on the box and two liveried footmen on the post board behind.

Seven children were born to Abraham III and Mary at Pen Ryn. They were: Abraham IV, Hannah, Elizabeth, Margaret, Robert Shewell, Lydia, and Issac. Historical and genealogical records reveal more about this family of nine than of any other who resided at Pen Ryn.

When the American Revolution began in 1775, Abraham III and his family were entirely unsympathetic toward the American cause. They were later described as "proud aristocratic Tories imbued with English prejudices". Their strong convictions brought them into the foreground of those stirring days.

When the British commander, General Sir William Howe, was about to leave his command in Philadelphia and return to England in 1778, an historical ball called The Meschianza was given in his honor. The ball was given on Monday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1778 at Walnut Grove, the country-seat of the Warnton family, and is reported to have been the most lavish event of its time. Major Andre did the whole of the decorations for the ball.



"The ballroom was decorated in a light elegant style of painting and showing many festoons of flowers. The brilliancy of the whole was heightened by eighty-five mirrors, decked with ribands and flowers. At midnight supper was announced, and large folding doors before concealed, sprung open, and discovered a magnificent salon of two hundred and ten feet by forty feet, and twenty-two feet in height. The walls were adorned with fifty-six large pier glasses, ornamented with green silk artificial flowers and ribands, There were three hundred wax tapers on the supper tables, four hundred and thirty covers, and twelve hundred dishes. There were twenty-four black slaves in oriental dress, with silver collars and bracelets. After the supper, the company returned to the ballroom and continued to dance until four o'clock in the morning."

The British officers present were large in number, but there were no more than fifty American young ladies at the brilliant affair. Most of Philadelphia's ladies had gone from the city before the British occupation, and those that remained, if they were not Tories, declined to attend the ball. Among the fifty "Tory ladies" who went to the Meschianza was Hannah Bickley, the daughter of Abraham III and Mary Shewell. She is reported to have been a great beauty and belle of the times, capturing the attention of many of the officers that night.

One month later the British army evacuated Philadelphia, and upon return of Washington's army, a celebration was given for his officers. Hannah Bickley being one of the "Tory ladies" was proscribed from the festival.

1779 brought the dark hours of the revolution for Washington and his forces at Valley Forge. The patriot's cause was in great need of money for food and clothing. In the Bickley household at Pen Ryn, there was a young heart that did not share the family's Tory sympathies, a heart that was fired with the revolutionary idea. Abraham Bickley IV, the eldest son of Abraham III and Mary, felt a sense of obligation to his fellow colonists in revolt. He stepped forward and gave his bond to a large amount of money for the purpose of procuring provisions and necessaries for Washington's army. Historical records state that to such men as Abraham IV the success of the revolution was attributed. But Abraham III was a proud Quaker who had pledged his allegiance to King George III of England, and he did not take well to this action of his son. Abraham IV was estranged from the family, took up residence in Philadelphia and never returned to Pen Ryn again. He was the only Bickley not buried in the family vault at Pen Ryn. His grave is in M. Moriah cemetery, Philadelphia.

It cannot be emphasized too much how strong were the convictions of this family and how unyielding was their pride. Elizabeth Bickley was Abraham III's second eldest daughter - her

older sister being Hannah. An account of Elizabeth's romance with a British naval officer named Thomas Gordon is told by her cousin Fanny Saltar in Fanny Saltar's Reminiscences of Colonial Days in Philadelphia - a collection of letters written by Fanny in the early 1800's.

"Thomas Gordon (that handsome boy who stands in the great family picture with a paroquet) was a wild blade, full of life and fun...He joined the British Navy at an early age being influenced by his mother. At the commencement of the revolution he was on board the Roebuck Man-of-War, which sailed up the Delaware to Bordentown and burnt Kirkbride's house. Afterwards, when in the prison ship off Rhode Island, he, on a dark night, with one of the prisoners, took the ship's longboat and escaped to the shore, where he exchanged his gray uniform for a laborer's dress. Pushing his way at night and on foot and sometimes begging a meal's victuals, until ragged, dirty, and half-starved, he reached Magnolia (the family home) without being recognized by anyone who had once known the dashing young British officer. But health and spirits soon returned and he became the devoted admirer of our cousin Elizabeth Bickley, then a very beautiful young girl."

Thomas called on Elizabeth often at Pen Ryn. She was undoubtedly

more than fond of him and encouraged his visits. However, he had deserted the British Navy; her father was a devout Tory, and she herself had been reared in strict aristocratic fashion. This reckless, daring man ran against her high ideals and fine breeding. Fanny aptly tells all in the final line:

"He was idle and extravagant in his habits and the good judgement of the young girl made her decline those attentions, which, perhaps, had his conduct been different, would have been the sunshine of her existence."

Indeed, he might very well have been the sunshine of her existence. Elizabeth Bickley remained unmarried all her life.

In 1782 Abraham III died and was interred in the family vault that he had constructed at Pen Ryn. The revolution came to an end the following year. The Americans had won their independence - it was a victory for many but not the Bickleys. They were bitterly disappointed over the outcome of the war. During the next several years they lived quietly at Pen Ryn, withdrawing themselves more and more from the outside world. As time went by, they centered their lives around themselves. A letter written by Elizabeth Shewell West, sister of Mary Shewell Bickley, takes note of this behavior.

( excerpt from a letter written by Elizabeth Shewell West to Elizabeth Shewell Swift.)

London, 14 Newman Street

September 25, 1793

"...I was indeed happy to hear from you that there is an affectionate intercourse between you and my dear sister Bickley's family. I say amiable for I am told they are truly so; that, perhaps, and the affectionate manner with which they live together may be the cause of envy in those whom might wish to break the bond by which they seem so firmly united. Will you, my dear Betsey, have the goodness to remember me affectionately to all of them - I think it possible that Elizabeth may have some recollection of me, Hannah was once my correspondent, but alas, I know not by what means it was discontinued..."

The six brothers and sisters remodeled the house circa 1793, and in the following year their mother, Mary Shewell Bickley, died and was buried beside her husband in the family vault. Hannah, Elizabeth, Margaret, Robert Shewell, Lydia, and Issac now shut themselves up at Pen Ryn. And there they remained for the long years that followed - years that grew into decades. In time, they became an oddity to the area and the subject of notoriety.

On file in The Pennsylvania Historical Society is an original newspaper clipping dated January 25, 1854. It is the obituary of Elizabeth Bickley, the last of the six to die.

This article written almost one hundred and twenty years ago reveals the astonishing facts about these six Bickley brothers and sisters.

"...Indeed, from the fact of the deceased and all her brothers and sisters having been born subjects of George III, they soon after the termination of the Revolutionary contest withdrew themselves from the world.

But the most remarkable fact connected with this family is that more than half a century ago six brothers and sisters, opulent, attractive, and in the highest social position, retired to their estate in the country, and lived and died there single and unmarried. Not the less marvellous is the longevity of life which attended upon this so generally estimated sacrifice of self. Of the six who thus retired from the world, the shortest lived reached the age of 71, the longest 94! For many years the family vault with the simple inscription "Vault of the Bickley Family, originally from Sussex, England" remained with only the two parents for tenants. For full seventy years had those brothers and sisters composed the family circle, ere death broke in upon them. At length they were called away. First one

went, and then another, and then a third. And now they are all gone. Their family pride, their high-toned self-respect, their virtues, their charities, all are at an end. They lie side by side; the same six who clung together in life, and in death would not be parted. Peace to their ashes."

Miniature Portrait of Abraham Bickley III

This miniature portrait of Abraham Bickley III, builder of Pen Ryn circa 1754, was painted by Benjamin West, eminent colonial artist, who was the brother-in-law of Mr. Bickley.

It is inscribed on the frame: "Abraham Bickley III  
Born 1731 Died Jan. 29, 1782 Etat 51 Years."

On the back of the miniature the artist has painted a group consisting of himself, his wife Elizabeth Shewell, and son Raphael Lamar West (See photography following Appendix III).

The miniature passed down through the family to Lucy Wharton Drexel. She in turn gave it to her grand-daughter, Sarah Penrose, in whose miniature collection it is today.

(Photograph courtesy of the Frick Art Reference Library, New York, by permission of Sarah Penrose Van Pelt.)



### The Bickley Coach

This is the coach imported from England by Abraham Bickley III soon after his marriage in 1758. The body is so high above the ground that flights of steps, to let down when the doors are opened, are necessary to get in and out.

Robert Wharton Bickley recounts in The Bristol Pike his cousin Elizabeth Bickley's stories of her trips to Philadelphia:

"After climbing up the folding steps, the arduous journey to the city of Philadelphia was begun for a shopping tour, and it may well be called an arduous journey, for the lumbering old vehicle was drawn at the immense speed of four miles an hour, and having sixteen miles to go to the heart of the city, at Front and Market Street, or High Street as it was called in those days. The start must have been an early one, and the drive tedious, the hours for shopping and refreshment short, as well as a necessarily late arrival home which the old lady said was perilous and dangerous, as the roads were rough and there was great danger of being stopped by highwaymen."

General Washington while living in Philadelphia is reported to have admired the Bickley coach and had his own modeled after it.

The coach remained at Pen Ryn until 1945 when Josephine Drexel Henry gave it to the Commissioners of Fairmount Park who placed it in Memorial Hall Museum. It was then withdrawn by the commissioners on May 27, 1954 before the closing of Memorial Hall as a museum and lent by them to the Brandywine Battlefield Commission, Washington's Headquarters, Chaddsford, Pa. The coach is now on display at the park and can be viewed at any time. It is labeled The Lafayette Coach since Lafayette rode in it on his second visit to the United States in 1825. (It is most likely he was a friend of Abraham IV).

(Photograph courtesy of The Free Library of Philadelphia)

(Post card courtesy of The Brandywine Battlefield Commission)

### The Whartons

After the death of his brother Robert Shewell Bickley in 1842, Isaac as the last surviving male heir of Abraham Bickley III wished to have the Bickley name perpetuated - it has been seen already how strong was that family's pride in their name. Accordingly, he persuaded his distant relative Lloyd Wharton to assume the surname Bickley, and in 1843 the Pennsylvania Legislature passed a law effecting this change of name. Mr. Wharton added the name of Bickley to that of Wharton and was subsequently known as Lloyd Wharton Bickley.

According to Isaac Bickley's will, Pen Ryn was to be devised at his death to his two surviving sisters, Hannah and Elizabeth, and then at their death to Lloyd Wharton Bickley.

Actually, the next of kin would have been Lloyd's older brother Thomas Wharton, but Thomas had only two daughters and so the Bickley name would not have been continued, whereas Lloyd Wharton had four sons. So goes the leaving of a fortune.

Lloyd had been born in 1801 and married Margaret Ann Howell in 1830. Their children as listed in Isaac Bickley's will were Lloyd Wharton Bickley II, Robert Wharton Bickley, Abraham Wharton Bickley (whose name was changed from Lawrence to Abraham in 1843 when he was four years old), and Howell Bickley.

When the last of the six Bickley brothers and sisters of Pen Ryn, Elizabeth, died in 1854, the entire estate was be-

queathed to Lloyd Wharton Bickley.

An inventory of the land holdings still on file in the Bucks County Courthouse in Doylestown reveals the wealth of the Bickley family.

#### Inventory of Bickley Real Estate

A tract of land in Bensalem Township, Bucks County, containing 250 acres (Pen Ryn)	\$62, 050.00
No. 4 North Front Street	6, 000.00
No. 19 North Front Street	6, 000.00
Northwest corner of Market and Front Streets	10, 000.00
No. 21 Market Street	6, 000.00
No. 23 Market Street	6, 000.00
Wharf and docks - No. 35 and 35½, No. 69 and 71 North Water St.	<u>30, 000.00</u>
	\$126, 050.00

It is doubtful however that Lloyd Wharton Bickley ever lived at Pen Ryn, for in September of the following year he died. Almost exactly one year after this his wife, Margaret Ann Howell, died also, leaving the Pen Ryn estate to her four sons: Lloyd II, Robert, Abraham, and Howell, whose ages at the time were 21, 19, 17, and 14 respectively.

Now, it is at this point and with these four brothers that a search of all historical records uncovers meager information. It is not definitely known whether they all lived at Pen Ryn or for how long. Robert seems to have lived there for a while. In 1861 he married Agnes L. Singer before leaving

to serve with the Union Army in the Civil War. Shortly thereafter, Abraham and Lloyd II also married. Whether any or all of them took their brides to Pen Ryn can only be speculated upon. For over twenty years there are few records to be found about the brothers - and nothing about Pen Ryn.

Then, in 1878, there is mention of both them and the estate.

"J.D.K. Reinhart, High Sheriff of Bucks County, has seized, taken into execution, and sold on the 7th day of September, 1878, Pen Ryn, the property of Lloyd W. Bickley, Abraham W. Bickley, Robert W. Bickley, and Howell W. Bickley."

The uncovering of this information was astonishing. However, the fact that there was no information revealing the reason for this seizure and sale was very disappointing. If it was a financial difficulty, it seems to have been temporary, for two months later Lloyd Wharton Bickley II bought back Pen Ryn house and some of its surrounding lands.

That the difficulty may have been financial is also suggested by the fact that around this time Lloyd Wharton Bickley II leased Pen Ryn to the Philadelphia Gun Club for a club house and shooting grounds.

The club membership was limited to 100 active and 25 non-resident members, and Pen Ryn apparently proved to be an excellent facility. The following is a description written by one of the members in the 1880's of the interior as it appeared during the gun club's occupation of the house:

"The club house, formerly the mansion of the

Bickley family, is visible through a long vista of foliage formed by old forest trees, many of which are more than 100 years old. The interior and furniture is in keeping with the place; heavy sideboards, beds and bureaus of solid mahogany, old-fashioned half a century ago, and good for another 50 years. In the hall stand weapons of the olden time, flint stock and arquebuse, while around the walls hang arms from India and the ruder weapons of Thibet. The dining-room, the walls of which are covered with sporting pictures, has a large old-fashioned fireplace, which is filled with blazing logs in winter and gives an air of comfort to those who sit around the long mahogany table after a day's shooting."

Bucks County histories state that these were the days when Delaware River transportation was in its prime, Two large passenger steamboats, the Columbia and the Twilight made daily excursion trips between Philadelphia and Bristol, fare 40¢ round trip, 25¢ one way. The first stop within Bucks County for north-bound steamboats was Andalusia Wharf, 14 miles from Philadelphia. The wharf was situated on the adjoining line of Pen Ryn ground and the Biddle estate, Andalusia. It has been recorded that the wharf, buildings and all surroundings were kept in excellent repair. Sloping stretches of green lawn with ornamental shrubbery and trees and a paved driveway led to the wharf. Nearby, on the west acres of Pen

Ryn was an attractive picnic ground called "Chestnut Grove" frequented by schools, societies, and pleasure parties, most of them coming from Philadelphia on the steamboats.

### The Drexels

Lloyd Wharton Bickley II died in 1890 and left Pen Ryn to his wife Hannah who on July 2 of the same year sold the property to Lucy Wharton Drexel.

Lucy had been born May 13, 1841, the eldest daughter of Thomas Wharton and Sarah Ann Howell (Smith). This is the Thomas Wharton who would have inherited Pen Ryn from the Bickley brothers and sisters in 1854; he was next in line but was overlooked because he had only two daughters. (And so the estate had been given to Thomas's younger brother, Lloyd.) Lucy, therefore, was a first cousin of the four Wharton Bickley brothers and was also related collaterally to Abraham Bickley III - her great great grandmother, Mary Clarke (Benbridge) Gordon being his first cousin.

Lucy was educated at St. Mary's Hall, Burlington, New Jersey. In 1865 she married Joseph W. Drexel, wealthy Philanthropist and member of the well-known banking firm of Drexel and Company of New York and Philadelphia. For many years she lived with her husband in New York, and then in 1888 he died leaving her four daughters: Katherine, Lucy, Elizabeth, and Josephine. The eldest three girls married shortly after this, and in 1890 Mrs. Drexel purchased Pen Ryn from Hannah Bickley for \$32, 864.00.

Within the next four years she also purchased several plots of land that had been separated from the estate in

the sheriff sale of 1878. Her property extended east to west from Station Avenue (then known as Herringbone Lane) to the Biddle Estate and north to south from State Road to the Delaware River. While the acreage was extensive, it should be remembered that it was still greatly reduced from the original 250 acres of Abraham Bickley III.

Mrs. Drexel now made extensive renovations to the house and grounds. She loved Pen Ryn very much and always had some project on hand for improving the estate. Circa 1900 she added the west wing, a windowless structure with a glass roof. She built the stone wall along State Road and had the brick and iron gateway erected at the entrance to Pen Ryn. She hired a contractor named Swinburne from New York who built the seawall along the Delaware, put concrete walls along the stream, and placed the gate at the stream's entrance to keep the water out at high tide.

Around 1905, the old Bickley barn adjacent to the house burned down and to replace it Mrs. Drexel had the carriage house built that stands today.

Although she lived quietly at Pen Ryn with her daughter Josephine, she kept a large staff of servants. The gardens were extensive and included vegetable gardens, vineyards, and apple, cherry, and pear orchards. Peacocks roamed across the lawns and down the grass terrace stretching in front of the house to the Delaware.

In William Davis's History of Bucks County published in



1905, Mrs. Drexel is described as "a woman of high character, generous and hospitable, enjoying the esteem and friendship of a very large circle of friends."

It was her custom each Christmas to have a huge tree placed outside in a small walled garden overlooked by the family dining-room. Presents were hung on the tree and the children from the surrounding area invited to come. Mrs. Drexel looked on through the dining-room windows while the butler took the presents off the tree and gave them to the children in the garden.

In the summer she could be seen riding about the countryside in her carriage (it has been reported she sometimes used the Bickley coach) with her coachman Patrick McAtee up front in high hat and coat with big brass buttons. She later purchased an electric car for herself when these became very fashionable for ladies to have.

An elderly neighbor tells of often seeing her strolling the widow's walk on the roof of Pen Ryn - "a trim attractive figure with a dainty parasol held over her head."

She seems to have been a dignified, gracious woman enjoying the solitude of country life after having lived in the high society of New York for so long.

Lucy Wharton Drexel died January 25, 1912 and left Pen Ryn to her youngest daughter Josephine.

Josephine had been born in 1878 and married in 1904 a Doctor John Duncan Emmet of New York. Three years after her mother's death, she divorced to marry Seton Henry, a New York

real estate executive.

As Mrs. Seton Henry, Josephine lived in New York with her husband at 36 East 72nd Street and turned Pen Ryn into their summer residence.

Circa 1920 the Seton Henrys had Pen Ryn renovated, making further additions and restorations. They had the east wing added as well as extensions to the rear of the house.

Mrs. Seton Henry was very interested in gardening. She had the walls for a formal garden constructed, a swimming pool put in with bath houses, plus networks of brick paths laid over the grounds. Under her direction a staff of gardeners turned Pen Ryn into one of the showplaces of Bucks County.

Mr. Henry, highly cultured and artistic, filled the old house with magnificent furniture, rugs, and art.

During the 1920's the Henrys entertained with parties quite often at Pen Ryn, and it soon became the scene of a lively, generous hospitality.

The following is a brief account of the marriage of their eldest daughter (they had two: Josephine and Katherine).

"The Henrys' eldest daughter, Josephine, married Joseph Wharton Lippincott, Jr. The wedding reception was held at Pen Ryn and was a never-to-be-forgotten event. It was on a perfect summer day. After the wedding breakfast, the young couple went down the lawn in front of the house, through an avenue of stately trees to the private wharf where the senior Lippincott's

yacht awaited them. The graceful white yacht with shining brass was moored exactly in the center of the vista. Amid the happy acclamations of friends on shore and blowing whistles, the yacht glided out into the broad river."

Sometime later the youngest daughter also married, Mr. Henry's health began to fail, and as the years passed, he grew progressively worse. Finally in 1945, Mrs. Henry was forced to put Pen Ryn up for sale. The following is an excerpt from a letter written by M. Gertrude Deavenport (an acquaintance of Mrs. Henry) to an Audrey Witmer, dated August 24, 1945.

"Strange to say, this very morning I heard from Mrs. Seton Henry. She is quite sad over the sale of Pen Ryn. Her husband has had a stroke, a very bad one, can only walk holding on to his valet.

"They are going to Arizona for the winter.

"She said that her two daughters were not interested in keeping the home which contains the original old brick walls and fireplaces over two hundred years old - she seems quite heartbroken."

Mrs. Henry might have kept Pen Ryn; however, she was evidently having trouble maintaining the house. She writes in a letter dated May 10, 1945:

"Ever since the beginning of the war, vandals have broken into Pen Ryn smashing everything."

On May 2, 1945, Pen Ryn was sold for \$27, 500.00 to Mr. Charles Biddle whose home "Andalusia" adjoins the estate.

(Photograph on the opposite page reproduced courtesy of  
The Free Library of Philadelphia)

### A School

The following year Mr. Biddle offered the house and surrounding ground to All Saints Episcopal School. He stipulated that the property should always be used as a school; otherwise, it would revert to Mr. Biddle and his heirs.

In Autumn of 1946, grades one to eight of the All Saints Episcopal School moved to Pen Ryn and became known as The Pen Ryn School. It continued until 1963 when All Saints Church, Torresdale, decided to discontinue the grades and keep only the kindergarten at the church. The property reverted to Mr. James Biddle, who had been given the estate December 22, 1961 by his father.

Pen Ryn was now vacated and boarded up. It remained empty for three years during which time it was sadly vandalized. (See photographs on opposite page)

With the closing of the school in 1963, a group of parents felt a strong need for a Christian day school in the area and decided to see what could be done about instituting such a school. An attorney obtained a charter. A board of directors representing varied fields was secured, and the vestry of Christ Episcopal Church, Eddington, agreed to sponsor the school.

It opened in September, 1964, at the Christ Episcopal Church. Mr. James Biddle was approached to see whether or not the school could continue to meet at Pen Ryn. Permission was received, and after extensive repairs, the school moved

to Pen Ryn in September, 1966.

It continues there today as The Pen Ryn School.

## Appendix I

### An Analysis of the Name Pen Ryn

Old reference sources and historical documents list 5 variant spellings of this name. They are:

Penrin, Penn Rhyn, Pen Rhyn, Pen Ryn, Penrynn.

The first Abraham Bickley (1663-1726) recorded of himself in the great family Bible that he was "the son of William, the son of Thomas, the son of John Bickley of Penrin in the County of Cornwall in Great Britain." 'Penrin' therefore seems to be the oldest spelling and was probably the same used by Abraham Bickley III when he built the house circa 1754.

The first variant spelling found was 'Penn Rhyn' in an 1893 article by Robert Wharton Bickley; and this continued to be the spelling during Lucy Wharton Drexel's occupancy of the house.

After Joseph Drexel Henry inherited the estate in 1912, she dropped one 'n' and wrote 'Pen Rhyn'. However, as time went by she changed the spelling again, this time to 'Pen Ryn' which is still used today.

The last variant, 'Penrynn' was found only once in a recent library record and probably has little significance.

For the obvious purposes of uniformity and clarity, I have consistently used the spelling 'Pen Ryn' throughout this history and chosen to trace its spelling changes in this appendix.

## Appendix II

### The Building Date of Pen Ryn

There are many conflicts in the records regarding Pen Ryn, 'the old Bickley home at Andalusia'.

Robert Wharton Bickley in his 1893 article in The Bristol Pike makes several astonishing errors regarding dates and builders of the house. Unfortunately, most later histories merely copied these same mistakes over and over again without investigating the accuracy of the source.

The majority of articles on Pen Ryn published after 1900 state the following:

Pen Ryn was built by Samuel Bickley (the father of Abraham Bickley III) in 1744, and the house was remodeled by Abraham Bickley III in 1793.

To correct the record the following facts should be noted:

1. Since Samuel Bickley was sheriff of New Castle County, Pa. (now Delaware) from October, 1742 until October, 1746, it is very dubious that he was at that time engaged in building Pen Ryn many miles away.

2. Samuel Bickley's will made at New Castle, Pa. (now Delaware) and dated 1749 lists him of being of Philadelphia at that time.

3. It could not have been Abraham Bickley III who



remodeled Pen Ryn in 1793 as he had been dead since 1782.

In summary, all evidence, gathered by going directly back to 18th century records, indicates that Abraham Bickley III built Pen Ryn circa 1754 for his intended bride, Mary Shewell and that his children (with Robert Shewell Bickley as head of the house) remodeled Pen Ryn in 1793.

It is extremely unfortunate that so many recent publications on Pen Ryn put into print the same erroneous ideas that have been held by so many people for so many years concerning the building of this colonial house.

### Appendix III.

#### The Story of Elizabeth Shewell

This is one of the best-known stories connected with Pen Ryn and probably the most romantic.

Elizabeth Shewell was the sister of Mary Shewell, who married Abraham Bickley III in 1758 and went to live at Pen Ryn.

In 1762 Elizabeth, who lived with her brother Stephen Shewell in Philadelphia, met Benjamin West, the colonial artist. A romance ensued, but West soon had to leave for London. He pledged his love for Elizabeth; the couple became affianced, and West sailed for England. At the Court of St. James, he soon became the favorite artist of King George III - who later knighted him.

When West considered the time ripe for his marriage, he approached the king with a request for leave of absence to visit his native land. This the king was reluctant to grant, fearing West might decide to remain in America. He accordingly proposed to send someone over to attend to West's business. But the latter declared that he must go in person. Finally, much pressed, he frankly avowed his intention of marriage. The king, determined to have his way, said that he would send a ship to bring the lady back.

This the king did, but when the boat arrived and Stephen Shewell learned of the young couple's intentions,

he was most violently averse to their marriage. He locked Elizabeth in her room to balk the match.

After confining her for several days, he arranged to have her taken out of the city to Pen Ryn where she was guarded by her sister Mary. The days languished away for Elizabeth on this isolated country estate, and each night she was imprisoned in a second floor bedroom.

Knowledge of the situation was soon spread abroad in the young colony, and several men, afterward notabilities, conspired to liberate the young girl. One of these was Benjamin Franklin, the second Billy White, the future Bishop of Pennsylvania, and the third Francis Hopkinson, later a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

The covering darkness of a moonless night, a ladder, a signal lamp, and a rowboat all figure conspicuously in the deliverance. Some versions of the story claim that the king's boat was made to wait at the harbor in Chester for fear Elizabeth might be intercepted in Philadelphia by her brother if she tried to board there. Others claim - and this seems the more probable - that the royal ship was anchored and waiting in the Delaware only a stone's throw from Pen Ryn.

Elizabeth escaped to England where she married Benjamin West at St. Martin's in the Fields, 1776.

The second floor room at Pen Ryn from which Elizabeth Shewell made her escape is now used as the first grade classroom for the Pen Ryn School. It is interesting to note that

in September, 1971, one of the school's first graders will be a little girl who is a descendant of Elizabeth and Benjamin West.

There is listed in the bibliography an interesting and very dramatic forty-page account of this story in the 1904 book by W. J. Mills entitled Through the Gates of Old Romance.

## Appendix IV

### The Hauntings and Ghosts of Pen Ryn

"From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties  
And things that go bump in the night  
Good Lord deliver us."

#### Scottish Prayer

It seems that few people believe in ghosts and haunted houses today, but the stories and legends that rise up around old mansions always make interesting reading. Certainly they are a part of the local folklore and as such should be preserved. I have, therefore, recorded all known ghost stories here for the amusement of non-believers and for the satisfaction of believers, whose number perhaps should not be underestimated.

The oldest Pen Ryn ghost story is one concerning a Robert Bickley, and it is here transcribed as it appears in a book published in 1904.

"It was the ringing of an evening bell tolled in a nearby hamlet which welcomed us into the beautiful roadway leading to Pen Ryn. That roadway is little changed today, but the house itself gazes upon its visitors in new attire. Probably there is no mansion in Pennsylvania that has had a more interesting history than this pile erected early in the eighteenth century by a pompous Bickley. On the estate is the family tomb guarding the dust of many generations of Bickleys - young

Bickleys who faded before their perfect bloom, old Bickleys who were glad enough to lay down the thread of life and rest their tired bones on that moss-grown bank. A long procession of men and women bearing a name they all were proud of, with but one exception. He, Robert Bickley, cursed his name and his father one Christmas night and then threw himself into the Delaware because the stern gentleman had told him never to darken his door in life, owing to an unfortunate marriage. Now, every Christmas eve it is said that he rises from the river, gaunt and slimy, and steals up the path to the house. Sometimes a belated wanderer sees him standing in the moonlight before the great hall door of Pen Ryn, moaning over his unhappy fate. Again he is heard in the corridors tapping with ghostly fingers at each chamber door for admittance. Promptly on the stroke of twelve, weird unearthly cries fill the house. Then every wakeful sleeper cuddles down low under the bedclothes. Perhaps it is only the wind playing about the chimneys, but the superstitious would have us believe that it is the shade of poor Robert Bickley calling to his young wife and cursing his fate and his name."

Exactly who this Robert Bickley is has never been determined. He cannot have been Robert Shewell Bickley, son of Abraham III and Mary, for it is recorded that he died a natural death at the age of 77 and never married. The Robert Bickley referred to could possibly have been a Wharton Bickley, son of one of the four Wharton Bickley brothers.

A second ghost of Pen Ryn is The Lady in Black, most often believed to be the mourning wife of Robert. She is unique in that she does not haunt Pen Ryn house but only the walks and paths of the grounds.

She has been known to appear more than once in the vicinity of the Bickley vault, lithe and willowy in a trailing gown of black velvet - "a wraith that walks under the age-old trees, through the walled garden, follows the path along the river, but never ventures too near the stately old mansion house." Her reluctance to approach the house is due no doubt to the fact that she was never welcome there as a bride.

Both of the above stories are quite old, and some people are inclined simply to pass them off as old wives' tales. There is, however, a very recent account of unusual happenings that took place in 1966.

The house had been boarded up for three years. When it was reopened as The Pen Ryn School, a teacher, Miss Ellen Snyder, had her classroom isolated on the second floor of the house as all the other classes were held on the ground floor at that time.

She relates that each afternoon at approximately the same time the room would suddenly be filled with a clammy coldness. It would leave as swiftly as it came.

More remarkable - occasionally there would be footsteps on the unoccupied third floor above, and a search of the upper regions of the house discovered no one.

The story is that as time passed and the school grew, the coldness left and the footsteps ceased. The children brought too much life and laughter back into the house for any ghost to remain.

Incredible?

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote in his work Haunted Houses the following line:

"All houses wherein men have lived and died are haunted houses."



## Appendix V

### The Cupid and Psyche Wallpaper

In 1920, Mr. and Mrs. Seton Henry had panels of this French wallpaper installed in one of the front parlors at Pen Ryn.

Known as "Les Amours de Psyche", the paper was originally designed at the Paris ateliers of Joseph Dufour by Louis Lafitte, designer to the king, in 1816. The original 1500 wood engraving blocks were used in the printing of this 1920 set of the wallpapers for Pen Ryn.

The set consists of twenty-six strips in grisaille and sepia, each about twenty inches wide and five feet and seven inches high, depicting all the scenes of the mythological story of Cupid and Psyche.

The parents of Psyche consulting the oracle

Psyche carried off by the zephyrs

Psyche at the bath

Psyche showing her jewels to her sisters

Psyche's attempt to stab Cupid

Psyche abandoned

Psyché picked up by a fisherman

Psyche carrying back the secret of youth

Psyche descending to the infernal regions

Psyche returning from the inferno

Reconciliation of Venus and Psyche

Marriage of Cupid and Psyche

Although there are twelve scenes to the set, there are today only seven at Pen Ryn. Five blank panels around the room could possibly account for the missing ones.

Nancy McClelland writes in Historic Wallpapers:

"The Cupid and Psyche paper is purely Neo-Classic in design; the figures are drawn with great elegance and grace, and the old mythological story is told in twelve different pictures that will always remain the most distinguished production of their epoch."

#### The "Psyche" Room - Photographed in 1939

This room, as well as the "Parlour" (see below), was remodeled in 1793 by the children of Abraham Bickley III. Also remodeled at that time were the two rooms directly above these on the second floor.

#### "Parlour" - Photographed in 1939

The portrait that hangs above the fireplace is of Lucy Wharton Drexel.

(Photographs courtesy of The Free Library of Philadelphia)

## Appendix VI

### The Bickley Family Crypt

Built by Abraham Bickley III before his death in 1782, this burial place has always been an object of keen interest to local historians.

Buried here were Abraham Bickley III (1731-1782), his wife Mary Shewell Bickley ( -1794), and their children: Hannah (1760-1853), Elizabeth (1761-1842), Margaret (1762- ), Robert Shewell (1765-1842), Lydia (1774-1845), and Isaac (1775-1853). Abraham IV (1759-1834), as has already been stated, was estranged from the family and buried at Mt. Moriah Cemetery.

The crypt lies in a thickly-wooded region to the north of the house. Originally, upon approaching it through the woods, there was scarcely anything perceptible, surely nothing that one would surmise as a vault. It was not until within a few feet of the spot that the gradual mound was discernible, so skillful were they in the art of deception in those days of ruthless plunder.

So it remained for over a hundred years. Then, around 1900, while Lucy Wharton Drexel was living at Pen Ryn, she had a path cleared through the woods and laid with gravel. The path passed beside the crypt and was named the Sarah Penrose Walk in honor of Mrs. Drexel's granddaughter. The path remains today, and since the time of its construction

has made the crypt easily accessible and its location well-known.

Unfortunately, this easy accessibility has made the vault an easy target for vandals ever since 1900. During Mrs. Drexel's time, thieves broke into it continually, looking for jewelry and gold.

When the Henrys took over the estate in the 1920's, they had all the caskets containing the remains of the Bickleys disinterred and placed in new caskets - very likely the old caskets as well as the remains themselves - for protection and preservation.

. During the 50 years that have passed since then, vandals have once more broken into the crypt time and time again. It is empty now. The iron door, broken open, is rusted fast in that position, and neighborhood boys have scrawled their initials on it.

Nevertheless, it is still fascinating to follow the Sarah Penrose Walk back to the crypt. The marble slab above the door still bears the inscription:

The vault of the Bickley family,  
originally from Sussex, England.

Looking inside one is amazed at the size of the bricked-up underground room, sufficiently large to inter so many and yet be hidden from view.

(See photograph on following page.)

## Appendix VII

### The Grounds of Pen Ryn

In general, the estate is composed of a small watershed with brooks, fields, deciduous woodland, conifer plantations, formal gardens, and lawns.

Of special interest is an ancient buttonwood tree which stands beside the carriage house. Almost three hundred years old, the tree measured twelve feet ten inches in circumference at breast height when it was mentioned by Edward E. Wildman in his 1944 book Penn's Woods. Since that time, the tree has been called The William Penn Tree. Unfortunately, it was partially destroyed in 1954 by Hurricane Hazel, but it still lives today and retains traces of its former dignity.

Also destroyed by Hurricane Hazel in 1954 were the sweeping stretches of lawn running to the river in front of the house. The land here was so badly washed away by the high water line that it was necessary later to fill in the gouge with sand dredged from the river.

Appendix VIII  
Small Structures

An animal cemetery with an obelisk monument occupies a small plot of ground at the edge of the woods north of the carriage house. The marker bears the inscriptions "Tony", "Jack", and "Bones". Tony may be a horse, but at least two of the animals are dogs. They were all pets of Josephine Drexel when she was a girl at Pen Ryn. The date on the monument is January, 1915.

Near this same spot but deeper in the woods is a little stone bridge which Lucy Wharton Drexel had built. The date, cut into the stone but almost obscured, is 1907.

Still farther north from the bridge and closer to the driveway is what appears to be the remains of an old brick well, now completely clogged with mud and leaves. Its age is unknown; however, it appears to be of a very early date.

Behind the mansion house and to the north there is a pump house erected by Lucy Wharton Drexel around 1900. A Rider-Ericson engine was used to pump the water. It has been abandoned now for some years, and the pump house itself has been allowed to fall into decay.

Only discovered within the last six months some distance behind the Bickley crypt along an almost completely overgrown path, are what appear to be the foundations of Lucy Wharton Drexel's hot houses. The surrounding areas appear to have been vegetable gardens and orchards. Attempting to trace the path still farther brings one to a small gate in the wall on State Road. This was obviously put there for the use of Mrs. Drexel's caretaker and gardener, John Digman and Charlie Gilbert, who lived on State Road and who would have tended the hot houses and vegetable gardens.

### The Gateway at Pen Ryn

This is a copy of an engraving done in 1958 by Thomas Reilly. The stone wall along State Road and this brick and iron gateway were added by Lucy Wharton Drexel (circa 1900). The driveway had then been known as Gravel Pike, which extended across State Road, the Bristol Pike and beyond.

At the time the gateway was erected, there had been a house recently constructed just beyond the proposed site and to the right, on a piece of land lost in the 1878 sheriff sale. Mrs. Drexel purchased this land and had the house moved for its owner. It now stands at 1714 State Road and is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Katzmar. Mrs. Katzmar is the granddaughter of Mrs. Drexel's gardener, Charlie Gilbert.

As an historical record, this engraving proved extremely valuable as there was no other drawing or photograph found of the gateway. Although the drawing was done in 1958, the gateway as shown here seems to have been little changed since Mrs. Drexel's day. Missing, however, are Mrs. Drexel's initials L.W.D., which were made of iron and had been attached across the top of the gate.

The main iron gate has been detached since the time of this drawing, and only recently the strip of ornamental iron above that has been torn down. That no effort was made to restore them is very disappointing.

Now painted white, the brick's original color was yellow.

(Engraving reproduced by permission of Elizabeth M. Walmsley)



Pen Ryn - Photographed in 1893

This photograph shows Pen Ryn as occupied by the Philadelphia Gun Club. The two men on the porch are members of the gun club but are unidentified.

The incongruous-looking porch had been added to the house only a few years before this picture was taken, making Pen Ryn look more like a farm house than the dignified country-seat of the Bickleys that it had once been.

If the porch were removed from view, one would be able to see more clearly the symmetrical Georgian facade the builder intended in 1754.

(Photograph courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia)

Pen Ryn - Photographed in 1912

This photograph shows Pen Ryn as the home of Lucy Wharton Drexel.

Mrs. Drexel embellished the facade greatly. She added a new, more elaborate porch, a string course around the walls, and a widow's walk on the roof. To the left of the house she had the west wing constructed (circa 1900).

The beginning of the grass terrace stretching in front of the house down to the Delaware is shown. Also discernible are the sloping sides of the terrace. It was very much elevated from the surrounding ground (5-10 feet) and tree-lined.

(Photograph courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia)

Pen Ryn - Photographed in 1912

This photograph again shows Pen Ryn as the home of Lucy Wharton Drexel.

There is a little better view here of the west wing than in the preceding photograph. The west wing was a windowless structure with a glass roof. The outside walls had only an ornamental molding where windows might be. Inside, Mrs. Drexel had the walls lined with shelves and used the room as her library. It must have been considered very sophisticated in its day.

Also shown on the right of the photograph is an addition to the rear of the house which Mrs. Drexel most likely added the same time as the library wing (circa 1900).

(Photograph courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia)

Pen Ryn - South Side - Photographed in 1939

When the Henrys renovated Pen Ryn they changed the west wing greatly as can be seen in this photograph. They broke through the walls, installed windows, covered over the glass roof, and turned it from a library into a drawing room. The east wing which they added at this same time now became their library.

Pen Ryn - North Side - Photographed in 1939

There are four walled gardens at Pen Ryn. The one shown here is the oldest, dating back to the Bickleys in the eighteenth century.

It was into this garden from a second story window that Elizabeth Shewell made her escape in 1776 to marry with Benjamin West. (See Appendix III)

This is the garden where Lucy Wharton Drexel had a Christmas tree placed each year and strung with presents for the children of the area.

Also shown in this photograph is the 'Tower Room' - a tiny room, not easily accessible, and having no apparent purpose.

The el-shaped wing was added by Mrs. Drexel circa 1900.

(Photographs courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia)

Pen Ryn - The South Terrace - Photographed in 1939

This photograph shows Pen Ryn after the restorations done by Mr. and Mrs. Seton Henry, circa 1920.

The facade has been returned to its original colonial character and presents a consistent and harmonious aspect. It remains little changed to the present day.

At the end of the terrace, through the trees, the east wing added by the Henrys circa 1920 can be partially seen.

A second terrace off the east wing was added at the same time.

### Pen Ryn Today - 1971

Pen Ryn is obviously a house that has experienced successive episodes of growth, but the result is both interesting and pleasing. The success of the river - front side shown here is undoubtedly due to its symmetrical qualities. The stucco walls are painted the same yellow color originated by Lucy Wharton Drexel in 1900.

### Carriage House Today - 1971

Obviously of a later date than the house, the carriage house (circa 1900) is little changed on the outside since it was first erected. Inside, the second floor which was once the coachman's living quarters and later the chauffeur's has been changed into a gymnasium.

## Afterword

This book has grown out of an idle curiosity to learn something about the past of Pen Ryn. When I first came to The Pen Ryn School as a teacher in 1969, I felt at once that here was a house of both architectural and historical importance. I wanted to find out what I could about its past, and during my first teaching year, I learned those things that were generally known. There seemed however to be a great many missing pieces to the story. After returning to the school a second year and teaching in the old rooms every day, I began to think again about this house and its past. Then, unintentionally, I came across a small bit of information in an old library book. Here was something about Pen Ryn that no one seemed to know. This convinced me that there must be a great deal more information that one could unearth.

And so began the research that led to the compilation of this book. The hunt took me into libraries, museums, historical societies, deed offices, and the homes of old residents of Bucks County. It was one of the most enjoyable things I have ever done, and it is with the greatest pleasure that the results are now presented to those who are interested in such records.

It is not surprising to me, however, that after pursuing almost every possible lead, the story is still not complete.

Dozens of my questions have been answered, and there is gathered here the most complete history of the house to date; however, there are still gaps in the story. I can only reconcile myself with the fact that the gaps have been made more narrow. A tremendous number of new things have been revealed, and information on known stories has been made more complete and accurate.

An earlier researcher on Pen Ryn concluded her history with these words: "There is much more that could be written about the Bickleys, the Drexels, and others whose lives touched Pen Ryn through the years. It has been fun finding out as much as is set forth in these pages. To you is left the fun of making a few discoveries of your own." Perhaps at that time she meant me. However, her words are as true today as when she wrote them 13 years ago. Now that you have read this book, perhaps you will be the next one to get in on the fun and discover a few secrets about this old house yourself. I hope so.

To the many people who have aided with the research along the way I give my thanks.

To all my little people at The Pen Ryn School this book is dedicated.

Joseph Ciccarelli  
The Pen Ryn School  
September 1, 1971



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