

**Charles P. Mills, Jr**  
**b. 1922**

### **Huntingdon Valley History**

There were only three families in the Sorrel Horse Tract off Huntingdon Pike and Byberry Road when Dorothy and I moved here March, 1952. Frank and Jean Muth, George and Hildegard McCoach, and Elmer and Margaret Campbell. Elmer was Lower Moreland Fire Police Chief for many years, and their son Tom Campbell built his house here on their adjoining lot when his mother died. Jean Muth was secretary for the Lower Moreland School District superintendents. One of the residents, Jency Durand, who now lives in the Muth house around the bend, told me her Grandfather Synnestvedt owned the farm where this whole Sorrel Horse Tract was developed. Jency's aunt is Doreen Cooper who was president of the First Pennsylvania Bank (formerly Huntingdon Valley Bank, now Wachovia.) We built our house ourselves. Some houses built later were prefab homes. The Huntingdon Valley Presbyterian Church minister, Leonard Clayton, John and Connie Zimmer, Roy and Irma Cook, Al Thomay, Monty and Elsie Sutherland and Huntingdon Valley Postmaster Lou and Elaine Heins lived in those "Gunison Houses" erected in the 1950s by Paul Stahl, Sr. Mail was delivered to residents' boxes on Huntingdon Pike at Sorrel Road.

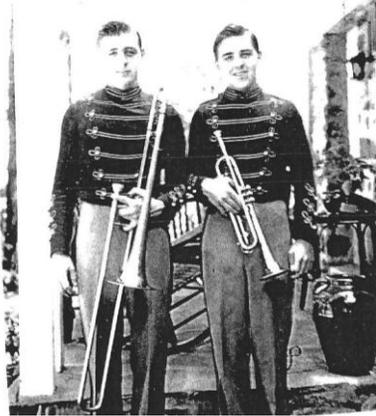
Washington Hudson and other Lower Moreland Township Commissioners referred to the Sorrel Horse Tract as the "Silk Stocking Section" of Lower Moreland. I often think what this place will look like a couple hundred years from now. Look at all the sections of Philadelphia that at one time were beautiful.

[Photo: Charlie's parents, Louise and Charles Sr.]



I did not grow up here. I was born 9/20/22 in the Feltonville section of Philadelphia and lived in Abington Township on Old Huntingdon Pike from January 1940 to October 1949. I should have attended Olney High School but went to Northeast High School because my dad graduated there. When I was a senior, my family moved to Old Huntingdon Pike between Cedar and Susquehanna Roads. I stayed at Northeast High School to graduate in June 1940. My son and his family now live in that house. I then went to Penn State for two years. The war came along, so I went to work at Cramp Shipyard and Rubicon Electrical Instrument Company where I met Dorothy Crowther. We were married October 15, 1949 in East Falls Baptist Church on Indian Queen Lane in Philadelphia and lived on Sumac Street. Because I had lived in Huntingdon Valley and there was a big move to the suburbs, Dorothy and I moved here March 1952.

A lot was advertised for sale on Byberry Road by Ball and Coffin Realtors in Jenkintown. They told us that lot was sold to Mike Krebs but another lot was available in the Sorrel Horse Tract. That was how we got here, even though we always wanted a corner lot to make it easy to put the car in and out of the garage. Ironically, in 1946 I worked for George B. Mebus Engineers, Glenside, PA and surveyed the roads in the Sorrel Horse Tract to develop the plot plan. Little did I know six years later I would live there.



[Photo: Loudenslager American Legion Post Band 1939  
Charles and George Mills]

Raymond “Bud” Murray and I worked in the Copper Shop at Cramp Shipyard on Girard Avenue on the Delaware River. We fabricated copper pipe that was installed on cruisers and other ships and submarines during WWII. An Italian luxury liner, confiscated in Argentina, South America, was converted to a troop transport. Bud was a 1937 Lower Moreland High School graduate. He, Johnny Oldroyd, Bill Alden and I carpooled to Cramps. In the 1940s we hunted rabbits, squirrels and pheasants on the Ridgway Farm on Red Lion Road and fished in the Pennypack and Neshaminy Creeks. We collected night crawlers for bait by pushing two prongs connected to an auto battery into the turf of Elkins Field on Huntingdon Pike. The charge would force the worms to the surface. Bud’s wife, Mae Campoli, was the telephone operator here at the switchboard in a house on Huntingdon Pike. Bud has been a friend for many years, and we now have lunch together about once a month.

[Photo: Our wedding, October 15, 1949]



When Dorothy and I lived in Wissahickon, we parked our car in the Smith Kline & French Labs parking lot at 15<sup>th</sup> & Spring Garden Street where I was employed. They built there in 1947 on the Baldwin Locomotive site, where my mother’s father worked years ago. Dorothy would meet me after work (she worked for Commonwealth Title Company in town) and we would eat at Linton’s Restaurant on Spring Garden Street around 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Streets. Linton’s was interesting because they had a conveyor belt that went between the booths. The food would come out on the conveyor belt and the waitress would put the food on the tables. Then, at the end of the meal, the dirty dishes would go back to the kitchen on a belt. When we moved here, Dorothy left Commonwealth and I carpooled with Joe Blair who lived on High Road. Joe’s father and my father were builders in Feltonville section of Philadelphia. Joe’s father built a row of houses on Eleanor Street around the corner from “C” Street where my dad built a row.

The nearest Acme was in Warrington, the only major food store near us. For clothes, we shopped at Santerian’s in Hatboro. The Ned Santerian family lived right here on the Pike (Merle Santerian

still resides there), but they didn't build that house. Curtis Steur, a captain and musical director in the Joseph Ferko String Band, was the builder. When the Steurs moved, the Santerian's bought it. He had a dress factory up in Wrightstown. The Acme in Southampton was first located where Joann's Fabric Store is today, and then they moved across the pike to where Maggio's is today, then moved again to Street and Davisville Roads in Warminster.

Our telephone party line had no dialing. The telephone operators were Mrs. Carol Wright, Mae Campoli Murray, etc. The exchange was "Wilson". Our party line had 8 rings. Our's was "Ring 4". We had a neighbor on the party line that was a traveling salesman and called his wife all hours of the night. He had Ring 6. Were we relieved when we heard the 5<sup>th</sup> ring! Go back to sleep!

### **Around the Town**

The Sorrel Horse Inn was on the corner of the Pike and Byberry Road. I heard that Mr. George Elkins frequented the bar often. Rumor was Mrs. Elkins had it torn down so he couldn't go there any more. I seem to recall that when she died, she was only dead a few weeks when he died. We all said that she wouldn't leave him alone to enjoy himself.



[Photo: The Sorrel Horse Inn, built c. 1750;  
OYRHS]

In the 1940s I saw the big mansion on Huntingdon Pike near the now Holy Redeemer Hospital burn down. I heard that the clothes were still left on the backs of the chairs and things like that. I remember that Fred Conard and his son Lou farmed the land across the pike from it. Later, Lou ran the bus garage for the Lower Moreland School District. Fred was custodian of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church.

Dr. Paul Grotzinger lived at the corner of Valley and Welsh Roads. Dr. Ernst Schmidt (former pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church) and his dog Duke and I would hunt with Paul up at Greenridge Farms before it and other farmlands were developed with homes. Duke would flush the pheasants off the ground. Only the male was legal. Well, the birds always got ahead of us, so one day we put Paul at the corner of the property and told him to stay there because the birds would fly that way across Buck Road. When we pushed we heard "bang, bang, bang". When we reached Paul, we asked, "Where are the birds?" He missed them all! We laughed. Paul was a great guy and surgeon at Holy Redeemer and Jeane's Hospitals.

Before Gloria Dei Lutheran Church was built at Huntingdon Pike and Welsh Road, 128 of us worshipped in the Huntingdon Valley Fire Hall in 1956.

White's General Store at the corner of Huntingdon Pike and Byberry Road (now site of Citgo Gas station) would find Mr. White sitting in a chair telling you where the merchandise you requested was located and to bring it to him. Later his son Charles helped him, and Donald pursued a profession in education.

Do you remember Dixie's Diner next to White's Store? Dixie's last name is Dixon. Might have been related to Russell Pletcher, Lower Moreland's Police Chief. Russell's sister was Mary Pletcher Woodard. Her husband Woody was the butcher at White's Store. Before that he was the butcher at Foley's and Bill's Markets on Huntingdon Pike at Red Lion Road. I was sorry to hear about Woody's death (January 2008). I remember once when I brought a deer to Bill's Market for Woody to butcher there was a whole pile of them behind the market. We bought hind quarters of beef from him and Woody would cut off a piece, raw, and chew it. From that he could tell how tender it was. He would let the quarter of beef hang for three weeks before it would be sold. One of the tricks of his trade. There was a big walk-in freezer in the back of the store.

At Dixie's Diner, we would see big cardboard boxes on the back tables when we would go there for lunch when building our house. We thought nothing of those boxes, although they were always there. Then one night Dixie was robbed. The milkman the next morning saw there was a robbery and called the police. I don't know who came, maybe Russ Pletcher, and they found slot machines inside the boxes that had their backs cut out. Don't remember what happened about that. Chief Pletcher was like a czar. Even when we had Huntingdon Valley Fish and Game Protective Association card parties he would always wear his uniform. And he wore these leather things that came up over the calves of your legs, like jodhpurs. He would play Bingo late into the night.

Justa Farm was the Elkins property. That's where they held the June Fete. I can't remember who was with me, but during the festivities one year, we decided to climb over the fence to see what was going on. I knew the television camera was there. I found it and followed it, yes, we were on the TV, and Dorothy saw us on our TV set.

Dorothy and I have been here 56 years and have been very involved in this community. Dorothy worked during Christmas time in the Huntingdon Valley Post Office next to Brown's Drug Store on Huntingdon Pike and Red Lion Road with Postmaster Lou Heins, Sparky Cataldo and George Robinson, both teachers at Lower Moreland, and John Miller and Bob Simon. The Bethayres Post Office was at the intersection of Huntingdon Pike and Welsh Road. Ma Doering was the postmistress there. Later she worked in the teachers' dining rooms at Lower Moreland Middle School and High School.

### **Lower Moreland Township Celebrates the 4<sup>th</sup> of July**

The Fourth of July celebration was a big deal in Lower Moreland. The committee was composed of representatives from all community organizations and churches. I was on the committee several years; president for one year. The Fish and Games' role during the daytime activities at Red Lion Elementary School (formerly Schmidt's Dairy Farm) was to provide for the Pet Show. Doc Vansant, the veterinarian from Rockledge, would come and judge the pets. Very low key. The Peanut Scramble was a big event then.

Ebbie Flack, HV Fire Chief, had an airplane. He would fly over with the peanuts and dump them onto the field. He found out that his insurance wasn't any good at flying low altitudes for something like that, so he couldn't do it anymore. Then he got the Rockledge Fire Company to

come with their big hook and ladder they just bought from the city of Philadelphia. We asked them to come and run the ladder up high and throw the peanuts down. But they didn't come and didn't come. Here, on their way, somebody on the truck tripped the latch to the ladder. The ladder started going up and up. They were now down near the Pennypack Creek before Moreland Road. The whole truck turned over on its side. The men jumped off; nobody was hurt. They pulled the truck over to Elkins Field. It was on display for a few weeks.

So one of our men suggested using our own fire truck to throw the peanuts off the back of it. They had to hold the children back from the rear of the truck so no one would get hurt. Some peanuts were colored and worth 25, 10 or 5 cents.

The biggest event of the Fourth of July Celebration was the evening parade. The parade route extended from Welsh Road and Philmont Avenue, north on Huntingdon Pike to Red Lion Road, then to the Fire House. Fireworks started at 9 PM, preceded with music by the Lower Moreland High School Band. Fire trucks came from all over, and floats of churches and organizations participated. It was huge. We often wondered what would happen if there was a fire in their towns. The trucks were all here. Chief Pletcher was always at the start of the parade checking every float to make sure the trailers wouldn't come unhooked during the parade while going uphill on the Pike. He would reject different ones for the littlest thing. Maybe a chain wasn't thick enough. He was a great one on authority!

### **The Huntingdon Valley Fish & Game Protective Association**

This was an organization of men from Lower Moreland and surrounding townships. I joined in 1942 while living on the on the Old Huntingdon Pike and was Secretary until it dissolved in 1972. I gave the minutes to Sylvia Fesmire. We met monthly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the one engine Huntingdon Valley Company Fire House, Red Lion Road (site of current Fire House. The Huntingdon Valley Baptist Church was next door). Increased membership necessitated moving to Red Lion Road Elementary School cafeteria. Spring and Fall meetings were held at Lorimer Park and a family picnic was held there in August.

The Purpose of the Association was to protect wildlife, support the Pennsylvania Game and Fish Commissions' programs to release pheasants, provide winter feedings to wildlife and stock the Pennypack Creek with trout and bass. We also monitored conditions of the Pennypack Creek and notified authorities, including Reading Railroad Company, when debris accumulated under the bridges hindering the flow. To aid conservation the members planted tree seedlings on their properties, open land, Lorimer Park, etc. supplied by Graterford Prison Farm. Spruce and pine trees can be seen today throughout Lower Moreland, many now over 50 feet tall. Members: Ray Gantt (President), Bill Ridgway (Past President), Larry Bonsal (Printer from Willow Grove and good friend of Ray Gantt), Frank Burkard, Elmer Campbell, Franklin Hoke ( LMSD Superintendent), Mike Krebs, Charles Mills Sr. (my Dad), Charles Mills Jr. (Secretary), Richard Mohlzan, Ed Morrow (Lorimer Park Administrator), Raymond (Bud) Murray, Joe O'Brien, Bill Rumpf, Russell Pletcher (LMTWP Police Chief), Horace Sipler, Jesse Terry, Arthur Vansant, Franklin Barrett, Walter Flack, Edward Schmidt, Carl Anderson and others.

Card parties were held in the second floor auditorium of the Red Lion School to raise money for wildlife feed purchases and contributions to wildlife protection agencies, as the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, and reported needs from Lower Moreland residents or special

projects. Mr. Franklin Hoke, the Superintendent of Lower Moreland Schools, would make chicken potpies for us which we would eat even at ten o'clock at night! Those pies were good! Virginia Truby, Head Dietician Lower Moreland Schools, cooked venison donated by successful deer hunter members. Mr. Hoke prepared hot venison sandwiches for the January meeting. An annual event was a family picnic at Lorimer Park. Jesse Terry was a member of the Association, and he had an airplane. He took Ray Gantt up one time. This was back in the 1960s. There was a hurricane which split Long Beach Island, New Jersey. They went down to look and take pictures. These and other pictures and movies members took were often shown at the meetings.

We also had Pennsylvania Game Wardens (now Wildlife Conservation Officers) come to speak. One of the reasons men joined was because they posted properties in the area where you could hunt. The Ridgway farm on Red Lion Road was one and all the open land along Philmont Avenue. Ours was a local club that was a member of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsman Clubs. The Game Commission had a farm in Graterford where they raised pheasants. They would release them in different areas in Montgomery County including Lower Moreland Township. The small game season would start in November, rabbits and pheasants. No turkeys or deer here then. These different properties were stocked for hunting. There was a lot of open land around here. The conservation group would put feed around in the winter for wildlife.

In those days there was no television. Movies, yes, but nothing like you have today. So activities like our Card Parties were very popular. When we were building our house here, all the neighbors helped. We did the same for them. I remember pouring cement floors for basements, garages, and porches. All the men would help on Saturday mornings. George McCoach's company did cement work for Sunoco gasoline stations. He would direct all of us. We were the "brutes". He would do the cement finishing. We had picnics together at Tyler and Lorimer Parks. Everyone would bring something and play games and have races for the children. It was a real community.

### **Looking Back**

When I was 80 I was asked if I had to do my life over again, what would I have done different. I replied, "Nothing!" I said that I would have liked to have graduated from college. But if I did, maybe I would have made a lot more money, but I wouldn't have met Dorothy, I wouldn't have the house and location that we have, I wouldn't have Bob, I wouldn't have been a charter member of Gloria Dei, President of Huntingdon Valley Rotary Club, Charter President of Churchville Rotary Club or District Governor of Rotary International and have so many wonderful experiences and friends.

Instead of sending sympathy cards, I send a letter of what remembrances I have of the deceased. I always start out with: *Remember me with smiles and laughter. If you can only remember me with tears, then don't remember me at all.* Dorothy's mother heard that somewhere. I said that at her funeral and ever since at others. These sentiments work for me and I hope they comfort those receiving them.



[Photo: Charlie and Dorothy in 2007]