

Legends surrounding Cooper's Corner

Cooper's Corner and, consequently, the Cooper house hold a special place in the folklore of Dover and Kent County. The existence of a large brick burial vault in the yard certainly did nothing to dispel the mystery of the place in the popular imagination. George Alfred Townsend's classic Delaware novel, *The Entailed Hat, or Patty Cannon's Times, a romance*, is both a compilation and a source of lower Delaware's antebellum folklore.

Townsend had the slave-stealer Derrick Molleston of Cooper's Corner serving as a lookout for the slave kidnappers: "That's whar he holds the Forks of both roads from below, and watches the law in Dover. ..." ⁹ Describing the route from Camden to Dover on the night of Patty Cannon's raid, Townsend says:

They crossed a mill-stream [Isaac's Branch], and soon afterwards a smaller run [Puncheon Run], without speaking, and came to a little log-and-frame cabin in a fork of the road, where Levin's horse tried to run in.

"Ha, friend! Is it not Derrick Molleston's loper thee has -- the same that he gets from Devil Jim Clark? What art thou then? I feel concerned for thee."

"A Christian too, I hope," answered Levin, forcing his nag up the road.

"Then thee is better than a youth in this dwelling we next pass," the Quaker said, pointing to a brick house on the left; "for there lived a judge whose son bucked a poor negro fiddler in his father's cellar, and delivered him to Derrick Molleston to be sold in slavery. I hear the poor man tells it in his distant house of bondage."¹⁰

The brick dwelling house in question could only have been the Cooper house, which had in fact been occupied by a judge. The reference to Derrick Molleston's house appears to refer to a building in the intersection of Cooper's Corner, which lay in the northwest quadrant of the present intersection. The Beers *Atlas* map shows no such building. The Molleston family was actually active in the area; Governor Henry Molleston operated the mill known today as Moore's Mill, on Isaac's Branch.¹¹

During the bloody aftermath of the Patty Cannon raid on the Cowgill House (now Woodburn or the Governor's House), Townsend has Derrick Molleston carrying the wounded slave-stealer Van Dorn toward his "den at Cooper's Corners"¹²

Townsend's yarn's relationship with history has been debated, but many agree that his retelling of geography and folklore is accurate, while chronology and event history are elaborated for effect.

9. George Alfred Townsend, *The Entailed Hat* (Cambridge 1955), p. 421.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 423.

11. Scharf, *op. cit.*, p. 1085.

12. Townsend, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

Interpretation

Cooper's Corner clearly possesses important connections in Delaware history, particularly the history of the Revolutionary period. The first three known residents, Kearney, Nixon, and Cooper, were important local figures. There is no reason to doubt that Townsend's yarn of Patty Cannon contains some truth. Regardless of its objectivity, the story enjoys considerable popular currency. From an architectural point of view, K-222 has virtually nothing to recommend it for recognition. There is a legend that parts of the house were used in the restoration of the Ridgely House on the Dover Green, but this story has not been substantiated.

What exists today above ground is the much-remodelled farmhouse of Parren Cooper's widow. Somewhere nearby, below ground, are remains from much earlier periods. The integrity of these remains must have been compromised by urbanization during the present century.

The tanyard and sawmill sites may lie undisturbed in the valley of Puncheon Run east of Route 113a. Molleston's legendary "den" may be sealed by pavement, but it is impossible to tell which pavement.

Recommendations

Cooper's Corner, as a point in space, possesses considerable historical significance, if only because of its role in the pivotal events of 1776. A few hours' encampment by the Light Horse would not have left recoverable evidence. There is, therefore, nothing to warrant a National Register nomination on the basis of the Revolutionary events.

Any proposals to develop anything in the valley of Puncheon Run below Route 113a will have potential impact upon resources identified in this study. Those resources include remains of Starkey's landing, Kearney's tanyard, and Judge Cooper's water-powered sawmill. All three of these sites might contribute significantly to our archæological understanding of eighteenth-century industry and commerce.

While no further action is recommended in connection with the present project, the cultural significance of the larger Cooper's Corner neighborhood cannot be written off.

Descent of Title
1068 South State Street, Dover, Delaware
K-222

Lula James Mowen to GAR Company, Inc.
2.35 acres ±

October 3, 1973
Deed Book T28, p. 425

On the west side of South State Street and the east side of Bradford Street extended, between Wyoming Avenue and Cooper's Corner, adjoining other lands of Lula James Mowen and lands formerly of Frank Minner, now of Anna Davis, on south side of land formerly of John L. B. Hutchinson and lands formerly of E. Haman Bostic, now of Robert S. Moore and wife. Reference to a survey by J. E. Haddaway, March 21-22, 1939.

Frances B. Berry to Lula James
2.35 acres

April 15, 1939
Deed Book O15, p. 50

Describes the property as containing a two-story brick and frame dwelling, barn, stable, sheds, and other buildings. Refers to the original ten-acre tract. For the portion of the parcel adjoining Minner to the south, see Deed Book B15, p.225.

William G. Bush, sheriff, to Frances B. Berry
8¹/₃ acres

November 12, 1936
Deed Book A15, p. 70

Sold by Sheriff Bush to satisfy a debt of Howard K. Berry, deceased. The part remaining of the H. C. Cullen sale, on the west side of the road from Dover to Cooper's Corner and both sides of the highway from Dover to Camden via Governors Avenue, bounded on the north by E. Haman Bostic and J. L. B. Hutchinson, south and west by Frank E. Maloney

Hortense C. Cullen to Howard K. Berry (confirmation)
10 ± acres

September 1, 1923
Deed Book K 12, p. 302

Tract lying on the west side of the state highway from Dover to Cooper's Corner "and is known as the Cooper's Corner Mansion Place being about 1 mile south of Dover." Adjoins other lands of the grantors and lands of Hutchinson.

Frank and Lydia Maloney to James and Hortense Cullen
53± acres

December 19, 1912
Deed Book H 10, p. 402

Tract on the west side of the road from Dover to Frederica and the northwest side of the road from Cooper's Corner to Camden, adjoining land of J. W. Minor and wife; land of Harriet W. Burton; land of Fred Waters; land of Gove S. Johnson, and others, the south boundary being Puncheon Run or Walker's Branch

Arthur J. Kingsbury to Lydia C. Maloney
77± acres

September 22, 1908
Deed Book P9, p. 495

Known as the Cooper property, excepting 10 acres deeded to J. W. Minor and excepting a parcel on the southeast side of the road from Cooper's Corner to Camden that was retained by L. C. Maloney. Residue of a tract left by Annie P. C. Cooper to Sarah A. Cooper (Shockley), except part already conveyed by Sarah A. Cooper to Lydia C. Maloney.

Sophia C. Perkins to Arthur J. Kingsbury
73± acres

August 4, 1908
Deed Book P9, p. 493

Land on both sides of the road from Dover to Camden adjoining land late of James Waples deceased, now Harriet Burton; land late of Dr. Henry Ridgely, deceased; land late of Lydia C. Maloney; and others.

Will of Sarah L. Cooper
72 acres

Dated November 17, 1903; Proved September 26, 1904
Will Book D2, p. 371

Sarah L. Cooper (widow) was known also as Sarah L. Shockley because of her marriage to John B. Shockley, from whom she was divorced. She describes herself as the widow of William Parene Cooper, residing on her farm at Cooper's Corner near Dover. She orders "that my body be interred in the family vault on my farm beside my first husband and my children." To her sister, Sophia C. Perkins, she left her farm at Cooper's Corner containing 72 acres of land more or less. Mentions bequests to William Paren Tomlinson and Clarence D. Tomlinson. The last substantive item of the will reads: "It is my will that my said sister Sophia C. Perkins shall make adequate provision in all events for the care and preservation of the family vault located on my farm at Cooper's Corner and that the bodies of my relatives or of the relatives of William Paren Cooper my deceased first husband may be there interred."

Will of Annie P. C. Cooper

Dated April 22, 1895, Probated April 18, 1899
Will Book C2, p. 64

Annie P. C. Cooper, single woman, of Philadelphia, stated, "It is my wish and desire that my body be interred in the Cooper vault on the Cooper farm about one mile from the town of Dover Kent County, Delaware and that the funeral be according to the rights and ceremonies of the Protestant Episcopal Church." She named Sarah E[?]. Cooper as her heir.

Letters of Administration of William Parran Cooper

March 19, 1861
Will Book T1, p.8

His widow was named as Sarah E. Cooper, who was his administratrix.

Alexander P. Taylor to William Parran Cooper

March 27, 1852
Deed Book C4, p. 245

William Parran Cooper to Alexander P. Taylor

March 27, 1852
Deed Book C4, p. 244

Straw-man transaction docking the entail on Cooper's property. Refers to the act of Assembly January 19, 1829, relating to entailed estates. Refers to will of Richard Cooper, Will Book P1, p. 131, in which he left the property in question to the heirs of Richard Jenifer Cooper, father of William Parran Cooper.

Will of [Judge] Richard Cooper

Dated January 23, 1816, probated September 4, 1816
Will Book P1, p. 131

Left in tail to his son Richard Jenifer Cooper a part of the land bought from Montgomery and Cokeley, described as beginning on the south side of Walker's Branch below the mill, a corner of the Batson purchase; westwardly with the division lines of the tracts to the main road from Dover to Molleson's Mill; north along the road to a line westwardly along the cripple 40 feet south of Walker's Branch, to the road from Dover to Camden; along the Camden road to the line of James McClyment and including the land acquired from McClyment's administrators.

William Montgomery and Letitia Coakley to Richard Cooper
491 acres 151 perches

December 23, 1794
Deed Book E2, p. 139

Tract near the town of Dover in Murderkill Hundred lately held and occupied by Thomas Nixon the elder, deceased, including parts of Brother's Portion, Smyrna, and Shoemaker's Hall. Detailed metes and bounds are provided, showing that the tract extended from the vicinity of Cooper's Corner to Moore's Lake on the south, and encompassed the present Kent Acres and Rodney Village subdivisions.

Will of Thomas Nixon

Dated November 18, 1779; Proved December 29, 1779
Will Book L1, p. 215

Nixon's estate remained unsettled for years. On August 1, 1796, his daughter Letitia Coakley took letters of Administration (Will Book N1, p. 179). To his daughter Letitia Coakley and Rachel Robinson and to his grandchildren, the son and daughter of Nicholas vanDyke by his daughter Elizabeth Nixon vanDyke, deceased, he left five shillings each, they already having their inheritances. To son {Charles?} Nixon, he left the "Plantation where I now dwell, situate on the west side of the county road from Dover to Penals Mill, part of Brother's Portion." To his son Nicholas Nixon he left all his land on the east side of the county road.

Edmund Kearney to Thomas Nixon
200 acres except 10 acres reserved

February 14, 1743
Deed Book N1, p. 15

The beginning point is 140 perches upstream from the mouth of Walker's Branch, described as part of Brother's Portion bought of William Starkey. The north boundary was described as the land of Samuel Dickinson.

William Starkey to Edmund Kearney
200 acres

January 21, 1741
Deed Book M, p. 148

The description is the same as above. In 1723, the property here called "Starkeys" was described as being late of Philip Kearny, deceased. At least two generations of Starkeys apparently held title to the property between 1699 and 1741, before a Kearny finally took title.

William Southebe to Edward Starkey
200 acres

23 Ninth Month 1699
Deed Book C1, p. 164

The description is the same as above.

John Walker to William Southebe
800 acres

1684
Deed Book B1, p. 47

Describes all of Brother's Portion, which extended from the present line of North Street on the north to Walker's Branch on the south.

John Walker, Grantee

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