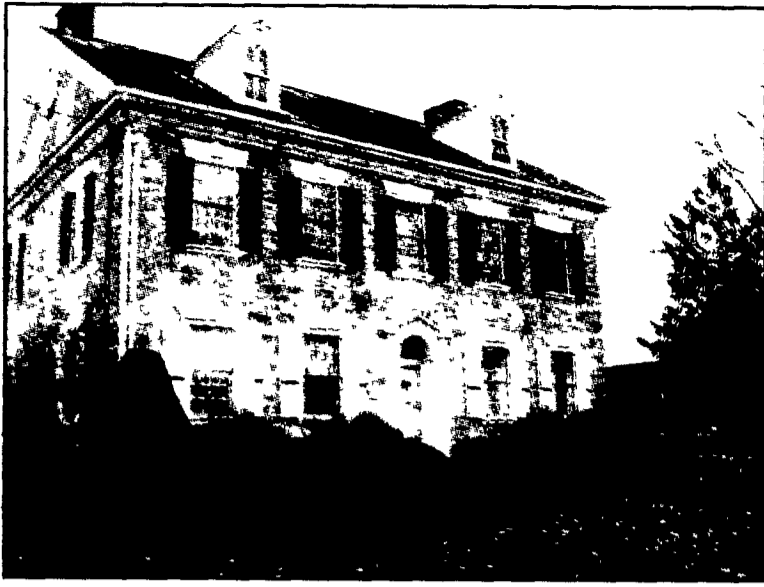


Fisher Homestead Showcases Living History



The Fisher Homestead is a historical landmark of the Oley Valley. The Georgian-style home built in 1801 features a 13-room interior with two 8-foot wide hallways, six fireplaces, and the finest details of master carpentry.

LOU ANN GOOD Lancaster Farming Staff

OLEY (Berks Co.) — It's difficult to tell where history begins and where it ends at the 1790 Fisher Homestead, where living history continues to unfold around Frank and Hilda Fisher.

The feisty 80-year-old Hilda is a long-time compiler of historical landmarks for the Berks County Historical Society. But she has made plenty of history herself. She received a national award from President Reagan for her work with the National Register of Historical Places, and numerous county awards for preservation of historical places and graveyards. Recently Hilda was named Ag Women of the Year for the county.

Travelers on Route 662 north of Oley are intrigued by the handsome Georgian-style home and the barn and out buildings of the Fisher Homestead.

The house is modeled similar to the mansions in the British Isles. The outer walls of the house are constructed with 18-inch thick limestone. The 13-room interior features two 8-foot wide halls, six fireplaces with intricate wood carvings, numerous built-in china closets, chair rail panels, friezes, and cornices such as a miniature of a Corsican general riding his horse.

The master bedroom or bridal chamber on the second floor has the most elaborate wood carvings, which at one time was desired by the DuPonts of Longwood Gardens as a summer room.

Hilda has an abundance of stories to accompany many of the home's features. For instance, each window in the house has 24 panes of 8x10-inches of bubble glass. It is said that someone viewing a crime through the window could not be considered a viable witness because the glass distorted the scene.

Still standing is the stone barn, used to provide accommodations for the horses of travelers on the way to Philadelphia during the late 1700s.

The Fishers have compiled an extensive history of their ancestors who inhabited the property before them. At times, the mansion housed four generations of Fishers. Frank and Hilda married in 1942 and moved into the house in 1945.

Uncommon for that era, both Frank and Hilda had graduated from high school. Hilda completed her education at the Kutztown State Teachers' College and taught school two years before marrying.

Frank credits his vocational agriculture teacher for instilling different farming methods. While neighbors were skeptical

of "newfangled" ideas, the vocational teacher garnered Frank's dad's respect when he helped shock wheat during an unexpected visit.

Through this newly-introduced ideas, Frank said students learned to feed cattle rations, to keep lights on in the chicken house in order to induce chickens to lay more eggs, and to fertilize wheat, corn, and oats.

He remembers when the family purchased one of the first Fordson tractors.

"But tractors aren't what they are today," Frank said. The family's first tractor required "one to cook before the tractor did when starting it," he said of the laborious effort.

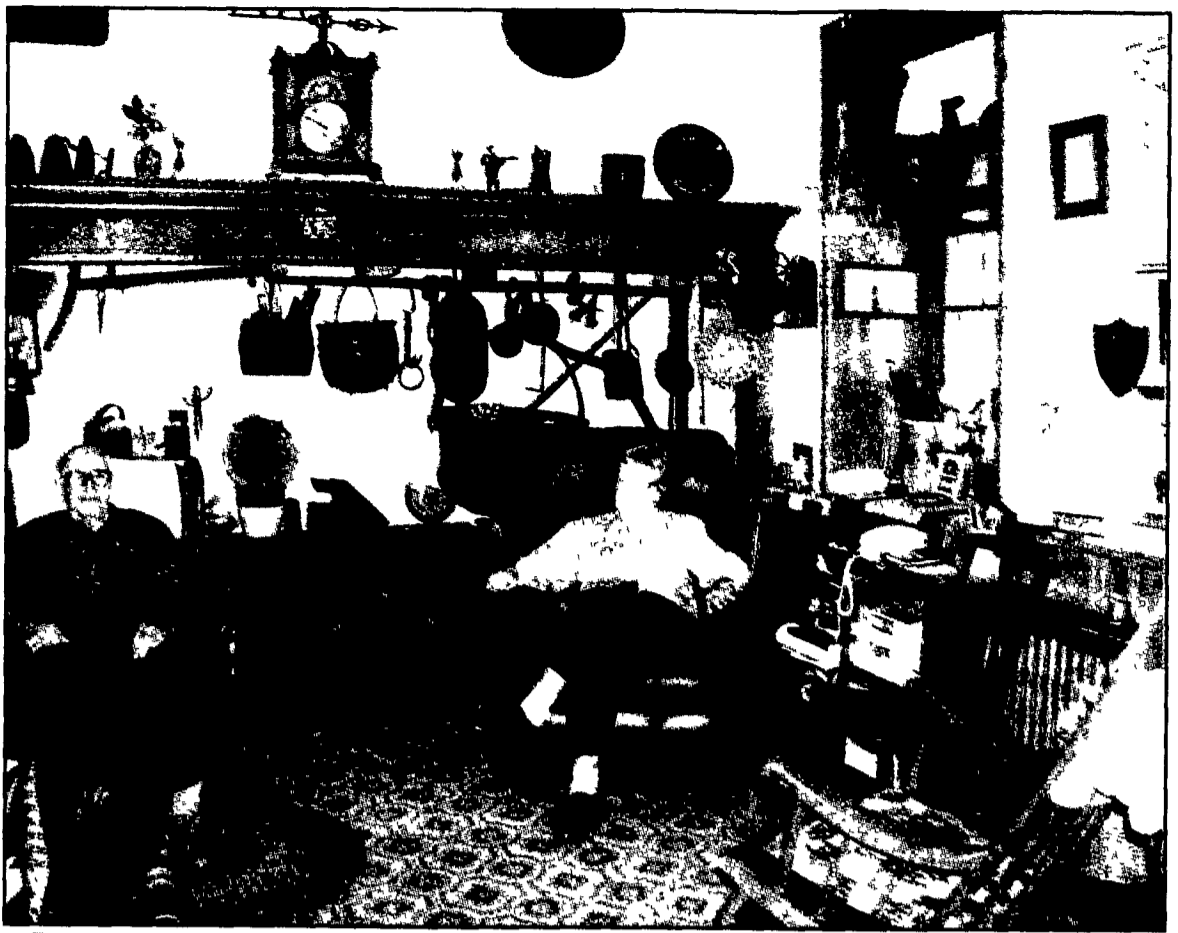
The move to the Fisher mansion had not been anticipated when they first married. Hilda recalls that on their wedding day, Frank's grandparents, who lived on the property, did not attend their wedding because it was butchering day. The bridal pair decided to drop by the homestead after the wedding. Because of bad weather, Frank carried the bride across the threshold, a custom associated with a couple first moving into their own home.

"We never knew that someday we would live here," Hilda said. Eventually, the couple had two sons, Steve who married Marjorie Werner, and Gery who married Carol Falter, and a daughter Eloise.

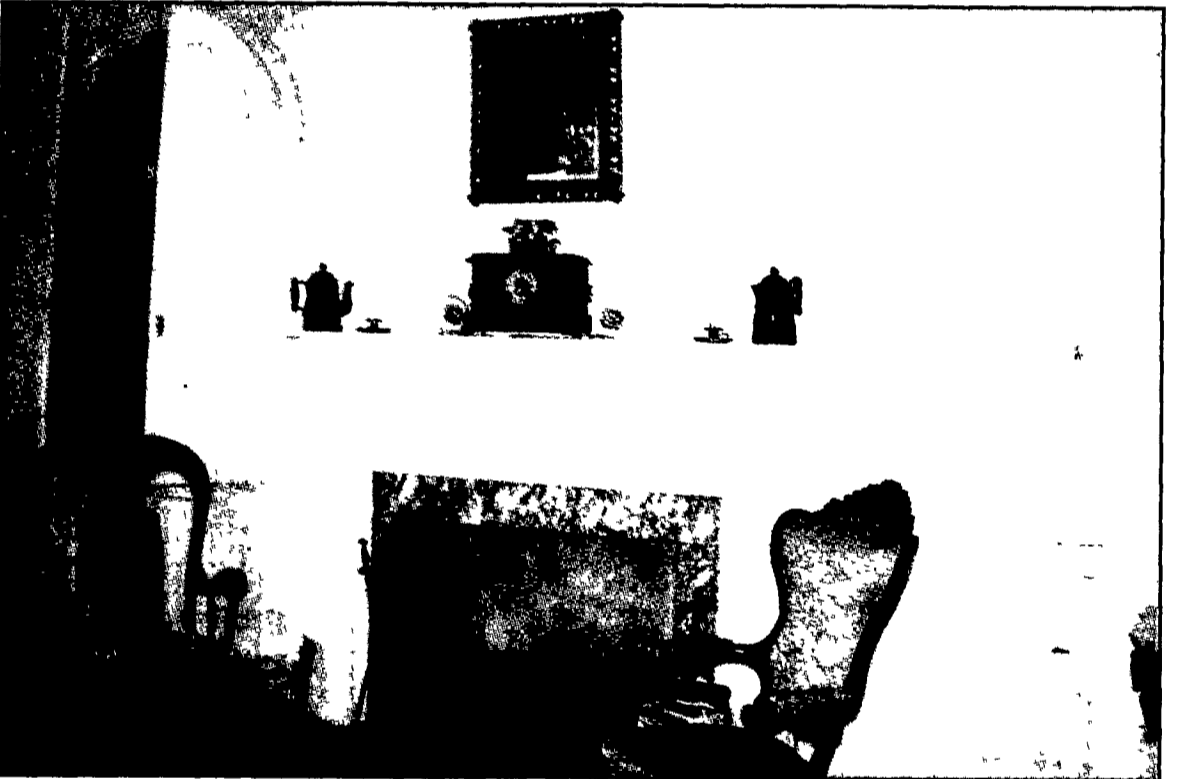
Hilda returned to teach about 13 years after the couple had their first child. Frank continued to farm 152 acres and was a school director for 20 years.

Farming methods changed dramatically during Frank's farming years. He recalls having free-range chickens in every building on the property.

"I had to hunt eggs and spend a whole night grading them to take them to the Philadelphia market the next day," Frank said.



Frank and Hilda Fisher have retained the historical significance of the home with its walk-in fireplace yet added modern conveniences. The "elens fenster," or soul window, which is a small window at the side of the walk-in fireplace, is reported to have been kept open in accordance with the superstitious belief that if there were no open window, there was no way for the soul of the deceased to escape.



Elaborate wood carvings are different in each of the six fireplace mantels and the flanking built-in closets that appear in the mansion.

While farming isn't as labor intensive as those days, Frank considers it more difficult to make it financially nowadays.

"Today corn prices are only half of what they were when I started. We must preserve farm land but we must also preserve the farm family to continue to exist," Frank said. "Market prices must align with the stan-

dard of living."

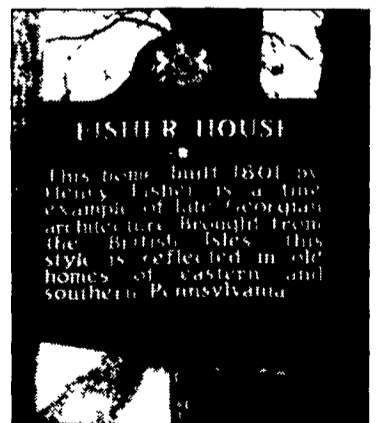
This is the first year that Frank is no longer farming. His son Steve retired from his job to take over crop farming.

The Fishers have always made vacation a priority. They have also been active in the International Farm Youth Exchange, with their sons going to Iran and Australia. The family hosted two exchanges from Turkey and one from Iran.

While the characteristics of old homes are generally admired today, it wasn't always so. During the 1950s-1960s, many farmhouses were modernized, destroying such features as walk-in fireplaces and brush-painting techniques on wainscoting and doors.

Fortunately, the Fishers have always valued the historical significance of the property. "We don't want to change things," Hilda said of the home's unique features. For example the original 1830's French wallpaper is still on the living room ceiling. Although aged, the decorative paper maintains the elaborate detail of that era.

The Fishers pointed out a



FISHER HOUSE

This home built 1801 by Henry Fisher is a fine example of late Georgian architecture brought from the British Isles. This style is reflected in old homes of eastern and southern Pennsylvania.

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Although many of the home's original furnishings had been passed down to various other families over the years, the Fishers have been able to purchase or

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“We never lived on Easy Street, but we lived on Happy Street.”

Hilda Fisher

Berks County Ag Woman Of The Year.

