

## 78 Yard Road House History

The earliest settlers in West Jersey were English Quaker proprietors who purchased land directly from the Lenni Lenapi. The Quakers preferred to acquire their land by purchase rather than by grants from the king. After years of persecution in England because of their faith, the Quakers feared that any grant from the King could just as easily be taken away. In general, proprietors were speculators who purchased shares in large land acquisitions that gave them rights to a given number of acres. They then surveyed and subdivided their purchases to sell to others for settlement. By 1700, as more settlers arrived, settlements moved north of the Falls of the Delaware at Trenton into present day Hunterdon County. In 1702, Queen Anne reunited East and West Jersey into a royal province.

## The Lotting Purchase

Starting in 1703, John Reading, William Biddle and John Wills negotiated with the Lenni Lenapi for the purchase of 150,000 acres known as the “Lotting Purchase”, which referred to the shares to be sold. The deed was signed by two sachems, Himhammoe and Coponnockous. Amwell Township was established by royal patent in 1718. It included all of present day Delaware, Readington, Raritan, East and West Amwell Townships as well as parts of Lebanon, Tewkesbury and Clinton Townships. In 1713, Burlington County was subdivided and Hunterdon County was established.

## The Haddon Tract

Along with his many other purchases in the colony, John Haddon, a London land speculator, purchased proprietary rights to 2,000 acres in the Lotting Purchase. In 1712, the 2,000 acre tract was surveyed by his daughter, Elizabeth Haddon Estauch, who had come to the colonies to oversee her father's holdings.<sup>1</sup>



A year after the survey John directed his daughter to sell much of his holdings but he retained the Haddon tract for another ten years. In 1748, Elizabeth sold 1,300 acres on behalf of her father for £780 to two German immigrants, Jacob Peter Snyder and Nicholas Syne/Sine, who were already in possession of the property.<sup>2</sup> One year after the purchase, Jacob Peter Snyder and Nicholas Sine partitioned the original 1300 acres and sold off 768 acres, leaving each with 266 acres.

<sup>1</sup> Sharp's Book B, p.42.

<sup>2</sup> See HCHS Ms. Deeds, Coll. 18, part 1, folder 171.

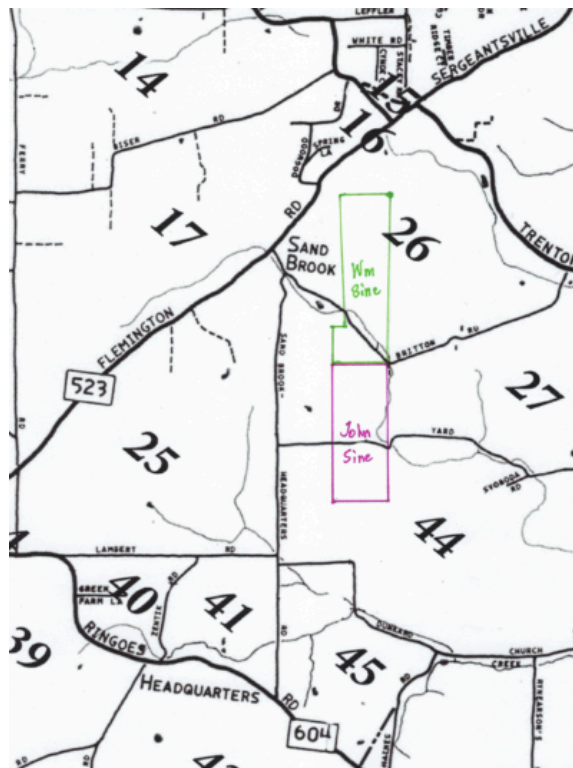
## The Sine Farm

Nicholas Sine and his brother Conrad had arrived in New York from Germany in 1724. Nicholas Married Urseltje Maulin at the Dutch Reformed Church in New York that same year. He was naturalized on July 8, 1730.

Shortly after acquiring his 266 acres, Nicholas Sine built a one and a half story stone bank house at the southeastern edge of the property near what is now the Third Neshanic River.

Dendrochronology analysis dates this original structure to about 1760. Although future alterations eliminated the central chimney and fireplaces, evidence of them still exists, including an original mantel and the ghost of the central winding stairs. The lowest level would have had a kitchen with a central cooking fireplace. There was most likely another possibly older structure attached to the west end of the stone structure where there is no stone wall.

In his will, dated 1778, Nicholas left his land with the stone house to his "cousin", Honis John Sine, who was actually his nephew, Conrad's son. We don't know much about Honis. In 1796, he conveyed 106 acres to his son William. The next year he will stipulated that the rest of his plantation be left to his son John, including the house. The farm remained in the Sine family until 1805. That year, Honis died, John inherited the farm and then died a short time later.



## The Holcombe Farm

Shortly before John Sine died the 100 acres, including the house, were purchased for \$3,666.67 by George Holcombe, grandson of the first settler of Lambertville, John Britton Holcombe.<sup>3</sup> John immigrated with his mother and step-father from England in about 1700. He built a stone house in Lambertville which was used by George Washington on his way from Valley Forge to Monmouth. John's son, Samuel, built a stone house and store in Mt. Airy in 1743. Both houses are still standing, the latter occupied by a descendent.

Samuel's sons, George and Samuel, Jr., both joined the cause of the Rebellion. Samuel had served as a scout in the Colonial Army. George Holcombe served as 1st Lt in Capt. John Phillips'

<sup>3</sup> Hunterdon Deeds Bk 11, p. 43.

Company of 3rd Regiment of the State Militia from Hunterdon Co. and was promoted to Capt. and then to Major. After the war they returned to farming.

George later became a land speculator living in New Brunswick. The Sine Farm was just one of several properties he owned. By 1815 he became overextended and assigned the Sine property to his brother, Samuel, Jr. for \$4,400.<sup>4</sup> Samuel died shortly thereafter, leaving the farm to his son, Robert. Samuel's wife, Robert's mother. Sarah (Emley) continued to live on the farm until her death in 1819. George ended his days penniless and blind in New Brunswick.



1851 Map of Hunterdon County, New Jersey : entirely from original surveys

Robert did not live on the farm long either. After he died intestate on Nov. 27, 1825, his administrators conveyed his farm to his wife, Elizabeth Pidcock Holcombe, in 1827 for \$1,603.<sup>5</sup> After Elizabeth died in 1843, ten of her eleven children and their spouses sold their shares in the property for \$2,700 to her eleventh heir, Robert. E. Holcombe, in 1846.<sup>6</sup> Robert had married Hannah Higgins in 1843 and they had one son, Asa. In 1856, Robert sold the property of about

<sup>4</sup> Hunterdon Deeds Bk 24, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> Hunterdon Deeds Bk 42, p. 126.

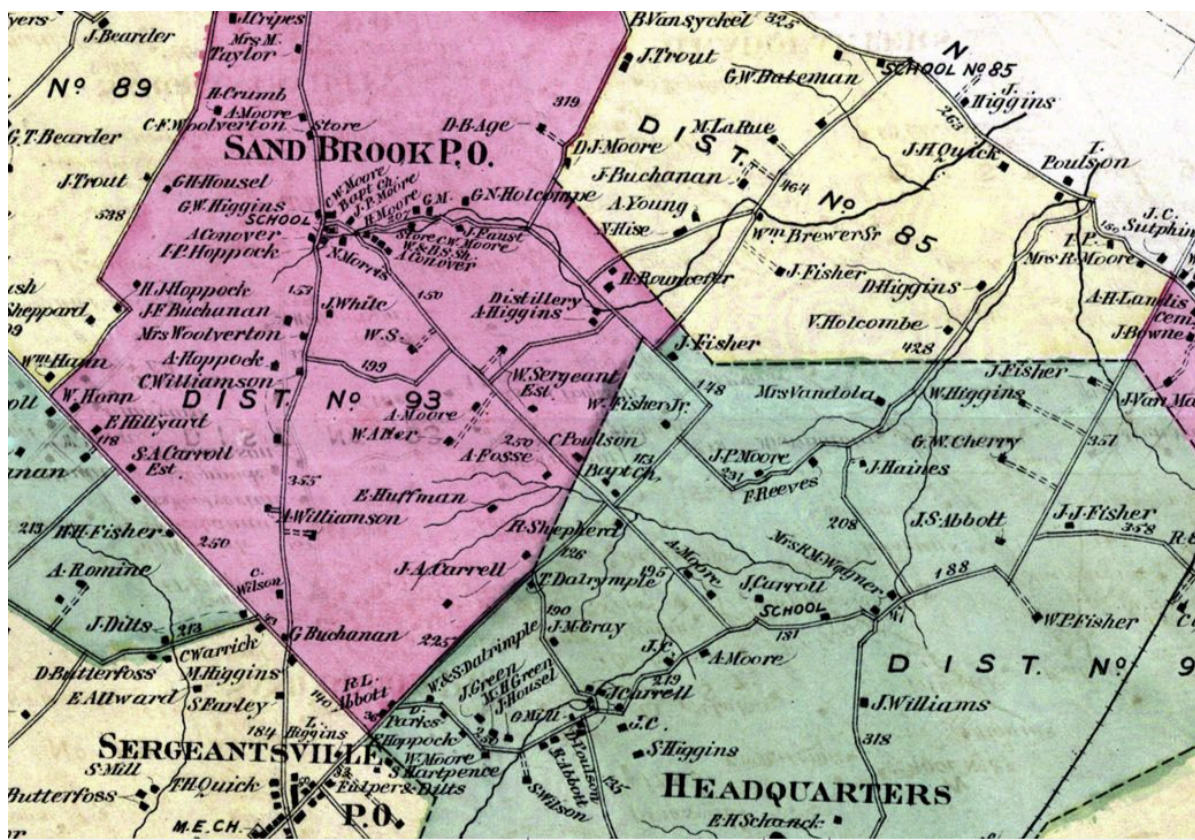
<sup>6</sup> Hunterdon Deeds Bk 86, p. 275.



92 acres to his brother-in-law, Alexander Higgins for \$5,313.30.<sup>7</sup> Despite his age, at 44 Robert was drafted into the Union Army in 1863.

## Higgins Farm and Distillery

Over the next fifty years, Alexander Higgins and his wife, Christiana Lucretia Hope, raised seven children in the house. Higgins was only in his twenties and just starting out as a distiller. but he



Hunterdon County 1873 Beers, Comstock & Cline, 1873

made major alterations to the house. He removed the central chimney and replaced it with a central straight staircase to a new full second floor. He added chimneys and fireplaces or wood stoves on either end of the first floor. The new stairs to the cellar required the removal of the cooking fireplace there. Eventually, Alexander became a well known distiller and ran a distillery on the farm.

Alexander ran a daily extensive farming operation in addition to the distillery. In the 1875 New Jersey Agricultural Census:

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<sup>7</sup> Hunterdon Deeds Bk 114, p. 366.



Alexander owns 8 horses, value \$750; 4 "milch" cows, value \$160; 6 "other cattle," value \$165; 100 sheep, value \$500; 8 swine, value \$75, \$100 poultry: total value \$1750.

Also, 86 acres of improved land at \$80 per acre; 10 acres unimproved at \$80 per acre; 180 bushels wheat, valued at \$250; 500 bush. corn, \$400; 250 bush. oats at \$150; 25 tons of hay at \$325; 12 tons of straw at \$120; 15 bushels of "irish potatoes" at \$12.00; 300 bushels of apples at \$90; 250 bushels of peaches at \$200; 400 pounds of butter at \$120: total value of farm and dairy products is \$1272 and total value of farm implements is \$600.

By 1900, all of Alexander's and Christina's children had left the farm. In 1902, at the age of 69, Alexander purchased the 81 acre Rounsavel farm nearby where he used to work. However, Alexander did not live long enough to enjoy it. The *Hunterdon Democrat* published the following obituary on June 20, 1905:

Alexander Higgins, Sr., a prominent and well-known resident of Delaware township, dropped dead while at work on his farm, near Sand Brook, about 3 o'clock last Wednesday afternoon, aged 72 years and 3 months. Heart disease was the cause of his death, with which he has been troubled for some time. Funeral services were held from his late residence on Sunday morning. Interment at Sandy Ridge. He is survived by a wife, three sons and two daughters.

The Hunterdon Republican carried the following obituary on Wednesday, June 21, 1905:

Alexander Higgins, Sr., aged 72 years, one of the oldest and best known residents of Delaware Township, died suddenly from heart disease on Wednesday afternoon of last week. Death came to Mr. Higgins while he and his son John were repairing a fence. Coroner Cramer viewed the remains and granted a burial permit. A widow, three sons and two daughters survive the deceased. The funeral was held from his late residence on Sunday morning. Interment at Sandy Ridge.

When Alexander died in 1905, he owned eight tracts of land including the homestead and Rounsavel Farm. His executors sold all of his holdings to various people. The homestead farm and distillery were purchased by Linton Avery Fluck of Flemington who never lived on it<sup>8</sup>. Ten years later, Fluck sold the farm to John Britton Yard.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Yard Farm**

John Yard had married Bessie Rowe in 1900. That year she had been a servant in the household of Linton Avery Fluck's father, Henry Augustus Fluck. John and Bessie worked the farm and

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<sup>8</sup> Hunterdon Deeds Bk 278, p. 289.

<sup>9</sup> Hunterdon Deeds Bk 317, p. 378.

raised their two children there. When John died in 1962, he left the farm to their only son, Elmer.



The Yard Farm in the 1930s

Elmer Yard and his wife, Sara (Case), continued to operate the farm and raised three children there.

At some point, an addition was made on the east end of the house and the porch was extended across the front of the entire structure. Also, sometime along the way, the structure on the west end of the house was replaced with a modern kitchen. The two chimneys on either end of the stone structure were removed and wood stoves were installed in the additions on each end.

After Elmer's death in 1978, the 100 acre property was divided between his three children, with his son Richard getting the house and 10 acres. We purchased the house and ten acres in 2019 and are enthusiastically researching its history and evolution over the centuries. The distillery still stands but needs extensive renovation. There is an old stone ruin behind the house with a fireplace that may have been an earlier home. We hope to rebuild this as well.

