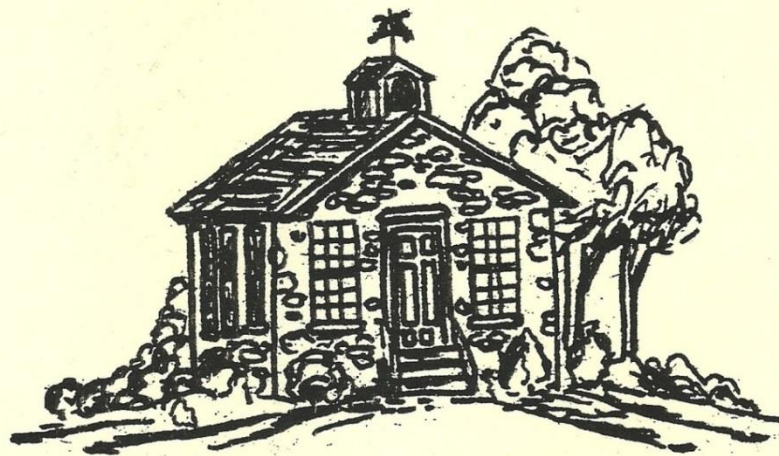




SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MRS. PRITCHARD

*There
Was a
Time When*



A book of interviews



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MRS. PRITCHARD

This book is dedicated to the people who gave
of their time and knowledge.....so that
we might grow.

Published as found by
Adams Apple Press
Bedminster PA 18910
for the
Solebury Historical Society
Solebury, PA
January 1, 2007



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These interviews were conducted simultaneously with an archaeological dig at the Solebury one-room school house by the fifth and sixth grade Social Studies Enrichment students of New Hope-Solebury Elementary School in the 1981—1982 school year.

We would like to thank the people who helped us with this book.

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Mrs. Pritchard



Interviewed by: Billy Angermann
Tommy Nicholes



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Mrs. Pritchard

Intvwr.: When and where were you born?

Mrs. P.: I was born in West Philadelphia in 1903 and we lived there until I was about ten years old.

Intvwr.: And then where did you go from there?

Mrs. P.: We moved from West Philadelphia out to Lansdowne, PA, in Delaware County. We had been ill and it was during a typhoid epidemic. We had three diseases, typhoid scarlet fever and diphtheria, my brother and I, within two years. Mother and Daddy decided that they wanted to go out of the city to raise us in good clear country air.

Intvwr.: How did people react when they heard there was an epidemic?

Mrs. P.: They reacted to the extent that they were concerned. They did not have the communication opportunity that we have nowadays and so it would not be in the newspapers but by the same token it meant it was not constantly put before them. The principle way that they found out how many were ill in those days was that the houses had quarantine tags on them. If you walked along the Street and you'd see houses with quarantine tags on them, usually the tag would say diphtheria, typhoid or scarlet fever, and that was more frightening when the families would see that their neighbors would have something like that and then, of course, there was the difficulty of disposing of the diseased.

Intvwr.: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mrs. P.: I have two brothers and one sister. My sister is the youngest and I am the oldest, and my two brothers are in between.

Intvwr.: What are some of your earliest memories?

Mrs. P.: Goodness gracious! Earliest memories. When we were living in West Philadelphia, we lived at 37th and Chestnut Sts. and almost across the street was a fire house. Of course, in those days they had horses, and I can remember going over there and the firemen would let us go to the second floor and slide down the brass pole. They had their recreation room and cots up on the second floor, but this was the easiest way they had to get down to the fire engine, and I used to love to do that, but as far as schooling is concerned, I went to a private kindergarten. There was a livery stable that we passed and we always stopped and petted the horses on the way to the kindergarten and on the way home. Instead of having formal desks as some kindergartens have, we had little tables. These tables had divisions of lines on the tops, so that we could play games, such as chess but of course we did not play chess at that age, but checkers and things of this sort or anything that had any little men to move and they were all right on the table. It was a nicely equipped kindergarten and lots of fun to go to.

Intvwr.: You mean the desks had a checker board on them?

Mrs. P.: It was a checker board type desk and the table was just one great big U. All the children would sit around the outside and the teacher would sit in the middle and that way she could walk around. I imagine we had about five or six children on



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Mrs. P.: (continued) each side. She would walk around on the inside and then any instructions that she gave us were from the inside of the table and we, of course, would be facing her and that way she was facing us. After kindergarten I went out to 38th and Spruce, which was an elementary school. There I stayed for the 1st and 2nd grades because it was in the 3rd grade that we moved to Lansdowne. No classes do I remember quite so much as the great big iron picket fence around the play yard. Of course, it was right in the center of the city and the trolleys were going by, horses and wagons were going by and we were not supposed to go outside of this fence. A man came each recess and lunch time and he sold pretzels, so the highlight of the day was to take a penny and go buy a pretzel. We played in the yard, of course, and it was a brick yard and they had a metal pole, similar to what you and I would probably call a maypole. It had the chains hanging down and I used to love going around it. I do not remember anything about school, just the big iron fence and recess. It was a tall building, but would not be considered tall nowadays but I would guess it was about three floors tall. But of course, in those days I was small and the building looked tall to me and maybe it really was not tall. It is part of the University City now in that area. At 38th and Spruce the University of Pennsylvania has all the stores, houses, etc. In fact one of the streets is closed.

Intvwr.: What were some of your favorite subjects?

Mrs. P.: I know English literature, I loved the stories. I never was a particularly good student in respect to being in a certain location in a class. I was never pushed or interested. I was more interested in the people in the class. I loved stories, poetry, and English literature. I never had any brains to remember anything, but I did memorize stories. I thoroughly enjoyed that part of it. Mathematics was good as long as I could understand the reasoning behind it. Of course, if you didn't understand the reasons you just went by the road. I always wanted to know how things were and what they were. Geography was completely fascinating. I suppose part of that was due to the fact that previous to Mother and Daddy being married, he was in the Spanish-American War and had done a limited amount of travelling. We were always exposed to what was going on in the world and I can remember when I was ill with the typhoid, Daddy would read to me while I was in a state that I could listen. I had a considerable amount of time when my temperature was so high that even if he read to me it did not make any difference to me.

Intvwr.: Was there any teacher or teachers that you did not like, or a favorite teacher?

Mrs. P.: Any time I would come home and criticize a teacher just because she had disciplined a youngster that I did not think was fair or some such thing as that, my mother would tell me (and this is just because you would say things when you first came home) that the grade teacher is older than you are and she had a reason for doing what she did and you just see that you behave yourself. This was the one thing when I was small that I felt and I look back on it now as a very good character developing angle.

Intvwr.: How was your schooling?

Mrs. P.: Well, I never particularly cared for one history teacher as far as her method of teaching was concerned. She was a peach of a person and I just loved her.



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Mrs. P.: (continued) It was in fifth grade and I was not interested in learning history and with my old difficulty of memorizing. She made it interesting but not to the extent that I was enthused about it. I had history taught to me at home but when it came time to memorize dates of what happened at such and such a time, I couldn't care less. I have changed since then.

Intvwr.: What type of punishment did they give out in school?

Mrs. P.: Goodness! I would say as far as punishment was concerned, would be talking and explaining but I was not conscious of any physical punishment. We were made to feel as though you were irresponsible if you did not contribute to the class.

Intvwr.: Did you have other jobs to do when you were a student in school?

Mrs. P.: We had to clean the blackboards, arrange the chalk and clap the erasers. Inasmuch as this was in the city there were no heaters to take care of but we had to see that the books on the shelves were in order. Later on in grammar school, of course, I grew up where we had grammar schools and no junior highs, we had a lot of craft materials to take care of and see that they were properly stored at the end of the class and we were also given the privilege of distributing these materials to the class, but only if you were a responsible youngster.

Intvwr.: Go back to the heating. What type of heating did they have?

Mrs. P.: I suppose it was steam heat, because I do not have any recollection of any vents, which would be hot air. Probably, and I am only guessing, that the steam heat would have been coal supplied. In those days the large buildings were using a soft coal or I guess you would call it a chestnut coal which is anthracite and not soft coal. I have no way to be able to say yes or no, one way or the other, as I did not have the opportunity to investigate something like that and I do not even remember any radiators in the rooms. It was always comfortable.

Intvwr.: What kind of games did you play?

Mrs. P.: Well, I already mentioned about the recess and the pole we had. We had jacks, and used the school steps in West Philadelphia. We played marbles and hopscotch. When we went out to Lansdowne, we were moving into a rural area with fields all around and we played Lay Low Sheepy. I don't know whether you ever heard of Lay Low Sheepy.

Intvwr.: No.

Mrs. P.: That was played with a group of children. Our house seemed to be the center with youngsters in the neighborhood. We had tall grass all around in the field so a group of youngsters would be divided in half and each one had a leader, and the leader and his group would go out in the field and then they would hide by lying down in the grass. Then their leader would come back and join the other group. The second group would then go out and try to find the first group. The leader of the first group would either call out calmly or quite loud, depending on how close the second group was to his group, and if the second group was quite close, he would sing Lay Low Sheepy. If they were far away from his group, he would then shout out Lay Low Sheepy. From this you knew how close and how quiet you had to be. If he



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Mrs. P.: (continued) called quietly and you knew the other group was quite close and youngsters did find you, you were supposed to run back to a base and the last one in would be the victim and he was usually handed out some sort of punishment.

Intvwr.: Like what?

Mrs. P.: Well, he might have to climb a tree, which there were lots of trees and then maybe jump down but not from the top branch but from good height. We were all used to climbing trees so it did not make any difference. It was not the case of being dangerous, but you could always fall and break your arm. It was part of the fun. I remember one time playing Lay Low Sheepy that when I went down to sit in the grass I sat on a yellow jackets nest.

Intvwr.: Wow!

Mrs. P.: It was one of those cases where you rose in a hurry.

Intvwr.: I can imagine.

Mrs. P.: But I did not make much of it at the time.

We had, which all the youngsters in the neighborhood enjoyed, what we called a trolley. My dad had built a little platform into one of the trees and then extended a wire, which was pretty strong, to another pole or tree and then he built a little trolley with wheels on it and we would climb up that platform and ride down that wire and when you came to the end you would just jump off. There was a rope attached to help you. Every youngster in the neighborhood just loved to ride that trolley.

But for school, when I got into high school I was in basketball. Being tall I was jump center. Other games, I would say I went out for track but not too much.

Intvwr.: Do you feel that boys were treated differently than girls in school, as far as activities and sports were concerned?

Mrs. P.: Whether there was any partiality to the boys?

Intvwr.: Yes.

Mrs. P.: No, I would say that the school that I attended was a very modern and up to date, not like it is today, but it was a well informed district. The directors were interested in a good thorough education. There were boys and girls intramural games. The varsity played with other schools. It is now called the Lansdowne-Aldan School, but that is a combination of districts. Our principal was loved by all the youngsters. Anyone that did not like him, all of us knew that that person had gotten in trouble, because he was the kind of a person you could go to and talk with. He would stop you in the hall and visit with you.

Intvwr.: Was it a small school?

Mrs. P.: Well, I do not know how many would be in the school population but I would say we probably had about 45 or 50 in the graduating class.

Intvwr.: Was that a lot for that time?



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Mrs. P.: Not particularly for the area because it was an area where the families wanted an education and were willing to pay for it. It was good and it did not squander money. I do not have any recollection of any parents squabbling about the money, but they were interested in having a good library. There was a special building just for the library on the grounds and the athletics, music, orchestra and band. All of the nice cultural opportunities were given to the children and it was not as though the teachers were doing extra curricular work because they used specially trained teachers for the special jobs.

Intvwr.: Your parents, how do you feel they raised you? Can you describe your parents to me a little bit?

Mrs. P.: Well, I have very vivid recollections of Dad nursing me through my typhoid. I do not seem to remember the diphtheria as well as the typhoid. I do not know why. It may have been because typhoid was the last one I had. I can remember Dad, with my high fever, babying me and reading to me and I would say both Mother and Dad were good disciplinarians. They did not take a lot of ruckus from us. On the other hand we were allowed to make our own decisions on things that were equivalent to our ages.

Intvwr.: What did your father do for a living?

Mrs. P.: Daddy was employed by the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company. 'He was not a life insurance agent per se, but he worked in the office and he was in charge of their duplicating department. In fact, he started it. He made copies of all their important papers using the first photostadt machine. I just loved to go down to his office and go into his lab, but I had to be very careful not to touch certain things and not to move certain lights and I was completely fascinated with the machine itself. He organized and started the Quarter Century Club. His name was Frank R. Leach and over a period of years it was always a joy to go down to the building and see the way people would talk to us. It was just one of those things, even at that age. When I say 'at that age' it was into my own early twenties, because my grandfather and my grandmother lived at the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company. My grandfather was building superintendent there. Because of that I was accustomed to going down there and a lot of people, like the doorman and engineer and any one that had anything to do with the operation of the building as well as people in the offices, never felt a thing about the fact that we would walking in and out. There were certain things we were not allowed to do and certain places we were not allowed to go, naturally, but nevertheless we never felt uncomfortable about going down there.

Mother was not only a mother but a good disciplinarian and both of them were very loving. We always felt as though we had friends.

Intvwr.: How old were you during the Depression?

Mrs. P.: Golly me, what was that 1939?

Intvwr.: Well, 1929 was the crash.

Mrs. P.: Well, I would have been 26 years old.



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Intvwr.: Did the Depression affect you in any way?

Mrs. P.: The Depression did not affect us so far as Daddy losing his job was concerned but it did affect us indirectly because we had relatives and we had friends who were restricted in many ways. We, fortunately, did not have any accidents happen in our family, which at that time there were many people who emotionally were not able to take the situation. I have very vivid recollections of men standing on street corners in Philadelphia when we went down to the city to do some shopping that was essential. They were selling apples, pencils and whatever they thought the public would have to buy. It was a tragedy in that respect. A lot of people would be walking around not having anything to do.

Intvwr.: What about World War I? Did that affect you in any way?

Mrs. P.: No one in my immediate family was in the service. Daddy had been in the service but when he was in the Spanish American War he contracted diphtheria and he was left with a very bad throat. Therefore, he was disqualified for future service in military life. However, he did help with the secret service and he wanted to do what he could so he was assigned to Philadelphia area for a certain length of time to keep track of the A.W.O.L. fellows, and that, in a big city like Philadelphia, is quite a job.

Intvwr.: What was the reaction of the people about World War I? How did the people around you react to it, emotions, etc.?

Mrs. P.: You mean whether they approved of it or what?

Intvwr.: Yes.

Mrs. P.: I would say they were very loyal to the country. They understood what it was all about. We discussed the situation at home. We had friends and relatives who were in the service. Unfortunately, one did not return. Even that family, sorrowful as they were to lose someone, felt as though it was an honor to give their life. The men who had to be rehabilitated not because of heavy physical injury but the adjustment to come back into civilian life had to be recognized by all of us. We overlooked some of the difficulties they had.

Intvwr.: What was it like after World War I?

Mrs. P.: You mean at the end of World War I? I can remember the day the peace treaty was signed, or whatever they called it in those days. One thing that sticks out in my mind afterwards was that it was the 11th month, 11th day, 11th hour of 1918 and when the churchbells and fire sirens all went off we were out at recess playing and of course we had an idea that the World War was coming to an end. I can remember every youngster just jumped, yelled, screamed and hugged one another saying 'the war is over, the war is over' and when you went home you felt so good. I found my mother and father in tears because they realized more than we did, as youngsters, what it meant to have the war over. It was certainly a moving experience. There was a beautiful Catholic Church across the street from our school and the chiming of those bells would 'split a gasket' to have that exuberance.

We lived about a mile from school and at that time there was no transportation. I do not know when the jitney started. Jitney's were private cars that would go between Lansdowne and 69th Street in Upper Darby. That was all of 5 cents. We were not



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Mrs. P.: (continued) allowed to use them so we had about a mile walk to school. Actually, it was farther away from school than a mile but by the time we cut across fields and through woods and so forth we had a mile to go. We just hurried home to tell mother and daddy that the war was over. Of course, they knew it, as far as that was concerned, but we were just bursting with it. Not only that, Daddy was not particularly handy with his hands, creative craftsman, etc., and I can remember mother sitting and winding wire around a Mother's Oats box and she made our first radio and it was a radio that had a little whisker to it. We just were fascinated by the fact that we could put earphones on. She allowed us to listen and we could put earphones on and hear something come in from the air outside, through that little radio. We used to behave good as gold so we could have the opportunity of listening to what was on the radio. That was an experience because they were broadcasting the fact that World War I was over.

We were not a wealthy family, just a common ordinary everyday clerk's family. But, we had an awful lot of love in our family.

Intvwr.: What about World War II? Did that affect you personally in any way?

Mrs. P.: Yes, World War II had, not in the immediate family because Daddy after World War I did not do any more work with the government, but in World War II he picked up again and he was doing whatever his assignments were, but it was all along the same line. He had been cleared as far as his status was concerned by the government, so far as security. He apparently always had a good security rating with the government. Whatever he did for the government in the Second World War was classified so I cannot tell too much about that. He was interested in what he was doing and whatever it was he was not away, but he was at home.

Intvwr.: Were you married at that time?

Mrs. P.: No. I was not married, wait. I was married in 1936 so that would be that I was married.

Intvwr.: Did your husband have to go into the service?

Mrs. P.: No, he did not. My husband was a Chemistry and Physics/Science teacher and he wanted to do what he could so he gave up his teaching and at that time we were living in North Jersey and he went to work in West Trenton in a laboratory there, using his scientific knowledge. His responsibility was to test all of the materials that were used in the airplane industry. He felt and I felt very proud of him. It wasn't fun, but nevertheless, he was certainly doing a good job for the government.

Lon was two years old and Pearl Harbor Day is his birthday. We always say he was a Pearl Harbor baby. My brother was in the U.S. Marines and my other brother was an Electrical Engineer for Bell Telephone and was doing his bit, along his line, because he was doing quite responsible work for Bell Telephone.

Intvwr.: What is your favorite memory?

Mrs. P.: Oh goodness. Favorite memory. I have had so many happy times. Oh there have been tears occasionally but mostly happy. I guess that my most precious memory is when my husband and I were married, but my favorite one is when my son was born. We were living in New York State at that time and we were about 25



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Mrs. P. : (continued) miles from the hospital and when I went into the hospital they told my husband to go home because our baby would not arrive for a while. Two hours after my husband went home, the baby arrived and when that nurse put that baby in my arms, I just felt as though my life was complete. I had always felt that it had been full of joy and complete, but I never felt as though it could be as complete as it was when that baby was put in my arms. He was well, and a perfect baby as far as formation was concerned and has just been a joy ever since, even now he is just a joy. His father died in 1959, and at that time he was twenty and in college and I can remember his coming to me and actually just taking over. Not in a bossy fashion by any means, but just by assuming responsibility for my welfare and he has been like that ever since. He is thoughtful, very practical and warm and so I feel that this is a reflection of the love that his father and I had that has come through in him and it is a wonderful memory. The entire time has been a wonderful memory. The entire time has been a wonderful memory. His father was a teacher and Lon said two teachers in the family is enough and he would never be a teacher. So what is he doing, - teaching - and loving it. It is a pleasure for me to go down into his school, after school hours of course, as I would not go down in the building unless it was an appropriate time. It is a pleasure for me to go down to his school and ask the youngsters if they have seen him because they seem so happy to go look for him for me. Maybe that is 'proud momma' speaking, I do not know but it reflects to me, having been with children all my life, their opinion of him and that is heartwarming.