

NORTH STAR COMMUNITY

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No author is ever totally responsible for the writing of a book, and this short history of the North Star community is no exception.

For their efforts in coordination of the material and research, I thank Jim Whisman, Jim Hohman, and Joe Poulouin. Special gratitude is given Paul Janocha for his continuing and unflagging enthusiasm and moral support through a difficult (but rewarding) assignment, beset by many delays.

Also deserving of special mention are Ef Dolman and Mr. and Mrs. Curt Wallace, who consented to be interviewed for background material, Paul Peach for providing much of the early historical information, and especially Harry Spangler, who spent many hours in clarification and in reading the manuscript. Without Mr. Spangler, neither this history, nor the community of North Star, would be in existence today.

Beverly Horning Kirby

December 4, 1978

A HISTORY OF NORTH STAR

Beverly Horning Kirby

When it was decided that the Engineering Department of the duPont Company would occupy the Louviers Building that was being constructed at Milford Crossroads, Harry Spangler considered with some trepidation the additional commuting time necessary to get to work. The area had never been known for its mild winters, and Spangler commenced his search for a home for his family in the vicinity of Louviers.

Twenty-six years ago, however, the lands surrounding the new Louviers site were comprised mainly of farm acreage. Suitable housing was difficult to come by. Expressing his concern about the situation to a car-pool member, Ralph Endriss, Spangler found that many of the engineers were experiencing the same plight.

Endriss and Spangler wondered aloud to each other if building their own homes might be the solution to the problem. Searches for individual building lots proved fruitless, however, and in February of 1952, Spangler called a meeting of men who might be interested in building their own homes in closer proximity to Louviers. He discovered much interest in the idea and proposed that an association be formed to pool their resources and purchase a single tract of ground large enough to provide building lots for all of them.

It was then that the idea which is now the North Star community began to take shape. Several locations were considered before the present site was chosen. One of these locations, now known as Limestone Acres, was rejected because of the "exorbitant" asking price of \$2,500 an acre and the concern for future commercial encroachment from adjacent Kirkwood

Highway. It is interesting to note the degree of foresight the association exhibited at that time, since neither Midway Shopping Center nor any of its surrounds existed. The closest commercially developed area to the Limestone Acres site was Prices Corner.

The search continued until the discovery was made of two farms which made up the subsequent North Star community. These were the North Star and Barnstable farms, for which the asking price (for two farmhouses, one frame house, and surrounding 440 acres) was \$140,000. Taxes on this property amounted to \$221.56 per year. Another area that was under consideration at the time included 100 acres located about four miles east of Kennett Square for which the asking price was \$16,000. This area is now developed and known as Bucktoe Hills.

After several consultations with employees of the duPont Co. which provided the association with the necessary insight in the areas of financing, legal structure of the association and land development, the decision was made to purchase the two farms which now exist as North Star. On the advice of the association's attorney, A. D. Christie (now a Superior Court Judge), a corporation was formed in March of 1952. The aims of the corporation were to purchase, develop and sell homesites, including the provision of utilities and roads. Calling themselves The North Star Corporation, the original officers and directors were:

H. F. Spangler - President

R. J. Endriss - Vice-President

A. H. Pieper - Secretary

L. S. Stinchecum - Treasurer

Directors: N. E. Scott, P. J. McClary, L. B. Musser, W.

Krall, W. E. Holberton, H. S. Hawthorne, L. G.

Hohman, P. Albertelli, and C. W. Simpson

Committees: Rules and Regulations - N. E. Scott,
Chairman; and P. J. McClary
Finance and Legal - W. E. Holberton, Chairman;
H. W. Hawthorne, Co-Chairman; R. W. Owings;
W. A. Haldeman
Membership - L. G. Hohman, Chairman; and G.
C. Hewes, Jr.
Housing and Building - R. J. Endriss, Chairman;
L. B. Musser, A. H. Pieper and W. Krall
Utilities - C. W. Simpson, Chairman
Civic - P. J. McClary, Chairman; and J. A. Molnar
Publicity - L. Bertrand, Chairman
Development - P. Albertelli, Chairman
Inventory and Appraisal - W. Krall, Chairman

Once the purchase of the North Star/Barnstable properties was approved, things moved rather quickly. An offer of \$130,000 was made and each member was asked to advance \$250 to finance a \$5,000 deposit on the property. The exclusive listing for the site was with Wheelock and Callahan.

The land was owned by Ellen DuPont Wheelwright (daughter of Coleman DuPont) and, although Mrs. Wheelwright did not actually live on the property, she did use it with guests for fox hunting and riding the many bridle trails. Some of these original trails still exist and residents have enjoyed hiking along them through the years.

Going back somewhat further, the present North Star community actually consisted of four farms with a central road bisecting the eastern and western halves. This road was originally called Creek Road, but was re-named North Star Road after the one-room schoolhouse at its northern end. In the 1920's, all four farms were purchased and consolidated by Simpson Dean. Then in 1940, Dean sold the property to Mrs. Wheelwright.

The area had been used exclusively for farming and fox hunting, except for land which is now the Brill Farm on Papermill Road. Until the onset of World War I, clay was extracted from this land by the Peach Kaolin Company. The firm was forced out of business after the outbreak of the war, due to competitive wages paid by neighboring concerns. Peach Kaolin was paying 12 1/2¢ per hour and couldn't compete with the going rate of 50¢ per hour.

Both domestic wars brought soldiers through the area. During the Revolutionary War, a group of Americans on their way to the Battle of the Brandywine dug a shallow trench for overnight shelter which is still in evidence behind the Brill farm.

True to those times, highwaymen on horseback prevailed in the area. Running along the base of Jupiter Road, Saturn Drive, and North Star Road is the abandoned Route 296; now nothing more than a dirt path. This road originally went through the lands west of North Star to emerge in Corner Ketch. This created a five-point intersection, and one historian's theory is that Corner Ketch got its name from a perversion of the word "catch." In other words, the highwayman must be apprehended before he reached the five-road intersection or he would disappear down any one of the four remaining thoroughfares and be unable to "ketch."

No one is quite certain how the name "North Star" came to be. The farm and one-room schoolhouse carried the name, but the reason for the designation has been lost to local historians and is open to speculation. One theory put forth the idea that what is now North Star Road is a true north/south line, pointing directly to the North Star in the heavens. Another theory, based upon the assumption that there was an underground slave railroad in the area during the Civil War, suggests that "North Star" might have been a code word for locating the escape point. One might be told to "look for the North

Star" and eavesdroppers would be none-the-wiser, thinking the heavenly body was the subject of the discussion.

The twenty original men who were involved in the formation of the North Star Corporation drew numbers to determine the sequence of lot choice. All others who purchased lots and became stockholders of the corporation were assigned selection numbers on a first-come, first-served basis. The first ten residents employed Richard P. Imschweiler, a builder from Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, to supervise the construction of their homes.

Wishing to exclude the two farmhouses and the frame house from lot selection and restrictions, the decision was made to sell these homes separately. The farmhouse and the land at the corner of North Star Road and Neptune Drive were sold in July, 1952, for \$15,000 plus \$2,500 for an additional lot. The record now shows that Senator Biden's family recently sold that property for approximately \$164,000. The frame house and 5 1/2 acres at the base of North Star Road was sold for \$8,500 in 1952. The Barnstable farm and approximately 7 acres was sold for \$20,000. The farm equipment was inventoried and auctioned. Farmer Crossan cut and baled forty acres of hay and picked all the fruit on the corporation's property for half the profits from its sale at the auction. The auction netted the corporation \$2,365.00.

The first goals of the corporation were to increase the membership to a total of one hundred, to purchase the land, and to begin improvements to the land as soon as possible. To become a shareholder in the corporation, the cost was \$2,500, which covered a lot and ten shares of common stock.

The corporation limited its jurisdiction to approval of house plans before building began and established some long-standing restrictions which have most certainly contributed to the value and beauty of North Star:

- (1) houses must be fifty feet from the right-of-way and twenty-five feet from

other boundaries, (2) minimum square footage was established, (3) farm animals, mercantile businesses, and multi-family dwellings were prohibited, (4) a Building Committee was formed and empowered to review and accept or reject house plans, (5) all lots were to be sold at the same price, regardless of location.

A consideration facing the corporation was the matter of school districts. The quality of the schools was a major concern. North Star lay in the Conrad and Harmony Elementary School Districts. The corporation attempted to have the Newark School District absorb North Star but the Harmony District (which was later the Hockessin Elementary School) refused to release North Star. The schools available to North Star remained Hockessin Elementary (with twelve North Star children attending during 1953) and Conrad High School (with three North Star students) until 1958 when the entire community became part of the Alexis I. duPont School District.

By May of 1952, the task of establishing street names was before the corporation. In keeping with the flavor of the community name, the decision was made to adopt names of stars and planets.

Throughout the history of the North Star Corporation, numerous proposals were brought forward regarding Artesian Water Company's purchase and operation of the water supply. In 1952, however, North Star decided to control its own water supply and formed an independent corporation -- The North Star Water Co., Inc. which was managed quite successfully for many years through the voluntary efforts of Clarence Moore, Lou Bertrand, Larry Stinchecum, Walter Holberton, Carl Simpson and Maurice MacDonald.

Toward the end of 1952, the interests of several real estate brokers had been aroused regarding the sale of homesites in North Star. One agent even went so far as to recommend to the Directors that the name be changed from "North Star" to something else in order to increase sales.

Through the years, several attempts were made by surrounding land owners to buy or lease lands as yet undeveloped but owned by the North Star Corporation. In early 1953, one of the area farmers expressed the desire to purchase a lot at the northwest corner of North Star Road for the purpose of erecting a gas station. The request was, of course, denied. Crops were harvested, livestock grazed, and portions of the land were leased for token sums to surrounding farmers for many years. As a young girl living at the corner of Jupiter and Mercury Roads (before Mercury was opened and the area developed), I can remember having to chase cows out of our backyard. I also recall the lands behind us being full of deer, squirrel, pheasant, and other forms of game and wildlife.

During late 1953, arrangements were made with the Conrad Corporation (of which H. B. DuPont was a principal) to mortgage North Star for \$100,000. As part of the mortgage agreement, the corporation gave Conrad an option to buy 154 acres on the west side of North Star Road for \$500 an acre. Conrad later exercised their option and purchased this ground. The \$100,000 served to pay off the existing mortgage to Mrs. Wheelwright and to provide funds to improve the roads and water system. The Conrad Corporation wanted voting stock in the North Star Corporation along with the mortgage, but was turned down.

The Annual Report to the Stockholders of December 12, 1953 stated that twenty new homes had been built during the year and were occupied, with five other homes under construction. A total of sixty-five lots had been sold. The community was still quite undeveloped however, since the records show that the Directors had to have "No Hunting" signs posted on the property. Some of the roads were still not finished. One of the original residents recalled having to put chains on his tires in July in order to get un-stuck from the mud on Venus Drive. Telephone service offered only eight-party lines in the beginning, and gradually improved to 4-party, 2-party, and eventually to

private lines. Newark was the closest shopping district in the area and North Star Road was quite rough, being mainly comprised of mud in the winter-time. One resident said that the early families had a genuine feeling of isolation being so far out in the country.

"Roughing it", as it were, led to the formation of several common-interest and social groups. The North Star Women's Association was formed mainly so that the wives could get better acquainted. They had several projects which included visiting speakers, Easter egg hunts, Christmas carolling, a community Christmas tree, community summer picnics, hayrides, and parties for the children. One very great contribution the women and teenage girls of North Star made was to volunteer their services to the handicapped children residing at Governor Bacon Hospital. A dancing class was also held at the Grange on Limestone Road for the children.

The North Star Bridge Club was another organization that formed rapidly. Eventually, it grew to such a size that on "bridge night" the party was held in three different homes. Another couple-oriented club was the North Star Gardeners, who met and flourished for years through a common zeal for beautiful landscaping and gardening. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, and even independent groups like the "North Star Juniors" (of which I was a member) came into existence. The community spirit was certainly in evidence, whether it emerged from the isolation or from the camaraderie of the early years.

In the early part of 1955, the Corporation ran into a bit of trouble in terms of working capital. Facing some opposition, the Directors allowed a neighboring farmer to select and cut timber in the area west of North Star Road in order to raise funds. He was permitted to cut poplar and oak with a trunk diameter of at least fifteen inches. The poplar sold for \$20 per 1,000-board-foot, and the white oak went for \$70 per 1,000-board-foot.

Hurricane Hazel made her impact upon North Star in October of 1955, which probably made the isolation seem even greater and more threatening. It was to be the worst, most violent storm ever to hit the area. One resident recalls, "We did not have much rain, but very high winds did a lot of damage. It tore shingles off, knocked trees down and we had salt water on our windows from the ocean. I had to brace my picture window with two-by-fours because it was bending in. The anemometer at Wilmington Airport registered over 100 miles an hour and broke, so we don't know what the wind speed really was."

A snow storm in the early years also caused the new families a great deal of discomfort. It happened to be a light, dry snow with heavy winds, which drifted the snow up to twenty-five feet between North Star and Hockessin. A recollection of that storm: "We lived by the fireplace for three days and we had two youngsters; one and three years old. We were cooking formula and sterilizing bottles in the fireplace, as well as, cooking our meals. The house got down to 40 degrees and we slept in the living room where it was warm." Another snow storm in March of 1958 caused power outages for five days.

By early 1957, the Board had begun to look toward the improvement of Section B, which is the Mercury Road area. A preliminary layout was prepared and discussions took place regarding the sale of these lots. A few homesites were sold, but the Corporation then hit a snag. After considering the cost of building roads and utilities, along with all the attendant surveys and other construction costs, the Board discovered that it could not sell the lots at the established price without experiencing a loss. Plans to develop Section B were temporarily delayed, and then owners of lots in that section were finally offered the option to choose an A-section lot (which was the core area along North Star Road, Venus, Neptune, and Saturn Drive).

Also in 1957, the idea of a swimming pool emerged. Ed Lowthian has been credited as the prime mover behind the swimming pool. The Corporation wanted to sell land to a separate non-profit corporation formed by the residents expressly for the swimming pool, for a price not to exceed \$500 an acre. The original site was to be located in the northwest corner of North Star Road and the abandoned Route 296 which would have been the southern section of the present Neal property. In 1960, six acres south of Route 296 were transferred to the North Star Civic Association (which was formed in 1959), for the price of \$1.00. In April of 1961, the plans for the change house were approved, and construction of the pool began. The North Star Civic Association then rented three of those acres on a long-term lease to the newly-formed North Star Swimming Club, Inc. The pool, change house, filter plant, and wading pool were completed during the summer. The remaining three acres were designated for recreational use. A picnic pavillion was also constructed and was enjoyed for many years through community picnics and Christmas carolling parties. Ed Friedman is credited with the building of the pavillion, which was torn down in 1976.

By the end of 1961, twelve more homes were built, for a total of ninety-one in North Star. Twenty-five acres in Section D (the Mars Road area) had been sold to Hollingsworth Construction Company, which built nine homes that year. At that time, eight of these homes were sold and five were occupied.

The following year continued to bring discussions regarding the development of Section B. Hollingsworth Construction Co. offered to purchase the acreage, improve it, and contribute toward the building of a water tower to serve the increased demand brought about by adding new homes. There was some controversy over the water tower; the Board ruling that it must be inconspicuous and covered by plantings. That summer, the Artesian Water Co. again made overtures to North Star, but an offer made to them failed to go through.

In March of 1963, the idea of the skating pond was brought forward. The idea was approved and in January, 1964, the Corporation issued a lease agreement for the skating pond to the North Star Civic Association.

At the end of 1963, one hundred and seven homes had been built in North Star. Several of the original owners decided not to build and sold their lots for prices ranging up to \$5,000. The net worth of the Corporation was reported to be \$60,344.50, which rose to \$76,911 by the end of 1964.

In 1965, lots were selling at a fast clip in the Mercury Road area. Houses were selling for \$32,000 and up.

One hundred and twenty houses were occupied by this time, with three more under construction. With so many families living in North Star by then, the northern end of North Star Road (being little more than a hilly, winding country land) was proving to be inadequate to handle the volume of traffic. In the spring of 1966, road construction began to widen and grade the road to the intersection of Henderson Road.

Artesian Water Co. entered the picture once more with a proposal of \$45,000 to purchase the water company from North Star. The Board agreed to sell it in 1966. Artesian then made North Star a part of its central system, which many residents regretted. It has been said that North Star had the best water in the county. The top layer of water was very soft, but under layers yielded hard water. But the sale of the water company did benefit the residents in a very important way. In 1970, Artesian installed fire hydrants which added protection against fire, and a sense of security for the residents. Ironically, not a single home had ever been lost to fire until the tragic occurrence in the Hendrick's home in the summer of 1978.

1967 brought the matter of dissolving the corporation to light. With all lands sold, but for a few exceptions, the corporation had essentially fulfilled its original duties of developing and selling its land. The acreage that remained

to be sold consisted of two vacant, hilly and wooded tracts and an ex-well site on Neptune Drive. One tract was finally designated as park land and sold to the Civic Association for \$1,500. The remaining tract in Section B was later developed.

During a special meeting of the stockholders on March 27, 1976, the Plan for Dissolution and complete liquidation of the Corporation was adopted. The balance of cash on hand was given to the sixty-five stockholders, making a total of about \$3,000 returned to each stockholder. This amounted to \$500 over each stockholder's original investment of \$2,500.

It should be noted that all the Board of Directors and Officers of both the North Star Corporation and the North Star Water Company served without compensation. The group was devoted and dedicated to the idea of making a success of the North Star Community. We believe this was the largest development of its kind in the country.

Of the original 440 acres purchased by the North Star Corporation, approximately 286 acres have been developed with about 200 homes. The remaining 154 acres on the west side of North Star Road are still owned by the Conrad Corporation. Had the Corporation been able to retain control of this land they would most likely be able to sell it now for about \$2,000,000.

It is hoped that through this short history, the current residents of North Star will be able to better understand and appreciate the valuable contributions made by the original "founding fathers". It was through their sound judgement, perseverance, and the optimism necessary for the fulfillment of dreams that North Star is the exemplary community it is today. This history is dedicated to those men who first conceived the dream, gave of themselves unselfishly, and saw the dream through to fruition.

Members of the Board of Directors and Officers of the North Star Corporation are listed below. In 1964 the position of Chairman of the Board was eliminated and the Board was reduced to nine members.

Numbers 1 to 13 are the first Board of Directors. The balance are in the order of being elected.

		Number of Years Served						
Directors	Director	Chairman of Board	President	Vice President	Secretary	Treasurer	Present Resident	
1.	H. F. Spangler	18	4				x	
2.	R. J. Endriss	5		2			x	
3.	A. H. Pieper ⊕	11			3			
4.	L. S. Stinchecum ⊕*	9				9		
5.	W. Krall	7					x	
6.	L. G. Hohman *	4						
7.	W. E. Holberton	8		3				
8.	P. J. McClary *	7						
9.	C. B. Simpson *	15			1			
10.	N. E. Scott ⊕*	8	2	3				
11.	L. B. Musser *	17	5	4				
12.	P. Albertelli	15						
13.	H. S. Hawthorne ⊕*	2						
14.	F. Pfizenmayer	6			5			
15.	H. V. Baird ⊕*	5				1		
16.	G. W. Maegerle	16	3	5				
17.	C. H. Collier	3		3			x	
18.	G. T. Farrow *	3						
19.	L. Bertrand	6	4	1		1		
20.	D. O. Neidigh	3					x	
21.	W. Bogar *	6				5		
22.	E. Lowthian	6	1		1		x	
23.	E. E. Friedman	3				1	x	
24.	M. MacDonald *	13			13	9		
25.	J. Hollingworth	4	1		1			
26.	W. Levy *	1						
27.	R. Foulk	2						
28.	C. Wallace	12		9	1		x	
29.	H. Chandler	3					x	
30.	C. McDougall	3					x	
31.	L. Fullhart	9					x	
32.	D. W. Hallman	7					x	
33.	J. Wolf	7					x	

Notes - ⊕ Did not build
* Deceased

Special tribute is made to M. MacDonald who passed away in January of 1978. He served as Secretary of the Corporation for thirteen years and Treasurer for nine years, in addition to being a Director of the Water Company. In the final years of the Corporation, most of the work fell on the Secretary and Treasurer. His devotion and efforts deserve special mention.

A tribute is also necessary for the following original or first members of the thirteen Board of Directors who are now deceased. These men all helped in a very special way to make North Star a reality.

N. E. Scott - served eight years as Director on the Board, two years as Chairman and three years as President

L. S. Stinchecum - served as Director and Treasurer for nine years, and as Treasurer of the Water Company.

L. B. Musser - served as Director for seventeen years, five years as Chairman and four years as President.

C. B. Simpson - served fifteen years as Director and one year as Secretary, and also as a Director of the Water Company.

P. J. McClary - served as Director for seven years

H. S. Hawthorne - served two years as Director.

L. G. Hohman - served four years as Director.

W. Bogar - served as a Director for six years and was Treasurer for five years.

Of the original members of the Board, H. F. Spangler, R. T. Endriss, and W. Krall remain as residents. W. E. Holberton is now living in Virginia, A. H. Pieper is still working at the Louviers Building, and P. Albertelli is living with his daughter near Malvern, Pennsylvania.

G. W. Maegerle served on the Board for sixteen years, as President for three years and five years as Vice President. It is believed that he is now living in Rehoboth Beach.

Curt Wallace served as a Director for twelve years and nine years as President during the final years of the Corporation. He is still living in North Star.

L. Fullhart served as a Director for nine years and as Vice President for eight years. He also resides in North Star today.

The Corporation's accountant, from the inception of the Corporation to dissolution, was Harry Frez a nonresident private accountant.