Stratford's History

The Tomlinson Mansion

respectfully submitted by Carole Dadino, Stratford Historian (CaroleD444gmail,com)

The Tomlinson name dominates early history in this section of Camden County. Joseph Tomlinson, a Quaker, came to Old Gloucester County in 1686 and settled on 117 acres on the east side of Gravelly Run, on the Blackwood-Clementon Road. On January 8, 1732, his son, Ephraim Tomlinson (1695-1780) purchased 619 acres of land that today encompasses parts of Laurel Springs, Lindenwold and Stratford. In the late 1830's, (some record the date as 1832) another Ephraim (1806-1893) great-great-grandson of Joseph Tomlinson, purchased land (or was given the land by his father, Benjamin) surrounding Laurel Lake, and Big Timber Creek. It held a Saw Mill, ("Porter's Old Mill") dated 1739, and a Grist Mill built by John Hillman in 1745. About 1840, Ephraim built a new Grist Mill that operated until 1956. It burned down in 1958.

Finding the home he resided in, near the creek, "unsuitable", in 1844, Tomlinson moved his bride, Sarah, to a Brick Mansion he had built next to his Mills. Around the Mills and Mansion, Ephraim began a small community consisting of a slaughterhouse, about 12 homes for his workers and a Schoolhouse. (It still stands, as a church, at the top of the hill south of the creek.) Ephraim soon became the owner of three farms and three stores, and his mule teams served the iron and glass factories throughout South Jersey. He chose the name Laurel Mills for his little village, after the Laurel that surrounded the lake.



l to r: Elizabeth Innskeep Tomlinson, Ephraim Tomlinson. Sarah Tomlinson Innskeep, Edward Tomlinson, William Innskeep Tomlinson, Frances Hains Tomlinson

A dirt road that wound down one hill, over the creek, past the dam and climbed the opposite hill became Laurel Mills Road (Currently, Laurel Road.)



This photo shows Laurel (Mills) Road, facing south towards Lindenwold. (Circa 1870.) A 1918 map shows the Tomlinson Estate, with all the buildings, including the house on the right, remained a farm. A few older Stratford residents remember the pictured house as a Stafford farmhouse. The Mansion is behind the trees on the right. Carriage ruts can be seen along the dirt road. The bridge over Big Timber Creek sits just before the hill and Laurel Lake is to the left. The hill was flattened somewhat, as Laurel Road was improved to Blackwood-Clementon Road.

The Mansion was transformed from a residence to a Maternity Hospital, shortly after WWI and was followed by the Stratford Military Academy in the early 1930's. Additional buildings, including a residence for the commander and his family, were built to house the Cadets and serve as classrooms. The first classes were held in 1935. The Academy closed about 1974 and the buildings were abandoned until the early 80's, when the property was purchased by the YWCA. After the YWCA left in 2006, the Stratford Classical Christian Academy purchased the property and held classes from Preschool to 12th grade until it closed in 2015. The Tomlinson Mansion is the oldest building remaining in Stratford and the new developers intend to restore it as part of their Senior Living Complex.

