



May Be Westfield's Oldest House

History links the name of William Pierson with two of Westfield's oldest houses. The family homestead on Benson Place, in which his great-great-granddaughter, Mrs. Phoebe Pierson Brewer, aged 92, now resides, was built by him about 1745. The house, at East Broad and Chestnut Streets, now the home of Dr. G. W. Esty, in which the pioneer spent the more prosperous years of his long life, was purchased by him in 1770. Its builder may have been Deacon John Woodruff, who lived there and died in 1768 at the age of 63.

William Pierson was a tailor. In the generation in which he lived on Benson Place (Elizabethtown Road), he worked at his trade by night, farmed by day. Here he reared a family of seven children, and when his son, William Jr., married in 1770, he gave him the old homestead as a wedding present and went to live in the Broad Street house. Here his wife died and he courted and won the hand of the winsome widow of Henry Baker, who lived across the way.

The age of this house is largely a matter of conjecture. Pearson Greaves, old town genealogist, thinks it was one of the first to be built in the settlement, "and if you say it is the oldest house now standing in Westfield you will not be far wrong". There were thirty acres in the farm, extending along Chestnut Street (then a lane connecting with the plantation of Samuel Miller) to the present Kimball Avenue, and along Broad Street, to include what later became Stanley Oval. Tradition holds Farmer Pierson in esteem as an animal husbandman.

William Pierson died in 1801, aged 80, and the house remained in the family until 1880, when Silas Pierson, great-grandson of the pioneer, fell upon hard times and his property was sold under the hammer to James

T. Pierson, a distant kin, for \$5000. This proved a profitable investment for the enterprising storekeeper. Scarcely was the ink dry on the deed of sale when he sold six of the thirty acres, including the homestead and farm buildings, for the price which he had paid for the entire tract.

The new owner, Charles V. Peddie, modernized the house in the Victorian manner. The left wing, which had been the kitchen, was torn down and a new wing built which became a parlor and the scene of many memorable social gatherings. That favorite Victorian embellishment, a cupola, was added, and as riding and driving were the chief family diversions, a porte-cochere extended from the wide, sweeping "front porch". Father Peddie and his elder daughter, Genevieve, were charter members of the town's first riding, Westfield Equestrian, club.

In 1905, the Peddies sold 600 feet of the property in the rear of their house and grounds on Chestnut Street, to Florist Charles Doerrer, and ten years later, he sold two-thirds of it (445 feet) to the newly organized Tennis Club. The club also bought the old Pierson barn from the Peddies, moved it to its present site and converted it into a club house. What are now the shower rooms were the box stalls for the Peddie horses; the pig sty adjoined; and, where, now, embryonic Tildens discuss the game from window seats overlooking the courts, while girls and boys of the teen age brush by them doing a wiggle-woggle that would astound their old-fashioned forebears, and, at the end of every whirl, remark, "That's the cat's whiskers!"—then and there, in the long, long ago, Farmer Pierson's little lambs gambled, and, in moments of high glee, gave forth a timorous "baa".