

The earliest settlers in the township were not necessarily the first owners of land in the township. Beginning in 1681, Surveyor-General Thomas Holmes produced a series of maps showing the settlements and improved portions of the county. The maps were periodically updated without annotation. Henry Baker, Thomas Dickerson, Randal Blackshaw, James Harrison (two tracts), James Radcliff and Herbert Springate are shown as the owners of the seven westerly tracts of land surrounding the central open park on one of the earlier versions of the map. Charles Hartford's name appears on another tract. A later version of the map deletes Radcliff and Hartford's names and reshuffles the tracts by omitting one of James Harrison's two tracts.

The purchase of land in Pennsylvania proved to be very complicated. Heavily timbered land with little or no standard reference points made accurate surveys difficult. The system of obtaining a warrant, requesting a survey, and finally obtaining a patent was cumbersome. Land, or more accurately the rights to land, were purchased by many while still in England. The land represented by the warrants were transferred like shares of stock. A purchaser could sell all or part of his "land" before any specific land was surveyed. Land speculation was common and many times the rights to quantities of land were bought and sold several times before they were actually laid out. It is not surprising that by the turn of the eighteenth century a general resurvey of Bucks County was required. This resurvey found a large amount of land which no one had a legal right to possess and which was declared vacant and eligible for purchase. Since a number of the original claimants never completed the warrant, survey, and patent process, determining "original" ownership is difficult. It wasn't until 1740 that the last patent of land in Wrightstown was issued. Between 1733 and 1740, three large tracts of land, totaling almost 800 acres were patented.

This final patent gives an example of the complications which often occurred. The land was located along the Durham Road between the park and the Buckingham Township line. The 1703 resurvey noted George Riggs was entitled to part of this property and the remainder was vacant. Riggs had died before he completed the purchase. John Parsons, who eventually received the patent, requested that 150 acres be laid out to him in 1718. The 150

acres was surveyed and was found to contain 190 acres. Parsons had also purchased a share of Joseph Hall's right to 500 acres. In 1725, he requested that 179 acres of that land be laid out in Wrightstown. He had the two tracts resurveyed in 1735. At this time an additional vacant tract of 30 acres within the park was revealed. He agreed to purchase the additional vacant land and another survey was done in 1739 to include this tract. His patent in 1740 was a confirmation of all these purchases in a single tract of 369 acres and 52 square perches of land.

This property is significant because it encompassed the intersection of the township's two main roads; Durham Road and Second Street Pike. John Parsons died about 1743. In 1744, his son Richard Parsons leased a house to Nicholas Penquite to operate a tavern; one of only two in the township.

There is no evidence that any of the 1681 owners ever settled in Wrightstown. James Harrison owned the most land in the township. He purchased the rights to over 6,000 acres of land in Pennsylvania while still in England. He had only a portion of these lands laid out in Wrightstown. He had other tracts surveyed to him in Lower Malsfield and Falls Township where he lived. When he died, his land went to his daughter Phebe and her husband Phineas Pemberton. It wasn't until Phineas Pemberton died that the land began to be sold to individual settlers. Many tracts were bought and sold several times before they were actually occupied.

Randal Blackshaw was another early property owner. He bought a tract of land adjoining that of James Harrison. He and Harrison were apparently well acquainted. They both arrived on the ship *Submission* in 1682 and both settled in Falls Township. Blackshaw had a number of indentured servants, some of which arrived with him, and others, such as Ralph Cowgill, who came to America on a prior ship. According to the standard indenture agreement, servants were to get 50 acres of land after their terms of service were complete. For some reason Blackshaw conveyed his entire tract of 200 acres in Wrightstown to his former servant. After Cowgill's death, in 1713, his two sons Abraham and Nehemiah sold the tract to Peter Johnson.

John Chapman is generally credited with being the first European settler in



Figure 4: Wrightstown was at the northern end of settlement in Bucks County on this Holmes Map. The map, begun in 1681, shows original purchasers of land from William Penn. Wrightstown and Newtown are the only townships laid out with town squares.