

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 10, 2009

The Piersons of Southwood Road: On the old farmhouse standing close to Southwood Road about one mile west of Hockessin is a date stone "Thomas Pierson, 1782." The Pierson family owned and occupied the 100-plus-acre farm that surrounded it for over 200 years. In the 18th century, the road on which it stands was the only way into what is now the village of Hockessin from the south and west. In early September 1777, British troops under Generals Howe and Cornwallis pushed toward Philadelphia over this road, before settling for the night in and around Hockessin Friends Meeting House. Fresh from landing at the head of the Elk (near Elkton, Maryland) and a skirmish at Cooch's Bridge, they were trying to circumvent Washington's army, which was keeping between the British and Philadelphia. Valley Road did not exist in 1777. Neither did the Lancaster Pike nor the Newport-Gap Turnpike. The British had to defeat Washington and Lafayette at Chadds Ford in the Battle of the Brandywine before the way was clear for them to enter Philadelphia, capital of the rebellious colonies.

Several generations of Piersons farmed on Southwood Road in the 19th century. Philip Pierson (ca. 1850–1928) had three daughters and a son, Wilson T. Pierson (1891–1979). When Wilson married Sarah Emma Sharpless of Yorklyn (1896–1985) in 1922, his new bride moved into the farmhouse with her husband and in-laws. They raised three children, William Sharpless Pierson (1926–), Philip Wilson Pierson (1928–), and Ruth Laura Pierson (1931–). William married Katherine Frazee (1927–) in 1948; eventually they built a small home on one side of the farm and raised two children, Gerald Pierson (1949–) and Nancy Pierson (1951–).

Philip married Romaine Jordan (1929–2002) in 1950. They lived in the farmhouse with his parents and farmed the old place with Philip's father, before removing to a farm near Clayton, Delaware, in 1968. They had two children, Charmayne Pierson Busker (1955–), and Wayne Philip Pierson (1957–). For many years before her father's death, Ruth lived with her parents while teaching in several local elementary schools.

Wilson Pierson died in 1979 after a lengthy illness. His widow Emma, and their daughter Ruth continued to live in the farmhouse, with Emma's son William and his wife, Katherine, "next door." In 1985, Ruth married this writer (Tom Marshall), and Emma Pierson died less than three months later. The remaining farm, including the 1782 Thomas Pierson house, was sold to settle the estate. Some years earlier, Wilson Pierson had sold a portion of his farm that became the western part of Wellington Hills. What was sold after Emma's death was around and across the road from the farmhouse, and this is known as Pierson's Ridge. Settlement was finally completed in 1988, and the old place passed out of the family. The house is presently owned and occupied by James Reinhard. Two of our Auburn Valley Railroad cars are named "Laura R. Sharpless" and "Emma S. Pierson," in memory of Ruth's maternal grandmother and her mother respectively.