

# Morris Knolls Property History

by

Vito L. Bianco

The history of Morris Knolls begins with an unlikely source: the elderly William Penn (1644-1718). Penn “was an English Quaker most noted for founding Pennsylvania in 1682. However, before he crossed to the western side of the Delaware, he and the other Quaker proprietors had purchased the rights to West New Jersey from John Lord Berkley sometime after 1674, and to East New Jersey from the estate of Sir George Carteret beginning in 1681.”<sup>1</sup> In the years just prior to his death, William Penn began to locate lands for himself in what would become Morris County.



William Penn

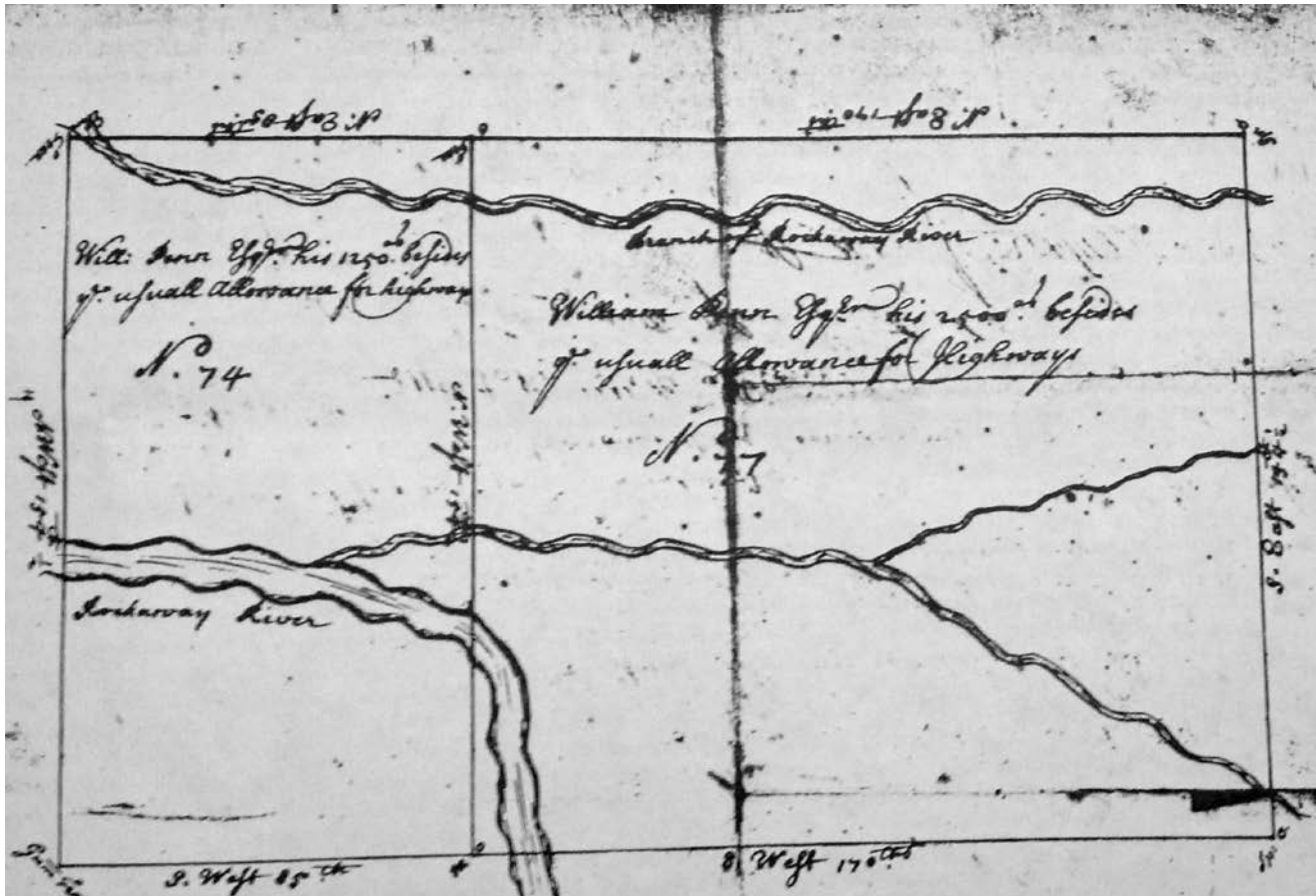
“The proprietors’ lands in Morris County were referred to as a new ‘promised land’ [intended to provide] a place of sanctuary and refuge for fellow Quakers.”<sup>2</sup> The June 14, 1715 survey of William Penn’s lots No. 74 and No. 77 is the earliest-known map of lands now primarily within Denville Township.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vito Bianco, *Images of America Denville* (2001), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Vito Bianco, *Images of America Denville* (2001), p. 8.



Detail of William Penn's 1715 survey showing lots No. 74 (left), where Morris Knolls would be located, and No. 77 (right), totaling 3,750 acres, most of which is now in Denville.

Together the two lots comprised a total of 3,750 acres. The plotting of Penn's lots shows that the Morris Knolls property was once part of the 1,250 acre tract of Lot No. 74, located near the lot's northern property line.<sup>4</sup>

"After Penn's death in 1718, his two sons began to sell the Quaker lands. At that time, many Philadelphia-based Quaker families began to migrate to Morris County."<sup>5</sup>

The Morris Knolls property likely remained part of a large wooded land-holding for many years. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, detailed maps began to record families living along Franklin Avenue abutting the property. The house closest to where Morris Knolls is today was owned by Josiah Collins (1830-1889). Directly across Franklin Avenue from Collins was Joseph L. Zeak (1821-1911) and his wife Mary C. Genung (1808-1895); next to them was Charles M. Crampton (1808-1889). Further south on Franklin Avenue, on the school side, was John Blanchard (born 1810 or 1818,

<sup>4</sup> The property claims of the Quaker Proprietors were resurveyed in the 1880s to resolve property disputes. The author used those surveys to determine that the location of the Morris Knolls property was within William Penn's Lot No. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Vito Bianco, *Images of America Denville* (2001), p. 12.

died 1891); next to him was Elias L. Palmer<sup>6</sup> (1808-1885), son of Ezekiel and Sally Hall Palmer, and grandson of Jacob and Phebe Palmer, among Denville's earliest settlers. Jacob Palmer was one of Denville's Revolutionary War veterans. He came from Long Island about 1760. He was a forgerman by trade and probably worked at the Franklin Forge on Cooper Road.<sup>7</sup>



Detail of Beers 1868 map of Rockaway Township showing the area along Franklin Avenue.

<sup>6</sup> His wife Nancy Palmer (1823-1860), died prior to the 1868 publication of the Beers map.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Elizabeth Willis and Robert A. Illig, *The Patriots of Denville* (1976), p.28.

Nothing could be found on the J. Bryant who appears across Franklin Avenue from Elias L. Palmer. Caleb W. Hopley (1845-1914) would appear on a later map<sup>8</sup> close the Josiah Collins. Into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these properties would change hands many times.

In the 1930s, Luigi Susco (1892-1983) purchased a number of acres along Route 46 and Franklin Avenue in Rockaway, and in 1936 re-located his lumber mill there after operating in Rockaway Valley since the end of World War I.



Luigi Susco with his daughter RoseMary on his lumber sled, winter 1936.

His property abutted the Morris Knolls property where it is believed he had timber rights, and constructed a portable sawmill that was set up until all the timber was cut and harvested.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robinson map, 1887.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Vito J. Bianco.



Luigi Susco cutting timber in the 1940s.

Luigi Susco's daughter, RoseMary (born 1933), lived next the Morris Knolls property from 1936 until she move to Denville in 1957. She recalled that the property was "all woods" and that "there was nothing there."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with RoseMary Susco Bianco.



RoseMary Susco in 1947

As a teenager, RoseMary used to sell Christmas cards to the families living along Franklin Avenue on both sides of the road along the Morris Knolls property “up to the entrance to the McWilliams Forge property.” She also remembered picking blackberries all along the Morris Knolls property in the summertime, as far as the railroad bridge on Franklin Avenue.<sup>11</sup> In 1953, RoseMary married Vito J. Bianco (born 1932). He went to work at the lumber mill for her father, and the young couple lived upstairs in her father’s house next to the Morris Knolls property for their first four years of marriage.

Vito Bianco recalled walking the Morris Knolls property often. He was taken by its natural beauty and abundance of wildlife, a refreshing change from Brooklyn where he was born and grew up.

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<sup>11</sup> *Id.*



Newlyweds, Vito and RoseMary Bianco, 1953

“I used to hunt on the Morris Knolls property,” he recalled. “Once I shot a deer there but I could not carry it back to the mill by myself. Luigi had to drive a truck into the woods and drag the deer back to the mill,” he said. He remembered when the school district purchased the Morris Knolls property in the 1950s. Afterward, Vito watched the progress of the construction of the new high school, as he would pass by the property daily.<sup>12</sup>

While it appears that no significant historical event occurred on the Morris Knolls property, it did play a part in the every day lives of the people living along its roadside. From the property’s distinguished earliest owner to the many who have enjoyed its natural beauty since, the Morris Knolls property shares the common heritage of an area rich in historic value and abundant in simple traditions.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Vito J. Bianco.