

A Short History of the Towers

The Towers was one of the first structures to be constructed in Milford. At its mid-life it under-went a major transformation that dressed its simple colonial frame with ornate Victorian attire. Over the years it has also been the home of many of Milford's best-know citizen's, some of whom rose to state and national recognition.

It appears that the original structure—a five-bay-center-hall, double-pile, Georgian structure—was built sometime in the late 18th century (although there may have been a simple log house on the site originally). The date 1783 was placed on the exterior east chimney when the house was remodeled in 1891, but this date has not been documented. One source states that on this site “as far back as 1788 there stood a building devoted to millinery. Here young girls learned the trade, and other young girls bedecked themselves with the finery of the period.”



The Towers' earliest recorded owner was John Wallace, a druggist who moved into the house in 1808 and operated his store from the first floor. Wallace served on Milford's first governing board when the town was incorporated in 1807.



John Lofland (1798-1849), who became widely know as the “Milford Bard”, lived in the Towers as a young man with his mother and step-father, John Wallace. His father was Isaac Lofland, a prominent merchant, who died when John was only five.

For a brief period Lofland studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He then returned to Milford and for the next thirty years resided in his “writer's garret” on the third floor of the Towers. Here he produced the vast majority of his poetic output that won him acclaim as one of the best poets in America by the reading public of the time. He also produced a stream of stories for the press (including the Delaware Gazette, the Saturday Evening Post and the Casket) and penned, for a fee, speeches and love letters for “inarticulate politicians and swains”.

John Lofland left Milford for Baltimore in 1838 at the age of forty-one. He returned but once, for a short visit. During his time in Baltimore he became friends with Edgar Allen Poe. In 1846 he moved to Wilmington, where he was one of the editors of Blue Hens Chickens, a very successful newspaper of the time.

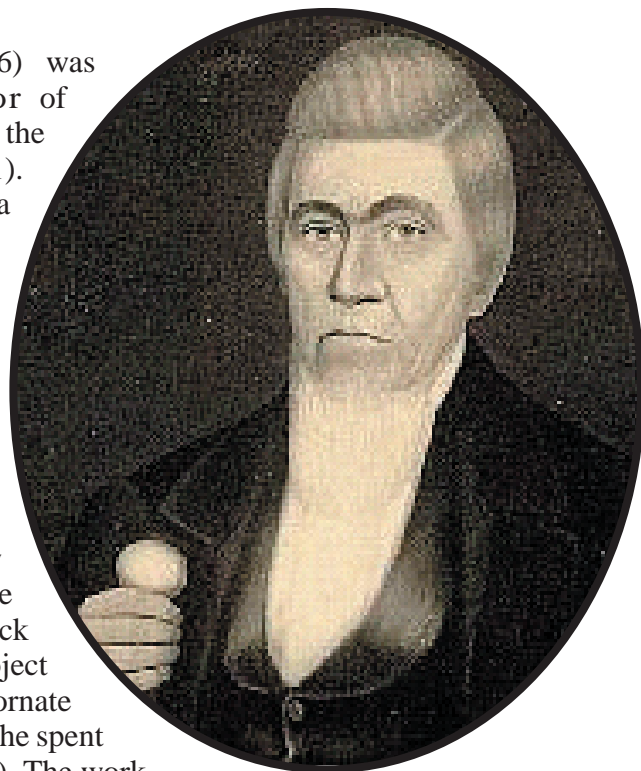
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Dr. William Burton (1789-1866) was governor of Delaware during the Civil War. He moved to the Towers from the Parson Thorne Mansion (where he had lived from 1858 to 1861). Dr. Burton studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and practiced medicine in Lewes before moving to Milford. Throughout the Civil War Burton favored peace and argued that the South should be free to leave the Union. However, in 1862 he was forced to allow the drafting of troops in Delaware to serve in the Union army.

Upon the death of Governor Burton in 1866, ownership of the house passed first to his second wife Ann Hill, and then upon her death in 1885, to their only child Rhoda Roudebush (1841-1917).

Rhoda had been married to Clint Roudebush of New York, of whom we know little except that he had money. By the time Rhoda inherited the house she was a widow. Moving back to Milford from New York she oversaw a major renovation project that lasted for four years and transformed the building into the ornate "Victorian" style structure that we see today. It is recorded that she spent \$40,000 on the project (roughly equivalent to \$900,000 in 2006). The work was completed in 1891. She named the building "the Towers".

After its renovation the Towers was painted dark red with dark green trim. Much of the ornate interior woodwork and exterior trim was crafted by ship carpenters on loan from Milford's thriving shipyards. The house was one of the first in Milford to have electric lighting.



To celebrate the completion of the house and to delight her beloved granddaughter, Rhoda hosted a most unusual party at the Towers on Old Christmas Eve in 1895. (The full story of which is attached.)

*F*or many years after Mrs. Roudebush's death in 1917 the Towers was the home of a succession of Milford's widows and spinsters.

In the 1960s the Towers was owned by Elizabeth Lofland Nutter. She let the Milford Historical Society operate "The Towers Gallery of Arts and Crafts" in the first floor of the Towers. Gov. Charles Terry spoke at the opening of the gallery.

William Chasanov purchased the Towers in 1969 and lived there with his family during the 1970s and early 1980s.

Michael Real and Mark Springer purchased the Towers in 1985. Over the next few years they did extensive restoration work. In the process they introduced the new exterior color scheme, in the California "painted ladies" style. In 1988 they began to operate the Towers as a bed and breakfast inn, using its historic name.

Daniel Bond purchased the Towers in 1992. He and his wife Rhonda have continued to operate the Towers as a bed and breakfast inn.

Continued on Next Page

A Wedding and a Reception for a Doll!

From the Feature Page of The Sussex Countian,
Georgetown, Delaware, April 21, 1977
by Linda Callaway

*S*trange things are often discovered in old, dusty attics: torn and yellowed birthday cards, presse flowers with no scent, wrinkled photographs with faded faces--all images from the past.

But many of these mere "images," as we may call them, come to life again when the true and loving story of their existence is brought to surface once more. Take, for instance, the story of "the invitation".

It began recently when Ernest Wilhelm, a retired insurance agent who lives in Georgetown, discovered among the papers of a client a yellowed, tattered, engraved invitation. Now one probably wouldn't have paid particular attention to this invitation, which was to a wedding reception, except for one thing. The reception was for a doll. It read:

*Mrs. R.B. Roudebush
announces the marriage
of
Alfreda Wooten,
the eldest doll of her granddaughter,
Ann Burton Marvel;
and invites you to be present at the
wedding reception,
Old Christmas Eve,
January fifth, eighteen hundred and ninety five,
from six until nine o'clock.
Corner Front and North Streets,
Milford, Delaware.*

*W*ilhelm realized that the little granddaughter mentioned in the invitation has been dead for about 13 years, but that during her lifetime she was eventually married to A. Felix duPont, Sr. And not knowing what else to do with such a novelty of a memoir, he gave the invitation to Mary H. Robinson, the editor of this newspaper, and a familiar acquaintance of the duPont family.

Mrs. Robinson had a surprise for Wilhelm--she told him that the doll was in her son's attic. It seems that Mrs. duPont had parted with it so that Mrs. Robinson's daughter, Margaret could equally enjoy it during her days of girlhood.

The doll was soon retrieved from a trunk in the attic and brought into the light to view. "Alfreda" stood about as tall as a three-year old. She had blonde hair and deep brown eyes with a distant, almost spookily look in

Continued on Next Page



them. She seemed to be thinking about something or someone. Her plaster face had begun to crack, and the blue silk jacket of Margaret's that she was wearing had faded harshly. Her two arms were missing, possibly from attending too many tea parties with her friends.

Her curiosity aroused, Mrs. Robinson then contacted Lockwood Pratt, who was once a next-door neighbor of Mrs. Roudebush, the grandmother who sent out the invitation. Although he was not old enough to have attended the wedding reception of the doll, he was able to fill in the gaps of the story with information he had been told.

According to Pratt, Ann Burton Marvel adored her grandmother, whom she lived with in "the Towers", a well-known Milford home. In turn Mrs. Roudebush would do practically anything to please her grandchild. (Incidentally, Mrs. Roudebush was responsible for having the towers built onto the home, and for redecorating it in Tiffany glass to keep in style for her second husband, a New Yorker.)

"Alfreda Wootten," the doll, received her name from Mrs. Roudebush's first married name, Wootten. Presumably then, the doll is now at least 100 years old, and probably was in the Wootten family.

It was at the Towers that Mrs. Roudebush conducted the wedding and reception for the doll--complete with organdy wedding gown, wedding cake, flowers, an elaborate dinner and a reception line. There was even a "groom," although no one is quite sure who it was--a neighborhood boy stood up with the doll.

It was supposedly quite a marvelous affair that Old Christmas Eve, with both adults and their children in attendance.

And though by today's standards such a party would seem odd and frivolous, perhaps Mrs. Roudebush just had enough imagination to bring her friends together and to show her love to her granddaughter all at Old Christmas Eve.

Whatever the reason, the destiny of Alfreda Wootten is now in the hands of Mrs. Robinson. The doll could be put into a museum, so that everyone could marvel at her story and wonder what's behind her distant eyes. Or perhaps someday a small girl will find her in the attic, look into those same eyes and know for sure.



Caption under a photo of the doll included with the article: Faded silk and cracked plaster mark this antique doll, but her eyes clearly look as though she is remembering the days when a little girl loved her very much. "Alfreda Wootten," as she was once named, was recently retrieved from a Georgetown attic, and is known to be at least 100 years old.

Note: The doll, Alfreda Wootten, was donated to the Milford Historical Society and can now be viewed at the Parson Thorne Mansion in Milford.

Final Note: It is said that the little boy who served as the "groom" for the reception, George Pierce, lived to an old age and never married again. ♦

*The
Towers*