

Pearson family among area's first settlers

While many of Hamilton Township's villages have earned places in the history books, White Horse can boast of being the home of the township's first recorded settlers -- the Pearson family which moved to the banks of the Crosswicks Creek long before the Revolutionary War.

According to Helen Almy West's *History of Hamilton Township*, Robert Pearson came to America on the English ship *Shield* which arrived in Burlington in 1678. Pearson was the father of one child, Robert II, who was born in 1686. The younger Pearson came to own 1,300 acres of land which included most of White Horse as we know it today. In 1706, Pearson built the first house in Hamilton, a noble mansion of stone and stucco that stood slightly to the east of White Horse. Located near the present site of Pearson

United Methodist Church, Pearson's home was known as South Hill for more than 150 years.

South Hill provided a home for a family that witnessed many events that led to the emergence of America as an independent nation.

Pearson married Elizabeth Tindall in July of 1706 and the couple were the parents of 10 children. After Elizabeth died in 1722, Robert married Mary Coar, who gave birth to eight more children. Many of the 18 youngsters born in the White Horse mansion would grow to play important roles in the history of the young nation.

Pearson's daughter Mary later married Philip Quigley and among the couple's sons was Captain Robert Quigley who saw considerable action during the American Revolution. Another daughter, Elizabeth, was the wife of

John Hutchinson, an early industrialist, while Rachel became the wife of John Douglas of Lambertton and the mother of Captain Alexander Douglas at whose house the battles of Trenton and Princeton were planned. Pearson's son Thomas married Sarah Hoff of Trenton while his daughter Anne became the wife of Benjamin Yard, a prominent local resident during revolutionary times. Another daughter, Achsah married William Imlay who built and lived in the famous Hopkinson House in Bordentown. Pearson's son Robert III became a man of great wealth who served as state treasurer during the revolution and helped to prevent the Tories from carrying away the state treasury. Still another Pearson offspring was a daughter named Theodosia who eventually married Trenton merchant Abraham Hunt. Hunt hosted the infamous party at which Colonel Hunt, the Hessian commander, was celebrating when his troops were defeated during the Battle of Trenton.

A Tragic End

One of the most notable members of the Pearson clan was Issac, the son of Robert Pearson and Mary Coar who was born in August of 1739. Issac married a granddaughter of Thomas Tindall and the couple built a mansion on the banks of Crosswicks Creek that became a social center of the community, hosting scores of lavish parties and dinners at which prominent local personalities could be seen adorned in gold-laced coats and powdered wigs.

Well liked by members

of the community, Pearson was elected to the Assembly several times. As the tide of colonial opinion began to turn against Mother England, Issac found himself caught up in the revolutionary fervor, actively resisting measures of the crown and serving on the Committee of Safety.

The early days of America's struggle for freedom saw the colonists taking many losses at the hands of well-trained and equipped British and Hessian troops. Several key military objectives had been lost and New Jersey seemed to be falling into British hands. As colonial losses mounted, Pearson felt that defeat was inevitable and, fearing the loss of his fortune, family, and home, decided to take an oath of allegiance to the British. While accounts of Pearson's decision vary, it is agreed that he rode on horseback to New Brunswick to take the oath. On his way to New Brunswick, he was attacked and murdered. Whether Pearson was shot for political reasons by colonists still loyal to the revolution or by robbers seeking the large amount of money he was carrying remains unclear to this day, although family members maintained that robbery was the motive behind the attack. Pearson's body was taken home and buried in the family plot where the Methodist church now stands.

One of Issac Pearson's sons, William, later served with distinction with the United States Navy, while a daughter, Mary, married Thomas Hopkinson, grandson of a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Pearson's mansion still stands at the foot of Hobson Street.