

"Idle Hour" - The Blake Homestead

18 Pleasant Grove Road, Schooley's Mountain

The original structure was built in the late 1700s, and now comprises the rear wing of the house. The original front entry opened into the small room with storage cabinets, now known as the Library or Butler's Pantry. From this room a small staircase led to what was then a very small second floor. The rear room on the first floor is now the Kitchen, with various cupboards, pantries and a narrow Jersey Winder" staircase leading to the rear portion of the second floor.

1839-40: Sold to Charles Drake

The then-current owner, Charles Drake, added the front of the house in 1839 to 1840. This includes the Dining Room, Living Room, center hallway staircase, and the Front and Back Parlors, and probably a wood Front Porch with a low roof. The Drake family ran the Morristown-Easton stagecoach service, and historical evidence shows that "Idle Hour" was the place where horses were changed and travelers boarded.

1852: Jacob Cole

Jacob Cole owned the property from 1852 to 1862, during which time it was known as "J Cole's Hotel." The substantial safe in the Living Room was used for safekeeping of travelers' valuables as well as the daily proceeds of the inn and hotel.

1862: Holloway Hunt

Holloway Hunt, a prominent lawyer, State Legislator and a pillar of the neighboring Schooley's Mountain Presbyterian Church, purchased the property from Cole, and between 1865 and 1897 the farm was run as a boarding house by Mrs. J. H. Hunt. During that period it was known as "The Idle Hour" and "The Maples."

1902: the Davis family

Apparently the property was sold to a Mr. Godwin, as records show that William J. Davis bought "Idle Hour" from him in 1902. Davis was a bachelor, and a well-known lawyer and banker from Harrison, New Jersey. He bought the property as a summer retreat for his invalid mother, Emma Louise Davis, but Mrs. Davis died just a year later. William kept the house as a hobby, and maintained it with the help of a resident gardener, John Reed. Reed lived on the property for 60 years, carefully maintaining the property and tending the gardens of peonies, lilacs, zinnias, roses and many vegetables and fruit trees.

With the help of a New York decorator, Davis substantially remodeled the Italianate farmhouse in 1914, making it into a Neo- Classically influenced residence. He added the colossal Ionic columns in front, supporting the full two-story Front Porch and the pediment front door surrounds. The urns, gazing ball stone benches, sun dial and "Freddie" the lion were added at this time, and the stone walls were built at a cost of \$1.05 to \$1.20 per lineal foot. Inside, the decorator added a number of Victorian touches, including the gilt mirrors in the parlors, the chandeliers, and the stunning inlaid hardwood floors.

Descendants of the two families have lived on the property to this day. The house passed to Mr. Davis's sisters Annie (married Blake) and Emma Louise (married Palmer). The families traveled from Harrison to "Idle Hour" by horse-drawn carriage until about 1935, when they sold the Harrison home and moved to Schooley's Mountain full time. Several of their carriages, large and small were housed in the barn until 1984, when they were sold at auction. Annie lived in the home until her death in 1957 at the age of 102. Her daughter, Emma Louise Blake lived at "Idle Hour" until shortly before her death in 1981. At that time the property passed to Josephine Sandford Blake (married McKnight) who lived there with her husband Dale until their deaths, in 1991 and 2005, respectively.

Outbuildings

The Barn complex comprises a number of utilitarian buildings all joined one to another. The two-story Barn itself is a gem of construction, with notched and pegged heavy oak beams that are in excellent condition. It includes a variety of rooms and enclosures, with haylofts, storage and working spaces, as well as a Ferrier's Shop, Tack Room, two box stalls and five straight stalls.

Other parts of the Barn complex include the "Library" connecting to the Coal Bin, the Ice House, a Privy (a "three-holer" with two adult seats and a child-size seat), a Chicken Coop and a Corn Crib. A separate Pump House encloses the water well that serves the entire property.

The Tenant or Gardener's House is a two-story wood frame dwelling with five rooms and two chimneys. It has no electricity, water or heat.

Neighboring Properties

The current owners tell us that "Idle Hour" is located in the Schooley's Mountain Historic District, recognized by the County, State and Federal governments. They note that open land on the north and west sides are in conservation use, administered by the State for land conservation. The Schooley's Mountain Presbyterian Church owns property on the east side, and the owners say that in the foreseeable future, development seems highly unlikely.

Some Statistics

- "Idle Hour" has a total of 13 principal rooms, including five Bedrooms, two Bathrooms and one Lavatory.
 - There are eight Fireplaces in all: four on the first floor and four on the second floor.
 - A full-height walk-up Attic is a marvel of the carpenter's trade, with hewn and pegged beams and beamed trusses.
 - The Basement under most of the house has stonewalls and masonry floors, with many storage and utility spaces.
 - The property totals 3.03 acres
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- The property has more than 70 magnificent trees, including spectacular copper beeches, as well as gray beeches. Also maple, ash, oak, catawba and various evergreens, and a magnificent century-old flowering magnolia.

