



Kulp's Tavern which dates back to 1832 is now part of Delaware Valley University's Roth Center for Sustainable Agriculture.



The farm produced hay for for city horses in Philadelphia. A bank barn is one that is accessible on two levels. It is filled with some interesting old farm equipment including a stationary thresher and a dangerous looking silage chopper.

yesteryear

# Roth Living Farm Museum

By **Russ Bellavance**, President of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society  
 Photos by Bay Hill Junior Resident Photographer **Kaitlin Foreman**

Our recent articles have focused on important parts of the area that used to farm and are now something else: Normandy Farms Hotel and Conference Center, Blue Bell Country Club and Montgomery County Community College. By now, you may be wondering if we have any farms that are, well, farms. The answer is “Yes!...sort of.” As you travel north on DeKalb Pike (U.S. 202) through Lower Gwynedd, you will come to a traffic light at Hancock Road, with an old 3-story stone building on the northwest corner of the intersection, and an old barn a little further on. In the back of those buildings, and extending all the way to the intersection of DeKalb and Welsh Road is the Roth Center for Sustainable Agriculture of Delaware Valley University, one of the nine farms maintained by DelVal. As the name suggests, the University operates the farm as an experimental farm, seeking new and better ways to maintain organic and/or sustainable agriculture in this area.

There are two old residences and multiple outbuildings on the property, but the ones that are sometimes open to the public are the stone building and barn along DeKalb. The stone building right on the corner is known as Kulp's Tavern, which was constructed by Andres Leyman (also sometimes spelled Lehman) in 1832 as a tavern and inn. Despite its design (and its misleading name), the building was only ever used as a residence, first by Leyman and then by the Isaac Kulp family from 1846 until the property was sold for back taxes during the Depression.

Del Val has restored the interior of Kulp's Tavern to the period of the late 19th century. Each of the 3 floors has four rooms off a central stairway. There is a cooking fireplace on the first floor, with a built-in baking oven and hooks for hanging cooking pots

over the fire. There are fireplaces in every room on the first floor and 3 of the 2nd-floor bedrooms, but none on the 3rd floor. It's a good thing heat rises! Several of the bedrooms have old rope beds, which would come with a tool that let you tighten the ropes as they became loose. This, of course, is where we get the expression “Sleep tight.” The exterior is clad in stucco in a pebble dash design (which was also the original design of our 1895 Schoolhouse). If you are wondering how to create a pebble dash design, the answer is that you throw pebbles against the wet stucco. Just in back of the house was a raised entrance to an underground area that at first I thought might be a root cellar. In fact, a tributary of Stony Creek flows underground there and the cellar was used to store milk in the cool waters of the flowing stream. Kulp's Tavern is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The barn is of the type known as a bank barn and is just a little north of Kulp's Tavern. A bank barn is one that is accessible on two levels, either because it was built into a hill or, as is the case here because an embankment was built to give access to the upper level. The barn is filled with a variety of old farm equipment. Some of the equipment might be familiar, but most of us would need a good tour guide to identify the less obvious equipment. Of particular local interest were two large pieces of equipment (a stationary thresher and a dangerous looking silage chopper) which were built by Heebner & Sons, from Lansdale, but originally based up Skippack Pike in Worcester. The farm focused on producing hay for the Philadelphia market; all those city horses had to eat after all. The hay, the milk and lots of other farm products would travel to Philadelphia on the old Reading Railroad, usually loading at the Gwynedd Valley station.

The farm and all of the buildings on it, including Kulp's Tavern and the bank barn, were a gift to Delaware Valley College (which became a university last year) in 1993. The gift was from Edythe Roth and was also in the name of her late husband. Technically, Kulp's Tavern and the bank barn are known as The Abraham & Edythe Roth Living Farm Museum. At the time of the property donation, Edythe also funded a generous endowment. From the endowment and its proceeds, DeVal was able to restore Kulp's Tavern, maintain the properties and even hire two full-time employees for the Farm and the Museum. But nothing lasts forever, and generous endowments often fail to keep pace with inflation. This has especially been true in our current environment, in which endowment investments (usually in bonds and CDs) keep throwing off less and less income. The Farm and Museum are down to only one full-time employee, and the Museum has only been open infrequently. The new Farm Manager for all of DeVal's farms, Scott Smith, and the brand-new manager of the Roth Farm and Museum, Bryce Cannon, are aware that they need to make some changes in order to get the public support of volunteers and funds that a history museum requires. We at the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society hope to be able to assist them, and I hope that any of you interested in farm history might consider becoming a supporter.

*This is the eleventh in a series of articles about local history brought to you by the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. If there is a topic you would like to propose for a future article, please contact me at [rcbellavance67@gmail.com](mailto:rcbellavance67@gmail.com). If you enjoy these articles, you may want to consider membership in the Society. Please see our website at [wvalleyhs.org](http://wvalleyhs.org) for more information.*