

CHAPTER 2 REGIONAL SETTING

Regional Setting

An understanding of a community's regional setting is important to the comprehensive planning process insofar as it identifies the external factors that influence the character and land use patterns of that community. Regional relationships include social and economic ties as well as the provision of municipal services such as schools, transportation, water and sewer service, police and fire protection and emergency medical services. The proximity of East Pikeland Township to urban centers, major transportation corridors and public facilities and services influences, to a great degree, the nature and rate of growth and development that affects the Township. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the key regional relationships that influence East Pikeland Township and to determine the implications of these relationships for the planning of the future of the Township.

Geographic Setting

East Pikeland Township is situated at the northern boundary of Chester County along the Schuylkill River that separates Chester County from Montgomery County to the north. The Township, like all of Chester County, is in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) that includes in addition the Pennsylvania Counties of Bucks, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia and the New Jersey Counties of Burlington, Camden and Gloucester. The U.S. Bureau of the Census reported the total population for the Philadelphia MSA at 5,972,241 in 1990. Although only 35 miles northwest of Philadelphia and 37 miles northwest of Wilmington, Delaware, both major urban centers in the Mid Atlantic Region, East Pikeland Township has been more immediately influenced by local urban centers such as Phoenixville and King of Prussia.

Bordering East Pikeland Township are the Chester County Municipalities of Schuylkill Township, Charlestown Township, West Pikeland Township, West Vincent Township, East Vincent Township and the Boroughs of Phoenixville and Spring City. This entire area is characterized by the urban centers of Phoenixville and Spring City and by the suburban-rural nature of the remaining municipalities.

Figures 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate the geographical relationship of East Pikeland Township to the Southeast Pennsylvania region and its major urban centers and to the northern Chester County region, respectively.

Regional Access

The orientation of East Pikeland Township is essentially toward the Schuylkill River Valley. Although the river is no longer an important source of transportation, as had been its history, the major highway system parallels it. U.S. Route 422, which links Reading and Philadelphia, serves East Pikeland Township via PA Route 29. A four-lane limited access highway, the proposed Route 113 Phoenixville Bypass is planned to provide an improved link between East Pikeland Township and the Collegeville Interchange on U.S. Route 422. PA Route 29 also provides access to West Chester, PA Route 113 to Exton and Downingtown and PA Route 724 to all of the Schuylkill River communities in Chester County. PA Route 23 provides a linkage with Norristown and Lancaster.

The completion of the Pottstown Expressway, recent commercial and industrial development in the King of Prussia area, the planned Route 113 Phoenixville Bypass and the influences of the Philadelphia area can be expected to increase the pressure for development in East Pikeland Township. Easy access and proximity of employment and commercial activities will make the Township even more attractive as a place to reside.

Table 2.1 provides the approximate distances between East Pikeland Township and the major urban centers in the region. Within commuting distance of the Township, these centers provide employment, shopping and cultural opportunities and their proximity will continue to place growth and development pressures upon East Pikeland Township.

Table 2.1

ESTIMATED MILES FROM EAST PIKLEAND TOWNSHIP TO REGIONAL URBAN CENTERS

Urban Center	Miles
Pottstown	10
Phoenixville	3
Exton	10
Downingtown	12
West Chester	16
King of Prussia	10
Norristown	12
Philadelphia	35
Wilmington	37

SOURCE: Opens Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan, East Pikeland Township, July 1993

The availability of land and housing in the Phoenixville area and the expansion of the highway network with the construction of the Route 113 Phoenixville Bypass to U.S. Route 422 will act as a catalyst for the attraction of continued growth and development in the region. This together with the increase in employment opportunities in the U.S. Route 202 and 422 corridors will likely attract additional commercial and residential development and thereby continue the pattern of suburban development occurring in the region and East Pikeland Township as well.

Regional Development

While the populations of some of East Pikeland Township's neighboring municipalities have decreased, such as Spring City (-4%) and Phoenixville (-2%), most of the municipalities in the region have grown in population between the years 1990 and 2000. The largest increases between 1990 and 2000 occurred in West Pikeland Township (53%), Charlestown (47%), West Vincent Township (40%), and East Vincent (32%). Although these and other Townships have increased their overall share of the regional population, the Borough of Phoenixville still retains its preeminence in the area because of its overall population size and density.

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 provide a comparison of population change and density, respectively, for East Pikeland Township and the surrounding municipalities.

Table 2.2

**EAST PIKELAND TOWNSHIP POPULATION COMPARISON WITH
SURROUNDING MUNICIPALITIES**

Municipality	1990	2000	% Change 1990-2000
East Pikeland Township	5825	6551	12%
Schuylkill Township	5538	6960	26%
Charlestown Township	2754	4051	47%
West Pikeland Township	2323	3551	53%
West Vincent Township	2262	3170	40%
East Vincent Township	4161	5493	32%
Spring City Borough	3433	3305	-4%
Phoenixville Borough	15,066	14,788	-2%
Total Municipalities	41,362	47,869	

SOURCE: Chester County Planning Commission, April 2001

As can be seen from Table 2.3, the population density is highest in the urban centers of Phoenixville and Spring City and tends to diminish with increasing distance from the Boroughs.

Similar to both national and regional trends, the number of persons per household in East Pikeland Township is decreasing. This is usually the result of an aging population (empty nesters), increasing single-person households and increasing single-head-of-household families. The net result is an increasing demand for dwelling units, and concomitantly for land and infrastructure, for a given population. Between 1990 and 2000, the population of East Pikeland Township grew by 12.5%, while the number of households increased by 28.2%, as shown in Table 2.4. Not only is East Pikeland Township likely to experience population growth in the future but there will be an even greater demand for dwelling units with the decreasing household size. Given the rather large lot sizes usually associated with suburban development, the implication of increasing household formation on the resources of the region and East

Pikeland Township in particular need to be addressed through the comprehensive planning process.

Table 2.3

EAST PIKELAND TOWNSHIP POPULATION DENSITY COMPARISON WITH SURROUNDING MUNICIPALITIES 1990

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Area in Sq. Mi.</u>	<u>Persons per Sq. Mi.</u>
East Pikeland Township	8.8	744
Schuylkill Township	9.4	740
Charlestown Township	12.5	324
West Pikeland Township	9.9	359
West Vincent Township	17.4	182
East Vincent Township	13.7	401
Spring City Borough	0.8	4131
Phoenixville Borough	<u>3.7</u>	<u>3997</u>
Total Municipalities	76.2	628

SOURCE: Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan, East Pikeland Township, July 1993, and Chester County Planning Commission, April, 2001

A comparison of population and household change and household size between Chester County as a whole and East Pikeland Township is given in Table 2.4.

Household income rose substantially in Chester County and in municipalities in the East Pikeland area between 1979 and 1989. West Pikeland, West Vincent, and East Pikeland showed the greatest increase in household income and it can be expected that East Pikeland will experience some rise in affluence along with the regional, county and national trends. A more affluent population is more likely to demand more in the way of public services which can stress the resources of a community, its agricultural, open space, natural, cultural and fiscal resources. Under these conditions it becomes critical how a municipality plans for the future in terms of managing growth and development.

Table 2.4

EAST PIKELAND TOWNSHIP POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD CHANGE AND HOUSEHOLD SIZE, 1990 TO 2000

	Change	1990 to 2000	Persons / Household	
	Population	Household	1990	2000
Chester County	15.2%	18.6%	2.73	2.65
East Pikeland Township	12.5%	28.2%	2.94	2.58

SOURCE: U.S. Census, 2000

General Regional Influences

Like most municipalities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, East Pikeland Township and its residents participate in the activities of and rely on other agencies, more regional in scope, for facilities and services. How and under what conditions these facilities and services are provided can have important implications for the future planning and growth management of the Township.

East Pikeland Township residents are provided educational and recreational services by the Phoenixville Area School District. The District serves three municipalities in the Phoenixville area. The Township has also joined the Borough of Phoenixville in a joint Park and Recreation Board to provide recreational services for its residents.

Fire protection services to East Pikeland Township are provided by the Kimberton Fire Company that also serves the Townships of Schuylkill, Charlestown, West Pikeland, West Vincent and East Vincent.

East Pikeland Township also participates in the planning activities of the Federation of Northern Chester County Communities. The Federation of Northern Chester County Communities is a regional planning and coordinating agency with representation from the Townships of East Nantmeal, East Vincent, North Coventry, South Coventry, Warwick and West Vincent in addition to East Pikeland and the Borough of Spring City. The planning activities of the Northern Federation have included the development of a Regional Comprehensive Plan and adoption of a Land Use Plan, analysis of local land use policies, coordination of the French Creek Scenic River Study, and development of local

Scenic River Management Guidelines. Of particular importance, at least in some portions of East Pikeland Township, is the Northern Federation analysis of ground water resources and an assessment of methods for managing and conserving surface water resources.

Specific Regional Influences

The construction of a number of facilities have had and will continue to have significant influence on East Pikeland Township. Not the least of these is the Pottstown expressway, completed in 1985, that provides excellent access between Pottstown, King of Prussia and Philadelphia. The availability of relatively low priced land and housing in the Pottstown area and the improved accessibility has attracted new growth and development to the region.

The more recent expansion of convenience shopping malls along PA Routes 113 and 724 have created attractive suburban commercial areas that frequently serve as a catalyst for more suburban growth, both non-residential and residential. Continued commercialization in the East Pikeland area offers the potential for the economic decline of older commercial areas such as the Village of Kimberton.

Most of the recent suburban development in East Pikeland Township has occurred on valuable agricultural land and on wooded sites, both of which establish, to a great degree, the character of the Township. If this kind of development is not carefully managed, not only will the character of the Township be drastically altered but other Township resources, both natural and cultural, may be jeopardized. There is evidence of threat to biotic and water resources in the Township that could negatively impact the quality of life of Township residents and generally devalue land for future development.

Impacts upon East Pikeland Township have also been felt as a result of the Phoenixville Area School District's decision to reduce or eliminate many community recreational services. That decision and continued growth may further strain fiscal resources as many municipalities, like East Pikeland, may be forced to provide expanded recreational facilities and services for their residents.

Planning Implications

The regional interrelationships described in the foregoing suggest a number of significant planning and growth management implications for East Pikeland Township.

1. Regional Transportation – The completion of the Pottstown Expressway, U.S. Route 422 has had and will continue to have a significant impact upon East Pikeland Township. The Expressway provides East Pikeland Township rather easy access to the major employment centers in King of Prussia and Philadelphia. While the Expressway has opened more land in the region to development, for example in Montgomery and Berks Counties, and somewhat bypassed East Pikeland Township temporarily, development pressures on the Township will remain because of its attractive location within the region.

The planned Route 113 Phoenixville Bypass that would connect PA Routes 23 and 724 in East Pikeland Township with U.S. Route 422 at the Collegeville Interchange will undoubtedly attract development of all types. While the Bypass may alleviate traffic congestion on PA Route 23, east of PA Route 724, traffic will likely increase on Route 23 to the west. Location alternatives are currently under consideration. Careful attention to the land use planning and growth management strategies for this area of the Township will be necessary to insure that community character, quality of life, facilities and services, and resource protection issues are adequately addressed.

2. Regional Development – There are several major commercial and industrial developments, either existing or proposed, in the King of Prussia area and in the PA Route 100 and U.S. Route 202 corridors. All of these are within relatively easy commuting distance of East Pikeland Township and will provide significant new employment opportunities. East Pikeland's proximity to these areas portends increasing demand for residential development in the Township.
3. Regional Income Growth – East Pikeland Township and the region has witnessed a trend toward higher household income and more affluence. Generally as incomes increase there is a demand for more and better services at the municipal level. The issue of the provision of sewer and water facilities, police, fire and emergency medical services, educational facilities and services, recreational facilities and services and any other quality of life issues will need to be addressed through the planning process and the development of growth management strategies.
4. Environmental Resources – The protection and preservation of the full array of environmental resources have recently become a major quality of life issue that all levels of government are attempting to address. Resources such as air and water require measures to be taken at the federal and regional levels while other resources such as agricultural

lands, open space, historic and scenic areas require action at the county and local levels. Such resources are what make up the character of communities and contribute to the quality of life of its residents. East Pikeland Township will need to address as part of its comprehensive planning process and growth management program those resource issues impacted by growth and land development.

5. Federation of Northern Chester County Communities - As growth in the entire region of East Pikeland Township expands, many planning issues will arise that transcend the ability of individual local municipalities to address. Cooperative efforts to plan for the future, manage growth, preserve and protect resources and provide facilities and services in a fiscally responsible manner can be advanced by participation in regional planning efforts like the Federation.

Historic Perspective

Distant Origins

East Pikeland Township lies upon ancient geological formations that were part of mountain building, decay, and continental movement dating to the earliest periods of earth formation. Two ridges, aligned southwest-northeast, divide the Township and its western Vincent neighbors into three valleys, suggesting the long creases that the pressure between continental plates long ago thrust into the building of the Blue mountains to the north. The French Creek and Pickering valleys, as well as the Schuylkill, were recognized by early explorers for their valuable and sometimes rare minerals, as varied as iron ore, kaolin clay and graphite, some of which are believed to result from such processes as ancient volcanism on a spreading sea floor. In the time since the end of the last ice age approximately 12,000 years ago, the entire piedmont area in which East Pikeland lies became part of the predominately hardwood forest that until recently covered all of Pennsylvania. The legacy to the early settlers was as rich a soil as could be found, plentiful game in woods and streams, and fine building materials.

Prehistoric Native Settlement

The earliest record of prehistoric Native American habitation in East Pikeland Township has been found in archaeological sites from the Archaic period, beginning about 8,000 years ago up to about 1,000 B.C. In the later Woodland period, which lasted until the European arrival in the 17th Century, the area was

well populated by the people known as the Lenni Lenape or Delawares. Remains of their camps have been found along the French, Pickering, and Stony Run creeks and the Schuylkill river, and their hunting tools are still uncovered in the plowed land. Their long-established trails can still be found, some under modern roads: The French Creek Trail west to the Susquehanna River parallels Ridge Road/Nutt Road, and the north-south trail parallels Rte. 113 and Hares Hill Rd., coming up from the Delaware River between Chester and Wilmington, crossing the Schuylkill River in the Township to meet the Perkiomen path near Trappe. They remained living in numbers among the European settlers until moving west at the time of the French & Indian war, 1753-1763, and were only occasionally found in the area after the Revolutionary War.

European Settlement

The name of French Creek – also called the Vincent River on some records, is thought to have come from the interest of early pioneers in the area, many of whom were French. Such a Frenchman, Peter Bezallion, is said to have lived, about 1700, in a cave where French Creek empties into the Schuylkill. But it may also be an alliteration of “Friend’s Creek,” from its Quaker settlers. The Indian name, Sankanac, means “Flint River.”

By 1674, William Penn was a trustee for the Crown of “West New Jersey” – the land west of a north-south line from the northern reaches of the Delaware River to the present Egg Harbor, on the Atlantic Coast. In 1682, Penn and other Quakers purchased a land interest in East New Jersey- east of the North-South line. But Penn saw a further opportunity – and petitioned King Charles II to make payment in land for a debt owed by the Crown to his father, an Admiral in the British Navy. The land was called West New Jersey, which included the land west of the Delaware River that was to become Pennsylvania. Penn was granted a royal charter appointing Penn and his heirs “true and absolute Proprietors of a tract of land, called Pennsylvania, lying north of Maryland, south of New York”. He saw the land west of the Delaware as an opportunity for his “Holy Experiment” – a Quaker colony first called the Society of Friends of West New Jersey, a realization of his ideal to enable Quaker households to practice their discipline of familial and spiritual communities in an agrarian society.

Swedish, Finnish and Dutch settlements had existed along the rivers for several decades before William Penn formed the three original counties: Chester,

Bucks and Philadelphia. The original Quaker homesteading settlements, the Cheshire or Chester Meeting Tract, and the Welsh or Radnor Meeting Tract, were laid out between the Delaware and the Schuylkill, covering parts of present day Chester, Delaware and Montgomery Counties.

Ownership and Exploitation

The Radnor Tract then extended only as far as Gulph Mills on the Schuylkill. But the Quaker settlements soon went far beyond to land farther up the Schuylkill, including The Pikelands. However, some of these properties became the tools of speculators. Dr. Daniel Coxe, Court Physician to King Charles II and friendly with William Penn, was able to obtain a land patent, together with investors Sir Matthias Vincent and Major Robert Thompson, each having 10,000 of the 30,000 acres that make up what are today four townships – East and West Pikeland, and East and West Vincent. This was one of many pieces of land involved in a grand scheme that intended to control the fur trade in beaver skins, all the way out to Lake Erie. Together with other investors they formed the “New Mediterranean Sea Company” to pursue their elaborate trading plan.

The early death of Vincent, and both the disinterest and early death of Thompson were among many setbacks for Coxe in promoting the Company. Penn himself complicated the finalizing of the legal deed of the Company, not being in favor of the trade monopoly that it might represent, and possibly influenced by the fact that Coxe was an Anglican, not a Quaker.

For the land that would become the Pikelands, the break with the Company came with the sale of Vincent’s 10,000 acres by his surviving wife and family to a Mr. Joseph Pike, Quaker merchant, of Kilcreagh farm, County Cork, Ireland. Coxe tried to purchase both the Vincent and Thompson acreage from the estates to add to his own, but many delays drained his patience. He sold his 10,000 acres to the new West Jersey Company, and turned his speculation to the purchase of land in the “Carolana” Tract, south of Virginia.

This was just the beginning of controversy. Following William Penn’s death, his widow and sons challenged the original sale of property to Coxe, Vincent and Thompson. For nearly a century, disputes of ownership continued through the Revolutionary War, finally coming to settlement in small steps between 1786 and 1792. An array of the most respectable legal talent was employed for generations, with voluminous court proceedings and long delays filling what could be a textbook case on legal wrangling.

These troubles were in large part related to the lands of Coxe and Thompson that became East and West Vincent Townships. The Pikelands were in part spared the same fate, in part because William Penn had confirmed land title to Vincent's widow, and in 1700 the family gained the control it needed to confirm the sale to Joseph Pike that had taken place in 1692. Ironically, the land we know as the Pikelands was owned by the Vincent family; East and West Vincent were the parcels owned by Coxe and Thompson. However, the Pikelands were to undergo other tribulations.

Joseph Pike was the eldest son of an English father and an Irish mother. His father had served in Cromwell's army in Ireland with distinction, but both parents later took the Quaker faith. From agrarian family beginnings Joseph began in business at age 18 as a wool trader and later as a dry goods merchant, opening a shop in Cork. In the course of his business that took him to Holland and Flanders, he gained friendly relations with William Penn. He was a strong supporter of Quaker teachings, writing and publishing tracts. This and a friendship with a Thomas Story, another friend of Penn, led to Story becoming Pike's agent in Pennsylvania. All this also probably had an influence on Penn's confirmation of land title to the Vincent family.

With the death of Joseph Pike in 1729, having never set foot in Pennsylvania, his eldest son Richard became owner of Pike's Pennsylvania properties, which included land in Caln Township, in Bucks County and elsewhere. As agent he chose Michael Lightfoot, brother of Samuel Lightfoot the surveyor, whose Quaker family lived in Pikeland and later built the first grist mill on Pickering Creek. Richard died in 1755 and his executors, Samuel Hoare and Nathaniel Newberry of London appointed Michael Lightfoot's sons, Thomas and William, as agents. Hoare was a brother in law to Richard Pike.

Pikelanders had lived on the land for more than half a century, paying taxes assessed under "Pikeland Township." With the lingering uncertainty of deed to their land, They were all still tenants. Hoare administered the properties, pursuing collection of rents from the Pikelands tenants. After Richard's death, he moved to sell the land to the leaseholders, who formed themselves into the loosely-knit "Pikeland Company" in 1762 to negotiate with Hoare. A court battle with the Pike family contesting Richard's will continued, based on a charge of mental incapacity when it was written, but the outcome gave Hoare undisputed control, acting as owner of the properties by 1764.

Hoare offered a deal to the Pikeland Company to enable the tenants to purchase their holdings, with L 2,500 down payment and L 4,000 per year for 3 years, beginning in 1763. This was divided on the basis of property value, and 68 tenants signed for it. Apparently Lightfoot, the agent, had great difficulty

collecting. After years of frustration, Hoare replaced the Lightfoots in 1773 by Andrew Allen, attorney and member of the first Continental Congress. Hoare soon conveyed the properties to Allen for a L 16,000 mortgage.

At this point a new period of confusing and obscure history began that lasted another 30 years. Allen was a Tory. In 1776 he departed for England and much of his property was sold by the Pennsylvania Assembly. In the charged atmosphere of the war, the Pikeland papers were lost, Hoare was trying to collect his mortgage, and finally in 1786 Hoare transferred his Trust powers to Benjamin Chew, who began a new period of negotiations with the Pikeland Company. By 1792, accommodation had largely been reached, so that valid titles to Pikeland lands were finally obtained for the most diligent tenants. Others who could not or did not pay were less fortunate.

By the end of the 18th Century, the distance from a hundred years of uncertainty was sufficient to enable a new foundation for growth. In the northern Pikelands close to Phoenixville and the transportation corridors, the character of growth began to diverge from that of the Pickering Valley, which maintained a more rural character. In 1838, the differences had grown such that a division in the townships was decided- into East Pikeland and West Pikeland. Thus two Pikeland municipalities have come down to us.

Settlement and Religion

In the meantime, the Pikelands grew in every aspect of settlement life, enduring several periods of settlement and migration by various groups. For instance, many of the Germans who had settled in the Pikelands in the early 18th Century moved west to be replaced by English, Scots-Irish or new Germans, who themselves often moved on. Religious life was a touchstone for most of them.

Settlement was closely tied to religious affiliation and practice. The building of permanent churches in the Pikelands began with the "Pikeland Lutheran Congregation beyond the Schuylkill" was formed in 1743, on the influence of Henry Muhlenberg who had come to establish his church in Trappe. By 1747 a log structure was built on the high northeastern point of the Township on Rte. 724 by the joined Lutheran and Reformed congregations. The Zion Lutheran Church in stone that replaced it in 1771 was used as a hospital by Washington's army in 1777. It became known as the "Old Organ Church," because of the Tannenberg organ installed in 1791. The organ survived the complete rebuilding of the stone church in 1860, continuing a reputation as a famous instrument, for this the second oldest Lutheran congregation in the United States.

In 1758 the Pikeland Friends Meeting was built at the intersection of Rte. 113 and Hares Hill Rd, for the parishioners who earlier would travel to the Uwchlan meeting in Lionville or the Schuylkill meeting at Corner Stores on Rte. 23. The cemetery for the meeting is still maintained there, where the Meeting House stood. A later Quaker meeting was built in 1818 on land given by Emmor Kimber next to his Boarding School for Girls at the intersection of Coldstream and Hares Hill Rd., and was sold in 1876 to become the Centennial Lutheran Church at Kimberton.

On the southern border of the Township, Two early churches are still to be seen high on a hill overlooking one of the Pickering Valleys: The Upper Pikeland Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Lower Pikeland church, now the United Church of Christ. The original buildings at that location were used as hospitals during the Revolutionary War.

Mills and Industry

Business and Industry in the Pikelands was encouraged by the suitability of the waterways for water-powered mills: good year-round stream flow, and a good head could be achieved in a reasonable distance. Local Mills for the grinding of grain and the working of wood were of immediate use to the farmers and settlers. The first recorded mills in East Pikeland were on the Pickering Creek in the Merlin hamlet. The Sheimer family operated a grist mill, cider mill and an up-and-down saw mill before the Revolution, and was said to be a supplier to Washington's army.

The Royal Spring, which rises along old Kimberton Road to the south of Pughtown Road, always has had excellent year-round flow, supporting water mills for nearly two centuries. Over the years a number of mills were built near its confluence with French Creek near Seven Stars Road on Mill Lane. The first was apparently built by Peter Shunk, who also supplied flour to Washington's army. At the confluence just on the Vincent Township border, in 1790 Clement Roentgen from Germany built the Pikeland Iron Works. Beginning with a foundry and a slitting mill, he invented a method of producing round bar iron and continued to produce various iron materials for, among others, the U.S. Navy during the war of 1812. Later the site became a machine, blacksmith's and wheelwright's shop.

Peter Shunk's mill improved in later hands as Prizer's Mill, becoming by the Civil War period a large grist operation with extensive tenant houses, miller's homes, and the shops mentioned above. The mill continued in operation until 1954, and is on the National Register.

In 1796, George Chrisman also built a mill fed by the Royal Spring which still stands in the center of Kimberton village and presently serves as the Kimberton post office. It continued to operate as a mill until 1938.

On the north end of the Township, the small Stony Run creek ran to the Schuylkill River. Perhaps too small to be exploited for water power, it supported another industry prevalent before the electric ice box: the collecting of ice from ponds in winter, and storage in local Ice Houses for sale in summer. George Elliott operated such a business on Stony Run, shipping the ice via the Pennsylvania Railroad line in the late 19th Century.

Taverns and Inns

Chrisman had been the owner of the early tavern just across the street, receiving his license in 1771 for “The Sign of the Bear,” or “The Black Bear.” It was a very popular as a Stage Coach stop, being both on “the Road to Conestoga,” west to Lancaster, and the road south to Yellow Springs. The tavern continues in use today, having been store, post office, drug store, post office and many kinds of other shops more recently.

Chrisman was an entrepreneur who successfully operated in the tavern, grist milling, and later the iron working businesses, the latter which he took up after selling his Kimberton businesses, in a move to Coventryville, where he operated the Coventry Forge. The only other early tavern license in the Township was from a Samuel Bradford and later a Jeremiah Messersmith for an unnamed tavern at the ford and ferry across the Schuylkill at the northwest corner of the Township. This was the route to Trappe, an extension of Hares Hill Road to the north. But the tavern quickly gained a bad reputation, and was out of business less than a decade later. The building still stands as a residence.

The Kimberton Inn, still flourishing in the center of Kimberton at the intersection with The Sign of the Bear, Chrisman’s mill and the Boarding School for Girls, was originally built about 1820 by Emmor Kimber to receive the relatives of his young charges. Later, with the arrival of the railroad it accommodated travelers and a livestock auction.

Education

In 1817 Emmor Kimber, a Quaker teacher from the Westtown Friend’s School, bought Chrisman’s mill and the surrounding farm of several hundred acres as the first step in establishing his French Creek Seminary for Females, or French

Creek Boarding School for Girls, and later after Kimber's death in 1850, the Kimberton Academy. Thus the origin of the name of Kimberton.

Kimber was an entrepreneur as well as a teacher, soon building the reputation of his school such that the young girls of good Quaker families in Philadelphia and as far away as the West Indies were sent for instruction by himself and his daughters. The semester tuition was \$70. He constructed stone dormitories and classrooms, some of which have survived partial destruction by a developer in 1940. As mentioned above, In 1820 he built the Boarding School Inn as a place for the visiting relatives of his students to stay, who could arrive by scheduled stagecoach from Philadelphia. Later he was instrumental in wider enterprises, such as the founding of the Schuylkill Navigation Canal and the Reading Railroad. Kimber was also an active abolitionist, and his school reportedly formed a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Education for the surrounding residents was not so easily addressed. In the 18th century there was no public education structure. But the Quaker emphasis on educating their children in their own way was strong. From the start, Penn had supported education even for the poorest children, and the meetings generally put a considerable effort into the task. It meant that they were often gathered to be taught in the meeting house or an adjoining building. The Germans did likewise in their churches, in their language. Itinerant teachers, usually male, were common at the time.

There are 18th Century records of a number "academies," or "classical schools" in the area, and as near as Spring City. But nothing so organized came to East Pikeland until Emmor Kimber's school in 1817, although there is an early reference to a "French Creek School" that may not be the same.

Free, tax-funded education finally came with the Pennsylvania Free School Act in 1834.

Chester County did not easily accept this, because of its many private schools. In East Pikeland, it was not finally accepted by vote until 1842. The one-room schoolhouses that first grew from this included:

- Emery's School on Western Road, which was replaced by the Western School.
- Hartman's School, at Kimberton Road and East Seven Stars Road
- Walter's School, at Rtes. 23 and 724.
- Stony Run School, near Wall Street, Spring Hollow and Spring City Roads.

The Revolutionary War

East Pikeland was directly involved in the Revolutionary War, especially from 1775 through 1778, and most heavily during the “Philadelphia Campaign” in 1777 and 1778. It was a source of provisions for the Army from its farms, mills and cottage industries. Military importance came in 1775 with the authorization by the Committee of Safety in Philadelphia for the Continental Powder Mill, and the site chosen was at Rapps Dam on French Creek. The need for gunpowder was desperate, with almost no American powder sources and a British blockade all along the coast. The ingredients of Saltpeter (75% of gunpowder) and Sulphur were not easily available.

In the spring of 1776, a concentrated building effort of a few months produced a complete water-powered manufacturing complex along the creek, with a large stamping mill to crush the raw ingredients, a graining mill to size the powder into grains, and a row of heated drying houses to finish the process. For raw materials, the committee went so far as to arrange for the training of the farm populace throughout the colony to collect and distill saltpeter from the leavings of pigs.

The mill was able to produce up to 2 tons of finished powder per week. Late in 1776, the Committee of Safety added a gun factory for the repair and manufacture of muskets and rifles. The importance of the operation was underscored by the assignment of a company of militia to the site, one of the earliest recorded.

The mill was a key element in a system of munitions supply that involved the Warwick and Reading iron furnaces near the headwaters of French Creek, which together with other furnaces such as Hopewell produced cannon and ammunition for Washington. The British knew about all this through their network of Tory spies, and endeavored to neutralize the powder mill. In March of 1777, a portion of the powder mill suddenly exploded, killing several and halting production. The culprits were never positively identified, but several with Tory sympathies were accused. The mill was slowly brought back into operation, only to become a casualty of the British invasion from the Chesapeake Bay in 1777 that led to the Battles of the Brandywine, Germantown, and all the other events culminating in the occupation of Philadelphia and Washington’s overwintering at Valley Forge. The British began to pursue Washington up the Schuylkill Valley but got only as far as the Fountain Inn near Phoenixville. However, a Hessian scouting unit managed to get to the powder mill on French Creek in late September 1777 and destroy it. Forewarned, everything moveable from the powder mill and the gun factory had been sent to safe locations.

The prime location of the mill on the creek with its long millrace was not forgotten after the war. Some of the mill buildings were reconstructed and over the next 150 years continued to operate variously as oil, saw, grist and spoke mills

Especially during the latter part of 1777 and until summer 1778, East Pikeland was deeply engaged in the side effects of the war. Patriot casualties from the local battles and the camps at Valley Forge filled the churches, barns and any available shelter, often taking overflow from the Military Hospital at Yellow Springs. The diseases that pursued the soldiers frequently went into the population. After sporadic British plundering, the winter at Valley Forge frequently brought foraging patrols of American soldiers to the farms and the mills, and the dilemma of whether to continue selling their produce into British-occupied Philadelphia or providing it to Washington.

Transportation – Road, Canal, Railroad

Main roads in the Township were established in the first decades of the 18th century, often on Indian trails. The Nutt Road, now Route 23 or Ridge Road, was named for the early Ironmaster working in Coventry, whose iron-carrying wagons moved down to a landing on the Schuylkill below Phoenixville, where the trip could continue by water to Philadelphia. The Schuylkill Road, splitting off from the Nutt Road to head toward Pottstown and Birdsboro as Route 724, was a similar traffic route to the furnaces and forges in that direction. As mentioned above, Kimberton Road and Pughtown Road, passing by the Sign of the Bear and Kimber's school at Hares Hill Road, were popular stagecoach routes from Philadelphia that could be taken as far as Lancaster and on to York, through Marietta on the Susquehanna.

Bridges were rare. Most crossings through the middle of the 19th century were still fords. By the time of the civil war, however, French Creek had two covered bridges, one on Rapps Dam Road and the other on West Seven Stars Road – just over the line in East Vincent Township. Also, An iron bridge of unique “bow” design on Hares Hill Road. All three are still in use. Pickering Creek likewise had a covered bridge at Merlin.

Real changes in transportation took place in the Township in the 19th Century. Along the banks of the River, the Schuylkill Navigation Company built its 108-mile canal from Philadelphia up to to Port Carbon at the base of the Blue Mountains to the Northwest, branching at Reading to the Union Canal that went west to the Susquehanna River. The canal carried everything in passengers and freight, but its profitable essence was the moving of anthracite coal from the mines in upstate Pennsylvania to Philadelphia.

Lock # 57 was at the Township border with Phoenixville, and the canal followed the river into Spring City. There was little direct benefit for East Pikeland, but the surrounding economies benefited and permitted easy shipment of farm products to Philadelphia.

The canal achieved great early success, but was soon threatened within little more than a decade by the railroad, and was eventually supplanted. The development of the steam locomotive by the 1830s sparked a full transportation revolution that affected the Schuylkill Valley along its length. The Philadelphia & Reading Railroad, chartered in 1834, was operating by 1842 and directly competing with the canal. The rail line was on the other side of the river from East Pikeland, in Upper Providence, requiring a substantial bridge and tunnel project at Black Rock. Again East Pikeland had only indirect benefits from the growth of Phoenixville and Royersford/Spring City nearby, which like most towns all along the Schuylkill from the mountains down to Philadelphia prospered. East Pikeland continued until after the Civil war with little more than an agrarian economy. The canal gradually declined, more quickly after it was leased to the Reading Railroad, their competitor, in 1870. .

The Reading had always been interested in expanding its reach laterally into the countryside. Already in the 1830s, local investors and promoters began to press for a new line out of Phoenixville to reach the Pickering Valley. This was argued for decades over financing and the choice of routes. Not until the 1870s did it bear fruit: The result was the Pickering Valley Branch of the Reading, which began in the center of Phoenixville, following French Creek up to Kimberton, then over a hill into the Pickering Valley and on to the town of Byers near Eagle, a distance of 13 miles. A station at the junction of Prizer and Kimberton Roads brought the first tangible benefit of the new transportation to East Pikeland. Small developments of new houses and businesses sprang up. Direct passenger service to Philadelphia was offered, but the primary business objective was to serve the farmers along the line. In that time, this area was still the breadbasket and grocer to Philadelphia. Milk, produce and livestock were all carried aboard regular daily trains. At Kimberton, a livestock auction was instituted that brought animals on the train from farms along the line, and the post office was located in the station for a time. Decreasing traffic in the 20th century forced line abandonment in 1949.

A second rail line through the Schuylkill Valley was completed in 1884, this one by the Reading's archrival, the Pennsylvania Railroad. It was laid this time on the East Pikeland side of the river – but without a station, so it too gave no direct benefit. It paralleled the Reading line up to Reading, then took a route northeast all the way to Wilkes-Barre. It too was abandoned after World War II.

Yet another line crossed East Pikeland in 1890, the French Creek Railroad or Sow Belly line, which from a spur on the Pickering Valley line along French Creek east of Kimberton followed French Creek for 12 miles all the way out through Pughtown and Coventryville to St. Peters Village at the Falls of French Creek. The line was intended to serve the granite quarries at St. Peters, and passengers were invited to travel to revival meetings in the country. But was poorly built and apparently uneconomical. Lawsuits ensued; after a year operation ceased and the rails were torn out a few years later. The line operators had envisioned something more extensive; to become a part of the speculative "Delaware and Lancaster Railroad," imagined as a line that would cross central New Jersey from New York, coming down through Pennsylvania and west through Kimberton and the French Creek Valley to Lancaster.

Rail came in one more form to East Pikeland: in the 1890s trolleys, with a line between Phoenixville and Spring City, came past Zion Lutheran Church on Rte. 724. There the company built the Bonnie Brae Amusement Park, giving the riders a reason for the trip.

Recent History

East Pikeland Township has seen considerable change since the early part of the 20th century. The area around Kimberton saw expanded housing areas, as did the corridors near Routes 23 and 724. Only the main roads were paved, according to a 1938 map. The reason for the growth in the Township over the years has been an influx of population that has found East Pikeland Township an attractive and practical place to live. The suburbanization of the Township, as most areas, occurred as the availability of automobiles made the general population mobile. In 1940, the Township population was 976. The estimated 2000 figure is 7323, or an increase of 7½ times that of 1940. Space to house the ever-increasing population came from the conversion of lands that had traditionally been dairy or wheat farms. Although some farms remain today, the predominant land use pattern in the central portion of the Township is residential. The spread of suburban development has occurred primarily in the French Creek valley, along Cold Stream Road. Also occurring since World War II has been the development of townhouse complexes, shopping centers and industrial sites, such as the Cromby Power Station (PECO) and shopping centers along Routes 724 and 23. The closing of the remaining one and two room school houses occurred in the 1950's, in favor of the regional school system.

The Township is now governed by a Board of Supervisors, with the assistance of Commissions, such as Planning and Historic. A number of significant

municipal events have occurred in the recent history of the Township. The Township Municipal Building was erected in the 1960's and expanded to its present size in 1974. The first Zoning Ordinance was adopted by the Township in 1969. The first municipal park to be dedicated to public use, Kimberton Park, occurred in 1998. This Comprehensive Plan is the third to be adopted by the Township, the first and second occurring in 1965 and 1984, respectively.

Attributions: Material for this brief history has been taken from published documents or papers in the Chester County Historical Society and resources within the Township offices. Special thanks are given to principal sources:

- 1) Estelle Cremers - "30,000 Acres – Vincent and Pikeland Townships, 1686 to 1850"
Copyright 1989, by Estelle Cremers.

This book is the most authoritative and complete history of East Pikeland, and is suggested as a reference for the Township.

- 2) Miriam Clegg - Numerous articles written for the Phoenixville Historical Society newsletters.
- 3) S. W. Pennypacker – Phoenixville and its Vicinity, Published 1872.