

## THE SCHAFER FARMS AND SCHAFER HOMES AT PATUXENT

by Matthew C. Perry

Patuxent Research Refuge was 2,670 acres in size for over three decades following establishment in 1936. From the late 1960s to 1994, the government made numerous acquisitions and land transfers that eventually increased the size of the refuge to 12,841 acres. The first area that was added to the Refuge was a collection of farms owned primarily by the Schafer family totaling 750 acres. The farms were located on the eastern side of the Refuge starting near the junction of Jericho Park Road and the old Route #197, and progressing down to the Patuxent River. They were adjacent to the endangered species research area, which was gaining nationwide prominence due to the whooping crane propagation area.

So, who were the Schafers and what do we know of their homes? The first family immigrant to the United States was Andrew Schafer, who was born in Hesse Kassel, Germany, in 1825, and died in Baltimore in 1880. His third child, John Sylvester Schafer moved to Laurel from Baltimore and then purchased a tract of land along the Patuxent River in 1892. He and his wife, Sarah Francis Riley, had nine children, 5 sons and 4 daughters. The original Schafer homestead was located at the end of a long access road between Bowie and Laurel, approximately one-half mile down Jericho Park Road from the existing Route 197.

John and Sarah Schafer's fifth son, William Abram Schafer, lived on the homestead and was a railroad engineer and a lay minister. Reverend Schafer lived in the two-story home that his father built. There also was a newer one-story home close to the original home and also a barn, chicken coop, and other improvements on the property. Reverend Schafer was rector of the Baptist Church in Laurel, Maryland, and often decorated the church with beautiful gladioluses from the gardens on his property. His prize-winning pumpkins were regularly entered in the local county fair.

Patuxent scientists Noel and Helen Snyder lived in the William Schafer's two-story house in 1976 and 1977. Noel stated that the old home used to shake in the wind and also let in snow through cracks in the boards. Noel remembers that he and Helen had the best vegetable garden they ever had with amazing cantaloupes and corn when they lived there. He also recalled that there were red-shouldered hawks nesting in the woodlands that came up close to the house. Another biologist, Con Hillman, stayed in the house part of the time when the Snyders lived there. The Snyders left Patuxent for work in Florida in early 1978. The Snyders were followed by George and Harriet Powell, taking over the same quarters.



Front view of William Schafer two-story house.  
Photo by Noel Snyder, 1977.



Back view of William Schafer two-story house.  
Photo by Noel Snyder, 1977.



Front door of William Schafer two-story house.  
Photo by Noel Snyder, 1977.



Garden of the Snyders in the William Schafer pasture. Photo by Noel Snyder, 1977.

All these persons (Snyders, Hillman, and Powells,) who lived in the old house on the William Schafer farm in the 1970s, were friends of mine. When the Powells left Patuxent in 1979 the government destroyed the two houses. We all were saddened with the loss, especially the historic two-story house. The site was leveled and no sign exists of the old homes. Two large trees, a sycamore and a white oak, which once shaded the houses and the occupants, now are all that exist to mark the spot where the houses stood.

I lived on the Refuge from 1971 to 1979 and made numerous trips to the William Schafer Farm. I still have foxglove plants that originated from the gardens around the house. I remember walking through the two homes when they were deserted and imagined the stories that could have been told if the walls could have spoken.



The William Schafer Farm pasture with two horses grazing. Photo by Noel Snyder, 1977.

In the early 1980s, one of the animal caretakers in the Endangered Species program at Patuxent was interested in Native American artifacts and set up a small hand-made sifting operation in the pasture of the William Schafer Farm. He sifted quite a large amount of soil and recovered points and other material used by the indigenous people that lived on the farm centuries before the European settlers arrived. His collection included some interesting finds and he was proud of his collection that he maintained at his house. Unfortunately, collecting and removing archeological material from a refuge is illegal. One of the administrators of Patuxent tried to retrieve the samples, but to my knowledge was unsuccessful.

In the 1990s, I conducted a study on the William Schafer Farm testing various compost materials to see the influence that these soil amendments had on invertebrate diversity and on vegetation composition, especially warm-season grasses. Gary Sumeriski, who lived in a Patuxent house at the time, was the heavy equipment operator, who prepared the soil with various randomly selected applications of compost. The results showed that compost did not improve the amount or diversity of invertebrates or improve the amount of native warm-season grasses. In fact the compost actually increased the diversity and density of exotic plant species. To my knowledge, this study was the only official study conducted on the Schafer property by Patuxent researchers. Wood ducks nesting in artificial nest boxes are monitored annually by volunteer Frank McGilvrey in ponds at the old gravel pits along the Patuxent River.



Gary Sumeriski disking plots and Sheila Tanata spreading warm-season grass seed. Photo M. C. Perry



Controlled fire of warm-season grasses at William Schafer Farm. Photo M. C. Perry

Millard Nathaniel Schafer was the third child and second son of John Sylvester Schafer. Millard was a carpenter and builder, specializing in churches and estate restorations. He built a another home on a parcel of land north of the family homestead using timber cleared from his land and hewn into lumber at his sawmill along the Patuxent River. Millard is also credited with building the Saint James Episcopal Church (now closed) and the Bowie United Methodist Church, both located in Bowie, Maryland (now called Old Bowie).

In 1909, Millard married Maria Louisa Kuhl, and he and “Mamie” had two daughters, Frances and Ruth. When Ruth was a young child, the Millard Schafer house burned to the ground. Millard then built a one-and-one-half story bungalow in its place in 1918. This house had a basement and also a circular driveway, where Ruth enjoyed planting flowers and feeding birds. Also on the property was a two-story older house where early Schafer relatives lived. This older house was converted to a carpenter shop by Millard. Farm buildings included a two-story barn (with stalls and a hay storage area), a corn shed, equipment sheds, and a car/truck garage. An interesting highlight of the property was a natural spring. A swimming pool and

livestock watering trough was built below the spring. Ruth married Grayson Edward Lehman in 1934, and Grayson moved onto the farm and into the then improved two-story house. The Lehmans had two children in 1953 and 1954 – Gary Grayson and Jane Frances.

Grayson Lehman, a printer by trade, farmed the land. Field corn was planted and harvested to feed the small herd of white faced Herefords and later Black Angus steers. Pumpkins were planted in with the corn and picked up at corn harvest time. The steers were sold each year for meat, with the family stocking their freezer with two from the herd. Wheat was harvested and sold at market yearly and the straw used for cattle and horse bedding. Jane owned several horses over the years and spent a large amount of time riding the properties in the area. The horses enjoyed the apple orchard in the top field along the road.

Crops were rotated with grasses that were cut and baled for hay for the livestock. Chickens, pigs, dogs, feral cats, and snakes also called the farm home. Three huge gardens yielded vegetables for the table, for canning, freezing, and sale along Route 197. Deer roamed the Schafer property in the 1950-60s, from those restocked in the area from deer trapped in Western Maryland. “No Hunting No Trespassing” signs were situated throughout the property and it was not until 1995 when hunting was allowed at Patuxent due to an excessively high deer population.



Millard Schafer home with snow in 1970 on Jericho Park Road (now Route #197).  
Photo by Jane Wood.



Millard Schafer House, 1987. Photo Natl. Park Serv.



Millard Schafer Barn, 1987. Photo Natl. Park Serv.

A 10.7-acre portion of the original Millard Schafer farm located at the north end of Jericho Park Road near Cash Branch was sold to Henry Charles (Harry) Kuhl, an uncle of Maria Louisa Kuhl in the early 1900s. Harry was the local postmaster and married Lily Maude Duval, who taught school in the one-room schoolhouse on the corner. After Harry's death, Lily took over as postmistress. Harry and Lily had two daughters, Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth married Wilbur Lee Harman and had three children Manya (adopted), David, and Ann.



Millard Schafer Barn and Machinist's Shop, 1987.  
Photo Natl. Park Serv.



Millard Schafer Farm Storage Garage, 1987.  
Photo Natl. Park Serv.

The family sold the property in 1964 to Herman Mitchill, a horse trainer associated with the Bowie Race Track. When Mr. Mitchill sold the land to the Patuxent Research Refuge, the property included a large two-story white house with columns in the front built by Millard Schafer, along with a garage and horse barn. Using an arrangement with the local fire department, the house was burned to the ground as a practice exercise not long after the sale. Jane Lehman, who lived in the Millard Schafer house in the late 1960s, remembers watching this fire from her bedroom window. Elizabeth Kuhl Harman celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in November 2015 and lives with her daughter, Ann Harman Clark, in Severn, Maryland.

There once was an old schoolhouse on the property at the triangular lot formed by the intersection of Jericho Park Road and the old Route 197. When the school closed, the property was purchased by Millard Schafer and converted to a two-story rental house with basement. That house was torn down as part of Jericho Park Road improvements in the 1960s.



Laurel-Bowie Road at Cash Branch. Jericho Park Road on right. Oct 16, 1953. Photo by Fran Uhler

Another farm on Jericho Park Road south of the long lane through the woods leading to William Schafer home was owned by the third Schafer son, Jesse Andrew Schafer. His sons, Andrew and Milton Schafer, were life-long bachelors. They grew tobacco, hay, and wheat. The property included a large two-story house and tobacco curing barn. Jane and Gary Lehman accompanied their father to the farm at tobacco harvesting time. Jane remembers going to this property to cut down a Christmas tree and riding her horses through this property into the gravel pit in the back. This property also was included in the sale to increase the size of Patuxent Research Refuge. Both house and barn are now gone and the site has been restored to wooded habitat for wildlife. However, many large trees, some record size, remain on the old home site,

The families along Jericho Park Road helped each other at harvest time, sharing equipment and labor. Mamie Kuhl would call the workers in from the fields with a dinner bell located behind the house and serve a hearty meal. On hot days Ruth would pull a wagon with lemonade to the workers in the fields at mid-morning and mid-afternoon.



Old farm equipment, Millard Schafer Farm, 2016.  
Photo M. C. Perry.



Beaver Dam on Cash Branch, Millard Schafer Farm,  
2016. Photo M.C. Perry.

In the mid-1960s, the government began condemnation proceedings with the Schafers for the properties along Jericho Park Road. The farms were adjacent to the endangered species area and the government wanted the area to serve as a buffer and minimize any disturbance to the endangered birds being propagated there. The offering price was considered too low and Grayson Lehman, representing the families along Jericho Park Road, sued the government protesting the selling price. A property appraisal was completed in 1967. The 92.5 acre property was appraised for \$150,000. The lawsuit ultimately succeeded in getting the sales price increased (his sister Jane has a copy of the appraisal). Under the terms of the sale in 1970, Millard and Maria Schafer could live out their years on the property, after which it would transfer to the Refuge, which in 1956 had been renamed Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. In 1971, both Millard and Maria died of strokes at ages 88 and 89.

The Lehmans spent the next year packing personal belongings of the house and farm, where Ruth had lived her whole life. Gary and Jane both finished high school in 1972 and that summer, moved to Naples, Florida, where a Schafer relative (Russell James Schafer) was building them a house. Gary and Jane began college at the University of Miami, Florida, where Jane graduated in 1975 and Gary six months later. Some of the money from the farm sale paid for Jane and Gary's college education and the Lehman house in Naples.

Jane Lehman remembers hearing the captive whooping cranes, maintained in cages at Patuxent, from her house on the farm. She remembers the Patuxent River and Cash Branch. She also remembers riding her horse to the gravel pits on the farm that were adjacent to the Patuxent River. In 1974, beavers were sighted on the refuge for the first time in decades and shortly thereafter the gravel pits at Schafer Farm were flooded by dams created by the beavers. Jane now lives in Houston, Texas. Her brother Gary Grayson Lehman worked for Patuxent during the summers of 1968 and 1969 and now lives in Orlando, Florida.

The government used the Lehman (Millard Schafer) house as a residence for employees of Patuxent for many years. Cam and Kay Kepler lived there in 1973 to 1977 and referred to the farm as the Rising Sun Farm. They painted an impressive rising sun on a large wall in the living room to reflect the beautiful sunrise and the bountiful land they experienced there. Their garden on a slope behind the house was shared by friends of theirs. Cam remembers a large (approx. six feet) black snake that lived in the large basement and in an adjacent apple tree in the summer. The Keplers let it live there and were never bothered by rodents in the house.

The Keplers loved their home and especially the outstanding water from the spring. Cam stated the water was of such great quality that friends would often fill bottles and take them home for their own use. However, when the Keplers tried to adopt two small girls from South Korea, the state officials refused their application, because they found non-fecal bacteria in the water. When the Patuxent Director, Dr. Lucille Stickel, learned of their predicament she contracted for a new well to be constructed. The adoption application was then approved (Sylvelin in 1975 and Leilani in 1977), but the new well water was not the quality of the old well water, which continued to be used for drinking water. Both girls are healthy and fine after over 30 years and living happily in Hawaii, where their parents worked for many years as biologists.

The Schafer farm at that time was enclosed by, and separated from, the rest of Patuxent by a high cyclone fence topped by three strands of barbed wire facing "out." The Keplers built a stile about eight feet tall over the back fence so they we could walk to the crane pens in good weather, or explore the woods and ponds on the refuge. The fence was eventually removed and the chain-link boundary fence for Patuxent was extended along Jericho Park Road to include the Schafer property.

Scott Derrickson and his wife lived in the house when the Keplers left and they were followed by Glenn and Nancy Olsen as residents in 1987 and 1988. Gary and Deborah Sumeriski lived in this house between 1988 and 1996. The last person to live in the Millard Schafer house was law enforcement officer Kevin Gormley, who lived there from 2007 to 2009. Unfortunately, frozen pipes during the winter resulted in extensive water damage and the house was demolished by the government in 2010. Now only the ornamental trees remain on the property at this unique location with an interesting history.

In March 2016, I visited the old Millard Schafer property several times to see if any remnants of the last Schafer occupants remained on the land. The blooming daffodils and Bradford pear added color to the fairly drab winter scene that once was alive with human occupancy. I saw an old piece of farm equipment that looked like a seeder, and based on the steel wheels and the rusted condition I dated it to the early 1900s. The old trees on the property were some of the largest that I know of at Patuxent and included a Norway spruce, Chinese chestnut, American beech, red cedar, and a butternut. I measured the circumference of all five trees and will compare size with others at Patuxent.

When they owned the farms the extended Schafer family conducted family reunions on the original William Schafer Farm homestead. Jane Lehman remembers offering pony rides for the children with her pony, Johnny. The family still has their family reunion every year, but now it is held at the Bowie Methodist Church in Maryland. Many of the Schafer ancestors are buried at the cemetery nearby at the Perkins Chapel. Fortunately, the Schafers, Lehmans, Harmans, and others in the family have kept the memories of the old homes in their heads in spite of the loss of the physical buildings.



Barns on the Millard Schafer property in summer 1987.



Gate Hinge at Cash Branch, William Schafer Farm.



Initials in large beech tree on old Jesse Schafer Farm.



Record size white oak on the old Jesse Schafer Farm.



Old Jericho Park Road at Jesse Schafer Gate.

Several persons contributed to this article, and special thanks to Jane Lehman Wood for numerous additions to the text concerning Schafer family, buildings, and memories. Also Cam Kepler for his memories of the Schafer farm.

Dr. Matthew C. Perry  
Retired Patuxent Researcher  
1209 Church Road  
Mitchellville, MD 20721  
mperry1209@verizon.net