

## Is the Studied Structure Indeed the Former Home of William Tennent?

Prepared by Ellen S. Jarvis, Warminster Township Supervisor, 9/28/11

### THE FIRST 500 WORDS

The "Cook Report" is among the most significant documents lending credence to the notion that the house located "within rods" (*a rod is 16.5 feet*)<sup>1</sup> of the Log College Monument is in fact a home once lived in by William Tennent. Prepared in June, 1986 by Kathleen E. Cook of the Bucks County Conservancy, the report concludes that "the property owned by Henry J. FitzMaurice from 1909 until 1939 was, in fact, owned by William Tennent from 1735 until his death in 1745."<sup>2</sup>

The *Intelligencer* newspaper, in an article dated September 6, 1889, reported on the visit of then-US President Harrison to Warminster, where reportedly 15,000 to 20,000 of the Presby faithful attended "exercises" to commemorate the founding of Log College, at meeting held on "the old Tennent farm." The newspaper article cites: "The exercises were held in an open field on the old William Tennant farm, below the village of Hartsville, now the property of the Carrell family.... The former owner of the property was John Baldwin, who purchased it of the Tennent estate."<sup>3</sup> "During the last years of his life, he (Tennent) occupied these acres now around us. His residence was on this side of the York Road, and the building, in which the young men studied and resided, was just opposite on the other side, only a few rods off." Note: a rod is 16.5 feet; the Log College monument is 110 feet away from the study property (Tennent House), on the opposite side of the original Old York Road right-of-way.

The "Cook Report" includes (on pages 5 and 6) a detailed ownership lineage for Tax Parcel # 49-9-42-1 in Bucks County which includes Rev. William Tennent as having owned the property from 9/11/1735 until its transfer by the widow Katherine Tennent and son Gilbert Tennent to John Baldwin on 2/8/1746. The provenance demonstrates clear transfer of title through its final transfer to Christ's Home on 12/6/1962 from Harold W. and Marian H. Warner, reflected in Deed Book 1690 (County of Bucks), Page 49.

The "Noble Report" (July 30, 2004) concluded that its professional survey of the structure indicates that the studied home would date back to the colonial period. "The timber framing of the portion of the building that is visible on the rear façade is, in my experience, a very rare and possibly unique, method of construction in Pennsylvania and the surrounding region. While only a small portion of the frame is exposed, it appears that the upright posts are mortised and pegged into the sill place and are spaced approximately 2' plus on center." Such post and beam with stone fill is said to be a rare construction technique for this area, and as such, would qualify the studied home to be included in the National Registry of Historic Places.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Intelligencer," newspaper, September 6, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> "A Preliminary History of 'The William Tennent Property', Old York Road, Warminster Township, PA," Kathleen E. Cook, Bucks County Conservancy, June 1986, pg. 1.

<sup>3</sup> "The Intelligencer," as earlier cited.

the original inscription was covered by a more elaborate one, and upon this was written:

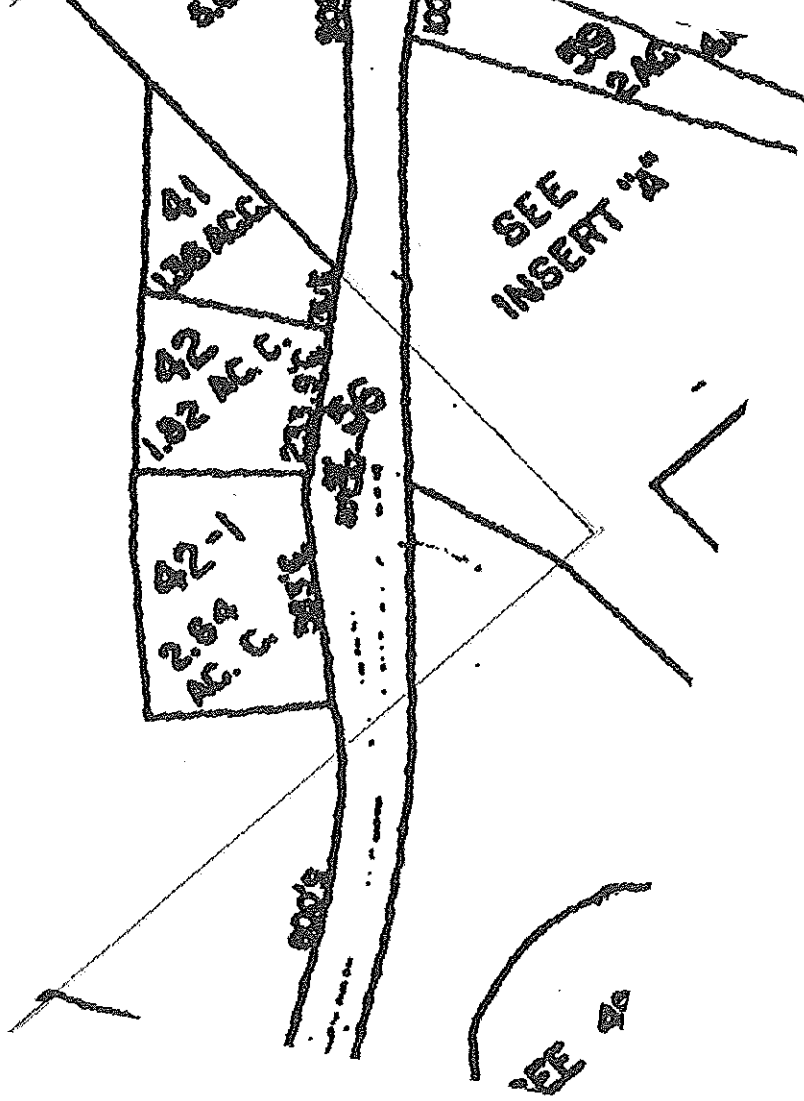
IN MEMORY OF  
 Rev. WILLIAM TENNENT SEN.  
 PASTOR OF NESHAMINY CHURCH, 1726-1742  
 AND OF DEEP RUN CHURCH 1726-1738  
 DIED MAY 6, 1746  
 AGED 73 YEARS  
 FOUNDER OF THE LOG COLLEGE  
 STRUXIT MELIUS QUAM SCIVIT  
 [He builded better than he knew.]

Search has been made for the deed of Mr. Tennent's "plantation" on York Road, where he lived and where he built the Log College. Some authorities are of the opinion that he lived here for some time before he acquired title. Some say that Mr. Tennent's house dates back to 1708. The deed was never recorded at the county seat. It was found by the writer in the library of Princeton University. Here it had been deposited in 1902 by Charles S. Richardson, Jr., who had visited Neshaminy for the purpose of getting material for an article in the *Nassau Literary Magazine*.<sup>4</sup> He secured the deed and other papers from a granddaughter of James Carroll, who acquired the property not long after the death of Mr. Tennent. The property remained in the Carroll family for many years. Ezra P. Carroll is clerk of the session of Warwick Church and has taken a leading part in arranging for the several celebrations.

The deed is on parchment. Through the assistance of Mr. Nelson L. Petty, vice-president of the Trenton Trust Company, and Mr. Edwin S. Allen, of the Secretary of State's Office, Trenton, a copy has been made, and is as follows:

THIS INDENTURE, made the eleventh day of September, in the year of Our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and thirty five, BETWEEN John White of the City of Philadelphia, merchant, of the one part, and the Reverend William Tennant of Northampton in Bucks County, clerk, of the other

<sup>4</sup> *The Nassau Literary Magazine*, vol. 58 ("A Week in the Log College Country").



## 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Neshaminy-Warwick Presbyterian Church

On the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Neshaminy-Warwick Presbyterian Church (1726 – 1976), a pamphlet was published that covered the history of the church. The Reverend William Tennent is of course covered in detail, having been the first pastor of the church. Helen Hartman Gemmill, 1918 – 1998, authored the first edition of this pamphlet.

The pamphlet includes an early pen and ink sketch from an 1889 issue of the Philadelphia newspaper "The Press" which was captioned as a "House near Hartsville in which the William Tennent, founder of the Log College, lived". Figure 6 shows this sketch. The view is from the North. The porch that is now on the front of the house is visible in the sketch. The small windows in the attic and the chimney of the living room fireplace are not shown. The North side windows had panel shutters on the first floor. The West end (on the right) is an area that now has asbestos shingles. In the sketch it had vertical siding and that portion of the house had a shed roof. The North kitchen window is also elevated from the current position.



1889 Sketch of the 'Tennent House'

## 275<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warminster Township

In 1986, the Warminster Township 275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commission published a booklet on the History of Warminster Township. It is believed that Warminster became a separate township from South Hampton in 1711. The booklet devotes almost three pages of text to William Tennent and his "Log College". The pages describe the events that took place surrounding the life of William Tennent in Warminster Township and his churches in Warwick Township. It also covers the involvement of ministers who surrounded and followed the Reverend Tennent in those churches. There is a picture of a home described as the Tennent House on page 20 of the booklet. This picture (Figure 7) is not very clear and is taken from the Southeast. The front porch and door can be seen. The roof dormer nearly stands out. Other features also do not conflict with the features of the home that we are now researching. The booklet contains a map that locates the house and the Log College Monument across the street from the Log College Apartments.

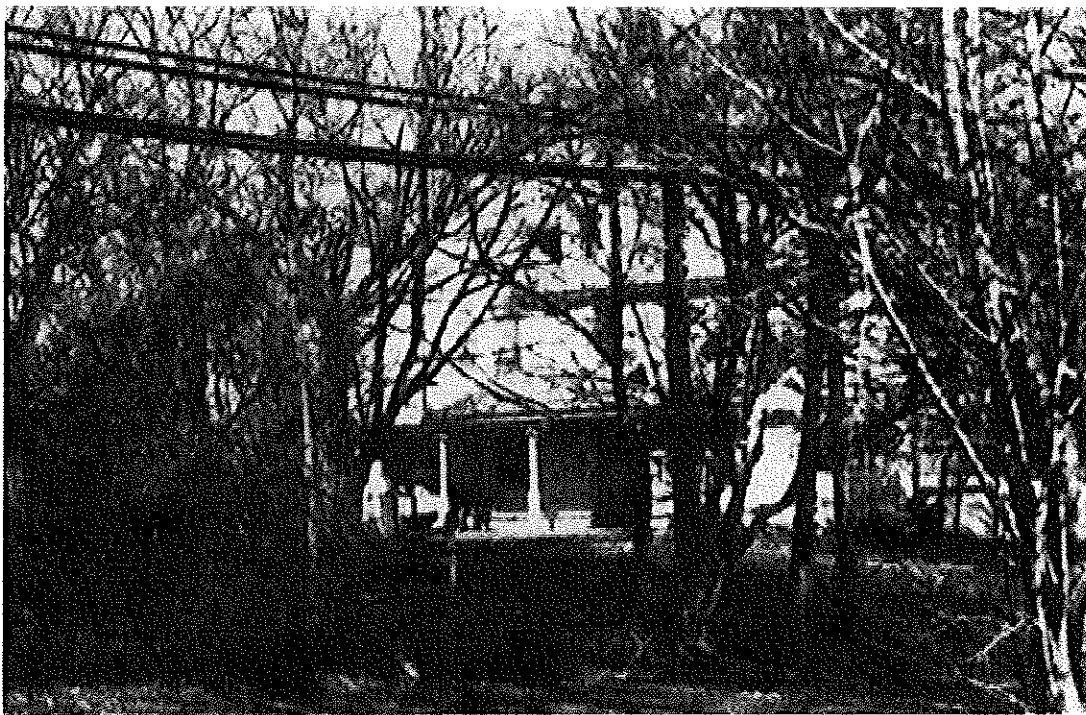


Figure 7, Tennent House From Warminster's 275<sup>th</sup>

## Letter to Jeff Marshall, June 11, 1986

Miriam Moore wrote this letter to Mr. Marshall, at the Conservancy. In it she discussed the FitzMaurice house and indicates her understanding that it was the William Tennent House. That portion of her letter follows:

"I am also writing to ask how I might obtain information on any historical research that might exist on the farmhouse owned by my grandfather. Henry Armistead Joseph FitzMaurice. The house in question is on the property of Christ's Home and was known in my grandfather's time as the William Tennent House. Before widening of Old York Road, the house sat to the left of York when traveling North and the Log College marker to the right. However, the house and marker are now located on the West side of York Road across from the Log College apartments. The dates my grandfather owned the house are approximately pre 1910 to the late 1930's." [Editor's note: Her grandfather bought the property June 9, 1909 and sold it May 26, 1939.]

## Letter to Robert Barone, September 9, 1985

Katherine Ann Auerbach, Director of Historical Programs at the Conservancy, wrote this letter to Mr. Barone. The letter was in response to a request for information by Mr. Barone. It began with some advice on how to obtain information and then gave some discussion of the Tennent Plantation. That portion of the letter follows:

"I am including with this letter a copy of an old map drawn to delineate an early path of portions of Street Road. Outlined in red is the property identified as owned by William Tennant. Adjoining property owners are also shown. I attempted to roughly outline on a present day tax parcel map the boundaries of Tennant's land so that you can see if, in fact, the house you are interested in falls on Tennant's land, or perhaps "Todd's Land". According to the Board of Assessments, Christ's Home owns both parcel 39 (52.2 acres) and parcel 42-1 (roughly 2 acres). Parcel 42-1 falls within the Tennant line, but the parcel 39 frontage on York Road lies South of Tennant's property on Todd's land.

The old map of Warminster, from 1721, is shown in Figure 9. The Tennent plantation is outlined in red.

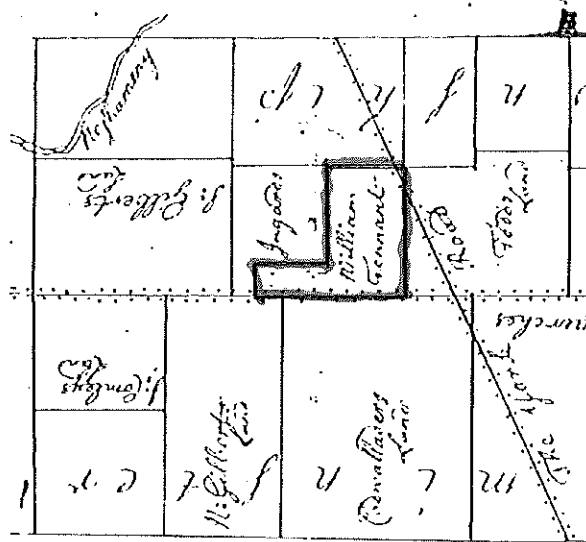


Figure 9, 1736 Map from Letter

## **“The Intelligencer” of September 6, 1889**

This issue of The Intelligencer, a Doylestown area newspaper, covered a visit of the President of the United States to Bucks and Montgomery counties to commemorate the founding of the Log College, on September 6th. The article said that between 15,000 and 20,000 attended the exercises at the Tennent farm. Reverend D. K Turner opened the exercises with a history of the Log College and its founder. The Tennent house was noted in an opening paragraph as follows:

“The exercises were held in an open field on the old William Tennant farm, below the village of Hartsville, now the property of the Carrell family. The farm is now occupied by George Carrell, his mother, and two sisters, and has been in the possession of their family for five generations. The former owner of the property was John Baldwin, who purchased it of the Tennent estate. The old Tennent house stood on the site of the house now occupied by John Gerhart above the Carrell homestead and owned by Isaiah Terry. The celebrated Log College stood on a field on the opposite side of the road, but the logs needed in its building have been removed and used in the construction of a pig sty.”

Later in the article the presentation of the Reverend included a discussion of the details of the Log College and the William Tennent house. That portion of the article follows:

“During the last years of his life he occupied these acres now around us. His residence was on this side of the York Road, and the building, in which the young men studied and resided, was just opposite on the other side, only a few rods off (a rod is 16.5 feet). [Editor’s note: The Log College monument is 110 feet away from the “Tennent house”, on the opposite side of the Old York Road right-of-way.]

The schoolhouse was of logs, about 18 by 20 feet in size, and perhaps two stories high. In it the students spent most of the day, and lodged at night with their preceptor or with families in the vicinity. Many years after his death the structure, which had become timeworn, was taken down, and a portion of the logs were used for a pigpen. The house which stands where his dwelling formerly stood may properly be spoken of as his dwelling *rebuilt*, for tradition tells us that the West end, containing a large stone chimney, is standing now, much as it was when he resided here. Within the fireplace of that chimney there was, until a few years since, a wooden crane, large and strong, on which it is commonly believed the pots and kettles hung where-in the students' dinner was boiled and their mush was cooked from corn grown on the ground under our feet. Before the logs, appropriated to the humble purpose already alluded to, were all decayed, Rev. Robert B. Belville, for a long period pastor here, had a cane made from one of them and presented it to Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D., of Princeton College.”

## **Property Transfer Records**

We have available to us a written list of property transfers of Bucks County Tax Parcel 49-09-0042-1, compiled by the Bucks County Conservancy Incorporated, for "historic purposes only". This is the parcel that is believed to be the site of the Tennent home. Per this list, the property was first listed as a messuage plantation when it was transferred in 1732.

A John White received the property in a Sheriff's sale on August 30, 1735. John White then transferred the 100-acre plantation to William Tennent September 11, 1735. William's son Gilbert and wife Catherine transferred the 100 acres to John Baldwin February 8, 1746.

The 100-acre plantation stayed intact through five property transfers until Cornelius and Joyce Carrell, on October 23, 1805, transferred only 80 acres to Isaac Carrell. Then a 9.4375-acre parcel, of the 80-acre plantation, was transferred to John Carrell on April 1, 1851. On March 29, 1869, John transferred 6 acres and 3 square feet to Samuel Garner. Mr. Garner is possibly the son-in-law of John Carrell.

This property was further reduced in size through several transfers until Harold and Marian H. Warner transferred the parcel to Christ's Home on December 6, 1962, for a sum of \$15,000. At that time the parcel was still described as a messuage (dwelling-house, associated buildings and land).

## **Notification of Sheriff's Sale 1735**

A reprint of the notification shows that the property, now known as the 100 acre messuage plantation of William Tennent in Warminster, was seized by Sheriff Timothy Smith and sold to John White for a sum of £121 to satisfy a debt of £40, 1 shilling and 11 pence that of the previous owner, Joseph Howell to John White and Abraham Taylor. Since Joseph White's heirs and executors were unable to sell the property and could not show that profit, from the property, over a period of seven years would not satisfy the debt, the property was sold at sheriff's sale. The order was through the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas.

The property was defined as follows: "ALL that Messuage Plantation and Tract of Land situate in Warminster aforesaid beginning at a Spanish Oak marked for a corner; thence North East by George Harris's Land forty-two perches to a marked Hickory; thence Southeast by the same land one hundred and eleven perches; to a post; thence Northeast still by George Harris's land one hundred and twelve perches to a post; thence Southeast seventy-three perches to a small Hickory; thence Southwest one hundred and fifty-eight perches to a small Spanish Oak; thence Northwest by the Land of John Cadwalader and Nicholas Gilbert one hundred and eighty three perches; to the place of beginning, containing One Hundred Acres. There is no description of the dwelling house that was on the plantation and though a dwelling house is included, there is no certainty that it is the "Tennent House".

## **Release of Land in 1735**

A reprint of a September 10, 1735 lease (agreement of sale) shows that John White signed it and that it leased the 100-acre plantation to Reverend William Tennent for the sum of five shillings. This document also includes a full definition of the perimeters of the land, but does not define the dwelling house or other buildings. Charles Read and John Richmond signed the document.

A reprint of a September 11, 1735 release shows that John White now had sold the property to the Reverend William Tennent for the sum of £140. This document also includes a full definition of the perimeters of the land, as before. The singular house, outhouses and buildings are not defined. A receipt for the price of £140 from the Reverend William Tennent is also included in the document. An addition to the document indicated that a deed had been delivered on November 4, 1735, and witnessed by Thomas Lawrence.

## **Release of Land in 1748**

A reprint of a May 6, 1748 lease (agreement of sale) shows that John & Elizabeth Baldwin signed it and that it leased the 100-acre plantation to James Carrell for the sum of five shillings.

The property was defined as follows: "A certain Messuage Plantation and tract of land situate in Warminster aforesaid beginning in a Road (leading to the Dutch Meeting House in Southampton) at corner formerly a Spanish Oak which is now down; extending thence Northeast forty-two perches to a marked Hickory; thence Southeast one hundred and eleven perches to a post for a corner; thence Northeast one hundred and twelve perches to a post in William Millar's line (bounded on the said three courses by land of the late Charles Inyards deceased, formerly George Harris's); thence Southeast by the said Millar's land seventy-three perches to a small Hickory for a corner; thence by land of the late Joseph Todd's, deceased, one hundred and fifty eight perches to a post in the aforesaid road; thence Northwest along the said road dividing from John Johnson's (formerly John Cadwalader's) and Nicholas Gilberts land one hundred and eighty three perches to the first mentioned corner at the place of beginning, containing one hundred Acres.

A reprint of a May 7, 1748 release shows that John & Elizabeth Baldwin now had sold the property to James Carrell for the sum of £230. This document also includes a full definition of the perimeters of the land, but does not define the dwelling house or other buildings. The deed was recorded and the receipt of £230 was documented on the same day.

the original inscription was covered by a more elaborate one, and upon this was written:

IN MEMORY OF  
 Rev. WILLIAM TENNENT SEN.  
 PASTOR OF NESHAMINY CHURCH, 1726-1742  
 AND OF DEEP RUN CHURCH 1726-1738  
 DIED MAY 6, 1746  
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<sup>42</sup> *The Nassau Literary Magazine*, vol. 68 ("A Week in the Log College Country").

James Craven's about three miles and a half southeast from the place where the church now stands, using the barn in the summer and house in the winter. Mr. Craven was Low Dutch, from Long Island, and attached to the Dutch Church subject to the Classis of Holland. Having now had the church in his house for so long a time he became a zealous member of the Presbyterian Church and his descendants and connections have formed a small but responsible branch of the church ever since.

In 1727 the foundations of a house for public worship were laid a few poles distant from the place where the church now stands; so vigorous did this society appear, even in the cradle, that this first church was an elegant stone building, forty by fifty feet, fitted for galleries, and the front of hewn stone. It was finished so that divine worship began to be stately performed in the summer of 1728. . . . William Tennent at this time lived on a farm which had been given him by his friend, James Logan, about equidistant from Neshaminy and Bensalem; but as he was advanced in years and found the supplying of two churches fourteen miles distant from each other too much for his diminishing strength, he resigned the charge at Bensalem and devoted his entire attention to the favored child of his grey hairs. Suited to this place, his generous friend Logan, accorded him a new plantation, in lieu of the former (situated on the Old York Road in Warwick Township about a mile and a quarter southeast of the church).

"What about this new plantation?" In Princeton University Library<sup>a</sup> there is a deed bearing the date of September 11, 1735, in which John White conveys to William Tennent, of Northampton Township, one hundred acres of land for one hundred forty pounds. Search was made for this deed in the records of the County Clerk at Doylestown, but the document had not been recorded. Turner traces this property all the

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<sup>a</sup>This deed is on parchment and is written in a bold hand:

" White to Tennent September 11, 1735 "	}	" Release of Land In Bucks Co."
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"This indenture made the eleventh day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and thirty-four between John

way back to the grant of William Penn,<sup>9</sup> and Mr. Ely, too,<sup>1</sup> has also examined the deeds for the same, and furthermore has made a map of the Tennent plantation, which was first published in the *Nassau Literary Magazine* of Princeton University, Vol. 58. Concerning this property several questions may be asked. Why is it that the Old York Road cuts off a small triangle on the northeast corner? Ezra P. Carroll<sup>11</sup> answers that question by calling attention to the fact that the Old York Road was not laid out until a number of years after this deed was given.

The William Tennent Parsonage stands on the west side of the Old York Road at the northern end of this property, immediately opposite this triangular section. Concerning Mr. Tennent's early residence in Neshaminy, Mr. Turner had the following to say in his address at the celebration of the Log College in 1889:

The precise spot at which Mr. Tennent resided and conducted his theological seminary the first eight years is unknown. September 11, 1735, he bought one hundred acres of land of John White, of Philadelphia. During the next ten years of his life he occupied these acres. . . . His residence was on this side of the York Road and the building in which the young men studied and recited was just opposite on the other side, only a few rods off. The schoolhouse was of logs, about eighteen by twenty feet in size, and perhaps two stories high. In it the students spent most of the day and lodged at night with their preceptor or with families in the vicinity.<sup>12</sup>

Authorities speak of the gift of Logan to Mr. Tennent, but no trace can be found in any of the records of Mr. Logan's name. The explanation of this may be that Mr. Logan gave Mr. Tennent the money for the purchase of one-half of the plantation.

Early in Mr. Tennent's activities about the Forks of the

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<sup>9</sup> Page 12, note.

<sup>10</sup> Mr. Ely has spent much time in following up the change of titles and his service has been most valuable. See map in Princeton University Library.