

The Tobacco House

While discussing tobacco during the 1857 Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, Eusebius Barnard Sr spoke against its use and those addicted to this form of intemperance saying “touch not, taste not, handle not, the unclean thing.” He cited his own 30-year use of the ‘weed’ and difficulty overcoming the evil habit. Little did he know that 20 years later his son Eusebius R Barnard Jr would make tobacco one of his most successful crops.

Eusebius Jr, like many local farmers, started growing tobacco in the late 1870s. Until then, the crop was mostly grown in the Lancaster area. Initially Eusebius planted two acres of tobacco, but with its success selling at market doubled the plot to four acres. He needed a drying barn and in 1881 hired John Underwood to build a tobacco warehouse for a cost of \$1,500.



Figure 10: Aerial photograph showing house and tobacco barn, 1965.

What makes this structure unique is not its use for tobacco, but for dances! From 1882 through 1891 there are several newspaper announcements of 'dances' and 'hops' being held at Eusebius Jr's tobacco house. These were large affairs with orchestras from Wilmington and Philadelphia playing to crowds of over 60 couples. There were even youth dances.

A Jolly Time.—On Thursday last Eusebius Barnard, of Pocopson township, had his extensive tobacco house swept and put in good condition, and in the evening had about sixty couples of young people on hand, who enjoyed themselves in dancing to music brought from Philadelphia. He will shortly give a similar entertainment to the married folks of the neighborhood.

Local News.

Evening Hop.—There was a hop last evening at Eusebius Barnard's tobacco house, Pocopson. 54 couples were present, who spent a few hours pleasantly in dancing to the dulcet strains of a Wilmington orchestra.

A Very Nice Time.—Despite the warm weather, fully sixty-five persons were present at the dancing party given by Messrs. Taylor and Darlington, in the tobacco warehouse of Eusebius Barnard, in Pocopson township, on Thursday evening. Shirley's orchestra, of Philadelphia, furnished the music for the occasion, and the many dancers enjoyed themselves hugely for several hours. Several West Chester party-going folks were in attendance. George Rush of Concordville gave an exhibition of rolling skating on some of his own make of skates.

Who would have thought that the property of Eusebius Barnard Sr, a devout Quaker, would become a community center for dancing along with tobacco production? By the early 1900s tobacco fell out of favor locally as a crop. What happened to the dances? In the early 1890s the West Chester Street Railway Company built a trolley line to Lenape and constructed their own dance hall as a destination. The need for Eusebius Jr's "tobacco dances" likely faded away. In 2021, the tobacco house/barn was torn down to make way for the new Pocopson Township building. Some of the old barn wood and stone was repurposed inside the township building.

