

The Yorks - Yost Mansion

By Bradley D. Cole

This is the short story about one of Bloomsburg's most magnificent historic homes and the family that built it. The Yorks Mansion remains on Market Street to this day. Although some know it as the Yost Mansion.

As a young boy growing up in Bloomsburg during the 1960s, I was fascinated by the big stately home at 249 Market Street. Since it is near the center of town, I passed by often. I'd look up at the tall columns, and wonder to myself, who lives there?

At some point, I was driving with my father, and we passed by the place, and I asked him who lived there. To which dad replied, Doc Yost. I remember thinking to myself, wow, he must be a *very* good doctor. And here's how a doctor came to own the grandest home inhabited in town today.

I'll start from the beginning. Frederick G. "F.G." Yorks of Bloomsburg Mills built the Mansion. F.G. bought the land in 1903, construction began on the house in 1905, and it was completed in 1906. The property has stayed within the family for one hundred seventeen years.

As a brief background, Bloomsburg Mills was founded in 1888 by Joseph Ratti. F.G., Frieda, and their two children, Milton and Elsie Yorks, came to Bloomsburg from the Paterson area of New Jersey around 1895 to join him in the company. Joseph Ratti and F.G. knew one another from the silk business in Paterson N.J. Yorks and wife Frieda followed him to Bloomsburg.

While the publication, Walk Bloomsburg, attributes the design of Georgian style architecture to architect, Verus T. Ritter, the Mansion was actually designed by Verus' older brother Meade B. Ritter. He worked as an architect out of Williamsport. When Meade died in March 1906, Verus took over work on the Yorks Mansion.

The grand 7,000-square-foot home was built a little more than ten years after the Yorks' arrival in the Town. Sadly, F.G. died in 1913 at age 54, only about seven years after the Mansion was completed. His wife, Frieda, had died the year before.

Afterward, his son, Milton, lived there until his death, also at age 54, in 1942. He also ran the Mill from the time F.G. died until his own death. Milton was single and had no children when he died.

In November of 1914, Milton's sister Elsie married William "Will" Potts Jones. Will was from a prominent Pottsville, Pennsylvania family, and involved in international banking. The couple had two daughters; first, Freda, who died in infancy, and then Patricia. Patricia was born in 1923 while the Joneses were in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

They went to Florida from Argentina and were there when the Depression hit the United States. Sometime around 1929-1930, Will, Elsie, and Patricia moved to Bloomsburg and into the Yorks

Mansion. William continued in banking and became president of the Bloomsburg Columbia Trust Company for a while.

Will and Elsie divorced, and she stayed in Bloomsburg, living in the Mansion. She became an influential woman in the Town. Elsie ran the Mill for two years during World War II after Milton died. For the War effort, Bloomsburg Mills produced silk for making parachutes. She also was a member of the Bloomsburg State College Board of Trustees from 1942 until 1957 (both her father and brother had also been Trustees).

Bloomsburg Mills had been central to the lives of the Yorks' until shortly after 1944 when majority interest was acquired by Jacques Weber. That ended local ownership in the Mill. Mr. Weber ran the business from a New York office and lived in Connecticut. He retired in 1966 and was succeeded by longtime executive James P. Marion, Jr. Mr. Marion retired in 1992. When Bloomsburg Mills closed in 2009, his son James P. Marion III was running the business. Bloomsburg Mills was a privately held major business and employer of the Town for 120 years.

Now back to Elsie, who died in 1964. Her death certificate lists Elsie's residence at the time as the smaller home on the northwest corner of the property, which is 239 Market Street. She left generous contributions to both the Library and Presbyterian Church. Both are also located nearby the Mansion on Market Street.

Elsie's daughter, Patricia, married Dr. Charles S. Yost in 1946. The Yosts moved into the Mansion—most likely after their marriage. Perhaps that is when Elsie relocated to the smaller home on the property.

Doc Yost, known as "Bud" by his friends, spent his entire lifetime in Bloomsburg, graduating from Bloomsburg High School in 1933. He was in private practice in the Town for 48 years, retiring in 1993.

Dr. and Mrs. Yost had five children who grew up in the Mansion. One of them lives there today. Both he and Patricia, after 62 years of marriage, died in 2009 and are both at eternal rest in New Rosement.

I don't know if it's true or not but, I heard that once someone mistook the Mansion for the Town Library. I can understand this mistake given the proximity of the Library to the Mansion and both being grand structures. They walked right in, and a surprised Mrs. Yost abruptly asked what they were doing in her home. The person replied that they were looking for the Library. The accidental visit was a short one.

That's the story of how the Yorks Mansion came to be known as Yost Mansion. Bloomsburg Mills is now a memory, but the grand Mansion erected by one of its founders still stands prominently on Market Street, with F.G. Yorks' descendants still in residence.



The photo of the Mansion taken by my Grandfather, Ray M. Cole, in 1955.