'Giggleswick'
If you live at "The Woodlands," you turn off Woodland Avenue beyond the Plainfield Country Club onto Giggleswick Way. As you drive up this circuitous road, passing three or four sets of buildings on the way to a circle at the top of the hill, you are impressed by the gracious entrance to this place—the beautiful old trees and well-kept grounds... the buildings that fit into the background and look as though they have always been there. You begin to wonder what it is that makes this place so different and unique. What lies back of its charm? The very name "Giggleswick" conjures up all sorts of questions. What does it mean? Where did it originate? Why Giggleswick? And then, as you walk along the paths and discover the groups of rocks that look like a miniature Stonehenge—and look at the line of oak trees leading to somewhere—you realize that someone of quality had lived here before and had created these things with imagination and loving care. When this property was developed into condominiums some ten years ago, someone else of quality had the imagination and wisdom to preserve and feature special attractions that link the past with the present.
The First Mellicks

My interest and curiosity led me to ask many questions, and, as a result, I learned lots of fascinating things about the area and the people who lived here a generation ago. One thing has led to another. For instance, I was told that the name “Giggleswick” was in connection with the Mellick family who used to own and live on this property. So, I tried to track down this rumor.

I soon discovered that there was a book (now out of print) written by and about the Mellick family. A friend had a copy she kindly loaned me. This book, Lesser Crossroads by Andrew D. Mellick, Jr.,
George P. Mellick rests, shortly after the turn of the century, along the allee of oak trees, known as the bridal path, that led to the front door of his home.

(Above) Today, the allee has been retained within the clusters of homes in Woodlands.

was originally printed in 1889 under the title *Story of an Old Farm*. The author lived between the years 1844 and 1895. Due to an accident when a young man, he became paralyzed and, consequently, inactive. He turned to writing the history of his family and the surroundings where he lived. I became especially fascinated with the story of the migration of the Moelick (the original spelling) family in 1741 from the Rhine region near Cologne, Germany, to Tewksbury Township in the Far Hills area in New Jersey. They built a stone farmhouse, ran a leather tannery, and became successful farmers and businessmen and admirable citizens. I learned that the original stone farmhouse still exists and is lived in and appreciated. There is an
The American homestead built by George Mellick's German immigrant forebears still stands in the Far Hills area of New Jersey and is identified by an historical marker (below).

historical marker to identify its importance and background. So, I ventured forth to find it. While I was taking pictures of the marker sign and the house, a young member of the family appeared and invited me inside, saying that his "Mom" would be glad to show me around. I was delighted, of course, when an attractive lady appeared from a back room and greeted me. The front hall had recently been decorated by a young man who lives in the area. A painted mural depicts the story of the old farm from the earliest days—showing the brook and tannery and buildings and neighboring landscape. It is beautifully done in soft colors and will be a visual testimony for future generations to appreciate. As much as I enjoyed the information and experiences that resulted from reading Lesser Crossroads, there was still no mention of the word "Giggleswick."
Yorkshire Roots: The Hartley Family

Then, all of a sudden I learned that Mrs. George Mellick, formerly Ella Hartley, was the one who claimed the name. Her family originated in Giggleswick, Yorkshire, England. At last the word “Giggleswick” was identified. As for the meaning of the word—another incident occurred to help explain this mystery.

While my nephew and his wife were in England recently, they stopped in Giggleswick while driving through the lovely Yorkshire countryside. A tour of the local parish church of St. Alkelda resulted in the purchase of a cookbook, which was being sold to raise money for the restoration of the old church, and a pamphlet that gave the history of the church and the village.
George and Ella Mellick pose before sailing to England in 1901. They usually purchased furniture for the Great Room during these annual trips.

In the back of the pamphlet there was a list of memorials and windows given to the church. To quote the following:

Both the East and West windows were given by members of the Hartley family, once of Catteral Hall. The East window represents the Crucifixion and the Ascension. The West is sometimes described as "The Ebbing and Flowing Well Window." The window in the choirmen’s vestry is another “Hartley” window. It represents the “Song of Simeon.”

How wonderful it was to find this information and now to be able to put it all together with the George P. Mellick who created a beautiful home and grounds on this property.

On the first page of the pamphlet was the following information:

As a centre of human habitation, the Village of Giggleswick is very ancient, so ancient that the true origin of the place name has been lost in the lists of antiquity. Several ingenious suggestions are current, of which the most probable, since it is the most matter-of-fact, is that the “Wie,” or village, was that of a former Scandinavian chieftain named “Gigel,” a name quite commonly found in early tax rolls in the North Riding.
Building of "Giggleswick"

Ella Hartley and George P. Mellick were married in 1884. They lived on 7th Street in Plainfield for ten years before moving to the large property on Woodland Avenue that they named "Giggleswick." They built a bungalow that they enjoyed for a few years before their friend John B. Benson, artist and architect, changed it to a more formal house by adding a second story to the bungalow and extending a long living room with a high ceiling and leaded windows at the end. Some people called it a ballroom. Charles Detwiller, architect, describes it as "a Great Room" with ceiling open to the roof rafters with large exposed beams. There was a little musician's gallery that hung out over the entry doorway from the small entry hall. To the left of the entry into the Great Room was a very large fireplace constructed with exposed brick and stonework from floor to ceiling and punctuated with shards of carved Roman ornaments broken from old sarcophagi. I am told that each year, on trips to England, the Mellicks would purchase some fine piece of furniture for that room. On the first floor there
Giggleswick had expanded into an imposing home by the time George Mellick died in 1925.

Furnishings for The Great Room, the most impressive feature of the house, were often bought in England.

was also a paneled den, a large dining room, and a kitchen. Up behind the stairway to the second floor was a room for the butler. There were four bedrooms and three baths on the second floor. The front door was heavily carved, and there were carved mantels over the three fireplaces as well as other carved doors, all of which must have been brought from England.
The Grounds of "Giggleswick"

Both Mellicks were enthusiastic gardeners and naturalists. Mr. Mellick created a rock garden with the help of Swiss engineers, using huge boulders dug up from the property. (This area is at the end of the terminal moraine, which accounts for their great size.) The cavities created by the relocation of these boulders formed pools that were filled with water. One could swim, after a fashion, in these pools. In one section there were caves and little docks where a toy boat could be tied. It is said that when Mr. Mellick arrived home from his daily commute to New York, he would climb the path to the top of
The novel features of Gigglewicker’s landscaping included the pools, created by moving huge boulders, and Ella Harlley Mellick’s iris garden, dominated by a 10-foot wooden mushroom.

a knoll, sit in the gazebo that he had had built there, and turn a switch to activate the waterfalls that fed the pools. What an ideal spot to enjoy the evening and cocktails after the hot train trip from New York. (He founded the Wall Street firm of Carlisle and Mellick.)

Mrs. Mellick had a peony garden and an iris garden and supervised natural plantings of wildflowers and shrubbery such as leucothoe, laurel, rhododendron, and azalea. At the top of the knoll by the gazebo there were lovely clumps of lilies of the valley and jack-in-the-pulpits growing under the trees. She had a carpenter make a wooden imitation of a mushroom, ten feet high, which was placed at some strategic spot in the iris garden. Needless to say, the Mellick estate required the attention of a capable groundskeeper. For many years that responsibility belonged to a Mr. John Kilgallon, whose position was one of coachman, caretaker, and gardener.

One of the special attractions was the allée of great oak trees that led from the front door of the house—up past the rock garden and over the hill. This was called the bridal path. It connected with matching trees to the Miller Fargo’s house. Later there were to be several other houses built beyond—for the Mellick’s son Roger and his bride, Catherine Ginna, for one. They persuaded the J. P. Stevenses (Jack and Edith) to join the community. Then there was “White Chimneys,” the residence of William H. Whitcomb, later occupied by the Robert Stevens family. All four houses are still there and occupied. The allée of trees is there, too, though the line has been broken at the ends to make way for the new development.
The Mellicks and Their Successors

The George Mellicks had three children: Hartley and Roger, the sons, and Edith, the daughter, who married Harold Belshaw. Their son, George P. Mellick Belshaw, was named for his grandfather and he spent a lot of time at “Giggleswick” as a young boy. Recently my husband and I had the privilege of visiting this “young boy,” who is now an Episcopal bishop of New Jersey and living in Princeton. We had a delightful time with him and his wife. The bishop showed me pictures of “Giggleswick” and its original owners—some of which he has generously shared by having copies made. He also showed me some of the antiques brought from England to furnish the big room—and last, but not least—the ten-foot wooden mushroom which now stands on his grounds as a reminder of happy days at “Giggleswick.”

The Mellicks were very generous to their family and to the community. When I was married in 1937 and came to live in Plainfield, I was a volunteer at the Ella Hartley Mellick Community

The wooden mushroom now stands on the grounds of her grandson’s home in Princeton, New Jersey.
Active in Plainfield affairs, Mrs. Mellick supported the community house named for her that served underprivileged children.

House, a neighborhood recreation center for underprivileged children. Ella Mellick was a charter member of the Plainfield Garden Club, founded in 1915. By the time I became a member in 1946 she was inactive, and so I did not have the pleasure of knowing her. George Mellick died in 1925, and for the next 20 years Ella lived in the house with her brother, Leonard, and her sister, Edith, both of whom died shortly before she sold the house in 1945 to the Stevens family, who owned it briefly. From "Gigleswick" she went to live with her son-in-law, daughter, and grandson in New Haven, Connecticut. She died there in 1951.

From 1945 to 1950 the house was empty, I believe. At this time the Alex Krolls were interested in converting a barn on the property. Plans were drawn up but proved too expensive. Their fifth child was on the way, and it seemed too much of an undertaking at that time to carry it out. It was suggested that they move into the big house with the provision that if they liked it they could purchase it. This they did. The Krolls are great tennis players. The big, long Great Room was turned into a badminton court. (They did not have proper household furnishings for such a room.) They spent several happy years there, and then the time came when it was advisable to move into Plainfield, where the schools were nearby. There were several occupants after that—Mr. and Mrs. Ed Rogers for five years, followed by others for a short time each. The Krolls were interested in developing the property but were prevented from doing so. They
then sold it to a realtor. The house remained empty—except for an invasion of hippies. The place was vandalized, a fire broke out, and as a result, the house was torn down.

**Creation of “The Woodlands”**

Many of the older Plainfielders whose children were grown and leaving home were tempted to sell their big houses and move into smaller and more convenient types of houses, but they could not find anything appropriate around this area and were moving elsewhere. At this point in the late 1970s, Mr. Charles Detwiller conceived the idea of building attractive cluster homes or condominium apartments on the Mellick property to fill this need. Knowing that Mr. Alden Loosli had had real estate development experience in Florida, Mr. Detwiller went to him for advice and consultation. They became interested in forming a partnership to build a “luxury complex” and formed the “Aldet Co.” The needed permission from the Town of Edison was granted, and now they were ready to go ahead with plans. A well-known architect experienced in condominium style was consulted. When he came to inspect the property, he was enthralled with the setting and so took on the job of designing the buildings. Then a contractor was engaged. Mr. Loosli was in charge of the business end, and Mr. Detwiller supervised the building. Mr. Detwiller had a special sentiment for the place. His parents had been friends of the Mellicks, and as a boy he used to swim in the pools. He concentrated on saving as many of the landmarks as possible.

In building “The Woodlands” every effort was made by both partners to carry out the highest standards in every way. Not everything went smoothly. It was a gargantuan project. There were struggles and pitfalls along the way to achieve their dream. All of that is another story in itself. But most important of all, it is due to these two men—Charles Detwiller and Alden Loosli—that we owe our appreciation and gratitude for preserving these special features that link the present with the past and give “The Woodlands” its special attraction and charm.

I am most grateful to the following people who have helped me in putting this story together.

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