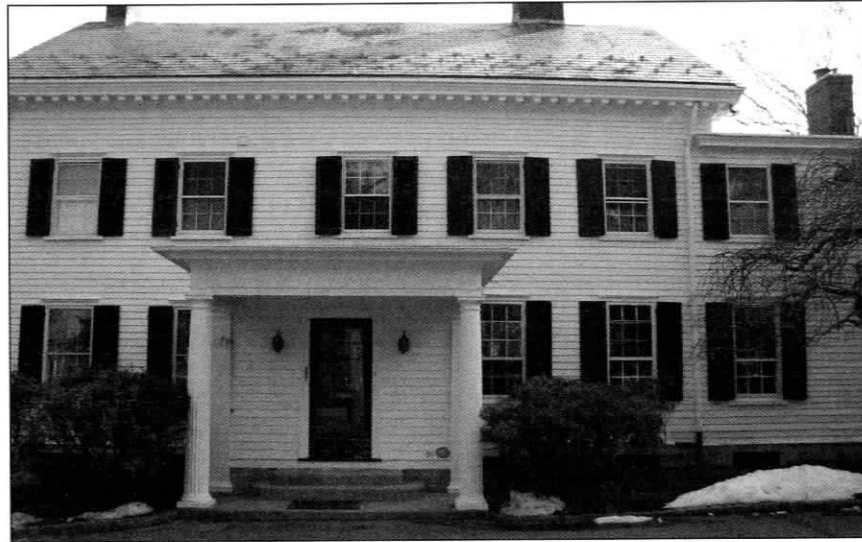


OLDEN FARM, PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY



LINDA GERACI

The front entrance of Olden Farm in 2005

The house known as Olden Farm, at 97 Olden Lane in Princeton, is the official residence of the Director of the Institute for Advanced Study. It has not always been so.

The land on which it stands was owned by Benjamin Clarke of Piscataway, who, in 1696, sold two tracts near the Stony Brook to his brothers-in-law, William Oldden and Joseph Worth. These Quaker families were original settlers of the Stony Brook area and among the earliest residents of what would become the town of Princeton. Many Olddens, Oldens, Worths, and Clarkes lie in the Stony Brook Friends Cemetery.

The original owner, William Oldden (a spelling that coexisted with, but gradually gave way to, "Olden") probably did not live on the property, but left the Stony Brook plantation to one of his sons, John Oldden. It descended through successive generations to Walter Hart Olden (1872-1935), who, while definitely not the last Olden, was the last to live in the house known as Olden Manor. Indeed, succeeding generations of Oldens have visited the house and the Institute from time to time, most recently in 1998.

The Olden family owned the property for seven generations before it came into the hands of the Institute for Advanced Study in 1936.

As much fable as fact surrounds the building we now know as Olden Farm. It has been said that there are bullet holes in the fireplace dating from the Battle of Princeton in 1777. No such holes are now visible, but it is possible that the fireplace, in an earlier existence, received fire, as the house sat well within range of the battle. Similarly, it is said that Washington removed

wounded soldiers to Olden Manor. Many homes in the area were used as field hospitals, but there is no documentary evidence that Olden Manor was one of them.

Walter Hart Olden, a member of the New Jersey House of Assembly from Mercer County, was a dedicated student of his own family's history. As it is impossible to know the exact history of the building, let Mr. Olden tell us what family lore relates. He wrote to V. Lansing Collins, historian and Secretary of Princeton University, on December 17, 1927:

"You ask about my house. Well, I am uncertain as to the exact date it was built, but know the history pretty well. It was at first a log house erected in about 1697/98, then the present location was selected a few years later and another log house built. A few years later the west end of the present house was added on the log house, then the log house taken away and the present middle section put on. A few years later an addition [was] built on to the east of the middle section. The east end was taken down in 1873 and the present rooms added in the place thereof."

"The old part of the house and the old barn were both standing during the Revolutionary war."

The house that John Oldden erected, after clearing the land, was probably not a log cabin such as we picture, but was constructed of local stone and hand-hewn timbers. Hand-hewn beams remain in the cellar of the central portion of Olden Farm, that small area that would have been the original structure adjacent to which, and above which, later additions were made.

The Princeton Township Historic Preservation Committee dates Olden Manor to c. 1720, and notes that, "The house has the appearance of a prosperous farm house incorporating a small 18th-century dwelling in its west wing."

Architectural change has been a constant at Olden Farm. The house would certainly have been enlarged as resident families increased in size, and as the Olden family fortunes flourished; remember that John Oldden was a farmer and his great-great-grandson Walter Hart Olden a state legislator.

A photograph dated April 24, 1910, has an inscription on the back (in an unknown hand) that reads, "The large or main part of the house is about 125 or 150 years old, was reenlosed with new boards and roof raised $\frac{1}{2}$ story 45 years ago."

Photographs dating to about 1900 suggest that the south entrance, facing the current Institute campus, may have served as the main entrance. This would explain the seemingly anomalous position of the interior stairway that leads from the hall to the second floor, which faces you as you enter from what is now the back door. A photograph dated 1927 suggests that the main entrance was by then in its present location.

Notable among recent alterations was the greenhouse added on to

the south side of Olden Manor by J. Robert Oppenheimer (Director, 1947-66), so that his wife, Kitty, could grow orchids. The greenhouse remained until it was removed in 1988, during the tenure of Marvin L. Goldberger (Director, 1987-91), in order to return the south façade to something like its original appearance. The current terrace was built when the greenhouse was removed.

Municipal fire engines were called to extinguish a second-floor fire in 1960, but the house sustained no permanent damage.

The kitchen was extended outward during the tenure of Phillip A. Griffiths (Director, 1991-2003). The current residents, Peter Goddard



COURTESY OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PRINCETON

Greenhouse added to the south façade by J. Robert Oppenheimer

(Director 2004-) and Helen Goddard, working with architect Jeremiah Ford, have renovated the kitchen, opened it to the terrace, and renovated parts of the second floor. They have also installed a delicate fanlight over the back (formerly front) door.

The Institute for Advanced Study's original focus at the time it purchased Olden Manor and 200 acres of surrounding land from the Olden family in 1936 was reported by the *New York Times*: "[T]he acquisition of land provides for the establishment of a campus on which would be constructed the institute's buildings for research and study." In founding Director Abraham Flexner's (Director, 1930-39) opinion, "We have neither the time nor the money to bother about the Olden Manor and the Olden Farm."

Initially, administrators were not sure what to do with the Manor. Professor Oswald Veblen noted that if the building were to house the Director, it would need servants' quarters. The ground floor, however, could be used for social gatherings, and "A radio receiver could be installed so that those who wished could listen to the Philharmonic concerts on Sunday afternoons." Flexner's "grave doubts as to the use of the Manor for social purposes"

es" were overruled. Frank Aydelotte (Director, 1939-47) was the first Director to live in the newly purchased property, and it has since housed all Directors of the Institute for Advanced Study and their families.

Known as Olden Manor for generations, the house adopted the less formal name of Olden Farm during the tenure of Dr. Harry Woolf (Director, 1976-87), and Olden Farm it remains today.



COURTESY OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PRINCETON

The south façade of Olden Manor in 1910

"I thought I'd never get used to such a big house, but now we've lived in it until it has a pleasant degree of shabbiness, and I like it very much," Oppenheimer once said. While no one could describe the house as shabby, Olden Farm does have the comfortable yet dignified appearance appropriate to a building occupied for several hundred years.

"The Director's House should become the center of an agreeable and lively social life for the Institute Community," said Carl Kaysen (Director, 1966-1976), and so it has been. It has also been witness to American history, from the earliest pioneer settlements to the Manhattan Project, and beyond. As the home of the Institute Director, it will continue to be witness to the intellectual, social, and cultural developments of our time.

Thanks to the Historical Society of Princeton; the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University; the Archives of the Institute for Advanced Study; the Princeton Public Library; Wanda Gunning, historian and head of the Princeton Regional Planning Board; Mary Spence, authority on the Olden Family; and John Mills, Curator of the Princeton Battlefield State Park.