

Initial Town sites

Early settlement of the City of Camden is interwoven with the acquisition and transfer of land. A number of families who owned land located between Newton and Cooper Creeks built homes and established residency. Out of these early settlers, the families of William Cooper, John Kaighn, and Archibald Mickle made substantial improvements and through their descendants, retained ownership of their lands for centuries. Lands belonging to these three families would later be subdivided to form a large piece of the future City of Camden.



William Cooper (1632-1710), progenitor of the Cooper family in America, was the earliest settler to effect improvements upon his land and to retain ownership through his descendants. In 1681, Cooper and his family settled on 300 acres in a wooded area near the mouth of the present Coopers Creek. Cooper named his estate Pyne Point and later established one of the earliest ferries to Philadelphia.

Jacob Cooper, Williams Cooper's great grandson, took his first step toward the development of a townsite on Cooper lands. Having acquired 100 acres of land in 1764 from his father, William Cooper (1694-1767), Jacob, in 1773, laid out 40 acres of his tract into streets and lots. He named his town after the Earl of Camden, Charles Pratt, a British friend of the American colonies.

Camden's northern boundary was an old bridle path, which Jacob named Cooper Street. The south line of the plat was located midway between Market Street and Plum Street (currently Arch Street). Streets were laid out from Cooper Street and the river eastward as follows: King (Front), Queen (Second), White Hall (Third), Cherry (Fourth), Cedar (Fifth), and Pine (Sixth). The location by this townsite in relation to modern day Camden is illustrated in Figure 6. By 1781, Jacob Cooper had sold 123 of the 167 platted lots. The remaining portion of his lands he sold to his nephew, William Cooper, son of his brother Daniel.

The next addition to the town of Camden extended further south to Federal Street. In 1893, Daniel Cooper's brother Joshua platted a tract which extended from the southerly line of his uncle Jacob Cooper's tract. Joshua laid out Plum Street (Arch Street) from the river to Sixth Street and platted a total of 53 lots on both the north and south side of Plum. This southern extension was commonly known as Cooper Village.

In 1820, extending further south, Edward Sharp, having purchased 98 acres from Joshua Cooper, laid out a portion of these lands into streets and lots and named it Camden Village. Sharp named the main thoroughfare Bridge Avenue, as he projected the construction of a bridge across the Delaware River to Windmill Island, a sandy island en route to Philadelphia which served as an obstruction to river traffic. The eastern end of the bridge was to be at the foot of Bridge Avenue, and although the bill authorizing its construction was approved by the state legislature in 1820, it was never built. Sharp's lots, located between Federal Street and a point 150 feet south of Bridge Avenue, were purchased by several people who afterwards took an active role in community affairs in Camden.

Among the purchasers of these lots were prominent figures such as Samuel Lanning, the first mayor of Camden; John D. Wessell, the owner of the ferry at Federal Street; and Reuben Ludlam, the first City treasurer.

Sharp had an impressive home built c. 1812 on 200 Cooper Street, Lot #42, in Jacob Cooper's original townsite. Gideon V. Stivers, prominent builder and mayor of Camden (1830-1838), built Sharp's house in accordance with the then popular Federal style. Edward Sharp went into debt in 1821. He lost his house, was forced to abandon his bridge plans, and his land was seized by the sheriff. During the 170-year lifespan of the Sharp house, there have been but five owners to date. One of the best local examples of the Federal style, the house has been preserved through its continuous occupation. It is presently listed on the National Registrar of Historic Places.

These three town plats, as laid out by Jacob Cooper, Joshua Cooper, and Edward Sharp formed the initial basis for the City of Camden.