Our House was a Home

When the History Center was preparing to open in 1995, a full-scale suburban house was planned for the Points in Time exhibit. I volunteered my near-pristine 1950 Cape Cod in West Mifflin for the display that would feature its brick façade and two period rooms. Museum staff came out to measure and take pictures, and for the next decade, my family would visit "our house" when touring the museum.

When we had moved there in 1988, the street was known as "pension hill"—veterans back from WWII got jobs at the Duquesne mill a couple miles away, bought houses on the breezy hilltop, and settled in for the next half century. Mail back then went through the Duquesne post office, and our house was simply #2 in the Skyline Terrace plan. (The sidewalk next door has #1 proudly embedded in what looks to be ceramic.) A couple restaurants at the hilltop became institutions: Paule's Lookout, where everyone held their special event, and Jim's Drive-In, still serving up hot dogs with their famous sauce.

Being the youngsters when we arrived, we were always the last awake by 11 p.m. By last year, the retirees had all passed on. We were now the first to bed at 11 p.m., and our house was not nearly large enough for three growing kids. We had maintained the original woodwork, stylish bathroom lights, even wooden screen doors. Though there was nothing wrong with the rock-solid kitchen cabinets, the coats of white paint marked them as a fashion disaster to homebuyers reared on HGTV. As we pulled them out, a surprise awaited—an unplanned time capsule of papers had slid down along the wall. We knew a female teacher had owned our house for decades but now we discovered the original owners: Mr. And Mrs. Edward J. Schwab. Making the connection stronger was, unbelievably, a portrait of the couple.

The complete collection, donated to the History Center archives, includes:

- Plastic chicken
- Window signs for bakers
- Note to baker
- Receipt from cleaners
- Rhea's Bakery coupon
- Bounty towels coupon
- A&P prize drawing coupon
- Letter from Rosenbaum fur storage
- Letter from Wise & Co., publisher of home improvement books
- Joseph Horne mail order receipt: $1.10 for two sealing rings for Presto cooker
- Nail file from Baltimore Life Insurance
- Pillsbury coupon from box
- Menu list that includes mincemeat pie and cucumbers & sour cream
- A sample of clear food wrap, the only artifact from the 1970s.

We've learned the woodwork we cared for is now painted, and a bucolic dining room mural has been covered too, but like any homeowner, we took with us our memories.
The plastic chicken was found among the window signs for bakers—was it a decoration or might it have been a sign too? And what did the R mean? HC LAA.