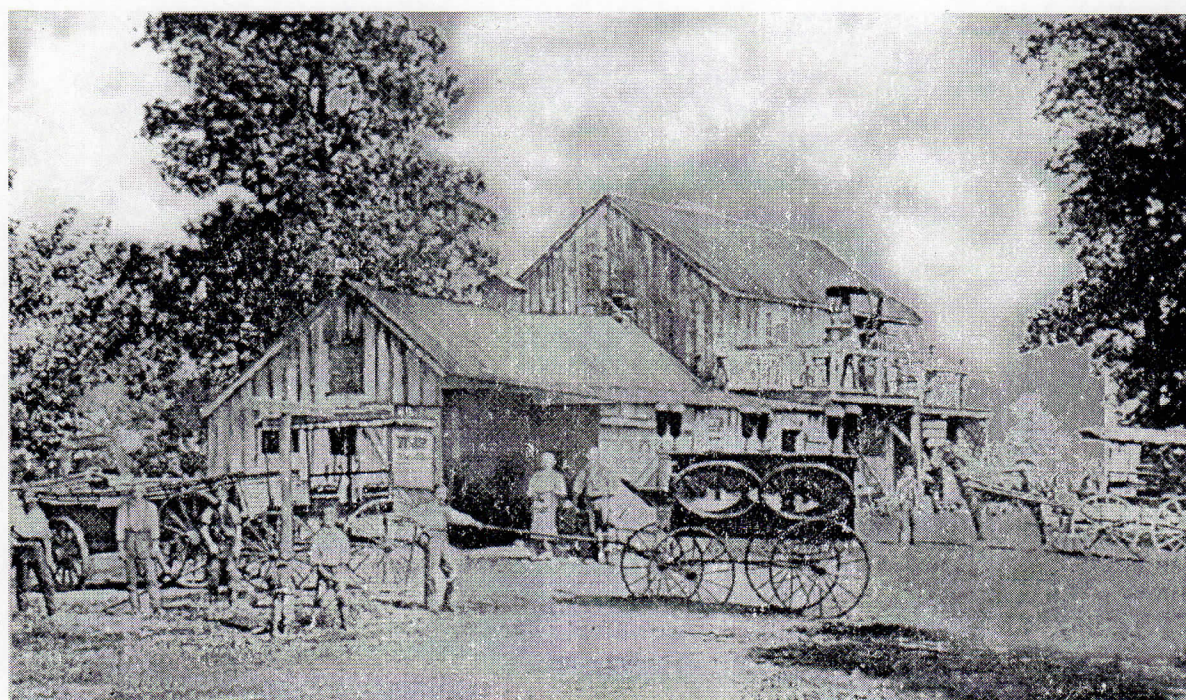


Through the Eyes of
Newt Howard
History of Ambler



The Newton Howard *History of Ambler* as published originally in the *Enterprise* Newspapers by Michael R. Fisher.

Newton (Newt) Howard has been a lifelong resident and keeper of Ambler folklore and history. For many years he operated the *Howard Camera and Art Center* on Butler Avenue in the heart of Ambler. Through his years spent dealing with the people of Ambler and the surrounding communities at Lower Gwynedd, Upper Dublin and Whitpain, Townships. He has amassed a treasure trove of fascinating history and stories. Many of these stories were originally published in the *Enterprise* newspaper. Take some time reading these wonderful stories. After you read them, you too, will be proud to associate yourself with your hometown, called Ambler.



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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF FORT WASHINGTON

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THE VILLAGE OF AMBLER 125 YEARS AGO

by

Newton M. Howard

The year was 1874, with the population of Ambler Village not yet reaching two hundred. The many water-powered mills, in and around the Village, were nearing the end of their existence, with the Industrial Revolution still years away. The North Pennsylvania Railroad, having established a line through here in 1855, named their depot "Wissahickon," with the settlement becoming known as the Village of Wissahickon. In 1869 the depot was re-named Ambler to honor Mary Ambler, heroine of the Great Train Wreck of 1856.

Many of the early homes and business places in the Village were located north of Butler Avenue between Main Street and Ridge Avenue. Jonathan Lukens, recognized as the first land developer in Ambler, had a surveyor lay out many of these streets before 1869. He had also established the Coal and Lumber Yard, selling it to Joseph Stackhouse in 1873.

Surprisingly, the Village in 1874 had neither a public school nor a church. There was a private school, Sunnyside Academy, founded in 1869 by Miss Elizabeth Knight, but most families could not afford to send their children to Sunnyside. It was necessary for the young people to travel great distances for a public school education at the old Shady Grove School on Lewis Lane, or to the Dager School on the Bethlehem Pike.

The closest churches were the Mt. Pleasant Baptist on Morris Road since 1834, the Upper Dublin Brethren or the Upper Dublin Lutheran Churches. Because none of these were within comfortable walking distance for Ambler residents, the Baptists announced in 1874 that a plot of ground at Spring Garden and Hart's Road had been purchased from David Ambler, but several years were to pass before a Chapel would be erected.

Jacob Lugar began construction of the first hotel in 1871. It was near the railroad depot. He called it the "Ambler Park Hotel", hoping to accommodate visitors to the local Fairgrounds of the Montgomery County Agricultural Society's Ambler Park.

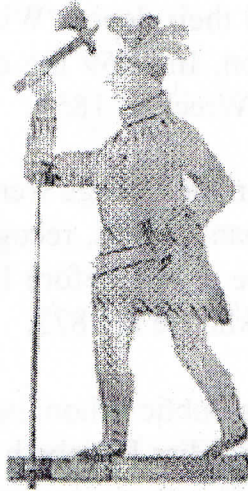
Before the hotel's completion in 1872, Jake Lugar was suddenly sold out by the Sheriff and moved back to Horsham. James Z. Wampole, next owner, likewise lost the property within a year, with A.S. Acuff becoming the new proprietor.

It was important during this period for a hotel to provide accommodations for the horses and carriages of their patrons. Ambler Park Hotel was soon advertising that sheds were available "to shelter forty horses, with ample room for any number of carriages."

On the second floor of these sheds, a large hall was built to accommodate 200 people. This was known as Yerkes Hall and was Ambler's first public hall. It was named for Davis Yerkes, who leased the entire hotel property from Acuff. It was used for lectures and gatherings of all types, with entrance to the hall from Short Street near Main.

Shortly after the Building & Loan Association moved to new quarters, a disastrous fire destroyed the 3-story frame structure on the northeast corner of Butler & Main, known as Buchanan Hall. This fire, on February 9, 1890, also destroyed the old toll gate, as well as Yerkes Hall, the stables and carriage sheds of Ambler Park Hotel. Historically, it was this fire which led to the formation of the Wissahickon Fire Company in 1891.

The Wissahickon draws its name from the region's first settlers, the Lenni-Lenape Indians. Although it's doubtful that these Indians (also known as the Delaware) ever inhabited the immediate area, it is probable that the Wissahickon was frequently used as a hunting ground and it is known that Bethlehem Pike was cut from the Minsi Path which ran from present day



Philadelphia to Kingston, New York region would be drawn to the stream itself, since the name Wissahickon means the catfish stream. An added benefit would have been the area now known as Blue Bell (formerly Pigeontown) which was known to attract passenger pigeon flocks of as many as two billion birds at one time.



William Penn

William Penn acquired title to Pennsylvania in exchange for debts which his father was owed by Charles II. He divided the property for purchase by speculators. Some, like the London butcher, Richard Whitpain, never really intended to emigrate. In Whitpain's case, his efforts to sell his 4,500 acres to others were co-opted by creditors, who seized it in satisfaction of the butcher's debts.

NORTH PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

ESTABLISHED in 1855

by

Newton M. Howard

Construction of railroads in Pennsylvania began in 1826, not long after the world's first railway opened in England. The beginnings in Pennsylvania were very crude, the first rails being made of wood with the wearing surface covered with a strip of iron. **The** first locomotives weighed only six or seven tons, with freight cars capable of carrying less than a small truck of today. Early railroads were built along waterways wherever possible, for here the land tended to be flatter, thus the necessity of expensive tunneling through rocky hills was avoided. With limited financial backing in a new venture whose future was uncertain, it was not feasible to do otherwise.

It was not until 1852 that interest was shown in construction of a line to connect Philadelphia with Easton. A request was made to the Legislature for the incorporation of a line to be known as the Philadelphia, Easton and Water Gap Railroad. This was granted in April of 1852, thus paving the way for the opening of extensive and rich agricultural and mineral markets in the Lehigh Valley to financial interests in Philadelphia. In 1853 this line became known as the North Pennsylvania Railroad and better known as the North Penn Railroad, with construction work beginning at that time. By 1855 the line from Philadelphia to Gwynedd was completed, with North Penn putting into service three locomotives built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Phila., for use on the lower part of this line, from Philadelphia to Gwynedd. Baldwin furnished additional locomotives for use on the railway's northern section.

The year is 1855, and July 2nd is an important day for the North Pennsylvania Railroad, for on this Monday, the inaugural run of the southern section of their proposed line that will eventually reach the Lehigh Valley and the River will be made. However, for now the line goes from Philadelphia only as far as Gwynedd, and for a very good reason. During construction of the line, massive rock formations were found just past Gwynedd making it impossible to go any farther without tunneling, which is already underway at the time of this historic first day running.

Aboard are almost a hundred non-paying passengers, including a number of railroad officials, city officials, and representatives of the press, many prominent citizens, a Philadelphia judge and members of the Bar.

For the occasion, the cars are decorated with flags, and all along the way crowds of people are anticipated to witness the train's arrival on this historic occasion. For most of the greeters along the way this will be their first view ever of a locomotive and its many cars..

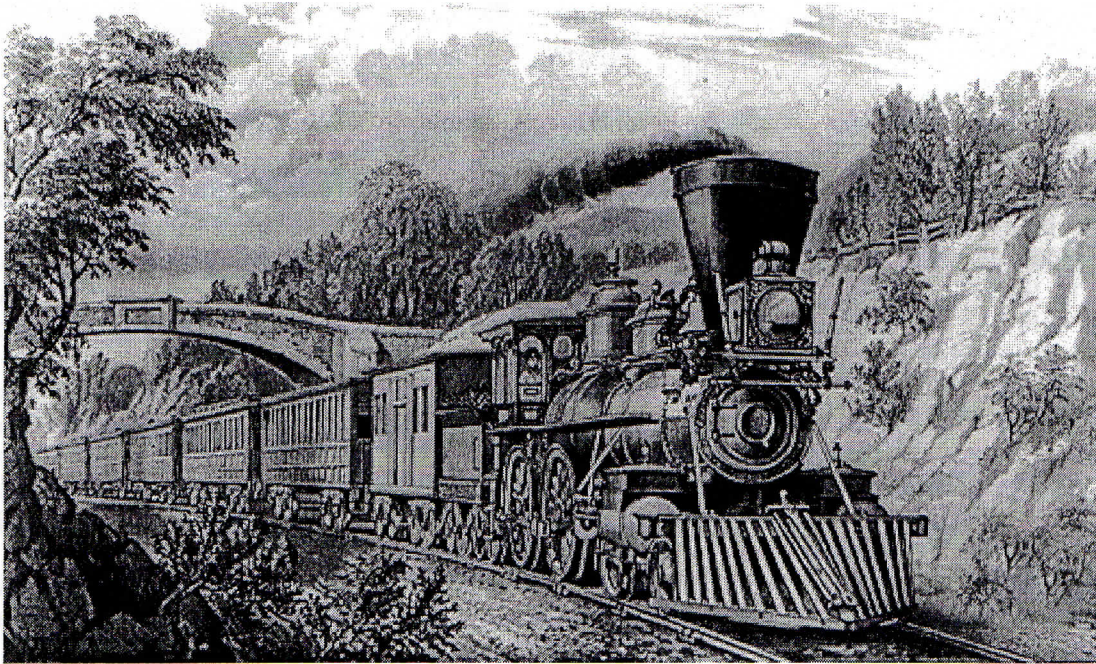
Now at 11 o'clock, with the cars loaded, they are drawn by mules to the Master Street Station. Here a waiting locomotive is attached to the trains and the journey begins, one that will take its passengers through exceedingly beautiful countryside. Spread before them will be highly cultivated, lush farms and fields. Later, the Philadelphia Inquirer is to describe passing through "majestic and park-like groves, hill and dale, and watered with sparkling brooks and streams."

After leaving the Master Street depot, the cars stop at Tioga Street, Fisher's Lane, Green Lane, Oak Lane, City Line, Old York Road, Cheltenham Hills and Tacony. They are now approaching the Edge Hill, Camp Hill and Fort Washington area.

Few if any aboard notice on passing through the rolling hills of Edge Hill, Camp Hill and Fort Washington, that there are some blind curves encountered which could very easily

cause future problems on this single-track line. Here in little more than a year's time was to occur what would be known as the "great" train wreck, the world's worst up to that time, July 17th, 1856, near Camp Hill station, later called Fellwick.

At around noon time, the cars slowly approach the new depot named Wissahickon by the Railroad. Here they stop briefly acknowledging the cheers of the crowds who have gathered from surrounding communities. Billowing black smoke from the engine had been seen earlier down track, while horse and riders had come from the new depot called Fort Washington with news the train had stopped there and was just leaving for the next stop, Wissahickon.



Many are here from the villages of Broad Axe, Gilkey's Corner, Three Tuns and Spring House, and have been waiting for hours for their first glimpse of this iron locomotive and the string of wooden cars it will be carrying behind. Few of those along the way have ever seen a locomotive, a wood cut being their only glimpse of this wonder that presages a big change in the way America will get around and something that was to make a major change in humanity throughout the country. Nearby Reiff's Grist Mill has closed down operations briefly for workers to witness this arrival at their village, only weeks ago given the name of Wissahickon.

After a very brief stopover at Wissahickon depot, the train begins slowly to proceed on its final legs of the journey to Penllyn and then the last stop of this new line, Gwynedd.

As it leaves Wissahickon, another group smaller than that at Butler Avenue crossing is waiting and cheering loudly. These are made up of workers at the Fulling Mill of Mary Johnson Ambler, most of whom are her sons several of the sons of widowed Mary Johnson were standing by the tracks in awe of this wonderful string of cars pulled by a gigantic locomotive. The boys, Joseph, 25 years old, Benjamin 24 years old, Isaac just 22 years old yesterday, Edward not yet 21, David a mere 17 years old, Lewis not quite 16, Evan 13 yrs old, and the youngest son Andrew only 13 yrs old, had wandered over to the tracks from their mother's Fulling Mill across the road. This was the first look at this invention that was gaining in popularity. Mary, unable to resist the pleas of her young sons, had agreed that the Fulling Mill could be closed for this period when the train was to pass nearby their mill. She did let them know that "Thee all will be expected to work longer hours tomorrow to make up for this frivolous wasted time today." She was not totally against this time off, for she herself was observed watching the activities from her

second floor window as the flag-draped cars crept slowly and majestically past her sons who were waving frantically to those aboard. Mary, widowed when Andrew died just five years before, had raised her eight sons alone since then and with their help was able to keep the Fulling Mill in operation.

Mary had no idea that in little more than a year a tragedy would draw her along with many others to give aid to victims of a tragic train wreck. Even more unbelievable is the fact that as a result of this incident, Wissahickon would be renamed to honor her service at the scene of a horrible wreck described as the worst in the entire world to date, on July 17, 1856, little more than a year following this inaugural run.

In a short time the train is pulling into the Penllyn depot, greeted by many more. The stop is another short one before starting on the final leg of this historic journey. At Gwynedd, the end of the line for now, dinner is being prepared at William Penn Inn, after which the long return to Philadelphia will resume. A brief stop will be made at Fort Washington where the group will explore Revolutionary Fort Hill.

The Train Arrives Tragedy Follows

by

Newton M. Howard

ARRIVAL OF THE RAILROAD Construction of railroads in Pennsylvania began in 1826, not long after the world's first railway opened in England. The beginnings in Pennsylvania were very crude, the first rails being made of wood with the wearing surface covered with a strip of iron. The first locomotives weighed only six or seven tons, with freight cars capable of carrying less than a small truck of today.

Early railroads were built along waterways where the land tended to be flatter, thus avoiding the necessity of expensive tunneling through rocky hills. With limited financial backing in a new venture whose future was uncertain, it was not feasible to do otherwise.

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By 1855 the line from Philadelphia to Gwynedd was completed, with North Penn putting into service three locomotives built by Philadelphia's Baldwin Locomotive Works for use on the lower part of this line, from Philadelphia to Gwynedd. Baldwin furnished additional locomotives for use on the railway's northern section.

The inaugural run was in 1855, with July 2nd an important day for the North Pennsylvania Railroad, for on this Monday, the inaugural run of the southern section of their proposed line to the Lehigh Valley was to be made. However, at that time the line from Philadelphia ran no farther than Gwynedd, and for a very good reason. During construction of the line, workers discovered massive rock formations just past Gwynedd, making it impossible to go farther without tunneling. This procedure was underway at the time of this historic first day running. Aboard were nearly a hundred passengers, including a number of officials of both the railroad and the city, representatives of the press, many prominent citizens, a Philadelphia judge and members of the Bar. For the occasion, the cars were decorated with flags, and all along the route crowds of people gathered to greet the train's arrival on this historic occasion. For most of these greeters along the way this would be their first view ever of a locomotive and its many cars.

Now at 11 o'clock, with the cars loaded, they were drawn by mules to the Master Street Station, where a waiting locomotive was attached to the trains and the journey begun, one that would take its passengers through exceedingly beautiful countryside. After leaving the Master Street depot the cars were to stop at the following stations: Tioga Street, Fisher's Lane, Green Lane, Oak Lane, City Line, Old York Road, Cheltenham Hills, Tacony, Edge Hill, Camp Hill, Fort Washington, Wissahickon, Penllyn and Gwynedd. Spread before them were highly cultivated, lush farms and fields. Later, the Philadelphia Inquirer's reporter was to describe passing through "majestic and park-like groves, hill and dale, and watered with sparkling brooks and streams."

Few if any of the passengers aboard noticed, on passing through the rolling hills of Edge Hill, Camp Hill and Fort Washington, that some blind curves existed which could very easily cause future problems on this single-track line. Here in

little more than a year's time would occur what would be known as the world's worst train wreck up to that time.

The company in 1855 had three locomotives in service on this Philadelphia to Gwynedd branch. They were the Aramingo, the Cohocksink and the Shackamaxon, all built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works, in Philadelphia. Of these three, two were destined to be destroyed in the Great Train Wreck on July 17, 1856, just below Fort Washington, at Camp Hill Station, in later years called Fellwick. At this time a single track existed for the entire length of the line, with sidings at strategic points along the way for passing. The lack of the safer double track was to contribute greatly to the tragic train wreck which was to happen in little more than a year's time.

The group on this inaugural trip de-trained at Gwynedd, the line's northern terminus, then known as Hoyt, where they had dinner at William Penn Inn. Returning to the cars for the journey back to the City, their next stop was made at Fort Washington where they left the cars for an inspection of the Fort Hill and Whitemarsh area. Then it was back to the City after a successful inaugural run of the brand new North Pennsylvania Railroad.

THE TRAGEDY A drama was unfolding as daybreak arrived in the Whitemarsh Valley. Trains originating at opposite ends of the North Pennsylvania Railroad, not yet a year old, would soon be involved in an event that was to go down in history as the Nation's worst train disaster. The year was 1856, and on this July 17th morning, it was already evident that the day would be another sweltering one.

A station along the line, which we know, as Ambler, was then called Wissahickon, a name given in 1855 by the railroad to identify this important stop, one that handled large quantities of dairy and farm products. Before the railroad came, this area had no name, being simply the western part of Upper Dublin township. Events of this fateful Thursday were in time to lead to the renaming of Wissahickon to Ambler. Many factors were to have important bearings on the events soon to unfold. Because the company was new, they were financially unable to have the telegraph service installed along the lines although the telegraph had been in service on many railroads for a number of years; for the same reason, they were operating with the less-safe single track, with plans for a double track years away. Heavy dew on the tracks in the early morning hours, which caused slipping, played an important part in the tragedy.

The weather had been typical of the city and suburbs, with expected high this Thursday to reach 102° before day's end. The heat and humidity had lingered through the night making the coming day difficult if not impossible. Excitement over the approaching Sunday School picnic out into the countryside near Fort Washington added to the restless sleep of hundreds of children and adults of the Sunday School of St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church, in the Kensington section of Philadelphia. This was a very large, and predominantly Irish parish, with many of its members only in America for a few years, the potato famine of Ireland having driven many of them to these shores. This would be the first time ever on a train for most of the children and adults alike. Ironically, many men of this parish had worked as laborers constructing this railroad the year before that was to take them out to Sheaff's Woods, not far from the Fort Washington Station, almost fifteen miles from the City.

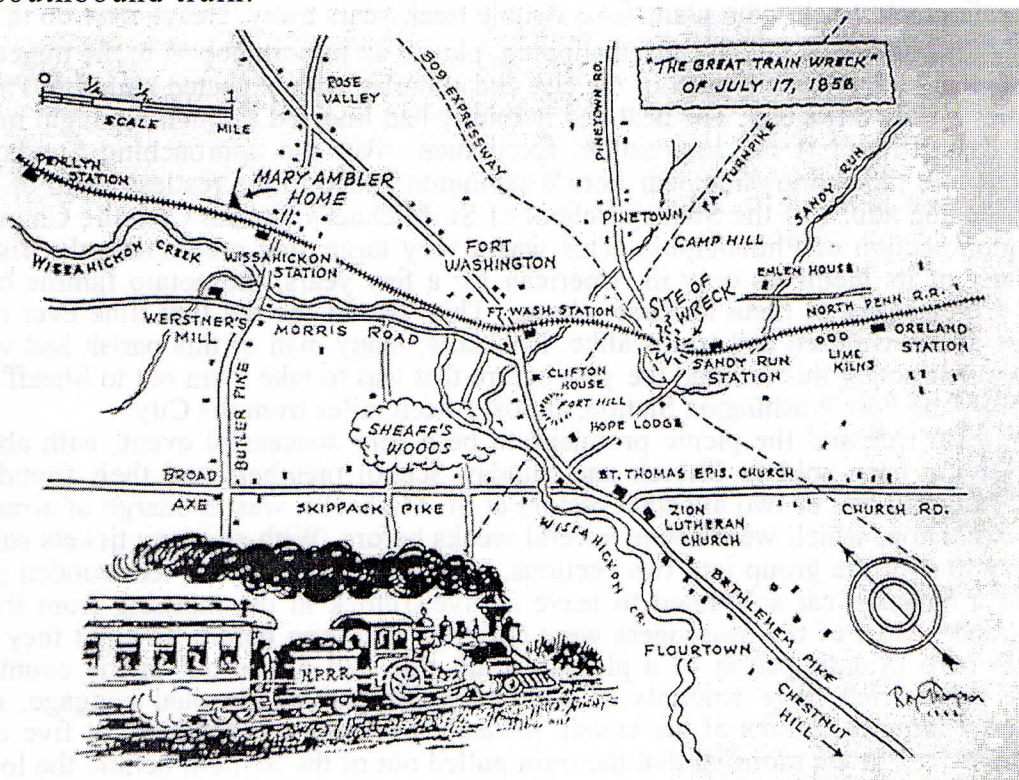
The train ride and the picnic promised to be a very successful event, with about 1400 tickets having been sold to Church and Sunday School members and their friends. Father Daniel Sheridan, one of two assistant rectors at St. Michael's, was in charge of arrangements for the excursion, which were begun several weeks before. With so many tickets sold, it was necessary to split the group into two sections, with the first section of ten wooden passenger cars and a baggage car scheduled to leave at five o'clock in the morning from the Master Street Depot. Most of the passengers were children, and long before daylight they began to assemble here in anticipation of a pleasant train ride and picnic out in the country. Their baggage car carried large amounts of equipment for games, personal baggage, and most importantly large quantities of ice cream. Instead of leaving as scheduled at five o'clock, it was almost 5:12 in the morning that the train pulled out of the Station, behind the locomotive Shackamaxon, which had been in service for less than a year. Waiting for late arrivers caused

this late departure, and would be one more factor affecting the events to follow. The conductor of the excursion train was Alfred Hoppel, who normally operated the regular southbound commuter train of three cars and a baggage car pulled by the locomotive Arming°, scheduled to leave Gwynedd at 6:00 this morning.

Hoppel, realizing they were running behind schedule, pushed forward with increased speed as they neared their destination. Meanwhile, the southbound commuter train, having left Gwynedd at six o'clock with twenty passenger aboard, arrived at Fort Washington at approximately 6:15. Railroad regulations required that they should stop at a siding just below Fort Washington Station, remaining there until the excursion train had passed. Additionally, they were required to send a man on horseback ahead of the train to flag down any train heading northward. This regulation seemed to be disregarded by the down train's conductor, 29 year old William Vanstavoran, who was making his third and final run as a conductor. He normally served as baggage master and assistant conductor. After a brief stop, the train left Fort Washington, approaching Camp Hill, now Felwick, at 6:18, proceeding at about ten miles an hour. sounding their bell continuously, when the excursion train, pulled by the Shackamaxon, came thundering around a blind curve at the rate of 35 miles an hour. A disastrous collision then occurred, of course, with appalling consequences. Vanstavoran, after returning to the city where he made his report, went to his home and committed suicide.

St. Michael's Church history reports that 53 members of the Church and Sunday School including the assistant rector, Father Daniel Sheridan, perished on that day, which was described as the country's worst train wreck to that date. Most of the casualties from the parish were in the age bracket of fourteen years to twenty years, with a smaller number of older persons. Contrary to popular belief, there were not many young children among the casualties due to the fact that the very young and their elders were assigned to the last passenger car, in order to prevent their running through the other cars. The largest number of victims were in the first three cars.

In retrospect it would appear that here was a tragic accident that most certainly could have been avoided. Most, if not all, of the blame must be placed on the southbound train.





Rendering of the Great Train Wreck

Facts from The History of North Pennsylvania Railroad

Construction of railroads in Pennsylvania began about the year 1826. A few years previous to that, England had been experimenting in this field.

The first rails were wooden with a strip of iron on the wearing surface.

First locomotives were very small, weighing only 6 or 7 tons.

First freight cars were capable of carrying less than a small truck of today.

The first railroads built in Pennsylvania took advantage of the somewhat flat landscape in the valleys and along the waterways. It was only when they found it could be a profitable venture that they began to disregard the unevenness of the countryside and build tunnels and go through hills with heavy cuts and fills.

It was not until 1852 that there was an interest in constructing transportation line connecting Philadelphia with the areas in the vicinity of the junction of the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers.

Early in 1852 the Legislature was requested to incorporate The Philadelphia, Easton and Water Gap Railroad Company. This was granted through an Act approved on April 8, 1852.

It was proposed that this railroad should be built from a point north of Vine Street in Philadelphia, to or near the Borough of Easton.

Act of incorporation gave the company authority to construct one or more bridges over the Delaware River and to connect with any railroad in New Jersey.

William B. Foster, Jr., engaged by the Commissioners to make surveys for the railroad, in particular a route by way of the valley of Sandy Run.

Report of engineer who surveyed the proposed route stated that "the country through which your road will pass is healthy, populous and very productive. It abounds in mineral and agricultural wealth; and I feel no doubt that the stock would be an

excellent one. Very few lines can equal it in local business." William 13. Foster, Jr., was succeeded by Edward Miller, as Chief Engineer.

Miller, on July 29, 1853, reported the best line which could be obtained was that which left the Wissahickon by the valley of Sandy Run, crossing the Bethlehem Pike near (later Fort Washington Hotel), 13-1/2 miles from Philadelphia.

American railroads in 1853 had at least 6 different widths or gauges of track, 4 feet, 8-1/2 inches; 4 feet 10 inches; 5 feet 4 inches; 5 feet 6 inches and 6 feet. The Edgehill cut is 3,000 feet long and has an extreme depth of 47 feet chiefly mica slate on edge. Edgehill at this place divides the waters which Delaware from those which flow into the Schuylkill.

Wissahickon Village Becomes Ambler Village

by
Newton M. Howard

It's a simple request. The citizens of our Village of Wissahickon are being asked, in the Year of Our Lord 1869, to choose a new name for both the Depot and the Village. Seems like something that could be accomplished quickly with no problems whatsoever. But that's not to be.

We've been called Wissahickon ever since 1855 when the North Pennsylvania Railroad established their line from Philadelphia to Gwynedd, calling their depot at our sleepy little community "Wissahickon." The area surrounding the depot soon became known as Wissahickon Village, though still a part of Upper Dublin Township.

And now, years later, Railroad officials realize that another station with the same name as ours exists on another of their lines. Occasional mix-ups, due to two Wissahickons, have lead to a decision to eliminate one of these, our station being the one chosen for re-naming.



Mary Johnson Ambler, the little Quaker lady for whom Wissahickon Village was re-named Ambler Village in 1869, the year following her death. She was honored for service given at the scene of the Great Train Wreck below Fort Washington station. Tuesday July 17th, 2001, marks the 145th anniversary of this 1856 tragedy. This is believed to be the only formal portrait of Mary Ambler in existence.

Photograph from Collection of Newton M. Howard

We've been invited to select a new name for the depot, and this is where the troubles begin. At least four family names have been suggested. These are the Harmer, Thomas, Reiff and Ambler families. The Thomas family has been prominent here for generations, with much of the land below Butler Avenue owned at one time by the Thomas family. Also, and perhaps more importantly, Isaac Thomas had been an early postmaster when he operated the general store on Bethlehem Pike in Upper Dublin on present-day St. Mary's property.

Another family in the running for the re-naming is the Reiff family, owners of nearly all the land west of the railroad for generations. They owned a number of grist mills, one of which stands today on Butler Avenue, although altered so much as to be unrecognizable in its role as a twin dwelling. The Reiff's followers feel the town should be named for them because of land given to the Railroad for building its first station. This however is questionable since a land deed shows a purchase of land for \$2,000 by the railroad.

Third family suggested is the Harmer family, first settlers of the land in question. They had received the land grant from William Penn way back in 1682, and it was felt their name should be considered for that reason.

Last, but not least, the Ambler family feels theirs would be an ideal choice because since about 1832 the family has owned large tracts of land, operating the local fulling mill for years. Both Mary and Andrew have since died, but four of their eight sons, Joseph, David, Isaac and Evan are prominent members of our Wissahickon Village today.

Each of the four names suggested has its merits, as well as its followers, making it impossible to agree on any one name. Very early on, though, two of the names have been eliminated, the Harmer and the Thomas families.

Now that it's narrowed down to a choice between the Reiffs or the Amblers, a very bitter argument has ensued. For months the battle has raged to such an extent that the Railroad officials have finally stepped into the hostile atmosphere to pick the new name.

Their choice is Ambler, the reason being given by the railroad is the aid given by Mary Ambler at the scene of the Great Train Wreck of July 17, 1856, where she spent the entire day working with the victims of the wreck in summer temperatures reaching 102° in the shade. Mary Ambler had died in 1868, and now, in 1869, the decision has been reached to call our old Wissahickon Village by her name.

Not everyone is happy about this name change, in fact, there are many problems as a result of the railroad's decision. After the station and the Village have been renamed Ambler, followers of the Reiff family, and even the Harmer and Thomas backers, are refusing to use the new name in addressing freight to the Village.

Rejection of the new name, "Ambler Freight Station", so irritates the railroad officials that they have told us that there will not be any freight accepted here unless addressed by its new name. We have been forced against our will to use the new name of Ambler whether or not we agree with them. Gradually we are using the new name, but not without leaving bitter feelings toward the Ambler family perhaps for years to come. Evidently, time does heal all, for today hardly anyone living has objections to the name. After all, the old name has been preserved in our Wissahickon Fire Company and the Wissahickon School District.

DOCTOR MARY - PHYSICIAN AND HISTORIAN

By
Newton M. Howard



Early portrait of Dr. Mary P. H. Hough - Courtesy of granddaughter Margaret O'Reilly

Summoned the night before at sundown by a worried father, a small lady all in black sits at the bedside of her young patient. On the table is an open black satchel, the sign of her profession, for this is Doctor Mary Hough. And now, after an all-night vigil, her three-year-old patient's fever has broken, just as the sun attempts to rise over Keasbey & Mattison's multi-storied factory buildings. A dampened cloth covers the boy's forehead. Little Domenic gives the doctor a faint smile.

A familiar figure in South Ambler's Italian community, Doctor Mary, as she is known, is exhausted, but pleased to have saved the life of Domenic, the only child of Antonio and Maria. In spite of the language barrier, she is able to show Maria how to sponge her little boy's face and bathe him in lukewarm water at regular intervals.

The year is 1901, and now, with the sun still not able to reach over the tall buildings, Doctor Mary emerges from the modest home of one of the immigrant workers to find her horse and buggy have been brought to the front of the house from blacksmith Edward Berry's stable. Assured by the doctor that their son will be well again, Antonio shows his appreciation by placing a sack of hot peppers and tomatoes on the seat beside her. This is payment for the doctor's watch through the night which resulted in breaking the fever that made him well again.

He wanted so much to give her a small bottle of his home-made dandelion wine but felt it might not be a proper gift for this little Quaker lady.

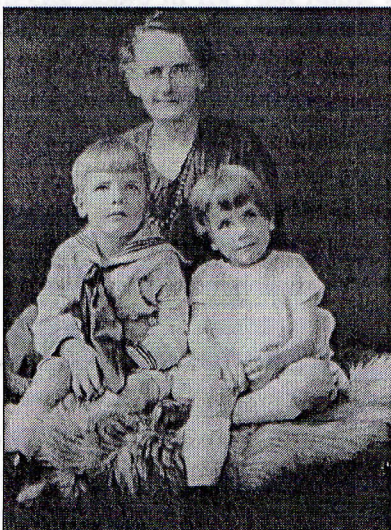
Italian men on their way to work at the plant tip their hats in respect to the little doctor in black, well-known in their community. Crossing the railroad that separates the Italian settlement from the rest of Ambler, she heads for her Butler Avenue home. Her children will be up by now, preparing for school. Fortunately, husband Dr. Charles Hough was able to be with them while she was at her patient's bedside. On those nights when both parents are called out, a nurse is available to care for the children. Driving to the carriage house behind their home, she turns over horse and buggy to stable boy Jeff Carr.

Both Mary and Charles took interest in providing medical care for the poor in Ambler, often receiving only a dollar or less. Fresh-picked produce, a dozen eggs still warm from the nest, or even a live chicken, were not unusual as payment.

Mary P. Hallowell was born in 1858 in Horsham Township, where her ancestors had settled in 1724. Here she attended the Friends' School. Graduating from Swarthmore College in 1878, she entered Women's Medical College in Philadelphia, receiving her diploma in 1881. Following graduation, she interned at Staten Island Hospital in New York for six months. Mary was one of the first female physicians in Montgomery and Bucks Counties.

Following her 1887 marriage to Charles B. Hough, the couple resided in their brand new Ambler home on Butler Avenue in "Doctors' Row". Here they practiced medicine together, raising their four children, William, Israel, Margaret and Tacy. After practicing for fifty years, Doctor Mary retired in 1931. Although continuing to see some patients after retirement, she was able to spend more time in research for her second love, an intense interest in preserving the early history of Ambler and vicinity. At first just a hobby, this developed into a strong desire to preserve all this for posterity. Largely through the efforts of Harry Hellar Kelly, publisher of the Ambler News, she was persuaded to furnish her stories in serial form in his newspaper for about a year. The popularity of these articles led to the publication in 1936 of her 54-page book "Early History of Ambler 1682-1888". This has proven to be an extremely valuable source of material concerning Ambler's early years, and the most comprehensive compilation of local early history ever written. Years of research are represented in this popular book.

In 1941, having contributed much as both physician and historian, Doctor Mary Hough became ill while vacationing at Cape May. She died soon after at the Hospital of Women's Medical College at the age of 83. Below is a photo of Dr. Mary with her twin grandchildren. The man on the right is Dr. Charles Hough, MD born in 1854 and died in 1919.



The Doctor Discovers Ambler in 1882

by
Newton M. Howard

"I discovered Ambler one day when I was walking up the Morris Road through six inches of snow. It was on a Sunday early in February, 1882." It was the words spoken by Dr. Richard Mattison in 1933 when he was called by the State of Pennsylvania to testify in a suit brought against him and his firm, Keasby & Mattison Company. He was at the time eighty-two years old and was asked to explain why taxes had not been paid on the companies rental homes.

During the cross-examination he continued the description of his first visit to Ambler, and this is more of his court testimony: I had been getting limestone samples at a quarry in Whitemarsh which our company later bought. My



Portrait of Richard V. Mattison, M.D.
Courtesy of Helen Mattison

pockets were full of specimens as I travelled about three miles to Ambler, and this is the first time I ever saw the town. I walked over to the train depot and waited for a train, in the meantime surveying the vicinity of the station. I saw a level piece of ground adjacent to the station which struck me as a very good place to start a factory. I later found the owner of the property, and his price for the same seemed to be reasonable and therefore I purchased the property from him."

But there's more to this story than was given in Mattison's court testimony. That Sunday in February of 1882 marked a milestone in the history of the Keasby & Mattison Company, begun in 1873 when Henry G. Keasby and Richard V. Mattison were students at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. They became friends and formed a partnership to manufacture pharmaceuticals. Capital for this venture came from Keasby, heir to the fortune of a New Jersey family, in the insulation business for several generations.

The new business was a success from the start, with the partners developing an extensive line of pharmaceuticals, the most popular being "Bromo Caffeine", available at most every pharmacy in the United States as well as in the major cities of Europe. And now, in 1882, they were considering moving from the city, for several reasons, primarily to find a purer water source closer to a railroad.

Recently they had added a department for manufacturing magnesia insulating products, with the future looking very promising. However, the source of raw material, a form of limestone known as dolomite, was not close-by. Mattison had been told of a quarry in Whitemarsh reputed to contain an almost endless supply.

With this in mind, he planned to visit the quarry and the nearby town of Ambler. Though it had snowed the night before, he began his walk early on Sunday morning from his Philadelphia home through Fairmount Park and up the Bethlehem Pike to the limestone quarry. It was a part of the Wentz estate, known as Hope Lodge. Mattison enjoyed walking and was in good condition for a man of 30 years.

Going down into the quarry, he chipped off several rock samples, putting them into his overcoat pockets. Heading up the pike, he reached Fort Washington. Then he traveled up the Morris Road, parallel by the Wissahickon Creek, noticing that its waters appeared to be extremely pure and free-flowing, much more so than those of the Schuylkill.

Reaching Butler Pike he noticed at the intersection an old Grist mill no longer in operation, learning later that it was now called the Plumly Mill, and was on the site of the original Harmer mill. On his way to the train depot, he crossed the Wissahickon Creek on what appeared to be an ancient three-arch stone bridge. He was told that this single-lane bridge was so old that no one knew when it had been constructed. The Doctor was advised to avoid falling through the holes in the bridge's roadway.

Arriving at the depot with some time to spare, he explored the town of Ambler, especially the area around the railroad, which he found was for sale by the owners, the Reiff family. The price being asked was very reasonable and he agreed to purchase two acres with the land being conveyed in March of 1882.

And that is how Dr. Mattison found Ambler in February of 1882. This marked the beginning of the largest manufacturing company ever to locate in Ambler. Keasby & Mattison Company went on to become the world's largest producer of magnesia and asbestos products, leaving behind their huge piles as a constant reminder they had been here.

The Doctor's "Wrap-Around" Castle

By
Newton M. Howard

Ambler was experiencing a mild building boom in 1912, with a number of commercial and residential structures under way. Two churches, Ambler Methodist on Lindenwold Avenue and St. John's Lutheran on Ridge Avenue, were begun that year.

News concerning construction of both churches appeared frequently on the front page of area newspapers. However, news about a most unique building project never seemed to make it to the front page of the Ambler Gazette, being instead relegated to the "Town Topics" columns inside the newspaper.

This "unusual" project of course was Dr. Richard V. Mattison's Lindenwold Castle, home today to St. Mary's Villa. Unusual was the fact that it was being built around his existing Victorian mansion of 1890, and that the home remained occupied during much of this period of construction.

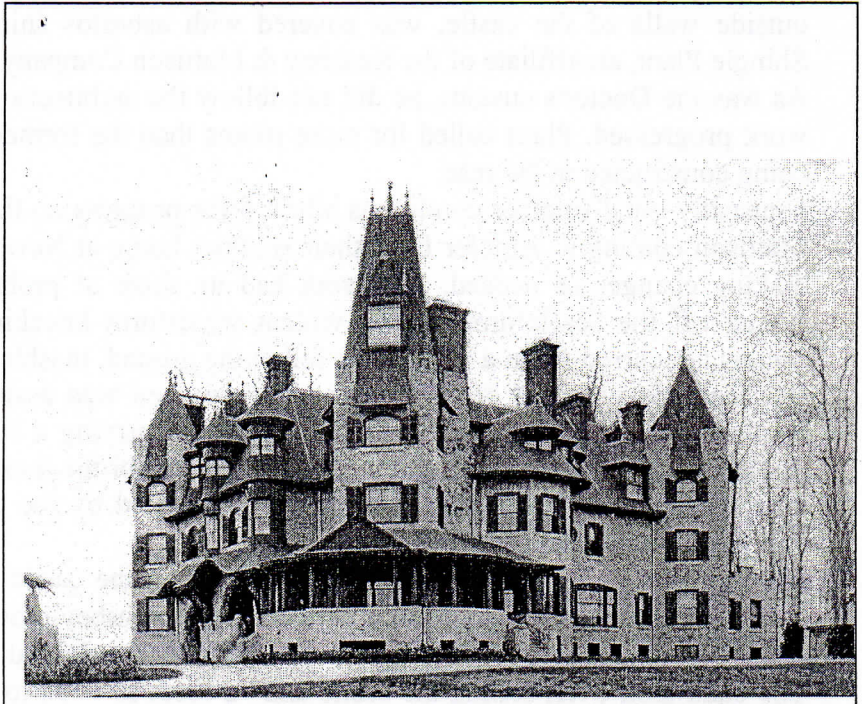
Mattison was a partner in the Keasbey & Mattison Company, founded in Philadelphia in 1873.

Moving to Ambler in 1882, the company grew rapidly, soon becoming the world's largest producer of magnesia and asbestos products.

Early in 1912, on deciding to turn his mansion into a castle, Mattison chose Milton Bean of Lansdale as his architect. It has been said that the structure was to resemble Windsor Castle, which Mattison admired. This is questionable though, because architect Bean had described his plans as being "of Scottish baronial architecture", thus raising more questions concerning the Windsor theory. Mattison's ancestors, named Mathieson, owned thousands of acres in North Scotland, where also do several castles, more closely resemble his Lindenwold Castle than does Windsor.

Milton Bean, no stranger to Ambler, had designed dozens of early Ambler structures, among these the familiar Lindenwold Terrace homes, the new Ambler Gazette building on Butler Avenue in 1897, and the Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church in 1898.

The three metal entrance gates to Lindenwold grounds also came from Bean's drafting table. These, incidentally, were fabricated in Ambler at the Pettit Ornamental Iron & Fence Works on South Main Street. Design of these gates has been erroneously attributed to "a famous artist of Munich, Germany."



The photo above is a view that shows Doctor Mattison's victorian home built about 1890. Enclosure as a castle began in 1912, with much of the original structure's shape retained. Main entrance and archway through to the rear remain in the same spot. Outer walls of the home's dining room were retained since stone used in original and renovated structure came from the same quarry. The view below shows the completed castle which follows lines of the original home. Taken from the same spot, it's easy to compare similarity of the two structures.

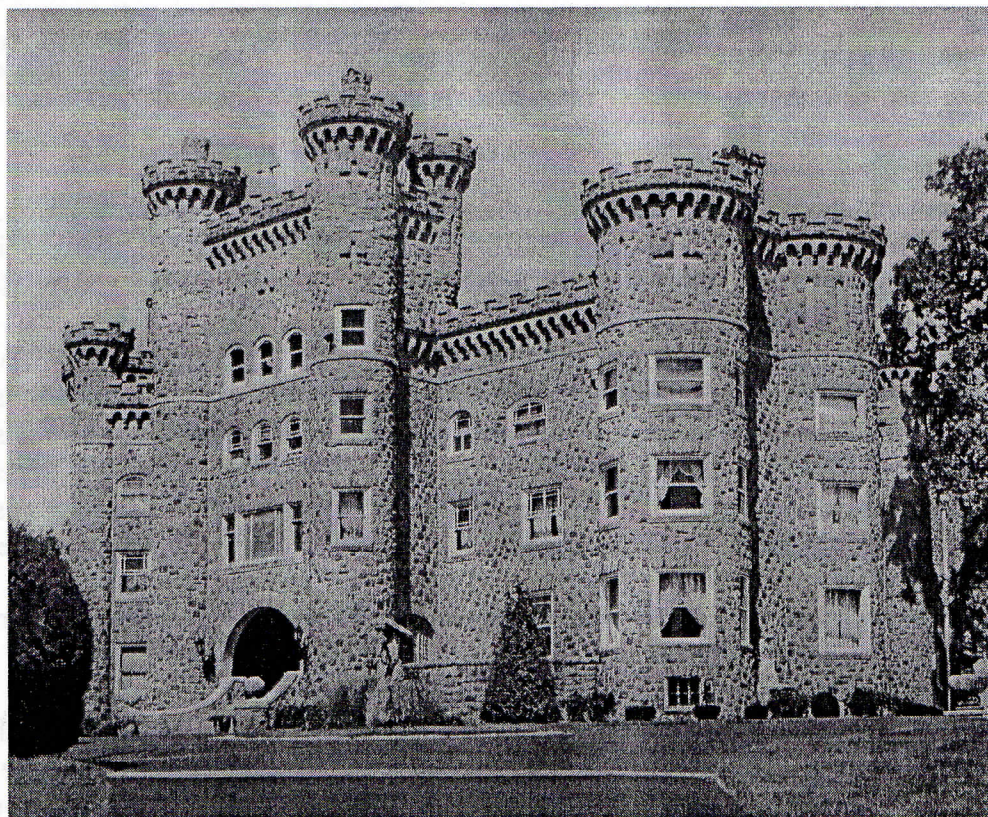
Photograph from Collection of Newton M. Howard

Castle construction began early in spring of 1912, following a mild winter. Stone used came from Mattison's quarry at Highland Avenue and Farm Lane, source of stone used in his original Victorian home. Also, from this quarry came stone used to build the Keasbey & Mattison Company homes which numbered around four hundred. The roof, entirely screened by the outside walls of the castle, was covered with asbestos shingles from the Ambler Asbestos Shingle Plant, an affiliate of the Keasbey & Mattison Company.

As was the Doctor's custom, he did not follow the architect's plans closely, making changes as work progressed. Plans called for more rooms than the former home, with the additional space being constructed at the rear.

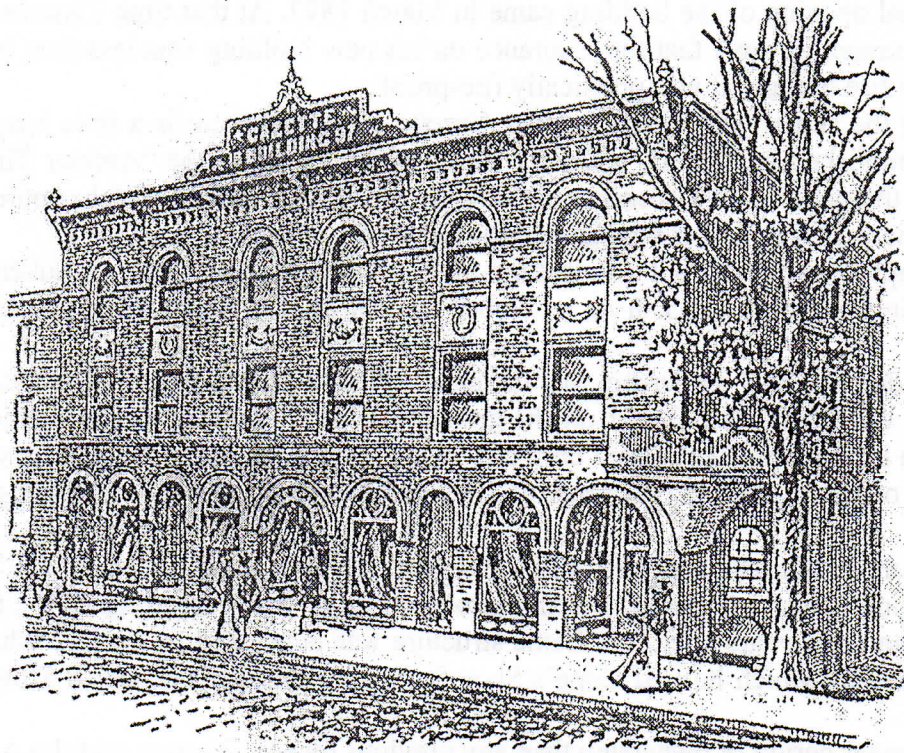
Unusually good weather conditions allowed for progress on the castle, with Richard and Esther Mattison coming to Ambler from their summer home at Newport frequently to check progress, making changes as needed. The work had its share of problems, with an occasional worker falling off the scaffolding, and a violent windstorm knocking much of it down. The worst accident occurred when a large stone fell to the ground, mashing the great toe of Patrick Durkin's left foot. He was one of Mattison's gardeners and was assisting in unloading the stone. On another occasion, Alexander Ewer slipped while carrying a 100-pound bag of plaster up to the scaffold, and fell seven feet, spraining both wrists. For the most part, work progressed to such an extent that much of the construction was completed by the end of 1912, with minor touches being completed the following spring.

Dr. Mattison and his second wife, Mary, lived in the castle until 1931-32. The stock market crash, plus having paid his former partner Henry Keasbey more than three million dollars as the result of a lawsuit, forced the couple to vacate the castle and move to #1 Lindenwold Terrace. The bank took over, selling the castle and 72 acres in 1936 to the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth for \$115,000, for use as an orphanage. Today the former Lindenwold Castle of Doctor Mattison is known as St. Mary's Villa



FIRE RAZED GAZETTE BUILDING IN 1896

by
Newton M. Howard



Architect Milton Bean's drawing of the 1897 Ambler Gazette building on Butler Avenue built to replace the frame structure at the same location that was destroyed by fire on September 30, 1896 though somewhat altered, the same building exists today, last occupied by the Cabaret.

This Friday marks the 100th anniversary of one of Ambler's major fires on this date, September 20 1896, the frame building on Butler Avenue housing the Ambler Gazette was consumed by fire.

Gazette owner Arthur K. Thomas reported that "the fire which broke out in the office of the Ambler Gazette about 2:30 on Sunday morning so completely wrecked the plant that not a pound of material or a piece of machinery was saved.

He further stated, "that only through the courtesy of the Lansdale Reporter and the Lansdale Republican that we were enabled to issue the Gazette this week. While our plans for the future are not fully developed, we may state that the Gazette office will be rebuilt as soon as is practical, and we hope inside of two months to be at home again at the old location. Until that time, we are establishing a temporary office in the Niblock building on Main Street, where the wants of our patrons will be attended to promptly." A small press was put in working order on Monday and a large supply of new type of the latest and best designs put in cases. Give us a call and we will do our best to please you.

The new Gazette building which will rise from the ashes of the one burned to the ground, will be rushed to completion with all possible haste. We are aiming to get housed in the new structure before Christmas. The gazette of course couldn't stop for a fire, and will appear regularly as usual. Our yearly subscription rate of \$1.25 will still be in effect.

Thomas lost no time re-building. Lansdale architect Milton B. Bean prepared plans that placed emphasis on a much larger, more modern, and most of all, a fire-proof building. In less

than three months, on December 10, 1896, the Ambler Gazette was once again being printed in its newly press room, even though the new building was not yet completed.

As work on the new three-story brick building progressed, plans were made for the interior layout, with the first floor devoted to Gazette offices, with rental stores and offices in the front and printing facilities in both rear and in the basement. The upper floors were to contain office space and lodge meeting rooms, in addition to a hall with stage and dressing rooms.

The formal opening of the building came in March 1897. At that time Thomas announced to other businessmen in town that the insurance on his new building was less than half of the one destroyed by fire because it was practically fire-proof.

Although the actual year of the Ambler Gazette's establishment is a little hazy, there was a newspaper published in 1879 by a Doctor Rose, which he called the "Ambler Times." Little is known about the paper until December of 1882, at which time Irwin S. Weber purchased it from Joseph Barbieri. It was Weber who gave it the name "Gazette."

Weber kept the paper for but a short time, selling it in 1883 to Horace G. Lukens, who sold it to Thomas in December 1885. Irwin S. Weber then moved to North Wales, to later become a postmaster.

It was under Thomas' ownership that the paper showed great progress. The facilities were first located on North Main Street on the grounds of the J. Watson Craft Lumber Yard. The presses were installed in a converted corn crib on the edge of the yard. Later they were moved to another part of the grounds at the corner of Short Street and North Main, a building still standing today.

As the Ambler Gazette out-grew these facilities, Thomas purchased land on Butler Avenue between Spring Garden and Ridge, moving into an existing frame building on the tract in March 1888. Less than eight years later, this frame structure was consumed by the fire which took it the adjoining building which housed Cope's Shoe Store, and damaged Gracey's Store on the other side.

After a longer period of ownership than any previous owner, Thomas sold the Ambler Gazette to former employee Joseph M. Haywood for \$8000, with an effective date of March 1, 1898. This price was for the business only, with Haywood arranging to rent the building from Thomas with a five year lease. The building's last significant owner and occupant was the Cabaret. Today much of the first floor is vacant.

GILKEY'S CORNER-PART ONE

by
Newton M. Howard

In the days following the American Revolution, a settlement existed at the edge of present-day Ambler. Called Gilkey's Corner, the name came from the tavern of Andrew Gilkeson on the northeast corner of two major turnpikes, the Great Road to Bethlehem, today called Bethlehem Pike, and the bisecting Butler Turnpike. The location was considered ideal, with no one doubting that here one day would be a thriving metropolis.

Descended from a family of Scottish origin, and born about 1750, Andrew Gilkeson had arrived here in Upper Dublin Township as a young man. By 1790, he had acquired much wealth, including a large plantation north and northeast of this important crossroads. His holdings, along Bethlehem Pike, reached as far north as Hagues' Mill Road. It was about 1800 that he purchased additional land at this busy crossroads where a small public house is said to have existed since pre-Revolutionary days. It is believed that Gilkeson was licensed to run a tavern in Upper Dublin as early as 1778.

By 1803 he had erected a larger, more substantial stone building to accommodate the increasing numbers of travelers, mainly farmers. They were using the Great Road to transport goods from the lush farmlands of Lehigh County into Philadelphia. The round-trip journey of at least two days made it necessary to have numerous stop-over taverns and inns along the way to accommodate the traveler. Here he could water his horses or even exchange them, besides stopping for nourishment of both man and beast, and a night's rest before continuing the long and arduous journey into the City.

Andrew's public place, Gilkeson's Tavern, while caring for the needs of the traveler, was an important part of the local community. Not only a place to imbibe, it was here that the latest news and gossip were exchanged. The Norristown Herald and Weekly Advertiser of December 5th, 1800, advised its readers that the tax collector would be "at the establishment of Andrew Gilkeson in Upper Dublin to collect taxes on land, dwelling houses, and slaves". It was here also that local residents voted. Before establishment of the Postal System, it was customary for locals to approach a traveler with a request to hand-deliver a letter to a person living along the route to Philadelphia. Taking its name from the Tavern, the crossroads soon became known as Gilkeson's Corner, or simply "Gilkey's Corner."

Travel on the Great Road decreased with the establishment of North Pennsylvania Railroad's line from Philadelphia to Gwynedd in 1855. Located less than a mile from "Gilkey's", one of the stations was called "Wissahickon" and around this depot the Village of Wissahickon developed. Prior to this, the area had no name, being simply a part of the western sector of Upper Dublin Township.

The railroad's arrival allowed for faster movement of food supplies into the City, in particular dairy products. The Village of Wissahickon, long the site of water-powered mills and farmlands, did not develop as expected until the 1880's when the Industrial Revolution brought the Keasbey & Mattison Chemical Works to the Village, now called Ambler. Until this time, Gilkey's Corner remained a viable location.

Andrew Gilkeson, the first of several Andrews, died on Friday evening August 1st of 1814, in his 63rd year, leaving a widow, five sons and four daughters. As was the custom then, local carpenter George Dunnet was brought in to measure the body for a custom-made pine coffin, built roughly to conform to the body's shape. For this service Dunnet received \$10.00. Without delay, the body was borne to the cemetery at St. Thomas' Church in Whitmarsh, for burial on Sunday August 3rd of 1814. Records show that the grave was dug by local laborer Christopher Loeser for the sum of \$2.50. Loeser, born in 1743, was a Veteran of the Revolutionary War and is also buried at St. Thomas'.

Andrew Gilkeson's death in 1814 left a widow and nine children, the estate shared mainly by the five sons. Eldest son James fell heir to the 50 acre plantation on which he was living, while Elias received his father's "riding horse, saddle and bridle". Young Andrew inherited his desk. Son Samuel became owner of the Tavern, and his father's "waggon and all its gears thereto pertaining." Youngest son, Joseph, received Andrew's silver watch,

The widow, Edith Gilkeson, and their four daughters were less fortunate, receiving only small amounts of cash and dowries. The will directed that each of his "unmarried daughters, Esther and Harriet shall receive Three Hundred dollars, and each shall have a trunk and all the property therein, and each of them a feather bed, bedstead, and all the furniture sufficient to make each of them a good bed."

Dr. John Jones of Three Tuns was paid a mere \$4.25 for medical attendance, while Dr. George Martin received \$56.50 for his services. Martin, of Whitpain Township, later moved to Whitmarsh when his family became owners of the Sandy Run Tavern, now known as the Clifton House, home of the Historical Society of Fort Washington.

Samuel Gilkeson operated the tavern until his death about 1847, while his brother James Gilkeson kept the store on the corner across Butler Pike from the tavern. Not long after, the properties were no longer held by any member of the Gilkeson family, with Jonathan Lukens becoming the new owner. The license to dispense spirits had years before been given up, signaling the end of the era of a public house at this corner in Upper Dublin. The building's new role was that of a general store to serve the Upper Dublin community.

Following a series of Sheriff sales, the property was purchased by David Dunnet in 1871. He operated the general store successfully for a number of years in the Bethlehem Pike side of the old Tavern building. The Upper Dublin Business Directory of 1871 tells us that he was a "dealer in Dry Goods, Groceries, Hardware, Drugs, Paints, Oils, Boots, Shoes, & c." and that he could be found at Gilkeson's Corner. Dunnet who had purchased the property from Jonathan Lukens was the son of carpenter George Dunnet who had fashioned the pine coffin for Andrew Gilkeson's burial in 1814 at St. Thomas' Cemetery.

Succeeding years, marked by Sheriff sales, saw many owners, until 1894 when the building and seven acres were sold to Edward H. Johnson, Sr., for \$3,000. He apparently did not operate the general store himself, but leased that part of the building to various operators, including Robert McIlroy in the early 1900's. During this period, the old "Gilkey's Corner" crossroads became known as "Rose Valley".

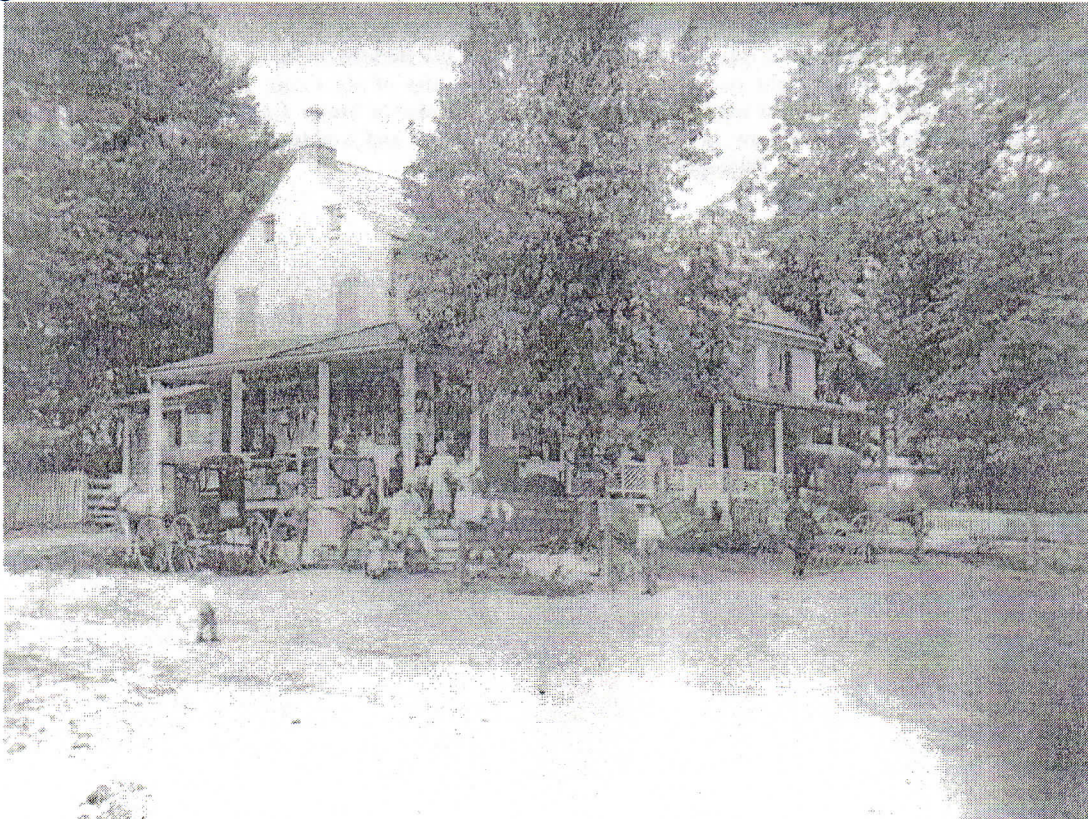
In 1912, during Johnson's ownership, an old stone barn behind the tavern was razed, disclosing a chiseled stone bearing the date 1803 and Andrew Gilkeson's name. Hand-hewn oak timbers,

with oak pins, as well as wrought iron hardware, nails and spikes, were retrieved and used in the erection of a double tenant house adjoining the store and fronting the turnpike, the houses having eight rooms each. Further information is unavailable.

In 1921 John H. Martin purchased the property from Edward H. Johnson, Sr., adding to the one-story structure along the Butler Pike side, operating it as a Tea Room. This addition has continued as the location of a food establishment to the present time.

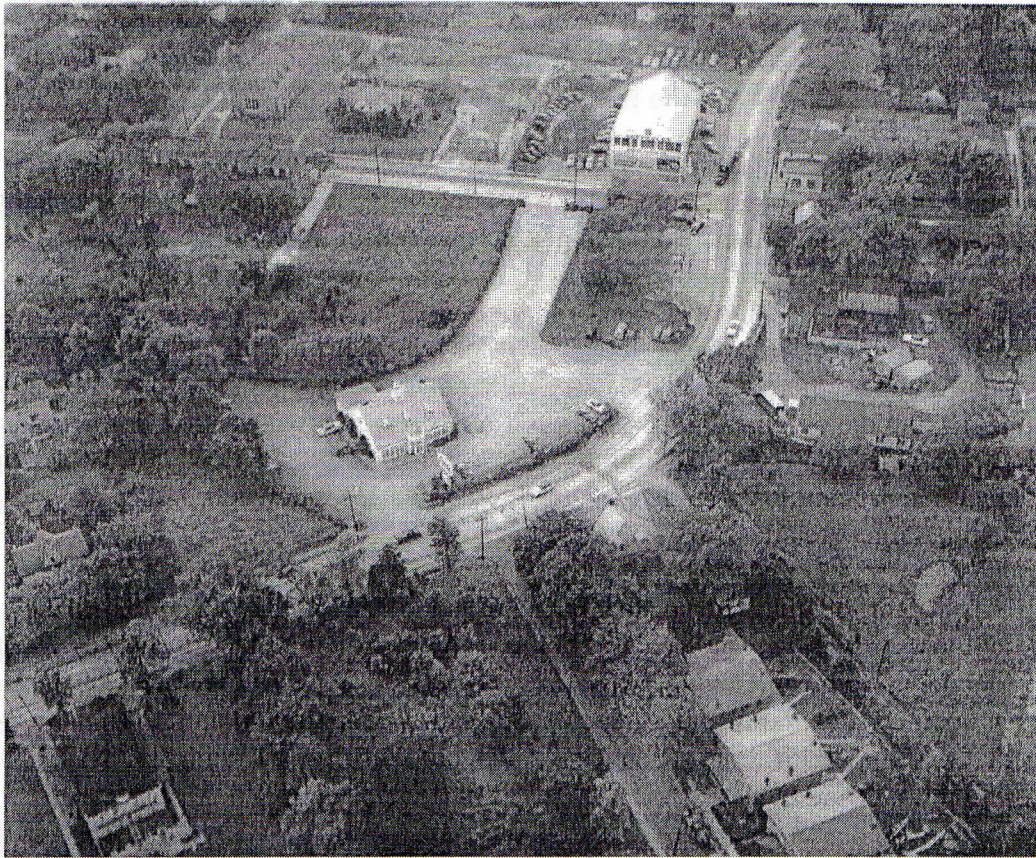
Martin sold the property in 1924 to John Stout, who just five years later sold it to George Porter. A major change came in 1946 when Charles Sandilos purchased the property from Porter. Born in Greece, he came to America in 1905, living in Scranton until 1933. The family then moved to Ambler, purchasing the popular eating place on Main Street, known as Nick's Lunch, famous for its Texas Wieners and the "secret" onion topping. Moving to the new location, now called Rose Valley Delicatessen, Sandilos installed the grill, enlarged the sandwich menu, and became the County's second largest retailer of Breyer's Ice Cream.

It was in April of 1950 that Rocco and Maria Costa acquired the old Gilkeson tavern from Charles Sandilos. Presently their five children are owners of this historic property. They are Michael, Domenic, John and twins Maryann and Sandra. Michael operates the delicatessen, while John operates the Patio and Fireplace Shop in both Ambler and Colmar, assisted by Maryann at the Ambler location. Today the 1803 building retains many features of its early heritage, both indoors and out.



Erected about 1803 by Andrew Gilkeson, the former tavern is shown when it was occupied by David Dunnet as a General Store. Date of this photograph is approximately 1871. News that a photographer would be on the spot often brought out many of the local residents to appear in the photograph.

Photograph courtesy of John Costa



Aerial photo of 1953 shows Butler Pike (the horizontal highway) and the Bethlehem Pike (curving highway) with the 1803 Gilkey's Tavern visible in upper right section. Lower right shows site of old Faust Tannery. Lower left is the very popular Howard Johnson's Restaurant while upper middle is the old Mullin Motor Co. Nothing remains at this corner today except the old Gilkey's Tavern, now, in 2001, the Costa Delicatessen and Ambler Fireplace and Patio Shop.

Photograph by Newton M, Howard.

GILKEY'S CORNER-PART TWO

by
Newton M. Howard

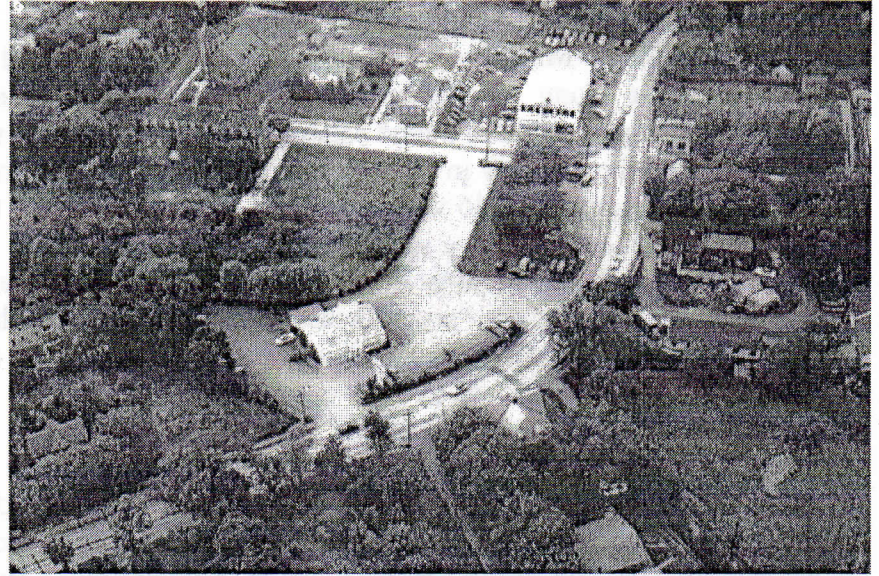
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Photograph by Newton M. Howard

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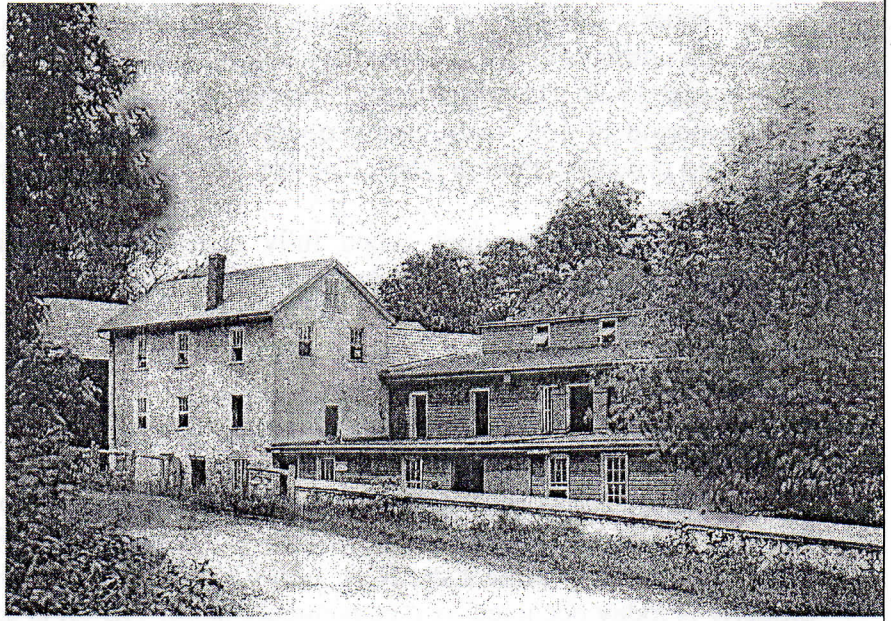
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HE FAUST TANNERY at GILKEY'S CORNER

by
Newton M. Howard

Known in its final days as the Faust Tannery, it was established in 1790 by Jonathan Thomas, with the purchase of ground from Andrew Gilkeson of the neighboring Tavern. The crossroads location at Butler and Bethlehem Pikes, called Gilkey's Corner, had been a busy commercial spot for more than two centuries, while the Tannery on the southeast corner operated continuously for 135 years.

The land was ideally suited for use as a Tannery; it had the necessary stream of water to furnish power for grinding the bark used in the tanning operation, and sufficient quantities of water to prepare the hides and tanning-liquors. Location at the juncture of two major highways made it extremely desirable.



Original buildings of the Tannery established in 1790 by Jonathan Thomas at the corner of Butler and Bethlehem Pikes on land that was originally part of the Andrew Gilkeson's property.

Photographs courtesy of Florence Faust Yeany

Jonathan Thomas operated the Tannery until his death in 1808, with his son David Thomas selling it in 1810 to an apprentice, James Rutter of Pottstown. At the same time, Rutter bought the 35 acre farm east of the tannery for his residence.

First appearance of a member of the Faust family was about 1841-1842 when young Alvin D. Faust came to work as an apprentice for Rutter. A native of Lehigh County, he received no wages, only board and lodging, with the opportunity to learn the tanning business. At the end of his apprenticeship, he was surprised to be paid 72 dollars for his year's service. Rutter, on paying these unexpected wages for the year said to him, "When I made the arrangements with your father, John Faust, I did not promise any wages, for I did not know what kind of a Dutchman I was going to get."

James Rutter sold the business and property to his apprentice, Alvin D. Faust, about 1850, the business staying in the Faust family for another seventy-five years, and only at that time did the Tannery business begin to slow down. With automobiles replacing horse-drawn vehicles, there was greatly reduced demand for leathers used by the horse.

When Alvin brought his wife down from Lehigh County to live on Tannery grounds, a problem arose which could have doomed the business for Alvin. The Fausts were Pennsylvania "Dutch", or German, and Mrs. Faust spoke little if any English. Unable to find any neighborhood women who spoke German, she became homesick to such a point that she wanted husband

Alvin to take her back home. The problem became so serious, that Alvin went to visit neighbor, Jonathan Henry and to have his wife Sabrina come over to visit Mrs. Faust and speak with her in German. This finally accomplished Catherine Faust from that time on and was content to stay in her new Upper Dublin home. They had five sons who ran both the Tannery and the adjoining farm successfully for many years.

Tanning is the process of converting raw animal hides into leather. The process was time consuming, but locally of interest was the bark used in the process. The Ambler Tannery used about a thousand tons of bark a year, coming mainly from the mountains around Slatington and Hellertown. Arriving at the Ambler Freight Station, it was then hauled out to the Tannery by a team of horses.

The Tannery, now known as the Faust Tannery, prospered until the end of World War I when increasing numbers of cars and trucks lessened the need for harness leather. No more hides were bought after 1920. There was enough leather on hand in vats to supply the diminishing demand. After a period of 135 years, active operations ceased after 1925, and some of the machinery being sold privately, then in 1940, a public sale was held to dispose of miscellaneous equipment and supplies.

Some of the tanning bark when fully exhausted was dried and used in the Village of Wissahickon, later Ambler, as sidewalks. It was used also on the race courses at Ambler Park. When the circus came to town, the used bark found its way in to the circus rings.

Getting rid of the old bark liquors was a problem. Prior to 1910, it was discharged into the Tannery Run Creek running through the center of Ambler, and known as "HoneyRun" of "Vinegar Bitters". When the in State, in 1910, would no longer allow it to be dis-charged into the creek, a filter plant was built.

Today, more than two hundred years after the Tannery's founding in 1790, members of the Faust family can be found living nearby the old Tannery. Fourth generation Florence Faust Yeany lives nearby while sister Ruth Ann Faust resides in Springhouse. Part of the old Tannery property is today occupied by a convenience store. The lot is across Butler Pike from the former Gilkey's Tavern, where many of the original features have been retained.



Catherine Faust



Alvin D. Faust

THE BLACKSMITH IN EARLY AMBLER

By
Newton M. Howard

Coming to the New World as settlers, William and George Harmer encountered land that was bountiful and extremely fertile. These were the 408 acres received by patent from William Penn in 1682. Today, a small section of this land we know as Ambler.

To assure survival in an unfamiliar land, the Harmers brought with them a supply of seeds, tools and farm implements. Soon after arrival, they erected a small shelter near the junction of present-day Morris Road and Butler Pike. A crude grist mill followed some time later, for processing the grains they were growing. It was at this spot a mill could always be found for the next 200 years.

Recognizing the importance of the horse for survival, the settlers were aware of the value of the blacksmith in caring for the animals. More importantly though, it was the blacksmith who was called on to make and mend the farmers' plows, wheels and many other iron objects essential to farming or mere existence. He was described as "an artisan who shapes and welds iron to produce horseshoes. He also makes or repairs hardware, tools, utensils and other objects." Essentially, he was much like the mechanic of today who keeps your automobile on the road, or your home appliances in working order.

The role of the blacksmith was considered essential for over two hundred years, with many to be found in all rural areas. Locally several were located near the Harmer Mill site, with Thomas Hillwig's shop, at the western edge of the village, believed to have been one of the earliest in the Village of Wissahickon.

Following the Civil War, Jacob Hoover's Blacksmith and Wheelwright Shops were established on the north side of Butler Avenue, between Spring Garden & Ridge. The wheelwright made wagons and carriages, in addition to repairing them. Often, the blacksmith and wheelwright were located side by side, or even in the same building.

Hoover sold his property and business to Alexander Niblock, a member of the same Niblock family well-known in later years for a successful family-operated restaurant at the site of present day Denney Electric. Other blacksmiths to occupy this site were Thomas Gusman, Samuel Hamilton and Arthur Hayden. Alex Niblock operated livery stables here, being succeeded by Charles Gerhart in the 1890's.

Also occupied for years by blacksmiths was the property of John Sheppard at Race Street and Spring Garden. The site since the early 1800's of water-powered mills, including a sawmill and a clover mill, Sheppard had the structure torn down at the turn of the century, replacing it with a two-story building, housing a blacksmith shop on the first floor. Early blacksmiths to occupy this new building were Benjamin F. Meyers, Arthur Hayden and Wesley MacLaughlin, all of whom have many descendants living in the Ambler area today. Arrival of the horseless carriage meant turning this building into a garage for servicing automobiles.

In the western part of the village, early blacksmith Thomas Hillwig was succeeded by Edward Berry who came to Ambler from Conshohocken in 1906. He occupied a stone building on the north side of Butler Avenue, on lands of the Reiff family, later moving across Butler Avenue to

Locust Street where he remained for years. He came from a long line of Blacksmiths, his grandfather George W. Berry having operated a shop at Gulph Mills for nearly 50 years. He was succeeded by his son George W. Berry, Jr., father of Edward Berry.

By 1932, the automobile's popularity had forced most blacksmiths out of existence, with Berry's establishment the last to remain in Ambler. In order to survive, he set up his motorized blacksmithing equipment on a truck, which allowed him to take his services right up to the stable door. Said Edward Berry, "I have met the demands of the time and age, and am now prepared to go anywhere in the county to perform blacksmith work."

Curiously enough, in this day of the automobile, Berry's grandson, also named Edward Berry, is pursuing a career as a full-time blacksmith in the vicinity of Boyertown. He thus becomes the fifth generation of Berrys directly involved in blacksmithing, finding enough business to easily fill a long work week.



Blacksmith Shop of Edward Berry on the north side of Butler Avenue when he first came to Ambler in 1906. Edward Berry is the man holding the pony on which his daughter Ida is sitting. Taller man next to Berry is identified as Hobart Bergey of Lansdale. No one else has been identified. Keasbey & Mattison acquired this property in 1918, tearing it down to build the Company garage in 1918.

Photograph from Collection of Newton M. Howard

THE TALE OF DAVID AMBLER'S HORSE

By
Newton M. Howard

Mary and Andrew Ambler had eight sons. This is the story of David, their fifth son, and a large room in the old Ambler Homestead. It's also about his favorite horse, but more about David and this unusual occurrence later.

The "special" room saw activity several times over the period of half a century. It was first used as a class room when the children of Mary and Andrew reached the age where education was in order. At that time formal education was almost non-existent, being furnished by a member of the family, or perhaps a neighbor or friend. In the case of the Ambler family who were Quakers, part of this learning was received at the Meeting House they attended in Gwynedd.

With the room set aside for classes, Mary taught not only her eight sons, but also the children of some of her neighbors. In this way she handled their early education until they were ready for more formal schooling, when public schools began to appear.

The room was next put to use as a hospital following the "Great Train Wreck" of July 17th, 1856. It occurred on the North Pennsylvania Railroad below Fort Washington, near the Camp Hill station. Known as the world's worse train wreck at the time, more than sixty persons were killed, most of them children. Involved in the head-on collision were a north-bound excursion train carrying Sunday School members to a picnic grove in Fort Washington, and the south-bound commuter train which had originated at Gwynedd Station. It was a single-track, established only the year before, that went no farther than Gwynedd because of large rock formations encountered.

History tells us that the frail Quaker lady, Mary Johnson Ambler, on hearing of the disaster, walked from her home in the Village of Wissahickon to the scene of the wreck. Fifty-one years old at the time, she worked alongside many other volunteers, including more than thirty doctors. Most of that day was spent caring for the victims, with the temperature reaching 102 degrees in the shade.

After administering to the injured, she had many of them brought to her home where the former class room was set up as a hospital. Here she cared for the victims, until they were well enough to return to their Kensington homes.

In 1869, the year after her death, Mary was honored by the Railroad, which changed the station name from Wissahickon to Ambler. This was in recognition of work done by her at the scene of the wreck, and in the hospital set up in her home.

Some years later, this same room once again was used, but in a most unusual fashion. After Mary's death, her son David purchased the homestead, where he was born in 1837, and moved in. David, on completing his education, had worked as a clerk at the general store in Fitzwatertown for two years. Afterwards, he moved to Quakertown, establishing a coal and lumber business. This he operated for ten years, returning to Wissahickon in 1869, the year the Village was re-named Ambler.

While living here at the old homestead, David owned a very fine driving horse, of which he was quite proud. About the year 1872, there was a horse sickness which was epidemic in this part of Montgomery County. David's animal was among the hundreds stricken. While large numbers were dying, David was determined to do everything in his power to save his favorite horse. He at once fitted up this same large room, used first as a classroom and then as the temporary hospital. Once again the room became a hospital, but this time for treating his sick horse. His efforts were not in vain, for in a relatively short time, the animal responded to his tender attention and regained its strength.

But there's more to the story of David's horse than has been recorded. We've heard nothing about David's wife Caroline, or her reaction to his bringing the horse into their home. Did she say, in true Quaker fashion, "Art thou out of thy mind, David, to think that I might share my home with a horse?" Or perhaps she said, "David, if thou bringest thine horse into the house, I shall be forced to leave thee." This part of the story will never be known.



Portrait of David Johnson Ambler, son of Andrew and Mary Ambler. Born in the old Ambler Homestead in 1837, he operated a Coal & Lumber business in Quakertown for ten years, returning to Ambler in 1869 to purchase the old homestead after his mother's death.

Portrait by Newton M. Howard

Dager School - The Eight - Square School

By
Newton M. Howard

Many townships and other municipalities resented government interference in education when, in 1834, the State Legislature established Pennsylvania's Public School System. Gwynedd Township in particular felt their two schools were adequate and refused to build the four new schools required by law.

Within six years though, Gwynedd gave in and began construction of the four required schools, completing them by 1844. Two were the familiar one-room schoolhouses while the others were the less-common "Eight-Square" style. They were designated the Upper Eight-Square and the Lower Eight-Square.

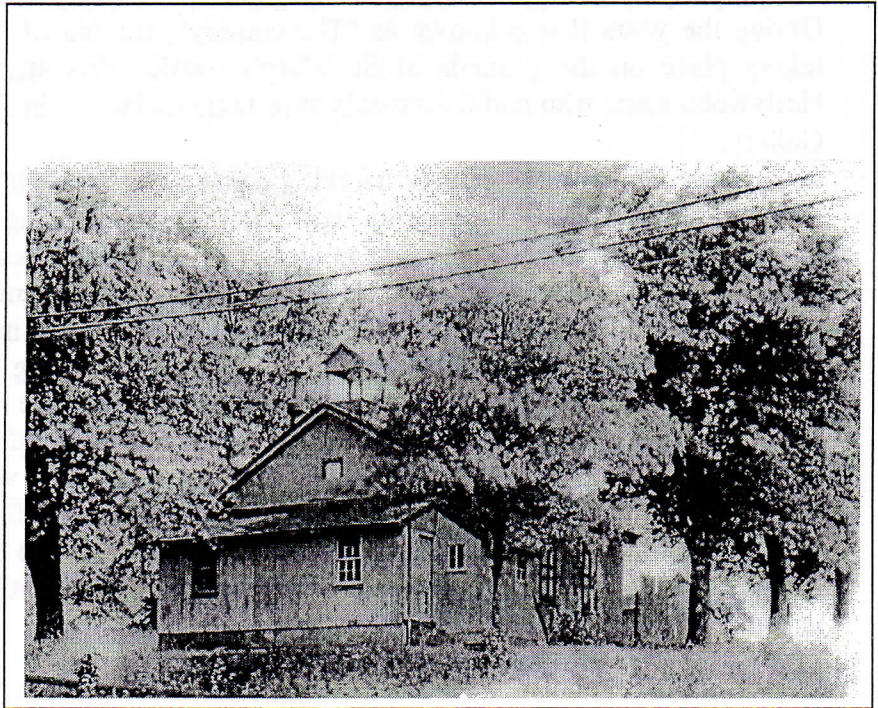
This story concerns the Lower Eight-Square, built on the Bethlehem Pike across from

the juncture of Dager Road. The name came from the octagonal or eight-sided shape, which at the time was considered a very practical concept. There were windows on seven sides with a door on the eighth. Sloping shelves were on seven sides with students sitting on backless benches facing these shelves being used as desks. The teacher had better control of the pupils from the center of the room where also was the pot-bellied stove.

This Eight-Square building served Gwynedd until about 1860 when it was remodeled to the more familiar style. After the re-building it became known as the Dager School, though known for years after as the Eight-Square.

When nearby Ambler Village established its Independent School District in 1881, enrollment at Dager School fell off drastically. A news item of May 1897 acknowledged the fact that "the Eight Square and three other schools in Lower Gwynedd Township will be giving a combined program at Springhouse to take the place of the annual commencement, since there will be no graduates this year".

By November of the same year, due to a lack of pupils, Eight-Square, or Dager's, closed its doors. Declining enrollment was due largely to the rapid growth of the Ambler Independent School District, with Ambler Village, now incorporated as the Borough of Ambler. With only six pupils in 1897, the cost of a teacher would have been much higher than the cost of sending these pupils to Ambler.



The old Dager School in Lower Gwynedd (formerly the Eight-Square School) as it appeared in the early 1900's while still in use as a schoolhouse. Note trolley track in lower part of Photograph. These were installed about 1902. Following use as a school, it became the "School Inn", a very popular restaurant for many years.

Photograph from collection of Henry Scholz

By 1903 though, Dager School was re-opened with twenty pupils, half of whom were black students from the Penllyn area. The teacher at the time was a Mrs. Hoffman. In later years, the school was once more abandoned, remaining vacant for some time until William J. McCans purchased the property, turning it into the popular and successful restaurant called "School Inn". The property up to the present day has been the site of many restaurants.

During the years it was known as "The Gallery", filming of "The Trouble With Angels" was taking place on the grounds of St. Mary's Castle. This starred Rosalind Russell and other Hollywood stars, who had their meals at restaurants largely in the Springhouse area, often at the Gallery.

An Ambler High School student, working part-time at the Gallery, was unaware that a film was being shot in Ambler. Reporting for work, he went about filling water glasses and placing salads on the tables. The kitchen crew had neglected to tell him the restaurant was closed to the public, and was reserved for a special party that evening. Each time he returned to the kitchen he remarked that there were an awful lot of nuns and priests out in the dining room. He mentioned that he had never seen so many nuns and priests in the dining room before, and that they were drinking and using language that shocked him, and some of the nuns were even smoking.

Finally a co-worker asked, "Did you notice the man at the head of the table?" Obviously not, for on returning to the dining room, a closer look showed that it was Frank Sinatra. Seems he was performing in the Philadelphia area and engaged the Gallery for the night to entertain Rosalind Russell and other Hollywood friends working in Ambler on the first of two films.

The site of the former Eight-square School of 1844 has continued to this day to be home to restaurants, more than a century and a half later.

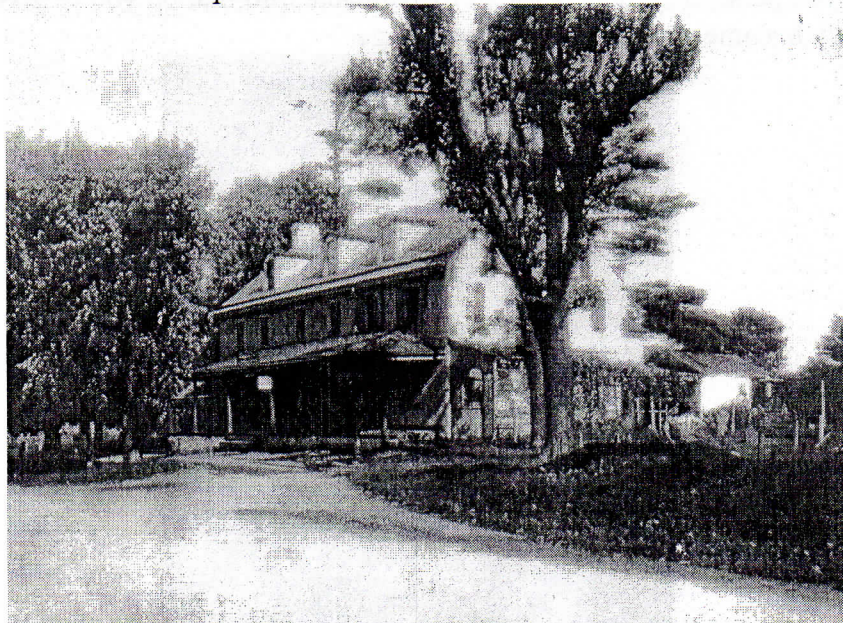
FRIEDA REMEMBERS EARLY AMBLER

by
Newton M. Howard

Asked if she remembered the Ambler Opera House, Frieda had this to say: "I was about four years old when Mama first took me to Sunday School at the Trinity Mission. We met in a room on the second floor of the Opera House building. The Mission was organized by St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in 1891, the year I was born. Later it became Trinity Memorial Church when Doctor Mattison erected that beautiful building for us out on the Pike."

"My Sunday School teacher's name was Miss Houghton. About a week before Christmas, we spent a whole afternoon decorating our beautiful Christmas tree. It was a gift from Doctor Mattison, who had received a carload of trees from Maine. The two biggest ones were for the stage of the Opera House and his mansion out on the Pike. That's the Castle today, you know. Miss Houghton showed us how to string popcorn and cranberries, alternating white popcorn with red cranberries. She had us make decorations from old Christmas cards too. These we cut out and trimmed with tinsel. It was a very lovely tree."

These were the words of Frieda Manderbach as she spoke fondly of growing up in early Ambler. But, who was Frieda and what was her role in the town's early days? Born on the west side of Bethlehem Pike, within sight of Mattison's mansion, she was the daughter of Aaron and Anna Nash Manderbach. Her grandparents were Frederick and Mary Palmer Nash, whose homestead stood almost opposite the terminus of Mattison Avenue, in front of the present-day Castle at St. Mary's. They acquired it from the Reiff family way back in 1846. After Frederick died, Mary Nash sold the homestead to Doctor Mattison in 1890, the year before Frieda was born. Soon he tore it down to create a more impressive lawn.



"Uncle Harry Nash, he was Cousin Mary's father, had a haberdashery in the Opera House Block of stores. I can still remember what it looked like back around 1901, just before he sold the business. Uncle Harry's store and Joe Angeny's Drug Store flanked the entrance to the theatre." Years later, Frieda was able to describe the complete lay-out of her uncle's store and its display windows, even drawing a complete floor plan.

Asked to describe the interior of the original Opera House, she responded with this: "The stage was very wide, with two lovely boxes on each side, one above the other. Their curved fronts were ornately decorated. I think it's a shame that the Doctor destroyed that beautiful interior just to convert it to a movie house. I remember one year attending Sunnyside Academy's graduation there. It was a sweltering day, and long before air-conditioning. That's where Ambler High School held their graduations for years. I went to many shows there with my cousins and friends. These were usually very well attended. It was so close to the railroad though, that once in a while the performance had to stop while a long, noisy freight train went by."

Frieda was proud of the fact that her father, Aaron Manderbach, was the first principal of Ambler schools. He held that position when the new Forest Avenue School was built in 1891. "I remember the day it burned to the ground. It was a Saturday afternoon; I think it was 1926. Mama and I had been visiting friends in Ambler when someone came to the door with the news that Papa's school was on fire. It looked like it was going to be destroyed. We went over to Forest Avenue as fast as we could. I was so glad that Papa didn't have to see it destroyed this way. He had died several years before. He so loved that school and felt a part of it. I never had the chance to attend there because Papa took a new teaching position at Bethayres. We moved from Ambler some time later."

"But that wasn't the end of Ambler for me; I spent much time at Grand mom's place. After she sold the old Nash homestead to Doctor Mattison, she built a new home on the other side of the Pike, right next door to Papa and Mama's place."

My planned meeting with Frieda never came about. Before it could take place, she tripped and fell over one of her dogs, his name was "Fonzie", making it necessary for her to be hospitalized. Several days later she died at the age of 98 years. And now, Frieda, though I never had the chance to meet you personally, thanks for all the valuable information you've given me. Your legacy will surely become a part of Ambler's heritage.



An early portrait of Frieda Nash Manderbach, born in Ambler in 1891. Daughter of Aaron Manderbach, first Principal of Ambler Schools. Her grandparents, Frederick and Mary Palmer Nash, owned the homestead next to Isaac Thomas' General Store and Post office on the Bethlehem Pike.

AMBLER'S FIRST HOTEL

By
Newton M. Howard

The North Pennsylvania Railroad established their line from Philadelphia to Gwynedd in 1855, calling one of their depots in the western part of Upper Dublin Township, "Wissahickon". Many felt that the area would grow rapidly as a result of the train's arrival. The railroad benefited by transporting more dairy products to Philadelphia from the Wissahickon station than any other on their line, with farmers from all around bringing their dairy products to the Wissahickon station every morning. The expected growth of the village, however, did not occur.

It was not until 1870 that things were about to change, with the Montgomery County Agricultural Society purchasing a large tract of land south of Butler Avenue, for use as their Fair Grounds and race track. By now the Village of Wissahickon had been re-named Ambler to honor Mary Ambler, heroine of the Great Train Wreck of July 17, 1856. The fair grounds were called Ambler Park. With thousands attending these fairs, investors began to take a second look at the Village of Ambler, not yet incorporated.

One of these early investors was Jacob Lugar, of Horsham, who purchased from Jonathan Lukens, about 1871, the vacant land between Main Street and the railroad, fronting on Butler Avenue. He began the hotel's construction almost immediately, the contractor's price being about \$4,500. An interesting item concerns the source of stone used in the hotel's construction. On New Year's Eve, December 31st, 1869, the Fulling Mill of the Ambler family burned to the ground. Lugar acquired the stone from the walls left standing to build the foundations of his new "Ambler Park Hotel". Some time later Lugar moved into the unfinished structure. Then, in a few weeks and without any explanation whatsoever, he moved back to Horsham, shortly thereafter being sold out by the Sheriff.

The property was conveyed some time in 1873 to James Wampole, of North Wales, with the hotel still not completed. Wampole had the open creek, Tannerie Run, arched over up to the railroad tracks. He also built the hotel's frame stables, with Ambler's first public hall on the second floor. This was operated by his son-in-law, Davis Yerkes.

Wampole, like Lugar, had possession of the hotel property for only a short time, being sold out by the Sheriff in 1875. Some unfortunate real estate speculations had caused him, the second owner, to lose the property.

Third owner, William Acuff, acquired the hotel for \$8,000 in 1875. He died in 1879, with ownership passing to his son, Alfred Acuff. He retained possession for four years, selling it to Samuel T. Godfrey for \$13,500 in 1883. During Godfrey's ownership, a disastrous fire, February 9, 1890, at the Buchanan Building, Butler and Main, destroyed that building, and spread to sheds and stables of the hotel, known then as Hotel Godfrey. Following the fire, Godfrey built a substantial stone stable to replace the frame buildings lost in the fire. He also at this time added a large wing to the hotel itself.

In 1892, Godfrey sold the hotel property to John D. Cooper for \$27,500, with Cooper selling it the following year to William C. Blackburn for \$40,000. Cooper, with a large profit of \$12,500, used \$5,000 of this money to purchase land at Butler and Spring Garden, part of the farm of

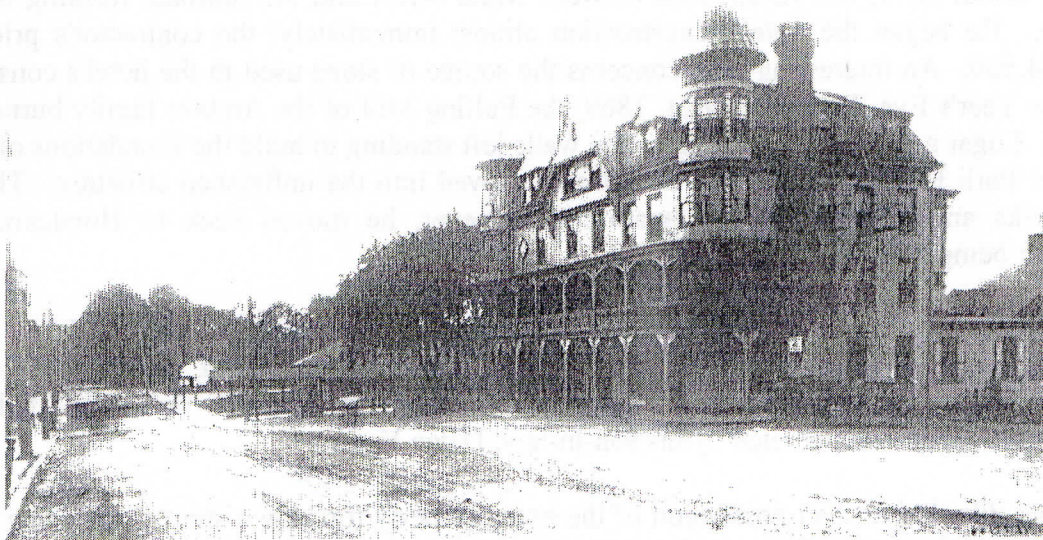
Charles and Susan Shoemaker, to build his Wyndham Hotel. Begun late in 1893, the Wyndham was Ambler's second hotel.

Owner William C. Blackburn, who called his place Blackburn's Hotel, was killed in 1900 in a Hatfield train wreck, with ownership passing to his son, Irvin Blackburn.

An interesting incident occurred at the hotel in 1904, in the largely Republican town of Ambler, when "a County Democrat campaigning from the upper porch was pelted with eggs at 40 cents a dozen Monday evening. The crowd tried to drown out his voice with noises, even a giant firecracker." After a ride around town, he was allowed to clean up the eggs at Hotel Ambler and leave town.

The Fretz family became the next owners about 1911, and in 1919 began construction of several stores extending from the hotel out to Butler Avenue.

Through the years, after changes of ownership and name, Ambler's first hotel, known during World War II as the Nesbitt Apartments, was destroyed by fire just before Christmas of 1944, leaving many families homeless, and with a loss of more than \$50,000.



**Ambler Park Hotel the first hotel in Ambler built in 1871
From the postcard collection of Henry Scholz**

A Second Hotel for Ambler

By
Newton M. Howard

"We've just come from the Village of Ambler, where we found its Hotel Wyndham to be one of the finest and best-equipped hotels we've ever seen in a country town". These were the words of New York millionaire Edwin Gould on arriving at the Three Tuns Inn, seeking refreshment for both man and beast. Gould himself was at the reins of a fine carriage drawn by four gray hackneys. Having attended a family wedding in Germantown, the Gould party was returning home by the scenic route which brought them into Ambler.

Hotel Wyndham at the time was just two years old, construction having begun in the fall of 1893. It was built by John Cooper, on ground fronting on Butler Avenue at present-day Spring Garden Street.

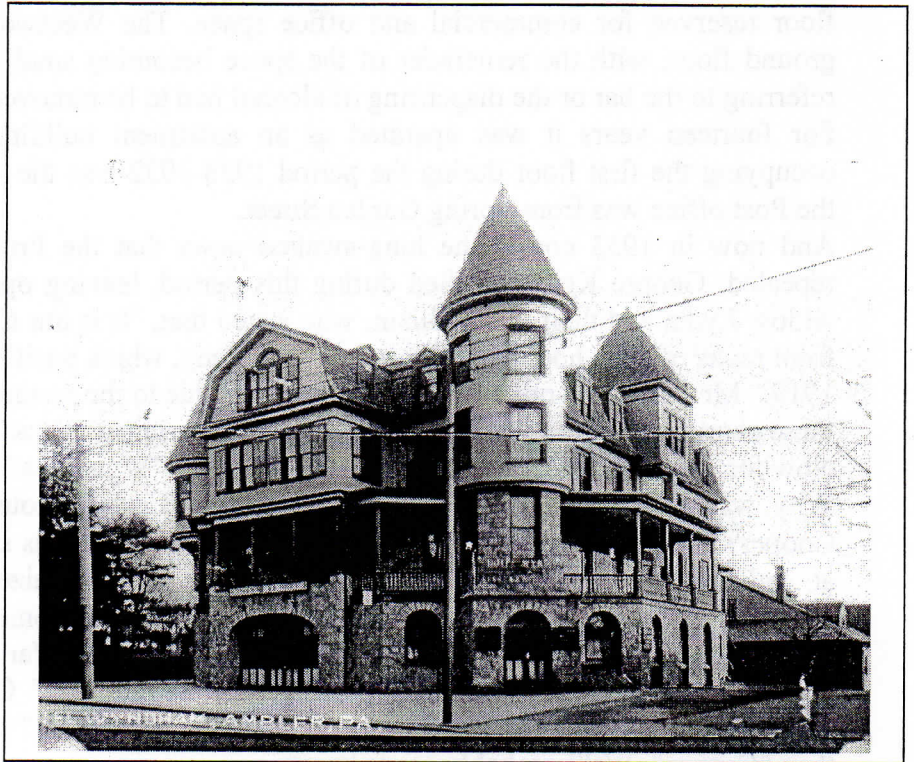
The Coopers had owned the old Ambler Park Hotel for only a year, when they felt that Ambler was ready for a second hostelry. They sold the hotel, built in 1871, to William Blackburn in 1892, realizing a profit of \$12,500.

Using \$5,000 of this money, they purchased the lot from Charles and Susan Shoemaker. It was a part of their 10-acre farm, acquired way back in 1869.

It's assumed that little more than excavation for the foundation was done that year with winter approaching rapidly. Major construction of this 45 room hotel, as well as the stables and carriage sheds, began the following spring.

By mid-1894 a handsome quartered oak bar was being installed. By June the new "Wyndham Hotel" sign was placed on the building; and, with Cooper's hotel license received, guests began arriving in large numbers for the hotel's first summer.

The Coopers operated the business successfully for a number of years until financial problems began to plague them. In 1904, it became necessary to sell their hotel to a creditor, Alexander Hipson, for \$37,500. Considering it a good investment, Hipson held the property until 1906, selling it for \$50,000 to George and Lydia Kern.



Hotel Wyndham on Butler Avenue at Spring Garden Street. Begun in 1893 by John & Elizabeth Cooper, full-scale operation began in mid-1894. Visible behind the hotel are its stables and carriage sheds, destroyed by fire in the 1920's. Photo from Postcard Collection of Henry Scholz

The Kerns, enjoying years of successful operation of their business, were suddenly faced with serious decision-making. The Eighteenth Amendment had brought about the Era of Prohibition, making it necessary for the Kerns to adjust their operations.

In an effort to survive this Prohibition period, Mrs. Lydia Kern arranged for the entire contents of the hotel to be sold. She then proceeded to convert upper floors into apartments, with the first floor reserved for commercial and office space. The Wentworth Bakery leased most of the ground floor, with the remainder of the space becoming small stores and offices. All signage referring to the bar or the dispensing of alcohol had to be removed by law.

For fourteen years it was operated as an apartment building. The most prominent tenant occupying the first floor during the period 1928-1932 was the Ambler Post office. Entrance to the Post office was from Spring Garden Street.

And now in 1933 comes the long-awaited news that the Prohibition Act of 1919 has been repealed. George Kern had died during this period, leaving operation of the Wyndham to his widow Lydia and their son William, who stated that, "It is our aim to place the Wyndham in the front ranks of such hostelrys along the North Penn, which position it held before it was closed in 1919." Mr. Kern was quite frank in stating "it is due to the restoration of beer that we are making these changes to return the Wyndham Hotel to its original status."

Now for a theory concerning the origin of the name "Wyndham" given the hotel by John Cooper: Why was it not called the "Cooper Hotel" or "Cooper House"? Possibly because of John Cooper's time spent in the Army during the Civil War. He was in the Quartermaster Department at Indianapolis for a year, after which he helped organize an independent company in Montgomery County. Members furnished their own equipment and horses, but soon after enlisting, all independent companies were required by the War Department to be attached to a unit. Cooper's company became a part of "Col. Wyndham's" Company "A", First New Jersey Cavalry, where he served for three years. Perhaps "Wyndham" seemed a better name for a hotel than "Cooper". We'll probably never know.

An Ambler Winter to Remember 1898-99

By
Newton M. Howard

After weeks of balmy autumn weather, we're experiencing a dramatic change. The skies darken suddenly as snow begins to fall on this day before Thanksgiving of 1898. Very light at first, it grows much heavier with increasing winds.

And now, early on the holiday morning, we find that blizzard conditions, continuing through the night, have blanketed Ambler with a heavy snowfall. Drifts have already reached nearly six feet high, making travel difficult. It's definitely a bad storm, but many manage to attend combined Thanksgiving morning services at Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church.

By mid-morning, the road to Broad Axe is almost hidden. Sleighs are finding travel through the fields a better way to go. Forest Avenue at Bethlehem Pike is completely blocked with a huge wall of drifted snow, while down the Pike at Rose Valley; several large drifts block the intersection. No traffic is moving there at all.

Merchants in Ambler's business center have managed to keep the sidewalks and roadways open by their continuing efforts with shovels. There's a sleighing accident reported out on the Pike by the new Trinity Church construction. Water pipes were being laid along the highway, with drifting snows hiding the open trenches. Driver and passengers are thrown from the sleigh into a snow bank but not seriously hurt. The horse, however, sustaining injuries, is cared for by the vet and housed at Jarrett Dager's stables over at Hotel Ambler. Traffic on the North Penn Railroad comes to a halt because of drifting snow.

Following this Thanksgiving storm, we've had several smaller ones, but none to compare with that which strikes us in mid-February of '99. Beginning on Saturday night and continuing all day Sunday, the storm reaches its peak on Monday. It finally ends at midday on Tuesday, after having dumped twenty inches of snow on our town. Winds have whipped up drifts of ten feet or more.

Trains are having difficulty moving. Stuck in drifted snow from Glenside to Jenkintown, they're unable to move even with two engines. Ambler residents able to get into Philadelphia by train, cannot return home that same day.

Not much moving in Ambler. The snow has stopped falling, but high winds are causing havoc out at Lindenwold Farms. "Billy" Devine rounds up men with shovels, and a five-horse sled. Lindenwold Terrace is completely drifted shut, so they go across fields to the old Houser place (today Rite-Aid) to open a path to the Pike, flattening drifts as they go.

From here it's up the Pike to Hague's Mill area, knocking down the piles of snow along the way. Rather than remove snow from the roads, they're leveling the drifts so that residents can get their sleighs out on the road to resume normal life.

(Isolated from much of the country and the world for almost five days now, all telephone and telegraph lines are down, with no newspapers available for some time.

A busy store on Butler Avenue has been Charles Dager's Meat Market in the Gazette Building. Those customers able to get into town have managed to clean his shelves of provisions. In the meantime, a shortage of meat has developed, with Dager killing some fine beef to supply his customers.

It's not until late on Wednesday that residents are able to read their first newspapers in days, and then only through the efforts of news dealer Jones Johnson. He manages to hitch up two strong horses for the trip into Philadelphia, bringing back a large supply of The Evening Bulletin. These sell out immediately.

There's more snow to clear from the railroad tracks than anyone remembers seeing in many a year. At Penllyn the drifts have closed the tracks solidly, while the Gwynedd Tunnel is drifted

shut, hidden completely. Farther down the line at Fort Washington, the snowfall has ended, with the plow, connected to two engines, attempting to open the heavy drifts in the cut behind Fort Washington Hotel. Local residents, lined up on the bridge over the railroad to watch the operations, are suddenly rewarded with a complete covering of snow thrown up by the action of the plow.

Proprietors of both the Wyndham and Hotel Ambler report accommodating large numbers of strangers stranded by the storm, while many residents declare that it was every bit as bad as that notorious blizzard of 1888.

An Old Ambler Neighborhood Remembered

By
Newton M. Howard

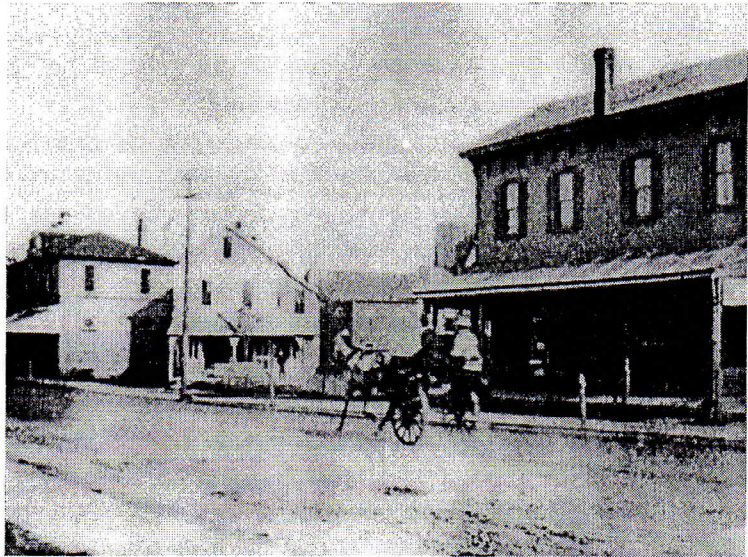
It's history can very easily be traced back to 1887 when Drs. Mary & Charles Hough purchased land just south of Lindenwold Avenue for investment. Soon they sold the southwest corner of Lindenwold & Greenwood Avenues to Richard L. Tyson of Philadelphia, who by 1891 had erected the combination store and residence, establishing his Meats & Groceries business in Ambler. During that period there was much activity in this neighborhood. Just across Greenwood Avenue a small family-owned candy and ice cream store operated for years. Some family names of operators of this store are Linde, Urban and Smith. It was popular with teenagers during the pre-WW2 years. There was the Tin-smithing

shop of Clifford Martin on Lindenwold Avenue in a red brick building erected in 1895 with bricks manufactured at the Ambler brick works of Irwin Dager. Here in this factory on South Main Street near Orange Avenue 100,000 bricks were produced at one firing!

Just around the corner on Park Avenue was Albert Shaw's Columbia Carriage Works, which also housed Ben Meyers' Blacksmith Shop. That building had been moved from the old Ambler Park Race Track where it served as the blacksmith shop. Just down Greenwood Avenue was the large greenhouse complex of the Kibblehouse family. They were wholesale florists selling their products in the Philadelphia market.

By 1904 Tyson disposed of his building and business to Josiah Longstreth. Ownership of the store and residence changed a number of times until Laura Colflesh, owner in 1923, placed the store and residence on the market, soon receiving an offer to buy from two men in Burlington, New Jersey. They were Charles Betz and his son-in-law Frank King, owners of a grocery store in Burlington. They were replying to the Colflesh newspaper ad.

And this is where a chapter in Ambler's history begins, one that was to embrace a period of fifty-four years, and would be dominated by a single family who left their mark on that section of Ambler. Just by sheer numbers alone, the family of Frank & Dorothy King, Sr. was to be



This early photograph, taken by William Acuff in 1898, shows the corner of Greenwood and Lindenwold Avenues. Here Richard Tyson erected the building in 1891 and established the first Meats & Groceries business on this spot. Operators changed through the years, with the final owners King & Betz, ceasing operations in 1977 after fifty-four years of serving the neighborhood. Today, this is the site of Terry Addison's Antique Drummer.

Photograph courtesy of Walter King

remembered, for they produced thirteen children, more than enough for their own baseball team, and an almost endless supply of clerks to work in the King & Betz store which became in time a landmark on Lindenwold Avenue. For over a half century their lives touched many lives in both Ambler and the surrounding communities.

On a personal note, the writer's aunt was a neighbor of the King family, and often visited us when we were growing up on Church Street. It seems that more than once on her visits she would have this to say, "Well, Mrs. King just had another baby!" During World War Two, five of the King boys were in the service. Ambler Presbyterian Church issued a newsletter for local servicemen with Mrs. Fanning Hoyt the editor, assisted by Mrs. John Ledeboer and many others. John McIlroy related this story. "Whenever I visited Mrs. King for address information, she always knew the complete addresses of all five of her sons, including the eight digit serial number, without referring to an address book."

All good things must end, and so it was with the popular neighborhood store, succumbing to progress that changed the way America shopped for its groceries and other household needs. The year 1977 marked the demise of King & Betz operations, an emotional happening for both the family and the hundreds of customers served over generations. In the following year Terry Addison became owner of the property and here he moved his Antique Drummer business, which continues to this day in the year 2001.

Before leaving this old neighborhood, here are some interesting facts about it. Lindenwold Avenue was not always so named, having been called West Avenue, and for good reason; it runs exactly east and west. North Street crosses Lindenwold and runs exactly north and south, so there's no mystery as to why it was originally called West Avenue. Take your compass to that intersection and check it out. It was Doctor Mattison who came along in the 1880's with the name Lindenwold. Somewhere along the way Lindenwold had even been called Cedar Road, being an extension of the present Cedar Road that starts at Susquehanna Road.

AMBLER POLICE - THE EARLY YEARS

By

Newton M. Howard

Many still living remember the sound of the horse's hoofs in the night, and the feeling of security as Chief Richard Ford patrolled the streets of Ambler. Known by everyone as Dick Ford, he could be described as a very colorful and charismatic individual, possibly our most memorable chief of all time. By day he was Ambler's Health Officer, the man who tacked those colorful quarantine signs on your door for measles, mumps, scarlet fever etc.

He wasn't the first police officer in town, though, for in 1897-98 there was a Constable James R. Stevens in the news. In 1899 James Boileau ran against him on the Democratic ticket for the position of High Constable. Elected in April of 1900, Boileau's uniform was bought with money raised by the citizens of Ambler. At the same time, his salary rose from \$45 to \$50 a month, with a set of handcuffs being purchased for \$4.25.

There were complaints in 1900 that the High Constable was rarely seen in the extreme limits of the borough, with a suggestion being made that call boxes should be placed in strategic parts of town for him to ring in.

Apparently not much serious crime existed in these years, for reports of police activities included breaking up crap games or arresting bicyclists for various "crimes" in town. Lindenwold Avenue was considered a speedway, with bicyclists turning onto Butler Avenue, frightening horses and in turn causing accidents. Those apprehended were taken before Justice of the Peace Thomas Biting at Main & Short Streets. Here they paid costs of \$7.75 or had their bicycles impounded. Local ordinance called for bicycles to have lights and horn's, with much police work spent apprehending violators.

An interesting story tells of an incident at the old Reiff's Mill on Butler Avenue, next to the Wissahickon Creek. This building, still standing today, was acquired by Keasbey & Mattison Company and converted into quarters for housing Italian men brought here to work at the plants. It was rumored that gambling was going on in the yard behind the building. Constable Boileau, with three deputies, swooped down on the men on a Sunday morning as they were playing a game similar to bowling. Arrested were seven men and a boy. The Justice of the Peace fined each man \$7.50, and the boy \$3.50. The "gambling" was the innocent and traditional Italian game of bocce! But they were betting pennies!

First mention of Dick Ford's name came in the summer of 1904, when he acted as a substitute for Officer Boileau who was vacationing. An interesting story is told of Ford before he became High Constable. He was a member of Wissahickon Fire Company. While he and other fireman were visiting Atlantic City in 1906 as guests of the local Fire Company, Ford witnessed a thief stealing luggage at the train station. He immediately began to pursue the thief, the chase taking them through the city, resulting in the capture, at which time Dick Ford turned over the thief to the Atlantic City Police.

In February of 1908 the voters of Ambler elected Ford to the post of High Constable, replacing Boileau; thus began the illustrious career of Chief Dick Ford.

Ford handled an awkward situation at the old Bandstand very diplomatically. While Frank Palumbo conducted the Ambler Band, a stranger in town was making a nuisance of himself by imitating train noises and other annoying sounds. Chief Ford approached the man, saying to him, "Sir, you have the choice of spending forty days in our lock-up or leaving town for good." The stranger, choosing the latter, was given a dollar and put on the Chestnut Hill-bound trolley waiting on the tracks by Joe Angeny's Drug Store.

It was decided in 1922 that Chief Dick Ford could make the rounds of Ambler more efficiently as a mounted officer. In addition to a horse, he was given a night stick, an automatic revolver, a sawed-off shotgun, a mounted uniform and a storm cape. Mounted, he was able now to make three rounds instead of one.

As late as May of 1927 Chief Ford was warning owners of automobiles not to leave them parked on the streets at night without lights. There was the chance of causing accidents or being stolen.



This photograph shows High Constable James Boileau holding his twin grandsons, born in 1902, the sons of Mr. & Mrs. Charles Lewis of South Ambler. They grew up to be Bill and Jim Lewis, well-known locally in the sports field, especially baseball. Photograph from the Collection of Newton M. Howard

Asbestos - Ambler's Legacy

By
Newton M. Howard

It's taken from the mines in the form of a rock and through processing is turned into a silk-like fiber. Historically asbestos was known centuries ago, with Pliny the Elder describing shrouds of woven asbestos used in cremation. Plutarch writes of "a perpetual lamp wick" in the temple of Vesta in Rome, while Marco Polo spoke of asbestos cloth in Central Asia.

It is said that the modern asbestos industry had its start with the working of an asbestos mine in Italy as early as 1868, with full-scale production beginning in Quebec Province in 1878.

The rock was prepared for commercial use by crushing and milling the crude asbestos rock, removing any impurities present. Resulting product was a fluffy, silk-like material that had lost all semblances to a rock or mineral. The asbestos with the longest fibers was the most desirable in the textile field while the shorter fibers were used in paper and millboard production and roofing shingles.

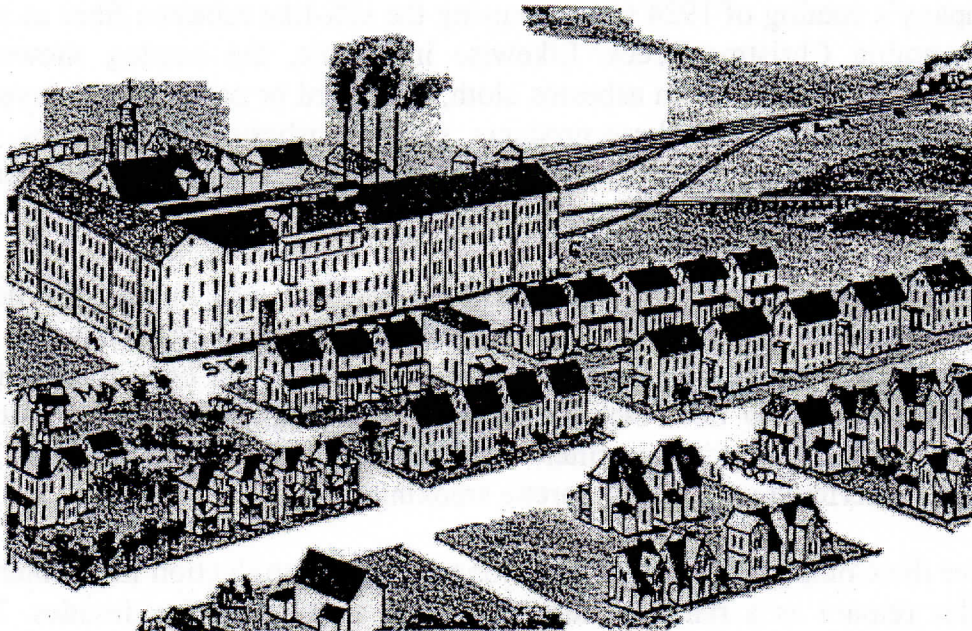


Illustration from 1894 shows Keasbey & Mattison Company first plants and the earliest company homes on the west side of the railroad in South Ambler. From collection of Newton M. Howard

Keasbey & Mattison Company, at one time the world's largest producer of asbestos products, with corporate quarters and manufacturing facilities in Ambler, began as a pharmaceutical firm in Philadelphia, moving to Ambler in 1882, where magnesia and asbestos became their major products. Realizing the need for insulating products, they soon went full-scale into the production of these products, eventually disposing of their pharmaceutical line that had also been extremely successful.

The firm owned Bell Asbestos Mines at Thetford in the Province of Quebec. The mines consisted of 120 acres of mining property containing about ten miles of railroad tracks, in addition to homes, mills and warehouses. These mines in 1907 were producing nearly 2,000,000 pounds of asbestos a month, all of which was being used by Keasbey and Mattison in Ambler.

The wealth generated locally by the asbestos and magnesia industries allowed for many changes in the landscape of Ambler, many of which are with us to today and not all of them desirable. The most obvious, the so called "white hills", just won't go away. A source of concern for years, they have been covered with soil and plant life to contain the waste which is largely magnesia. These waste piles are today considered more or less stable.

Had asbestos not been available, there most likely would have been no need for the 400 company homes and its not likely Doctor Mattison would have built his Castle or even the original Trinity Church. Neither would the Opera House have come about. Mattison was no doubt the most powerful man ever in Ambler. He was the dominant partner in the firm of Keasbey & Mattison although the business began originally with money from partner Henry G. Keasbey, whose family for generations had been in a successful insulating business in New Jersey.

The company's catalog of 1924 suggests using the silk-like asbestos fiber as water filters or for trimming Christmas trees. Likewise incredible, the catalog shows a line of household products made from asbestos cloth, millboard or paper. Nearly every home in Ambler had one or more of these products, such as: asbestos cloth doilies, table mats, stove mats, iron holders, pot holders, asbestos toasters, asbestos baking sheets and "Sad Iron" rests made of Asbestos Millboard.

Concerning health hazards connected with asbestos, it was known for decades that prolonged inhalation of the tiny fibers could result in a lung disorder known as asbestosis. It seldom appeared without at least ten years of exposure, but once present it generally worsened. It's ironic to note that the industry years ago knew of this situation and furnished their workers with air filters but in many cases they refused to wear them because they interfered with their cigarette smoking.

Long after the Company has ended their long period of production in Ambler their huge waste piles remain as a reminder that they were active here for decades. These piles consist mainly of magnesia waste with just a small percentage being asbestos fiber.

AMBLER'S FIRST BASEBALL TEAM - ORGANIZED 1887

By
Newton M. Howard

"Our left fielder, Jack Acuff, could run a block and jump up on a fence to catch a high ball and never miss, but if he had to stand and wait for a ball to drop in his mitt, the chances were 10 to 1 that he would miss it." Those were the words of William L. Diehl, manager of Ambler's first organized baseball team, as he returned thirty some years later, meeting with a group at the Euclid Avenue home of the team's captain, Newton B. Myers.

Present at this reunion, in 1918, was Andy the bat boy, who added, "Many a time we would hold our breath, waiting for Jack to make the catch, fearing he would miss and lose the game for us." Other old-timers were present for this momentous reunion. Newt Myers, captain and second baseman, was now confined to a wheel chair by a crippling illness.

This famous team was organized in the spring of 1887 with the backing of Henry G. Keasbey, partner in the local Keasbey & Mattison Company. He and Dr. Richard V. Mattison had founded their Chemical Works in Philadelphia in 1873, moving in 1882 to larger facilities in Ambler.

The playing field was on South Main Street just off Butler Avenue on land that would later house the Reading Freight Station. It was just across the tracks from the Keasbey & Mattison plants, and from the third floor of one of these buildings, Keasbey's family and friends frequently watched the games.

These were the members of that now well-known team: pitcher Ed Thomas; catcher Tom McCann; first baseman Ed Delp, second baseman and captain Newton B. Myers; shortstop Jack Gillan; third baseman Jack Urban; left fielder Jack Acuff; center fielder Elmer Gorman and right fielder Joe Morley. The team's mascot and bat boy was thirteen year old Andy Godfrey. Eight of the players were employed at the Keasbey & Mattison Works, while the ninth, Ed Thomas, worked for his brother Arthur, owner of the local newspaper.

According to Manager Diehl, "We had no substitutes; in fact, we didn't need any, as every man would play the game through, even if he had to play on one leg, and if I remember rightly, I think our catcher 'Old Stonewall' Tom McCann caught a ball one time with one hand because the other one was injured."

Diehl continued, "We had some good games, though not as scientific as games played today. The boys all tried to knock the cover off the ball, and usually it was sent a mile, or else there was a strike out. Ed Thomas was quite a pitcher that year and had a splendid drop curve ball, which baffled all the batters who stood in front of him. As for our catcher Tom McCann, anything that came within three yards of the plate would not get past him.

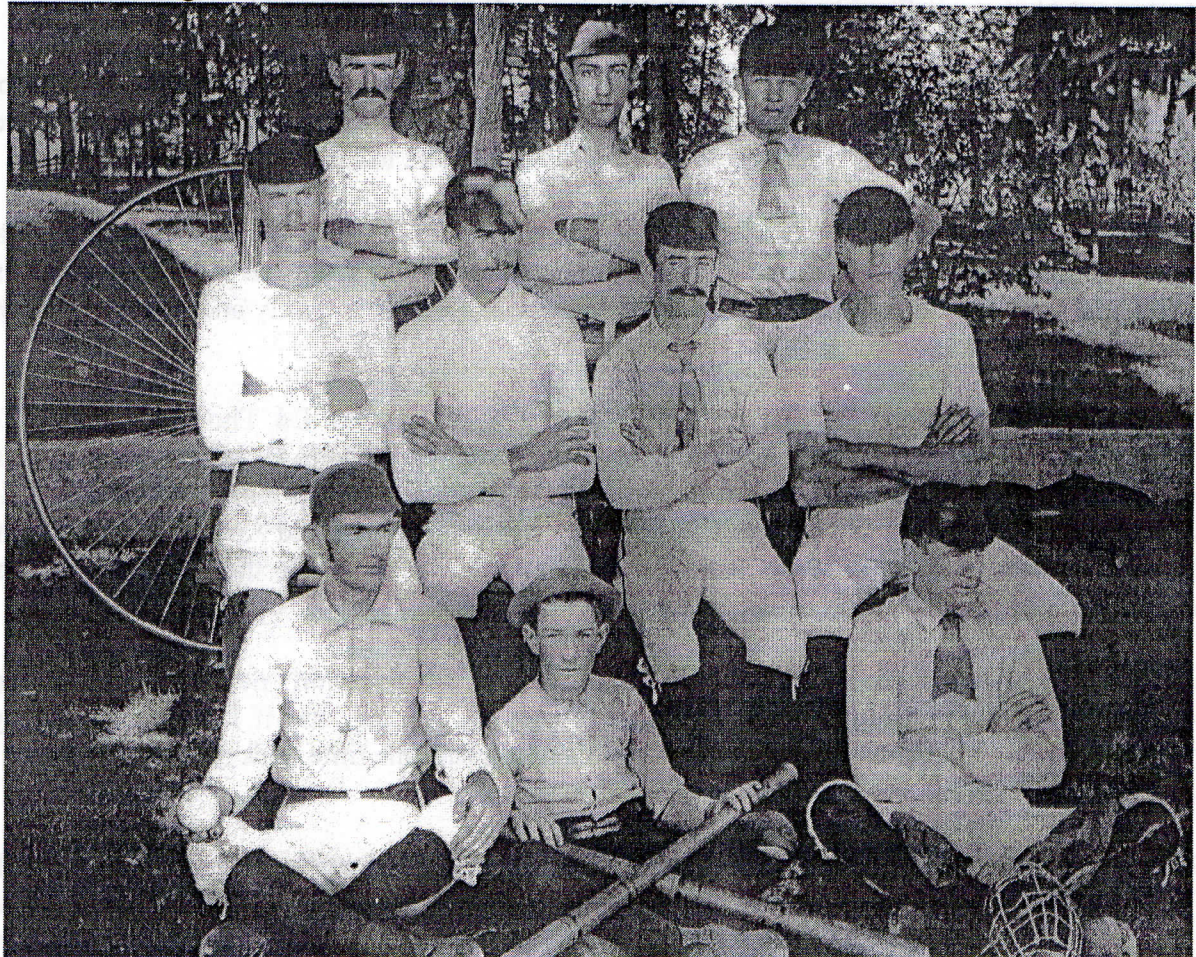
"Our first baseman 'Big Ed' Delp, could catch anything near him. He had been brought down from Hatfield to work at the Plant just so he would be eligible to play on the team." Andy Godfrey noted that work was secured at the K&M plant for several other players just to get them on the team.

Former bat boy and mascot, thirteen year old Andy Godfrey, now local physician Dr. Andrew Godfrey, told the group of his experiences since the days of that 1887 team. Following Medical

College, he entered the Army during the Spanish-American War, serving as a field surgeon. After the War he started his practice in Ambler, only to have it interrupted again by the World War. And now he was once again discharged with the rank of Captain in the Medical Corps.

He recalled an interesting happening in 1902, between the two wars. Returning from a house call, he was driving up present day Church Street before any houses had been built, when his horse suddenly began to sink into the quicksand near Trinity Church. Fortunately the horse remained perfectly still, allowing Godfrey to unhitch and remove him from the quicksand. Ambler's streets at that time were poor, having several such areas, the worst being on North Main Street, near Tennis Avenue.

This renowned team of 1887 played some very good games with Sellersville, Quakertown and other local clubs, building a reputation so great that in succeeding years it was not easy to equal their outstanding record.



Ambler's First Baseball team

Front: Ed Thomas, pitcher; Andy Godfrey, bat boy & mascot; Tom McCann, catcher
Middle: Ed Delp, first base; Newton Myers, Captain & second base; Jack Gillan, shortstop;
Jacl Urban, third base
Back: Jack Acuff, left field; Elmer Gorman, center field; Joe Morley, right field
Photograph from Collection of Newton M. Howard

Charles & Susan Shoemaker - Early Ambler Settlers

By
Newton M. Howard

No street bears their name, nor does the spot where their Butler Avenue home once stood have a marker. There is nothing to remind us that Charles and Susan Shoemaker, pioneers in early Wissahickon Village, now Ambler, ever existed. In the years following the Civil War they acquired land on the south side of Butler Avenue in the Village center, intending to build a home and farm the land, at the time, planted with a crop of wheat.



This photograph shows the original 16-room frame home of Charles & Susan Shoemaker on Butler Avenue. Built in 1868, most of the lumber used in its construction came from Isaac Thomas' Sawmill across the street, with the carpenter from Hatboro walking to the site each day. Stores and Ambler's first Municipal Parking lot today occupy this spot. Site of Isaac Thomas' Sawmill is now a part of Denney Electric parking lot.

Photo above from the collection of Newton M. Howard

You're wondering by now just who were the Shoemakers and why we should be remembering them. Well, young Charles, a resident of Philadelphia, worked occasionally in his father's apothecary shop at 2nd and Buttonwood. Susan was a resident of Wissahickon Village, one of five daughters of Isaac and Tacy Thomas. Isaac Thomas was Postmaster in Upper Dublin township, the Post office being housed in his General Store on the east side of Bethlehem Pike, land later that of Richard V. Mattison, and now St. Mary's Villa.

Another daughter, Ardella Thomas, was married to local physician Dr. Albanus Styer, the couple living at the Thomas homestead, Styer often visited the Shoemaker apothecary in Philadelphia for medical supplies, where he became a close friend of young Charles, with Styer inviting him out to the Thomas home for week-ends. On one of these visits Susan and Charles walked over to her father's sawmill, properly chaperoned by her four sisters, not realizing that one day they would be building their home in the Village with lumber from Isaac Thomas' sawmill, formerly that of the Ambler family.

He soon became captivated with Isaac's daughter, the "vivacious and gracious" Susan, with the courtship blossoming into marriage in 1852. It was still called Upper Dublin at the time of their marriage.

The name Wissahickon was given in 1855 by North Penn Railroad when they established their line to Gwynedd.

They lived at first in Horsham Village, later moving back to Wissahickon into the old Reiff homestead on Butler Avenue, now McDonald's. Soon they purchased ten acres from her father for \$2,500. This included land on the south side of Butler Avenue from present-day Spring Garden Street to Lindenwold Avenue, and in depth back to Poplar Street. Here they built a 16-room frame house with locally-sawn lumber coming from Isaac's sawmill just across the street at

Butler and Spring Garden. The house was unique in that it had a bathroom, rare at the time, causing travelers passing by to point out the residence.

Soon after purchasing the land they were approached by James Wampole who in 1875 lost his Ambler Park Hotel to the Sheriff and wished to build a home in the Village, by now renamed Ambler Village. This was on the southeast corner of Butler and York. That house was moved years later and still stands today at the corner of York and Poplar Streets.

Still intending to farm the land, they sold another parcel about 1876 to Henry Slutter where he built his first home. Today this is the site of the old Ambler Theatre, later the Christian Cinema. Slutter bought more land from the Shoemakers, where he built another home and his carriage shop. By 1881, the Shoemakers sold land between Lindenwold Avenue and York Street to John Buchanan who developed the "Doctors' Row" homes.

The Shoemakers continued to sell land to various developers that cut into their farmlands, finding time to build their second home next to the original house. By 1890 the First Presbyterian Church purchased part of the original acres to build their first church.

One of the last buildings erected on the original ten-acre lot was the Wyndham Hotel, with John Cooper acquiring the land in 1893. The ten-acre wheat field that had become the Shoemaker farm was dwindling away, victim of a developing Borough of Ambler, incorporated as a borough in 1888, a banner year for developing in the borough. Charles and Susan Shoemaker's lands had become one of Ambler's earliest commercial developments.

In the early 1950's, much of the ten acres of wheat acquired by Charles and Susan Shoemaker became Ambler's first municipal parking lot, with the entrance roadway from Butler Avenue called Cavalier Drive. It would seem appropriate if somewhere in the vicinity of these original lands of Charles and Susan Shoemaker, they could be remembered for their early endeavors in developing Ambler.



(This article is based in part on "Early History of Ambler - 1682-1888", by Dr. Mary P. H. Hough, subject of the December 2000 Enterprise historical article "Dr. Mary")

THE DOCTOR'S UNIQUE TANK HOUSE

by
Newton M. Howard

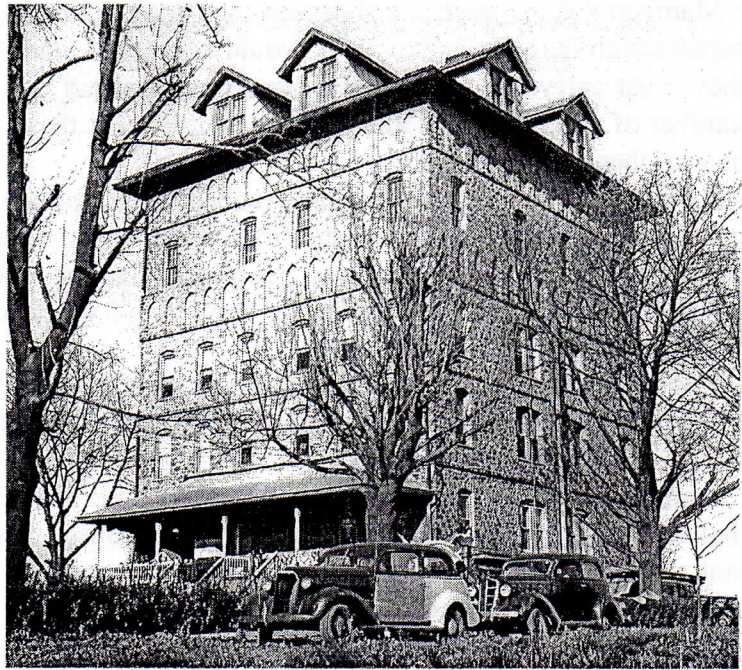
Established by Dr. Richard V. Mattison in 1892 the Ambler Spring Water Company was part of his estate known as Lindenwold Farms. He and his partner Henry G. Keasby had brought their Chemical Works to Ambler in 1882, with the result that their success led to a rapid expansion in both the residential and commercial areas of Ambler.

This growth made it necessary in 1903 for the Water Company to supply more water at greater pressure, in order to reach Ambler's higher elevations. To alleviate these conditions, plans for a most unusual stone building were announced by Mattison's superintendent, William "Billy" Devine, who had this to say of the plans.

"The building will contain five huge water tanks on the top floor, each with a capacity of 20,000 gallons. These will be made of cedar, and each one will be 16 feet in diameter by 16 feet high." He stated further that, "this structure will be erected next to Loch Alsh reservoir, which was named by Dr. Mattison after a lake in Northern Scotland, home of his ancestors. Elevating these tanks will give us more pressure to reach all parts of town. Before the operations begin, though we must tear down the old frame water tower and tank on that spot. Also in this building, and located under the tanks, will be four housing units, each one four stories high, with eight to ten rooms and a bath.

When excavation for the foundation began, not many onlookers were present, but as word about Mattison's unusual building began to spread around town, many more appeared on the scene. Some couldn't believe that four homes were to be located in this large building, with 100,000 gallons of water "up in their attics".

Among those watching the operations was a gentleman wearing a faded blue Union Army cap. The stranger, whose name was Charlie, walked with the aid of a cane, and mentioned to his companion that he knew Billy Devine, and just 38 years ago they were mustered out of the Army together. Speaking of the building under construction, he said he'd never in all his travels seen a structure quite like this. "I don't think I'd feel safe livin' in a house with all that water upstairs.



Dr. Mattison's Tank House, also known as the Tower House, on Loch Alsh Ave. the top floor held five water tanks, each with a capacity of 20,000 gallons beneath these tanks were four apartments, actually four complete homes, one at each corner of the building. Each was four stories high, with the first floor partially below ground level. The tanks were hidden from view by the dormers on the roof and the top row of windows, all of which were dummies.

Photograph by Newton M. Howard

Why, would you do if the tanks sprung a leak while you're asleep? You'd drown before you ever woke up, that's what you'd do."

Then he spoke further of his acquaintance with Billy Devine, the tow having served together in the Fifth U.S. Light Artillery during the Civil War. Continuing, he said, "Billy and I didn't keep I touch after the War, and it wasn't until about 1888 that we met by chance at Hotel Ambler, down by the railroad. Billy had just come to work as a carpenter. He could do anything, and it wasn't long before the Doctor recognized this talent and made him superintendent of all of the company houses too. He has charge of everything except the plants over at the Chemical Works."

Mattison's stone quarry, a short distance down Farm Lane, was to furnish all the stone used in construction here, the stone walls would be thicker than normal because of the tremendous load they must carry. Evidently not everyone was afraid of living below so much water, for large number of applicants had already signed up to rent these four unusual homes before the masons had reached the second story.

As fall approached, workers had reached the fourth story, with the 20-inch iron beams being installed to carry the weight of the filled water tanks. This floor received a thick coat of cement, and over this a solid asphalt floor, guaranteed against leakage for a period of 10 years. By early fall the masons were working on the top row of windows, and soon the roof would go on the building.

It is now a year since construction began, and the tenants began moving into the four homes. They must have been pleased with what they found, for many of these families live there for a period of twenty to thirty years.

Mattison gave his new building the name "Tower House". The public, however, soon replaced that with the more appreciate name of "Tank House", for obvious reasons. The location of the tanks at this higher elevation increased the water pressure dramatically, allowing for better water distribution to all parts of Ambler.

It was in 1973 that the "Tank House" was torn down, the five tanks having been removed some years before. It was replaced by a large capacity metal storage tank.



This photograph shows the actual quarry where the stone was harvested for Doctor Mattison's castle, Trinity church, the Tank House and many of the homes constructed in the Ambler area for the Keasby & Mattison workers. It was located at the corner of Farm Lane and Highland Avenue, now a park.

Photograph by Newton M. Howard

MEMORABLE PERFORMANCE AT THE OLD AMBLER OPERA HOUSE

by
Newton M. Howard

Early in this century a theatrical production company brought to the Ambler Opera House Harriet Beecher Stowe's beloved "Uncle Tom's Cabin". Many looked forward each year to seeing the performance, a favorite with Ambler theatergoers.

The original Ambler Opera House, built around 1890, had a wide stage, flanked by four boxes with ornately-decorated curved fronts. There were two on each side, one above the other. This large stage allowed for band concerts, amateur shows, vaudeville, wrestling and boxing, minstrel shows, political rallies and graduations. Even a moderate-sized circus could be accommodated here. Acoustics of the original Opera House were considered second only to those of La Scala Opera in Milan, according to an entry in the autobiography of an opera star who had sung here. Lighting was considered superb and the seating comfortable.

A Philadelphia-based opera company often ended their season with performances in Ambler. Their railroad car, containing scenery, costumes and props, was brought out to the freight yard siding, with the company staying in Ambler for several performances. Recognized as the finest on the North Pennsylvania Railroad between Philadelphia and Bethlehem, the popularity of the Opera House was due largely to its location on the railroad. Arrival in 1902 of the Lehigh Valley trolleys brought even larger crowds into Ambler.

The "Uncle Tom's Cabin" company had their own car, which carried scenery and props, and provided living quarters for cast and stage crew while in Ambler. For this performance, they even carried real live bloodhounds. Coming to Ambler by railroad, their car was moved by a shifter to a siding in the freight yard just across the tracks from the Opera House.

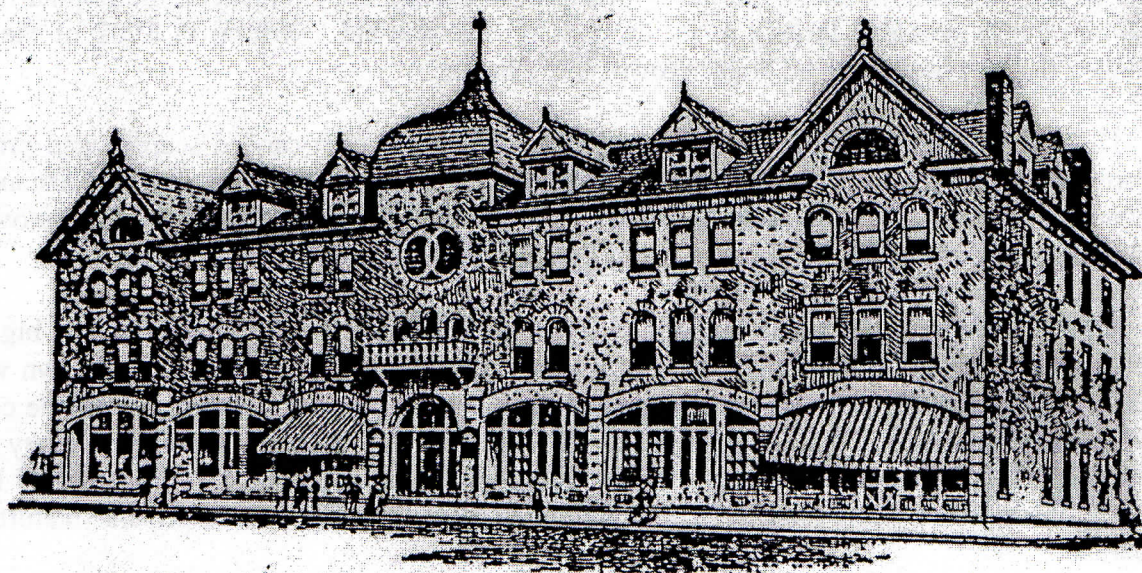
An advance party had come to town earlier to put up posters and arrange for the big parade, necessary to ensure a large turnout. Local paper advertising and posters around town were not enough to guarantee a full house. Scheduled for the afternoon of the show, the parade consisted of a bass drummer and bugler, followed by the entire cast in costume, parading on every street in Ambler, their sole purpose being to make enough noise to bring out the residents and let them know there was a show tonight. Bloodhounds used in the play were a popular feature of this parade.

The afternoon parade was a success, for in the evening the theater was filled to capacity, with standing room only. As the house lights dimmed and the curtain rose, the play seemed to begin normally. Before long, though, there was a sense that something on the stage was not right. Those in the audience familiar with the play were aware that the actors were speaking unfamiliar lines. Before the first act had ended they realized the players were intoxicated, learning afterwards that members of the cast had sent out for an ample supply of beer before the show. As the play progressed it was quite obvious that this was going to be a surprisingly different version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin". Lines were forgotten or changed and the players began to

giggle uncontrollably and to trip over props or each other. At one point an actor came precariously close to falling over the footlights into the orchestra pit.

Before the last act could be completed, the curtain came down abruptly, leaving the astonished audience in a dimmed theater for more than fifteen minutes wondering what was to come next. Finally, the staggering manager of the group appeared before the curtain, supporting himself by the ropes, and saying, "Well, what are you waiting for? You got your money's worth, didn't you? You know the story. Uncle Tom's dead and little Eva goes to Heaven, so what more do you want?" With that, he disappeared behind the curtain leaving more than 700 stunned theatergoers awestruck at this most unusual performance.

All the magnificence of the original interior was lost, however, when it was remodeled in 1928-29 into a movie theater to compete with the brand-new Ambler Theater, featuring motion pictures and vaudeville. It was soon found that Ambler could not support two movie houses, with the result that, in a few years, Warners took a long lease on the remodeled Opera House, closing it forever to the public. Used only for K&M Company functions and High School graduations, the Class of 1939 was the last to graduate from the Opera House. Final blow came in 1967 when the huge building was sold to an oil company and demolished to build one more service station. Another Ambler landmark lost to progress.



1901 drawing of original Ambler Opera House built about 1890. Six stores occupied the ground floor until 1904 when the space was taken over for Keasbey & Mattison Company offices. Store on right with awning was the Opera House Grocery. Entrance to the Opera House itself was in the center, flanked by Opera House Drug Store of Joseph S. Angeny, Jr. on the left and Haberdashery of Harry S. Nash on the right. Second floor housed meeting rooms of lodges, etc., while the Opera House Ballroom occupied the entire third floor.

Drawing from collection of Newton M. Howard

The Ambler Opera House Stores

by
Newton M. Howard

Keasbey & Mattison Company, on moving to Ambler in 1882, established their manufacturing and office facilities a block south of Butler Avenue, leaving vacant a lot fronting on Butler Avenue between the railroad and Maple Street. In this block was a deep quarry, its stone having been used in construction of buildings in early Ambler village.

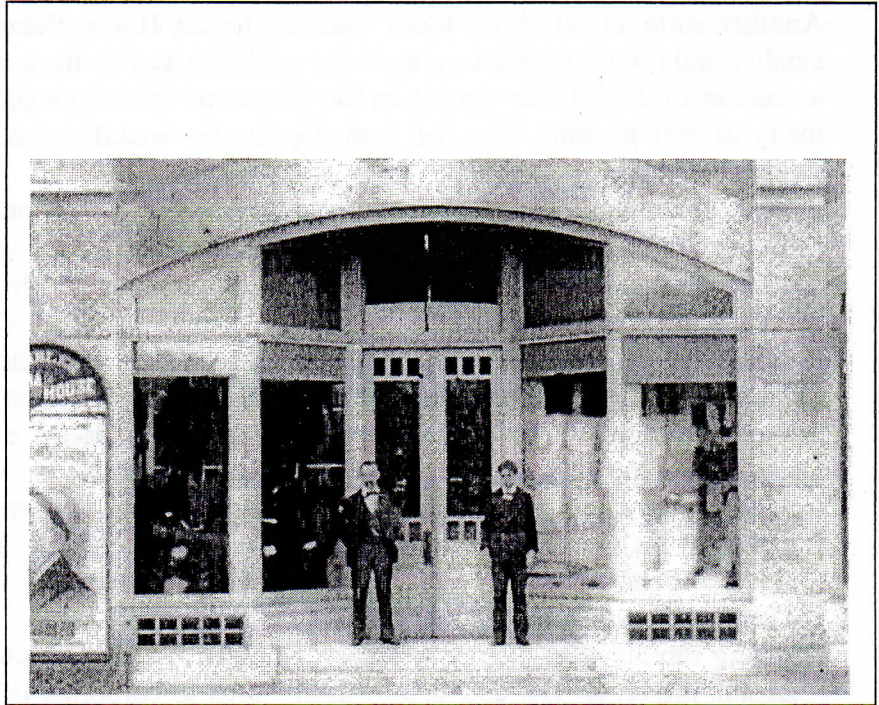
Not until about 1890 did the Ambler Opera House Building, known also as the K & M Office Building, appear on the site of the old quarry. The first floor dominated the new structure, for here was the famed Ambler Opera House, its entrance in the center of the building. Running perpendicular to Butler Avenue, it extended to the rear of the structure.

Also on the ground floor were six retail stores, three on each side of the theatre entrance. Located on the second floor were many rooms for rent by lodges or other organizations, with three of Ambler's churches having their beginnings here. The third floor housed a massive ballroom, extremely popular with the public.

Joe Angeny's Opera House Drug Store occupied one of the stores, to the east of the entrance, from the onset. His soda fountain was popular with theatre patrons as well as the general public. In 1894, with the water supply coming from Loch Linden on Doctor Mattison's estate, a tiny fish found its way into the system and eventually the jet of Angeny's soda fountain. Stopping the flow of water, it became necessary to call local plumber Frank G. Kramer to set things right.

The store on the opposite side of the entrance housed the Opera House Men's Clothing Store, with Harry S. Nash its proprietor. Nash had begun business earlier at Gilkey's Corner with partner Plumly in a section of the old Gilkeson Tavern building. In his youth, Harry had operated his father's stone quarry at Farm Lane and Highland Avenue. This later became Mattison's quarry, source of stone for local Company homes.

Largest and busiest of these stores was the Opera House Grocery at the corner of Maple and Butler, with many different proprietors during its existence. William H. Smith, apparently its first operator, sold the business to George C. Wagner in 1898. Ownership changed frequently,



Rare photograph of the Opera House Haberdashery, one of six stores in the Ambler Opera House Block during the period 1890-1905. Shown are proprietor Harry S. Nash and his young clerk, Albert H. Englerth, owner in later years of a Coal & Feed Yard on South Main Street bearing his name. Below the building in 1901 there were stores on the ground floor. Largest, on the right with awning, was the Opera House Grocery. Flanking the theatre entrance are Joe Angeny's Drug Store, with awning, and Nash's Haberdashery. Note that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was being performed at the theatre.

Photograph courtesy of Mary Nash Woodmansce, daughter of Harry S. Nash

the final proprietor being Nelson B. Keyser of Three Tuns Village, where he had conducted the General Store and had been its postmaster.

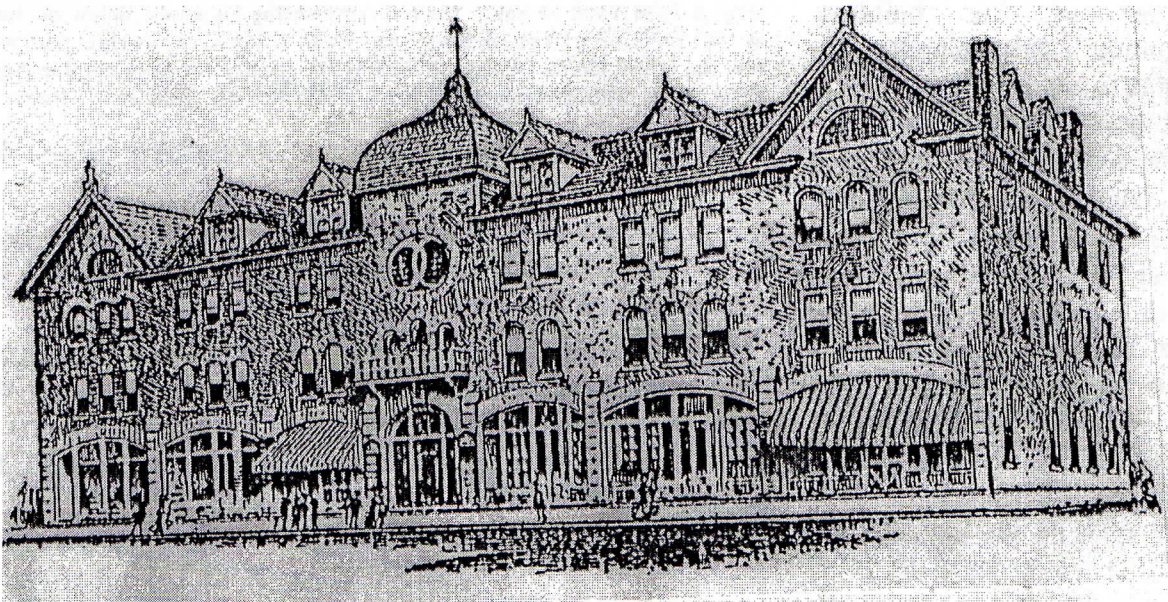
The entire Opera House building was the setting for much activity every day and night through the years, with activities greatly curtailed during the sweltering summer months, especially performances at the Opera House, where temperatures could easily reach 100°.

Another store in this busy block was the Opera House Bakery of Henry Clark. His breads, candies and home-made ice cream were well-received by the community, but he was best known as caterer to the popular dances in the enormous third floor ballroom, with an attendance of as many as 400 persons. The hall was popular for wedding receptions, as well as the regularly scheduled dances.

It was in mid-1897 that a movement was afoot to re-locate Ambler's Post office from Stillwagon's Bakery into the Opera House Block across the tracks. John S. Buchanan, due to become the next postmaster, was working diligently with Dr. Richard Mattison to make this happen, while Ambler Gazette's publisher, Joseph Haywood, was opposed to such a move and fought it vehemently. This move never came about, with the new post office built in 1898 remaining on the east side of the railroad tracks, next to the First National Bank.

Though extremely popular, the stores had a relatively brief life span. After only fourteen years, Doctor Mattison refused to renew leases, choosing instead to convert the space to corporate offices for the rapidly expanding business. Leases were not renewed, with stores moving to the east side of the tracks. First to make the move was Joe Angeny to Butler and Main at the former Sunnyside School location. Fortunately for Angeny, the school was discontinued in 1903, with conversion to stores the following year.

Growing rapidly, Keasbey & Mattison Company soon became the world's largest producer of Asbestos products. The conversion from stores to corporate offices was complete by 1905-06. The Ambler Opera House remained in the building to continue its role in the entertainment field with movies and vaudeville until the mid 1930's.



Drawing by the architect Milton Bean showing what Dr. Mattison envisioned the Opera House would look like when completed.

THE DOCTOR BUILDS A BANDSTAND

by

Newton M. Howard

Ambler in the Spring of 1911 is enjoying a period of prosperity. Business is good at all plants of the Keasbey & Mattison Company, with production at the "Shingle Plant" especially brisk. Company president, Dr. Richard V. Mattison, reports that more than two hundred company homes have been built, with many more on the way. On this very pleasant Saturday in May, crowds larger than normal have been pouring into town. By late afternoon, all four local restaurants report long lines of patrons waiting to be served.

Reason for all this activity is tonight's special concert by Frank Palumbo's Ambler Band. It's to be held at the new Bandstand, an octagon-shaped building completed just a few days ago by K&M's carpenters. It's on Butler Avenue near Maple Street, and, appropriately enough, it's surmounted by a roof of "Century" Asbestos Shingles, made right here in Ambler. Seven of its eight sides are emblazoned with names of the great composers.

Very soon now, Palumbo and his musicians will present a special program of mainly classical music that includes the "Sextets from Lucia", plus selections from "Carmen". Those who have attended the practice sessions say that the band is in excellent form. Palumbo turned this group of musicians into a professional-sounding concert band soon after arriving in Ambler way back in 1902. He came here well-qualified, being known as one of the finest cornetists in the country. Additionally, he operates a successful tailor shop right on Butler Avenue.

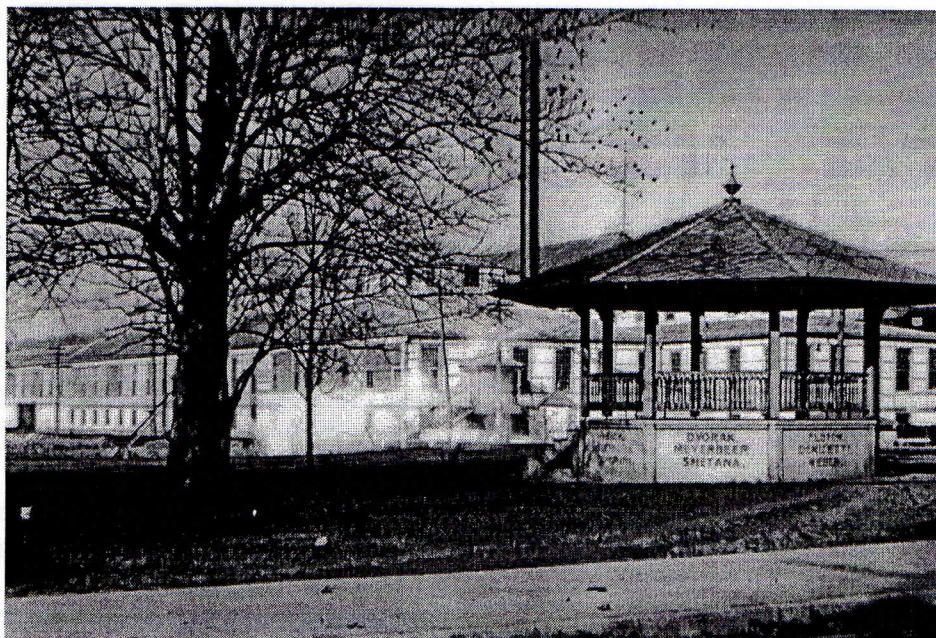
The crowds around the bandstand have been a surprise to everyone. We knew many strangers would be in town for the event, but no one expected to see nearly a thousand attending this inaugural performance. The combination of the new structure plus the reputation of the Palumbo Band have brought in larger crowds than Ambler has seen since the old days at the Fair Grounds, with the race track being the big attraction.

As eight o'clock nears, the musicians are tuning up. Chief Dick Ford has instructed his deputies to be on the lookout for the inevitable pickpocket, and to try to keep the crowds out of the streets. Many here tonight are asking this question: Why did Mattison choose to build the structure so close to the streets, making it necessary for patrons to stand on the sidewalk, and even in the street? But that was Doctor Mattison's decision and few here would dare criticize him. Why no seating was provided is another question being asked, although many have been thoughtful enough to bring along their own chairs or blankets.

This special event at the bandstand is not without a bit of humor when Chief Dick Ford encounters a stranger annoying the crowd by imitating train noises. Ford offers him the option of spending 40 days in the Ambler lock-up, over on Main Street, or leaving town for good. Choosing the latter, the stranger is given a dollar and placed aboard the Chestnut Hill bound trolley waiting on Main Street, next to Joe Angeny's Drug Store. The band performing tonight under Frank Palumbo had its start as the Citizens' Band in 1897. During the period from 1898 until 1902 they had their share of successes and failures, but with Palumbo's arrival the group took on a more professional character under his direction. Many of the members were Italians with varying degrees of talent, several having played in the Royal Band of Italy. Many were employed at the K&M plants.

Promptly at eight o'clock, Palumbo ascends the stairs and is greeted with a resounding applause. As he raises his baton, quiet falls over the crowd; the long-awaited inaugural concert at the bandstand is under way. Needless to say, it's a huge success, measured by an unusually large number of encores. The concert runs well over the allotted time, with many feeling that future successes here are assured by tonight's triumph.

Palumbo, after the final encore, had this to say about the evening's performance: "I speak for my musicians when I say we're extremely pleased with the reception given us tonight. Doctor Mattison and his family are in Newport and unable to be with us this evening, but I wish to thank him publicly for providing this long-needed facility. I'm sure that the folks in Ambler, as well as our visitors in town tonight, will be enjoying our new bandstand for many pleasant evenings in the future."



Ambler Bandstand — Built in 1911 by Dr. Richard V. Mattison — Was on the corner of Butler and Maple — Now the site of McDonalds parking lot. Photo from collection of Newton M. Howard



Ambler Band in the early 1900's — Only persons identified are: starting from the left — Frank Pileggi, Harrison Ziegler, unknown, William Knoblock, and band leader Frank Palumbo.

Photo from collection of Newton M. Howard

CELEBRITY PATIENT AT HOSPITAL IN AMBLER

By
Newton M. Howard

It was in May of 1920 that a portion of the former Joseph Haywood estate was sold to Dr. Richard V. Mattison. Known as the "Asbestos King", Mattison was the active partner of Ambler-based Keasbey & Mattison Company, world's largest producer of asbestos products, and no longer in existence.

The Haywood family, owners of The Ambler Gazette for more than a half-century, acquired their property back in 1868. Vacant for some time, a tract of just seven acres was sold to Mattison. It was located between Tennis and Mt. Pleasant Avenues and fronted on the Bethlehem Pike, and today is a part of the Artman Home complex.

Included in Mattison's purchase was the three-story mansard-roofed Haywood mansion, some out-buildings and a large frame barn. The barn was torn down by Mattison's workers and hauled out to Lindenwold Farms where it was re-assembled on land recently purchased from the John B. Vansant estate. Dr. Mattison was expanding his Lindenwold Farms properties which would eventually include more than 400 acres. Part of this acreage, which includes the Castle and Loch Linden, is owned today by St. Mary's Villa for Children.

Improvements to his newly-acquired Haywood property included installation of a new heater, two bath rooms on the second floor, one bath on the third and a pantry on the first floor. Water was brought onto the grounds by the Ambler Spring Water Company, owned by Mattison. These improvements were made with the intention of leasing the house as a residence.

Just a year after acquiring the seven acres, Mattison was approached by two physicians of wide experience, Dr. G. D. Noeling, of 1112 Chestnut St., Phila., and Dr. G. W. Tupper, of Cold Point. They had been looking for a spot to set up an osteopathic sanatorium, and apparently were pleased with the location, for they leased it from Mattison, and began major changes, such as installation of an X-ray department and an accident ward. They turned it into a first class facility, calling it the Haywood Manor Sanatorium.

Incidentally, Dr. Mattison had two reasons for purchasing the property, the first being his interest in the mansion, which he wished to sell or give to Ambler for use as a Veterans' Memorial Hospital to honor veterans of World War One. Interest in this project lagged and by 1921, it was realized that it would not come about. His other interest in the property was to acquire the large frame barn.

The new Haywood Manor Sanatorium opened July 15th of 1921. Only a month later, a new patient came to them for treatment of an ear condition, making several visits a week. He came there from Huntingdon Valley Country Club, his temporary summer residence while he worked in nearby Willow Grove. He was a lieutenant-colonel in the First World War. He loved horse-back riding and kept his horses at the stables of the Fortside Inn in Whitemarsh. He rode frequently in the picturesque Whitemarsh Valley. Occasionally he would motor from his Country Club residence to Fortside Inn, saddle up one of his favorite horses, and ride up the Bethlehem Pike for his treatments at the Sanatorium. The Pike at that time was a dirt road with very little traffic.

The mystery patient was internationally-known in the music field, his place of summer employment being Willow Grove Park, where he and his popular band played for many years. He was described on his visits to Ambler as being attired in a tweed jacket and knickers, with matching cap.



If the reader has not yet guessed the identity of the celebrity patient, he was the designer of a musical instrument of the brass family, named for him and introduced into the United States in 1899, and called the Sousaphone. Of course he was John Philip Sousa, who was 66 years old at the time of his Ambler visits in 1921. He retired in 1931 from an illustrious career in music, dying in 1932 in Reading, Pa., in his 77th year.



Recently in the news, a warning was issued to band members playing loud music, such as Sousa's marches, that it was advisable for them to wear ear plugs to prevent damage to the ear drums. Were Sousa's visits to the Haywood Manor Sanatorium in any way related to such ear problems?

The hospital was not in existence for very long, because in 1924 Dr. Mattison sold the property to the trustees of the Artman Home for Lutherans, "for one dollar and other monetary considerations".

CARRIE HEISS 57 YEARS AN AMBLER BUSINESS WOMAN

by
Newton M. Howard

Born in Chestnut Hill in 1866, Carrie Meher seemed destined to spend most of her adult life in the retailing field. Following her marriage in 1885 to Walter N. Heiss of Kensington, the newlyweds moved to Pennville, which we know today as Maple Glen. Here they operated the General Store and Post Office, which belonged to the Simmers family.

Nineteen year old Carrie was responsible for operating the store, while her husband went on the road as a peddler, travelling the countryside and selling goods from his wagon. His travels often took him into Ambler, where he became acquainted with Rees C. Roberts, owner of the popular Pharmacy at the northeast corner of Main & Butler. This was before 1895, and Roberts, recognizing the couple as aggressive merchants, suggested that they might want to think about selling their Pennville business and moving into Ambler.

"This town has a great future," said Roberts, "and it's due largely to the presence of the North Pennsylvania Railroad, and the Keasbey & Mattison Company. The railroad came here in 1855, but a bigger event was the decision by Henry Keasbey and Richard Mattison to move their plant out here from Philadelphia in 1882. They started as a pharmaceutical firm, but now they're expanding into asbestos and magnesia insulating products." Rees Roberts continued, "I think that you and Mrs. Heiss just might want to consider growing along with Ambler. If you agree to it, I have this small store on Main Street right behind my pharmacy that I'll rent to you at a very reasonable price." After showing Walter the store, Roberts said: "Why not discuss it with Carrie and let me know what you think."

On Walter's return home after a long day on the road, and after Carrie had closed their store for the day, the couple discussed selling their Pennville business, where expansion seemed limited, and moving into Ambler, where growth was almost certain. By next morning, their minds made up, Walter met with Roberts and arranged to rent the Main Street store. Thus began the establishment of a business in early Ambler that would continue until the retirement in 1952 of a widowed Carrie Heiss.

The couple's dry goods store, featuring men's, women's and children's clothing and notions, soon grew to the point where they needed more space. A popular jewelry store in Ambler was Schafenacker & Huber, on Butler Avenue next to Rees Roberts' Pharmacy. In 1900 the partnership was dissolved, making the property available at a time when Carrie and Walter were in need of more space. By spring of 1900, having purchased the property, they moved into their new store, which was three times the size of the one on Main Street.

As business continued to grow, Walter Heiss rented once again from Roberts, their original Main Street store, making it a first-class haberdashery, which he operated. Mrs. Heiss expanded the Butler Avenue store, with emphasis on women's and children's clothing. She featured ladies' millinery, making it necessary to hire several hat trimmers at this time.

In 1912 tragedy struck the Heiss family with the sudden death of Walter N. Heiss at the age of 55 years. Besides his widow, he left a young daughter Ethel Heiss. Before his death, they had purchased land on Race Street and erected three brick homes. Later they bought more investment property on Butler Avenue in the next block east of their store, occupied at the time by Charles Gerhart's Livery Stables. Next to this they erected a building which housed the Ambler Photo Gallery.

After Walter's death, Carrie continued to run the business, as well as their real estate interests. In 1913 she had builder Howard Amey erect a motion picture theatre which she called the Palace. This was built on the site of the Photo Gallery that had been torn down and moved to South Spring Garden Street. The Palace Theatre had a successful grand opening on Labor Day of 1913, with all of the 300 seats filled long before showtime. The theatre, however, had a very short life span, being destroyed by fire set by an arsonist, January 15, 1916. Rather than rebuild, she sold the property, and it became, in 1917, Wissahickon Fire Company's second location.

In 1952, after more than a half century on Main Street and Butler Avenue, and becoming Ambler's best-known business woman, Carrie M. Heiss decided to retire from business. Death came in 1961, following a fall which had broken her hip a month before.



This photo shows Mrs. Carrie M. Heiss in her Butler Avenue store in 1952, just months before retiring from more than a half century in business in Ambler.

Photograph by Newton M. Howard



This photograph taken about 1906 shows Carrie and Walter Heiss, at the right, in front of their Butler Avenue store. The three ladies, clerks in the store, are left to right: Lizzie Coleman; Tacy Clayton, from Blue Bell; and Lizzie Cook (Robinson). Mrs. Heiss for years employed three or four women as clerks and hat trimmers.

Photograph courtesy Jean "Becky" Cramer, daughter of Lizzie Cook.

QUESTERS – BORN in FORT WASHINGTON

by
Newton M. Howard



It was always a joy working with her. She had an outstanding sense of humor, once you got to know her. Born in Dodge City, Kansas in 1887, Bess Bardens led a varied and interesting life before marriage brought her to Fort Washington in the 1920's. Her mother died giving birth to Bess, who was named Jessie Elizabeth Snyder. Unable to care for his daughter, her salesman father turned over this duty to friends of the family who soon after moved to Los Angeles, taking Bess with them.

As a teenager, Bess moved with her new family to Pasadena. It was here that she studied art and music, but, more importantly, she participated in the Rose Bowl Parades with her own cart and two ponies. This tells us something of the person who would, someday become the founder of an organization that was to grow from a State-wide group to a national group and in time even international. There are many chapters in our immediate area.

It was in Pasadena that Bess met her future husband, W. George Bardens and they were married there in 1908. After raising two daughters and making several moves that brought the family closer to the east coast, the Barden's family settled in the small Pennsylvania village of Fort Washington in the 1920's.

It was during World War II, in the summer of 1943, that she became a volunteer with the Ambler branch of the Red Cross. With her daughters grown, it's understandable that she could not remain idle. It was during her lunch hour one day while volunteering at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church at the corners of Ridge Avenue and Race Street, that she saw a syrup pitcher in a second-hand shop window, on Main Street, in Ambler. This became the nucleus of her collection which continued to grow as did the original Quester group, formed in 1944 with a group of friends meeting at her Fort Washington home.

The writer first became acquainted with Mrs. Bardens, as she was always known, when she came into my photography shop. It was my pleasure to photograph much of her valuable collection in her home. This consisted mainly of tea caddies, her specialty, and pieces of period furniture.

THE DOCTOR'S NEW ARCHITECT - JOHN BOTHWELL

by
Newton M. Howard

When John Henry Bothwell came to Ambler in 1920 to work for Dr. Richard V. Mattison, most of the company homes had already been erected. Of Scottish descent, Bothwell was a native Philadelphian, who had been asked by Mattison to become head architect for the Keasbey & Mattison Company.

He was not Mattison's first architect though, for Milton Bean, of Lansdale, had been engaged much earlier to design company homes in South Ambler, as well as Lindenwold Terrace, the "Half-Acre" and other locations. Plans for Trinity Memorial Church in 1898 were those of Bean, as were possibly those of the Ambler Opera House in 1890. It is certain that he designed for Mattison the Lindenwold Castle conversion of 1912, in which the 1890's mansion was "wrapped" in local stone to resemble Windsor Castle.

Bothwell's education had been received at the Franklin Institute School of Drawing. He was a member of the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He had been employed as an industrial designer for Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company and the American International Ship Corporation. He was chief draftsman for an architectural firm in Delaware as well as maintaining his own practice.

At the time of Bothwell's arrival in Ambler, with his wife and daughter Mabel, the company homes on Upper Church Street were already under construction. Unlike the earlier twin homes on Lower Church Street, with their outhouses, these were single homes with bathrooms. Intended for employees a little higher up in the chain of company workers, the first erected was the corner store building and several homes next to the store. The new architect lived in the uppermost home in this block where the monthly rent paid was \$15.

Bothwell worked on plans for the next group of company homes to be built, the two rows on Renfrew Avenue, with Mattison hinting that not many more would be erected. He stated that "bad times are a-coming", and wished to end the building operations in preparation for a downturn in the economy. But then soon after, the row on Randolph Avenue was begun. These would complete almost four hundred employee homes constructed over a period lasting more than thirty years, and were definitely the final homes to be built.

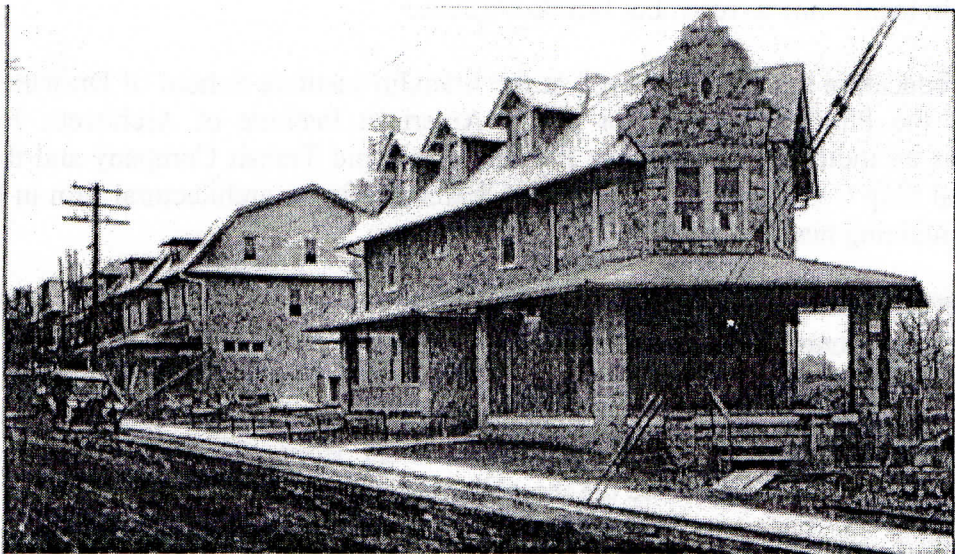
Perhaps John Bothwell's most challenging project during his time with Mattison was the interior renovation of K&M's Ambler Opera House building. This was brought on directly by the arrival in 1928 of competition from the new Ambler Theater, built with the purpose of featuring the new motion pictures sweeping the Nation and the civilized World.

Built in 1890, the Ambler Opera House had a wide, ornately-decorated stage flanked by four boxes. It had served the Community well for years, and now the popularity of the motion picture, coupled with competition by the new theater, made it absolutely necessary for Doctor Mattison to act. He summoned his architect to re-design the theater's interior for the showing of movies. In so doing, the beauty of the original Opera House was unintentionally lost forever. In addition to this great loss, there are no known surviving photographs showing the fabulous interior of the original Ambler Opera House.

On arrival in Ambler, Bothwell worked out of an office next to the home of Superintendent William Devine on Farm Lane. Soon after, his office was removed to the third floor of the family's Church Street home, at the top of the row.

The Bothwell family was well-known for their love of animals, in particular cats. Perhaps most remembered by neighborhood children though was their large rhesus monkey kept in the cellar. For children on their way to or from Matthias Sheeleigh School, a stop at the cellar window was a must. While still residing on Upper Church Street in 1948, Bothwell died at the age of 75 years, and is buried in Mount Peace Cemetery in Philadelphia.

Note: Prior to World War II, the writer worked at the K&M Plant Office with Bothwell's daughter Mabel Bothwell Westwood. Later, she gave me two of her father's drawings of the Ambler Opera House interior renovations of 1929-30. Unfortunately, after her death, large quantities of his drawings were accidentally discarded from his third floor office.



Upper Church Street homes and store at corner of Church Street and Bannockburn Avenue as construction began in 1919. First to occupy the store was Fred S. Arnold in 1921, who was followed by T. M. Wright in 1923. Photograph courtesy of Karl Scholz



Pencil sketch of architect John Henry Bothwell by Newton M. Howard.

WISSAHICKON FIRE COMPANY - THE EARLY YEARS

By
Newton M. Howard

Incorporated as a borough in 1888, Ambler was considered a very progressive community, and seems strange then that it lacked adequate means of fire protection. There was only the antiquated bucket brigade, with plans by Keasbey & Mattison Company to install underground pipes to carry water under pressure into the center of the borough.

Over a period of seventeen years there had been only two major fires in the Village of Ambler. One of these, on the last day of the year 1869, consumed the deserted Fulling Mill of the Ambler family, while the next, in 1886, burned Theodore Quinty's brand new house to the ground in an hour's time. Evidently residents did not feel the need for up-dating their fire-fighting equipment.

All this was to change dramatically in February of 1890 when the worst fire to date struck the Buchanan Building at the northeast corner of Butler & Main. The three-storied stone and frame structure, not yet three years old, was completely destroyed in a short time. After neighbor David Knipe saw smoke coming from the cellar windows, a rider was dispatched to Jenkintown to solicit the aid of their fire departments. Their equipment was placed on a flat railroad car and sent up to Ambler, but too late to be of any help. The building had already been destroyed as residents watched helplessly with only buckets of water to fight it. Hoses from Keasbey & Mattison were too short to reach the fire scene. Lost also were the recently abandoned toll house and sheds of the Ambler Park Hotel, with other buildings saved by tacking carpeting to the walls, and saturating it with water.

It was this disaster that brought about the formation of Ambler's first fire company the following year. The charter was approved on April 6, 1891, when "Wissahickon Fire Company of Ambler" became a reality. First meeting place was on the second floor of Plumly's General Store at Main & Race, now a part of Deck's Hardware. Shortly thereafter, they moved into their new quarters in one of J. Watson Craft's buildings on North Main Street, where they would remain for a quarter century.

The alarm system for the new Wissahickon Fire Company seems to have been a problem from the very beginning. Mounted in the cupola on the firehouse roof, the alarm bell proved to be unsatisfactory, and by 1907 was replaced with a locomotive tire received from the Reading Railroad.

This metal tire was not loud enough either to be heard in all parts of the borough, for in 1911 a new method was once again considered. This time it was to be a shrill whistle mounted on the outside wall of Doctor Mattison's Shingle Plant just across the tracks and not far from the firehouse. Activated electrically by a push button at the firehouse, the new whistle once again was not loud enough, making it necessary to order another high-pitched, piercing whistle. This proved to be only slightly more efficient.

There was great concern about getting to the fire scene promptly in those early days. So great was it, that in 1908 sleeping quarters were provided in the firehouse for the driver of the fire wagon who had a telephone next to his bed. Additionally, two sets of hanging harness were installed in front of the fire wagon for rapid gearing of the horses in time of alarm. The horses, stabled in the rear of the building, had been purchased from J. Watson Craft, owner of the

Lumber & Coal Yard. To pay for these horses, a committee was formed to solicit funds from property owners in and around Ambler.

The two horses saw double duty, for they were used in street work by the borough. When the alarm sounded, commissioner of streets Albert Kulp would rush to the firehouse, unhitch the horses and hitch them to the chemical wagon and drive to the fire scene.

The Fire Company owned property near the southwest corner of Butler & Main, adjacent to Doc Ambler's General Store, where it was hoped they would one day build a new firehouse. The new building never came about, because in 1916 the Palace Movie Theatre of Carrie Heiss on Butler Avenue was torched by an arsonist. Deciding not to re-build, Mrs. Heiss instead placed the property on the market. This was purchased by Wissahickon later that year. Using the standing walls of the burned-out Palace Theatre, a new building was erected, with dedication of this, their second location, scheduled for November of 1917.



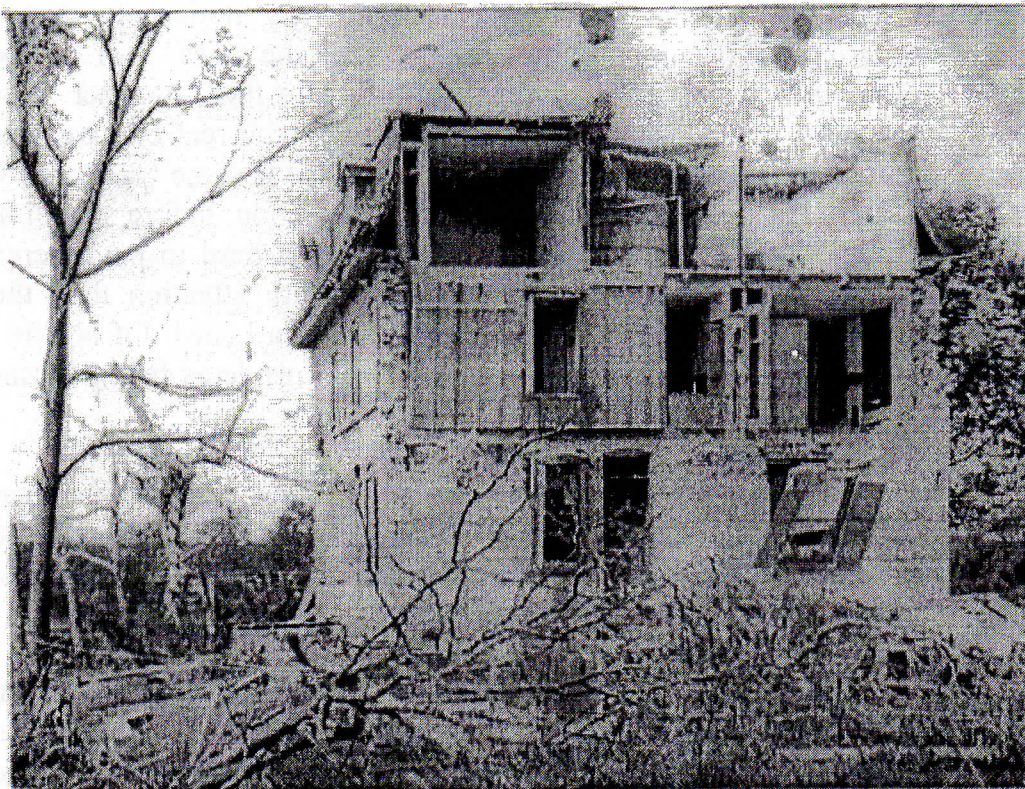
This photograph from about 1908 shows Wissahickon Fire Company's horse-drawn fire wagon in front of the original firehouse on North Main Street. Shown are driver Albert Kulp, and Fire Chief Arthur Hayden. Kulp also worked for the borough as commissioner of streets, using these two horses for borough work. All these buildings exist today, only slightly altered.

Photograph from the collection of Newton M Howard.

Tornado Strikes Ambler - Then on to Jarrettown

By
Newton M. Howard

"Property Worth \$200,000 Wiped Out in the Vicinity of Ambler and Great Damage at Other Places Alexander Knight Reports Loss to His Property in Ambler Will Be More Than \$25,000. His home an absolute wreck. Mrs. Knight, who was in it, is prostrated by the shock". Thus did a Philadelphia newspaper report the devastation by tornado that struck the area on May 28th 1896. Cordelia, wife of Alexander Knight, was alone at their Ambler home on Thursday afternoon, her husband at work in Philadelphia. Their two young children, Harold and little Cordelia, were attending Sunnyside School just a short distance up Main Street. Sunnyside was a private school conducted by their aunts, Miss Delia and Miss Sallie Knight.



Scene of destruction at the Knight homestead by the tornado that struck the area May 28th of 1896 This is the site today of Knight Playground bounded by Bannockburn Avenue, Church and Main Streets.

Photograph from Collection of Newton M. Howard

Concerned about the rapidly darkening sky, she was compelled to look out the window, only to see clouds churning in an ominous sky. Noises seemed to be getting louder and closer. She felt that the house was vibrating, but assumed it was her imagination until suddenly one whole side of their house broke away. Huge old trees were being uprooted as the furious storm reached its peak. She evidently blacked out for she remembers only being helped to her feet by family and friends viewing the unbelievable destruction, Little Cordelia's greatest concern was her favorite doll which she had left on the window sill in the morning and could not find. It was discovered the next day almost half a mile away. When Alexander Knight arrived home from Philadelphia, workmen were removing debris from the railroad tracks across from his farm.

The tornado had traveled rapidly to John Turner's Driving Park, just up the lane a short distance where the roofs of his stables had been lifted off with many of his prize horses killed in the process. These were the grounds of the old Ambler Park established by the Montgomery County Agricultural Society, in 1870.

The lane to the Knight farm from Bethlehem Pike would later become Church Street. Meanwhile, across Bethlehem Pike, the workers at Doctor Mattisons Lindenwold Farms had never seen such winds as seemed to be building up. Shingles on his largest barn began to come loose and blow around, and Superintendent Billy Devine's men were kept busy tying down anything that could blow away. Following the storm, it was discovered on Mattisons grounds that a yellow pine rafter from the Knight home had pierced a big hickory tree fifteen inches in diameter. The rafter, resembling a great arrow that might have been sent from some all-powerful bow, remained in the hickory tree for days after.

Greatest destruction occurred over in Jarrettown, with the sky noticeably darker on that Thursday afternoon where old-timers who knew how to "read the skies" said "it doesn't look good. You know, I don't like the looks of that sky at all", said this old-timer seated on the Jarrettown Hotel porch. Last time it looked like this, we had some real bad weather. Lots of wind and a heavy rainfall. I think somethings headin our way," as if some really bad weather is coming. They weren't very wrong, either, for early on that afternoon, before school had let out for the day, the fifty pupils at Jarrettown School were finding it hard to pay attention to the teacher. The skies outside their classroom were attracting more attention than the lessons. Clouds were moving rapidly in a churning fashion as the sky darkened. Of all the areas hit, Jarrettown was the only spot where lives were lost, with two residents being crushed by the violent storm that lasted for but a short time.

After the storm a reporter touring the area counted 50 demolished buildings between Ambler and Jarrettown, in addition to hundreds of uprooted trees along the way. The new greenhouses of Charles W. Bergner at Morris Road and Butler Pike in Ambler were a complete wreck, while Doctor Mattison reported a loss of more than \$8,000 to his barns and trees.

The Knight homestead, rebuilt the year after the storm, served the family for a number of years. Eventually it was sold to the Borough of Ambler. Being slated for demolition at a later time the fire company was allowed to use it for practice and it was accidentally destroyed by fire during a practice session by the fire department, in later years. Today it is the site of Knight's playground bounded by Bannockburn Avenue, South Main and Church Streets.

ITALIAN MISSION IN AMBLER

By

Newton M. Howard

The year is 1908, and several men and women are meeting with a group of young Italians gathered outside a store in South Ambler. Escorting the young people to the store's basement, they oversee the founding of Ambler's Italian Mission, with 30 children present at the Sunday School's first session.

Weeks earlier, during Sunday service at Ambler's Methodist Church, some ladies are aware of three young Italian boys outside, apparently attracted by the sounds coming from within. Invited to join in worship, they decline, possibly out of shyness.

One of these ladies, Mrs. Ellsworth Posey, suggests to other members that perhaps a mission should be established in the neighborhood of these boys from across the tracks.

With this in mind, she and a social worker friend rent a room in the basement of a Chestnut Street store for \$5.00 a month. Under the guidance of church members, attendance increases rapidly, and a large adult class is organized. To communicate with these older Italians, in America only a few years, it is felt that a pastor fluent in their language is a necessity.

With the Methodist Home Mission unable to supply such a person, Ambler's Presbyterian Church steps in, arranging for the Philadelphia Presbytery to furnish an Italian-speaking pastor, Mr. Barano. Support comes from Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church when a school is set up in their building for teaching English to the adult Italians.

Soon outgrowing their quarters in the store basement, the Mission erects a large tent on a lot provided rent-free by Doctor Mattison, at the corner of Butler Avenue and Locust Street. With the Italian missionary Rev. Barano leading the group, a well-known Ambler School teacher, Miss Mae Rynear, becomes very active teaching Italian children in the tent, many of whom follow her later into the Presbyterian Sunday School.

Soon it's realized a more substantial structure is needed when a violent wind storm destroys their tent. A frame building 24 x 48 feet, and costing \$800, is completed in 1914, the funds being provided by the five local Protestant churches and by Mattison's partner, Henry G. Keasbey, living in France at the time. The building, cold and drafty in the Winter, is heated by a pot-bellied stove. Foes of the church continually harass the congregation by throwing stones at the building during services and breaking windows, making it necessary that they be covered with heavy chicken wire.

The congregation loses Rev. Barano, when he returns home in 1915 to fight for his native Italy in the first World War. Michael Frasca replaces him, serving until 1924.

During Frasca's service period, the congregation loses a devoted friend and teacher, Miss Anna Renner, one of six Ambler residents killed in a train wreck in 1919 just below the Fort Washington station.

In December of 1924, Reverend P. Alfredo Della Loggia becomes pastor of the Italian Mission, having been ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1923 at Carbondale, Pa. The depression years bring on a serious problem when Doctor Mattison is forced to sell the land housing the Chapel. This makes it necessary for the congregation to dismantle the building and move it to another location, or erect a new Chapel. During Della Loggia's pastorate, a welcome gift of \$5,000 is received from the will of Maria Virginia Cibotti of Philadelphia. This is used toward the purchase of a lot on North Main Street, where a chapel is erected and renamed Ambler Presbyterian Chapel, with dedication services held in 1939.

Rev. Della Loggia serves until his retirement in 1950, being succeeded by Rev. Cyrus Scapellati. It's during Scapellati's time with the congregation that the Italian-language service is discontinued. In 1962, Rev. Allan Kinloch becomes the first non-Italian Pastor.

Financial difficulties make it necessary for the Ambler Chapel and two other small churches to join in June of 1966, forming the Church on the Mall at Plymouth Meeting, with Rev Allan Kinloch as their Pastor. Thus ends the life span of the Italian Mission in Ambler.



(My thanks to Lillian Della Loggia Vandegrift, daughter of Rev. Della Loggia, and to Valdo Dragani, long-time member of the Church, for assistance in writing this very brief history of Ambler's Italian Mission. Photograph taken about 1929 shows congregation of the Ambler Italian Mission in front of their wooden structure erected in 1914 at Butler & Locust. Rev. P. Alfredo Della Loggia is fourth from the left. Some of the families represented are: Angellilus, Basti, Benigno, Davis, Della Loggia, Dragani, Ferla, Giampa, Godlewski, Grasso, Menna, Naso, Pugliese, Vera, Volpe and Wolf.

Photo from collection of Newton M. Howard

HORSE THIEVES AND LIVERY STABLES IN EARLY AMBLER

By

Newton M. Howard

Early records show that Jacob Hoover owned a blacksmith shop, carriage factory and livery stable in the Village of Wissahickon, later called Ambler. Occupying much of the north side of Butler Avenue between Spring Garden and Ridge, all three of Jacob's ventures were essential for early settlers to get around, or even to survive. Besides caring for the horse, the blacksmith made and repaired farm implements. The carriage shop made the horse-drawn vehicles, while the livery stable provided transportation for those who owned neither horse nor carriage. The livery met all trains coming into the Village, picking up either passengers or goods, playing the role of today's taxi, bus or truck.

Coming from Bucks County to our Village during the Civil War, Alexander Niblock by 1885 had succeeded Jake Hoover as owner of these properties. Part of this land purchased by Niblock on Butler Avenue became the site in later years of the Niblock Restaurant, an Ambler landmark established about 1890 and operating into the early 1950's.

Charles Gerhart succeeded Niblock in the operation of the Livery. Coming to Ambler from Philadelphia in 1888, he at first operated his livery business at the stables of Ambler Park Hotel down by the railroad. When Gerhart moved later to the old Niblock Livery location, the property was owned by Walter and Carrie Heiss who rented it to him.

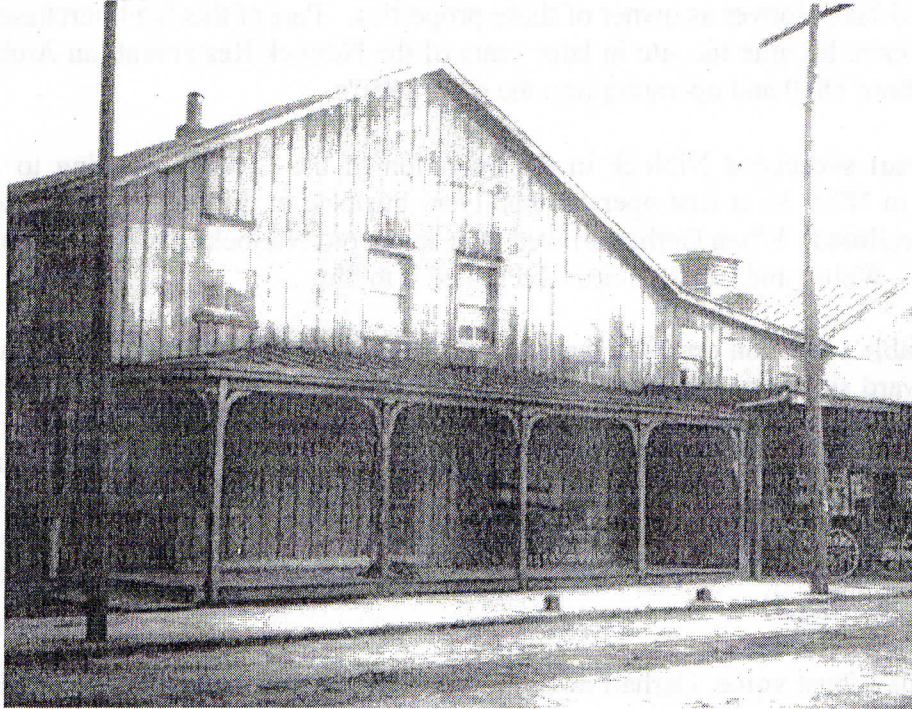
The livery stable's location opposite the Presbyterian Church of Ambler made for an interesting though awkward situation. Charles Gerhart was a colorful individual, a person with a booming voice, and known occasionally to use language not suitable for the ears of Presbyterians, especially during church services when the oppressive mid-summer heat demanded that all windows of the church be open. At times his voice could be heard above that of the preacher, resulting in a delegation from the church being sent across the street to bargain with Gerhart. An agreement was reached whereby he promised to retire to the rear of his building during periods of worship at the church.

Because of his robust voice, Gerhart acquired the name "Cussin' Charlie". This may have been due in part to an incident in his early years when an elevator accident caused the loss of his leg below the knee. A very crude replacement wooden leg gave him extreme pain at times, perhaps contributing to the language used. Behind the livery stable was, and still is, the open stream known as "Honey Run". Here he frequently led his horses to cool off their hooves and legs. With no feeling in the wooden leg, it could easily become so wet that it would swell the entire length of the leg to such a degree that he was in pain. That could very easily have contributed to the cussin' for which Charlie Gerhart was so well-known.

An incident involving the theft of a horse occurred on a Friday evening in 1897 when local resident Charles Horn hired a horse and carriage from Gerhart's Livery Stables. He tied it to the hitching post in front of Doctor Yerkes' office before going in. When he came out the team was gone, with two small boys reporting a thief untied the horse and proceeded out Lindenwold Avenue to the Pike heading toward Chestnut Hill. Redding a second team, Gerhart, Horn and several others soon were in hot pursuit of the thief, following him to the top of Chestnut Hill where it was learned he was heading down toward Germantown.

Unable to catch him, the pursuers returned to Ambler, taking the train to Wayne Junction where it was believed he was headed. Evidently he took his time, certain he had eluded his pursuers, for the Gerhart party arrived at Wayne Junction Station ahead of the thief. In the meantime, a trolley car had crashed into the stolen wagon throwing him out. On getting to his feet, he began to run and was arrested on suspicion. Returned to Ambler two days later, the horse thief was identified by several witnesses and sentenced by 'Squire Thomas Bitting to the prison in Norristown for three months.

Generations of the Gerhart family operated from this Butler Avenue location for a number of years, until in 1920 the property was sold by owner Carrie Heiss to Ambler Furniture Company. Occupying space at Park Avenue Storage and then the Wyndham Hotel Stables, the Gerharts eventually acquired their Main Street location, with the family dealing in used furniture, moving and antiques. Today the site of the old Livery Stable is occupied by Regan's Shoes, a Shoe Repair Shop and a Copy Service.



This 1910 photograph shows the Butler Avenue Livery Stables while occupied by Charles Gerhart. It was copied from a snapshot belonging to Ethel Heiss Thompson, daughter of early Butler Avenue merchants Walter & Carrie Heiss, owners of the Livery Stable property at the time. Photograph from the collection of Newton M. Howard

The Corner in Ambler Where History was made

by
Newton M. Howard

The oldest building in Ambler's business district has played an important role in our history. Built before the Civil War, when the town was called Wissahickon, it was the site of our first post office and general store in 1861, and our first school in 1869. The first bank began operations here in 1884, after the name was changed to Ambler. And finally the congregation of an early church first met here as a mission in 1891 for almost a year.

This building, at Main Street and Butler Avenue, is presently the property of Ralph DelConte, who operated a successful business for years before retirement.

In 1857, Joseph L. Wilson purchased this land from the Reiff family, early settlers of this western sector of Upper Dublin. He erected the building sometime before 1861.

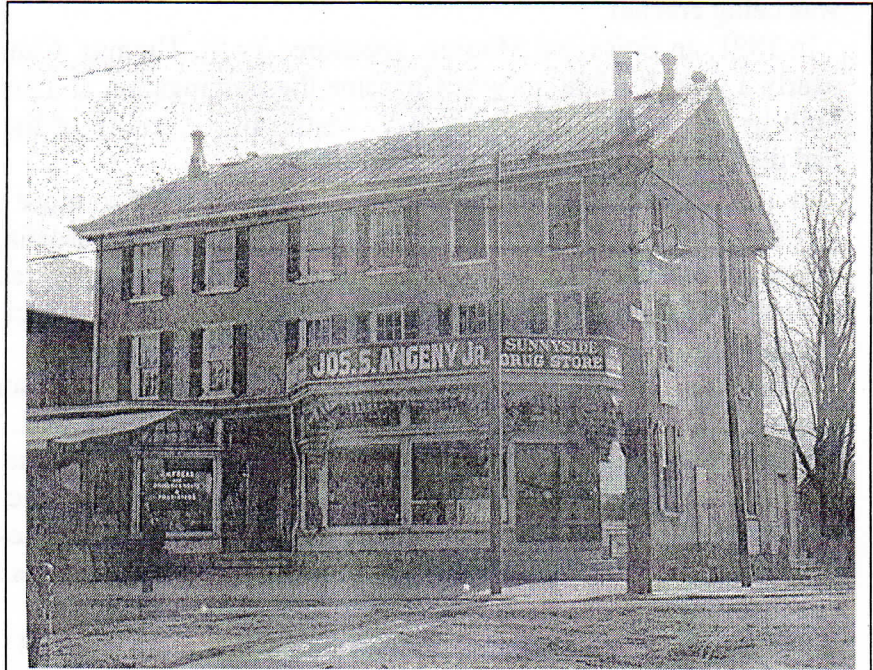
This same year he learned that Upper Dublin postmaster Isaac Thomas, who operated the general store on the Bethlehem Pike, would soon be retiring. Wilson applied for the position and was appointed postmaster March 19, 1861, his new building thus becoming the location of the first post office within the borough limits.

Two years later, in 1863, he sold the building to George K. Knight. Samuel Comly bought the contents of the store, succeeding Wilson as post-master. In 1865, Miss Elizabeth Knight became postmistress with Comly continuing as operator of the general store.

Civil War veteran Benjamin J. Hilles became the next postmaster in 1870, following in 1873 by Evan J. Ambler, son of Andrew and Mary Ambler. Wisahickon had changed to Ambler to honor his mother in 1869, with the post office name remaining in Upper Dublin.

Evan Ambler was the last postmaster in this building. In 1876 he purchased land from Knight, across Main Street, erecting a three-story Mansard-roofed building. On December, 5 1883, history again was made when the name of the post office was changed from Upper Dublin to Ambler, thus making Evan Ambler the first postmaster of Ambler's Post Office.

Ambler's first institution of learning was a privet school called Sunnyside Academy, founded in 1869 by former postmistress, Miss Elizabeth K. Knight. Opening in a small building on South Main Street with only six pupils, increased enrollment made it necessary for her to ask for and receive permission to move into the upper floors of her father's building before the year was out.



This building at Main & Butler was occupied for over half a century by Joe Angeny's "Sunnyside Pharmacy"

Photograph from Henry Scholz collection

Larger quarters allowed the school to grow rapidly, with her sisters, Miss Sallie and Miss Cordelia joining in the successful operation of the school. Space formerly occupied by Evan Ambler's general store became Sunnyside's main room.

In 1884, while Sunnyside was in operation, the First National Bank of Ambler was founded, using a section of the school's first floor to conduct their banking business while their building was being erected.

In 1891, an Episcopal Mission, sponsored by St. Thomas' Church of Whitemarsh, met here for nearly a year. In 1898 this group became the congregation of Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church, built by Dr. & Mrs. Richard V. Mattison in memory of their daughter Ester Victoria, who had died of typhoid fever at the age of four.

In 1903, a decision was made by Miss Sallie Knight to close the doors of Sunnyside forever. Her father had died that year, leaving Miss Sallie, Miss Cordelia, and their brother Alexander as executors of his estate. She felt that tending to his extensive real estate holdings and operating the school would be too strenuous, and also, 34 years of association with Sunnyside was quite enough time to spend.

Sunnyside School's closing coincided with Keasby and Mattison's announcement that leases of tenants in the Opera House Block stores would not be renewed. The company was growing and wished to use this space for corporate offices. For one of these tenants, Joseph S. Angeny, Jr. who operated the Opera House Pharmacy, the news that the Sunnyside building would be renovated into stores was very welcome. He opened for business in 1904, clling his pharmacy the Sunnyside Drug Store. Angeny ran a very popular business for more than half a century at this historic location, his family closing the store in 1959.

The building, after continuous occupancy for more than 135 years, now has as tenants an insurance agent and a food store.

The Clarke Building - Recycling at Work

by
Newton M. Howard

In an age when it's generally believed that razing an old building and erecting a new one is the way to go, a recent renovation in Ambler proves this is not necessarily true. An eyesore for years, the building has become the attractive home for a new business venture called "KC's Alley". Not especially old, the building was erected in 1920 by one William Clarke. So that we would not forget it, he emblazoned the building's upper facade with his name and the year for future generations to see.

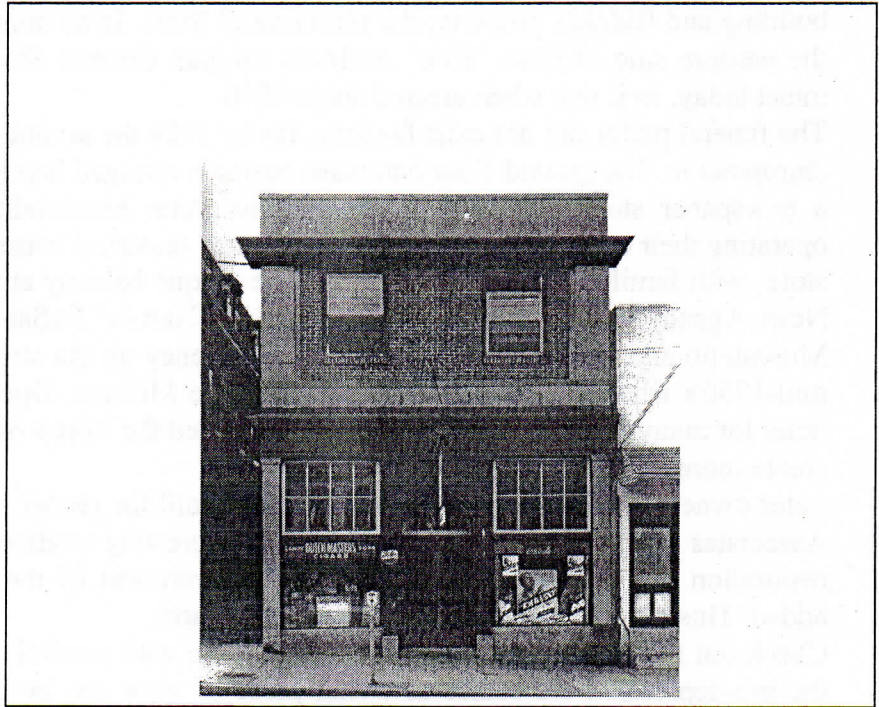
William Clarke had conducted his hardware business for some time next door in the western side of the former General Store of Evan "Doc" Ambler. Next owner of that building, Henry Biddle, had made extensive

alterations to the structure when he purchased it from the Ambler family in 1909, eliminating the first floor General Store and lowering the floor to sidewalk level, creating two stores in this space.

Next to Biddle's property was a vacant lot which years before had been the orchard, garden and side yard of Doc Ambler's store. Popular evening band concerts were held on his lawn, with arc lighting provided by Doctor Mattison. The Citizens' Band of Ambler performed here, while the audience enjoyed the music, standing or seated on the porches of the Ambler Park Hotel property across Butler Avenue. Many stood in the street.

That same lot had been sold to Wissahickon Fire Company years before William Clarke acquired it. Their intention was to build a new firehouse on the spot to replace their rented quarters on North Main Street. To raise money for the new firehouse, they rented the lot to a man with a tent. He installed chairs, a generator and a motion picture projector; his tent being one of four spots movies could be seen in Ambler at that time. With not enough business to support four movie houses, the manager of the Ambler Opera House approached the Fire Company. If they would cease operations in the tent, they would be paid a percentage of the Opera House receipts for one night each month.

Wissahickon Fire Company had second thoughts about the wisdom of erecting a firehouse on Butler Avenue between Main Street and the Railroad. How would they ever get their fire wagon out if the gates at the crossing were down and traffic had backed up in that entire block? Biddle



William Clarke's building erected in 1920 housed his hardware business on the first floor while an undertaking establishment occupied the upper floor. Note the space between the two buildings that allows original western side of Doc Ambler's General Store to remain almost as it looked in 1876. Current exterior renovations were based partly on this photo taken by the writer in the early 1950's.

Photograph by Newton M. Howard

was willing to buy back the land, and in turn sold it to William Clarke, who was feeling the need to expand in 1920.

Here Clarke erected the present building to house his hardware business on the first floor with a funeral home on the second.

For access to this funeral establishment, Clarke left a space about six feet wide between his new building and Biddle's property, the old General Store. In so doing, he had unwittingly preserved the western side of Evan "Doc" Ambler's original General Store, allowing it to remain almost intact today, as it was when erected about 1876.

The funeral parlor did not exist for long, for by 1924 the second floor space was being used by a chiropractor. The ground floor hardware business changed hands several times before becoming a newspaper store. By 1945 brothers-in-law Peter Muscatello and Nicholas DeSando were operating their successful Ambler News Agency, featuring home deliveries and retail sales at the store, with family members pitching in. The unique balcony at the rear of the store became the News Agency's office, with daughter Catherine "Tootsie" DeSando acting as the bookkeeper.

Muscatello and DeSando moved their News Agency up the street to the Knight Building in the mid-1950's when the building was sold to Mike Monaco. Operating a taproom and makeshift hotel for many years, it was Monaco who extended the store's balcony to the front of the store to create more rooms above.

Later owners continued the taproom operation until the recent sale of the building to Red Brick Associates which led to the renovations. An interesting treatment of the present building is the restoration of the former balcony area by the removal of the front portion that Monaco had added. This is used effectively today as a dining area.

Check out this fine example of what can be done with a solidly built structure. This building of the pre-depression era stands as living proof of what can be done, rather than razing and re-building.

AMBLER CORNER WITH HISTORIC PAST

By
Newton M. Howard

No one alive today remembers the old Buchanan Building at the northeast corner of Butler & Main. Known also as Buchanan Hall, it was here that events over a short period of time were to have a profound effect on the Borough of Ambler. The formation of Ambler's Wissahickon Fire Company came about as the direct outcome of the happenings here on a Sunday afternoon way back in 1890. We have no accurate description of the building's appearance, having to rely on sketchy verbal accounts and a vague drawing of unknown origin. Extensive research has led to the creation of both the illustration and the story concerning an important event in Ambler's early history.

It was a part of David Knipe's original tract of land, acquired from Jonathan Lukens in 1869. Bounded by Butler Avenue, Main Street, Water Street (now called Race) and North Spring Garden, it was here that Knipe soon built his three-story mansard-roofed home still standing today, the house can be found rather easily in the middle of that block.

Covered by a forest of tall trees, Knipe's property was retained intact as the family residence until 1887 when he sold to the Buchanan brothers the entire western sector fronting on Main Street. They paid \$2,250 for this tract of land, which marked the first opening of Knipe's lands to commercial development.

It's assumed that the Buchanans soon after erected their three-story building on the Butler & Main corner. From written accounts, we've learned that the ground floor of this gigantic building housed several offices and stores, with an Opera House located on most of the second floor. It was in this new building that the Union Library, organized earlier at Three Tuns, had been persuaded to relocate their facilities to Ambler. Housed also on the upper floors were a huge ballroom and meeting rooms for at least five local lodges.

Little more is known of Buchanan Hall except that on a Sunday afternoon, February 9, 1890, a disastrous fire destroyed the entire building, taking with it several smaller structures nearby. Reported by neighbor David Knipe who saw smoke coming from cellar windows, the fire was soon being fought by the local bucket brigade. Young Jack Burl and his friends, having run from Sunday School out on North Street, assisted by throwing buckets of water on carpeting nailed to nearby buildings to keep the fire from spreading.

Butler & Main was the most active crossroads in Ambler in 1890. Here were the Sunnyside School, "Doc" Ambler's General Store, Ambler Park Hotel with its sheds and stables, and the abandoned two-story Toll House, all threatened by the spreading fire.

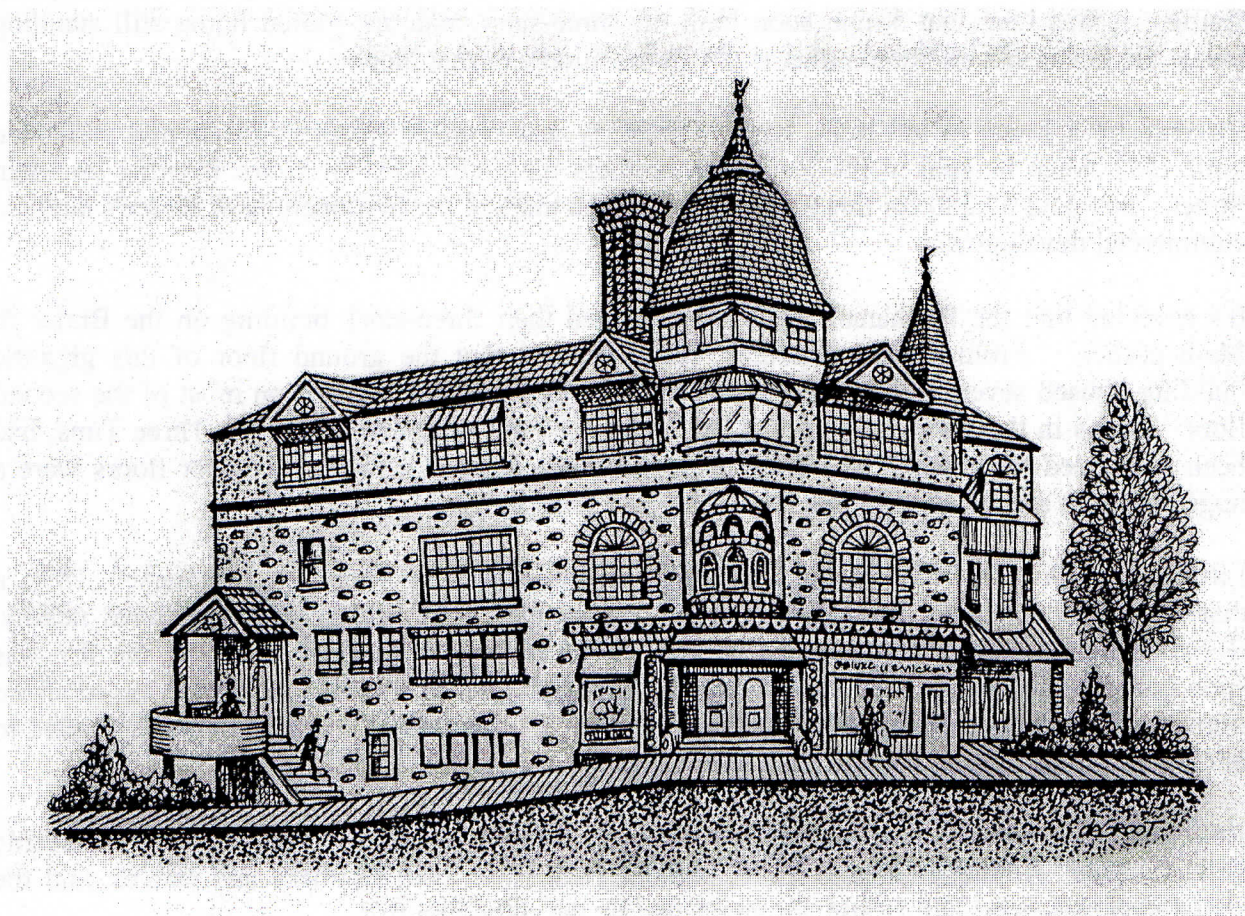
A man on horseback had been dispatched at once to Jenkintown for assistance by their fire companies. Loaded onto a flat railway car, their fire-fighting equipment arrived at Ambler in less than half an hour, too late though to save the Buchanan Building. Consumed besides Buchanan Hall were the sheds and stables of Ambler Park Hotel, and the Toll House.

Ambler citizens, following this devastating fire, finally realized they could no longer exist with just a bucket brigade. A committee met in earnest with a resulting charter received by April 6th, 1891. It was now official: "Wissahickon Fire Company of Ambler has come into existence, and

will soon be occupying quarters in their own building on J. Watson Craft's Lumber Yard property on Main Street." Now their greatest concern would be raising funds to finance modern, up-to-date fire-fighting in Ambler.

The Ambler Gazette was reporting, as late as five months after the fire, that "the debris at Butler & Main from the big fire is only now beginning to disappear." The same newspaper had this to say about new construction: "Our old patron, William Sullivan of Norristown, has the contract to furnish the cut stone for Keasbey & Mattison's new building."

This second item suggests the start of construction on Keasbey & Mattison's large building that housed the more familiar Ambler Opera House. It seems logical that with the destruction of Buchanan Hall, which housed an Opera House, stores, offices, meeting rooms and even the library, that Doctor Mattison would entertain thoughts about erecting his own structure having similar facilities. The year 1890 seems to have been the start of construction of the "new" Ambler Opera House, remembered by many living today.



Drawing by artist Lee deGroot shows the Buchanan Building at the northeast corner of Butler & Main from 1887 to 1890 when it was consumed by fire. Known also as Buchanan Hall, the three-story building housed stores and offices on the first floor and Ambler's first Opera House, not to be confused with Doctor Mattison's Ambler Opera House of a later period. On upper floors were lodge meeting rooms, a large ballroom and the Union Library.

Illustration courtesy of Wissahickon Valley Historical Society

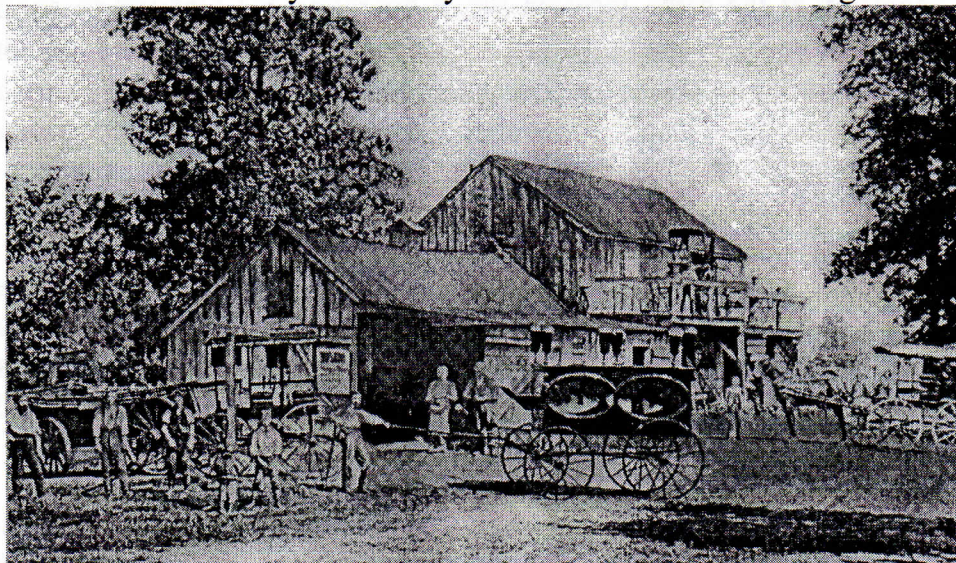
HENRY SLUTTER'S CARRIAGE SHOP

By

Newton M. Howard

It was in Plumstedville that Henry Slutter met and married Mary Walters in 1868. Moving later to North Wales and then Springhouse, Henry was employed as a carriage builder at both places, working at the newly established Jacob Rempp Carriage Shop in Springhouse before moving to Ambler Village about 1878.

Henry and Mary lived in Jacob Hoover's Butler Avenue frame building that later became Alex Niblock's Livery Stables and then Charles Gerharts Livery. In this building Slutter established his own carriage-building business, later purchasing a lot on the south side of Butler Avenue from Charles and Susan Shoemaker. Paying \$1,000 for this lot in 1878, he erected a home, selling it just two years later to Dr. Albanus Styer. It was then that Henry purchased a second lot on Butler Avenue from the Shoemakers, erecting a second home and his own carriage shop. It's interesting to note that the first home eventually was razed in 1927 to build the new Ambler Theatre in 1928, while a part of that second home can be clearly seen today next to the Theatre building.



This photograph - of Slutter's Carriage Shop on Ridge Avenue, across from the Presbyterian Church, is the most prized photo in the writers collection. For years it was displayed on the walls of the Keasbey & Mattison Company's offices in the old Ambler Opera House Building. When the Company was disbanded the framed picture was headed for the trash dumpster when office worker Joe Noble rescued it. He showed it to long-time resident Herb Amey on Race Street, who identified it immediately as the Slutter Carriage Shop. Joe in turn gave it to me many years ago for my photo collection. This marks the first publication ever of the photograph.

Photo from Collection of Newton M. Howard

Henry Slutter's Carriage Shop enjoyed a brisk business lasting more than a quarter century. Peak years saw as many as 25 new carriages produced annually by a work force of eight men. Much of the shops business was refinishing and decorating carriages of all types, the work being done on the second floor of the building, reached by a ramp at the rear.

In 1897 he completed a handsome delivery wagon for Samuel H. Freas, owner of the busy meat and provisions store at Main and Walnut Streets. Freas had come to Ambler earlier from Cold Point, operating his butchering business from a wagon. A news item of

1897 tells us that, 'Mr. Freas has installed fans in his store for the comfort of customers, the fans being operated by a windmill mounted on the roof of his store'. This building being partially visible, still stands today at the northeast corner of Main and Walnut streets.

Having completed a buckboard for J. D. McDonnell of Penllyn, Slutter was building a large coal-delivery wagon for J. Watson Crafts Lumber and Coal business. Several sleighs were in the works in 1898, a year marked by heavy snowfalls. Emanuel Vogt, the baker who succeeded Abram Stillwagon's Bakery in 1899, had just finished re-building after a disastrous fire in 1900.

And now in 1903 Vogt's delivery wagon was being painted and decorated by the Slutter work force. The roadway in front of Slutter's shop, now Ridge Avenue, was graded by the Borough in 1903, taking off about three feet from this road, then called Summit Avenue for obvious reasons.

The elevation of the road was originally the same as that of the present-day Presbyterian Church lawn and the block between York Street and Lindenwold Avenue, known years ago as Doctor's Row.

Retiring in 1907 for health reasons, Slutter sold his business to Arthur Hayden who continued operation at the same location while operating his blacksmith shop at Spring Garden and Race Streets. Hayden operated both the Carriage Works and his horseshoeing business at two different locations for five years when he disposed of the carriage shop to Frank Llewellyn of Bucks County. From that time on, all activity at the Carriage Works ceased, with the property in 1913 coming into the hands of investors, the same year that founder Henry Slutter died.

A whole new era opened up in 1920 when Gernard Meyers, the milk dealer on Greenwood Avenue, purchased the property, transforming the buildings into a milk cooling, pasteurizing and bottling station for his business. He later added to the 1880 home of Henry Slutter for use as the Meyers family residence. This was the start of the successful Meyers Dairies in Ambler, a business employing many local residents for a number of years.

In 1921, Meyers announced the reduction in milk to eleven cents a quart and seven cents for pints. By 1922 the company announced a plan to utilize the thousands of gallons of perfectly pure water wasted daily. The plan called for establishing a wet wash laundry as an adjunct to the dairy plant. Thus, Ambler Damp Wash and Meyers' Dairies operated for a short time side by side. Early commercial laundries did washing only, no drying. In later years the Meyers Dairies business was absorbed by Abbott's Dairies, which eventually left Ambler.

Newt liked this photo so much he had intended to use it on the cover of the book he had planned to print. We have done that for him.

THE BICYCLE'S EARLY YEARS IN AMBLER

By
Newton M. Howard

Thousands converged on the Fair Grounds at Ambler Park in 1876, many arriving by train at the depot near the Park entrance. Main attraction was the Agricultural Society's Annual Fair held in the fall. This year's special feature was a bicycle race on the half-mile track, with many seeing for the first time the high-wheeler, called also the "penny-farthing" or the "bone-crusher". The conventional two-wheeler would not appear for more than a decade.

The 1890's saw the arrival of a bicycle acceptable to the public, one with both front and rear wheels the same size. Bicycle clubs formed rapidly, Ambler's being called the Century Wheelmen.

Bicycle road races became popular in these years. Locally a five-mile race was scheduled in the spring when roads were fit to travel. Beginning at Fortside Inn, it ran up Bethlehem Pike to Fort Washington, then up Morris Road to Butler Pike. From there it was on to Broad Axe and back on the Skippack Pike to the place of beginning. Prizes were two silver cups worth \$25 each.

Bicycle races at Willow Grove Park proved to be so popular that they were building a bicycle track of wood instead of dirt, with completion expected for the July 4th crowds. October of 1897 saw a 25-mile race that attracted 8000 spectators, many from Ambler.

So popular was Sunday bicycling, that it became the concern of ministers of the Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Philadelphia and vicinity. They campaigned against this 'evil' in a letter to area Wheelmen's clubs.

Bicycling groups from Philadelphia traveled regularly out to the countryside, stopping for meals and overnight accommodations at local inns. Popular with these riders were Fortside Inn in Whitmarsh, and William Blackburn's Hotel Ambler. Proprietors of both places were members of L.A.W., the League of American Wheelmen, offering members 20 percent discount on meals and accommodations.

Fast cycling in Ambler was an ongoing problem, with Lindenwold Avenue a virtual speedway. Turning onto Butler Avenue was dangerous, with the possibility of colliding with carriages or frightening horses.

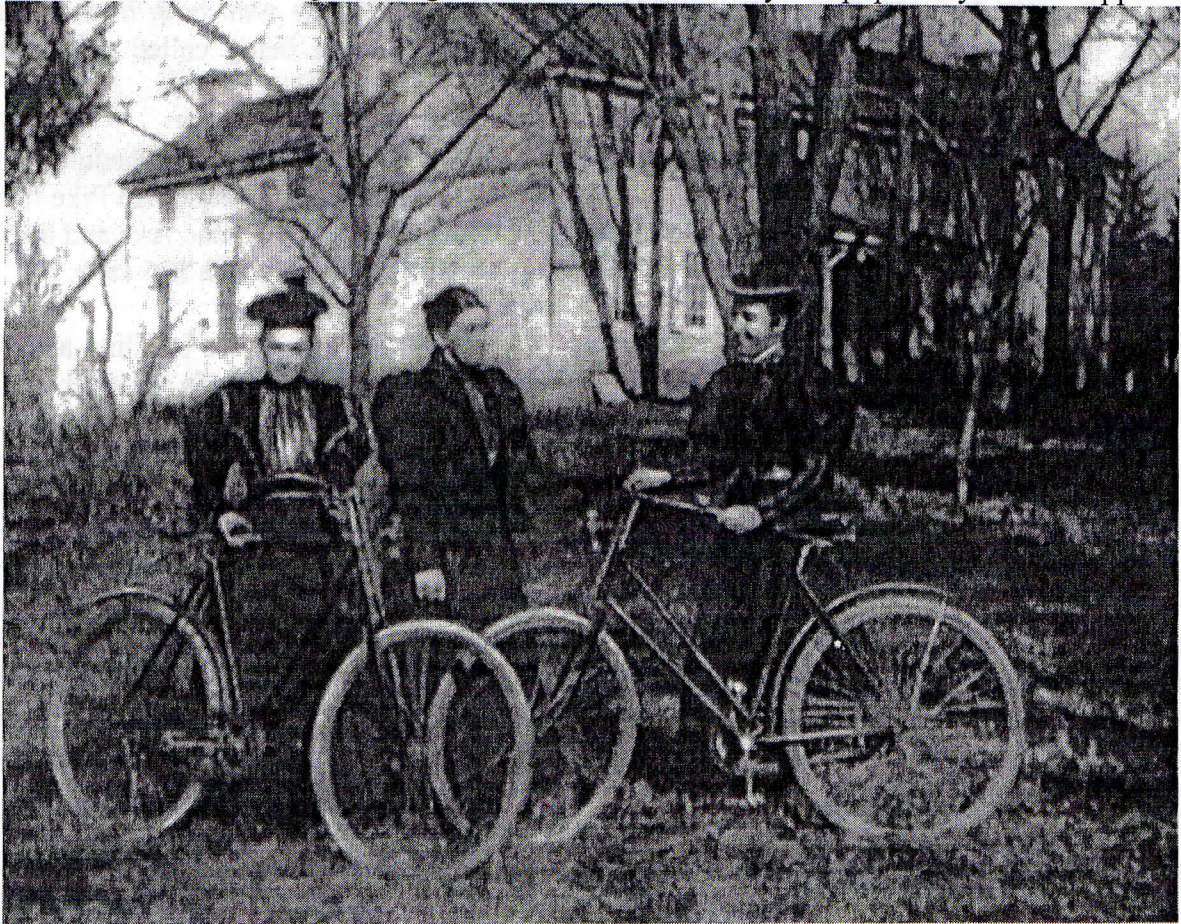
Ambler had strict enforcement of bicycle laws. Because two young men, William Clemens and Charles Ervin, rode their wheels through Ambler on a Monday evening without lights, they were invited by Constable Stevens to visit Justice of the Peace Thomas Bitting who impounded their wheels for costs. The boys claimed their "lights just went out." So strict was law enforcement in Ambler, that members of L.A.W. suggested that signs be posted at entrances to Ambler warning out of town cyclists that Ambler has ordinances on lights and bells that are strictly enforced.

There were bicyclists in nearly all age groups. Retired Ambler barber William Howard, a 78-year old Civil War veteran, was said to be the oldest bicycle rider in Montgomery County.

Bicyclists were warned of the danger of drinking from wayside wells, pumps or springs when making trips through the country. Because of this great danger to the cycling fraternity, Dr.

Richard V. Mattison, a member of L.A.W., erected and dedicated to their use the well-known cyclers' well on his property along the Bethlehem Pike. He was acutely aware of the dangers from impure water, his own daughter Esther Victoria having died from typhoid fever at the age of four years. Water at this well was sanitarily pure, its purity being carefully guarded by the Doctor's own Ambler Spring Water Company, predecessor of Ambler's present water system. This same water was used for drinking by all the employees of Keasbey & Mattison Chemical Works as well as employees living in company homes in South Ambler.

As the century came to a close, it was evident that more automobiles were being seen on the roads. Skeptics were now admitting the automobile was no longer a fad, but was here to stay. It was just a hundred years ago that a gradual decrease in the bicycle's popularity became apparent.



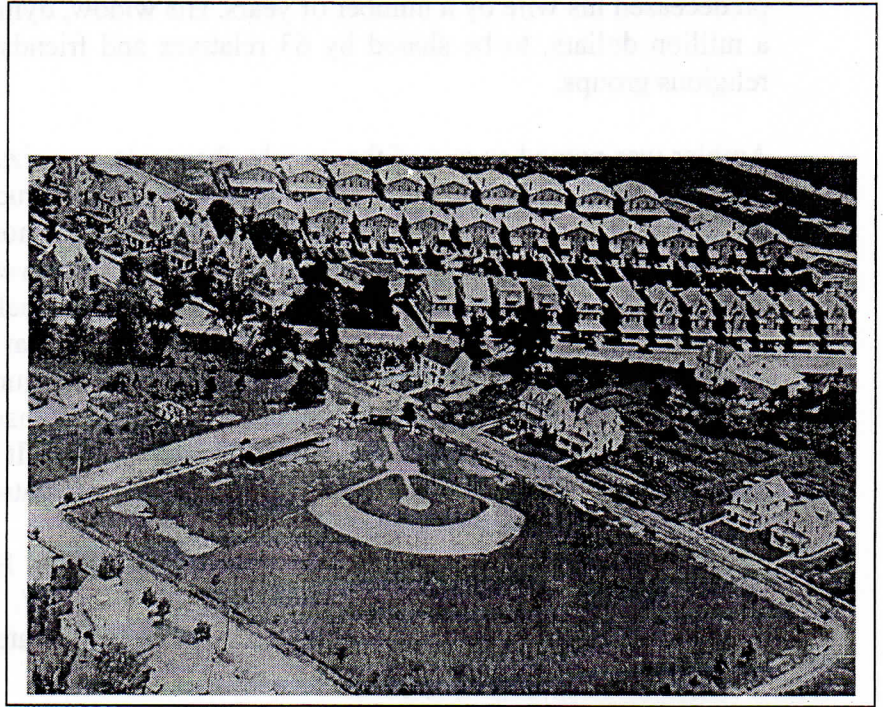
Shown with their "Wheels" in the early 1900's are: Elma, Bertha and Gertrude Walker, daughters of William C. Walker. Behind them is the familiar Mary Ambler Homestead, owned during that period by Walker.

Photo courtesy of Richard Johnson, Jr. - The Johnson Press

When Pickering Field was Lindenwold Field

by
Newton M. Howard

Dr. Richard V. Mattison in 1908 purchased 16 lots, comprising the entire block bounded by North Street, Trinity, Park and Highland Avenues. Having paid \$7,500 for this tract of land 400 x 316 feet, he announced it would be made into a public park, with extensive landscaping and tree-lined walkways. Following completion of the project, he erected a large sign reading "Lindenwold Park". Many still alive in 1908 remembered when this ground was a part of 35 acres purchased back in 1870 by the Montgomery County Agricultural Society. Calling it "Ambler Park" it was here that they held their successful annual Fairs for a number of years. By 1888 they had ceased operations, selling 32 acres of their property to John E. Turner, a well-known horse trainer, interested in acquiring the half-mile track and its buildings.



This 1929 aerial view shows Pickering Field when it was known as Lindenwold Field. Looking toward the North Street & Highland Avenue corner, the picture shows Keasbey & Mattison's company homes on Renfrew Avenue and Upper Church Street. Photographer unknown.

Photo Courtesy of Wissahickon Valley Public Library - Ambler Branch

Turner operated his Ambler Driving Park successfully for many years. In 1905, illness and the public's loss of interest in horse racing led him to retire. The old fair grounds and racetrack as a result were broken up into building lots for sale.

Mattison gave no indication that his "Lindenwold Park" would be replaced soon with an athletic field, but in less than two years it became "Lindenwold Field", for use as a baseball and football field by K&M employees. In early 1911 a new grandstand was being constructed, evidence that it was no longer the "Park".

Lindenwold Field for many years was Ambler's most popular locale for sports, band concerts and other entertainment. A typical day-long celebration of the 4th of July occurred back in 1913 with a baseball game in the morning between K&M AA and Wyndmoor AA. In the afternoon there were foot races and other field events. Winners in the mile race were: 1st, W. Walt; 2nd, Garwood Howard; and 3rd, Tony Catanzaro. All three of these winners were employed at Keasbey & Mattison Co. Another young man, 11-year-old Pete Decembrino, distinguished himself in a quite different way. He entered two different contests and won both. First was the cracker-eating contest, then, still possessing an appetite, he entered the pie-eating contest and won that. His condition on July 5th was not noted in the news of 1913. Many descendants of these four winners reside today in the Ambler area.

The July 4th celebration did not end with those events, for in the evening spectators filled the grandstand on the North Street side, to be entertained by the Ambler Band until it was dark

enough for the spectacular fireworks display. Residents surrounding the Field made certain their garden hoses were ready in case a rocket landed in the wrong place.

And now for the connection between the name "Pickering" and Lindenwold Field, Charles W. Pickering, Jr., a Philadelphia banker, lived with his wife, Elizabeth Bunting Pickering, at their estate "Pinecroft", on the Morris Road just on the edge of Ambler. Charles Pickering predeceased his wife by a number of years. His widow, dying in 1921, left an estate of more than a million dollars, to be shared by 63 relatives and friends, in addition to eight charitable and religious groups.

Ambler was named as one of these eight charitable organizations, receiving a bequest of \$5,000. She expressed the wish that it be used "in the construction of some public improvement, preferably a swimming pool in the open, to be in memory of my late husband, Charles W. Pickering, Jr. " and also that "a tablet is to mark the improvement. "

The bequest, however, was only partially fulfilled. It is believed that, following World War II, the monies went into a fund to build a Veterans' Stadium at the Ambler High School grounds on Tennis Avenue. With the razing of the school, the Stadium was also destroyed. Although the swimming pool never became a reality, the requested bronze tablet was installed in later years at the base of a flagpole on the present-day Pickering Field. It reads: "Pickering Field - In Memory of Charles W. Pickering, Jr." Had not Dr. Mattison created the Park in 1908, there would be sixteen homes on these grounds today.

The Pickering home, after the deaths of both Charles and Elizabeth Pickering, was occupied by Elizabeth's sister and brother-in-law, Mr. & Mrs. W. W. Doughton. The estate, called "Pinecroft", no longer exists, but its memory is perpetuated today in the naming of Pinecroft Place, a roadway just off the Morris Road.

THE AMBLER TOY FACTORY

By
Newton M. Howard

Yes, there was a toy factory in Ambler. Though little is known of the facilities, most of their production went to department stores and wholesalers in the mid-west, with apparently little or none sold locally.

Manufacturing is believed to have begun following the First World War. It started in a rear building of the former Henry Slutter Carriage Shop on Ridge avenue, across from the Ambler Presbyterian Church. Adelos Gorton is listed as president of the company, with Luther Fretz an associate. Ambler and Fort Washington boys found summer employment at the factory.

During the school year they would stop after school to pick up toys and a set of paints and brushes. The toys, presumably lead figures, were painted at home, and taken back to the factory for payment. By 1920, the Toy Factory had moved to Park Avenue, renting a portion of Harvey Dager's Park Avenue Storage & Warehouse. This was located just south of Lindenwold Avenue and near the terminus of Euclid Avenue.

A large dynamo, installed to supply power, operated ten wood-working machines. By Spring of 1920 the company was reporting a busy season, with patented wooden toys and chess boards popular in their line.

By summer of the same year, a change in their product line occurred when porch enclosures, window screens and screen doors were being advertised. Little is known of their activities after 1920.

But the building they occupied on Park Avenue has a much more interesting history than the Toy Factory. It was originally a blacksmith shop on the grounds of Ambler Park Fair Grounds, established in 1870 by the Montgomery County Agricultural Society. The blacksmith serviced the popular half-mile racetrack on the grounds. In 1888 the Fair Grounds were sold to John E. Turner, well-known in the horse-racing and training field. Turner was interested in acquiring the racetrack and related buildings, and called his facilities the Ambler Driving Park.

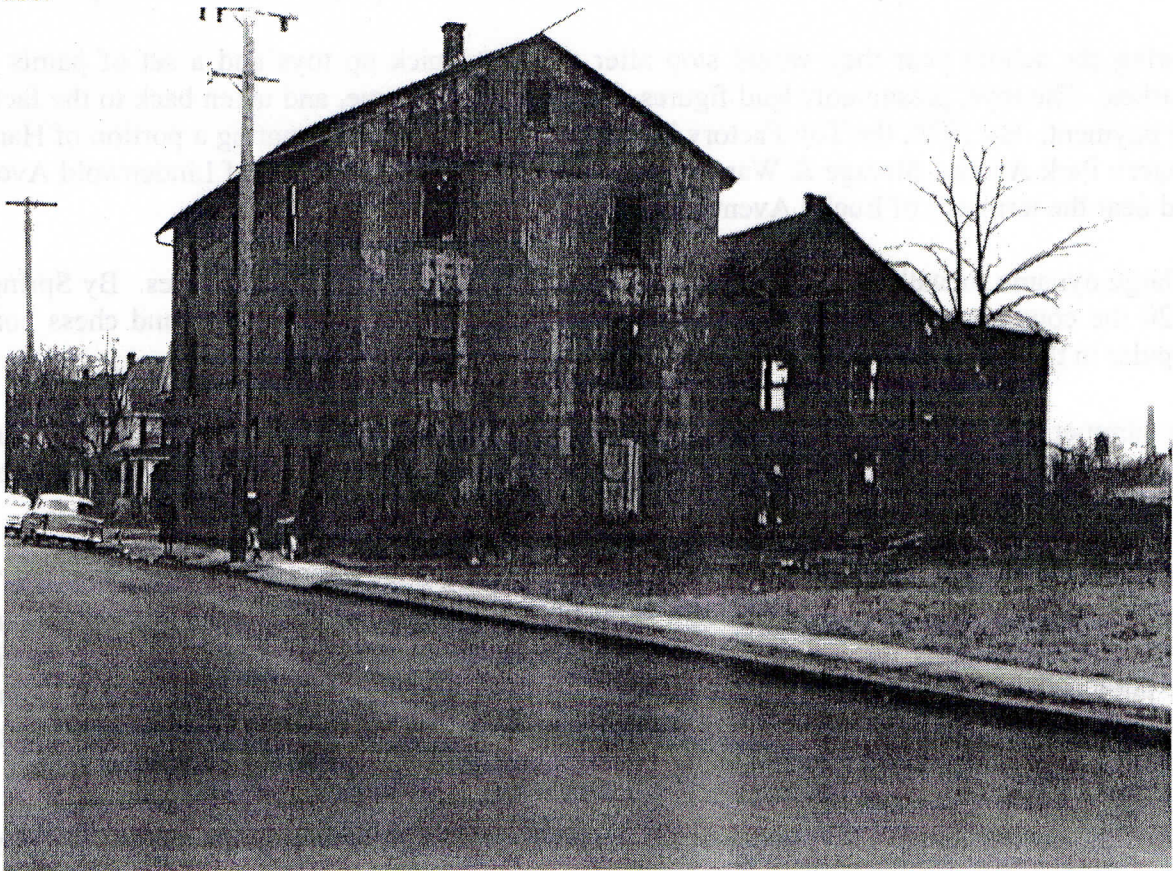
Sometime during Turner's ownership of the racetrack, Albert Shaw purchased the old blacksmith shop, moving it to his lot on Park Avenue about 1892. Incidentally, the name for Park Avenue came from the fact that it was one of the roads leading onto the grounds of old Ambler Park. It was in this building that Shaw established his Carriage Works. Here he acted as an agent for the Columbia brand carriage, as well as repairing all others. Once again the sound of a blacksmith could be heard within the walls of the old shop, as blacksmith Benjamin Meyers became associated with Shaw.

Albert Shaw ceased operation of his carriage business around 1902, perhaps because the popularity of the automobile was increasing. He sold the property to Harvey Dager, a local antiques dealer in the warehousing and moving business. Dager, who had been using the upper floors of the Ambler Gazette Building for his storage business, divided the second floor of his new building into two sections for furniture storage. On the first floor he added thirteen stalls for use in his livery business. Soon after, he added a new building out to the sidewalk, more

than doubling his space. With the new building and renovations complete, the entire property received a fresh coat of paint by local painter August Scholz.

By 1922, Charles W. Gerhart, Sr. and his son Ross, also in the moving and storage business, were occupying the Park Avenue premises. Prior to this time, Gerhart had operated his livery stables on Butler Avenue, having come to Ambler around 1894. His first location was at the stables of Hotel Ambler Park. Next, he succeeded Alexander Niblock in the livery stable business on Butler Avenue near Ridge.

Gerhart remained on Park Avenue until the days of World War II. His successor, also a moving and storage company, suffered a major fire which destroyed the historic blacksmith shop and its attached buildings. The ruins remained for some time before being replaced by a small apartment house.



Smaller of these two buildings was originally the blacksmith shop moved about 1892 from the Ambler Park Fair Grounds. Established in 1870 by the Montgomery County Agricultural Society, the Fair Grounds were sold to John Turner in 1888. Larger building on the left was added by owner Harvey Dager in 1908.

Photo by Newton M. Howard

Birthplace of Ambler's First Bakery

by
Newton M. Howard

About 1872 Abraham Stillwagon came to Ambler, soon meeting and marrying Mary Hulett. Six years later the couple purchased a plot of ground 50 by 200 feet at the northeast corner of Butler Avenue & Spring Garden Street, paying owner Jonathan Lukens \$500. This hilly ground dropped off sharply to the "Honey Run" creek behind and was considered undesirable for building purposes. This prompted Mary Amble's son David to remark to Stillwagon, "Thee must be crazy, Abram, to pay such a price for that land."

Here, about 1880, they established Ambler's first bakery, erecting a frame structure to house both their business and family. Two years later, Abraham known as Abraham or "Abe", went to

work as a carpenter with a construction firm erecting factory buildings for the new Keasby & Mattison Chemical Works. Mary Stillwagon took over operation of their bakery and confectionery business, in addition to raising their children, Oscar and Jennie.

It was in 1894 that Abe became Ambler's postmaster, the post office being located in the eastern part of their building. This was the place where Ambler residents, for four years, met daily to pick up and send their mail, and also to exchange news and gossip.

While Abe was postmaster, two dogs lived in the building. A story handed down concerns the one "Josh", as told by Abe himself. "Josh" retired Monday evening visibly indisposed and as I tucked the covers around him, his body temperature seemed above normal. His pulse was weak and irregular, with his tongue showing signs of whooping cough or convulsions. All the doctors were in bed. "Abe continued, as I said goodnight to Josh hoping to find him well in the morning. But alas! At the dawn of day I found that Josh had gone to that home from whence no dog returns. Josh was dead! I tried to resuscitate him with a fresh bone, but in spite of these efforts Josh remained dead, deader than a door nail. We buried him the next day behind the stable with many friends in attendance."

The Stillwagon's decided in 1899 to sell their baking business and property to Emanuel Vogt, a baker who occupied one of the stores in the Ambler Opera House building. Early in the spring, Vogt took possession and began major improvements to his newly acquired building. It was entirely of frame, including the bakehouse attached to the rear.



The left side of this frame structure housed Ambler's first bakery. Founded 1880-81 by Abram and Mary Stillwagon, and the family lived on the right side and the upper floors. The Bake-house was attached to the rear of the building. Shown left to right are, Daughter Jennie, son Oscar, and parents Abram and Mary Stillwagon. Ambler's Post Office was on the right side 1894 - 1898. The Stillwagons were succeeded in 1899 by the Emanuel Voght Bakery.

Photograph Courtesy of Oscar Stillwagon.

The front section was used for selling baked goods, confectioneries and ice cream, while the upper floors provided living quarters for the Vogt family and a servant.

Abe and Mary Stillwagon, not yet ready to retire, next bought ground on Butler Avenue, at the railroad, erecting a four- story brick building.

This housed his cigar factory and later the highly successful Stillwagon Restaurant, with Mary's homemade pies and Abe's homemade ice cream popular on the dessert menu. Many years later, with the end of prohibition, this property became well known as the "Ambler Palace" until its removal in recent years to provide Ambler with more parking-space.

Early on a Monday morning in August of 1900, while the workers at Vogt's Bakery were frying doughnuts, a portion of the fat spashed over onto the fire, immediately igniting and setting the bakery's interior ablaze. Unable to extinquish the flames, they fled the building. Meanwhile, the servant, upstairs with the six Vogt children still asleep, smelled smoke and looking out the back window, saw flames shooting from the bake-house. She ran to the street, sounded the alarm and then fainted. About 7 o'clock as Vogt was making bread deliveries across from the Fire House on Main Stree, the alarm sounded. He rushed to the fire scene, a block and a half away, arriving just before the fire company. While the members of Wissahickon Fire Company hooked up the long hose from Keasby and Mattison, Voght and his neighbors rescued his six children and managed to save articles from their home. The fire was brought under control very quickly. Shortly after the fire Emanuel Vogt annound plans to rebuild, but this time a fireproff brick building of three stories containing a bakery, two stores and two dwellings. The structure remains at this corner, across Butler Avenue from Hotel Wyndam. It has been the American Stores, who moved there in 1920's, next Sun Ray Drug Store, remembered by many today. Next an interior decorating establishment, known as "Fine Things". This is presently a skate-board shop.

Lindenwold Farms

By
Newton M. Howard

The enormous estate was called "Lindenwold", while the working area behind his residence was known as Lindenwold Farms. He was Richard V. Mattison, M.D., lord of these many acres, and active partner in the Keasbey & Mattison Company. Nearly 400 homes had been built to house the company workers, maintenance for the homes being provided by a cluster of workshops along Farm Lane close to Loch Alsh Avenue. Here were located the painters, paper-hangers, plumbers, carpenters, electricians, metal-workers or anyone needed to keep these rental homes in top condition. Another group of workers operated the enormous farm and dairy areas; there were



Photo from 1945 shows one of the several barns at Lindenwold Farms being razed. Believed to have been the largest barn in Montgomery County, it stood on Farm Lane at Schiavone Drive. This barn and the cluster of shops nearby serviced Mattison's estate and his hundreds of Company homes.

Photograph courtesy of Gus Eitelgeorge

three large barns, one of these reputedly the largest in Montgomery County. Producing more than enough for Mattison's family, the surplus from Lindenwold Farms was sold locally.

In charge of all these operations was Civil War veteran William "Billy" Devine, with Mattison since 1888 until his death in 1923. A home was provided Devine in this area of activity for use as his residence and offices, a home in existence today on Farm Lane. As Mattison's right-hand man, Devine controlled everything connected with the company homes and farm operations, everything except operations at the factories. He scheduled all work needed for the company homes, work which was done year round, starting at one end of a row and working their way to the other end, one house at a time. There was little choice in paint colors or wallpaper, a medium to dark green for exterior house trim being widely used. From the paper-hanging shop of Bill Knoblauch, the wall coverings tended to be very conservative, with your walls likely to look the same as those of your neighbors

Mattison had several large icehouses to store the harvest from Loch Linden, the Inlet

The cellar of his carriage house behind the castle stored ice for the exclusive use of Mattison's kitchen staff, with the cook giving strict orders that the ice brought into her kitchen each day must be clean and free of any sawdust. This was the responsibility of young Victor Romano, hired for his ability to speak both English and Italian and thus act as interpreter for the dozen or more Italian gardeners on the estate. For his care in seeing that the ice was clean and free of any sawdust or ground cork, the cook with one of her delicious desserts rewarded Romano, his favorite being the lemon meringue pie.

An early accident to the doctor's jaw made a restricted diet necessary with poultry and soft foods comprising much of the menu. In spite of his great wealth, Mattison rarely enjoyed a good steak. Thousands of chickens, ducks, turkeys and pheasants were raised on the farms for his table, with the excess being sold locally.

Interested in horticulture, Mattison had his own gardener and large grounds crew working out of a group of greenhouses just off Farm Lane near Highland Avenue. Over the years his gardeners had captured top honors at the major flower shows,

Following the stock market crash, Mattison's empire crumbled, all holdings lost except for the Water Companies and a residence nearby. Key workers at Lindenwold Farms were called into the office of new superintendent Charles Hibschan and informed, "Everything is being closed down, for maybe a week, a month or forever." It turned out to be forever, with Richard and Mary Mattison forced to vacate the Castle and move to #1 Lindenwold Terrace which had been deeded in Mary's name. It was here that second wife Mary Mattison died in 1935, with Richard Mattison's death occurring the following year. At the same time, new owners St. Mary's Orphanage of Conshohocken took possession of the landmark estate at the edge of Ambler, continuing today as St. Mary's Villa.

Library Founded at Three Tuns Village

By
Newton M. Howard

Our tiny Village of Three Tuns is formed by two busy intersecting highways, either deep in mud, dust-filled, or snow-bound, depending on the season. We have a little one-room schoolhouse, a blacksmith, Clem's General Store and the old Three Tuns Inn, where it's been said General Washington once entertained his officers. Not much else except for lots of farmlands. Far from the big City, we may be hard to find on the map, but we're happy and it can truly be said that we have more cattle than people, in this the Year of Our Lord 1834. Right down the road a piece is the tollgate, with traffic passing through our village, headed for Gilkey's Corner, first step in the long journey into Philadelphia.



Clement Jones' General Store at Three Tuns Village is the building that housed the area's first library in 1834. His store was erected in 1833 and was across the Butler Turnpike from the old Three Tuns Inn. Just across Norristown Road from his store was the little frame schoolhouse in which the seven men met to found the Union Library Company of Upper Dublin in January of 1834. Photograph courtesy of the Historical Society of Montgomery County

Over at the schoolhouse, Amos Lukens, our schoolmaster, is firing up the little pot-bellied stove for a special meeting called for this evening at seven, on this frigid Monday in January. Amos receives little compensation for all his responsibilities. Besides teaching the three "R's", he's required to clean the schoolhouse, keep a supply of firewood and keep that stove producing heat, besides having a supply of quill pens sharpened for his students, some reluctant to learn at all.

Amos is one of seven men in our Village who will be meeting tonight with one purpose in mind, the formation of a library in this part of Upper Dublin Township. First to arrive is James Rutter, who's owned the tannery at Gilkey's Corner since 1810, so he's pretty well known in these parts. Amos greets him with, "Good evening, Jimmy. You're early." Rutter replies with, "Evenin'", Amos. Clem and Lew will be right over. They're closin' the store". He's referring of course to brothers Clement and Lewis Jones. Clem owns the General Store built just last year. Rutter has just put his horse and sleigh in Clem's stable behind the store.

Soon Clem and Lew arrive, with the remaining three appearing soon after. They've come by sleigh or on foot through the newly fallen snow of last night. They are Dr. Joshua Y. Jones, Samuel Mann and Jesse Shoemaker. "We've all finished our chores early so we could be here this evening for something of concern to all, something that will benefit our community, so gentlemen, let's get started on the business that brings us together." This is Jimmy Rutter again speaking.

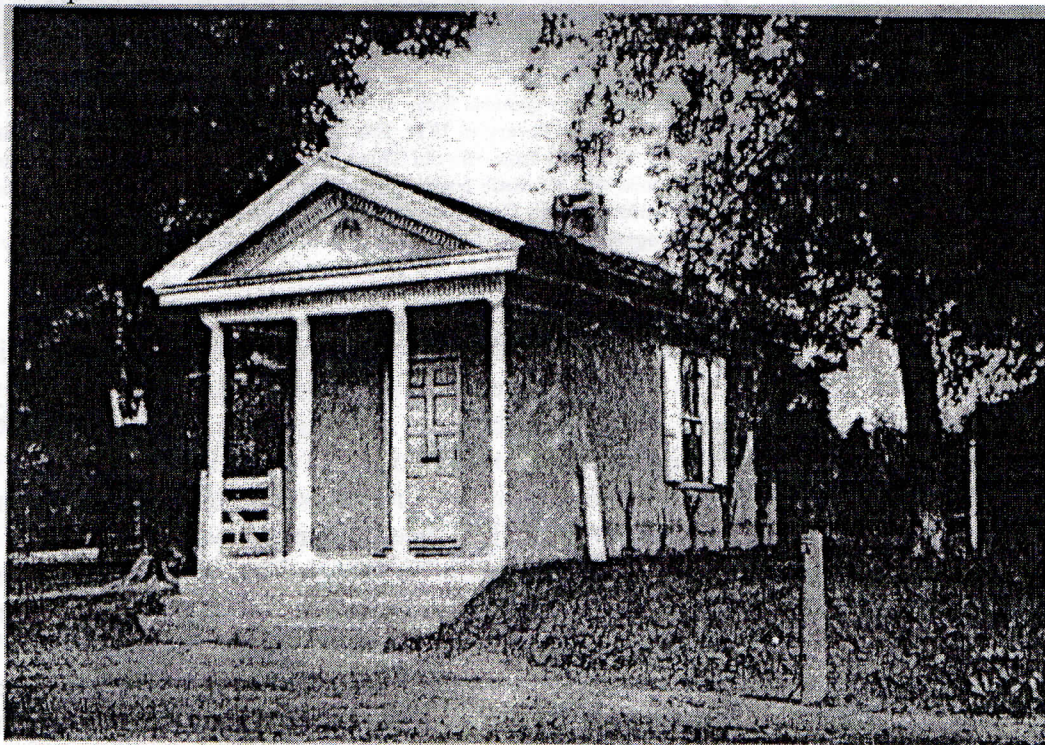
Having met before Christmas over a repast and cigars at the Inn, it was decided that a library was sorely needed for the community, and set a date for this meeting. And now, at the appointed hour, the seven men agree that indeed a library will be formed, each agreeing to contribute books from his own personal collection to form its nucleus. Name chosen for the new organization is "Union Library Company of Upper Dublin".

Next order of business sees Jimmy Rutter named the first president, Amos L. Lukens secretary, with Clem Jones becoming the first librarian, largely because the books will be housed in his General Store across the road. For this he's to receive \$5.00 a month.

In a very short time the Library has grown, becoming very active and a definite asset to all of Upper Dublin, not just Three Tuns. By 1888, though, things are happening in the nearby Village of Ambler that will have a profound effect on Three Tuns and the Library forevermore. Efforts to incorporate Ambler Village into a borough seem to be bearing fruit. Richard Mattison, his partner Henry Keasbey, J. Watson Craft and other leaders have been pushing for the incorporation as a borough and dropping out of Upper Dublin township, with certain advantages to be had as a borough.

Following Ambler's incorporation, officers of Union Library Company of Upper Dublin are soon convinced that it would be beneficial to make the move into the rapidly expanding community of Ambler, while growth at Three Tuns appears to be stagnant.

Having moved into the second floor of the brand-new Buchanan Building at Butler & Main in Ambler, they are barely settled when the great fire of February 9, 1890 strikes, destroying the entire building. All furniture and books of the Library, renamed the Union Library of Ambler, are lost except for about 100 books out on loan.



After the fire that destroyed the store Wilmer Atkinson built this building to house the Library, in 1907.

HISTORIC AERIAL PHOTO OF AMBLER

By
Newton M. Howard

Keasbey & Mattison Company, in the early 1920's, was preparing a catalog showcasing their extensive line of asbestos products. Dr. Richard V. Mattison, company president, believed that a striking photograph should be used on the cover. The agency concurred, suggesting an early aerial photograph that showed their Ambler plants and a section of the town. Next step was to seek out the maker of this photograph for permission to use it on the cover.

They found that William Nicholson Jennings, Internationally-known photographer, had made the aerial photo in 1920, and that his studio was located in Philadelphia. On meeting with Jennings, it was learned that he was well-known for his accomplishments in both photography and science. He was born into a wealthy family in Yorkshire, England, in 1860. A change in England's economic conditions caused his father to lose their woolen mills in 1876, with the family coming to America several years later to seek their fortunes in the New World.

William Jennings, on arrival in Philadelphia, began looking for employment in center city. His search took him to John Wanamaker's store on Market Street. He had been trained in stenography and typewriting in England, and while Jennings was being interviewed for a stenographic position by Wanamaker himself, a Remington typewriter salesman entered. He attempted to sell his product for use in the store's offices. Showing interest, Wanamaker stated that he had no one who could operate a typewriter. Jennings spoke up, asking permission to demonstrate the machine, impressing Wanamaker to such a degree that he hired Jennings and gave the Remington salesman an order for typewriters. Jennings thus became John Wanamaker's first typist.

A few years later, becoming interested in photography, he experimented with photographing lightning. It was he who first photographed streaks of lightning, showing their true form, rather than zig-zag lines. His collection of lightning photographs is today housed at the Franklin Institute, of which he was a lifetime member.

In 1889 he photographed the Johnstown Flood, using equipment given him by George Eastman, founder of Eastman Kodak Company. Around this time, he became fascinated with photography being done from free-floating balloons. Believing he could improve upon the quality of these photographs, he approached a balloonist, arranging to accompany him on his flights. The highlight of his aerial photography career came on July 4th, 1893, when he was the first person to successfully photograph Philadelphia from a free-floating balloon. This was the first city in the world to be photographed in such a fashion. Boston had been photographed earlier, but from an anchored balloon.

Following his success in aerial photography, he was contacted by steamship lines anxious to secure better photographs aboard ships on the open sea. His photographs showed a marked improvement in quality, with the result that he crossed the Atlantic for the next six years, making photographs aboard all the major liners, such as the Lusitania and Mauritania. He was away for weeks at a time from his wife and three children back in the United States.

While working for the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company, out of England, he followed with interest White Star Line's activity in having the world's largest fleet of ocean-going passenger

steamships built at Belfast. Because he had been away from home for some time, he purchased a ticket to New York on the maiden voyage of one of these ships. It was called the "Titanic" and was both fast and luxurious, as well as being described as "unsinkable". He looked forward to this adventure and his luggage was packed long before the maiden voyage scheduled for April 10th of 1912, from Southampton. He planned to do much photography aboard the ship and was in Southampton a week before its departure. Here he was contacted by Charles Stokes, representative of his employer, the Canadian Steamship Line, who asked him to stay in England longer to do more shipboard photography aboard the Empress of Britain. He was told that if he did not stay, he would lose his contract with the Canadian Line

Regrettably, he turned in for refund his ticket for that trip aboard the "Titanic". Days later when he was at sea aboard the "Empress", Jennings learned of the Titanic disaster. For the remainder of his life, he remembered the feeling as the Titanic news was posted by the ship's purser.

William Nicholson Jennings died in 1946 after having lived life to the fullest. It was in 1949 that his son Ralph Jennings, with wife Lois, purchased a home in Fort Washington where they raised two sons. It was Lois Jennings who contributed much toward making this article possible.



This is believed to be Ambler's first aerial photo. Made in 1920 for Keasbey & Mattison Company by Internationally-known photographer William N. Jennings, and it marked the start of aerials taken from an airplane. Used as the cover photo for their catalog, it was the first time an aerial photograph was used to illustrate an advertising piece. Details of K&M facilities have been strengthened by a commercial artist while subduing details of the town.

Illustration from Collection of Newton M. Howard

Matthias Sheeleigh: The Pastor and the School

by
Newton M. Howard

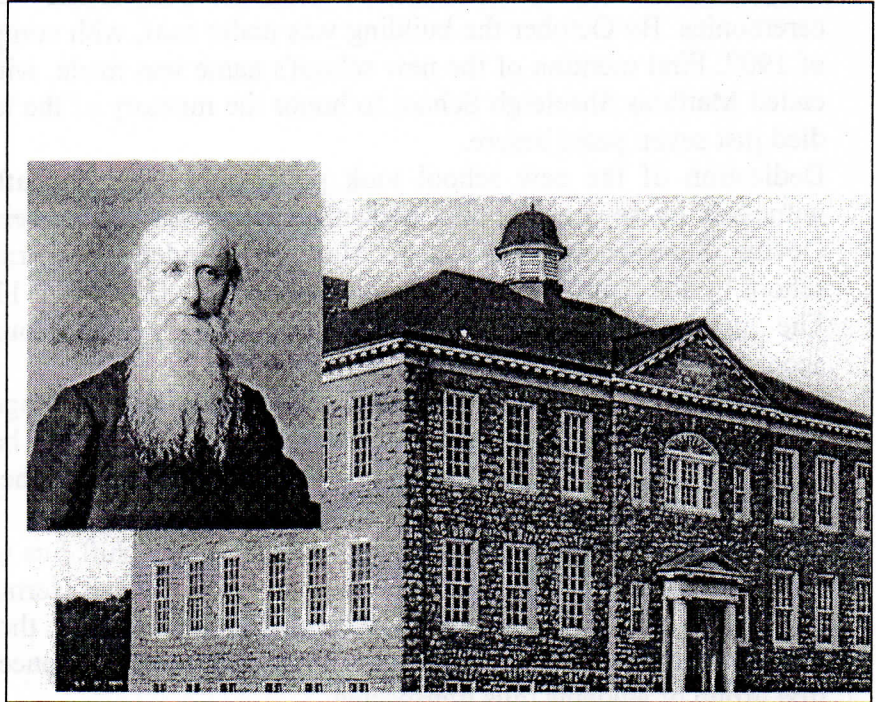
Having spent most of his life in another century, Reverend Matthias Sheeleigh did not live to see the Upper Dublin School that bore his name. Born in 1821 at Charlestown in Chester County, he died in 1900 at his Fort Washington home, in his 79th year.

Reverend Sheeleigh became pastor of the Lutheran congregations of both Whitemarsh and Upper Dublin in 1869, serving until 1898. Attempting to resign in 1895, he was prevailed upon to remain an additional three years. After resigning, he continued to live in Fort Washington until his death. For forty years he had been editor of Lutheran Sunday School Herald, a popular publication of the day. From 1871 until his death, Sheeleigh prepared the Lutheran Almanac and Yearbook.

The need for a new school in the western sector of Upper Dublin Township became apparent with an increase in company homes being built by the rapidly expanding Keasbey & Mattison Company in Ambler. Since moving here from Philadelphia in 1882, the company's growth soon exhausted the labor force available locally. Workers at the asbestos plants were coming from out of town by train, car and later the trolley. Commuting to Ambler became costly, with workers requesting that living quarters be provided closer to their place of employment. With none available, Keasbey & Mattison Company, in order to keep operating, was forced to erect their own homes, the first being in South Ambler around 1890 and near the factory buildings. Next built were the eight homes on Lindenwold Terrace for executives, followed by a larger group at Argyle Avenue and Douglas Street. Those surrounding the new Trinity Memorial Church appeared about 1901-03.

As early as 1903 the Upper Dublin School Board was negotiating with Doctor Mattison to purchase land, but considered his price too high. Appearance of the Church Street-Ambler Road homes in 1906, the largest group to date, made it absolutely necessary for the School Board to act promptly and provide a school for increased number of students expected from these new neighborhoods.

The Board purchased from Mattison in March of 1906 a lot 200 x 225 feet on the corner of Argyle Avenue & Douglas Street for \$1,250. By May, plans of local architect Watson K. Phillips



Reverend Matthias Sheeleigh (1821-1900) for whom Matthias Sheeleigh School in Upper Dublin was named. Cornerstone for school, at Argyle Avenue and Douglas Street, was laid in 1906 and building demolished in 1969. Playground occupies this site today.

Rev. Sheeleigh portrait (inset) provided courtesy of Upper Dublin Lutheran Church. Matthias Sheeleigh School.

Photograph courtesy of Henry Scholz.

were approved. Known at first as the Argyle Avenue School, it was to have four rooms on each of its two floors.

Local builder Daniel W. Sperry was given the contract, the price tag being \$17,833, and a completion date set for December 1st of 1906. Cornerstone was laid in August with no formal ceremonies. By October the building was under roof, with completion date changed to February of 1907. First mention of the new school's name was made, with the announcement it would be called Matthias Sheeleigh School to honor the memory of the late Reverend Sheeleigh who had died just seven years before.

Dedication of the new school took place on a Thursday afternoon in the Spring of 1907, witnessed by several hundred persons. The school was presented with a piano by William J. Devine, Superintendent of Doctor Mattison's Lindenwold Farms. A flag was given to the new school by the Ambler Lodge known as Hendricks Castle No. 117, Knights of the Mystic Chain. The members had marched from their Ambler Opera House quarters to the new school accompanied by the Arion orchestra of Lansdale.

It was Friday afternoon, October 22, 1909, that a large photograph of Rev. Matthias Sheeleigh was presented to the school by his family and hung in the hall. There were four teachers at Sheeleigh School at the time: Mary K. Stewart, Principal; Esther L. Taggart; Bessie R. Lightkep and Lavina MacFarland.

An interesting story tells of the first use of a make-shift bus to bring children from the Three Tuns-Maple Glen area to Sheeleigh School. Local butcher Herman Arnold was prevailed upon to empty out his truck and install two benches to transport the small group of students. This information was verified to the writer by former resident Frances Scheibner who was among the first group of students thus transported.

In 1969, progress deemed it necessary to raze the building, considered no longer adequate for today's education process, the location becoming a neighborhood playground

CHURCH BUILT TO HONOR DAUGHTER'S MEMORY

By
Newton M. Howard

Early in 1891, the need for a Mission in Ambler was felt by St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in Whitemarsh. The minister Rev. Samuel Snelling arranged for the group's first meeting in a classroom of Sunnyside Academy in Ambler, at the corner of Main & Butler. Meeting place later was a room in Keasbey & Mattison's Opera House Building.

Known at first as St. Thomas' Protestant Episcopal Mission, it was late in 1897 that industrialist Dr. Richard V. Mattison asked that they choose a new name, their choice being "Trinity Mission". By spring of 1898, Dr. Mattison and his wife announced they would build a church for the Mission in memory of their deceased daughter Esther Victoria. It would be called Trinity Memorial Church, with plans for the structure being prepared by Lansdale architect Milton B. Bean, well-known for many Ambler buildings he had designed.

Work on the new edifice was underway in mid-summer with cellar excavation completed and foundation begun, using stone brought from Mattison's Quarry a block away at Highland Avenue and Farm Lane. The estimated cost at that time was \$40,000.

When the walls of the church had reached sufficient height, the cornerstone was laid in the base of the tower by the Bishop of Pennsylvania O. W. Whitaker. Contained in the cornerstone box were Esther Victoria Mattison's full name, date of birth and death, a bible and prayer book, plus a copy of the Ambler Gazette of August 11, 1898, which showed architect Bean's drawing of the church. This was held on a day late in September at 3:30 pm, with 32 clergymen present. After the ceremony, officials and guests attended a luncheon at the Ambler Country Club, a short distance away on present-day Trinity Avenue.

Original plans called for a slate roof, but were changed to tile, making it necessary to install heavier rafters. In the meantime, the Mattisons were meeting with the well-known New York firm of Fred S. Lamb, engaged to do the stained glass work in the new church.

By May of 1899, work on the tower had progressed to the point where it had risen above the roof line. At this time Mattison made a change, not in the architect's plans, which was to prove disastrous. He decided to install a large clock in the tower, with a face 10 feet in diameter, large enough to be seen from the railroad station and other parts of Ambler. This decision made it necessary to increase the tower's height by thirteen feet, resulting in the lack of sufficient support for the extra weight.

On a Monday afternoon just before 4 o'clock, about 20 feet of the top of the tower came crashing down without much warning, doing damage amounting to several thousands of dollars. Two large holes broke through the tile roof, crushing the rafters and hurling tons of stones, mortar and debris into the cellar. This accident made it necessary to remove about 50 feet of stone from the tower down to the roof line and begin again, this time eliminating the Doctor's plans for the clock.

By Spring of 1900, work on the church was being pushed along by Leidy Heckler and his carpenters. Efforts were being made to complete the Sunday school room first, in order that

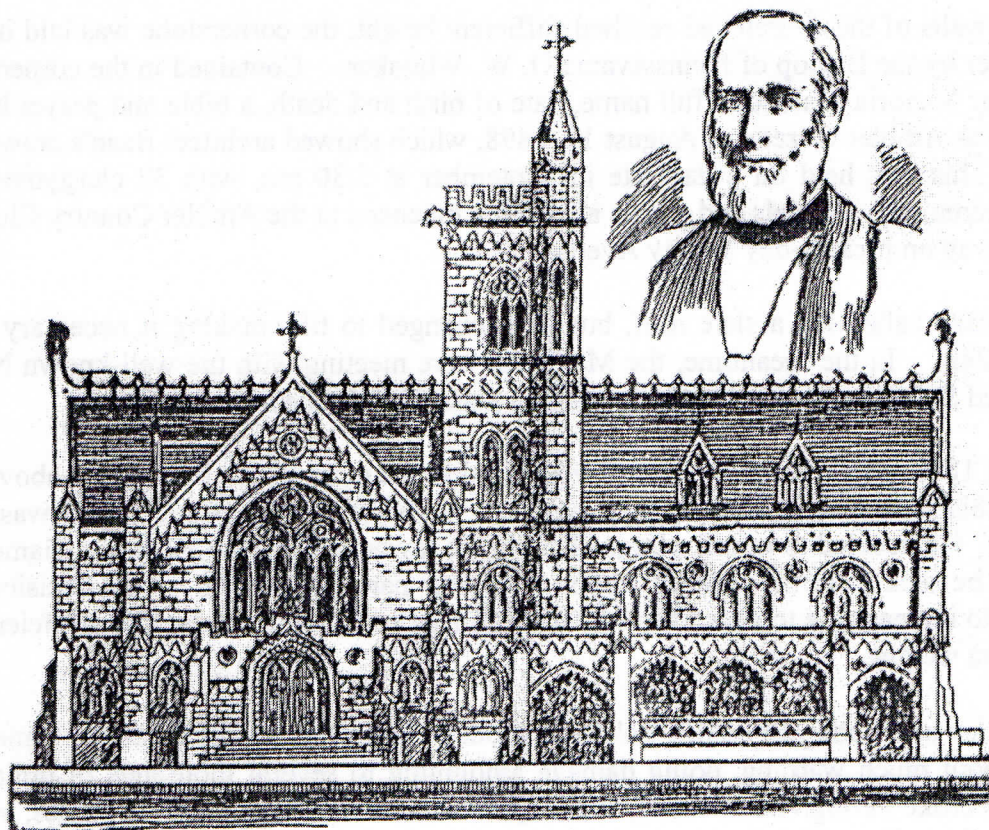
services could be held here early in May, at which time the congregation would be vacating their rented room in the Opera House Building.

With consecration scheduled for early in 1901, and ceiling work being completed from scaffolding high in the church, tragedy struck when a young carpenter stepped back, plunging to his death on the cement floor below.

Though the church was not completed, consecration was held on Esther Victoria Mattison's birthday, February 2nd, 1901, at which time she would have been eighteen years old, had she lived.

On June 16, 1986, disaster struck when fire destroyed the "Church of the Beautiful Windows", as it had become known. The devastation was so great that little could be salvaged, making it necessary to rebuild.

Work began on the new building late in 1988 with completion the following year. During construction of the new Trinity Church, services were conducted just across the Pike in the chapel of St. Mary's Villa, owned since 1936 by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Incidentally, St. Mary's property had once been the home of the Mattisons.



Drawing of Trinity Memorial Church prepared in 1898 by Architect Milton B. Bean for Dr. and Mrs. Richard V. Mattison, in memory of their daughter Esther Victoria Mattison who died in 1887 at the age of four years. Inset shows Bishop O. W. Whitaker who laid the cornerstone in the Fall of 1898.

Illustration is from Collection of Newton M. Howard

"DOC" Ambler's Stable Becomes Early Ambler Garage

by
Newton M. Howard

Behind Evan Ambler's General Store stood an unpretentious frame building with its entrance on Main Street. Built around 1876, it housed his horses, carriages and wagons.

Evan, better known as "Doc" Ambler, was the seventh son of Andrew and Mary Johnson Ambler. An early Postmaster in the Village of Ambler, he operated the store at Butler & Main until his sudden death in 1893, the result of an accident. The widow, Mary Jenkins Ambler, continued operation of the business for several years, later leasing the store to others, before selling the property to Henry Biddle in 1909.

New owner Biddle altered the old General Store extensively, allowing the stable to remain unchanged. It was this frame building that was leased to Lee Myers in 1911 for use as a garage to store and service the new automobile, which many believed was not just a fad but was here to stay. By that summer Ambler borough already had 32 automobiles, with an additional 12 in a one-mile radius of Ambler. Just a year later, the total had risen to 69 in the borough and outskirts.

Few external changes were made to the original building. A native of Philadelphia, Myers moved his family into one of Leidy Heckler's Fairview Avenue homes in 1911. Earlier he had worked as a machinist in J. Clayton Reed's "Ambler Garage", as well as operating an auto repair shop at Arthur Hayden's Blacksmith Shop on Butler Avenue.

Calling his venture the "City Garage", Myers' business grew steadily. Besides offering service, he handled sales of the Oakland automobile, advertising that the garage was "never closed". An innovative business man, he announced in 1913 that he would, "give lessons in driving the automobile to ladies or any persons desiring same." Miss Ethel Heiss, on acquiring her brand-new Oakland touring car, learned its operation from Lee. Mrs. Charles D. Jones of Ambler Highlands likewise mastered the art of driving, with Myers remarking "the ladies are just as capable as any man in operating the automobile".

Arrival of the "horseless carriage" brought many new problems, one relating to the car's cranking mechanism. Local news items of the day declared that "William Walt broke his arm Saturday morning cranking his automobile", and that "William Jago of Broad Axe broke his arm recently while cranking his machine".

Speeding was cause for concern, with neighboring villages in 1912 enforcing speed laws for automobiles; 12 miles per hour in village limits, and 24 miles per hour in open country. The same year brought this ruling: "Everyone operating an automobile must now have a license, cost being \$2.00. Exception - Truck drivers do not require licenses."

Business at the City Garage grew rapidly, soon outgrowing Doc Ambler's old stable. By 1914 landlord Biddle agreed to enlarge the premises. A larger stone building was erected around the stable with the old wooden building later removed. The new stone garage, 50 feet square, had an

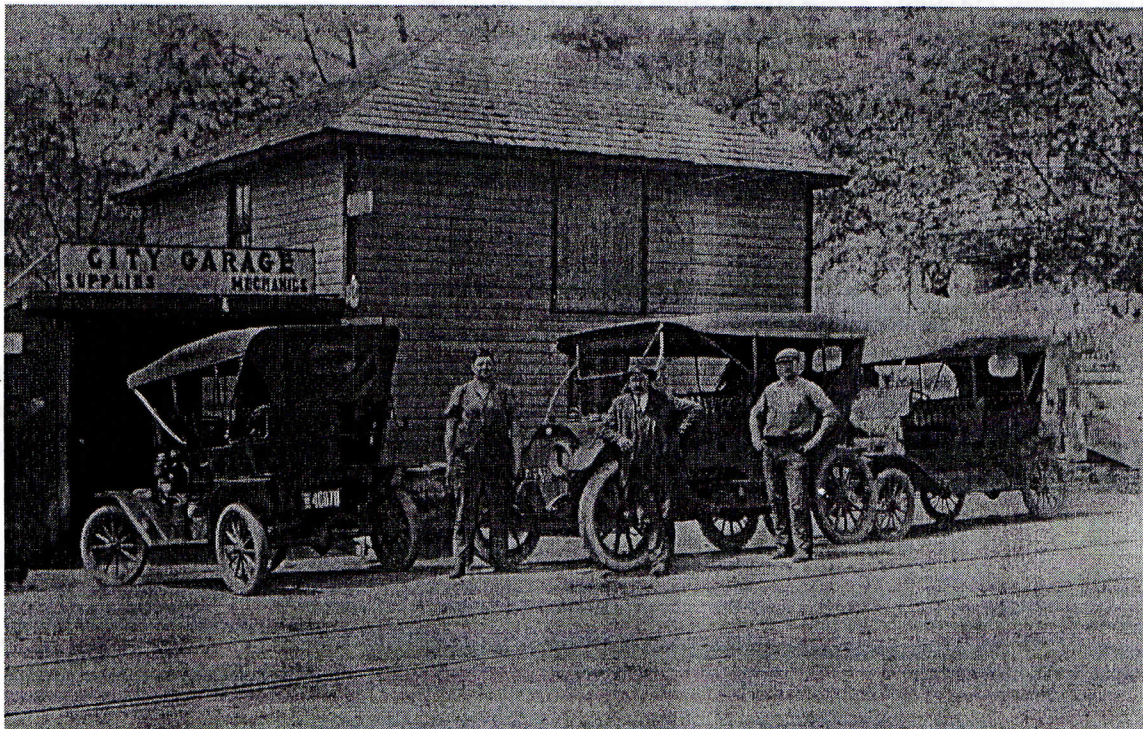
elevator to move cars from one floor to another. That building exists today on Main Street just off Butler Avenue.

As the popularity of the automobile increased, so too did the garage businesses of the two pioneers, J. Clayton Reed and Lee Myers. Several new garages emerged to take advantage of the growing popularity of this new means of transportation.

Soon the City Garage changed hands, becoming that of Harvey Heath who in 1917 had married Margaret Myers, daughter of his boss Lee Myers. Harvey's brother Charles, better known as Chubb, joined him in the business which prospered for a number of years. Chubb is probably better remembered as the security guard at the First National Bank of Ambler. During a 1933 robbery, he was bound and gagged by the bank robbers and held captive in the bank's basement until the hold-up men were captured sometime later. It was here in Heath's Garage that Jake Yost's Taxi Service began many years ago. The garage business continued for years, with Doc Ambler's old stable property later becoming a beer distributor's warehouse. Today it houses automobile-related businesses.

The story on how this article evolved from discovery of early Ambler photographs in an Ocean City Candy Store follows:

This rare 1913 photograph shows the original "City Garage" of Lee Myers on South Main just off Butler Avenue. The frame building was the former stable of Evan "Doc" Ambler who operated his General Store at Butler & Main. Photograph was "discovered" at Rauhauser's Candies in Ocean City, N.J. and is furnished courtesy of Nancy Rauhauser Blomdahl. She is the great granddaughter of Lee Myers, and daughter of Mary Alice Heath and husband Curvin Rauhauser, formerly of Ambler. Lee Myers is believed to be the man in the center of photograph.



Shown above the two Heath brothers, Charles and Harvey who operated the garage for many years.



City Garage as it appeared in later years

HISTORIC AMBLER PHOTOS SURFACE IN OCEAN CITY CANDY STORE

Almost as interesting as the above article is the story behind discovery of the photograph illustrating it, by Ambler couple Bud and Mary Jane Wahl. It seems that Mary Jane's love for chocolates from Rauhauser's Candies in Ocean City brought them to this popular Ocean City store on a late-summer weekend.

While Mary Jane selected her chocolates, husband Bud Wahl engaged in a conversation with owner Nancy Blomdahl who spoke of her family roots in early Ambler and the garage business her great grandfather established there years ago. He was Lee Myers who founded the "City Garage" in 1911. This later became Heath's Garage, with Nancy's grandfather Harvey Heath marrying Lee Myers' daughter Margaret in 1917. Harvey and Margaret had three children, one daughter Mary Alice Heath marrying 5&10 assistant manager Curvin Rauhauser. They became the parents of Nancy Rauhauser Blomdahl, moving later to Glenside, where they acquired an interest in candy-making. That interest eventually took them to Ocean City where they established their popular Rauhauser's Candies business.

It was mentioned by Nancy Blomdahl that she had some old Ambler photographs of the Lee Myers' City Garage and Heath's Garage. As a result of Bud Wahl's conversation at Rauhauser's Candies, these rare photos were eventually forwarded to Ambler, with the earliest one illustrating the above local history article by Newton M. Howard

It might be timely to request that anyone having photographs of early Ambler tucked away should get in touch with our history writer, Newt Howard, or the "Enterprise" editor Mike Fisher

(at 215-886-3023) You may have a treasure waiting to be discovered. Don't wait! Get up into your attic now! It'll be too hot next summer.

Margaret Myers Heath operated a store for a time in the former Ambler Gazette Building. It was known simply as Mrs. Heath's Store, and here she sold candies, pastries and Smith's Ice Cream. Address of that store is today 57 East Butler and some years ago was the site of the writer's first business location on Butler Avenue, and was called "Howard Camera & Art Center".

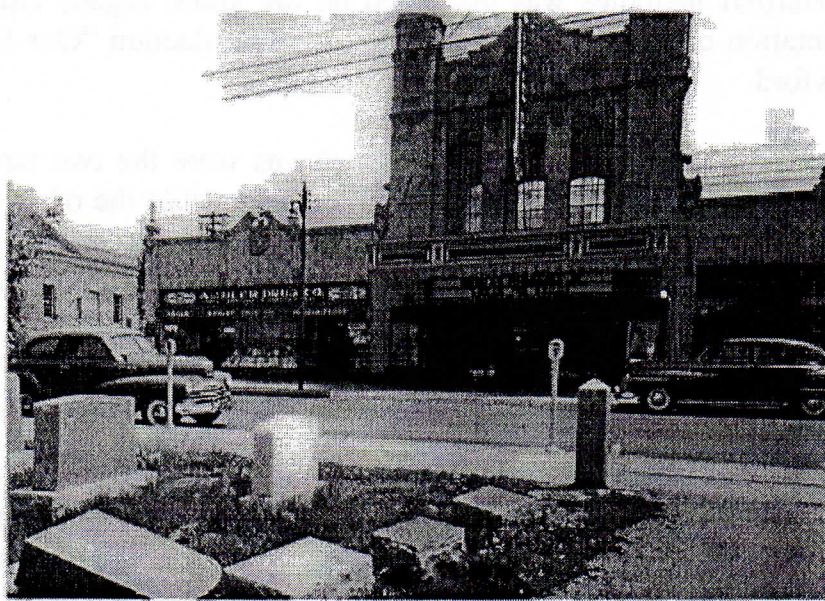
Harvey and Margaret Heath's daughter Mary Alice, conducted a dance studio in the basement location under her mother's store. While working in her mother's store, she met Curvin Rauhauser, assistant manager of the Woolworth Store. Marrying him in 1942, she persuaded him to leave Woolworth. Taking a position at Standard Pressed Steel, Rauhauser became acquainted with an amateur candy maker, and assisted him from time to time. This introduction to candy making led Mary Alice and her husband to Ocean City where they found a candy business for sale, the owner ready to retire. The Rauhauser Candies business continues successfully today, being carried on by second and third generations.

Incidentally, one of the Heath brothers, Charles, also known as "Chubby", was in the local news in 1933, while working as a watchman at the Ambler National Bank. During a bank robbery he was bound and kept in the basement until the bandits were apprehended within hours of the incident.

Ambler Gets a Second Theatre in 1928

by
Newton M. Howard

With Doctor Mattisons Opera House dominating Ambler since its construction in 1890, rumors of a second movie house for Ambler began to surface as early as 1920. The borough was growing and it was felt another theatre could be supported. Rumor in 1922 concerned the Stanley Company's desire to erect a fine theatre in Ambler, with a property owner on Butler Avenue being approached.



A rare 1947 photograph shows part of front elevation of the Ambler Theatre built in 1928. Featured film at this time was "Sinbad the Sailor", starring Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Ambler Drug Store occupied the eastern store from opening day, while the other store had a number of different occupants. Interesting foreground shows the Monument Works of Isaac Pyne a longtime manufacturer in Ambler. This spot later became Regan's Shoes and today is the site of the Lucky Well Restaurant. Photograph by Melograno Studios is from the Collection of Newton M. Howard

Rumors continued, with Doctor Mattison hinting that perhaps he might erect another theatre, possibly in the vicinity of his Ambler Opera House. He said, "My Opera House is too small for motion pictures and residents of our town may look for a much larger one some time in the future." Nothing further was heard of his plans for a number of years.

By 1927 it was apparent that something was about to happen, with word that Dr. Albanus Styer's house on Butler Avenue at York Street had been purchased and was about to be razed. Built in 1878 by carriage shop owner Henry Slutter, and later sold to Styer, the old house was soon gone, leaving a gaping hole on Butler Avenue at York Street. The news was out. A new theatre was about to be built in Ambler, but not by Doctor Mattison.

Dr. Mattison, on hearing about the new Ambler Theatre, was furious. He hurriedly called in architect John Bothwell to draw up plans for a complete renovation of the Opera House interior

for use as a movie house. It was Dr. Mattisons nature not to be outdone by anyone. Ambler Theatre construction began in 1928 from plans of Solomon Kaplan of Philadelphia, the small business block to include the theatre and two adjoining retail stores. By years end the new owners, the Harrison Brothers, sold it to The Equity Theatre, Inc., owners of four other houses, two in Ocean City, one in Holmesburg and one in Darby. All of Equity's theatres had been equipped with synchronized sound apparatus for talkies. This was the dawning of a new era in America. The role of the movie had been established, and nothing was going to hold it back.

After months of building, the gala opening of the new Ambler Theatre was held on New Years Eve December 31, 1928. Judge Harold G. Knight welcomed the audience of more than twelve hundred and introduced J. William Ditter, Sr., as the featured speaker. Following this, an organ recital of Victor Herbert melodies was presented on the grand organ. The house lights then dimmed for presentation of short subjects and the sound production "Our Dancing Daughters" starring Joan Crawford.

Opening of the new Ambler Theatre was a big event, as were the two new stores adjoining. Ambler Drug Store occupied the eastern side from the start while the other had several tenants including Neigut's Grocery who had moved from North Main Street to the new location but soon moved back to its original quarters. The American public was not ready for the Super Market concept that Neigut attempted to bring to Butler Avenue.

For a number of years the Ambler Theatre and the Opera House co-existed, sharing the movie and vaudeville business, both able to survive, until some time in the 1930's when Warner Brothers took a long lease on the Opera House, closing down the facilities to the public. Following this closing, Keasbey & Mattison Company was permitted to use the Opera House for company functions. Ambler High School was allowed to use the facilities for graduation exercises through 1939, after which time the new high school was completed with its own larger auditorium.

Ambler Theatre's successful opening was described as a "glorious sunrise in the dawn of a greater Ambler, now second to no other town in the suburban section in manner of entertainment." The Theatre and stores were highly successful for years until drive-ins and shopping malls had their effect on them. After leasing the abandoned Ambler Theatre for two years, radio evangelist Harry Bristow became its new owner in 1978. He re-named the theatre Christian Cinema, and maintained a very successful operation until his death in recent years. It was during his ownership that he evicted the State Store as tenant, considering them not appropriate in his complex.

And now, in the year 2002, under new ownership, the old Ambler Theatre complex is about to embark on a rebirth, with an old Philadelphia restaurant ready to open in the spot occupied for years by Ambler Drug Company.

Autos and Alligators - Mr. Reed's Garage

By
Newton M. Howard

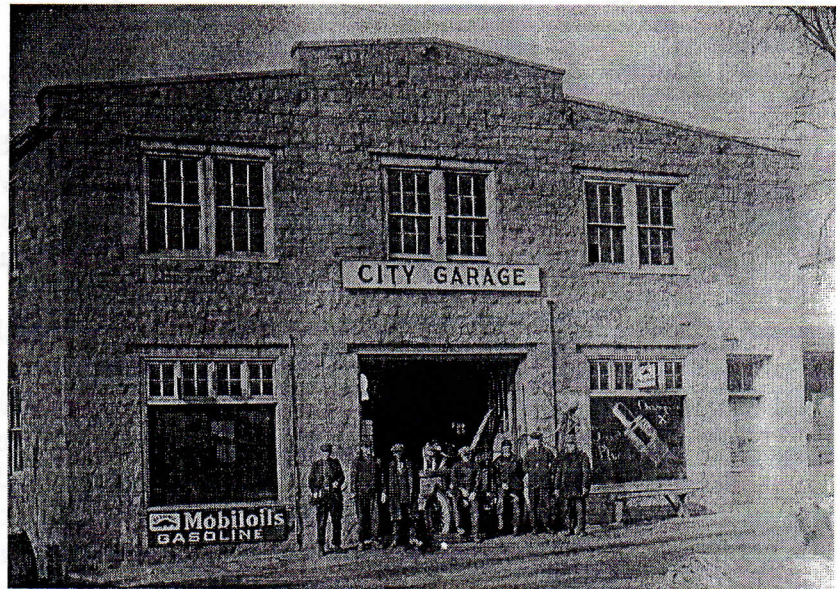
No doubt about it, the automobile was here to stay, and no longer just a fad. It was 1909, and to keep these "horseless carriages" in running order, several garages were under construction in Ambler. One of these was being built on Butler Avenue for Harry W. B. Reed, plans having been drawn up by architect Milton B. Bean of Lansdale. Completed in 1910, the garage was turned over to Harry's son, J. Clayton Reed, who called it "The Ambler Garage". It was better known locally though as Reed's Garage. In addition to servicing autos, he had dealerships for new cars and trucks.

The business flourished for about twenty years, at which time Reed made a drastic change based on something

he had seen on a visit to Florida in 1929. Clayton Reed became interested in something new, called the "Tom Thumb Golf Course". It was the first miniature golf course to appear, and it motivated Reed to such a point that he converted his garage in 1930 to an eighteen-hole indoor miniature golf course. It was described as most attractive and a very difficult course, complete with water hazards, sand traps, bunkers, fountains and rock gardens, as well as attractive murals on the walls. Open every day and night, the charge was 35 cents per round, 25 cents for repeats.

Next, the premises were leased to the Ambler Post office from 1934 until their brand-new building just across the street was ready to be occupied in 1938. Acme Market was next to lease the space for a number of years, prior to moving into their present building. The Variety Center of Sol Gill became the next tenant, with Gill eventually buying the property and dividing it into two stores. The State Store rented the larger of the two, while his Variety Center occupied the smaller side. On retirement in 1985, Gill rented the smaller store to a general merchandiser.

The garage venture in 1910 was not the Reed family's first introduction to business in Ambler, for way back in 1880 Harry W. B. Reed came to the Village of Ambler and established his tin-smithing business. It was located on the southeast corner of Race and Spring Garden Streets, now a part of Denney Electric's parking lot. Reed occupied the second floor of a small building erected on the site of the old sawmill, in operation before the Civil War. He leased the first floor to Ben Meyers, and later to Arthur Hayden, both early Ambler blacksmiths. The gases from the



An early view of The Ambler Garage erected in 1910. Reed's alligators were kept in the open Honey Run Creek behind the building. One of them escaped from the barricade, came up the slight hill next to the building and was sunning itself on the sidewalk when discovered on a Sunday morning in July, in the early 1920's. Present tenants of the structure are the State Store and a general merchandise store.

Photograph Courtesy of Mrs. Harry Reed Woodmansee

blacksmith shop, however, drifted up to the second floor ruining Reed's tin, making it necessary for him to move.

The move took him to Main Street, where he erected a building for his tin-smiting business and established a successful hardware store. On January 1st, 1908, Reed leased his tin-smiting and hardware business, with an option to buy, to Garnett M. Deck and M. H. Shoemaker, both from Norristown. This move, ninety years ago, led to the establishment of Deck's Hardware, still going strong on North Main Street, and at present one of Ambler's oldest continuously operated businesses.

But what about the alligators? Well, here's what happened. The Reeds, frequent visitors to Florida, became fascinated with the alligator, often bringing several home with them and, in the warm summer months, keeping them in the stream behind the garage, moving them into the basement for the Winter. Sometime after the end of the First World War, Mr. Reed had a crate of alligators sent up from Florida, and these he kept in the Honey Run Creek. To restrain them he made a makeshift cage of chicken wire. Occasionally one would get loose, but would not go too far astray.

Chief of Police Dick Ford warned Reed often to be sure the alligators didn't get out of the caged area. The Chief said, "Clayt, you know that if your 'gators get loose and work their way down to the Wissahickon Creek, they just might end up in Philadelphia, and before you know it they could find their way into the center of the City, and end up roaming around City Hall".

Well, it was no surprise to Chief Dick Ford, on this warm Sunday morning in July, when a group of young boys approached him excitedly as he was patrolling on horseback at the Forest Avenue School. "Mr. Ford, you gotta come down to Butler Avenue real quick. You won't believe what we just saw. One of Mr. Reed's big alligators got loose and it's sunning itself on the sidewalk in front of his garage. Apparently it had broken through the chicken wire barricade and walked up the slight incline next to the garage. Tying his horse to a hitching post, Ford found owner J. Clayton Reed, and said, "Clayt, do you know what one of your 'gators is out on the sidewalk? I told you before to try to keep them under control. So I'm gonna have to tell you this time you gotta get rid of them for good."

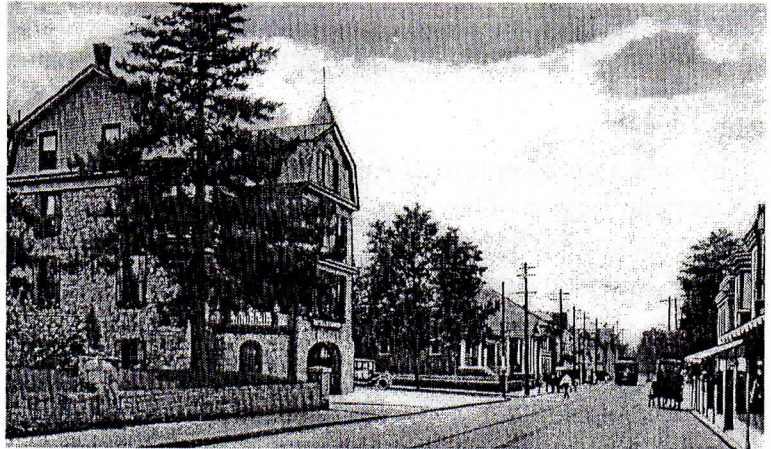
Well, Reed did get rid of them as promised. He had them stuffed and presented to friends and relatives. He saved the best ones for himself, hanging them on the walls of his living quarters above the garage. One relative, who received a specimen about three and a half feet long, kept it in the cellar until protests from his wife forced him to part with it.

AMBLER CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS IN 1927

by
Newton M. Howard

It was a Monday morning early in December, and a small group of curious on lookers had gathered near Hotel Wyndham to observe an annual event that would signal the opening of Ambler's 1927 Christmas season. Keasbey & Mattison's electricians had come up from the plant early that morning to install hundreds of colored electrical lights on the stately pine that graced the lawn of Mrs. Kern's hotel.

It was a huge tree, described as one the most attractive community Christmas trees to be found. It was the focal point of Ambler's annual Christmas celebration, and stood next to the hotel, near the site of the present-day Sherwin-Williams store was of such perfect shape that it commanded the attention of all who saw it, especially at night.



The crew from K&M also strung lights across Butler Avenue between Spring Garden and Ridge, all of this at no cost to the borough. K&M at the time owned the electric company and furnished electricity for Christmas lighting free of charge.

In later years when they sold the company to Philadelphia Electric, they continued to install the lights.

Butler Avenue in early 1900's — Looking toward the Railroad — Hotel Wyndham at left was built in 1893 — Across Spring Garden St. is the first National bank built in 1884 and the Ambler Post Office built in 1898 — The Trolley came to Ambler in 1902. Copy from postcard collection of Henry Scholz

Christmas shopping in the Borough in 1927 could be described as brisk. Ambler's location made it the hub of a large shopping area. Communities surrounding the Borough, including Fort Washington, Flourtown, Three Tuns, Maple Glen, Springhouse, Penllyn, Blue Bell and others, were drawn to this shopping center by the presence of several banking institutions and stores, none of which were available in their own communities.

With Ambler businesses closed Wednesday afternoons, it was traditional for Ambler shoppers to take the train ride into the City, to shop and view Christmas displays at the department stores. This Wednesday closing custom continued until the mid 1950's. Another popular spot for shopping was Norristown, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. Sunday shopping in that period was non-existent.

Locally, Christmas gifts could be found at the three drug stores: Angeny's, Brenneman & Brady's, and Stillwagon's. A store popular for women's and children's gifts was Mrs. Heiss', and a place on Main Street for small electrical appliances and other gift items was Deck's Hardware. Furniture, radios and electric lamps could be found at Ambler Furniture Company, on Butler Avenue since the turn of the century.

If you felt like a snack or light lunch while shopping, Niblock's Restaurant could accommodate you. Also ready to serve customers was the fountain in Oscar Stillwagon's Drug Store, and on Main Street, it was either the Green Owl Cafe or "Nick's", famous for his Hot Texas Weiner, with his secret chopped onion dressing.

The big event of the Christmas season for Ambler took place on Christmas Eve, when hundreds of children of the community began to line up at the brightly-lighted tree. The lighted block was roped off, for all of the activity would take place here. Local church choirs and a Colony Club trio had been performing on the lawn of the Presbyterian Church for several weeks, but on this special night their performance would be on the lawn next to the Hotel, for here is where Santa Claus would be giving out half-pound boxes of candy to the hundreds of children standing in line.

This was a joint venture of Ambler Rotary, Ambler Kiwanis and Norton Downs Post #125 of the American Legion. They purchased 720 boxes of candy for distribution, with any boxes left over being taken on Christmas morning to the children of Tabor Home, Christ Home, House of the Holy Child near Springhouse and the Sunshine Home in Flourtown.

The year 1927 was a very good one, but things were soon to change in Ambler, and in the Nation! As early as 1925, Dr. Richard V. Mattison had prophetically suggested that people in Ambler should prepare for bad times. At that time, he had completed construction of the Randolph Avenue houses, the last of his Company homes. His plans called for constructing several more blocks parallel to Randolph Avenue, but he ordered construction halted, feeling very strongly that "bad times are on the way".

All this prosperity was to change soon with the stock market crash that was to ruin Mattison and plunge the entire country into its greatest depression of all times.

GROWING UP ON LOWER CHURCH STREET

by
Newton M. Howard

As you grow older your thoughts go back to your "roots" and you acquire a greater interest in your own family heritage, which in my case began on that part of Church Street known simply as Lower Church Street, not just South Church, or East or West, but just plain "Lower" Church. It wasn't until much later in life that I began to wonder why it was so designated, and determined that Doctor Mattison played a big part in this naming.

To begin, he set up a class system in Ambler soon after the arrival of his Chemical Works here in 1882, which became eventually famed Keasbey & Mattison Company. Some of the earliest homes he built were the eight houses on Lindenwold Terrace. These were completed in 1897 and were rented in some cases to executives in his organization, or to prominent persons in other fields, who, he felt, were worthy of living this close to his mansion, later to become the "Castle". These eight houses were completed for the total cost of \$96,000, or \$12,000 each; a few of these were sold outright to the "proper" persons worthy of living this close to his residence.

In 1898 the cornerstone was laid for the Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church he was building in memory of his only daughter who had died eleven years earlier of typhoid at the age of four years and four days. The edifice was completed and consecrated in 1901 on her birthday, February 2nd.

The occasion of building the church brought about the naming of Church Street, from the church to the railroad. Previous to this it had no name, being a part of the old Montgomery County Agricultural Society's Fair Grounds from 1870 until about 1882, after which it was John Turner's Ambler Driving Park, a prominent Race Track of the day. Long ago in history it had been known as Burk's Road, being the road, or lane, leading from Burk's home on present day Cedar Road to his grist mill on the Morris Road, which was reached by fording the Wissahickon Creek.

At this time he began construction of the Victorian homes in the immediate vicinity of the church, these also to be rented by those high up in the Keasbey & Mattison firm. It was not until about 1900 that he began construction of these twin homes on Lower Church Street for the laboring class of his factories. These homes could be rented only by employees of K & M and the rent was quite low, a mere \$9.00 a month in 1914. The houses had no bathrooms, and were distinguished by the outhouses in the back yards. These were also twin, back to back, two-holer models, cold in the winter and hot in the summer. The last homes built were in 1926.

The only water in the house came from a single faucet in the kitchen. Hot water, when required, was obtained by heating it on the large coal/wood stove in the kitchen, which was not too bad in the winter, but unbearably uncomfortable in the summertime. This same kitchen acted as the bathroom, with Saturday nights reserved for the weekly baths. Large amounts were heated well in advance of bath time, in large copper boilers from Deck's Hardware. This was an oval shaped boiler and was standard equipment in nearly every house hold on Church Street, "Lower" that is, because "Upper" Church Street enjoyed the luxury of bathrooms. The Upper Church Street houses were single homes, which placed them higher up the ladder.

The three streets, Lower Church, Ambler Road, and Randolph Avenue, formed a triangle which served as a playground and a convenient dump. Doctor Mattison provided a small concrete wading pool, complete with a fountain. This was put out of commission shortly after erection by having a piece of wood jammed into the fountain head.

Lower Church had as a finish black cinders from the K&M boiler house, while Upper Church had a harder surface.

In the mid to late twenties, there were few if any conveniences. This, however, didn't seem to bother anyone. There was probably only one home that had a telephone,

and the owner of that home naturally was a very popular person, and someone you made a point of being nice to. Radios were scarce, if not non-existent. I believe the first one to appear on our street was one made by my father. It was a crystal set, and I can remember Friday night fights that were broadcast. A crowd gathered on our front porch to listen to the radio with its speaker sitting in a cut-glass bowl to amplify the sound in a crude manner.

One of the biggest events of the summer for the kids of the neighborhood was the ritual of cleaning out the out houses. Doctor Mattison's crew would go right down the alley cleaning a pair of back-to-back outhouses at a time. The equipment included a large flatbed wagon drawn by two horses, and a crew of two or three men. There were many wooden barrels which were filled one at a time and the metal top clamped on. The dippers used were what appeared to be a ten gallon bucket attached to a long pole. Those performing this ritual were referred to as honey dippers. Now for the interesting part. As work progressed, the barrels were filled and placed on the wagon and secured with chains for the trip to the dumping grounds which were out on Lindenwold Farms in open fields where today the Upper Dublin High School stands. We were too young to know any better, because as the wagon started up Upper Church Street, we hitched a ride on the back of the wagon and rode all the way out to the dumping grounds. The barrels were emptied on acres of ground and the summer sun began the evaporation process. After a few days in the sun, it looked like the alligatored surface of dried up river bottom. If the workmen had more work to be done, we had the pleasure of a ride back home. If not, it was a short walk.

Gas lighting was still in effect in the twenties, with a meter in the cellar which took quarters. I can remember the flickering of the lights which signalled the time was near for another quarter in the meter. Gas was used for a small cook stove also, but the wood and coal stove took care of the major part of cooking and baking.

Something we didn't look forward to was coming home from school to find a huge pile of wood on the front lawn. Employees of K&M were allowed to purchase these scraps from the plant box shop. It was our job to throw this wood through the cellar window, and then go into the cellar to pile these pieces in a neat pile along one of the walls.

The heating system in the homes was a pipeless heater with a single grating mounted in the floor between the living room and dining room. All heat came through this grate, with smaller grates in the ceiling to carry some of the heat to the second floor. Not much heat came through, and to make it even colder in the bedrooms at night, it was very necessary after the heater was "banked" at night, to open bedroom windows a few inches to avoid being overcome by coal gas.

Lower Church at the time was a part of Upper Dublin Township, with Matthias Sheeleigh School at Argyle Avenue and Douglas Street being our school. it was a long walk to school in all kinds of weather. There were no busses for us, only those from Three Tuns and Maple Glen coming to school by bus. The first bus driver for the district was our butcher Herman Arnold. When the township decided to furnish a bus for the Three Tuns-Maple Glen area, Arnold agreed to empty out his butcher wagon and place benches inside for use as the first school bus.

We had delivered to us on Church Street milk from Meyers Dairies, bread from either Bond or Freihofer's and of course Herman Arnold was our butcher. All this was at a time when few residents of Church Street had any means of transportation other than using the trolley, which at the time ran along Bannockburn between Main Street and the Pike.

Opposite Lower Church Street was the Knight Homestead, today the Playground. Back then part of it was the grazing meadow for his cows. This made it a hazardous place for neighborhood kids to play. it was necessary to forever keeps your eyes on the ground, or later regret it.

Mr. Knight also, without thinking of course, made the mistake of placing his strawberry beds within view of all who lived there. And I remember them as strawberries tastier than any you'll find today anywhere.

The homes on Lower Church Street, Ambler Road and Randolph Avenue were erected on land that Mattison had purchased from the Knight family. They were no doubt glad to be rid of it because much of this land was swampy, so much so that Mattison took about two years to under drain before any construction could begin. Even today heavy rains will cause deep water to accumulate around Church and Main Streets. This swampy condition was caused in 1855 when the North Penn Railroad constructed their line from Philadelphia to Gwynedd Valley, with the roadbed blocking the flow of water from the tract, water that freely flowed to the Wissahickon before the train's arrival.

Historically, Church Street was one of our earliest roads, though not called by this name until 1898 when Trinity Church was begun. Dr. Mattison had suggested it as an appropriate name for a lane that had been called Burk's Road and Reiff's Road. It was used for access to the Morris Road and the grist mills of both Burk and Reiff families.

The three streets, Church Street, Ambler Road and Randolph Avenue, formed a triangle with an alley on the entire perimeter. This served as an informal playground, and a very convenient "dump". Dr. Mattison provided for us in the late 1920's a cement wading pond, complete with a fountain in the center. The fountain was active for only a few days, when it was put out of order when a broom handle blocked the flow of water permanently. The triangle was a place for burning your trash. There was always a bonfire in action, except on wash day which was always Monday. In these days before clothes dryers, clothes were always hung in the back yards', and anyone caught burning trash on wash day ran the risk of being run out of town.

There were sounds associated with the old neighborhood, for instance the rattle of glass milk bottles, as Meyers' milkmen made their rounds long before daylight arrived. They left the milk on the porches so early in the winter that by the time we were getting up for school and work, the milk began to freeze, pushing the cream out of the bottle by as much as two inches. The first one to bring in the milk usually took this rich frozen cream from the top, leaving milk that wasn't as rich as it should be.

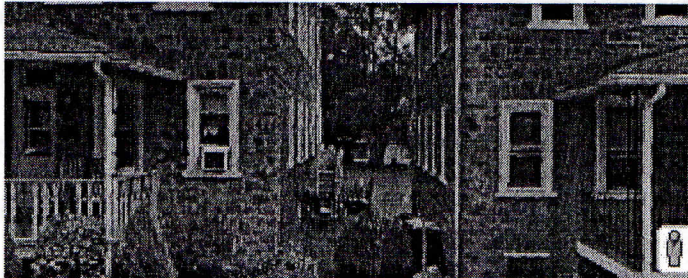
The back end of the butcher wagon drew the kids like a magnet. Butcher Arnold could be counted on to cut off a slice from a roll of baloney for each one gathered there when he raised the back door of the wagon. This was a clever move on his part, because you're less likely to steal anything from a man who has given you a slice of meat.

Usually on Saturday mornings you could count on a visit from the scissors grinder back in the alley, and usually on foot. He took care of all the knives the housewife had been saving for his visit. There was a rag man in his horse drawn wagon, and a man who bought all kinds of scrap metal, including the ball of lead foil that every household had.

A popular peddler with the housewives was the man who sold yard goods. Many made their own clothes back then so he was welcomed merchant. The one I remember was Sammy Candle, who made his rounds in his horse-drawn wagon with a roll-up curtain on the back of the wagon. These peddlers of yard goods usually ended up with their own store some place either in Ambler or the vicinity.

Then there was the Iceman who was indispensable in the summertime. If you didn't use his services, it would have been necessary to take a wagon up to the Ice house on South Main Street opposite Orange Avenue. It was called the Zero Ice Company and they made their ice in a large building still standing today. For house delivery each home had a card to hang in the window. Each corner had a different number representing the number of pounds of ice you wanted, so the iceman could read this from the street, and brings in the proper size to be placed in your ice box. The pan under the ice box to catch melting water had to be emptied regularly or you would find water all over your kitchen floor.

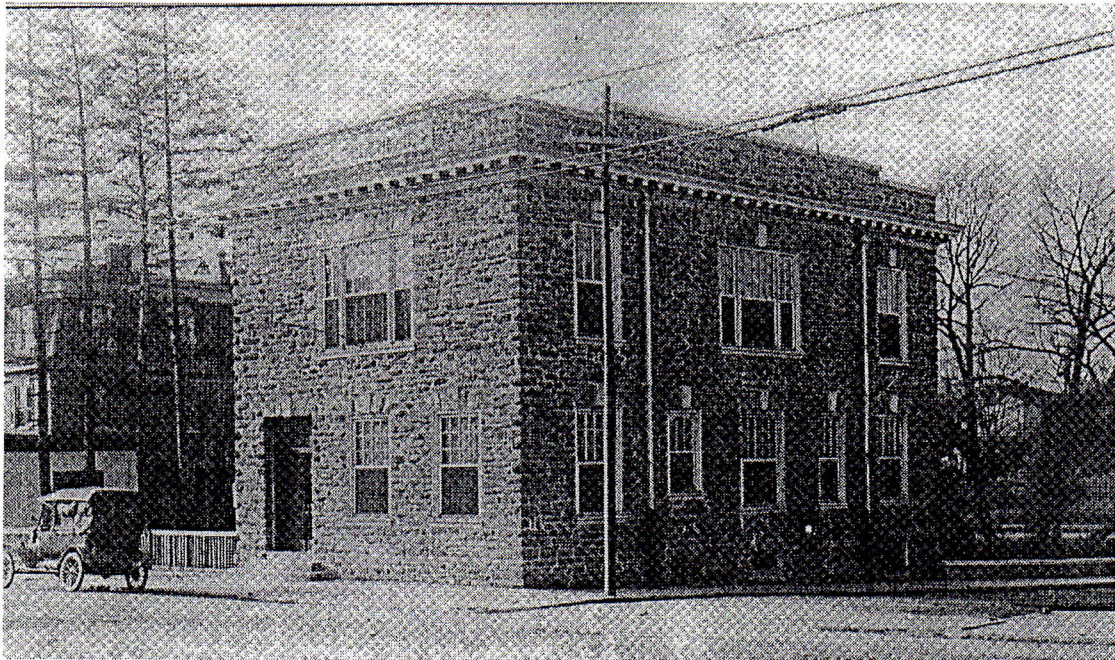
All these peddlers and most of the delivery men gradually disappeared as many were able to acquire automobiles allowing them to go to the stores for a larger selection.



This story had been started by Newt but he never got around to finish it. It was found on his old word processor and we decided to do just that, get it finished and published.

Ambler Village Connects to the Outside World

by
Newton M. Howard



Above is an early view of the old Bell Telephone building at Butler & Spring Garden. Erected in 1906, it served as the exchange for years until the move to larger quarters at Race & Spring Garden. Then it became home to the Ambler Borough offices and Police Department until their move to the former Post office Building at Butler & York. In 1993 commercial Real Estate broker James Reis purchased the building. Seen next to the Bell building is the David Knipe home built about 1869 and still visible today.

"Mr. Watson, come here, I want to see you!" It was March 10, 1876 that these famous words were uttered by Alexander Graham Bell to his assistant Thomas A. Watson. And now, just ten years later, the Village of Ambler is being connected to the outer world. The Delaware & Atlantic Telephone Company is installing a switchboard in Reickard's Pharmacy, on the northeast corner of Main & Walnut. Their lines have been brought across the railroad to Butler & Main, and then north on Main Street to the Pharmacy. There are but five subscribers to the new system, each paying \$72 a year.

The Pharmacy is crowded this morning with curious onlookers fascinated with the operations as Mr. Reickard learns the switchboard procedure from company representatives. True, the quality of reproduction is extremely poor, but the telephone is so new with much room for improvement. Many see great things in the future, with the possibility of one day talking with persons in other states, perhaps the West Coast in time, or even talking some day across the ocean by telephone. There are skeptics in the group who feel nothing-good will come of this evil invention, an instrument of the Devil.

Reickard soon sells his Pharmacy to Dr. Ellery B. Shoemaker, who also becomes new switchboard operator, as we learn from Boyd's Directory of 1888-90. On acquiring the business from Reickard, Shoemaker moves across Walnut Street to his building on the southeast Corner.

Success comes in a very short time, with Delaware & Atlantic soon requiring larger quarters. By 1901 switching equipment has been moved to the third floor of Rees Roberts' Pharmacy at Butler & Main. Roberts is the new pharmacy owner, having bought the business from Dr. Albanus Styer, successor to Ellery Shoemaker.

Soon Keystone Telephone enters the picture, making possible expanded telephone service to Norristown, and later Philadelphia. Problems arise when the company uses the same poles as the Ambler Light Company. At night when the streetlights are turned on, the more than one hundred subscribers find that their telephones do not function at all.

With business booming, the company in 1905 makes an important move, purchasing land from David Knipe at the corner of Butler and Spring Garden. By 1906 the new building is erected and it's now known as the Bell Telephone Company.

Early 1907 see the operators moving from the third floor of Rees Roberts' building to the new quarters, with an open house scheduled shortly thereafter.

By 1913 another special open house is held, allowing residents to view the facilities and meet the nine operators, one of who, Miss Nellie Roberts, has been with the company since 1900. Cake, ice cream, coffee and sandwiches are served on the second floor.

Years later Bell erects much larger facilities at Spring Garden and Race, with the old Bell building becoming home to Ambler Borough offices and the Police Department. With the Borough's later move to new quarters in the former Post office, commercial real estate broker James Reis purchases the vacated building in 1993.

A story about the exchange in the 1920's bears re-telling. Each morning just before noon for the past two weeks, a caller has been asking the operator for the correct time. And now, on a Monday, at ten minutes before noon a call has come in again. It's the same man, with the same question. Though company policy forbids talking with subscribers, the operator is determined to find out why he calls every day with the same request. After giving the requested information, she says, "While I have you on the line, could I ask you a question?" He replies, "Sure, why not!"

"Well, you know you've called our switchboard every day for more than two weeks asking the correct time. Could I ask why you do this? Don't you have a watch or a clock of your own?" He replies, "Of course! I have a beautiful gold pocket watch. I'm calling from Keasbey & Mattison Company, where it's my job to blow the whistle for the work shift changes, and I want to be sure the time is correct before I blow the whistle. "

A moment of awkward silence follows, broken by the voice of the operator replying, "Well, this is somewhat embarrassing. You see, we set our clock here at the exchange at noon every day when the K&M whistle blows!"

AMBLER POST OFFICE GETS ITS OWN BUILDING IN 1898

by
Newton M. Howard

Back in 1898 something special was happening in Ambler that involved the post office. For the first time ever, plans were afoot to erect a building for their exclusive use. Prior to this, space was always shared with another business, usually the general store or the postmaster's place of businesses.

As early as 1826 the Upper Dublin Post office was located in Isaac Thomas' General Store on the Bethlehem Pike. This was the predecessor of the Ambler office, and was moved to Joseph Wilson's General Store at Main & Butler in 1861.

In May of 1898 President McKinley appointed John S. Buchanan to succeed Abram Stillwagon as Ambler's Postmaster, effective July 1st. This was known as early as 1897, with the result that Buchanan was approached by Dr. Richard V. Mattison, who for some time had tried to have the office located in one of the stores in his Opera House building.

This move to the west side of the railroad was being resisted by many townspeople, especially Joseph M. Haywood, through editorials in his Ambler Gazette. Most of Ambler's homes were on the eastern side of the tracks, as were its schools and churches. One exception was Trinity Mission, meeting in a room in the Opera House building. They would eventually move into their new Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church, being erected by the Mattison's in memory of their deceased daughter Esther Victoria.

Buchanan and Mattison made numerous trips to Washington, meeting with the Postmaster General's office, in an attempt to have the Ambler office moved to Mattison's structure. Because so many lives had been lost at the dangerous crossing, there was much opposition to moving the facility across the tracks.

The next thought was to interest a group of investors in erecting a structure on the east side for exclusive use of the post office. Three prominent individuals met, agreeing to construct a building next to the First National Bank on property owned by George K. Knight, whose son Alexander was one of the three investors; Joseph Haywood and John J. Houghton were the other two. The group met with the Postal Department in Washington, getting their commitment to lease the planned building for a ten-year period.

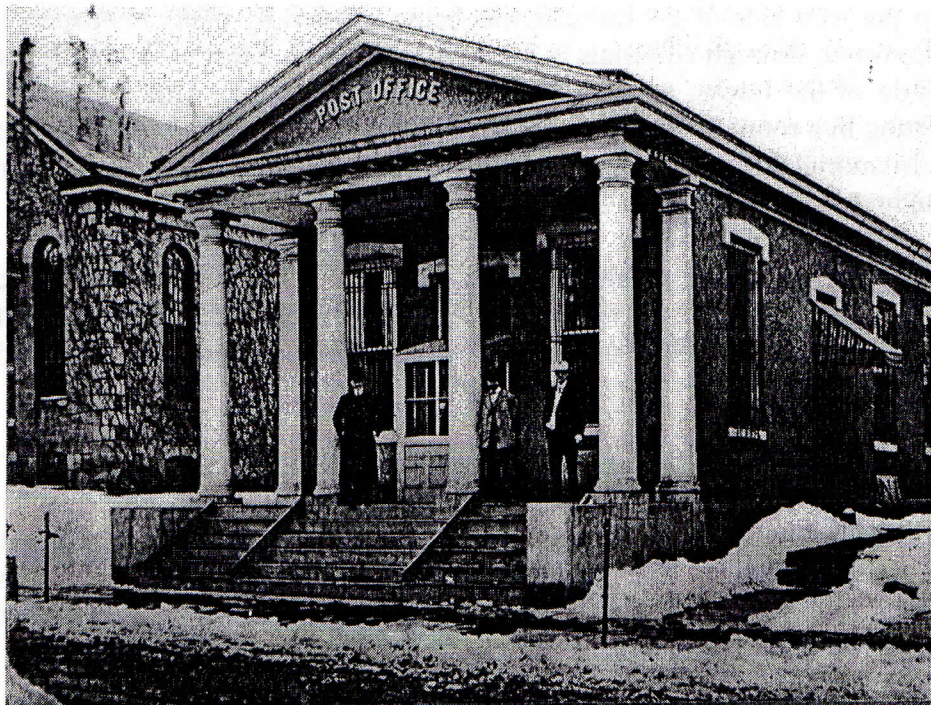
Design for the proposed structure was presented by Ambler builder J. Sims Wilson, and was described as being "of one story in height, of Colonial style, following the Ionic design in architecture". With approval received from Washington in September, Wilson began construction immediately, promising completion within a month. Earth taken from the excavation was hauled a short distance to Spring Garden Street, being utilized to raise the level of the roadbed over the creek. Millwork for the new post office came from a plant in North Wales, while bricks used in the structure were manufactured locally on South Main Street, at the Ambler Brick Works of the late Irwin Dager. His widow Mary Dager was continuing operations, with kilns capable of producing 100,000 bricks per run.

A striking feature of the new building was the front elevation, dominated by its four galvanized iron columns. Ambler painter Ellsworth Niblock completed his work inside and out by the fall, enabling Postmaster Buchanan to conduct business before the year's end in the new post office, which was considered by many one of Ambler's handsomest structures.

John Buchanan was to be remembered for implementing home delivery of mail in 1902, the first two letter carriers being William W. Slutter and Clarence Streeper. John was postmaster from 1898 until 1904 when illness forced him to resign, with his brother Joseph A. Buchanan succeeding him. The illness was so severe that John died early the following year at 43 years of age, the death occurring on the birthday of his brother Joseph.

With original roof lines unchanged, the old post office is visible today as the renovated two-story building next to the former Mellon PSFS Bank building on Butler Avenue. It has been joined to the building originally known as the Knight Building.

Accounts of the post office history in recent years have shown that it at one time occupied one of the stories of the Ambler Opera House building. Personal research fails to verify that information.



Ambler Post Office on Butler Avenue — Built in 1898 next to the First National Bank — John S. Buchanan was the postmaster at the time — The building exists today although hardly recognizable.

Photo from collection of Newton M. Howard

MEMORIES OF OLD AMBLER HIGH SCHOOL

By
Newton M. Howard

In the spring of 1922 Ambler's School District purchased a tract of land from the Joseph Haywood Estate. Located on Tennis Avenue, east of Ridge Avenue, this was to be the site of Ambler's first high school building. The Haywood Estate was massive, and included all land fronting on Bethlehem Pike, between Mount Pleasant and Tennis Avenues. It extended down beyond present-day Hendricks Street. Today, we know it as the land housing the Artman Home complex, the Haywood Park housing development, a funeral home, apartment units and many other smaller housing projects.

Prior to this time high school classes had been held in the building on Forest Avenue. The entire Ambler School System in 1922 consisted of the Mattison Avenue and the Forest Avenue schools.

Just weeks later, the Ambler School Board elected E. E. Kerschner as principal of this new high school. Some of the new teachers appointed at this time were: Raymond Duncan, the Misses Alice Kelly, Anna L. Potteiger, Lucy G. Coyle, Bessie Dunmoyer, Bessie Lightkep, Ardella Styer and May M. Rynear.

By August of 1922, work had already begun with cellar excavation being done by local contractor Charles Gerhart. The structure, of brick, concrete and steel, was to be as nearly fireproof as possible. The two-story building would measure 160 feet by 73 feet in depth. J. M. Kirk received the plumbing contract, while that for electrical work was awarded to C. M. Riley. There would be 15 class rooms as well as a large auditorium, which could be used as a study hall, gymnasium, etc.

During the high school's construction, a temporary building was erected on the Forest Avenue grounds. It contained two rooms, capable of housing 42 pupils. At the year's end, construction seemed to slow down, with materials slow in arriving at the site. The start of 1923 saw a renewed effort to speed up building operations, with a possible opening scheduled for the start of the Fall term. Just weeks before opening date, the contract for window shades was awarded to local merchant Anthony Lapetina, proprietor of the Ambler Furniture Company. His prices were better than either Gimbels or Snellenbergs, both prominent Philadelphia department stores.

Though not completed, the new high school was opened at the start of the school year with an enrollment of 267 students. The following December saw the opening of the new auditorium. A special musical program featuring classical and semi-classical music by well-known artists was witnessed by an audience of more than 500.

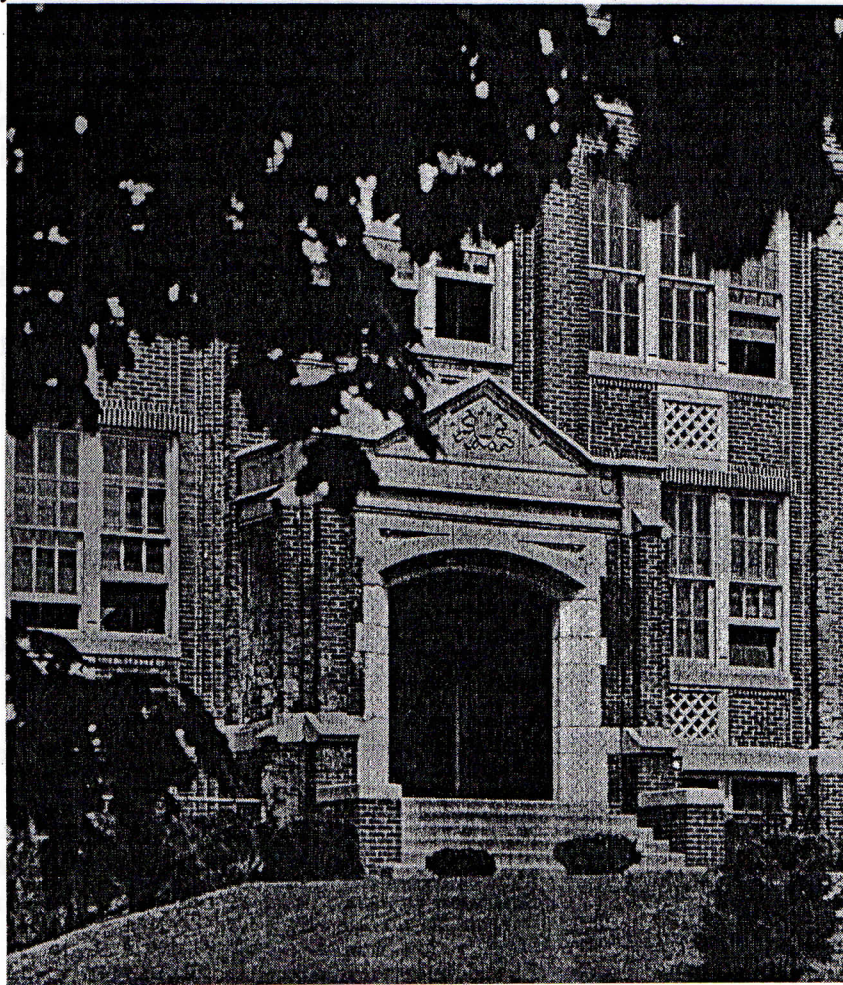
Something new was added to the old Ambler High School in 1930 when the Ambler School Board purchased additional land from the Haywood Estate. It was of an irregular shape, measuring 167 x 240 x 75 feet. On this land a frame structure was erected for use by the Industrial Arts students. The work was done by the "Shop" crew, under the supervision of Mr. Abram "Chief" Hunsicker, Industrial Arts Instructor since about 1923. Joe Kunsman came later as an assistant to Hunsicker. The Shop saw service for many years thereafter. It was in 1938-39

that a new metal and wood-working shop replaced it when major additions to Ambler High School included a brand new Industrial Arts department.

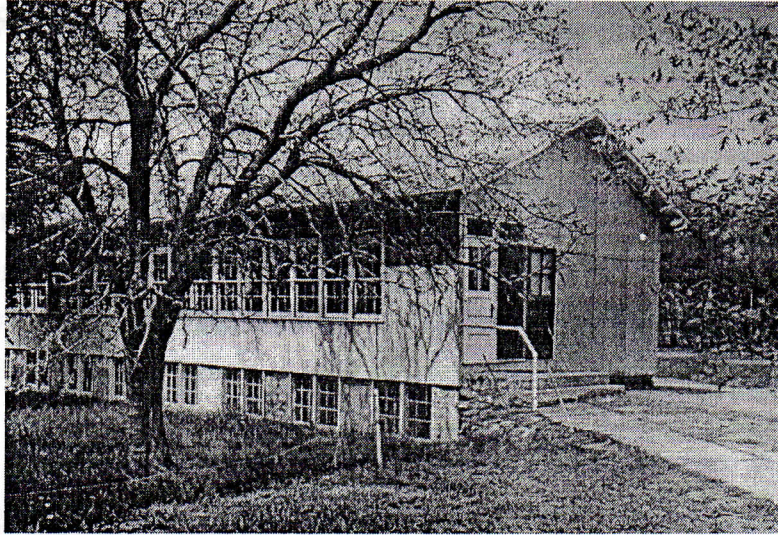
This addition to the high school included a new and larger auditorium, and here the AHS Class of 1940 became the first to use its facilities for graduation ceremonies. Prior to this time all commencement exercises had been held at the historic Ambler Opera House, a part of Keasbey & Mattison Company's office building.

The year 1950 saw the addition of the Community Memorial Stadium on the grounds of Ambler High School. This was erected with funds subscribed by families and friends of Veterans of the Second World War. The stadium however had a short life span, being razed about 1973 along with the old high school with all its additions, only to be replaced with a housing development.

Thus in the time frame of about half a century, Ambler had witnessed both the construction and demolition of its first high school and Community Memorial stadium, with no traces of either remaining today.



Entrance to original Ambler High School on Tennis Ave. — opened in 1923
Photo from collection of Newton M. Howard



Industrial Arts Shop — Built in 1930 by students under the direction of Abram “Chief” Hunsicker assisted by Joseph Kunsman and many Industrial Art’s students.

Photo from collection of Newton M. Howard

LOW BRIDGE AHEAD - TROLLEY vs RAILROAD

by

Newton M. Howard

The truck driver carrying a tall load approaches the underpass with caution. Clearance appears to be extremely low. It's at the western terminus of Tennis Avenue just past Main Street. He stops for closer inspection of the apparently small opening under the railroad.

Not just an optical illusion, the clearance is actually low, very low. It did not happen by accident, but was the result of a battle waged more than a century ago between the railroad and the traction company as both competed for the same passenger business.

North Penn Railroad, established in 1855, had built a profitable passenger and freight service between Philadelphia and Gwynedd. The traction company, better known as the trolley company, entered the competition in the mid to late 1890's, giving the railroad no little concern. A group of interested parties in Ambler met at John Cooper's new Hotel Wyndham about 1894 intent on establishing a trolley line to Norristown, feeling Ambler's citizens would benefit from easy access to the county seat. At the same time, additional revenue would be generated for businesses in the Borough. Not only John Cooper, but all members on this committee would thus have benefited by such action.

The planned trolley route to Norristown never came about, however, having met with insurmountable opposition from one person. He was Charles W. Bergner, President of Bergner & Engel Brewing Company, of Philadelphia. His vast estate at Ambler included much of the land on both sides of Butler Pike, near its intersection with the Morris Road

It was necessary for trolley companies to secure permission from land owners to lay their tracks on one side of the road or the other. Since Bergner owned property on both sides of Butler Pike and refused permission for tracks to be laid on either side, the trolley line could not be installed. Said Bergner when asked permission, "Absolutely not! I built my summer home out here to get away from city noises and I do

not want the trolley noises near me." Thus single-handedly Bergner thwarted efforts ever to establish a line to Norristown. The group continued efforts for years to achieve their goal without success.

Refusing to give up, the group had another plan for connecting with the County seat. This would have brought the line from Skippack Pike through fields near Dawesfield on Lewis Lane to Morris Road and eventually West Ambler. From here it would have been a simple matter to go over or under the railroad and then down Main Street to Butler Avenue.

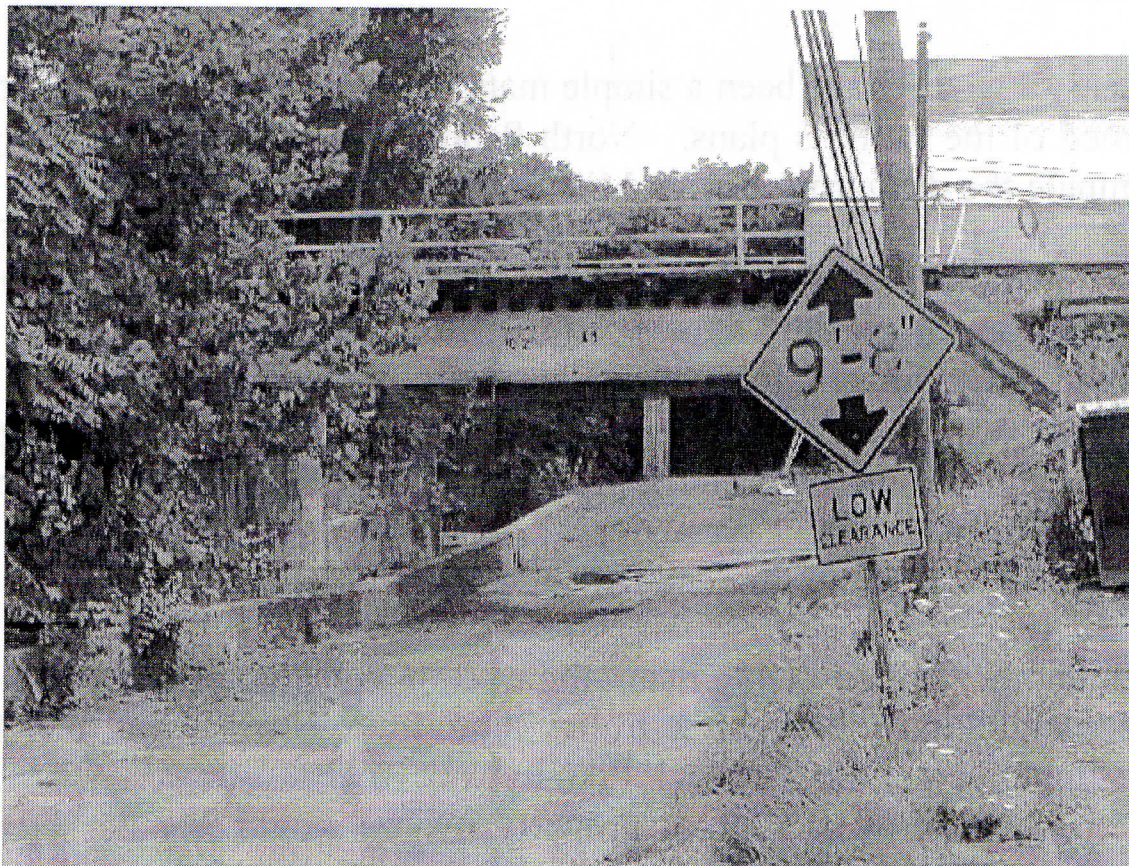
At least it would have been a simple matter had not North Penn Railroad learned of the trolley's plans. North Penn at the time was preparing to eliminate the dangerous Reiff's Mill Road crossing over their tracks and replace it with a subway, or underpass, just a short distance north of the crossing at the western terminus of Tennis Avenue. On realizing that the traction company would attempt to use this underpass to go under the railroad, they altered their plans hurriedly to make certain that the clearance would definitely be too low to ever allow a trolley to pass underneath. At the time, the approaches to the bridge could have been elevated to make better clearance. This also would have lessened the dangers of flooding of the roadbed under the bridge.

With another failure facing them, the traction company had a new plan. This would have brought a trolley line from Norristown into Fort Washington from the Skippack Pike by way of Lafayette Avenue. This failed when permission from property owners could not be secured. Despite so many rejections by property owners, the group of citizens continued attempts until the turn of the century to connect Ambler with Norristown.

With the approach of a new century, attention was turned to the new proposed trolley line. It was planned to connect Chestnut Hill with Allentown. The trolley line would enter Ambler from the Bethlehem Pike onto Butler Avenue, travelling through the business district to Main Street where it would go to Bannockburn Avenue, eventually returning to the Bethlehem Pike, heading once again for Chestnut Hill. This

planned route through Ambler was expected to bring boom times to the borough. It did bring a degree of prosperity to local businesses. With it however came problems such as many accidents involving the horse and carriage and later the automobile. The trolley line through Ambler was discontinued in the late 1920's being replaced by a number of bus lines.

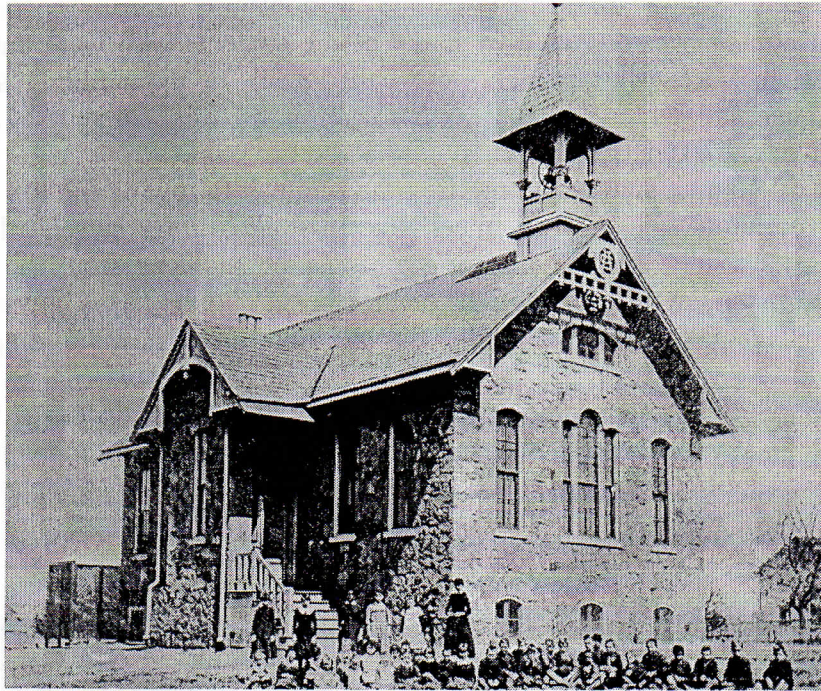
The North Pennsylvania Railroad purposely constructed this bridge at its current height in order to insure that the underpass would be too low when they learned of the planned trolley route to Norristown via Tennis Avenue.



FOREST AVENUE SCHOOL DESTROYED BY FIRE

By
Newton M. Howard

The alarm continued to sound as hundreds converged on the scene of the fire at Forest Avenue School. That Saturday afternoon in February of 1926 was cold and overcast as crowds were drawn to the fire by columns of billowing black smoke and the rosy glow in the sky. Fifteen year old Helen Bowers, who lived next door, had seen the smoke earlier and turned in the alarm. She and her younger brother then went to the school, broke a window in the office and rescued whatever could be carried away. Helen was a student at the new Ambler High School on Tennis Avenue, opened only two and a half years before.



It was in September of 1891 that the old school being consumed by fire first opened. Principal Aaron H. Manderbach and teachers Miss Hannah Bean and Miss Edith Ermentrout were in charge. This was Ambler's only public school and had a total enrollment on that opening day in 1891 of just 128 students.

Among those watching the burning school were many teachers, one of them Florence Whiteside, who had taught at Forest Avenue for three years. She was heard remarking to fellow teachers Anna Gear, Bessie Dunmoyer and Evelyn Kulp that she had a new camera but didn't remember to bring it along, being almost certain that somebody in the crowd today would have a camera to photograph such a devastating fire. Also watching the school's destruction were Supervising Principal Jacob M. Fisher, Principal Elam E. Kerschner, and teachers Raymond Duncan, Willis Milspaugh and Abram Hunsicker.

Wissahickon Fire Company was assisted by a dozen companies from surrounding regions, a fire such as this having high priority among fire fighters. They tried valiantly for about three hours to save the structure, but all in vain. The building, of brick and stone, had an unusually large number of small window panes, more than a thousand of them, with relatively little masonry support, especially on the upper floor. The fire is believed to have started in the basement, where the heating system, fired by bituminous coal, was located.

Two firemen were overcome by smoke and had to be carried from the first floor of the blazing inferno by their comrades. They were treated on the spot by local physicians present. There was a great danger of both the roof and the upper walls falling in, making it necessary to keep onlookers back at a safe distance. Assisting companies played continuous streams of water on buildings surrounding the school, as well as Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church across Spring Garden Street. Soon the entire roof had fallen in as well as the upper walls.

During the blaze, a group of volunteer ladies, under the leadership of prominent local business woman Carrie Heiss, served hot coffee and lunch. Mrs. Heiss, whose husband Walter had been an active member of the Wissahickon Fire Company until his death in 1912, was one of the largest property owners in Ambler.

Even as the fire continued to burn, the school board was on the scene arranging for the displaced Forest Avenue students to be distributed between the two remaining schools, Mattison Avenue and the High School on Tennis Avenue, without any interruption of their schooling. This decision, of course, was regretted by many of the students who were anticipating a long holiday following the fire. The firemen were called back to the building several times on Monday to extinguish the flames which broke out again in the ruins, in spite of a light snow that had fallen. Following this, watchmen were placed at the fire scene.

The School Board held an emergency meeting the Monday following the fire to discuss rough plans for a new building with local architect Watson Phillips. He suggested that an attempt should be made to use any brick and stone that could be salvaged from the fire, and at this meeting estimated that a new school could be erected in six months. This however did not come about, because it was fall of the year after the fire before the new building was ready for occupancy.

The new school, completed with fewer window panes than its predecessor, was to serve the school district for many years, with thousands of students passing through its portals, before abandonment as a school. Its final use was as the headquarters for SAGA, only to be abandoned by that group in recent times. Today it serves as the quarters for SAAC, Senior Adult Activities Center in Ambler.



This photograph of the aftermath of the Forest Avenue School fire on February 20, 1926 is believed to be the only one in existence and was taken the day after the fire by Forest Avenue School teacher Miss Florence Whiteside. Walls of the upper floor have completely fallen in with only the chimneys remaining. A light snow had fallen and traces of steam can be seen rising from the ruins.

Photograph furnished by John Astler, son of teacher Florence Whiteside (Astler)

SEA-GOING VESSEL BUILT IN LAND-LOCKED AMBLER

by
Newton M. Howard

Since 1933, residents of Ambler as well as Reading Railroad commuters watched with interest a small vessel taking shape on North Main Street. And now, on a Fall morning in 1948, many are surprised to find the vessel, a forty-six foot sea-going sail boat, no longer in its usual spot next to Brooke Johnson's Machine Shop. The 16-ton craft has been loaded onto a twelve-wheeled trailer for transport to the waters of the Delaware River. Long-time dreams of Brooke Johnson and his son David are finally being realized, as the first step of a planned five-year trip around the world gets under way. Later, as the vessel is being lowered by crane into the waters of the Delaware River at Allegheny Avenue, Brooke's granddaughter Nancy Morgan christens it "Dearest".

Following these ceremonies, the Gloucester type two-masted schooner is taken to New York to have sails fitted to her 40-foot mast. Two of their pet dogs are to accompany the Johnsons on this journey, "Pete" a brown Alaskan sled dog, and "Rags" a black & white wire-haired terrier.

Brooke Johnson started in business in Ambler way back in 1897 in a small frame structure on Butler Avenue near the railroad. The building had been moved there from Main Street on the Ambler Park Hotel property. Here he opened his first machine shop, for bicycle and general light repair work, with business brisk during this popular year of the bicycle. That same building served in later years as a shoe repair shop next to the Ambler Palace building, erected in 1900 by Abram Stillwagon as his restaurant and cigar factory.

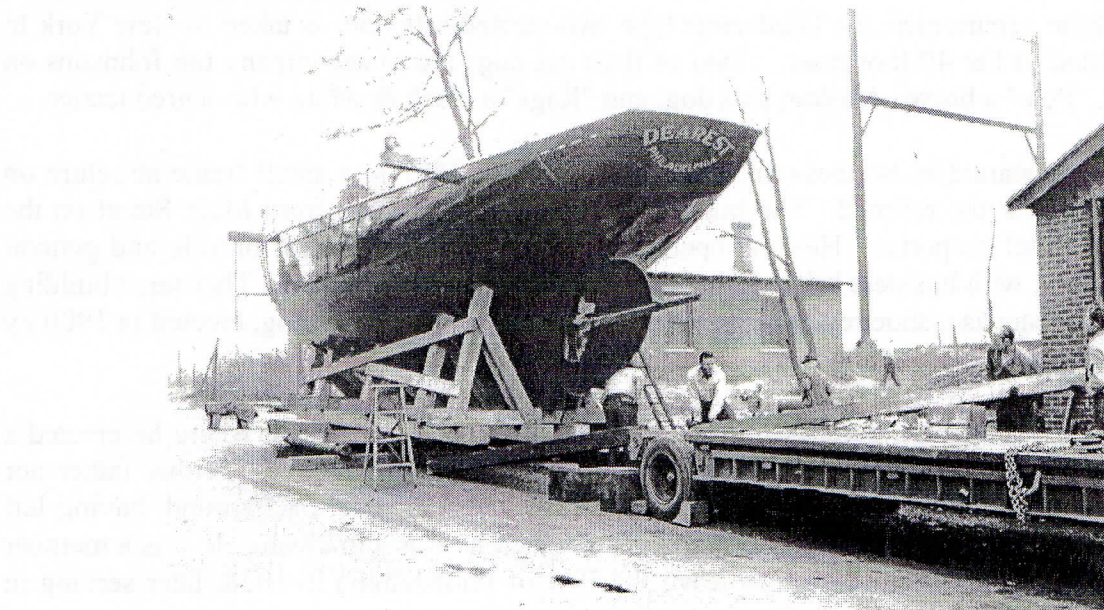
In the early 1900's Johnson purchased property at Main Street near Tennis, where he erected a modern machine shop. It was here the ship-building project began in 1933, neither father nor son having had prior experience in boat building. Dave had a nautical background, having left high school to join the School Ship Annapolis, from which he was a graduate. He was a member of the crew of the last square-rigger to leave the Port of Philadelphia in 1928, later serving in World War II as a lieutenant in the Merchant Marine.

For years, 82 year old D. Brooke Johnson, and his son, 47 year old D. Brooke Johnson, Jr., had dreamed of this globe-circling trip. The younger Johnson, better known as Dave, was a familiar figure around town, remembered as wearing a derby when he rode his bicycle through the streets of Ambler.

The elder Johnson, considered a genius by many, had been called in, on more than one occasion, to solve manufacturing problems that no one else could correct. An oft-told story concerns a problem at the Keasbey & Mattison Company's plant. Production came to a halt when a critical part on a machine failed to function. When hope was given up by company officials, Brooke was called in. Working behind closed doors, he soon had the equipment up and working so that production could resume. His bill submitted for fifty dollars was questioned by K&M officials with the following: "You've fixed our machine with a simple part that costs no more than fifty cents, and yet you've given us a bill for fifty dollars. How can you explain charging us so much?" To this, Brooke replied, "You're absolutely right. The part cost only fifty cents, but the extra \$49.50 charged was for knowing what to do with that fifty-cent part."

In November of 1947, just a year before the launching, the machine shop and the vessel experienced a devastating fire which damaged the shop and threatened one side of the ship. This meant additional work to prepare the vessel for the approaching trip.

Unfortunately, Brooke Johnson's dream of the trip around the world was never to be fulfilled, for on the trip south by way of the inland waterways, son David felt his father's health would not allow for the strain of the long trip, so he packed up his father and sent him back to Ambler, continuing the trip south alone. Soon Brooke was back at his old Main Street Machine Shop, with business as usual. The planned trip never came about for father or son, with the vessel becoming a shrimp boat on the Gulf of Mexico. Whereabouts of Brooke's boat "Dearest" are unknown today, according to granddaughter Nancy Morgan Ewing, who recalls the christening more than half a century ago. She remembers that the champagne bottle refused to break until several attempts. We are certain of one thing only, that the dreams of father and son of that trip around the world were never realized



Photograph from 1948 shows Brooke Johnson's sailing vessel being loaded onto trailer in Ambler for transport to the Delaware River. There it was launched and christened "Dearest" by Brooke's granddaughter Nancy Morgan, shown here on the deck. Planned five-year trip around the world never came about.

Photograph by Newton M. Howard

FIRST AIR MAIL LEAVES AMBLER IN 1938

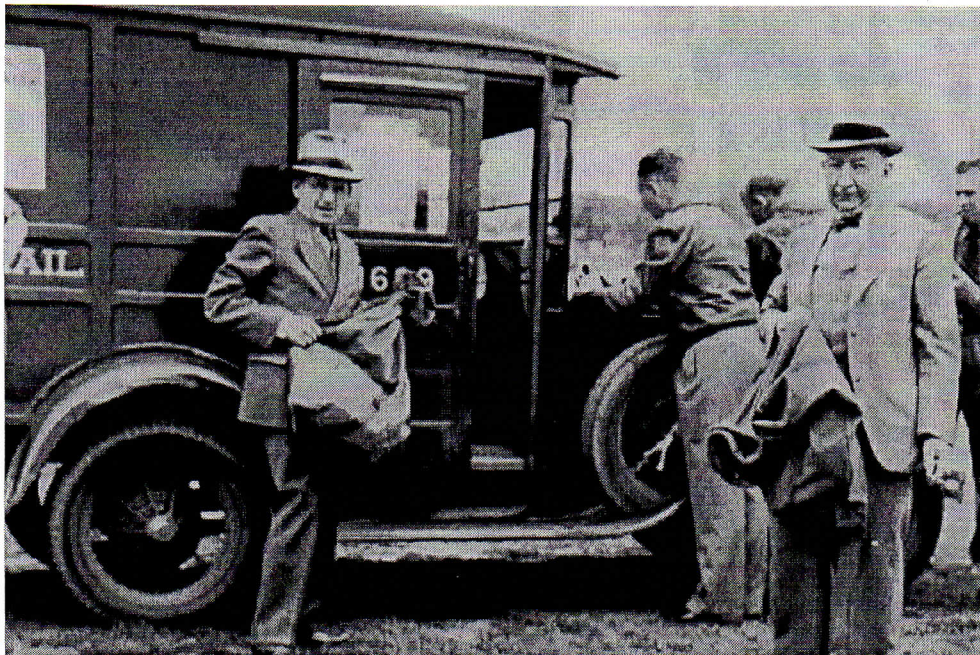
by
Newton M. Howard

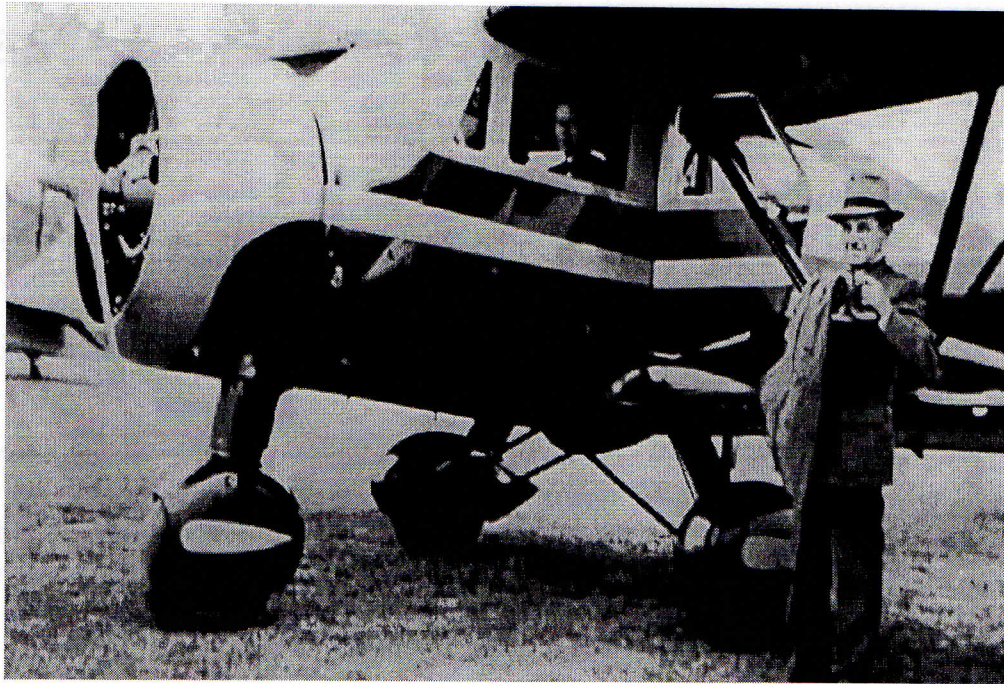
May 19th of 1938 was a day to remember at the Post Office in Ambler, for on that Thursday, the first Air Mail left Ambler by truck at 2:20 p.m. This was the first leg of a journey with its destination nearby Wings Field. On the truck were the Postmaster, Oscar H. Stillwagon, and Assistant Sidney Horn, each carrying a mail pouch. The Post office at this time was located in the former Reed's Garage building on Butler Avenue, having moved there from their quarters in the Wyndham Hotel six years before

Arriving at Wings Field, they were met by two waiting planes, piloted by George Miller and Robert Boswell, who had been authorized by the Postal Department to fly the mail to Philadelphia. For reasons of safety, one pouch was to be carried in each plane. Adding to the ceremony, a squadron of four Navy planes flew over the field and dipped their wings in a salute to the district of Ambler. Stillwagon, after delivering his mail pouch to the pilot, was invited to be a passenger in one of the planes but declined the offer

At precisely 2:40 p.m. the two planes majestically took to the air, inaugurating the first Air Mail flight from Ambler, with the destination being the S. Davis Wilson Airport in Philadelphia. The two pouches contained Air Mail from 33 other post offices in the area besides Ambler. Some of these were Norristown, Conshohocken, North Wales, Skippack and Willow Grove.

Another occurrence during 1938 was the completion and dedication of the new Ambler Post Office building across Butler Avenue. This was vacated in recent years and now houses the Ambler Borough offices, and the Police Department.





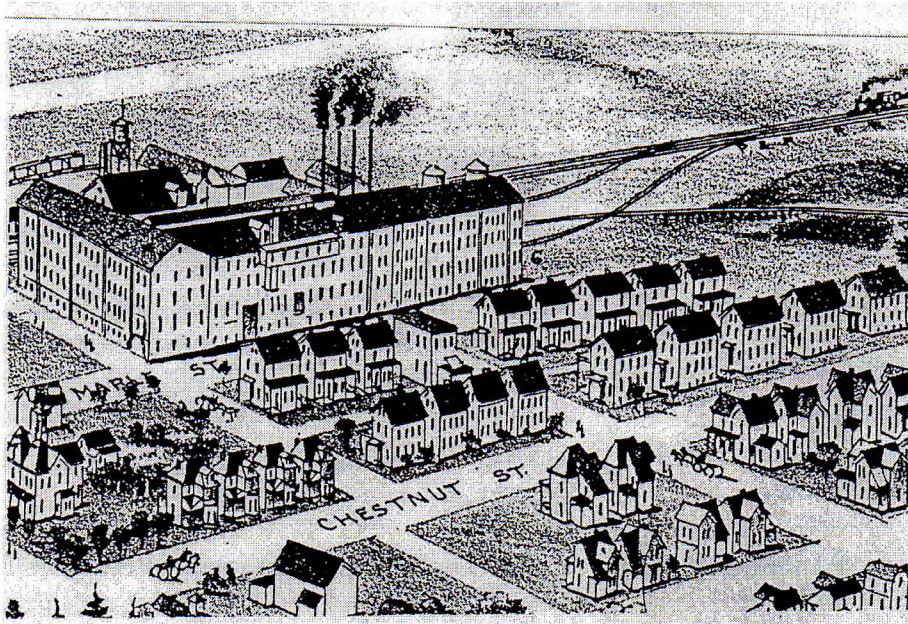
The photo on the left shows Postmaster Oscar H. Stillwagon and Assistant Sidney Horn arriving at Wings Field, while the photo on the right shows Postmaster Stillwagon delivering his mail pouch to the pilot of one of the aircraft.

Photos courtesy of Oscar H. Stillwagon, Jr.



Dr. Mattison's Shingle Plant

By
Newton M. Howard



An early view of the "Asbestos Shingle, Slate & Sheathing Company of Ambler", an affiliate of Keasbey & Mattison Co. Known locally as the Shingle Plant, it was built in 1905 and furnished employment for many years to residents of Ambler and vicinity. Believed to be completely fireproof, the structure was destroyed by a spectacular fire in May of 1989.

Drawing from collection of Newton M. Howard

"Ambler will soon have a new manufacturing facility, for we have just received our charter from the State". These were the words spoken by Keasbey & Mattison president Richard V. Mattison in the summer of 1905. He was referring to the "Asbestos Shingle, Slate & Sheathing Company of Ambler", formed with capital stock of \$1,000,000.

Mattison further stated it would most certainly furnish employment for many workers in the Ambler area for years to come. He said, "I have given one of our products the name "Century Asbestos Shingle", because of its ability to withstand the wear of both the elements and of time. Just last year, an experimental batch of the shingles had its first application ever on my new structure, the "Tank House". We are now ready to begin large-scale production".

The mammoth factory was to be built just north of the railroad station on the site of the old mill-pond that serviced the Reiff family's grist mill on Butler Avenue for years. The Reiff family owned all the land west of the railroad, and in 1882 sold to Richard Mattison and Henry G. Keasbey a small portion of land next to the railroad. They soon after moved their pharmaceutical works from Philadelphia to Ambler, beginning the rapid growth of what was to become Ambler's largest employer ever. In addition to the new manufacturing facilities, a huge warehouse 224 x 120 feet was to be constructed with adequate switches and sidings being furnished by Reading railroad.

The building products about to be manufactured here, while new to this country, had been extensively manufactured and used in Europe for years. It was just the year before that Mattison had sent his elder son, Richard, Jr., along with Plant Superintendent Thomas Rose, to Austria. Here, in Vienna, they consulted with a gentleman who had been working on the same process for asbestos shingles as Doctor Mattison.

Both Mattison and the gentlemen from Vienna had applied for patents for the same product. The Doctor invited the Austrian to "Bushy Park", his mansion at Newport. Here they evidently worked out any differences that might have existed, for production at the new Shingle Plant would soon begin in Ambler.

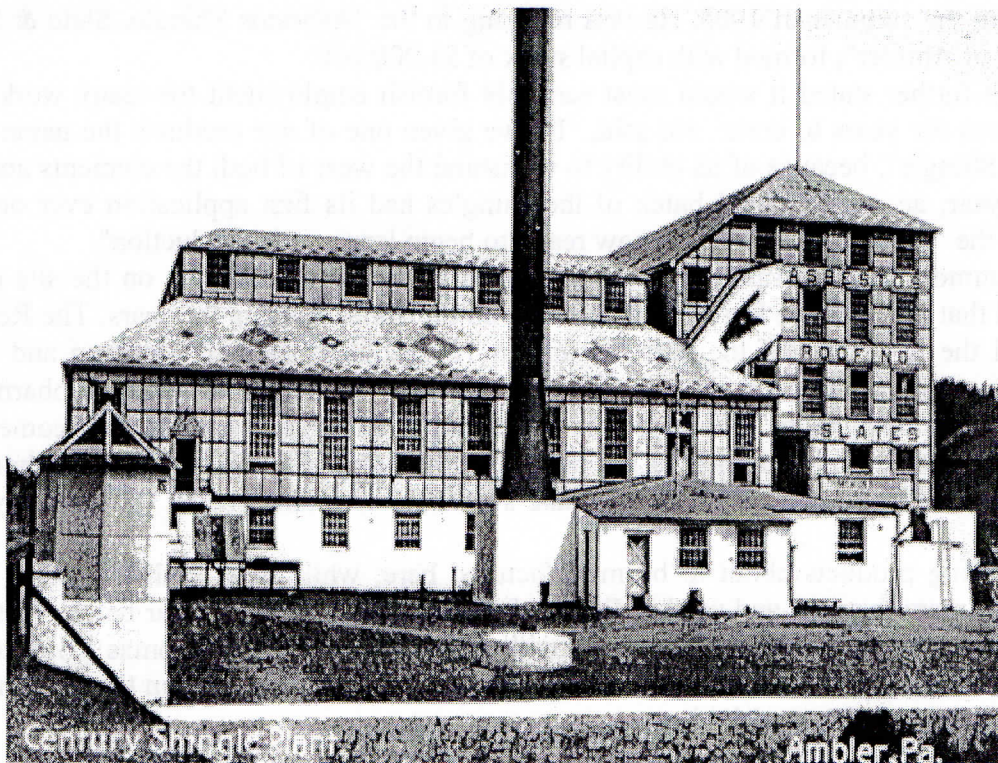
Although the company would eventually manufacture a wide variety of products for the building trade, it would for all time be known locally as the "Shingle Plant".

It was during this same period of the plant's establishment that construction of a large group of company homes was about to begin. This gave a very valuable boost to the production output of the new plant. These homes were located at lower Church Street, Ambler Road and a section of South Main. This ground had been purchased from the estate of George K. Knight several years earlier. Since it was formerly swamp land, it had been undergoing a process of drainage, preparatory to starting the building operations. Here at this housing project would be the first large-scale application of roofing shingles produced at the new Shingle Plant.

Many of these homes have their original "Century" shingle roofs, and before long will be heading into their second century of use. Composed of cement, a resin binder and a minimal amount of asbestos fiber, they withstand the elements, as Mattison predicted back in 1905. Completely fire-proof, they are however fragile if walked on or otherwise abused. Soon after production began, orders were received for covering the roof of the new \$60,000 Cheltenham High School, as well as the tower of the church at Trumbauersville.

Finally, a word about the old Shingle Plant, in 1905, Mattison stated that his new factory building would be completely fireproof, since both the exterior and interior would be covered with their fireproof asbestos sheathing. "As the steam heating and power will be generated in a building completely separated from this plant", he continued, "The danger from fire will be reduced to absolutely nothing". Generated in the company's boiler house, steam for heating was to be carried underground to the new facilities.

In May of 1989, however, a spectacular fire claimed the building that was being used in its final days as a giant warehouse. In all fairness to the Doctor's prediction, cause of this fire was due to its flammable contents rather than the building itself.



CHRISTMAS 1936

THE J. HARVEY GRAVELL STORY

By

Newton M. Howard

"There's good news tonight out of a small Pennsylvania town called Ambler." These words were spoken early in December of 1936 by a popular radio news commentator as he related details of an unusual happening at American Chemical Paint Company located there. "Plant owner J. Harvey Gravel," he continued, "has announced an unprecedented action which warrants telling to the Nation as we approach this Christmas season."

He disclosed further details of the surprise story. Gravel for some time had been inquiring of his employees the amount of money owed for mortgages, medical and hospital bills, large purchases of home appliances, and even grocery bills. "And now, just before Christmas, it is learned that he has paid all debts of his employees, which has cost him about \$100,000. Employees who were debt-free have received checks for \$100 each."

This heart-warming news came at a time when effects of the Great Depression were still being felt, and war clouds were gathering over Europe. The Spanish Civil War was dominating the news, and now two new names were appearing on the horizon. They were Benito Mussolini rising to power in Italy, and Adolph Hitler gaining absolute power in Germany. But the average American saw no threat to the United States. After all, Europe was too far away from our shores to be concerned.

Many, on hearing this news originating in Ambler, were asking: "Who is J. Harvey Gravel?" Well, he was born in Philadelphia in 1880, growing up with a keen interest in chemistry, electricity and sciences in general. While he and a young friend experimented in the family basement, an explosion and ensuing fire almost ended his career.

It was in 1914 that Gravel's career took off. The automobile industry, on the brink of an explosive period of growth, came face to face with a serious problem. The steel body was doomed unless rusting under the paint could be controlled. Gravel had earlier come up with a product to correct just such a problem. He called it "Deoxidine" and realized that he held the key to the success or failure of the auto industry.

Successful in selling the idea to the automobile manufacturers, he was able to launch his own company which he called the American Chemical Paint Company. In later years he took pleasure in saying that the ingredients of his "Deoxidine" were "a bucket, a broom handle and a good idea".

In this same year one of Gravel's first employees, Frank Scardino, came to work for him. Only recently arrived from Italy, Scardino became a lifelong friend and employee, soon becoming foreman of the manufacturing plant. Sharing Gravel's love of music,

Frank played the violin while Harvey since early youth had played the piano and now the organ. The two got together often with other musically inclined employees to make music in the office.

From the very beginning, Gravell's new company made rapid growth, soon outgrowing their quarters in Philadelphia. By 1924 the company had re-located to much larger quarters in Ambler, where it continued to grow, becoming second only to Keasbey & Mattison Company established much earlier there.

In Ambler, Gravell's office on the second floor also housed the organ. Frequently he would go out to the production floor, saying to Scardino, "Frank, we've mixed up enough chemicals for today. Why don't you get your violin and come into the office for awhile?" Harvey liked to play the organ at its loudest. This so annoyed a company executive whose office was directly below that he complained to Harvey that he could not do his work when the organ was being played. Gravell replied, "Then go somewhere else and do your work."

The news of his generosity in 1936 attracted the attention of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who sent him a personal letter of congratulations. The next year, besides paying bonuses to all employees, Gravell paid the wives of all married workers \$300. He claimed that a wife was behind every happy employee

Sadly, only three years after his generosity of 1936, he died on December 8th of 1939. His \$3,000,000 estate was shared by fifteen key employees who were to continue operation of the company begun in 1914. American Chemical Paint Company later was called Amchem, with numerous mergers still later eliminating the name completely.



Frank Scardino and Leon Cherksey, two of the fifteen employees who shared the \$3,000,000 estate, hold portrait of James Harvey Gravell, founder of the American Chemical Paint Company, later called "Amchem".

Photograph courtesy of Frank Scardino, Jr.

HOOPESTON: FORT WASHINGTON'S GHOST TOWN

by
Newton M. Howard

For nearly a quarter century a successful iron rolling mill operated in Fort Washington. Today few traces remain to even hint that it existed there in a part of present day Fort Washington Industrial Park. Thousands each working day pass by several buildings remaining of a village once called Hoopeston. One such building was the company store of the Hoopes & Townsend Iron Works at Spring Avenue and Pinetown Road, in recent years known as the Coach Inn. Other buildings on Pinetown Road, housed the company's superintendents.

Rumors began to circulate early in the spring of 1900 that local real estate agent Louis S. Whitcomb had purchased C. F. Kunkel's 85 acre farm for an unidentified manufacturing firm. The deal was expected to be closed in the near future.

Whitcomb later announced that the purchaser was the firm of Hoopes & Townsend of Philadelphia, a leading manufacturer of nuts, bolts, rivets chains, flat chains and chain links. The company had originated in 1849 in Wilmington, Delaware, with Barton Hoopes the founder. Just two years later, S. Sharpless Townsend became Hoopes' partner, and in 1852 the company moved their plant to Philadelphia, on Buttonwood Street east of Broad.

Hoopes was a native of West Goshen Township, Chester County, learning the trade of machinist as a youth. He soon became an ingenious mechanic, his most notable achievement being the perfection of a process of cold-punching metals.

Plans in 1900 called for eventually moving their entire Philadelphia operation to Fort Washington. For the present, they planned only to build a rolling mill to supply sheet material for use in their manufacturing process in Philadelphia.

The end of 1900 and early 1901 saw rapid progress in setting up their Fort Washington plant, with switches run in from both the Reading and the Pennsylvania Railroads. The Reading alone put in more than a quarter mile of switching.

By fall of 1901 operations were ready to begin, with the company store about to open. Here space was provided to house the postoffice due to open March 1st of 1902. Company homes were going up with the "cement row" to provide 32 housing units. Already there were 250 men on the payroll, most of these coming from out of town by way of the very convenient railroad and the newly constructed trolley.

Barton Hoopes did not live to see his plant expand to Fort Washington, but left his widow and three sons: Clement R., Dawson and Barton Hoopes, Jr., to operate the mill.

Workers were paid every two weeks at Hoopeston on Saturday, and as in any factory town, a small group of rowdies looked forward to pay day to make the rounds of local bars. The owner of the Fort Washington Hotel, Robert Gordon, Jr., was being commended by Village residents for his action on a Saturday evening in April of 1902. On hearing that a sizable group of the Hoopeston workers was reported on their way to his place of business, he promptly closed up his bar at 11 o'clock and went to bed, in order not to break the peace of quiet Fort Washington Village.

An attempt was made to bring religion to Hoopeston residents by at least two local churches, Trinity Lutheran of Fort Washington, and St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church, of Ambler. Trinity Lutheran rented one of the row houses where they established a branch Sunday School, with an enrollment of more than 15 scholars.

By fall of 1903 there were 400 to 450 men employed at the Hoopeston Iron Mill, with the plant running night and day and still not able to turn out enough iron for their Philadelphia bolt works. This in turn increased the need for more housing in Fort Washington, with plans for 44 more houses to be constructed. This prosperity also affected the company store which was not adequate to handle the increased business. A new and larger store was planned, which was to be 68 x 33 feet, and 2 stories high. It was to be built on the corner of Spring Avenue and Pinetown Road, with a 2 story stone addition 45 x 20 feet in the rear of the store.

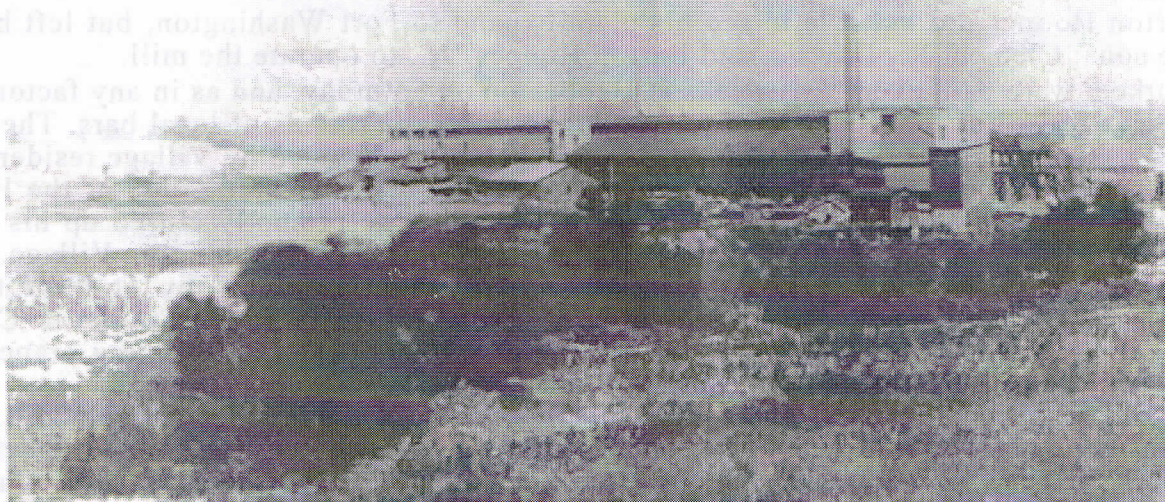
Hoopeston was not without labor problems. In late 1903 workers went on strike on payday because of a pay cut. The Sheriff was on hand, with strikers being promptly dismissed and ordered to vacate company homes within five days. Other workers were standing by ready to take their jobs and prepare to move their families into the "cement row" and other company

homes. Strikers who had been discharged met the trolleys every day, with the purpose of dissuading men from seeking work at the big mill.

The iron mill's heyday was in the period preceding and following World War I. Later a decline in business came about, with the company deciding to end the business.



The company store



The Hoopes & Townsend mill

Christmas Eve Fire Damages "The Little Church On The Hill"

By
Newton M. Howard

Possibly the most emotional event in Saint Anthony of Padua's history occurred in the early morning hours of Christmas Eve, when a disastrous fire struck. Originating in the old structure created by Father Henry Stommel in 1886, it quickly spread to parts of the newer building, wiping out much of the church's 114-year history.

Known later as "The Church Builder", Henry Stommel was born in 1842 about thirty miles from Cologne, Germany. Educated in his homeland, he was admitted to the American college at Louvain, Belgium, intent on serving German-speaking Catholics in rural America.

Fluent in several languages, his first pastorate in America was in 1871 at the Church of St. John the Baptist in the Bucks County community of Haycock. It was here that his 'church building' began with the establishment of three mission churches.

By November of 1875, and now pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Doylestown, Fr. Stommel directed the founding of five more mission churches. One of these was Saint Anthony Parish in the Village of Ambler. Know for choosing highly-elevated locations with good drainage, he acquired two acres of land, part of the former Andrew and Mary Ambler farmlands, the location being one of Ambler's highest.

Protestants and Catholics alike questioned the wisdom of building the church in a community almost entirely non-catholic. Already established in the Village was the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, just two blocks downhill, with the original Methodist Church under construction. The Village, not yet a borough, had only three Catholic families in 1886.



This photograph from about 1950 shows the original Saint Anthony's church built in 1886 under the guidance of "The Church Builder" Father Henry Stommel of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Doylestown. It was this part of Saint Anthony's that sustained the most damage, with the steeple miraculously receiving less damage.

Photograph by Newton M. Howard

Despite these odds, the cornerstone was laid April 26th, 1886, with local builder Albert Beck chosen as contractor for the new church. Months later, in a partially completed Saint Anthony's Church, Father Henry Stommel celebrated the First Mass.

Dedication ceremonies by Archbishop Patrick John Ryan were held September 21, 1886, with the new church opening its doors debt-free and fully decorated.

At this time a parish school was established, operated by the Sisters of St. Francis. Unsuccessful due to a lack of students, the school closed in just a few years, only to re-open in the 1920's with the Sisters of St. Joseph in charge of a larger number of students.

Father Stommel served the new Saint Anthony's, traveling weekly from Doylestown until July of 1888, when the first resident pastor, Fr. Augustin H. Rufe, could replace him. At the time of St. Anthony's establishment, Hendricks Street did not exist, with the church property abutting that of Arthur Van Luvanee, today the home of sexton Peter Sweeney. It was during Fr. Rufe's stay here that a deed of dedication was presented to Borough Council in 1900, thus creating that steep thoroughfare between Butler and Forest Avenues we know today as the Hendricks Street Hill.

One pastor remembered by many parish members is Father Alexander Sawers who was pastor in residence when the new church was dedicated November 25, 1956, just seventy years after Father Stommel's original building. The new construction retained much of the old church skillfully incorporated into its design. Another very popular pastor was Monsignor Eugene Sullivan, beloved by all, who came to St. Anthony's in 1972, serving the Parish faithfully for many years.

The disaster during pre-dawn hours of Christmas Eve served to bring closer together members of the close-knit Parish as well as residents of all faiths in the community. Wissahickon High School offered the use of their auditorium for church services with an emotional Christmas Eve Mass attended by more than a thousand persons, with standing room only.

The present Pastor, Monsignor Stephen McHenry, at this memorable service, echoed the feelings of parishioners both old and new. Devastating though the fire had been the building has suffered extensive damage but the parish remains stronger than before, ready to rebuild an even closer-knit community.

It is hoped that Father Stommel's original little church will be preserved, once again to be a part of the new Saint Anthony of Padua when it rises from the ashes.

(This article is based in part on the 1986 publication "Saint Anthony of Padua Parish" and the rare 1921 publication "Father Stommel, the Church Builder" by Lee Gregory Fink).

White City Amusement Park

by
Newton M. Howard

In was in March of 1897 that PRT, the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company, had a force of men working on construction of proposed picnic grounds in Erdenheim. A syndicate was rumored to have purchased about twenty-five acres consisting of land formerly known as "Yeakel's Meadow" and adjoining land of the Charles Heydrick estate. A member of this syndicate was well-known scenic railway builder Thompson, leading to speculation that amusement facilities similar to Willow Grove Park were to be built here.

Soon it was confirmed that indeed such a project was under way, and would be called Chestnut Hill Amusement Park. Opening was expected to be the following year. Lumber had been delivered to the site with several buildings under construction, the largest being the Grand Casino. Already completed was a large lake, now being filled and stocked with fish. In the center of the lake was an island covered with grass and flowers, while on this island was an American flag made of red, white and blue electric lights. Electric launches were to operate on these waters.



Chestnut Hill Amusement Park, better known as "White City", opened in 1898. A popular spot for a number of years, differences with neighbors adjoining the grounds forced the organization to disband in 1912, selling out to a group of wealthy neighbors for \$100,000.

Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth Sadler

Grand opening of Chestnut Hill Park occurred on a Saturday in June of 1898. Though not completely finished, it attracted large crowds, most of them coming by trolley out of Philadelphia. The PRT Company had extended its Route 23 trolley line from the City to Erdenheim making the Park easily accessible to thousands, in particular on week-ends. Newspapers of the time described this as the longest open-air trolley ride in America for a nickel. Though known officially as the Chestnut Hill Amusement Park, its more familiar name soon became 'White City' because of the multitude of buildings painted white.

A major attraction at the Park was the scenic railway claimed to be the longest in the country. Built at a cost of \$30,000, the railway, featuring caves and hills, covered much of these twenty-five acres. Popular also were the merry-go-round, a miniature railway, shooting galleries and roller-skating rinks. The bandstand attracted many, with occasional appearances by famous conductors John Philip Sousa, Victor Herbert, Walter Damrosch and Arthur Pryor.

Though an orderly and refined group frequented the park in its early days, later crowds tended at times to become a bit unruly. Residents of the neighborhoods bordering on White City brought charges against the operators for violating Sunday Blue Laws. This action continued for several years, with arrests and fines a regular occurrence.

In 1902, the Lehigh Valley Transit Company's line from Allentown to Erdenheim was connected with the Union Traction Company at Chestnut Hill Park, greatly increasing attendance at White City. This popular trolley line brought large numbers from the Ambler area, especially on the week-ends. So great were the crowds, that trolleys built to hold 52 persons often were over-loaded with as many as 150 aboard.

White City was popular with the summer boarders at the Clifton House in Fort Washington. Before the establishment of the Allentown to Erdenheim trolley line, boarding house proprietor George Herrman transported his guests by horse and carriage to both Willow Grove Park and White City. When the trolley arrived, guests were able to board the trolley that stopped at the door of the Clifton House.

In later years, crowds at White City had changed to such a degree, especially as the closing hours on Saturday nights approached, that motormen on the northbound trolley in particular did not look forward to the ride since it was certain to carry a large number of intoxicated individuals.

By 1911 White City was becoming a local nuisance, so much so that a group of wealthy residents got together in 1912 to purchase the grounds for \$100,000. Buildings were dismantled and lumber sold. In later years the grounds, occupied by White City for a period of about fourteen years, became the location of Springfield High School about 1920. The lake created by Chestnut Hill Park in 1897 remained through all these years.

FIRE LOSS LED TO BIRTH OF FIRE COMPANY

Company chartered April 6th, 1891

by

Newton M. Howard

The recorded history of fire in Ambler is older than Ambler itself. The first fire on record was New Year's Eve of **1869**, when the Fulling Mill, located at the intersection of Reiffs Mill Road and Main Street, burned to the ground.

Fires were few and far between in the early days of our town. The next fire to be recorded was not until June 3 of **1886**, when a newly-built home of a Mr. Theodore Quinty on S. Main Street was completely destroyed in one hour's time.

Shortly thereafter, the alarmed townspeople called a meeting to try to find the means of protecting their homes and properties from fire loss in the future. A committee was appointed to investigate the fire problem further.

At the next meeting, the committee reported that the Keasbey and Mattison Co. offered to supply water from its pumps to fight fires. The pumps were said to be capable of generating a pressure of 100 pounds per square inch and therefore could throw a stream of water over any house in town at the time.

The committee also reported that nearly \$500 had been subscribed by residents of the community. The idea was proposed to lay pipe from the K & M pumps into and through the town with fire plugs to attach the hose at designated places where the system might be used to the greatest advantage. It was further proposed to purchase 250 feet of hose with the balance of the subscriptions. Plans were also discussed for the possible purchase of a hand-powered pumper.

On Feb. **9, 1890**, the fire protection system proved inadequate. A building on Main Street at Butler Avenue belonging to John S. Buchanan was destroyed along with the tollgate and some sheds belonging to a nearby hotel, as Ambler experienced another major fire loss. The first recording of mutual aid was at this fire. A man was sent on horseback to enlist the aid of Pioneer and Independent Fire Cos. in Jenkintown. Apparatus from the two companies was placed on rail cars and moved to Ambler on an express train. Needless to say, they arrived only in time to help save the surrounding structures. Every available person carried water in efforts to preserve the nearby buildings.

After this disastrous fire, renewed efforts were pressed to form a local fire company. Borough Council passed Ordinance 14, which gave council authority to spend money to protect property from fire. On Nov. 21, **1890**, a public meeting was called in the office of Werstner and Buchanan of North Main Street, and the following statement was signed by those present:

"We the undersigned, present at a meeting held Nov. 21, **1890**, for the purpose of organizing a fire company, agree to become members of such an organization and to use our influence towards furthering the interests of the same."

The signers were J. Watson Craft, A.K. Thomas, John S. Buchanan, John L. Gusman, H.W.B. Reed, Edmund Plumly, James Bartleson, T. Elwood Walton, C.E. Hallman, Addie Welch, Lewis B. Gusman and Joseph Haywood.

A certificate of incorporation was drawn up and submitted to the county for approval on Feb. 18, **1891**. The charter was received on April 11, 1891 and was dated April 6, **1891**.

The borough announced a \$500 appropriation for fire protection. Many of the townspeople made donations to the newly-formed fire company in the total amount of \$2,335.01. During the company's first year, a steamer, hose reel cart (with 850 feet of hose), and a ladder wagon were purchased for the total sum of \$2,270. The apparatus was housed in a building on North Main Street belonging to J. Watson Craft and rented from him for \$12 per month.

Early records indicate company activities included fairs, strawberry festivals, benefit shows in the opera house, as well as parades, conventions and the like. The entire company, with equipment, was sent to the State Convention Parade in Reading in **1895**. G.F. Theel defrayed the expenses to send the fire company and Fife and Drum Corps along too. On June 12, **1896**, the Relief Association was formed, with Dr. D.W. Shelly elected as president.

Everything seemed to run smoothly until August **1896**, when the Board of Engineers reported that the engine was "in very bad shape, not fit to run on a fire." The company officers approached the Borough Council to explain the condition of the engine and also their meager treasury of \$132. The borough, after deliberation, purchased a "Silsby 600 Gallon per Minute Steam Fire Engine, type 2D" for the price of \$2,800. This steamer is still in the fire company's possession and can be seen leading the company in parades. The new steamer was housed, with a parade, on Thanksgiving afternoon, Nov. 26, **1896**.

At a meeting on Nov. 3, **1905**, the engineers reported, "Had engine out Friday at noon Nov. 3, 1905, and done fire work down at Locust Street plug they filled a 400 gallon tank in one and one quarter minutes also threw a stream from one nossel 175 feet from end of nossel to end of stream and with two nozzles it threw the water 145 feet after which the engine was taken to the plug at the corner of Forest Avenue and Hendricks Street where it threw a stream with one nossel 148 feet."

In **1916** the first motorized apparatus was purchased for the company by the borough. This truck was a 750-gallon-per-minute American LaFrance pumper. Also in the same year, a committee was appointed to plan for a new building on the property on Butler Avenue purchased from Mrs. Heiss. The site was previously occupied by the Palace Theatre, a moving-picture house that was burned out in a large fire.

This site, however, was destined to be involved in another large fire. In **1962**, on a cold, snowy February night, just four years after the Wissahickon Fire Co. had relocated to its present location on Race Street, disaster struck the Ambler Furniture Co., which now occupied the recently renovated structure. The entire building, along with the adjoining building which was also part of the furniture company, was completely gutted, resulting in the worst major fire in Ambler in modern times.

In **1935**, 27 Ambler women met and organized the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Wissahickon Fire Co. In the years since their creation, the Ladies Auxiliary conducted numerous fundraising events that have provided many thousands of dollars of support for the fire company.

Responding to the increased needs for traffic control and other services, the Wissahickon Fire Co. Fire Police was organized in **1953** by Walter B. Pearce, who also served as its first captain. The Fire Police are now a familiar sight directing traffic at fires, accident scenes and other emergencies throughout our area. They also augment regular police officers in traffic control for parades and other public events.

Today, the Wissahickon Fire Co. is housed in a 1950's vintage brick building on Race Street near Butler Avenue. Approximately 70 active firefighters maintain a fleet consisting of two modern pumpers, a rescue-pumper, an older reserve pumper, a ladder truck equipped with a 110-foot aerial ladder, and a fully-equipped rescue truck. In addition, the company maintains two inflatable boats, a HazMat support unit, two Fire Police traffic units, and a Command vehicle.

In fire training, Wissahickon has endeavored to keep pace with the times. New developments in firefighting gear and tactics are continually being added to company drills and procedures. Members receive training at both Montgomery County and Bucks County fire academies and the National Fire Academy. At these, our members achieve national certifications in Firefighter **I & II**, Instructor I, Officer I & II, and complete numerous advanced and specialty fire and rescue training classes.

Today, the Wissahickon Fire Company is still 100% volunteer. None of its members are compensated for the hundreds of hours they spend responding to over 600 emergency calls and dozens of training sessions per year, maintenance of the apparatus and equipment, and running of the corporation. The Wissahickon Fire Company continues its pledge to provide Ambler, Lower Gwynedd, and surrounding communities with the best equipment and highest levels of fire protection and rescue capabilities.



1896 Silsby 600 Gallon per Minute Steam Fire Engine, type 2D