

## ***The Parrish – James House “The Red Gables”***

### ***A history of 311 Bank Avenue, Riverton, New Jersey***

Prepared by Roger T. Prichard for the Historical Society of Riverton, rev. September 24, 2019



*311 Bank Avenue in 1993*

*photo by Gary Ford*

The ten founders of Riverton commissioned architect Samuel Sloan to create villas for them on the riverbank of the new town. Philadelphian William D. Parrish was the first owner of this villa which became 311 Bank Avenue, part of the original Lippincott farm. All ten were built during the spring and summer of 1851.

Riverton was originally intended to be principally a summer town and Parrish kept his principal residence in downtown Philadelphia until the end of his life in 1863. He and his family definitely used the Riverton home, as the 1860 Census taken June

29<sup>th</sup> shows the whole family living here (then part of Cinnaminson). Interestingly, another census enumerator back in Philadelphia also counted William and his family residing in Philadelphia just three weeks later. William was active in the management of the Riverton Improvement Company.

### ***Development***

On February 8, 1851, Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr. purchased about 120 acres of farmland from Joseph and Beulah Lippincott for \$20,000. On today's street plan this parcel would be bounded by the riverbank, the railroad, Howard Street and Church Lane. Miller was acting on behalf of a group of ten investors, including himself and William D. Parrish.

Their intentions for the new town of Riverton were described in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* of April 9, 1851. It named many of the original ten founders, including William D. Parrish.

A subsequent *Public Ledger* article at the end of the summer on September 4, 1851 reports all ten “beautiful villas erected, the most of which are already occupied by their owners.” This presumably includes William Parrish's home.

The Founders largely based the development of Riverton on handshakes and trust. The villas were all constructed on land that was still in the name of Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr. In the case of 311 Bank, Miller did not execute a formal deed transferring the lot to William Parrish until early the next year, on January 26, 1852, prior to the incorporation of the Riverton Improvement Company.

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The house first appears on two editions of the first map, *Plan of the New Town of Riverton* (undated, but probably published that same year, in mid-to-late 1851). An early original of the map is in the collection of the Porch Club of Riverton while the Historical Society has a scanned copy of a slightly later version and an identical print of that one is in the possession of Ken and Mary Louise Smith of 503 Bank.

Both versions of this map show William Parrish's name next to the vignette of his house and they both list him as one of the ten investors.

### ***The Three Sisters***

The founding of Riverton was very much a family affair. This house is the upriver structure of a trio of nearly-identical "Three Sisters" villas, so-called because the three spouses of the named male Founders were sisters. Left to right, William D. Parrish was married to Elizabeth Wright Miller (1817-1891), Robert Biddle to Anna Miller (1822-1891), and William Canby Biddle (at modern number 307, demolished in the 1980s) was married to Rachel Miller (1818-1892).

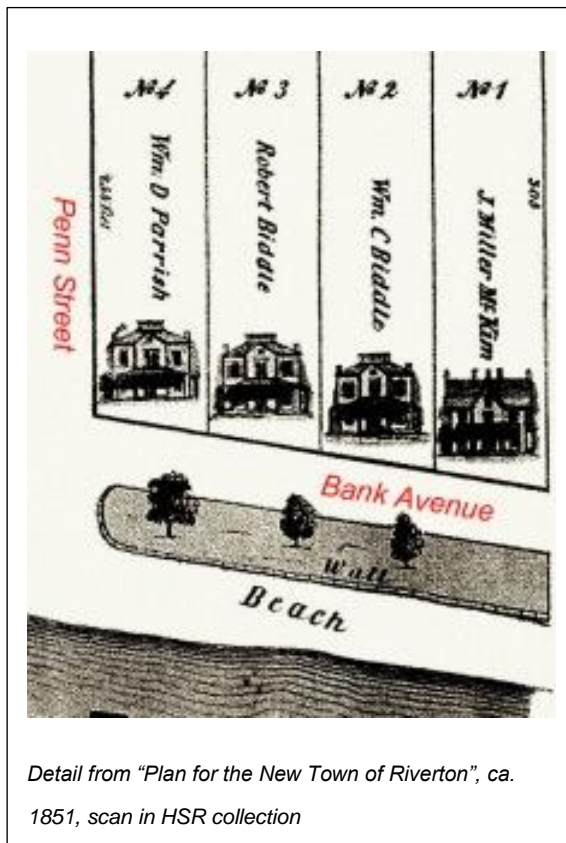
All three Miller sisters led long lives and died within 18 months of each other.

Complicating the Riverton family tree, two of these Miller sisters (Anna and Rachel) married two brothers (Robert and William Biddle). Further, the sisters were also siblings of Founder Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr., who was the named purchaser of the two farms which would form the core of Riverton in 1851, and who sold 311 Bank to William Parrish in January 26, 1852.

Another Miller sibling, Charles P. Miller, also had one of the original homes in Riverton, which he purchased from Founder Chalkley Gillingham. It stands today, numbered 100 Main Street, and was shown with his name on the second map ca. 1851 "A New Plan of Riverton" mentioned above. He was not shown as an investor in the town, however.

Yet another Miller sibling, William Henry Miller, seems to have had no direct involvement in Riverton but in 1896 his son Charles Cooper Miller built the handsome Colonial Revival house at 101 Lippincott Avenue.

The families were also complex on the Parrish side, as our William D. Parrish had two siblings in other founding households. His sister Susanna Dillwyn Parrish married Rodman Wharton and



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they built their villa on the downriver corner of Bank Avenue and Main Street, today #407. Their brother Dillwyn Parrish built his home on the other corner of Main Street, today #501 Bank Avenue.

## ***William Dillwyn Parrish (1815-1863) and Elizabeth Wright Miller Parrish (1817-1891)***

### ***Parrish family background***

The Parrish family presence in the New World reaches back to the earliest decades of colonization. A comprehensive family history begun by William D. Parrish's brother Dillwyn and completed by their niece Susanna Parrish Wharton documents this well. It is entitled *The Parrish Family [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] Including the related families of Cox – Dillwyn – Roberts et al* published in Philadelphia in 1925 by George H. Buchanan Company. Ancestry.com has a low-resolution scan; a print copy is in the collection of Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

It begins in Maryland six generations earlier in 1655 when **Capt. Edward Parrish** (1600-1679) comes to Maryland (probably from Virginia) to be the Surveyor General. He begins assembling land for plantations, a process handed down the line through descendants **Edward Parrish** (1640-1680), **Edward Parrish** (1669-1723) and **John Parrish** (1698-1745).

By John Parrish's time, his holdings included plantations scattered through the area from the West River in Anne Arundel County to Baltimore County, including a 2,000 acre plantation in Baltimore called "Parrish's Reach", which included the area today set aside as Druid Hill Park.

Unfortunately, John Parrish had guaranteed a business note for a friend who then defaulted. As a result, John and his wife **Elizabeth** lost nearly everything (date unknown). Husband and wife then both died within two months of each other in 1745, he at age 47 and she at just 40.

They left at least seven children, the youngest just one month old. The middle child would become the grandfather of our William D. Parrish. His name was **Isaac Parrish** (1734-1826) and he had been born at Parrish's Reach. Orphaned and impoverished at age 11, Isaac was obliged to give up his dream to become a doctor. He was sent to Philadelphia to be apprenticed to a man named Abraham Mitchell to learn the trade of a hatter. He evidently fit in very well with that household, because in 1759 he married Abraham's daughter **Sarah Mitchell** (1739-1825).

Isaac went into business for himself. The 1785 *Philadelphia Directory* by Francis White (<http://www.archive.org/stream/philadelphiadire1785phil#page/56>) lists him as a hatter and shopkeeper on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street between Market and Arch. This is likely the same house in which he and Sarah lived and worked for 66 years, located on the northeast corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Church Street, across the street from Old Christ Church. It is depicted in a 1917 drawing by Frank H.

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Taylor and still stands today, looking much as it does in that drawing. Later directories list it as 17 North Second Street, the number it carries today.



*Isaac and Sarah Parrish house, NEC 2<sup>nd</sup> and Church Streets, Philadelphia, drawing by Frank H. Taylor, 1917. Collection of Free Library of Philadelphia*

It was in this house that Sarah and Isaac had ten children. Three died as infants and then two more were lost as young men in the great yellow fever epidemic of 1793.



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Isaac had much to overcome from his parents' misfortune in an early age and then the loss of five of his own children, but after his death his grandson Dillwyn Parrish wrote in the memoir later published in 1925 by Susanna Parrish Wharton, "[O]ur grandfather was remarkable for his cheerfulness and vivacity and was often engaged in devising plans for the innocent amusement of his grandsons and their young friends who were always welcome visitors. He entered into their sports with the ardor of youth, frequently engaging with them in play. But there was also the seriousness and dignity of the Christian, and when his grandchildren were collected around him he would often impart to them what had been useful to him."

The loss of five siblings may have encouraged one of Isaac's children, **Joseph Parrish** (1779-1840), to set his sights on becoming a doctor. The father of our William D. Parrish, Joseph succeeded brilliantly, studying under Dr. Caspar Wistar and graduating from the University of Pennsylvania as a Doctor of Medicine in 1805. He began practicing medicine, opening his office in his parents' house in 1806, according to the *Philadelphia Directory for 1806* by James Robinson (<http://www.archive.org/stream/philadelphiadire1806phil#page/n205> ). The same directory for 1807 shows him having moved his practice to number 18 Chestnut Street (old numbering system).

Dr. Joseph Parrish had a long and distinguished career in medicine. His father must have been gratified to see his son succeed in a profession he himself had desired but had been prevented from entering by the circumstances of his parents' misfortunes.

Dr. Joseph Parrish married **Susanna Cox** (1788-1851) of Oxmead Farm, Burlington County in 1808. Like his father, Joseph and Susanna also had a large family with 11 children, all of whom grew to adulthood. Two of their sons also became physicians, another **Isaac Parrish** (1811-1852) and another **Joseph Parrish** (1818-1891). Other children distinguished themselves also: one child grew up to become the first president of Swarthmore College and one became a pharmacist and the president of the College of Pharmacy. Another founded the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People.

In addition to his many medical activities, Dr. Joseph Parrish continued his father's work in the organized efforts to eliminate slavery. He was for many years the president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race. Most, if not all, of Joseph and Sarah's children would continue the work for the abolition of slavery.

A good source for details of Dr. Parrish's life is found in the Parrish family history published by Susanna's daughter Susan P. Wharton in 1925 from material assembled by Dillwyn Parrish in the 1880s. This excerpt will give an idea of his character:

[Susanna's] father, Dr. Joseph Parrish, was for years President of the old "Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery," a society incorporated in 1775, founded and sustained by such men as Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Benjamin Rush, James

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Pemberton, Howard M. Jenkins (presidents) and many others prominent in the welfare of the city.

Dr. Parrish's house was one of the stations of the famous Underground Railroad, and while the children could not fully participate in its workings, they learned to keep quiet when a slave was harbored in the cellar, and grew up with the knowledge that many were being secretly conveyed to the next station,

Old Peter Quire, colored, who as a boy drove the doctor's "chair," and who died recently in Newport, R.I., was never tired of telling how he and Dr. Parrish followed with untiring zeal, and often with success, masters trying to escape with runaway slaves, not always their own. "Does thee see that vehicle in front us? Follow wherever it goes."

I [that is, Susanna's daughter, Susan] have been told by a friend who was present that when my grandfather died, the sidewalk was filled for two squares with negroes walking in the funeral procession. It is easy to understand why from childhood [Susanna] openly espoused the cause of this race, and was as long as she lived a member of the "Abolition Society," as it was familiarly called.

Growing up in such an atmosphere, it was also not surprising to find her keenly alive to the great interest of the Civil War, and alert to do her part for the great issues at stake. The way in which she threw herself into the activities of the Sanitary Commission, working assiduously with a band of devoted women for the soldiers in the field, has left a lasting impression.

In addition to the sources mentioned above, a remarkably exhaustive genealogical work is *The Parrish Family, including the Allied Families of Belt, Boyd, et al*, researched by Katherine Cox Gottschalk and compiled and published by Scott Lee Boyd, Santa Barbara, California, 1935.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89069611721;view=1up;seq=16>

The accompanying photograph from about 1853 shows nine Parrish siblings, the children of Dr. Joseph Parrish. It is found in the 1925 family history by Susannah Parrish Wharton mentioned earlier. This is a scan from a copy in the collection of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

Pictured are:

*Back row*

George Dillwyn Parrish (1820-1871) An importer of merchandise from Britain

John Parrish (1813-1896) Minister in the Society of Friends

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Edward Parrish (1822-1872) Founder and first president of Swarthmore College, scientist and pharmacist, appointed by the U.S. government as a commissioner to settle disagreements with Kiowa and Comanche tribes, during which he died of malaria at Fort Sill, Indian Territory.

Samuel Parrish (1830-1889) Youngest of the 11 children, an antiquarian and man of letters, collector of “many valuable manuscripts photographs and prints.”

Joseph Parrish, M.D. [jr.] (1818-1891) Also a physician like his famous father, he earned his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1844. Chair of Obstetrics at Philadelphia Medical College, he was an active member of many medical societies and commissions.

*Front row*

William Dillwyn Parrish (1815-1863) *the subject of this article*

Sarah Parrish (1817-1900) A founder of the Home for Aged and Inform Colored People

Dillwyn Parrish (1809-1886) Another of the founders of Riverton, built the home at 501 Bank Ave. He was a pharmacist, for many years the president of the College of Pharmacy. Like his father before him, in 1851 he was made president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race”, a position in which he served for 35 years until his death in 1886.

Susanna Dillwyn Parrish (1827-1915) Another of the founders of Riverton (with her husband Rodman Wharton). Widowed after just four years of marriage, she devoted the rest of her life to the “Abolition Society” and charities to promote the welfare of the poor, prisoners, Indians, and wounded soldiers during the Civil War.



George, John, Edward, Samuel, Joseph  
William, Sarah, Dillwyn, Susanna  
Taken about 1853. In possession of Sarah L. Parrish, daughter-in-law of Dr. Joseph Parrish

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### **William Dillwyn Parrish (1815-1863)**

William Dillwyn Parrish was born February 19, 1815, the fourth child of Dr. Joseph Parrish and Susanna Cox Parrish. The James Robinson directories for this era show Joseph Parrish, MD as residing at 109 Mulberry Street (old numbering). Mulberry is today known as Arch Street and the house was likely modern number 313. A later photograph in the collection of the Friends Historical Library shows a portion of this house shortly before its demolition c. 1889.

We have no information about William's early years or education. The next record we have for him after his birth indicates that he was a talented artist and was also inclined to science and engineering. It is a mention in Hazard, Samuel, *Register of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia, July 1833-January 1834. This recounts awards made by the Franklin Institute at its eighth exhibition of American manufacturing in October of 1833, when William would have been 18 years old. He was given honorable mention "for a perspective drawing of an Electrical Machine. A very beautiful performance, which reflects credit on the artist."



*William D. Parrish (undated) from Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College*

William married **Elizabeth Wright Miller** on November 2, 1836 when he was 21 and she was 19. They wed at the Cherry Street Meeting House with nearly 200 fellow Friends witnessing. Notable witnesses to their wedding included abolitionists Lucretia Mott and her husband James. Many figures attended who would become involved in the founding of Riverton 15 years later. In addition to many Parrishes and Millers, also present were Caleb Clothier, Rodman Wharton, Robert Biddle and William Canby Biddle. (It was a family affair – Wharton would later marry William's sister, and brothers Robert and William Canby Biddle would later marry two of Elizabeth's sisters.)

About a year later, an ad appeared in the *Public Ledger* of January 29, 1838 in which William describes himself as a manufacturer of steam engines, boilers, mill gearing and “machinery in general”. This is notable not only for his age (he was 22 at the time) but also because of the address of his works, “on River Schuylkill, opposite Chestnut St., West Philadelphia.”

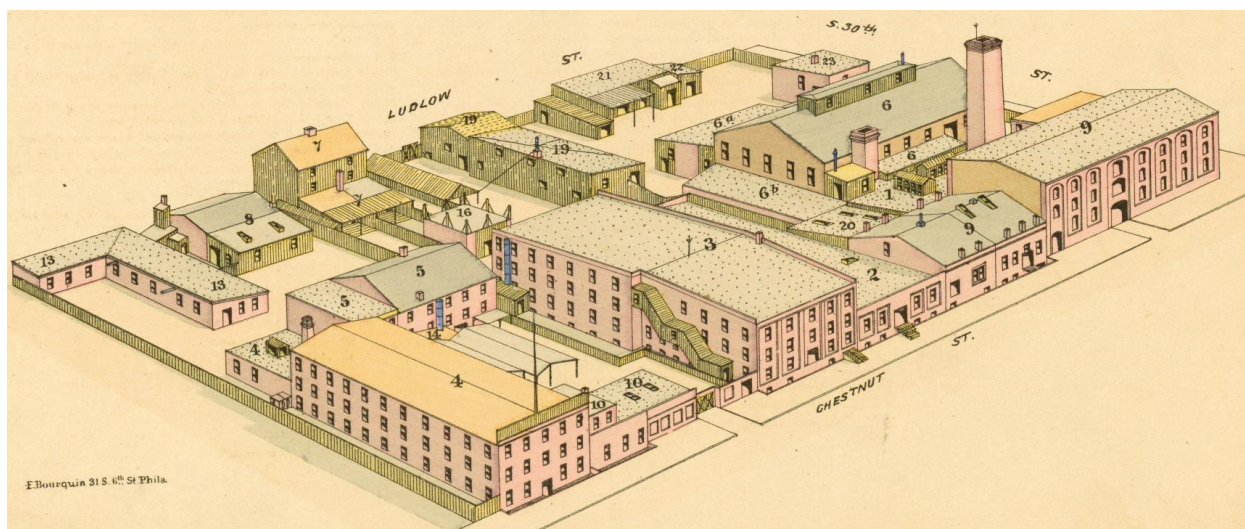
**W**ILLIAM D. PARRISH, Manufacturer of High and Low Pressure STEAM ENGINES and BOILERS, of approved construction, for BOATS, MILLS and MANUFACTORIES. Also, RAILROAD WORK, MILL GEARING and Machinery in general, which he will warrant to be of good materials and superior workmanship. All kinds of CASTINGS done to order, and executed with despatch. Orders received at the Office, EIGHTH Street, 1 door below Arch, or at the Manufactory, on River Schuylkill, opposite Chestnut St., West Philadelphia. [J22-3m\*

Advertisement in *Public Ledger* of January 29, 1838

This is almost certainly the same industrial property which he owned throughout his life and was still managed by his estate long after his death in 1863. His estate finally offered the property for sale in 1906. The parcel was on the northwest corner of 30<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut Streets (a site occupied in modern times by the main Philadelphia Post Office building).

Several drawings of this real estate exist in the Hexamer General Survey publications in the collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia, among others (though none from during Parrish’s short lifetime).

Here is an isometric drawing of the buildings in the 1885 edition. It is likely that the some if not all of these buildings existed during Parrish’s time.

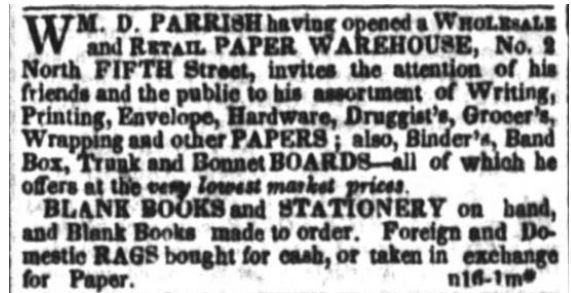


From *Hexamer's General Surveys*, 1885. Collection of Free Library of Philadelphia

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The 1839 edition of McElroy's directory of Philadelphia (available in the Internet Archive) lists him as being in partnership with a man named Johnson, saying that their iron foundry and machine shop was located in West Philadelphia but their office was at "223 Mulberry, ab 6th". Mulberry is today's Arch Street and the address today would be in the 600 block of Arch.

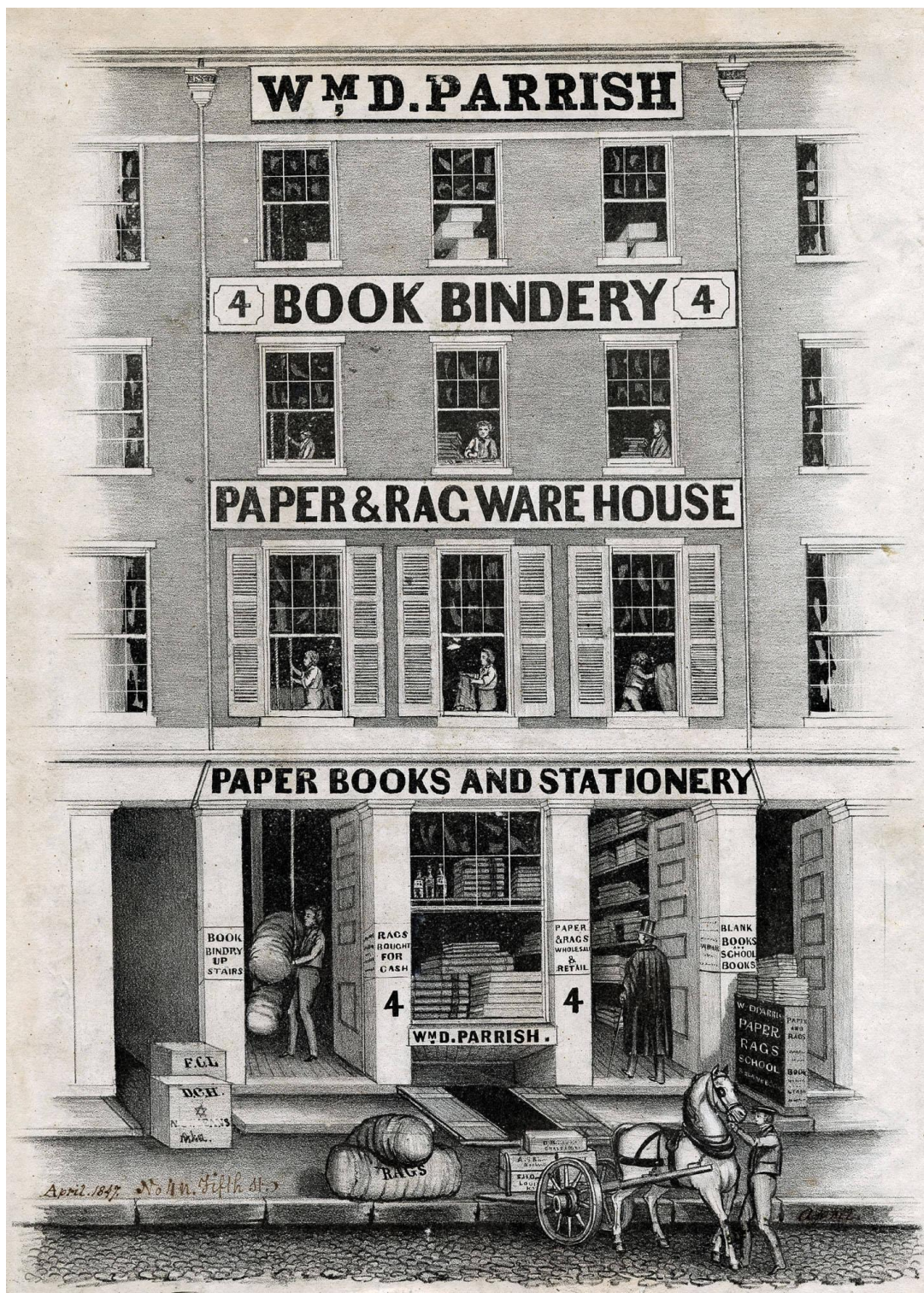
The next development in William's life was his founding of a paper retailing business that also purchased rags to be recycled into paper. He announced it in this advertisement in the *Public Ledger* of December 12, 1842.



**W**M. D. PARRISH having opened a WHOLESALE and RETAIL PAPER WAREHOUSE, No. 2 North FIFTH Street, invites the attention of his friends and the public to his assortment of Writing, Printing, Envelope, Hardware, Druggist's, Grocer's, Wrapping and other PAPERS; also, Binder's, Band Box, Trunk and Bonnet BOARDS—all of which he offers at the very lowest market prices.  
BLANK BOOKS and STATIONERY on hand, and Blank Books made to order. Foreign and Domestic RAGS bought for cash, or taken in exchange for Paper. n16-1m\*

*Philadelphia Public Ledger of December 12, 1842*





Lithograph by Charles Augustus Poulson, April 1847



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He evidently operated this business at this location for about a dozen years, some of the time in partnership with his brother Samuel and with a man named Alfred L. Hough. As late as the 1854 edition of *McElroy's Philadelphia City Directory*, William is still listed as "Paper Warehouse" at 4 North 5<sup>th</sup> Street, with his home at 339 Sassafras [Race] Street (old numbering).

By 1855, though, his personal entry indicates that he had an "office" at SW corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Minor Streets. (Minor Street was a single block long, running east and west between S. 5<sup>th</sup> and S. 6<sup>th</sup> Streets below Market, just a half block north of Independence Hall.) "Hough & Parrish" was listed as a paper warehouse.

His residence at 339 Sassafras was next door to 341 Sassafras, the home of in-laws (and fellow future Riverton founders and Riverton next-door neighbors) Robert and Anna Biddle.

He seems to have conducted a variety of businesses, and invested in real estate throughout this period. In an ad in the March 17, 1845 *Public Ledger* he offers for rent "two large and commodious COAL WHARVES on Chestnut Street, West Philadelphia." These would have been adjacent to the large property he owned and managed at 30<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut mentioned earlier.

In the October 1, 1849 issue of the *Public Ledger* he offers for sale a "modern built three-story Brick HOUSE ... in MARSHALL St., between Parrish and Poplar." As the McElroy's directory for that year list him as living at a different address (339 Sassafras), this house on Marshall Street was either an investment property or he was selling it in the role of a real estate broker.

The 1850 Census lists him as owning \$12,000 in real estate.

At about the time he is investing in the development of the town of Riverton he also purchased land in Camden, New Jersey. The National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Cooper Street Historic District shows him purchasing 408 Cooper Street (still standing) in 1853 and his executors selling it in 1866. It suggests that he built the home that stands today on that lot about 1860.

William continued his ironwork business, evidently until his death. In February of 1858 he completed the first gas storage tank for the fledgling gas company of Pottstown, PA, according to a retrospective article in the *Pottstown Mercury* of March 22, 1963. They report that it had cost \$21,000.

In the 1860 Census and in Philadelphia City directories until his death three years later his occupation is listed as "Gas Engineer". The July 25, 1863 issue of *Scientific American* ran a detailed article about the "Parrish's Patent Gas Mixer", an innovative device to improve the process of generating gas for household lighting, etc. from petroleum tar.

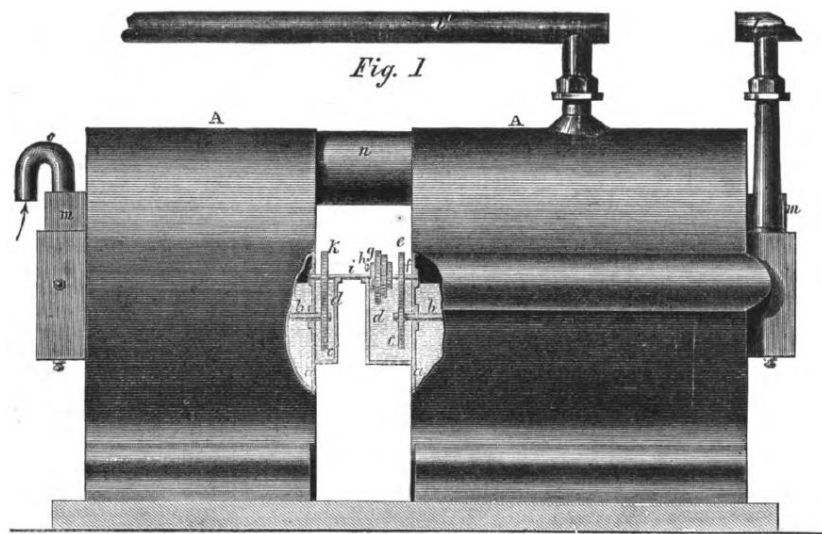


A WEEKLY JOURNAL OF PRACTICAL INFORMATION IN ART, SCIENCE, MECHANICS, CHEMISTRY AND MANUFACTURES

VOL. IX.—NO. 4.  
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NEW YORK, JULY 25, 1863.

SINGLE COPIES SIX CENTS.  
\$3 PER ANNUM—IN ADVANCE.



**PARRISH'S PATENT GAS-MIXER.**

*Clip from article in Scientific American describing Parrish's device to increase the efficiency of gas generating machinery*

Like his father and several siblings, William Dillwyn Parrish was an active supporter of efforts to abolish slavery.

As a part of his anti-slavery sentiments, William made what was evidently his only venture into publishing. In 1847 he published *The Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy*. The book was published posthumously, as Lundy had died in 1839. According to his Wikipedia entry, Lundy was an ardent abolitionist who traveled, lectured and wrote, seeking to limit slavery's

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expansion. In the book, available from archive.org, Lundy mentions having relied on William's father, Dr. Joseph Parrish, to provide medicines against cholera as he prepared for his 1833 expedition to Mexico and Texas (which was at the time part of Mexico).

William D. Parrish served as the secretary of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, according to *The Oldest Abolition Society*, published by the Society in Philadelphia in 1911.



*William Dillwyn Parrish in the last 6 months of his life. Photograph by  
Wenderoth & Taylor, Philadelphia  
Collection of Friends Historical Library*

He also worked in other charitable areas, serving in 1862 as one of the "Managers" of the Philadelphia Society for the Establishment and Support of Charitable Schools.

William Dillwyn Parrish died on Christmas Day, 1863, at his downtown home of 1416 Arch Street, of typhus fever. He was 48 years old and was survived by his widow and five of his seven children, ranging in age from eight to 23 years of age. His body was buried in Friends' Fair Hill Cemetery, joining a number of other family members of the founders of Riverton.

### ***Elizabeth Wright Miller (1817-1891)***

William and Elizabeth were married for 27 years before his early death. Elizabeth was also raised a Quaker, born on March 8, 1817 to **Daniel Leeds Miller, Sr.** (1788-1866) and **Hannah Nicholson** (1790-1863).

Both of her parents were born in the area of Salem, New Jersey and had moved to Philadelphia. Her father was a financier and was the principal founder and long-time president of the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company. As mentioned

earlier, several of her siblings were also involved in the founding of Riverton.

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She was widowed at age 46, just 7 months after the death of her mother. We know that at some point she moved from their home at 1416 Arch Street, because by the 1880 Census she was living at 2034 Delancey Place, Philadelphia (still standing). That Census shows her as the head of the household, which also contained her daughter Mary (who was Elizabeth and William's youngest child, then 24 years old) and Elizabeth's brother and his wife, Charles P. and Anna M. Miller. As mentioned earlier, Charles P. Miller had owned another of the founders' homes in Riverton for a number of years, today numbered 100 Main Street. The household included an Irish domestic servant named Catherine Cuniff.

Elizabeth died at age 74 on March 11, 1891 and was buried in Fair Hill Cemetery, as were her husband and many other family members.

### Children

William and Elizabeth had 7 children, 5 of whom lived to adulthood. Their first child was not one of the fortunate ones. Named for William's father, **Joseph Wright Parrish** died just short of his fourth birthday in 1842. In a letter a few days earlier, Lucretia Mott wrote "Wm. Parrish's little son Joseph is lying very low with inflammation of the brain - 4 years old - a great trial to his parents - not expected to live thro' the night." Beverly Wilson, Ed., *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott*, (Chicago, University of Illinois, 2002).

Sons **Dillwyn Parrish, Jr.** (1840-1899, note irregular use of "Jr.") and his younger brother **Alfred Parrish** (1848-1921) became very successful in the transportation world, investing in and improving streetcar lines around the world, including London, Dresden, India, and Cape Town as well as the Ridge Avenue line in Philadelphia. They also were directors of coal and iron corporations in Alabama. Dillwyn's obituary in the Philadelphia *Times* of August 14, 1899 described him as "one of the best known promoters of street railways in this country, Europe and Africa."

Youngest daughter **Mary Parrish** (1855-1928) married noted physician Louis Starr, one of the earliest to establish pediatrics as a distinct branch of medicine. Two of Mary and Louis' children (i.e. William Dillwyn Parrish's grandchildren) distinguished themselves in WWI. Dillwyn Parrish Starr volunteered for Britain early in the war and served as an ambulance driver in several areas until joining the Coldstream Guards as a Lieutenant. He was killed in action in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. His sister Elizabeth Parrish Starr joined the United States voluntary aid program in Europe as a Volunteer Nurse and member of the French War Emergency Fund. Later as Head



*Image believed to be Elizabeth Wright  
Miller Parrish  
Collection of Friends Historical Library*



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of Reconstruction of the Civilian Section of the Somme region, she was decorated by the French government with a Silver Medal, the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Francaise.

After the death of William Dillwyn Parrish in 1863 his estate was administered by his widow Elizabeth and their oldest living son Dillwyn Parrish, Jr. Whether his family continued use of the Riverton home, or rented it out, isn't clear. They finally sold the property 14 years after William's death. In all, it was owned by the Parrish family for 27 years.

### ***General William Levis James (1833-1903) and Anna Elizabeth Thompson James (1839-1922)***

In a deed dated May 16, 1878, Elizabeth W. Parrish and Dillwyn Parrish, Jr., executors of the estate of William Dillwyn Parrish, sold this property to "Anna E. James, wife of William L. James" for \$7,000.

It was unusual in this time for a married woman to be purchasing real estate in her own name. No obvious reason has been found to explain why her husband, a distinguished retired army general and businessman, would not be named on the deed of the house that was to be their sole residence.

Anna may have had independent means, but she is something of a mystery. No records have turned up as yet indicating her early years or anything about her family. In fact, the only reason we know that she was born in January of 1839 and married General James in 1874 is that both of those facts were shown in the 1900 US Census.

#### ***William Levis James (1833-1903)***

William Levis James was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, August 14, 1833 to **Hickman** and **Margaret Fendall James**. His mother died when William was 13 years old, leaving her husband with 7 small children, including our William Levis James.

The 1850 US Census lists Hickman James' occupation as a butcher and indicates that 16-year old William is also working as a butcher.



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According to the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* for January 12, 1855, Hickman James held the position of Recorder for Chester County.

On April 18, 1861 William Levis James, then 27 years old, married his first wife, **Sibilla Embree Janney**, just a week after the attack on Fort Sumter opened the Civil War. Their first child, **Ada Sibilla James**, was born some time in 1862.

### Civil War Service

Shortly thereafter, on November 2, 1862, William enlisted in the U.S. Volunteers with the rank of Captain. He was almost immediately promoted to Full Captain and Assistant Quartermaster. (Quartermasters manage the physical materiel and equipment which supply and transport an army.) An advertisement in the September 26, 1863 edition of the Philadelphia *Inquirer* over his name, from Fort Monroe, Virginia, offers for sale hundreds of horses and mules captured from the Confederates in Virginia and North Carolina. Evidently the U.S. Army already had more horses than it needed.

It seems that William Levis James' duties seldom took him close to combat, according to a detailed published account, though it compliments his efforts to keep the regiment supplied and on the move. His services were performed mostly or entirely in Virginia. Isaiah Price, *History of the 97<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry During the War of the Rebellion 1861-1865* (Philadelphia: Prepared at the Request of the Regiment, 1875).

He evidently was able to go home on at least one occasion because William and Sibilla's second child, **John Butler James**, was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on August 1, 1864.

William James was involved in some significant disagreement at about this same time. The Philadelphia *Inquirer* of September 23, 1864 contained this brief report from Fortress Monroe:

*Captain Wm. L. James, who was so summarily dismissed the service about nine months ago, and subsequently reinstated, resumes his former position in the place of Captain Kimball, much to the satisfaction of his numerous warm friends in the place.*

The incident did not harm his career in the slightest. In fact, promotions started to come with surprising quickness. A few months later he was promoted from Captain to Brevet Major. Two months after that, on March 13, 1865, he was promoted to full Colonel. Two months later, shortly after Lee's surrender, James moved his office (the Quartermaster of the Department of Virginia) to the Confederacy's former capital of Richmond, Virginia, "to facilitate the transaction of the immense business yet to be transacted in his department," according to a newspaper account.

On March 1, 1866 he was promoted for the one more time, to Brevet Brigadier General, and then on July 1 he mustered out of the Army for good. He had risen from a Captain to a General in 3-1/2 years.

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## Return to Civilian Life

On September 1 of that year William and Sibilla's third child was born, **William Janney James**. Things were not happy for the family, however. They lost their second child, **John Butler James**, to diphtheria on May 12, 1867, just two years old. The baby, William Janney James, also died that year (date and cause unknown).

General James established himself in business in Philadelphia quickly after returning to civilian life. The Philadelphia and Southern Mail Steamship Company was founded in March, 1866 and William became its "General Agent" in Philadelphia. His name was appearing in many advertisements in newspapers by the Summer of 1867 and, while not an officer of the corporation, he likely was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the company.

In contrast to his success in business, his personal life became ever more difficult, with the death of his wife Sibilla on January 19, 1870, of consumption. He had now lost his wife and two of their three children, all in the span of 2-1/2 years.

In the 1870 US Census he is listed as living in Philadelphia in a house with a number of unrelated people, evidently a boarding house, in "District 47" with a local post office at 1828 Olive Street, near 19<sup>th</sup> and Fairmount. The Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory for the same year lists his home as "West Chester".

By the 1872 edition of that directory, his home is listed as 1621 Vine Street and in 1878 he is at 1703 Filbert Street. It is not known who was taking care of his one surviving child, Ada.

**THE PHILADELPHIA AND SOUTHERN MAIL STEAMSHIP COMPANY'S REGULAR SEMI-MONTHLY LINE**  
FOR WILMINGTON, N. C.  
The Steamship PIONEER, (812 tons), Captain J. BENNETT, will leave for the above port on Thursday, August 15, at 8 o'clock A. M., from Pier No. 18 (second wharf below Spruce street).  
Bills of lading signed at through and reduced rates to all principal points in North Carolina.  
Agents at Wilmington, WORTH & DANIEL.  
W. L. JAMES, General Agent, No. 314 S. DELAWARE Avenue.

**THE PHILADELPHIA AND SOUTHERN MAIL STEAMSHIP COMPANY'S REGULAR SEMI-MONTHLY LINE**  
FOR NEW ORLEANS, LA.  
STAR OF THE UNION (1076 tons).....Capt. T. N. Cooksey  
JUNIATA (1215 tons).....Capt. P. F. Hoxie  
TIOGA (1075 tons).....Capt. J. F. Morse  
Will leave this port every two weeks, alternately, touching at Havana returning for freight and passengers.  
The TIOGA will leave for New Orleans on Saturday, August 3, at 8 o'clock A. M., from Pier No. 18 (second wharf below Spruce street).  
The STAR OF THE UNION will leave New Orleans for this port July 20.  
Through Bills Lading signed for Freight to Mobile, Galveston, Natchez, Vicksburg, Memphis, Nashville, Cairo, St. Louis, Louisville and Cincinnati.  
Agents at New Orleans—Creevey, Nicholson & Co.  
W. L. JAMES, General Agent, No. 314 S. DELAWARE Avenue

*Philadelphia Inquirer, July 29, 1867*

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**Philadelphia & Southern Mail Steamship  
COMPANY'S  
SAVANNAH LINE  
STEAMSHIPS TONAWANDA AND WYOMING,**

Sailing regularly every Saturday, alternately, from *Pier 41, foot of Queen Street, Philadelphia*, and from *foot of Abercorn Street, Savannah*, connecting with the **CENTRAL R. R. OF GEORGIA**, and **ATLANTIC AND GULF R. R.**, and connecting Roads to all interior points.

**THE ESPECIAL ATTENTION OF INVALIDS**

and others desiring to escape the severity of our Northern climate, and who design wintering in Florida, is called to this route, via Savannah, as being more comfortable and expeditious than any other route now open to the traveling public.

The accommodations of the Steamers of the Company are unsurpassed, and Florida passengers have **CHOICE OF ROUTES FROM SAVANNAH**, either by daily trains on the *Atlantic and Gulf Railroad*, or by first-class steamers from *Savannah*.

No extra charge for Meals or State-rooms on the Steamers of this Line, or for transfer of passengers or baggage at Savannah, when passengers hold *Through Tickets*.

For further information, or for Freight or Passage, apply to

**WILLIAM L. JAMES, General Agent,**

*130 South Third Street, Philadelphia,*

OR TO

**HUNTER & GAMMELL, Agents,**

*84 Bay Street, Jones' Block, Savannah.*

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*Ad from A Guide to Florida, Land of Flowers by R. S. Gardiner, 1872*

General James' personal life took a turn for the better in 1874 when he married for the second time, to **Anna Elizabeth Thompson** (January 1839 – September 7, 1922). As mentioned earlier, we know very little about Anna.

On May 16, 1878 Anna bought 311 Bank Avenue in Riverton, just in time for the birth of their first child together, **Margaret Fendall James**, on July 28. The 1880 US Census shows the family living at this house. Another daughter followed on November 23, 1880, **Anna Whitall James**.

Also in 1880, his employer, the Philadelphia and Southern Mail Steamship Company began steps to dissolve and sell its assets, including 8 steamers. According to a notice in the April 12, 1882 *New York Times*, "The enterprise was a failure ... from the start."

William was still advertising runs for that company as of February 12, 1881 but on May 6 an advertisement appeared which showed him as the Philadelphia agent for the Ocean Steamship Company of Savannah, located at 25 South Third Street.



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General James continued to act as a steamship agent at least through 1896, according to notices in the “Marine News” column of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. A Philadelphia City Directory for 1900 lists him as an insurance agent, with an office at 238 Drexel Building, Philadelphia.

### Veterans' Activities

General James later served in at least one veterans' organization, the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, holding several positions including Chancellor and Acting Commandery-in-Chief of the Pennsylvania Commandery. According to its Wikipedia entry, the MOLS was an independent organization of Civil War officers formed in the immediate aftermath of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln “in response to rumors from Washington of a conspiracy to destroy the Federal government”.

In an event sponsored by the Order in 1884 he made a visit to the Gettysburg battlefield in the company of other retired officers. (No indication exists that he had personally served at Gettysburg during the conflict.) This is a detail from a larger group portrait on the old battlefield, showing General James in the center.



*Courtesy of US Army Heritage and Education Center, MOLUS Massachusetts Collection*

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### The “Red Gables”

At some point, William and Anna began referring to their home on the riverbank as the “Red Gables” and the house was painted red. They and, later, their daughter Margaret F. James Reese modified the structure somewhat and ran it as a small hotel or guest house. This was not unusual in Riverton as the town retained its reputation as a genteel destination to escape the summer heat of the city.

Exactly when they began the hotel is not clear, as no advertisements for it seem to have survived. In Riverton Historian Betty B. Hahle’s 2002 monograph “Some notes on 311 Bank Avenue” she indicates that it was for the boarding house that the porches on the second and third floors were added and that it was Anna James who operated the boarding house. Hahle quotes from an interview she made with later owner Mrs. Walter E. Michel that it was painted a “barn red” that “gave it a particularly bright red glow ... especially when the sun [was] setting over the river.”

In addition to the porches, the James also improved the property in other ways. The accompanying clip is from the monthly newspaper *The Riverton Journal* from August 16, 1882. It details the considerable investment to provide an improved water supply for the house. In a time before municipal water systems, every home had a well. While smaller ones of this era typically had a hand-operated pump at the well, the larger ones had a variety of ways to fill a cistern, either in an attic, a tank on a tower in the backyard, or on the upper floor of an outbuilding.

This article indicates that prior to this time there had been a small steam engine-powered pump which was inadequate to the task. It had previously been housed in a small shed which was then converted to a quaint children’s playhouse, which exists to this day in the backyard. Now a third floor was added to the stable to contain a 3,700 gallon iron tank under a mansard roof. A new steam engine was installed on the first floor to drive a pump to fill the tank. The remains of the stable exist today, too, as the undistinguished garage directly on the corner of Penn Street and Carriage House Lane. It has lost its upper floors and any detail it may have had.

him.

—Mr. Wm. L. James has about completed some extensive improvements in the rear of his property on First street. A mansard roof has been placed on the old stable building, the building itself having been entirely remodelled inside. An iron tank with 3700 gallons capacity occupies most of the available space in the third story, and is supported by heavy yellow pine timbers, which run through the entire building, and find lodgment in well-constructed piers of masonry, several feet beneath the surface of the ground. It is supplied with water by a small steam engine located on the ground floor, which draws its supply from a well close by. The other portions of this floor are used for the storage of fuel. The second floor is used for storage purposes. The whole arrangement of the building is most complete, and it is without doubt the best water works in town.

The small house which formerly contained the engine has been converted into a beautiful play house, and its comforts are daily enjoyed by the children of the neighborhood.

The Riverton Journal, August 16, 1882

It is a reasonable assumption that these improvements to the water supply were needed to operate the house as a hotel. A tank of 3,700 gallons is far more than a single family might expect to need for many days, but would be very useful when running a boarding house. Note the early reference to Bank Avenue as "First Street".

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Eight years later, in 1890, Riverton resident and professional lithographer Otto Koehler drew a birds eye view of the town and sold prints of it. Reproductions are found in many Riverton homes



Riverton NJ – 1890 [detail], *Otto Koehler, Lithographer*

today. Comparisons with photos of other properties indicate that Koehler's work was quite accurate, so it is reasonable to assume that the appearance of 311 Bank isn't far from the truth. The house shows the taller roof that it still has today, higher than indicated on the tiny vignette of the house in the c. 1851 "Plan of the New Town" map but it does not yet have the second and third floor porches.



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Noteworthy is the stable in the rear, which shows the mansard roof which the 1882 newspaper article mentions as concealing the iron water tank.

A municipal water company began in 1888, called the Riverton and Palmyra Water Company, and slowly began laying water mains in the two towns. Presumably 311 Bank had city water within a few years because General James advertised for sale “Steam pump and iron tank – 4,000 gallons” in the May 24, 1896 edition of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*.

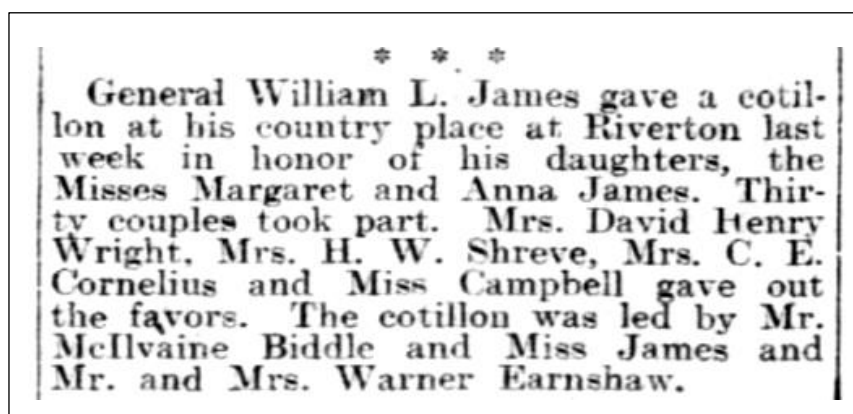
### The later life of General James

The last time that General James’ name appears in a Philadelphia directory is in Gopsill’s City Directory for 1900, in which he is listed as an insurance agent, with an office in the Drexel Building and home in Riverton.

We know that he served the new Borough of Riverton by being a Borough Councilman because of a mention of a meeting on July 29, 1901 in the New Jersey *Report of the State Sewerage Commission to the Legislature for 1902*, which describes him as “chairman of the sewer committee of the council”. As an interesting Riverton sidelight, this appears to mark the beginning of the construction of the first public sewers in Riverton. The report states “... the commission decided that the plans submitted for a sewer system for the borough of Riverton did not require its approval, as the sewage would be discharged into waters which were not within the jurisdiction of the commission.”

According to his obituary in *The Churchman* for July 4, 1903 he had served Christ Church Riverton as its secretary of the vestry and “a prominent citizen of Burlington County”.

The last newspaper mention of General James during his lifetime that has turned up is this society column item in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* for April 20, 1902.



There is no evidence that he lived anywhere other than Riverton, so its characterization as “his country place” is artistic license on the part of the society reporter. The daughters were 23 and 21 at the time; one married 9 years later and the other not until 24 more years had passed.

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James may have already been in ill health at that time, as his obituary mentions that his final illness lasted over a year.

Poignantly, the Civil War General died on the Fourth of July, 1903, “at his home on the River Bank before daybreak,” according to the obituary in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* the next day. He was buried in the Oaklands Cemetery in West Chester, Pennsylvania, near his parents and his first wife and their two children who predeceased them.

### General James' surviving family

William Levis James' family continued to live at 311 Bank for decades. He was survived by his daughter from his first marriage who was mentioned earlier, Ada Sibilla James (1862-1937), his second wife, Anna Elizabeth Thompson James (1839-1922), and his two daughters from the second marriage, Margaret Fendall James (1878-1962) and Anna Whitall James (1880-1959).

The family tried to sell the Red Gables four years after his death, listing it for sale in the January 27, 1907 edition of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. The property was not sold, however, possibly because there was a recession and then a stock market crash later in the year. The family continued to own the property for another 30 years.

**Ada Sibilla James** never married and seems to have spent much of her life in her father's household at 311 Bank Avenue. One exception was a period beginning when the Philadelphia *Inquirer* for July 24, 1898 mentioned that she was visiting Riverton but living in Columbus, Ohio.

Ada appears in the 1900 US Census (when she was 38) as a boarder in the household of John W. Estill and his family, in Pinal County, Arizona Territory. There can be no doubt that the entry is for the same woman, but there is no obvious reason why she was living in ranching country that year. The Census lists both Ada's mother and Estill's mother as having been born in Ohio, so there may be a family or family friends connection. Ada is not shown as having an occupation in the 1900 or any other Census return. She does not appear in the 1910 Census but is back in Riverton in 1920, yet absent in 1930.

Ada never married, died in 1937 at age 75, and was buried with her father and other family members in West Chester. She was a member of Christ Church, Riverton, but their record of burials lists her residence as New Lisbon, NJ.

General James' second wife, **Anna Elizabeth Thompson James**, survived him by 19 years. She died in Riverton September 7, 1922, and was buried in Middletown Cemetery, Delaware County, Pennsylvania. About a year and a half before her death, Anna sold 311 Bank Avenue to her two daughters, Margaret Fendall James and Anna Whitall James for one dollar. Her step-daughter Ada was not mentioned in the new deed.

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The General and Anna's two daughters were "extremely attractive and well known in social circles in Riverton," according to a small item about fashions at dances at Cape May hotels in the August 24, 1902 issue of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*.

Their first daughter, **Margaret Fendall James** (1878-1962) seems to have always lived at home. She was 24 when her father died and it wasn't until she was 32 that she married **John Houghton Reese** (1877-1919) in "a pretty wedding" at Red Gables in 1911, and the couple began their married life there.

Reese was one year Margaret's senior, and had grown up in Riverton, first at 201 Fulton Street but by the 1910 US Census he was living with his elderly parents at 611 4<sup>th</sup> Street. It listed his occupation as a traveling salesman in the oil industry. Reese was quite a sailor, serving as the commodore of the Riverton Yacht Club in 1911 and 1912. He sailed in the "Mosquito" fleet and when he purchased a Larchmont Interclub boat (LI) in 1919 the Philadelphia *Inquirer* called him "one of the best sailors ever developed at Riverton." Tragically, later that season he died suddenly of appendicitis, at the age of 42 after 8 years of marriage.

His death left Margaret a widow at age 42, caring for her elderly mother (at age 80), a three-year-old daughter (also named Margaret), and with a hotel/boarding house to run. Both her half-sister Ada and her sister Anna lived at home, so she would have had assistance.

Things quickly became difficult. Her mother Anna died just three years later in 1922 and finances began to be a problem. Between 1924 and 1929 Margaret and her sister Anna ran up \$11,100 in debt secured by no fewer than five separate mortgages on 311 Bank Avenue, according to the recitation of the deed when they restructured its ownership in 1929.

Two of these mortgages were held by Curtis and Florence Stavely, who later came into possession of the house in 1937 (see below). Another mortgage was held by Levis H. Wallace, the father of Mary Wallace Michel, who was also a subsequent owner (in 1943).

It is not clear how long the Red Gables was operated as a hotel. The last evidence of that is a listing in *Manning's Burlington Directory* for 1929, which lists only Margaret as "Proprietor" even though her sisters also lived there and Anna was named on its deed.

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1929—RIVERTON DIRECTORY—1929

Red Gables, Margaret F. Reese prop, hotel, 311 Bank av

The story of Red Gables continues below with sister Anna Whitall James.

Margaret does not appear in the 1930 US Census at any location. By 1935 and 1940 (per the 1940 US Census) she was living with her daughter's family in Southwest Philadelphia at 2612 Holbrook Street. The Census lists her occupation as a supervisor-clerk in a department store.

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She died in 1962 and was buried in the same Oaklands Cemetery as her husband and many of his family.

General and Anna James' second daughter, **Anna Whitall James** (1880-1959), lived at home in the Red Gables until her marriage in middle age. Census entries indicate her occupation as a music teacher and church organist, serving as organist at Christ Church, Riverton, for many years.

Anna James married **Maurice Guy Belknap** (1871-1940) on June 6, 1928, just as debt on the Red Gables had become very substantial. No record of the location of their wedding has been found but the date was mentioned in the deed described next. There was also an announcement of their engagement in the December 17, 1927 issue of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. Anna was 47 years old and Maurice was 56; this was evidently the first marriage for each.

Belknap was a Philadelphia attorney in general practice, earning a bachelor of laws degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1892. He seems to have always worked as an independent practitioner in downtown Philadelphia, but as the US entry into World War I became inevitable he joined the Navy as a lieutenant on March 26, 1917, one week before the US officially declared war. He held the rank of Lt. Commander upon his resignation in 1920.

Belknap was already familiar with Riverton, having been a member of Riverton Yacht Club, according to an article in the October 1919 issue of *Motor Boating* magazine. This may be how he and Anna had become acquainted.

The Reese sisters restructured the ownership of the heavily-mortgaged Red Gables in a one dollar transaction whose deed was dated June 14, 1929. In this deed, ownership was transferred to Maurice G. Belknap (Anna's new husband) as a trustee for the interests of Margaret and Anna.

Exactly how this worked out is somewhat opaque. A year later, the 1930 US Census lists Anna and Maurice living at the Red Gables (as renters, which could be technically true if they paid rent to Maurice in his role as trustee). No other members of the household are shown and no servants.

Farther down the 1930 Census page is another entry for 311 Bank Ave., renters Robert A. Marshall, a construction engineer, and his wife Gertrude. The fact that they appear as a separate household suggests that 311 Bank had by now been divided into distinct apartment units (as it is today) and not configured as a boarding house or hotel.

In 1937, Maurice, Anna, and Margaret sold 311 Bank, but evidently Maurice and Anna continued to live there as renters.

Maurice Belknap died February 5, 1940 of pneumonia at the age of 68 years. He was buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery.



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His widow, Anna Whitall James Belknap, continued to live at 311 Bank but we don't know for how long. The US Census for 1940 (the most recent available) shows her as a renter living alone in one of the units. The building had three households in that Census, as it does today. One of those households included Donald Patterson, a salesman, and his wife Abbie. The third was headed by William M. Shoemaker, Jr., a partner in a caulking factory, with his wife Emily and grown son Victor, a laborer.

As of 1940, then, members of the James family had lived continuously in the house since 1878, a span of 62 years.

Anna Whitall James Belknap died February 5, 1959 in West Chester, Pennsylvania at the age of 78 years.

### ***Curtis E. Stavely and Florence E. Stavely***

This deed, dated June 10, 1937, conveys the property from Maurice G. Belknap, Trustee, and others, to Curtis E. Stavely and his wife Florence E. Stavely. This is another transaction for the nominal sum of one dollar, so the exact nature of the transaction is unknown.

Stavely was a local contractor who lived and operated his business from 16 W. Charles Street, Palmyra. Not newcomers to the property, the Stavelys had earlier held two of the mortgages on it, dated 1924 and 1927, so it is possible that the acquisition of the property was in some form a resolution of their lien against it.

There is no indication that the Stavelys actually lived here.

During the period that the Staveleys were the landlords, the third floor apartment was occupied for a brief period, probably only a year or two, by another couple with many Riverton connections in more modern times. According to Skip Lippincott (Howard Franklin Lippincott, Jr.), in a conversation with Roger Prichard in September 2019, Skip's parents rented that apartment right after their wedding in October 1942. **Howard Franklin Lippincott, Sr.** (1919-2005) and **Doris Melcer** (1920-1990). An announcement in the *Courier-Post* confirms the date as October 16, 1942, as well as the address. Skip's parents had "fondly" referred to the top-floor apartment as "bat heaven." Howard Lippincott, Sr. went on to found the Lippincott Boat Works in 1946, which built champion Lightnings, Comets, and Stars for many years in a yard on the Pompeston Creek.

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## ***Mary Moore Wallace Michel (1897-1994)***

In a deed dated August 21, 1943, the Stavelys sold the property to Mary W. Michel, again for the sum of one dollar.

Just as Curtis Stavely had held a mortgage on 311 Bank during the 1920s when the James family encumbered it with more and more debt, so Mary Michel's father had also been a lender to the James family. He had given the first of the five mortgages on 311 Bank, in 1924, for \$5,000.

Mary's father was **Levis H. Wallace** (1863-1938), a resident of the Palmyra area all his life who was listed in the 1910 US Census as operating a hotel at 125 Broad Street, Palmyra. That \$5,000 mortgage was still in effect at the time of this conveyance in 1943, according to the deed. Whether any of it had been paid off is not mentioned, nor are the terms of cash or other considerations listed. (Mortgage records in Mt. Holly would provide detail with some research.) It is likely that Mary inherited the mortgage as an asset from her father when he died in 1938, leading to her acquisition of the title to 311 Bank in 1943. Despite his unusual first name, no evidence has surfaced to suggest that this Levis Wallace was related to the earlier resident, General William Levis James.

In a parallel to the earlier purchase of 311 Bank by a married woman acting as an individual when Anna James (wife of General William James) acquired it, here this deed also lists the property as being conveyed to Mary Michel alone, though she was married.

Mary's husband was **Walter Eugene Michel** (1898-1964), a horticulturist who had graduated from Cornell in 1920 and had a long career with Dreer's Nurseries in Riverton. His obituary indicates that he had been the president of both the New York City Florist Club and New Jersey Florist Club. Walter's parents, Eugene and Julia, also lived in Riverton and the 1940 US Census shows Eugene's occupation as "Manager – Plant Nursery".

According to Riverton Historian Betty Hahle, the Michels lived at 311 Bank for many years. Mary's obituary indicates that she had graduated from the predecessor to West Chester University in 1918 and had been an elementary school teacher for a number of years (as had her mother before her, according to Census entries). Her husband Walter died in 1964.

Mary appears to have lived in the building and acted as a very active landlord right up to selling it at age 95. In an email conversation on November 25, 2018, the next owner, Gary Ford, recalled:

I met her on the front porch several years prior to buying. Stopped in several times to see if she needed a hand with anything. Always said everything was OK. One time the front door was open and the first floor apartment was vacant. I called and she yelled "come to the bathroom". I went cautiously and found her straddling the bathtub, huge pipe wrench in hand, changing the tub faucet washers. Another time I found her, paint brush in hand,

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touching up some woodwork on the 3rd floor apartment. Asked me in her usual gruff way if I was being nosey or just visiting.

Mary sold the house to the Fords in 1992, a little over a year before her death on March 31, 1994 at the age of 96.

### ***Gary R. Ford and Virginia A. Ford***

Mary Michel's daughter Doris Ridgway acted as her power of attorney on December 11, 1992 to sell 311 Bank to Gary and Virginia Ford, of 404 Lippincott Avenue. The deed also indicates that Mary Michel was still living at 311 Bank up to that time.

In the November 25, 2018 conversation, Gary recalled:

[If you're] familiar with renovations of old Victorians, you'll understand. I bought an old 3 unit place, each apartment with one 1920-30s bathroom and one old kitchen of the same age and condition. Knob and tube wiring, galvanized and lead piping, No storm windows, 50%+ of old putty missing from windows (thank heavens for old diamond glazing points), lots of repairs to 1850s plaster and lathe walls and ceiling. Other than those things, most other repairs were not too bad and it was done in about a year.

The Fords lived in the ground floor unit while renting out the other two floors for almost 25 years. During this time they made a considerable number of upgrades to the systems of the property and added open baluster porch railings on all levels to replace the solid low walls that had been there.

Gary and Virginia entertained on the expansive porch many neighbors who happened by, especially to enjoy sunsets. He was known for his skills in mixing a memorable Manhattan.

### ***Michael Kearney and Mary Kate Kearney***

In a deed dated May 16, 2017, the Fords sold 311 Bank to 309 Bank Ave., LLC, a corporation owned by Michael and Mary Kate Kearney of 700 Manor Road in Cinnaminson.

Over the course of 2017 and 2018, Michael further modernized the systems and interior layout and finishes of the building.

On the exterior, significant changes to the façade were also made at this time, removing original windows to add modern doors to improve access to the porches on the first and second floors. The original double front door was also replaced with a single door and sidelight window at this time to improve the energy efficiency of the building. The original brick chimney on the downriver side of the roof, in poor condition and out of plumb, was also removed at this time. (The Fords had removed two other chimneys earlier.)

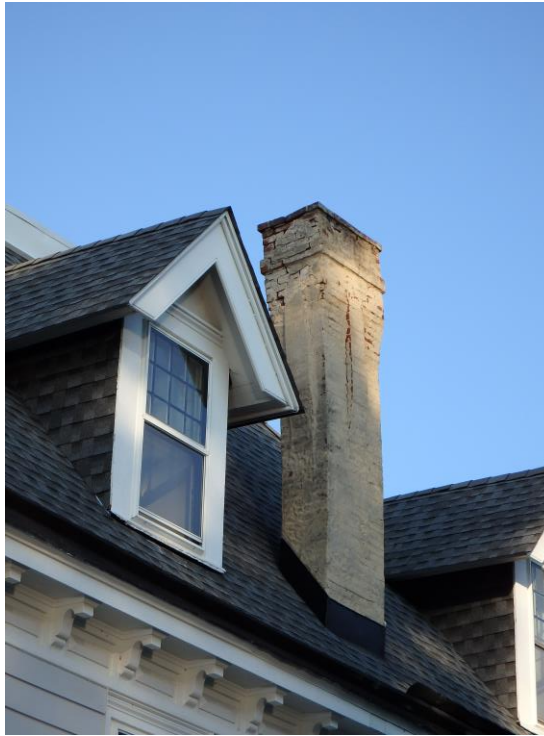


Original front door prior to removal and storage in 2018  
*Photo by Roger Prichard*



Center front windows on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor prior to removal and storage in 2018     *Photo by Roger Prichard*





Downriver chimney prior to demolition in 2018

*Photo by Roaer Prichard*

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## Sources

Other than deeds, all sources not otherwise cited may be found in the public family tree on Ancestry.com named "Early Families of Riverton NJ".

<https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/108021762/family?cfpid=320070645371>

Deeds to the property are as follows, in the Deed Books of the Clerk of Burlington County.

- 1851-02-08 Deed Book C5 page 404 Joseph Lippincott and Wife to Daniel L. Miller, Jr.
- 1852-01-26 Deed Book G5 page 140 Daniel L. Miller, Jr and wife to William D. Parrish
- 1878-01-16 Deed Book U9 page 473 Executors of William D. Parrish to Anna E. James
- 1921-02-11 Deed Book 581 page 207 Anna E. James to Margaret F. J. Reese et al
- 1929-06-14 Deed Book 734 page 211 Margaret F. J. Reese et al to Maurice G. Belknap, Trustee

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- 1937-06-10 Deed Book 873 page 209 Maurice G. Belknap, Tr. et als. to Curtis E. Stavely, et ux.
  - 1943-08-21 Deed Book 960D page 10 Curtis E. Stavely et ux to Mary W. Michel
  - 1992-12-11 Deed Book 4475 page 263 Mary W. Michel to Gary R. Ford and Virginia Ford HW
  - 2017-05-16 Deed Book OR13276 page 9327 Gary R. Ford et al to 309 Bank Ave., LLC