

The Wharton-Fitler House

A history of 407 Bank Avenue, Riverton, New Jersey

Prepared by Roger T. Prichard for the Historical Society of Riverton, rev. November 30, 2019

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407 Bank Avenue in 2019 photo by Roger Prichard

This house is one of the ten riverbank villas which the founders of Riverton commissioned from architect Samuel Sloan, built during the spring and summer of 1851, the first year of Riverton's existence. It looks quite different today than when built, due to an expansion in the 1880s.

Two early owners, Rodman Wharton and Edwin Fitler, Jr., were from families of great influence in many parts of American life. Each had a relative who was a mayor of the City of Philadelphia.

The first owner of this villa was Philadelphian **Rodman Wharton**, the youngest of those town founders at age 31 and, tragically, the first to die. Rodman Wharton was the scion of several notable Philadelphia Quaker families with histories in America dating to the 1600s.

Tragically, Rodman Wharton's life here was brief. He died in this house at the age of 34 on July 20, 1854, a victim of the cholera epidemic which swept Philadelphia that summer.

After his death, the house changed hands several times until it was purchased in 1882 by **Edwin, Jr. and Nannie Fitler**. Edwin was the son of Philadelphia's popular mayor of the same name who managed the family's successful rope and cordage works in Bridesburg. The Fitlers immediately enlarged and modernized the house, transforming its simpler 1851 Quaker appearance to a fashionable style today known as Queen Anne.

The Fitlers spent summers here, and at least three of their children, when grown, purchased year-round homes in Riverton. After Edwin and Nannie's deaths in 1901 and 1906, the property passed through many hands throughout the 20th Century and was divided into a number of apartments.

Background: the development of Riverton

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 Rodman Wharton. We will find that Miller's name appears again and again in the saga of this house.

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 Rodman Wharton (though misspelling his name).

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 Rodman Wharton'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.

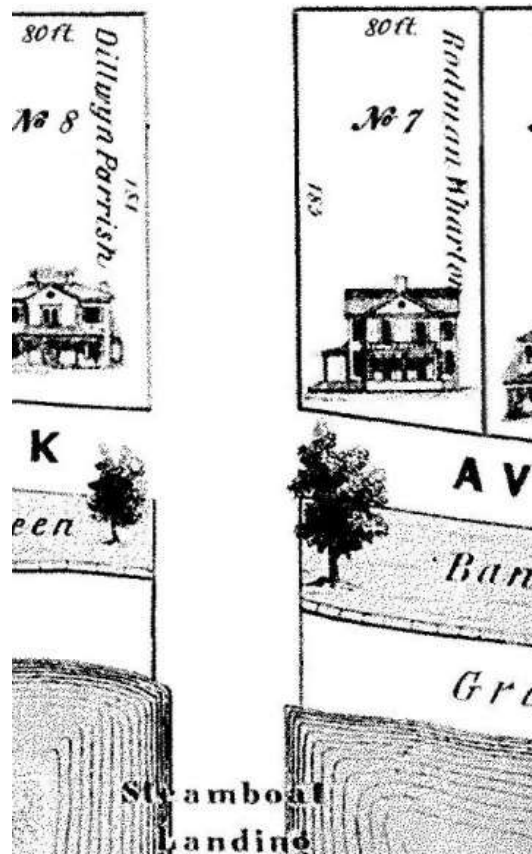
In the case of 407 Bank, Miller did not execute a formal deed transferring the lot to Rodman Wharton until early the next year, on January 26, 1852, prior to the incorporation of the Riverton Improvement Company.

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 Rodman Wharton's name next to the vignette of his house and they both list him as one of the ten investors.

The Riverton families

The founding of Riverton was very much a family affair. While Rodman Wharton himself was apparently not related to any of the other founders, his wife, the former **Susanna Dillwyn Parrish**, had two brothers among the other nine founding families. The two brothers had confusingly-similar names: Dillwyn Parrish and William Dillwyn Parrish. Dillwyn Parrish built the house right across Main Street on the upriver corner of Main and Bank (today's 501 Bank) and William's house is a short block downriver, on the downriver corner of Penn Street (today's 311 Bank).



Detail from "Plan for the New Town of Riverton", ca. 1851, scan in HSR collection

Owners Rodman Wharton and Susanna Dillwyn Parrish Wharton

Rodman and Susanna Wharton were the first owners of this house, starting in 1851. Each was descended from Quaker families with long and notable histories. Rodman's family included a member who had arrived with William Penn on the ship *Welcome*, the first governor of Pennsylvania, a member of the continental Congress, the longest-serving Mayor of Philadelphia, and a commandant of the United States Marine Corps. His younger brother Joseph later became renowned as the founder of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Rodman Wharton (1820-1854)



From Anna Wharton Smith, *Genealogy of the Fisher Family*

Actual photographer is unknown. Photo is credited as Gutekunst, but they began in business about 1856. Also FHL has a print of same and the back reads "F. Gutekunst, 704-706 Arch Street", which indicates that Gutekunst made the prints 1865-1866, more than a decade after Rodman's death.

Rodman was born on January 26, 1820, one of ten children of **William Wharton** (1790-1856) and **Deborah Fisher** (1795-1888).



From FindAGrave.com



From Wikipedia

They were a Quaker family of very substantial wealth, which permitted them to devote considerable time to Friends' activities and social concerns, including abolition of slavery and improving the condition of Indians and prisons. See the later section about the early history of the Wharton and Fisher families for more background.

Young Rodman's family life is well-described in several publications, largely due to the financial success (and long life) of Rodman's younger brother **Joseph Wharton** (1826-1909). In addition to a broad variety of business interests and innovations in mining, manufacturing and science, brother Joseph is best remembered as the founder of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. See the citations in the "Sources" section. The richest account is Willard Ross Yates, *Joseph Wharton – Quaker Industrial Pioneer*.

Rodman's time as a child and youth was divided between the family's city house and their country summer retreat near the Schuylkill River.

The Wharton family's city home was at 130 Spruce Street in Philadelphia's Society Hill neighborhood (today number 336). Built in 1796 by Samuel Pancoast, a carpenter from Mansfield, Burlington County, it was purchased in 1817 by our Rodman's grandfather Samuel Rowland Fisher as a wedding gift for Rodman's parents, William and Deborah.

Rodman's mother Deborah lived in the house for 71 years, until her death in 1888.



336 Spruce St., Philadelphia

Photo by Roger Prichard 2019

The Wharton family country home of Rodman's youth was "Bellevue". According to its Wikipedia entry it was a large stone house on 106 rolling acres above the Schuylkill River purchased by William Wharton's father Charles in 1802. Located at about where today's Allegheny Avenue and North 29th Street intersect, it was about two miles from Rodman's mother's family country house "The Cliffs", which still exists as a ruin in Fairmount Park.

According to author Yates, "they passed most of their summers in the big stone house set among willows and giant oaks."



Bellevue Mansion, Germantown, Philadelphia

Wikipedia

We don't know much about Rodman's early years or education. In describing brother Joseph's education, author Yates says Joseph "was provided with a somewhat greater measure of formal schooling than that offered to the other children. ... None of the Wharton clan attended any institution of higher education, nor was there ever any question of them doing so."

Despite the evident lack of formal schooling, the family instilled in Rodman a great respect for the arts and sciences, and for the acquisition of knowledge through personal initiative.

We do know that money was no object for the family. Rodman's parents "had no gainful occupation" and "lived off fortunes inherited from relatives who had been rich Philadelphia

merchants,” according to Yates. Indeed, the 1850 Census estimates their wealth in real estate alone at a stunning \$100,000. Whereas McElroy’s Directory from those years might list other men as “attorney” or “merchant”, William Wharton was simply identified as “Gentleman”.

Their wealth allowed both parents to set an example of a duty to others. Young Rodman grew up witnessing his father William and his mother Deborah grow to be widely-respected ministers in the Society of Friends. They and the rest of the family (and the other founders of Riverton) followed the Hicksite faction in the split of the Friends in the 1820s. According to his obituary, William at age 17 “renounced the gaities of the world” and led “a long life of simplicity and self-denial.”

Both parents engaged in many Friends’ committees, including aiding the Indians and managing Quaker schools. They organized committees to urge the City of Philadelphia to provide free public education for black children. Ultimately successful, William “had that school under his special care for a number of years,” as Deborah later recounted. In public education, William also was one of the first directors of the public schools in Philadelphia, serving for twenty years.

Like his parents, Rodman became active in the affairs of the Society of Friends and social causes and remained involved throughout his short life.

For parents to pursue these many selfless activities outside of their household while raising ten children was only possible with the help of servants. While a few were African-American, the rest were Irish, mostly immigrants. All were supervised by a “sturdy, capable and motherly woman” named Margaret McGinley who was in service to the Whartons for most of her adult life. The 1850 Census shows four servants living in the Spruce Street house, including McGinley.

Author Yates quotes Rodman’s sister Esther describing their parents’ approach to raising children as “[w]ise, kind, & tenderly affectionate, were the mother & father, indulgent as seemed to them proper, and most gently reproofing, when reproof was necessary. Few harsh words were heard.” Older children, such as Hannah and Rodman, helped to raise the younger ones.

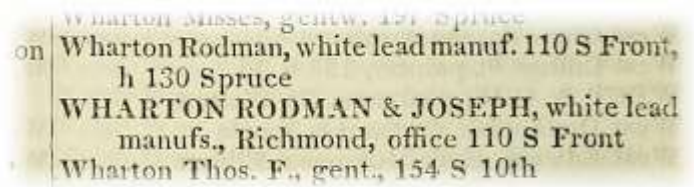
The siblings were all close, especially the brothers. Belying a stereotype of Quaker life, they attended dances with their girlfriends, heard Fanny Kemble read Shakespeare, attended concerts by artists such as Jenny Lind and lectures by Thackeray, Emerson and others.

Young Rodman himself was described as caring little for the lighter sorts of social entertainment, and was more attentive to young women like himself who worked on projects sponsored by the Friends.

Yates says both Rodman and his younger brother Joseph were not impulsive, rather acted rationally and deliberately, and both brothers “quickly reached a limit of tolerance for the ideas of others. Headstrong to an advanced degree, each felt compelled to be master.”

Rodman Wharton in business

When he “came of age” in 1841, Rodman purchased a partnership in a business which manufactured white lead (lead carbonate), a substance used in the manufacture of paint and, despite its poisonous nature, of cosmetics. He first appears in the McElroy’s Philadelphia City Directory of 1842 as a “merchant” at 101 South Front Street (old number) on the southeast corner of Front and Walnut Streets one block from the docks. By 1844 it has changed to “white lead manuf.”



Wharton Rodman, white lead manuf. 110 S Front,
h 130 Spruce
WHARTON RODMAN & JOSEPH, white lead
manufs., Richmond, office 110 S Front
Wharton Thos. F., gent., 154 S 10th

1848 listing in McElroy’s Directory

Archive.org

By 1848 the listing has changed. Rodman is still living at home, younger brother Joseph has joined him in his firm, their works is in Port Richmond and their office is now at 110 South Front (old number), below Walnut.



110 S. Front Street in May, 1859, five years after Rodman’s death (by then #226). Built by Rodman’s great-grandfather Joshua Fisher.

Coll. Library Co. of Philadelphia

This is an interesting move, and kept things all in the family in a big way. Number 110 had been a very stylish Georgian mansion, built in 1753 by Rodman’s great-grandfather **Joshua Fisher** (1707-1783), a very successful importer and owner of the first packet ship company (i.e. ships that sailed on a schedule) between Philadelphia and London.

This was the Fisher family house for four generations and was the house where Rodman’s mother, Deborah, grew up and lived until she married William Wharton.

Though even fancy houses had customarily been used also for the transaction of business, by the time of Rodman and Joseph’s move into 110 this area had become mostly unattractive, jammed with merchants, factories, and all the chaos that came with being one city

block from the wharves. In other words, it was a perfect place for an office for a business which sold white lead. Rodman's unmarried uncle Thomas Fisher, however, continued to live in this house until his own death in 1856.

Rodman evidently didn't manufacture the white lead in this location and he probably didn't learn the trade on his own. Likely from the start, he had partnered with Samuel F. Fisher and George T. Lewis, both of whom were already in this business. It's not clear if this Samuel F. Fisher was related to Rodman's mother's family.

In 1846 the three decided to build a new factory on Gunner's Run in Port Richmond, north of the city, using capital provided by Rodman (from his father, presumably). They named the factory the Aramingo Works. By previous plan, Rodman bought out the two partners in 1847 when brother Joseph came of age and joined him. George T. Lewis came back to the partners with an offer, quickly accepted, to expand the factory to process cottonseed oil, an effort which was unsuccessful.




Ad in the *Baltimore Sun* for May 12, 1848

By 1849 Rodman had sold his interest in the cottonseed oil process to brother Joseph. Rodman had, in the meantime, invented an improved process to manufacture barrels and kegs and wanted to pursue it. Starting with the 1850 Directory, Rodman's business was only listed as "merchant" but he continued to advertise in the *Public Ledger* that he sold white lead and kegs at least until 1853.

Sorting out father William Wharton's investments

The white lead and barrel businesses were not the only things to occupy Rodman's time. As author Yates details, Rodman's father William paid all of his attention to the Society of Friends. This, added to his declining health, caused the family's complex real estate holdings to suffer. These comprised a large number of parcels inside and outside the City of Philadelphia, including some in the hinterlands of Pennsylvania and New York State, managed by agents rarely, if ever, seen in person.

In the mid-1840s, Rodman took over the management of these many assets, with his father's blessing. It required great effort to clear up titles, boundaries, and leases to the point of overwork. When, in the spring of 1847, Rodman's horse threw him, breaking his leg, Rodman's confinement to bed was brother Joseph's first opportunity to learn to be Rodman's eyes and ears for the far-flung collection of properties, all at the tender age of 21.



TO EMIGRANTS AND OTHERS—LANDS FOR SALE.—4300 acres of Land, situate in Hamilton county, and State of New York.—being about thirty miles north of Little Falls, on the Mohawk river, and the New York state Canal. The land is rolling and well timbered; the soil good and the climate salubrious.

A village has been started in the immediate neighborhood, and considerable clearances made

Also—2500 acres of Land, about three miles from Curwinstown, in Clearfield county, Pa., bounding on cleared land in fine cultivation.

Title to the above indisputable. They will be sold very low for cash, or part cash and part credit. Further particulars given on application to

R. WHARTON,
No. 110 South Front st.

my 30-1 mcd*

Ad in the *Public Ledger* for June 13, 1849

Working to better society

Following the example of his parents, Rodman somehow found time to devote to organizing and promoting a number of causes for the less fortunate, both within and independent of the Society of Friends.

For some years starting at least as early as 1842, when Rodman was 22 years old, his name was listed in various public announcements as a member of the “Committee of Twenty-Five on the Abolition of the Death Punishment.” A fellow member was Dr. Isaac Parrish, brother of Rodman’s future wife Susanna (their marriage was still eight years in the future).

In 1848, Rodman was listed as a “Manager” (that is, a board member) of the Philadelphia Society for the Employment and Instruction of the Poor in its published announcement of the opening of its New House of Industry in Catherine Street.

In 1852 he was listed as a Committee member of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, founded in 1797. Serving with him was his brother-in-law (and Bank Avenue neighbor) Dillwyn Parrish.

His wife Susanna Dillwyn Parrish Wharton wrote the following many years later. It appeared in the 1896 book by her niece Anna Wharton Smith, *Genealogy of the Fisher Family*:

Rodman Wharton, though young, had made himself felt, through his interest in the unfortunate. Among these were the slaves of our Southern States, for whose emancipation he was a warm advocate.

Also, in another field, a meeting held at his house in 1851 resulted in founding “The Catherine Street House of Industry,” for the temporary shelter of the homeless poor, which still continues its usefulness.

In connection with some of our best citizens, he took an active interest in furthering the plans of Dorothea Dix, for the building of a hospital for the insane poor of Pennsylvania. Through the influence of this committee her memorial, reciting as an eye-witness the sufferings of this helpless class in the jails, penitentiaries, and almshouses of this Commonwealth, reached the Legislature, and resulted in the passage of a bill, April 14, 1845, for the establishment of “The State Lunatic Hospital,” near Harrisburg, with the provision that the “indigent insane” should always have precedence of “pay patients.” In a letter to Rodman Wharton, Miss Dix says, “I feel a real gratitude for the cordial, hearty manner in which you have taken up the cause I advocate.”

Though Rodman is described as an advocate against the institution of slavery, he does not appear to have taken a leadership role in any of the organizations created for this purpose, unlike most other Riverton founders. (After his death, however, his wife Susanna worked tirelessly in organizations pursuing the betterment of the African-American population.)

Courtship, marriage, the founding of Riverton, and tragedy

These varied subjects will be interleaved here in chronological order as they played out in the last years of Rodman's young life.

As mentioned earlier, Rodman was described as caring little for the lighter sorts of social entertainment, and was more attentive to those young women who shared his interest in charitable projects for the betterment of society.

First engagement

We know that Rodman had a disappointingly unsuccessful engagement with **Marianna Pelham** (1825-1872), the niece of abolitionist and women's rights proponent **Lucretia Mott** (1793-1880), according to the biography of Marianna's mother by Sherry H. Penney and James D. Livingstone, *A Very Dangerous Woman*, (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

In a plotline worthy of Jane Austen, the Whartons were good friends of the Mott family and in about 1841 Marianna (then age 15 or 16) accepted the proposal of Rodman Wharton even though she was secretly deeply in love with her first cousin **Thomas Coffin Mott** (1823-1899). Sometime later her conundrum began to unfold within her family. Her mother observed that it was unjust to give Rodman "a divided heart". Showing more kindness than grasp of logic, her mother dismissed worries about the marriages of first cousins by saying "I know a good many simpletons in the world whose parents are not cousins." And thus was ended Rodman's first engagement. Authors Penney and Livingstone report that Rodman "accepted the rejection graciously."

Epilogue: Marianna did, indeed, marry her cousin Thomas Mott in 1845, when she was 19. Adding to the tangle of the Riverton family tree, about 23 years later Marianna and Thomas's daughter **Isabella** married **Joseph Parrish** (1843-1893). Joseph was the son of Riverton founder Dillwyn Parrish and thus would have spent his youthful summers in the house on the Riverbank across Main Street from Rodman's house. So – the daughter of Rodman's first fiancée married the nephew of Rodman's second fiancée, and ultimate wife, Susanna Dillwyn Parrish.

Second engagement

Rodman did not marry on the rebound. As mentioned, Rodman was attracted to women who shared his interests in social causes. This described **Susanna Dillwyn Parrish** (1827-1915) accurately at that time of her life and even more so in the decades after Rodman's early death. They were likely acquainted as young people and then found themselves working together on beneficial projects. Yates describes young Susanna as "a dedicated social worker" as were, indeed, her parents and siblings.

It wasn't until June 4, 1850 that Rodman and Susanna married in a Meeting for Worship held in home of her father, **Dr. Joseph Parrish** (1779-1840), which was located on the north side of Arch

Street west of North Third Street in what is today known as Old City. See the later section on Susanna's life and family.

Susanna was 22 and Rodman was 30 years of age.

As quickly as things had happened in all of Rodman's life, changes now began to come even faster.

Move to Montgomery Square

The couple quickly took up residence in a somewhat different part of the city from both sets of parents. The next McElroy's Philadelphia Directory after their marriage lists Rodman's residence as 7 Montgomery Square (specifically 10th above Cherry, according to two Friends ledger entries for son William Redwood Wharton). Montgomery Square occupied the block from 10th to 11th Streets, Cherry to Sassafras (Race) Streets in what is today's Chinatown neighborhood, according to J. C. Sidney, *Map of the City of Philadelphia*, 1849 (philageohistory.org).

Susanna soon found herself pregnant with their first child.

Buying the farms

Simultaneously, the audacious idea of creating the new town of Riverton was in the works. Unless now-inaccessible records accumulated by the late historian Betty Hahle could shed light on how this unfolded, we have no record of when the idea was first proposed or how it was carried out until the founders formally purchased two riverfront farms in Burlington County.

We do know that Rodman Wharton was in the thick of planning for Riverton. As mentioned earlier, the first farm was purchased on February 8, 1851 from Joseph and Beulah Lippincott by founder **Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr.** (1820-1871) on behalf of the other founders. Then just six weeks later, on March 25, 1851, Rodman partnered with Miller to buy the adjoining farm on the upriver side from Isaiah and Elizabeth Toy. Both names, Rodman Wharton and Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr., appeared on the deed for this second transaction.

Why did Rodman partner with Miller to purchase the Toy farm but not for the Lippincott farm six weeks earlier? It's not clear. Also obscure is why, one year later, when the New Jersey Legislature approved an act to create a corporation for the founders, called the Riverton Improvement Company, the act only indicates its intent is to facilitate the conveyance of the Lippincott farm to the RIC, but no mention is made of the Rodman's and Miller's second, adjoining farm.

The town of Riverton was clearly intended to encompass both farms. The undated-but-early map "Plan of the New Town of Riverton" in the collection of the Porch Club, mentioned earlier, shows intended streets across both farms as far as the Pompeston Creek. This map definitely predates the act of the legislature. We know this because this earlier version of the map includes early

founder J. Miller McKim but by January of 1852 he had been replaced by Prof. Charles D. Cleveland (based on the deed transfer from Miller to Cleveland for 305 Bank) and Cleveland's name was on the Act of the Legislature in March, not McKim's.

Might the other founders have begun to worry about becoming overextended beyond the first farm and so backed out of investing in the second one after the map was drawn? Both Rodman and Miller were young, just 31 years old, the youngest of the founders (both born in 1820, Rodman in January and Miller in December). Might the brashness of these youngsters have made the others uneasy?

The late Riverton historian Betty Hahle wrote that it didn't take a long time before a number of lawsuits arose around Miller. Possibly related, within the decade, the entire parcel which was the former Toy farm went up for Sheriff's Sale.

The week when Rodman Wharton and Miller bought the Isaiah Toy farm must have been a dizzying one.

Birth of first child

On March 23rd, Rodman's wife Susanna delivered their first child. They named the baby William Redwood Wharton, after Rodman's father William and Rodman's grandmother Hannah Redwood.

Closing on the second farm

Two days later on March 25, 1851 Rodman and Miller went to settlement on the Isaiah Toy farm.

Death of baby William

Joy turned to sorrow in another five days with the death of their baby on March 30, 1851.

Riverton hits the news

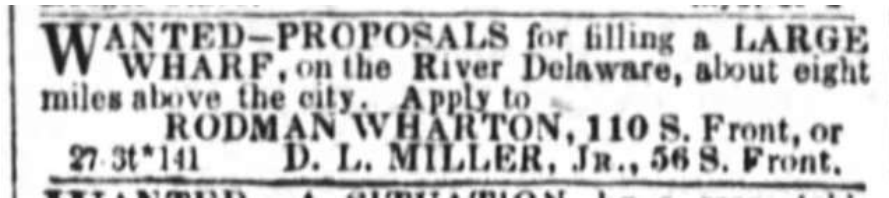
In just another week, on April 9, 1851, Riverton became known to the world, presumably creating much talk and drawing attention. The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* published a glowing item about the founding of Riverton, the first mention of the town in the press.

Villas on the Delaware.—A number of our most respectable citizens have selected a site on the Delaware River, nearly opposite Tacony, for the erection of summer residences for their families, which, being at a convenient distance from the city, will probably induce others to follow the example. The spot has been named Riverton, and extensive improvements are now going forward, which will soon render it a favorite place of resort. Messrs. J. M. McKim, Wm. D. Parrish, Rodman Walton, Daniel K. Miller, Wm. C. Biddle, Edward C. Biddle, and Caleb Clothier, have had plans prepared by Samuel Sloan, Architect, for the erection of tasty villas, and the work is now under contract and in progress. A wall is to be built along the river front, and the bank graded like the celebrated Riverside at Burlington. A wharf is also to be built for a steamboat landing, and a station-house on the Camden and Amboy Railroad, which passes through the property. The company is composed of ten persons, all of whom will build villas during the present season. When these buildings are completed, the location will be one of the most beautiful along the river, and be the object of admiration to the passers on the river.

Philadelphia *Public Ledger* for April 9, 1851

Getting the wharf built

In the story above, on April 9, they said “[a] wharf is also to be built ...” but it wasn’t yet built by May 27 when Rodman and Daniel Miller placed this ad in the *Public Ledger*:



Philadelphia *Public Ledger* for May 27, 1851

Does this mean that the timber cribbing for the steamboat landing was already in place and all that was needed was to fill it with dirt – or were they actually advertising for someone to build the entire wharf? Either way, Rodman was taking the lead on it.

Governor visits on September 2, 1851

It is impossible to imagine the frenzy of activity along the riverbank that summer. The farms were purchased in February and March, the town announced in the press in early April, contractors were being sought for the wharf in late May – yet somehow when the Governor's steamboat landed at the new wharf on September 2nd, the town was beautiful, with all ten large villas erected, "the most of which are already occupied by their owners."

Visit of Gov. Fort to Riverton.—The village of Riverton, on the Delaware river, opposite Tacony, was on Tuesday visited by Governor Fort and his family, who were landed at the new wharf from the steamboat New Philadelphia. The Camden firemen, who were on board on an excursion, enlivened the scene by the music of their band, and the passengers gave three hearty cheers for the Governor of New Jersey. He spent the night at Riverton, and left yesterday morning in the steamboat Washington, from which he was transferred in the river to the New Philadelphia, and returned home by way of Bordentown. This new place has been most beautifully improved within the last five months. The wharf, fifty feet front, has been completed, the river side walled and sodded to match that of Burlington, and ten beautiful villas erected, the most of which are already occupied by their owners. Four or five miles above this village another town has been located, at which improvements have been commenced. It is called Progress, and is situated at the mouth of the Rancoon, where a wharf is being built as a steamboat landing.

Philadelphia Public Ledger for September 4, 1851

There is no way to tell what Rodman's role was in this astonishing effort, but his experience in managing his father's many real estate holdings undoubtedly gave him skills to wrangle contractors (unlike some other of the founders) so it's likely he was in the thick of it.

Birth of daughter Susanna Parrish Wharton

The next year, on May 23, 1852, Rodman and Susanna continued the tradition of confusing duplication of names in these families when they were blessed with the birth of a second child in Philadelphia. Named for her mother, she was evidently a great blessing to Susanna for her entire life. Baby Susanna grew up, did not marry, and was at her mother's side the rest of her long life, sharing her many activities and causes. (This made three generations of Susannas, probably why nearly every subsequent reference to the youngest calls her Susan.)

Moving in on the riverbank

We don't know when the Wharton family moved in and began to enjoy the new house. All of the other founders treated their Riverton homes as summer residences at this time, we believe, but it appears that Rodman Wharton moved his family here year round quite soon, while continuing to maintain Rodman's place of business in the city. By the 1853 edition of McElroy's Philadelphia Directory, Rodman no longer is shown with the residential address on Montgomery Square. He is merely listed with the business address as "Merchant" at 110 South Front Street.

It is generally a rule of thumb that directory information is collected toward the end of the year before its title year. If that is the case for that directory, the Wharton family may well have stayed on permanently in Riverton in the fall of 1852.

As mentioned in the next item, son William Rodman Wharton later described himself as being born in Riverton (in early May, 1854) and describes Rodman himself as being "of Riverton, N.J."

Similarly, the subsequent sale of the home to Miller (two items down) distinguishes the Whartons as being "of Riverton", while fellow founder Miller is "of Philadelphia." Rodman's Last Will and Testament uses the same language.

The account of Rodman's death detailed below also quotes him as saying to his mother, from his deathbed, "Mother, I don't look to Riverton as my permanent home! I want to live nearer to you."

What must the Whartons' winters in the incomplete town of Riverton have been like? We know that other founders' families closed up their Riverton homes and moved back to their Philadelphia homes during the cold weather. This begs several questions. Riverton was still quite tiny so why would the family have wanted to live in isolation in a town with few neighbors (at least of their social class)? Paddlewheel steamboat service was generally discontinued when there was ice in the Delaware, so how did Rodman commute to his business on Front Street in Philadelphia? The trains would have still run but still needed a ferry trip at Camden.

Birth of son William Rodman Wharton

Another healthy baby came along two years after Susan on May 9, 1854, evidently born at the house in Riverton. (Later Census records indicate he was born in Pennsylvania, but his

biographic sketch in a 1912 Yale alumni publication, probably written by himself, say he was born in Riverton.) The parents again named the child after Rodman's father William, this time choosing "Rodman" as a middle name. Like Susan, this child also lived a long life, dying at age 91. Throughout his life he chose to be called by his father's name, so references in newspapers, etc. are to "W. Rodman Wharton."

Sells Riverton home to Daniel L. Miller, Jr.

There is no reason evident for this puzzling transaction. On May 20, 1854, three weeks after the birth of son William Rodman Wharton (and two months before Rodman's unexpected death), Rodman and Susanna sold this house to Daniel L. Miller, Jr. for the sum of \$7,250 (per the deed recorded in Deed Book P5 page 611).

As we will see by the subsequent accounts of Rodman's death, he and Susanna continued to live in Riverton, presumably in this house, despite no longer owning it. (It is also interesting to note from the deed that Daniel L. Miller, Jr. is identified as "of the City and County of Philadelphia" but the Whartons are identified as "of Riverton in the township of Chester, County of Burlington." It is another indication that the Whartons were no longer residents of Philadelphia and this was their only home, which they now have inexplicably sold.)

Why sell the house yet keep living in it unless you were hard up for money? Rodman's parents were exceptionally wealthy – had he gotten himself into a business jam yet they declined to help him out? Is this in some way related to problems in the partnership with Miller in the purchase of the Isaiah Toy farm nearby?

Cholera

Several cholera epidemics hit the City of Philadelphia, in the 19th Century. The disease is rare in the developed world today, but epidemics were common before the advent of sanitation and clean water. It is caused by an infection from bacteria carried in unclean water and is often fatal. At this time, many households still used privy pits and obtained their water from wells.

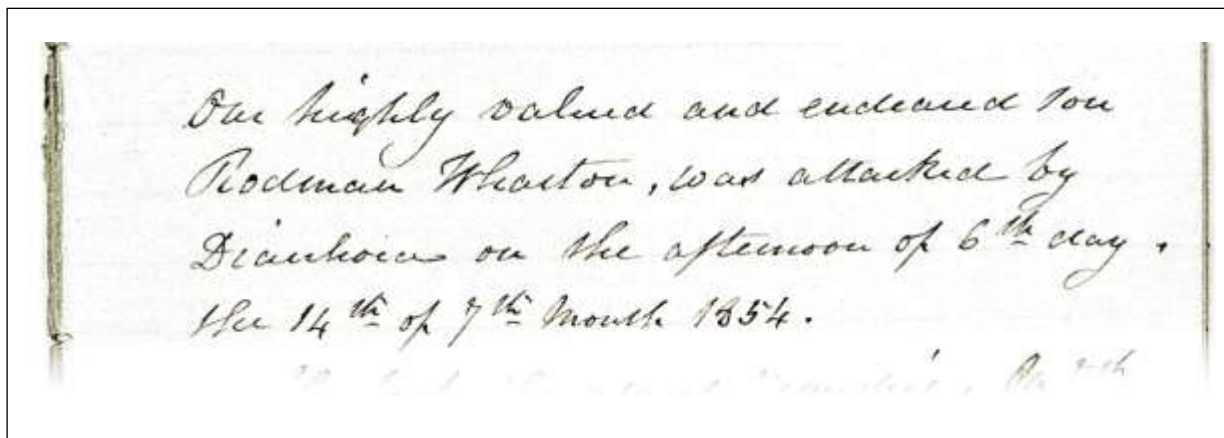
Two large epidemics in 1832 and 1849 were particularly notable, and then in the summer of 1854 the disease appeared in Philadelphia again.

The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* for July 17, 1854 reported that "69 persons died of cholera asphyxia" in the preceding week. As a proportion of the population, that would be the equivalent in today's Philadelphia of 380 deaths from cholera in a single week.

This disease ended Rodman Wharton's life on July 20, 1854. There is no indication that any other members of his household or the Riverton population contracted the disease.

We have an extraordinary glimpse of Rodman's final hours from a remarkable handwritten document in the collection of the Friends Historical Library (in the Anna Wharton Morris papers,

Box: 2A Folder: 7). It is undated and unsigned but written in a fine, feminine hand, possibly by Rodman's mother Deborah. The following transcription follows its spelling, punctuation, and grammar.



Our highly valued and endeared son Rodman Wharton, was attacked by Diarrhoea on the afternoon of 6th day, the 14th of 7th Month 1854.¹

He took the usual remedies, On 7th day morning, the 15th in response to his wife's query, "How does thee do my dear?" he said, "I am coming all right now." She asked, "How does thee know." His reply was, "I know by feelings." He rose, and came down to breakfast, still feeling comfortable, but soon after he had finished it, said, "My dear, I feel very sick, and must go to my bed." He looked very pale, and after getting to bed, remarked upon the nature of his disease saying, he believed had premonitory symptoms of Cholera, and that he was not more agitated when his leg was broken. ²

Dr. Stokes was sent for, came and prescribed for him. He asked Susan³ during this day to repeat something to him; but as nothing immediately presented to her, he proposed that she should read Cowper's address to his mothers picture⁴; but her anxiety for him, combined with the revival of the loss of her own mother, so overcame her, that she was unable to finish it and he regretted having made the request.

¹ Dates are given in customary Quaker notation of the time where "First Day" is Sunday and "First Month" is January. Here "6th day the 14th of 7th Month 1854" is Friday, July 14, 1854.

² Rodman had been thrown from his horse in the spring of 1847, breaking his leg and committing him to bed rest for a period. Willard Ross Yates, *Joseph Wharton – Quaker Industrial Pioneer*, (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1987).

³ A nickname for Rodman's wife Susanna Dillwyn Parrish Wharton.

⁴ William Cowper, "On Receipt of My Mother's Picture", poem, 1798.

On 1st day, the 16th his parents were sent for, and arrived at Riverton at 2 ½ PM. By that time the remedies were taking effect, and he was so much better, that he remarked to his mother that it did not appear necessary on his account, that she should have come, but added, “I was afraid Susan would be worn out.” Under this favorable aspect of things, his father returned home in the evening.

On 2nd day, the 17th his symptoms were so much improved that Dr. Stokes considered him convalescent.

As he lay in his bed apparently without any suffering, he had a very full and interesting conversation with his mother, embracing many matters of mutual interest – during which he said, “Mother, I don’t look to Riverton as my permanent home! I want to live nearer to you.”⁵

In the afternoon he was allowed by the Dr. to sit up a short time, and to take a cup of tea and soaked cracker, no solid food having been taken since 7th day morning. He said it was very nice, and no one, to have seen him then, looking as he did in health, and apparently almost well, would have thought how soon a sad reverse would come.

He continued comfortable during the evening and night – until 4 o’clock⁶, 3d day 18th, he awoke & did not feel so well, but said he wanted to go to sleep again, which he did for more than an hour, and on first rousing again, said he felt better. It was not long however before he complained of nausea – and Dr. Reese⁷, a resident of Riverton, who had been previously consulted when Dr. Stokes was not at hand, prescribed for him on his way to the city. But the remedies failed of the desired effect – great prostration came on about noon, with a sense of oppression; and a most appalling change took place, so that when both the doctors arrived about 2 ½ o’clock, they were astonished and alarmed! Yet did not immediately commence the stimulating process as he had a little fever.

He said to Susan, “Thee knows I have felt very serious about this illness from its first commencement, but being so much better yesterday, I brightened up again.” He seemed sensible, early after this unfavorable change that it was of a serious character, and said to his mother “I cannot stand this long,” and in the afternoon said

⁵ Unusually for the founders of Riverton, Rodman and Susanna apparently moved to the new town year round by 1852, giving up their city home.

⁶ The abbreviation for “o’clock” used by the writer.

⁷ The identity of “Dr. Reese” isn’t definite. Since he is described as “on his way to the city” presumably his practice was in Philadelphia and he lived or was possibly summering in Riverton. McElroy’s Directory of Philadelphia for 1854 lists just one person named Reese who is a physician, one John J. Reese, M.D., with a practice at 122 S. 9th (old number). This could easily be the John J. Reese, M.D. (1818-1892) whose son John J. Reese, Jr. later married Caroline Macy Miller (1860-1890), a daughter of Riverton founder Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr.

he did not think the Doctors could reach [?] his case, asking Dr. Stokes about 10 PM, “if he thought they could.” He replied, he hoped so.

Dr. Stokes remained with him all night and Dr. Reese and a number of neighbours and relatives, all the early part of it, down stairs, it being now a case of extreme illness.

What a change in a few hours, from hopefulness to almost hopelessness!

During the night he said, “Mother, I am trying to be resigned, and I think I am,” also that his “mind was perfectly peaceful.”

On 4th day, the 19th there was a slight improvement of the symptoms, as the medicines and stimulants remained longer, and there seemed less distress, so that a little hope was kept alive in the hearts of those to whom he was most dear. But in the afternoon the distressing symptoms increased. On being asked if he would like to see his father, he said, “That I would, the dear man; he has been kind to me up hill and down dale, and very generous too.” His father came soon after, which seemed a comfort to him. He said, “Father I have had very sweet unity with thee; I wanted to say this much to thee.” He several times expressed his satisfaction in having his mother with him during his illness, once said, “How sweet it is to have those with you whom you love, and in whom you have confidence.” His mother said, “Thee knows thy mother has always loved thee dearly.” He replied, “Oh, yes, I never doubted that.” She continued, “My love for thee has been like that of David and Jonathan.” He responded, “How precious.”

To his wife he said, “Dear, thee must not be too much cast down.” She said “I am trying to feel just right about it,” and added, “Does thee feel cast down.” He said, “No, we are all bound to the same goal, the beloved and the true. It’s a short story soon told.”

Another distressing night came. The medicines administered with the hope of promoting rest and sleep proved ineffective, and it was evident that he was losing ground.

Early on 5th day morning the 20th he rose up in his bed, and looking out of the window, said, “The face of nature looks beautiful.” Truly it did, for those whose hearts were at ease, for all unclouded the sun had arisen. But he was perfectly sensible of his own condition and evidently felt that his close was near. To Dr. Reese who came in during one of his seasons of exhaustion and distress, he said Dr. “This only physical weakness, there is not a cloud in my way. The mind is at peace.” Which this physician, a Presbyterian by profession, afterwards said was the most impressive lesson he had ever had from a man in such a condition. Soon after he addressed his

father, saying, “Father, I want to say a few things to thee.” “I have not much to leave, but I think with what Susan has in her own right, there will be enough for her to live in comfort & simplicity, and that is the way I think a Christian ought to live.” His father said, “I have loved Susan for her own sake and for thy sake, and will cherish and take care of her as long as my mortal life lasts.” He said, “And the children too.” To which his father responded, “and the children too.” Rodman then said, “I want to send a message of love to all my sisters, for I have loved them all very tenderly, Hannah, Sarah Barker, Mary Thurston, Anna and Hetty, and to all my brothers Charles, Joseph and William. And to all my brothers and sisters in law, Dillwyn Parrish, John Parrish and all the rest, but I am too weak to name them all.”

Turning to his wife who was by his side he said, “Thou hast been very precious to me. Our united life has been very sweet.” & & .

All of his brothers, and several of his sisters came during the day, all of whom he saw, recognizing and seeming gratified in seeing each one. Also giving a cordial greeting to several of his brothers and sisters in law who also came.

He called his brother Joseph to him and said, “I have a favor to ask of thee – to settle up my books and arrange my business affairs. By careful revision and comparison, I believe all will be clear, and think thou wilt not have much trouble.” His brother promised to fulfil his request.

He then said he was not quite satisfied with his will, made some time ago, and would like a little change in it, but he “supposed it was now too late.” On being told it was thought not, and a Codicil being proposed, he said he thought a new will would be more satisfactory. He then gave his views, which his father wrote down, and after it was completed read the will to him. He asked to have one item in relation to his wife read again. Then said “It is all right.” After which he signed it in the presence of several witnesses.⁸ He had feared that his strength would not hold out until this was done, but after it was finished, he seemed as if he had nothing more to do with this world and said, “What a blessing it would be if I could now pass quietly away. Once said faintly “failing fast.” After a pause he said impressively, “My Father – “Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed by thy name – Thy Kingdom come – thy will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven” – here he ceased but his wife went on with great calmness and solemnity to the end!

To his sister Sarah Barker he said, “Well Sally, my dear sister, thee has come; I was afraid I should never see thee again. Thee knows I have always loved thee most tenderly” She replied, “And I have returned it.”

⁸ Rodman’s will is available in Ancestry.com at https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/8796/005663857_01053/284954

To John Parrish, “I have had near unity with thee.”

He appeared to suffer less through the day, than during the past night, although the sick stomach continued so that nothing was long retained. But about [blank] oclk PM, he straightened himself out on his bed, and lay perfectly quiet with one hand over his head, his breathing sometimes suspended so that we though he was gone – until just as the sun was setting when his sun went down in brightness and the immortal Spirit winged its way to the realms of blessedness.

“That life is long which answers life’s great end.”

During all this day the language was most appropriate and impressive, “See with what peace a Christian can die.”

Incalculable our loss!! – but great his gain –

He departed this life 7th Mo. 20th 1854⁹, being 34 years and nearly 6 months old.

The mortal remains were conveyed in the steamboat *Rancocas*¹⁰ to the city, and thence to Fairhill Burial ground¹¹, on the 22d – and impressive solemnity prevailing throughout, and testimonies borne on the boat, and at the grave, to the efficiency of that Divine Power which made him what he was, and which only can preserve in prosperity, and support in adversity.

Rodman and Susanna had been married just four years. His death left Susanna, then age 26, with a two-year-old daughter and a son barely two months old. She had already lost both of her parents, her mother (also Susanna) just three years earlier as Riverton was being built and her father Joseph many years earlier when Susanna was thirteen.

Rodman was the youngest of the founders of Riverton and the first to die.

It is interesting that the account does not mention founder Daniel L. Miller, Jr. at all, possibly suggesting estrangement. Miller and Rodman had worked together closely on many projects, one of Miller’s sisters was married to Susanna’s brother William, it was not quite two months since Miller had bought their only home and Miller was their next door neighbor on the riverbank (on the downriver side at the site of today’s 405 Bank Avenue).

⁹ That is, July 20, 1854, six days after the onset of symptoms.

¹⁰ The steamboat *Rancocas* was one of the steamers serving Riverton’s wharf. Early the next year, on February 23, 1855, *Rancocas* and *Wave* were purchased by fellow Riverton founder Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr. according to an article in the March 1, 1855 edition of the New Jersey *Mirror*. How he used them is unknown.

¹¹ Many other founders of Riverton and their families were buried at Fair Hill. Rodman and Susanna’s first child, the baby William, had already been buried there three years earlier. Wife Susanna would follow, 61 years later, as would their daughter Susanna in 1928.

Susanna Dillwyn Parrish Wharton (1827-1915)



Susanna Dillwyn Parrish Wharton, about 1853 (detail of family group)

From *The Parrish Family*, 1925

Susanna's early life

Rodman's wife Susanna was one of eleven children of **Joseph Parrish, MD** (1779-1840) and **Susanna Cox** (1788-1851). She was born on July 29, 1827, probably at the family's home on the north side of Arch Street, west of Third Street (now gone). Her father Joseph was an eminent physician, like his own father, but also involved in social causes, principally the abolition of slavery and participated directly in assisting the escape of slaves.

See the later section about the history of the Parrish family for more background.

A good source for details of Susanna's life is found in the Parrish family history published by her daughter in 1925 from material assembled by Dillwyn Parrish in the 1880s (see Sources). This excerpt will give an idea of the character of the Parrish home when Susanna Dillwyn Parrish was growing up:

[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 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] 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.

After Rodman's death

Rodman's wife Susanna never remarried. She lived a remarkable life for 61 more years, raising their two surviving children (William Rodman and Susan), an incredibly active life, always with her daughter at her side.

That book details the tireless efforts of this notable woman on behalf of those less fortunate. Some of the areas which received the focus of her work were:

- The Yearly Meeting's Indian Committee

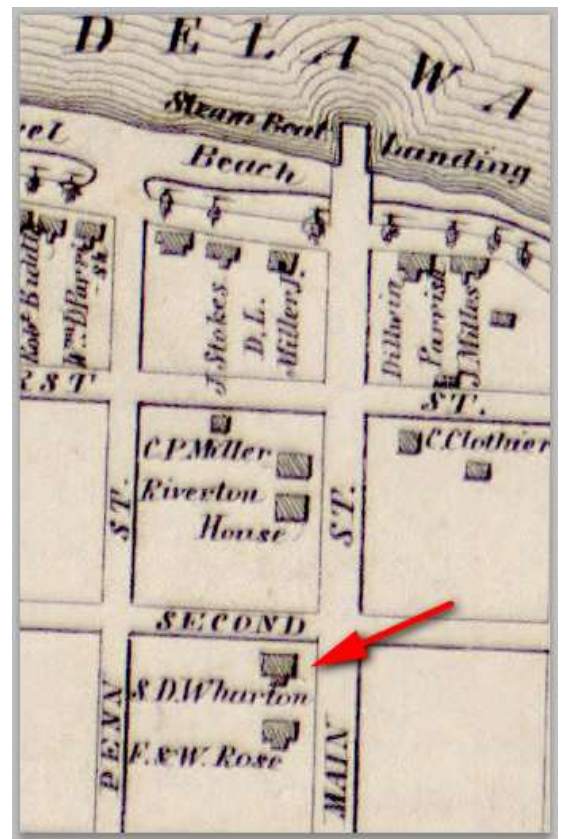
- Changing attitudes to treat alcoholism as a disease requiring medical supervision
- Improving the conditions at prisons, starting with the Moyamensing Prison in Southwark.
- Founding or assisting various charities for the poor, particularly after meeting with and learning from Octavia Hill in London. In addition to the plight of African-Americans, another focus was on immigrants. An item in the March 27, 1892 edition of the *Philadelphia Times* describes her as a “patroness” for a musicale to benefit the “Eighth Street Industrial School for Italians.”
- Founding the Children’s Aid Society in 1882

Susanna’s daughter described her works as “a suggestion of the quiet, ever-growing insight which she exercised over every human being who came within her scope – a gentle sympathy which touched not only the lame, the halt and the blind, but which was great enough to see in each one the struggle which is ever a part of human life.”

We have no record of how long Susanna and her very small children stayed on at Riverton after Rodman’s death. She was very close to her brother Dillwyn, whose Riverton home was just across the street, so his presence may have allowed Susanna and the children to stay where they were for the time being, though she no longer owned their home (recall that Rodman had sold the house to Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr. just two months before his sudden death.

The 1858 *New Map of Burlington County* by Parry, Sikes, and Earl shows “S. D. Parrish” on the corner of Main and 2nd Streets, one block inland from their former home. Researching its deed history might shed more light onto this.

In the 1860 Census, she and the two children were shown as living in Cinnaminson with comfortable assets: real estate of \$5,000 and “personal estate” of \$15,000. Though Riverton was a part of Cinnaminson Township in those days, this appears to be some other location in Cinnaminson. None of the names on the preceding or following pages are of known Riverton residents (house numbers were not yet used). Further, the pages that do include the



1858 *New Map of Burlington Co.* by Parry, Sikes, and Earl

names of people known to live on Bank Avenue list those names in house-by-house order going downriver, with the name corresponding to this house being Edwin Spooner, who had purchased the property in 1858 (see section on Spooner below).

Several of the names of her neighbors in the 1860 Census do appear on the 1860 map "Vicinity of Philadelphia and Trenton from Actual Surveys by DJ Lake and SN Beers" published by C. K. Stone and A. Pomeroy. They are found in the little settlement between Cinnaminson Avenue and the Pennsauken Creek along the Burlington Pike (today's Rt. 130). Why she would have chosen to move the children from Riverton and away from steamboat and railroad transportation to the City is a mystery.

By 1864, Susanna appears for the first time under her own name in the *Philadelphia City Directory*, with an address of Germantown Avenue above Harvey. By 1867 she is several blocks south at 5050 Germantown (no longer standing).

In the 1880 Census, she and the now-grown children are at 2107 Delancey Place, in Center City. Daughter Susan's occupation is listed as "At home", while son "Wm. Rodman Wharton" is "Mechanical Engineer".

By the 1890 directory, Susanna is living at 910 Clinton Street, the home she (and daughter Susan) would occupy for the rest of their lives. Son W. Rodman Wharton would live there until his marriage in 1904. In an interesting coincidence, another Riverton founder had lived a few doors away in the same block of Clinton Street fully fifty years earlier. At least as early as 1841, Prof. Charles Dexter Cleveland had his town home at 903 Clinton Street, from which he also operated a school for young ladies. Prof. Cleveland was a founder of Riverton (replacing J. Miller McKim's share of the endeavor probably in late 1851) where he lived in the riverbank house which later became 305 Bank Ave.,

Founding of the NAACP

Even late in life, Susanna and her daughter would continue to be intensely engaged in social issues. In 1909, Susanna and Susan had a direct hand in creating an organization which became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This grew from an alarming increase the number of attacks on African-Americans by whites, highlighted by the Springfield (Ill.) Race Riot of 1908 (see Wikipedia article), during which a mob of about 5,000 European-Americans attacked and destroyed black neighborhoods.

That such violence could occur in the North, and in the city most closely associated with Abraham Lincoln, so horrified those working on behalf of African-Americans that leading figures put together a national call for a conference on the upcoming centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, to be called the "National Lincoln Conference."

BRING UP NEGRO QUESTION.

Many Sign Call for a National Lincoln Conference in Negroes' Behalf.

Signatures of many well-known men and women are attached to a call issued yesterday for a National "Lincoln Conference on the Negro Question." Its object is a full discussion of present evils, to awaken a renewed interest and activity in behalf of the colored race, and to obtain for it perfect equality. In the call the question is put, "How far has it [the Nation] lived up to the obligations imposed upon it by the Emancipation Proclamation?" Special mention is made of the disfranchisement of the negro and what is considered the neglect of the Supreme Court to pass upon this disfranchisement.

The names signed to this call include Miss Jane Addams, Chicago; Prof. W. L. Bulkley, New York; Mrs. Harriet Stanton Blatch, New York; Mrs. Ida Wells Barnett, Chicago; E. H. Clement, Boston; Miss Kate Claghorn, New York; Prof. John Dewey, New York; Prof. W. E. B. Du Bois, Atlanta; Miss Mary E. Dreier, Brooklyn; Dr. John L. Elliott, New York; William Lloyd Garrison, Boston; William Dean Howells, New York; Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, Chicago; Hamilton Holt, Mrs. Florence Kelley, Miss Helen Marot, Dr. Henry Moskowitz, Miss Leonora O'Reilly, Miss Mary W. Ovington, the Rev. Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst, the Rev. John P. Peters, Dr. Jane Robbins, Charles Edward Russell, and J. G. Phelps Stokes, all of New York; Judge Wendell Stafford, Washington; Miss Helen Stokes, New York; Lincoln Steffens, New York; President Thwing, Western Reserve University; Oswald Garrison Villard, New York; Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, New York; Bishop Alexander Walters, New York; Horace White, New York; Dr. J. Milton Waldron, Washington; Mrs. Rodman Wharton, Philadelphia; Miss Susan P. Wharton, Philadelphia, and Prof. Charles Zueblin, Chicago.

New York Times, February 14, 1909

Susanna was 81 years old but joined this effort without question, adding her name to a distinguished list which included W. E. B. DuBois, Jane Addams, and Lincoln Steffens. The call was published in newspapers around the country. (Note that the names in the ad are in alphabetical order.) Daughter Susan was right there by her side also. At the second conference which resulted, in 1910, those assembled voted to create a new organization, to be called the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. See: Mary White Ovington, *How the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Began*, (New York: NAACP, 1914). It isn't clear how long or in what capacity either of the Wharton women continued to be involved. The NAACP, of course, became a powerful force through the ensuing century.

Susanna's death

Susanna died at Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania, on June 12, 1915, in her 88th year, according to a notice in the *Friends Intelligencer*. Buck Hill Falls is above Stroudsburg in the Pocono Mountains, a vacation area particularly favored by Philadelphia-area Quakers. Her funeral was held in her long-time home at 910 Clinton Street and her body was buried at Fair Hill Burial Ground, joining that of her husband Rodman, buried 61 years earlier and baby William Redmond Wharton.

After Susanna's death, in her book about the Wharton family, daughter Susan wrote:

My mother often quoted Pollok's line on "The Departed":

"They set as sets the morning star,
Which goes not down within the darkened west,
Nor hides itself amid the gloom of night,
But melts away into the light of Heaven."

Daughter Susan P. Wharton's later life.

Rodman and Susanna's daughter Susanna Parrish Wharton (always known as Susan) continued her charitable activities and lived at 910 Clinton until her death. Like many other Riverton founding family members, she had attended Swarthmore College. She never married.

She continued and expanded on her mother's work for the improvement of conditions for the underserved in society.

Even before her mother's death, Susan's work included the notable even of bringing W. E. B. DuBois to Philadelphia to perform his landmark study of its African-American population. Mentions of her work in this era are found in Michael B. Katz & Thomas J. Sugrue (eds.), *W. E. B. DuBois, Race and the City*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

A reprint of DuBois landmark 1899 book *The Philadelphia Negro, A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) indicates that bringing DuBois to Philadelphia was Susan's idea and resulted from her efforts.

In David L. Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois, A Biography*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2009), it is observed that

... Quaker Susan P. Wharton convened a strategy meeting in the ancestral town house at 910 Clinton Street near the heart of the Negro ghetto. ... Wharton urged a comprehensive study of the Negro population to be undertaken by [University of Pennsylvania] in collaboration with the Philadelphia branch of the college Settlement Association of America, on whose executive committee she had served since its founding in 1890.

Lewis goes on to cast a shadow over the effort by observing that some of these white reformers "... were prey to eugenic nightmares about 'native stock' and the better classes being swamped by fecund, dysgenic aliens."

According to her obituary in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* in 1928, she was one of the founders (in 1916) of the Whittier Center Housing Company. It was an organization "engaged in the building and leasing of homes to colored people", per an ad in a 1921 issue of *The Friend, a Religious and Literary Journal*. An online article in the Philadelphia Encyclopedia (<https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/settlement-houses/>) describes her involvement and mentions that the Whittier Center was renamed for her after her as the Wharton Centre. It remained in existence until the first decade of the 21st Century. (<https://whyy.org/articles/a-historic-haven-for-black-philadelphians-slated-for-demolition/>)

Adopted daughter

There is a final curiosity in the plot of the lives of the mother-and-daughter Susannas' on Clinton Street. Enigmatically, the 1910 Census shows the household as including these family members: Rodman's widow Susanna ("head" age 82), their daughter "Susan P" ("daughter" at age 57) ... plus one Eleanor Wharton Willard ("daughter" at age 7), plus one lodger and two servants. At age seven Eleanor is clearly not a biological daughter. But who was she?

Eleanor also appears in the 1920 Census, spelled "Elinor Wharton", identified as "niece" and age 17, working as a librarian at the Free Library. Some of the story is revealed in the records of the Race Street Meeting in 1925. She applied for membership in the Society of Friends for the purposes of marriage. After she is found suitable to join, it records her marriage on June 16, 1925 to one Robert Atkinson, the clerk's entry describing her as "adopted daughter of Susan P. Wharton." So she had not been a birthright Quaker, thus not the daughter of a deceased relative, and had been adopted by Susan.

The notation in the 1910 Census of the unusual name "Willard" and her age of 7 are clues that let us speculate that she may be the Eleanor Florence Willard who was born May 30, 1902 at 2114 S. 65th Street, Philadelphia and baptized an Episcopalian.

Eleanor was the 7th child born to a carpenter and his wife who had shifted frequently from one small tenant house to another in the Cobbs Creek working class neighborhood. Eleanor's mother Lizzie then died just two years after Eleanor's birth. This would have been devastating for father William Henry Willard, working for carpenter's wages and now alone with seven children. It is likely that he gave up the youngest child (at least) for better care than he could provide. There are no further records of him (or any "Eleanor Willard") in the Philadelphia area.

What is her connection to Susan?

Clearly, an impoverished carpenter widower living in a tiny rented house with seven small children (and not a Quaker) would not be part of the same social circles as the Whartons. Conversely, this situation would certainly be the focus of some of their charitable organizations.

Why, of all the struggling families Susan encountered in her life, might she have chosen to become personally involved and adopt this child (adoption date unknown) living in a distant neighborhood remains a mystery.

The addition of the small child from a chaotic home to the quiet household at 910 Clinton must have made for an interesting transition. It would have been a challenge for an unmarried woman in her late 50s and her mother in her late 80s, though the Wharton women had shown themselves to be more than capable of anything which life threw in their path.

Eleanor was 13 when her adoptive grandmother, Rodman's wife Susanna, died in 1915.

As mentioned, Eleanor later married Robert Atkinson, a teacher. As of the 1940 Census they lived in Wayne, Pennsylvania, where she was a housewife and Robert taught at the Shipley School. They had two sons.

Susan's death

In June of 1928, not long after completing her work on the family history which her uncle Dillwyn had started 45 years earlier, Susan contracted pneumonia at home. To aid in her recovery, she traveled from the city to Buck Hill Falls in the Poconos, where the family had vacationed (and where her mother had died a decade earlier). The fresh air wasn't enough, though, and Susan died in the General Hospital in East Stroudsburg on September 21. She was 76. Her death certificate lists the cause as "lobar pneumonia" with "general debility" as a contributing factor.

A funeral was held at her long-time home at 910 Clinton Street, Philadelphia. Her body was cremated and Susan's ashes joined the others at Fair Hill.

Son William Rodman Wharton's later life.

Rodman and Susanna's son had been born in this house just two months prior to his father's death in 1854. We do not know much about the early years of William Rodman Wharton (whose name usually appears as W. Rodman Wharton).

He graduated from Yale University, Sheffield Scientific School, Class of 1875. In his obituary published by Yale we find the following:

WILLIAM RODMAN WHARTON PH B, 1875

Born May 9, 1854, in Riverton, NJ

Died January 7, 1946, in Easton, Pa

Father, Rodman Wharton, member Rodman Wharton & Brothers, manufacturers of white lead, Riverton, son of William and Deborah (Fisher) Wharton of Philadelphia Mother, Susanna Dillwyn (Parrish) Wharton; daughter of Dr Joseph Parrish and Susanna (Coe) Parnsh of Burlington, N J

C S Hallowell School, Philadelphia, attended Swarthmore College 1871-72

Entered Sheffield Scientific School with the Class, mechanical engineering course, member The Colony and Berzehus

Journeyman in machine shops and iron foundry in Philadelphia 1875-79,

Traveled in Europe in 1880 and 1899,

Operated quartz quarry in Maryland 1881-82,

Pay- master in iron mines in Boonton, N J , 1882-83,

Associated with Wm Wharton, Jr & Company, Inc. , manufacturers of special track work for steam railways and railroads, 1884 until retirement 1926:

in charge street railway track laying 1884-87,

drafts- man 1888,

on construction Third Avenue cable road, New Yoik City, 1889,

drafts man and engineer 1890-92,

chief draftsman 1892-98,

traveling engineer 1900-03,

chief inspector 1903-08,

chief engineer 1909-10,

consulting engineer at time of retirement),

Member Engineers Club of Philadelphia and Society of Friends

Married June 22, 1904, in Philadelphia, Clara Charlotte d'Azambuja, daughter of Jules Jacques Louis Parigot (M D Univ Ghent 1834) and Maria Carlota (d'Azambuja) Parigot. No children

Death due to influenza Buried in Easton Cemetery Survived by wife

By the 1880 Census, he is living with his mother and sister (and an Irish maid) at 2107 Delancey Place and his occupation is listed as Mechanical Engineer.

W. Rodman's principal employer was his uncle's firm, the William Wharton, Jr. & Company, was a pioneer maker of manganese steel trackwork for steam railroads and street railways. Originally located in South Philadelphia on Washington Avenue, near 24th Street, they built a new plant in the Lehigh Valley, in Palmer Township in 1914. W. Rodman relocated there in 1915 and worked

there for the rest of his career. **William Wharton, Jr.** (1830-1907), W. Rodman's uncle, was a younger brother of his father, our Rodman Wharton.

W. Rodman married **Clara Charlotte d'Azambuja Parigot** (1859-1957), daughter of a Belgian physician father and a Brazilian mother. They married late in life, in 1904; W. Rodman was 50 and Clara was 44. The Philadelphia *Inquirer* described the small ceremony as "quietly celebrated". She had lost both parents by that time and was a teacher of languages at Drexel Institute.

They never moved back to Philadelphia after W. Rodman retired, living in Easton, Pennsylvania. He died in 1946 at the age of 91 while his wife Clara lived to the age of 97. Both are buried in Easton.

Rodman Wharton's early family history

Rodman was born at the intersection of several remarkable Quaker families. His grandparents were **Whartons, Redwoods, Fishers** and **Rodmans**. Fortunately for us, several excellent family histories exist, so only the highlights will be repeated here. See the "Sources" section for details.

Wharton family

The Whartons played extensive roles in the development and government of the colony and State of Pennsylvania. Just a few are mentioned below.

Rodman's paternal grandfather (William Wharton's father) was **Charles Wharton** (1743-1838), a highly-successful merchant/importer, became wealthy, and didn't entirely fit the stereotype of the Quaker. He dressed fashionably and also raised money in support of the American Revolution, though he conspicuously declined tasks which directly involved the hostilities. As mentioned earlier, Charles was the one who purchased the family country estate Bellevue, in 1802. His family town house was a mansion at 136 South 2nd Street (old number) near Spruce.

Charles' brother **Samuel Wharton** (1732-1800) was a member of the Continental Congress in 1782 and 1783. He speculated extensively in land in what is today Ohio and West Virginia.

Charles' brother **Franklin Wharton** (1767-1818) was the third Commandant of the United States Marine Corps.

A half-brother of Charles' was **Robert Wharton** (1757-1834), the longest-serving Mayor in the history of the City of Philadelphia. Though not in an unbroken stretch, he was in office from 1798 to 1824.

Charles' first cousin **Thomas Wharton, Jr.** (1735-1778) served as the first President of Pennsylvania (i.e. governor) following the declaration of independence from Great Britain.

It was Charles' grandfather **Thomas Wharton** (1664-1718) who brought the family to America, probably arriving in Philadelphia in the 1680s, shortly after William Penn.

Finally, as yet another connection often wondered about, another of Charles' brothers, **Carpenter Wharton** (1747-1780), had a great-grandson **Edward Robbins Wharton** (1850-1928). Edward's wife, the former Edith Newbold Jones, is much more famously known as **Edith Wharton** (1862-1937), the celebrated author of *Age of Innocence* and *Ethan Fromme*.

Redwood family

Both of Rodman's grandmothers were named Hannah; both were from early Quaker families from Newport, Rhode Island; and both of those families came to Newport by way of trading in the Caribbean.

Rodman's paternal grandmother (the wife of Charles Wharton, discussed above) was **Hannah Redwood** (1759-1796). She was descended from **Abraham Redwood**, a merchant who had removed to Newport from Antigua sometime between 1712 and 1718. The Redwoods made their fortune on sugar plantations on Antigua. It was not unusual in American history for the wealth generated by businesses based on slavery to be used by later generations to fund their efforts to end slavery, and that was the case here.

Fisher family

Rodman's mother, Deborah Fisher, was descended from early Quaker immigrants to Philadelphia, and the pedigree doesn't get any better than **John Fisher** (? – 1685), who arrived with William Penn on the ship *Welcome* in 1682.

Deborah's father **Samuel Rowland Fisher** (1745-1834) was evidently a fascinating character. Unlike the Whartons, whose views on the American Revolution were diverse and nuanced, if not actually contradictory, Samuel and his siblings were unanimous in their opposition to belligerency. Fairly or not, the Revolutionary authorities took this as a sign of opposition to the independence effort, labeled them Loyalist and treated them accordingly. He and some other Quakers were arrested in Virginia and imprisoned under harsh conditions, leading to the death of at least one of them. Returned to Philadelphia, Samuel was tried for treason based on a letter he had written to his brother. Unwisely, in the middle of a war, he antagonized the judge by refusing to recognize the court's legitimacy, and was convicted and imprisoned in the old jail which stood at the southwest corner of 3rd and Market Streets. Unrepentant, he remained in jail at least two years, refusing to compromise and alienating others among the Society of Friends who tried to help him.

Samuel Fisher did not marry until he was 45, when he married Hannah Rodman (see below).

As mentioned earlier, Samuel Fisher's grand house was at 110 South Front Street (old number), the home later used by Rodman Wharton as an office for his white lead business.

Many in the Fisher family had scientific and industrial interests. Deborah's grandfather **Joshua Fisher** (1707-1783) experimented with the hydrograph and published a navigation chart of the Delaware Bay which remained standard for nearly a century. Joshua had been a slaveholder, then freed all but one of the slaves. His son, the colorful Samuel, freed the last one. He was a very successful importer and owner of the first packet ship company (i.e. ships that sailed on a schedule) between Philadelphia and London. Joshua built the family country house "The Cliffs" overlooking the Schuylkill River near 33rd and Oxford Streets in what is today Fairmount Park. It still exists today, sadly as a ruin.



Joshua Fisher's villa "The Cliffs". about 1931 from Wikipedia

Rodman family

Rodman Wharton's given name comes from his maternal grandmother, the former **Hannah Rodman** (1764-1819). She grew up as part of a noteworthy Quaker family in Newport, Rhode Island.

Her family was descended from **Captain Thomas Rodman** (1640-1728), who came to Newport from Barbados in 1675, where he owned a plantation. He married **Hannah Clarke** (1667-1732), the daughter of the Governor of Rhode Island. Thomas and his brother John made considerable investments in land on nearby Block Island, a presence still remembered through the names of Rodman's Hollow and Rodman's Pond.

They also bought large land holdings in New Jersey, including in Burlington County, though that connection with the area apparently did not last into the era of the founding of Riverton.

Many generations of the Rodman family were heavily involved in shipping. Another **Captain Thomas Rodman** (1724-1766), the grandson of the first Captain Thomas Rodman, was lost at sea in 1767 when his brig *Dolphin* foundered during a passage from Honduras to Jamaica. The family plantation in Barbados certainly relied on slaves and they may have been involved in the

slave trade. Indeed, it is speculated that the *Dolphin* may have been a slaver. Within a generation or two, though, Rodmans in New England had become staunch abolitionists.

The Rodmans were definitely involved in the New England whaling industry. A second cousin of Deborah Fisher, **Sarah Rodman** (1793-1888) was married to **Charles Wain Morgan** (1796-1861), a Philadelphian by birth and an owner of several whaling ships and whaling-related businesses. One of his whaling ships survives today, the one named for him when built in 1841, *Charles W. Morgan*. It is in the care of the Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, CT, and is the only surviving 19th Century wooden whaling ship from the American fleet.



Charles W. Morgan at Mystic Seaport Museum

Susanna Dillwyn Parrish's early family history

Rodman Wharton's wife Susanna Dillwyn Parrish came from a family that had achieved great respect in the decades before her birth, though it didn't have the pedigree or remarkably broad record of accomplishment as the Wharton family.

The Parrish family presence in the New World reaches back to the earliest decades of colonization. A comprehensive family history begun by Susanna's brother Dillwyn and completed by her daughter Susanna Parrish Wharton (Susan) 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 the time of grandson John Parrish, 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 (Roberts)** (1705-1745) lost nearly everything. 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 Susanna Dillwyn 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 (available on Archive.org) lists him as a hatter and shopkeeper on 2nd 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 2nd and Church Street, across the street from Old Christ Church. It is depicted in a 1917 drawing by Frank H. 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 2nd 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.

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 Susanna Dillwyn 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 (available on Archive.org). 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 Dillwyn Parrish’s mother **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.

Most of Susanna’s siblings distinguished themselves in various ways. Two of the brothers also became physicians, another **Isaac Parrish** (1811-1852) and another **Joseph Parrish** (1818-1891). Other children distinguished themselves also: **Edward Parrish** (1822-1872) grew up to become the first president of Swarthmore College. **Dillwyn Parrish** (1809-1886) became a pharmacist and the president of the College of Pharmacy and was also a founder of Riverton. **William Parrish** (1815-1863) was also a founder of Riverton and was an industrialist in Philadelphia. **Sarah Parrish** (1817-1900) 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.

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 Susanna 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

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) *see the HSR monograph on 309 Bank Avenue.*

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) *The subject of this monograph.*



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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Owner Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr.

As discussed in the earlier section about the lives of Rodman and Susanna Wharton, on May 20, 1854 Rodman inexplicably sold this house to fellow Riverton founder **Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr.** (1820-1871). The deed indicates the consideration was \$7,250.00

Miller was Susanna's brother-in-law and was Rodman's partner in the purchase of the adjacent farmland from Isaiah Toy. Rodman and Susanna evidently remained in the house. Two months later, Rodman was dead of Cholera. We don't know how long Susanna and the children stayed or whether Miller himself ever took up residence here. The 1854 edition of McElroy's *Philadelphia City Directory* shows Miller's city address as 27 Arch Street (old numbering) and his business ("merchant") at 56 South Front Street, about a block above Rodman's white lead business at 110.

Owner Daniel Leeds Miller, Sr.

Adding to the puzzle, just two years later Miller Junior then sold the property to his own father on August 5, 1856, for \$8,000. For some reason, the Miller Junior had purchased the property in his own name only, but when he sells it to his father the deed indicates that it belongs to both Miller Junior and his wife Anna.

Daniel Leeds Miller, Sr. (1788-1866) does not seem to figure in the development of Riverton in any other way, apart from no fewer than six of his adult children being either founders or early purchasers of houses here. Miller Senior was a distinguished member of Philadelphia Quaker society and was the principal founder and long-time president of the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company.

This deed also describes Miller Junior and Anna as "of the Town of Riverton Burlington County", whereas on the previous deed (when Miller Junior purchased it from Rodman Wharton), Miller Junior is identified as "of the City and County of Philadelphia." This is an indication of when founder Miller moved permanently to Riverton. It corresponds to the absence of a residential address in McElroy's starting with the 1855 edition. Starting with the 1857 edition, he appears with a home address again, now reading "h Riverton".

The 1858 *New Map of Burlington County* by Parry, Sikes, and Earl shows Miller Junior's name still associated with the house, and no longer associated with the next house downriver, which had been his on the original town plan. (Note that maps and directories are helpful but cannot be relied on for exact dates and locations.)

There is no indication that Miller Senior was actually resident in this house, or anywhere else in Riverton, for that matter.

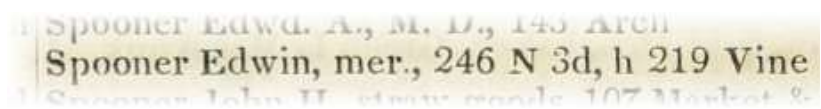
Owner Edwin Spooner

Miller Senior held it for a year and a half and on January 6, 1858, Miller Senior and his wife Hannah sell the property to **Edwin Spooner** (1813-1879) for \$7,500.

There does not appear to be a business or family connection between Edwin Spooner with Miller or any of the other Riverton families, nor was Edwin Spooner a Quaker (he and his wife were married in the Reformed Church of Willow Grove, PA).

The 1860 Census (enumerated on June 29) lists the Spooner family here in this house. It includes Edwin at age 48, occupation "Leather Merchant" with \$10,000 worth of real estate and \$300 of other wealth; his wife Sarah W. Spooner, age 35, born in Massachusetts; daughter Sarah M. Spooner, age 16; daughter Ellen G. Spooner, age 14; domestic Mary Stafford, age 38, born in Ireland; and domestic Ann Duke, age 32, also from Ireland.

From his occupation of "Leather Merchant" we can be confident that he is the same person as the entry in McElroy's *Directory* for 1857 in the business section under the heading "Hides, Oil and Leather" as "Spooner E. & D. C." at 246 North 3rd Street. Later, under "Miscellaneous" they are again listed as "(goat skins and sumac)". In the alphabetical section, he appears as a "Merchant" with a business at the same address, home at 219 Vine Street (new numbering). Each address is located just a short distance from 3rd and Vine Streets.



Entry in 1857 *McElroy's Directory of Philadelphia*

Directories from other years list them at other addresses in that Philadelphia neighborhood. They were evidently quite well-to-do, as the 1850 Census lists him as owning real estate worth a very substantial \$50,000.

The family seems to have used the Riverton house as a summer home, because McElroy's continuously lists a residential address for Edwin in the city.

Riverton's National Register nomination mentions that Spooner also owned the lot at the corner of Penn Street and Carriage House Lane, 109 Penn Street, with a carriage house which he built between 1860 and 1864.



109 Penn St., Carriage House for 407 Bank

From Google 2019

Owner Rodman Barker Ellison

On March 12, 1864, Spooner sold the house and two other adjoining parcels, including the carriage house, to **Rodman Barker Ellison** (1832-1907) for the sum of \$10,000. This sale brings the property right back into the tangle of Riverton Quaker family relationships.



RODMAN BARKER ELLISON
John B. Ellison & Sons (Established 1822)
Mrs., Importers and Exporters of Woolens

From 1901 *King's Notable
Philadelphians*

What are the chances that a new owner would purchase the property ten years after Rodman Wharton's death – and share the same, unusual first name? And the "Barker" middle name makes things even more interesting, because Rodman Wharton's sister **Sarah "Sally" Wharton** (1821-1866) had married a Barker (**Abraham Barker** (1821-1906)) and the history of Philadelphia Quakers is filled with Barkers.

Unfortunately for those of us hoping for a crystalline structure, extensive research with Ancestry.com has so far failed to turn up the connection between this new owner Rodman Barker Ellison and any known relation/ancestor of Rodman Wharton. The Rodmans, Barkers, and Whartons all had large families and the confounding habit of using the same given names over and over.

However ... this new owner Rodman Barker Ellison brings one more rich connection to the game. He was married to **Hannah Nicholson Miller** (1835-1915), yet another sister of Riverton founder Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr.!

So to recap, we have seen Miller Junior figuring repeatedly in various aspects of Rodman Wharton's short life (including buying Rodman's house just two months before Rodman's death), three of Miller's sisters were married to other founders with original houses on the riverbank (**Elizabeth** to **William D. Parrish**, **Anna** to **Robert Biddle**, and **Rachel** to **William Canby Biddle**), and another brother, **Charles P. Miller**, was living in the Main Street house originally intended for Chalkley Gillingham (today's number 100). Now in 1864 we find that another sister Hannah and her husband are buying this home built by Rodman and Susanna Wharton. This makes a total of six Miller siblings with households on or adjacent to the riverbank in 1864.

Rodman Barker Ellison was the second son of an exceptionally successful manufacturer, importer, and wholesaler of woolens, **John Barker Ellison** (1794-1865). Rodman joined his older brother **William P. Ellison** (1828-1908) in their father's firm as adults, which was renamed "John B. Ellison & Sons Co.". They ran it for the rest of their lives and it survived them both by decades. The firm operated worldwide, with offices in New York, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Baltimore, London, and Montreal.

The firm constructed an impressive headquarters building at 22-24-26 South 6th Street, Philadelphia, in 1881.

Following a frequent pattern of the time, the two Ellison brothers bought side-by-side summer houses. Apparently working together all day wasn't enough – they set their lives up so they could vacation together, too. Rodman Ellison bought this one in 1864 and William P. Ellison bought the downriver house next door. It was demolished in the first half of the 20th Century, but would be today's 405 Bank Avenue, and, yes, that is the house originally built by the ubiquitous Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr. Research on 405's deeds will undoubtedly turn up more information.



Because Rodman Ellison's family used Riverton as a summer home, they maintained their City home throughout. The 1870 *Philadelphia City Directory* shows them living at 1313 Arch Street (then a neighborhood of elegant townhouses prior to the construction of City Hall and, coincidentally the same block as the one on which Nannie Myers grew up, as detailed in a later section).

The only member of the immediate Ellison family to ever appear in the Census in Riverton appears three years after the family has sold the house. His son, then-11-year-old **Rodman William Carlisle Ellison** (1868-?) has the unusual distinction of appearing twice in the same Census. On June 4, 1880 he is recorded at home in Philadelphia with the family, by then living at 300 South 11th Street but two weeks later, when the count was taken in Riverton, young Rodman pops up again, staying with the Roberts' family on the riverbank at what is today 205 Bank Avenue. (Thomas Roberts was a Philadelphia wholesale grocer who lived year round in Riverton and had a son who was 15 and a daughter who was 10, children young RWCE would have known from earlier summers. Incidentally, Thomas Roberts' partner in the grocery business was John Rulon Miller, a nephew of, yes, our Daniel Leeds Miller, Jr.)

We don't have any more information about the Rodman Ellison family's years in Riverton. It seems that brother and business partner William P. Ellison next door apparently bonded better

with Riverton. According to the obit for William's wife Ellen in the April 2, 1920 *New Era*, William's family lived in the next-door house at 405 Bank "about 40 years." This was their summer house, because the family also maintained homes in the City; in 1880 and 1890 they were at 313 S. 17th Street. William was a member of Riverton's Christ Church until his death in 1908, long serving as a vestryman and as its senior warden and also donating funds in 1876 to create the Sunday School addition (then in the frame structure at 609 Main Street, more recently Freddy's Shoe Service, on land which William had purchased for the church in 1868).

Brother William's three sons were members of the Riverton Yacht Club and one, **William Rodman Ellison** (1856-1928), was commodore from 1895-1904. Another son, **Henry Howard Ellison** (1853-1937), further tangled the Riverton family tree by marrying the daughter of **Edward and Sarah Ogden**, down the street at 503 Bank Avenue, one of the most influential families in the later 19th Century history of Riverton.

Back to Rodman Ellison, he sold 407 Bank in 1877, before the summer season began. They had been here for 13 years. He chose a very different property for the summer home he would enjoy for the rest of his life, a farm on the Main Line in Radnor of 124 acres, evocatively named "Linden Shade Farm". He raised "Many fine horses, brood mares, and Jersey cows," according to S. F. Hotchkin, *Rural Pennsylvania in the Vicinity of Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1897).

Rodman Ellison died on that estate in 1907. Though a birthright Quaker, at some point he had converted to Episcopalianism and his body is buried in the cemetery at the Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr.

Owner Salome Troubat Maul Kay

The next owners had a strained marriage, and then a brief, sad stay in Riverton.

On April 30, 1877, Rodman Ellison and his wife Hannah sold 407 Bank Avenue to **Salome Troubat Maul Kay** (1819-1880), the wife of **Charles Roberts Kay** (1815-1881), a birthright Quaker "of Penn's Manor, Falls Township" for the sum of \$17,000.

The deed was only in Salome's name, not her husband's. [This phenomenon needs more research because we have seen it happen several times during this era. Does real estate ownership confer on the woman rights which she would not have otherwise had (voting, for instance)? Does it help with taxes?]

The choice of Riverton and this house in particular is understandable. Salome's sister Anne lived year round next door in today's 100 Main, the house originally intended for Chalkley Gillingham but then occupied by the Miller sibling Charles P. Miller. Salome's sister was married to influential Philadelphia banker John Bioren; they had owned 100 Main for a dozen years.

It seems like Salome and her husband may have been trying to recast their lives into quiet retirement in fresh air. Charles was disabled by a lung disease, so a riverbank home next door to her sister's family would seem ideal. (The Census two years later shows the couple living in this house with two female servants. Charles is listed with an occupation of "retired lawyer" and shown as having pleurisy, an inflammation of the lungs.) The two had evidently lived apart for decades (see the end of this article) but rejoined to purchase this house.

But just a month before Salome and Charles could go to settlement on this house, their already challenging lives got worse, with the death of one of their two sons. Their adult son **James Maull Kay** (1840-1877) died at age 37. James and his brother **John** were both single and living together at 2007 Arch Street. The 1877 city directory shows James' occupation as a clerk and lists no occupation for the brother.

Salome and Charles bought the Riverton house, and another blow was struck less than a year and a half later. Their remaining son **John R. Kay** (1842-1878) died in Atlantic City at age 36.

His life must have been complicated. The 1875 directory also lists him at 2007 Arch Street and shows he was associated with the business of R. T. Maull & Co., a canvas shop at 22 South Delaware Avenue run by his uncle Raymond Troubat Maull. Yet by 1877 the directory shows he has no employment and he is not listed at all for 1878.

John's obit in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* describes that he died "suddenly" and enigmatically notices that "[h]is male relatives and friends are respectfully invited to attend his funeral, on the arrival of the steamer *Twilight* at Chestnut street wharf ... Interment at Laurel Hill. Carriages will be in waiting." Why only male relatives? (His brother's obit had the same thing.) Why would the funeral depend on the arrival of the steamer *Twilight*, a regular on the upper Delaware River? Since this notice mentions no location, was the funeral actually held on board the steamboat?

With son John's death, in the course of just a year and a half, Salome and Charles were left childless, with no daughters-in-law and no grandchildren. They were aged 59 and 62.

Things got worse. Four years after the death of their remaining son, Salome herself died here on November 15, 1880 at age 61.

Charles, aged 64 and in poor health, has lost his whole family in just a few years.

Just 11 months later, Charles, too, died in Riverton, on October 2, 1881.

To make matters even harder on him during those 11 months, he had to sort out wife Salome's affairs because, incredible as it may seem for the wife of an attorney, she died without a will. Charles' petition to take control of her estate lists a tangle of seven next of kin. It is likely paperwork that Charles was in no condition to undertake.

Charles, at least, had a will of his own, with the foresight to name brother-in-law (and next door neighbor) John Bioren as executor, to help sort it all out.

Salome Troubat Maull had grown up in Philadelphia, born to a sailmaker named James Maull, Sr. The 1850 McElroy's *Philadelphia City Directory* shows his business at Spruce Street Wharf and his home at 83 Pine Street (old number).

The Maull family had a long and varied relationship with ships, shipping, and navigation. Her great-great-uncle **Nehemiah Maull** (1737-abt 1780) was, like a number of relatives, a ship pilot and drowned in a shipwreck. The site was named the Miah Maull Shoal and marked with a lighthouse that bears his name today.

Charles and Salome had married in 1839. He has left a small footprint on history. He appears in the 1850 Census in Northern Liberties, living with his mother, occupation Attorney at Law, but Salome and their sons aren't there, they are living with Salome's parents.

In 1860 Charles doesn't appear in the Census at all, but is listed in the 1860 McElroy's as an attorney at 139 South 5th Street, and residence at "(Penn Manor)", presumably near the site of Penn's country villa Pennsbury Manor in Bucks County. Curiously, that is the last directory in which he seems to be listed.

Salome Kay and the boys, though, in 1860 are still living with her widowed mother and her two brothers. One was an attorney who had been a classmate of Charles at Penn, and the other was the canvas dealer already mentioned.

By the 1870 Census, Salome is still living with her mother and one brother's family. One of her sons is still with her but one is not. There seems to be no record of Charles in the 1870 Census, either in Philadelphia or in Bucks County.

Living apart for decades, they somehow rejoined their lives in 1877 to buy 407 Bank Avenue. Within four years both of them – and both of their sons – were gone.

Owner Nannie Heiskell Myers Fidler

Settling the Kay estate

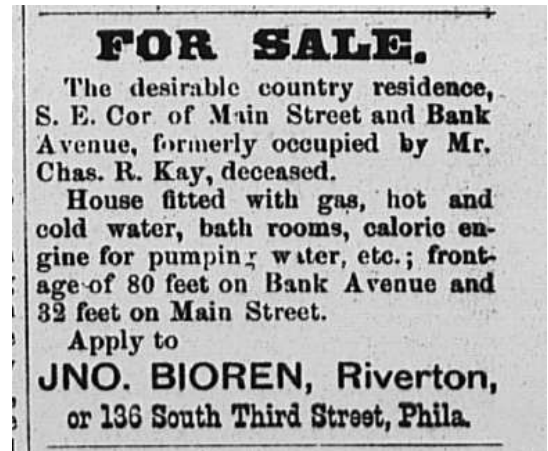
The deaths of Salome and Charles Kay in quick succession must have left many legal loose ends, since Salome had not left a will and the house was in her name. Fortunately, her brother-in-law and next-door neighbor, banker John Bioren, was Charles' executor and he presumably had access to capable accountants and attorneys.

With remarkable, almost unbelievable, speed, he organized the Kays' many legal heirs, found a highly-qualified buyer for 407 Bank, and went to settlement on it in 1882, all in just five months.

The accompanying advertisement is interesting in several ways. One is that Salome and Charles Kay had evidently kept the house's systems up to date, in spite of their many personal hardships. The mention that the house is fitted with gas and hot water, in particular, is noteworthy because an article in that same newspaper 8 months earlier indicated that Riverton did not yet have live gas service "yet it will not be long before gas is introduced here". Running new iron gas pipes through existing plastered walls and ceilings creates considerable disruption and dust, quite a job to undertake in an occupied house if the occupants are coping with other life challenges.

The "caloric engine" mentioned to pump well water is also of interest, probably a Stirling-type atmospheric heat engine. These were similar to small steam engines but did not require boilers and so were simpler but not as powerful. Presumably it would be fired up as needed, to pump well water into a tank, either in the upper floor of an outbuilding or in the attic of the house. The 1890 birds-eye view lithograph of Riverton by Otto Koehler (reproduced later) shows what appears to be an elevated water tank built in the yard between this house and 100 Main.

Finally, the 32' frontage of the property on Main Street in the ad is a typo and should read 320', the distance the deed describes from the riverwall along Main Street to the corner of the property with Carriage House Lane (at the time it continued from Penn Street to Main Street and was called First Street).



From December 15, 1881 *Riverton Journal*

Sale of the house – and transformation

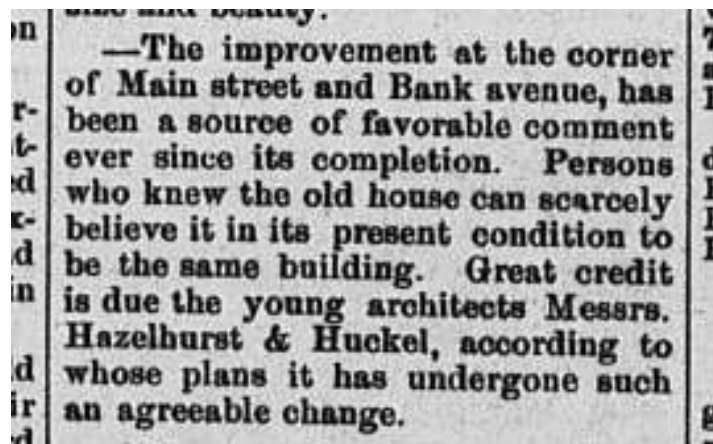
The deed, dated March 22, 1882, lists as the sellers no fewer than eighteen “heirs at law and legal representatives of Salome T. Kay,” giving some idea of the complexity of this effort.

The buyer is “Nannie Myers Fidler, wife of Edwin H. Fidler, Junior”. **Nannie Heiskell Myers Fidler** (1857-1906) is yet another example of a 19th Century married woman purchasing real estate in Riverton in her name alone, as mentioned earlier. The purchase price was \$12,625.

Deeds in New Jersey are usually not specific about buildings on the parcel, but this one describes “the two story Brick and rough cast Dwelling House thereon erected.” Roughcast was a kind of coarse stucco with pebbles or shells mixed in that was applied to the wall by literally throwing it to get an even distribution. The mention of brick is interesting. Since the description was written by the executor of the estate who has lived next door for almost 20 years it is likely correct, even though no brick is visible today and there is no evidence that any of the other Samuel Sloan founders’ houses was made of brick.

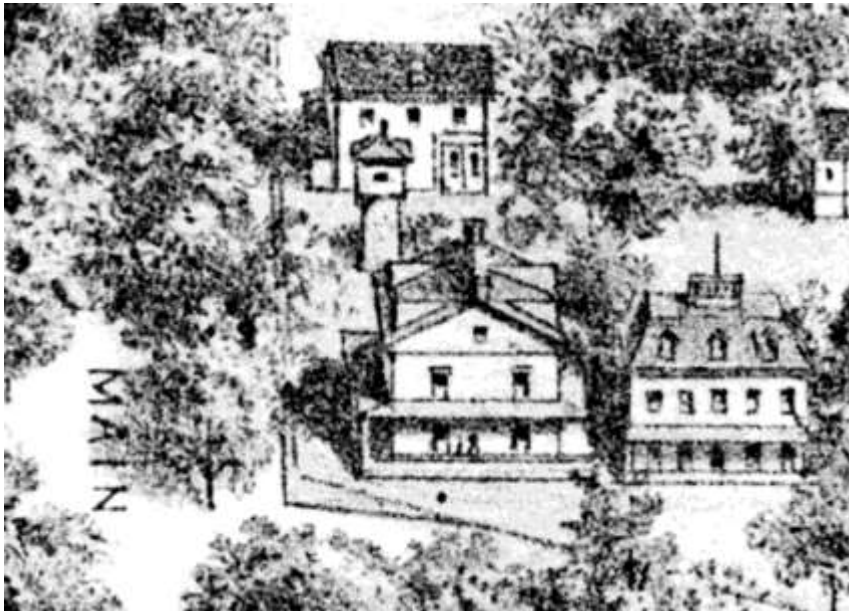
The house was only 31 years old, but the Fidlers had few financial constraints and they immediately transformed the relatively simple Quaker-style home into a much larger house in the current style (which we today would call Queen Anne).

We know from this little article in the *Riverton Journal* of August 6, 1882 that the dramatic rebuilding was complete within about 5 months and was the work of architects Hazlehurst & Huckel.



From August 16, 1882 *Riverton Journal*

Edward P. Hazlehurst and Samuel Huckel, Jr. had recently formed an architectural partnership (by 1881) with offices at 530 Walnut Street in Philadelphia. Hazlehurst had formerly been in the firm of Frank Furness.



After the 1882 rebuild.

Detail from 1890 Birds Eye View of Riverton, litho by Otto Koehler.
407 Bank in center, 100 Main above, 405 Bank to right (orig. Daniel
Leeds Miller, Jr.'s house)

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Gerald Weaber wrote an excellent, well-researched article on the Fitlers for the Historical Society of Riverton *Gaslight News* #138 in November 2009. Most of his information isn't restated here because those pages are included at the end of this section in their entirety. Material included here is either summary or additional insight not included in the Weaber article.

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Nannie Haskell Myers Fidler

Nannie Fidler was the owner of record of this house so we will start with her. A fascinating glimpse of Nannie's home life as a child was published on Facebook by Robert McNulty on his page "Philadelphia Stories by Bob McNulty" on April 12, 2015. It was based on a later photograph of the once-grand Myers family home at 1334 Arch Street, owned by Nannie's father, **Nathan Myers** (1832-1908). The family only lived there from 1870-1877. Probably coincidentally, Rodman Ellison, mentioned above as an earlier owner of our 407 Bank Avenue in Riverton, lived on the same block of Arch Street in 1870, at number 1313.

We haven't independently verified much of McNulty's account, but it seems well-researched. Here is what he wrote:

In 1870, William Hamm sold 1334 Arch Street to Nathan Myers. Nathan owned an auction house and came from a very wealthy family (in 1860, his family was worth \$977,000.....\$25,000,000 today).



1334 Arch in 1911, from FB "Philadelphia Stories by Bob McNulty"

Also living here was Nathan's wife Margaret and their teenage daughter Nancy. The Myers Family lived here until 1877 when Nathan retired from business at age 45. The mansion remained on the market for 3 years.

When Nathan retired he moved his family to their country estate which was located near the current day intersection of State Road and Convent Lane. Also living there were his mother, two sisters, a brother in law and a niece. They had 11 servants to tend to their needs.

Nathan got bored with being retired so in 1892, he bought a hotel. Once upon a time there were 2 hotels at the intersection of Broad and Walnut. On the NW corner was the Hotel Bellevue and on the SW corner was the Stratford Hotel. In 1892, Nathan bought the Stratford. He and Margaret lived there and managed the hotel until 1902 when they sold out to George Boldt, the owner of the Bellevue. Boldt tore down both hotels and built the Bellevue Stratford Hotel on the NW corner of Broad and Walnut. When the Bellevue Stratford was completed in 1904, Nathan and Margaret took a suite there where Nathan died on July 12, 1908 at age 75.



Nanny Fidler at the Riverton Bezique Club ca 1898 Coll. HSR

When McNulty mentions Nannie's parents moved in 1877 to "their country estate" he is probably referring to a property named "Belrose", an estate across the river and upriver about two miles from Riverton. It is shown on this 1887 map by G. M. Hopkins.

The estate is at the bottom, in the name of Nannie's mother, Margaret. Again, we see an example of real estate owned solely in the name of the wife in a married couple.



From *Atlas of Properties near the Philadelphia and Trenton Rail Road, Frankford to Trenton*, 1885, Plate 5 By G. M. Hopkins from philageohistory.org

For orientation, note the north arrow at lower left. "Torresdale Landing" is the next steamboat landing upriver from Riverton, the site of today's Delaware River Yacht Club. This is the extreme northeast tip of Philadelphia. (A puzzle is the middle initial "E" used on the map. We know the family was in this area because Mr. and Mrs. Myers are listed in the 1880 Census as living on the "Road in Torresdale" in the 23rd Ward." These atlases were of high quality, so it's not a given that this is just a typo.)

Not coincidentally, however, their immediate neighbor to the north was none other than our Nannie's father-in-law, Edwin H. Fittle [Sr.], president of Fittle Cordage and soon-to-be Mayor of Philadelphia. The timing in 1877 seems to be that Nannie and Edwin, Jr. got married in January and then her parents bought this country estate right next to their new in-laws. We have no information about how Fittle, Sr. felt about his new in-laws moving next door.

There are two Riverton connections to mention before we leave the subject of the Myers family, and the Belrose estate.

- The middle name of Nannie's paternal grandfather (Nathan's father) was Bispham, a most unusual name and, intriguingly, the name of the family who had previously owned the farm from which the upriver part of Riverton was created (referred to above as the "Isaiah Toy Farm").
- Also worthy of note is that the 1880 Census shows that also living in this household were Ellen M. Showell and her son Edward B. Showell (Jr.), then 17 years old. Ellen was Margaret's sister (i.e. Nannie's aunt) and had been widowed at age 25, left with an infant son and another son, John, just four years old. Ellen and Edward, Sr., had been married at the Myers family church in Philadelphia, but he had come from Worcester County, Maryland. There is a tiny town there today still named Showell, according to Google Maps. Edward, Jr. later moved to Riverton, building the (now demolished) stone house at 105 Bank Avenue. Through his son Rex Showell, he was an ancestor of many Riverton residents familiar in modern times, notably **Elsie Showell Waters** (1918-2018). Edward, Jr.'s brother also purchased a home on the riverbank, 301 Bank Ave., now demolished, originally the Edward Lippincott house.

The Myers family evidently had no formal church connection until the 1850s, when the records of the Grace Church Episcopal Chapel in Philadelphia indicate that many in the family were baptized as adults, shortly before Nannie's birth. Nannie evidently remained an Episcopalian all her life, because in her will she left a handsome bequest to Christ Church, Riverton.

An early record of Nannie's life appears in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for March 26, 1873. For reasons that aren't apparent, Nannie, then 16, was the woman given the honor of christening a new ship at Cramp's shipyard in Port Richmond. The article says,

As the bow of the now-swiftly gliding vessel touched the water Miss Nannie Myers, daughter of Mr. Nathan Myers, of this city, broke of the bow a bottle of wine made from grapes grown in the State after which the vessel was by her named, by pronouncing the words, as she shattered the bottle, "I christen thee *Indiana*."

The *Indiana* was the third of four new steamboats built by Cramp & Sons for the American Steamship Company, a subsidiary of the Pennsylvania Railroad. According to her Wikipedia article, *Indiana* spent her entire 24-year on the Philadelphia-to-Liverpool run. No connection has turned up between the Myers family and either the American Steamship Company or Cramp & Sons to explain Nannie's role that cold late-winter day.

We have a later photograph likely depicting Nannie and her mother Margaret Ann Heiskell Myers. This photo is in an album in the collection of the Riverton Free Library, believed to be created

from photos taken by Riverton photographer David Lothrop (and possibly his daughter Bertha) over the span of several years around 1887.

See the HSR monograph about this album by Roger Prichard for a more detailed discussion of its dates, etc. It is believed to have been created by or for the Fidler family of Riverton. Some of the pages are captioned in pencil in a child's handwriting. This page reads "Mrs. Meyers and Mrs. Fidler," and the spelling of Fidler has been clumsily corrected. The names are likely transposed, and "Meyers" is evidently a misspelling. Thus, the younger woman on the left is believed to be Nannie (30 years of age in 1887) and the older on the right would be her mother Margaret (who would have been 55 in that year). We have no sources which might tell us the name of the coachman.

The photograph is taken on the riverbank, but we can't tell where. The carriage is of a style called a "Victoria", and likely belongs to Nannie and her husband.



“Mrs. Meyers [sic] and Mrs. Fidler” (detail) ca. 1887 *Collection of Riverton Free Library*

Names are probably reversed.

Edwin Henry Fitler, Jr.

Nannie married Edwin, Jr. on January 31, 1877 and they settled at 129 N. 18th Street, at about 18th and Cherry Sts.

It is peculiar that their wedding achieved very little public notice, considering that Nannie was the daughter of an influential businessman and, as we will see below, Edwin's father was one of the most prominent businessmen active in civic affairs in Philadelphia. In those days a social event such as this could be expected to rate reporting in the local newspapers, with fashion commentary on the bride and her attendants and an enumeration of the distinguished guests.

Oddly, no such articles have been found, only a very brief legal notice in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* two days later. Unlike the two other legal notices for marriages on that page, it does not mention the location of the wedding, merely the names and that it was performed by "the Rev. William Suddards, D. D." Dr. Suddards was the rector of the church, Grace Episcopal, but the omission of the church's name from the notice raises the possibility that this quiet ceremony took place somewhere else. All of this is consistent with the relatively small public record both Nannie and Edwin Jr. left behind, which would suggest that they may have led much more retiring private lives than either of their colorful fathers.

They would purchase 407 Bank in Riverton for use as a summer house five years later in 1882. They moved their City home to 1530 Walnut St. by 1885, an address they would keep until their deaths twenty years later. Edwin's parents City address for many years was a few doors west at 1600 Walnut.

Edwin Henry Fitler, Jr. (1853-1901) was the son of **Edwin Henry Fitler, Sr.** (1825-1896), a 19th Century industrialist success story. One good summary of Edwin, Sr.'s life is Edwin Jaquette Sellers, *Genealogy of Dr. Francis Joseph Pfeiffer of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and His Descendants*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1899), p.32. A google search of the name will turn up numerous contemporary accolades.

The father, Edwin, Sr., eschewed both his own father's tannery business and an early effort to pursue the law and instead apprenticed in a cordage business (that is, making rope and twine). He had a particular knack for creating machines to improve both the speed and the quality of the manufacturing. In 1859, when he was 34, he bought out the owner of the business and renamed it Edwin H. Fitler & Co.

Both of Edwin, Sr.'s sons joined him in the business, our Edwin, Jr. and his younger brother **William Wonderly Fitler** (1857-1931).

By 1880, two years before our Edwin, Jr. and Nannie set up their Riverton summer house, the business had outgrown their cramped works on Germantown Avenue above 10th. The company

built an entirely new factory in Bridesburg, just above the Frankford Arsenal, on 15 acres of land. This location, on Tacony Street, is today occupied by the Dietz and Watson plant.



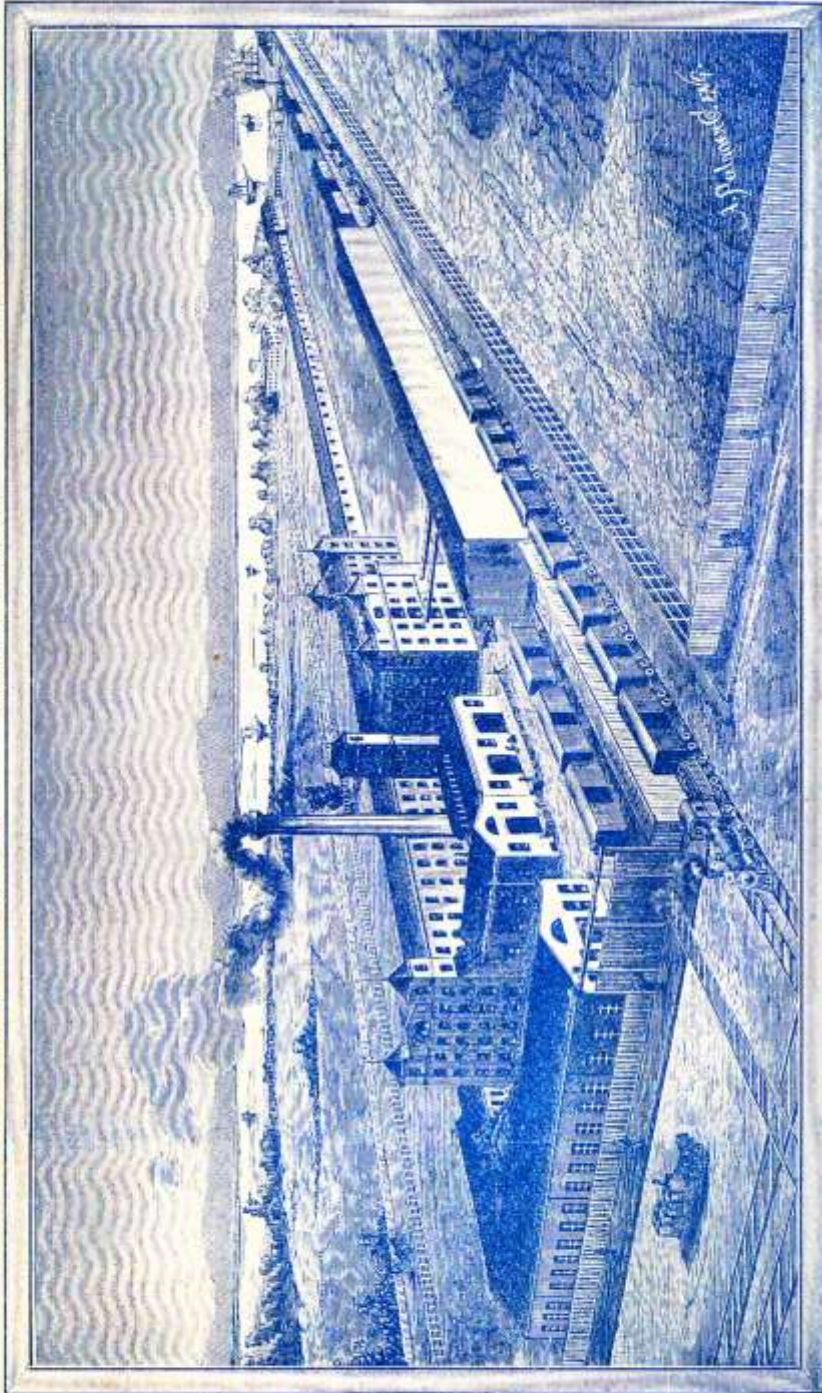
From Atlas of Properties near the Philadelphia and Trenton Rail Road, Frankford to Trenton, 1885, Plate 1 By G. M. Hopkins
philageohistory.org

EDWIN H. FITLER & CO.
 PHILADELPHIA CORDAGE WORKS, 23 N. WATER ST., and 22 N. DELAWARE AVE., PHILADELPHIA, PA., U.S.A.
FACTORY AT BRIDGEBURG.

EDWIN H. FITLER.
 EDWIN H. FITLER, JR.
 WILLIAM W. FITLER.

Manufacturers of MANILA, SISAL & TARRED CORDAGE,
 Oil Well Cables and Derrick Rope, Bale Rope of all kinds,

MANILA AND SISAL BINDER TWINE, for Home and Export
 Trades. Dealers in Hemp, Oakum and Naval Stores.



Undated view looking east, Delaware River in background, Tacony Street in foreground. Coll. Free Library of Philadelphia

Contemporary accounts claim that the cordage works was never sued, nor was there ever a strike in its history.

Edwin, Sr. achieved even greater renown by running as a reform candidate for Mayor of Philadelphia. He served just one term, from 1887 to 1891, but was widely respected. After his death in 1896, Fitler Square in southwest Center City and Fitler Street in the Far Northeast near his country home were named in his honor, as well as an elementary school in Germantown.

Our Edwin, Jr. may have found it difficult to step out from the shadow of his illustrious father. Even today, Google searches for the name turn up very little for Edwin, Jr.

Work to rebuild 407 Bank Ave. was likely complete in the summer of 1882 but we don't know if the family used it that summer.

Unlike a number of other influential Riverton residents of the time, neither Edwin, Jr. nor Nannie appears to have been intensely involved in civic affairs, either locally in Riverton or on a larger scale. We know from her obituary that Nannie was active in Christ Church. The only mention for an activity other than professional for Edwin, Jr. was in the Palmyra *Weekly News* for January 14, 1888, which indicated that Edwin, Jr. was a board member of the Riverton Ball Club.

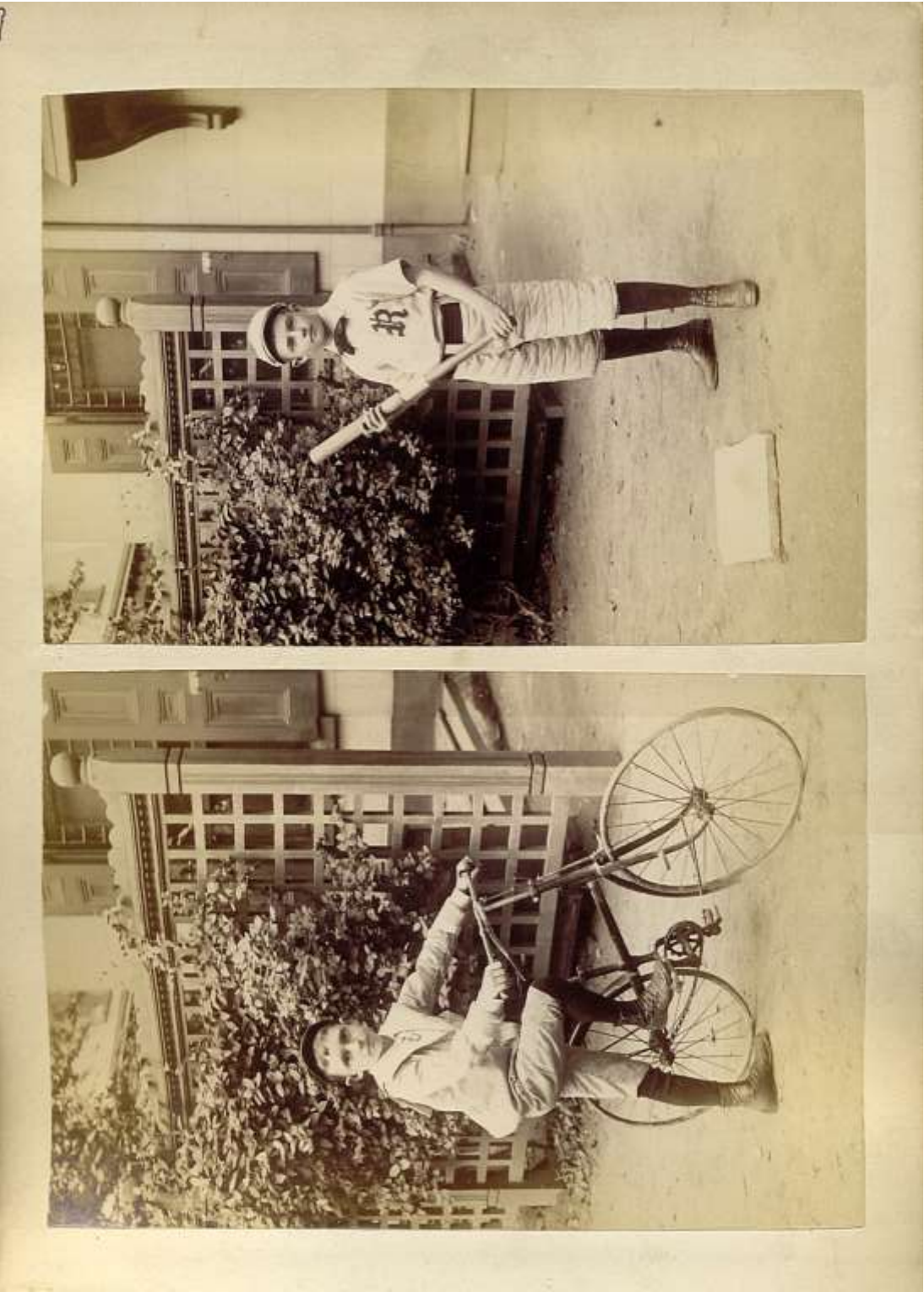
Baseball was a growing craze at that time. One of the only photos of the Fitler family in Riverton shows one of the sons in a Riverton baseball uniform, posing at the back porch of 407 Bank Ave. Note that the cellar door slightly visible in the left photo is now gone, but the stone steps still exist in the basement.

The original is in the collection of the Riverton Free Library, in the album mentioned earlier. It is one of a pair of photos of two brothers in the same location. Since we believe the album to be from sometime after 1887, it is likely that the boy on the right in the ball uniform is **Nathan Myers Fitler** (1878-1940) and the boy on the left with the bike is younger brother **C. Cecil Fitler** (1882-1925).

When they grew up, Nathan Myers Fitler married **Mary Biddle** (1879-1966) of 201 Bank Ave., who, as author Mary Biddle Fitler became beloved of Rivertonians for her four books of semi-autobiographical fiction about growing up on the riverbank. They lived in the home at 109 Bank Ave. for many years.

C. Cecil Fitler also married a riverbank girl, Edna Frishmuth, who grew up on the upriver corner of Bank and Linden (now gone). Her parents gave them the elegant home that still stands at 11 Bank Ave. as a wedding present.

Much more detail about Nannie and Edwin, Jr.'s children can be found in Gerald Weaber's comprehensive *Gaslight News* article reproduced later on.



Probably C. Cecil Fitler (l) and Nathan Myers Fitler (r), sons of Nannie and Edwin Fitler, Jr.
in back yard of 407 Bank Ave. about 1890. Coll. of Riverton Free Library

Altogether, Nannie and Edwin, Jr. had five children, all of whom lived to adulthood. The youngest, Margaret, was born in 1896, eight years after the previous child, when her mother was 39.

Baby Margaret Fitler got the short end of the stick as far as stable childhoods go. She was just four years old when her father, Edwin H. Fitler, Jr. died and then just nine when she lost her mother Nannie.

The cause of Edwin, Jr.'s death on the 4th of July, 1901 hasn't been turned up. He was just 47 and his obit in the Philadelphia *Times* indicates that he died after "an illness of several years". He had taken over the presidency of his father's Fitler Cordage Company on the death of his father in 1896 but only held that position two or three years before being obliged to resign for his health. He died at their City home at 1530 Walnut St.; evidently he was too ill to travel to Riverton that summer. Edwin, Jr. had only outlived his father by five years and his mother survived him by three years.

Nannie herself died 4-1/2 years later at the age of 49. We do not know the cause. A peculiarity of her death is that it occurred in the middle of the winter, January 23, 1906, and yet she died in Riverton. A piece in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* the next day is datelined Riverton and says she "died at her summer residence here this afternoon, after an illness lasting several months. ... It has been Mrs. Fitler's custom to spend her winters in Philadelphia, where she had her residence at 1530 Walnut street, but her illness prevented her from leaving Riverton last fall." (The obit incorrectly identifies her as the widow of the former mayor, instead of the widow of his son.)

As mentioned, Margaret was just nine. By this time, Margaret's oldest brother Nathan Myers Fitler was 27, already married (to Mary Biddle) and living down the road on the riverbank at 109 Bank Ave. with their two small children. He became Margaret's guardian and she grew up in their household. For more about Margaret's life, see the monograph on 311 Bank Avenue, where she lived after her marriage.

Nannie's will had left the real estate at 407 Bank Ave. in trust for Margaret as well as a substantial cash bequest. Brother Nathan Myers Fitler handled the sale of the property, though this did not happen until 1913. There is no indication that the house was rented during that period and there appears to be no entry for it in the 1910 Census. Presumably the house sat empty for seven years as the next generation went on with the business of growing up and managing their young families.

One final bit of trivia about the family, also mentioned in Gerald Weaber's article below, is that Edwin, Jr.'s brother William Wonderly Fitler had a granddaughter Margaretta whose nickname was "Happy" and who married the governor of New York, Nelson Rockefeller, who later became Vice President of the United States under Gerald Ford.



Gaslight News

November 2009

Historical Society of Riverton

vol. XXXIX, no. 4 (#138)

Founded 1970

Riverton, NJ 08077

Incorporated 1978

Once again, Mr. Gerald Weaber, President of the Historical Society of Riverton, informs and entertains our readers with an absorbing profile of the fascinating Fidler family. He began research for this intriguing article last December and has been diligently pursuing more details since. It is complete in this issue.



Fascinating Fiders among the movers and shakers since Riverton's early days

The cast includes a Mayor of Philadelphia, millionaire industrialists, an author, rope makers, auto makers, golfers, a Second Lady of the US, and a horse show ribbon winner!

Just about everyone associated with Riverton knows of the Biddle family for the role that it has played in the founding and development of our town in its early years. But some have never heard of the Fidler family and their strong ties to the Biddles and the mark they left on local history.

broad administrative powers under the new Bullitt Charter of 1885. Fidler won wide support for mayor based largely on his reputation as a successful Bridesburg businessman. Edwin H. Fidler had old-fashioned ideas believing that public officials should be honest. Before Fidler took office it was common for the chief of police to collect one dollar a month from the 6,000 saloon keepers so that they could open their side doors on Sunday contrary to the law. Fidler appointed an honest man to be the chief of police. In a few weeks a dozen of the most notorious payers for police protection were sent to prison.

Mayor Fidler's family prospered, enabling five of his grandchildren to raise families in Riverton. The Philadelphia mayor lived in Philadelphia throughout his life in a

See FIDERS on 2

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As new mayor of Philadelphia Edwin H. Fidler had an old-fashioned idea—honesty

In 1887 the small town of Riverton was barely thirty-six years old when the City of Philadelphia elected its first charter reform candidate in Mayor Edwin Henry Fidler. Riverton's prosperity in the 19th century was tied to the largess of the Philadelphia merchant class and its wealth.

The new mayor was the first leader of Philadelphia city government granted

A founder's descendant shares marvelous memories of an idyllic life on the riverbank



Edwin H. Fidler
Edwin H. Fidler
Rope manufacturer,
Mayor of Philadelphia
1887 - 1891

Nathan Myers Fidler
Husband to Mary
Biddle Fidler; a favorite
uncle of Miss Barbara



FITLERS from I

mansion on 16th and Walnut Streets and also at his country seat at *Luzon* in the Torresdale section of Philadelphia, and later he lived in a summer home in Riverton overlooking the Delaware River.

Mayor Fidler's sons lived in Riverton while managing the family cordage business, making twine and rope, in the Bridesburg section of Philadelphia. *Edwin H. Fidler & Company* made Mayor Fidler a multi-millionaire in the late 19th century.



Edwin H. Fidler & Company

At the time of his death in 1896, at the age of seventy-one, Mayor Fidler's net worth was more than three million dollars. An intensely patriotic citizen, Fidler raised and equipped a regiment from his employees at the cordage business to fight in the American Civil War. Later, Fidler was active in organizing and promoting Philadelphia's

great Centennial Exposition of 1876 and served on its board of finance.

Great-grandchild of Riverton founder fondly recalls halcyon days

Last December, I interviewed one of the few surviving great-grandchildren of Robert Biddle, one of Riverton's founders in 1851. Mrs. Barbara Page Bartholomew, a former Riverton resident and descendant of the local Henry and Charles Miller Biddle family, now lives with her daughter in Newtown Square.

Barbara Page Bartholomew was born in 1912 in Riverton to Lilian Biddle and Walter Page, who raised three children, Jean Biddle Page, Walter Biddle Page and Barbara Page (Miss Barbara). During my visit I showed Miss Barbara early stereo viewer slides and postcard images of Riverton. The photographs stirred childhood memories, laughter and some tears as Miss Barbara shared her memories of life on the riverbank. She took particular note of one photograph of a horse-drawn carriage on the riverbank driven by a coachman wearing a suit and top hat and accompanied by two finely dressed women.



Author Mary Biddle Fidler on left in carriage on Bank Avenue in Riverton with Mrs. Fidler.

She took a magnifying glass and studied the images of the carriage passengers. Miss Barbara was thrilled to identify the image of her mother's younger sister, Mary Biddle Fidler, sitting in the Fidler carriage. Mrs. Bartholomew recalled her teenage years working for her aunt, Mary Biddle Fidler, who authored four books using Riverton as a backdrop for an adventure series for children featuring the character *Reddy*.

Mrs. Bartholomew typed her aunt's manuscript drafts for some of the books in the *Reddy* series. The other books included *Kid*, *Anna Mary*, and the *Big Wharf*. It took Mrs. Mary Biddle Fidler seventeen years and countless manuscript submissions to finally attract a publisher for her *Reddy* book printed in 1929. (The Historical Society of Riverton website features an article on the *Reddy* book series at www.gaslightnews.homestead.com)

Miss Barbara recalled a Riverton where almost everyone living on the riverbank seemed to be a Biddle or Fidler. There were the Biddle boys and their *Biddle Motor Car Company* who turned down an offer by Walter Percy Chrysler to join his enterprise. The *Biddle Car Company* was bought and moved to New York in 1920 by a consortium of owners including Philadelphians Walter H. Lippincott, G.H. Stetson, the hat manufacturer, and Myers Fidler.

Miss Barbara was fond of her aunt's husband, Nathan Myers Fidler, whom she

affectionately called Uncle Myers and who she said built the first swimming pool in Riverton. Nathan Myers Fidler and Mary Biddle Fidler lived in the home known as Graystone at 109 Bank Avenue. The first swimming pool in town was on the same property where the Fidler playhouse once stood. The playhouse, where Miss Barbara played as a youngster, was later the home to Anne Knight-Ruff, author of *Ruff Copy*, located at 4 Thomas Avenue behind Graystone. The pool once owned by Ms. Ruff was not the original Fidler pool. Recently the property at 4 Thomas Avenue was razed and the lot split into separate parcels where two modern homes were built.

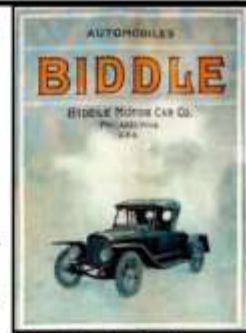
A news story in *The Philadelphia Public Ledger* announced, "Riverton - March 31st, 1902 One of the prettiest weddings of the season occurred today, when Miss Mary Biddle, eldest daughter of Mrs. Henry S. Biddle, was married to Mr. Nathan Myers Fidler, grandson of the Edwin H. Fidler, former Mayor of Philadelphia".

THE CHILDREN OF EDWIN H. FITLER, JR. OF RIVERTON 1880S-1920S

The children of Edwin H. Fidler, Jr., son of the Philadelphia mayor, lived in Riverton earning fame, fortune and some notoriety as nationally ranked female amateur golfers, horsewomen, and yachtsmen. A Fidler cousin in 1968 received national attention when news of her relationship with Governor Nelson Rockefeller thwarted his bid for the Republican nomination for President of the United States.

Mayor Fidler and his wife, Josephine R. Baker, kept a summer home in Riverton. Four of their five grandchildren were born in Riverton. Mrs. Fidler died in her Riverton summer home after a prolonged illness in 1906. She was a member of the Porch Club and Christ Church. Christ Church was important to the Riverton Fiders. Nathan Myers and Mary Biddle Fidler were married at Christ Church in 1902 by the Rev. R. Bowden Shepherd. Nannie H. Myers Fidler, wife of Edwin H. Fidler, Jr.,

See **FIDLER** on 4



An undated ad for the Biddle Motor Car Company

Miss Barbara recalled a Riverton where almost everyone living on the riverbank seemed to be a Biddle or Fidler. There were the Biddle boys and their Biddle Motor Car Company who turned down an offer by Walter Percy Chrysler to join his enterprise.

Mrs. Bartholomew typed manuscripts for her aunt, Mary Biddle Fidler, author of four books using Riverton as a backdrop for an adventure series. Illustration from *Anna Mary - A Girl of the Nineties* by Mary Biddle Fidler





A portrait of a younger Barbara Page Bartholomew, born 1912, daughter of Lillian Biddle who was sister to author Mary Biddle Fidler - the subject of an interview by Gerald Weaber

Cordage wealth provided a lavish life for three generations of Fitlers

FITLERS from 3

left a five thousand dollar bequest to Christ Church. A stained glass window stands at Christ Church in memory of the Fidler family.

Mayor Fidler's grandsons actively participated in the management of the Fidler rope works until its purchase by Columbian Rope Company in 1948. The wealth produced by the Fidler Company endowed three generations with the resources to live lavishly on Philadelphia's Main Line and in Riverton.

Mayor Fidler's two sons, Edwin H., Jr. and William Wonderly Fidler, managed the cordage enterprise alongside their father until the Mayor's death in 1896. Edwin H. Jr. served as President and Treasurer for the cordage works from 1896-1898 until the stress of daily affairs required his hospitalization. Edwin, Jr. moved from their Walnut Street home in Philadelphia to Riverton for the summer of 1898.

Nathan Myers Fidler, also known as N. Myers Fidler, the eldest son of Edwin H. Fidler, Jr., was born in Philadelphia, trained as a stockbroker and later served as president of the cordage company. Nathan and Mary Biddle were married in 1902 at Christ's Church. The 1910 census shows Nathan

Myers living at 109 Bank Avenue with his wife Mary Biddle age 31; Ralston age 10 months; N. Myers, Jr. age 6; Henry age 4; and Martha age 7; identified as a sister

and six servants. The family moved from Riverton and lived in Wynnewood, Pa. for the remainder of their lives where Mary Biddle Fidler, author of adventure books for children, died in suburban Ardmore, PA in 1966 at the age of 87, having served three terms as chairman of the Devon Horse Show.

Clarence Cecil Fidler, also known as C. Cecil Fidler, was born in Riverton and the second Fidler brother to marry a Riverton girl whose mother was a Biddle. An April wedding in 1904 united C. Cecil Fidler and Miss Edna Helen Frishmuth. Between 1907-1911 the couple gave birth to two daughters and one son while living at 11 Bank Avenue. In 1910 C. Cecil,

age 27, lived with his wife Edna age 26; daughter Margaret 2 years old; and Mr. Fidler's youngest brother Dale B. age 21 years. By 1920 the household had six servants, who outnumbered the three family members living in the grand home at 11 Bank Avenue.

A *Trenton Times* headline on Aug. 20, 1908, read, "Say Ticket Agent Used Hatchet". The article told the story of Pennsylvania Railroad ticket agent Charles Silverthorn, who was arrested for allegedly striking C. Cecil Fidler in the shoulder with a hatchet following Mr. Fidler's complaint that the ticket agent was discourteous to his wife, Mrs. Edna Frishmuth Fidler of Riverton, earlier that day.

In 1911 Mrs. C. Cecil Fidler's horses, *Pink Lady* and *Pandora*, finished first and second in the harness horse division at the *Monmouth County Horse Show*, and her horse *Florham King* took ribbons in both the pair and tandem classes. Sadly, in the

The local newspaper wrote that on February 13th, 1909, "Edwin H. Fidler, Jr. and two friends rowed across the Delaware River from the Fidler home to Disston's wharves in Tacony, braving chunks of floating ice...took more than two hours...Fidler is in the habit of going (across the river to work) daily via motor launch from his home to Phila., then by trolley to the Fidler cordage works, unless the river is frozen over...".

HOME FOR NINE
3 Fitlers
6 servants
The Fidler
Residence at
11 Bank Avenue

The next issue of *Gaslight News* will feature an article by Mrs. Phyllis Rodgers, Vice President of the Historical Society of Riverton, in which she will trace the history of that grand Bank Street home and outline the painstaking efforts by a local family to restore it in the 1980s.



same year, Mr. & Mrs. Fidler buried their infant daughter, Edna Faith.



George Grantham Bain Collection (Library of Congress)
Mrs. C.C. Fidler riding her horse & carriage

Mrs. C. Cecil Fidler was born Edna Helen Frishmuth, daughter to John C.W. and Hannah M. Biddle of Riverton. C. Cecil died in 1925 after a distinguished career with the Edwin H. Fidler Company.

Edwin H. Fidler III was born in Riverton in 1883 and later lived with his wife, Elisa, at "The Terraces" in Rosemont, PA. Elisa qualified for the 19th Annual National Ladies Golf Championship sponsored by the United States Golf Association in 1913. She played as a nationally ranked ladies amateur golfer, as did her sister-in-law, Mrs. C. Cecil Fidler of Riverton. Our research retrieved copies of passport applications for brothers C. Cecil and Edwin, 18 and 17 years of age, respectively, dated April 1900 just prior to their September trip to the tomb of their Irish ancestors. Mr. Fidler's son, H. Biddle, worked as a sales manager at the Fidler rope works until his untimely death in 1936. He fell from a hotel window in New York at the age of thirty. Mr. Fidler III worked as a stockbroker in Philadelphia. Both he and his wife were avid golfers at the Merion Cricket Club until his death in 1945.

Dale Baker Fidler was born in Riverton exactly nine months after the famous snow blizzard in March 1888. Drifts reached fifteen to thirty feet high along the riverbank. Dale lived in Riverton for a time in his early twenties with his older brother, C. Cecil, at 11 Bank Avenue. He owned an investment trading business located at the Union League building in Philadelphia and later lived in Ardmore, Pa.

Margaret Fidler, the only daughter of Edwin

H. Fidler, Jr., was born in Riverton and married Oliver G. Willits of New York in 1915. The couple lived in Riverton at 309 Bank Avenue.

The Fidler legacy in US history

William Wonderly Fidler successfully led the Fidler enterprise after 1898 and raised his daughter, Rachel, and his son, William Wonderly, Jr., in Philadelphia before moving to the Main Line. William Wonderly, Jr. was a businessman and yachtsman whose first marriage lasted only ten years. His daughter Margarette was born in 1926. She was known to the girls at the Shipley School in Bryn Mawr as "Happy" for her "bright smile and perpetual good humor". Happy Fidler-Murphy married Governor Nelson Rockefeller in 1963.

Happy Fidler-Murphy was thrust into the public eye when, within weeks of her divorce, she married Rockefeller. Happy was compared to the Duchess of Windsor and accused of costing Rockefeller the opportunity of becoming President of the United States. News accounts compared the Governor to the Duke of Windsor, who gave up the throne of England for the woman he loved.

Nelson Rockefeller finally realized his childhood dream to hold national office when President Ford appointed him Vice President of the United States following the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon in 1974.

Margaretta "Happy" Fidler was the great-granddaughter of both Civil War General George Gordon Meade, who commanded the Union troops at Gettysburg, and Philadelphia Mayor Edwin H. Fidler.

-GERALD WEABER

HISTORICAL NOTE The Blizzard of 1888

One of the most famous snowstorms in American history, it hit the eastern United States March 11th and 12th 1888. *The Great White Hurricane* paralyzed communities from Maine to Chesapeake Bay. Cities became isolated when telephone and telegraph wires snapped, trains stopped, and roads became impassable. The National Weather service estimated that 40 inches of snow covered New York and New Jersey. Philadelphia claimed high winds blew up to 60 miles an hour, creating snowdrifts 40 to 50 feet high. Hundreds of deaths were reported. In NYC, the resulting transportation crisis led to the creation of the New York subway system.



It is widely acknowledged that his marriage to the just-divorced Margaretta Fidler Large cost Nelson Rockefeller his bid for the 1964 Republican nomination for US President.

Owners Richard Hughes then Minnie V. Herr

Of these next two deed transactions, one lasted three days and the next lasted 36 years.

In a deed dated October 23, 1913, Nathan Myers Fidler, in his role as guardian for his sister Margaret Fidler, sold 407 Bank Ave. to Richard J. Hughes, “of the City of Altoona, in the County of Blair and State of Pennsylvania” for the sum of \$10,000.

Just three days later, this man from western Pennsylvania sold the property again, this time to “Minnie V. Herr, wife of Albert W. Herr, of the Borough of Riverton.” The price was the same, \$10,000.

This peculiar transaction becomes clearer when we find the obituary for Richard J. Hughes in the *Altoona Tribune* of October 17, 1914 (just one year later) and see that he was from Philadelphia and has a surviving daughter “Minnie Herr, of Philadelphia.”

So Richard J. Hughes bought 407 Bank Ave. to turn right around and sell it to his daughter. (As we see repeatedly, the deed is put in her name alone, not in that of her husband or the two jointly).

There is little information available about the life of his daughter **Mary Virginia “Minnie” Hughes Herr Shoemaker** (1867-1942). She had married **Albert William Herr** (1859-1918) in 1886 in Camden. In 1900, evidently childless, the couple lived in a boarding house in North Philadelphia on N. 15th St., between Oxford and Columbia. The 1900 US Census shows Albert’s occupation as a liquor salesman. (His obituary in 1918, however, said he had worked for 21 years with the New York furniture firm of Ferguson Brothers.) In the Philadelphia directories Albert appears at that address as late as the 1908 but is gone from the 1909 edition.

They don’t seem to appear anywhere in the 1910 Census.

The next year, Minnie visits her father in Altoona, as he is “suffering from the effects of a fall,” according to an item in the February 14, 1911 *Altoona Times*. It mentions that she is “of Riverton, N.J.” so she and Albert are already living in Riverton two years prior to her purchase of 407 Bank Ave. from Nathan Myers Fidler. It is possible that Albert and Minnie were renting it, liked it, and saw the opportunity to buy. It was certainly a nicer place to live than boarding houses in Philadelphia. A \$10,000 home was probably more than a salesman could manage, hence the purchase by Minnie’s father.

Minnie’s father Richard J. Hughes had evidently succeeded well in business in Altoona and may have made a gift of the house to his daughter. We know that he was not in good health (and, indeed, died just one year later).

Minnie’s husband Albert then died in this house on June 8, 1918 at the age of 58, of Bright’s Disease, according to the records of Christ Church, Riverton. (Bright’s disease refers to a variety

of chronic diseases of the kidneys, according to Wikipedia.) The obit in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* indicates that he lived in the “old homestead of Edwin H. Fidler” (misidentifying him as the former mayor).

Albert’s obit mentions that he was a member of the Riverton Yacht Club.

Minnie mostly stayed on in Riverton another 24 years until her death. For some reason she moved around, yet maintained ownership of 407 Bank Ave.

The 1920 US Census shows her living in – and owning – the house at 100 Main St., which is the house next door (originally intended for founder Chalkley Gillingham) and shows her household including two sisters-in-law, Fannie and Emma Herr, both single women, sisters of Albert. No servants are part of the household. There is apparently no entry in this Census for 407 Bank Ave.

We know that 407 Bank is already at least two apartments by 1924. The July 6, 1924 edition of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* has an ad describing two apartments, one five rooms and one six. Note that electric light is still worth mentioning in an ad. They didn’t rent quickly. Two ads appear on August 31st of the same year. Helpfully to us, they mention the apartments are “just finished”, suggesting that the division into two units has just taken place.



July 6, 1924 *Philadelphia Inquirer*

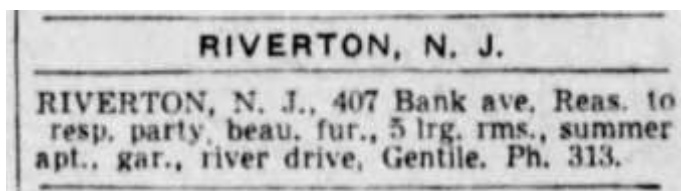
The 1926 and 1929 editions of the *Burlington County Directory* list “Minnie V. Herr” back at 407 Bank Ave. On October 22, 1926 the *Camden Courier-Post* includes an engagement announcement for the daughter of “Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Ruster” at this address.

By the 1930 Census, Minnie is no longer at either house. 100 Main St. is by then owned and occupied by the famous Arthur Dorrance and family, of Campbell Soup renown and one unit in 407 Bank Ave. is now being rented by Arthur C. P. Quinby, an advertising writer, and his daughter Harriet.

Minnie had evidently remarried by now, by the clause in the next deed which reads “[a]nd the said Minnie V. Herr, afterwards known as Mary V. Shoemaker ...”.

With this last name, we find Minnie living at the shore in 1930, in Avalon, to be specific. The 1930 Census lists her at 256 6th St., Avalon, New Jersey, as the wife of **Leroy P. Shoemaker** (1872-1950), a salesman of milk. It indicates that he or they own the house in Avalon.

Another ad for an apartment here appears in the June 4, 1939 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, ominously indicating that only a “gentile” would be accepted. This is particularly chilling considering what was happening in Europe at this time.



June 4, 1939 *Philadelphia Inquirer*

In the 1940 US Census, both Minnie and Leroy P. Shoemaker are back in 407 Bank Ave. as husband and wife. His occupation is again given as a “salesman of milk and by-products”, confirming that the couple in the 1930 Census in Avalon are one and the same.

That 1940 Census also lists another family renting at 407 Bank Ave. in the other unit. This is **S. W. Molokie**, a mechanical engineer in utilities and his wife **Charlotte**. (Oddly, this Census also lists our Minnie and her new husband as renters, even though we know from the deeds that Minnie was still the owner.)

The 1940 Census also indicates what is probably only a coincidence: another family with the unusual name of Shoemaker just three houses down the block at 311 Bank Ave. The head of that household is William M. Shoemaker, Jr. and he is 68 years old in 1940. Arguing against any family connection to our Leroy Shoemaker is that William was not born in North Carolina as was Leroy, and is also the same age as Leroy that year. (See also the HSR monograph on 311 Bank Ave.).

Two years later, Minnie died in this house of a heart attack on November 8, 1942 at the age of 75.

Her death notice calls her “Mary Virginia Shoemaker (nee Hughes)”. The notice and the entry on the books of Christ Church, Riverton, indicate her address as 407 Bank Ave.

There are strangely two FindAGrave.com entries appearing to be for her grave at Woodlands Cemetery, Philadelphia. One calls her “Mary Virginia Shoemaker” and the other shows a headstone reading “Mary Virginia, wife of Albert W. Herr”.

Her will has not been located for this monograph, but the next deed of sale for this house indicates that Minnie left the residue of her estate, including 407 Bank Ave., to one Emily D. Templin, wife of Charles L. Templin of Atlanta, Georgia. We have no indication as to why Minnie’s husband Leroy Shoemaker did not inherit the house he had been living in for more than ten years, nor is there an obvious family connection to the Templins. A newspaper article in the Atlanta *Constitution* lists him as a heating and ventilating engineer.

Owners Walter D. Lamon, Jr. and Dorothea T. Lamon

Brig. Gen. Walter D. Lamon, Jr. (1915-1971) and his wife **Dorothea Trout Lamon** bought the property on June 11, 1949 from Emily Templin for an undisclosed price. General Lamon was retired from the N.J. National Guard and founded the real estate firm today known as Lamon Associates. He served on various boards for the County and other organizations. This was one of the many properties in which he invested over the years.

Other owners in the 20th Century

The Lamons sold the property within four years and a large number of transactions followed for this investment property. See the “Deeds” section of the “Sources” at the end for details. None of these has been researched.

During this time, 407 Bank Ave. was divided into more and more apartments.

By the time **Thomas J. Dolecky** sold the property to **Michael and Cathleen Spinelli** on April 29, 2009 for \$475,000 the house had become subdivided into five apartments and did not meet code in a number of regards. Spinelli reports that insurance was unobtainable for the property in its current condition and they were only able to close at settlement by making extraordinary covenants of work which would be performed on an aggressive timetable.

Even from the outside the house was suffering – the stone pillars for the porch columns were leaning and crumbling and the posts themselves were rotting. The porch floor had rotten to the point where there were visible holes in it. Major masonry work on the stone retaining walls which border the Main and Bank frontages was required as they were leaning and collapsing.

Over the next several years, the Spinellis transformed the house, resolving all code violations and then dramatically improving its appearance and attractiveness as a rental.

Cathleen died in November, 2018 after a lengthy illness. Michael is still the owner today and manages the property meticulously.

Sources

Other material from sources mentioned in the text and listed below 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>

Family Histories:

Willard Ross Yates, *Joseph Wharton – Quaker Industrial Pioneer*, (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1987).

Anne H. Wharton, *Genealogy of the Wharton Family of Philadelphia 1664-1880*, (Philadelphia: Privately printed, 1880).

Anna Wharton Smith, *Genealogy of the Fisher Family 1682-1896*, (Philadelphia: Self-published, 1896)

Susanna Parrish Wharton (compiler) and Dillwyn Parrish, *The Parrish Family (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) Including the related families of Cox – Dillwyn – Roberts – Chandler – Mitchell – Painter – Pusey*, (Philadelphia: George H. Buchanan Company, 1925)

Edwin Jaquette Sellers, *Genealogy of Dr. Francis Joseph Pfeiffer of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and His Descendants*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1899)

Other Books:

Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Horace Mather Lippincott, *The Colonial Homes of Philadelphia and its Neighbourhood*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1912)

Deeds:

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 136 DL Miller Jr to Rodman Wharton
- 1854-05-29 Deed Book P5 page 611 Rodman Wharton to DL Miller, Jr
- 1856-08-05 Deed Book C6 page 396 DL Miller Jr to DL Miller Sr
- 1858-01-06 Deed Book C6 page 571 DL Miller Sr to Edwin Spooner
- 1864-03-12 Deed Book A7 page 297 Edwin Spooner to Rodman Ellison
- 1877-04-30 Deed Book N9 page 549 Rodman Ellison to Salome Kay
- 1882-03-27 Deed Book O10 page 451 Maull et al to Nannie M. Fidler
- 1913-10-23 Deed Book 499 page 36 Nathan Myers Fidler (guardian) to Richard J. Hughes
- 1913-10-26 Deed Book 499 page 274 Richard Hughes to Minnie V Herr
- 1949-06-11 Deed Book 1069 page 8 Emily Templin to Walter Lamon Jr
- 1952-02-20 Deed Book 1121 page 198 Walter Lamon, Jr to James Leonard
- 1954-05-22 Deed Book 1189 page 79 James Leonard to Edwin James

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- 1954-10-26 Deed Book 1209 page 11 Edwin James to Sabino Manlio
 - 1955-08-01 Deed Book 1241 page 473 Sabino Manlio to Ida Kemp (later Wolk)
 - 1969-12-03 Deed Book 1720 page 1183 Edward and Ida Wolk to Edward and Ida Wolk
 - 1971-04-15 Deed Book 1760 page 819 Wolk to Edwin and Linda Rhoads
 - 1978-09-29 Deed Book 2121 page 202 Edwin Rhoads to John Paolin
 - 1980-05-16 Deed Book 2358 page 195 John Paolin to Thomas Dolecky and Leontin
 - 1993-02-03 Deed Book 4513 page 47 Est of Leontina Dolecky to Thomas Dolecky
 - 2009-04-29 Deed Book 6640 page 99 Thomas Dolecky to Michael and Cathleen Spinelli
 - 2018-12-28 Deed Book 13370 page 3491 Est of Cathleen Spinelli to Mickael Spinelli