

Introduction

Rapid industrialization and the expansion of the middle class in Philadelphia in the late 19th century led to overcrowded, polluted urban environments. Many families sought relief from the congestion and grime of city life, yearning for cleaner, rural surroundings. Drexel Park, just 7 miles to City Hall in Philadelphia, offered the ideal solution, a neighborhood that combined the tranquility of suburban living with an easy commute to the city.

Located in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, Drexel Park, established in 1924, has been a model of suburban living for over a century. Before Drexel Park's creation, suburban neighborhoods were developed incrementally with only a few houses at a time. Drexel Park was one of the first fully planned communities, spanning 105 acres divided into small lots sizes to incentivize owners of different economic means to combine any number of lots to create their ideal lot size, with fully developed utilities from the outset. This ambitious project set a new standard for suburban living and laid the foundation for future developments.

Thomas Conway Jr., the developer behind the neighborhood, was a forward-thinking businessman with contributions extending far beyond Drexel Park. He played a key role in the development of interurban transit systems, making it easier for people to commute to and from cities, helping not only to connect Philadelphia to its rural outskirts, but he also shaped the transportation networks of other major cities. Conway's philanthropic contributions strengthened local communities, by donating land to create local public hospitals, and increasing public education facilities. Conway's foresight in suburban planning ensured that Drexel Park would be a thoughtfully designed, vibrant neighborhood for generations to come.

The architectural design of Drexel Park reflects a vision of simple elegance. With wide, tree-lined streets, distinctive architecture, and spacious homes, the neighborhood blends early 20th-century design with modern living. These features represent the careful planning that went into Drexel Park's development, creating an environment that remains both aesthetically appealing and functional.

Generations of residents, past and present, have shaped the community through shared traditions and events. From holiday celebrations and block parties to newer customs like Lunar New Year and the Fall Festival, these gatherings have fostered a culture of belonging that continues to thrive. As Drexel Park enters its second century, the Drexel Park Homeowners' Association plays a crucial role in preserving the neighborhood's traditions while fostering engagement among residents. This book is a tribute to that continuity, to the enduring spirit of Drexel Park, and to the future generations who will continue to shape and carry on its legacy. For those who live here, Drexel Park is not just where they live, it is an integral part of their identity and where memories are made.

This book will guide you through Drexel Park's history. It is meant to be read from beginning to end, allowing you to experience the neighborhood's evolution. The chapters take you through life starting in the late 19th century of Philadelphia's influence on surrounding suburbs, and then to Upper Darby and the streets of Drexel Park, unveiling its architectural beauty, rich traditions, and vibrant

community spirit. This book reflects on Drexel Parks past while looking forward to its future, inviting current residents, former neighbors, and anyone interested in suburban history to explore the neighborhood's legacy and the connections that have shaped Drexel Park over the last century.