

## East Falls Past—Midvale Avenue

*The Fallser*, January 2008, by Wendy Moody

Tucked away in the historic Chadwick Papers at Falls of Schuylkill Library is an article written in 1933 reminiscing about the early history of Midvale Avenue. (Note: the "lower side" of Midvale is the side with the train station). Here are some excerpts:

- Midvale Avenue is so named because it occupies the middle of the valley, between two hills, a short distance beyond the Reading Railroad.

- Long before the avenue was opened to its present length there was a dirt road, known as Mifflin Street, passing up the hollow from Ridge Avenue, so called because the Mifflin Mansion stood on the upper side of the road back from Ridge Avenue.

- Around 1853, there was a deer park with a high picket fence enclosure that extended along the lower side of Mifflin Street to Indian Queen Lane.

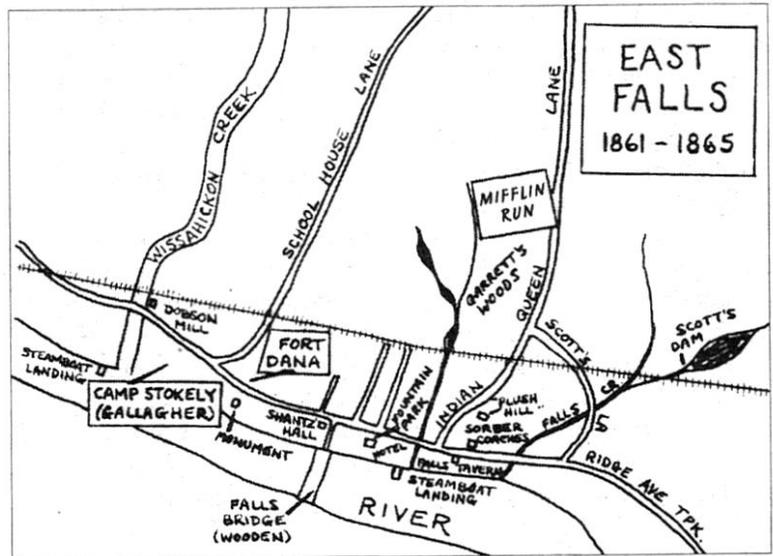
- A stream, Mifflin Run, passed beneath a stone culvert under Ridge Avenue. At the river end of the run, two wooden troughs carried water to two ponds on each side. These ponds were used for keeping live catfish for the Fountain Park Hotel and the Falls Hotel. The fish were killed daily to supply the once famous catfish and waffle suppers for which both hotels were noted.

- At the confluence of Mifflin Run with the Schuylkill was an old-time steamboat landing with a little bridge going to the Falls Hotel. At this point in the river a fine sand bar provided an excellent place for baptizing the converts by the Falls of Schuylkill Baptist Church.

- As late as the 1870s, the valley now occupied by Midvale Avenue (above the railroad), was covered with a forest, principally of tall poplar trees, with an almost impenetrable underbrush, forming a splendid place for rabbit hunting. At Conrad Street, on the lower side, began Garrett's woods, a chestnut grove with a moss carpeting, used for many years by Sunday Schools for their picnics.

- Around 1868 Midvale Avenue (Mifflin Street), between Ridge Avenue and the railroad, appeared like this: Looking up the hill from Ridge, on the right-hand corner, was John Johnson's store and flower garden. In the rear was the stable, beyond which were the nicely-kept yards of the dwellings fronting on Indian Queen Lane. Then came the little frame home of Charles Boothroyd, Benjamin Marley's carpenter shop, the rear of the Baptist Church with its horse sheds, and the three-story stone parsonage occupied by Lewis Mettger. Beyond this was a row of dwellings erected by Henry Becker, and the brewery (Dutch Hollow) at the end of Smith's knoll, once covered with a black-berry thicket. Patrick Dougherty's home and stable close to the railroad finished that side of the hollow.

- On the other side of the street were the two dwellings that the stonemason Henry Becker erected, standing on what is now St. Bridget's Church lawn. Becker occupied one house and Cornelius De Groff, the



marble cutter and noted singer, the other. At Frederick Street, where the Midvale Theatre now stands, were James Morrison's two dwellings. Then came Stein's brewery yard, and on the corner, James Morrison's frame building used in 1862 - 63 as the armory of Captain John Dobson's company.