

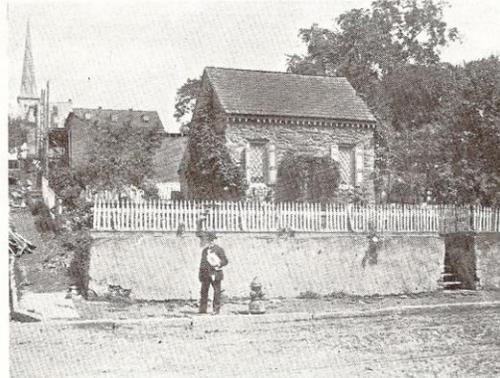
East Falls Past—Shronk’s Vision

The Fallser, September 2009, by Wendy Moody

In Volume 5 of the Chadwick Papers is a collection of columns and clippings written by Robert Roberts Shronk. Below is **A Bit of Falls History**, published in the March 12, 1914 edition of the *Weekly Forecast*. It’s a unique first-person recollection of the Falls in a much earlier time, as the author narrates his ride down Midvale:

“How things have changed since I last traveled in this neighborhood” said a passenger in a Midvale Avenue trolley car, as it crossed Wissahickon Avenue on its way to the Falls of Schuylkill. “The last time I came here it was by way of Indian

Queen Lane, and I stopped for dinner at Sam Wilson’s Abbey Hotel. The grounds we have passed were then part of Coulter’s big farm. I have heard of this new settlement, Queen Lane Manor, but had no idea it was as pretty as it is. So that’s the Queen Lane reservoir and filtration plant? I remember Scott’s 20-acre lot with the big barn occupied by James Stace. On the lot was the encampment of the One hundred and Eighteenth or Corn Exchange Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, in 1862. In those days, where this avenue now is, was a cart road through a dense wood, in which I spent many a day gunning for rabbits. Right here east of the old Norristown railroad was the big dam known as McMackin’s Dam, on which we boys skated in winter or swam or fished in it other seasons. This part west of the railroad was swampy land and it was called “Dutch Hollow” because Henry J. Becker, a German stonemason, built rows of dwellings and the big brewery up there on the hill. Where the Reading Railway’s new station stands was Patrick Dougherty’s stone dwelling. When it was being built in 1854 the walls collapsed and one mason was killed and two others badly injured. Here where the Baptist Church stands was Algernon Roberts’ deer park. On the upper side of the hollow was the Mifflin Mansion, which we boys used to dread to pass after sundown because of its being haunted. In the little stone springhouse by the run the ghost was frequently seen and would come out dripping with milk. The run passed under Ridge Avenue in a large culvert, at the far end of which were troughs to carry the water to the big catfish ponds belonging to the Falls and the Fountain Park Hotels, from which many a good fry of fresh catties were borrowed by unscrupulous fishermen. Yes, things have changed, and, all things considered, I guess it is for the better, but I cannot help feeling a longing to have things as they were even if I can never have them.”



Henry J. Becker, who built “Dutch Hollow,” in front of the old lodge of the Mifflin Mansion, Ridge Ave. and Stanton St. (St. Bridget’s steeple in background.)