

East Falls Past--Street Names in East Falls

The Fallser, April 2010, by Wendy Moody

Curious about the origins of street names in East Falls? Many of them, as you might know, are the surnames of former Philadelphia mayors: Barclay, Conrad, Vaux, Henry, McMichael, Fox, and Stokley. From *Street Names of Philadelphia* by Robert Alotta, we learn the origins of others:

Wissahickon Drive was built in 1826 along the banks of the creek from which it takes its name. The name “Wissahickon” is a corruption of the Indian name *wisameckham*, meaning “catfish stream.”

School House Lane, originally an Indian trail which led from the Wingohocking Creek to the Ridge Road, at the mouth of the Wissahickon, was known as the “Cross Street to Schuylkill.” First called Bensell’s Lane, it was laid out and confirmed by the Quarter Sessions Court in 1760. Germantown to Ridge Road and the Schuylkill River, and thus to Philadelphia. In 1758 a resolution to erect an “English and High Dutch or German School” along this road resulted in the building of the Germantown Union School-House in 1761; it later became Germantown Academy. At this point, Bensell’s Lane became known as School Lane, then School House Lane in 1893. By good chance, other schools and colleges, such as Penn Charter, Ravenhill Academy, and the Philadelphia Textile School grew up along the once country-like “lane.”

Warden Drive was named for William G. Warden, one of the co-founders of Standard Oil. Warden owned many parcels of land in East Falls. He donated the land on which the Falls of Schuylkill Library now stands.

Weightman St. takes its name from William Weightman, the senior partner of Powers & Weightman Chemical Co., once located near Ridge Avenue. Weightman built his huge fortune himself, partly from the sale of quinine during the Civil War and also through wise real estate investments. His home was Ravenhill Mansion on School House Lane.

Ridge Avenue – Ridge Avenue followed an old Indian trail, so named because it was situated on the ridge between the Schuylkill and the Wissahickon. The first settlers referred to it as the Manatawny or Plymouth Road, because it led toward the Manatawny Creek and to Plymouth Meeting. In 1803, citizens petitioned the legislature for a turnpike road along the ridge but it was refused because the Germantown Pike ran parallel to it. In 1811 an act was passed “to enable the government to incorporate a company for making an artificial road beginning at the intersection of Vine and 10th Street” and running on to the Perkiomen. The route was to be “as near as may be consistent with economy and utility to Wissahickon creek...” The Ridge Avenue Turnpike Company must have acted swiftly because the Ridge Road is listed in the street directories beginning in 1813. The turnpike was freed from toll prior to 1873.



Indian Queen Lane – It is believed the name commemorates an Indian legend. The road was first confirmed in 1773, from Germantown to Ridge. It remained unchanged until 1918 when it was widened from Vaux to Conrad. The section from Henry to Vaux was dedicated in 1925. The earlier sections (Vaux to Cresson) were widened between 1947 and 1953.

Queen Lane – the source of the name is the Indian Queen Tavern that once stood at the corner of this street and Germantown Avenue. Some sources imply the lane commemorates Queen Anne of England. In order to eliminate confusion between this street and Queen Street in Southwark, this Queen became a lane between Germantown and Wissahickon avenues in 1917, and between Wissahickon and Conrad in 1925.

Abbottsford Ave. – Charles Frederick Abbott (1821-97), an affluent admirer of novelist Sir Walter Scott, came to Falls to purchase a home. He bought a mansion built in 1752 which reminded him of the novelist's Scottish home ("Abbottsford"). The community which grew up around the mansion (near MCP) assumed the name of the mansion. Abbott served as a member of the PA. legislature (1858 – 1862) and on the Board of Education.