

East Falls Past –Mifflin School

The Fallser, June 2012, by Wendy Moody

In 1936, a Suburban Press article announced that the Board of Education decided to name the new school, then being erected at Midvale and Conrad, the Thomas Mifflin School.

The article described the school this way: *“The new building has been designed in a colonial style, with the assembly hall facing on Conrad Street, parallel to the main entrance, which is also on Conrad.*

The structure has an ell-shaped plan with the main classrooms facing Midvale. It is

fire-proof throughout, made of brick and limestone, two stories in height, with a beautiful clock tower dominating the building.

There will be 20 classrooms, with two first-grade rooms of extra size fitted with storage closets, one kindergarten room, one special classroom, one adjustment room, and rooms for speech-improvement, industrial-arts, clothing, and food.

There will be a pupil capacity of 1000.

Outdoors will be plenty of play space, both to the south and western sides with ample shrubbery on each street frontage.

The name selected is certainly an appropriate one inasmuch as Thomas Mifflin, first Governor of Pennsylvania, resided not far from the school, and Midvale Avenue was once called Mifflin Street because of the stream, known as “Mifflin’s Run,” that rippled down it to the Schuylkill River.”

Thomas Mifflin School stands on land that was once the tudor-style home of Patrick H. Kelly, a prominent building contractor. (Grace Kelly’s uncle).

Ground was broken for the new school in the spring of 1936 and was built in conjunction with the Public Works Administration. The general contract was awarded to John McShain with subcontracts given to: Bugger & O’Hara (plumbing and heating), S. McClintock Sons (steamfitting), Ross Electric (electric), John B. Kelly, Inc. (brickwork), and Houghton Elevator Company.

The final costs were:

Erection of Building: \$625,420.00

Furniture and Equipment: \$20,000.00

Land: \$31,787.75

Total cost: \$677,207.75

Federal Government Grant: \$280, 656.00

Cost to School District: \$396,551.75

The cornerstone ceremony was held on October 16, 1936. The most colorful part was the raising of the flag by Anthony Marino, Class of Breck 1936, who was dressed in



uniform. The school children saluted and sang the Star Spangled Banner with great zest. Among the attendees were Bessie Dobson Altemus and John B. Kelly.

The school opened for classes in February, 1937. That May East Falls residents were invited for a Public Inspection. The Suburban Press reported that hundreds took advantage of this opportunity to meet the teachers and promenade through the corridors and classrooms. Principal Dr. Israel Galter, who had been Principal of Breck School, delivered a welcome address in which he stressed the importance of a close liaison between home and school. A splendid vocal program by the East Falls Mixed Chorus, under the direction of Joseph Smith, followed. A newspaper, dated January 21, 1800, reporting the death of Thomas Mifflin, was presented to the school.

At the formal dedication services on Jan. 28, 1938, Morris Leeds, V.P. of the Board of Education presided. Addresses were given by Francis Biddle and six others.

Thomas Mifflin School was placed on National Register of Historic Places in 1988.