

East Falls Past – Wissahickon Creek

The Fallser, November 2012, by Wendy Moody

In 1936, the *Suburban Press* reported some interesting observations on the Wissahickon Creek, focusing on its geology, flow, and early buildings.

Geology:

A geologist who examined rocks along the Wissahickon determined that the Wissahickon Creek was older than the Schuylkill River. The river, he said, came down from upstate long after the smaller stream had been flowing for years.



He said the rock specimens from the Wissahickon belonged to the azoic age (before the appearance of life). Their wavy lines showed they had been heaved up while in a molten state by the force of the earth's internal heat. Upon the surface were the reddish colored crystals of the American garnet.

Flow:

There is an old belief that the Wissahickon Creek originally flowed across Ridge Avenue, a short distance from its present bed and emptied into the Schuylkill at a point just below the forebay of the Queen Lane Pumping Station. This belief was somewhat verified before Gustine Lake was made. Ditch diggers found evidence of the creek bottom in Robeson meadow when they were making excavations for an interceding sewer.

When the great flood swept down the valley on October 14, 1877 and tore a deep gully across Ridge Avenue, a short distance below the lower side of the creek, the foundation and part of the wall of a springhouse, which once stood along the shoreline of the stream, was revealed.

Buildings:

In 1844 "Pop" Bension built "The Hermitage," a resort on the upper side of the Wissahickon, near the foot of Hermit Lane. A large dancing floor was erected at the west end of the property and it became a popular place for picnics.

Five years later, Henry Lippen erected Wissahickon Hall (see photo), which is still standing at the foot of Gypsy Lane, and successfully ran the resort. It was later taken over by his son, Charles Lippen, who also conducted an ice business there. The ice was cut from the creek and stowed away in the storehouses until summer when Lippen's wagons delivered the ice around the neighborhood.

Later Joseph Smith ran the Maple Springs Hotel, which was along the south side of the creek, between Gypsy Lane and the Henry Avenue Bridge.

In 1922, the *Philadelphia Record* stated "The creek becomes more attractive as the years go by, and is visited by thousands who stroll along the bridle path on the upper side, or spin along the drive in automobiles. One of the latter-day attractions is the high and beautiful reinforced concrete bridge, which carries Walnut Lane across the creek and

valley, linking Roxborough with Germantown. The Falls of Schuylkill Business Men's Association, among other groups, has for some time been trying to have Henry Avenue extended from Midvale Avenue across the Wissahickon by a similar bridge, so as to form a connection between Roxborough and the central part of the city with a driveway.”
(Note: This happened in 1932 when the Henry Avenue Bridge was completed).