

## *The Village of Falls of Schuylkill*

IN 1681, the year he became proprietor of Pennsylvania, William Penn began granting tracts of land in his newly established province. His land grants were recorded by the surveyor general of the province, Thomas Holme, on *A Mapp of y<sup>e</sup> Improved part of Pensilvania*,<sup>1</sup> which showed the city of Philadelphia as a rectangular tract one mile in width, north and south, and two miles in length, east to west, from the Delaware to the Schuylkill River. North of Vine Street, which was the northern boundary of the city, the map showed a tract of irregular shape extending to a distance of several miles from the city. Identified as "The Liberty Lands of Philadelphia City," this area had been set aside by Penn to be allotted as bonus grants to purchasers of large estates in the hinterlands.

If Holme had indicated the locations of roads on his map, he would, no doubt, have drawn a thoroughfare extending northwestward from the northern boundary of the city, following an irregular course through the Liberty Lands, or Northern Liberties. Tradition says that this road, referred to frequently as the Ridge Road, was originally an Indian trail.<sup>2</sup> While its origins cannot be documented, the thoroughfare was surely in use during the first decade of Penn's colony. Without it there would have been virtually no access to the saw and corn mills built at the mouth of Wissahickon Creek, five miles from Philadelphia. These mills were erected in accordance with an agreement dated 1686, and were mentioned in a deed dated 1690.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Mapp of y<sup>e</sup> Improved part of Pensilvania in America, Divided into Countyes Townships and Lotts*, surveyed by "Tho: Holme." Facsimile of Holme's map of Pennsylvania with names of the first purchasers copied from an original in the possession of the publisher, Samuel L. Smedley, Chief Engineer and Surveyor of the City of Philadelphia, 1876.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Starne Miles, "Roxborough: A History," in Joseph Starne Miles *et al.*, *A Historical Sketch of Roxborough, Manayunk, Wissahickon* (Philadelphia, 1940), 15.

<sup>3</sup> The agreement to build the mills and the 1690 deed are referred to in Deed Book H, No. 16, 417, Department of Records, City Hall, Philadelphia.

It may have been that the road extended only as far as the site of the Wissahickon Mills in 1687, for in that year the inhabitants of Plymouth Township, several miles farther to the north, petitioned the Court of Quarter Sessions at Philadelphia, requesting that a cartway might be laid out to their township. In answer to this request, it was "ordered that there be no disturbance or molestation to the inhabitants of the Plymouth Township in their finding and laying out a convenient cart road from Philadelphia to their Township."<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1706, however, that the road was laid out by surveyor Thomas Fairman and confirmed by the court, an action taken in response to two more petitions from Plymouth Township inhabitants and others—one petition being for a road from Wissahickon Mills to Perkiomen Creek,<sup>5</sup> and the other petition requesting court confirmation of the existing road from Philadelphia to Wissahickon Mills.<sup>6</sup>

The desire of these petitioners for a direct and convenient means of access to Philadelphia was largely attributable to their interest in marketing lime, which was much in demand in the city where it was used in making the mortar needed to build brick houses. Probably the earliest Pennsylvania lime came from Plymouth Township kilns;<sup>7</sup> specifically, from a five-thousand-acre tract granted in 1683 to Major Jasper Farmar<sup>8</sup> and later inherited by his widow and children. The discovery of limestone in the area was reported to William Penn by Chief Justice Nicholas More on September 13, 1686: "Madame Farmar has found out as good limestone on the Schuylkill as any in the world, and is building with it. She offers to sell ten thousand bushels at six pence the bushel upon her plantation . . . ."<sup>9</sup>

In 1706 and 1707, Thomas Fairman reported the completion of the laying out of both sections of the Ridge Road, as had been requested.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a thoroughfare was formally established from the intersection of Sixth and Sassafras (later Race) Streets, in Philadelphia, through the Northern Liberties to Wissahickon Mills, and

<sup>4</sup> Court of Quarter Sessions, Road Docket No. 1, 24, City Archives, City Hall, Philadelphia.

<sup>5</sup> Road Docket No. 2, 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore W. Bean, *History of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1884), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Exemplification Book 1, 2, Department of Records.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Miles, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Road Docket No. 2, 27, 32.

thence through Roxborough and Plymouth Townships to the Perkiomen Creek.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, the Ridge Road was an important link between Philadelphia and the interior, with its lime, grain, and lumber.

Between the fourth and fifth milestones out of Philadelphia, at the northern extremity of the Northern Liberties and just south of the Wissahickon Creek, the Ridge Road followed a course along the eastern bank of the Schuylkill River. The route of the road in this vicinity was dictated by topographical considerations, for a range of hills, rising steeply at the Falls of Schuylkill, left only a narrow strip of flat land along the bank of the river as a natural roadway.

Dramatic as the scraggy hills on either side of the Schuylkill may have been, a still more striking natural feature was the turbulent crashing of the waters of the river at a point where a great rock jutted from the eastern bank to create the Falls of Schuylkill. The scene was long ago recalled by a local historian:

This long rock I well remember, and have often, when a boy, fished from it. It extended from the foot of the hill to about two-thirds the distance across the river, forming a complete natural dam, a part of it overhanging on the lower side. In high freshets the water flowed over it and made a beautiful cascade; at other times it forced the river into a narrow channel on the western side, through which it ran with great rapidity and much noise, falling some five or six feet in a distance of about one hundred and fifty yards, and could be heard at a distance of from one to five miles, according to the state of the river and the winds.<sup>12</sup>

Turbulent as the river was at times, it was often greatly reduced in flow. Remarkably dry weather, for example, was experienced in August, 1816, when the following under a Philadelphia date line was reported in a Connecticut newspaper: "Our oldest inhabitants can-

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Starne Miles (p. 19) notes that the Ridge Road has been known by many names: "In a deal between Matthew Houlgate, one of the early pioneers, and his son, Matthew Jr., in 1720, it is called the 'Great Road that leads from Plymouth to Philadelphia.' In another between John Wood and John Houlgate, 1754, it is called the 'King's Road leading to Philadelphia.' In one between Bartle Righter and George Righter, 1763, it is called the 'King's Highway.' In another between Richard Baker and Joseph Starn, 1765, it is referred to as the 'Plymouth Road.' In a deed between John Potts and Edward Milner, 1770, it is called the 'Wissahickon Road,' and in one between John Gorgas and John Gorgas, Jr., 1773, it is called the 'Manatawny or Great Road.' In an agreement between Michael Righter's sons in 1783, it is called the 'Reading Road.' In a deal between John Righter and John Kennedy in 1802, it is called the 'Great Road leading from Philadelphia to Reading.'"

<sup>12</sup> Charles V. Hagner, *Early History of the Falls of Schuylkill, Manayunk, Schuylkill and Lehigh Navigation Companies, Fairmount Waterworks, Etc.* (Philadelphia, 1869), 10.

not remember that the Schuylkill has ever been so low as at present—it may be crossed on foot at the Falls, without wetting the feet. The meadows in the vicinity of the City are perfectly dry; and unless speedily relieved from the long absence of Rain, serious injury is feared.”<sup>13</sup>

Regardless of the state of the river, the scenery at the Falls of Schuylkill was always picturesque, and travelers on the Ridge Road naturally took notice of the place. The spot became well known for the excellent fishing to be enjoyed there. One of the earliest buildings erected at the Falls was the fishing house of the Society of Fort St. Davids, a club composed of prominent Philadelphians. It is said that the Society was established in 1747;<sup>14</sup> its clubhouse, or “Citadel,” was under construction in 1755.<sup>15</sup> Charles Valerius Hagner (1796–1878), who resided at the Falls of Schuylkill in the early years of the nineteenth century, noted that the locality was once known as Fort St. Davids. The clubhouse and its surroundings have been described as follows:

On an elevated and extensive rock contiguous to the Eastern bank of the river, and projecting into the rapids, rose the primitive rude but convenient and strong structure of hewn timber, cut from the opposite Forest. It was capacious enough for the accommodation of the numerous garrison, who were then more celebrated for deeds of gastronomy, than deeds of arms. Their retirement in the admirable location, at the foot of an elevated and woody hill, and on the rock bound shore, favored the undisturbed enjoyment of their piscatory sports and feasts. No chosen site could have been selected of more picturesque beauty and interest, or equal for angling on the meandering stream.

In those days, and long since in the [nineteenth] Century, no place on the river equalled the Falls, for rock and perch fishing; and small blue catfish were taken in abundance by hand nets, dipped in the eddies of the stream, or in the circular water worn cavities of the tide deserted rocks.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), Sept. 3, 1816.

<sup>14</sup> William Bucke Campbell, *Old Towns and Districts of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1942), 137.

<sup>15</sup> A minute in the records of the Society, dated March 21, 1755, states: “We proceeded to erect the Citadel now nearly finished,” and the Governor presses the members “to make suitable provisions for completing and finishing the noble work before carried on and nearly finished.” Quoted in Joseph Patterson Sims, “The Fishing Company of Fort St. Davids,” *Historical Publications of the Society of Colonial Wars in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, VII, No. 4 (1951), 8.

<sup>16</sup> *A History of the Schuylkill Fishing Company of the State in Schuylkill, 1732–1888* (Philadelphia, 1889), 29.

The Society continued to function until the Revolutionary War, when its clubhouse was plundered by the British Army. On the return of peace, the members rebuilt the structure, seventy-feet long and twenty-feet wide, and resumed their revelries, employing a well-known local fisherman, Godfrey Shrunk (Shronk, Schronk, etc.) as caretaker.<sup>17</sup> When Shrunk was about seventy-four years of age (c. 1830), he recalled that the members of Fort St. Davids would cook forty dozen catfish at a time, and that he often caught three thousand catfish in a night with his dip-net. The perch and rockfish were also numerous and large, and he sometimes took thirty to eighty pounds in a morning with hook and line.<sup>18</sup>

Hagner was well acquainted with Shrunk, who, he wrote, "was a very successful fisherman, and also cultivated a truck garden. On the river front of his property he had a valuable shad fishery, where I, when a lad, often went to see them catch shad. On one occasion I saw them, with one sweep of the seine, catch 430 fine shad, and saw, besides, many escape from the seine." Shrunk was only one of a number of fishermen at the Falls, some of whom in a three-month fishing season "made enough by catching shad in a simple hook or dip-net to support their families for a whole year. They anchored, or fastened to the rocks in the rapids, the small boats from which they fished; some of the particular stations were more valuable than others, and there was much rivalry in the early spring who should first get possession of the favored spots, which the boat never left during the whole season; if it did, by a rule among themselves, any one else was at liberty to take possession." The catfish for which the Falls of Schuylkill was famous were a migrating fish that came from the sea on or about the twenty-fifth of May, their run lasting some two or three weeks. These fish, which made "remarkably fine eating," were white on the belly and black on the back; their numbers were so immense as to "blacken the narrow passages of the river."<sup>19</sup>

While the Schuylkill was supplying the resources for a prosperous fishing industry, its tributary known as Falls Run, the mouth of

<sup>17</sup> Hagner, 11-12, 21, 25, 26.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania, in the Olden Time* (Philadelphia, 1884), I, 432.

<sup>19</sup> Hagner, 23-25.

which was just above the rocky natural dam of the river, was providing power to operate at least one mill by the middle of the eighteenth century. *A Map of Philadelphia, and Parts Adjacent* made in 1752 by Nicholas Scull and George Heap<sup>20</sup> indicates the location of a sawmill between Ridge Road and the Schuylkill River, near the mouth of Falls Run. A later facsimile of the map<sup>21</sup> also shows a sickle mill, situated on Falls Run just above the point where that stream was crossed by the Ridge Road.

Hagner recorded that his father, who resided at the Falls from a period shortly after the Revolution until his death in 1830, "owned the two lower mills on the Falls Creek." Their location, as he describes them, seems to be at the same sites marked as mills on the Scull and Heap map. The one nearer to the mouth of Falls Run, at the time his father purchased it, "was and had been for many years a paper mill, one of the oldest in the country." The mill on the opposite side of Ridge Road was built by Hagner's father on a site previously occupied by "an ancient grist-mill." Higher up the creek was a stone-cutting mill, and still farther up the creek were the remains of an ancient powder mill."<sup>22</sup>

By 1869, Hagner observed, the run was much diminished in flow since his boyhood in the early decades of the century. "Even in my time," he recalled, "there was at each of those mills power sufficient to drive, at all times, a pair of five-foot mill-stones, generally two, and sometimes three pair. The mill lowest down the road had two waterwheels. Like all streams in the vicinity of Philadelphia, it has dwindled down to almost nothing."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the ample flow of water, that had recommended sites along Falls Run for the establishment of mills in the eighteenth century, changed in such a way as to require their abandonment in the nineteenth.

It was neither the fishing resources nor the water power available at the Falls of Schuylkill which was sought by William Smith, who began purchasing tracts of land there in the 1750's. Dr. Smith, a

<sup>20</sup> Nicholas B. Wainwright, "Scull and Heap's Map of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXI (1957), 69-75.

<sup>21</sup> This facsimile of the map appears in J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), I, opposite p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Hagner, 12, 31-32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

native of Scotland, had come to America early in that decade and in 1755 had become the first provost of the College, Academy and Charitable School of Philadelphia, an institution which would later become the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>24</sup> In August, 1757, Dr. Smith purchased at a sheriff's sale seven acres of land on both sides of the Wissahickon (or Ridge) Road, near the Falls.<sup>25</sup> This purchase was supplemented by others<sup>26</sup> until, by 1764, the Provost had holdings of five contiguous lots at the Falls of Schuylkill.

As early as 1762, Dr. Smith had built a dwelling on his land, for on June 2 of that year Hannah Callender recorded in her diary that she had seen "Smith's Octagon."<sup>27</sup> The house was so designated because of its semi-octagonal bay, which, in an engraving<sup>28</sup> dated 1794, is shown with a cupola on its roof. In the engraving, the structure is seen to consist of several wings. An examination of the building itself, which stood until recent months, clearly revealed by the locations of interior masonry walls that the structure, as it finally evolved, was the product of several periods of construction. As a result of the various additions which were made, the building, while lacking architectural pretension, became quite picturesque.

The dwelling stood on the brow of a hill that afforded extensive views up and down the river. In the 1794 engraving it is seen to stand high above the roof levels of buildings on the bank of the Schuylkill—two structures by the bank of Falls Run (possibly the mills mentioned by Hagner), and the clubhouse of Fort St. Davids near the rocky Falls.

Smith's was one of the first countryseats to be built near the Falls, and, as such, it was sometimes referred to as a mansion. Indeed, his estate, once known as Smith's Folly, must have seemed an impressive establishment to the few fishermen and millers who resided near by. There were two other dwellings besides the main house on his hill-

<sup>24</sup> Charles J. Stille, *A Memoir of the Rev. William Smith, D.D., Provost of the College Academy and Charitable School of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1869), 6-10.

<sup>25</sup> Deed dated Aug. 18, 1757. Common Pleas Court Sheriff Deed Book A-1, 222, City Archives.

<sup>26</sup> Deeds dated Oct. 7, 1757 (Deed Book D, No. 1, 139); Apr. 27, 1761 (Deed Book I, No. 4, 360); Sept. 9, 1761 (Exemplification Book 4, 480); Aug. 4, 1764 (Exemplification Book 5, 390).

<sup>27</sup> *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, XII (1888), 453.

<sup>28</sup> Hagner, frontispiece.

side tract, and the several structures have been referred to as the mansion, the hexagon house, and the octagon building.<sup>29</sup>

About the time that Dr. Smith was beginning to buy land at the Falls of Schuylkill, residents of the area were attempting to establish a ferry there. The nearest ferry, kept by Francis Garrigues about one-half mile downstream, as shown on Scull and Heap's map of 1752, had been discontinued by 1760; and one Phineas Roberts planned to construct a ferry on land he owned on the west side of the river, opposite the Falls.<sup>30</sup> In September, 1759, he petitioned the Court of Quarter Sessions to have roads laid out leading to "a Ferry above the Falls."<sup>31</sup> A committee was appointed by the Court to view his site. Their subsequent report resulted in a verdict that "it appearing to them that the Petitioner hath not any settled or Established Ferry over the River Schuylkill as by the said petition is falsely insinuated the Court Orders and adjudges that the petition and return be set aside and quash'd."<sup>32</sup>

Upon Phineas Roberts' failure to establish the ferry, Provost Smith, who owned the land on the northeast side of the river, just above the Falls, decided that he would take up the project. In January, 1760, Thomas and Richard Penn, "Proprietaries & Governors in chief of the Province of Pennsylvania," granted him the "liberty & privilege of erecting keeping & occupying a Ferry over the said river Schuylkill . . . for the transporting & carrying over the same all persons wagons Carts & other carriage horses cattle goods wares merchandizes & things whatsoever hereby strictly prohibiting all other persons on the said river from taking or carrying over the same within the distance of one mile above & below the said intended Ferry hereby settled & established." This license, covering a seven-year period beginning on March 1, 1760, was granted to Smith for the nominal consideration of "five English silver shillings" per year, in view of the "Expense which the said William Smith must be put to in making Wharfs & landing places & providing nec-

<sup>29</sup> Charles K. Mills, "The Falls of Schuylkill: An Old Village and Its Associations with the History of the University of Pennsylvania," *Old Penn* (University of Pennsylvania weekly), autumn issues, 1912. Collected as a scrapbook of the same title at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 4-7.

<sup>30</sup> Exemplification Book 3, 317.

<sup>31</sup> Road Docket No. 3, 246.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 251-252.



essary Flats & Boats & the constant attendance requisite thereunto.”<sup>33</sup>

Hagner mentions that the ferry at Falls of Schuylkill was a rope ferry.<sup>34</sup> Crossings of this type were established at several points on the river and were not universally popular, as seen by the following comment:

These Schuylkill ferries were rigged with ropes running from shore to shore, by means of which the boats were drawn across. Navigators on the river frequently cut these ropes, thus delaying ferriage, and in 1766 the Assembly passed an act imposing a fine of ten pounds for such an offense; but to secure freedom of navigation it also enacted that under the same penalty the ferrymen must sink the ropes when they were not in use.<sup>35</sup>

Dr. Smith probably found his ferry profitable, for in 1774, some years after the expiration of his original license, he built a wharf for its accommodation, together with a “public landing and place of stowing heaping or piling . . . wood timber scantling stones or any other commodities brought thither to be transported or borne by water on the said River.”<sup>36</sup>

In March, 1760, the same month Smith’s ferry rights took effect, the Court of Quarter Sessions confirmed a new road, forty-feet in width, providing convenient access to the new river-crossing. This road began at the “Wissahiccon Road,” near the site of Smith’s ferry, and followed a tortuously steep course up the slope of the Provost’s hill, extending about one-half a mile to a point where it intersected an older thoroughfare, known then as Palmer’s Road and later as Scott’s Lane, that extended from the site of the defunct Garrigues ferry to the village of Germantown, two miles northeast of the Falls.<sup>37</sup>

The new road and ferry had an advantage over the old route in shortening the distance from Germantown to the “Connostogoe Road,” on the west side of the Schuylkill, in Blockley Township. In petitioning to have this road laid out, “divers of the Inhabitants of Blockley and Germantown” had set forth that there was a “great

<sup>33</sup> Patent dated Jan. 21, 1760. Exemplification Book No. 3, 317.

<sup>34</sup> Hagner, 35.

<sup>35</sup> Scharf and Westcott, III, 2140.

<sup>36</sup> Mentioned in Deed Book D, No. 48, 178.

<sup>37</sup> Road Docket No. 3, 256.

necessity" for such a thoroughfare to be established "in the best and most convenient place for Waggon or Timber Wheels." The new route would be "very usefull," they said, "to the Inhabitants of Germantown and parts adjacent to carry their Timber to and from William Palmer's Saw Mill,"<sup>38</sup> which was located near Smith's land.<sup>39</sup>

The flow of traffic occasioned by the opening of the ferry and the new road leading to Germantown (known later as Indian Queen Lane), when added to the already important traffic on the Wissahickon (or Ridge) Road, made the intersection an obvious location for the establishment of a tavern. Provost Smith lost little time in exploiting the opportunity thus afforded, for by 1763 he had erected a two-story building at the intersection and rented it to a "Widow Blackwood," who opened a tavern there. An insurance survey made in March of that year mentions the dimensions of the "New stone House" (thirty feet six inches in front on the road and thirty-one feet six inches in depth) and of its kitchen, which was a separate building about fifteen feet from the tavern.<sup>40</sup> These dimensions correspond to those of a structure which still stands at 4156 Ridge Avenue, discounting subsequent additions and alterations. Known as the Old Falls Tavern, the building is a rare instance in the Philadelphia area of an eighteenth-century tavern still in operation.<sup>41</sup>

When Smith sold the tavern in 1801 to Robert Kennedy, he also conveyed to Kennedy his ferry (including boats, landings, imple-

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-249 (December Sessions, 1759).

<sup>39</sup> A deed dated Mar. 3, 1760 (Deed Book H, No. 12, 483) indicates the proximity of "William Palmer's Saw Mill" to Dr. Smith's property at Falls of Schuylkill.

<sup>40</sup> Insurance survey dated Mar. 24, 1763 (Philadelphia Contributionship Policy No. 818).

<sup>41</sup> In 1801, Dr. Smith sold the tavern property for £2,800, describing the structure as a "messuage or tavern commonly known by the name of the Falls Tavern." The lot on which it stood was bounded on three sides, respectively, by the Wissahickon Road, the forty-foot-wide road leading to the Falls Ferry, and the low-water mark of the River Schuylkill. Deed Book E.F., No. 8, 1.

Robert Kennedy, the purchaser of the tavern, was mentioned as a yeoman in the 1801 deed; in 1810 he was styled an innkeeper. Deed Book I.C., No. 16, 439. In subsequent deeds to the premises, as late as 1864 (Deed Book L.R.B., No. 31, 132), it is mentioned that the property is "commonly known as the Falls Tavern," and its owners, at least until that date, are consistently mentioned as innkeepers. These subsequent owners were Robert Watkins (1810 to 1829) and his heirs (1829 to 1853), Michael Arnold (1853 to 1864), and Samuel N. Smith. Deed Book I.C., No. 16, 439; Deed Book T.H., No. 90, 145; Deed Book L.R.B., No. 31, 132.

ments, and exclusive rights of ferrying) and a lot on the opposite side of the "Ferry Road," with a frontage of fifty feet on the Wissahickon Road and extending to the low-water mark of the Schuylkill. As described in the deed, the premises included a "Shad and Herring Fishery at and in the River Schuylkill . . . now under Lease to Godfrey Shranck." At the same time, Kennedy acquired the right to use, during the fishing season, the "Towing Path" on contiguous land owned by Smith. He was also granted privileges of piping water from Smith's land and of using "the Water Flowing in the Run Under the Bridge near the Premises . . . to be Conducted through Pipes . . . into a New Fish Pond to be Dug" by Robert Kennedy. Hagner explains that artificial ponds were made for the purpose of keeping catfish, which were caught in immense numbers in the spring, thereby providing a supply which would last into the summer and autumn.<sup>42</sup>

With his extensive and varied holdings at the Falls, Provost Smith had the most valuable real estate in the area during the 1780's and 1790's.<sup>43</sup> This property was assessed as high as £3,000 (1783) and as low as £1,410 (1795). The only estate at the Falls of Schuylkill which compared in value with the Smith property during these decades was that of General Thomas Mifflin, which was situated on a hill by the upper side of the Ridge Road, just above the Provost's hill, from which it was separated by a small valley and stream, sometimes called Mifflin Run. In 1778, the year preceding his resignation from Washington's army, General Mifflin had followed Dr. Smith's example in choosing the Falls as the site of his country home.

His real estate was purchased that year from Sarah Lewis for a yearly rental of £60, payable throughout the lifetime of the grantor. It was described in the deed<sup>44</sup> as a "Messuage or Tenement and two Tracts . . . of Land." One of these was situated along the bank of the river, and the other was on the opposite side of Ridge Road, where Mifflin's dwelling, commanding an impressive hill-top view, was built. The building, with its symmetrical facade, had a more

<sup>42</sup> Hagner, 24.

<sup>43</sup> County Tax Assessment Ledgers for Northern Liberties West, City Archives. Ledgers of the following years are available: 1783, 1785, 1786, 1787, 1791, 1792, 1795, 1796, 1797, 1798.

<sup>44</sup> Deed Book D, No. 60, 104.

conventional attractiveness and dignity than the Provost's dwelling and was an appropriate retreat for Mifflin, Governor of Pennsylvania from 1790 until 1799, but his twenty-two acre property was, naturally, not equal in value to the 137 acres owned by Provost Smith. Its assessed valuation ranged between £720 (1787) and £1,325 (1783).<sup>45</sup>

Although the property passed from Governor Mifflin's possession in 1799,<sup>46</sup> it continued to be a remarkably handsome estate for many years to come. When offered for sale in June, 1833, Fountain Green, as it was then called, was described as a "splendid country seat," commanding "views of the most picturesque scenery in the Union." An advertisement set forth its advantages at length.<sup>47</sup>

It contains about eighteen acres thirteen perches of land in the highest state of cultivation, abounding with fruit and ornamental trees. The improvements are the splendid mansion, gardener's house, ice house, milk house, bath house for warm, cold, and shower bathing; barn, carriage house, and stables, with extensive granaries, &c. all built of stone and brick. The mansion house is replete with every convenience, marble mantles, coal grates, (some of which cost a hundred and fifty dollars,) &c. &c. The present occupant has erected a furnace in the cellar which thoroughly warms the whole building; no dampness is visible in the walls at any time. No house in the city can be more comfortable, rendering it a delightful summer or winter residence. The water is introduced into the house and around the property from a dam of pure spring water, about three hundred yards in the rear of the dwelling; at least a thousand dollars have been expended in laying iron pipes. . . . There is now erected a well built stone dam of twenty feet in height:—the stream passes through the whole length of the property on which there are several beautiful cascades of different elevations. The Deer Park fronts on the Ridge Road, and is occupied by several of those noble animals.

The details mentioned are eloquent of good living. It is significant, for instance, that "the present occupant has erected a furnace in the cellar which thoroughly warms the whole building." In the 1830's and 1840's, furnaces were just beginning to supersede fireplaces as the means of heating homes; hence, Fountain Green

<sup>45</sup> County Tax Assessment Ledgers for Northern Liberties West.

<sup>46</sup> Mortgage dated Aug. 12, 1799, Mortgage Book M, No. 18, 269; deed dated Apr. 19, 1800, Deed Book I.W., No. 7, 345.

<sup>47</sup> *Daily Chronicle*, June 15, 1833.

provided an early example of this innovation. It is also notable that "water is introduced into the house" by means of iron pipes, thereby obviating drawing water from an outside well.<sup>48</sup>

As depicted by E. Whitefield<sup>49</sup> in the 1840's, when it was the residence of Andrew McMakin,<sup>50</sup> the dwelling had a veranda, two stories high along its facade. Stylistic considerations suggest that this, as well as the fountain on the front lawn, was added in the nineteenth century.

Though Fountain Green was less than five miles from Philadelphia, the trip to the city could be frustratingly inconvenient, for the surface of Ridge Road varied from mud to dust in accordance with prevailing weather conditions. The Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt describes the thoroughfare in Governor Mifflin's time:

On the twentieth of April [1795] Mr. Guillemard, Caleb Lownes, and myself, set out on horseback from Philadelphia, through Ridge Road, on our way to Norris Town. This road, like all the public roads in Pennsylvania, is very bad, for provision is brought to that city from all parts in large and heavy laden waggons. The constant passage of these waggons destroys the roads, especially near the town, where several of them meet. Ridge Road is almost impassable.<sup>51</sup>

To remedy this deplorable situation a bill was passed on March 30, 1811, permitting the Ridge Turnpike Company to build an artificial road over the earthen course of the old Ridge Road, beginning at the intersection of Ninth and Vine Streets, Philadelphia, and extending to the Perkiomen Bridge.<sup>52</sup> This was an early instance of turnpike construction, a profitable type of venture which was to become quite common by mid-century.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Edwin Iwanicki, "The Mifflin Mansion at the Falls of Schuylkill," *Germantowne Crier*, XVII (1965), 55-56.

<sup>49</sup> Print at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew McMakin (or McMackin) acquired the property by deed dated July 5, 1844 (Deed Book R.L.L., No. 22, 418), and sold it on Apr. 3, 1850 (Deed Book G.W.C., No. 61, 508).

<sup>51</sup> Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels Through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797; with an Authentic Account of Lower Canada* (London, 1799), I, 2-3.

<sup>52</sup> Miles, 19.

<sup>53</sup> During the 1840's and 1850's the *Germantown Telegraph* contains numerous references to turnpikes under construction in the vicinity of Philadelphia.

Shortly before the turnpike was constructed, transportation at the Falls had been improved by the construction of a chain bridge across the Schuylkill. This was accomplished by Robert Kennedy, the owner of the Falls Tavern, and Conrad Carpenter of Germantown. In 1808, the legislature had granted them the right to build the bridge and to collect specified tolls; its construction was evidently completed the following year.<sup>54</sup> Shortly thereafter Josiah White and Erskine Hazard erected a rolling mill and wire factory near the bridge.<sup>55</sup>

When the chain bridge broke down in 1816, White and Hazard built a wire suspension bridge across the river, extending from the top windows of their mill to some large trees on the western side of the river, where there was a descent by steps. The bridge accommodated only pedestrians, and no more than eight persons were permitted on it at any one time. Philadelphia historians have claimed that this was "certainly the first wire suspension bridge in the United States, and probably in the world."<sup>56</sup>

About the end of 1817, the Schuylkill Falls Bridge Company completed a wooden bridge, which lasted until 1822 when a flood destroyed it. The bridge which replaced this, in 1829, built by another company under the same name,<sup>57</sup> remained until 1842 when it was destroyed by fire.<sup>58</sup> There was much delay in replacing the structure. In 1847, the *Germantown Telegraph* stated that, in a short time, the public would again have "the greatest convenience of a bridge at the Falls."<sup>59</sup> This report was too optimistic, for in 1849 it was not yet finished, construction having been slowed from damage by a freshet.<sup>60</sup> Finally, in October, 1850, it was opened for use.<sup>61</sup>

Excursions to the Falls of Schuylkill became popular in the early part of the nineteenth century. Shortly after the first bridge at the

<sup>54</sup> Fred Perry Powers, "The Historic Bridges of Philadelphia," *Publications of the City History Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1914), I, 300, 306.

<sup>55</sup> Scharf and Westcott, III, 2145; Hagner, 40.

<sup>56</sup> Scharf and Westcott, III, 2145.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Germantown Telegraph*, Aug. 31, 1842.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, June 16, 1847.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, July 4, 1849. News items about the bridge also appear on Aug. 18, 1847, and June 28, 1848.

<sup>61</sup> *Germantown Telegraph*, Oct. 16, 1850.

Falls had been constructed, it was recommended to sight-seers in the vicinity of Philadelphia. A tour suggested by James Mease in his book *The Picture of Philadelphia* (1811) took the traveler northwest from the city along the western bank of the Schuylkill to this "chain bridge of modern construction." Crossing to the eastern side of the river, the traveler could stop at "a house of public entertainment, called the Falls Tavern." Mease further suggested that "the oil mill of Mr. Hagner at this place may prove interesting to some."<sup>62</sup> By 1844 a public house, known as the Fountain Park Hotel, had been established on part of the old Mifflin tract,<sup>63</sup> where it competed with the nearby Falls Tavern. Hagner recalls that "thousands of people resorted to the hotels at the Falls" to eat catfish "with the accompaniment of coffee," and that "for many years the village was celebrated for its catfish and coffee."<sup>64</sup>

While the village was gaining a tourist trade, it was declining as a locality for mills and fisheries. This setback was in part brought on by the construction several miles downstream of the Fairmount Dam in 1821, which raised the water level of the river. At the same time, it "put an end to the water power, fisheries and mills at the Falls" which, Hagner observes, "from having been a thriving, bustling little place . . . became a comparatively 'deserted village' for some years after."<sup>65</sup> A step toward a more prosperous future for the locality was taken in 1834, when the Philadelphia, Germantown, and Norristown Railroad opened its Norristown branch, which passed through the village at the Falls.<sup>66</sup> Even so, a map made in 1839 shows the "Falls Village" as a rural crossroads hamlet with a scattering of perhaps a dozen buildings.<sup>67</sup>

In 1848 the firm of Thomas H. Powers and William Weightman, chemical manufacturers in Philadelphia, purchased land at Falls of Schuylkill and established a plant there the same year, making

<sup>62</sup> James Mease, *The Picture of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1811), 351.

<sup>63</sup> Mentioned in a deed dated June 14, 1844, Deed Book R.L.L., No. 21, 406.

<sup>64</sup> Hagner, 24.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 45, 51.

<sup>66</sup> Edwin Iwanicki, "The Philadelphia, Germantown, and Norristown Railroad," *Germantown Crier*, XVII (1965), 24.

<sup>67</sup> "A Map of the County of Philadelphia," from actual survey, made under the direction of Charles Ellet, Jr., civil engineer, in accordance with an act of assembly passed on June 30, 1839 (Philadelphia: Published by Charles Ellet, Jr.).

additions to their holdings in subsequent years<sup>68</sup> and ultimately becoming one of the largest and most prosperous industrial concerns in the area. With the establishment of this plant, the Village of Falls of Schuylkill started on its way to becoming a modern industrial community, one which was to be the site of one of the largest carpet factories in the United States. That phase of the area's development belongs, however, to the history of Philadelphia rather than to that of the village, for in 1854 the Village of Falls of Schuylkill became a part of the consolidated city.<sup>69</sup>

*Pennsylvania Historical  
Salvage Council*

EDWIN IWANICKI

<sup>68</sup> Plan 74N15, lots 1 to 6, Registry Unit, Department of Records.

<sup>69</sup> This article is a revision of a 1966 prize-winning paper in the eleventh annual colonial essay contest sponsored by the Colonial Society of Pennsylvania and administered by the University of Pennsylvania.