The Flow of History along Chester Creek

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The Flow of History along Chester Creek

By Walt Cressler  

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Chester Creek, Thornbury Township, Delaware County  

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Overview

The Chester Creek watershed comprises 67.2 square miles of southeastern Pennsylvania and includes parts of fourteen townships, five boroughs, and one city. The main branch flows from its source in Westtown Township and runs a length of 24.5 miles through rural, suburban, and urban parts of Chester and Delaware Counties before reaching the Delaware River. The total length of the creek and its tributaries has been estimated at 128 miles. The western topographical boundary of the Chester Creek watershed roughly follows US Route 202 along its mid-portions and continues along High Street in West Chester Borough towards the northwest. That is the location of a major tributary known as Goose Creek. Another major tributary, East Branch Chester Creek, has its origins at the northern end of the watershed on the slopes of the South Valley Hills. Its upper reaches are bounded by PA Route 100 on the west and Boot Road on the east. The largest tributary of Chester Creek is its West Branch. Its drainage area in the southwest portion of the watershed is bounded by US Route 202, PA Route 491, PA Route 261, and Concord Road. Concord Road forms an arc along the southern edge of the watershed through the middle of Aston Township to the city of Chester. The eastern topographical boundary of the Chester Creek watershed is traversed by PA Route 352 throughout almost its entire length along with a portion of Boot Road in the north. These topographic boundaries of the Chester Creek watershed correspond to early colonial roads that were built on the high ground of the divides between neighboring watersheds.
Chester Creek, as well as the city and county of that name, are named for Cheshire in England. According to an often told but disputed story, when William Penn arrived in 1682 aboard the ship Welcome at the town of Upland during the first landfall in his new colony at the mouth of the creek, he turned to his friend Robert Pearson, whom he referred to as “the companion of my perils” and asked him to rename the town. Pearson supposedly suggested the name of his own hometown in England. It seems likely that the name of the town was actually changed during a meeting of the colonial assembly when they established the names of the first three counties of Pennsylvania, one of which was Chester for the many colonists from Cheshire. The name for Chester Creek followed, as its lowermost reaches flow through Chester. Previously it had been referred to as Upland Creeke, or Upland Kill, its name from the Swedish and Dutch occupation. The Lenape name for the stream was supposedly Mecoponack.

The Chester Creek watershed is the catchment area for all the precipitation which falls within its topographic boundaries and drains into the Delaware River through Chester Creek and
its tributaries. Watersheds can be studied as ecosystems within which water, energy, and nutrients flow. Plants capture energy from sunlight and convert water and carbon dioxide from the air into the sugar molecules which make up their structures. They draw further nutrients up through the soil, which consists of decaying organisms and crumbling rock. Animals eat plants and nutrients are further pumped up the food chain as animals are eaten by other animals. When they die, they return to the soil. Gravity forces the downhill flow of nutrients and takes them out of the watershed ecosystem to the sea. More nutrients are added by the further decay of bedrock beneath the soil. At least, this is the picture of the Chester Creek watershed ecosystem without humans in the equation. The natural operation of the eastern deciduous forest which is native to the Chester Creek watershed has changed drastically in the last few centuries. The Lenape burned the forest to open up areas for hunting and small-scale agriculture. When the Europeans arrived, they cleared land for farming and altered the flow of the streams to tap its energy for their watermills. With scientific farming and the industrial revolution, more and more energy and nutrient inputs came from further and further outside of what the watershed ecosystem produced itself. Now, in the early part of the twenty-first century, the connections that the Chester Creek watershed has beyond its boundaries are truly global.

The story that follows highlights many of the natural and cultural features of the Chester Creek watershed, from its sources to where the creek finally meets the waters of the Delaware River. Some of the treatments are shallow, and some of them go deep. This is an ongoing project to promote the engagement of people with the landscape within which they live.

Westtown Township

The source of Chester Creek is in Westtown Township just east of US Route 202/322 near the Westtown Township building. Its waters flow toward the southeast and pass under Pleasant Grove Road just to the east of Saint Maximilian Kolbe Parish Church and School. From there, it flows through the subdivisions of Pleasant Grove and West Glen and meanders under PA Route 926, Street Road, briefly before bending to the northeast. After flowing under South Concord Road, Chester Creek flows through a wooded corridor that traverses this suburban landscape and arrives at its confluence with Goose Creek behind the Westtown-Thornbury Elementary School. On old maps these headwaters of Chester Creek are referred to as Walton’s Run and “Goose Creek” is considered either the main branch of Chester Creek or a West Branch.
“Goose Creek”

“Goose Creek” is a major tributary of Chester Creek that originates in West Goshen Township in a wetland along Turner Lane, opposite the West Goshen Shopping Center at Turner Square. Goose Creek is technically an unnamed tributary because its name isn’t registered with the USGS Board on Geographic Names. The woodland surrounding this wetland is on property owned by the West Chester Area School District. The administrative buildings for the school district adjoin the woodland to the south, where they face Paoli Pike.

Goose Creek from west side of Turner Lane
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Goose Creek flows towards the southwest. As it traverses this parcel, the woodland narrows to a riparian corridor impinged upon by the parking lots and buildings of small industry and apartments. The next street under which Goose Creek then flows is Garfield Avenue. On this street, Goose Creek flows past Brewer Heating and Air Conditioning.
On the other side of Garfield Avenue is a small cemetery through which Goose Creek flows. The stream makes its way through another small woodland in this block, which is backed onto by businesses fronting Gay Street to the southeast and lots facing Washington Street to the northwest. Approaching the town of West Chester, Paoli Pike has changed to the main west bound commercial street of Gay Street for that town.

At the end of the block, Goose Creek flows under Montgomery Avenue. It passes West Goshen Pumping Station No. 1 on one side of Montgomery Avenue and skirts the edge of
Henderson High School’s playing field and stadium on the other. Up the hill is perched the large colonial revival structure of Henderson High School itself.

Goose Creek from Montgomery Avenue, and looking towards Gay Street (McDonald’s on left)

Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Henderson High School, West Chester Area School District

Henderson High School

The Henderson High School building was originally the West Chester High School before the consolidation that led to it being just one of the high schools in the West Chester Area School District. One noteworthy graduate of West Chester High School was Bayard Rustin, the civil rights activist who is best known for organizing the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom during which Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the “I have a dream” speech. He also participated in one of the first Freedom Rides to protest segregation in the South, advised Dr. King on the principles of non-violence, was a conscientious objector during World War II and protested Japanese internment, joined protests against British colonial rule and French nuclear testing in Algeria, and later in life joined marches for LGBTQ rights. He died in 1987.
He got his start as an activist while a high school student at West Chester High School. He led actions against the segregated Warner Theater in downtown West Chester, the YMCA, and at various dining establishments around town that wouldn’t serve African Americans. The Gay Street School which he attended during his primary years was segregated, but West Chester High School was integrated apparently because there weren’t enough African American students of high school age to put in another school. He was a brilliant student and a talented athlete and musician. He recruited both black and white students for his campaign, which involved sitting in the white section of the Warner Theater and testing the reactions of restaurants to a group of white potential customers and a group of black potential customers and carefully recording what happened.

As it continues to flow through this portion of West Goshen Township, Goose Creek passes to the north of a twisted set of major thoroughfares as they transition to the main commercial streets of the Borough of West Chester. Gay Street is one-way going west through West Chester, and Market Street is one-way going east through West Chester. One block to the east of the West Chester border at Garfield Avenue/Westtown Road, these one-way streets take traffic that weave to and from both Paoli Pike and West Chester Pike.

After Goose Creek flows under Montgomery Avenue it passes behind the DK Diner which faces Gay Street. Once Goose Creek flows under Gay Street, it enters the Borough of West Chester.

One block south is Market Street, and just to the east is the Charles A. Melton Arts and Education Center, which was originally founded because African American residents of West Chester were prohibited from using the YMCA.
Goose Creek headwaters in wooded portions of West Goshen Township
Image: Google, 2017
Borough of West Chester

The Borough of West Chester has been the county seat of Chester County, Pennsylvania since 1799.

Goose Creek drains the southeastern portion of the Borough of West Chester from south of Marshall Square Park and east of High Street. High Street is the main north-south thoroughfare through town. To the north and west, West Chester is drained by tributaries of Brandywine Creek.

Marshall Square Park

Marshall Square Park was laid out in 1848 to honor the Chester County botanist Humphrey Marshall. Marshall was the first American to write a treatise on American plants, his definitive book on trees and shrubs called *Arbustrum Americanum*. He was born in Marshallton, and was a cousin of the even more renowned botanists John Bartram and William Bartram.

The upper reservoir of the West Chester Water Works was located in Marshall Square Park until it was removed in the early 1880s. The park was initially under the management of a committee which consisted of Joshua Hoopes, William Darlington, and David Townsend. They gave instructions to the nurseryman Paschall Morris to install concentric circles of plantings around the reservoir. In 1878, Josiah Hoopes was hired to revisit the botanical design of the park. He proposed to plant specimens of every kind of tree that was climatically suited to grow in West Chester. It was during the implementation phase of his design that the reservoir was
removed. He managed to plant 160 distinct species of tree and shrubs. The park was recognized in the late 19th century as having one of the best botanical collections.

Josiah Hoopes (1832 – 1904), was the senior member of the firm of Hoopes, Brother, & Thomas. He was a student of the botanist and institution builder William Darlington. In 1852, he built a small greenhouse in West Chester and filled it with representative flora of the world. This grew to an 800-acre establishment extending into West Goshen Township by 1908 with 10,000 square feet under glass. He, his brother Abner Hoopes, and George B. Thomas operated one of the largest nurseries in Pennsylvania. At their peak, they budded 600,000 young peach trees, 150,000 apples, 50,000 pears, 40,000 plums, and 50,000 cherries. They supplied the expanding orchards of Michigan with peaches and shipped thousands of Venus fly-traps from the Carolina bogs to collectors in Europe. Early on their business was known as Cherry Hill Nursery, but changed its name when it expanded to Maple Avenue Nursery. Maple Avenue is just a block northeast of Marshall Square Park. After Josiah’s death in 1904 the business was taken over by his brother Abner and then by Abner’s son Wilmer until the business closed in 1948. One of Josiah Hoopes’ enduring legacies besides Marshall Square Park is the swamp white oak allee in front of Swarthmore College’s Parrish Hall. Also, in 1868 he published the first practical treatise on conifers, The Book of Evergreens. He helped found the Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania in 1859 and was its president from 1869 until 1875. He was also a trustee of the West Chester Normal School from its founding in 1871 until about 1886. The Hoopes family of Pennsylvania are descended from Joshua Hoopes who came to Bucks County from Cleveland, Yorkshire, England in 1683.

Somewhere nearby was the Marshall Square Sanitarium. Sadly, the founder of Mother’s Day, Anna Jarvis (1864-1848), died there after spending her last embittered years as a resident.
Just southeast of Marshall Square Park in the Borough of West Chester is the site of the Sharples Works, the former manufacturing complex of the Sharples Cream Separator Company. The company was founded by Philip M. Sharples (1857-1944) and became a highly successful operation. Prior to technological innovations introduced by the Swedish engineer Gustaf de Laval in 1878, the separation of cream from milk was a time-consuming process that involved hand skimming cream from milk cooled within earthenware crocks that were immersed in the water of springhouses. De Laval invented a continuous separator that operated with centrifugal force. Sharples was granted the distributorship of de Laval’s separators within Chester County in 1881. He owned a machine shop, where he made improvements on the cream separator. He secured patents for his improvements and won the inevitable patent suits. Around the turn of the twentieth century, he was manufacturing 60,000 cream separators a year in West Chester. He opened additional factories in Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, and Hamburg. By 1911, he owned his own coal mine in West Virginia to provide fuel for his factories. Part of his success can be attributed to his elaborate advertising campaign. He was able to live in high style at Greystone Hall on the outskirts of West Chester. It all came to an end in 1933 when the company went bankrupt during the Great Depression. Family dairy farms that were his best customers were wiped. They couldn’t compete with the economies of scale realized by the new centralized dairy farms that had milk brought to them on refrigerated trucks.

The Sharples Cream Separator Company factory buildings were converted into the Sharples Works Apartments.
Sharples Works Apartments, including interior of parking garage

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
Goose Creek flows under Gay Street and Market Street, after which it passes next to the terminus for the West Chester Railroad. At that point, it begins to flow towards the southeast and make a wide bend through town.

One block north of Gay Street is Chestnut Street. At the corner of High and Chestnut Street is the large brick structure that houses the Chester County Historical Society. On its north side, it is connected by an upper floor pedestrian walkway to Horticultural Hall, the building where the first Women’s Rights Convention in Pennsylvania was held, on June 2nd and 3rd, 1852. The meeting was inspired by the first Women’s Rights Convention in the nation, which was held in Seneca Falls, New York just four years earlier.

The block along High Street between Gay and Market Streets is the heart of the historic political and economic center of the Borough of West Chester. On the west side is the entrance to the old court house, and on the east side of the street are the bank buildings critical to financing the early growth of the town.
March for the Environment, rally at Chester County Courthouse  
Speaker: Carolyn Committa, PA state representative & former West Chester mayor  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017

Bank buildings on east side of High Street  
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2017

The brick building between the two structures with classical porticoes was the Bank of Chester County where William Darlington was president for 33 years starting in 1830.
After flowing invisibly under Gay and Market Streets, Goose Creek flows due southwest for a couple of blocks between streets and alleys to just beyond Franklin Street where it begins its bend towards the southeast and flows parallel to that street for several blocks.
Along this course, Goose Creek is closely encroached upon by the town’s infrastructure, such as the auto parts warehouses along East Barnard Street.
Three blocks downstream, Goose Creek flows under Lacey Street and past the rail yards of the West Chester Railroad. At Lacey Street, Goose Creek flows under a bridge past the Borough of West Chester’s Public Works Department.
A building on Lacey Street which looks like a structure from the early days of the railroad is occupied by the BYL Group of Companies, through which bill and debt collection, background screening, and accounts receivable management can be outsourced.
West Chester Railroad

Until 1986, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) ran a commuter line to West Chester from Philadelphia. Its West Chester terminus was between Market and Barnard Streets. After regular passenger service ceased to West Chester, enthusiasts began to use the railroad for excursions.
Riggtown

Goose Creek continues to flow towards the southeast and through the Riggtown neighborhood of the Borough of West Chester. The stream flows parallel to Franklin Street for one block, passes under Nields Street and flows for another block alongside Franklin Street alongside the Ramsgate Towne Homes.
At Linden Street, Goose Creek bends more abruptly towards the southeast and passes under Franklin Street where it flows between the southern margin of Greenfield Park and a Quonset hut that is occupied by the JHL Lawn & Landscape business. Greenfield Park is a 1.9
acre town park used for athletic events by different organizations. Part of the land for the park was purchased from Harry Taylor in 1941 for the grand sum of one dollar. A second piece of land for the park was purchased in 1963 for an additional $400.

Past Greenfield Park, Goose Creek flows in a southeasterly direction parallel with the West Chester Railroad. On the other side of the tracks, is the chemical manufacturing plant of Sartomer.

Once Goose Creek passes under Rosedale Avenue, it exits the Borough of West Chester and reenters West Goshen Township. There, Goose Creek is entered by an unnamed tributary which flows in from the northeast. The tributary originates at the southwest corner of the
interchange between U.S. Routes 3 and 202. It flows between the two cemeteries of the Green Mount Cemetery Association and Rolling Green Memorial Park, past the Chester County Government Services buildings and the playing fields of the West Chester United Soccer Club. The tributary then flows under Westtown Road, past car dealerships and trucking depots, under South Bolmar Street and into Goose Creek.

Goose Creek then flows between the A. Duie Pyle trucking warehouse and depot on South Bolmar Street and The Edge at West Chester, which are luxury apartments for students of West Chester University on Matlack Street. Other structures along Matlack Street associated with West Chester University include its Graphics & Printing Department, Human Resources and Facilities offices, and the Alumni & Foundation Center. The Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders is on Carter Drive, which turns off Matlack Street and runs closer to Goose Creek. Along its length are many small industries and retail outlets that back onto the stream.
Goose Creek skirts the eastern edge of the West Chester University campus, particularly the facilities along Matlack Street and Carter Drive within West Goshen Township. The rest of campus lies within the headwaters of the Plum Run tributary of Brandywine Creek. West Chester University evolved from its origin in 1871 as the West Chester Normal School to become the four-year West Chester State Teacher’s College in 1927, and then West Chester State College in 1960 after it added a liberal arts program. Finally, it became a comprehensive regional university in 1983 as part of the newly created Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

As it approaches the West Chester Bypass (U.S. Routes 202/322), Goose Creek catches the outflow of the West Chester Borough Sewage Treatment Plant. Next to the treatment plant is the Fire Department Training Center.
U.S. Route 202/322 Corridor

Goose Creek flows past small industrial parks on the U.S. Route 202/322 Corridor. After it passes under the highway, Goose Creek flows past the Willow Brook Industrial Park. A bridge across the stream leads to the driving range and putting greens of Tee It Up Golf.

Just downstream, Goose Creek catches the outflow of the West Goshen Township Sewage Treatment Plant. It’s due to the presence of two major sewage treatment plants and large areas of impervious surface in its headwaters that the PA Department of Environmental Protection has classified Goose Creek with the relatively low water quality designation of Warm Water Fisheries.
After it passes the West Goshen Sewerage Plant, Goose Creek enters Westtown Township. It flows between the leafy residential subdivisions of Coventry and Wild Goose Park and enters a wooded valley as it passes under Oakbourne Road. The West Chester Railroad continues to follow alongside Goose Creek. The stream passes back and forth beneath it a couple times during its course. For part of its length through this section, Goose Creek flows through a portion of Oakbourne Park.
Goose Creek then reaches the woods and fields of Oakbourne Park, a Westtown Township public park established on an old estate. The park lies to both sides of South Concord Road. The uphill side to the west of South Concord Road contains the Oakbourne Mansion and its spectacular water tower. The township rents out the mansion for events and holds public meetings there. The downhill side of the park to the east of South Concord Road includes the wooded valley of Goose Creek and a sweeping vista of agricultural fields that alternate between corn and soybean crops over the years.

By the late 1800s, the site was the summer residence of a Mr. and Mrs. John Hulme. In 1882, it was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. James Smith, who enlarged the original granite mansion and named it “Oakbourne.” They added an ornate copper cornice and other features, such as a tower which afforded a wide view of the surrounding countryside. For about a decade they enjoyed the house and the grounds. They raised livestock and created a park along the north edge of the property among the large trees. There, they created a small pond along an unnamed
tributary of Goose Creek. Goldfish inhabit the pond. The Smiths also built ornamental stone walls, some of which can be seen crumbling along Oakbourne Road.

They willed the property to the Philadelphia Protestant Episcopal City Mission, which established a convalescent home for white women in 1893 according to the stipulation in the will. It was called the James C. Smith Memorial Home.

Ninety-six acres of the property was sold to establish the Pennsylvania Epileptic Hospital and Colony Farm in 1896. Eventually the property was subdivided to form Oakbourne Park, Gaudenzia House, and the Pleasant Grove residential neighborhood. The convalescent home was forced to close its doors due to prohibitive operational costs in 1971, so Westtown Township purchased the property to establish Oakbourne Park. The efforts of retired Westtown Township supervisor L. Charles Scipione were instrumental in the restoration of the water tower.
Two sides of the Oakbourne Mansion water tower

Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Here there be dragons!
Hickory horned devil on the service road at Oakbourne Park
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
Tributary of Goose Creek and pond  
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Ruins of stone wall and serpentinite gate post near Oakbourne Road  
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Goose Creek under railroad bridge, Oakbourne Park  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Goose Creek in Oakbourne Park

Fields and wooded edges of Oakbourne Park

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012
Goose Creek continues to flow towards the southeast alongside the railroad. To the east is the leafy Westtown Coventry Estates subdivision. Goose Creek flows under Westbourne Road next to the Westtown-Thornbury Elementary School. There is a large cattail marsh along the creek to the south of Westbourne Road.

Westbourne Road over Goose Creek at Westtown-Thornbury Elementary School
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Goose Creek from Westbourne Road and nearby cattail marsh
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Westtown-Thornbury Elementary School

The Westtown-Thornbury Elementary School is one of the public elementary schools in the West Chester Area School District. Goose Creek enters Chester Creek in an open wetland meadow behind the school. The combined streams bend around the grounds of the school on the back side, while Westbourne Road bends around the front side of the school in a sharp right-angled turn.
Chester Creek flows under the opposite bend in Westbourne Road and then takes a sharp turn towards the southeast parallel to both the road and the tracks of the old Philadelphia and West Chester Railroad once again. Smooth alder grows along its banks.
Westbourne Road over Chester Creek, behind the Westtown-Thornbury Elementary School
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Chester Creek downstream from Westbourne Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Bayard Rustin High School

Chester Creek flows past the grounds of Bayard Rustin High School, one of the four high schools in the West Chester Area School District. It is named in honor of the civil rights activist and chief advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who grew up in West Chester. He was the man who introduced Dr. King to the concept of non-violent resistance to social injustice and who organized the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Bayard Rustin High School opened in 2006. The naming of the school was controversial. As a gay African American conscientious objector and former Communist, some found certain aspects of his life objectionable. The school board chose to honor the memory of the man and his principles despite the objections.

Westtown Train Station

Chester Creek then flows under PA Route 926, Street Road, and enters Thornbury Township, Chester County. Just to the east of Chester Creek, the railroad also passes under PA Route 926. The old Westtown train station located here serves as an art gallery. Between the rail line and the creek is a small commercial center that includes the art gallery, the Westtown post office, a karate studio, and the Goose Creek Grille.
Bridge over Chester Creek, PA 926, Street Road

Westtown Post Office, McCormack Karate, and the Goose Creek Grill

Westtown Station Gallery and sculpture garden

Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012
Goose Creek Park

Chester Creek forms a south-pointing meander bend behind this commercial center, where it embraces the acreage of a Thornbury Township park known as Goose Creek Park. When the restaurant and the park were named, the assumption must have been that they were located right along Goose Creek, which is reasonably close by. A small unnamed tributary enters Chester Creek from the southwest as it begins to bend around the park. Goose Creek Park facilities include a picnic pavilion, a playground, and a paved perimeter trail.
View of Goose Creek Park from Chester Creek

Erosion along Chester Creek and unnamed tributary between Goose Creek Park and Bainbridge subdivision

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Waln Run

As Chester Creek leaves Goose Creek Park, it is joined by the waters of Waln Run, another tributary. Waln Run flows into Chester Creek out of the southwest. Its entire length is contained within Thornbury Township, Chester County.

Penn Oaks Country Club

Waln Run originates as a water trap on the golf course of the Penn Oaks Country Club.

Waln Run flows towards the northwest through the Sage Hill and Bainbridge subdivisions of Thornbury Township, Chester County.

Waln Run Park

Between the two subdivisions, is open space designated as Waln Run Park. The entrance is along a cul-de-sac off of Westtown-Thornton Road called Echo Hill Road. The park includes a wetland comprising both cattails and *Phragmites* reeds. Waln Run is difficult to access in the park through a tangle of multi-flora rose and wineberry brambles.
Waln Run then enters Chester Creek between Goose Creek Park and Westtown-Thornton Road.

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An enlarged Chester Creek then flows east under Westtown-Thornton Road, which itself passes under a railroad bridge of the West Chester line at this point.
Less than a quarter mile past the railroad bridge is a confluence with a major tributary, the East Branch Chester Creek, which flows into Chester Creek from the north.
East Branch Chester Creek

The source of the East Branch Chester Creek is in the Wyntre Brooke Apartment complex at the southern edge of West Whiteland Township. The stream emerges from a culvert next to the tennis court behind a row of apartments. The waters from the East Branch percolate through a cattail marsh situated there. The apartments are located near where Ship Road, Boot Road, and Phoenixville Pike all come together.

East Branch Chester Creek flows south towards Boot Road. As it does so, it passes into West Goshen Township.

Boot Tavern

The intersection of Boot Road and Phoenixville Pike was the site of the Boot Tavern, where General Howe ordered his Hessian mercenaries to position themselves following the Battle of the Brandywine in order to intercept the retreating Continental army. On September 16, 1777 there was a brief inconclusive skirmish near the tavern on the Meredith farm in bad weather. It was one of two skirmishes that comprised the so-called Battle of the Clouds.
East Branch Chester Creek along Boot Road near Phoenixville Pike
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

East Branch Chester Creek passes under Boot Road and enters the Knollwood and Brookfield subdivisions within West Goshen Township.

East Branch Chester Creek at Knollwood Drive, Knollwood subdivision
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

From its source, the East Branch Chester Creek has been running south, roughly parallel to Phoenixville Pike to its west. Downstream from the residential housing subdivisions, it enters a narrowing convergence of PA Route 100 and Phoenixville Pike where the landscape becomes considerably more industrial. The Brandywine Valley SPCA and the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s
Witnesses are on its east bank. Both of those institutions front onto Phoenixville Pike. Just before the creek passes under Phoenixville Pike, it passes between two discontinuous ends of Greenhill Road, which was interrupted to build PA Route 100.

![Old Greenhill Road bridge over East Branch Chester Creek](image)

**Old Greenhill Road bridge over East Branch Chester Creek**
*Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012*

**Greenhill Corporate Park**

Downstream from this point, East Branch Chester Creek skirts the southwestern edge of the Greenhill Corporate Park, home to the Chesterbrook Academy Elementary School, the Graduate Center of West Chester University, and various businesses. Access to the corporate park is through McDermott Drive off Greenhill Road.

At the southern end of the Greenhill Corporate Park, East Branch Chester Creek flows under PA Route 100 close to the access ramps with U.S. Route 202. On its west bank is the Deer Run Industrial Park. The stream continues flowing towards the southeast and passes beneath U.S. Route 202 as well. Closely parallel to the highway, is North 5 Points Road, which the stream also passes under.
East Branch Chester Creek flows towards the east after passing under North Five Points Road, where the waters soon widen into the West Chester Reservoir, also known as Fern Hill Lake. To the north of the lake are QVC Studio Park, the American Helicopter Museum, the Brandywine Airport, and the Brandywine Business Center. The latter is a corporate park that includes a large UPS facility. To the south of the reservoir is the Woodcrest residential subdivision, businesses such as Ice Line Quad Rinks and Moonbounce Adventures, and the West Goshen Community Park. The dam for the reservoir is along Airport Road, which forms a boundary between West and East Goshen Townships.
Industries surrounding East Branch Chester Creek and Fernhill Lake in West Goshen Township
Image: Google, 2017

QVC Studio Park

The QVC Studio Park complex is the headquarters of the home shopping channel, QVC, which stands for “Quality, Value, Convenience.” The company touts itself as a third option for consumers, alongside online e-commerce and brick-and-mortar stores. The cable, satellite, and broadcast television network was founded in 1986 by Joseph Segel. Comcast bought a controlling majority share of its stock in 1995 and then sold its majority share to Liberty Media in 2003. After spinning off a couple of branches of its business in 2010, the company that kept
ownership of QVC was called Liberty Interactive, which later changed its name to Qurate Retail Group.

As of 2018, QVC broadcast to 350 million households in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, France, Italy, and China. The 80-acre QVC Studio Park opened in 1997 in the former corporate offices of Commodore Business Machines, the maker of the popular early home computer from the 1980s, the Commodore 64.

In 2018, Qurate Retail Inc. planned to eliminate more than 2,000 of its total 27,000 jobs in order to consolidate its operations following the purchase of QVC’s Florida-based rival shopping channel HSN and the Seattle-based Zulily, an online shopping service. A small number of people were expected to lose their jobs at the headquarters and television studios in West Chester (actually West Goshen). Qurate’s revenues totaled $14 billion in North America, Europe, and Japan, having shipped more than 170 million items through its television and online channels in 2017.
American Helicopter Museum and Education Center

The American Helicopter Museum and Education Center is the nation’s premier museum dedicated to rotary wing aircraft. It was founded in 1993 and opened its doors to the public in 1996. Its creation can be largely credited to Peter Wright, a founder of Keystone Helicopter and a pioneer in the commercial helicopter industry. The Philadelphia area has been a hotbed of rotary wing aircraft innovation, and the museum is a tribute to those pioneers and a showcase for a large variety of rotary aircraft.
Views inside the American Helicopter Museum

Photos: Walt Cressler, 2014
Larry Barrett (1922-2020) was an aeronautical engineer who worked on the first American jet engines for Westinghouse and then went on to become an important design engineer for Boeing Helicopters at their factory along Ridley Creek. He worked there for thirty years. He designed the rotary bearings for the CH-47 Chinook and the HRB-1/CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters, which have been manufactured there since the 1960s. He introduced Teflon fabric bearings for vibration reduction. He was also a pioneer in the computer programming of helicopter rotor blade tracking and balance. He received several patents in both jet engine and helicopter design. He became a founding member of the American Helicopter Museum and Education Center after he retired.

Larry was a very active board member of the Chester-Ridley-Crum Watersheds Association for many years. He focused particularly on the water quality of Chester Creek as it flows through Thornbury Township, Delaware County, where he lived. He received the association’s Individual of the Year Award in 2012. He was also deeply involved with open space issues within the township where he fought unregulated development. One of the township parks, Barrett Meadows, is named for him.
West Chester Reservoir

The West Chester Reservoir is also known as Fernhill Lake. It’s a back-up water storage facility owned by Aqua Pennsylvania. The dam and spillway can be viewed from Airport Road, which also serves as a boundary line between West Goshen and East Goshen Townships.

The spillway at the West Chester Reservoir  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

East Branch Chester Creek downstream from Airport Road  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

The view of East Branch Chester Creek downstream from Airport Road reveals a small patch of rural landscape in the midst of a predominantly industrialized area. As East Branch
Chester Creek enters East Goshen Township, it flows past the West Chester Area YMCA facility to its south, and two units of the Goshen Corporate Park to its northwest and northeast. An unnamed tributary enters from the northwest after passing among these corporate parks and some residential subdivisions in East Goshen Township. East Branch Chester Creek then flows under Paoli Pike.

Another small unnamed tributary enters from the southwest in West Goshen Township. It originates behind the West Goshen Town Center shopping facility which fronts onto West Chester Pike. As it flows towards the northeast, it wends its way through Coopersmith Park and then past the Fugett Middle School and East Senior High School of the West Chester Area School District. At the corner of the school district property, the tributary flows under Ellis Lane and enters East Goshen Township and its confluence with East Branch Chester Creek.

Coopersmith Park

Coopersmith Park is a West Goshen Township park. It has a picnic pavilion and a wooded portion along the stream with a walking trail. The Goshen Terrace Nature Trail can be accessed from the Goshen Terrace Apartments. The apartments have Tudor-style facades on streets with names such as Queen Lane and Kings Way Drive. The woodland in Coopersmith Park consists primarily of Norway maples and Paulownia trees with a tangled undergrowth of Japanese honeysuckle.
At its confluence with the unnamed tributary East Branch Chester Creek is in the middle of a bend that takes its flow towards the northeast. Once it completes the bend so that it continues its general southeasterly trend, the creek flows parallel to Reservoir Road, which lies to its east. It passes a large agricultural estate to the west, a rare sight amidst this landscape of residential subdivisions and corporate parks. A stream restoration project took place on the East Branch Chester Creek along Reservoir Road north of its intersection with Strasburg Road. East Goshen Township received a Pennsylvania Growing Greener Grant in 2001 to restore about 1500 linear feet of severely eroded and undercut creek banks through this section. The project was completed in 2004, and entailed relocating sections of stream, lowering the stream bank, creating wetland pools, and restoring the floodplain and riparian buffer. A find stand of river birches grows along the creek.
Restored section of East Branch Chester Creek along Reservoir Road, East Goshen Township
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
East Branch Chester Creek passes under Reservoir Road and then Strasbourgh Road close to where the two roads intersect. On the other side of Strasburg Road, the waters of the creek had for many years been impounded to form the Milltown Reservoir. Reservoir Road runs along the western edge of the basin.

Milltown Reservoir

In 2017, the dam for the 10-acre Milltown Reservoir was scheduled to be lowered to comply with the safety regulations of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. The 20-foot high dam was considered at risk of failing in a major rainfall. The plan was to reduce the size of the reservoir to a 2 ½-acre pond. East Goshen Township also planned to retain recreational uses, which many residents feared would be lost. A fishing pier, trails, meadow, boardwalk, and parking spaces were all slated for a 19-acre area.
East Branch Chester Creek flows south from the reservoir and passes under West Chester Pike, PA Route 3. Above its west bank near the highway sits Service King Collision Repair of West Goshen (even though it is in East Goshen Township). After the creek passes under the pike, it enters the Ridgewood subdivision. It flows parallel to Westtown Way, which runs along its east side. Along Westtown Way, a sign posted at a picket gate indicates the “Township Yard,” which appears to be a storage area for the Public Works Department of East Goshen Township.
East Branch Chester Creek then flows under Westtown Way between two cul-de-sacs, Westtown Circle and Dutts Mill East.

Both the East Branch Chester Creek and Westtown Way turn towards the southwest after the creek flows under the road. At this point, Westtown Way forms the boundary between East, and then West Goshen Townships and Westtown Township. Through this section, the creek meanders through a dense woodland that is part of the property belonging to the Westtown School within Westtown Township.
Westtown Way comes to a T at Westtown Road. At the southwest corner of the intersection of the two roads, East Branch Chester Creek is joined by a tributary called Forsythe Run, which flows down from the northwest.

**Forsythe Run**

Forsythe Run is a tributary of East Branch Chester Creek that flows almost entirely within the southeast corner of West Goshen Township. Its source is within the Concord Manor residential subdivision, just a few cul-de-sacs south of Rolling Green Memorial Park. As it passes through the neighboring Westtown Acres subdivision, its waters are fed from a large stormwater basin along Basin Drive. The stormwater basin is surrounded by numerous suburban cul-de-sacs. Forsythe Run is visible at numerous points as it wends its way through the subdivisions of West Goshen Township. As it does so, it approaches closer and closer to Westtown Road until it is flowing parallel with it just after passing beneath Partridge Lane.
Forsythe Run at Partridge Lane
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Forsythe Run flows near Barker Park, a small West Goshen Township park, which is situated on Westtown Way just east of its intersection with Westtown Road.

Forsythe Run at Barker Park
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Forsythe Run then meets the East Branch Chester Creek in Westtown Township just south of the intersection between Westtown Road and Westtown Way.
Intersection of Westtown Way (on right) with Westtown Road

Forsythe Run just north of Westtown Way

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Downstream from Westtown Way and its confluence with Forsythe Run, East Branch Chester Creek bends towards the southeast and flows between Westtown Road and the Westtown School woods.

Downstream from Westtown Way, the East Branch Chester Creek winds through the woods and fields of the Westtown School, a Quaker boarding school dating from 1799. Its founders wanted to provide a “guarded education” for Quaker youth in the Chester County countryside far from corrupting city influences of Philadelphia. For this reason, not even music
and art was taught at the school for many generations. Natural history was a major focus, though, as a worthy study of God’s creation. As a result, the Westtown School produced many naturalists and scientists, especially during the formative years of the republic in the nineteenth century.

Several of the earliest Westtown School graduates were also involved in some interesting social experiments. The industrial revolution produced profound changes in social relationships. Automation began to replace hand craftsmanship, artisan’s guilds, and master-apprentice relationships. During this transition, utopian notions of factory work were embraced and promoted. These ideals were based on the Enlightenment notions of reason and progress, which upheld a harmonious association between workers and owners. Their most influential proponent was Robert Owen, a Scottish industrialist who inspired a number of experiments in both Great Britain and the United States in the 1820s. At least three graduates of the Westtown School were intimately involved in ventures inspired by Robert Owen. Joshua Gilpin initially set up his paper mill on the Brandywine on Owenite principals. Thomas Say joined Robert Owen himself at the utopian colony of New Harmony, Indiana, and Rueben Haines was a founder of the equally ill-fated Valley Forge Commune. In their efforts to establish harmony in these communities, the utopian associationists had inferred, through the powers of reason, that certain traditional practices had always led to conflict in society. These traditions were marriage, private property, and religion. However, their attempts to abolish these practices also generated a lot of conflict. For this and other reasons, the utopian experiments were short-lived.

At the founding of the school, as at many new settlements of the time, a saw mill and a grist mill were erected. The East Branch Chester Creek was dammed to provide water power for the mills. The head races for both mills and the remains of a dam are visible in the woods south of Westtown Way and north of the school campus. They appear to be dry ditches extending along the forest floor. The old dam is just upstream from the bridge that carries Westtown Road over the creek.

Remains of the old dam, East Branch Chester Creek near Westtown School
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
East Branch Chester Creek meanders through the woods associated with the Westtown School. During the course of one of its larger meanders, it flows under Westtown Road and continues to flow roughly parallel to it, but on the west side rather than the east side.

Just downstream from the bridge, East Branch Chester Creek flows past the Westtown Township Waste Water Treatment Facility, and absorbs its treated outflow.
A short distance downstream from the waste water treatment facility, East Branch Chester Creek is joined by Hickman Run, a tributary that flows into it from the northeast and is dammed on the other side of Westtown Road to form Westtown Lake.

Hickman Run

Hickman Run is a tributary of East Branch Chester Creek that drains a large portion of northeastern Westtown Township between the intersection of PA Routes 3 and 352 and the Westtown School. It originates in a residential subdivision in that portion of Westtown Township. Its headwaters include a couple of small tributaries.

Mariner East Pipeline

The Mariner East Pipeline traverses the headwaters of Hickman Run at the intersection of PA Route 3, West Chester Pike, and PA Route 3, Middletown Road. As a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners, Sunoco Pipeline LP repaired its old pipeline in 2014 and renamed it the Mariner East. Around the same time, they started constructing the larger Mariner East II Pipeline also to transfer propane and butane from the Marcellus Shale region of Pennsylvania to its refinery in Marcus Hook. The pipelines, which mostly run adjacent to each other with a few exceptions, are 350 miles long and traverse 17 Pennsylvania counties. The pipelines enter the Chester Creek watershed at the southeast corner of West Whiteland Township and the northeast corner of West Goshen Township. They traverse the length of East Goshen Township and cross the eastern end of Westtown Township. They traverse the northeastern corner of Thornbury Township, Delco, and the entire western edge of Edgmont Township. They split in Middletown Township. The Mariner II Pipeline traverses the length of Middletown Township, turns through Chester Township on its way to Upper Chichester and Marcus Hook. The previously existing pipeline traverses Aston Township.

The construction of the pipelines disrupted communities, created concerns about transporting highly volatile liquids near homes and schools, resulted in citations from state regulators for numerous violations, and became subject to a criminal investigation by state and local prosecutors.
Mariner II Pipeline drilling operation at PA Routes 3 & 352
Photo: Patrick Cressler, 2019
Hickman Run flows towards the southwest. Once it passes under Walnut Hill Road, it enters woodland on Westtown School property. There, it flows amongst a ropes course that is used by the school.
Hickman Run is dammed to form Westtown Lake on the campus of the Westtown School. The lake is a popular stopover for migratory waterfowl. During the day in early November when these photos were taken, ruddy ducks, pied-billed grebes, and mallards were observed.
Between Westtown Lake and the woods to the north are agricultural fields that are planted with corn, soybeans, and pumpkins. This was once an orchard that included apple, peach, and cherry trees. Also, south of the lake, the Westtown track was once the Boy’s Orchard and the field beside the Stadium Tennis Courts was the Girl’s Orchard. The students were permitted to pick up fallen fruit to snack on.

Hickman Run continues in the form of outflow from the dam and passes under Westtown Road and joins the East Branch Chester Creek.
Hickman Run continues as outflow from the Westtown Lake dam and passes under Westtown Road. From there, it flows through meadows and woodland and enters East Branch Chester Creek.

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Southeast of Westtown Lake is the main cluster of buildings that comprises the campus of the Westtown School. Its centerpiece is the Main Building, completed in 1888 from a design by Quaker architect Addison Hutton.
The buildings look out over a substantial vista which includes the athletic and agricultural fields belonging to the school.

Below its confluence with Hickman Run, East Branch Chester Creek continues to meander through a wide floodplain between Westtown Road and the Plumly Farms subdivision to the west.

Along this stretch of the stream, the original grist mill once stood. The tail race downstream from the grist mill is still visible as a shallow ditch. The miller’s house along Westtown Road is used by the Westtown School as a residence.
Grist mill tail race, Westtown School

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

East Branch Chester Creek with damage from Hurricane Sandy

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
A zip line carries travelers across East Branch Chester Creek along this stretch of the stream courtesy of local landowner Alan Wright.

Silver maples and black willows line the banks of the creek as it winds through an increasingly open meadow on its way south.
Upon passing under PA Route 926, Street Road, at the L. Charles Scipione Bridge, the East Branch Chester Creek passes into Thornbury Township, Chester County. L. Charles Scipione was an influential member of the Westtown Township Board of Supervisors.
Downstream from the bridge, East Branch Chester Creek is joined by Westtown Run from the east.
Westtown Run

Westtown Run originates behind Penn Wood Elementary School in Westtown Township. It is one of ten public elementary schools within the West Chester Area School District. From there, Westtown Run flows towards the southwest, and passes under Robin Drive and Shady Grove Way as it traverses the Woodcock Farm residential subdivision.

Westtown Run at Shady Grove Way

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Westtown Run traverses the southeast corner of Pete’s Produce Farm, an agricultural and educational enterprise of the Westtown School. Amidst the fields, the stream flows through a tangled riparian corridor of scrubby trees and brush, as well as a wetland glade of sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*).

Pete’s Produce Farm

Starting in the year 2000, farmer Pete Flynn leased 200 of the Westtown School’s 600 acres to grow produce. The trustees refused to divest themselves of the land, despite real estate market pressures. They valued the open land and the closeness of the farming experience to the students of the school. This enabled Pete Flynn to sustainably sell his produce directly to retail customers from his produce stand on Street Road at the edge of the school property. Crops included corn, tomatoes, zucchini, squash, and beans.
Pete’s Produce Farm, roadside stand on PA Route 926, Street Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2019

Old farmhouse next to Pete’s Produce Farm stand
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
After flowing under PA Route 926, Street Road, Westtown Run enters Thornbury Township, Chester County at the location of a small pond in a residential area along Cheyney Road.
Westtown Run skirts the northern edge of the campus of Cheyney University and flows parallel to Street Road before entering the East Branch Chester Creek just to the west of Westtown Road within the Thornbury Soccer Park. Just before this confluence, Westtown flows behind The Concept School at the southeast corner of Street and Westtown Roads.

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Thornbury Soccer Park

The confluence of the East Branch with the main branch of Chester Creek occurs at the southern edge of the extensive playing fields of Thornbury Soccer Park, the home of the West Chester United Soccer Club. The floodplain of Chester Creek is at one of its widest points here.

East Branch Chester Creek at the Thornbury Soccer Park
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Canada geese at the Thornbury Soccer Park during the off-season
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
The enlarged waters of Chester Creek then flow parallel to the railroad bed of the old Philadelphia and West Chester Railroad to the south and Westtown Road to the north. Across Westtown Road stands the Meadowcroft Presbyterian Church.

Chester Creek then flows along the southern edge of Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, the nation’s oldest HBCU (Historically Black College or University). At the west end of campus, Chester Creek passes under Dilworthtown Road. At the east end of campus, it passes under Cheyney Road. In between, the creek is joined by three small unnamed tributaries from the south. Chester Creek passes through the Cheyney Wetland, which provides habitat for migratory waterfowl.
Bridge over Chester Creek at Dilworhtown Road; Railroad crossing in distance
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Chester Creek from Dilworhtown Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania

Cheyney University is one of the fourteen universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. It is also the oldest Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in the United States. Prior to its move in 1902 to the farm of George Cheyney along Chester Creek, it had its start as the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. It was founded through a bequest begun in 1837 by Richard Humphreys, a Quaker philanthropist who had been born in the West Indies and upon moving to Philadelphia became concerned for the struggles of African Americans. He envisioned a curriculum based on agriculture and the mechanical arts as the basis for improving their lives.

The Institute for Colored Youth was chartered by the state legislature in 1842, and a spacious building was erected on Lombard Street in 1851. It was the most important school for African-American youth in Philadelphia for the rest of the 19th century. Charles L. Reason, an abolitionist and America’s first black college professor (at New York Central College), was principal from 1852 until 1855. He instituted a rigorous classical curriculum and started a library and public lecture series. Instruction in the sciences intensified with the hiring of Robert Campbell in 1855. To improve his own scientific knowledge, Campbell tried to enroll in a lecture series at the Franklin Institute but was prevented from doing so because of his race. He then became an ardent abolitionist and advocate for black emigration to Africa and the Caribbean.

Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett succeeded Charles L. Reason as principal in 1856. He de-emphasized the sciences in favor of more civics and a reform-oriented curriculum. This included a new emphasis on teacher training with the passage of Pennsylvania’s Normal School Act in 1857. Bassett’s most famous student was Octavius V. Catto, the 1858 class valedictorian who became a prominent civil rights activist, baseball player, and instructor at the school. In 1869, Bassett left the school to become the country’s first black diplomat through his appointment as Minister to Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

He was succeeded as principal by Fanny Jackson Coppin, an Oberlin College graduate who built the school’s reputation and programs in an exemplary fashion. She did this in the face of rising post-Reconstruction racial discrimination, exemplified tragically through the murder of Octavius V. Catto during Philadelphia election riots in 1871. She modernized and expanded the curriculum, expanded the network of the school’s benefactors, and hired top-notch faculty. These included Richard T. Greener, the first black graduate of Harvard, who taught English; and
Edward Bouchet, the first black graduate of Yale, who headed the science program. The school continued its emphasis on teacher training, but under Fanny Coppin also began a successful vocational training program, which anticipated by several years Booker T. Washington’s advocacy of such industrial education to enhance the self-sufficiency of African-Americans in society. Towards the end of her time at the Institute, Fanny Coppin prepared it for its move to Cheyney Station in Thornbury Township along Chester Creek from its last location in Philadelphia at 9th and Bainbridge Streets. When the Institute relocated in 1902, she parted for Maryland to found Coppin State College.

In 1913, the Institute for Colored Youth was renamed the State Normal School at Cheyney; in 1921 it became Cheyney State Teachers College; in 1959 it became Cheyney State College; and in 1983 it joined the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education as Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. It continues its mission of educating people for the teaching profession but has expanded its programs to over 30 disciplines. Prominent graduates have included journalist Ed Bradley of the CBS program “60 Minutes”; Robert C. Bogle, publisher of the Philadelphia Tribune, the oldest newspaper continuously owned and operated by an African American; state representatives Thaddeus Kirkland and Michael Horsey; U.S. Congressman Curt Weldon; Robert L. Woodson, founder and president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise; and Ambassador Joseph M. Segars.
Emlen Hall (Keystone Honors Academy) and Humphreys Hall, Cheyney University
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017

Biddle Hall (includes President’s Office), Cheyney University
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017
Burleigh Hall (includes University College and Residence Life), Cheyney University
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017

Browne Hall, Cheyney University
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017
Dudley Centre (Theater), Cheyney University

Carnegie Hall (includes Dean’s Office), Cheyney University

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017
Under the leadership of Dr. Steven G. Hughes, Cheyney University offers a Bachelor’s of Science degree in Marine Biology with a concentration in either marine biology or aquaculture. Dr. Hughes is the director of the Aquaculture Research and Education Laboratory, which he designed to “help meet the educational, research and extension needs of the Mid-Atlantic region and its critical waterways” by training professionals in the various sciences. The laboratory has several recirculating systems for research on both tropical and cool to cold water species. There are two 3,000 square foot wet laboratories that also include a separate 200 square foot aquarium room dedicated to aquarium fish and shellfish culture and a feed mixing and preparation room. Dry laboratory facilities are used for both water quality analyses and assessments of fish nutrition and physiology. Students in the program have also gotten internships in such places as Disney World, the USDA-ARS Laboratories, and the Institute for Marine and Environmental Technology in Maryland.
Recirculating system in the wet lab, AREL, Cheyney University

Rows of tilapia, Aquaculture Research & Education Laboratory, Cheyney University

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017
The laboratory and Cheyney University have also established a public-private collaboration with Herban Farms LLC and built a 10,000 square-foot aquaponic greenhouse on campus. The greenhouse is used for the commercial production of basil and fish. Students are able to conduct research and study the economics of the system. In doing so, they work on developing methods to increase the production efficiency of both. The basil is distributed to local grocery stores.
Lots of aquaponic basil, Herban Farms LLC

Basil delivery van outside of greenhouse, Herban Farms LLC

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017
Herban Farms basil for sale at Gentile’s Market, Newtown Square
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018

Dr. Steven Hughes feeding the koi that fertilize the aquaponic basil at Herban Farms
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017
In 2019, Cheyney University faced a drastically declining enrollment, a nearly $10 million budget shortfall, and the likelihood that it would not be re-accredited. Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf met with state higher education officials who agreed to support a transformation plan that included public-private partnerships and other alternatives but postponed a decision to provide another loan from the state system. The new Chancellor of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, Dan Greenstein, dismayed Cheyney supporters by suggesting a new path in light of unlikely re-accreditation, such as affiliation with another university as a department or school - or providing career training programs that don’t require accreditation. In July of 2018, the university had announced plans to create an African American-focused institute to promote its legacy by partnering with Thomas Jefferson University, Starbucks, and other entities. These plans did not lead to a financial turnaround. Without one, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education would not re-accredit the school. It had received a two-year extension to fix its finances, but there was no mechanism to further extend the timeline. Cheyney University was also facing the possibility of having to repay the U.S. Department of Education tens of millions of dollars in mismanaged financial aid revealed in a 2015 review.

The university ended the fiscal year with a balanced budget, however, due to fund-raising efforts that including a “Resurgence” campaign led by alumni and a $2.5 million unrestricted grant from the state. They also admitted twice the number of first year students in the fall of 2019 over the previous year, bringing the number of students enrolled to over 600. These factors, in addition to Governor Tom Wolf’s pledge to eliminate Cheyney University’s $40 million debt to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and its chancellor’s office, led to the university being reaccredited in November 2019. As an accredited university, its students would continue to be eligible for state and federal financial aid. The conditions for reaccreditation required the submission of two reports in the following year, one providing evidence of a repayment plan to the federal Department of Education and a resolution of the debt to the state system, and one to show the general sustainability of the university’s finances. The accreditation commission planned another review in the 2022-2023 academic year.

Meanwhile, Cheyney University’s president of two-and-a-half years, Andrew A. Walton, alienated members of the academic community during the existential struggle to save the school. As a former Highmark health insurance executive, he had been hired by the state system from private industry to turn the financial situation of the university around. His methods were not well received in some quarters. Two former university administrators who he had terminated filed suit against him, alleging he had misspent funds. The academic community was also dismayed that he unilaterally hired a new Provost without a search committee consisting of faculty members and other campus stakeholders.
Creek Road is a continuation of Westtown Road under a different name as it skirts the southern end of Cheyney University’s campus. Creek Road parallels Chester Creek from this point all the way to Glen Mills. Before Chester Creek flows under Cheyney Road and leaves the vicinity of campus, though, it passes by the Cheyney University Wastewater Treatment Plant located at the eastern end of the large university parking lot on Creek Road.

Cheyney University Wastewater Treatment Plant

Photos: Walt Cressler, 2017

Thornbury Township, Delaware County

The southeast corner of Cheyney University’s campus is in Thornbury Township, Delaware County, while the rest of it is in Thornbury Township, Chester County. Chester Creek enters Thornbury Township, Delaware County just past the confluence of the second of the three unnamed tributaries that flow into it from the south there, which is near where Westtown Road turns into Creek Road.

The original Thornbury Township was split between the two counties when Delaware County was formed out of Chester County in 1789.

After Chester Creek flows under Cheyney Road it continues a wide bend that it had been making around the southern end of Cheyney University and flows towards the northeast. As it does so, the creek enters an area of woodland and a large meadowland, known as Barrett Meadows.
Barrett Meadows is open space set aside within Thornbury Township, Delaware County to be preserved in perpetuity as habitat for birds and other wildlife. It is named for Larry Barrett, retired Boeing mechanical engineer and a longtime resident of the township who has been active in promoting open space and environmental issues. Al Guarante of the Delaware County Birding Club has reported seeing rare Lincoln’s sparrows and Nelson (formerly known as sharp-tailed) sparrows here. Both species favor open grassland habitat, which has become scarce in the region.
Soccer ball at the flood line a few days after Superstorm Sandy
Perhaps it came downstream from the Thornbury Soccer Park
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

“Cheyney Run”

At the eastern end of Barrett Meadows, Chester Creek is joined by an unnamed tributary that flows out of the northwest that is known locally as Cheyney Run. It originates in Thornbury Township, Delaware County, but passes in and out of Thornbury Township, Chester County by way of the Squire Cheyney Farm.

Squire Cheyney Farm

Thomas Cheyney (1731-1811) was a local farmer who warned George Washington about the British flanking movements at the Battle of Brandywine in 1777, but went unheeded. He served as a delegate to the U.S. Constitutional Convention in 1787 and as a local justice of the peace for 25 years.

His estate was in disrepair since becoming vacant in 2006. In 2013, John and Vicki Murphy bought the house and surrounding buildings at auction and restored them in partnership with the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia. John Murphy was an estimator for a construction company and a history buff. He and his wife didn’t want to see the historical property deteriorate any further. The estate had been part of a subdivision of single-family homes called the Preserve at Squire Cheyney, developed by Orleans Homebuilders. The developer returned the original buildings to Thornbury Township, which are now part of its 52-acre Squire Cheyney Park.
Squire Cheyney Farm as pumpkin patch

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Barn and spring house, Squire Cheyney Farm

Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012
Chester-Ridley-Crum Watersheds Association tree planting along Cheyney Run Preserve at Squire Cheyney development and renovation of original farmhouse in background
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2015

Cheyney Run as meadow rivulet
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2015
“Tanguy Run”

Just before entering Barrett Meadows, Cheyney Run is joined by another small unnamed tributary given the local name of Tanguy Run. Its headwaters are between the intersection of PA Routes 926 and 352.

Mariner East II Pipeline construction in Thornbury Township Delco along PA Route 352
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017

This tributary runs through the Tanguy community, a single-tax social experiment established by Quakers.
Tanguy Run flows out of the northeast along the east side of Tanguy Road and enters Cheyney Run at Creek Road just north of Barrett Meadows.

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Cheyney Run joins Chester Creek at the eastern end of Barrett Meadows, just before it flows under Station Road. Station Road forms an obtuse angle that encloses the eastern and southern borders of Barrett Meadows. Cheyney Station is at the western end of Station Road where it intersects with Cheyney Road.

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The bridge on Station Road over Chester Creek

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
The bridge that carries Station Road over Chester Creek is a simple concrete structure that was built in 1914 by road contractor James J. Skelly, who started his career as a superintendent at the quarries just downstream from this bridge. As far as bridges go, it is not one of the more aesthetically pleasing examples in the watershed.
Barrett Meadows is included within an extensive trail system within Thornbury Township, Delaware County. From there, an extensive trail runs between Chester Creek and the tracks of the old West Chester and Philadelphia Railroad, which was SEPTA’s West Chester commuter line until 1986. The trail provides good vantage points for viewing flora and fauna in and around the creek in the extensively wooded area between Barrett Meadows and Glen Mills.
The trail network extends into neighboring parks and public properties that cover a variety of habitats and provide views of ruins of the township’s industrial past. A local birder encountered on the trail by the name of John Mercer reported that the woods here were a good place to see unusual migratory thrushes in the spring.
Along this corridor, Chester Creek passes under a bridge that carries Locksley Road over it. On the southern bank of the creek just upstream from the bridge is Locksley Station, which was just a whistle-stop.
On the north side of the creek near this location is the Locksley Grist Mill, also known as the Luckenbach Mill, to reflect the name of its more recent owners who were responsible for its restoration and conversion into a fine home. It was originally built in 1790. Some of the stone to build the mill was obtained from the original grist mill that was built in 1718 along Chester Creek nearby. For much of its existence the Locksley Grist Mill was operated by the James family. Daniel and Eliza Worrell James moved from Upper Providence Township with their family in 1867. They had four sons and four daughters. Daniel was born in 1810 near Warwick in the far northwestern corner of Chester County. After being apprenticed to a millwright at age 16, he travelled extensively in southeastern Pennsylvania installing and maintaining waterwheels and other machinery. By the time he moved to Upper Providence, his reputation as a mechanic was well-established and he became a leading citizen. Daniel served as school director, county commissioner, county auditor, and director of the county Agricultural Society. During the Civil War he led recruitment drives and sent two of his sons off with the Grand Army of the Republic. Once the Civil War was over, they moved to Thornbury Township where Daniel and his older sons operated the grist mill and sawmill. Daniel died in 1888. His son William James operated the mill until he suddenly died of typhoid fever in 1892. William’s wife Susan Groce James was the first female school director in Thornbury.
In 1962, the property was bought by Richard “Bud” Luckenbach, an accomplished stonemason and millwright. He operated a historic restoration business called “18th Century Building” through which he restored many old farmhouses and other structures in southeastern Pennsylvania until his death in 1987. He took on the Locksley grist mill as his personal project, restoring it from its remaining two walls into his family home, completed in 1966.
Early view of grist mill along Chester Creek, Thornbury Township
Photo: Provided by Keith Lockhart to Newlin Grist Mill for “Mills of Delaware County” display, 2019

View of Chester Creek from abandoned bridge across from Grist Mill Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Remains of old mill dam on Chester Creek  Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Some stone ruins can be observed along the Thornbury Township Trail downstream from the Locksley Station. Most of the ruins are of structures that dated from the early decades of the twentieth century when the John T. Dyer quarries were in operation. There are some earlier structures that were incorporated into the later structures, though. An early sawmill and grist mill were built at this location by the Cheyney family. The grist mill dated from 1718. Other records also indicate that Mary Frazer had a sawmill at this site starting in 1770, where Richard Cheyney had built a sawmill in 1766. Henry Myers is recorded as its owner in the mill survey of 1826. Its stonework was incorporated into the 1790 Luckenbach mill. The mill dam is visible on the edges of Chester Creek, even though the middle had been breached long ago. Along the west side of the creek can be seen the old mill race. It is dry now, but it carried water in a controlled fashion from the pond impounded behind the dam down to the waterwheels of the mills. The mill race was probably altered and widened several times during its history. Thornbury Township historian Sam Neuman speculates that it and the earliest mills were built by enslaved people. There are records that show that the Willcox mills downstream were built by enslaved people. Some Quakers had enslaved people in Pennsylvania until 1776. Ultimately the mill race was capable of carrying a large volume of water since it appears to have been about eight feet deep and ten feet wide.
One large set of ruins is next to the railroad tracks and has the mill race running between two widely set pair of walls. A combination of stone walls and poured concrete walls constitute the foundation of the Locksley sawmill, which apparently was rebuilt and expanded upon perhaps more than once, while incorporating older walls. While it operated from 1860 until 1890 it was under the ownership of the resident of nearby Locksley Hall, Daniel James.
Portion of Locksley sawmill with deep mill race in foreground
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017

The trees’ revenge on the old sawmill
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2016
Detail of Everts & Stewart atlas map showing locations of Locksley grist and saw mills. They were owned by Daniel James at the time.
John T. Dyer Quarries

On the opposite side of the tracks is a larger ruin also consisting of stone walls. These match the location on a 1911 map of one of the stone crushers associated with the John T. Dyer quarries.

Ruins of Dyer stone crusher along railroad track

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Interior view of Dyer stone crusher, perpendicular and to the rear of walls in previous photo

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2016
The quarries themselves can be found by exploring the trails that enter the woods, where a railroad spur to a second quarry and another stone crusher once existed. The quarry stone consists of trap rock, a form of igneous rock known to geologists as diabase. It is highly desirable as road aggregate due to its durability and uniform quality. Diabase solidified from magma that was released from below as the Earth’s crust weakened and as the magma was trapped in the surrounding rock. The weakening of the crust was due to continental rifting that occurred approximately 600 million years ago during the break-up of the supercontinent Rodinia and the opening of the Iapetus Ocean. (When the continents came back together again over 200 million years later, the more famous supercontinent Pangea was formed, and when it split up, the Atlantic Ocean was formed. Iapetus was the father of Atlas in Greek mythology).

John T. Dyer is known to have used poured concrete in the 1920s to create foundations for his stone crushers in Berks County, and he used stone for the stone crusher foundations built earlier.
The early twentieth century photo of the John T. Dyer trap rock quarry and stone crushers in Birdboro, Pennsylvania convey an impression of what the Chester Creek valley in the vicinity of Dyer’s Thornbury operation must have been like since they are contemporaneous. The Dyer quarry in Birdboro is still in business into the twenty-first century, though.
A 1934 map shows that the owner of the Thornbury property is John T. Dyer 2nd. The quarries ceased operation in 1942.

The first John T. Dyer was a prominent Norristown businessman who was born in Lehigh County in 1848. He was descended from early Quaker settlers who founded Dyerstown in Bucks County. John T. Dyer’s father moved from there to Lehigh County to teach school, but then
became involved in building and contracting, lumbering, and general merchandizing to the New York and Philadelphia markets. After receiving his public school education, John T. Dyer became a clerk at one of the slate quarries in Slatington, Lehigh County. He soon became involved as the superintendent of new railroad lines as they were being constructed. By 1880 he had his own railroad contracts, the first one being for the New York, Ontario, and Western line. He did a lot of construction on the Pennsylvania Schuylkill Valley line, which led to him moving permanently to Norristown. He received many further contracts to build railroads in Maryland, the Midwest, and the Ohio Valley, as well as for trolley line construction in Norristown itself.

John T. Dyer was also in the crushed stone business. He had quarries near Norristown and at Howellville in Tredyffrin Township as well as the Locksley Quarries in Thornbury Township. His biggest operation was in Birdsboro, Berks County where he had trap rock quarries on a large scale. These quarries are still active under the name Birdsboro Materials, a division of the H & K Group.

John T. Dyer acquired the tract in Thornbury Township by early in 1901. The Chester Times lists a real estate transaction on January 8 as follows:

*Thornbury -- Thomas F. Reilly, of Philadelphia to The John T. Dyer Quarry, Co., of Pa., stone quarrying plant, other machinery, etc., and tract of 20 acres, also house and tract of 2 ¾ acres, 9 square perches, $22,500.*

It appears as though some stone quarrying equipment was already in place and was part of the purchase. The stone crushing equipment was steam-powered, and fueled with considerable amounts of coal. The quarry was shut down temporarily in late 1902 due to the lack of coal in the aftermath of the Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902. The strike ended with the intervention of President Theodore Roosevelt.

That was the same year that twenty-year old James J. Skelly of Norristown became a superintendent for the John T. Dyer Company. In 1903, he moved to Delaware County and became the superintendent of the Locksley Quarries. John T. Dyer seems to have gotten into the crushed stone business to supply a need of the railroad construction industry, but a new market was opening up as the paving of roads became more prevalent. Particularly with the enactment of the Sproul Highway Act, townships received funding from the State Commissioner of Highways to top dress the new state highways with fine crushed stone. Townships in Delaware County obtained some of this stone from the Locksley Quarries. Aston Township received five train car loads in 1905.

Perhaps it was because of the pressures of keeping up with the demand for crushed stone, but the John T. Dyer Quarry Company got into trouble with its neighbors starting in 1906. The House of Refuge, which later became known as the Glen Mills Schools, and a large number of other local residents brought suit against the quarry company in the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas. They complained of heavy blasting that woke them in the early hours, houses shaken, roofs damaged, and dangerous flying stone. The case was in the courts until 1909, when the decision against the quarry was sustained and the plaintiffs were free to ask for an injunction against the quarry company.

It might have been no coincidence that 1909 was also the year that James J. Skelly left his job at the Locksley Quarries and started his own contracting business based in Lima, Middletown Township. James J. Skelly went on to be a major road builder in Delaware County. His company built Baltimore Pike from Media to Chester Heights, which included one of the
first cloverleafs in the state, located at the intersection with Middletown Road, PA Route 352. He built the first section of Interstate 95 through Delaware County, known as the Chester Expressway. At the time of his death in 1967, his company was building the first section of the Blue Route, which started in Radnor Township. He was a national figure, having been elected as the president of the American Road Builders’ Association at their annual Chicago convention in 1945.

West Chester Railroad bed, with old railroad ties perhaps belonging to spur leading to Dyer quarries
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2016
Bonner Park

Entrance to Bonner Park from Blossom Hill Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

The Thornbury Township Trails and Chester Creek enter Bonner Park, which contains the ruins of the Taylor/Frazer house. John Taylor built the house in 1739. When he died in 1759, his daughter Mary inherited the house, the farm, and the nearby Sarum Forge on Chester Creek. Upon her marriage to Persifor Frazer (1736-1792), the property then belonged to her husband as dictated by the laws and customs of the time. Women may have been second-class citizens in the eighteenth century, but Mary Taylor Frazer did not take a secondary role with regards to her husband or the property. They both fought as American patriots in the Revolutionary War in their own way. During the long periods when Persifor Frazer was soldiering, Mary ran the farm and the forge. On 15 October 1776, Squire Cheyney wrote to Persifor Frazer, “Your wife...has managed your business to admiration...I believe the buffet [table] must be neglected, for farming seems to engage all her attentions.”
Taylor/Frazer house ruins – 1739 original portion on left; 1770 addition on right
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2017

Views of Taylor/Frazer house, 1893; addition from 1770 visible in right photo
Photos: William Bonner & Chester County Historical Society
Persifor Frazer was born in nearby Newtown Township. At the time of the Revolutionary War, he became Captain of Company A, Fourth Pennsylvania Battalion and then Lieutenant Colonel of the Fifth Pennsylvania line, both under General Anthony Wayne. He fought at the Battle of Brandywine. Two days after the battle, on September 13th, 1777, Mary defiantly faced British troops as they arrived to plunder the farm and sought to capture her husband. While her children, servants, and an injured American soldier escaped into the woods, she and a slave named Rachel protected the farm. Mary hid important papers and valuable family heirlooms, and when demanded to help the British soldiers find supplies, she refused. As she told the tale years later, she even confronted the looting soldiers and made them return some of the stolen items. They had taken food, clothing, horses, liquor, and a precious store of salt. After the British took Philadelphia and the Continental Army settled down for the hard winter in Valley Forge, Mary rode all over the countryside on horseback gathering supplies donated by friends and neighbors and took them to the camp herself. At least, these were the stories that we can imagine her telling around the hearth that can be still seen in the old Taylor/Frazer farmhouse ruins.
Persifor Frazer was eventually captured and held prisoner in the new Walnut Street Prison in Philadelphia. Mary took great risks and visited him there several times in the British held city. After one visit, she smuggled out some of the maggot-ridden bread that he had been given to eat and a letter he had written and showed them to George Washington. Washington wrote a letter to General Howe of the occupying British army about the disgraceful conditions in the Walnut Street Prison and was able to get them somewhat better treatment. After his release, Frazer became Brigadier General of the Pennsylvania State Militia.

The house was made into a bakery in 1920. There was a large oven, which has been reduced to a mound of bricks. The house burned down in 1926. The ruins are on the National Register of Historic Places. The ruins were stabilized in the year 2000, and are maintained by the Thornbury Township Historic Commission and the Thornbury Historical Society.
Bonner Park’s woods are partly dominated by tulip poplar and partly by American beech. Saplings of American beech are profuse in the understory.
Chester Creek bends towards the southeast around Bonner Park, continuing to flow between the railroad and Creek Road. As all three (“river”, road, & rail) make the bend, Slitting Mill Road enters Creek Road from the northeast. The road’s name likely dates from the days of Sarum Forge.
Downstream from Bonner Park and towards the southwest are over 800 acres that comprise the grounds of the Glen Mills Schools for adjudicated youth. The Glen Mills Schools originated as the House of Refuge in Philadelphia in 1826 as part of an early reform movement to separate incarcerated juveniles from the influence of the adult prison population. It is the oldest institution of its kind in the United States. It moved to its location at Glen Mills within the Chester Creek watershed in 1910. In 1931 the Sleighton Farm School for girls was legally separated from the Glen Mills School, having been its former Girls Department, and became its own institution until it closed in 2001. The Glen Mills Schools was a private non-profit organization that was referred to as the Harvard of reform schools during its heyday.

At-risk teenage boys from Pennsylvania and other states lived in cottages at the Glen Mills Schools. They had access to state-of-the-art athletic facilities, including an Olympic-size swimming pool. Its athletic program yielded NFL recruits. In 2018, the Glen Mills Schools housed 383 boys. It received the highest number of private placements of any institution for Philadelphia youth who had committed crimes. Boys were sent to the Delaware County campus from as far away as New York, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, and California. In 2017, high school equivalencies were earned by 162 Glen Mills students. Executive Director Randy Ireson said at the time that the Glen Mills Schools were “committed to providing the highest quality of services to at-risk youth, transforming their lives by offering students a future filled with new opportunity, hope, and resiliency.”
This ostensible mission was cast in a disturbing light when a surveillance video recorded a counselor attacking a student during a “guided group” session in July 2018. Philadelphia’s Department of Human Services temporarily stopped sending children to Glen Mills and began an investigation into not just the incident, but the entire operations at the school. Delaware County and Chester County also stopped sending their adjudicated youth to Glen Mills pending the completion of an investigation. The two counselors involved in the incident were fired, and then arrested. Four others were suspended.

This proved not to be the first time such incidents occurred. In 2000, Glen Mills had also been at a point where its safety programs and staff training were deemed in need of an overhaul, after eight children reported to inspectors that school employees had assaulted them. The director during that earlier crisis was C.D. Ferrainola, who ran the Glen Mills Schools from 1975 until 2007. Under his supervision, the school grew from fewer than 100 local boys to more than a thousand from all over the country. The practices he instilled seemed overwhelmingly successful and served as a model to similar institutions for many years. By 2019, the dark side of these years of growth emerged. C.D. Ferrainola had established a peer-pressure system, in which the boys were expected to inform on one another. The well-behaved boys who impressed delegations from other U.S. states and European countries were living a life of intimidation. Rather than social workers, who C.D. Ferrainola despised, former athletes and body-builders were hired as counselors. One of these was director Randy Ireson, who started as a counselor in 1979 upon graduating from West Chester State College where he was a star defensive tackle on the football team. Instead of investing in social services, Ferrainola emphasized athletics. State-of-the-art athletic facilities and stadiums were built. An 18-hole golf course adjacent to the campus was added in 1999. Meanwhile, Ferrainola dismissed all complaints of abuse made by boys in his care as coming from a few disgruntled students. During the fallout from the 2000 events, Ferrainola and the school’s lawyer Guy Vilim blocked the state police from interviewing students. Alarmed, the state persisted in its case and demanded reforms. Glen Mills submitted a corrective action plan and promised to retrain its counselors and report all abuse complaints within 24 hours. By the end of the year 2000, the state was satisfied and Glen Mills was back in good standing. But, state records then showed that in the five years prior to 2018, Glen Mills had fired at least 14 staff members and reprimanded 9 because of ongoing physical assaults on children. Once again, these incidents were claimed by then director Randy Ireson to be isolated and unusual events. In retrospect, they were a clear indication of deep and systemic problems. A subsequent investigation by the Philadelphia Inquirer revealed that serious violence had been an everyday occurrence at Glen Mills for decades. When students complained, they were told by staff that Glen Mills was as good a situation as they could expect and if they continued to complain they would be transferred to a state-run facility crowded with sex-offenders and the mentally ill.

The city of Philadelphia had been prepared to send youth back to Glen Mills but following the Philadelphia Inquirer investigation the city suspended all enrollments for the first time in the school’s history. Human Services Commissioner Cynthia Figueroa was joined by Philadelphia City Council Members and state lawmakers in calling for an immediate independent investigation of the school. As the Delaware County district attorney conducted a probe into possible violations of the law at the school and the state’s Department of Human Resources investigated whether the school should keep its license, other Pennsylvania counties and states such as California, Texas, and Michigan began pulling their students.
Shortly after the newspaper investigation was published, executive director Randy Ireson took a medical leave of absence, and the president of the board of managers, Joe Hand, Jr., resigned. The remaining school administration continued to deny any wrongdoing. As more and more students were being withdrawn and given new placement hearings, the school administration presented students with a pre-written letter to show to judges that they didn’t want to leave Glen Mills. Most refused to sign the letters, even after being told that their sentences would restart if they were placed somewhere else. This falsehood further alarmed outside observers. Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf ordered a review of the oversight of the school by the Department of Human Services. With a full array of law enforcement tools at hand, State Inspector General Bruce Beemer began an investigation of both the practices of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and the Glen Mills Schools. State Auditor General Eugene DePasquale also began a separate investigation into the school’s policies which was completed in June 2020 and found that the school failed to comply with child abuse laws while lacking the necessary policies and training for reporting abuse. The state’s investigations corroborated the newspaper’s findings. By the end of March 2019, less than six weeks after the Philadelphia Inquirer published its report, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller ordered all Pennsylvania youth to be removed from Glen Mills. Shortly afterwards, a class action lawsuit was filed in federal court on behalf of students and their families by civil rights attorney David Rudovsky in partnership with the Philadelphia law firm Berger Montague. In early April, the Glen Mills Schools appealed Pennsylvania’s emergency removal order of its students. They claimed that it would have been impossible for them to maintain “a culture of cruelty and daily violence” right under the noses of the trained professionals who regularly visited the campus. They also alleged that public defenders visited their clients once a week for years and never filed a complaint. To that, the chief of the Children and Justice Unit at the Philadelphia Defenders Association, Leola Hardy, said, “utterly untrue” and that they had “vigilantly documented concerning incidents that occurred at Glen Mills.” It was their advocacy that led to the closure of the intake of Philadelphia youth there. As alternative placements were made for all the remaining boys at Glen Mills, 250 employees were laid off, many of whom would also lose their mortgage-free housing on campus. The Department of Human Services then revoked all 14 licenses that had been issued to the school, one for each building, finally closing it down. The investigation by the Pennsylvania state auditor general and the Office of the State Inspector General continued. The golf course remained open.

An additional class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of four Glen Mills students in April 2019 by the major national child advocacy group Juvenile Law Center, along with Education Law Center PA and the law firm Dechert LLP. The complaint was not only filed against the Glen Mills Schools but accused state leaders in the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education of failing to protect the boys and to even assure that they received an education. Marsha Levick, chief legal officer of the Juvenile Law Center, expected the two lawsuits to join. The daughter of boxer Muhammed Ali and Philadelphia area resident Khaliah Ali Wertheimer wrote an editorial for the Philadelphia Inquirer in support of the lawsuit.

In July 2019, in response to the Glen Mills case, PA Governor Tom Wolf ordered the state to overhaul the oversight of its juvenile residential programs. An Office of Advocacy and Reform was created, which included the new position of Child Advocate to serve as ombudsman for youth in the state’s facilities. A Council of Reform was also created to recommend further actions in addition to the governor’s orders for agencies to reduce institutional placements for children, strengthen oversight of their programs, and increase accountability to these institutions.
Meanwhile, the Philadelphia Inquirer published another lengthy investigative report on the lack of oversight by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services of Glen Mills and other privately-run juvenile programs. Even when reports of abuse were investigated, DHS rarely substantiated them. As a result, nearly every adult accused of beating children in these facilities continued to work with them.

On November 5, 2019, Jack Stollsteimer was elected as the first district attorney in Delaware County history from the Democratic Party. Part of his campaign platform was a call to conduct an independent investigation of the Glen Mills School. He had disputed that claim of his predecessor District Attorney Katayoun Copeland that there was no need to refer the case to Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro. She believed there was no ethical conflict or lack of resources in her department that would have warranted such a referral.

Meanwhile, in December Governor Tom Wolf announced a partnership with Pew Charitable Trusts to form the Juvenile Justice Task Force to spend a year studying ways to improve the safety of youths in the state’s care. In January 2020, he followed that up by announcing a $5.1 million state funding boost to hire over 100 additional staff members in several program areas of the Department of Human Services to improve oversight of juvenile residential programs.

As the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the spring of 2020, the vacant Glen Mills School buildings were used as an emergency response center by the Delaware County Citizen Corps. The group was established in 2010 as an organization of volunteers to help displaced people after fires and floods. During the pandemic, they used the Glen Mills School buildings as a hub for distributing supplies, coordinating county communications, and providing a safe place for exposed first responders. Two of the buildings were then approved as a Federal Medical Station to assist local hospitals in freeing up beds for coronavirus patients.
A small, unnamed tributary flows through the school grounds after originating farther to the southwest on the south side of Glen Mills Road across from the Glen Mills Golf Course through which it also flows.
Spring house on Glen Mills Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Unnamed tributary of Chester Creek at edge of Glen Mills Golf Course and Bonner Park
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Chester Creek then arrives at the historic village of Glen Mills. Creek Road converges with Glen Mills Road and Sweetwater Road at the bridge over the creek here.
The railroad passes through here, too. It had arrived in 1858. The picturesque Glen Mills Train Station was active from 1880 until 1986 and is now the home of the Thornbury Historical Society.

The road now referred to as Glen Mills Road was laid out during the years 1687 and 1688. The village of Sarum was established where the road crossed Chester Creek. A group of investors became interested in iron ore that was found in the area. They invested funds to help John Taylor construct Sarum Forge here in 1724. He had devised an innovative new method of rolling sheets of iron between heavy metal rollers. The resulting denser and smoother iron provided finished products that were of higher quality than previously used methods. It was the only mill of its kind in the county. Immigrants were attracted to the opportunities for work at the mill, and by 1742 John Taylor had established a store in Sarum and by 1743 Obadiah Russell operated a tavern there.

The British felt threatened by the economic competition from such enterprises in the colonies and passed the Iron Act of 1750. This prohibition against the domestic production of iron work was ignored, but both the resentment it engendered and the continued output from Sarum Forge contributed to the struggle for independence from Great Britain. The next owner and operator of Sarum Forge was Percifor Frazer, the husband of John Taylor’s daughter Mary. He was a Continental Army officer serving under General Anthony Wayne. (More about the Frazer’s can be found in the section about Bonner Park).
In 1836 the Willcox family expanded their paper mill operations from the West Branch of Chester Creek at Ivy Mills to the site of the old Sarum Forge and renamed the location Glen Mills. The conversion from iron mills to paper mills may have been associated with a major strike in the Chester Creek mills during the spring of 1836, when workers sought shorter hours.

In 1846, James M. Willcox added the Glen Mills Upper Mill farther upstream which had been the site of John Taylor’s saw and grist mills beginning in 1746. Both the upper and lower mill sites were owned by Abraham Sharpless just prior to their acquisition by the Willcox family.

At these mills, the Willcox family produced paper with innovative anti-counterfeiting measures for the national currency. During the Civil War, they produced the paper for the “greenbacks” and “shin plasters” that Abraham Lincoln used to finance the war. They had no gold reserves to back them up and were a testimony to the public confidence in the Union. Glen Mills became known as the “Million Dollar Village” on account of all the bank note paper produced there. The lower mill was owned by the Willcox family until 1888, the upper mill until 1917. Sometime afterwards until the 1920s, Joseph Dohan owned one or both of the mills and made cardboard.

Early photo of Glen Mills
Photo: Provided by Keith Lockhart to Newlin Grist Mill for “Mills of Delaware County” display, 2019
Another early view of Glen Mills
Photo: From an advertisement card for Harry Bewley, Jr., Printer, Carbon Street, Media, PA
Formerly held by Media Historic Archives Commission; donated to Thornbury Historical Society

Ruins of “Upper Glen Mills” in 1936
Photo: Formerly held by Media Historic Archives Commission; donated to Thornbury Historical Society
Whereas the Glen Mills historical marker seems to indicate that Sarum Forge and subsequently the Willcox Lower Mill was located in the vicinity of the Glen Mills Train Station, other sources such as the Delaware County Planning Commission “Mills of Delaware County” 2019 survey and maps seem to indicate that they were located farther downstream where Forge Road crosses Chester Creek. The Upper Mill belonging to the Willcox family was also downstream from the historical marker, between it and the site of the Lower Mill. The same survey indicates that there were indeed mills in the upstream vicinity of the historical marker, but they did not belong to John Taylor or the Willcox family. As first mentioned in the 1826 survey, there was indeed a slitting and rolling mill, but it belonged to John Edwards, Esq. He also had a sawmill. He had built a forge in the 1780s and converted it into a slitting mill in 1816. Soon he was producing seven tons of sheet iron each month. In 1829 it was converted into a cut nail factory. Just upstream from his operations, apparently Thomas Thatcher had a tilt mill starting in 1805.
Just downstream from Glen Mills and on the east bank of the creek is a huge hole in the ground. It is the Glen Mills Quarry of the former General Crushed Stone Company, now owned by Hanson Aggregates. It is also the site of an HMA (Hot Mix Asphalt) plant. First opened in 1884, the quarry was the source of much of the ballast used by SEPTA and in Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor.
Inside Hanson Aggregates, Glen Mills – Is that a raven atop the utility pole on the right?
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

In 2013, the quarry was the nesting site of a pair of Common Ravens, the first such record for Delaware County. The southern portion of the quarry is in Middletown Township. As Chester Creek flows past the quarry, it pours over two dams in rapid succession. The upper dam is a high, vertical concrete wall and the lower dam has a more gradual incline.

After Chester Creek flows past the northwest corner of Middletown Township at the former site of one of the Wilcox paper mills, the creek forms the boundary between Thornbury Township on the west and Middletown on the east side. The creek then flows under Forge Road at another former site of a Wilcox paper mill.
Martin Park

A short distance downstream, Chester Creek curves around the eastern end of Martin Park, a Thornbury Township park located between the creek and Stoney Bank Road to the west. Along Stoney Bank Road are a variety of old structures, including tenement houses from the era of the Wilcox paper mills. One of the mills owned by Mark and James Wilcox was along Chester Creek at a location within or near the park where the creek runs close to the railroad tracks.

Chester Creek within Martin Park, close to the railroad tracks
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Later in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Darlington family operated the Cornucopia Dairies on the other side of Chester Creek at this location.

A small unnamed tributary flows through Martin Park out of the west from the direction of mature American beech woods on the other side of Stoney Bank Road. Outcrops of folded gneiss bedrock and loose boulders can be found in the woods.

Beech trees and boulders, Martin Park

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

The small unnamed tributary had a sawmill located on it at one time. There is an old mill pond and evidence of old mill race within the park and some stone rubble that may have been part of the sawmill. The mill survey of 1826 indicates that Abraham Sharpless had a sawmill here at that time.

Old mill pond, Martin Park

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Martin Park lies within a portion of Thornbury Township that was part of Aston Township until 1842. An act of legislature annexed the portion of Aston Township to Thornbury Township north of the Stoney Bank Churchyard and between the border with Concord Township to the west and Chester Creek to the east. As a result, the map of Thornbury Township, Delaware County has a short southeasterly projecting panhandle that is traversed from the northeast to southwest by Stoney Bank Road.
Past Martin Park, Chester Creek forms the boundary of Chester Heights Borough to the southwest and Middletown Township on its northeast flank. It continues to flow more-or-less parallel to the railroad tracks.

Borough of Chester Heights

The Borough of Chester Heights also was once part of Aston Township. In 1946, the residents of this neighborhood seceded from Aston Township because they were unhappy with the taxes.
About a half mile downstream and just below the bridge that carries Darlington Road over Chester Creek, a small unnamed tributary enters from the west. The tributary originates in a subdivision called Hamanassett at Darlington within the Borough of Chester Heights. The subdivision is built around a historic house with a tragic history that serves as a bed & breakfast in the early twenty-first century.

Hamanassett

Hamanassett was built in 1856 by Dr. Charles Delucena Meigs (1792-1869) on a hill overlooking the Chester Creek valley near where Darlington Road meets Baltimore Pike. It was named after the area in Connecticut where Dr. Meigs’ ancestors had settled in the 1600s. He himself was raised in Georgia. His unusual middle name was in honor of a Spanish gentleman greatly admired by his maternal grandfather during the Revolutionary War.

Charles D. Meigs was made chair of obstetrics of the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia in 1841. Through his dramatic looks and theatrical lectures he became the leading U.S. authority on women’s health. He was uncompromising in his sense of moral righteousness and in his conviction that he was correct in all matters of women’s health. His chief rival at Jefferson Medical College was the chair of surgery, Thomas Dent Mütter, whose teaching specimens later became the core collection of the Mütter Museum at the College of Physicians in Philadelphia. Whereas Dr. Mütter was concerned with his patients’ comfort and the cleanliness of everything that came in contact with them, Dr. Meigs could not even be bothered to wash his hands because that would imply that “doctors were not gentlemen.” Throughout his career, he advocated copious amounts of bloodletting and leeching, and taught his students the technique for applying leeches to the inside of a woman’s uterus using a speculum. Ultimately, his vociferous denial of the contagious nature of diseases and his prejudice against anesthesia led to a crumbling of his reputation as these two ideas became more accepted. His ultimate downfall in Philadelphia society was precipitated by his appearance at the Union League in Philadelphia, which his abolitionist son John helped to found. When Dr. Charles Meigs agreed to speak on behalf of abolition at the Union League his son was thrilled at first. But, when he argued that the real problem with slavery was that it encouraged the “comingling” of races leading to “half-breed” children of his “godlike race, the archetype of the Grecian demigods and heroes” and the “nude and barbarous tribes of the African race,” it was too much. The group that had gathered to argue for the equality of the races was so offended that John Meigs had to resign from the Union League.

Charles D. Meigs submitted his letter of resignation to Jefferson Medical College in 1860. He had bought thirty-seven acres of land in Delaware County and planned on retiring there. He built his house on top of the hill, along with a barn and a stable, a tenant house, a springhouse, an icehouse, and a workshop. He created a refuge where he could escape his critics and spend his time with his children and grandchildren, and read and write poetry. He no longer had any interest in medicine, which was changing too fast for him to understand it any longer. His retirement was not as relaxing as he hoped. The Civil War broke out. In his isolation, Meigs had an agreement with the conductor of the train that passed nearby each day to give two whistles for news of a disastrous battle but to “whistle twice as often” for a successful one. He had great interest in the war. His son Montgomery C. Meigs was quartermaster general for the Union. When his favorite grandson died in battle and his wife died seven months later, Meigs began to pine away. His children demanded that he move back to Philadelphia where they could care for him, and he finally died there in his sleep at the age of seventy-seven.
Darlington

The east bank of Chester Creek in Middletown Township between Forge Road and Rocky Run is known as the Darlington Valley, where many generations of the Darlington family lived. It was the location of the Darlington Dairies, run by the Darlington family for six generations. Starting in 1795, Jesse Darlington (born 1764) shipped fresh-churned butter to shops in both Delaware and Chester Counties.

The Darlington Dairies were the first in the Philadelphia market to ship butter packed in ice. As the railroad network developed, the Darlington family was quick to adopt it for the distribution of their product. Starting in 1858, they began shipping butter by rail to Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. Darlington butter was used in the White House in 1879.

When, in the late 19th century, the Darlington family was using the name Cornucopia Dairies for their business, they got in a trademark dispute with the Pratt family, their neighbors in Middletown Township. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court in 1886 where the right of the Darlington family to use the trademark was upheld. In 1938, Paul Darlington, Sr. died and the dairies were inherited by his sons Paul Darlington, Jr. and Richard Stiles Darlington, Sr., the
last of the Darlington family to run the business. In those days, the Darlington Brothers Dairies focused on delivery of milk and other dairy products to homes, schools, and local Dairy Queens. As supermarkets began to dominate the dairy market and home deliveries became unpopular, Darlington Brothers Dairies couldn’t compete with the neighboring Wawa Dairies, which adapted by expanding into the convenient store business. In 1966, the Darlington Brothers Dairies was sold to the Calbusera Brothers, who operated it only until 1969.

There are several historic estates associated with the Darlington family. The original Darlington farm at first belonged to John Sharpless, who was perhaps the same Quaker settler who was the first to set up a homestead in Nether Providence Township. The 1687 map made by William Penn’s surveyor Thomas Holme shows parcels held by a John Sharples in both locations. The founder of the dairies, Jesse Darlington (born 1762) married Amy Sharpless and thus came by the family property in Middletown Township. Jesse was the son of Thomas Darlington (born 1724) and Hannah Brinton. Incidentally, he had an older brother named Edward (born 1755) who married Hannah Townsend. One of the sons of Edward and Hannah was William Darlington, the famous citizen of West Chester and founder of many institutions there, and who happened to be Jesse Darlington’s nephew.

The original Sharpless/Darlington farmhouse, 1682 – visible from the Darlington Trail
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Sign showing ownership history of the historic Darlington farm
Photo: Richard Stiles Darlington, Jr.
The last Darlington to own the historic Darlington farm was Charles Darlington. The sign would lead one to believe that he inherited it from his father Jared. In fact, during his entire career he worked for DuPont, and bought the farm from his father Jared in order to save the older man from bankruptcy. Since he saw no money to be made in farming, Charles sold the farm to George Wood of Wawa. His father Jared bought another farm in Chester Heights, went into the mushroom business, and went bankrupt again.

Farther upstream along Chester Creek and next to the railroad track is a house built in the early 1800s that is next to the site of the former Cornucopia Dairies facilities. This was the home of one of the last two Darlington brothers who owned the dairy, Richard Stiles Darlington Sr. His son Richard Jr. grew up there. As a boy, he worked in the dairy next door. His father sold the house and property in the 1980s to owners who had little appreciation for historic structures. The property deteriorated and eventually went into foreclosure. New owners deemed the dairy buildings structurally unsound and hired contractors to demolish them in the fall of 2016. Some of the business records of the dairy were stored in the attic. The contractors came on a weekend when the owners were away and the records were destroyed along with the buildings – a historian’s nightmare.

House formerly owned by Richard Stiles Darlington, Sr.
Photo: Richard Stiles Darlington, Jr.
About a half mile down the railroad tracks near Darlington Road is a house built in 1753. It is just yards from where the Darlington Railroad Station once stood, as well as the site of the Darling post office. Martha Sharples Darlington was the well-known postmistress of the Darling post office. She lived in the house. Starting around 1860, the post office was located in the train station, but it 1909 it moved into its own building across Darlington Road. In 1918, the name of the post office was changed from Darlington to Darling in order to prevent its mail from getting sent to another post office in Beaver County that was also named Darlington. In 1963 the post office was moved to the east side of the tracks. It was a tiny office, and was famed for being the smallest post office in the nation. It closed in 1974.
In more recent times, Jared and Nancy Darlington lived in the house. In 1993, they moved into the house after Jared retired from a long career working for the Scott Paper Company. They embarked on a long period of lovingly renovating the house. Jared Darlington died in 2013, and when Nancy died in 2017, for the first time in over 225 years there was no longer a Darlington living on the land of their ancestors in Middletown Township.

Martha Sharples Darlington’s house lately owned by Jared and Nancy Darlington, built in 1753
Photo: Richard Stiles Darlington, Jr.

As it flows under Darlington Road, the Chester Creek flows through a wooded area known as the Darling Woods. Broad-winged Hawks have been known to nest here.

Cornucopia and Darlington Trails

Middletown Township has an elaborate network of walking trails. The Darlington Trail makes a loop that is bisected by Darlington Road. It hugs the east bank of Chester Creek closely in and out of the tight meander loop where Darlington Road crosses the creek. At its northern end the Darlington Trail overlaps with the smaller Cornucopia Trail loop as the two form a figure eight. At the southern end, the Darlington Trail loop is connected to the Rocky Run Trail, which follows the Chester Creek tributary by that name.
Darlington Valley subdivision along the Cornucopia Trail near the site of the former dairy
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

The downstream railroad bridge over Chester Creek visible from the Darlington Trail
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Folded gneiss outcrops along the Darlington Trail
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012
Unnamed tributary of Chester Creek traversed along the Darlington Trail
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

The upstream railroad bridge over Chester Creek encountered on the Darlington Trail
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
View of Chester Creek from the Darlington Trail, downstream of Darlington Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Sign for the Darlington Trail at Darlington Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Chester Creek flowing under Darlington Road, as viewed from the Darlington Trail

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

View of Chester Creek along Darlington Trail upstream from Darlington Road

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Where the Darlington Trail crosses the railroad tracks

Shagbark hickories along the Darlington Trail
Horse farm along the Darlington Trail

Meadow overlooking the Darlington Valley, Darlington Trail
Unusual architecture along the Darlington Trail  

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Downhill from the historic Darlington farm, the Darlington Trail crosses the unnamed tributary again near Darlington Road  

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Blazing maple along the Darlington Trail
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Rocky Run

Chester Creek is joined from the northeast by Rocky Run near where Middletown Township’s Rocky Run Trail converges with the Darlington Trail. Rocky Run is the most pristine stream in the Chester Creek watershed. It has a High Quality-Cold Water Fisheries classification with the PA Department of Environmental Protection. It also is designated a Migratory Fisheries due to the presence of American Eels.

Gradyville

Rocky Run’s source is behind the old Edgmont Fire Station at Gradyville crossroads in Edgmont Township where Gradyville Road intersects with Middletown Road, PA Route 352.

Gamble Cotton Lap Factory

Rocky Run flows towards the southeast for a short distance and passes beneath Gradyville Road. On the upstream side of the road was the location of the Gamble Cotton Lap Factory.

Where Rocky Run flows under Gradyville Road

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Rocky Run in the vicinity of the former Gamble Cotton Lap Factory off Gradyville Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Rocky Run flows towards the southeast through the Deep Meadow subdivision of Edgmont Township. It then passes under Sycamore Mills Road in the vicinity of the Sycamore Woods Estates subdivision, consisting of small cul-de-sacs off Sycamore Mills Road.

Sleighton School for Girls

Rocky Run flows through the grounds of the now closed Sleighton School for Girls. It had been part of the Glen Mills School until legally separated from that institution in 1931. In 1975, the Sleighton School became co-educational. Due to financial difficulties, it closed in 2001. 81 acres of the property was owned by Elwyn, Inc. until 2019. During the primary election that year, Middletown Township residents approved a referendum for the township to purchase the parcel to create a passive park and preserve open space. The $8 million purchase added an average of $8.47 a month to the residents’ tax bills, but it added to the 640 acres of public open space accessible in the township. This includes another 22 acres of the former Sleighton School that was used for active recreation and was condemned by the township in 2005.
While flowing through the grounds of the Sleighton School, Rocky Run crosses the border between Edgmont Township and Middletown Township.
Pratt Family Farms

Between Forge Road and Old Forge Road were located three dairy farms belonging to the Pratt family. The Pratt family properties were on both sides of Middletown Road. They pioneered the production of large quantities of ice cream. It was carted to Chester and transported by boat to Philadelphia and was the new favorite dessert in Media, the Delaware County seat. The Pratt family got in a trademark dispute with the nearby Darlington family over the name Cornucopia Dairies. The Pratt family lost the case in a U.S. Supreme Court decision.

The enterprise was begun by Thomas Pratt (1818-1883), who was succeeded by his sons Peter W. Pratt and William Pratt. Peter W. Pratt’s house is on the southwest corner of Middletown and Yearsley Mill Roads. The farmhouse belonging to the parents, Thomas and Mary Worrall Pratt (1817-1870), was once located on what is now the Penn State Brandywine Campus between Vairo Library and the Tomezsko Classroom Building. Only the ruins of the springhouse survived into the 21st century. Thomas Pratt grew up in that house, and assumed ownership of the farm when he turned 21 in the year 1839. That was also the year he married Mary Worrall and joined the Delaware County Institute of Science. The Pratt and the Worrall families were Quakers whose ancestors were among the first settlers who came to Pennsylvania with William Penn.

The Pratt family ancestor first settled in Edgmont Township in the 1680s, and after a period of indentured servitude, bought the farm now known as Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation. Four generations of the Pratt family lived there. The father of Thomas Pratt, also named Thomas, did not inherit the Edgmont Township family farm which naturally went to his oldest brother Joseph. The older Thomas raised one family in Marple Township, and following the death of his first wife moved to the Middletown Township farm which belonged to his second wife Hannah Heacock from her previous marriage. This is where the younger Thomas was born and raised. His father died two years after his birth. His mother Hannah was related to the influential Minshall family, whose heir was Enos Painter. She reached out to him and asked him to be her son’s guardian. Enos Painter set young Thomas up financially by selling some land that the boy had inherited and had a role in supporting the Westtown School which young Thomas attended.

Thomas and Mary Pratt grew the dairy business on their farm into the large enterprise specializing in ice cream during the 1840s. During the Annual Autumn Exhibit of 1848 held by the Delaware County Institute of Science, they exhibited eight flavors and won first prize for lemon. They increased the number of farms to the west of Middletown Road to three. Mary inherited her family’s farm on the east side of the road. Thomas Pratt became a wealthy man. He invested in property in the Borough of Media as that town was being incorporated as the new Delaware County seat. He exercised his influence by founding and presiding over the Delaware County Mutual Insurance Company in Media, and by becoming a county commissioner from 1855 to 1858. Thomas Pratt was an abolitionist and a temperance advocate. He served as manager of the Charter House temperance hotel in Media starting in 1850. In 1859, he helped found Elwyn Institute, then called the Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded Children. The following year he founded the Cumberland Cemetery on his wife’s property across Middletown Road. He eventually retired to a house just north of the Court House. He was able to pass on his three farms to his three surviving sons. Two of the daughters of Thomas and Mary Pratt married sons of the Darlington family, which furthered the family dairy business interests.

Thomas Pratt was a supporter of many progressive 19th century causes, but with the glaring exception of women’s rights. His marriage to Mary was strained due to his patriarchal
attitudes that seem to have been extreme even for the time. She felt unjustly excluded from the profits of their enterprise, which even extended to the land that she had inherited. He had forced her to sign the power of attorney for that property over to him. Mary died in 1870, and Thomas married Sarah Johnson four years later. When he died in 1883, he left most of the estate to her. At that, the children from his marriage to Mary, disputed the will claiming that Thomas had taken property rightfully belonging to her, including the land she inherited that now included the Cumberland Cemetery.

After it flows under Forge Road, Rocky Run passes behind the campus of the Delaware County branch of Penn State University.

Penn State University, Brandywine Campus

![Entrance to the so-called Brandywine branch campus of Penn State](Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012)

In the early twenty-first century, the branch campus of Penn State University in Delaware County was renamed the Brandywine Campus despite the fact that the Brandywine Creek watershed is almost eight miles to the west. A public relations company hired by the institution settled on the name Brandywine as conferring the most regional prestige, but with geographic disregard to Rocky Run, the fine stream that actually flows through the woodland behind the built campus. The name change was found necessary because the old name of Penn State Delaware County Campus was too similar to that of the nearby Delaware County Community College. Their mail was getting mixed up.

The ground breaking for this branch campus of Penn State took place in 1968, and it was dedicated in 1971.

The tulip poplar dominated woods at the back of the built campus can be entered from behind the Vairo Library. A cross-country running trail provides access to the Rocky Run valley.
A small tributary of Rocky Run that passes through the campus has been named Pratt’s Run.

As it flows past the misnamed Brandywine branch campus of Penn State, Rocky Run begins a gradual bend towards the southwest and passes under Old Forge Road near its intersection with Yearsley Mill Road.
Yearsley Mill

Yearsley Mill was located along Rocky Run at the end of Yearsley Mill Road just beyond where Yearsley Mill Road comes to a “T” at Old Forge Road. The original grist mill was built in 1741 on the land of John Talbot. It was sold in 1784 to James Emlen, who built the mill that was in continuous use over the next century. It was purchased by Nathan Yearsley in 1823, and by 1836 it was operated by Humphrey Yearsley until his death in 1887. The mill race that powered the mill diverted water from Rocky Run. It is believed that flour from the mill fed American troops fighting in the War of 1812.

On the opposite side of the road are an old farmhouse and an associated barn that has also been converted to a residence. They were contemporary with the mill, which is no longer standing. The farm was bought by George Wood in 1901 and became Wawa Farm #4.

James Emlen (1761-1798) was the son of a wealthy Quaker brewer who had a townhouse on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. James sought a more simple and spiritual life in the country. He learned the milling trade from a relative in Kennett Square, but appears not to have had an active role in running the mill along Rocky Run once he bought it in 1784. Instead, it was operated by his good friend and tenant Nathan Yearsley. James Emlen lived a contemplative life near the mill for the remainder of his days, except when he was called to perform religious service elsewhere. He and his wife Phebe Pierce of Thornbury Township had six children. They left them at home in 1793 to go to Philadelphia to be representatives at the Friends’ Yearly Meeting. Phebe quickly succumbed to yellow fever, which was raging that year. Less than a year later James joined a Quaker peace delegation to Canandaigua, New York to meet with the Six Nations. His principles took him back to fever-ridden Philadelphia again in
1798 as representative to the Friends’ Yearly Meeting. Before he left he wrote his will and appointed guardians for his children. He gave Nathan Yearsley first right to the mill and bequeathed money for the founding of the Westtown School. His foresight was all too accurate, for that year he succumbed to yellow fever.

James and Phebe’s youngest son, James Jr. (1792-1866) also lived a life of exemplary Quaker service and sacrifice along with his own wife. He hardly knew his own parents, as he was raised by his mother’s family in Thornbury Township and then boarded at the Westtown School. In 1816, he married Sarah Farquhar, a minister in the Society of Friends. They probably met as students at the Westtown School, where James and Sarah also taught for a period of their adult lives. After they got married they moved to Middletown Township next to the mill, but at a second, smaller house on the corner of what are now Old Forge and Yearsley Mill Roads. James bought out his siblings’ shares of the mill. They raised seven children in the midst of their own religious activities and travelling ministries. They had a school next to their house, which served as a temporary Orthodox meeting house during the Hicksite schism starting in 1828 until a new meeting house was built along Middletown Road in 1835.

Meanwhile, Nathan Yearsley (1762-1825) was operating the grist mill and gradually rose from tenant to proprietor. He owned the grist mill and thirty surrounding acres by at least 1802 according to the tax records. In 1823, he bought the main house and its surrounding acres from the Emlen family. He would have been the one who sold flour to the American army during the War of 1812. That was the year he married Tacy Hill (1765-1839). They had one child, Humphrey Yearsley (1815-1887). His father died when he was ten. A guardian was appointed for him and a miller hired to run the mill until Humphrey came of age at 21 in the year 1836. He and his wife Catherine Water were active in the community. Humphrey supported a temperance hall in the village of Lima, which was nicknamed Wrangletown for the rowdiness of its Pineapple Tavern. Catherine was on the planning committee for the Ladies’ Fair at the Delaware County Institute of Science. The mill did not prosper in the subsequent decades. The milling became subordinate to farming as a source of income. In 1870, heavy rainstorms in the Chester Creek watershed swept away the mill dam and bridge. Humphrey died in 1887 with no will and debts. Catherine was left with only a $300 widow’s exemption from the creditors and claimed a corn sheller, some furniture, and a horse named Dave, a cow named Clover, and a heifer named Blossom.

After several changes of ownership, the mill property was bought by George Wood in 1901 as part of 1000 acres he purchased in Middletown Township to lease as tenant dairy farms to support what eventually became the Wawa Corporation. He chose not to repair the mill. In 1945, the Wawa Corporation sold the former Yearsley Mill land holdings to private owners. In 2013, Penn State Brandywine bought 21 acres along Yearsley Mill Road to Old Forge Road to extend its campus. The purchase included the old barn.
A few hundred yards downstream from the site of Yearsley Mill, Rocky Run passes beneath Darlington Road.

At this point, both the road and the stream skirt the property of Delaware County where a number of county institutions are clustered. These include the Delaware County Library System central offices, the Delaware County Medical Examiner, the Regional Crime Lab, the Juvenile Detention Center, and most prominently, the Fair Acres Geriatric Center. The northern end of Middletown Township’s Rocky Run Trail is located at Old Forge Road in front of the Fair Acres Geriatric Center.
The Fair Acres Geriatric Center is Delaware County’s publicly funded institution for the care of the elderly. It is a direct descendant of the Delaware County Poor Farm, which was relocated to this site in Middletown Township when its previous location was appropriated in 1850 for the site of the new county seat of Media. Building began on the new site in 1856 after the 210-acre property was purchased from Abraham Pennell and was completed in 1857, the same year as the poor farm shut down in Media. Pennell’s farm was called Fair Acres, which was adopted as a more congenial name than that of the Delaware County Poor Farm. His original two-story stucco home is at the northwest corner of Middletown and Old Forge Roads. It is known historically as the Ogden House. A women’s building was added to the facility in 1949. A burst of new construction occurred from 1957 until 1960, and the first high-rise was added in 1963. The county ran a working farm and canning operation at the facility until 1967. This ended when the county transitioned from a partially residential community to a health care facility for the elderly. Building 8 of the Fair Acres complex is the tallest building in Delaware County and was erected in 1977.
Winter view of Building 8

View of Fair Acres complex and Chester Creek valley from sixth floor window of Building 8
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2017
Rocky Run flows towards the southwest downstream of the county complex where it passes through woods and meadows that can be enjoyed by walkers along the Rocky Run Trail.

Granite Farms Estates

Rocky Run flows through the grounds of the retirement community of Granite Farms Estates. A small unnamed tributary enters from the east. It originates between the county complex to the north and the Thomas Chevrolet dealership to the south. It flows behind Thomas Chevrolet, the Rocky Run YMCA, and Granite Farms Estates, all of which are entered from U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike.
Granite Farms Estates looming above the valley of Rocky Run
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Rocky Run Trail over unnamed tributary emerging from woods behind Granite Farms Estates
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Rocky Run flows parallel to Valley Road as it approaches the Wawa Dairies facility. The stream is lined with some very large American sycamores.

Pennell Mills

Along this portion of Rocky Run once stood a saw mill complex that was owned by Abraham Pennell (1753-1840). He and his wife Hannah Sharpless Pennell (1747-1823) raised their children in a house just downstream, located behind the Wawa Dairies facility. They had the stone farmhouse enlarged in 1799. Abraham had inherited the house and surrounding 250 acres of the “Grubb tract” from his father William Pennell. William purchased the acreage from the heir of Henry Grubb in 1753. He operated the mills at what became Glen Riddle further down the Chester Creek valley. Abraham’s son James subsequently lived in the house.

George Wood bought the Pennell house and farm in 1900 as he began the Wawa Dairies enterprise. Since then, the house has mainly been used as offices for dairy executives and staff and as a gallery to display photos and documents of Wawa Dairy Farms history. It 1980 the building was restored to its 1830 appearance, which according to a pamphlet distributed in the early 1980s by Wawa, Inc., was when Abraham’s son Joseph made alterations to the house the same year that he built a saw mill on Rocky Run.

According to other sources, Joseph (1788-1849) lived in another stone farmhouse that is on the old Franklin Mint property across U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike.
Joseph Pennell house, south side of Baltimore Pike
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2018
Wawa Dairy Farms

Rocky Run flows behind the main facilities of a thriving enterprise that has its roots in the dairy industry, Wawa Inc. The Wawa Dairy Farm was opened by George Wood at this location in 1902. George Wood was originally involved in textile manufacturing in New Jersey. In the 1860s, he had taken over management of his father Richard D. Wood’s cotton plants in Millville and May’s Landing, New Jersey. His father was one of the founders of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and George Wood was also on its Board of Directors. George Wood vacationed at the Idlewild Hotel in Media, and was charmed by the bucolic surroundings. In what started out as a hobby in 1900, he bought three farms in the countryside west of Media, including the Rocky Run Dairy Farm owned by the Pennell family. He started dairying with one bull and six cows on his 1100 acres. He bought Guernseys, a breed known for its rich milk. His first sanitary milk house was designed by the Quaker architect Addison Hutton. The Millville Manufacturing Company also had a headquarters building at 4th and Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia designed by Hutton.

In 1902 George Wood opened his dairy, and named it Wawa, inspired by the wild geese that he saw on the pond formed by the dammed Chester Creek near his new home and business. There is a prevalent misunderstanding that the word “Wawa” is the local Lenape name for wild goose, but in fact it is an Ojibwe word that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow used in his poem “The Song of Hiawatha,” which is actually about a person from the Seneca nation. George Wood was evidently inspired by the poem.

In those muckraking days prior to the Pure Food Laws, George Wood made available certified milk bottled under sanitary conditions and marketed it as “Wawa Pediatric Certified Milk.” He later also patented “Clover Sweet” milk. In 1914, his main market in Philadelphia required all milk to be pasteurized unless certified as produced in a healthy manner. In 1928 the
laws required separate plants for certified milk and pasteurized milk. In that year Wawa built a combined plant that complied with the laws. It still operates at its location facing U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike at Valley Road. The plant now produces more juices and teas than milk. When it opened, neighbor Peggy Wilcox called it “Cow College.”

Wawa Dairy Farms primarily marketed its milk to Philadelphia and Atlantic City. It operated its own train depot in West Philadelphia at 32nd and Market Streets. The milk depot was at 32nd Street and Woodland Avenue. During World War II, the Philadelphia Navy Yard provided a lot of business. Wawa staked out its territory and had amicable agreements with neighboring dairy farms. For example, the Smedley family marketed its Penncrest Farms milk to the nearby towns of Media and Swarthmore. Their high-quality milk was also produced by prized Guernseys.

George Wood died in 1926. The business remained in the family, and are its main stockholders to this day. When George Wood died, Harry Farber ran the dairy, and Charles Rife was the herdsman. During the 1930s and 1940s Wawa Dairy Farms began to sell off large parcels of land. In 1945 the entire cow herd was sold. Wawa has contracted out milk production ever since, but it maintained a small herd for show on the pastures surrounding the plant into the 1980s.

After World War II, business boomed. The 1950s were the short-lived heyday of the home delivery market. Wawa Dairy Farms expanded its market by absorbing the Turner & Westcott Dairies that supplied the Main Line and absorbing the Crystal Dairy in Chester.
Water treatment facility on Rocky Run behind Wawa Dairies, east side of Valley Road  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Wawa Corporate University, west side of Valley Road – at one time it was possible to see real cows here  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
The headquarters for Wawa, Inc., known as “Red Roof,” is located about a mile towards the southwest from the Wawa Corporate University and the 1928 dairy plant. It’s high up on the opposite bank of Chester Creek in Chester Heights Borough on the south side of Baltimore Pike. None of the current buildings have a red roof. The red roofed building was the first building rented and occupied by George Wood at this location in 1892, but it has since been demolished. At the core of the current corporate complex is “Blossom Hill,” the former home of Grahame Wood, who was a grandson of George Wood. In the early 1960s, with the advent of supermarkets and the decline of home dairy deliveries, the family business was undergoing a fiscal crisis. As Grahame Wood reflected on the company’s future near the site of what is now the Grahame Wood Reflection Garden, he came up with the plan to start of chain of convenience stores, or “bantam stores” as he conceived of them. As the cotton textile plants in Millville, New Jersey were still in the family and they too were failing, their assets were sold to raise capital to start the convenience store chain. These Wawa Food Markets have been the foundation of the company’s successful business model ever since the first one was opened on MacDade Boulevard in Folsom, Ridley Township, in 1964. In 1975, the stores started brewing fresh coffee and selling sandwiches and hoagies.

By the 50th anniversary of the stores in 2014, the $9 billion company had 650 outlets in six states with 22,000 employees. The company had an intense and passionate following due to its emphasis on employee development and customer satisfaction, in addition to the convenience of making coffee, made-to-order sandwiches, and other snacks available around-the-clock.
Grahame Wood Reflection Garden

Fifty years ago, Grahame Wood reflected on the future of Wawa often as he drove or walked on this Lane next to the Reflection Garden, to his home at “Blossom Hill.”

The Dairy business was in decline and Grahame was committed to preserving the Wawa brand and jobs associated with the Dairy. His vision fostered a new business...Wawa Food Markets. Grahame’s reflections on this Lane changed our lives forever.

The purpose of a Reflection Garden is for all of our associates to have a place to seek refuge from an “on the go” world. Between work and family life, we all are faced with a multitude of expected and unexpected events. The Grahame Wood Reflection Garden is available to all Wawa associates for every such event, whether they are good times or bad.

By naming this Garden for Grahame Wood, we recognize how he surmounted seemingly hopeless adversity to, in the end, change the lives of all those who visit this Memorial. We trust that his example will lift the spirits of every visitor.
“The Carriage House,” Wawa, Inc.  Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018

Store Support Center, Wawa, Inc.  Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
Rocky Run Trail

Rocky Run flows beneath Valley Road and passes behind the Wawa Corporate University. A parking area for users of the Rocky Run Trail is accessible from Valley Road at this location. Downstream from here, Rocky Run and accompanying trail passes through particularly scenic woodland. The woods are dominated by American beech and tulip poplar, but there are also quite a number of red and white oaks. Spicebush dominates in the understory. As befits a stream named Rocky Run, the geology is notable. There are outcrops and boulders of beautifully folded gneiss. Some large crystals of feldspar can be found in pegmatite boulders visible at a specific spot along the trail.
Gneiss boulder along the Rocky Run Trail

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Pegmatite along the Rocky Run Trail

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Rocky Run, true to its name

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Nice example of folded gneiss, Rocky Run Trail

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
The Rocky Run Trail crosses over Rocky Run a couple places as the stream makes its last meander bend on its approach to Chester Creek. Right after the last crossing of the Rocky Run Trail over Rocky Run, the trail joins the Darlington Trail and Rocky Run passes through the railroad embankment and joins Chester Creek on the other side.
About an eighth of a mile downstream of where Rocky Run enters it, Chester Creek flows under U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike.

U.S. Route 1

U.S. Route 1 is a long ribbon of asphalt between Maine and Florida. It was once known as America’s Main Street when it was the main conveyor of traffic along the eastern seaboard of the United States, before that role was taken over by Interstate 95. Locally, it is known as Baltimore Pike. Baltimore Pike was chartered in 1809. It connected Philadelphia and Baltimore by way of Chadds Ford along this route. The road was paved with concrete from Media to Wawa in 1916.

On the 7th of July 1920, halfway through his first season with the New York Yankees, Babe Ruth overturned his $10,000 Packard on a rain-slicked curve along Route 1 in Wawa. He was driving from Washington to Philadelphia after a 17-0 romp over the Washington Senators. He spent the night at a neighboring farmhouse after banging up his knee and suffering cuts on his face. The next day he told a local mechanic to keep the car because, “I’ll get another one in New York.” He and his travelling companions took a train from Media. Meanwhile, news of the accident reached Philadelphia before they did. When they got there, they were startled by a newspaper headline that cried, RUTH REPORTED KILLED IN A CAR CRASH. He survived his ordeal in Wawa to become not only the most famous baseball player, but the most famous man of his time in the United States.

The bridge that carries U.S. Route 1 over Chester Creek

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Wawa

On the west bank of Chester Creek within the Borough of Chester Heights is the unofficial village of Wawa. A once active rail station by that name was located within a meander bend of the creek here. Prior to the arrival of George Wood, who conferred the name of Wawa on the place, it was called Grubb’s Bridge. Henry Grubb was an 18th century landowner who sold the property to William Pennell in 1753. Much of the Pennell family farmland then came into the possession of George Wood as he established and expanded the Wawa Dairy Farms during the first decade of the twentieth century. It is said that George Wood named Wawa after the Lenape name for “wild goose” which he found in abundance here. He no doubt was inspired by the local goose population, but the derivation of the name was more likely inspired by the use of the word “Wawa” in *The Song of Hiawatha* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The Lenape name for goose is not “Wawa” in any case. Longfellow used Ojibwe inspired words in his poem, which incidentally was about a spiritual leader of the Seneca, who spoke yet an even different language.

After Chester Creek flows under the bridge at U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike, it passes through a portion of the Wawa Preserve of the Natural Lands Trust. In 2012, trees were planted along the creek here to provide a riparian buffer. The rest of Wawa Woods is a mature grove of American beech trees. A small unnamed tributary enters Chester Creek from the southwest at the preserve.
Chester Creek then bends around the Wawa Railroad Station, which has undergone a hiatus in service since 1986, but is being refurbished in order to extend service beyond the current rail terminus at Elwyn. Along Chester Creek near the Wawa Station was located Thatcher’s Tilt Mill.

Franklin Mint

Downstream from the station, a small unnamed tributary flows into Chester Creek from the northeast where it originates in a large tract of mixed woods in between the Pennsylvania State Trooper Media Barracks and Glenwood Elementary School. This tributary flows behind the former Franklin Mint, defunct producer of coins and collectibles.

The Franklin Mint was founded in 1964 by Joseph Segel. The large manufacturing facility and museum for the display of its coins and collectibles was built on Baltimore Pike in 1976. It was sold in 1980 and became a subsidiary of Eastern Mountain Sports. In its heyday, it produced the coinage for nearly twenty sovereign nations. It was better known for its many lines of collectible plates, figures, and other objects, many of which depicted icons of popular culture that were featured in full-page magazine advertisements. It went out of business along with a lot of other enterprises at the turn of the twenty-first century and the bursting of the so-called dot.com bubble.

Development of the 170-acre former Franklin Mint property was opposed by residents, slowed by the struggling economy, and further delayed by a legal dispute among the developers. The developer’s initial proposal for the site in 2006 included 1.2 million square feet of retail space, more than 1,000 rental units, 400,000 square feet of commercial space, a movie theater, and a hotel. A group of concerned citizens calling themselves Save Middletown opposed what they called “the city” and succeeded in getting a downsized proposal approved in 2012. The developers then disagreed on how to proceed. One of the three partners, the Wolfson Group, submitted plans and the other two partners, the McKee Group of Springfield and Pennrose Properties of Philadelphia, sued to stop approval of the plans. The case was settled and McKee and Pennrose bought out the Wolfson share for a reputed $25 million. A new proposal called for 350 townhouses, offices, retail space, and a hotel. Middletown Township passed a revised zoning ordinance in 2014 that advanced the plan.

Franklin Center is an example of the high-density mixed-use town center development concept that was new in the Philadelphia suburbs at the start of the 21st century. The developers saw an opportunity for such a project in Middletown Township, since it had no distinctly defined town center already. The town center concept is framed as having the benefits of “smart growth” in contrast to the typical car-dependent suburban sprawl. It has multiple commercial amenities within walking distance of homes and offices, and provides a variety of transportation modes to-and-from the town center. Ideally, the density of the built area preserves open space and environmentally sensitive areas.

Opponents anticipated traffic problems with the increased density and posted “No City” and “Save Middletown” signs to voice their opposition.
On the slope between the Franklin Mint and Chester Creek was once located the Wild Goose Tea Room, operated from the 1920s until 1963 by Katherine Willcox. George Wood donated milk to her enterprise in its early days, because he was interested in seeing it succeed. Jack Kelly operated the tea room from 1963 until 1968, but then sold it to John Megen who changed it into the Lobster Pot & Steakhouse Restaurant. Franklin Mint bought the property in
1975, but it continued to operate as a restaurant for another couple decades until it was abandoned and demolished.

Logtown

High on the west bank of Chester Creek off of Valley Brook Road is the site of Logtown. This was the location of an old Presbyterian church that was called Mount Gilead, or Blue Church. As an outpost of the Middletown Presbyterian Church, it was where Scots-Irish workers from the Old Sarum Forge worshiped. The congregation was formed in 1728, and the most recent church building had been constructed in 1766.

Chester Creek continues to flow towards the southeast parallel to the railroad tracks, and soon arrives at the village of Lenni.
Lenni

The unnamed tributary that originates between Glenwood Elementary School and the Pennsylvania State Police Barracks enters Chester Creek at the upper end of a widening in the creek known as Lenni Lake. The widening was created by Lenni Dam, which once served the mill community of Lenni. The village clusters along Lenni Road on both sides of its bridge over Chester Creek. Downstream from Lenni Road, Chester Creek forms the boundary between Aston Township to the southwest and Middletown Township, which is still to the northeast.

John Lundgren had a paper mill at Lenni on Chester Creek from 1798 until 1816. Lenni then became the farthest upstream of the seven major cotton mill communities that thrived in the Chester Creek valley between the 1830s and 1850s. Peter Hill established the first cotton mill at Lenni in 1825. He was a gentleman farmer and failed merchant, whose profligate ways led to his holdings at Lenni and Parkmount to be held in trust by his father-in-law Nathan Sellers. Hannah Sellers Hill, Nathan’s daughter and Peter’s wife, subsequently leased the Lenni Mills to Daniel Lammot, Jr., a merchant of French descent who was connected to the du Pont family of the Brandywine Valley. Daniel Lammot’s daughter Margaretta married Eleuthére Irenée duPont’s son Alfred Victor duPont. The Lenni Mills were a major center of cotton spinning and weaving prior to the Civil War.
The Lammot family belonged to the Church of New Jerusalem. The family of Nathan Sellers and the Hills were Swedenborgians.
Sources also indicate that the prior name for Lenni was Taylor Town. It was renamed in 1825 by William Martin who also is mentioned as the owner of Lenni Mills at that time.

During the Great Flood of 1843, the water at Lenni surged eighteen feet above its normal level. On the morning of August 5, 1843, the lower Delaware River valley region was saturated by a nor’easter. This was followed in the afternoon by three hours of violently stormy weather at the headwaters of Chester Creek and its neighboring streams. There was continuous thunder and lightning. The upper Chester Creek valley received 16 inches of rainfall in those three hours. By 4:30 p.m. the creek had escaped its banks and rose one foot per minute. A sloping wall of water between five and ten feet high moved downstream at 20 miles per hour between the hours of 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. The water wall surged at the mill hamlets where dams burst. Bridges clogged with debris also blocked the water until they burst. Daniel Lammot lost his office at Lenni and several other buildings were swept away.

The Lenni Mill also suffered from a fire in 1845 and was subsequently rebuilt.

Peter Hill died in 1851 and Daniel Lammot moved to the Brandywine Creek. For a time, the mills in Lenni were leased to General Robert F. Patterson, who was mainly known for the notoriety of letting Confederate reinforcements get through at the First Battle of Bull Run.

In 1885, the mill was leased by Daniel Lees to produce yarns and plushes, and his estate continued production after his death. By 1906 the mills were vacant but were occupied again by the Victoria Plush Mills in the first half of the twentieth century up until 1946. The surviving Lenni mill buildings are now part of an industrial complex belonging to Westlake Plastics, which has been at this location since 1947. Another business established around the same time (1945) in the industrial heart of Lenni was a manufacturer of insulation for electrical motors called Lenni Products.
The Maplewood Hotel on Lenni Road in the heart of Lenni was built in 1850 as a general store and residence. From 1879 until 1979 it was a hotel as well as a tavern, the latter function having experienced a brief interruption during Prohibition.

The Philadelphia and West Chester Railroad had a train station at Lenni, which was part of the SEPTA commuter line to West Chester until 1986. At the Lenni Station is a large outcrop
of a rock formation which has been named the Confluence Gneiss, after the confluence of Chester Creek with the West Branch Chester Creek located a short distance downstream.

Lenni Station was also the northern terminus of the Chester Creek Branch Railroad, which operated between 1869 and 1972. From Lenni, the Philadelphia and West Chester Railroad heads east and out of the Chester Creek valley. After many years of effort, the bed of the Chester Creek Branch Railroad has been finally converted to the Chester Creek Rail Trail.
Chester Creek Rail Trail

The Chester Creek Rail Trail was the vision of a dedicated bicycle enthusiast named Mike Fusco. He dedicated himself to the task beginning in 1994. After a long process of generating support, getting the cooperation of the municipalities, support from the county, and preparing the trail, a 2.8 section of the Chester Creek Rail Trail from Lenni to Knowlton was finally dedicated and opened in December 2016. Sadly, Mike Fusco didn’t live long enough to see his dream realized. He died suddenly in 2014, a year before the actual construction of the trail began. The Friends of the Chester Creek Trail had been formed to continue carrying out his mission, though. Upon completion, it will connect Wawa Station to the Caleb Pusey House in Upland.

After passing beneath the bridge for Lenni Road, Chester Creek flows between industrial buildings, including Westcott Electric on its western shore. As it does so, it bends so that its general direction of flow changes from southeasterly to a more eastward direction. Several hundred feet downstream, Chester Creek arrives at the sites of two more 19th century cotton mill communities. Parkmount is on the north bank, and Crozerville is on the south bank.
Parkmount

Early photo of Parkmount Mills
Photo: Provided by Keith Lockhart to Newlin Grist Mill for “Mills of Delaware County” display, 2019

Parkmount Mills or more currently: Applied Powder and Coatings
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
The first mill at Parkmount was a cotton spinning mill built by Peter Hill in 1829 for Samuel W. Riddle, who leased the Parkmount Mills before investing his money in the establishment of Glen Riddle. Samuel W. Riddle and his brother James came to Pennsylvania from Belfast in the early 1820s.

While Samuel remained a Presbyterian, James became a Methodist minister in the wake of a local revival inspired by the itinerant preacher James Caughey from England. In 1839 he married a Quaker lady and moved to the Leiper estate at Avondale on Crum Creek where he opened a cotton mill. In 1844, he purchased the Gilpin estate at Kentmere on the Brandywine, opened a cotton mill, and built a Methodist chapel.

Meanwhile, Samuel first went to Crum Creek and rented a mill at Avondale from Thomas Leiper in 1827 before coming to Parkmount. By 1850, an Irish carpet weaver named George Callaghan was operating the Parkmount mills for Riddle, while Riddle himself developed operations at what became Glen Riddle, which he purchased in 1843. Parkmount Mills in 1850 wove cotton counterpanes and figured tablecloths on power looms, and woolen carpets on draw looms, which were large complex pre-Jacquard hand looms. There were a total of 18 looms at Parkmount Mills at that time.

The mills at Parkmount experienced fires in 1862 and 1887. The current buildings date from 1888. By 1870, Parkmount was the home of the Parkmount Mills Cotton & Woolen Company. Starting in 1955, the Aldon Rug Company operated in Parkmount. When it stopped operation in 1970, the last vestige of the once great textile industry in the Chester Creek valley came to an end.

Parkmount has been the location of the Diffuselite Company since 1970, originally owned by Hugh Aiken. It is a manufacturer of lenses for lighting fixtures. Also located in Parkmount are Applied Powder and Coatings, and a company called DGF Products. The latter produces filtration and coils for industrial and commercial uses.
The first mill in Crozerville was the Bottomley Brothers Woolen Mill established as early as 1811. John B. Duckett operated a paper mill here starting in 1826, but it failed by 1837 during the financial panic of that year. John P. Crozer bought the mill from the Bank of Delaware County in 1838, and thus founded the cotton mill community of Crozerville which he expanded, and where he first created his fortune. Incidentally, Crozer was a director of the Bank of Delaware County from 1825 until 1862. Crozerville Mills was itself an expansion of John P. Crozer’s operation at the West Branch Mill. When Crozer moved into a house next to his new mill in Crozerville in 1839, he brought the Sunday school that had been meeting at the West Branch Chapel with him.

During the Great Flood of 1843, Chester Creek carved out a new course along the tail race of the mill at Crozerville.

In 1854, John P. Crozer had the Crozerville Methodist Episcopal Church built on Mount Road for his Methodist workers. He thought that Mt. Hope Methodist Church on Concord Road was too far away for them to go. Reverend George W. McLaughlin was its first pastor.
Crozerville United Methodist Church on Mount Road

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Dutchman’s Fountains (left) on Mount Road

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
During its heyday in the 1850s, yarn was produced from over 7,000 spindles at the Crozerville Mills. From 1867 until 1881 the mills were operated by John P. Crozer’s son, Samuel A. Crozer while John P. Crozer lived in Upland near the mills he opened there. From 1881 until 1884, they were operated by his son-in-law, William H. Robinson, and then the mills closed.

The mills opened again and had various operators between 1887 and 1902, including William Carson & Company who called them the Brookside Mills. They were called the Yorkshire Worsted Mills (operated by Miller & Pleet) starting in 1905, but then they closed as textile mills for good in 1960.

The former Crozerville Mills have been owned and occupied since 1961 by the Container Research Corporation, manufacturers of reusable shipping containers. Part of the complex is also occupied by the Res-Kem Corporation. The whole complex has been given the name Riddle Valley Industrial Park.
St. Francis de Sales Church

The St. Francis de Sales Church is located along New Road in Crozerville. It started out as a mission of the St. Thomas the Apostle Church in the 1880s. The church was dedicated in 1894 with Reverend Edward J. O’Reilly as its first pastor.

New Road in Crozerville, with a view of St. Frances de Sales Church
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

View of Chester Creek from New Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Chester Creek Cotton Industry

At the border area of Aston and Middletown Townships, Crozerville was one of seven mill hamlets that developed along the steep valleys around the confluence of the West Branch and main branch of Chester Creek. This is the most precipitous part of the fall line along the entire creek. The fall line is where a stream drops from a higher to a lower elevation. On the eastern seaboard that takes place where the hills of the Piedmont transition to the flat Coastal Plain. Along the three mile stretch of Chester Creek where the cotton mill hamlets were located the water drops from 120 feet above sea level to 30 feet above sea level. Most of these sites had started out with mills of other kinds, but by the 1830s they were all centers of water-powered cotton textile production. Each cotton mill community also had machine shops, as well as grist mills and saw mills associated with them. Each mill seat included a dam, a headrace, a wheelpit, the mill itself, and a tailrace. Because of the steep terrain, headraces could be short and still accommodate the ten to twenty foot head of water necessary to power the mill wheels. The steep rocky terrain also kept this portion of the Chester Creek valley from being farmed. Along the West Branch of Chester Creek was the aptly named West Branch mill complex. Crozerville was at the confluence, and from north to south, Lenni, Parkmount, Glen Riddle, Rockdale, and Knowlton were all along the main branch of Chester Creek.

In the United States, the Industrial Revolution began in earnest in the 1820s when water-powered automated factories for the spinning and weaving of cotton began to be profitable. By the 1790s in Great Britain, the power loom invented by Edmund Cartwright was working in tandem with James Hargreaves’ spinning jenny that was invented a decade or so earlier. This technology was imported to the United States, but the American textile mills that had gotten started around the turn of the nineteenth century failed because of the resumption of cheaper British imports when the War of 1812 ended. Finally, a new tariff was imposed on British imports in 1824 so that American textiles could compete. To build the new industry, early entrepreneurs bought up old grist mills, saw mills, paper mills, and iron forges and converted them into textile mills. The creek valleys of southeastern Pennsylvania and northern Delaware were a center for this new industry along with Lowell, Massachusetts and Paterson, New Jersey. The early textile mills along the Pennsylvania creeks and the Brandywine were smaller operations than the ones farther north. They were not heavily capitalized at first and tended to be financed as partnerships by friends and relatives from profits made from other enterprises. Because of the smaller amounts of capital and the use of the mills for prior purposes, the cotton mills were smaller along Chester Creek than in other parts of the country. The spinning and weaving often took place in separate buildings.

Self-contained mill villages grew up around each mill seat. Multi-family worker’s houses were built close to the mill, usually along a road next to the stream. A store, a school, and a church were built nearby to meet most material and spiritual needs. Farther up the valley slopes were situated the slightly larger foreman’s and mill operator’s houses, and at the very top with a grand view over everything was the mansion of the mill owner and his family. This hierarchical and patriarchal commercial society was built on trust. For the owners, faithfulness to contractual obligations is what defined a real man. The family was the cornerstone economic unit at all levels. For the owners, family connections were important sources of capital and the continuity of ownership. For the mill workers, families provided income from all the cumulative labor that could be provided, from children to the parents, to any live-in grandparents, who were usually
widowed. A member of the family also had to stay home to take care of the children who were too young to work, but that workless period was very short for each child.

Major players in this emerging Chester Creek textile industry were mill owners John P. Crozer, Samuel Riddle, Daniel Lammot, and Richard Smith. The cotton they used as raw material came into the port of Chester mainly from slave plantations of the Piedmont region of Georgia and the Carolinas. They spun and wove it in their factories to produce coarse cloth, mainly for work clothes, sleeping clothes, flannel underwear, ticking, table cloths, calicos, and muslin. Finer quality cotton textiles at the time were still mainly produced in Great Britain. Labor in the Chester Creek cotton mills was for the most part provided by immigrant families from England and northern Ireland.

The early nineteenth century was the time of the Second Great Awakening, when renewed religious enthusiasm spread among those who reacted against the Enlightenment era emphasis on reason as the core of human values and progress. The Smith family were evangelical Episcopalians, and John P. Crozer was an evangelical Baptist. They, in particular, strove to create self-contained paternalistic mill villages in which the spiritual and material well-being of every level of the community was cultivated by institutions they created. They did this through founding Sunday School societies, and building churches such as the Smith’s Calvary Episcopal Church in Rockdale and Crozer’s Baptist Chapel near West Branch. Crozer also built a church so his Methodist workers wouldn’t have to travel very far, the Crozerville Methodist Episcopal Church on Mount Road.

Crozerville lies right where Chester Creek meets its West Branch.
West Branch Chester Creek

Dilworthtown Crossing

West Branch Chester Creek originates on the east side of U.S. Route 202/322 and south of Dilworthtown Road, at the Shoppes at Dilworthtown Crossing in Thornbury Township, Delaware County. The source of the stream lies between Hellman Auto Service Center and a Super Wawa convenience store.

![Access road to the Dilworthtown Crossing Super Wawa above the West Branch headwaters](Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012)

West Branch Chester Creek flows towards the west through a wetland of *Phragmites* reeds on its way towards the Cherry Creek subdivision.
Cherry Creek Subdivision

West Branch Chester Creek passes through the middle of the Cherry Creek subdivision, a residential development of large, multi-gabled, oatmeal-colored, single family homes with high-pitched roofs. The subdivision incorporates an original farmhouse and renovated barn that are situated along the two main intersecting loop streets of the development, Cherry Farm Lane and Old Barn Drive. The West Branch Chester Creek bisects the larger of the two loops as it flows parallel to a cul-de-sac called West Branch Lane. Within this loop formed by Cherry Farm Lane is also a wooded open space.
The Old Barn, Cherry Creek subdivision  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

West Branch Chester Creek in the Cherry Creek subdivision  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
West Branch Chester Creek makes a slight bend towards the southeast and enters the community of Brinton Lake.

Brinton Lake

West Branch Chester Creek was dammed to form Brinton Lake. There are many architecturally unique dwellings among the Brinton Lake community along the west shore of the water, which was originally a mill pond. Access to the community is from Brinton Lake Road. On the other side of the road along the West Branch were once the grist and sawmills of Caleb Brinton during the last quarter of the 19th century. His ancestors first built mills at this site in 1690. They lasted until 1916. The Brinton Lake Wetland is a stopover for migratory birds.
North on Brinton Lake Road, just south of where it meets Dilworhtown Road, is located Thornbury Township, Delaware County’s most charming and whimsical parks, Palmer Arboretum. Palmer Arboretum includes a boxwood labyrinth, two giant Adirondack chairs, a hopscotch board, a wishing well, and a pavilion that houses a cross-section of the former
National Champion white ash. The tree once stood on the grounds of Thornbury Elementary School at the corner of Creek and Gradyville Roads. These features are surrounded by a grove of river birch and sweet gum.

Palmer Arboretum boxwood labyrinth in its early stages
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Shrine to former White Ash champion, Palmer Arboretum
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Shortly after West Branch Chester Creek flows under Brinton Lake Road, it then passes under Mill Road. To either side of the creek between these two roads was located the grist and saw mills of Caleb Brinton.

At Mill Road, West Branch Chester Creek crosses the boundary from Thornbury Township, Delaware County to Concord Township.

Concord Township

Concord Township was incorporated in 1683. The 14-square mile township nearly doubled in population in the first decade and a half of the 21st century to more than 17,000 people. The largely rural township was rapidly developed. In an attempt to remove the five township supervisors who were perceived to favor development over the existing residents, a referendum was filed in 2014 by a group called Concord First to ask citizens to change the status of Concord Township from a second-class township to a first-class township. The change would have altered the leadership structure from supervisors elected at-large for unlimited six-year terms with property taxes capped at 14 mills, to commissioners elected to four-year terms either at-large or in voting wards with taxes capped at 30 mills. If it had been successful, the current supervisors would have had to step down.

Just south of Mill Road, West Branch Chester Creek is joined from the southwest by a small unnamed tributary that has as its source a series of water traps on the golf course of the Concord Country Club.

As it continues to flow towards the east, West Branch Chester Creek skirts the northern edge of the adjoining Brinton Lake Corporate Center, Shoppes at Brinton Lake, and the Concordville Industrial Park. The largest structure in this complex is the Costco Wholesale big box store. Other major structures include the warehouses of Cott Beverage, Two Men and a Truck, and 98 Sports. This is also the locations of the Oasis Family Fun Center and the Sky Zone Trampoline Park, in juxtaposition with the Crozer Medical Plaza at Brinton Lake and the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) Specialty Care & Surgery Center.

The southern edge of the industrial park and shopping center is along U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike, and the eastern edge is along Thornton Road. Just before West Branch Chester Creek reaches Thornton Road in the northeastern corner of the Concordville Industrial Park, was the site of Concord Mills, which date from 1695.
North on Thornton Road at its intersection with Glen Mills Road is the crossroads village of Thornton, located within Thornbury Township, Delaware County. Thornton served as an overnight rest stop between the port cities of Chester and Philadelphia and the farming regions of western Chester County and Lancaster County. As was typical for such crossroads villages, wheelwright, blacksmith, and livery services were available. Accommodations in Thornton were provided at the “Yellow House,” an inn built around 1750 by George Gray. Both the British forces and members of the Continental Army when the inn was used as a field hospital following the Battle of the Brandywine. One of the longest continuously running post offices in the nation is hosted in the Yellow House. John King served as its first postmaster after it was opened in 1829. The Yellow House has also served as a cloth factory, village market, antique shop, artist’s studio, and community center.
The barn and stables associated with the Yellow House have been converted to a restaurant. The barn had an extraordinarily large hay mow to accommodate the needs of the many horses, oxen, and cattle that travelers and drovers brought into the village for an overnight stay during their journey.
The barn and stables of the Yellow House, with more recent additions
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

The village of Thornton was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007.

A view of the historic village of Thornton
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
To the west of the village of Thornton, the Bethlehem United Methodist Church is located at the intersection of Glen Mills and Westtown Roads. The church is built of the local serpentine stone. The Bethlehem Church Woods is a mature beech-dominated woodlot.

About a quarter mile after the West Branch Chester Creek passes under Thornton Road, it is joined from the north by a small tributary called Deborahs Run.
Deborah's Run

Deborah's Run originates in a woodlot in Thornbury Township, Delaware County, located between Glen Mills Road and the George W. Hill Correctional Facility.

George W. Hill Correctional Facility

The George W. Hill Correctional Facility is Pennsylvania’s only privately-run prison and is under contract with Delaware County. The 1,883-inmate facility is located in Thornton, Concord Township. Deborah's Run flows through its grounds and is impounded by a dam that conveys a service road to the back of the prison.

The prison is named for George W. Hill, who became its superintendent in 1995 when the Delaware County Prison, also known as Broadmeadows, was privatized. He had been a member of the Springfield Police Department since 1955, and its chief from 1975 until 1988. At that point, he was elected sheriff of Delaware County, a post he held until appointed warden at the Delaware County Prison in 1992.

Delaware County council members were preparing to build a new prison at the site in the mid-1990s for $95 million. Delaware County Prison Board chairman Charles Sexton and Delaware County councilman Wallace Nunn convinced the county council that building a private prison could save millions of dollars. In 1995, Wackenhut Corrections Corporation of Florida was selected as the contractor which built the prison for $55 million. Its large capacity allowed it to take prisoners from Chester and Philadelphia Counties for a fee. In 1999, the new prison was named for its superintendent George W. Hill, who was battling cancer. It was noted with admiration that his illness did not interfere with his ability to oversee the success of the transition to a private prison facility. He retired in 2008 and died in 2010.

The Wackenhut Corporation was started as a private-security firm in 1954. It was founded by George Wackenhut of Upper Darby, who graduated from West Chester University. As a member of the Army Corps of Engineers he witnessed the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. After the war, he joined J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI for a brief period until starting his own security firm. A separate branch called Wackenhut Corrections began in 1984 to take advantage of the growing demand for private prison services as the number of inmates burgeoned due to the federal government’s “tough on crime” policies during the “war on drugs” and the general political climate favoring private enterprise during the Reagan-era 1980s. Federal inmates in the United States increased from 25,000 in 1980 to its peak number of 219,000 in 2012. The Wackenhut Corrections Corporation became the GEO Group, Inc. in 2003. George Wackenhut died the following year. Litigation over inmate deaths at a number of GEO’s facilities around the country cut into the company’s profits, so it abandoned its contract with Delaware County in 2009. GEO’s facilities were routinely understaffed to enhance profits, which created an unsafe environment. Community Education Centers, Inc. of West Caldwell, New Jersey took over management of the prison. GEO then purchased Community Education Centers in 2017 and resumed management of the George W. Hill Correctional Facility. GEO was doing well financially once again after the Trump administration’s Attorney General Jeff Sessions reaffirmed the federal commitment to private prisons. Having grown enormously since its Delaware County origins, GEO is a national corporation based in Boca Raton, Florida. As of 2016, it had 64 prisons and 60 day-reporting centers around the country and a revenue of $2.1 billion. Twenty-two of those facilities are in Pennsylvania, including the prison in Delaware...
County. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is GEO’s biggest client. Its fortunes had rebounded since the summer of 2016, when Sally Yates, the Deputy Attorney General under Barack Obama, had issued a memo directing the Bureau of Prisons to phase out the use of private prisons. This was in response to a Justice Department’s Office of the Inspector General report that had been issued a few weeks earlier. The report showed that private prisons had much higher rates of violence and lockdowns and poorer access to medical facilities than federal facilities. This could have been a fatal blow to the private prison industry, but it was saved by the rescinding of the Yates memo and the Trump administration’s immigration policies.

Meanwhile, attempts were made in 2018 to increase the transparency and public accountability of the George W. Hill Correctional Facility in Delaware County. The Delaware County Coalition for Prison Reform began attending the prison board meetings in large numbers, urging its members to hold the meetings outside the prison in a more accessible location. The board members hadn’t recorded their meetings until it was pointed out by Nether Providence Democratic Committee chair Christine Reuther that they were violating the state’s Sunshine Act by not doing so. The first ever Democrats to be elected to Delaware County Council were elected in 2017. These two council members, Kevin Madden and Brian Zidek, proposed to their three Republican colleagues to expand the five-member prison board to increase transparency and accountability. An 1839 state statute calls for three prison inspectors appointed by the county’s Board of Judges and two by county council, but a 2009 amendment permits council to establish a larger oversight board to include the county’s chief executive, two judges, the county sheriff, the county controller, the county council chairman, and three members of the public. The county council defeated the proposal, 3 – 2. Later in the year, Delaware County renewed its contract with the GEO Group for five years and $264 million, with an option to extend it twice for another two years as a nine-year, $459.9 million contract. GEO pledged to spend $3 million on improvements to security, health care, transportation, and living units. They also offered to loan $14.8 million to the county, at no interest, for capital improvements to the prison if the county chooses. Members of the Delaware County Coalition Reform were not entirely satisfied, pointing out that the guards at the facility were still the lowest paid in Pennsylvania. Also, the prison board had hired Phoenix Management to compare the costs and quality of privately and publicly run correctional facilities. The report had been delayed, and reformers thought that it was premature to finalize the contract renewal before the report was made available.

Finally, after a year of political discourse which at times became acrimonious, the county council voted unanimously to replace the five-member Board of Prison Inspectors with the expanded Jail Oversight Board. The tipping point came when various stakeholders in the county’s criminal justice system approved the plan, such as President Judge Kevin F. Kelly. They saw value in the expanded oversight and the public confidence that would result. Judge Kelly took umbrage at Councilman Madden’s remarks however. Madden pointed out that no longer would 30% of county tax dollars be controlled by an unelected board which the “Delaware County GOP has used…to hide patronage and corruption from the public eye” and “that has cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars over the years.”

When voters in Delaware County elected three more Democrats to county council on November 5, 2019, they put that body entirely in the hands of the Democratic Party for the first time since the Civil War. A Democrat was also elected district attorney for the first time in the county’s history. Operations at the county jail came under new scrutiny. The longtime superintendent, John Reilly, Jr., had been the subject of a whistleblower’s complaint in 2014 for creating an environment hostile to minority workers and for hiring an unqualified favorite as
assistant superintendent. The politically appointed Board of Prison Inspectors kept the alleged misconduct from ever becoming public. John Reilly, Jr. was from a prominent Delaware County Republican family. His father John Reilly was district attorney from 1981 until 1987, and his brother Andrew Reilly was longtime chairman of the county’s Republican Party. John Reilly, Jr. had been recruited by Wallace Nunn in 2001 to be deputy superintendent at the jail after serving 12 years as assistant prosecutor in the Delaware County District Attorney’s office, and then became superintendent in 2008 after George W. Hill retired. Following the shift in political power in the county and an investigative report by the Philadelphia Inquirer and The Caucus into the allegations against Reilly, he chose to retire.

In February 2020, the Delaware County Council voted to commission a study to see what would be required and how much it would cost to shift the George W. Hill Correctional Facility from private back to public ownership.
Deborahs Run flows south into Concord Township and through the residential subdivision of Twin Creeks at Mendenhall, where it flows under Trimble Road.
Deborahs Run enters the West Branch Chester Creek within the Twin Creeks at Mendenhall subdivision just north of U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike.

Just below the confluence of the two streams was once located the sawmill belonging to E.S. Leedom.

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Baltimore Pike

The West Branch Chester Creek flows under U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike.

After passing under U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike, the West Branch Chester Creek enters the Newlin Grist Mill Park.

Concord Creek

At the west end of the Newlin Grist Mill Park, the West Branch Chester Creek is joined by Concord Run. Concord Creek was formerly known as Webb Creek.

The source of Concord Creek is along PA Route 491, Naamans Creek Road, at the boundary between Concord and Bethel Townships, and the divide between the Chester Creek and Naamans Creek watersheds.

As Concord Creek meanders in a northerly direction, it passes under Shavertown Road. About a quarter mile east on Shavertown Road is the Darlington Fine Arts Center.

Elam Woods

Concord Creek flows through Elam Woods, a fragment of mature American beech-dominated forest with some large tulip poplar trees where two source tributaries converge near Smith Bridge Road. To the west of the woods is the Elam subdivision.

Concord Creek flows under Smith Bridge Road. One mile to the east on Smith Bridge Road is the location of the Concord Township Park, the Concord Township Public Works facilities, the Concord Township American Hero Memorial, the Rachel Kohl Community Library, and the historic Pierce-Willits House, home to the Concord Township Historical Society.

Rachel Kohl Community Library, Concord Township
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
Concord Township American Hero Memorial
Concord Township Public Works facilities in the background
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018

Pierce-Willits House

Pierce-Willits House, home of the Concord Township Historical Society
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
The Pierce-Willits House was built around 1810 by John Pierce, a descendent of the first inhabitant of the property. The house was built to replace the original log cabin that dated from 1744. The enormous copper beech tree next to the house is believed to have been planted around the time it was built. It is listed as one of the Pennsylvania State Champion trees. Francis P. Willits purchased the Pierce residence in 1885. He was born in 1856 and was a graduate of the Maplewood Institute. He began the commercial mushroom industry in the area by importing spores from England in 1892. His brother-in-law Jacob F. Styer incorporated mushrooms in his nursery business which was located on U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike. The house was in the family until 1975, when it was acquired by Concord Township and made into the headquarters of the Concord Township Historical Society.

1927 concrete bridge carrying Smith Bridge Road over Concord Creek, engineered by George Wright
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Marrow Tract Subdivision

After passing under Smith Bridge Road, Concord Creek passes through a wooded corridor associated with the Marrow Tract subdivision of single family homes.

Fox Hill Farm Subdivision

To the east is the Fox Hill Farm subdivision of densely clustered townhouses. Concord Creek bends widely and skirts the northern portion of this subdivision and then flows under Temple Road.
A quarter mile south on Temple Road is a cul-de-sac called John Meyers Circle. There is a small pond in this neighborhood, which could be the remains of an old mill pond. Records indicate that in this vicinity a John Myers had a saw mill and Thomas Marshall had a bark mill.

Garnet Valley School District

East of this neighborhood is located the Concord Elementary School, which has as its immediate neighbors to the south the Garnet Valley Elementary School and the Garnet Valley Middle School. On the other side of Smith Bridge Road and a little farther to the east is the Garnet Valley High School. The offices of the Garnet Valley School District are housed in an addition to the Garnet Valley Elementary School. The Garnet Valley School District educates the public school students of Concord and Bethel Townships and the Borough of Chester Heights. First through fifth graders of Bethel Township attend Bethel Springs Elementary School, but all other public school students in the district attend school within this centrally located education complex along Smith Bridge Road. All kindergarteners attend Concord Elementary School, as well as first and second graders from Concord Township and Chester Heights Borough. Garnet Valley Elementary School educates the third through fifth graders.

Spring Valley Business Park

After it flows under Temple Road, Concord Creek skirts the southern margin of the Spring Valley Business Park. In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, this business park has included a State Farms Insurance operations center, offices of the accounting firm Deloitte, offices of LaFrance Corporation, a Marriott Residence Inn, and the Covenant Fellowship Church. Access to the business park is from its northern and eastern sides along Spring Valley Road and along U.S. Route 322, Conchester Highway by way of Fellowship Drive.
Concord Creek flows under U.S. Route 322, Conchester Highway.

Concord Township Sewer Authority

On the other side of the highway, Concord Creek flows past the sewage treatment plant of the Concord Township Sewer Authority.

Concord Creek is joined by a small tributary that enters from the west and originates in the Concordville Town Centre.

Concordville Town Centre

The Concordville Town Centre is a commercial shopping development that is slightly offset to the west from the original center of Concord Township. Concordville Town Centre, towards the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century included a Home Depot, PetSmart, Target, Acme Market, Staples, Five Below, Marshalls, DSW Designer Shoe Warehouse, and the restaurants Outback Steakhouse, Bertucci’s, and Shere-e-Punjab.
Concordville and town center for Concord Township. The old Concord Friends Meeting House is located here along Concord Road. It is next to the Concord Community Center, and the Concord Township Offices are nearby and accessible from Thornton Road.

Concord Friends Meeting House

The Concord Monthly Meeting was organized in 1686, and included Friends from Concord, Bethel, Aston, Chichester, and Birmingham Townships. A site was leased from John Mendenhall starting in 1697 for the building of a meeting house at Concord and Thornton Roads. His perpetual lease was for one peppercorn a year. A log structure was built in 1710, and replaced by one of stone in 1728. Classes for children were held beginning in 1717, but a separate schoolhouse wasn’t built until 1779. The meeting house was a sanctuary for wounded soldiers after the Battle of Brandywine. After a fire in 1788, the meeting house was rebuilt and enlarged.

The congregation split during the Hicksite controversy in 1827. By 1837, the Orthodox Friends built a separate meeting house nearby on the same plot of land. When the members resolved their differences, everyone moved back into the original meeting house. In 1920, the former Orthodox Friends Meeting House was rented by the Concord Grange #1141, who purchased the building in 1945. The Grange served as a cooperative purchasing and retail sales agent for the local farmers who were members. The last meeting took place in 1978, as the nature of the township made its final transition from rural to suburban. The building was sold to the township to become the Concord Township Senior Center.
The Concord Community Center was originally the gymnasium of the Maplewood Institute, which was a co-ed boarding school founded by Joseph Shortlidge in 1862. The gymnasium building was built in 1898. Starting in 1909 the institute only accepted boys and young men. The buildings subsequently came into the possession of Church of Our Savior, but were sold to Concord Township in 2005.
The Concord Township Offices are visible from U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike, but are accessible from Thornton Road. The offices are in the former buildings of the Dante Orphanage. The orphanage was started in 1920 by the Sons of Italy to care for Italian World War I orphans. It later became a home for single parent families run by the Immaculate Heart of Mary order of nuns until it closed in 1968. That was when it was purchased by the Church of Our Savior.
Less than a mile to the southeast along Concord Road is St. John’s Episcopal Church. The original log church was built in 1702 on land donated by John and Margery Hannum. In the 1690s, George Keith led a movement to return Quakers to some of the Church of England’s practices, such as baptism. The Hannums of Concord were influenced by this movement and were baptized. John Hannum was the township constable and also operated the Buck Tavern out of his home. Queen Anne donated the pewter Holy Communion service in 1707. The congregation also received donations from the Concord Friends Meeting and from the Catholic mission station at Ivy Mills. Concord was living up to its name as a center of religious toleration in what came to be referred to as the “Toleration Triangle.” The original log structure received a brick addition in 1769, and was replaced in 1790. The current Greek revival building was built in 1844.
Bridge over Concord Creek on Concord Road
Il Grinaio Italian Restaurant is the large green building on the right side of the road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Concord Creek at Concord Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Shortly after it passes under Concord Road, Concord Creek enters the Newlin Grist Mill Park where it joins West Branch Chester Creek.
Newlin Grist Mill Park

Entrance to the Newlin Grist Mill Park on Cheyney Road
Relay station of the Chester Water Department is visible across the street
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

The Newlin Grist Mill is a fully operational 18th century grist mill that is open for tours. The surrounding park has other historic buildings and amenities for picnicking and hiking and other recreational activities.

Newlin Grist Mill Park visitor center (left) across Cheyney Road from the grist mill
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Nathaniel Newlin built the original mill at this location in 1704. He and his wife Mary Mendenhall came to Pennsylvania from Liverpool in 1683. Nathaniel was the son of Nicholas Newlin, a prominent landowner of the Mount Mellick Meeting in Queen’s County, Ireland who
also had emigrated. Nathaniel Newlin established his grist mill on West Branch Chester Creek downstream from two mills established by his father in 1683 and another mill owned by his wife’s brother. Nathaniel became a representative in the Pennsylvania Provincial Council from 1685 until 1687, and also served as a judge in the Chester County courts.

Nathaniel Newlin had a grandson, also named Nathaniel, who in the 1730s doubled the size and grinding capacity of the mill. He added a second waterwheel and had two sets of millstones operating simultaneously. At that time, the mill was called the Concord Flour Mill. The mill ground wheat, corn, oats, buckwheat, and rye.

The grist mill continued to be operated by the Newlin family until 1764. In that year, it was leased to William Trimble, who bought it outright in 1817. The mill was then sold to Samuel Newlin Hill in 1860, and so came back into the possession of a Newlin descendent. The Hill family owned it until 1941. After some successional squabbling, commercial mill operations were finally abandoned, and the property was sold to a Daniel Conlan. The mill languished. In 1958, though, the mill and surrounding land was sold to Earl Mortimer Newlin, an eighth generation descendent of the original mill founder Nathaniel Newlin. He created a non-profit foundation and historic park in 1962. After a restoration of the interior structure, gears and other machinery, the mill was back as the only original water-powered grist mill from the colonial era still in operation.
Newlin Grist Mill waterwheel – in action
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2019

Replacement waterwheel being built with traditional methods
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2019
Waterwheel mechanism, Newlin Grist Mill
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2019

Millstone and tool display, Newlin Grist Mill
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2019
Barrel and measures, Newlin Grist Mill
Photo: Walt Cressler 2019

Sifting floor, Newlin Grist Mill
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2019
Newlin Grist Mill and Miller’s House across Cheyney Road with headrace in foreground
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Early photo of the Newlin Grist Mill
Photo: Provided by Newlin Grist Mill for their “Mills of Delaware County” display, 2019
The central feature of the park is the timber and stone grist mill, of course. There is also the miller’s house, a typical stone structure of its era. It was built in 1739 by the grandson of Nathaniel Newlin. It has two bedrooms upstairs, and a “keeping room” and a kitchen downstairs. There is a beehive oven outside the kitchen fireplace.

A small old bank barn behind the miller’s house and mill was moved from its original location onto a former barn site in 1986. It’s also referred to as the granary and library.
A small stone springhouse was built in 1710. For a brief period, it was inhabited by Thomas Marshall and his wife Edith Newlin, a daughter of Nathaniel and Mary Newlin. The springhouse was donated to the Newlin Grist Mill Park in 1977 by John and Marianne Wolf at which time it was rebuilt.

A log cabin was built in 1965 to accommodate many uses for visitors over the years, including receptions, meetings, dances, and other events. Its logs are hand hewn, and it has a ten-foot fireplace.
A replica of an 18th century blacksmith shop was built of local stone. Its period tools were donated by the McKinley Forge of the nearby village of Chelsea, where the family business has been in operation for over 300 years.
Newlin Grist Mill Park also includes the Trimble House, a fieldstone manor house begun in 1739 by William Trimble. The date stone over the entrance reads 1742, which must have been the date it was completed. William Trimble operated a saw mill downstream as well as other mill operations at different times. He operated the Newlin grist mill starting in 1764 and became its owner in 1817. It belonged to his heirs until 1860.
Sluice gate on head race below dam on Concord Creek, Newlin Grist Mill Park
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Head race from Cheyney Road with fish hut on right
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Waterfall from head race to fishing pond, which drains into creek
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

West Branch Chester Creek in Newlin Grist Mill Park
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Redbreast sunfish (Lepomis auritus) at Newlin Grist Mill visitor center
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2019
Within the Newlin Grist Mill Park is a portion of the defunct Octoraro Branch of the Philadelphia and Baltimore Central Railroad. The Philadelphia and Baltimore Central Railroad was chartered in 1854 to connect Wawa Station to a junction of the North Central Railway north of Baltimore. The railroad line was only completed to the bank of the Susquehanna River at Rowlandsville near Port Deposit. Construction started in Concordville in 1855. By 1859 the section from Wawa to Chadds Ford was complete. The railroad extended to Oxford in 1860, to Rising Sun, Maryland in 1865, and finally to Octoraro Junction in Rowlandsville in 1868. In 1881, the rail line was consolidated with the West Chester & Philadelphia Railroad, which was controlled by the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad. This entity was succeeded by the Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington Railroad in 1916, but by then, everything was really controlled by the Pennsylvania Railroad. Passenger service ended on Octoraro Branch in 1935. The rail line was abandoned south of Catora, Maryland in 1961 and became unusable north of the Brandywine River from being washed out during the flooding of 1971 and 1972.
After leaving Newlin Grist Mill Park, the West Branch Chester Creek continues to flow to the southeast. Polecat Road closely follows its route until the road ends at Ivy Mills Road.

Trimble Mills

In addition to a saw mill, William Trimble operated a paper mill on West Branch Chester Creek from 1799 to 1820. Trimble also had the farthest upstream cotton mill in the Chester Creek watershed, but it failed in 1816 due to the British flooding the textile market. John D. Carter was managing the mill at the time, and afterwards moved on to operate a more successful venture at Knowlton. After the cotton mill failure, William Trimble went back to operating a saw mill and grist mill at Trimble Mills. The grist mill of course is better known as the Newlin Grist Mill. It also appears that on some maps the Trimble Mills are called the Felton Mills, perhaps after a subsequent owner.

Along Polecat Road is preserved a two-family tenant house for workers at the nearby Trimble Mills. The house was built sometime prior to 1750. It is known as the Polecat Road House, and was donated to Concord Township in 1967.

Polecat Road House

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Ivy Mills

Along the West Branch Chester Creek where Polecat Road meets Ivy Mills Road was located an important early paper mill. Thomas Willcox established Ivy Mills in 1729. It was the second paper mill built in British North America, following the establishment of the Rittenhouse paper mill on the Wissahickon Creek in 1690. Ivy Mills supplied paper for Benjamin Franklin’s publications, for the production of Continental currency, and for official Congressional and State documents.

Thomas Willcox had come from Ivy Bridge in Devonshire. According to legend he brought with him a sprig of vine that suggested the name Ivy Mills. Thomas and Elizabeth Willcox were Roman Catholics. Their home was a regular stop for Jesuit priests travelling from Maryland to Philadelphia. Masses were held at their house from 1729 until 1852, when St. Thomas’s Church was built nearby. A resident priest dwelt in a small house on their property until a parish house was added on the church property. Their parish was the first in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.
Early photo of original Willcox paper mill, Ivy mills
Photo: Provided by Keith Lockhart to Newlin Grist Mill for “Mills of Delaware County” display, 2019

Ivy Mills in the late 19th or early 20th century
Photo: Stephen H. Appleton, Media Historic Archives

Ruins of the paper mill, Ivy Mills
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
England prohibited the colonies from printing paper money in 1764. When the War of Independence came, they attempted to flood the colonies with counterfeit bills. To have captured the Ivy Mills paper molds would have been very advantageous. Mark Willcox had promised to throw them in the mill pond if the enemy came, but in 1778 the Pennsylvania council of safety had issued an order to Colonel Boyd to seize a mold that had the word Pennsylvania marked on it in 24 places.

In 1836 the Willcox family expanded their paper mill operations to the site of the old Sarum Forge farther north on the main stem of Chester Creek, and renamed the location Glen Mills. At that site they produced paper with innovative anti-counterfeiting measures for the national currency. The paper mill at Ivy Mills remained in operation until 1866.
Ruins of mill, miller's house (?), and old well – viewed from Ivy Mills Road
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
St. Thomas the Apostle Church

The St. Thomas the Apostle Church developed from the services that were held at St. Mary’s Chapel in the mansion of the Willcox family at Ivy Mills. The ground was purchased in 1852 and the church completed in 1856. The first pastor was Reverend Joseph Maugin. St. Thomas the Apostle Church is along Valley Brook Road in Chester Heights Borough, just a little more than half a mile to the northeast from Ivy Mills where Ivy Mills Road comes to a T at Valley Brook Road.

St. Thomas the Apostle Church has some interesting neighbors just to the south along Valleybrook Road in the heart of Chester Heights Borough. A Queen Anne style Victorian house with modern yellow siding is the home of Parastudy, Inc., an organization that hosts classes, community events, and psychic fairs. In the 1950s, it started out as a study group that focused on the psychic readings of Zoe Nickerson and was based in Brookside, Delaware. In 1959, the organization changed its name from the Brookside Study Center and incorporated as the non-profit Parastudy, Inc. Its headquarters moved to this house in Chester Heights in 1960. It has been reported to be the location of many spirit visitations and hauntings.
Parastudy, Inc. is next to Wilson’s Auctioneers & Appraisers, which deals in more material matters. Just south of the architecturally eclectic cluster of buildings associated with the auctioneers, is the entrance to the historic Chester Heights Camp Meeting at Hunters Lane. The public face of the camp meeting is not as conspicuous as it had been in the past. It is now hidden behind a townhome development. A large portion of the property along Valleybrook Road was subdivided for a luxury townhome development called Brookefield at Chester Heights that had its grand opening in 2018. On the opposite side of Valleybrook Road from the Hunters Lane entrance to the townhome development and the camp meeting, is the eastern end of Smithbridge Road, which goes towards Delaware.
Chester Heights Camp Meeting

The Chester Heights Camp Meeting was originally chartered in 1872 as the Philadelphia Camp Meeting and Excursion Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the fall of 1870 at the Philadelphia Preacher’s Meeting, a group of clergymen suggested the purchase of a countryside grove for the city’s churches and Sunday schools to use for religious and social purposes and as a means of spiritual renewal in the aftermath of the Civil War. The 148 acre farm of Joshua and James Williamson was purchased for its easy rail access from the city, and for its 50 acres of woods. The camp meeting opened promptly for the summer season in 1872, and nearly 18,000 people visited in the first year as part of 40 separate excursions. They came by rail from Philadelphia, Chester, and Wilmington to the train station placed just northwest of the entrance by the Baltimore Central railroad. The groups that arrived in the first year included hundreds of children in the company of John Wanamaker, who was Sunday school superintendent from the Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia at the time. Other groups were from the Ladies Aid Society of the Old Folks Home, the Temperance Harvest Home, and the Village Green Circuit. With the influx of people, a post office was built near the camp meeting entrance and businesses followed, including a general store and a sawmill. By the next year, the camp meeting built a large restaurant, boardwalks, large stables, and platforms for tents. By 1890, most of the tents were replaced by small Victorian-style cottages. One large tent for outdoor services in front of the main pavilion survived until 1944. The cottages were supplied with electricity in 1915, but didn’t get running water until 1966. Before that the cottagers hand-pumped water from wells and carried it. In 1972 the name of the organization was changed from the Philadelphia Camp Meeting and Excursion Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church to the Chester Heights Camp Meeting Association and came under a new set of by-laws. They were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. Two groups of arsonists struck in 2011 and 2012, and the camp meeting lost more buildings during a windstorm in 2015. Later in 2015 the camp meeting sold 20 of its 31 remaining acres to be developed in order to have the money to restore its buildings and cottages. Some of the buildings had to be moved by professional building movers. The camp meeting reopened in 2018 with about 40 of its cottages remaining, and all its buildings hooked up through the new development to modern electrical and plumbing conveniences.
After West Branch Chester Creek flows under Ivy Mills Road, it continues to flow towards the southeast.

A little less than three-quarters of a mile downstream, West Branch Chester Creek passes under Smith Bridge Road. The concrete bridge at this point is called Hibbard Bridge No. 21, and looks like many of the other county bridges that were built in the 1920s. Smith Bridge Road actually leads to Smith Bridge over the Brandywine Creek about ten miles to the southwest.
A quarter mile downstream from Smith Bridge Road, the West Branch Chester Creek enters the Borough of Chester Heights. In about another quarter mile it takes an abrupt turn south along Valley Brook Road and passes under Mattson Road, where that road comes to a T at Valley Brook Road. The concrete county bridge that carries Mattson Road over West Branch Chester Creek was built in 1930, engineered by George Wright. One of the two bronze plaques on the bridge refers to it as “Matson Bridge No. 12 on Matson Road over West Branch Chester Creek.”
“Matson Bridge No. 12 on Matson Road over West Branch Chester Creek”
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

West Branch Chester Creek from Matson Bridge No. 12
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Bronze plaques on Matson Bridge No. 12  
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Downstream from Mattson Road, West Branch Chester Creek continues to follow beside Valley Brook Road for about another quarter mile. Green Creek enters from the southwest.
Green Creek

Green Creek’s water quality classification was upgraded from Trout Stocking Fisheries to Cold Water Fisheries-Migratory Fisheries in 1995 as the result of a request by the Chester-Ridley-Crum Watersheds Association to the PA Department of Environmental Protection.

Bethel Township

![Bethel Township sign](image)

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Green Creek’s source is in Bethel Township, Delaware County at a pond in the center of patch of woodland next to the Pond View residential subdivision. The two opposite sides of the woodland are surrounded by a petroleum tank farm. The ball fields of Bethel Community Park are situated between the petroleum tanks and the housing development. On the other side of Foulk Road, PA Route 261, is Bethel Springs Elementary School.

![Green Creek at Logan Lane, Pond View subdivision](image)

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Green Creek flows towards the northeast and flows beneath Bethel Road near the Bethel Township Building.

Bethel Township Building – and the neighboring Bethel Sewer Authority
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

Green Creek flows through the Garnet Mine Road Woods, a mixed mesophytic woods dominated by American beech and tulip poplar. The woods are bordered by the residential subdivisions of Long Meadow and Northbrook. Just south of Garnet Mine Road, Green Creek is joined by an unnamed tributary that flows into it from the northwest.
Green Creek at Darzcuk Drive, at the south end of Garnet Mine Road Woods  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

The unnamed tributary originates in the Concord Hunt subdivision in Concord Township.

Source of Green Creek tributary at Kirk Road and Huntsman Drive, Concord Hunt subdivision  
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012
The unnamed tributary of Green Creek passes just south of Garnet Valley High School at Bethel Road. It is joined by another small unnamed tributary which joins it from a woodland to the southwest. The combined waters flow beneath the intersection of Bethel and Featherbed Roads and enter Clayton Park.

Clayton Park is the largest of Delaware County’s parks and comprises 170 acres of Concord and Bethel Townships. It includes nature trails, picnic pavilions, four ball fields, and a
nine-hole golf course. The park is named for Nelson D. Clayton, whose widow donated the initial 59-acre parcel of farmland to the county in 1957. In subsequent years, the county acquired adjacent properties to obtain the full 170 acres of the park. The woods in the park consist of mature American beech and sugar maple. In addition to all its amenities, a high-voltage transmission line bisects the park from west to east.
After the unnamed tributary flows through the length of Clayton Park, it joins Green Creek just south of Garnet Mine Road, back across the border in Bethel Township. Their combined waters flow under Garnet Mine Road and then under U.S. Route 322, Conchester Highway in rapid succession. Green Creek then flows into Concord Township. It continues to
flow towards the northeast and passes under Concord Road. The concrete county bridge dates from 1921. To the west is the densely built Riviera at Concord subdivision.

Green Creek is joined by another small unnamed tributary that originates from the northwest at a pond just to the north of Mattson Road.

Green Creek enters the southern tip of Chester Heights Borough just west of Valley Brook Road and joins the West Branch Chester Creek.

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The West Branch Chester Creek flows beneath Valley Brook Road. The name of the bridge at this location is the Johnson Mill Bridge No. 11.

Johnson Mill Bridge No. 11 over West Branch Chester Creek  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

West Branch Chester Creek from Valley Brook Road  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Peters Mills

Along the West Branch Chester Creek at Valley Brook Road was the location of the grist and saw mills of Samuel F. Peters. The first mill was built sometime prior to 1767 by his
grandfather William Peters. He had built a brick residence in 1750 that had a date stone that included his initials “W.P.” The saw mill was built sometime in the 1790s. It was a slitting mill that slit logs to make boards for building ships. Samuel F. Peters took possession of the mills in 1842. He sold the mills to Charles J. Johnson in 1872, who called them the Forest Queen Mills. It was also known as the Johnson Mill, which persists as the name for the bridge at this location. Johnson also built a cider mill. In 1913, the mills became the property of James Fritz, who resumed operation of the saw and cider mill in 1915. There are some stone ruins near the bridge, evidently of former buildings associated with the mills.

Ruins at the site of Peters Mills

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Chelsea

About a half mile south on Valley Brook Road, where it meets Concord Road, Chelsea Road, and Foulk Road (PA Route 261), is the crossroads village of Chelsea in Bethel Township. It lies right at the divide between the Chester Creek and Naamans Creek watersheds. Green Creek flows through Concord Township just to the northwest of Chelsea.

Chelsea was known as Corner Ketch until the year 1856. It is the location of McKinley Blacksmith and SiteOne Landscape Supply.
The West Branch Chester Creek enters Aston Township at the Johnsons Mill Bridge on Valley Brook Road.

Aston Township

Aston was first settled by English Quakers in 1682, but was known as Northley until 1687. Aston Township was incorporated in 1688. Its name had been changed by the township constable, Edward Carter, to hearken back to the town of his origin in Oxfordshire, England.

Rolling Hills Industrial Park

As it enters Aston Township, West Branch Chester Creek skirts the southern edge of the Rolling Hills Industrial Park. As it does so, it makes a wide bend as it turns from flowing in a southeasterly direction to a northeasterly direction. As it rounds the bend West Branch Chester Creek flows past such establishments as Russo’s Collision, Mulch Works Recycling, Inc., Philadelphia Electrical Equipment Company, and Folsom Tool and Mold Corporation. A variety of other similar businesses line the winding drives of the Rolling Hills Industrial Park, which has as its central thoroughfare Crozerville Road.

Aston Mills

At the edge of the Rolling Hills Industrial Park, West Branch Chester Creek flows under Birney Highway just north of the end of Mount Road. At the corner of Birney Highway and Mount Road is the Loyal Order of Moose Hall. South of Mount Road, Birney Highway changes its name to Aston Mills Road.
West Branch Chester Creek enters a wide floodplain at this location, which is known as Aston Mills. Aston Mills has also been called Tyson’s Mill, Llewelyn Mills, and Rhodes Mills as its ownership has changed through time.
West Branch Chester Creek under bridge for Birney Highway
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

West Branch Chester Creek continues to flow towards the northeast and passes between the Delaware County Technical High School towards the north and the Obdenaker trash truck depot to the south. Next to the Obdenaker facility is the small Lewis H. Fisher Memorial Park.
The Lewis H. Fisher Memorial Park is named for an Aston Township commissioner who died in 2005. The park was dedicated in 2007, and was formerly called Eagle Field. There is a trail through the woods and fields, and benches along the creek.
Crozerville Woods

West Branch Chester Creek enters the Crozerville Woods, dominated by tulip poplar and red oak, with a ground cover of many Christmas Ferns.

West Branch Mill

The aptly named West Branch Mill was located along the West Branch Chester Creek. It was the first cotton mill owned and operated by John P. Crozer. Crozer was the son of a farmer and a devout Baptist. He got his start in milling on Crum Creek, where he rented a mill from Thomas Leiper. John P. Crozer purchased an abandoned paper mill on the West Branch of Chester Creek at a sheriff’s sale in 1824. It had been operated from 1790 until 1795 by Aaron Mattson. Crozer installed second hand cotton spinning equipment. He later expanded to mills at Crozerville and Knowlton, and then massively expanded his operations to Upland and Chester with the advent of viable steam power for large-scale manufacturing. His son Samuel managed the mills at West Branch and Crozerville while John P. Crozer lived in Upland during the latter part of his life.

John P. Crozer was a devout Baptist. He built the West Branch Chapel in 1836. It housed an active Sunday school. The building later became a public school. When Crozer moved to a house near his new factory nearby in Crozerville in 1839, he took the Sunday school with him.

The West Branch Mill burned during labor unrest in 1836. During the Great Flood of 1843, Chester Creek was 23 feet above its normal level at the West Branch Mill. A lot of the mill’s structure was destroyed. Following the flood, a new road was built past the mill. At some point, the West Branch Mill was one of the manufacturing sites for the Aldon Rug Company, which lasted until the flood from Hurricane Agnes in 1972.

The West Branch Mill in the early twenty-first century is called the Rockdale Industrial Center and is the location of businesses such as Carmen’s Auto Body and artist spaces belonging to Heron Studios (downstairs) and Heron Crest Studios (upstairs).
Carmen’s Auto Body, Rockdale Industrial Center – part of West Branch Mill complex
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Mill workers houses associated with West Branch Mill, on Mount Road
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

The twelve-foot high mill dam at the former West Branch Mill was removed in August 2010 through a cooperative effort among the Chester-Ridley-Crum Watersheds Association, Aston Township, and the PA Fish & Boat Commission. Engineers from the URS Corporation were hired to conduct the dam removal. As of that date, the West Branch Chester Creek was restored to a free flowing stream for the first time since the colonial era.
West Branch Mill dam breach with Dave Weihbrecht of URS Corporation
Photo: Anne Murphy, 2010

West Branch Chester Creek at West Branch Mill
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Past the West Branch Mill, the West Branch Chester Creek continues to flow alongside Mount Road.

Poore Park

Along the shore of West Branch Chester Creek is Poore Park, just before the creek flows under New Road. The mill dam at this location on the creek was breached in December 2009. At the junction of New Road and Mount Road is the Aston Township World War I Memorial.

West Branch Chester Creek then flows between Flextron Industries on its right bank and the old Crozerville Mills on its left bank, which is now called the Riddle Valley Industrial Center.
At the confluence of the West Branch and the main branch of Chester Creeks are located the Crozerville Mills on the Aston side and Parkmount Mills on the Middletown side.

After the confluence of the two streams, their combined waters flow towards the northeast past Parkmount and then bend towards the southeast to flow parallel with Mount Road. Chester Creek flows beneath an old railroad bridge that is now part of the Chester Creek Rail Trail. Immediately downstream from the bridge, Chester Creek passes the Glen Riddle Mills on its west bank.

Glen Riddle

Where Chester Creek flows under PA Route 452, Pennell Road is the location of Glen Riddle, which was originally named Pennsgrove. Samuel W. Riddle moved his operations from Parkmount and expanded them at Glen Riddle which he purchased in 1843. In 1854, a store and post office were built on the northeast corner of what are now Glen Riddle and Pennell Roads. That’s the year Riddle changed the location’s name from Pennsgrove to Glen Riddle to avoid confusion with the Pennsgrove, New Jersey post office. Riddle was nominally a Presbyterian, and a member of the Hibernian Society. Among all the cotton mill owners along Chester Creek, he could identify with his workers the most, since he shared the same origins in Northern Ireland with many of them. By 1850, the cotton mills at Glen Riddle were spinning on 4,980 spindles and weaving on 160 looms. It was Samuel W. Riddle’s son Samuel D. Riddle (born in 1861) who became the owner of famous Thoroughbred race horses Man O’War and War Admiral.
Pennsgrove had originally been the site of saw and grist mills owned by William Pennell. Pennell had purchased a 417-acre tract from Henry Grubb in 1753 to expand his holdings. Around that time, Pennell built a house on the north side of what is now Glen Riddle Road, just east of Palmer’s Lane. Upon his death in 1783, William Pennell was the highest taxpayer in Middletown Township. The property was bought by Nathan Sharpless in 1785. By 1815, Sharpless added a cotton mill to the woolen factory and fulling mill he had already established there.

By 1831, the land at Pennsgrove was owned by George W. Hill. At that point, there was already a cotton weaving mill run with power looms there, as well as a manufactory of the power looms themselves. They were operated by James Houghton and John Garsed. Richard Garsed, the son of John, would go on to become one of the principal manufacturers of textile machinery in the United States.

During the Great Flood of 1843, six people died as the floodwaters hit the workers’ tenement buildings. Among them were John Rhodes, his daughters Hannah and Jane, and his granddaughter Mary Ann Collingsworth.

Starting in 1843, Samuel W. Riddle owned and operated the mills for many decades. Riddle built the Glen Riddle Presbyterian Church on the north side of Parkmount Road in 1879. Services stopped in 1901. The church later burned and is commemorated by a residential cul-de-sac called Burnt Church Court at its former site. There was a big fire in the mill in 1896, and around 1901 Riddle went bankrupt. In 1904 the estate of Daniel Lees purchased the property. It was the site of the R.E. Fernando Binz Carpet Corporation and the Glen Riddle Manufacturing Company, a producer of wadding.
In 1943, Glen Riddle was purchased by the Sunroc Corporation. It had been declared an essential industry during World War II and expanded to this location. Sunroc was founded as a bottled water company by Samuel Oliver Morrison in the Pine Ridge neighborhood of Nether Providence Township in 1922. By 1935, water coolers were being manufactured there. The company began its government contract in 1936, but to the general public the name was synonymous with water fountains. The Sunroc Corporation left its facilities at Glen Riddle in 1993.
At Glen Riddle, Chester Creek passes under PA Route 452, Pennell Road. Shortly after the bridge, the creek abruptly turns to the south and flows past an Aqua Pennsylvania drinking water outtake.
Sharp bend in Chester Creek downstream from Pennell Road; Aqua PA drinking water outtake on right
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
After Chester Creek turns towards the south after Glen Riddle, it flows parallel to Pennell Road, continuing to form the boundary between Aston Township to the west and Middletown Township to the east. Where Mount Road in Aston ends at Pennell Road is the location of the Novotni Brothers Paving Company.

Novotni Brothers Paving Company

The old quarry at the Novotni Brothers Paving Company on Mount Road in Aston is an exposure of rock that started out as magma within the chamber of an ancient volcano. It was part of a chain of volcanic islands that formed about 476 million years ago during the Ordovician Period and collided with ancient North America approximately 428 million years ago during the Silurian Period. The rock unit represented at the quarry has been named the Confluence Gneiss by West Chester University geologist Hal Bosbyshell. It is named for the nearby confluence of Chester Creek with its West Branch. Gneiss is a metamorphic rock that typically exhibits light and dark minerals in alternating bands. Much of the Confluence Gneiss does not show such banding, though, but there are banded layers in this unit that can be seen at other localities. The light and dark minerals at the Novotni Brothers quarry are distributed evenly and consist of hornblende and biotite mica and quartz and plagioclase feldspar. Other localities where the Confluence Gneiss is exposed also include large bodies of amphibolite, which represent ancient lava flows. Most of the Confluence Gneiss derived from magma that had never erupted. The Confluence Gneiss is part of a much larger rock unit called the Wilmington Complex, which as the name implies reaches all the way down to Delaware. The rocks of the Wilmington Complex are what remain of the ancient volcanic island chain that was somewhat similar to Japan, but is now fused to the Mid-Atlantic region of North America. The Confluence Gneiss is contiguous
with another unit within the Wilmington Complex, the Brandywine Blue Gneiss, which inspired the name of Wilmington’s minor league baseball team, the Blue Rocks.

Rockdale

A bit farther downstream is the site of Rockdale, when as a cotton mill hamlet had as its major owner Richard Somers Smith, a man of Swedish ancestry. He was the U.S. vice-consul to Sweden during the War of 1812. While in Gothenburg, he warned the U.S. merchant marine of the war having broken out before the British captains knew about it.

Rockdale included a nail factory owned by Henry Moore that had been part of Abraham Pennell’s Old Sable Forge. Moore acquired the nail factory in 1815 and built a cotton factory on the site in 1825. Richard S. Smith was a sales agent for Henry Moore’s nails. Moore got into a situation where he owed Smith a lot of money but couldn’t pay, except to grant Smith full ownership of the mills. The Smith family became summer residents in Rockdale following the cholera epidemic of 1832 in order to spend the more unhealthy months of the year outside of Philadelphia. They rented a mansion formerly owned by John P. Crozer. They were related by marriage, friendship, and business association to the du Ponts. After the War of 1812, Smith had been a commission agent for them.
By 1831, Henry Moore’s weaving mill in Rockdale was operated by John S. Phillips. When ownership passed to Richard S. Smith, Phillips continued to rent the cotton weaving mill and the associated stone farmhouse and greenhouse. John S. Phillips was a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences and one of the founding members of the Franklin Institute when it was established in 1824. He cultivated rare and exotic flowers in the greenhouse at Rockdale. He also was an inventor. As an older man he prepared the lighting and machinery for the 1864 Sanitary Fair in Philadelphia. He also donated his collection of 65,000 original European engravings to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The collection included works by Cranach, Dürer, Fragonard, and Hogarth. His grandfather, John Phillips, had made a fortune selling a cargo of slaves in the West Indies. He built a large mansion on Front Street in Philadelphia. When the British occupied Philadelphia following the defeat of the Continental Army at the Battle of Brandywine in 1777, General William Howe requisitioned the Phillips mansion as his own residence. Young John S. Phillips watched his father William drub the son of General Howe during the occupation, which became a point of great family pride. The family lost its fortune during the war. John attempted to recover the family fortune through numerous enterprises through his life, including weaving cotton at Rockdale, through sugar refining with partner Joseph Lavering, and weaving cotton in Holmesburg with partner David Lewis, Jr.

Richard S. Smith and his family were evangelical Episcopalians. The established the Calvary Episcopal Church located along Mount Road in Rockdale. It was organized in 1834 and in 1836 held its first services. The name was suggested by Pennsylvania’s Episcopal Bishop
After losing the mill after the financial Panic of 1837, Richard S. Smith became president of the Union Insurance Company.

In 1845, the mills at Rockdale were bought by an absentee manufacturer by the name of Bernard McCready. He added a spinning mill to the weaving mill that Phillips had operated. Thomas Blackburn managed the mills on McCready’s behalf.

The property was sold to Samuel W. Riddle in 1875. He manufactured tablecloths and other products there, but went out of business in 1901. In 1903, it was back in operation again as Penn Tapestry, owned by Joseph S. McElroy. He manufactured tapestry stripes and other upholstery novelties, as well as piece goods, couch covers, curtains, lap robes, and pillow slips. This operation closed in 1944.

The buildings were put to a new purpose in 1948, when it was opened by Ahrens, a lumber and mill work. The nail factory was destroyed in a flood in 1971. In 1983, the Centennial Home Center opened on the site of the Old Sable Forge. It is now King’s Mill, a banquet center, wedding venue, and catering business.

Prior to its ownership by Henry Moore and Richard S. Smith, Rockdale and the Old Sable Forge was originally owned by Abraham Pennell who built it in 1785. It consisted of a
rolling and slitting mill and the nail factory which was built in 1809. There were structures on both banks of Chester Creek. There was also a grist mill associated with the property.

Thomas Odiorne bought the forge from the Pennell family. He belonged to a family related to the Willcoxes and the Moores, but was raised and educated in New Hampshire. He was a member of the Dartmouth College class of 1791. He also had industrial interests in New England as well as along French Creek in northern Chester County, Pennsylvania. To supply the nail factory, he probably obtained bar iron from Old Sarum Forge farther upstream along Chester Creek, or from an ironworks along French Creek.

Nathan Sellers then acquired Old Sable Forge. Before the War of Independence, he was the first American in the business of wire drawing and wire working. He based this work at the Old Sable Forge. He used fine brass wire to make flat paper molds for paper currency and other paper products. His molds were used at Ivy Mills along West Branch Chester Creek and the Gilpin paper mills along Brandywine Creek.

The Sellers Family

Nathan Sellers was a member of the fourth generation of a major manufacturing family that emerged in southeastern Pennsylvania and had a major impact on the nation and the world. The primary focus of the family’s operations was in the Darby Creek watershed, but they also had early connections to the industrial operations in the Chester Creek watershed through Nathan Sellers.

Descended from the original settler of Upper Darby, the weaver Samuel Sellers of Derbyshire, for several generations the family’s innovations had major impacts on the course of
industrialization. Samuel Sellers’ son Samuel Sellers, Jr. built the family seat of Sellers Hall. He invented a machine for twisting worsted, the combination of wool and cotton. Samuel, Jr.’s son John developed water power at the family estate to run a grist mill, a saw mill, and a tilt mill. He also developed a method of weaving wire to make sieves for grain. John was a friend of Benjamin Franklin, and was one of the original members of the American Philosophical Society.

In the fourth generation, Nathan Sellers and his brother David were the first to build a cotton mill in Delaware County, which was located in the Darby Creek watershed. Nathan then purchased for his daughter Hannah the mills at Lenni and Parkmount along Chester Creek that she and her husband Peter Hill leased to Daniel Lammot. Nathan Sellers used Old Sable Forge along Chester Creek for his pioneering work with wire.

Hannah’s cousin John, a son of John Sellers who was brother of Nathan and David, established Millbourne along Cobbs Creek, which during its existence was one of the most productive merchant flour mills. Hannah’s brother Coleman went into business with his sons, George Escol and Coleman, Jr. at Cardington at the confluence of Naylor’s Run and Cobbs Creek in Upper Darby in 1828, and developed carding, papermaking, and the manufacture of locomotives and other machinery. Coleman Sellers, Jr. gained fame for inventing the first stereoscopic movie camera in 1860 and going on in the 1890s to engineering the Niagara Falls hydroelectric plant. The Sellers family member with the biggest impact perhaps, was William Sellers, a son of the John Sellers who had established Millbourne. William Sellers built a machine tool factory and took out 90 U.S. patents. He was very influential in the implementation of industrial standardization. He established the U.S. standard for screw threads and promoted general industrial standardization through his presidency of the Franklin Institute. His standards and production efficiencies were adopted by the Pennsylvania Railroad, which went on to become the first modern corporation. He also organized the plant that provided structural steel for the Brooklyn Bridge.

Aston-Middletown Little League

Immediately downstream from Kings Mill, Chester Creek flows past the ball fields of the Aston-Middletown Little League, which are also on the west bank. Up until 1993, the Sunroc Corporation owned the Aston-Middletown Little League fields. When the company left the area that year, there were concerns about the fate of local baseball, but it persisted.
Pennell Road continues to run parallel to Chester Creek. On the west side of Pennell Road just south of the ball fields is an old farmstead up on the hillside that has been converted into offices for a variety of businesses.
Hillwood Farm

The Hillwood Farm dates from about 1785. In the first quarter of the 21st century, its buildings have housed the offices and classrooms of Makin’ Music and Rockdale Music, as well as the offices of Advanced Engineering, Inc.
Barnaby’s of America

A few hundred feet south on Pennell Road is located a Barnaby’s of America restaurant. The building appears to be an old mill built of local field stone. A simulated waterwheel on the north side of the building is a tribute to the mill heritage of the local Chester Creek valley, in any case. The waterwheel was built over a small stream. The stream is an unnamed tributary of Chester Creek which enters a culvert beneath Pennell Road at the edge of the restaurant parking lot and enters Chester Creek on the other side of the road. There is a large outcrop of banded gneiss on the north side of the parking lot.
Gneiss outcrop at Barnaby’s of America parking lot  
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Chrome Run

A short distance downstream, Chrome Run joins Chester Creek from the northeast. Chrome Run drains a large part of central Middletown Township. It is named for the commercial deposits of chromium that were once mined along its valley. It was once known as Clark’s Run.

Penncrest High School

The source of Chrome Run is near Penncrest High School, the public high school of the Rose Tree-Media School District. The high school is named for Penncrest Farm. It was built on former fields of the Smedley family farm of that name.

Honeycomb Union AME Church

Across Barren Road and a bit southwest from the high school at Van Leer Avenue is the historic Honeycomb Union AME Church. It was founded in 1852 by James and Mary White, among others. James White had a dream of a gathering of sheep, which inspired him to start the congregation. Luke Smith was the first pastor. During the Civil War, three fugitive slaves took refuge there, and became members of the congregation. They had been scouts forced to serve the Confederate army as it approached Gettysburg. They took advantage of being on their own north of the Mason-Dixon Line and fled. Their names were George Smith, John Peters, and William Spradley. The latter served as secretary of the congregation for 60 years.

Services at the church were very intense at times. Members inspired with the Holy Spirit would hug the hot potbelly stove and step away unharmed. For many years songs were sung in Common Meter and rhymes were invented as the improvised songs were sung. Later the
congregation adopted Long Meter. They added an organ, but it was put in the back of the church. Many in the congregation considered it an instrument of the devil at the time, so the members of the choir sang with their backs to the altar and the congregation.

The Honeycomb Union AME Church was made from “honeycomb rock” which is a type of weathered serpentinite local to the area. The church underwent complete renovations in 1971, which may have been the time that the honeycomb rock was covered over with a layer of plaster.

Chrome Run flows south and passes under PA Route 352, Middletown Road. Just to the west on Middletown Road is located another historic house of worship, the Lima United Methodist Church.

Lima United Methodist Church

The first sanctuary of the Lima Methodist Church was built in 1835 on the north side of Middletown Road just west of what is now Oriole Avenue. Not long after the itinerant English minister James Caughey inspired a Methodist revival in the area, the local Methodist Society was formed in 1832 and met in the home of William Fox at the intersection of Middletown and Pennell Roads. James Riddle, the brother of Samuel W. Riddle, was a lay minister to the congregation in its early years. The sanctuary was enlarged in 1873, and then again in 1905. In 1908 a Sunday school wing was added on the east side. In 1960 a new sanctuary was added on the west side. In 1966, the old sanctuary was dedicated as the Merion Habersett Memorial.

The Promenade at Granite Run

After passing under PA Route 352, Middletown Road, Chrome Run is forced underground beneath the Promenade at Granite Run, a town center development at the former site of the Granite Run Mall.

As early as 1875, the west side of this site was occupied by a quarry. By the early 1900s, the owner of the Lima Granite Quarry was Ben Fields. He had a house that he called “Idle Moments” at a location that was later occupied by the J.C. Penny store.

In 1929, Casper Nullen built extensive greenhouses and raised up to 17,000 cut roses at a time at the eastern end of this area. The greenhouses were located just north of the place where the Sears store was later built. By 1943, the business was called Nullen & Rolf. Later, Fred Muller took over the greenhouse business and raised cut roses exclusively for the Penn Fruit chain of supermarkets.

The Sears store was opened in 1973. It was one of the three anchor stores for the Granite Run Mall, which opened in its entirety during the following year. The other anchor stores were J.C. Penney and Gimbels. There was also an Acme Market and a Clover store (that later became Kohl’s), which had their own satellite buildings.

By the early 21st century, the indoor mall became a less and less popular retail option here in the heart of Middletown Township. The new owners of the 59-acre property, BET Investments, demolished all but the anchor stores and the Acme Market and Kohl’s to build a town center design emphasizing walkability and mixed residential, retail, and office space surrounding an open courtyard. They called it The Promenade at Granite Run. It was an example of a retail trend called “de-malling.” BET Investments, a commercial real estate company based in Horsham, PA owned by Bruce E. Toll, bought the property in 2013 for $24 million. Michael
Markman was the company’s president and also on the project. The mall closed and demolition began in 2015. The anchor stores and the Acme Market and Kohl’s remained open, as did the stand-alone Sears Auto Center and PennDOT driver testing and licensing center. But one of the anchor stores, J.C. Penney, closed before the project was complete. Apartment buildings were constructed on the site of the former movie theater along Oriole Avenue and the site of the former Chi Chi’s Restaurant along PA Rt. 352 comprising a total of 400 apartments. A covered overpass was built to connect the latter apartments to the Acme Market. A pediatric office of the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia was built along Baltimore Pike. Frank Theatres CineBowl & Grille, with its combination of movie theater, restaurant, and bowling alley, occupied the second floor of the old J.C. Penney. A trail was put around the perimeter of the complex with spokes to connect with other parts of the surrounding township such as the public library and the township building. Some of the shops, apartments, and other offices began opening in 2018.
Baltimore Pike

Chrome Run flows under U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike.

Lima

A half mile from Chrome Run to the southwest on U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike is the crossroads village of Lima. It lies at the intersection of Baltimore Pike and Pennell Road, PA Route 452. In 1806, Philip Yarnall opened the Pineapple Tavern at this location. Its clientele was so rowdy that Lima acquired the nickname of “Wrangletown.” In an attempt to counteract this influence, the Sons of Temperance opened a Temperance Hall nearby on North Pennell Road in 1848. It was built by the congregants of the Lima Methodist Church. Later in the 19th century, the Temperance Hall was converted into a residence.

The Pineapple Tavern was purchased in 1908 by James J. Weathers, who opened a grocery store in the building. His son Larry Weathers used the adjacent barn as an auto repair shop starting in 1922, where he began selling mass-produced cars. Two years later a building especially built for the repair shop was erected. Starting in 1931, Larry “Papa Lar” Weathers operated an official Dodge dealership from his shop. In 1939, he had a showroom built. That was the same year that Baltimore Pike was widened to accommodate all the new automobile traffic that Larry Weathers was benefiting from. The road widening resulted in the demolition of the original Pineapple Tavern building. A new grocery store was built, which remained in operation until 1975. In 1948, the showroom and service department were upgraded. In 1961 Larry Weathers, Jr. took over the Dodge dealership after his father had gotten sick. He had fun running the dealership through the peak times for American cars in the 1960s. After the fuel crisis of the 1970s and the inroads on the market by fuel-efficient foreign cars, Chrysler had its first bailout crisis in 1980. Weathers Dodge was one of the dealers that lent money to the company along with a $1.5 billion loan from the government of President Jimmy Carter. The loan was paid back three years later, coinciding with the introduction of the mini-van. 1983 was also the year that Larry Weathers III joined the business. He took over in 2007. Two years later, in the midst of the Great Recession’s global economic crisis, Chrysler went bankrupt and ended its franchise agreement with 789 dealerships nationwide. This included one of its oldest ones, Weathers Dodge. Larry Weathers III adapted to the situation and reopened as a used car dealership called Weathers Motors.

The village of Lima is concentrated between the intersection of Pennell Road with Baltimore Pike, north to where Pennell Road ends at Middletown Road, PA Route 352. The last house on the west side of Pennell Road where it meets Middletown Road is the former home of Dr. Samuel Trimble. He was a beloved country doctor who operated his private practice out of his house. He was born in 1843 and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1866. He was also interested in natural history and had the reputation for knowing Delaware County better than anyone else of his time.

The veterinarian Raymond Conelly lived nearby, in a house that has been since demolished. He lived from 1901 until 1959 and was an associate of Thoroughbred horse breeder Samuel D. Riddle. Conelly was the owner of the Man o’War Remedy Company.
Riddle Hospital

After passing under U.S. Route 1, Baltimore Pike, Chrome Run emerges behind the Riddle Hospital. The hospital was founded at the bequest of Thoroughbred horse breeder Samuel D. Riddle.

The property had previously belonged to the Hibberd family. Samuel Hibberd built a farmhouse here in 1784. Samuel D. Riddle bought the Hibberd farm in 1909. He raised work horses at the site of the hospital. When he died in 1951, Riddle left $2.5 million from his estate to found the hospital and bequeathed the 72-acre former Hibberd property for the hospital’s location. The hospital received its charter in 1956, broke ground in 1960, and finally opened in 1963. A southern wing was added in 1971 and a new west wing was added in 1982.

The Riddle Hospital was acquired by the non-profit Main Line Health in 2007. Its other acute-care facilities include Paoli Hospital, Bryn Mawr Hospital, and Lankenau Medical Center. Main Line Health invested in major renovations of its hospitals beginning in the second decade of the 21st century. It proposed a bond towards modernizing Riddle Hospital at the beginning of 2020 for a total cost of $327 million. The new patient pavilion would include a new entrance, imaging facilities, laboratories, ten new operating rooms, hospital pharmacy and kitchen. The East Wing and Annex 1 of the older hospital building would be demolished to make room for more parking in the plan. The existing hospital would get a new 13-bed intensive care unit. The overall inpatient capacity would be reduced from 193 to 174 beds, but that was consistent with projected demand through 2028.
Where Chrome Run barely sees daylight – behind Riddle Hospital
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012
Granite Drive

Downstream from the Riddle Memorial Hospital, Chrome Run flows along Granite Drive and passes under it on its way into a wooded portion of the property owned by the Williamson Free School for Mechanical Trades. Granite Drive goes past Toys R’Us and the offices of Physicians Weight Control to a quiet set of cul-de-sacs lined by condominiums built in the 1980s.
Chrome Run flows through the 220-acre grounds of the Williamson College of the Trades, which was the site of a former chrome mine, hence the name of the stream. On the grounds of the school is the remains of a serpentine barren. The serpentine bedrock is the source of the chromium ore. The chrome mine was on Jesse Hibberd’s farm, which he settled in 1836. The mine was active from 1856 until 1876. Afterwards, the mining of chrome became more commercially viable elsewhere. The source of chromium along Chrome Run was a placer deposit. In other words, the chromium was washed and sieved out of the sand and gravel.
The Williamson Free School for Mechanical Trades was founded in 1888 by Isaiah Williamson, a Philadelphia dry-goods magnate, philanthropist, and pioneer in vocational education. He wanted to provide financially disadvantaged young men the opportunity to become productive members of society. The 220-acre campus was purchased in 1889, the year that he died. The school opened in 1891, after the completion of the eleven buildings, which were designed by Frank Furness. The chair of the building committee was department store pioneer John Wanamaker. Members of the initial board included Edward Longstreth, the manager of Baldwin Locomotive; James C. Brooks, the president of the Southwark Foundry & Machine Company; John Baird, a marble supplier; and Frank Gowen, the former president of the Reading Railroad.

The school initially offered three year programs in carpentry, bricklaying, patternmaking, and machine shop skills. The first graduates went into the workforce in 1894. In 1957, a fire destroyed all the shop buildings but one. The school’s future was in doubt, but it was saved when an agreement was made with the trustees of the Rodman Wanamaker estate. The John Wanamaker Free School of Artisans was created, which became an integral part of the Williamson Free School.

The school became a post-secondary institution starting in 1961, and in 1972 began awarding Associates Degrees in Specialized Technology. It offered training to male students in six trades: carpentry, paint & coatings technology, masonry, machine tool technology, horticulture & turf management, and power plant technology. The school charges no tuition or fees for room and board. Applicants with high school diplomas or GEDs are carefully screened using aptitude tests and an interview process during which financial need is considered. The
endowment-supported students live there from Monday until Friday and adhere to a strict disciplinary code designed to build character. They are required to attend chapel services on weekdays and are subject to random drug tests. Only seniors are allowed to leave campus during weekdays. Rule-breakers are punished with weekend chores when others are home with their families. After three years of this training and experience, 100% of the graduates get jobs.

The prohibition to charge tuition in the school’s charter put it on insecure financial footing at times. Its mission caught the attention of philanthropist Henry M. Rowan of Langhorne in 2007. Rowan was the founder of the induction furnace company Inductotherm. In the 1990s, he had made a large donation to Glassboro State College, which was renamed Rowan University. In 2008, he and his wife Lee, along with H.F. “Gerry” and Marguerite Lenfest of Huntingdon Valley donated a total of $45 million, bringing the Williamson Free School’s endowment to $100 million.

After a few years, a new capital campaign was deemed necessary. Rowan promised another $5 million if the school could match it with other donations. As board members called around for donations, it soon became apparent that the school’s name, the Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades, obscured its mission and sounded outdated. In 2015, its name was changed to Williamson College of the Trades. This change required a bill to be passed by the Pennsylvania legislature allowing schools that offer associate’s degrees in specialized technology or business to use the word “college” in their names. The Williamson School also took steps to change its accrediting body from the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. It planned to change the associate’s degree it offered to one that will be easier to transfer as credits to another institution if any of its over 200 students plan to continue their education.

In December of 2015, at the age of 92, Henry M. Rowan died. To honor his transformative generosity over the years, the Main Building was renamed Rowan Hall in his honor.
At the south edge of the Williamson Free School property, Chrome Run flows under the tracks of the former West Chester Railroad. There was once a Williamson School Station, and a railroad spur transported coal to the school’s power plant.
Chrome Run flows under Glen Riddle Road through the midst of the former holdings of Samuel D. Riddle, the son of industrialist Samuel W. Riddle. Samuel D. Riddle was born in 1861. He expanded the family’s farm holdings in Middletown Township. By the time of his death in 1951, Samuel D. Riddle owned most of the land between Baltimore Pike and Mt. Alverno Road to the north and south, and between Pennell Road and Middletown Road to the west and east. He was most known for being the owner of the famous Thoroughbred race horses Man O’War and War Admiral, but also raised lots of other livestock. Work horses were raised on a farm of his at the site of the Riddle Memorial Hospital. A mule barn was on Howarth Road near Chrome Run. A dairy farm was at Glenloch.

In 1918, Samuel D. Riddle purchased Man O’War as a yearling for $5,000 from August Belmont at Saratoga and brought him back to his Middletown farm. Riddle and his horse trainer Louis Feustel soon realized they had an extraordinary horse on their hands, and sent it straight down Baltimore Pike to the Glen Riddle Farm in Maryland for more intensive training. From 1919 to 1920 the horse only lost one out of twenty-one races. Man O’War’s one loss was to the appropriately named Upset. He set five world records. His final race was on October 11, 1920 when he defeated 1919 Triple Crown winner Sir Barton by seven lengths in a match race and shattered the world record for 1 ¼ miles by six seconds. He went out to stud in Kentucky from 1921 until he died in 1947. His most famous son was War Admiral, also owned by Riddle. War Admiral was the Triple Crown winner in 1937 and competed in the “Match Race of the Century” with Seabiscuit in 1938.

To the north of Glen Riddle Road and the railroad tracks is the residential subdivision of Riddlewood. Almost all the streets are named after Thoroughbred race horses. Riddlewood is located east of Pennell Road, south of Baltimore Pike, and along the western edge of Chrome Run.

On the north side of Glen Riddle Road, at the site of The Residence at Glen Riddle Senior Living, is where Samuel D. Riddle’s Mansion was located. Following his death in 1951, the contents of the mansion was auctioned off, including the trophies won by Man O’War and other horses. The estate was sold in 1957 to business partners Charles Lavin, a pioneering nursing home developer, and Dr. Jacob Rapp, who converted it into a Home for the Aged. Dr. Rapp’s niece Marjorie Light recalled a boring day when she was 10 years old accompanying her uncle as he measured each room for conversion. She was enraptured with the ballroom, however, with its black and white tile floor and gargoyle fountain mounted on the far wall. Dr. Rapp left his general practice in West Philadelphia and served as physician-in-residence. He and his family lived in the West Gate House, at 265 Glen Riddle Road. The East Gate House had a pool, but the building was demolished and the pool filled in. The Mansion became Suites for the Elderly, and the barn was converted to an Apartment Annex.

On the opposite side of Glen Riddle Road, at the site of the Tunbridge Apartments, was the location of the Glen Riddle Casino, a popular spot for banquets and annual farmer’s banquets.
Downstream from Glen Riddle Road, Chrome Run flows through a wooded area in the heart of Middletown Township. To the west is Howarth Road and to the east is Mystic Lane. Single family homes on large lots back up to the Chrome Run valley along both of these residential streets. Chrome Run makes a slight bend towards the southwest and flows under Howarth Road. A ford over the stream existed here until the late 1970s. Now there is a one-lane bridge.
At Howarth Road, a small unnamed tributary enters Chrome Run. It enters from the northeast after flowing past Olde House Lane. The other side of this street is where Chrome Run made a bend towards the southwest. The Olde House was built on the high ground above these two streams.

Chrome Run continues to flow towards the southwest parallel to Mt. Alverno Road. It reaches a large pond that results from a dam on Chrome Run at St. Andrews Drive. The pond is an attractive water feature in the Glenloch residential subdivision of Middletown Township. It might be related to one or more historic mills that existed in this vicinity. Morris Truman had a saw mill, which was erected sometime prior to 1777. By 1812 it was owned by Samuel Levis, but went out of use after this date.
Downstream from the saw mill was the Bottomley Woolen Mill. It was operated from 1810 until 1832 by James and John Bottomley. In 1832, it was taken over by James Miller and Robert Boyd, who made edge tools, bobbins, and paper at the mill. The building burned and went out of business in 1848.

Chrome Run continues to flow towards the southwest parallel to Mt. Alverno Road. It passes under the Chester Creek Rail Trail and enters Chester Creek on the other side from MGN Automotive along Pennell Road.

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Several hundred feet downstream from its confluence with Chrome Run, Chester Creek reaches Mt. Alverno Road after flowing behind Glen Mills Sand & Gravel and Snyder’s Ace Hardware & Home Center.

Snyder’s Ace Hardware & Home Center

Mt. Alverno Road

The covered bridge Mt. Alverno Road was replaced by a concrete bridge around the year 1920. In the early 18th century, before any kind of bridge was constructed here, the spot was known as Presbyterian Ford. This was the route that was taken by members of the Chester Creek mill communities to the Middletown Presbyterian Church, the first of its denomination in the area. It was established in 1729.

Chester Creek downstream from Mt. Alverno Road
On the east side of Chester Creek below Mt. Alverno Road was once a starch works. It was built around 1856 by William Barnett and ended production in 1921. The building burned down in 1933.

Chester Creek continues to flow towards the southeast. Towards the southwest is a hill formed by the valleys of Chester Creek to the east and north, West Branch Chester Creek to the west and the headwaters of Marcus Hook Creek to the south of Concord Road. The hill is traversed by Red Hill Road. On the hilltop are several landmark institutions, such as Neumann University and Mt. Hope Methodist Church.

Fisher’s Corners

Fisher’s Corners is a section of Aston Township where Aston Mills Road and Convent Road converge on Concord Road at a point where Concord Road bends towards both the southwest and the southeast. Aston Mills Road enters from the northwest and Convent Road enters from the northeast.

Neumann University

Neumann University was founded by the Sisters of St. Francis. It opened as the Our Lady of Angels College in the fall of 1965. It changed its name to Neumann College in 1980 when it became co-ed and in the early twenty-first century it became Neumann University when it added additional programs.
The university sits on land that was once part of the Dutton tract. In 1845, the land was purchased by an Episcopal clergyman named Benjamin S. Hethrington who established the Aston Ridge Seminary for Young Ladies. This institution went bankrupt in the following decade. The buildings and surrounding property was purchased by William Moroney in 1859, who then conveyed it to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. St. John Neumann was presiding as the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia at the time. The former Episcopal seminary became the Philadelphia Preparatory Seminary of St. Charles Borromeo until a new Catholic seminary was built in Overbrook and completed in 1871. The old seminary in Aston then came up for sale, and was purchased by the Sisters of St. Francis along with the surrounding 300 acres. The Sisters erected a new building for the Our Lady of Angels Convent in 1873 because the old seminary was too small. In 1965 they began educating girls after opening the Our Lady of Angels College next to the convent.

Mt. Hope Methodist Church

Aaron Mattson, the paper manufacturer who had a mill at what became John P. Crozer’s West Branch Mill, donated the land for the Mt. Hope Methodist Church in 1807. It was the first church building on record for Aston Township. Mt. Hope Methodist Church was enlarged in 1838 following the revivalist preaching of the itinerant Englishman James Caughey. The church was incorporated in 1860 and the parsonage constructed in 1877.

Near the Mt. Hope Methodist Church, Tryens Road goes off to the left from Concord Road. The first house on the left side of Tryens Road was built in 1684 and is the oldest house in Aston Township. It served as a station on the Underground Railroad. One of the escaped slaves who stopped here was a woman named Kitty who disguised herself as a servant. There was a trap door in the kitchen for hiding.
Crum Run

About a half mile downstream from its confluence with Chrome Run, Chester Creek is joined by another tributary that drains Middletown Township from the northeast, Crum Run.

Crum Run originates on the west side of PA Route 352, Middletown Road and flows towards the southwest under Copes Lane. It passes through a wooded area and skirts the edge of Indian Orchards to its south.

After flowing under Cricket Lane, it goes past the Hidden Hollow Swim Club, where it expands into a pond just before reaching Spring Valley Road. After flowing under Linville Road, Crum Run bends around the single-family home along Clover Circle and then wends its way through Linvilla Orchards.
Crum Run flows through Linvilla Orchards, which by the 21st century was one of the last working farms in Delaware County. On over 300 acres, an enormous variety of activities have taken place there. The farm market and garden center are surrounded by rows and rows of fruit trees and berry bushes that are the site of seasonal “pick your own” forays. Peaches are the biggest seller. 58 varieties yielded about 315 tons each year, and the 27 varieties of apples yielded about 200 tons. Other crops grown at Linvilla included apricots, plums, nectarines, pears, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. First planted in 2006, over 40,000 Douglas fir and Canaan fir were available for “cut your own tree” visits during the Christmas season. 5,000 were sold each year. Membership in swim clubs is an option, where both casual fun and swim and dive team practice and competitions take place at the Knowlton and Hidden Hollow swimming pools. There are hayrides, a playground, ponds for fishing, barnyard animals to visit, indoor mini golf, classes on a variety of topics such as gardening and cooking, a gift shop, and concerts. Seasonal events have become favorite family traditions, especially Pumpkinland and various festivals, such as Blueberry and Strawberry Festivals, when those fruit become ripe.
Farm Market and path towards Playland, Linvilla Orchards
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018

Garden Center, Linvilla Orchards
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
Linvilla Orchards once featured an 80-foot tall octagonal barn. It was a major area landmark until it burned down on August 16, 2002. It was originally built in 1889 as a dairy barn. The farm market operated out of the barn starting in the 1940s. It later also housed the
baker, gift shop, and offices. After the fire, when renovations were being done on the surviving foundation, a water well was discovered in the center of the structure. The well is believed to have pre-dated the building of the barn in 1889, and would have provided fresh water for the dairy cows that were fed and milked in the barn.

Lydia and her son Arthur Linvill bought the barn and the surrounding 110-acre farm in 1914. They began the business that grew into the grand enterprise that it is today by selling peaches from the porch of the house starting in 1918. As the family expanded through the generations, so did the business. Arthur’s sons Paul, Larry, and Donald worked on the farm, adding neighboring parcels and two swim clubs. In the mid-twentieth century, Paul attended a trade conference of the precursor to the North American Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association and brought back the idea of “agritainment.” Linvilla has since become a model of this combination of farming and entertainment. Margaret Fisher Linvill, who married Paul in 1957, opened and operated the gift shop upstairs in the octagonal barn from the 1980s until it burned in 2002. She also taught classes on flower arranging and wreath making, and created the farm’s Pumpkinland event.

In 1987, Larry announced he was ready to retire. Paul and Margaret didn’t have enough capital to buy him out, but then Middletown Township purchased 157 acres of the tract for $2.4 million to provide both public open space and the wherewithal for Linvilla Orchards to stay in the Linvill family. That year, Paul and Margaret’s four children came home to work on the farm. By the second decade of the 21st century, Jean Linvill Hanneman was the general manager and oversaw the garden center and Pumpkinland. Susan Linvill Jochum handled finances, payroll,
and the food services. Nancy Linvill Dole was the art director. Steven Linvill was in charge of maintenance and facilities in association with farm manager Norm Schultz.

The Linville Farmhouse and its historic porch where it all started
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018

At the edge of the Linvilla Christmas tree farm, Crum Run passes under the Chester Creek Rail Trail and then enters Chester Creek.

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Pyramid Materials Quarry

Opposite the confluence with Crum Run is located the Aston Industrial Park, which Chester Creek embraces within a northeastern pointing meander bend. The industrial park is dominated by a quarry belonging to Pyramid Materials, a source of road aggregate. This quarry is geologically notable as the only place where the two rock formations of Baltimore Gneiss and Wissahickon Schist can be seen in contact with each other.
Knowlton

At the southeast corner of the industrial park, where Chester Creek meanders back towards the south and flows under Knowlton Road, is the former site of the Knowlton Mills. This is the farthest south of the seven historic water-powered cotton mill hamlets of the Chester Creek valley. John P. Crozer was the owner after he added the mills to his growing enterprises, expanding them from the West Branch Mill and Crozerville farther upstream. Knowlton was named after his wife, Sally Knowles. Prior to that, it was known as Moggey’s Ford. Moggey’s grave was next to Chester Creek.

During the Great Flood of 1843, the wall of water reached a height of 33 feet at Knowlton. Crozer’s new factory was swept away by the water, and as it did so, the bell in its tower kept tolling. He rebuilt the mill in 1844.

By 1850, it was both spinning and weaving cotton. There were 1,548 spindles, and 160 looms. The mills were operated by Abraham Blakely and a partner at that time.

Prior to the arrival of John P. Crozer, the site of Knowlton Mills was occupied by a series of other enterprises. Elijah Tyson was assessed in the tax rolls as operating a saw mill there in 1807. The mill was bought in 1813 by Judah Dobson, who changed it into a copper-rolling mill. At that time, the road to Village Green in Aston was called Copper Mill Road. Now it is known as Knowlton Road.

In 1825, John D. Carter changed the mill into a cotton factory. It was a cotton spinning mill that was owned from 1829 to 1832 by Edward Darlington and Chester merchant Thomas Clyde. John D. Carter managed it for them. He had earlier operated Trimble’s Mill on the West Branch Chester Creek until it failed in 1816 due to cheaper British textile goods.

Edward Darlington (1795-1884) was a cousin of William Darlington, the physician, banker, botanist, and founder of many institutions in West Chester. Edward was born in West Chester, and attended the West Chester Academy, which was founded by his cousin William. He was an attorney who played a significant role in Delaware County, where he moved with his family at a young age. He read law with Samuel Edwards in Chester, and passed the bar in 1821. From 1833 until 1839 he was an Anti-Masonic and then a Whig member of the U.S. Congress for Pennsylvania’s 4th district, and advocated for manufacturing interests. He opposed Andrew Jackson’s veto of the charter for the Second Bank of the United States. He supported a tariff to protect the cotton industry. He opposed the expansion of slavery into new states and Washington, D.C. and opposed prohibiting the introduction of anti-slavery petitions in the House of Representatives. He supported the American Colonization Society. He was friend of fellow congressman James Buchanan. They had been on a committee together to receive the Marquis de Lafayette on his return visit to the U.S. in 1824. He was a director for both the Bank of Delaware County and the Delaware County Mutual Insurance Company. He moved to Media in 1851 in the year after it was founded as the new county seat, and served as the district attorney of Delaware County from 1851 until 1854.

In 1832, Robert Beatty and John O’Neil began manufacturing edge tools at the mill, until a fire in 1834. In the following year, the tilt mill and saw mill were purchased by John P. Crozer, along with a complex that included one brick and seven stone houses. Crozer built a new stone cotton mill in 1843, which was destroyed in that year’s big flood and rebuilt the following year.
Towards the southwest, Knowlton Road meets Concord Road and Pennell Road at Five Points in Aston Township at the edge of the Chester Creek watershed. Five Points was once known as Village Green.
The Seven Stars Hotel was erected at the intersection of Concord and Pennell Roads in 1738. It played a central role in the early life of the community. Thomas Vernon failed in his petition to the court to establish a tavern there in 1740, having lamented that there wasn’t such an establishment within easy reach of his house. Finally, James Johnson received a license to keep a “public house” at the Village Green in 1762, which is believed to have been at the hotel. The Seven Stars Hotel was a stage coach stop and watering place for horses and people for many years. It was also an election polling place.

The Seven Stars Hotel is believed to be where General Cornwallis spent the night of September 13th, 1777 after the Battle of Brandywine. According to Ashmead, Cornwallis had warned his troops not to rob the local residents, but three Hessian mercenaries were accused of robbing two families. Teenage girls from each family were able to identify the soldiers who then were found to be in possession of the stolen property. General Howe had them court-marshalled. For their punishment, they drew lots and the “winner” had the grim task of hanging the other two in the middle of Village Green.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows was chartered at the Seven Stars Hotel in 1831. In 1836, the Chester Creek Trade Association was formed there. They organized strikes at the cotton mills along Chester Creek in 1836 and 1842. They put forth demands for more pay or for fewer hours at the same pay. This was during a time when there was a higher demand for yarn and cloth. National attention began to be focused on conditions in the factories. In 1837, in the wake of a Senate investigation, William Shaw denounced child labor and the denial of education that resulted for the children. For their part, local mill owners John P. Crozer and Samuel W. Riddle wanted to see national limits on child labor. During the following years the industry muddled along during a prolonged recession following the Panic of 1837, but by 1842 the manufacturers had imposed their third 15% pay reduction since 1840. Workers went on strike again that year. They wanted a reversal of the pay reduction and an end to the practice of paying wages in the form of company store orders. The organizers of the strike went on trial on charges of riot and conspiracy. The jurors found them innocent of riot but guilty of conspiracy. Thomas S. Bell, the judge of the Delaware County Court of Sessions in Chester, in defining conspiracy said it was legal for workers in a combination to peacefully to turn out on wages and working conditions issues and to peacefully persuade their fellow workers and employers to their just cause. It just wasn’t legal to use force. There wasn’t enough evidence to convict anyone of riot pertaining to an alleged incident in which a “nobstick” or scab worker was knocked off the dam on Chester Creek and dunked in the millpond at Burt & Kerlin’s weaving mill. Finally, the mills reopened on the owner’s terms. At that time, products of the mills were selling at a low price.

In 1847, mill workers met in the Odd Fellows Hall at the Seven Stars Hotel to draw up a resolution to urge state legislators to pass a law limiting the workday to ten hours. The bill was finally presented by a sympathetic senator from Lehigh County, and the law was passed in 1848. It called for a maximum ten-hour day, a sixty-hour week, and prohibited children below age twelve from working. There were two major flaws in the law. Violations had to be brought about by suit in order for the mandated $50 fine to be collected, and minors from age 14 to 21 could work any number of hours by consent of their parents or guardians. The law was ignored for five years in Delaware County, where it was claimed that it amounted to unconstitutional interference and led to an unfavorable competitive position in relation to other states. The manufacturers were feeling increasingly uncomfortable, though, because they expected their workers to be law-
abiding and they were breaking the law themselves. They went so far as to travel to the industrial centers of Waltham and Lowell, Massachusetts to urge them to voluntarily adopt a ten-hour workday law in their state, so that they would be more comfortable with complying with the Pennsylvania law. Finally, led by John P. Crozer, the mill owners along Chester Creek complied with the law. Consequently, they found that the productivity in their mills went up.

South of Knowlton Road, Chester Creek is paralleled by Chester Creek Road on its northeastern bank.

An unnamed tributary flows out of the northeast, having originated at a fishing pond on Linvilla Orchards next to the Knowlton Swim Club. It flows parallel to Knowlton Road, passing under it twice near the southern terminus of the Chester Creek Rail Trail. The stream passes under Creek Road before entering Chester Creek.

Delaware County Field and Stream Association

About a quarter mile downstream from Knowlton Road, Chester Creek flows past the property of Delaware County Field and Stream Association, which is accessible from Creek Road.
About another quarter mile downstream, Chester Creek and Chester Creek Road intersect with Duttons Mill Road. Another small unnamed tributary flows into Chester Creek from the northeast, having originated in the woods behind Christ United Methodist Church. In 1966, the congregation moved to this location from 3rd & Jeffery Streets in Chester where it was known as South Chester Methodist Church.

Duttons Mill

The former site of Duttons Mill is along Chester Creek at Duttons Mill Road. It was also known as Forest Dale Mills. Thomas Dutton operated a tannery from 1790 until 1808. He supplied leather belts to the factories along Chester Creek that were so vital to the operation of their machinery. Thomas Dutton had witnessed the actions of General Cornwallis and the British army at Valley Green in Aston following the Battle of Brandywine. From 1808 until 1813 he joined a Quaker mission among the Seneca at Tunessassa and was involved with Handsome Lake and Cornplanter as they revitalized Seneca culture. For the following four years, Thomas Dutton was the director of the Delaware County Poorhouse. He returned to Aston after the death of his first wife. He is supposed to have introduced the first steam engine to Delaware County, which was built by William Parrish of Philadelphia.

In the 1830s, Jonathan Dutton operated the grist and saw mills at this site. They were washed away in the Great Flood of 1843, and rebuilt the following year. The mills were on the west bank of the creek and the owner’s mansion was on the right bank. The mansion was built after 1843.

View of the mansion at Dutton Mill

The covered bridge at this location was replaced by a concrete bridge in 1923.
Before this mill site was owned by the Dutton family, Thomas Cobourne built the second grist mill in the colony of Pennsylvania at this location in 1687. After petitioning the court, he was able to break the monopoly on milling held by Caleb Pusey, who was William Penn’s official miller. This happened the same year the Edgmont Great Road was laid out, providing ready access between the grist mill and the surrounding farms that were being established. The Edgmont Great Road, now known as PA Route 352, is just a mile to the northwest along Dutton Mill Road from the site of the mill. The wooden mill was replaced with a building built of stone in 1750.

In 1775 the mill was bought by Nicholas Fairlamb. A boulting mill for sifting flour and a saw mill were added. One source says that the mills were sold to Jonathan Dutton in 1792.

On the west bank of Chester Creek in Aston Township, just downstream from Dutton Mill Road, is a current industrial structure – the Endless Pools Factory Showroom.
Borough of Brookhaven

Once Chester Creek passes under Dutton Mill Road, it forms the boundary between Brookhaven Borough to the northeast and Aston Township to the southwest. Less than a half mile downstream, a very small unnamed tributary enters Chester Creek from the north. Its source is behind the Brookhaven Swim Club which is located along Chester Creek Road.

Chester Creek from Creek Road in Brookhaven Borough

In 1902, the newly formed Chester Water Company built a filtration and water storage facility on Harrison’s Hill on the south side of Dutton Mill Road where it meets Edgmont Avenue (PA Route 352). The facility was designed to supply water to Chester Township and the City of Chester during the days before the Borough of Brookhaven was incorporated from Chester Township in 1945.

The borough experienced a period of rapid growth during the 1950s and 1960s. Edgmont Avenue became its central commercial corridor with numerous shopping centers dating from that era. The town remained relatively unchanged until 2014, when the Chester Water Company sold 56 acres of its property between Dutton Mill Road and Coeburn Boulevard to developers. Residents questioned the development of the only remaining open space in the borough and any need for another shopping center. Developers moved ahead on building an even more giant Giant Food Store, which moved there from its smaller previous location across Edgmont Avenue. The development, called the Shoppes at Brookhaven, also included an LA Fitness, a Pet Valu, and a Starbucks. An existing baseball field on Edgmont Avenue that was leased by the borough was relocated to the other side of the property.
Bridgewater Mill

A bit farther downstream, Chester Creek flows under Bridgewater Road, at the former site of the Bridgewater Paper Company Mills. Joseph Willcox and Company had a paper mill at Bridgewater on Chester Creek from 1866 until 1872. It was also the Pennellton Mill, and later the American Rendering Plant. The location is now the home of Giant Constructors, Inc.

The Bridgewater Farms subdivision of Aston Township which extends south of Bridgewater Road to Baldwin Run was part of Chester Township until 1960, when residents seceded from Chester Township and joined Aston Township. Children from the neighborhood continued to attend Chester Township schools for the next ten years until the Penn-Delco School District board was ordered to accept students from the Bridgewater Farms neighborhood.

After merging with Chester Creek Road at the base of the bridge, Bridgewater Road continues to follow the course of Chester Creek on its east bank. Where Brookhaven Road merges with Bridgewater Road is the location of the Brookhaven Borough wastewater treatment plant.

Shepard Run

A tributary called Shepard Run flows into Chester Creek at this location. It originates a short distance to the north within a woodlot near the Thomas Cobourn Elementary School.

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Trimble Run

Historically, another small tributary entered Chester Creek near here. It was called Trimble Run, and is memorialized through the name of the Trimble Run neighborhood of Brookhaven.

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Toby Farms

At this southern end of Aston Township, Chester Creek forms the boundary between Aston and Chester Township to the east. The small portion of Chester Township to the east of the creek comprises the Toby Farms subdivision and includes Toby Farms Elementary School. After Hurricane Floyd struck in 1999, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Authority (PEMA) bought fifteen damaged homes that were located in the floodplain at Toby Farms and in the City of Chester.

Baldwin Run

Baldwin Run flows into Chester Creek from the west at a point opposite Worrilow Park, which is located within the Toby Farms neighborhood.

Baldwin Run originates in Aston Borough, where its source behind the Dutton Mill Village Shopping Center along PA Route 452, Pennell Road. Towards the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, the shopping center mostly consisted of restaurants – Elliott’s, Pizza Hut, Lucky Wok Chinese, and Applebee’s Neighborhood Grill & Bar. There was also a Retro Fitness in the back in case diners needed to work off their meals.
After Baldwin Run flows under PA Route 452, Pennell Road, it enters Upper Chichester Township.
Dutton Run

Baldwin Run is joined from the north by a very small tributary called Dutton Run. It originates behind some large commercial and industrial structures that line Dutton Mill Road that are at the southern edge of the Aston Industrial Park.

IceWorks Skating Complex

On the north side of Dutton Mill Road near its intersection with Pennell Road, PA Route 452 in Aston, is the large ice skating complex known as IceWorks. It opened in 1997 with both an Olympic-sized rink and a National Hockey League-sized rink, but added two more NHL-sized rinks in 2001. The facility also includes many other amenities, such as training rooms, two dining establishments, banquet and birthday party rooms, a pro shop, and an arcade. As of 2013, it provided the home rinks of over 180 hockey teams at many levels from college to elementary school, and from adult to youth club leagues. IceWorks has also hosted many competitions, including the U.S. Curling Nationals, the U.S. Speed Skating Nationals, as well as regional and sectional championships for U.S. Figure Skating. IceWorks employs many professional coaches and trainers involved with the figure skating and hockey youth programs and it is a center for many National, International, and Olympic competitors. It is also a fun place to go when the rinks are scheduled for a casual open skate outing.

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To the south of Baldwin Run in the vicinity of its confluence with Dutton Run, is a petroleum tank farm of the Sun Oil Company. Baldwin Run continues to flow towards the east and into Chester Township.
Bridgewater Industrial Park

On the north bank of Baldwin Run is the Bridgewater Industrial Park. There are many industries represented there. Baldwin Run skirts the edge of Burman’s Medical Supplies, 3M-Dyneon, and AEX Group.

Sun Center Studios

On the south bank of Baldwin Run is the I-95 Industrial Campus Park, which also includes many industries such as Frito-Lay and Ingersoll Rand. Baldwin Run flows right along the edge of the 33-acre property belonging to Jeffrey Rotwitt’s Sun Center Studios. Between 2010 and 2019, nine major movies had been made there. M. Night Shyamalan has made it his home studio, including for the making of the flop After Earth with Will Smith (2013), the hit Split (2016), and the final installment in the Unbreakable trilogy, Glass (2019). The Rocky sequel Creed (2015) was filmed there, and Bryan Cranston and Kevin Hart cracked up the studio during the filming of The Upside (2017). In 2019, Jeffrey Rotwitt announced that he was optimistic about finally getting funding to build a 175-room hotel, and outdoor event space and an indoor theme park as the Mid-Atlantic answer to Universal Studios and Walt Disney World.

At the east end of the studio lot, Baldwin Run flows under Concord Road. On the other side of the road, Baldwin Run forms the boundary between Chester Township on the south and Aston Township on the north. Along Concord Road and just south of Baldwin Run on the Chester Township side is the 2SP Brewing Company. The stream then turns towards the southeast past Independent Container Line.

Southwest Delaware County Sewer Authority

Baldwin Run then flows past the Southwest Delaware County Sewer Authority treatment plant on its north shore in Aston Township. The plant is accessible by way of a road called Catania Way that runs down the west bank of Chester Creek from Bridgewater Road.

Baldwin Run joins Chester Creek across from Worrilow Park.

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Below its confluence with Baldwin Run, Chester Creek flows entirely within Chester Township as it bends towards the southeast and then towards the east around Toby Farms.
As Chester Creek turns sharply to the east, it flows past the Caleb Pusey Historical Site in the Borough of Upland. Here the creek forms the boundary between Chester Township and Upland Borough to the north. With the establishment of Pennsylvania in 1681, Caleb Pusey (1651-1727) was the official miller of William Penn’s new colony. He purchased 250 acres of land from William Penn in the lower Chester Creek valley. He had exclusive rights to operate the Chester Mills, a grist mill and saw mill on Chester Creek here where his 1683 house still stands. It is the only extant building in North America within which William Penn is known to have entered. It is also considered to be the oldest surviving English house in Pennsylvania. The form of the house and its mode of construction became the standard for rural Pennsylvania architecture. It originally consisted of a single room with a loft. Its rubble fieldstone masonry and wood shingle roof characterized the architecture of the region. The stone was collected by clearing the fields or from local outcrops. Mortar was produced by burning limestone or oyster shells in large open kilns.

The Chester Mills were the first grist mill and saw mill built in Penn’s new colony. They were an investment made by a stock company that came to be known as the Free Society of Traders. The mills were located at the head of tide on Chester Creek. Caleb Pusey was Penn’s mill manager and agent. His training had been as a last maker, that is, a maker of shoe molds, but
he must have had good business sense to have been chosen as Penn’s mill manager. He had come in 1682 with Penn aboard the Welcome. The carpenter Richard Townsend and several other investors were among the 100 people also on board. It was Townshend’s responsibility to erect the mill. The millstones, gears, and pre-cut timbers were shipped aboard the Welcome. Back in London, the prefabricated mill had been built, tested, and disassembled for its journey. Within a year of assembling the mill in Chester, Townsend left for Germantown to build his own mill.

In 1686 at the first Court held in Chester, Caleb Pusey petitioned against a water mill being set up farther upstream on Chester Creek by Thomas Cobourne. This was an important test case against Penn’s manorial privilege of monopolizing mill construction in the colony. In Penn’s absence, his deputy governor William Markham also ordered Thomas Cobourne to desist. Cobourne’s neighbors supported him in their need for a new mill. The will of the people was heeded and Penn’s monopoly was broken. Thomas Cobourne was able to establish another grist mill on Chester Creek at what is now Duttons Mill Road in the Borough of Brookhaven. Afterwards, mills proliferated throughout the stream valleys at the points where the power of falling water could be tapped. By 1694-1695 the tax records show levies on five mills. In addition to Pusey’s Chester Mills and Cobourne’s mill, there were mills in Darby, Haverford, and Concord Townships by this time.

Before the end of the century, floods destroyed the Chester Mills twice. They were rebuilt, but they were not making a very good return on the initial investment. By 1699, Samuel Carpenter was the only remaining partner with Penn and Pusey in the milling venture. By then they had started making a profit. A weathervane with the initials of the three men marked the occasion of Penn’s celebratory visit to the Caleb Pusey house that year. It is a famous colonial icon. It was put on the roof of the mill manager’s house, but it “squeaked and groaned so noisily” that it was removed. It now resides peacefully at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

1699 commemorative weather vane
Image: Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Before he retired, Caleb Pusey added a fulling mill and a dyeing mill to the operations at Chester Mills. In 1845, John P. Crozer purchased the mills, and the land and other buildings associated with them. In 1848 the original grist mill burned. The community still thrived. John P. Crozer built a schoolhouse in 1849, which still stands at the Schoolhouse Museum. The building was purchased in 1966 by the Pusey and Worley families and restored by The Friends of the Caleb Pusey House in 1975 and 1976.
Another historic building at the Caleb Pusey Historical Site is the Pennock Log House, which was relocated there in 1965. It was originally built in 1790 in Springfield Township by Caleb Pusey’s great great granddaughter Lydia Jackson Pennock and her husband William Pennock.
Many stories reveal the character of Caleb Pusey. For example, in 1688, there were rumors of Lenape outrages along the Brandywine Creek. It was reported that three families had been massacred and 500 warriors were encamped along the banks of the creek. Caleb Pusey led a delegation from his home along Chester Creek to investigate. They carried no weapons. What they found at the Lenape village was the chief suffering from a lame foot. He was lying on the ground with his head on a pillow as the women worked and the children played around him. When Caleb Pusey told him about the rumors that were circulating, the chief was quite dismayed.
Chester Creek at the Caleb Pusey Historical Site

Entrance to Caleb Pusey Historical Site past contemporary houses in the Borough of Upland

Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
Delaware County Incinerator

Downstream from the Caleb Pusey house, Chester Creek flows under Upland Road. On the south side of the creek, the road continues to the southwest into Chester Township with the name Incinerator Road. Along this road is found the incinerator of the Delaware County Solid Waste Authority.

Borough of Upland

Downstream from the bridge for Upland Road, Chester Creek forms the boundary between Upland Borough to the north and the City of Chester to the south.

John P. Crozer established the Borough of Upland around the original house and mill seat of Caleb Pusey during the last major expansion of his business and philanthropic endeavors. He built his mansion on the hill and named the town Upland after the colonial Swedish community that William Penn had renamed Chester upon his arrival.

By the early 1840s, John P. Crozer and other mill owners along Chester Creek had entered a period of prosperity after recovering from the economic depression that followed the Panic of 1837. A protective tariff was restored, which also benefited manufacturers. John P. Crozer had profits from his enterprises at West Branch, Crozerville, and Knowlton. He invested his money in factories in Upland that were much bigger than anything he had previously built. In 1844, John P. Crozer purchased the 66-acre Flower estate, which included the Caleb Pusey house and Chester Mills, for $13,000. Technology had changed, and it was finally economically viable to use coal-generated steam to power mills rather than water. John P. Crozer built three factories
along Chester Creek in Upland that still stand and are now used by other businesses. Even though industry in the age of steam power no longer needed to be located directly along the creeks, they required space for the larger factories that steam power allowed, and access to the newly developing railroad network to be supplied with coal and raw materials and access to greater markets. The Chester Creek valley on the flat coastal plain nearer to the Delaware River provided these conditions. John P. Crozer built his first five-story cotton factory and tenement houses just downstream from the colonial Chester Mills. After he built his mansion on the hillside he moved into it in 1847. By then, the town of Upland had 46 tenement houses for the growing work force. At first, an 80-horsepower steam engine supplemented water power that was provided by a long head race to the dam one mile upstream. Two more large factories were added downstream closer to Kerlin Street. Before long, all the factories were entirely steam powered.

Crozer Mills Enterprise Center in two of Crozer’s old mills in Upland
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
The Borough of Upland was incorporated in 1849. The first commissioners were George Leiper, Edward Darlington, Samuel Edwards, Daniel Lammot, and John M. Broomall.
John P. Crozer had the Upland Baptist Church built in 1852 as a center of worship for the community. It was one of many widely ranging philanthropic projects that John P. Crozer embarked upon after establishing Upland. These included the University of Lewisburg in central Pennsylvania, which later was named Bucknell University after Crozer’s son-in-law William Bucknell. The co-educational normal school in Upland became the Crozer Theological Seminary after his death. He also established the Pennsylvania Baptist Education Society to support the education of Baptist ministers. He was president of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society and on the board of the American Colonization Society. He was instrumental in getting the United States to recognize the nation of Liberia in 1862 and was involved in introducing coffee as a cash crop there. During the Civil War, John P. Crozer worked along with John Wanamaker as members of the United States Christian Association, which performed a similar combined function as the modern Red Cross and USO as well as a chaplain’s office. He also served terms as president of various charitable institutions, such as the Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded Children in Elwyn, and the Home for Friendless Children and Women’s Hospital, both in Philadelphia.
Crozer Run

Crozer Run is a very small tributary of Chester Creek which flows south out of the Borough of Upland and into Chester Creek near Kerlin Street and the 19th century factory buildings built by John P. Crozer.

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Crozer Park

In the City of Chester opposite the first of John P. Crozer’s former Upland factories is Crozer Park. As Chester Creek flows past this factory, it bends from southeast to northeast and flows in that direction along the edge of the rest of the park to Kerlin Street.
Within Crozer Park, along Finland Drive, is the Finland Memorial. It was dedicated in 1938 on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the arrival of Finns to the Delaware Valley as settlers in the colony of New Sweden. The historical marker says that this particular tract “along Delaware River from Marcus Hook to Chester River” was called Finland, and was given to Captain Hans Ammundson Besk by Queen Christina in 1653.
At the east end of the Crozer Park, Chester Creek flows under Kerlin Street. The concrete county bridge over the creek at Kerlin Street dates from 1922.
Bronze plaque on county bridge that carries Kerlin Street over Chester Creek
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Chester Creek beneath the Kerlin Street bridge, Crozer Park
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
Family of Canada Geese beneath the Kerlin Street bridge
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
Downstream from Kerlin Street, Chester Creek bends once again towards the southeast. The Crozer Chester Medical Center occupies the east bank of the creek in Upland. The former Crozer Theological Seminary is now used as offices of the Crozer Chester Medical Center. The seminary was originally established as a co-educational normal school by John P. Crozer, but after his death his heirs developed it into a Baptist seminary in 1867. It was a center for the teaching of the Social Gospel. Henry Vedder was its most vocal proponent at the seminary. In 1925, advocates of the more conservative and traditional approach to theology within the Baptist establishment started the Eastern Baptist Seminary in St. David’s, Pennsylvania in response to the teachings at Crozer. Martin Luther King, Jr. learned about the Social Gospel at the Crozer Theological Seminary and graduated from there in 1951. In 1970, the seminary merged with the Colgate Rochester Divinity School and moved to New York.
Next to the seminary building along the north side of the parking lot is a building constructed of green serpentinite stone. It looks like a chapel. It is Pearl Hall, the former library of the Crozer Theological Seminary. Its construction, book collections, and an endowment fund were provided by William Bucknell, who was also the benefactor of Bucknell University. It opened in 1871 in honor of his late wife Margaret Crozer, the daughter of John P. Crozer. The name Margaret is derived from the Greek word “margaron”, which means “pearl.”

William Bucknell (1811-1890) was born in nearby Marcus Hook. He began his work life as a wood carver, and then invested his earnings into a real estate business. He financed the installation of the first gas lines in Chester and founded the Chester Gas Company in 1856. He then moved onto gas investments in Philadelphia, and had ownership in various railroads, coal mines, and iron mines. He saved the failing University at Lewisburg in 1882, which was then renamed Bucknell University in his honor.
Conrail Freight Line

At the southern end of the Crozer Chester Medical Center, Chester Creek flows under bridge for the Conrail freight line which runs closely parallel to the bridge for Interstate 95. This particular rail line was originally laid down by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1886 after they lost their bidding war with the Pennsylvania Railroad to acquire the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad, which crosses further downstream.

Interstate 95

Chester Creek passes under the bridge which carries Interstate 95 over it.
City of Chester

Past the Crozer Chester Medical Center in the Borough of Upland, and downstream from the bridges for Conrail and Interstate 95, Chester Creek meanders for the rest of its length through the City of Chester on its way to the Delaware River.

The four-square miles comprising the City of Chester are home to close to 34,000 people as of the 2010 census. Chester was the county seat of Chester County until Delaware County was formed in 1789, after which Chester became the seat of Delaware County until the county government moved to Media in 1851. Chester was a borough from 1795 until it was incorporated as a city in 1866. Chester was a center for manufacturing from the 1840s until as late as the 1960s. During the Civil War and during subsequent wars, Chester had a major ship-building industry, reaching its height during World War II. During the decade of the 1910s, the predominant textile mills in Chester were replaced by heavy industry. By the early 1950s, the dominant players in Chester and adjacent boroughs were Sun Oil, the Ford Motor Company, American Viscous, Scott Paper, Western Electric, and the Baldwin Motor Works. As manufacturing declined later in the 20th century, massive disinvestment resulted in population loss, increased joblessness and increased crime. Chester languished as one of the nation’s poorest and most violent cities. One in three residents lived in poverty, and for decades Chester had the highest homicide rate of any city in the United States.

Major developments along the waterfront in the 21st century, such as Harrah’s Casino, which opened in 2007, and a Major League Soccer stadium were meant to jump-start new investment in the City of Chester. In 2008, local lawmakers and private investors offered nearly $500 million to create an attractive destination along the Delaware River front. The centerpiece was Talen Energy Stadium, the home field of the Philadelphia Union, the area’s first professional soccer team. Governor Ed Rendell pledged $47 million in state funds. There was meant to be surrounding housing, restaurants, a convention center, and a supermarket and other stores. The stadium opened in 2010, but the public didn’t stay and spend any money in the restaurants and stores after the games. The supermarket, which would have addressed the City of Chester’s food desert problem, never materialized.

In 2019, the Philadelphia Union’s parent company, Keystone Sports & Entertainment, launched new development plans for the area. In partnership with the Riverfront Alliance of Delaware County, they requested proposals from twenty architectural firms to submit a “Chester Waterfront Master Plan” that would include a sports-and-entertainment and health-and-wellness campus to surround the stadium. Successful redevelopment was critical for the City of Chester at this juncture. The city had been in the Pennsylvania Act 47 program overseeing financially distressed cities since 1995. The city was granted a three-year extension in 2018, but if it could not pay its debts by 2021 the state could declare a financial emergency and take control over Chester. Meanwhile, Mayor Thaddeus Kirkland, first elected in 2015, formed a 17-member economic development committee in April 2019. That, and federal designation of the Chester waterfront as a Qualified Opportunity Zone in 2018 providing investors tax breaks for development projects, were promising developments.

Meanwhile, the Fare & Square supermarket opened in 2013 and the old Delaware County Electric Co. building was converted into The Wharf, consisting of offices, including that of the Philadelphia Union’s headquarters.
Grassroots efforts of the community to reinvigorate the economy and culture in Chester were showing signs of greater success than the big development projects alone. A visionary figure in the revival of Chester was Devon Walls. He was inspired by an uncle who had been arrested in the civil rights demonstrations in Chester during the 1960s. His uncle advised him to make sure he did two things in his life: go to Africa and to build a community in Chester. He started in 2011 by establishing the Locomotion Café as a place where friends could meet and play music. Soon, his dreams included resurrecting the decaying downtown corridor. In 2014, he became the first African-American to own a building on the Avenue of the States, the former dominant retail block of Chester. Most of downtown Chester had been owned by Korean immigrants. By 2019, he owned 14 properties and was working towards a plan of setting up a gift shop, flower shop, a local market, and a farmer’s market. The Italian Brothers Restaurant became the Brothers Jazz Café. Young chefs were trained there in the “Little Chefs” program. The MJ Freed Theater building includes four venues – the MJ Freed Theater itself, Abstract Space, Chester Made Maker Space, and the Dandridge Room. The theater seats 220 people for performances, films, and receptions. The Abstract Space seats up to 110 people, also for films, performances, and community gatherings. The Chester Made Maker Space promotes arts and culture in Chester, in partnership with the PA Humanities Council. The Dandridge Room is a large dance space and exercise studio above the theater.

Chester had been down before. By the middle of the 19th century, the borough of Chester was little more than a small fishing and boat-building village that happened to also be home of the Delaware County courthouse, which most of the population of the county complained was too far away. The seat of Delaware County government then moved to Media in 1851, which would have left Chester as a dying fishing town. But Chester and its neighboring Delaware River townships were ripe for economic development. Inspired by the success of John P. Crozer in establishing the mills and community of Upland in the 1840s, other industrialists invested in land and capital purchases of equipment in and around Chester. They, too, took advantage of the favorable post-depression national economic conditions, the technological breakthroughs in large-scale steam power, and the favorable geographic location for large industry along the coastal plain flats near the Delaware River.

John M. Broomall, who was an influential defense attorney at the time, invested in riverfront property between Chester and Marcus Hook. In 1849, with John P. Crozer as a partner and Edward Darlington as their legal counsel, he purchased a 55-acre farm on the west side of Chester Creek. After buying additional neighboring farms, they planned out the development of Chester’s South Ward. On the map of the City of Chester in the Hopkins 1870 atlas of Delaware County, the South Ward is shown extending from Chester Creek to Lamokin Run, which is shown running towards the river just west of Tilghman Street. Lamokin Run has long since been routed through pipes beneath the paved surface of the city. Near its headwaters was the Lamokin Station of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad. The station is now a triangular lot at the head of Broomall Street, next to an electric substation along Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor. When Broomall and Crozer had the streets for the South Ward laid out, they also built the houses and factories and sold them at cost, but taking up to 75% on the mortgages for the land. In 1853, Broomall bought out his partner Crozer. Broomall used his profits to restore the old Market Square in the historical center of Chester, which became part of the Middle Ward. The Middle Ward extended from Chester Creek to Ridley Creek south of the railroad, which still
parallels 6th Street. John M. Broomall bought the burned out home and store of Preston Eyre, who was Edward Darlington’s father-in-law.

Another person who invested in the old center of Chester early on was James Campbell. He started out as a loom boss for John S. Phillips at Rockdale Mills. He then became the manager of James Houghton’s factory at Pennsgrove. When that enterprise failed in the Panic of 1837, Campbell stayed in the Chester Creek valley. He had married the daughter of John Garsed, who had set him up at Pennsgrove. George Leiper took an interest in him, and built a cotton factory for him to rent in Leiperville where he became very successful. With his profits, he invested in the central part of Chester by refurbishing its old buildings. He bought the old jail, the workhouse, and an adjacent bowling alley and renovated them. He also brought to town a steam engine and a hundred power looms and soon expanded his enterprises, at the center of which was Pioneer Mills. He was recognized as a pioneer in bringing modern industry to Chester, but he lost it all in the Panic of 1857.

John M. Broomall’s future father-in-law, John Larkin, Jr., purchased an 83-acre farm in 1850 and developed what became the North Ward of Chester. The North Ward lay between Chester and Ridley Creeks north of the railroad and 6th Street. The 1870 Hopkins map shows the northern extent of the city ending around 16th Street near the Pennslyvania Military Academy, which is now Widener University. John Larkin, Jr. was the first mayor of the City of Chester after it was incorporated as a city in 1866. He continued to profit from his real estate investments in the North Ward, selling his last lot in 1881.

On of the most successful purchasers of Larkin’s investments was Abraham Blakeley, a Lancashire weaver who emigrated to the United States in 1828 at the age of 22. At first he was a weaver in Germantown and Pottsville, but first arrived in the Chester Creek valley as John P. Crozer’s weaving foreman at the West Branch Mill in 1833. His first wife was an Irish woman he married in 1836 who died within a year, leaving him a son. In 1838 he married Maria Miles, a protégé of Sophia du Pont. He went into partnership with Phineas Lownes at the Knowlton Mills in 1846, leasing a factory from John P. Crozer. In 1853, he sold his interest at Knowlton, and moved to a three-story brick mill in the North Ward of Chester built for him by John Larkin, Jr. Four years later he bought out Larkin’s interest and continued to prosper. Before long, the Arasapha Mills of Abraham Blakeley and Sons comprised a dozen buildings in which 200 workers ran 8500 spindles and 270 looms powered by Corliss engines. They manufactured work cloth, tickings, denim and striped cloth. The main Arasapha Mills complex was on the northeast corner of Tenth and Walnut Streets, at the headwaters of what was then called Mundy’s Run. The stream ran to a canal along Canal Street that opened upon a navigable portion Ridley Creek next to Algodon Mills. The canal is now largely filled in and occupies a wooded portion of Ridley Creek’s west bank between Hinkson Street, East 8th Street, and Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor rail line.

To live in a home suited to a man of his stature in the community, Abraham Blakeley bought Bishop Alonzo Potter’s mansion. He served for many years on Chester City Council and was leader of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He died in 1886. Abraham Blakeley was the great grandfather of Mrs. Bates, who named her farm along Middletown Road in Middletown Township after his mills. Arasapha Farm is one of the last working farms in Delaware County, which also operates as a seasonal attraction such as the Haunted Hayride and Bates Motel around Halloween.
Meanwhile, by the beginning of the Civil War, Chester had been transformed into a major manufacturing center. It was the home of a substantial cotton industry, and there were shipyards, machine shops, iron foundries, and furniture factories.
After flowing past Christopher Columbus Elementary School, Chester Creek forms a sharp northeastern-pointing meander bend which takes it around Chester High School and its associated ball fields and grounds.

Deshong Park

On the eastern shore of this bend in Chester Creek is Deshong Park, which once included the mansion of industrialist and quarry owner Alfred O. Deshong and his surrounding estate. Upon his death in 1913, he bequeathed his 22-acre property to the City of Chester. An art museum is on the grounds, which he built to house his collection of 19th century American and European paintings and Japanese and Chinese lacquerware. The endowment and museum declined in the 1970s and the Deshong trust was dissolved in 1984 by Delaware County Court Judge Francis J. Catania. The real estate went to the county development authority and the art collection went to Widener University. The former art museum building has since been used for receptions and other events. The mansion was considered unsafe and was demolished in 2014.
On Earth Day in 2017, several groups from the community converged on Deshong Park to help revitalize it as a public space. The event coincided with the annual stream clean-up organized by the Chester-Ridley-Crum Watersheds Association and also included people from the Chester City branch of the Salvation Army, the Cambodian Association, Harrah’s Casino, Penn State’s Pennsylvania Sea Grant, and Widener University.

Ann Foulds of the Pennsylvania Sea Grant describing the life cycle of the American Eel and its relationship with freshwater mussels; Chester mayor Thaddeus Kirkland is on far right

Young American eel in the elver stage of life
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2017
Chester Creek makes a meander bend towards the southwest as it passes under U.S.
Route 13, which is 9th Street in this part of Chester. Where the creek bends back towards the
southeast, it flows between two ends of a discontinuous portion of 8th Street.
Chester Creek then flows under 7th Street. Just to the east of the bridge over Chester Creek are New Life Ministries on the north side of the street and Cityteam on the south side. The services these two organizations and Chester Eastside Ministries provide are vital to the city’s well-being.

View to the east from the bridge over Chester Creek at 7th Street, Chester
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Chester Creek downstream from 7th Street
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
One block downstream, Chester Creek passes under the bridges for 6th Street and the railway for both the SEPTA commuter line to Wilmington and Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor. This was the right-of-way that originally belonged to the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad as part of its Darby Improvement project.

Sixth Street, Chester, looking east, 1902
Photo by Stephen H. Appleton
Media Historic Archives Commission

Sixth Street, Chester, looking west, 1902
Photo by Stephen H. Appleton
Media Historic Archives Commission
As Chester Creek makes another meander bend towards the southwest, it flows under the bridge for 5th Street. Just to the east of the creek is the original Chester town center, which includes the 1724 Old Chester Courthouse. This is the oldest public building in continuous use in the United States. It served as the Chester County courthouse from 1724 until 1786. It was used as the Delaware County courthouse from the year Delaware County was formed in 1789 until 1851 when the county seat moved to Media. It was Chester Borough Hall from that year until 1866 when Chester was incorporated as a city, and then served as Chester City Hall for many years.

When England declared war against Spain at the outset of Queen Anne’s War, soldiers were enlisted at the courthouse for an expedition to Cuba. Anthony Wayne rallied and drilled his troops here in January 1776. Nearly fifty years later, when Marquis de Lafayette returned to the United States to be honored for his role in the American War for Independence, he was entertained in this building.

The Old Chester Courthouse is on the Avenue of the States, which is the former Market Street. Across the street is the former location of the Pennsylvania Arms, a noted stopping place.
on the Post Road (now U.S. Route 13) that was built in 1747 and demolished in 1952. George Washington stopped there following the Battle of the Brandywine in September 1777.

The headquarters of the Delaware County Historical Society is right next door to the Old Chester Courthouse, to its south.

![Delaware County Historical Society](image)

The current Chester City Hall and the offices of the Chester Water Authority and DELCOR (the Delaware County Regional Water Authority) are also just east of Chester Creek in the neighborhood between 5th Street and PA Route 291, the Industrial Highway.

**Chester Water Authority**

The City of Chester created the Chester Water Authority in 1939, when it was first known as the Chester Municipal Authority. Under its auspices, the city purchased all the assets of the investor-owned Chester Water Service Company. This private utility itself had its origins in the city-owned waterworks dating back to 1866. That was the year that the Pennsylvania state assembly passed an act to allow the City of Chester to build a waterworks, if the majority of property owners voted in favor. The South Ward of the city adopted the act, and starting in 1868 pumped Delaware River water through the South Ward Waterworks into a 1.5 million-gallon reservoir on Concord Road at Pusey Street. The plant was located at the foot of Franklin Street on the Delaware River. As the city and its industries grew, the demand for water increased. The waterworks were sold to the investor-owned New Chester Water Company in 1885. The demand for water continued to increase tremendously as Chester’s industry continued to boom. The company reorganized in 1927, and its name was changed to the Chester Water Service Company.
The quality of the water coming from the Delaware River had been deteriorating and reached a critical point of contamination over the next decade. After the City of Chester bought back the waterworks and all the other water company assets in 1939, a new source of water was investigated. In 1941, Delaware County Republican leader John McClure and four associates on the Chester city council were indicted for profiting from a sale of the waterworks to a private syndicate. They were acquitted in 1943 but told to return the money. Finally, in 1948 a dam and associated water facilities began to be built on the Octoraro Creek, located 40 miles west of Chester. High quality water from the new Octoraro Reservoir was available starting in 1951. The Chester Municipal Authority built its headquarters at Fifth and Welsh Streets in 1963. It changed its name to the Chester Water Authority in 1965. In response to a severe drought in the 1960s, the authority doubled its capacity by developing an additional source of water from the Susquehanna River, which was pumped along a ten-mile pipeline to the Octoraro Treatment Plant. By the second decade of the 21st century, the authority had 42,000 customers and provided water to 200,000 people in 43 communities in southern Chester County, western Delaware County, and the southern tip of Lancaster County.

In 2019, the Chester Water Authority was subject to a hostile takeover attempt by investor-owned Aqua Pennsylvania, potentially creating another turn in its public-private ownership history. Aqua Pennsylvania sued to prevent the water authority from following through on its proposed $60 million bailout of the City of Chester. The proposal was for the Chester Water Authority to pay off the city’s debt in exchange for a 40-year agreement to keep the city from selling the authority to Aqua Pennsylvania. The bailout would be paid for by a 10% rate increase that the Chester Water Authority said would be less than the high rates ordinarily charged by Aqua Pennsylvania. As one of the Chester Water Authority’s customers, Aqua Pennsylvania said they would be harmed by the agreement. They had been paying $750,000 a year to the water authority to buy bulk water to supplement the supply to Aqua Pennsylvania’s customers in neighboring systems.

DELCORA (left) and the Chester Water Authority (right)
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

DELCORA (Delaware County Regional Water Quality Control Authority)

The Delaware County Regional Water Quality Control Authority (DELCORA) was created by Delaware County Council in 1971.

The water company Aqua Pennsylvania announced its purchase of DELCORA’s system in September 2019 for $276.5 million. It was to be the private water company’s largest purchase
to date, and the largest ever privatization in Pennsylvania of a public water or wastewater system. With the acquisition, Aqua Pennsylvania added 165,000 additional retail wastewater customers in 42 towns to the 29,000 wastewater customers they already had. The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission was expected to approve the purchase within a year. Aqua Pennsylvania’s main business was to provide its 450,000 customers with drinking water, but the company began expanding into wastewater when laws became favorable for the acquisition of such systems. A 2012 Pennsylvania law allowed a utility to spread its acquisition costs among customers throughout the state, and a 2016 law allowed investor-owned utilities to charge rate-paying customers for the appraised market value of an acquired system instead of its lower depreciated cost. These laws prompted a wave of smaller systems to become consolidated under private ownership. By selling to Aqua Pennsylvania, DELCORA would avoid $1.2 billion in capital costs it needed to meet the new and ongoing regulations of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. DELCORA planned to channel the sale proceeds to a trust to benefit its customers, rather than the usual practice of using the money to fund government projects.

When approved, Aqua Pennsylvania would acquire DELCORA’s system of retail, commercial, and industrial customers and its wholesale agreements with municipalities in Delaware and Chester Counties that were serviced by 168 miles of sewer mains, 14 miles of large diameter force mains, and a 50-million gallon-per-day wastewater treatment plant in Chester that served the western part of its territory. Until the sale, about 9 per cent of DELCORA’s wastewater volume had been treated at Philadelphia’s Southwest Water Pollution Control Plant near the airport. An additional incentive for the sale was the Philadelphia Water Department’s plan to greatly increase its charges for this treatment by 2028. Aqua Pennsylvania planned to build a large sewer main to pump this portion of the wastewater to the plant in Chester, which would also be expanded for a total cost of $400 million to $600 million.

As the fall 2019 election season arrived, the county Democrats criticized the no-bid deal between DELCORA and Aqua Pennsylvania. They saw the move as keeping an important Republican patronage stronghold from falling into Democratic hands in case the political control of the county change for the first time in more than 150 years. Aqua Pennsylvania was perceived as rewarding its political patrons. Its political action committee gave $110,000 to Delaware County Republicans since 2015. Aqua Pennsylvania’s president Chris Franklin said that the company merely gives political contributions to officials elected by their customers. DELCORA’s executive director Robert Willert accused the Democrats of making the situation political. Willert also happened to be the president of the Ridley Township Board of Commissioners and head of the township’s Republicans. In May 2020, the Delaware County Council sued to block the sale in the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas. The lawsuit alleged illegality of the trust that was created to hold the proceeds from the sale which would then be used to suppress sewer rate increases for nearly a decade afterwards. The lawsuit referred to the arrangement as “a political patronage deal to benefit the outgoing members of the county council and their political supporters, to the detriment of the public at large.” Aqua Pennsylvania President Marc Lucca responded that any insinuation of the sale as “political payback is reprehensible and inaccurate” and that county resources should be focused on “bringing employees back from furlough and responding to the COVID-19 crisis.” Within a week, the Delaware County council took the further step of introducing an ordinance to dissolve DELCORA. It claimed the power to do so under the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Act. DELCORA then filed for a preliminary injunction to block the takeover, claiming that the transfer of authority was illegal because it required advance approval from state and federal
environmental regulators and the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission. They also claimed state law would be violated by terminating a municipal authority that still had outstanding bond debt. Just hours after the Delaware County Council formally voted to dissolve DELCORA, Common Pleas Court Judge Barry C. Dozor granted a temporary stay blocking the takeover and a hearing was set to consider arguments in the case.
Downstream from 5th Street, Chester Creek bends once again towards the southeast and flows under PA Route 291, Industrial Highway. West of the creek, PA Route 291 merges with the old Chester City grid and becomes West 2nd Street. East 2nd Street on the east side of the creek follows its original layout, but East 3rd Street is obliterated for four blocks by PA Route 291. The obliteration includes the original Market Square, which was at 3rd and Market Streets. Market Street is now called Avenue of the States.

View across PA Route 291 towards Edgmont Avenue and City Hall
City Hall is low brick building to far right; Old Chester Courthouse is at tower near center;
CSMI Education Management LLC is in the white high-rise building
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Chester Traction Company

The Chester Traction Company was the largest trolley system in Delaware County. It was part of group of traction companies controlled by the Interstate Railway Company. It had direct connections from Market Square in Chester to the cities of Philadelphia and Wilmington. Its routes to Marcus Hook and Darby connected with Media and many other stops in Delaware County. Their offices were at 13th Street and Edgmont Avenue, where they also had large car barn which could accommodate 100 cars.

The day in 1908 when the company announced pay cuts, the majority of the conductors and motormen voted to join the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees and stage a strike. Violence ensued.
Chester Traction Company ticket
Media Historic Archives Commission
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2018
On the east bank of Chester Creek just downstream from the bridge for PA Route 291 is Ethel Waters Park. It is a city park named in honor of the singer and actress who was born in Chester in 1896. She began her career by singing the blues, and went on to perform in jazz and big band concerts, and on Broadway. As an actress, she appeared in movies and television. She was the second African American to be nominated for an Academy Award, as a supporting actress in the 1949 movie “Pinky” directed by Elia Kazan. She died in 1977.

Downstream from Ethel Waters Park, Chester Creek flows under the bridge for 2nd Street. On the west side of the creek below 2nd Street is the William Penn Landing Site.
William Penn Landing Site

Chester Creek flows past the William Penn Landing Site, where William Penn first set foot in his new colony October 28, 1682. He promptly changed the name of the local community from Upland to Chester, after the place in England where most of his Quaker shipmates aboard the Welcome were from. He stayed nearby at the home of Robert Wade before embarking up the river to oversee the laying out of Philadelphia.

The stone that marks the spot where William Penn landed
Photos: Walt Cressler, 2012

The first Quakers arrived in 1675 on both sides of the Delaware River. Among them was Robert Wade, who built the Essex House in Upland. It was located on what became the northwest corner of 2nd and Penn Streets in Chester. Its southeast gabled end faced Chester Creek, not far from where William Penn arrived for the first time in his colony. On March 4, 1681, William Penn was granted a charter by Charles II to pay a debt to his father Admiral William Penn. Admiral Penn had helped Charles II come to power during the Restoration and had served in the wars against the Dutch. As a Quaker, or a member of the Society of Friends, the younger William Penn was a member of one of many dissenting sects that emerged in seventeenth century Britain. Penn was fortunate in having influence with royal power that enabled him to establish a refuge for his fellow Quakers and others who sought freedom of religious conscience. The first shipload of purchasers in Penn’s new colony arrived in New Castle, Delaware in December 1681. Among these was Penn’s cousin William Markham who acted as deputy governor. A second ship, the Samuel, arrived in September 1682. Penn was among the third group to arrive, aboard the Welcome, and first set foot in his new colony on October 28, 1682 in Upland, whose name he changed to Chester. Robert Wade was on Penn’s newly established council for his colony. Penn’s cousin and deputy governor William Markham had taken up residence in the Essex House. William Penn was Robert Wade’s guest at the Essex House when he first arrived.
Prior to the arrival of William Penn, the Delaware Valley was the scene of exploration and settlement by the powers of Protestant Europe since the beginning of the 17th century. They were seeking to claim New World territory to compete with the large holdings of Catholic Spain and Portugal farther south. The first to sail up the Delaware River was Henry Hudson in 1609. He was an Englishman who was exploring on behalf of the Dutch, whose claims to the area date from this voyage. Then in 1610, the Englishman Sir Samuel Argall entered the bay and named it for Thomas West, Lord De La War, who was governor of the English colony of Virginia at the time. The Dutch continued their explorations in competition with the English. Among them was Captain Cornelius Mey for whom Cape May is named. Three years after the Dutch West India Company was incorporated in 1621, it established Fort Nassau at the mouth of Timber Creek in what is now Gloucester County, New Jersey. This outpost did not last very long. Neither did Swanendale at the mouth of Lewes Creek on the other side of the bay. It dissolved in a bloody misunderstanding with the Sekonese in 1631.

Meanwhile, the Swedes had done well during the Thirty Years War and were looking to expand their world influence. Their settlement in the Delaware Valley was their only attempt at establishing a New World empire. In 1638 they established Fort Christina at the mouth of the Christina River in what is now Wilmington, Delaware. In that year, the Swedish West India Company had hired the Dutch Peter Minuit to lead the colonists aboard the Kalmar Nyckel and the Gripen. The second expedition of 1640 consisted primarily of soldiers who had evaded service or committed other offenses. The third expedition consisted of Finnish tree poachers. This unpromising start began to turn around in 1643, when more Swedes arrived aboard the
Fama and the Swan. This fourth expedition established the first permanent European settlement in what is now Pennsylvania, under Governor Johan Printz at Tinicum Island near the mouth of Darby Creek. They built Ft. Gottenburg and the governor’s mansion Printz Hall at Tinicum and built Fort Elsenburgh to command the other side of the Delaware River at the mouth of Salem Creek. They established settlements along the Delaware River from Fort Christina to Upland at the mouth of Chester Creek, and in Kingsessing, Passyunk, and Wiccaco (now Southwark).

The Swedes continued to compete with the Dutch, who were becoming a great maritime power. The year that Johan Printz firmly established the capital of New Sweden at Tinicum, the Dutch built Ft. Casimir at what is now New Castle, Delaware. In 1653, Johan Printz returned to Sweden and left the running of New Sweden to his son-in-law John Papegoya, who had married his daughter Armigart. All went well until the arrival of the new governor Risingh, who in 1654 commanded the Swedes to attack the Dutch at Ft. Casimir. As a result of this misadventure, in 1655, Peter Stuyvesant came down from New Amsterdam and captured all of New Sweden for the Dutch. They established their new seat of government on the foundation of Ft. Casimir and called it New Amstel.

The Dutch venture came to an end in North America when the English defeated them at New Amsterdam in the Hudson Valley in 1664 during one of the Anglo-Dutch Wars. Charles II was firmly on the throne after the restoration of royal rule following the end of Oliver Cromwell’s Commonwealth. Following the capture of New Amsterdam, the new governor Col. Richard Nicolls sent Sir Robert Carr to the Delaware River with the frigates *Guinea, William,* and *Nicholas.* Thus equipped he captured New Amstel. Charles II then granted the colonies of New York (former New Amsterdam), New Jersey, and Delaware to his brother James, the Duke of York. The succeeding governor, Col. Francis Lovelace, brought the Delaware Valley into conformity with English law in 1667. The English enterprises in the Mid-Atlantic suffered a setback in 1673, however. After England and France declared war on the Netherlands in 1672, the Dutch recaptured the New York and Delaware Valley settlements. The treaty of 1674 returned them to the Duke of York, however. Edmund Andros was the new governor of the Duke’s lands, with Edmund Carr the commander on the Delaware River. The Duke of York’s laws were proclaimed that year at the court in Upland on Chester Creek. These laws prevailed until the Pennsylvania colony was granted to William Penn in 1681 to pay the royal debt to his father Admiral William Penn for his service during the Anglo-Dutch Wars.

CSX Freight Rail Line

William Penn’s Landing Site is adjacent to the railway for the CSX freight rail line which supplies the power plant for the Kimberly-Clark factory here. The CSX freight rail right-of-way was originally built in 1837 by the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad. A bridge carries it over Chester Creek.

Kimberly-Clark

Looming over William Penn’s Landing Site is the coal chute of the Kimberly-Clark Chester Cogeneration Plant that supplies power to the paper mills of Kimberly-Clark, which are all located on the east bank.
Chester Creek approaching CSX freight line bridge, the Kimberly-Clark power plant, and the Delaware River
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012

Kimberly-Clark, the former Scott Paper Company
Photo: Walt Cressler, 2012
The Dallas-based Kimberly-Clark Corporation bought out the Scott Paper Company in 1995. Scott Paper had pioneered the manufacture of modern toilet paper rolls at this location. Scott Paper was founded by two brothers named Irvin and Clarence Scott. They had moved to Philadelphia in 1867 from Saratoga, New York to join their brother Thomas Seymour Scott who started a paper wholesale business there two years previously. The company was called T. Seymour Scott & Brothers. They cut paper that they had purchased from a variety of manufacturers into various sizes and shapes and sold it. The paper was mainly used to wrap meat and produce. Thomas withdrew from the business and Irvin and Clarence founded Scott Paper in 1879. They were pioneers in the marketing of toilet paper. At first it was sold in drug stores among the medical supplies. Irvin’s son Arthur moved the company away from creating custom labelled products for retailers such as Wanamaker’s. Arthur Scott also improved the company’s success through his advertising methods. In 1910 the company bought a former soap factory in Chester along the Delaware River close to the mouth of Chester Creek. It was at this location that they began manufacturing their own brand paper. Toilet paper rolls were their inspired innovation, and they started manufacturing and selling it in that form in 1915. In the 1920s, they expanded their operations into the former Swarthmore Paper Mill. By 1939, the Scott Paper Company was the largest manufacturer and exporter of toilet paper in the world. Their corporate headquarters was at Scott Plaza in Tinicum Township, at the mouth of Darby Creek. One of the CEOs of Scott Paper, Thomas McCabe, also had a stint as president of the Federal Reserve.

In 2018, Kimberly-Clark decided to invest $150 million in its Chester mill, which makes the Scott 1000 toilet paper. The money was used to replace the coal-fired power plant, a process expected to take three years. It will be replaced by a natural gas-fired plant. The company also received a $6 million matching grant from the state of Pennsylvania’s Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) for the project. Kimberly-Clark was in the process of updating its U.S. plants while at the same time cutting costs in the name of efficiency. The number of employees at the Chester plant was down to 600 from a high of 800 in 2011.

As Chester Creek flows beneath the coal chute, its waters enter the Delaware River. They are joined by the outfall of the Delaware County Regional Water Quality Control Authority (DELCORA) just below the mouth of Chester Creek.

In 1880, the shore of the Delaware River around the mouth of Chester Creek was the site of bustling industrial activity. At the foot of Kerlin Street was located the Roach Shipyards. To their east were the Keokuk Mills, the South Ward Water Works pumping station at the foot of Franklin Street, the Irving & Leiper Mills, the shipyards of William Booth and Corson & Company, and Chester Sugar Refining.
Chester Sugar Refining

Photo by Stephen H. Appleton, ca. 1900
Media Historic Archives Commission

City of Chester steamboat [on the Delaware River]
Photo by Stephen H. Appleton, ca. 1900 – Media Historic Archives Commission
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