

Lucy Sampson: Berwyn Photographer

Mike Bertram & Tim Lander

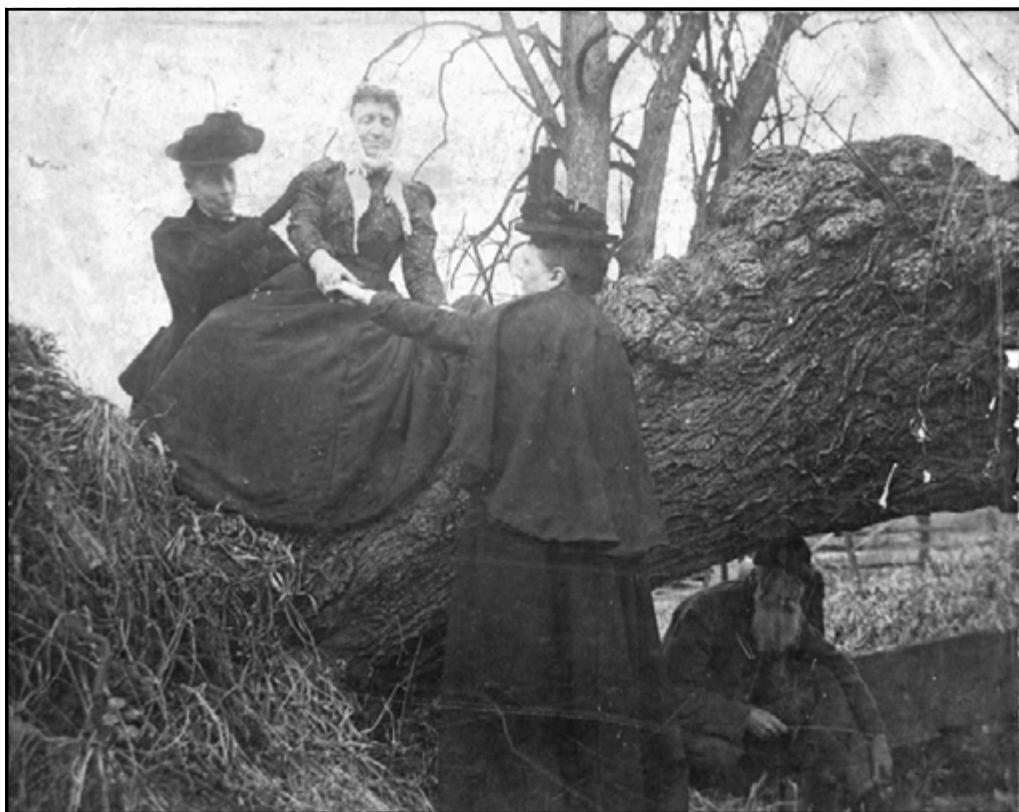
The Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society has numerous old photographs in its archives. Mike Bertram has sorted through many of them to identify a collection taken by Lucy Sampson a hundred or so years ago. He delivered a presentation showcasing some of these photos at the Society's May 2011 meeting. This photo essay is an adaptation of that presentation, and features roughly a third of those old images.

Lucy's family came from Massachusetts. Her father, Albert Sampson, was a stone-cutter and construction superintendent who worked on a number of large buildings in Philadelphia, including the Masonic Temple just north of City Hall. Lucy was born in Lowell in 1852, according to census records. By 1870, the family was living in Philadelphia, together with a lodger named James Francis. Lucy's eldest sister Sarah, known as Sallie, married Mr. Francis in February 1873. By the 1880 census, Lucy, her parents, and other sister Leora (known as Fanny) were living in Radnor. Later, probably after her father died in 1890, Lucy made her home in Berwyn with Sallie and her husband. James Francis was a real estate lawyer, with offices at 4040 Market Street and 705 Walnut Street in Philadelphia.

The Francis' Berwyn estate, Rhydlyn, shown in the photo above, was on the north side of the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks, on the west side of the eponymous Francis Avenue. Although the property has since been subdivided, the house remains standing today.

Lucy took up the profession of photography in 1898, and she had a darkroom in the Francis house. She was well known in Berwyn as she moved around the village with her camera. Lucy produced an extensive collection of picturesque rural and sylvan scenes, historic buildings, the interiors of stately homes along the Main Line, and group and individual portraits. Her prints were included in many books and magazines.

Lucy, never married, passed away on May 16, 1920, after being stricken with pneumonia.



Many of the photos in the Society's archives have no caption, and we are only able to identify the subject matter through other sources. In the upper photo, it is easy to discern Mr. Abraham S. Latch and his distinctive flowing beard, ducking beneath the fallen tree while his lady companions—one of whom could be his wife, Emma—make their way over the top. Mr. Latch owned General Howe's quarters on Contention Lane until 1900, when he sold it and the surrounding farmland and built a gray stone house in north Berwyn. The lower photo of Mr. Latch proudly tending his roses was likely taken at that Berwyn home. He became Assessor and Tax Collector for Tredyffrin, and he took the School Census as well, prior to his death in 1914. His son, C.W. Latch, was a founding member of the Tredyffrin Easttown History Club.



Above we see Dr. James Aiken and his daughter Daisy. In 1911, Miss Aiken married the Rev. William Potter Van Tries, at that time the pastor of the Trinity Presbyterian Church. Mr. Van Tries served other churches during the following thirty-five years, at which time he retired to Berwyn. After retirement he served the Malvern Presbyterian Church for some years. Daisy died in 1972, at the age of 83. The Aiken family name continues to grace Aiken Avenue in Berwyn. Past Quarterlies contain many details about the Aikens; Daisy authored a piece on "The New Easttown Library" in Volume 10, Number 3 (April 1959).

At right is an uncaptioned photograph. From her professional demeanor and her case of rolled-up documents, one can imagine that this is Lucy herself. The Society has not turned up any photographs that conclusively identify her, so the possibility remains open.





Above we see Main Avenue in Berwyn, with Trinity Presbyterian Church to the right. You can see from the writing on the postcard that this street was known as Church Avenue at the time. Lucy printed many of her photographs on postcard stock, and her hand-written notations are sometimes the only clue that she was the photographer. Many of the photos in the archives were identified by comparing these notes to handwriting that is known to be Lucy's.

Below is a picture of Lancaster Avenue in Berwyn, with the entrance to the train station on the left as we look east. The Fritz Lumber building is easily recognizable at left rear. The lack of traffic is quite a contrast to modern Route 30, not to mention the lack of pavement or traffic signals.





The photo above is of Hall & Hibbard's first grocery store on Lancaster Avenue, Berwyn, next to Waterloo Road. Frank Hibbard is at left, with Elvin Hall on the right. As noted in the *Quarterly* of October, 1970, Mr. Hibbard ran the store. Mr. Hall went around to the customers in a horse-drawn wagon taking orders and delivering them the next day. In the summer, they wore the customary long white aprons and straw hats, a sort of grocer's uniform.

Below, Cassatt Avenue looking north, with the Oliver Bair estate, Hillcrest, straight ahead, and the bell tower of the chapel of the Baptist Church in the Great Valley to the right. Perched at the top of the South Valley Hill, Hillcrest possessed a grand view of the Great Valley to the north. Oliver Bair was the founder and owner of the largest undertaking establishment in Philadelphia, at 1820 Chestnut Street. He was born in Chester County, received his education in the Coatesville Public Schools, and went to Philadelphia as a young man, where he gained fame and fortune as a funeral director. There is no evidence that he was a year-round resident of Berwyn. It is likely that he used Hillcrest as a summer home, although his daughter Mary later lived there year-round. She resided in the home until the 1950s.





At top is the First Baptist Church of Berwyn, on Waterloo Avenue looking north. Founded in 1896 by former members of the Baptist Church in the Great Valley, the building shown here was dedicated in 1904. Abraham Latch served as a deacon for a time. See the *Quarterly* Volume 25, Number 3 for more interesting details on the founding of First Baptist. While the building no longer functions as a church today, its exterior remains remarkably unchanged from this photo.

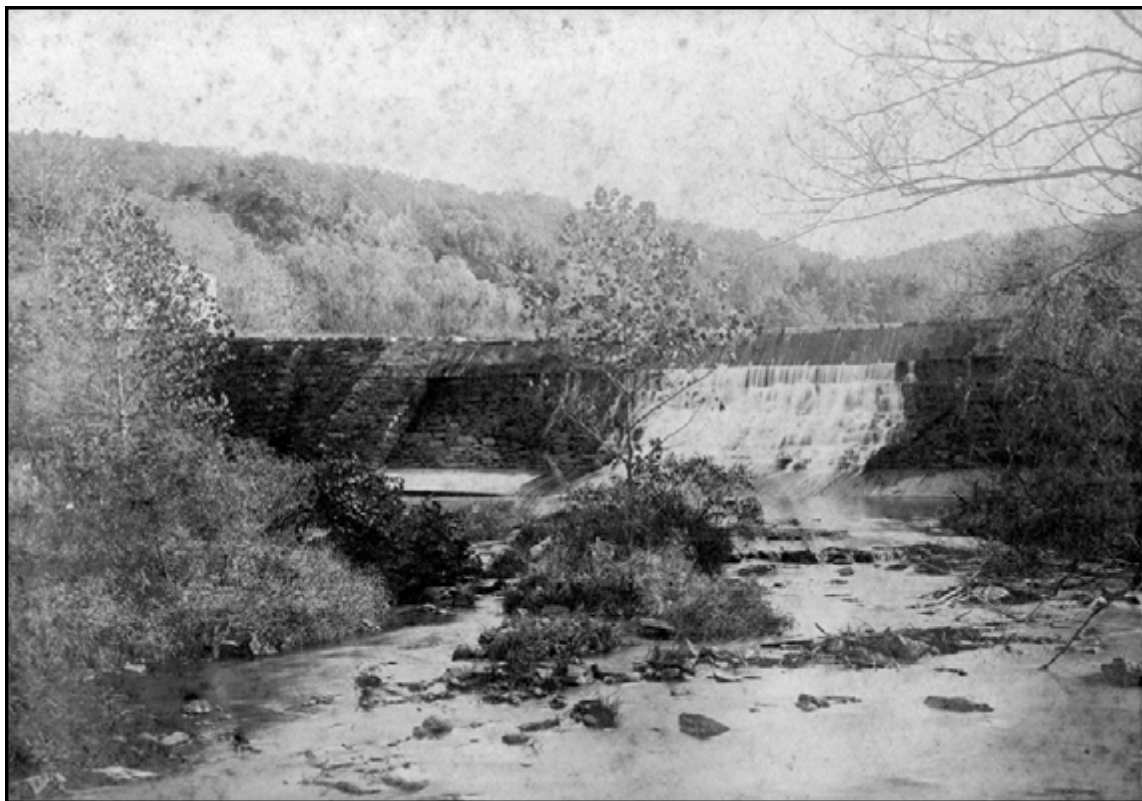
The bottom photo is William H. "Harry" Burns' planing mill, located on the current site of the Mack Oil Company. Mr. Burns built many structures during his career, including his own home on Kromer Avenue in 1890 (visible behind the mill); Trinity Presbyterian Church (1892); and the Tredyffrin-Easttown Joint High School (1908). The *Quarterly* Volume 26, Number 2, states that he employed 45 men whose weekly wages in 1893 amounted to \$600. His contracting business was reported to be "second to none in the county and equaled by few in the state."



Lucy did not limit her photography to Berwyn, by any means. This is North Valley Road in Paoli, looking north from the vicinity of the railroad overpass. The Biddle and Dingee estates would be at right, and most of the land to the north, in the Great Valley, would be farmland. While all of that has certainly changed, the building at left remains standing.

Below, the iconic Diamond Rock Schoolhouse, with Diamond Rock Road leading uphill to the left, and eastbound Yellow Springs Road to the right. Built in 1818 on land donated by George Beaver, the school eventually was abandoned as larger schools were built nearby. Restoration commenced in 1909, and volunteers continue to preserve this local landmark, which will be the subject of an upcoming meeting of the Historical Society.





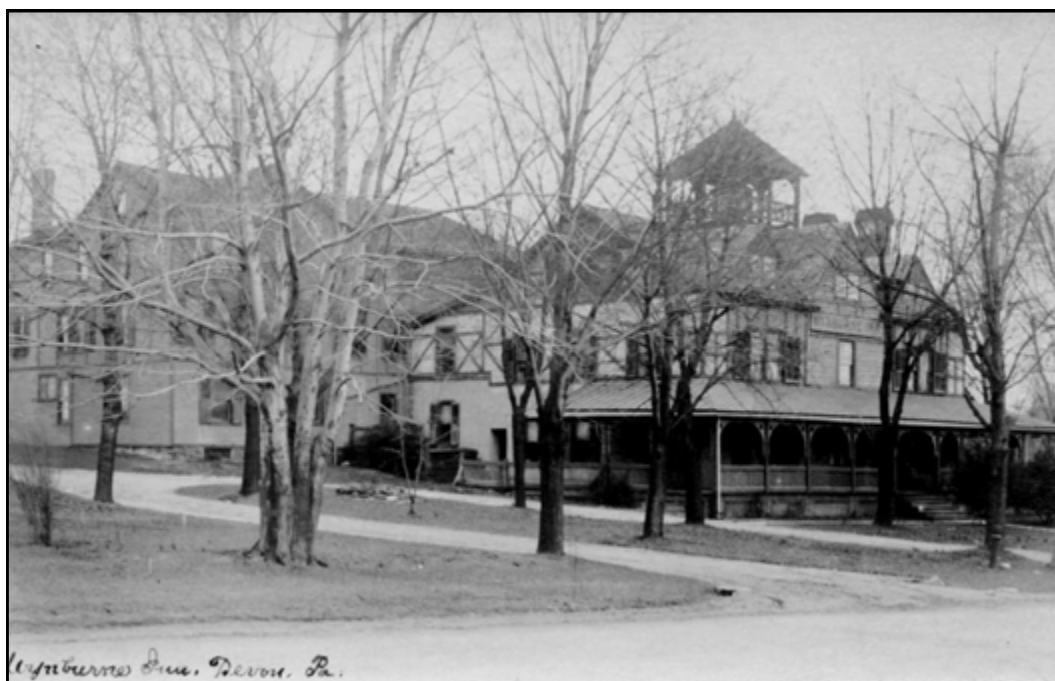
Lucy found many sites of interest to photograph in Valley Forge, which was established as Pennsylvania's first state park in 1893. In the 1790s, Valley Creek was dammed upstream of the Isaac Potts house, which served as Washington's Headquarters during the encampment of 1777-78. The dam provided water power to the forge that was rebuilt after the Revolutionary War. The original dam was reconstructed and enlarged a number of times, and continued to provide power in the days of the cotton mill shown at left in the photo below. The curious goat stands in what would be Route 252 today, facing the junction with Route 23. If you stand on the bridge on 23 you can see the foundation of this dam, which was torn down in 1920 as part of a Park Service initiative to restore the area around Washington's Headquarters to a more colonial appearance. The mill building and cottages were demolished as well.

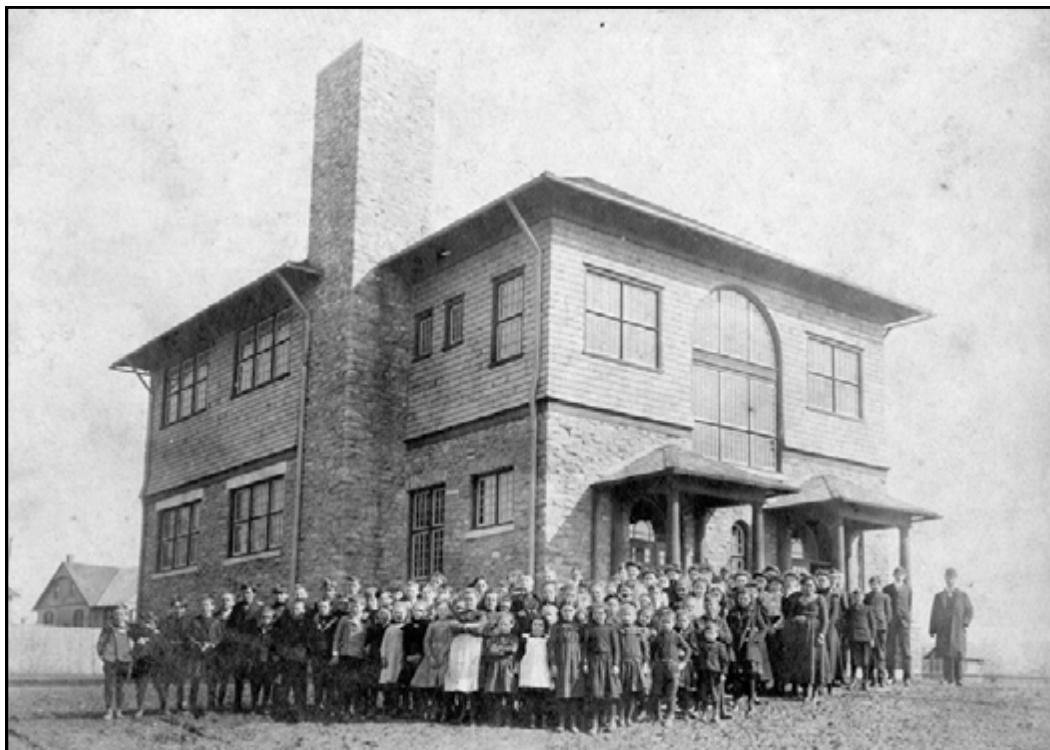




At the turn of the last century, there were still colonial-era inns operating on the upper Main Line, as well as newer and much larger inns catering to the summer crowds seeking to escape the heat and bustle of the city for the relative peace and quiet of eastern Chester County. The Paoli Inn burned down in 1899, so the photograph above was likely taken within a year or two of that date. The inn was located near the site of the current Paoli Post Office, across the railroad tracks from the Dewees and Bracken feed, coal, and lumber business on West Central Avenue. The large building in the background at right is part of the Dewees and Bracken business.

The photo below is the Wynburne Inn in Devon, built around 1885 by Harry Burns on the foundation of an old barn. It was located on Old Lancaster Road, a short walk east from Lucy's home on Francis Avenue. The subject of a "Then & Now" article in the Fall 2006 issue of the *Quarterly*, the inn was originally opened in the summer months only, but eventually remained open year-round, at the reasonable price of \$9—\$15 per week. A 1933 atlas shows the name as being the Lincoln Inn, which ultimately burned and was replaced by single-family homes.





Lucy was very involved with the local schools. In addition to her photographs of the school buildings, she took many class photos. At top is the Paoli School on South Valley Road, circa 1913. According to an interview with Ethel Jones Meagher in the *Quarterly* Volume 40, Number 4, the grammar school was on the first floor, with the high school grades on the second floor. All grades appear to be present for this photograph.

The bottom photo is of a class at the Berwyn Grammar School. It appears that these students had significantly less enthusiasm for photography than Lucy did. We are nevertheless indebted to Lucy for recording so many images of people and places of the Upper Main Line so many years ago.

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The Society owes thanks to past member Dorothy Reed, who collected many of the prints now attributed to Lucy Sampson. The archives include many old photographs that have yet to be digitized for posterity. Anyone wishing to assist the archive team in this process should send an email to archives@tehistory.org.