

Update on Westover Park, Scene of the 1930 Devon Fireworks Explosion

Some of our readers may be aware—maybe even a few remember—the devastating fireworks explosion that occurred on April 3, 1930 at the Pennsylvania Fireworks Display Company in Devon on Old Lancaster Road just north of, and around the curve from, the tunnel under the railroad tracks.

In 1978 Bob Goshorn, then editor of the *Quarterly*, researched this event and prepared a detailed and well-written article about the explosion which killed 10 and injured scores of others, and the subsequent investigation. In 1978, the printing process used for the *Quarterly* allowed only for very limited use of illustrations. In 2007, almost 30 years later, as part of the Tredyffrin 300 celebration, TEHS editor and historian Mike Bertram wrote an update about the explosion which included new information and a few relatively low-resolution images.

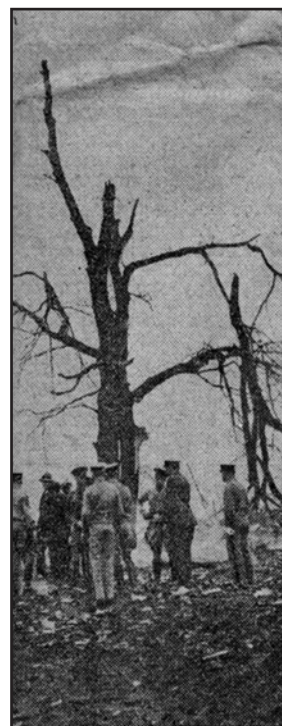
Since the updated article appeared in 2007, several noteworthy developments have occurred. As part of the recently-introduced TEHS online Image Collection database, there are now some 30 unique images—all at much better resolution, with some seen here—of the devastation from the explosion, including several remarkable aerial photographs and some excerpts from various newspaper clippings which are chilling in their view of the aftermath. If you have not yet seen them, they are well worth examining, and can be viewed on our website.

In addition to the online images in our collection—and the significant improvement in their quality—historical maps now available online allow viewers to see the location of the original property and to more readily identify with the explosion's horrific effects on surrounding properties. Online census records and death certificates have yielded even more information.

The factory was never rebuilt and the property has remained undeveloped since the explosion. Tredyffrin Township acquired the seven-acre property in 2002 and it is now known as Westover Park, and can be seen on Tredyffrin Township maps, designated as recreational and open space.

Since the original plan to develop a township recreational facility on the site has not come to pass, and the property had not received much recent attention, a community resident, Michele Hawk is one of several individuals who has taken up the cause to further the efforts of helping to establish a Pennsylvania bird sanctuary at Westover Park. She is providing educational sessions designed to inform area residents about what happened at the property some 86 years ago, and the current plans for the as yet undeveloped park. She will be presenting a program on the history and anticipated bird sanctuary at the Society's free public meeting at 2 pm on May 15, 2016 at the Easttown Library and Information Center. Please join us for that presentation.

Lastly, given the history of the Westover Park property, there is emerging community interest in nominating the site for a blue and gold Pennsylvania Historical Marker, similar to the newly installed marker on Route 30 that marks the Devon Horse Show. If you are interested in assisting in this marker endeavor, please contact us at info@tehistory.org.
— Heidi Sproat



Clockwise from upper right, the TEHS Image Collection identifiers are DFF23, DFF19, DFF36, DFF17, and DFF31. For more information on these historic images, search for those identifiers in our online database.

Courtesy of TEHS Archives and Judy DiFilippo