

Historical Context

Although not directly financed by the Pennsylvania Railroad, as the earlier Bryn Mawr Hotel (1872) had been, the existence of the Devon Inn depended significantly on the railroad and its major investments in infrastructure. When the railroad opened Broad Street Station in 1881, along with the viaduct and bridge connecting it with West Philadelphia, the need to change from the train to a streetcar at the West Philadelphia depot was eliminated, thereby significantly shortening the trip from the Main Line western suburbs to central Philadelphia. The *Times (Philadelphia)* noted that previously “the half hour required to go to and from the West Philadelphia depot to the business center of the city in the streetcars was always a drawback [to commuting from the suburbs].” These developments made living year-round in the suburbs—even those more distant—much more practical, and families who could afford to do so began building country homes. In addition, for those whose permanent home remained in the city, it became easier to enjoy the fashionable suburban lifestyle while staying in the

cooler countryside for the warmer months. Both arrangements increased the potential for passenger business on the railroad. The officers of the Pennsylvania Railroad found the business model of locating hotels close to train stations to be successful, and it wasn't long before private entrepreneurs also showed interest.

To encourage summer rail travel, the PRR's Passenger Department published a yearly *Summer Excursion Routes Book* from the late 1880s through the early 1900s. The guide was designed to provide the public with a short description of as many as 400 different summer resorts in the eastern United States and Canada, with the railway routes for reaching them and the cost.

Independently owned resort hotels like the Devon Inn were included along with those owned and operated by the railroad. The accompanying 1884 illustration for Devon is typical of what appeared in those guides. *(continues on next page)*

Pennsylvania Railroad Summer Excursion Routes Book

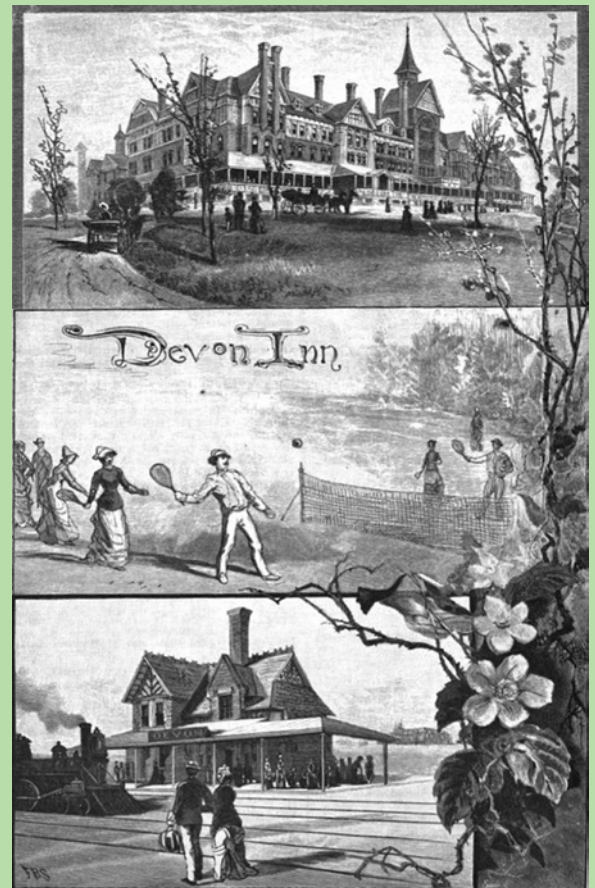
Even resort hotels like the Devon Inn, not owned by the railroad itself, were included in the book as a way of promoting passenger railroad use. This 1884 advertisement for the Devon Inn depicts a typical illustration.



First Bryn Mawr Hotel Engraving — An engraving of the original Bryn Mawr Hotel that accompanied an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, dated July 26, 1872, stated that the hotel had opened the previous month.

First Bryn Mawr Hotel

By the time the Devon Inn opened in 1882, the first Bryn Mawr Hotel had already been in business for a decade, built in 1872 by the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) and managed by a subsidiary, the Keystone Hotel Company. The enterprise was very successful from its start, but by 1886, something had changed. Its popularity was diminishing, and the PRR was choosing to defer basic maintenance. It has been suggested that competition from the newer Devon Inn was the major reason for its decline in profits. The first Bryn Mawr Hotel was destroyed by fire in 1887, and by that time it was said to have been deteriorating. A new hotel was built on the site, designed by the firm of prominent Philadelphia architect Frank Furness, but it was financed by a group of private investors, not the PRR. Since 1896, the second Bryn Mawr Hotel building, a grand survivor of a glorious past, has been home to The Baldwin School.



An illustration from the 1884 PRR *Summer Excursion Routes* guide showing the Devon Inn and the Devon Station.



Devon Boulevard — This early postcard, looking north toward the Station, appears to show a livery coach leaving the Station and traveling along Devon Boulevard on its way to the Inn. The photo is courtesy of TEHS Archives, Herb and Barbara Fry Collection.

Our story begins in the fall of 1881 when Lemuel Coffin and Joseph B. Altemus of Philadelphia purchased 480 acres between Berwyn and Eagle Stations with the intent of building a very large hotel in the village to be known as “Devon.”

The original station serving what was to become Devon was located just east of the Valley Forge Road crossing, but by September 1881, the *Times (Philadelphia)* announced that “An imposing structure will be erected as a depot by the railway company, to whom the purchasers gave three acres of ground and \$3,000 in cash.”

The investment paid off well for both the railroad and the developers of the Inn. By the time the foundation for the new Devon Station (the same structure presently on the site) had been dug in December of 1882, the Inn had opened for its first season. There were already twenty-five trains running daily between Broad Street Station and Devon.

The Inn was built on a hill 800 yards to the south of the railroad so that smoke and noise would not be an annoyance to its occupants. As guests arrived at the Station with their luggage and trunks, they would be met by horse-drawn stages like those seen in the photos. The stage service was provided free of charge. By 1884, the long avenue leading from the Station was shaded by rows of handsome trees on either side, and the approach to the Inn was said to have been a spectacular sight, especially at night. By 1886, the grounds were planted with many trees and shrubs, and the area that had been simple farmland a few years before was transformed into an impressive landscape.

In August, the *Times (Philadelphia)* reported that “Since the 1st of June last over thirty-six thousand passengers have got on and off trains at Devon Station.” By 1890, thirty-two roundtrip trains ran each day at a fare of less than twelve

cents each way. An express trip could be made in twenty-nine minutes, making it a more convenient commute than was possible from some parts of Philadelphia.

As the summer heat approached, many of those able to afford to close their city homes chose to move their families to the cooler temperatures and entertaining lifestyle to be found at the Devon Inn. The press described in florid prose the benefits of residing in the country, as may be seen in this excerpt from an 1891 article in the *Times (Philadelphia)*:

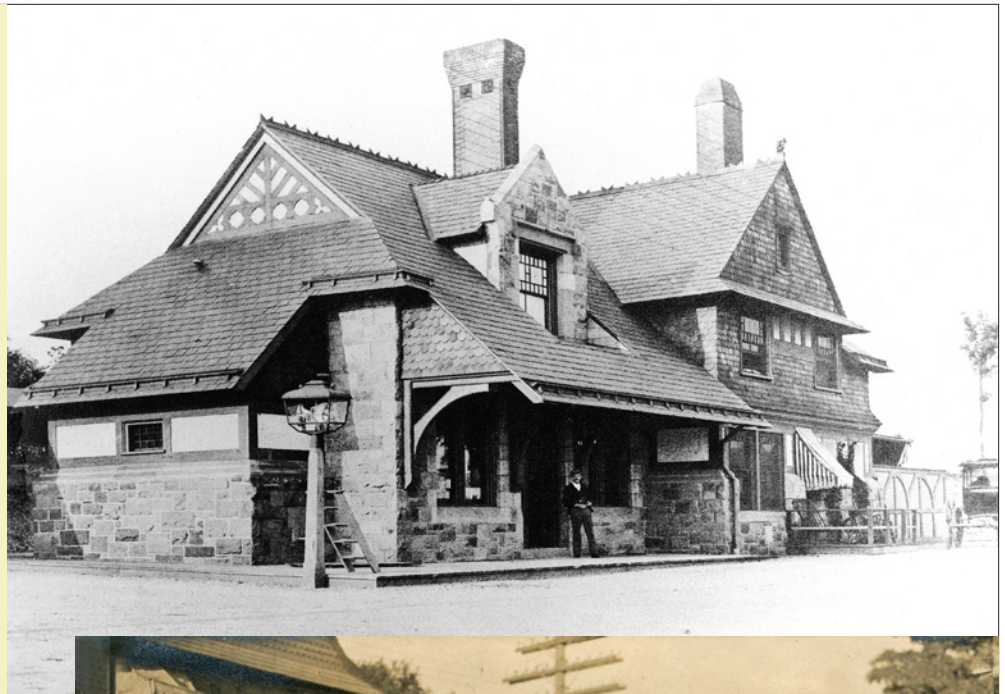
“To be at Devon is to enjoy country life in its reality. It is not like being housed up in a close settlement a few miles out, which is little more rural than the heart of the city itself. Probably there never was a people needing more than the refreshments, all the solace to be derived from country life in its better forms than the people of the large cities of today. The period is rife with high excitement. The fever of commercial speculations, the agitation of political passions, the mental exertion required by the rapid progress of science, by the ever-recurring controversies of philosophy, and, above all, that spirit of personal ambition and emulation so wearing upon the individual and yet so very common all unite to produce a combination of circumstances rendering it desirable to turn as frequently as possible into paths of a more quiet and peaceful character. The age needs repose of mind. People need the shade of the trees and the play of healthful breezes to refresh their used-up energies. They need the cup of water, pure from the spring; the flowers, to soothe without flattery; the birds, to cheer without excitement; they need the view of the green turf to teach the humility of the grave, and they need the view of the open heavens to tell where all human hopes should center. All this and much more is found at Devon—high, breezy and beautiful...”

The Devon Station — In keeping with the significance of the Inn, the Pennsylvania Railroad's intent was to create a station at Devon that, according to the *Times (Philadelphia)*, would be the "most elaborate affair architecturally yet attempted along its line at a suburban place." The station site was also to be richly landscaped.

In November of 1882, the railroad contracted William H. Bilyeu, who had also constructed the first Devon Inn, to build the station. W. Bleddyn Powell, who had designed the Wayne Station, was listed as the architect on the construction contract. However, in contrast to Wayne, the building materials used at Devon were more expensive and the result more ornate. The station was built of stone, and the roof was made of slate. Terra cotta was used for both the roof ridges and the chimneys, and the wooden shingles on the walls created decorative patterns.

As Greg Prichard wrote in his National Register Nomination, "It's clear that Devon Station was to be special; not larger than Wayne in scale, but definitely more of a showpiece for the P.R.R. to make an impression on resort vacationers."

Image: Devon Station, 1890. *On the Main Line, The Pennsylvania Railroad in the 19th Century*, by Edwin P. Alexander, Clarkson N. Potter, Inc, 1971, Figure 21.



Carriage Outside of Devon Station — This 1910 photo is another example of a livery coach waiting at the Devon Station, presumably to transport passengers to the Inn or possibly some other local destination. *Courtesy of Greg Prichard.*

Summer Resorts.

THE DEVON INN,

Main Line Pennsylvania Railroad. 31 minutes from Broad St. Station, Philadelphia. Opens June 1.

OFFERS UNEQUALED ATTRACTIONS

In *healthfulness* of situation and surroundings, in *comfort* of accommodation and appointments and in *EXCELLENCE OF COOKING AND SERVICE*.

Located 540 feet above tide water, on the heights bordering the famous Chester Valley. The Inn is built of stone and brick, has handsomely furnished large rooms, spacious balls, elegant parlors and reception rooms, reading, smoking and card rooms and has every improvement known to the best city hotels; Hydraulic passenger elevator and 22 suites of rooms with private bath rooms attached. Handsomely appointed dining rooms, with small tables for family parties. Pennsylvania Railroad trains to Broad Street 25 times each way daily. Distance, 16 miles. Time by express, 31 minutes. Commutation fares less than 12c. per trip. Coach at Devon to and from all trains free of charge. Western Union Telegraph office in the house.

MUSIC DAILY. MORNING AND EVENING.

Charles M. Schmitz, leader.

Riding and driving horses and carriages. Stabling for private teams. Good bicycling roads, tennis courts, billiards, bowling alleys, ball grounds.

SINCE LAST SUMMER

a road has been built to the Lancaster Pike, passing under the railroad through a stone arch.

MODERATE SCALE OF CHARGES.

Double rooms \$36, \$42, \$45, \$50 per week. Single rooms, \$18, \$21, \$25 per week. For private bath rooms, \$1 per day additional. Suites with private parlors at special rates. Transient rate, \$4 per day.

Plans can be seen and information may be had at the Colonnade Hotel, Philadelphia.

H. J. & G. R. CRUMP.

Rates at the Inn

Devon Inn Ad, 1892 —

This advertisement for the Devon Inn ran in the *Times (Philadelphia)* on June 5, 1892. Many of the same features found in the 1886 ad were mentioned, but four years later, the Inn was now promoting its electric lights. The weekly double room rate now started at \$36, and single room rates had increased to \$18 to \$28 per week. Private bathrooms were an additional \$10 each week.

Devon Inn Ad, 1886 — This Devon Inn advertisement first ran in the *Times (Philadelphia)* on April 10, 1886 and continued until the Inn opened on May 29th. The ad emphasized the beautiful countryside, the Inn's interior (with hydraulic elevator), the excellent food and service, the telegraph and telephone, and the convenience of the train. It also listed the many leisure activities. Double rooms cost \$32 to \$50 per week, with the weekly charge for single rooms being \$17.50 to \$25. Private bathrooms were available for \$1 per day extra, and there were special rates for suites with private parlors.

THE DEVON INN

OPEN FOR THE SEASON 1892

Main Line Pennsylvania R. R.

29 Minutes from Broad St. Station, Phila.

SCALE OF CHARGES:

Double Rooms,	\$36, \$45, \$50 per week
Single Rooms,	\$18, \$25, \$28 per week
For Private Bath Rooms \$10 per week additional.	
Suites with Private Parlors at Special Rates.	

Located on the Heights Bordering the Famous Chester Valley, at Elevation of 540 Feet Above Philadelphia, and Surrounded by Cool, Healthful and Picturesque Country.

THE INN is built throughout of Stone and Brick, has Large and Handsomely Furnished Rooms, Spacious Halls, Elegant Parlors and Reception Rooms, Reading Rooms, Smoking and Card Rooms, and every improvement known to the best city hotels; Hydraulic Passenger Elevator, Electric Lights, rooms with Private Bath attached. Handsomely Appointed Dining Rooms, Open Fire-places in Bed Rooms. PARTICULAR EXCELLENCE is maintained in ATTENDANCE, COOKING and SERVICE. Pennsylvania Railroad Trains to Broad Street Station thirty-two times each way daily. Distance, 16 miles. Time by express train, 30 minutes. Commutation fares less than 12c. per trip. Coach at Devon to and from trains without charge. Western Union Telegraph in the House. Grand Orchestra. Shaded walks and roads. Riding and Driving Horses and Carriages. Stabling for 100 Private Teams. Good roads for bicycling. Handsome Large Lawns, Tennis Courts, Bowling Alleys, Billiards, Ball Grounds.

H. J. & G. R. CRUMP, DEVON INN, DEVON, PA. (Colonnade Hotel, Philadelphia.)