

## The Building

In this section, we have gathered additional information on the structure, interior, and infrastructure of the Inn. Building and maintaining an establishment that could house several hundred well-to-do city dwellers accustomed to modern conveniences, and be a place to spend the summer where they would enjoy all those comforts without the noise, crowding, dirt, and heat of the city, was a massive undertaking.

### The First Devon Inn — 1882



Images courtesy of Greg Prichard.

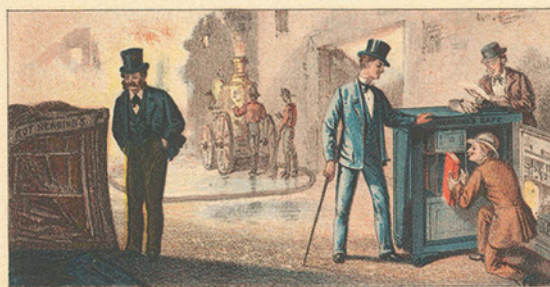
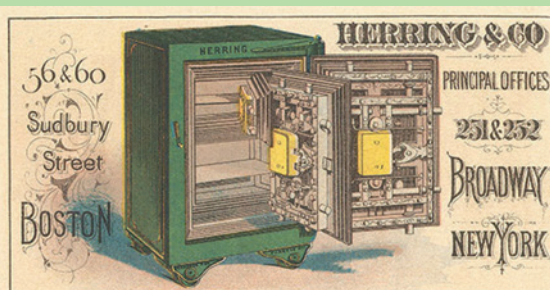
### The First Devon Inn — 1882

James P. Sims designed the first Devon Inn after the rambling, old hotels in England. Most of the building was three stories high. One part was stone, and another had wooden shingles or boards. The roof was red tile. There were many chimneys and wrap-around porches. The upper portions of the gables were “pebble dashed” which gave them a rough, white look. Pebble dash is an outer wall finish in which small pieces of crushed rock, pebbles, or shells are set into an outer coat of stucco or cement.

The Inn opened on August 16, 1882, and this photo was taken a week later on August 24<sup>th</sup>. The roads and walks around the building were still being graded, and there were plans to add large trees around the grounds during the coming months. According to a July 29, 1883 article from the *Times (Philadelphia)*, there was one existing “great, gnarled, venerable cherry tree” on the lawn. It may be shown in this photo.

By May of the next year, the Inn had a new four-story addition to the east. Between the two buildings was a covered entrance hall that was high and open. It has been said that a breeze was always blowing, providing comfort to guests. The addition included billiard rooms and bowling alleys, as well as an upgraded laundry, and servants’ quarters were added to the upper floors. The new space also had a level underneath, on the side of the hill, that was used entirely as an indoor playground for children and their caregivers.

In 1883, the price for a typical room for two, with meals, was about \$50 a week or approximately \$1,265 in today’s dollars.



**Herring & Co. Trade Card** — This three-panel trade card is from the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. Notes from the Free Library in Philadelphia read, “Top: open Herring safe showing structure of three doors; middle: three men happily examining contents of Herring’s safe pulled from burning building in background; another man sadly looks on damaged “Not Herring’s safe” with firemen and engine in background; bottom: in elegant parlor, woman placing silver into open Herring safe.”

### 30 DAYS' RECORD HERRING'S SAFES FIGHTING FIRE.

THESE REPEATED PROOFS THAT HERRING'S SAFES ARE TRUSTWORTHY SHOULD INFLUENCE BUYERS. THE FOLLOWING FIRMS AND OTHERS TESTIFY TO THE PRESERVATION OF ALL CONTAINED IN THEIR SAFES IN RECENT FIRES. WE CAN REFER TO

**THOUSANDS OF OTHERS.**  
**UNITED STATES EXPRESS CO.**

OFFICE AT CANASTOTA, N. Y.  
BURNED SEPT. 4, 1882.  
C. G. DE WITTE

**FIRE IN PHILADELPHIA,**

AUG. 30, 1882.  
1—CHAR. B. REES, SON & CO.  
2—LEE & BOWERS.

**FIRE IN WILLIAMSPORT, PENN.,**

AUG. 28, 1882.  
H. MERRIN & SONS.

**BURNING OF THE KIMBALL HOUSE,**

ATLANTA, GA., AUG. 12, 1882.  
1—G. W. ADAIR.  
2—J. W. GULPEPPER,  
Sec'y and Treas. ATLANTA WATER-works.

**THE VINEYARD HAVEN FIRE,**

VINEYARD HAVEN, MASS., AUG. 10, 1882.  
JOHN H. LAMBERT.

**BURNING OF THE DEVON INN,**

DEVON, PENN., AUG. 12, 1882.  
H. J. & G. R. CRUMP.

**LARGE FIRE AT GALVESTON,**

GALVESTON, TEXAS, AUG. 2, 1882.  
1—W. WURZLOW.  
2—F. DORMAN.

**HERRING & CO.,**

NO. 251 AND 252 BROADWAY, NEW-YORK.

**Herring & Co. Advertisement** — This ad for Herring’s Safes from the *New York Times* (1883) specifically lists the Devon Inn as one of its many success stories in protecting safe contents from the dangers of fire.



## First Devon Inn Fire

The fire at the first Devon Inn was discovered on August 13, 1883, at 8:50 AM after most working men had already left on the early train to the city. Most people believed that the fire began in a defective flue leading out of the kitchen, but opinions varied regarding the cause. Some thought it was started by the careless lighting of a match by a watchman. Others felt that it could have been an elevator workman who opened the flue where the fire was already smoldering, causing it to further ignite. Harry J. Crump said that the winter storms had damaged the large eight foot by eighteen-inch-wide chimney belonging to the kitchen range. Heavy winds had made it sway, and mortar joints had been loosened. During the spring they had repaired and braced the stack, but Crump felt that they must have failed to discover an open joint.

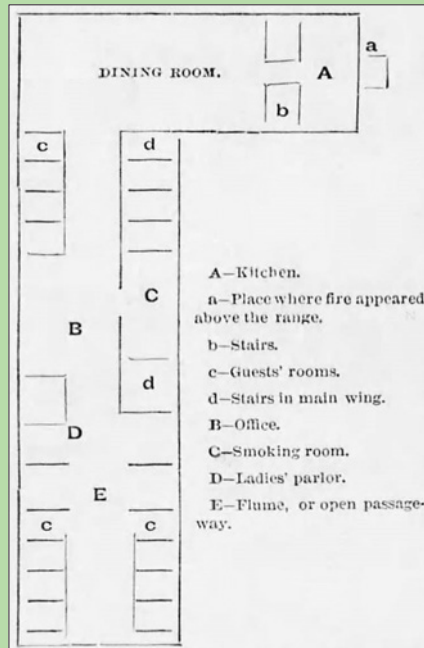
The steward on duty, M.J. Reilly, sounded the gong on each hallway, and fortunately he also remembered to turn off the gas, preventing what could have been a devastating explosion. It took about a half hour to evacuate everyone from the building, and although some reported no panic, there was certainly plenty of excitement. One woman insisted on returning to her room after initially being led to safety. When M.J. Reilly located her, she had climbed back into bed and covered herself with a pile of clothing, awaiting the worst. She was then carried out of the building. Apparently two or three other guests had rushed for the windows but were found just in time—with one leg out—and helped to escape safely. One servant did jump from a third story window and sustained severe but not life-threatening injuries.

By 10:15 AM there was nothing left but several large chimneys. The gnarled old

black cherry tree—possibly shown on the lawn in the first Inn photo—burned well into the night.

Why did the Inn burn so quickly and completely? The Inn's location may have played a crucial role. The Crumps often boasted that if there was a breeze anywhere, the Devon Inn would have its share. That breeze may well have fanned the blaze and prevented its containment in spite of the fire suppression system described in the *Daily Local News* of May 31, 1883, that was claimed to be “fully capable of successfully accomplishing [its] work.” This system used the water tanks in the attic to feed “fire or water stations” located on the landings. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* of August 14 reported that the system was put into use but did not adequately retard the fire.

The fire was no surprise to some, and a small blaze had been reported the summer before. One of the guests was quoted in the August 14, 1883 *Times (Philadelphia)*, “We have long expected a fire in the house,” said W. J. Lloyd, “and last night we had quite a talk about it when we were gathered on the porch. We knew that the fire escapes were incomplete and that safety would be due to our own agility in case of a conflagration. I don't know who were in the party, but I do know I went to bed with an uneasy feeling and woke up much relieved when I found that nothing was wrong. My feelings were somewhat different when I got the news of the fire upon my arrival in the city. I have no insurance on my wardrobe and jewelry.” Unfortunately, the Devon Inn fire was not unusual. On September 16, 1883, the *Memphis Daily Appeal* wrote that there had been more than 400 hotels destroyed by fire annually in the United States and Canada.



**Diagram of First Inn** — When the fire at the first Devon Inn started, proprietor Harry J. Crump had been away at National Guard camp in Phoenixville. When he returned that afternoon, he drew this diagram of the building's lower floor that showed where he believed the fire had originated above the range in the kitchen. The drawing also provides a clear understanding of the “flume” or open passageway, an architectural design that was incorporated into the second Inn as well.

## Herring's Patent Champion Safe

Herring & Co. was one of the major safe manufacturers in the United States in the 1880s and was based in New York. The Devon Inn installed a Herring's Patent Champion Safe for protection of important documents and valuables, especially those belonging to their guests.

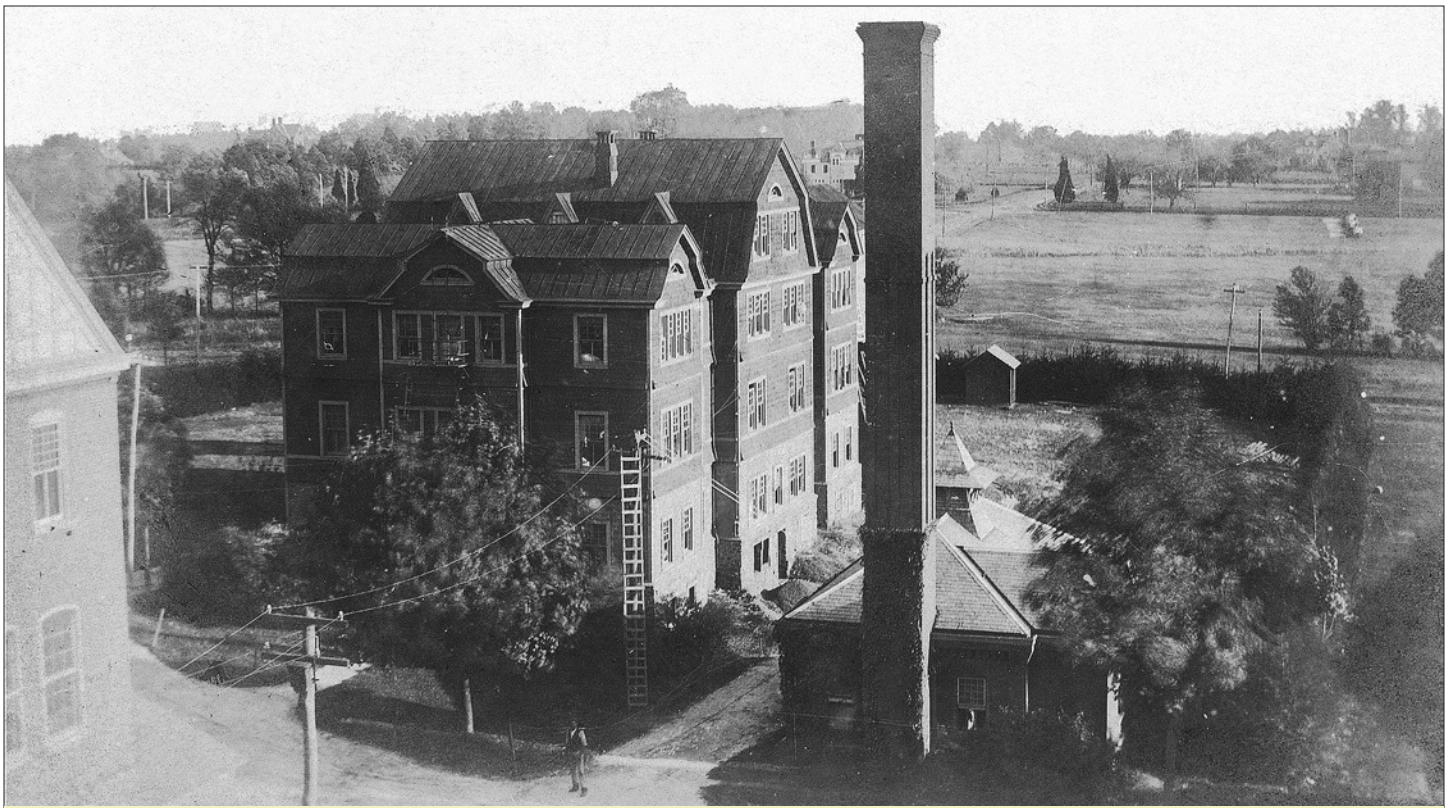
After the fire, Herring used the following statement from Harry J. and George R. Crump in its advertising: “Gents: Yesterday morning about nine o'clock our large hotel was totally destroyed by fire. The HERRING'S PATENT CHAMPION SAFE we had in use in our office was subjected to an intense heat, the feet, dials and knobs having been melted off, and gives us great pleasure to say that it preserved our books, valuable papers, money and jewelry.”

A loaded revolver was also found in the corner of the safe. It was covered in rust but otherwise in good shape. Harry Crump removed the cartridges, and the weapon was apparently preserved as a memento of the fire.

## Fire Insurance

Considerable property was recovered, principally articles of clothing in a more or less damaged condition. Nearly all the furniture was lost. A lost and found bureau was established near the ruins where the recovered articles were conveyed by the finders and then turned over to the owners.

The largest insurer was Boston Underwriters at \$7,500. Fire Association of Philadelphia, Hartford (Connecticut), Queen (England), Insurance Company of North America, and American Fire of Philadelphia each held policies for \$5,000. Fifty-one additional companies made up the remainder of the \$150,000 coverage. This amount paid in 1883 dollars would be worth \$3,982,445.93 in 2020, adjusted for inflation.

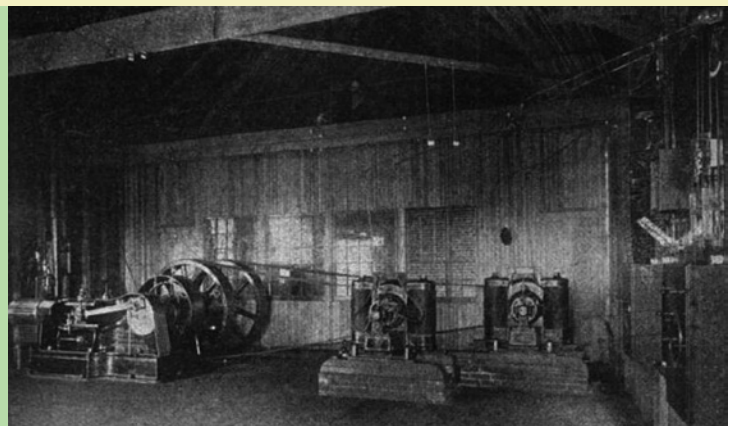


**The Barracks and Power House** — This Lucy Sampson photograph was probably taken in the early 1900s, and it appears that she was standing on the upper floor of Devon Inn looking southeast. The building on the left is labeled “The Barracks” and was constructed in the spring of 1883. It contained elaborate laundry facilities on the lower floor and servants’ rooms on the top. Its architecture looks very much like the first Inn, and it was the only building to survive the August 1883 fire. To the right of the Barracks, the “Power House” (or “Engine House”) building, with its tall smoke stack, contained the boilers for steam heat and hot water, and the engine and dynamos of the electric plant. *Courtesy of Stephen DiAddezio.*

## Electricity

The first mention of electricity at the Inn was found in a *Philadelphia Inquirer* article dated September 7, 1890: “The Devon Electric Light Company started 1500 incandescent lights in operation Thursday night on the board walk, piazzas and in the dining room of the Inn and at night the glow of these myriad electric fires renders the grounds a veritable fairy land.” An 1890 article in the *Electrical Engineer* describes the plant’s equipment in some detail and includes an image of the interior of the facility, but contains no information on its location. (The claimed capacity of the plant—two 400-light dynamos—does seem to conflict with the report in the *Inquirer*.) It also states that the “success already obtained with the plant is such that it will be increased to double its capacity during the coming winter.” Then, in 1891, an article in the *Times (Philadelphia)* announced that “all the gas has been taken out of the inn, leaving nothing but electric light throughout,” with no specific reference to the power supplier. Goshorn’s article reports that the power was provided by the Wayne Electric Light Company, which seems possible since that company had been registered with the Pennsylvania Department of State for several years, and it was serving Devon when the plant in Wayne burned on February 1, 1896.

But did the apparently successful Devon Electric Light Company simply disappear, replaced by Wayne Electric, between late 1890 and the spring of 1891? A search of the Pa. Department of State records did not turn up any business entity matching this one and none of the available maps identify a corresponding building. However, advertisements for the sale of the Inn—placed in 1910 after Miss Simmons’ death—note the existence of a complete electric light plant on the property, and the 1920–21



**Power Plant** — Image of the “Central Station Plant” at the “Devon Electric Light and Power Company,” built by the prominent La Roche Electric Works of Philadelphia. The two dynamos, on the right, were driven by a high-speed steam engine, which can be seen on the left. Image from *Electrical Engineer*, November 19, 1890.

marketing brochure for the Devon Manor School for Girls notes that there is on the grounds a “power-house, containing the heating plant and electric-lighting plant.” Therefore, the Devon Electric Light Company appears likely to have been simply the grandly named lighting plant for the Inn, which would explain why it was not filed as a separate business entity and why no building with that name appears on the maps. It also means that Wayne Electric was not the supplier in 1891 when the gas service was reportedly removed. In any case, electricity was here to stay, and the Inn’s Springfield Gas Machine was advertised for sale in the *Inquirer* in 1903.



## Gas Lighting

When the first Inn was built, gas was used for lighting. Philadelphia had gas street lighting starting in 1836 and gas lighting then moved into homes, factories and other commercial establishments, providing much improved light quality compared to candles, whale oil and kerosene lamps. The “illuminating gas” used was commonly “coal gas” produced by heating coal to drive off the hydrocarbons. The availability of this gas was largely confined to urban areas because of the cost of production and distribution. However, the well-to-do families who came to Devon and other suburban towns to occupy summer or permanent homes wanted the same amenities they had in their city residences. The Gilbert and Barker Manufacturing Co. of Springfield, Mass., provided the answer in their Springfield Gas Machine. The machine installed at the Devon Inn was reportedly capable of handling more than 700 light fixtures. The gas their device produced was nothing other than a mixture of vaporized gasoline and air. It was an elegantly simple, self-regulating machine. The fire risk was minimized by locating the gasoline tank itself in an outbuilding well away from the point of use. Only the fan that vaporized the gasoline and sent the mixture through the pipes leading to the burners needed to be in the main structure. A machine for a residence cost about \$500, well beyond the reach of the average homeowner, but of course that was not their target audience. The availability of these point-of-use gas sources helped open up the rural areas around Philadelphia and other cities to commercial, industrial, and residential development. Springfield Gas Machines were manufactured until 1918 and many stayed in use long after. In addition to lighting systems, Gilbert and Barker developed other products that depended on their technology such as instant water heaters, fireplace inserts, and heaters for clothes irons. When electricity became the dominant resource for lighting, Gilbert and Barker applied their knowledge of handling petroleum products to serving the automobile industry and introduced the first measuring gasoline pump in 1911. Check the pumps at your local station—Gilbert and Barker survives as Gilbarco.

## SPRINGFIELD GAS MACHINE

Improved under twenty years' manufacture and  
experience—maintains the lead.

**FOR COUNTRY RESIDENCES** It has proved to be a necessity and a luxury.

**FOR HOTELS** and other buildings, in connection with our Mixing Regulator, it produces gas of uniform quality, free from smoke, used through plain open burners.

**FOR MECHANICAL ARTS** it furnishes gas for heating purposes, at 40 to 50 cents per thousand feet.

Best quality GASOLINE, for Gas Machines, constantly on hand. Send for quotations.

Among the Hotels lighted by the Springfield Gas Machine, with Mixing Regulator attached, would mention the following: Glen Summit Hotel, Glen Summit, Pa.; Devon Inn, Devon, Pa.; Engleide, Beach Haven, N. J.; Avon Inn, Key East, N. J.; Luray Inn, Luray, Va.

For further particulars, address,

**GEORGE W. HULME,**

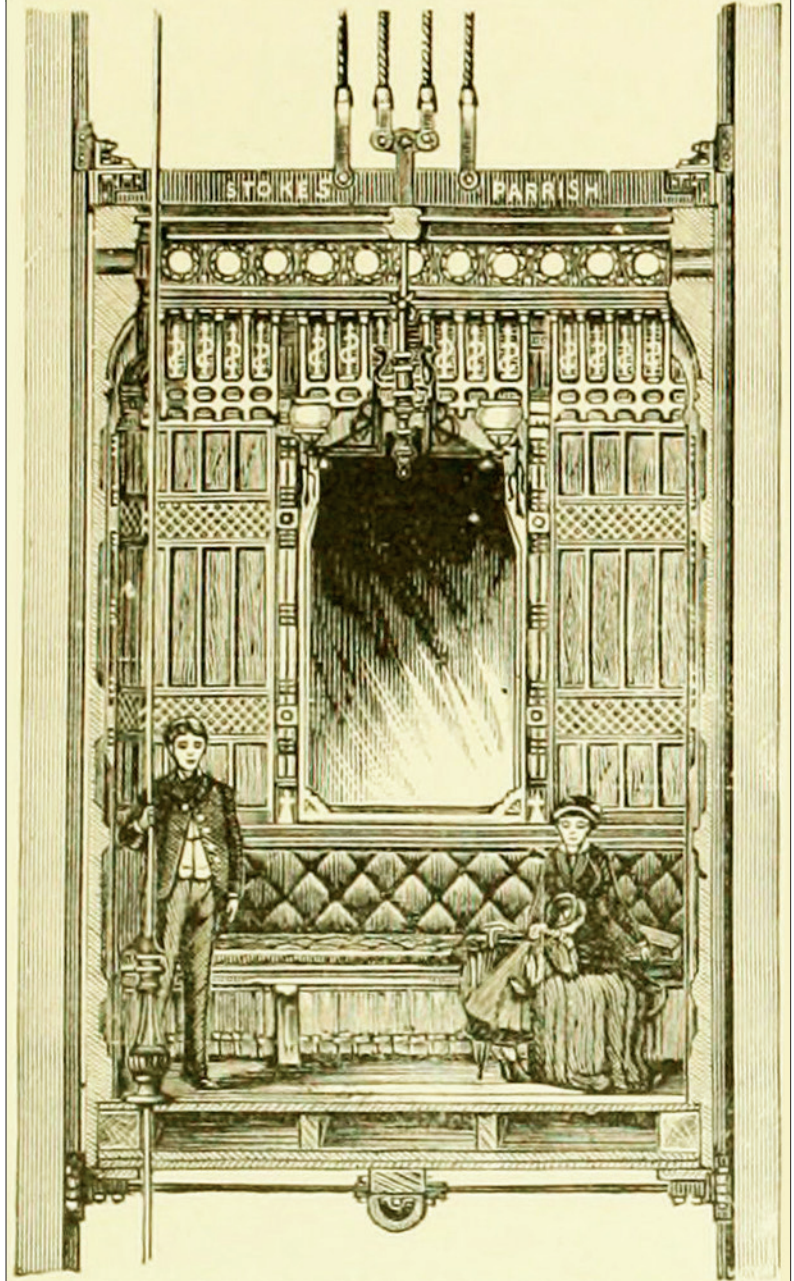
12 North Seventh Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

Cooking Stoves for use with Gas Machines.

SEND FOR CATALOGUE.

## Stokes & Parrish

Established in Philadelphia in 1873 as a manufacturer of general machinery, with an office at 3001 Chestnut Street, Stokes and Parrish constructed hydraulic passenger elevators not only for the Devon Inn but also the Wissahickon Hotel and the Bryn Mawr Hotel (now The Baldwin School). The firm was acquired by the Otis Elevator Company for \$50,000 in 1888, and the name was changed to Stokes & Parrish Elevator Company.



This image of a hydraulic elevator car is from an advertisement for Stokes & Parrish proclaiming “Safety, Speed and Economy.” Hydraulic elevators of the era used water power to lift the elevator car and gravity for its descent. A cable or rope passing through the cabin was used to control a valve in the hydraulic system, causing the elevator car to ascend or descend, and allowed a skilled operator to provide a smooth ride and accurately arrive at the desired floor level before opening the door of the car to allow passengers to enter or exit. The required water pressure came from water stored in an elevated tank on the premises.

**Springfield Gas Machine** — This advertisement for the Springfield Gas Machine specifically mentions the Devon Inn. It also lists the Avon Inn in Key East, NJ which was another hotel that was once managed by Miss M. E. Simmons.



## Ice House and Lake \*

Ice for use at the Inn was originally cut at Waterloo Mills, approximately 1.5 miles south on Waterloo Avenue, but a pond (or “lake”) and ice house nearer to the Inn—approximately a half mile—were constructed in 1883. This lake was used for boating and fishing in summer as well as harvesting ice in winter. An article in the *Times (Philadelphia)* on June 6, 1886—reporting on improvements at the Inn—waxed lyrical about “a clear and very romantic lake with a waterfall” located a “few hundred yards away” from the Inn.

The 1887 atlas shows the pond and ice house on the west side of Fairfield Avenue in line with the west end of Berkley Avenue at its intersection with Fairfield Avenue. The 1897 atlas shows a rectangular structure with a stream running through it in the same location, but it is unlabeled. Presumably that was still the ice facility, but it appears that the “romantic lake” was gone. By the time of the 1908 atlas, Berkley Road (all of the “Avenues” had become “Roads” by the time of the 1897 map) had been extended though that area, and the unidentified structure was gone.

In the wake of progress, natural ice was no longer needed to operate the Inn, as evidenced by a 1910 advertisement promoting the sale of the Inn after Miss Simmons’ death that highlights a “complete electric light and ice plant” on the property. Meanwhile, the nearby Berwyn Ice Company had been producing ice commercially since 1902. A visit to the area today discloses no obvious evidence of these earlier constructions.



Section of 1887 J.L. Smith map showing the lake and ice house at the top. Courtesy of Radnor Historical Society.

Specialized tools were used for ice harvesting and distribution. Courtesy of The Antique Ice Tool Museum [www.antiqueicetoolmuseum.org](http://www.antiqueicetoolmuseum.org).

## Water Supply

Goshorn describes the location of the original water reservoir as one mile north of the Inn. It was actually to the south, as reported in the *Daily Local News* of May 31, 1883. This water supply was not used for long, perhaps because of its distance. The October 25, 1885, issue of the *Times (Philadelphia)* reported that Coffin and Altemus were considering building a waterworks at springs within a half mile of the Inn. Indeed, the 1887 and 1897 atlas maps show a waterworks at the northeast corner of Chester and Fairfield avenues. This is not shown on the 1908 map, which includes the standard marking for water lines in the streets, suggesting that a municipal water supply had been established.

In his presentation at the Tredyffrin Easttown History Club’s 1999 annual banquet, Morrison Coulter, then president of Philadelphia Suburban Water Co., told the story of how municipal water came to Devon through the actions of the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR). The PRR facilities at Radnor and Glen Loch (west of Paoli) required reliable supplies of large amounts of water for their steam engines. In the mid-1890s, the PRR retained American Pipe Manufacturing Co. of Philadelphia to develop a distribution network. In the period 1895–99, American Pipe developed Pickering Creek pumping station, Diamond Rock reservoir, and



**Water Tank** — This photo showing an elevated water tank to the south of the Inn, is from a private collection album labeled “1896 Devon Horse Show.” This is likely the second water tank, holding 22,000 gallons, erected in late 1884. A tank of a similar size had been incorporated into the rebuilt Inn, enclosed in the building’s cupola. These elevated water tanks provided sufficient water pressure for the plumbing in the hotel, as well as the hydraulic elevator and fire suppression systems. Photo courtesy of Barbara & Jack Jacobsen.

laid pipes along Lancaster Turnpike from Bryn Mawr to Glen Loch. Also in 1895, American Pipe incorporated the water companies of Easttown, Tredyffrin, Villanova, and East Whiteland. Through a series of reorganizations, all of these became part of North Springfield Water Company in 1899, which in turn was acquired by Philadelphia Suburban Water Company in 1925.