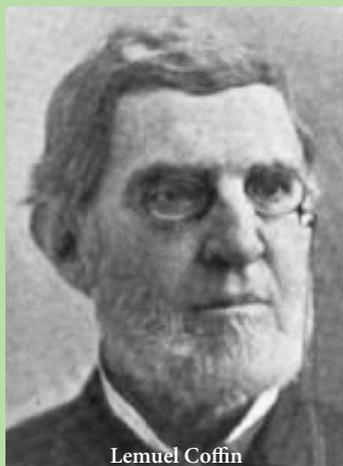


Personalities

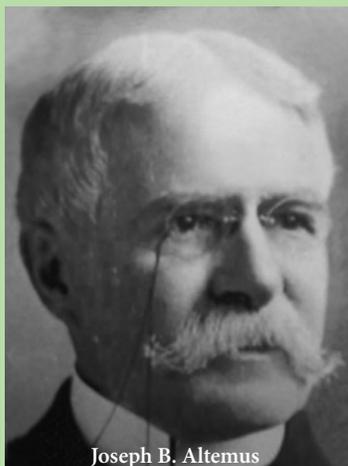
These are the stories of people behind the Devon Inn. Most of them are about the Inn's financial backers, architects, builders, managers and some of the more notable guests, all of whom rated extensive coverage in the press. The stories of the gardeners, cooks, maids, waiters, stable staff, and many more who kept the house running, were not often documented, but we have been able to include short items about two of them.

Lemuel Coffin & Joseph B. Altemus

As early as 1857, Joseph B. Altemus was a promoter and investor in passenger railroad services, and we can easily assume that those connections led him and his business partner, Lemuel Coffin, to purchase the land that became Devon.



Lemuel Coffin



Joseph B. Altemus

The men worked together at the successful firm of Coffin, Altemus & Co., a dry goods commission business on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. The company, with additional offices in New York, Boston and Baltimore, acted as manufacturing representatives and agents for many textile mills throughout the country. In 1881, at the time they purchased nearly 500 acres in Easttown with the intent to build a large hotel, their volume of business was said to be roughly \$7 million per year, or approximately \$175 million today, adjusted for inflation.

The Pennsylvania Railroad had used a successful business strategy when developing Bryn Mawr. The resort hotel would entice Philadelphians to visit the country and then, after guests became comfortable, the Railroad would sell them adjacent building lots. It should be of no surprise then that Coffin and Altemus not only built the Inn, but also constructed houses nearby and sold subdivided lots for people to build their own residences. In 1883, twenty acres of undeveloped land was selling for about \$300 an acre (about \$7,650 today). In 1885, a tract of land west of the Inn sold for \$1,000 an acre, and smaller houses on about two acres near the Inn were on the market for \$10,000 to \$12,000.

Everything changed in January of 1895 when Lemuel Coffin slipped on icy pavement near his home on Spruce Street and died shortly thereafter at age seventy-eight. Probate of his will was complicated by the fact that his real estate holdings,

COFFIN, ALTEMUS & CO.,
Dry Goods Commission Merchants,
NEW YORK. PHILADELPHIA. BOSTON. BALTIMORE.

Agents for

S. H. GREENE & SONS,
Manufacturers of Washington Prints, Oil Robes, Dress Goods,
Martha Washington Fancies, Imperial Pinks and Purples,
Riverpoint Robes and Plain Oil Colors in various widths and qualities.

FARR ALPACO CO., Serges and Italians.

BARNABY MFG. CO., Fine Zephyr Cinghams.

**BLEACHED MUSLINS, BROWN SHEETINGS,
DRILLS, DUCKS AND OSNABURGS,**

—MANUFACTURED BY—

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Williamsville Mfg. Co. | Slater Cotton Co. | Powhatan Mills, |
| Centreville Mills, | Atlanta Cotton Mills, | Forestdale Mfg. Co. |
| Monahansett Mfg. Co. | Hamlet Mills, | Natchez Cotton Mills |
| Trion Mfg. Co. | Exposition Cotton Mills, | Crown Cotton Mills. |

SPECIAL ATTENTION paid to orders for the **Export Trade.**

including the Devon Inn property, were carried on the company books, but they were titled Joseph B. Altemus and Lemuel Coffin, as tenants in common. Other partners in the firm were therefore not to share in profits or losses from a sale of the real estate.

By 1896, the business had other problems, as well. There was a financial depression, and the company was having trouble securing bank loans. The business model was changing for dry goods merchants, and many mills were beginning to sell directly to their customers, thereby reducing the commission income for the middleman.

The firm was also forced into litigation with the Coffin estate over the ownership of the land holdings. The Devon property, now consisting of about 300 acres, was valued at between \$1,000 and \$3,000 an acre. There was an unsuccessful effort to market it, and many were shocked at the news in September of 1896 that Coffin, Altemus & Co. had failed.

After a ruling by the court eighteen months later in favor of the company, a portion of the Devon property was sold in the summer of 1898 to Miss Mary E. Simmons, proprietor of the Inn since 1895. Edward T. Stotesbury and James W. Paul, Jr, partners at the Drexel investment firm, purchased the additional land to the south. The company's books showed a loss of nearly \$500,000 from the Devon property sale, but the firm was able to make settlement in full with all of its creditors.

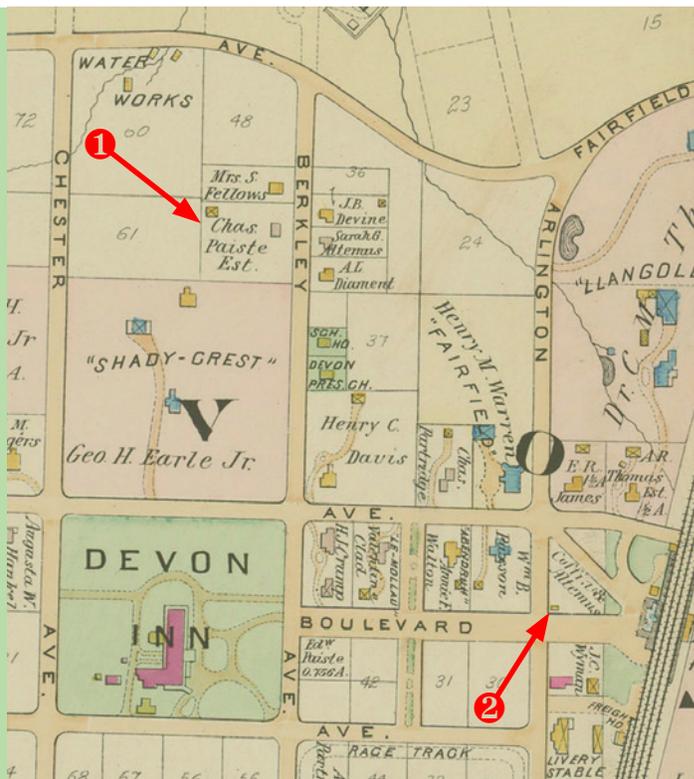
Joseph B. Altemus retired in 1899. In February of 1912, he died at age eighty-three of heart disease at his home in Germantown.

Charles Paist

Charles Paist was an early and successful Easttown Township real estate investor, and he was one of the land owners who sold property to Coffin and Altemus in 1881. He was contracted by them in 1882 to supervise the building of the first Devon Inn, and he remained as superintendent afterward. He owned numerous properties in the vicinity (e.g. ❶ the nearby parcel on Berkley Road). His job appears to have also included real estate sales of the land surrounding the Inn and his office was located on the triangular property (❷) at the northwest corner of the intersection of Devon Boulevard and Arlington Avenue (later Lancaster Avenue), as shown on the 1897 map.

It seems likely that Paist was closely involved in Altemus' real estate troubles in 1896, and that he would have played a role in the unsuccessful effort to sell the Inn and surrounding properties prior to the bankruptcy of Coffin, Altemus, & Co. The pair was also being sued by a group of Devon citizens over development rights and the closure of a part of Waterloo Road near the station. Compounding the troubles he was facing, Paist was also a director at the recently failed Chester County Guarantee, Savings and Trust in West Chester, where he and many friends lost a lot of money. On May 31, 1897, the unfortunate Charles Paist took his own life at his Devon Inn office by slitting his throat with a butcher knife. He was 60 years old.

It should be noted that it was during this difficult period that the first Devon Horse Show was held on July 2, 1896 at the Polo Grounds. Then in 1897, just 15 days after the death of Paist, the second Devon Horse Show was held on the lawn of the Inn.

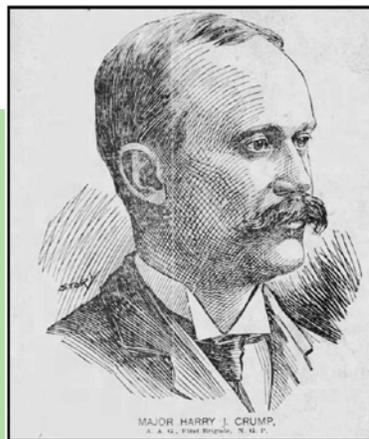


This enlarged detail from the 1897 map shows one of Charles Paist's numerous properties in the area (❶) as well as the site of his office in the triangular property close to Devon Station (❷). *Courtesy of Radnor Historical Society.*

Crump Brothers

In 1882, when Coffin and Altemus chose Henry J. (Harry) and George R. Crump to manage the Devon Inn, the two young men came with strong credentials. Their father, John Crump, was a wealthy, successful architect and builder in Philadelphia. In 1865, he had supervised construction of the Union League and perhaps had reason to meet Joseph Altemus who had been an active early member. John Crump also owned the very popular Colonnade Hotel on Chestnut Street and Congress Hall in Cape May. The father put his sons in charge of running both hotels, and by the time the Devon Inn opened, the Crump brothers were well known to be among the very best American hotel men, successfully catering to people who expected the finest.

Many guests at the Inn were early risers, and the young equestrians among them would start off their day with a cross-country ride before breakfast. Among the early riders was a beautiful young woman, Miss S. K. Phillips, whose father was a well-known Philadelphia stockbroker. She and George Crump became romantically involved during the Inn's second summer and were secretly married, telling no one for months. Apparently Mr. Phillips started to suspect something and was not pleased to learn the news!



Henry (Harry) J. Crump and his younger brother George R. managed the Devon Inn from 1882 through 1893. Harry was also a member of the First and Third Regiments of the Pennsylvania National Guard. He became Regimental Quartermaster at the end of the Spanish-American war. Harry died in 1911 at age 59. His brother George predeceased him in 1897.

In 1891, well before the Altemus and Paist financial struggles, the Crump brothers ran into their own fiscal trouble. They attributed the problem to extensive renovations at the Colonnade Hotel and indirectly to the failure of the Keystone Bank of Philadelphia. They agreed upon a settlement plan with their creditors and continued on with their businesses. The following year, their father passed away.

In the spring of 1893, G. Jason Waters replaced the Crump brothers at the Devon Inn. In October of 1894, the brothers were forced to sell the Colonnade Hotel for the benefit of their creditors. The business passed into the hands of E.T. Linnard and their cousin, George Arthur Crump, who is known more widely for designing and building Pine Valley Golf Club.

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Miss Mary E. Simmons

In 1895, Miss Mary E. Simmons (1842–1910) became manager of the Devon Inn, succeeding the Crump brothers and G. Jason Waters, but her interesting story begins a few years earlier.

In the late 1880s, Miss Simmons had earned an excellent reputation as manager of a variety of establishments in New Jersey and New York. Early in her career she was also well known in connection with the Bellevue Hotel in Wayne. When the new (second) Bryn Mawr Hotel opened in May of 1891, she was hired to run it. Some sources indicate she may have been an investor, as well. Her younger sister, Miss Ellen R. B. Simmons, also assisted at Bryn Mawr, and while there, she met Mr. John W. Patten of Devon. Later that fall they became engaged. (Over the years Patten was best known as the President of the Devon Polo Club, an original organizer of the Devon Horse Show, and the President of the Devon Dog Show.)

Early in the spring of 1892, the two sisters took a trip to Paris via steamship. Upon their return to New York, it seems that Federal Customs officers had been tipped off, and four of their trunks were seized. The items found inside were valued at about \$2600 and included two Paris-made ball gowns. An inspector also uncovered a ruby and diamond ring valued at \$1500 hidden in a small bag beneath the dress of one of the sisters. Duty had not been paid on any of the items, and the goods were confiscated. Apparently, a reporter questioning Miss Simmons described her as wearing a gown designed by Charles Frederick Worth along with many diamonds. She was quoted in the *Times* saying, “I have been told by my friends and by my lawyer not to talk about this.” Miss Simmons also claimed that she would compel the newspapers to take back the untruths they had written, insisting that she and her sister were not “smugglers.” We have been unable to find any retractions.

About a month later, on the evening of April 28, 1892, Miss Ellen R. B. Simmons married John Williams Patten. The couple resided at Mr. Patten’s home, named “The Buttonwoods,” north of Devon Station, within the triangle defined by what is now N. Waterloo Road, Old Lancaster Road, and Station Avenue. The house and nearby barn still stand in the northwest corner of the property.

In the spring of 1893, the Crump brothers were struggling financially, and G. Jason Waters from the Hotel Windsor in Atlantic City took over management of the Inn. He remained until January of 1895, when it was announced that Miss M. E. Simmons had been hired. She was described as having a magic touch and immediately brought in an architect, painter, decorator, and upholsterer to completely update the appearance of the Inn. According to the *Times*, when she moved from Bryn Mawr, she brought with her a “remarkable collection of curios, hangings, carved furniture, and other beautiful objects of decorative art, many of them obtained abroad.”

Miss Simmons started the season with an elaborate dance that was attended by not only Inn guests but also neighboring cottagers and a group from the city that was accommodated by a special train running at midnight. Miss Simmons also initiated a series of teas to be held throughout the summer months, for which her sister Ellen handled the hostess duties.

Coffin, Altemus & Co. failed in September of 1896. Their Devon property was held up in court for the next eighteen months, but during the summer of 1898, Miss Simmons purchased the Inn and a large portion of the land surrounding it.

Prior to this time, Miss Simmons would often manage other hotels during the winter months, and in December of 1897, she followed Dr. George S. Gerhard, the founder of Bryn Mawr Hospital, to Colorado Springs to assist him in opening a sanitarium. She had likely become acquainted with him the previous September when they had worked together at the Inn on a hospital benefit. After purchasing the Devon Inn, however, her winter season management of other properties seemed to have stopped, and in November of 1900, it was announced that she and her sister would spend the winter in Europe.

Over the next decade, Miss Simmons continued as proprietor of the Inn, offering teas, card parties, concerts and dances, but as early as 1900, it was noted that both the Devon Inn and the Bryn Mawr Hotel were somewhat vacant during the late summer as the society folk had moved on to the mountains or seashore.

Miss Mary E. Simmons died on January 26, 1910 of a pulmonary embolism. She was 68 years of age. Her sister Ellen S. Patten inherited the Inn.

The Inn’s Popular Head Waiter

In July of 1891, William H. Dover was the head waiter at the Devon Inn. Research shows that Dover was from Philadelphia and may have previously graduated from Lincoln University, the Historically Black College in southern Chester County. By the summer of 1891, it appears that he had completed his first year of Medical School at the University of Pennsylvania and had made such a good impression on the Inn’s guests that they were raising the funds needed for him to complete his education. We had hoped to uncover more information about Dover, but unfortunately so far, we have been unable to find anything.

Noble and Notable Guests

During its peak years of popularity, the Inn hosted many prominent foreign guests as well as members of local society.

In the summer of 1886, the former Italian Consul to Philadelphia, Count Goffredo Galli and Countess Galli (American Clara Roberts) were guests at the Inn for nearly the entire summer. They also arrived with their pack of Scotch Terriers, and much to the Count's frustration, the Inn would not board the dogs. Begrudgingly, Count Galli was forced to find a home for the famous pups at a neighboring farm house.

Count Montgelas of the German Embassy also spent time at the Inn that summer. A story was told at the Colonnade Hotel years later that the Count had proposed a wager that he could successfully run any Chester County pig against a horse over a twenty-five yard track. Suspecting a trap, no one from the chuckling crowd took him up on the bet. Later on, however, Montgelas explained that he had been serious. He had planned to teach the pig to suspect grain at the end, and wasn't counting on the pig's legs, but rather his appetite. The Count was also known to be quite popular with the young ladies.

It is perhaps a 1905 English cricketer's story of Barclay Warburton (publisher of the *Philadelphia Evening Telegraph* and captain of the Philadelphia Polo Club) that best tells

how locals viewed such foreign nobility among their ranks. Warburton had registered at the Inn behind a Frenchman who had just signed the guestbook as "Count de _____ and valet". Using a bit of American humor, Warburton followed along and signed the book, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Count de Warburton and valise" using the more colorful term for suitcase as a play on words.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Beale McLean of Washington, D.C. could often be found mingling among the noble set. Through inheritance, Edward McLean would become the publisher and owner of *The Washington Post*. His wife, Evalyn Walsh McLean, was a mining heiress and one of the last private owners of the Hope Diamond. During the 1912 horse show, the McLeans and their eldest son Vinson—nick-named the \$100,000,000 baby due to his inheritance potential—stayed at the Devon Inn. It is said that Vinson was obsessively protected by his mother, and during that stay the child was always accompanied by "six husky guards, each armed to the teeth." The following May, Mr. and Mrs. McLean and son Vinson again headed north to Devon via their private railroad car. Although no record can be found that she ever underwent surgery, Mrs. McLean was said to have been in practical seclusion at the Inn suffering from appendicitis. Tragically, in 1919 young Vinson was hit by a car in front of their Washington home and perished.



Devon Inn Livery — This 1904 photo, entitled "All Aboard," shows a well-dressed driver and his canine companion waiting outside the Inn to transport guests back to the Station—an advertised amenity provided by the hotel. Note the words "Devon Inn" painted on the lower side of the carriage. On the back of a related postcard, provided by William Woys Weaver, a handwritten note describes this same noteworthy driver dependably meeting many dozens of trains daily for decades without fail. Just imagine what this dedicated gentleman's character must have added to life at the Inn! *Image courtesy of the Chester County Historical Society.*

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