

## Life at the Inn

The Devon Inn was well-known as a fashionable place for rest and relaxation, but with so many guests together in one place, there was plenty of activity and amusement, too.

In addition to being a grand summer boardinghouse, the Inn became a kind of clubhouse for its socially prominent clientele. There were many activities and events organized not only by hotel management, but also by individuals as well as social, athletic, and charitable organizations, among others. Day-trippers and local residents took part as well as guests. The most well-known of these events, and the longest-lasting, is the Devon Horse Show.

In 1886, the Devon Inn hired the Germania Orchestra, and it was the first time a suburban hotel had brought in music for an entire season. The ensemble played every morning and evening, and on nice afternoons, special performances were given on the lawn. There were garden parties, card parties, dances, and various luncheons and dinners. And of course there was courting.

Late nineteenth century courtship in the United States followed specific norms, especially among the wealthy, and there were acceptable ways for eligible men and women to meet. Social life at the Inn met that standard. On August 7, 1885, the *Times* wrote an article about different resort hotels entitled “Where They Flirt.” At the Devon Inn, apparently there was a “dark angle in the stone wall at the corner just large enough for two and in its obscurity recognition [was] impossible. Early in the evening there [was] a scramble to reach this terra incognita.”

Guests had also taken up walking, and Hammer Hollow—generally in the area bound by Pugh, Upper Gulph, Valley Forge, and West Valley Roads—was a favorite destination. Within

a half hour’s stroll, Hammer Hollow offered springs, a lake, and an old mill. A photo of the Falls at Hammer Hollow was included in Julius Sachse’s book, *Devon and its Surroundings*, and guests described it as a most romantic outing.

Another Devon Inn walking tale was described by the *Times* on October 10, 1886. A group of young friends were up late into the evening when one casually remarked to another that it was not much of a walk from Devon into Philadelphia. A friendly \$200 bet ensued, and it was suggested that the sixteen mile walk be completed in four hours. The first friend was determined to begin immediately, and with two mutual acquaintances accompanying him by horse and carriage, he set off at 3:30 AM. At 7:15 AM the next morning the young man was at the Colonnade Hotel, having won the bet with fifteen minutes to spare. (\$200 in 1886 would be worth \$5,513 in 2020, adjusted for inflation.)

Wagering at the Devon Inn may have been just as popular as walking. On August 29, 1886, the *Times* described an agreement between two young men to play a specified number of “manly sports” games. The contest included a game each of checkers, backgammon, cribbage, poker, dominoes, and billiards. It also included euchre, a nineteenth-century trick-taking card game that is said to be responsible for introducing the joker into the modern card deck. At the end, the score was even, so they played mumblety-peg as the tie-breaker. Mumblety-peg was a popular pocketknife game in the 19<sup>th</sup> century where the knife was typically “flipped,” instead of thrown, in an effort to make it stick in the ground. Unfortunately for the loser, he had to pull the knife (or peg) from the ground with his teeth. It was written that the winner was one of the best all-round game players in Philadelphia.



**The Second Devon Inn** — In this photo of the second Inn, the prominent Devon Inn sign may be seen at the main entrance and a large number of people are gathered on the Inn’s long front porch. Because of the immature state of the landscaping, the date would seem to be quite early, perhaps 1884 or 1885. Could this be an image of the grand opening of the second Devon Inn on June 7, 1884? Or perhaps it was from the well-attended German Cotillion (see “The German” later in this section) held that July when all ladies wore white and gentlemen were in evening attire? Whatever the occasion, guests at the Devon Inn were always elegantly dressed and entertained in style. *Courtesy of Stephen DiAddezio.*



## Fashion at the Inn

Being properly and fashionably dressed was a major project for the guests at Devon Inn, especially the ladies. There was no such thing as packing light. They couldn't get dressed in the morning and wear the same outfit until changing to go out for dinner, as we often do today. During the late 1800s, Victorian style—with its elaborate dresses and bustles—was replaced by the slightly simplified Edwardian style. Even so, the daily requirements for a fashionable lady during the Gilded Age would include a morning dress (high neck and long sleeves), a day dress (open neck and shorter sleeves), a tea gown (more relaxed version of the preceding), a dinner gown and a combing jacket. And of course, she couldn't be seen in the same outfit every day. Detailed descriptions of evening wear were included in society columns in the newspapers: "... Miss Neilson in a white lace dress trimmed with corn-colored velvet; Miss Sarah Biddle, wearing black lace and scarlet flowers; Miss Agnes Chandler, in white surah and duchess lace, with pearls..." and so on.

In addition to dresses and gowns, a well-dressed lady would need appropriate corsets, bodices, corset covers,



DEVON HORSE SHOW—"THE SPECIAL EXHIBIT."

undergarments, nightwear, and numerous petticoats. Then there were shoes, various accessories, and often elaborate hats. Add in appropriate outfits for riding, golf, or other sports, and you can understand why they brought wagon loads of trunks, plus maids to help them with dressing and maintaining all this finery.

Gentlemen had a somewhat easier job, but they still had to have several changes of clothing during the day. Formal day wear was a morning coat with contrasting trousers (most commonly seen today among orchestra members at matinees), while more relaxed daywear was a sack suit (predecessor of today's business suit), and for evening events, black tie and tails. Tuxedos became acceptable wear for less formal evenings. Sports had their own wardrobe requirements, of course. The men benefitted from not needing all the specialized undergarments and the fact that they didn't need many different versions of the same outfit—black tie and tails variations all look very similar.



Examples of the types of ladies' daytime fashions that might have been seen at the Inn





**Dining Room 1899** — The Devon Inn was often recommended for its fine food and excellent service. Families and individual guests took their meals in the oak-paneled dining room as seen in this photo. Three large oak-surrounded fireplaces reached up to the high ceiling. Guests were seated at an assigned table with a specific waiter for the duration of their stay. The tables were said to be beautifully decorated with flowers, cut glass, silver and china. Nearly all the food served was raised on the property, including beef, butter, milk, and vegetables. Fruits and berries came from an adjoining farm and were used in desserts. In May of 1884, there was a plan to start a wine cellar. By 1886, it was noted that the greatest profit for the hotel was from the bar and the wine that was ordered. Claret and Burgundy were the most popular wines.

In June of 1884, the Philadelphia Bicycle Club stopped at the Inn for an early dinner after a ride from the city. The menu included cream of asparagus, halibut, sweetbread and peas, orange fritters, lamb and mint sauce, macaroni and cheese, cauliflower and strawberries. They rode back by starlight. *Photo courtesy of the Chester County Historical Society.*

In keeping with the style of the times and the social status of the guests, formal dress was expected at dinner. This drawing of a typical 1890 dinner gown from the *Times (Philadelphia)* described the dress thus: "Low-pointed bodice, with short sleeves, oval train and panels in pale blue brocade. Left side of the bodice and front of skirt in yellow gauze, bedecked with bands of tinted feathers and appliques of turquoise and pearl beads or silk gimp. Feather aigrette\* in the hair. Bertha of white mousseline de sole†, arranged in soft folds to fill up the heart-shaped opening of the low bodice, which invisibly fastens slantwise." — "Dinner Gown," *Times (Philadelphia)*, June 22, 1890, p. 12.

\* A spray of feathers worn on a hat or in the hair. † Refers to the style of wide and deep-cut neckline known as a Bertha, shown here with an insert of folded or gathered gauze-like silk.

Newspaper articles often referred to the Devon Inn as "The Devon," and the engraving on this spoon reflected that name. *Photo courtesy of Meg Wiederseim.*





## Afternoon Riding and Driving

Carriage driving and horseback riding were favorite pastimes at the Devon Inn, and they were full of both romance and interest. A few of the most popular destinations included: George Washington's Valley Forge headquarters and King of Prussia, both five miles away; the romantic waterfall at Hammer Hollow, two miles away; the Paoli Battlefield (scene of the infamous "massacre"), four miles away; and "Mad" Anthony Wayne's grave at St. David's Church, one and a half miles away.

Julius F. Sachse's 1892 book, *Devon and its Historic Surroundings*, provided guests with an illustrated guidebook for touring the local area, including the places noted above. Sachse wrote, "The Devon Inn derives its interest, however, not only from fashionable patronage, convenience, and perfect appointments, but from the historic associations of the picturesque hills and valleys round about it."

By 1895, however, it seems that afternoon coaching was no longer as popular as it once was, and fashionable girls were no longer as interested in it.

These illustrations depict a typical afternoon diversion at the Devon Inn where guests entertained themselves by riding and driving in the countryside. "A Morning Ride in the Park" and "A Ride in the Park," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 15, 1892, p.12



## Amateur Base Ball

We first find reference to "Base Ball" at the Inn in the summer of 1886 when Devon beat Bryn Mawr by a score of 21 to 17. The team roster comprised many familiar names, including Lemuel C. Altemus and George H. Earle, Jr.

The Pennsylvania National Guard First Regiment had been ordered to find a location within 20 miles of Philadelphia for their summer encampment and chose the grounds of the Devon Inn. Young Harry Crump was a first lieutenant in Company D, and perhaps this relationship influenced the choice of location. Along with skirmish drills, dress parades, and shooting practice, the captains and lieutenants played a rousing game of "base ball" in which, according the July 16, 1886 *Times (Philadelphia)*, "the Captains were permitted to win by a score of 18-13." During the first inning, several team members were knocked out—requiring medical attention—and apparently the match provided fine entertainment for hotel guests.

From 1887 to 1892, advertisements for the Inn included reference to the ball grounds. In 1888, the Inn's team was called the Devon Base Ball Nine, and it was captained by Colonel Robert E. Glendinning of the First City Troop. They played against such teams as Wayne, Bryn Mawr, and the Germantown Cricket Club. At the end of the season, it was announced the next summer would feature an additional club made up of the Inn's waiters. By 1890, the Devon Inn was a popular destination of Philadelphia cycling groups, and various wheelmen clubs also played baseball on the grounds.

This illustration depicts a dramatic moment in a typical "base ball" game of the era. "Base Ball" *Times (Philadelphia)*, August 6, 1893, p. 8



## The German

The German dance became very popular in America in the years after the Civil War. Although it was initially called the German Cotillion, gradually the word cotillion was dropped, and the dance simply became known as “The German.”

The German can be best described as a dance party with games. The hostess would always ask a young man with an outgoing personality to act as the leader. Typically, a ring of chairs was set up, with space allowed for dancing inside. The couples who participated took seats and would stand up to waltz around the room. Various games would be announced, and guests were chosen to take part. It was customary that the hostess would provide special favors, and typically the evening ended with a late supper.

A German was held at the Devon Inn as early as July of 1884. It was described as being a young person’s affair with no married folk included. Almost all the ladies wore white, and the gentlemen wore evening attire. The hostess gave out nearly 500 favors, and an evening meal was served afterward in a private parlor.

It appears that Germans were held at the Inn nearly every year through at least 1900. Sometimes they would be danced incidental to a grand ball, and other times they were held on their



own. Both single and married guests in their most fashionable attire attended, and on occasion, young people from the city and neighboring areas would also be invited. Most often, the Germans were held in the Inn’s Dining Room, and in September of 1892, the room was described as “ablaze with electric lights and fragrant with the perfume of choice specimens of horticulture.” In later years, the Germans were also held in the Ball Room. The young man who was asked to lead would always get recognition in the press, as would the novelty of the dance program. The favors seemed to vary from flowers and bonbons to decorated masks and confetti. A supper always concluded each evening, and the Inn’s fine cuisine made it an added draw.

## State Federation of Pennsylvania Women Meeting

The three-day annual meeting of the State Federation of Pennsylvania Women was held at the Devon Inn at the end of October in 1907. The Saturday Club of Wayne arranged the meeting, and special trains ran from Philadelphia. The Inn arranged a daily rate of \$2.50 for the several hundred delegates who attended, themselves representing many thousands of other members of the Pennsylvania Federated Clubs.



Mrs. Edward W. Biddle, Carlisle, Pa.



Mrs. M. W. Orme,  
President of Saturday Club, Wayne, Pa.

Mrs. Edward W. Biddle of Carlisle was elected President, and she emphasized civic improvement in her address. The advancement of public schools and the regulation of picture shows and child labor were also major issues. The Saturday Club hosted a reception at the Inn and coordinated visits to Bryn Mawr College, Valley Forge, and St. David’s Church.

On the final evening, the West Philadelphia Shakespeare Club provided a rendition of “The Taming of the Shrew”

wherein all the male characters were played by women. The Inn’s Ballroom blinds were drawn, and the doors guarded against any possible manly intrusions. Mrs.

J. B. Johnson, president of the Shakespeare Club, provided background about the Inn to the delegates. She indicated that it was “owned by a wealthy lady who had made it very much more than an ordinary inn. There she [had] gathered a large collection of curios, bric-a-brac and works of art which [were] the admiration of all guests.”

She was, of course, referring to the notable Miss Simmons.