

Postscript

After Miss Simmons died in January, 1910, the Inn passed to her sister and her husband, who put it up for sale that same year. The Inn was not sold until 1914, but meanwhile it continued operating until 1913, when the Temperance Movement dealt the Inn a blow from which it never recovered. In March, the Inn, along with 27 other establishments in Chester County, lost its liquor license, putting Devon at a serious disadvantage compared to the 34 hotels in the county, and others in surrounding counties, that were still able to sell alcohol. According to an undated recollection by Mr. Gary Wheeler of Wayne, "it didn't pay after this, and so was closed by the end of the year." And things went downhill from there.


A syndicate bought the building, contents, and land in 1914 for about \$350,000. One article in the *Inquirer* said that it was "the intention of the purchasers to continue the Inn as a hotel," while another less than a month later reported that Samuel Greenlee, representing the syndicate, declared that the Inn would not be used as a hotel. There was also a report that plans were being made for extensive renovations and an addition. Nothing came of any such plans, and in 1915, the Inn was sold at sheriff's sale for the outstanding debt of \$108,153. The Inn was not completely inactive during this time, however. The Devon Horticultural Society held its annual exhibition on the veranda in June and a dahlia show in September. In 1916, there was another unsuccessful effort to form a stock company and reopen the Inn.

Then, in 1917, the Devon Manor School was chartered, and plans made for the old Inn to be "converted into a girls' boarding school capable of accommodating two or three hundred pupils in the winter time and in the summer, under the name of Devon Manor, will blossom forth into a full-fledged summer inn once more." It's unlikely that it ever became "a full-fledged summer inn." There were a number of ads in 1920 and 1921 for Devon Manor (or sometimes Devon Inn) as an "apartment house," but with reference to resort-like amenities such as tennis, golf course privileges, and a dining room with "the best of cuisine."

The school opened in 1917 (not 1919 as reported in the Goshorn text), but was in financial difficulties from the start. In the spring of 1918, creditors filed for involuntary bankruptcy to prevent a sheriff's sale, because they feared other creditors would be treated preferentially. By late 1923 the school was out of business. A petition of involuntary bankruptcy was filed in November, and the sheriff attached the furniture and other tangible property. The nature of the real estate transactions surrounding the property is not clear, however. Our research into newspaper files shows it being sold at sheriff's sale in 1924, whereas Goshorn's article, and one by Herb Fry state that it went back to the Leeches, who had acquired it in 1915.

In April of 1926, the Devon Park Hotel Corporation was chartered, and the hotel opened with a celebratory ball on June 5th. A. Stanley Stanford, who had managed the Inn for several

The
NEW DEVON PARK HOTEL
is Horse Show Headquarters



BE sure to attend the Devon Ball on Friday evening of Horse Show Week which is being given under the auspices of The Devon Park Hotel.

Make it a point to see and enjoy—


*The new JAPANESE FLORAL GRILL
and the RUSTIC TERRACE GARDEN*

*You are invited to dine and entertain at Philadelphia's finest Suburban Hotel,
10 miles from city line, capacity 600 guests*

DEVON PARK HOTEL
DEVON, PA.

CAPTAIN A. STANLEY STANFORD
Managing Director

A new school...for boys



Three and one-half miles from Valley Forge, just off Lancaster pike, a new military school for boys has been established. On its ample campus, an engagement was fought by Light Horse Harry Lee.

The main building cost approximately \$750,000. 171 rooms with baths—single beds. The kitchen and bakery are the most fully equipped of any school in eastern United States. Recreation building, bowling alleys, billiard room. Large auditorium. Gym under construction. Polo, golf. Cavalry unit.

College Entrance Board requirements are the scholastic standard. The aim is to teach boys how to study. Thorough preparation for college or business. Classical, scientific, commercial courses.

Undenominational—Christian influence.

Write for Catalogue
The Registrar, Box A, Devon, Pa.

Valley Forge Military Academy

(LEFT) Devon Park Hotel advertisement from the 1926 Devon Horse Show Catalog. (ABOVE) Ad for the new Valley Forge Military Academy, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 19, 1928.

years after Miss Simmons died, was Managing Director. Advertised features included a new Japanese Floral Grille and a French Terrace Garden lit by antique street lanterns. There was dinner dancing almost every evening, and Sam Brown's Orchestra would often broadcast over different local radio stations direct from the hotel. Horse show related events were again held there.

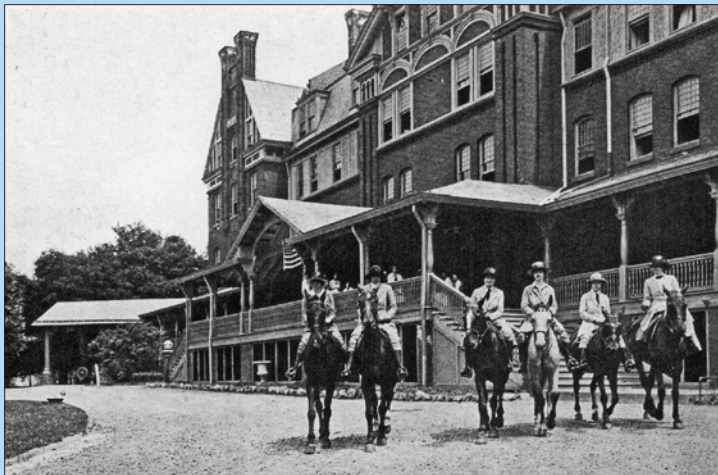
Announcement of the establishment of Valley Forge Military Academy was made in May, 1928, and it opened in September, but the hotel had continued to advertise throughout the summer. The hotel must have been seriously under-utilized during this time to have allowed school renovations to take place at the same time. Captain Milton G. Baker of the 103rd Cavalry supervised the remodeling and would become superintendent of the school. Although most of the facilities listed already existed as part of the Devon Park Hotel, a June advertisement indicated that a new gymnasium was under construction. It also specified that the main building cost approximately \$750,000.

The Academy officially opened on September 26, 1928 with over 100 boys in residence. Sadly, on January 18th, not long after the students had returned from Christmas break, the school burned. The fire started on the fourth floor, close to the elevator shaft, in the early morning while the campus slept. An instructor was awakened by the smell of smoke and after unsuccessfully attempting to extinguish the fire, sounded the fire alarm. A bugler called the cadets to assemble, and they filed out of the building, mostly in their pajamas. Firemen from surrounding areas responded to the call, but apparently

the scarcity of water prevented them from extinguishing the flames, and an hour later the roof collapsed. Fortunately no one was injured.

Very little remained of the former Devon Inn after the Valley Forge Military Academy fire, save for some masonry, but the last standing wall collapsed as a consequence of the massive Devon fireworks plant explosion in April of 1930. Five years later, development of the old hotel site was announced. It took four more years, but in 1939, it was revealed that 52 colonial-style residences would soon be built on the site. J. Robert Lenhart of Downingtown had purchased the property from the State Banking Department, and Lenhart would also manage the development. The houses would be offered for sale in the \$5990 to \$9500 price range.

The heyday of the great resort hotels had long since passed. They blossomed in the 1880s with the increasing wealth and disposable income in America's industrial centers, improved transportation, a new emphasis on health and outdoor activity, and amenities like electric lights and telephones that may have exceeded what some patrons had at home. But as the 20th century opened, the costs of modernizing and maintaining aging facilities were high, and the probability of profiting from those expenditures low: locations like Devon that had once been out in the country were increasingly suburbanized, thus diminishing their attraction to those seeking to get away from it all, and the socialites who had been their primary customers began to seek novel and more fashionable leisure pursuits, such as touring the new national parks in the west, or traveling abroad.



(CW FROM UPPER LEFT) 1920-21 Devon Manor school marketing brochure photo titled "Off for a Ride." Courtesy of Radnor Historical Society; Ad for Devon Manor school; "General View of Tragic Devon Blast and Some Refugees" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 4, 1930, p. 1



A Most Unusual School for Girls

Devon Manor solves the problem confronting parents who wish their daughters to receive a cultural and practical education under the most favorable conditions—social, moral, mental and physical.

The faculty is remarkably strong, consisting of specialists from the country's leading colleges. College Preparatory, Post Graduate and Vocational Courses. Music, Art, Arts and Crafts, Kindergarten, Expression, Domestic Arts and Sciences, Secretaryship, Philanthropy and Social Service work.

Devon Manor purposes to fit each student so that she will be capable of leadership in the social and economic activities of her own community.

In its equipment, wholesome food and outdoor athletics, Devon Manor offers ideal advantages for the development and enjoyment of splendid health. Resident doctor, nurses and dietitian. 16 acres. Fireproof building. Outdoor classrooms and sleeping porches. Three artesian wells on the premises supply pure water of crystal clearness.

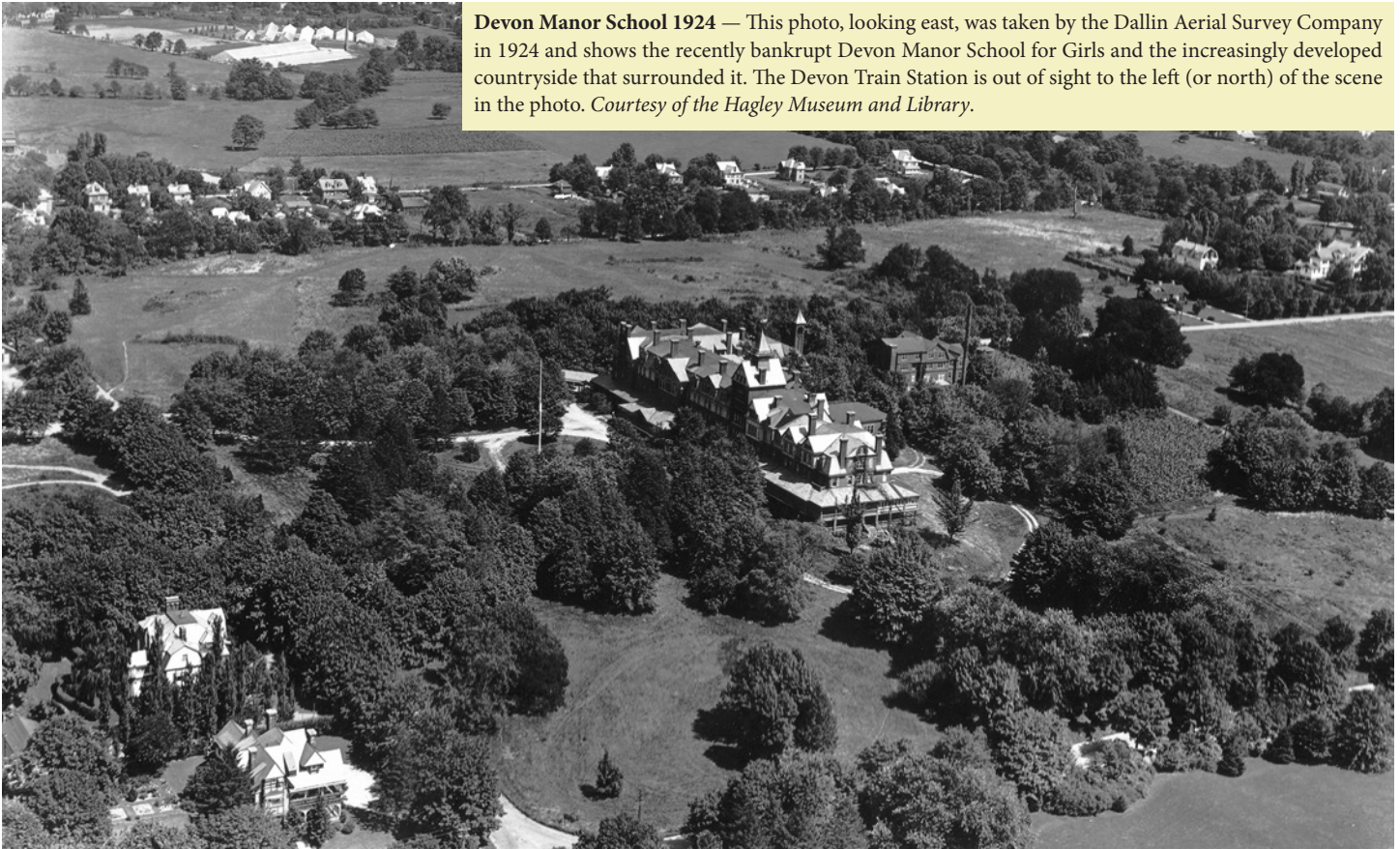
Devon Manor is only 40 minutes from Philadelphia and six miles from Valley Forge. It is situated on a high elevation overlooking the beautiful Chester Valley.

FRANCIS R. LOWELL, Pres. **DEVON MANOR**
Box , Devon, Pa.

Booklet will be mailed on request.



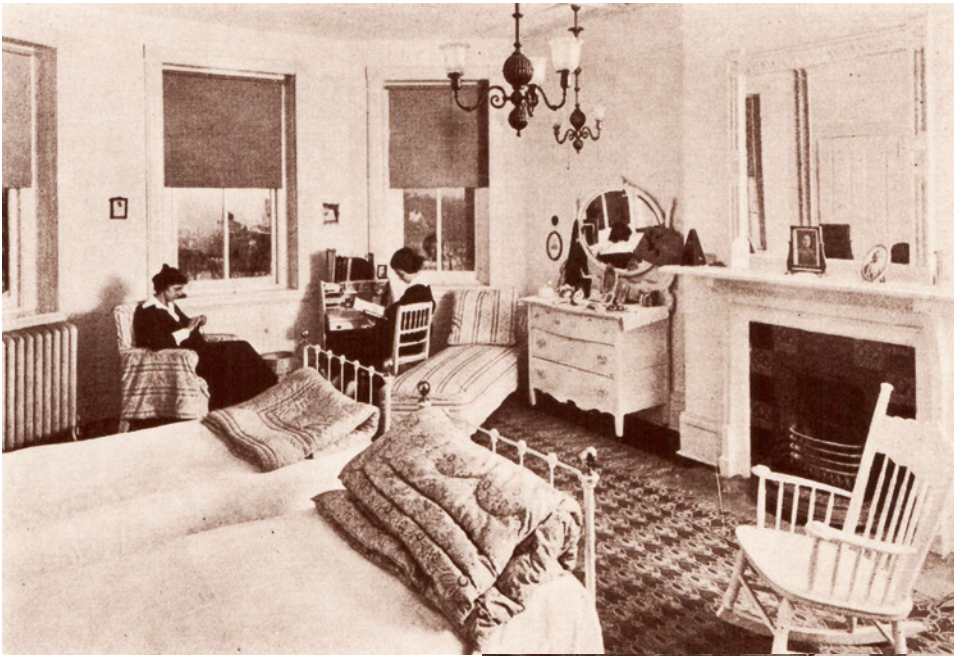
EDITH SAMSON, Pres.



Devon Manor School 1924 — This photo, looking east, was taken by the Dallin Aerial Survey Company in 1924 and shows the recently bankrupt Devon Manor School for Girls and the increasingly developed countryside that surrounded it. The Devon Train Station is out of sight to the left (or north) of the scene in the photo. *Courtesy of the Hagley Museum and Library.*



Graduation — Although this photo is undated, we know a little about the Devon Manor School's first commencement from an article in the *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger* dated June 7, 1918. The class had 11 graduating girls—the same number seen in the photo—and W.F. Slocum, former Judge of New York, was the main speaker. There were buglers, fifers and a flag raising ceremony honoring the American troops who were at war. *Courtesy of the Chester County Historical Society.*

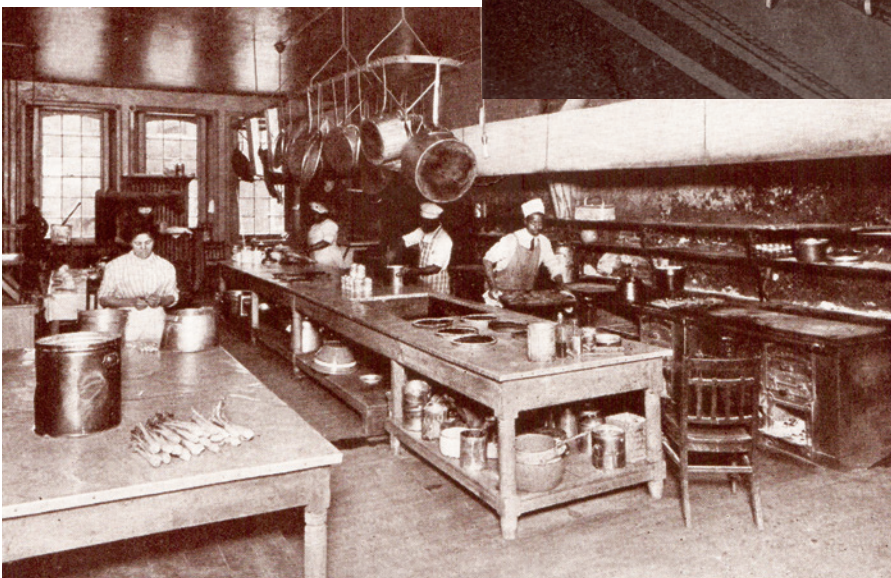


Bedrooms — The Devon Manor bedrooms were located on the second and fourth floors and were described as unusually large with closets and connecting bathrooms— exactly as they were portrayed years before at the Devon Inn. Many of the rooms also had fireplaces, and one can be seen in this photo.

The third floor of the Inn had bedrooms, but in the Devon Manor incarnation, it was used as an infirmary. According to the *Devonian*, on October 9, 1918, there were numerous “flu” sufferers at the school—not surprising since the “Spanish Flu” had already killed 12,000 in Philadelphia by that time.

Entrance Hall — We have not found any photographs of the Entrance Hall from the Devon Inn per se, but this Devon Manor photo—with what possibly appears to be some school books on the table—seems consistent with what is described by the *Times* on May 25, 1884: “The entrance hall, with its carved oak ceiling, paneling and dado, and the great, handsome open fireplace, also of oak, reaching away up to the lofty ceiling, presents a massive appearance.”

The three photos on this page are from the 1920–1921 Devon Manor School Marketing Booklet. *Courtesy of Radnor Historical Society.*



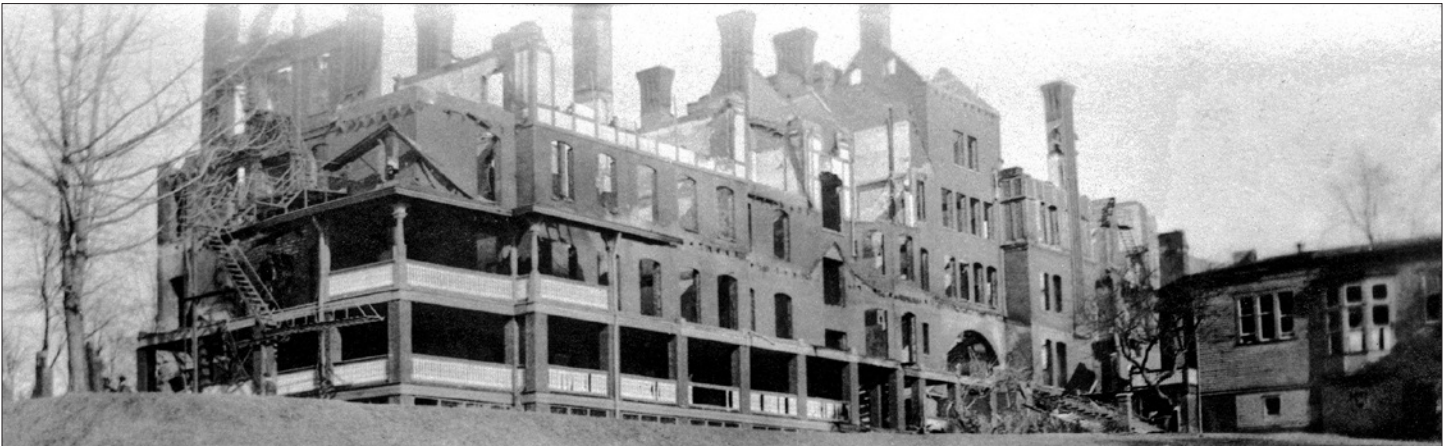
Kitchen — The School’s kitchen was described as being in a dedicated space in a wing of the building. The Devon Inn’s kitchen was in what can be presumed to be that same location—the bottom of the building’s “L”—and it seems safe to assume that very little changed there when the Inn transitioned to a school.

The fire at the first Devon Inn was believed to have started in the kitchen flue, and according to the 1918 *Devonian*, the girls at Devon Manor participated in a fire drill on November 24. It was said that the building was emptied in two minutes and only a few unfortunately slow souls virtually “burned to a crisp.” The following day they repeated the drill, and the students assembled in “record time.”

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Military Squadron Review c. 1928 — Tom Goldblum of Valley Forge Military Academy and College indicates that this photo was taken of a Squadron Review or what is now called a Corps of Cadets on Parade. The image appears to have been taken in the late fall or winter on the southwest lawn of the former Devon Park Hotel. *Photo courtesy of Greg Pichard.*



Building Ruins, 1929 — This photo from the TEHS Archives was taken after the catastrophic fire in January of 1929 and shows the collapsed roof and sad skeletal remains of the gutted structure. The photographer was looking northeast and standing on the lawn where the VFMA cadets would drill and parade, and in previous years, where girls from Devon Manor School would have played field hockey and where the Devon Horse Show was held in its early years. The concussion from the devastating explosion at the nearby (in Devon about a mile away) fireworks plant on April 3, 1930, was reported to have knocked down the wall that had remained after the fire. *Courtesy of Greg Prichard.*

Former Devon Inn Burns — Flames destroyed the Valley Forge Military Academy in Devon on January 18, 1929. Efforts to bring the fire under control were fruitless. *Photo courtesy of Stephen DiAddezio.*


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Devon Park Hotel, 1927 — This photo of the Devon Park Hotel was cropped from a larger image taken by the Dallin Aerial Survey Company on May 30, 1927. The image is looking southwest. *Courtesy of the Hagley Museum and Library.*

Devon Park Hotel

On the Lincoln Highway at Devon



Rates with meals, \$6 per day up. Special weekly rates. Ideal location to hold your card party, reception, wedding or private dance.

Tennis, Horse Back Riding and Golf
Motor out the Lincoln Highway to Devon, or Pennsylvania R. R. to Devon Station; 88 trains daily.

Philadelphia's Largest and Coolest Suburban Hotel
Special Luncheon, \$1.50—Dinner (6.30 to 8.30), \$2.50
Dancing During and After Dinner No Cover Charge
The Famous Sam Brown's Ritz Orchestra

Devon Park Hotel Ad, 1926 — This ad for the Devon Park Hotel ran in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on July 9, 1926. Weddings were added to the list of features, and rooms with meals started at \$6 per day, much less than during the early and more successful years

• **THE SITE OF THE OLD**
Historic Devon Inn..
DEVON, PA.

Now Being Developed into
**A BEAUTIFUL
RESIDENTIAL PARK**

•
**ALL STONE FRONT
HOMES**
WITH 60' FRONT LAWNS



Come See Them Today
\$6690 \$6990 with
2-Car Garage
1 1/2 Squares Front Devon Station (Approximately 80 Trains a Day). TO REACH: Get Lancaster Pike 1 square past Devon Horse Show Grounds (Devon Blvd.), turn South 1 Block to operation.

**J. ROBERT LENHART. DEVELOPER
AGENT ON PREMISES**

1940 Residential Marketing Ad — Developer J. Robert Lenhart marketed his new homes in the May 12, 1940 *Philadelphia Inquirer* by noting their location on the former site of the historic Devon Inn. (BELOW) The exteriors of many of the houses that remain there today appear largely unchanged. *Courtesy of Larry DeYoung.*



Artifacts — Residents of the development have found many fragments left over from the demise and demolition of the Inn. This small collection of pieces of glass and metal, including a window sash weight, emerged from the garden soil in the yard of one resident, along with countless bricks. *Photo courtesy of John O. Senior*