

CARPENTER'S RUN AND CARPENTER'S WOODS: A BRIEF HISTORY

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Carpenter's Woods was initially incorporated into Fairmount Park in 1912, but it had long been a "corner of heaven" for local children, as shown in this 1898 photo. GHS.

Introduction

Beginning in the mid-19th century, the engineers and surveyors who designed the streets, bridges and other infrastructure of Philadelphia began systematically diverting more than a hundred miles of streams into large sewer pipes to provide drainage for the city's expanding neighborhoods. Because so many of the streams that once

ran through the city have been subsumed by this underground sewer infrastructure, what becomes remarkable in the modern landscape is any stream that still runs on the surface.¹ Each of these remnants has a story of its survival, and a little stream in West Mt. Airy that neighbors call Carpenter's Run is no exception.

¹ For a detailed look at the justifications for stream to sewer conversions and the consequences of this work, see the "Creek to Sewer" page at <www.phillyh2o.org>, the website of Adam Levine; also his article, "Sewers, pollution and public health in nineteenth century Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Legacies*, 10 (May, 2010):14-19; and his forthcoming essay, "The grid versus nature: The history and legacy of topographical change in Philadelphia," in Brian Black and Michael Chiarappa, eds., *Nature's Entrepot*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

Carpenter's Run has its source in a patch of woodland south of Greene Street, between North and South Mt. Pleasant Roads (Figure 1). From there it winds its way a little more than a mile to join Wissahickon Creek just upstream of the Kitchen's Lane Bridge. It survives today as a surface stream because its valley was incorporated into Fairmount Park and thus protected from development. This park extension, known as Carpenter's Woods, was instigated by the City Parks Association (CPA), a local park and planning advocacy organization founded in 1888. Two ordinances in 1912 and 1913 set aside the valley as parkland, and the land was acquired over the next seven years from a handful of property owners. More than half of the land was given to the city for a nominal fee, but later parcels were purchased at market value, with the most expensive of these only ending up as part of the park after a year-long battle in City Hall and in the courts.

In retrospect, the cost of this (or any) piece of urban parkland seems unimportant compared to the benefit derived from it by generations of humans and wildlife. As the city's first bird sanctuary, Carpenter's Woods has been a welcome haven for neighbors, flora, and fauna for more than 100 years. It is a place about which the poet Gerald Stern has written, "This is a corner of heaven here."² No poet would have ever waxed eloquent about this woodland if the original city plan had been executed, and the valley had become the site of yet another residential development – for the simple reason that there would have been no woodland left to write about.

One note about the stream's informal name: while it appears on David Schaaf's beautiful and informative 1993 map, "The Neighborhood of Mt. Airy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," no official city maps ever identified this small stream. The only earlier map to name the stream, calling it Kitchen Creek, was created in 1913 by the City Parks Association and first published in local newspapers. But that name did not stick: when this map was reprinted in an official city publication later that year the label on this stream had been removed.³ Naming unnamed



Figure 1. This map is from a section of a 1993 map by David Schaaf, *The Neighborhood of Mt. Airy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*. For the sake of clarity, historical information has been deleted.

tributaries would have made the same sense for the City Parks Association in 1913 as it does for neighbors of Carpenter's Run today: it gives the stream an identity, making it seem like the valuable amenity it truly is. Humans, being verbal, find it much easier to love something with a name; the unnamed seems, by implication, unimportant.

The Original City Plan: The Valley Under Siege

Until the early 20th century, city engineers in Philadelphia and elsewhere seemed intent on

² Gerald Stern, "In Carpenter's Woods," from *Early Collected Poems: 1965–1992* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 53–54.

³ George M. Greene, "Map showing existing and proposed parks, parkways and playgrounds for northwestern section of Philadelphia and proposed garden city revision at Lincoln Drive and Hartwell Avenue." Map published with the stream name in "Germantown to have garden city," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 27, 1913, and without the name in *Annual Report of the Bureau of Surveys of the City of Philadelphia for the year ending December 31, 1913* (Philadelphia: 1914), 13.

wringing the maximum possible use out of every piece of land, even if that meant radically reshaping the landscape – cutting down hills and filling in low spots, putting streams in sewers to get them out of the way of urban development and to provide gravity drainage of both stormwater and sewage for the new neighborhoods. Similar to the plan for many other small stream valleys in the city, the one drawn up for Carpenter's Woods in 1885 called for the unnamed Wissahickon tributary that flowed in this valley to be put in a sewer under a winding Mt. Pleasant Road, the woods to be cut down, the valley filled over the pipe, streets cut through, and houses built (Figure 2). Such an approach to open space, whether woodland or farmland, certainly yielded the city far more tax revenue than allowing the land to remain in its natural state. Owners of built-up land, divided into lots and densely packed with buildings, paid a full tax rate – about double that paid by owners of a similar acreage of undeveloped or rural property, who were taxed at the farm rate.⁴

In the decades after the creation of the plan for Carpenter's Woods, as the land remained undeveloped, the City Parks Association came to the rescue. By the beginning of 20th century, the young organization had already become a strong voice that worked to shift the city's narrow-minded and often short-sighted view of open space. Rather than seeing land as simply an economic resource to be developed and exploited for its potential tax revenue, the CPA encouraged the view that open space could have many long-term benefits if, instead, it was acquired by the city as parkland. In its 1912 annual report, the CPA insisted: "There is no more efficient way to increase the health of the City than to increase the area of its open-space system. Parks are fully as necessary to the health of the people as are hospitals. Indeed they are more so, because they tend to put hospitals out of business."⁵

Preserving streams that had not already been put into underground sewers by adding their valleys to the Fairmount Park system was a main focus of the CPA's work. The group's lobbying resulted in the creation of several watershed parks in the first decades of the 20th century – in the valleys of Cobb's, Pennypack, and Tacony creeks – and these larger



Figure 2. This 1885 plan shows Mt. Pleasant Avenue built over the stream (highlighting added) running through Carpenter's Woods. Under this scheme, the stream would have been captured in a sewer under the street. City of Philadelphia, Streets Department.

projects certainly helped ease the way for the City's acceptance of parkland in the smaller stream valleys.

Most of these smaller streams were not saved. The CPA's attempts to preserve the upper reaches of the Wingohocking Creek, which ran through Mt. Airy and Germantown and was once a main tributary of Frankford Creek, and the lower reach of Thomas Run, a Cobb's Creek tributary in West Philadelphia, were both lost, and both now survive only as names on the city's sewer map. The group had better luck preserving small streams in the Wissahickon watershed, an effort it considered as important as the initial preservation in the 1860s of the larger valley of which these tributaries were a part. By 1912, the valley of Cresheim Creek and an area once known

⁴ Edward P. Allinson and Boies Penrose, *Philadelphia 1681–1887: A history of municipal development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1887), 238. In 1886, the full tax rate was double that of the farm rate, \$1.85 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation versus \$0.92%, with an intermediate suburban set at \$1.23%.

⁵ *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of The City Parks Association of Philadelphia* ([Philadelphia], September 1, 1912), 20.

as the Houston Ramble at the lower reach of Paper Mill Run (now called Monoshone Creek) had already been preserved. However, as the CPA annual report noted that year, "There are a number of other valleys still to be acquired, and we earnestly urge that they now be placed on the City Plan as extensions of Fairmount Park."⁶ The valley of Carpenter's Run was one of these.

If municipal reports are any indication, the lobbying of the CPA began to bear fruit in the changing views of influential city officials. Wrote the city's chief engineer and surveyor, George S. Webster, in his 1910 annual report: "In the vicinity of and within the confines of the larger American cities the former prodigality in the abuse of streams is giving way to conservation. The streams are being preempted for parks or preserved for future water supplies (and) the continuance of the practice of discharging sewage into them is forbidden . . . The condition of the streams in this City in this respect is being materially improved each year."⁷

In the following report and others from the period, the CPA amplified and underscored Webster's view:

If the city does not now take these valleys, with their rugged natural beauty, for the use of the people for all time, streets will soon have to be thrown over them . . . This means that the City would have to pay not only the increased cost of filling for the streets, but it must also pay the owners of the abutting ground in the valleys for the cost of bringing the entire area up to the level of the streets. As has been demonstrated by Chief Webster of the Bureau of Surveys, the cost of opening the streets and of these changes of grade would amount to far more than the cost of acquiring the valleys for park purposes. This consideration leaves out of sight altogether the beauty of the running streams and wooded slopes, with which

*the valleys are blessed throughout. This beauty makes its own appeal.*⁸

To get a better appreciation for the amount of work this filling entailed, one needs only to go to the embankment that carries Greene Street through Carpenter's Woods, and imagine how much material it would take to fill the depressions on either side even halfway to the street level.⁹ Besides the cost of filling the streets, by adding these valleys to the park system the city could also avoid the expenses of building sewers, water and gas lines, and other infrastructure improvements that would have been required if the land was to be developed as part of the urban street system.

The Revised City Plan: Carpenter's Woods Saved

The preservation of Carpenter's Woods took shape in four city ordinances over an eight year period. The first, in 1912, authorized a "revision of the lines of grades of a portion of City plan No. 214" bounded by Greene Street, Carpenter Lane, Wissahickon Avenue and Allens Lane.¹⁰ A second, in 1913, extended the revision to cover the area between Greene Street, Mt. Airy Avenue, McCallum Street and Ellet Street (Figure 3).¹¹ In a brief report accompanying the 1913 ordinance, the City Council's Committee on Surveys stated that the purpose of these revisions was "the preservation of the natural topographical features and the incorporation of a portion of the area into an extension of Fairmount Park."¹² Carpenter's Woods now covers about 37 acres, but this first extension included only 21 acres, mostly from the family of the late James S. and Richard S. Mason and a small parcel from the estate of George W. Carpenter (Figure 4). Either the City Parks Association or the surveys committee must have gained assurances from these owners that their land would

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷ *Annual Report of the Director of Public Works, and of the Chief of the Bureau of Surveys for year ending December 31, 1910* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Co., 1911), 48.

⁸ CPA, 24th Annual Report, 46-47.

⁹ Thanks to Tony Aiello, a West Mt. Airy resident, for introducing us to this landscape anomaly and thus sowing the seeds for this article.

¹⁰ *Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia from January 1 to December 31, 1912* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Co., 1913), 62-63. While many maps and sources, including this one, refer to Carpenter Street, for consistency this has been changed in non-quoted material to the current official name, Carpenter Lane.

¹¹ *Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia from January 1 to December 31, 1913* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Co., 1914), 406.

¹² *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Philadelphia from September 18 to December 30, 1913, vol. II* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Co., 1913), Appendix 104, 357.



Figure 3. The single Mt. Pleasant Road shown on the 1885 plan in Figure 2 becomes, in this revision, the somewhat odd North and South Mt. Pleasant Roads that now run on either side of the valley. Wayne Avenue was originally planned to cross the valley, but this section was never built and was eventually removed from the official city plan. (Stream line highlighting added.) City of Philadelphia, Streets Department.

be donated to the city rather than sold, because the report also stated, "It is not anticipated that any damages will be claimed against the city by reason of the revision."¹³

In 1916, another ordinance set out the terms of the land donations for this new park.¹⁴ In cash, it cost the city virtually nothing, since the Carpenter and Mason estates received only a dollar each for their respective properties. Besides giving the city land within the park boundaries, they also deeded to the city another nineteen acres in long and narrow strips, from fifty to eighty feet wide – land that would become the roads surrounding the park, including portions of Mt. Airy, Wayne and Wissahickon Avenues, Sedgwick, Ellet and Sherman Streets, and North and South Mt. Pleasant Roads.



Figure 4. This 1910 map of Carpenter's Woods and vicinity shows property owners at the time of the initial transfer to the city (the Carpenter estate is represented by its trustee, Sidney L. Wright). The black outline shows the park lines established by 1912 and 1913 city ordinances. The gray shading indicates the current extent of Carpenter's Woods, extended by land purchases authorized by City Council in 1916 and 1920. Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Property owners commonly claimed damage payments from the city when new streets were cut through their properties, but in this case the owners gave the land outright.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these wealthy landowners were being completely altruistic. Part of the agreement outlined in the ordinance stipulated that the city was to construct the new streets in a timely manner, which would both increase the value of the adjacent property held by these estates and make it much easier to subdivide and sell it as house lots.

An additional ordinance, in 1920, extended Carpenter's Woods to its current dimensions, a revision that required rerouting and in some cases eliminating sections of streets around and through the

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia From January 1 to December 31, 1916* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Co., 1917), 409-419.

park.¹⁵ This time, however, nobody was giving anything away. The Mason family sold more of its land, and another parcel came from the estate of Margaret McLean. The bulk of this new park section, almost 12 acres, came from real estate broker J. Morgan Lister – whose asking price, more than \$10,000 an acre, might have been an accurate reflection of real estate values at the time but was an ongoing controversy in two successive mayoral administrations. Figure 5 shows both the original park donation and the later extension.

While the ordinances and legal documents related to this transfer of land to the city invariably refer to it as an “extension of Fairmount Park,” for years before these official transactions the area had been known as Carpenter’s Woods, after the best known of its previous landowners, George Washington Carpenter. In one of several mentions of the place in his diaries, Germantown resident Cornelius N. Weygandt wrote that he “drove . . . through Carpenters woods” on August 11, 1888.¹⁶ Newspapers also referred to it by this name. In two articles from 1904, a coyote and a pair of burglars were reported as escaping into Carpenter’s Woods. In 1911, 800 local Boy Scouts pitched tents there for the first annual field day of Philadelphia Council and, three years later, 600 Girl Scouts came to the woods for their first field day. A 1913 article about a YWCA picnic indicates that, although the property no longer belonged to the Carpenter family, the name for the place had stuck: “a point in Carpenter’s Woods, on the old Mason estate, at the end of Wayne Avenue in Germantown.”¹⁷

Landowners in Carpenter’s Woods

The previous owners of the land in Carpenter’s Woods were identified with the assistance of a Depression-era inventory, created under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration, of all real and tangible property owned by the City of Philadelphia. It encompasses nineteen volumes and is now held by Philadelphia City Archives as Record

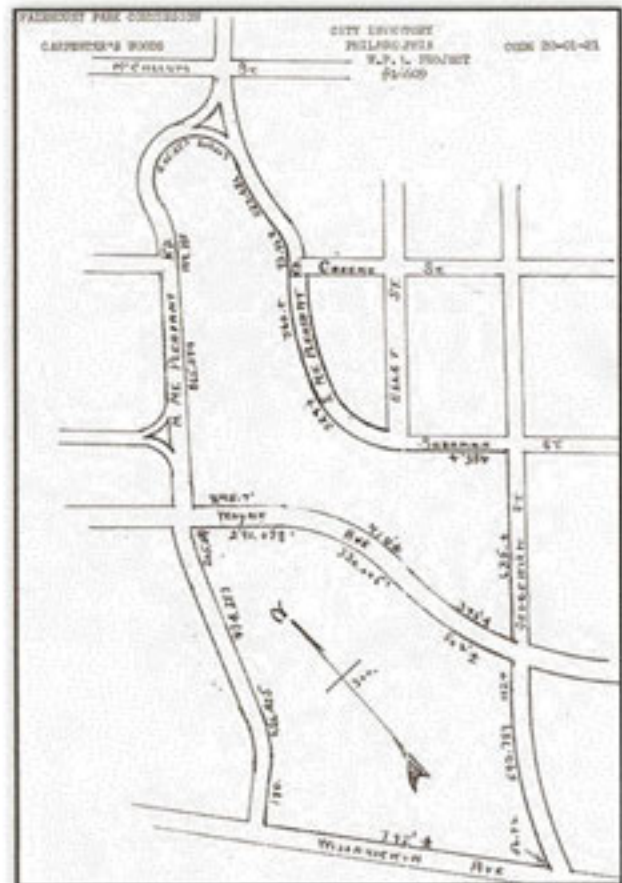


Figure 5. Carpenter’s Woods as delineated by a 1936 survey of city property, when Wayne Avenue was still projected to cross the valley. Now only Greene Street runs across the upper end of the park. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 68, Bureau of City Property.

Group 68.3. One five-page section of this inventory, created in 1936, contained the names of all the previous owners of the land in Carpenter’s Woods along with a map (Figure 5) and a deed registry including all the associated deeds (hereinafter cited as WPA Inventory).

All of the property owners were wealthy Germantown people and, except for Carpenter, are little known today except as names that appear here and there on late nineteenth and early twentieth century real estate maps. The following brief biographies will bring them back into the limelight, if only for a moment, and if only to identify the people whose

¹⁵ *Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia From January 1 to December 31, 1920* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Co., 1921), 22–24.

¹⁶ Cornelius N. Weygandt Papers, University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

¹⁷ All citations from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*: “Coyote wolf fled to Mt. Airy woods; animal destined to become firemen’s mascot broke its bounds,” March 9, 1904; “Policeman shot by burglar in a duel; Germantown bluecoat frustrated attempt to rob Carpenter Street residence,” October 24, 1904; “800 Boy Scouts hold field day in Germantown . . . Carpenter’s Woods full of tents,” June 18, 1911; “Girl Scouts to work Fourth,” June 30, 1914; “YWCA picnic encounters foes,” June 22, 1913.



Figure 6. George Washington Carpenter. Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians. GHS.



Figure 7. Phil-Ellena. GHS.

common legacy, whether given freely or sold for profit, is Carpenter's Woods.

George W. Carpenter

Born in 1802 and raised in Germantown, George W. Carpenter (Figure 6) was educated at Germantown Academy and, at age 18, "was initiated into the mysteries of the drug business in the establishment of Charles Marshall, Jr., where he accumulated a small sum of money and a large capital of knowledge."¹⁸ In 1828 he went into business on his own, manufacturing and selling drugs, eventually taking on a partner and trading under the name of Carpenter, Henszey & Co. By the end of his life, Carpenter had amassed great wealth, holding deeds to over 500 acres and more than six hundred buildings in Germantown and other areas. Certainly the grandest of these buildings was the Greek Revival mansion that he built for himself and his wife Ellen and named "Phil-Ellena" in her honor (Figure 7). Carpenter helped create the local gas company and the Germantown Water Company, and served

as a bank director and on the boards of several railroad companies. When the railroad that is now the Chestnut Hill West line of SEPTA was opened in 1885, it had four stops on property of the Carpenter estate – at Allens Lane, Carpenter, Upsal, and Tulpehocken Streets – which certainly made the land more desirable and valuable. In addition to his business activities, Carpenter also had broad interests in mineralogy, medicine, agriculture, botany and geology, and he wrote numerous articles and one textbook on medical subjects.¹⁹

Carpenter's large estate, one obituary sermonized, was "accumulated by unremitting attention to business, and especially in the judicious investment of money in real estate, stocks, &c. He commenced the world without a dollar not earned by his own hands. His example should not be lost upon the rising generation."²⁰ Another source, however, comments that overwork was one of the contributing causes of death, so perhaps the lessons provided by his life are not quite so clear-cut.²¹

Carpenter was only 57 when he died in 1860; his estate, however, had a longer life than its accumulator, continuing on in various forms until the

¹⁸ J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia 1609-1884*, Vol. 3 (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts and Co., 1884), 2273.

¹⁹ Sheryl Farber Mickelberg, "A decorative analysis of Phil-Ellena, a Greek Revival mansion." (Master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 15-16, 21-22.

²⁰ "Deaths," *Germantown Telegraph*, June 13, 1860.

²¹ "George Washington Carpenter, 1802-1860," *Germantown Crier*, 38 (Fall 1986): 4, 82.

mid-1920s.²² Ellen Carpenter lived in the house named for her until it was torn down in 1893, when a hundred acres of the Phil-Elena grounds were deeded to Edward J. Stotesbury and Anthony J. Drexel for one dollar. These two financial moguls and other associates formed the Carpenter Land and Improvement Company, which developed the property into a new upscale residential community called Pelham.²³ More than two decades later, Sidney L. Wright, acting as trustee for the estate, deeded less than a quarter of an acre to the City for one dollar, for the extension of the wooded park that memorializes the Carpenter name.²⁴ Wright was still the trustee in 1925, when the last two tracts of the estate, totaling about ten acres, were sold for \$165,000 to developers who planned to build houses worth \$2 million on the property.²⁵

Margaret McLean

When Margaret McLean died on December 4, 1914, at age 90, she was living "at her late residence," on Cresheim Road above Carpenter Lane.²⁶ We found little other information about her. Some people leave but the slightest traces of themselves after death, and it is only through records related to her brother, Hugh McLean, that we can assume to know anything at all about Margaret McLean.

We assume that she was the unnamed sister who co-owned a Germantown textile mill and adjoining property (Figure 8) with her younger brother Hugh;²⁷ that, like Hugh, she emigrated to the United States from Scotland sometime in the mid-19th century;²⁸ and that because of her surname at death, she never married. We assume it was in her honor that her brother and his wife named one of their two daughters Margaret. Hugh McLean's residence, at the same address and probably the same house as that in which Margaret died, is described as "pala-



Figure 8. The Glen Echo Mill in an 1880 Hexamer survey, when it was owned by "Hugh McLean and sister." It was leased to the firm of McCallum, Crease & Sloan, who ran it as a carpet factory. Free Library of Philadelphia, Map Collection.

tial" in a newspaper account of a family wedding – a not-so-humble affair attended by over 400 guests, with the hallway alcove itself large enough to accommodate Herzberg's Orchestra, which played the wedding marches and reception music and accompanied the dancers from ten until midnight.²⁹

The mill co-owned by the McLean siblings was situated on Carpenter Lane in Germantown, next to Paper Mill Run, another Wissahickon Creek tributary just over the ridge to the east of Carpenter's Run (Figure 9). A mill had been located on that spot as early as 1812; it was taken over and expanded by the McCallum family beginning in the 1830s. They called it Glen Echo Mills for the echo in the glen in which the buildings stood, and it quickly became one of the largest carpet factories in the world. During the Civil War, as demand for carpeting plummeted, Glen Echo was retooled to meet the Union Army's desperate need for wool blankets. The mill ran day and night, with the raw material for the blankets washed in water from Paper Mill Run. This polluted the stream so badly that downstream property owners got an injunction stopping the practice, after which the waste water was disposed of "by pumping it to the tops of the surrounding hills, into ponds

²² "Last Carpenter Tract Sold," unnamed newspaper, 1925. Carpenter Family File, GHS.

²³ For a good overview of the development of Pelham, see Lois Frischling, "Pelham: A residential enclave," *Germantown Crier*, 38 (Fall 1986): 4.

²⁴ Sydney L. Wright and Germantown Trust Company to City of Philadelphia, January 15, 1917, Deed Book JMH 111-363. Philadelphia City Archives.

²⁵ "Last Carpenter Tract Sold."

²⁶ "Death notice," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 6, 1914.

²⁷ The unnamed sister is noted in Ernest Hexamer, *Glen Echo Mills* (Hexamer General Surveys, Vol. 16, 1880), Plate 1513.

²⁸ *Historical catalogue of the St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia, with biographical sketches of deceased members*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1913), 116-117.

²⁹ "Two brilliant weddings," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 26, 1892.

and over fields"³⁰ – not an ideal solution, and certainly not one that would pass muster with today's stricter environmental standards.

Hugh McLean started as a salesman for the McCallum company and sometime after the death of William McCallum in 1875, the Glen Echo property was sold to Hugh McLean and his sister, who also purchased nearby plots of ground. In 1895, the old Glen Echo Mills was torn down, with the smokestack the last part to fall. A newspaper reported that "a thousand or more people from different parts of Germantown, Chestnut Hill, Mt. Airy, Roxborough and the city proper assembled to see the stack demolished, and as it fell a big cheer was given by the crowd."³¹ The factory and thirty surrounding acres had become too valuable to lie vacant, so Hugh McLean (and we presume, his sister) transformed the property into building lots. "Streets are being cut through the grounds, and everything will be done to make the property conform as near as possible to the new suburb of Pelham, which is directly opposite, on the south side of Carpenter street. One of the principal streets running through the property will be a 1000-foot continuation of Lincoln drive."³² This winding road still follows the meanderings of Paper Mill Run, which ended up in a sewer under the street. As the mill was being dismantled, Hugh McLean came up with the "novel idea of . . . laying of ten boilers taken from the old mill in the bed of Paper Mill Run," forming a dam that diverted the stream from its course and into the sewer on the other side of the street, allowing the old stream bed to be more easily filled to the level of the new streets.³³

Hugh McLean died on July 15, 1897.³⁴ As part of his legacy, two pieces of property passed to Margaret McLean that eventually became part of Carpenter's Woods.³⁵ Her estate received \$2,900 from the city for 35/100 of an acre.³⁶

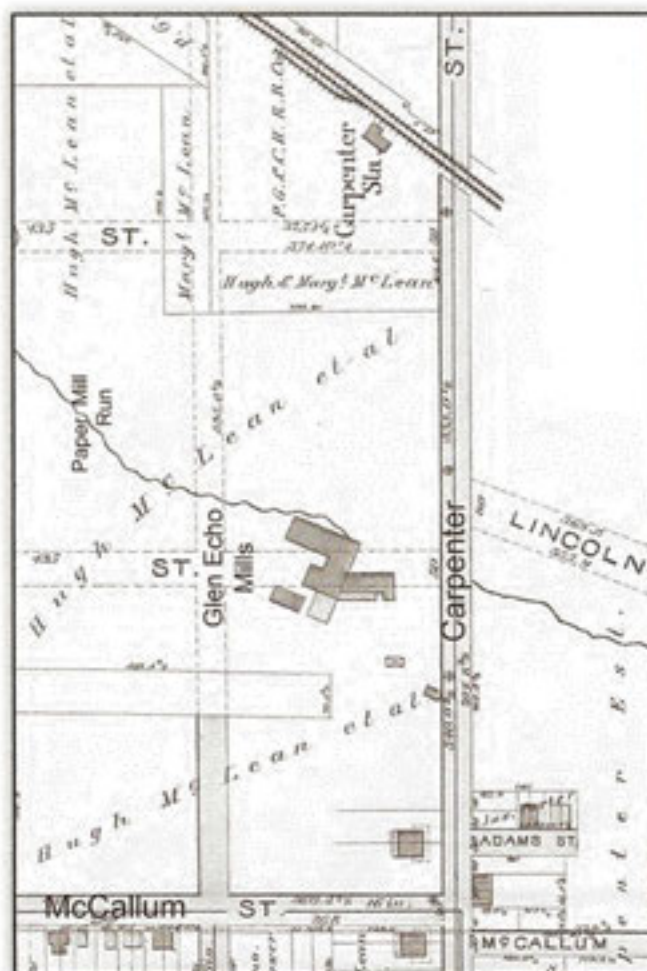


Figure 9. This 1889 map shows the location of the Glen Echo Mills and the many surrounding properties owned by Hugh and Margaret McLean. Paper Mill Run (now Monoshone Creek) ran past the mill. Lincoln Drive is still a dotted line; eventually it wound its way up this valley, built on top of the sewer that captured this stream. Philadelphia Water Department Historical Collection.

Mary Taylor Mason

Mary Taylor Mason was born on January 15, 1871 in Philadelphia, the fifth of six children of Mary

³⁰ "Old Glen Echo Mills demolished to make room for building improvements," unnamed newspaper, no date (ca. 1895), Jellett Scrapbook Collection, GHS. The 1895 date of this demolition is an extrapolation based on another newspaper article, also from the Jellett Scrapbooks, reminiscing about the demolition, dated May 1920 and titled "Twenty-five years ago this week."

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "Hugh McLean dead," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 16, 1897.

³⁵ Deed, John Bell to Margaret McLean, February 15, 1904. Philadelphia City Archives.

³⁶ Edward L. Fiss et al. to the City of Philadelphia, October 19, 1921, Deed Book JMH 1159-518. WPA Inventory.

T. Thomas and Richard S. Mason; the first three children died in infancy. In 1878, she moved with her family into a house in Germantown they called Cerné (Figure 10).³⁷ Her father was heir to a blacking (shoe polish) manufactory started by her grandfather, James S. Mason, located on Front Street in Philadelphia from 1851 to 1919.³⁸ After James Mason died in 1888, his son ran the business, accumulating wealth but displaying it in a modest sort of way. When he died in 1912, an obituary called Richard Mason "a man of strong, clear, and cultured mind, and of the most elevated and generous personal character; just and immovable in his convictions . . . deeply, unostentatiously Christian in his outlook on life and his conception of duty. Of ample means, he gave largely and continuously to such charitable objects, both public and private, as appealed to his judgment."³⁹

Mary Mason seemed to have inherited her father's generosity and independence of mind. After graduating from Bryn Mawr College in 1892 with a bachelor's degree in history and political science, she taught at Mrs. E. L. Head's School in Germantown (where she had previously studied – or in the vernacular of the time, been "prepared"). She supported a variety of causes, including the Civic Club, a progressive women's organization. She also served on a sectional school board for three years before joining the citywide Board of Education in 1899, representing the 38th Section in Germantown



Figure 10. The Mason family home, Cerné, was on Schoolhouse Lane near Wissahickon Avenue. It is now part of an athletic complex owned by Germantown Friends School. Courtesy of Jane Pepler.

for the next ten years.⁴⁰ In a front-page story, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that she was only the fourth female member in the history of the Board: "The appointment gives general satisfaction because of Miss Mason's eminent fitness for the position . . . Since her graduation(she) has devoted near all her time and energies to the cause of education."⁴¹ In this devotion, she seemed to have put her family's money to good use, "going abroad largely for the purpose of gaining a knowledge of foreign educational systems. This study, together with her practical experience on the Sectional Board of her ward, will render her competent to acceptably fulfill the duties of the more important position to which she has been appointed."⁴²

At age 40, Miss Mason (who never married) decided to go to medical school, beginning at Johns Hopkins University in 1911 and finishing her M.D. at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania

³⁷ Jane Pepler, compiler, "Descendants of John Thomas," accessed August 7, 2012, <<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pepler/thomas.html>>.

³⁸ Advertisement photo and description, Library Company of Philadelphia, <www.flickr.com/photos/library-company-of-philadelphia/4624354635/>, accessed July 9, 2012.

³⁹ "Richard Servetus Mason Dead," unnamed newspaper, June 6, 1912. Jane Campbell Scrapbook Collection, GHS.

⁴⁰ *Bryn Mawr College Calendar: Register of Alumnae and Former Students 1920* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr College, 1920), 119.

⁴¹ "Miss Mason appointed," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 7, 1899.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Bryn Mawr College Calendar 1920*, 119.



Figure 11. The 1915 graduating class of the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, now Drexel University College of Medicine. Dr. Mason is in the third row, second from the left. Image courtesy Legacy Center Archives, Drexel University College of Medicine. Photo p2970.



Figure 12. Mary Taylor Mason (right) and her sister (left) at Cerné, circa 1950. Courtesy of Jane Pepler.

in 1915 (Figure 11). For two years after graduation she was an "assistant demonstrator in obstetrics" at the college.⁴³ A 1916 report about the Maternity Department of the college lauded her readiness "to investigate any case that shows a special need, thus combining the duties of a social service worker with those of a clinician."⁴⁴ Her interest in the underprivileged was not limited to her medical practice; for many years she also served on the board of the Philadelphia Housing Association, which advocated for better housing conditions for the city's poor population.⁴⁵

In May of 1920, Mason walked 30 miles in two days, from Germantown to New Hope, with her friend Herbert Welsh, who called her "a practical humanitarian, traveler, and experienced Tyrolean pedestrian."⁴⁶ A few years later, on one of many European excursions she took with her sister, Jane Graham Mason, she scaled the Matterhorn. This in-

terest in the outdoors, perhaps combined with her philanthropic nature, may have encouraged her, as lead trustee for the estate of her father and grandfather, to arrange for the donation in 1916 of about 18 acres to the city, for Carpenter's Woods. As part of the later park extension, a second conveyance of 2.495 acres was made on behalf of the family, which cost the city \$14,970.00.⁴⁷

In 1953, *Life* magazine featured "The Misses Mason" – Mary and Jane (who also never married) on the occasion of their 75th anniversary "At Home" at Cerné (Figure 12). When asked if they were having any friends in to help celebrate the anniversary, Mary Mason replied, "All our personal friends are in the cemetery." Their only disappointment came after the party, when they discovered that none of the 150 guests had left any calling cards on the silver platter provided for that purpose.⁴⁸ Jane Mason joined their friends in the cemetery the following

⁴³ *Forty-First Annual Meeting of the Alumnae Association of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania*, June 1 and 2, 1916. (Philadelphia: Published by the Association, 1916), 59.

⁴⁴ *Housing Problems in America: Proceedings of the Tenth National Conference on Housing*, Philadelphia January 28, 29, 30, 1929 (New York: National Housing Association, [1929]), 337; *Housing Yearbook 1939* (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1939), 215.

⁴⁵ Herbert Welsh, *The New Gentleman of the Road* (Philadelphia: Wm. F. Fell Co., 1921), 98. Mason only accompanied Welsh on the first leg of the walk; his destination was his summer home in New Hampshire.

⁴⁶ Deed, Jacob Unruh to James S. Mason and Richard S. Mason, October 19, 1880 (Philadelphia City Archives); Mary Taylor Mason et al. to the City of Philadelphia, October 24, 1917, Deed Book JMH 294-292 (WPA Inventory); J. Claude Bedford, Master in Partition Court of Common Pleas #5198, April 18, 1912, to City of Philadelphia, May 9, 1919, Deed Book JMH 574-126 (WPA Inventory).

⁴⁸ "Life goes to a 75th anniversary 'At Home': The Misses Mason Have a Festive Day," *Life*, October 26, 1953, 186-87.

spring, and Mary Mason lived on alone at Cerné until her death on August 13, 1957.

J. Morgan Lister

J. Morgan Lister was a well-known real-estate agent and property owner in Germantown whose father, Benjamin B. Lister, had one of the largest rent-collecting lists in Philadelphia. In 1917, the younger Lister bought some adjoining parcels from the Carpenter and McLean estates in the vicinity of Sedgwick Street, Carpenter Lane, and Wayne and Wissahickon Avenues.⁴⁹ The properties covered about 23 acres and were valued, according to a contemporary news article, at fifteen to twenty thousand dollars an acre.⁵⁰ Lister offered to sell about half of the property – 11.73 acres, to be exact – to the Fairmount Park Commission for an extension of Carpenter's Woods. He was eventually paid \$121,971.13 for the land, but not before the transaction caused a political uproar and brought into question the right of the Commission to make such purchases.⁵¹

Besides the high price, part of the objection was that the Park Commission only had about \$51,000 on hand at the time, not enough to buy the property outright, and had committed the city to a mortgage to pay for the remainder. Complained Mayor Thomas B. Smith at a meeting of the Park Commission in 1919, "If the city is not in a position to pay for lands outright, it ought not to make payments under any system involving the payment of interest on its purchases."⁵² In a statement that might be echoed in many present-day hearings about the city's parks, the Mayor added, "The city is not ready to buy any more property for its parks . . . We have a great number of small properties, and lack money to put them in order."⁵³ At this meeting the Park Commission agreed not to purchase any more land

on mortgages, but still insisted that the Lister purchase be allowed to stand.

The next mayor, J. Hampton Moore, took the battle to the courts in 1921. He not only thought the price for Lister's land was excessive, but also insisted that it was unneeded, as there was other parkland in that vicinity. "A mile away children played on an ash dump," Moore said. "Inquiry showed that this plot of ground cost \$121,000, and we could not get \$15,000 for a playground to save the health of those children."⁵⁴ He also questioned the constitutionality of the Park Commission to act in these matters without the approval of City Council.

During the court hearing of the city's suit to block the sale, Colonel Sheldon Potter, representing Lister, argued that the sale was proper and that the "commission took the land because it wants to preserve the watershed from contamination." City officials insisted that the cost was "grossly excessive," and noted that the price the city was being asked to pay for the 11.73 acres of parkland was \$25,000 more than Lister had paid when he bought the entire 23-acre tract.⁵⁵

In a behind-the-scenes plea less than two weeks after this case was heard, Lister penned a note on Union League stationery to Eli Kirk Price, a Park Commission member who served on the Land Purchases & Damages Committee: "Can you not see your way to help this sale through as it would be of great help & there would be great satisfaction in demonstrating that the sale at \$10,000 per acre to the Park was not highway robbery."⁵⁶ In the end, the Court upheld the authority of the Park Commission to purchase the land, also turning down a taxpayer's lawsuit against the sale that was filed the following year. Lister got his money, the city got the land, the neighbors got a priceless park that they have cherished for all the decades since, and the controversy was quickly forgotten.

⁴⁹ Edward L. Fiss & Walter T. Lee Exes. of Will of Margaret McLean dec. Lot 10 June 17, 1918; Sydney L. Wright and Germantown Trust Co. Trustees, Four Deeds for Lots 4 & 6, Lot 5, another portion of Lot 6, and Lot 8, all dated June 17, 1917. Philadelphia City Archives.

⁵⁰ "Carpenter's Woods in Park," unnamed newspaper, July 10, 1919. Jane Campbell Scrapbooks, GHS.

⁵¹ For a broader perspective on the power struggle between the City government and the Fairmount Park Commission in the first decades of the twentieth century, see Robert P. Armstrong, "Green space in the gritty city: the planning and development of Philadelphia's park system" (PhD dissertation, Lehigh University, 2012), chapter 5.

⁵² "City discontinues purchase of parks," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 10, 1919.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ "Mandamus system handicap to city, Mayor declares," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 18, 1920.

⁵⁵ "Park extension causes a suit," unnamed newspaper, probably November 23 or 24, 1920, Carpenter Family File, GHS.

⁵⁶ J. Morgan Lister to Eli Kirk Price, December 2, 1920. Fairmount Park Commission Land Titles, Carpenter's Woods folder, Box A-964. Philadelphia City Archives.

Epilogue: For the Birds

Carpenter's Woods became the city's first official bird sanctuary in 1921, due mainly to the lobbying by the students and faculty of the nearby Charles W. Henry School at Carpenter Lane and Greene Street. While vacationing in Meriden, New Hampshire in 1920, Caroline T. Moffet and Edith Scott, the principal and a teacher at the school, were inspired by a visit to a bird sanctuary there, one of the first in the country. On their return to Philadelphia, they became missionaries for bird conservation. They incorporated the study of birds into various parts of the Henry School curriculum, teaching the value of birds in civics class, building bird houses and feeders in manual training class (Figure 13). Students heard guest lectures about birds, and visited the Academy of Natural Sciences to see its extensive ornithology collection. The culmination of this effort was the Bird Masque (Figure 14), a grand pageant performed in Carpenter's Woods by hundreds of students, based on the playbook that had been written for the 1913 dedication of the New Hampshire bird sanctuary that had so inspired the two educators.⁵⁷ Preparation for this event involved the teachers from the art and sewing departments in creating the costumes, and others from the physical education department in choreographing the dancers. A friend of the school provided the music, and the result was a neighborhood hit that ran for many years.⁵⁸

"Merry music and graceful, dancing children in radiant-hued costumes filled Carpenter's Woods . . . yesterday, as the children of Charles W. Henry School gave a Bird Masque," reported *The Philadelphia Bulletin* about the May 21, 1921, performance. The article continued:

In the midst of a natural amphitheatre, beside a clear-running brook, the children acted their parts, while the hillsides to the right and left were crowded with thousands of parents who formed the audience. No scene could have been more effective to bring out the moral of the masque, which was to



Figure 13. Henry School students displaying acceptable types of bird-houses. *Beehive*, April, 1926. GHS

*teach the love of birds. The woods is a bird sanctuary, and in it are many specimens. The birds seemed to know they were protected, for they flew about heedless of the throngs of visitors.*⁵⁹

As important as these annual performances were to all the students who performed in them, Moffet's work had an effect that carried far beyond the schoolyard. Two years after authorizing the bird sanctuary, the Fairmount Park Commission voted to renovate two old buildings in Carpenter's Woods. One served as a caretaker's cottage, and became home for Miss Moffet; the other was converted into a bird museum and the headquarters of the newly-constituted Fairmount Park Bird Club. This organization soon after changed its name to the Wissahickon Bird Club, and in 1945, the birders merged with the Friends of the Wissahickon, founded in 1924 with a mission "to preserve the natural beauty and wildness of the Wissahickon Valley and stimulate public interest therein."⁶⁰ Carpenter's Woods itself, while part of the Wissahickon Valley Park, now has its own advocacy group, The Friends of Carpenter's Woods, whose brochures still trumpet the importance of this section of parkland to local bird life.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Percy Mackaye, *Sanctuary: A Bird Masque*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1913, p. ix.

⁵⁸ "Philadelphia's first bird sanctuary," *The Beehive*, Germantown, Pa., 4 (April 1923):1.

⁵⁹ *The Philadelphia Bulletin* article, quoted in "Philadelphia's first bird sanctuary," *The Beehive*, Germantown, Pa., 4 (April 1923):1.

⁶⁰ "The Wissahickon Wilderness: Will it Survive?," *Chestnut Hill Local*, August 11, 1977.

⁶¹ Stephen R. Lawrence and Keith Russell, "The Birds of Carpenter's Woods: Philadelphia's First Bird Sanctuary." Online publication, no date, accessed July 11, 2012, <<http://www.focw.org>>.



Figure 14. A 1930 performance of the Bird Masque by Henry School students. GHS

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