A Charming Five-Mile Ramble Along the Schuylkill. (The East River Drive.)

Where to go in this uncertain weather, save on the asphalt of our heated streets? Why, what’s the matter with our grand old Fairmount Park? A little corner of it, a short stretch of five miles along the Schuylkill, as far as the mouth of the Wissahickon, will just fill the bill. Try it.

A TRIBUTE TO WASHINGTON.

How to reach the Green street entrance (so-called because we don’t get there by way of Green street as a rule) you have been told in our No. 5.

Rightaway, we have before us the tribute we raised the other day to that unique figure in the history of this country, George Washington. It was not erected too soon, either. It was 115 years last October since the following announcement appeared in London’s New York Packet:

BE IT REMEMBERED.

That on the 17th of October, 1781, Lieutenant-Colonel Earl Cornwallis, with above Five Thousand British Troops, surrendered themselves prisoners of war to His Excellency, General George Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces of France and America. LAUS DEO.

“Westward the Star of The Empire Takes its Way,” says an inscription on the monument, a paraphrase by Bancroft, of Bishop Berkeley’s well-known line, Westward the course of empire takes its way.”

The fact that, in spite of this statement, our only George faces the east, has been commented upon and explained, defended and combated by the light of Freemasonic rites. Be that as it may, we are proud of that statue.

AN UNFREQUENTED OASIS.

Did you ever turn down this very first avenue branching off to the left toward the river, or did your eye ever catch the distant vista of yonder Corinthian pillars that suggest something more than an ordinary steamboat landing? Down there you will find the Fairmount Water Works and a tiny park of their own, with old trees and shady benches by the water’s edge, a picturesque serpentine walk climbing the side of the live rock that holds back the reservoir, a grateful monument to the memory of Frederick Graff, who designed and executed the Water Works, etc., not to mention the conversation kiosks, the engine houses and the inevitable ice cream restaurant.

Take your kodak to this little oasis and you will bring home souvenirs that not one in one hundred Philadelphians will be able to locate.

That fountain station of Leda with the Swan was modeled after one of our Philadelphia belles in 1812, Miss Vanuxen. It once stood on “Centre Square.” The old folks will tell you all about Penn Square,
where the Public Buildings now stands; up to seventy-two years ago last May it was called Centre Square
and, by the way, the south side of it used to be the “hanging ground” of the old city.

This rocky hill, utilized for its present purposes only since 1819, is the original Fair-Mount, whose name
was afterward extended to the whole park. So fair was it in its primitive beauty that William Penn is said
to have contemplated building his resident there at one time.

“My eye, though not my heart is upon Fairmount, unless the unworthiness of some spirits drive me up
to Pennsbury or Susquehanna for good and all,” he wrote in 1701.

So firm, too, was this rock on its granite foundations that in after years it was made the terminal pillar of
the line of redoubts that the British stretched across from the Schuylkill to the Delaware at Kensington,
during their occupancy of this city from 1776 to 1778.

ALONG THE DRIVE.

We return to the Drive and one moment takes us to its bifurcation at Lemon Hill, with Lincoln’s statue in
the angle.

We erected this to our martyred President on September 22, 1871. Some of the lines inscribed on those
plinths are household words: “With malice towards none, and charity to all,” “the government of the
people, by the people and for the people,” etc.

On our left at this point we see the coquettish houses of our local boat clubs, the Fairmount Rowing
Association and the Quaker City Barge Club, the Pennsylvania Boat Club and the Crescent B. C.

The Bachelor’s home stands out by itself, of course. There was a Bachelor’s Hall” hereabouts in the
early years of last century. Said George Webb (one of Franklin’s junta):

Fired with the business of the noisy town.
The weary Bachelors their cares disown;
For this lov’d seat they all at once prepare,
And long to breathe the sweets of country air.

Another double house shelters the University and the Philadelphia Barge Clubs and yet another the
Malta and Vesper Clubs.

TAM O’SHANTER.

Facing the latter, on the right side of the drive, the quaint group of statues under that shed commands
attention.

A poetical quotation on one of the pillars tells you all about it, even though the sign painter managed to
blunder in transcribing these few lines and insisted on making “rightly” rhyme with “night.” Verily,
printers and writers of every kind are to be pitied when the day of retribution comes.

This is the scene in Burns’ inimitable Tam O’Shanter, where

As market night
Tam had got planted unco right
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi’ reaming swats, that drank divinely,
Little concerned (it gars me greet)
with the “sulky, sullen dame,” who sat waiting for him at home,
Gathering her brows, like gathering storm;
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.
   On Tam’s right observe
At his elbow, Souter Johnny.
His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
Tom lo’ed him like a vera brither:
They had been fou for weeks thegither.
   And on his left sits the landlady,
with whom, the poet says, Tam “soon grew gracious.”
The night drave on wi’ sangs an’ clatter,
And aye the ale was growing better;
The Bonter tauld his queeriest stories;
The landlord’s laugh was ready chorus;
The storm without might rair and rustle
Tam did na’ mind the storm a whistle.

But all the world knows how his night’s fun ended.

The last four club houses standing in single blessedness on our left are those of the College Boat Club of the University of Pennsylvania, the West Philadelphia Boat Club, the Undine Barge Club, whose motto, “Labor ipse voluptas,” would be most appropriate to cycling (“the labor itself is a pleasure”) and the Philadelphia Skating Club and Humane Society.

LEMON HILL.

That road ascending to our right goes to the Lemon Hill observatory, a relic of our Centennial Exhibition, twenty years ago.

The hill itself has been noted in our local history for a considerable time and has been spoken of under a variety of other names – Pratt’s Garden, Vinegar Hill, The Hills. The site of the present mansion on its summit was that of Robert Morris’ home at the time of the Revolution. It was from this place he was taken to the jail on Prune street (now Locust, below Sixth) after he had utterly ruined himself to purchase this country’s freedom.

GIRARD BRIDGE AND NEIGHBORHOOD.

That structure with a timely “shelter” beneath it is merely a lighthouse to warn a boatman of the sudden bend in the river at this point.

That embankment of fresh-looking clay that you may notice on the west side of the river is the city end of the West River-Drive, now fast nearing completion. We must travel it later on.

A quarter mile farther, notice on our right the tribute we have just paid to the memory of James Abram Garfield.
Ask the old folks at home what they think of the present Girard Avenue Bridge, as compared with its wooden predecessor. It was twenty-two years old this Fourth of July and cost us a round one and a half million dollars! There has been money spent worse than this.

Climbing up to Girard avenue in cork-screw fashion, just the other side of the bridge is “Brewery Hill,” as we all designate it; the well-known cluster of brew-houses there in the background is “Brewerytown.”

And what think you of the spick and span appearance of the newly fronted and enlarged engine house of the Spring Garden reservoir, and the elegant parterre of flowers in front of it?

These ornamental flowerbeds, now being multiplied from year to year along this drive, afford a pleasant contrast to the slimy river slope of days agone.

And has the tunnel through old Promontory Point lost any of its picturesqueness in your eyes through its being so familiar a sight? It is a natural excavation, you know; it was hewn out of the solid rock just twenty-seven years ago; if you look, you will see no masonry or artificial lining about it. Its height? About 23 feet.

GLANCES RIGHT AND LEFT.

After we pass this gaunt bridge of the Pennsylvania Railroad, look across the river. That yellow house among the trees is Sweet Briar Mansion, opposite the children’s playground in West Fairmount Park. That gilt dome farther up is that of Memorial Hall, and that large building farther still is Horticultural Hall, all worthy objects of a visit when we ramble in that direction.

This double-arched stone bridge on our right, opposite the park guard’s house (3 1-3 mile from P.B.) is Dairy Bridge, with a good road to the “Diary” (1-3 of a mile away), and thence to Columbia avenue or Diamond street, north and south of the East Park reservoir respectively.

Behind those palings on our right, they are laying the foundations which General Grant’s statue will rest.

Is not such a good stone road “great” in such wet weather as we are having this July! This driveway, at least as far as Strawberry Hill, is an object lesson in road construction that we might turn to profit in many another locality.

It reminds me of a certain entry in the minutes of Council, under date of July 4, 1718, which tells us how a road was then “ordered to be laid out from Philadelphia to Wissahickon by 5 com’rs.” How those five commissioners would stare if they saw their road now!

When we emerge from under this other red-coated iron bridge see away at the next bed in the river those white spires among the green foliage, now partly concealed by yet another bridge; that is the white city of the dead, on Laurel Hill.

That enticing path meandering R beneath those lovely trees beyond the little dairy is not intended for our kind of mount; see it marked “bridle path.”

A minute or two and we reach the bridge; it is the new means of transit erected by the traction company to take their passengers across to Woodside Park. Its opening for general traffic is only a question of days; we shall have something more to say about it then.
And immediately beyond it (4 ¾ m. from P.B.) is our familiar climb up Strawberry Hill with its popular foundation, and Strawberry Mansion on top there. This is a favorite route to and from Diamond street. From this fountain to the corner of Broad and Diamond is 2 ½ miles.

A quarter of a mile farther, that road dividing North and South Laurel Hill Cemeteries on our right, is Hunting Park Lane. Take note of it; we may take it some day for a round trip by way of the Old York road.

FALLS VILLAGE.

And another quarter of a mile brings us to Falls Village (5 ¼ miles from P.B.). A natural cascade was once a noted feature in the river right here; hence the name of the locality. For two-thirds of its width from this, the eastern side, the Schuylkill was dammed by a long rocky projection. The wear and tear of the waters for ages past had cut out all kinds of fantastic figures in the rock, and among them the imprint of a giant foot, heel, sole, toes and all.

I have read of a similar impression on the summit of a mountain away in the far East; the native assert that Mohammed made it with his foot when he departed from this earthly sphere. And somewhere in “Ould Ireland” I saw remarkably life-like impressions in the living rock of what seemed to be two human knees and legs. The patron saint of the Emerald Isle knelt in prayer on that spot, tradition said; and the excavations were known accordingly as “St. Patrick’s Knees.” Here, it would seem our forefathers’ thoughts ran in another direction, and that huge foot at the Schuylkill Falls was known with them as the “Devil’s Foot.”

On yonder rise at the back of the village you might have seen, up to three or four years ago, the big stone house which was Governor Mifflin’s mansion during the Revolution. He was the chief executive of this State for three terms of three years from 1790 to 1799.

The noble structure which now spans the river here recalls, by contrast, the poor old bridge which is said to have tottered into the water at this very spot in 1816 “in consequence of the great body of snow that was on it.”

THE END OF THE DRIVE.

In a few moments we reach the pumping station of the once much-talked-of Queen Lane Reservoir.

That black sand road describes an oval behind it and falls into our drive again after touching Ridge avenue at School lane; this other branching to our left in front of the engine house leads to the famous City Line hill. Don’t add to its long list of casualties by your lack of ordinary caution next time you come down that way.

A few yards farther, five miles from the Park entrance, or six and three-quarter miles from the Public Buildings, the Schuylkill River drive proper ceases and the Wissahickon River drive commences yonder on the other side of Ridge avenue.

With the balance of the 2940 acres which constitute Fairmount Park, we shall make acquaintance on various future occasions.

A.E.