
When our forefathers wanted to strike the top of Chestnut Hill they rumbled their way up from Front street to the old Rising Sun Tavern (now disappeared) and thence all along the Germantown road; and this was also their itinerary if they wished to make the Spring House pike.

The condition of the primitive Germantown road may be gathered from the fact that it once took Isaac Norris, of Fair Hill (you know where Fairhill Cemetery is located), a whole day to haul a load from his place at the said Fair Hill to Philadelphia.

We are considerably better off nowadays. Although Germantown avenue (as we now call it) is not a billiard table either as to grade or as to smoothness, it is, to say the least, cyclable; and if we don’t care to rough it, we are at liberty to avoid most or all of its length on our present errand.

TO FLOURTOWN VIA ANDORRA.

If you feel particularly lazy, stroll away along the Schuylkill River-drive and the Wissahickon Drive (as per Trip 16 and 17) and on to the Andorra Nurseries.

There turn R. The roughish stone road and the hills you encounter from that point will seem worse than they really are after your Park ride, but it’s only a matter of less than two miles, when you strike the Spring House Pike at Flourtown (16 m. from Public Buildings), and there wait for us.

You may congratulate yourself on having rounded Chestnut Hill easily; ours will be the reward of the charming views from its summit.

TO FLOURTOWN VIA CHESTNUT HILL.

We run up North Broad street and turn L into Cayuga street (as outlined in our Main Outlets of Philadelphia).

Cayuga, as you know, is the name of one of the old Indian tribes. The famous warrior Logan – not Penn’s Irish secretary, of course, but the chief of that name – was Cayuga. If you ever ramble by Fort Hill in Cayuga county, New York, think of him; that’s where he was born, although he spent most of his life in Pennsylvania.

At the end of Cayuga street, cross Germantown avenue into Roberts avenue and on to Wayne street, into which you turn R.

The wretched stretch of clay that has so long disgraced this street for the length of a block or two will shortly disappear; meanwhile, don’t use the path; an accident which befell an aged couple here, the other day, has brought down upon us the temporary ire of the local “powers that be.”
We soon emerge from under the railroad bridge anyway, on to the brick pavement, and a little ankle motion enables us to fly up the long incline of Wayne street.

BEAUTIFUL GERMANTOWN.

Do not tarry too long admiring, right and left of us, the truly beautiful specimens of Germantown’s residential architecture or the interesting relics of the “German Towne” of other days that we shall meet between this and Mount Airy; Germantown is worthy of a special pilgrimage, which we must make to it some day.

For the present, watch for Tulpehocken street on your right; you will find it where the brick pavement ceases at this date (a little over 7 m. from start); ride it up for the distance of one block, and, opposite the second Presbyterian Church, wheel L into Green street, another smooth road bordered on each side with remnants of ancient wildernesses and the most modern creations.

Now beware of this steep descent going down past the Upsal railroad station. Just opposite the station we turn sharp R. The noble width of Upsal street lies temptingly before us, but it would take us too swiftly to the uneven pavements of Main street. Let us bear immediately L., away from it, down this brand-new avenue labeled Pelham road. Is not this the very acme of our fin-de-siecle elegance and comfort?

A zigzag turning to the left would take us into McCallum street, whence by way of Willow Grove avenue, Seminola avenue and Highland avenue we could strike the top of Chestnut Hill – a lovely section and some very steep hills, take that route, if you want to investigate it for yourself. I have had some walking to do, up that way; that may be the reason I am not more enthusiastic in my recommendation of the route in its present state.

See how merrily we spin away through what used to be the Carpenter estate; in a few moments we pass L what remains of the stately mansion of former days and we strike the Germantown Main street, 9 miles from start.

Let us see how its Belgian blocks feel.

MOUNT AIRY.

One mile takes us to the old-time Mermaid Tavern – beg pardon, “Mermaid Hotel” this one is called. Not thus did Keats name its prototype in the old country:

“Souls of poets, dead and gone,
What Elysium have you known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?

Have ye tippled drink more fine
Than mine host Canary’s wine?
Or are the fruits of Paradise
Sweeter than those dainty pies
Of venison? Oh, generous food!
Drest as though bold Robin Hood
Would, with his Maid Marian,
Sup and bowse from horn and can.

I have heard that on a day
Mine host’s signboard flew away.
Nobody knew wither, till
An astrologer’s old quill
To a sheepskin gave the story,
Said he saw you in your glory
Underneath a new-old sign,
Sipping beverage divine
And pledging with contented smack,
The Mermaid in the Zodiac.

Do you notice those aged willows seemingly wondering what they can be doing among such surroundings, stone quarries, electric trolley cars and what not? They are the only survivors of a number of their species which once encircled a pond in front of the tavern.

Yonder log-house, whimsically roofed with red-painted sheet-iron, could tell you about those days of yore; it was erected there by a German cooper as far back as 1743.

It could tell you, among other things of that memorable December morning of 1777 when Lord Howe marched out along this very road, with the loudly proclaimed intention of driving “Mr.” Washington over the Blue Mountains, and of My Lord’s ignominious return in the darkness of the fifth night after his leaving town. Had not a certain King of France marched 30,000 men up a hill and then marched them down again?

CHESTNUT HILL.

Starting from the Mermaid Hotel, we face an upgrade practically one mile long, as far as the Chestnut Hill Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Here Germantown avenue is continued straight out by the Perkiomen and Germantown Pike. On our right a signpost shows us the beginning of the “Bethlehem Pike.” The traction people, who have purchased this road and are making welcome improvements on it, could tell you a different tale. They do not own the “Bethlehem Pike,” but the Spring House pike, of which the Bethlehem pike is the northern continuation eight miles away from this point. However, the entire road is generally designated by one name, and official accuracy has simply given way to popular custom in this instance.

Chestnut Hill, with its many wealthy mansions, deserves more than a passing glance, and should get a visit from us when the opportunity presents itself. For the present we turn R into this so-called Bethlehem Pike.

TOWARDS WHITE MARSH VALLEY.

This other station we now pass on our right is the Reading Company’s “Chestnut Hill.” And now, ere we dive down this hill, do pause a moment on its summit to “take in” the lovely White Marsh Valley spread out before us.
At the tollhouse, halfway down the incline, we pay eight cents for the whole length of the pike. That new road L is of no account to us, it goes no farther than the adjacent property; what concerns us is the new garb in which this pike is being dressed. What do you think of it?

Down we fly, past the present terminus of the Chestnut Hill and Walnut street trolley, past the popular Wheel Pump Hotel, and when our cyclometers register 13 miles from start the road from the Wissahickon followed by our lazy friends converges with our own from L.

FLOURTOWN.

This is Flourtown, miscalled by some and misprinted by others “Flowertown.”

Before the advent of the railroad this was a notable place for the halting of flour teams on their way from up country to the Philadelphia market. “You should have seen the crowd of them when I was a boy, all around about the Farmer’s Inn that’s standing there yet, and another hotel that’s shut up now,” said an old resident to me some three years ago; “the whole week long, it was like a funeral procession, only not so mournful; then the railroad came, and that was the death of the flour hauling.”

To this is probably due the name of this little town, in addition to the tradition (which I have long tried in vain to verify) that a flour mill stood here as early as 1719.

Of the architectural relics of Revolutionary times, one is still shown the stranger here – a log house said to have been occupied as a bakery by a woman named Heydrick, at a time when bakeries were indeed scarce in this section.

Close to the railroad crossing, a turn L goes to Norristown (8 m.); “hilly and rough,” the natives say. We don’t mind the hills so much, but we draw the line at roughness when we can.

A quarter of a mile further L to Barren Hill (3 ½ m.); R to Fitzwatertown (3 m.).

ON TO FORT WASHINGTON.

St. Thomas’ Church, on the top of that elevation R, is an ancient landmark; southeast of it is Church road, which goes all the way to the Old York road; northwest is the Skippack road to Broad Axe, Blue Bell, etc.

We halt at Tollhouse No. 2, with its genial old couple and their clever dog; then go straight through at the crossing, past Fort Side Inn (a house fast growing into favor with our local cycledom) and up a sharp hillock with the White March Public School L.

Such names as “Fort Side” and “White Marsh” are suggestive, and, sure enough, as we round the bend in the road, a stone imbedded in a fence R catches our eye with the following inscription:

About 700 feet south of this stone
Is an American redoubt and the
Site of Howe’s threatened attack,
December 6, 1777.
From here Washington’s army
marched to Valley Forge.
A flagstaff on the eminence, back of the road, points out the spot from which “Mr.” Washington was not “driven over the Blue Mountains,” but whence his half-starved, half-clad troops marched voluntarily to the Heroes’ Camp which we visited in our Trip Awheel No. 5.

The house that Washington used as his headquarters is still inhabited, and is well worth a visit.

A CORNER OF DUBLIN TOWNSHIP.

At Fort Washington Station we have covered fourteen miles. Three-quarters of a mile ahead, R to Jarrettown (2 m.), and half a mile farther still is Rose Valley crossroad; R to Three Tuns (2 m.) or Willow Grove (7 m.; L to Ambler.

It’s remarkable how some places boom up. Ambler started yonder on the Wissahickon about a mile on our left, with something like a fifteen-acre settlement. Not till about ten or eleven years ago was there any sign of its increasing, and now it has spread out from the creek to the pike and all along the pike as far as our friend Tollhouse No 4. “Ambler” they christened it. “Jumper” I would call it.

Another mile and a half of Montgomery county ups and downs, and we reach Spring House.

SPRING HOUSE.

An old tavern is this Spring House; it dates back at least a quarter of a century before the Bethlehem road became a great channel of military communication during our struggle for independence, and General Lacy mentioned it in his military dispatches in 1777.

Do you recollect its description in “The Foresters,” the poem in which our famed ornithologist, Alexander Wilson, related his journey afoot from Philadelphia to Niagara Falls in 1804?

“The road was good, the passing scenery gay,
Mile after mile passed unperceived away,
Till in the west the day began to close.
And Spring House Tavern furnished us repose.
Here two long rows of market folks were seen.
Ranged front to front, the table placed between.
Where bags of meat, and bones and crust of bread,
And hunks of bacon all around were spread;
One pint of beer from lip to lip went round,
And scarce a crumb the hungry housedog found;
Torrents of Dutch from every quarter came,
Pigs, calves and sauer kraut the important theme.
While we, on future plans resolving deep.
Discharged our bill and straight retired to sleep.”

Northwest of Spring House is the road to North Wales, Gwynned, etc., which supplies a link between this pike and the Perkiomen Valley road, of which we must avail ourselves at a later date. Southwest lies the road to Penlyn, and Blue Bell on the Skippack road; while, almost due east, is a cross-country cut to White Hall and Limekiln pikes.
We might take the latter on our return trip, but we should find it considerably rougher and more hilly than the Spring House pike. It would take us through Jarrettown, Dreshertown, Fitzwatertown, Edge Hill, Waverly Heights and Pittville to Branchtown, whence we would reach home as per Trip No. 6.

A.E.