



Courtesy Pennsylvania Railroad

### BRYN MAWR HOTEL

Of the many hotels and boarding houses in Bryn Mawr, the one that aided most in its development was the Bryn Mawr Hotel which was built by the Pennsylvania Railroad. This building made Bryn Mawr a socially prominent spot and many of its guests became permanent residents. In fact, the guest list read like the "Who's Who" of Philadelphia.<sup>20</sup> The hotel soon became a favorite resort for men who could not leave their businesses for more than the conventional two weeks in the summer. The hotel was packed to capacity all summer long in its early years; however, later in the century, the business failed because of the lack of guests in July and August.<sup>21</sup>

The first wing of this huge edifice was built in 1871, the second wing in 1873, and the third wing in 1876. The hotel was built especially for Centennial visitors and was of mammoth size—350 rooms for 250 guests and was four floors high.<sup>22</sup> The facilities offered were outstanding which probably accounts for the high social class of the residents. For the convenience of the guests, suites and single rooms had been constructed.<sup>23</sup> The hotel boasted the first elevator on the line, a pool room, bowling alleys, and first quality mattresses. It was located on a 25½ acre plot of land with terraced gardens, and it was only two minutes walking distance from the station. The four story structure was built of stone and had a mansard roof. It was run under the management of the Keystone Hotel Company and under the personal supervision of Mr. P. S. Attick. The season did not open until May 31st, which was later than most of the other boarding houses.

The surroundings of the hotel for the first few years had been rather dismal. In front were two large unsightly ice ponds which in dry weather turned into mud ponds. These ponds were fed by a small stream which today has been diverted into a culvert. The first years found the area almost treeless until the Pennsylvania Railroad planted some maple trees.

As the surroundings became more beautiful, the rooms were almost always filled because of the pleasant surroundings, gas lights, and bathtubs. One of the outstanding features was that the Bryn Mawr Hotel could boast at least one bathroom to each floor, and no more than 50 people would have to use this bathroom.<sup>24</sup>

This splendor was destroyed by a disastrous fire which broke out in October 11, 1887, at 6:30 A.M. The fire, which started in a defective flue on the fourth floor, was discovered by employees. The 40 residents were warned and fled to safety. Brave waiters tried to fight the fire with water from the rooftop water tank; but they were forced to flee, and most of the building was destroyed by the time Philadelphia fire engines arrived by railroad gondola car. Haverford College students helped to save some of the furniture, but many on-lookers felt that they wrecked more than they saved.<sup>25</sup>

After the fire, a new hotel was erected on the site by a neighborhood syndicate. Designed by Allan Evans, the new building cost the promoters half a million dollars. Half of this amount was obtained by sale of stock and half through sale of bonds. The stock never paid a cent of dividend, and when the bonds finally came due, the group could not pay the interest. The mortgage was foreclosed and with this, the hotel stopped operations.<sup>26</sup> The failure of the Bryn Mawr Hotel can be laid to the fact that Bryn Mawr was no longer considered a summer resort and patrons went elsewhere for their vacations. Later the building was bought by the Baldwin School for Girls and is still being used as a private school today.

The previously mentioned hotels and boarding houses were probably the most important in Bryn Mawr, but it would be unfair to overlook the smaller ones because they too played an important part in Bryn Mawr's history.

22. Townsend, op. cit., p. 57.

23. "The Main Line in 1884 Was Vacation Land," op. cit.,

24. The Main Line Chronicle.