

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF NORWOOD

By

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Norwood, Pennsylvania, is a small borough covering 1.87 square miles and with an approximate population of 6,000. Located nine miles from Philadelphia and four miles from Chester, Norwood is bounded by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad on the North, by the Muckinipates Creek on the South, by South Avenue and another branch of the Muckinipates on the East, and by Amosland Road and Summit Avenue on the West.

The first inhabitants of what is now Norwood were the renni-renape and Delaware Indians. Swedish pioneers, who were the first white inhabitants and who became friendly with the renni-renape Indians, settled in the countryside near Tennicum Island in the Delaware River where Governor Printz settled in 1646. John Morton, signer of the Declaration of Independence, was a descendent of an early Swedish settler who came to the Governor Printz colony and built a farmhouse, known as the Morton Mortonson House, within the confines of what is now the Borough of Norwood. This house stands today and is built on high ground at the point where the Muckinipates and Darby Creeks join. It was built probably in the 1670's by

Morton Mortonson, the grandfather of John Morton, who sailed from Gottenbury, Sweden, on the ship "Orn" in 1654. The initials "M. M." etched in brick can be seen on one wing. This house was continually occupied until 1950 when it was in such disrepair that it was vacated. In 1953 the house and the ground immediately surrounding were given to the Borough of Norwood to be leased for custodial purposes to the Delaware Couty Historical Society.

The English settlers, having come to Chester and Philadelphia with William Penn in the 1680's, ventured into the hinterland of the Delaware River to establish their farms on the lands that later became the borough of Norwood.

Norwood was laid out in 1873 by John Cochran, a real estate operator of Chester and Philadelphia. He was associated in the business with his son, I. E. Cochrane, and another son, Samuel, who was the surveyor who made the first plan of the original Norwood, known as the Cochrane tract. This Cochrane tract consisted of three pieces of farmland fronting on Chester Pike (also called Old Post Road, The Queen's Highway, The King's Highway, and The Old Southern Road). These three pieces of farm land were laid out into

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644 building lots and three or four public sales of these lots were held. About 1883 Edwin L. Mintyer, a Philadelphia real estate man, purchased a piece of farmland between Chester Pike and the Railroad. He formed a corporation (The Norwood Land Association), advertised extensively in Philadelphia with a Fally-ho and four white horses, made special excursion rates on the railroad, and successfully engineered quite a land boom for that section. The Henderson, Dufee, Shaw, Dickenson, and Shuster farms were all opened for development between 1887 and 1893.

In order to advertise the new town and attract possible purchasers of lots, John Cochrane erected "The Norwood Hotel", a large frame five-story building on Welcome Avenue between Winona Avenue and Ridley Avenue, in 1873. This Hotel was conducted for many years as a successful resort. Originally, Norwood was intended as a summer resort, and the early homes were meant to be vacation respites from the city heat.

Norwood, named by Mrs. I. Engel Cochran after the Novel Norwood, or Village Life in New England by Henry Ward Beecher, was incorporated into a borough on June 8, 1893; and the Charter was recorded in the office of the Recorder of Deeds on November 23 of the same year.

The railroad was built in 1874 when the Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington Railroads abandoned their tracks along the Delaware River and constructed the present cut on the right of way through Norwood as it now exists. The original station was erected in 1875 and rebuilt in 1950.

The first store in Norwood was located on what is now 294 East Winona Avenue. It was a country store patronized by farmers traveling the old Amosland Road to the Inskeep Mill (Glenolden) for grain and feed. Later stores were built at 159 Seminole Avenue and on Chester Pike. Now Chester Pike is Norwood's business center, with several gas stations, large supermarkets, a movie theatre, a funeral home, a bank, drug

and variety stores, and numerous restaurants, hotels, churches, and small shops. Chester Pike is also Norwood's main traffic artery.

The first school in Norwood was built by the Ridley Township School Board in 1877 and enlarged in 1890. The old building is still standing today on Chester Pike above Summit Avenue. When Norwood was incorporated as a borough in 1895, the first new School Board made an unwise decision in accepting this old school from the township instead of demanding funds than for the erection of a new school in a better location. In 1912 improved properties had to be purchased at heavy cost to the taxpayers in order to secure the site for another borough school at Mohawk and Winona Avenues. In 1956 a modern new elementary school was built on Seneca Avenue. Although intended to supplement the older building, it has taken the full student body since the Mohawk Avenue School was condemned in December of 1958. Norwood and Glenolden built a joint Senior

High School, Glen-Nor, on South Avenue in Glenolden in 1922.

A need for greater facilities motivated a new jointure of Norwood, Glenolden, and Prospect Park in 1956. This jointure, The Interboro School System, uses the former Prospect Park High School on Washington Avenue in Prospect Park for grades seven to nine, and the former Glen-Nor High School building in Glenolden for grades ten to twelve. New additions have been constructed at both cities and completed in 1959.

The first church in Norwood was the Methodist Church, erected about 1886 at the corner of Mohawk Avenue and Cleveland Avenue. This building was later moved to its present location on Chester Pike. The Lutheran Church on Chester Pike at Winona Avenue was built the next year, 1887, the first building later replaced. There are several other churches now located in Norwood, including Saint Gabriels Catholic Church on Mohawk Avenue, Saint Stephens Episcopal Church on Chester Pike, and the Assembly of God Church on

Mohawk Avenue.

The borough of Norwood is a municipal corporation. Its rights and powers are very much like those of a person. In its corporate name a borough may sue and be sued, and complain and defend itself in courts. It may purchase, hold, lease, and sell real estate as the needs of the Government require. It is, however, a creation of the commonwealth existing by reason of statute permission.

The Norwood Borough Council is composed of seven members, elected at large by voters, for terms of four years. It is the legislative body and determines policies by enactment of ordinances and resolutions. It is also the chief administrative agent of the borough government. Council legislates on matters in the categories of public safety, public works, public health, public utilities, and public finance. Meetings are presided over by the President of Council who preserves order, decides questions of order, and casts a vote in case



of tie. The council administers through committees. The president of council appoints all committees and designates the chairman. Each committee consists of three men, and at present there are the following committees: Ways and Means; Highways and Sewers; Police, Light and Fire; Building; Ordinance; Special Railway; and Parks and Recreation. Council appoints certain officials such as the Secretary, Treasurer, Solicitor, and boards and commissions. Regular council meetings, held on the second Friday of each month, are open to the public.

The Burgess is elected by the voters for a four-year term. His powers are narrowly restricted, even though he has a variety of duties. He is ceremonial head of the borough and may sign or veto ordinances, although council may over-ride his veto by a two-thirds vote. He is Justice of the Peace and directs the police force. He also appoints the Zoning and Civil Service Commissions.

Other borough employees are the tax collector, three auditors, two justices of the peace, a constable, Borough Secretary, Borough Treasurer, Borough Solicitor, and Borough Engineer.

In 1898, the council of Norwood appointed the first "town constable". Now the specially trained personnel includes one chief and three patrolmen, augmented by special police in case of emergency. The police cars are completely equipped for all emergencies and is in a two way communication with the broadcasting station of Sharon Hill Police, which serves this and neighboring municipalities. Headquarters are in the Norwood fire house and consist of two cell blocks, an office equipped with radio, finger printing apparatus, and files containing records of arrests, identification, etc.

Norwood Fire Company No. 1 is the second oldest volunteer fire company in Delaware County; it was chartered in 1874 and now consists of 324 firemen, approximately 35 of whom are

active members. Officers are elected to one-year terms by popular vote of the company. They boast some of the most complete and modern equipment in Pennsylvania. An auxiliary electric plant is maintained which provides power for the fire siren and for lights in the fire house in case the main source of electricity is shut off. The company maintains building and social quarters through dues and various activities. The borough purchases and maintains all fire fighting equipment and gives further support by the rental of the borough office, police headquarters, and the hall for council meetings.

The local public health function is performed by the Board of Health. Council appoints five members to the Board, and the Board then elects its own officers. Council appropriates funds for the performance of health functions, but the Board of Health has some income from its own operations. Among its other duties, the Board is in charge of arranging with a private contractor for garbage collections. These

collections are made twice a week during the winter and three times a week during the summer. Plumbers' registration and plumbing inspection is performed by the plumbing inspector, who is directed and supervised by the board.

Among the various activities of the maintenance employees is the collection of ashes, and rubbish collections are made weekly during the winter and summer.

The major portion of the work relating to highways is done by employees of the borough engaged for this purpose. They maintain the surfaces of the streets, paint traffic lines and do other work necessary to street maintenance. A borough garage was built in 1940 to serve as a storage place for the equipment of the borough.

Both the sanitary and storm sewers are maintained by borough employees. A complete sewerage system is laid throughout the borough, and every home in the borough is provided with sewerage facilities. Norwood is a member of the Muckini-

pates Sewer Authority which maintains a modern sewage disposal plant at the south-eastern corner of Norwood.

Street lighting is furnished by the Philadelphia Electric Company on an annual basis. Charges have been made from time to time to give to the people of Norwood the best possible lighting facilities obtainable.

In 1925 the American Legion Post established a library with books collected from the borough residents and, in 1938, decided to make it a public library. Space was granted for use in the Norwood Elementary School. A new modern library was built on Winona Avenue in 1951. This is one of the most attractive, and is rapidly becoming one of the best stocked, libraries in Delaware County. Funds are appropriated by the borough council, and although most help is volunteer, a part-time professional librarian has been hired.

There are four parks in Norwood, the largest of which covers forty-two acres. The others are small parks on

Winona Avenue, Summit Avenue, and Huron Avenue. The large park, at the southern end of Norwood, is landscaped with oak and gum trees. For the athletically inclined, the park contains a baseball diamond and softball field, a football field, a basketball court, and an ice-skating rink. For the children there is a complete line of play equipment including swings, see-saws, sand boxes, etc. Picknick areas with tables, benches, and stone fire-places complete the picture. All facilities are free. The Winona Avenue Park is known as the Memorial Park, and is dedicated to the men who served in World War I. A monument engraved with 146 names was erected in their honor.

The citizens' Fourth of July Association is an independent organization of the people of Norwood. It is supported by voluntary contributions, and functions in its civic capacity only for Fourth of July celebrations. These celebrations include a parade, races, games, refreshments and a free movie.

It was in 1885 that the first Fourth of July celebration was held, and yearly celebrations have been held since that time. This annual event gives Norwood much favorable publicity in the state of Pennsylvania and is one of which the residents are justly proud.

It is interesting to note how many names of the town's founders are familiar today in Norwood, and it is only natural that the families who have lived and grown with the borough have a continued and fond interest in the community. This spirit, when joined with the progressive and cooperative attitude of the "new comers", should make possible the continuation of the progress of this residential town.

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