

The former Diehl house on Easton Road, now site of the Thriftway Supermarket.

Gertrude Diehl looks back.

Remembering Glenside as family's "country town"

By Cindi McCloe

There are many memories in that place. Although it was not readily noticeable even while speaking with the woman in her apartment in the [Normandy Farm\[s\] Estates](#), a retirement home in [Blue Bell](#), it was immediately obvious after departing.

Four years ago, she moved there after the last of her six brothers and sisters died. Celebrating her 80th birthday in June, she recently pulled out numerous mementos of bygone days to help in the celebration of the 100th anniversary of [Glenside](#).

The box camera snap shots and the post cards and written notes all succeeded in capturing not only generations of an American family, generations past and generations still living, but also a fleeting era in the history of a small town.

[Gertrude Virginia Diehl](#) was born the seventh child [Samuel E. Diehl](#) and [Gertrude V. Diehl](#) on June 29, 1908.

* Please turn to Page 2*

That the spirit of industrialization and urbanization was coming to Glenside is evidenced in hindsight by the fact that there were at least three toll gates, " These existed, Gertrude remembers, along [Easton Road](#) at three intersections: [Limekiln Pike](#), [Glenside Avenue](#), and [Jenkintown Road](#). To avoid paying the five cent toll, she said, horses and buggies simply used to ride around the gates.

The Diehl family lived in a large house on a four-acre estate spread along Easton Road on the very site where the Thriftway Supermarket is now located. Gertrude described her home as "a Spanish style house with red tile roof." But the house was much more. In the parlor, she said, there was one birth (her own), two weddings, and one death (her mother's)." The rooms were large and decorated in the breezy, yet ornate style of the day, although the character of the furniture imparted a sense of solidity and dimension to the rooms.

"There were properties on both sides of ours," Gertrude said. Between 1904, when the family moved to Glenside from Oakdale¹, and 1907 her father, a noted Philadelphia businessman, purchased those two adjoining properties in a seemingly defiant gesture intended to prevent the community from erecting a school. In 1907 the Harner Hill School, an elementary school, was built across the street on a site on which now stands the [Glenside Post Office](#).

The number six trolley², as well, was put in shortly after the family moved to Glenside. "I heard stories of the men who laid the tracks camping in the woods on [Bickley Avenue \[Road \]](#) in back of our estate," Gertrude said. They made a lot of noise.' Bickley Avenue was at that time only a dirt road. The long winding driveway of the Diehl estate extended from Easton Road straight through to Bickley avenue.

Gertrude's father, an entrepreneur, founded several businesses in his lifetime, including Diehl Motor Truck Works, manufacturers of Model-A-Open Express Body trucks, which advertised it's one-ton chassis for "only \$1,000" and it's one-and-a-half-ton chassis for \$200 more. He also founded the Beverage Bottle Company which was taken over by one of his three sons, Samuel E. Diehl Jr., and renamed the Soft Drink Bottler Supplies. In addition, the elder Diehl created "Savor-ee Chef's Delight," a kitchen bouquet to flavor soups and gravies.

A fire in 1940 destroyed the Diehl home , forcing them to a new house on [Roslyn Avenue](#) in Glenside where the family rented for seven years. In 1941, the elder Diehl, who had traveled daily to and from Philadelphia on business, suffered a stroke which forced him to retire. Five years later, in 1946, the "former truck manufacturer," as a clipping from a 1946 edition of the "Evening Bulletin" referred to him, died at 91.

Gertrude displayed a treasured photograph of her father on the boardwalk of Ocean City after his stroke. "He was a grand old man." [Could it be [this picture](#)? I don't know, but it is possible. If you look carefully, it seems as if my great grandfather may be standing on a pier or some such thing.]

¹ In my copy of the article, there is a correction. As I know [June Diehl Leaver](#)'s handwriting, it is she who crossed out Oakdale. She *correctly* wrote Oak Lane above this paragraph. The Diehls moved from [Oak Lane](#), not Oakdale

² "**ROUTE 6** | Ogontz Ave. - Between Ogontz & Cheltenham and Broad & Olney - 5.6 miles. The Glenside line was established in 1924 operating between Willow Grove Depot and City Line & Ogontz via Limekiln Pike. In 1929 service was extended into the city to Broad & Olney via Ogontz Ave. In 1958 buses replaced streetcars north of Cheltenham Ave." | Page 8 of a 1974 SEPTA brochure entitled, "*The History of Trolley Cars and Routes in Philadelphia*." SEPTA stand for **S**outheastern **P**ennsylvania **T**ransportation **A**uthority. | I found this booklet in the Source Notes for the Wikipedia page for [SEPTA Route 6](#) >> [Philadelphia Trolley Tracks](#) >> <http://www.phillytrolley.org/1974history/1974history-index.html> | [HERE I arranged the picture pages as a brochure/PDF](#). I also included the home page of the website - [Philadelphia Trolley Tracks](#). Two for the price of one.

From 1946 to 1984, Gertrude lived with her brother and sister on Glenside's [Harrison Avenue](#).³

Her brother, Samuel Diehl, who died in 1984 [should be 1983], left behind a neatly typewritten personal testimony of his experience with the Glenside fire company on the night of the [Willow Grove Park](#)⁴ fire in the 1930s.

[**THIS IS UNCLE ERVIN'S, as we called him, account of the Glenside fire company helping on the night of the Willow Grove Park fire.** I came into possession of Mom's digital files and found it.

Back in the thirties there was a large fire in Willow Grove Park. Most all the amusements on the midway were on fire. Glenside got a call for help and so did most all fire companies nearby. It was early in the evening and a very cold winter night, there was no snow on the ground but we expected some and had the chains on the fire trucks. Chas. Fenski drove the [1923 Seagrave Pumper](#)⁵ [[Seagrave Pumper](#)⁶] and I sat on the front set ringing the bell and cranking the hand siren. We went up Easton Road with the chains clanking, so did not make very good time. As we went past the mountain in the park, a large piece of burning wood fell right in the middle of the steering wheel, we knocked it off and turned left at Moreland Road and then left in the park drive and over the bridge between the two lakes and parked beside the lake near the band pavilion. We pulled the 2 1/2" hose straight across the lawns to the fire with the help of some spectators; I called to one, "hey boy give us a hand" when I looked at him, I discovered it was Mr. Westphal, who lived a few doors above the fire house and used to belong to the crew, he was old enough to be my father. Chas. Fenski and I hooked up the pump and when we got the call for water we started to pump and every one left, leaving me in charge of the pump. The PRT [[Philadelphia Rapid Transit](#)⁷] came around with a truck loaded with

³ I remember this house very well, but I don't remember the house number to give you a Street View hyperlink or the like. If I sat down and thought, I could tell you a lot about this grand old house. I do remember the beautiful old furniture and the grandfather's clock to the right (?) of the stairs to the second floor. Once or twice I was on the third floor where [Aunt Myrt](#) had her art studio. 😊

⁴ This is a merging/replication of three web pages and/or blogs. This was done June 16 - 17, 2025

⁵ This linked picture sequence is retrieved from [The Henry Ford](#) >> [Past Forward Activating The Henry Ford Archive of Innovation](#) >> [Archive Insight](#) >> [Seagrave Fire Apparatus](#) | Retrieved June 4, 2025

⁶ Jim Woods was able to provide an actual picture of the Glenside Fire Company #1 1923 Seagrave Pumper. You can clearly see "Glenside Fire Co. Number 1" written on the hood of the pumper along with the company's insignia right below the wording. In further communications, Jim says, "The 1923 Seagrave was the first custom built truck the company purchased. It could pump 750 gallons a minute, it was designed with a centrifugal pump which was the first of its kind in the area. It was chain driven, right hand drive with no windshield.

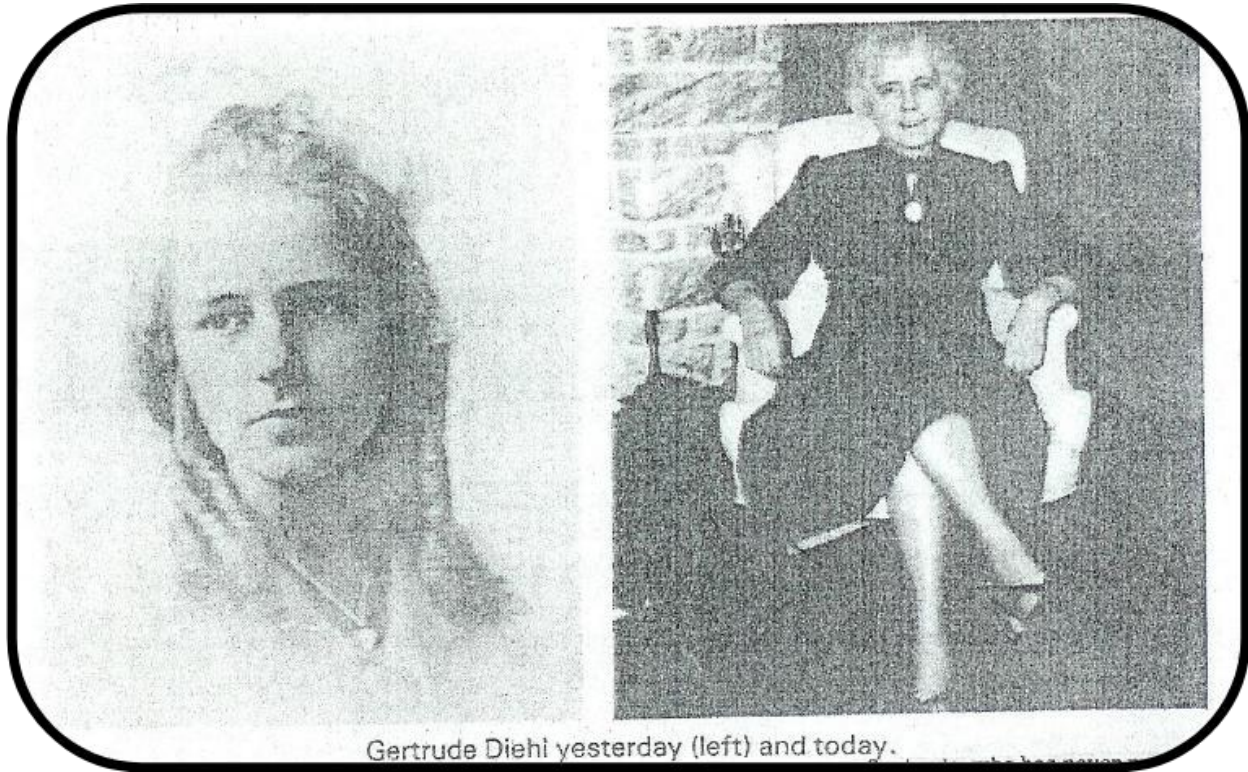
⁷ Retrieved June 14, 2025 | [Post replicated here](#)

the five gallon cans of gas and oil an asked if we needed any. I told them to come back in about one hour, as I had enough for three hours of pumping. It was very lonely and cold, all I had to do was check the thermometer on top of the radiator cap to make sure it did not heat up, which it never did. I then laid up on the hose bed of the truck over the 4" exhaust pipe and put a blanket over myself and several times I dozed off, when the governor on the truck slowed down the engine I was right up to check. After pumping for about two hours the RPT [maybe PRT?] came back with gas and we filled the tank. They left quite a few five gallons cans of gas with me. What I want to bring out is, our 1923 Seagrave pumped water on that fire for 5 hours and 15 minutes without a stop. There was no other fire company at that fire that pumped that long, some ran out of gas and some trucks froze or heated up and broke down. **THE END**

Continuing with Aunt Gert's story/memories...]

Gertrude, who has never married, attended the [Philadelphia School of Bible](#) for three years and taught bible classes for several years.

She plays the piano during church services on Sundays at Normandy Farms and hymn services Sunday nights. Sometimes she play in the infirmary also. She also paints, both nature scenes and animals and greeting cards. Painting is a pastime she shared with other family members.



Gertrude Diehl yesterday (left) and today.

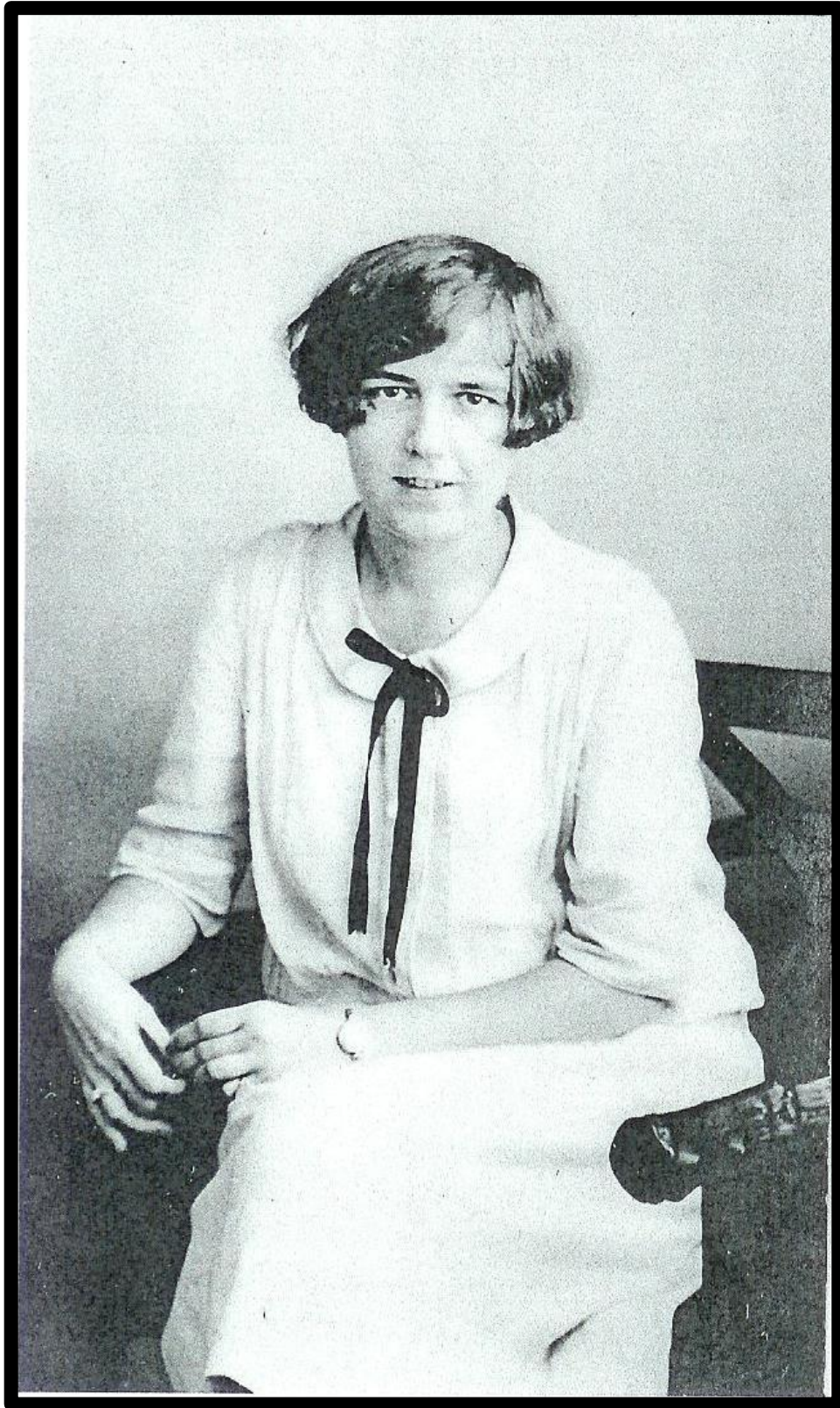
On the walls of her apartment are hung several paintings in oil by her late sisters [[Myrtle](#)]. The cuckoo clock that churns every 15 minutes over one chair in her present home also hung on the walls of her grandfather's home, and the heavy carved teakwood chair in the corner can be seen in pictures she has of the Diehl estate at the turn of the century. The matching teakwood desk, Gertrude said, sold in 1984 for \$1,000.

The reminders are all there, but Gertrude Diehl concerns herself more these days with her busy life at [Normandy Farms](#). "It's hard to get everything done, even though you are in a retirement home," she said, laughing. "I just thought I could give you some interesting facts concerning Glenside." After all, she lived there for 76 years.

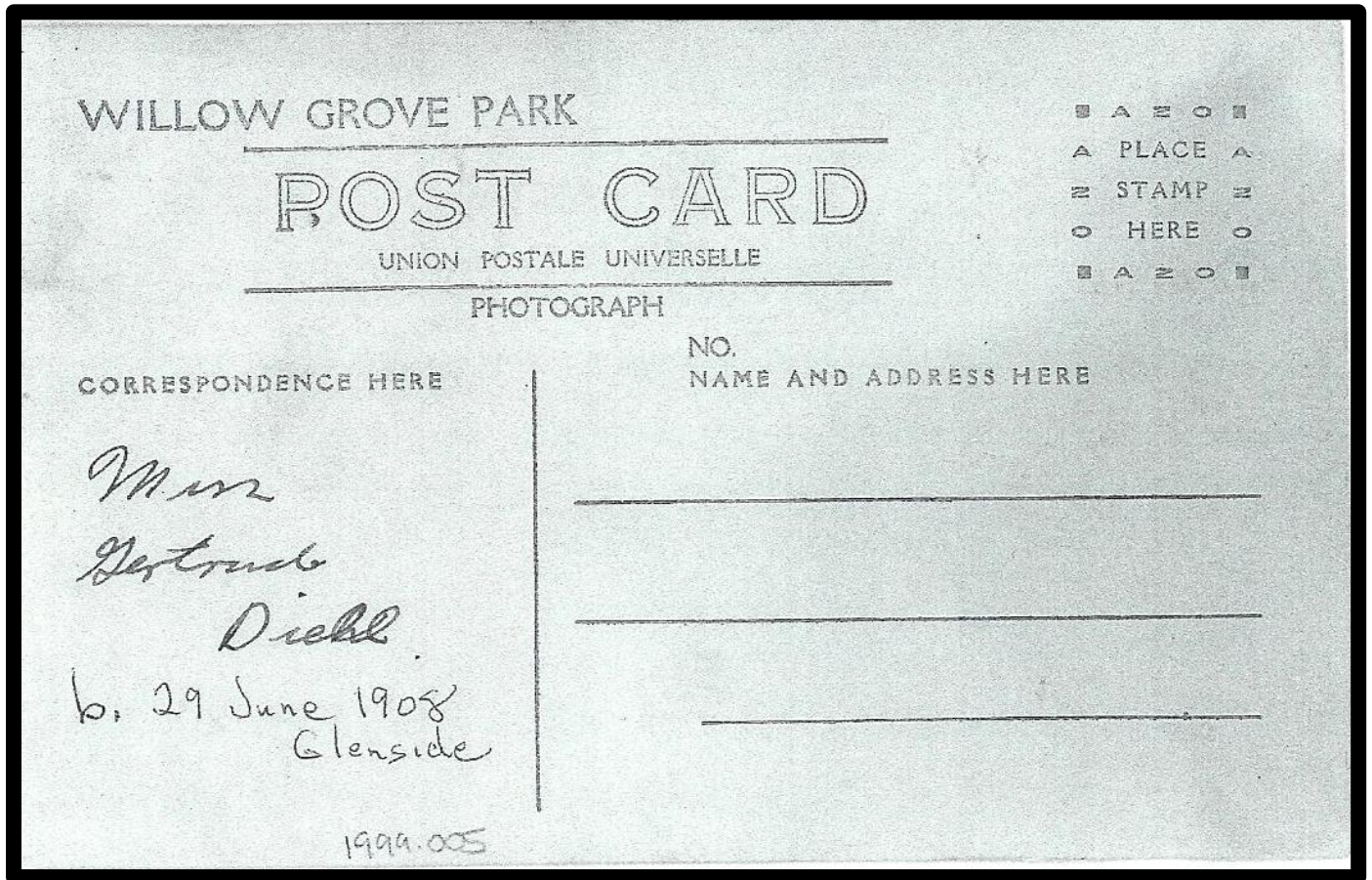


Samuel Edwin Diehl, Sr.
Gertrude Virginia Diehl.
279 S. Easton Rd Glenside PA

1949.005



A young [Gertrude Virginia Diehl](#) - date unknown



For Union Postale Univeralle ⁸

⁸ From the [Wikipedia for Universal Postal Union](#), “ The **Universal Postal Union (UPU)**, French: *Union postale universelle*) is a [specialized agency](#) of the [United Nations](#) (UN) that coordinates postal policies among member nations and facilitates a uniform worldwide [postal system](#). It has 192 member states and is headquartered in [Bern](#), Switzerland.^[2] | Retrieved June 14, 2025. I have no idea what the picture was on front of the post card.



[Gertrude Virginia Addis Diehl](#)

A A E O A
A PLACE A
E STAMP E
O HERE O

ADDRESS

POST CARD

Gertrude Virginia
Addis Diehl

James grand
mother

w/o
CORRESPONDENCE Samuel Ervin
Diehl Sr
No younger photo

1999.005



Residence of Samuel Ervin Dehl
279 So. Easton Road, Glenside, TX


1199-005



The Samuel Ervin Diehl estate was located on the east side of South Easton Road near the present site of a shopping center and directly across the road from the former Glenside Public School. Diehl was associated with [Jay Cooke & Company](#) in the 1870s and with [Manufacturers' National Bank](#) in the 1880s. [In 1888 Diehl founded a beverage bottler and supply company.](#) He later started [Diehl Motor Truck Works](#), a manufacturer of motor trucks that were used by many bottlers in the eastern part of the country during the 1920s. In 1904 the Diehl family moved to this estate from the Oak Lane section of Philadelphia. In 1907 Diehl purchased two adjoining properties. The four-acre estate extended from Easton Road back to Bickley Avenue. The house, in the Spanish style with a red tile roof, was destroyed by fire in 1940.

This scanned picture and the caption, which I have expanded through hyperlinks comes from page 110 of [Images of America: Cheltenham Township: Old York Road Historical Society](#) | Publication date: August 15, 2001 | Arcadia Publishing Library Editions

I have substituted this scanned picture in place of the picture which Jim shared with me. I think that it is a bit clearer.

 Ms. June Diehl Leaver
PO Box 366-267 Twin Oak Dr
Dublin PA 18917
CHARTER MEMBER

192
SL

279 So. Easton Road, Glenside, PA
Samuel Ervin Diehl Residence
1911 Packard Sr. burned Jan. 1940

1999.005



The Diehl dining room is decorated in Victorian splendor - Page 111 - documented and exchanged as on page 15.



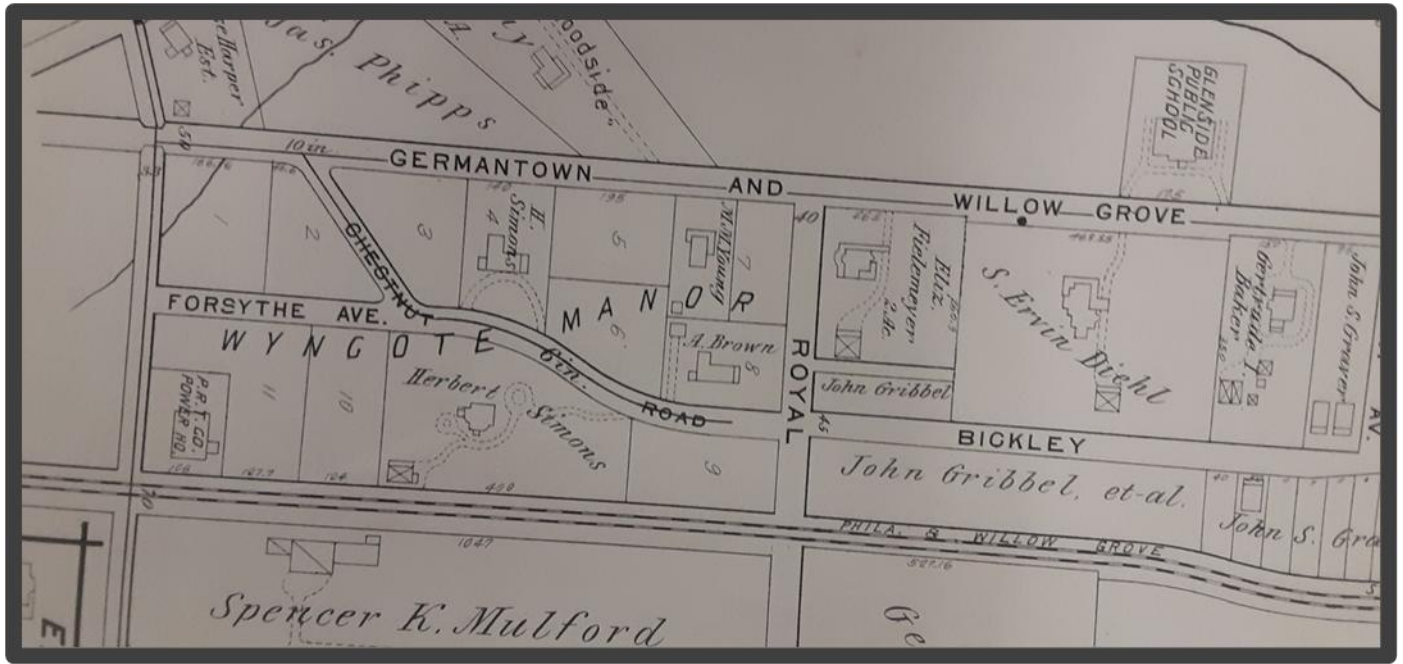
Ms. June Diehl Leaver
PO Box 366-267 Twin Oak Dr
Dublin PA 18917

CHARTER MEMBER

This furniture sold @ auction
in 1984 from Samuel Ervin Diehl, Jr.
Harrison Ave home after his death

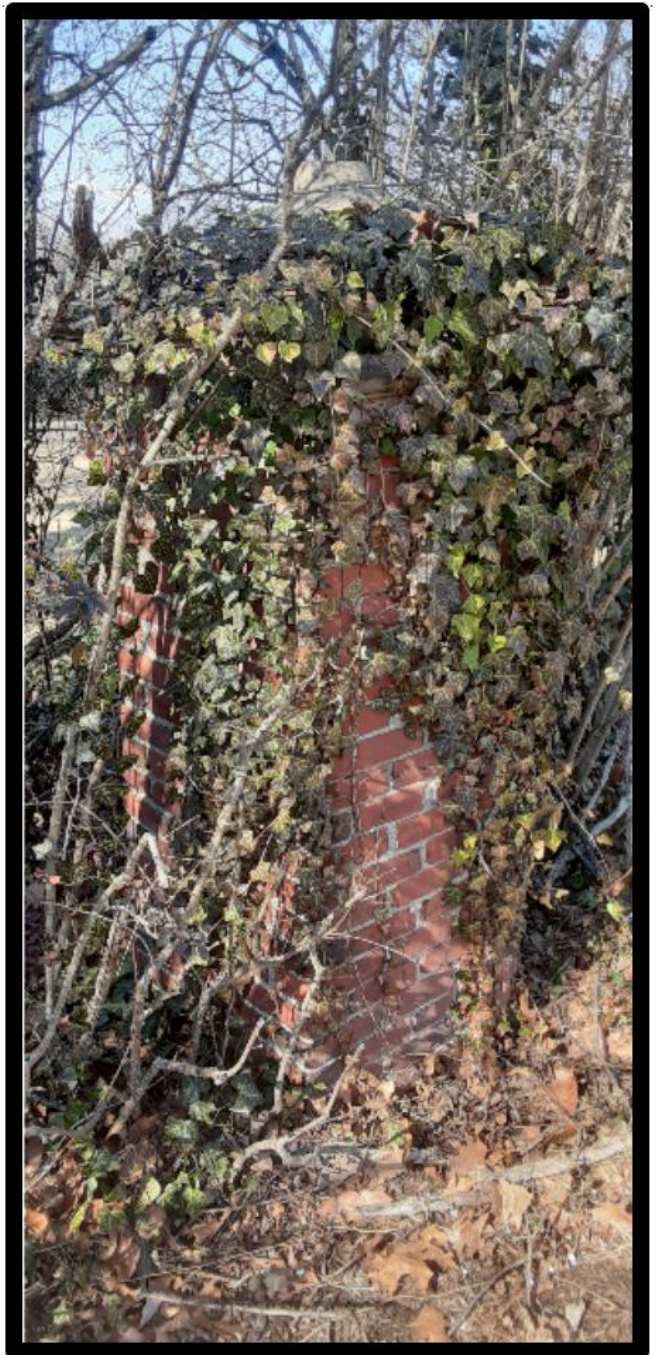
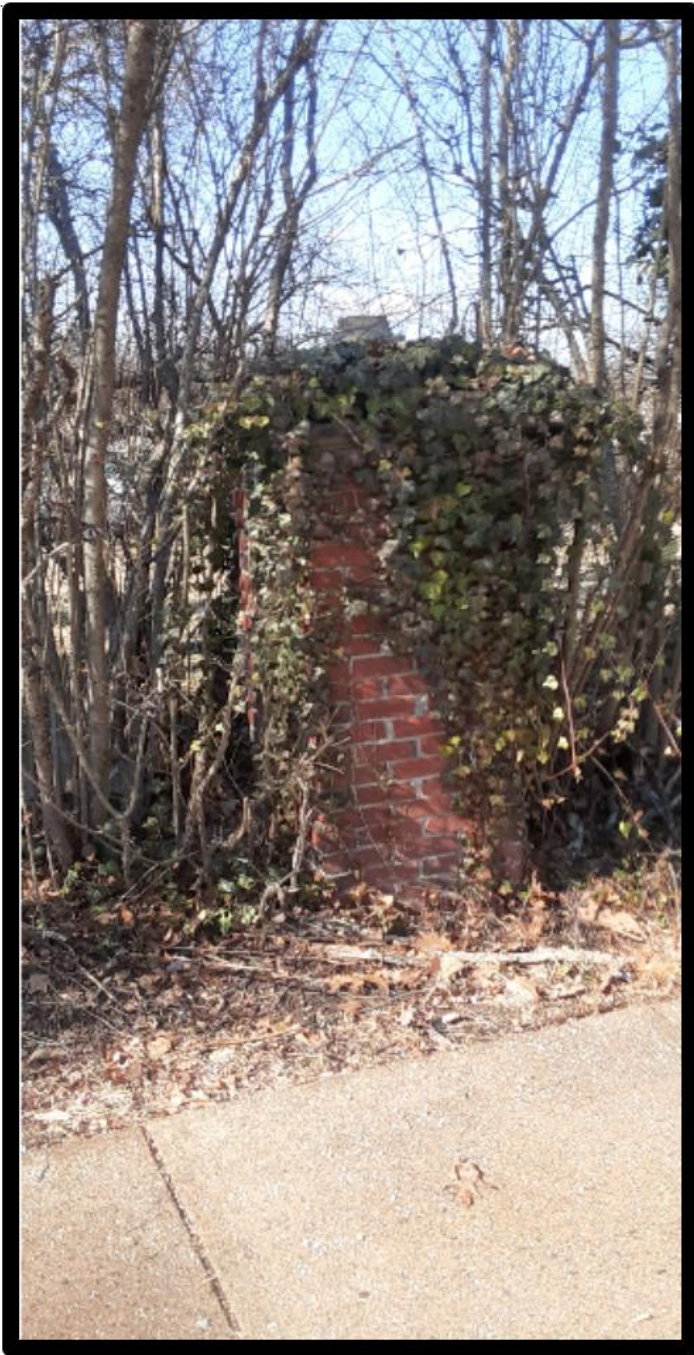
Dining Room 279 S. Eston Rd.
Clenaside PA

This is **THE END** of the article and pictures which Jim sent to me on March 13, 2025.



This is part of a pre-1927 map of Glenside, Pennsylvania. It shows/labels my great grandfather's property. Do you see it on the right-hand side of the map? Also note "GLENSIDE PUBLIC SCHOOL" across the street from the property. This is mentioned in the above newspaper article. The Glenside Post Office now calls this property home. Evidently South Easton Road was known as "Germantown and Willow Grove." You can clearly see Bickley Road.

In a March 4, 2025 e-mail, [Jim Woods](#) shared with me two pictures a brick pillar that is on Bickley Road. He also shared two pictures of a brick fence fence buried in the weeds. Those in Glenside believe that these are some of the last vestiges of my great grandfather's estate. Here is the brick pillar followed by the fence.



These are two pictures of a brick pillar that is on Bickley Road. Those in Glenside believe that it is some of the last vestiges of my great grandfather's estate..



Picture 1: While it is hard to see, these bricks buried in the weeds off of Bickley Road represent the fence that was seemingly around my great grandfather Diehl's estate.



Picture 2: While it is hard to see, these bricks buried in the weeds off of Bickley Road represent the fence that was seemingly around my great grandfather Diehl's estate.

This newspaper article and the old family pictures are curtesy of Jim Woods. I have transcribed the article and arranged the 7 additional pictures which he sent to me in a March 13, 2025, e-mail. Thank you, Jim.

What about a proper picture of the Diehl estate? It comes from Mom's files.



*The estate of my great-grandparents Samuel Ervin Diehl, Sr. and Gertrude Virginia Addis Diehl. Using modern numbering, it was at [279 South Easton Road, Glenside](#). "It was built especially for them, and they were the only ones to ever live there. The family moved there from [West Oak Lane \[Oak Lane \]](#) in 1904..." - Mom. While Mom said it was destroyed by fire in 1937, the **Glenside News** reports that it actually burned March 12, 1940*

What about another picture of Aunt Gert? This too comes from family pictures. I have no idea of when it was taken. She is sitting at a piano. She sure could play!

