

East Falls Past-- Falls Tavern

The Fallser, November 2009, by Wendy Moody

The Falls Hotel used to stand on the rear property of our Sunoco A Plus Market. On August 12, 1920, Robert Shronk wrote this intriguing article about the hotel for the local paper, *The Chronicle*:

The old saying that "Water is free" has been put to a test to the people residing in the neighborhood of Ridge Avenue and Queen Lane. The flowing fountain connected with the Falls Hotel, which was erected in 1731, has been removed, as has the large trough from which many a thirsty horse quenched its thirst.



The old fountain was supplied with water from a large spring up in what was once known as Smith's hollow, and conveyed to the hotel in pipes. People in the vicinity have long been accustomed to carry their drinking water from the fountain. It is not known just how long the fountain has been in existence, but it has stood there for more than a century. From the time the old horse cars first ran to the Falls in the summer of 1859 until the fountain was removed, cars would stop in front of it so that the conductor, driver or motorman might drink the cool and refreshing water. Drivers of the horse cars would frequently give their horses a drink.

Someone has suggested that the removing of the fountain is to get even with the advocates of prohibition. Whether that be true or not, the removal of this old landmark is most sincerely regretted.

The history of this hotel is recounted in *East Falls: 300 Years of History*. Also called the Falls Tavern (originally Fort St. David's Hotel), it resembled many of the old inns – a 2 ½ story high building of heavy white-washed plaster with a steep pitched roof. In the front was a two-storied porch with a fanciful black iron balustrade. In the back, facing the river, were more porches where people could enjoy refreshments. Inside was a colonial staircase covered in deep red carpet and a dark-paneled bar room.

At one time the tavern had the reputation of being the best place to find catfish and waffle dinners. It was operated by Mrs. Robert Watkins, Sr. in connection with a ferry across the Schuylkill. The fish were taken directly from the river.

"Bobby" Evans succeeded Mrs. Watkins as proprietor and diverted part of Mifflin Run, forming a pond in which he kept a large supply of fish. Michael Arnold, the next proprietor, increased business by erecting a wharf on the riverfront to accommodate the Fairmount Barge Clubs, which came during the summer. When Fairmount Park took over the riverfront, the tavern began to decline. John Dobson and Mrs. Matilda Whelen were subsequent owners.

It was reopened in 1935 by the Drury Corporation who promised “a modern dance orchestra, chefs, and drinks of all description.”

In the EFHS archives is a 1971 letter written by an architect urging preservation of the historic building. Nevertheless, it was torn down in 1972.

To view excellent photos of the tavern and its demolition, go to [Digital Diamond – Temple University](#) and type in **Falls Tavern**.