

DEVEREUX IN EASTTOWN AND TREDYFFRIN TOWNSHIPS

J. B. Post

While The Devereux Foundation is presently headquartered in Lower Merion Township, in its early years it was centered in Devon. The Foundation, first known as the Devereux School and later as The Devereux Foundation, did much of its early real estate acquisition in this area. Before looking at the land holdings in these two townships, a bit of history of the organization is in order.

Helena T[rafford] Devereux (1885-1975) was the daughter of Arthur Trafford and Betsy (Blyton) Devereux, both from England. She grew up in south Philadelphia and, as often happened in those days with many women, Helena became a school teacher in the Philadelphia public schools in 1906. She had a knack of dealing with the "special children"—the slow learners. This knack was recognized, after some testy encounters with the entrenched bureaucracy, by her being offered, in 1912, the position of Director of Special Education. By this time, she had started taking "private students" as a result of an article in a national magazine entitled "The First Class of Special Education in an Elementary School in Phila-



delphia" extolling her efforts. In 1911, she rented quarters in Avalon, New Jersey for eight students. With this success, she opened her home in Philadelphia to students in 1912. By 1918, she moved her operation to Devon, renting the "Acerwood" property—and very briefly calling the school the "Acerwood School." Later that year, the property was bought and thus began the expanding land holdings of the Devereux School. Adjacent property was quickly acquired and the buildings adapted to use as a residential school.

The Devereux Foundation has been very generous in allowing me to examine its real estate records. The records, however, can be a bit confusing as the same piece of land is often referred to by several names: the Devereux program in operation, the building's former name, or the former owner. Programs moved from property to property as facilities improved. In one case, the records are under the name of the bank from which Devereux bought the land. Devereux has land holdings in many states, but this article concentrates on just the major ones in Easttown and Tredyffrin Townships.

The accompanying maps are plates from various property atlases of this area. They show either owners of land in 1912 that would eventually become Devereux property or land later owned by Devereux. Devereux real estate transactions were of two kinds: expansion of the programs and income producing. The

rental income from, and later sale of, these properties supported the operations of the Foundation. In 1940, all holdings were transferred from the Devereux School to The Devereux Foundation. As of this date, all the land holdings of Devereux in Chester County are conveniently recorded starting in deed book 0-20 vol. 486 p. 212 at the Recorder of Deeds in West Chester.

The first recorded property acquisition after "Acerwood" was the adjacent Miller property, called "Birchgate," in 1919. Both properties are now considered to be at 228 Highland Avenue in Devon and can be seen near the middle of the 1912 map below.

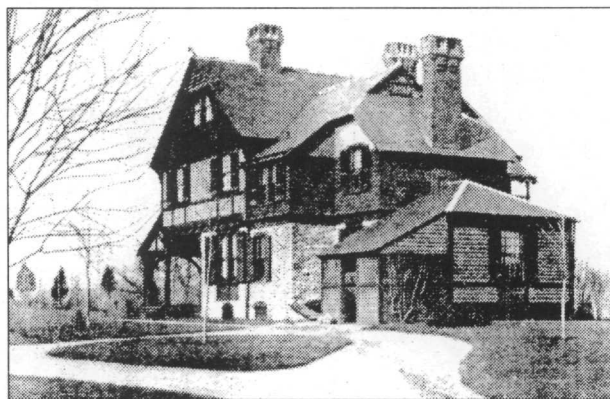


In the same year, 35 acres were acquired at 826 Maple Avenue in Berwyn, the beginning of larger holdings. This location was called variously "Coates Main Manor," "Devereux Manor," and "Langdale." In 1957, two "professional buildings" were constructed on this land. Always a good neighbor, in 1951 Devereux allowed the Tredyffrin/Easttown School District to use this property's tennis courts and gym for a district-

sponsored day camp at no charge. The district assumed liability coverage.

The Wheeler property of four acres at 123 Old Lancaster Road was acquired at the end of 1935 and was expanded in 1937 by the addition of the two-acre Fister property at 119 Old Lancaster Road.

1937 also saw the acquisition of "Fennerton," the Dingee estate on Central Avenue in Paoli. Only the western half of area around the house was sold to



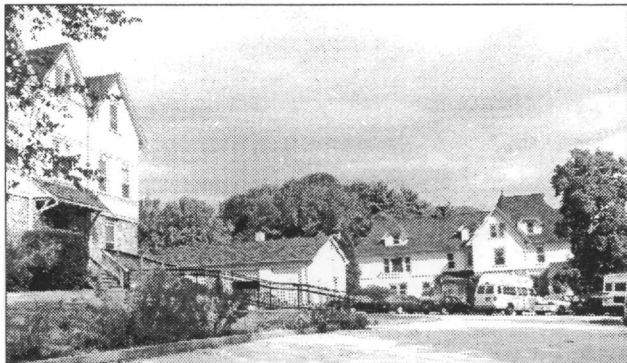
Fennerton c. 1920.

Devereux. The Dingee estate continued to hold the eastern portion until the middle of the century when it was ultimately acquired by the Burroughs Corporation as the site of its research facilities. Devereux sold "Fennerton" in 1957 and the site is now the Colonial Towers Apartments. The Burroughs Research Laboratories are gone and the Paoli Pointe Condominium is now at that location.

Currently a private residence, 500 South Waterloo Road in Devon was acquired by Devereux late in 1938. The 14 acres included the main house and some outbuildings. The adjoining Ilsley property was later leased to expand the programs. In 1924, Miss Devereux married James Fentress and at first this location seemed to be a combination of home, administrative office, and classroom. In 1989 the land was sold piecemeal. At different times, the location was referred to as "Nirvana," "Academy," "Welsh," "Boyd

Center," "Oaks," and "Fenoaks."

With the acquisition of 115 Old Lancaster Road in February of 1941, the previously acquired properties at 119 and 123 Old Lancaster Road were expanded to a



Services provided at Devereux Industries, 119 Old Lancaster Road, Devon, include auto and bike shops, greenhouse and floral shop, custodial services, packaging/assembly, and mobile work crews.

full 6.9 acres for the vocational rehabilitation program. At times called "Fenstone," "Irvine," and "Administration," it once housed administrative offices as well as programs.

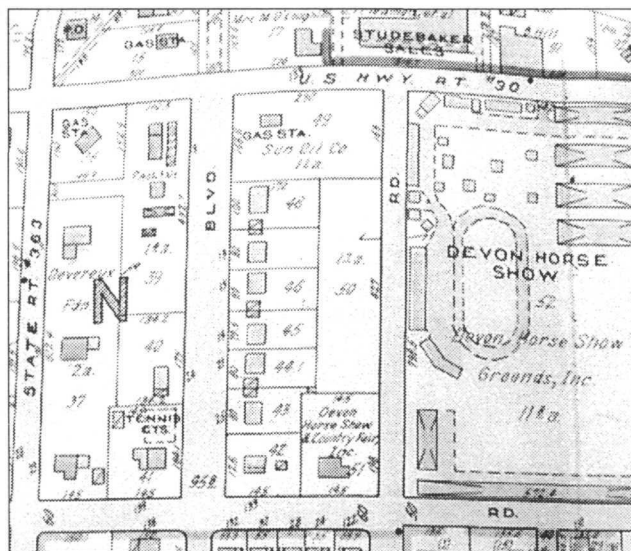
In 1940-41, parcels of property on the south side of Lancaster Avenue where the Berwyn-Paoli Road branches off were acquired. In 1985 this plot was sold and the Highlands development is now at this site. The current location of Trinity House in Berwyn, where Leopard Road merges with Lancaster Pike, was once a Devereux property acquired in 1941 and sold in 1979.

The Kerr property, at 830 Maple Avenue in Berwyn, was purchased in September of 1943 and continued the acquisition of houses along Maple Avenue. In 1944, 806 Maple Avenue—also known as "Spruce Cottage"—became part of Devereux.

Expanding from the original holdings on Highland Avenue in Devon, the Welard and Reid properties were acquired in 1951 and 1990 respectively.

Waterloo Gardens in Devon was once a string of properties acquired in 1954 and

1957 by Devereux and used to house the administrative operations of the Foundation. Various names were attached to these parcels: "McSweeney," "Hayward," "Junghans," "Lodge," and "Paolini." With the acquisition of the Edwards estate in Lower Merion in 1992, Devereux moved its headquarters from Easttown and the former "Administration Building" land on Waterloo Road was sold to the Le Boutilier family in 1997.



The Devereux Foundation administrative building is on the left side of this portion of a 1963 map. The long rectangle between State Route 363 and Devon Boulevard on this map is now Waterloo Gardens in Devon.

Some small pockets of property need further investigation, but the ones described above are the major Devereux properties in these two townships. Rental quarters are not a part of this survey, but I can't resist noting that at one time a program operated out of 30 South Valley Road and office space was rented at 15 Russell Road, both in Paoli.

From the humble beginnings in Devon, Devereux has expanded its programs to include twelve states plus the District of Columbia, providing help and services to children and adults with special needs,

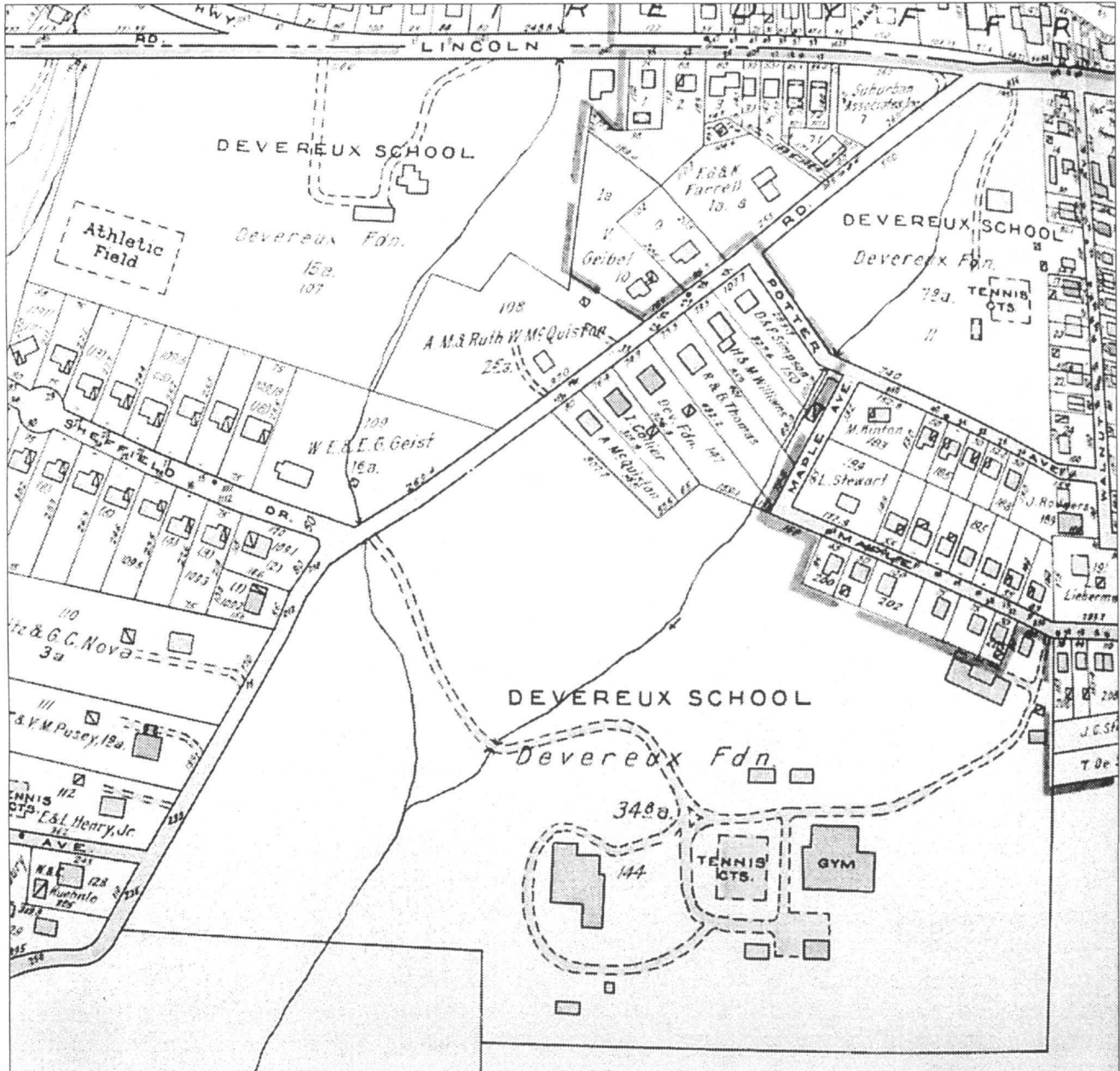
including emotional, developmental, educational, and cognitive disabilities.

2. The national headquarters of Devereux is at 444 Devereux Drive, P.O. Box 638, Villanova, PA 19085.

NOTES

1. A 24-page biography of Helena Devereux, *Reaching the Mind, Touching the Spirit* can be found at www.devereux.org/site/DocServer/HTDBio.pdf?docID=281.

J. B. Post was the map librarian at the Free Library of Philadelphia for nineteen years. He is now retired and is currently the Treasurer of the Tredyffrin Easttown History Club.



The Devereux property in the upper left corner of this 1963 map is now the Highlands development of houses on Lancaster Avenue in Berwyn. The property in the upper right corner is now Trinity House, a retirement community in Berwyn. The large property at the bottom is the 35-acre Whitlock Center at 139 Leopard Road, Berwyn. This center has 8 live-in buildings for 100 students. The gym is being renovated and a new therapeutic pool and recreation center is being built where the tennis courts once were.