

Remembering People

Benjamin Parker Crookes

The following is adapted from the Haddon Heights Historical Society *Bulletin*, April 1983.

On December 5, 1863, Benjamin Parker Crookes was born at Horsleywood House, Derby, England. At an early age, he decided to learn as much as he could in England about the meat business. After a few years working and learning with his brother in England, Mr. Crookes followed some of his Parker cousins to America in 1888 at age twenty-five. Upon arriving in New York, he proceeded to Philadelphia and secured a position with Thomas Bradley, a wholesale meat merchant with offices at 21st and Market.

At that time, it was the practice of Allan Steamship Line, a large English line, to require bids from Bradley's, Swift & Co., the Morrisises, and other provisioners, every time one of their ships docked in Philadelphia. Shortly after Mr. Crookes joined Bradley's, he persuaded the Allan Lines to award their first long term contract to Bradley.

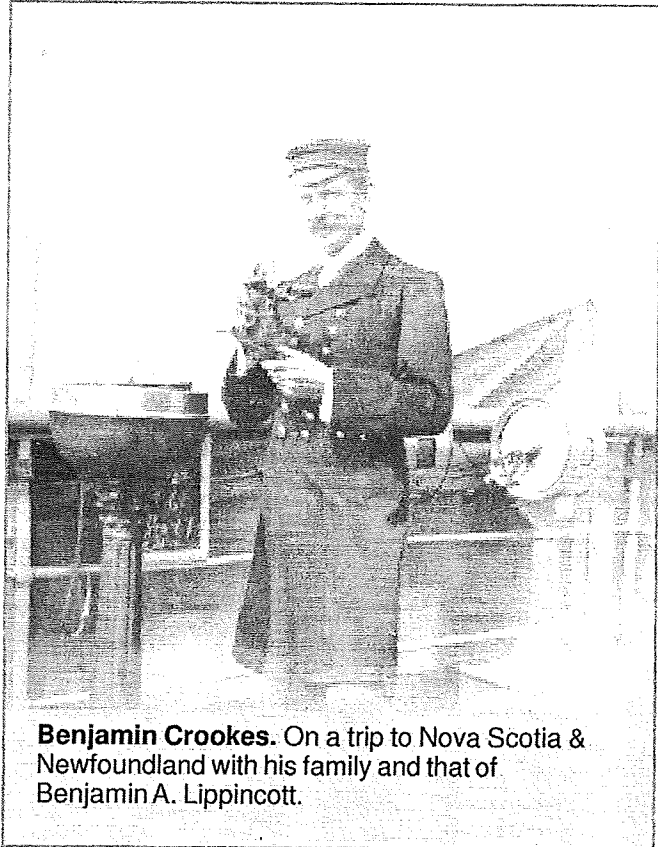
In 1894, B. P. Crookes, Commission Merchant, was established at 130 South Second Street, Philadelphia. This firm was very successful in provisioning Allan Lines and Hamburg-American Lines, as well as private yachts owned by such people as Cyrus Curtis and Randall Morgan. The Pennsylvania Regiments were also provisioned by the B. P. Crookes firm.

Soon after arriving in Philadelphia, Mr. Crookes met Anna Whiting Williams at a strawberry festival held at a Presbyterian church mission in the city. Crookes courted Miss Williams, the daughter of Alfred Williams, a successful glove manufacturer and importer, for eight years before they were married in 1895 at her father's home, The Pines, in Germantown. A few years later, a daughter, Josephine, was born to them at their home on Chelton in Germantown.

Mr. and Mrs. Crookes and their daughter spent the summer of 1898 at the Williams house in Atlantic City with Mr. Crookes commuting to center city Philadelphia on a daily basis. This commuting required taking a train from Atlantic City to Camden, the ferry to Philadelphia, and a trolley or cab to his business. A solution to this exhausting ride was to move to a developing area in New Jersey that had attracted Mr. Crookes's attention and admiration from the train: Haddon Heights.

In 1900, the Crookes family rented rooms at 22 West Atlantic Avenue from Mrs. Hamilton, widow of a Baptist minister, until they found a house for sale at 107 Seventh Avenue. (This house, which then cost under \$1500, was sold in 1982 for \$68,000). While Mrs. Crookes always had a good selection of fresh meat available from her husband's business in Philadelphia, other residents had to rely on a vendor who traveled through town with a horse and wagon for their meats. Mr. Crookes, at his wife's urging, reluctantly opened a retail meat store in a small building which had been the F. Fries Co. Real Estate office. This business venture met the needs of the community so well that a larger store was built in 1902 on the west side of Station Avenue at the White Horse Pike, next to the original store.

While B. P. Crookes in Philadelphia continued to command most of its owner's efforts, the new, growing



Benjamin Crookes. On a trip to Nova Scotia & Newfoundland with his family and that of Benjamin A. Lippincott.

The Ideal Suburb

community of Haddon Heights presented many business, social and civic opportunities to Mr. Crookes. After building a large house next to the meat market for speculative resale, Mr. Crookes surprised his family by deciding to make that house, 126 White Horse Pike, their home.

As a vestryman of neighboring St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Mr. Crookes was aware of St. Mary's need for a church bell. The *New Jersey Scope*, December 24, 1908, reported that "through the kind efforts of Mr. B. P. Crookes, St. Mary's Episcopal Church is the proud possessor of the first church bell in Haddon Heights, which will be rung for the first time on Christmas morning." A similar bell was given by Mr. Crookes to the Haddon Heights Volunteer Fire Co. No. 1; the bell can still be seen in front of the present Fire Hall.

In 1908, when Clemens Titzck, Sr. founded the First National Bank of Haddon Heights, B. P. Crookes, along with Harold E. Rogers, Edward I. Deibert and others, served as a founding director. Each director invested \$5,000 cash and guaranteed another \$5,000 in securities to obtain the charter. When the Haddon Heights Building and Loan (eventually to be part of the Haddon Savings & Loan Association) was founded, Mr. Crookes served as treasurer. Another of the Crookes family's ventures came to light in January of 1914, when the residents of Haddon Heights no longer had to travel to Woodbury or Camden to see a moving picture show but could go to his wife's newly-built movie theatre on Station Avenue.

On Saturday, October 24, 1914, the *Haddon Heights Chronicle* reported that "a gloom was cast over the entire community on Saturday last, when it was announced that Mr. Benjamin P. Crookes, one of our most prominent citizens, both socially and in his business relations, had passed into the great beyond, 'from whose bourne no traveler ere returns.'" O. A. Weidner, Charles Runkle, E. I. Deibert, H. E. Rogers, W. J. Brown and the Hon. Frank B. Jess served as pallbearers for their fellow member of the Haddon Heights Lodge No. 191 F & A M with funeral services held from St. Mary's Episcopal Church.

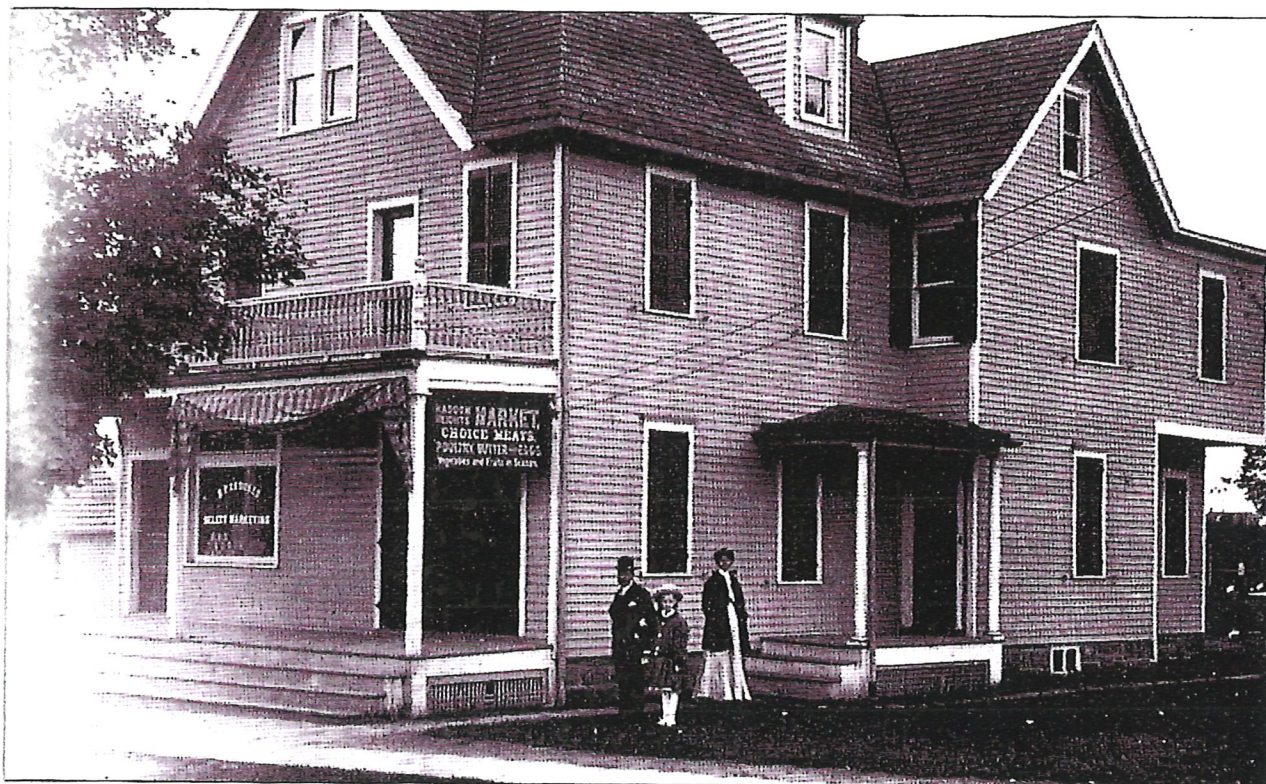
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Gander Club program, 1906.
Program for the first annual banquet of the Gander Club, a social organization for Haddon Heights businessmen of which Benjamin Crookes was a member. The menu included "Heights Punch."



RESIDENCE OF BENJAMIN CROOKES, HADDON HEIGHTS, c. 1910. The Crookes residence and farm stands at 126 White Horse Pike, across from the First Baptist Church. Mrs. Crookes, known as "Mother" Crookes throughout town, poses on the porch. The house was a typical dwelling existing along the White Horse Pike at this time of suburban development. Daughter Josephine Crookes lived in the residence until she sold it in the 1970s. (Courtesy Haddon Heights Library.)



Built
1902

HADDON HEIGHTS MARKET, c. 1910. Benjamin Crookes, his wife, Mother Crookes, and daughter, Josephine, pose outside their new meat market at the corner of the White Horse Pike and Station Avenue. Mother Crookes convinced her husband to give up his position as ship's chandler and open the market. Crookes then no longer needed to commute to Camden. The Crookes residence can be seen at the far right. (Courtesy Haddon Heights Library.)



OPTION 1 - RENDERED CORNER VIEW - STATION AVENUE & WHITE HORSE PIKE