



Manayunk (Images of America)

Thom Nickels

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Manayunk, the Native American word for "place where we drink," was first explored by Dutch and English surveyors in the late seventeenth century. These early explorers found the area, which expands upward from the banks of the Schuylkill River, to be quite fascinating. In later years, Manayunk's rolling hills, slanting lawns, and clusters of houses, mills, and church spires stood out and made the neighborhood a unique section of Philadelphia, reminiscent of Italy or southern France. Manayunk explores the growth of the region from a river town with a population of sixty to its rise as "the Manchester of America," akin to the British town of the same name. A manufacturing mecca noted for its mills along its immigrant-dug canal, Manayunk has an indomitable spirit that helped the town triumph over floods and the Depression of 1929. A place of fascinating oddities, one of the first buildings in Manayunk was a gin mill. Manayunk looks at the building of the grand canal, which in 1825 was filled with arks and square-toed flat-bottomed boats. In the summer, the canal became a roughshod rendition of Venice, with its long boats pointed at both ends carrying grains and produce while being poled up the canal by Philadelphia gondoliers. Also illustrated is the construction of the elevated Reading Railroad line and the disarray this engineering feat brought to the town. Notable citizens, such as Capt. John Towers ("the Father of Manayunk"), members of the Levering family, Samuel Streeper Keely, Seville Schofield, James Milligan, and William B. Nickels, are also profiled.

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