



Haverford Township Historical Society



HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP'S ANNIE L. LOWRY WATER TROUGH

By Richard D. Kerr

Annie L. Lowry (1823-1908) was a resident of Philadelphia. According to her Philadelphia death record, she was born Annie Louisa Davidson on May 10, 1823 to Nathan and Mary (maiden name Lane) Davidson. Reportedly, her father later built a mansion opposite Girard College in Philadelphia, and Annie was married from this home to an attorney. Brought up as a Lutheran, she later became a member of the Reformed Episcopal Church. By the time of the 1870 U. S. Census, Annie was a widow living with two older unmarried sisters. During her life, she involved herself as a volunteer, officer and patroness in causes of the day like animal welfare, anti-vivisection, women's rights and temperance. She gave generously of her time and money to the two church denominations and to many charitable organizations. She has been described as "a woman of marked personality and vigorous opinions, and one was her hatred of cruelty to helpless creatures, human or dumb."

In Annie Lowry's era, organizations for the prevention of cruelty to animals (SPCA's) emerged in an effort to change society's treatment of animals and its attitudes toward them. The first such organization to form was the Royal SPCA in England in 1824. The first SPCA in the United States was the American SPCA in New York City in 1866. In Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was organized in 1867 and officially chartered in 1868. The Pennsylvania SPCA touts itself as the first humane society in the state and second in the country after the American SPCA. While women constituted a major part of its volunteers and supporters, its board of directors and officers were all men. In 1869 a Women's Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, with an all-female board of directors, was established. (It should be pointed out here that the various SPCA organizations are independently operated from each other and not in a unified structure. They formed primarily in reaction to the abuse of horses witnessed on the streets of cities. Only in later years, when horses had left the streets, did concern for dogs and cats assume primary importance.)

Among her many interests, Annie Lowry was particularly involved with the Women's Pennsylvania S. P. C. A. from its creation. She served as its vice-president for many years. She died in August 1908 at the age of 85, and was buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia. (Her Philadelphia death record lists the date of death as July 31, while the gravestone in the Davidson plot is inscribed August 1.) Annie Lowry's will was the subject of a *New York Times* article on August 8, 1908 because she left a hefty half-million dollars, out of a total estate of \$600,000, to charity. She bequeathed specific amounts to nearly fifty institutions and societies for specific purposes. A separate \$5,000 fund generated interest to be used by a cousin to care for Annie's cats and parrots. Elwood Bonsall, a well-known and wealthy Philadelphia real estate lawyer, served as trustee of her estate, including the residual unbequeathed balance.

As a result of her generosity, two Annie L. Lowry Memorial Hospitals were established, at the Lutheran Orphans Home in Topton, Pa. and the Tressler Orphans Home in Loyville, Pa. She bequeathed \$55,000 to her beloved Women's Pennsylvania SPCA, with another \$3,000 coming from her residual balance. At her

bequest, the Women's Pennsylvania S. P. C. A. established the Annie L. Lowry Home for Smaller Animals (mainly dogs and cats) at 86th St. and Eastwick Ave. in Philadelphia in 1912. It was the first of two "Lowry Homes" that the organization would have and use to further its work. This was the first animal shelter in America, with the nation's first animal adoption program. Using bequeathed funds, the Women's S. P. C. A. also created an Annie L. Lowry Band of Mercy, part of a nationwide "Band of Mercy" campaign to teach children kindness to animals. The local effort grew to over 600 children.

Another specific bequest of Annie Lowry to the Women's Pennsylvania S. P. C. A. was to be used for the provision of public water troughs throughout the area for the benefit of horses, dogs and other animals. Some of these fountains also had provision for use by humans, partly in the belief that if workmen had a source of water to drink, they might use bottled liquor less in trying to slake their thirst. In addition to having troughs and fountains made and placed around the region, the organization purchased and operated a mobile Annie L. Lowry Memorial Horse Watering Wagon.

At this point we come to Haverford Township. One trough design, with the inscription "In Memory of / Mrs. Annie L. Lowry / Womens Pa. S. P. C. A." was used in the 1910s for the production of multiple troughs, each hewn from a large block of granite. They were rectangular in shape, with a main upper trough for horses and a lower trough at one end for smaller animals like dogs. One of these Lowry troughs was placed in Haverford Township, at the intersection of Burmont and Glendale roads. Burmont Road had been part of an early significant route, as far back as William Penn's time, from Delaware County's northern townships to its main city of Chester. In Annie's era, this location would have seen a large number of passing horses engaged in transport and haulage.

By the early 1970s, however, Haverford's Lowry water trough had long outlived its usefulness. When increased traffic and road widening threatened the water trough's existence, the Haverford Township Historical Society wrote to the Women's S. P. C. A. of Pennsylvania, which conveyed ownership of the trough to the historical society for preservation. At that time it was believed to have been the last public water trough in use in the township, and perhaps in Delaware County.



Haverford's Annie L. Lowry memorial horse trough, shown in March 2016 in the natural spring in Powder Mill Valley. It existed here from 1973 until its second rescue and re-location to a more prominent location in January 2019.

The historical society worked with Haverford Township, through its Parks Board, to relocate the trough to the township's recently acquired Powder Mill Valley Park along Karakung Drive. Just south of the parking area below Nitre Hall, there exists a natural spring in the hillside below the railway tracks. The spring has a water pipe coming out of a low stone wall in the hillside, with a receiving apron and drain facility in the flat area below. In 1973 the trough was placed within this feature, under the source pipe to receive the spring water. Within a few years of placing the trough, however, township personnel plugged the spring pipe. During the subsequent decades, undergrowth and soggy ground conditions have led to the spring and trough disappearing from view and being forgotten. On January 22, 2019, a hard freeze facilitated a rescue of the heavy granite trough, and it was hauled to a better and more visible location along the path behind Nitre Hall.

A few Annie Lowry water troughs are known to remain in existence, none in active use. Two troughs like Haverford's are located in Philadelphia. One is curbside in front of Roxborough High School on Ridge Ave. near Fountain St., and the other (inscribed "The Gift of / Mrs. A. L. Lowry") in front of the Fireman's Hall Museum at 147 N. 2nd St. A trough of the same design, but inscribed "Del. Co. / S. P. C. A. / 1913," is preserved in Aldan Borough. A fancy tall Lowry water trough, featuring a carved urn bearing the inscription "Drink Gentle Friends," still exists on Bainbridge St. near 3rd St. in Philadelphia. In 1988 the Women's Pennsylvania S. P. C. A. changed its name to the Women's Humane Society.



*Lowry memorial trough on Bainbridge St., Philadelphia, with friends.
(National Museum of Animals image)*

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