

Then...

Main Line Airport/Great Valley Corporate Center



The Main Line Airport. *Thomas Skilton, 1939. Courtesy of the Orville Jenkins Collection*

In 1929, this property located on the north side of Swedesford Road in East Whiteland Township, and a half-mile east of Morehall Road (now Route 29), was a small farm owned by William Devaney. But in this aerial image looking north taken just ten years later, by Pennsylvania Railroad photographer Thomas Skilton, the land has changed markedly from a quiet farm to a well-known regional airfield called the Main Line Airport. Owned and operated by the Curtiss-Wright Corporation of New York City, the grass runways form an “X.” The old 1851 barn was used as an aircraft hangar, and an adjacent coach house served as a school to train aircraft mechanics. “PAOLI” had been prominently painted on the barn roof as an aid to aviators at a time when visual navigation was still the norm for most pilots. On most weekends, a love of aviation made the airport a magnet for thousands of local enthusiasts out to witness aerobatic demonstrations and parachute jumping displays, or for many, their first airplane ride.

and Now



The Great Valley Corporate Center. *Roger Thorne, 2009, from An Aerial Retrospective of the Upper Main Line*

By the early 1950s, with the waning popularity of local aviation, and the discovery of high-grade limestone beneath the property, the airport's then owners, Demorr Aeronautical Corp., sold the Main Line Airport to Bethlehem Steel Corporation for future use of the land as a limestone quarry. The eventual decline in the fortunes of American steelmaking and subsequent sale of the property by Bethlehem to a Wilmington company kept the land lightly-used for two decades. In 1974, Rouse & Associates, later to be Liberty Property Trust, purchased the first 650 acres of Great Valley land that would become known as the Great Valley Corporate Center. Looking north across the intersection of Swedesford Road and Valley Stream Parkway, one sees the exact location of the old Main Line Airport barn and buildings. And north of that intersection, one sees the sprawling campus of Siemens Medical Solutions near the apex of the old crossed runways. Whether as a farm, an airport, a stone quarry, or an office park, the landscape of the Great Valley was going to fundamentally change.