



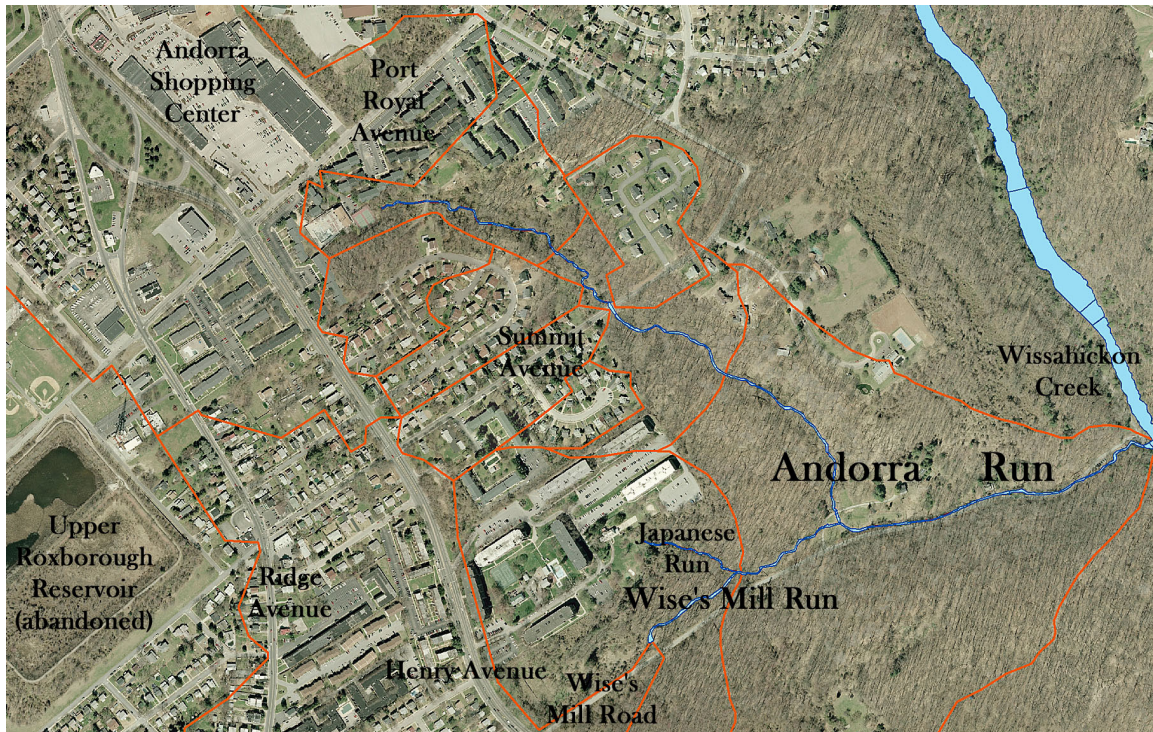
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# Preliminary historical report on Andorra Run (Wise's Mill Run) watershed

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Unless otherwise noted, all photographs were taken by Adam Levine on May 30, 2008, and all maps are from the PWD Archives.



A portion of the Andorra Run watershed showing  
Current above-ground streams and other features  
Red lines indicate storm-sewer-shed boundaries  
Source: PWD Office of Watersheds

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

This small watershed covers about 446 acres in the Roxborough and Andorra neighborhoods on the western flank of the Wissahickon Valley. Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the watershed was mostly rural, with scattered homes and estates throughout the area and concentrated residential development in several sections along Ridge Avenue. (For details see Klinge Map 1929 (rev. 1945). The post-World War II housing boom, combined with the widening of Henry Avenue in the mid-1950s, opened up the watershed to denser development that today includes numerous high-rise and low-rise apartment complexes, and a sprawling shopping center that sits on top of the stream's original source.

Historical resources affecting the stream (such as dams, spring houses, and nearby ruins of old buildings) are outlined in the "Description of Streams and Features" below. An inventory of all historically significant resources within the watershed was beyond the scope of this report.

## A NOTE ON STREAM NAMES

For several I propose that the main stream in this 446 acre watershed be called Andorra Run, rather than Wise's Mill Run as has been previously used. First, the portion along Wise's Mill Road is the smaller section, with the largest section of the watershed (as well as the historical source of the stream) in the city's Andorra neighborhood. Second, if the proposed wetland at the upper end of

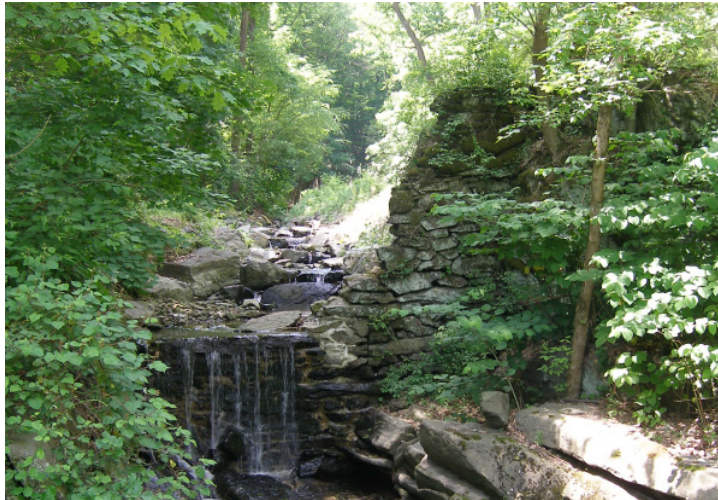
Wise's Mill Road is built, the Fairmount Park Commission will likely want to install interpretive signage to describe the project. For that purpose alone, naming both extant tributaries is important, and since it flows in a valley paralleling Wise's Mill Road, the Wise's Mill Run designation makes the most sense for the stream emanating from the wetland. Japanese Run might seem a strange name for the smallest tributary, but it is derived from a Japanese garden marked on the Klinge Map of 1929 (rev.1945) and seems appropriately romantic and intriguing for this remote corner of the park.

Finally, naming all three of these previously anonymous streams will give them an identity, which may help encourage a sense of stewardship among neighborhood residents and park users. In general, if we fail to name various streams and their watersheds and refer to them, on our infrastructure maps, as functional "drainage rights of way," we cannot be surprised when residents treat the streams with similar disrespect. Giving anonymous streams names that resonate with their human neighbors might seem presumptuous and trivial, but given the precarious state of stream health in our urban watersheds, anything that may help increase human awareness and lessen human impact should be considered. In some neighborhoods, we even consider enlisting the neighbors in the process of naming their streams, to give them an even greater sense of ownership and involvement.

## **DESCRIPTION OF STREAMS AND FEATURES**

### **Andorra Run**

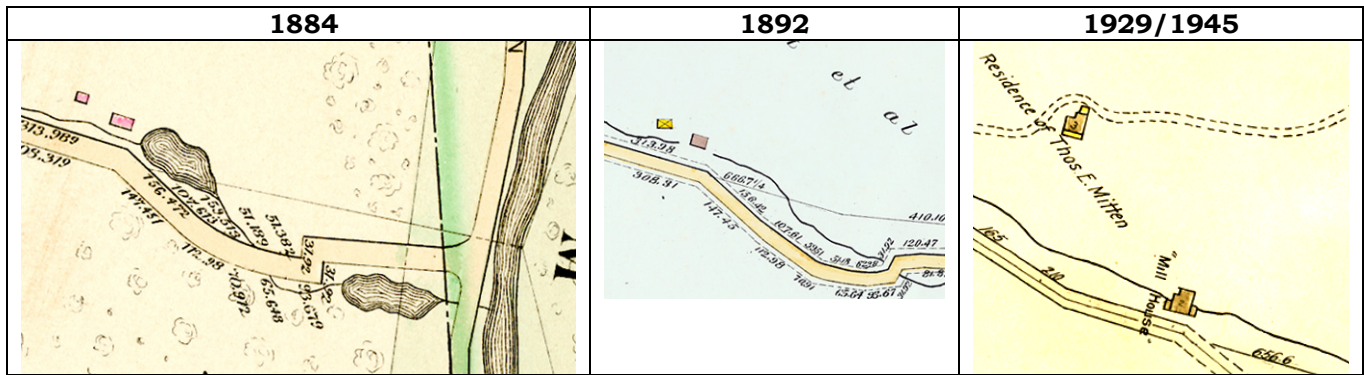
This stream empties into Wissahickon Creek north of Valley Green Inn, near where Wise's Mill Road joins the Forbidden Drive. A short distance upstream from the mouth, a small dam (below) that seems to be a remnant of a larger structure is found just below the point where the stream crosses from the south to the north side of Wise's Mill Road.



The valley is almost a gorge here, very narrow, and the road sits almost in the stream bed at some points. The 1884 Hopkins map (see map sequence below) shows the pond that was once formed behind this dam, and a second pond on the north side of the road just upstream. But this is the only source that shows these ponds, and none of the sources indicated that any industrial facilities were ever associated with them.

The upper pond may have been an ornament to what the Klinge Map of 1929 (rev.1945) calls the "Mill House," then owned by the Mitten family, who made a fortune running streetcars in Philadelphia in late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. During my tour of the watershed on May 30, 2008, the existing landscape did seem to suggest the prior existence of such a pond.

At some point the stream was diverted underground as it passes in front of this house. The sources are unclear on this, but it was certainly before 1959 (since the 1959 aerial photograph clearly shows the stream underground), and it may have been as early as 1892 (see map sequence below).

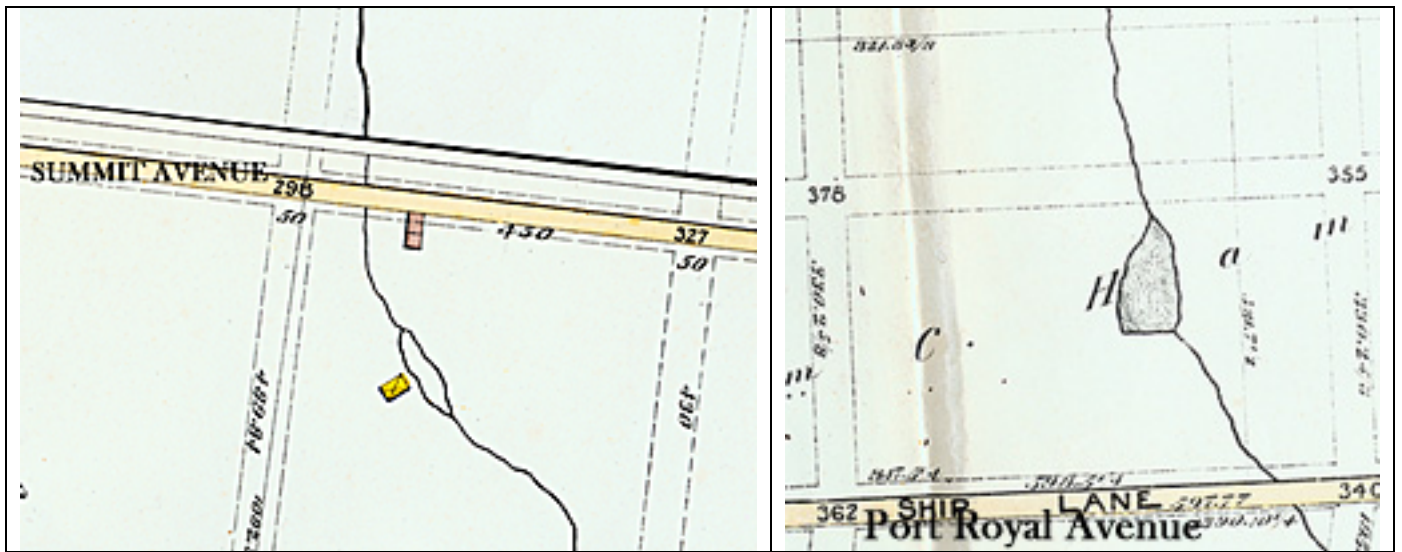


As it passes underground in front of this house, the stream flows over a step dam into a box culvert. Upstream of the underground section is another dam on the property of 800 Wise's Mill Road. A cattail-filled depression in front of a spring house looks to be a remnant of a small, perhaps ornamental pond. No sources show any pond at this location, or any industrial or other structures associated with this dam, which may have simply augmented a natural fall of water at this point.



Wise's Mill Run (see description below) joins the main stream on this property.

From this point the main stream turns northward into a densely-overgrown valley, very steep in places. I did not explore this valley on foot. Such an examination would certainly be worthwhile and could uncover historic remnants of interest, which may correspond to two features noted on the 1892 map. This map indicates what seems to be a small mill race and associated structure downstream from Summit Avenue, and a small dam and pond upstream from Port Royal Avenue (see below). No other maps show these features.



The 1884, 1892 and 1911 maps clearly show the source of Andorra Run, emanating from a spring house north of Port Royal Avenue near Ridge Avenue. The 1911 map (below) is notable because it shows street lines drawn over this entire stretch of the stream, which indicate a grand plan for development which was never fully carried out.



Red line indicates watershed boundary; street on left is Ridge Avenue; blue line is stream, ending at spring house

On the 1929/1945 map, the stream is only shown as far as Summit Avenue, with Brierdale Road (a street that was on the city plan for many years but never built) curving over the stream bed between Summit Avenue and Port Royal Avenue.

Henry Avenue was expanded from a two-lane road to its current boulevard configuration in the mid-1950s. By 1959 the first structures on what is now the Andorra Shopping Center appear in the aerial view, and the upper section of the stream disappears from view, diverted into stormwater pipes that now empty into the stream below Port Royal Avenue. This is where the stream currently begins its above-ground course. By 1961, plans to culvert the stream were abandoned, and this narrow upstream corridor became part of Fairmount Park. It now also serves as a drainage right-of-way for the city, carrying a sanitary sewer that more or less parallels the stream. (See PWD ERV plans 1066070 and 1066071.)



Upper Section of Watershed in 1959  
SOURCE: DVRPC  
<http://www.dvrpc.org/Aerials/>



Upper Section of Watershed in 1970  
SOURCE: DVRPC  
<http://www.dvrpc.org/Aerials/>



Upper Section of Watershed in 1980

SOURCE: DVRPC

<http://www.dvrpc.org/Aerials/>