

CHESTER TIMES – December 22, 1915 – RACE PROBLEM AT COLWYN –  
Ordinance Introduced in Council to Prevent Conflict Between White and Colored Residents

One of the most peculiar ordinances ever seen in this State was introduced by Burgess S. w. Waterman at the monthly meeting of the Borough Council of Colwyn, this county, Monday night.

Colwyn is just east of Darby and is near Sharon Hill. The town consists of only five hundred houses and nearly all the male residents are employed in Philadelphia. Colwyn boasts of the fact that there are no millionaires within the limits of the borough. It is known as one of the progressive boroughs in this county.

The ordinance would prevent colored people from residing in those sections of the borough now exclusively occupied by white families. It would also prevent white families from settling in sections now given to colored residents.

The ordinance passed first reading by a vote of 6 to 1. Members of the Council and that the ordinance was constitutional because it applied to both whites and blacks.

The ordinance reads as follows:

An ordinance to prevent conflict and ill-feeling between the white and colored races in the Borough of Colwyn, and to preserve the public peace and promote the general welfare by making reasonable provisions requiring the use of separate blocks for residences by white and colored people, respectively.

“Section 1. Be ordained by the Chief Burgess and borough Council of Colwyn, that from and after the passage of this ordinance it shall be unlawful for any white person to use as a residence or place of abode any house, building or structure or any part thereof, located in any colored block, as the same is hereinafter defined; and it shall also be unlawful for any colored person to use as a residence or place of abode any house, building or structure, or any part thereof, located in any white block, as the same is hereinafter defined; provided, however, that nothing hereinafter contained shall preclude persons of either race shall preclude persons of either race employed as servants by persons of the other race from residing upon the premises on which such employer resides, and that nothing herein contained shall be construed or operate to prevent any person who, at the date of the passage of this ordinance, shall have acquired a legal right to occupy, as a residence, any building or portion thereof, whether by devise, purchase, lease or other contract, from exercising such legal right and that nothing in this ordinance contained shall be construed to apply to the use of any building or structure, except such as are, or hereafter may be located within either a white or a colored block, as herein below defined..

“Section 2. And be it further ordained by the Chief Burgess and Borough Council of Colwyn, that the word “black” as the same is used in this ordinance shall be construed to mean that portion of any street or alley, upon both sides of the same, between the two adjacent intersecting or crossing streets in any case, where either of the said adjacent streets intersects, but does not cross the street upon which the block in question may be located, the houses upon the side of the last-mentioned street facing the intersecting street shall be deemed a part of the said block. Corner houses shall be deemed to be located in the block in which they are numbered.

SEGREGATION IN BLOCKS – “ A white block shall be construed to mean a block, as hereinabove, defined or which, at any time hereafter, shall become a block in which white persons are residing, and in which no colored persons are residing except such, if any, as may be employed as servants by white residents therein, as provided in Section 1 hereof; also, any block,, as the same in hereinabove defined, heretofore formed and also any block, which may hereafter be formed, shall have become or which at any time hereinafter, may become a block in

which white persons are residing, and in which no “colored persons are residing except such, if any, as may be employed as servants, by white residents therein as provided by Section 1 hereof.

“A colored block shall be construed to mean a block as hereinabove defined, which shall have become, or which shall hereafter become a block in which colored persons are residing and in which colored persons are residing and in which no white persons are residing, except such, if any, as may be employed as servants by colored residents therein, as provided in Section I hereof; also, any block as the same is hereinabove defined, heretofore formed and any block which may be hereafter formed in which there were no residents, but which, shall have before, or which, at any time hereafter, may become a block in which colored persons are residing, except such, if any, as may be employed as servants by colored residents therein, as provided by Section 1 hereof.

“A resident of any block shall be construed to include any person occupying any room therein as a sleeping placer, whether as owner, tenant, dependent, boarder or otherwise, unless it appears that such occupation is merely transitory, and that such person has another fixed place of abode; but nothing in this definition shall be construed to affect the provision in regard to servants in Section 1 hereof.

“Section 3. Be it further ordained by the Chief Burgess and Borough Council of Colwyn. That after the passage of this ordinance, no building or portion of a building in the borough of Colwyn shall be used as a church or for the purpose of conducting religious services, or for a school, a dance hall or an assembly hall, by white persons in a colored block, as the same is defined in this ordinance, and after the passage of this ordinance no building or portion of a building in the borough of Colwyn shall be used as a church or for the purpose of conducting religious services, or for a school a dance hall or an assemblage hall, by colored persons in a white block, as the same is defined in this ordinance; provided, however, that nothing herein contained shall apply to any building or portion of a building which, at the time of the passage of this ordinance, is being used as a church or for the purpose of conducting religious services, or for a school, a dance hall, or an assemblage hall or which, at the time of the passage of this ordinance, any person or persons or corporation shall have acquired the legal right to use as a church or place for conducting religious services, a school, a dance hall or an assemblage hall, by devise, purchase, lease or other contract.

**BUILDERS MUST DESIGNATE COLOR** – “Section 4. On all streets upon which no house is occupied or house built the color of residents, schools and places of public assembly shall be governed by the adjacent streets, and if the immediate and adjacent street is not built up, then by the nearest adjacent street that is built up and containing at least live residences, and any person desiring to build on vacant property shall state whether the house they are building is to be occupied by white or colored people, and the Building Inspector of the Borough of Colwyn shall not issue a permit in such cases unless the applicant complies with the provisions of this Section.

“Section 5. And be it further ordained by the Chief Burgess and Borough Council of Colwyn that any and every person violating any of the provisions of this ordinance shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be subject to a time of not less than five nor more than fifty dollars (and each day that said violation shall continue, shall be considered a separate offense,) or in the default of the payment of said fine, then to be imprisoned according to the provision of act of Assembly in such case made and provided; and the owner or agent of any building or any part of any building, who shall cause or permit the same to be used in violation of this ordinance, shall be deemed to be equally guilty of a misdemeanor with the

person occupying said building, or any part of said building, and upon conviction, shall be subject to the penalty prescribed in this section of this ordinance.

“Section 6. And be it further ordained by the Chief Burgess and Borough Council of Colwyn that this ordinance shall take effect from the date of its passage.”

In introducing the ordinance Burgess Waterman said: “The majority of the colored people living in this borough are in favor of such an ordinance. It is indeed a serious problem. The only thing in common between the whites and blacks is the success of the nation. Equal provisions are made in the ordinance for the whites and blacks. It is indeed a deplorable condition when we do not look forward to protect our property rights just the same as we protect life and limb by means of firemen and police, if we allow negroes to settle in blocks now occupied by white residents the property value would certainly decrease and we have to protect the poor man who is buying his home.”

Colwyn plans to make impossible within the town limits, such incidents as occurred at Fifth-Ninth and Spruce Streets, in Philadelphia, when negroes attempted to move in an “all white” section. It was said Monday night that Colwyn was the first town of the North to pass such an ordinance segregating negroes. The ordinance will again be discussed at the council meeting in January.