

# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

*Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 1

October 15, 2010

## **Downingtown Little League was founded in 1949**

Several community leaders formed the Downingtown Little League on June 30, 1949. It was the first Little League in Chester County, and one of only six leagues in the Philadelphia District.

The founding officers were: Dr. George Bousum, president; Francis Tweed, vice president; Charles Emery, secretary; Vinton Smedley, treasurer.

Original sponsors of teams were Pepperidge Farm, St. Anthony's Lodge, Loyal Order of the Moose and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Games were played on the vacant lot on the southwest corner of Manor and Pennsylvania Avenues; where a backstop, dugouts, scoreboard and fence were installed.

The first official games, a doubleheader, were played on June 10, 1950. Opening day ceremonies included musical selections by the DHS marching band and an invocation by Father Daniel Hoy of St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Burgess Lee Hamilton threw out the first ball.

In the opening contest, John Chilla, whose son and grandson eventually played in the league, tossed a five-hit gem for Pepperidge, beating the Moose 5-3. In the nightcap, Bill Stringer smacked the league's first homer, to help St. Anthony's edge the VFW 8-7.

Vol. 1, No. 2  
October 20, 2010

## **American Legion's School Medal Established by Downingtown Post**

Shortly after the Charles F. Moran Post was founded in 1920 by Raymond Greenleaf, Robert Dougherty, Howard Harvey and Joseph Miller, Gilbert McIlvaine (who succeeded Greenleaf as commander) designed the first School Medal. The first medal was awarded in 1921 to Esther Eppeheimer (Mrs. Charles Pollock). The School Medal was adopted by the Legion as a national program the following year to foster the ideals of Americanism.

The Downingtown Post was named after the first local serviceman to die in World War I.

*The Historical Society would love to add printed material, photos and artifacts, related to the Downingtown Post, to its Archival collection. Call us (610-269-1709) if you donate any of these items.*

## **Life in the Borough has changed significantly since the 1960s**

A promotional brochure produced by the Borough Planning Commission in 1962 to attract industries to Downingtown, included these interesting facts:

- The population increased by 43%, from 4,926 in 1951 to about 7,200 in 1961.
- The number of industries jumped 48%, from 19 firms in 1954 to 28 in 1961. And the number of industrial employees in that time frame increased from 1,992 to 4,610. The biggest industrial companies were: Pepperidge Farm, 847 employees; Downingtown Paper Co., 775; Chemical Leaman Tank Lines, 550; Milprint, 434; Gindy Inc., 250; Downingtown Iron Works, 200; Davey Paper Co., 116.
- 62% of the industrial work force was unionized.
- Wage rates for various occupations in Downingtown were: bookkeeper, \$87 a week; mechanic, \$2.63 an hour; stenographer, \$74 a week; tool and die maker, \$2.89 an hour; truck driver, \$2.45 an hour; welder, \$2.72 an hour.

# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

*Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 4

November 2, 2010

## How Kerr Memorial Park was established

Downingtown's Dr. Edward Kerr Memorial Park is one of the community's jewels. But few people realize the park's early development was one of the many private enterprises undertaken by the Downingtown Business Men's Club, forerunner of the Downingtown Area Chamber of Commerce. In 1927, a year after club members had underwritten the construction of Borough Hall, they decided that an overgrown, 45-acre area along Pennsylvania Avenue should be developed as a public park.

Community leaders appointed in 1928 to a park commission to oversee the project were: Guyon Miller, chairman; Walter B. McIlvain, vice chairman; Ernest Smedley, treasurer; John Noll, secretary. Other members included: Mrs. E.B. Fisher, Frank Parke, Frank McGraw, Perry Tyson and Park Plank.

The park was comprised of several tracts. Harbison Walker donated 19 acres. Thomas Downing gave 11 acres. Eight acres were purchased from Mrs. Ella Roberts. Also 5 acres were donated by the Downingtown Paper Co., and Downingtown Iron Works contributed 2 acres.

One of the first projects was construction of tennis courts in 1929. Fish ponds and cinder walks were completed in 1931. A baseball diamond was built in 1932. A summertime play program, supervised by the School District, was established. The concrete entrance off Lancaster Avenue, funded by the Depression era Works Progress Administration, was built in 1934.

Initially funded by public subscription and contributions by the school district, in the early years, none of the projects and programs was supported by the Borough until 1935, when Council appropriated \$1,500 for the upkeep of the park.

***Hist-O-Grams are emailed to members and friends of the Downingtown Area Historical Society. Please pass them on to friends and family. And send comments to [Info@DowningtownAreaHistoricalSociety.org](mailto:Info@DowningtownAreaHistoricalSociety.org).***

# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

*Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 5

November 10, 2010

## Grandma was a showgirl at St. Anthony's?



The Women's Auxiliary of St Anthony's, in the Johnstown section of the Borough, was formed in 1947. Some of its current activities include: supporting an orphanage, the Lords Pantry, Teri's Run, the Michael Bartone Memorial Foundation, a girls softball team, and awarding a \$250 book scholarships to one senior at Downingtown High School East and West High Schools, and Bishop Shanahan.

But back in the day, the Auxiliary members also were showgirls, bedazzling huge audiences with their musical talents. We're not sure when this shot of the cast of their Christmas Show was taken. If you can identify any of these showgirls, send their names to [info@downingtownareahistoricalsociety](mailto:info@downingtownareahistoricalsociety).

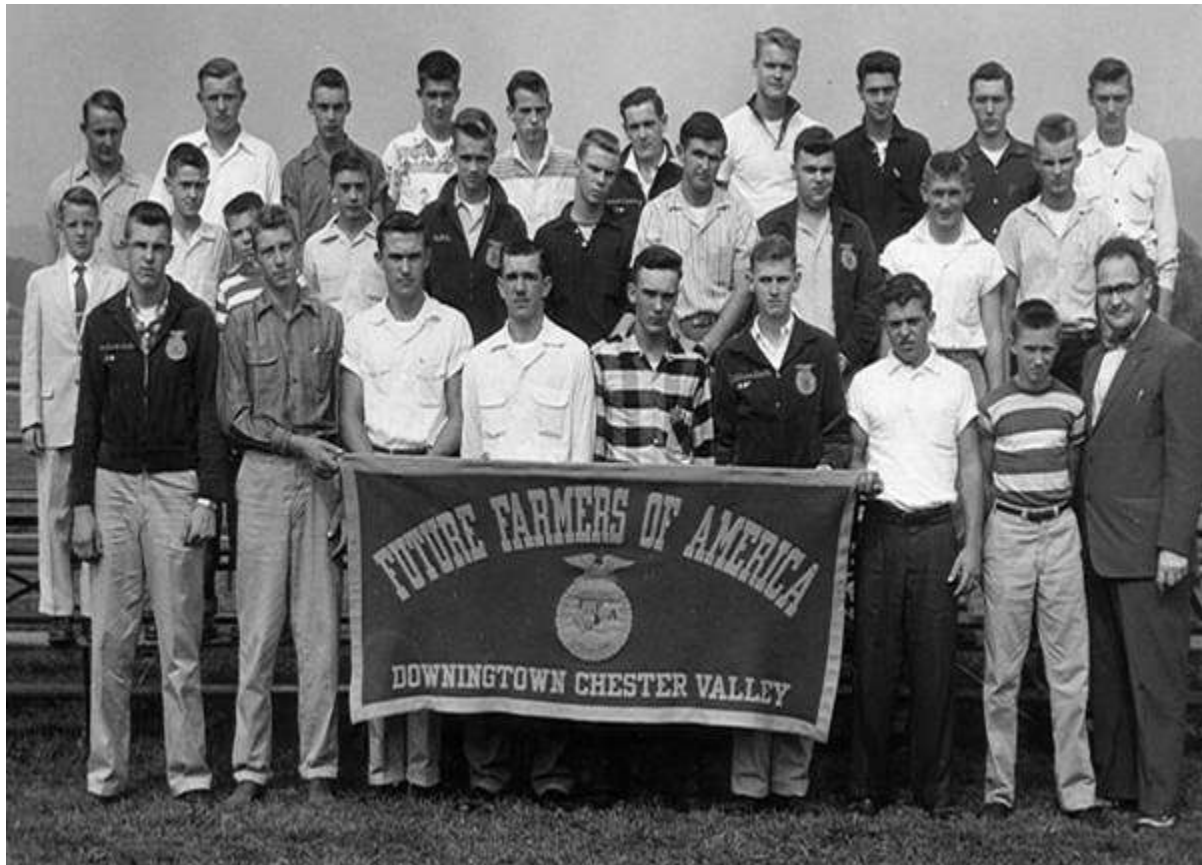


# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

*Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 6

November 18, 2010



Members of the FFA at DHS in the 1956-57 school year were: front row, Richard Ruth, Thomas Newlin, Richard Rice, Henry Jankowski, Warren Reese, William Smith, Leland Stanford, James Beggs, Harold Klinger, advisor; second row, Albert Hultz, Jeff Peterson, Francis Trego, Martin Byers, Harry McMinimee, Warren Rainear, William Dawson, Walter Trego, Charles Messner, Ralph Millron; back row, Henry Roth, Lamar Howe, John Hoffman, Robert Zynn, Wade Murray, Russel Ramsey, Paul Pennypacker, Clarence Watson, James White, Lee Huey.

## FFA and Harvest Queens once blossomed at DHS

You think the Downingtown area has changed over the years? Consider when the annual Farm Show was a major event at DHS, back in the day when the townships in the school district were primarily rural.

Bob Klinger recently donated three scrapbooks kept by his father, Harold Klinger, the DHS agriculture teacher and advisor to the local Future Farmers of America chapter (FFA) in the 1940s and 1950s offers many insights on life was different 50 and 60 years ago.

For example, clippings found in the scrapbook from the mid-1950s provide details on the shows put on by student members of the FFA and the Future Homemakers of America. They included judging of student entries of corn, potatoes, grains, vegetables, fruits, poultry, dairy products and cattle, plus a tractor driving contest. And FHA students' baked goods, handmade clothing and home decorations were exhibited and judged, as well.

The highlight of the festivities was the crowning of the Harvest Queen. Candidates were nominated by members of the FFA; junior and senior class students voted to determine the five finalists. Ruth Hall, the top vote-getter, was crowned as Queen. Her court included: Betty D'Attilio, Jean Timmerman, Suzie McCue and Marge Eppolito.

## **Block captains needed for Luminaria project**

Good Neighbors in the Downingtown area who want to make the Christmas holidays brighter this year are being asked to participate in the Downingtown Area Historical Society's Luminaria project.

The tradition of displaying as many as 15,000 lighted Luminaria candle sets along the sidewalks and driveways of homes in Downingtown and the surrounding townships has been a local Christmas Eve tradition for more than 30 years.

The Historical Society is looking for volunteers who will serve as block captains, who can help make the Luminaria project a success by taking orders from neighbors, friends and family for Luminaria sets. The sets are comprised of a candle positioned in a plastic base which is placed in a wax-coated paper bag.

The Luminaria project is a major source of funding for the Historical Society. Proceeds from the project are used for the continued restoration and maintenance of Ashbridge House, headquarters of Historical Society, and to preserve its archival collection of documents, photos and artifacts. The 301-year-old Ashbridge House is located on Route 30 in East Caln.

For additional information, call Carol Grigson at 610-269-1167.



# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

*Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 7

November 24, 2010



**This is the Central School, which Raymond Dennis attended for 12 years. The facility on West Lancaster Avenue in the borough had been known as the Institute building before the Downingtown School Board bought it in 1872 for \$6,950, and then spent \$8,100 to convert it into a school.**

## **Recollections of a turn-of-the-century Downingtown schoolboy**

In 1978, Raymond Dennis, who was 90 years old at the time, wrote a 24-page memoir of his boyhood years, when his family lived in houses on William Street and Webster Avenue in Downingtown. He graduated from DHS in 1906 and earned a degree in engineering at the University of Pennsylvania in 1910. After working 29 years at the Lukens Steel Co., he retired in 1953. He and his wife, Helen, had two children Alice D. Ezrah and Raymond Dennis Jr.

Noted below are some of Dennis's recollections of attending Downingtown public schools for 12 years. Some of the information in his memoir, which is part of the Historical Society's archival collection, was supplemented by other material in our archives. :

There were two school buildings in the borough when Dennis was in grade school in the late 1890s. The original East Ward School (replaced by a new structure in 1923) on East Lancaster Avenue only had four grades. When East Ward students reached the fifth grade, they had to transfer to the Central School (where Messiah Lutheran Church now is on West Lancaster Avenue). The Central School became a 12-grade facility when the high school was established there in 1882.

The Central School facility had been known as the Institute building before the Downingtown School Board bought it in 1872 for \$6,950, and then spent \$8,100 to convert it into a school.

After the student body had grown to a total of 660 pupils, the School Board recognized the need for a new facility. So the original Central School was demolished in 1909 and construction of this new school was completed on the same site in 1910, at a total cost of \$60,000, including furniture and equipment. The building became known as the West Ward School in 1933, when secondary level students started attending Junior-Senior High School, which was constructed at a cost of about \$200,000, on Manor Avenue. That building is the site of the STEM Academy, which opens next fall. West Ward was razed when Beaver Creek School, on West Pennsylvania opened in 1960.

Since he lived in the west end of the borough, Dennis attended the Central School for all 12 years of his public schooling in Downingtown. When he entered ninth grade in the fall of 1902, the high school's enrollment totaled about 30 pupils, including several students from outside the borough. Their classrooms occupied the rear of the building's second floor.

The school yard behind the building was divided by a wood fence, separating the boys from the female students. Five-hole outhouses were located on each side of the school yard.

*Additional recollections from Dennis's memoir will be cited in future Hist-O-Grams.*

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# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

*Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 8

December 7, 2010

Here are some more of Raymond Dennis's recollections, written in 1978, about life in Downingtown in the early 1900s:

- Most people rented their home. Their monthly rental was \$5 to \$10. A coal stove in the parlor had a pipe that extended into the ceiling in order to heat the second floor bedrooms.
- There were two bakeries in town that had delivery routes. They charged a nickel for an unwrapped loaf of bread. Pies were 5 and 10 cents, and a half dozen cinnamon buns cost a dime.
- When a woman went into labor, someone from the family had to walk or ride a horse to the doctor's since there were no phones. As a result, babies were often delivered at home by midwives. And surgery was usually performed at the patient's home.
- When someone died, neighbors often prepared the body for burial; embalming was not done.
- Most employees worked 10 hours a day, six days a week. Dennis's father was a carpenter for the Pennsylvania Railroad, earning \$60 a month. Store clerks made \$10-\$12 a week.
- "Times have not changed much over the past 80 years. Girls became pregnant and had to marry. Mothers performed abortions and the daughters died from infection, and nothing was said or done about it. It only served as gossip. The town also had call girls who used to spend their time in the daylight hours sitting by the window in the west end Post Office (at the corner of Lancaster and Stuart Avenues), watching for the arrival of a traveling salesman."
- The Downingtown jail was located on Brandywine Avenue, next to the Downingtown Methodist Church. On Sunday morning, the kids used to would climb (5-foot high wood fence between the church and the jailhouse) to look in the small window to see how many drunks had been lodged on Saturday night."
- The large tract of land—bounded by Boot Road, the Pennsylvania Railroad, Chestnut Street and Brandywine Avenue—was the ½-mile Downingtown Race Track, which included a grandstand and bleachers. Harness races were conducted on Saturday afternoons and holidays.
- Downingtown's baseball field, which included a wooden grandstand and bleachers, was located on West Lancaster Avenue just beyond the former First Baptist Church. County League teams, which included the West Chester, Coatesville, Parkesburg and other clubs, played Downingtown there Saturday afternoons.

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# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

*Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 9

December 13, 2010

## **Despite Great Depression, borough thrived in 1941**

Although the Great Depression continued in many parts of the United States, there was a big blowout in Downingtown over the weekend of June 20-21, 1941. Characterized by borough officials as a "Triple Play Celebration," the festivities got underway on Friday evening with the ceremonial burning of the mortgage for the construction of Borough Hall. The municipal building, whose construction in 1926 was underwritten by the Citizens Holding Co., had been leased to the borough.

The Holding Company, established by members of the Business Men's Club (precursor of the Downingtown Area Chamber of Commerce) was spearheaded by Allen Keim and Park Plank.

Borough officers were Leo Hamilton, burgess and Chandler Roberts, president of Borough Council, whose members included Herbert Ash Jr., Nelson Dennis, Dr. Thomas Parke, Mark Shaw and Ray Sheeler.

The building cost \$43,985, \$25,000 of which was covered by a mortgage, and the balance of the funding was raised through bonds bearing 4 percent interest.

The borough leased the building for \$250 a month, and the American Legion paid \$240 a year for the use of two rooms.

The Post Office rented part of the building, at \$1,800 annually, for 10 years. By 1941, the Post Office's annual rent decreased to \$1,400.

Also on Friday night, the Alert Fire Company's new firehouse on West Pennsylvania Avenue was dedicated. It replaced the original firehouse on Downing Avenue.

Officers of the Alert were: W.I. Pollock, president; Calvin Ax, vice president; Leland Wilson, treasurer; Elmer Schrumpf, recording secretary; and Arthur Glauner, financial secretary. Trustees were William Mittel, Robert Laird and Creston Shoemaker. Ruth Scrumpf was president of the auxiliary. The Alert's working force was led by Capt. Jacob Habecker Jr., First Lt. Wilson F. Pollock and Second Lt. Harry Paul.

Saturday afternoon's activities began with a parade, followed by the housing of a new fire truck at both the Alert and the Minquas. Both were built by the Autocar Co, at a total cost of \$20,000. .

Officers of the Minquas were John Noll, president; George Perry, vice president; Edward Murray, corresponding secretary; Vinton Smedley, financial secretary; R.V. Smedley, treasurer. Capt. J.M. Binder and First Lt. E.R. Smedley were the leaders of the Minquas working force.

William Barrett was chief of the borough's fire department.

# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

## *Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 10

December 20, 2010

### **What was happening here in 1974**

Items of interest found in the December 1974 issues of the *East Branch Citizen*, a weekly newspaper that covered the Downingtown area:

- Prices of houses included: 122 Locust Knoll Road, East Brandywine, \$43,500; 116 Morris Road, Uwchlan, \$52,500; 504 Grant Ave., Downingtown, \$33,500.
- Diane Ayoub, Lynn Reed, Kim Henry and Leslie Powell formed the quartet that played *Dance of the Tot Flutes* during Downingtown Junior High's Christmas concert.
- Leonard Frame, owner of Eagle Machinery, was about to begin his second year as president of the Greater Downingtown Chamber of Commerce. He said 37 of the 165 members had joined in his first year.
- DHS heavyweight wrestler Jim McGowan, who won a match on Saturday afternoon, was treated at Paoli Memorial Hospital that night for an injury suffered while fighting a fire at the Latoff residence, 338 E. Lancaster Ave., Downingtown.
- Newly elected officers of the Downingtown NAACP chapter were: Donald Crabb, president; Walter Horsey, first vice president; William Sweeney, second vice president; Joyce Burgess, secretary; Jeanne James, treasurer.
- New officers of the Downingtown Rotary Club were: Richard Radcliffe, president; Grey Olliver, first president; Robert Schafer, second vice president; Peter Smith, secretary; Lewis Wilson, treasurer; Robert Brown, assistant treasurer.
- Tom Lee was the new fire chief of the Downingtown Fire Department. He succeeded Hallan Usher, who was elected president of the Minquas Fire Co. Other Minquas officers were: Ernest Smedley, vice president; Robert Cumens, assistant chief; Michael Dunn, captain.
- Members of the Downingtown Lions Club who received service pins were: Robert Barber and Herbert Lee, 10 years; Dickey Hutchison, 20 years, and Vinton Smedley, 30 years.
- Mrs. Ida Owens, 318 Bradford Ave., Downingtown, a foster mother for four children, won a 10-speed bike awarded by Town Motors, Exton, at the grand opening of its new showroom.

### **25 year earlier**

And the December 1949 editions of the *Downingtown Archive*, a weekly newspaper that preceded the *East Branch Citizen*, published these noteworthy items:

- Marshallton School students who presented a Christmas operetta included: Harold Savidge, Elmer Fredd, Miriam Ramsey, Carol Ann Stouff, Irwin Rubincam, Ralph Hall, Patsy Glennan, Jean Romig, Gwen Curry, Nancy Jefferis, Lynne Klunder, Patsy Bittle, Pete Luminella, Charles Nichols, Barry Wickersham and George Fredd.
- The Mothers Club of Wallace Township held a Christmas party at the Glen Moore Fire Co. Students from Indiantown and Lincoln Schools who participated in the program included: Catherine Lilley, Ann Williamson, Billy Houck, Margaret Miller, Judy Hogan, Barbara Harple, Richard Mason, David Miller, Dolores Simmers, Barbara Parrott, Mabel Arters and Charles Davis.
- Winners of the DHS Photo Club competition were: Jim Zaferes, first place; Fred Bagshaw, second; Jean Eckbold, third.
- DHS football players named to the all-county first team were Jack Helm and Pete Hayes.
- Mrs. Querino Sbei, Helen Dolan and Lena McGuckin were new members of the Downingtown Junior Woman's Club.

- Officers of the Women's Missionary Society of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Lionville, were: Mrs. Elmer Ruth, president; Edith Cornwall, vice president; Isabel Acker, secretary; and Mrs. Gilbert Smedley, treasurer.
- New officers of St. Anthony's Lodge were: Benny Valocchi, president; Charles DiSante, vice president; Anthony DiBerardinis, treasurer; Anthony DiLuigi, Italian secretary; Frank Sack, English secretary; Anthony Viscichini, financial secretary; Armand Taraschi, censor; John Francella, auditor; Joseph Mento, assistant auditor.
- Officers of the newly formed Joint Consolidated School Board were: George Nixdorf, president; Mrs. Edwin Baldwin, vice president; Mrs. Charles Ezrah, secretary; Howard Baldwin, treasurer.

# Downingtown Area Historical Society's Hist-O-Gram

*Interesting Local History, Accessed From Our Archives*

Vol. 1, No. 11

December 30, 2010

**85 years ago:**

## **Boffo blast blotted bad blood in borough**

Downingtown residents threw a helluva party when the new Borough Hall was dedicated on October 7, 1926. The blast helped bind wounds that had been bleeding for decades.

The day-long dedication ceremonies started at 1:30, with the ringing of the Alert Fire Co. bell. In addition to many speeches by local dignitaries and officials from neighboring towns, there was a parade that afternoon to the Alert fire hall on Downing Avenue, where a new fire truck was housed and more speeches were given by numerous Downingtown and Chester County fire company officials.

That evening, following a blast of the Minquas Fire Co. whistle, a huge, second parade got underway at 7:30.

The parade included music provided by the Knights of Malta band, which also played in the afternoon parade and at that morning's football game (DHS vs. the Lower Merion Reserves), plus bands from Coatesville High School, Atglen, Glenside and Churchtown. Apparently Downingtown High had not yet established a marching band.

Cash prizes were awarded to the fire company having the largest uniformed contingents in the parade and the company traveling the longest distance to participate. Prizes also were given to the largest, best appearing, most unique fraternal organizations, and those that created most laughter. And the largest contingent from one family in the line of march; plus the best decorated bike and floats, also received awards.

If a stranger had come to the Borough for the first time that day, he or she probably would have assumed that Downingtown's residents were always part of a happy municipal family.

Wrong! It had been a dysfunctional community for several decades.

The seeds of discord were planted in the late 1880s, when residents of the borough's East Ward wanted the Post Office to be re-located to their end of town. The borough's sole postal facility had been situated across from the railroad station on West Lancaster Avenue for many years because that location provided easy access to the Pennsylvania Railroad, which carried much of the mail to and from the borough.

The dispute reached a point where Congressman Smedley Darlington tried to settle the problem by convincing the U.S. Postmaster General to establish two postal facilities in March 1890, making Downingtown the only borough in the nation to have two post offices.

As a result the new East Downingtown Post Office was located in a building at the intersection of East Lancaster Avenue and Parke Alley. The building was later occupied by McClure's Colonial Bake Shop and Archie Wasson's real estate business.

Fueled by their success on the postal front, the East Enders proposed, later in 1890, that the borough be split in two. The demarcation line between the two new boroughs was to be Brandywine Creek. That plan was shot down by four of the six members of borough council and the burgess (mayor) because the division of the town would have been costly as well as divisive. That decision was supported subsequently by the Court of Chester County.

In the mid-1920s, borough councilmen Allen Keim and Guyon Miller were determined to build a municipal building that would help heal the psychological split in the borough, which had lingered for more than three decades since the post office fiasco in 1890. A Borough Hall also would create a central seat of government in the growing town; the council had been meeting in the Alert fire hall since 1892.

But a large building project was impossible to undertake at the time because the borough had recently made a commitment to construct a much needed waterworks, with a \$135,000 price tag.

The post office issue finally was resolved in 1925, when members of the Downingtown Business Men's Club, precursor of the Chamber of Commerce, established the Citizens Holding Co., which underwrote construction of the \$43,985 municipal building. The building was erected on a plot of land, purchased for \$700 by borough council, on the south side of Lancaster Avenue, on the edge of the Brandywine. \

Most important to the plan was the U.S. Post Office Department's agreement to consolidate the borough's two post offices into one space, which was rented in the new municipal building, at \$1,800 annually, for 10 years. To sweeten the deal, federal postal officials also agreed to provide delivery to all borough residences and businesses at no extra cost.

Although the new Borough Hall didn't settle all the East Ward versus West Ward tiffs in Downingtown over the coming decades, it's easy to see why Downingtown's leaders had good reason to celebrate on October 7, 1926.

And when current borough residents hear tales about those battles over the location of the post office in Downingtown in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they often just shake their heads and smile.

## **Ashbridge House to become a clip joint**

Members and friends of the Historical Society are invited to come to our headquarters on East Lancaster Avenue (next to Chick-Fil-A) in East Caln to participate in a newspaper clipping session Sunday afternoon, Jan. 9. Participants can join the monthly clipping sessions at any time between 1 PM and 4 PM. Clippers of all ages are asked to bring their own scissors to clip articles about local people, institutions and issues from area newspapers we've been collecting, so they can be added to our archival collection.

If you have any questions about the sessions, don't hesitate to contact Carol Grigson, our archivist, at 610-269-5413.

## **Thanks for your help with the Luminaria project**

The officers and directors of the Historical Society wish to thank all the block captains and their customers who helped make the Luminaria candle sale such a success this Christmas.

As you all know, the project is critical to our survival because the funds raised enable us to maintain Ashbridge House, our 18<sup>th</sup> Century headquarters, and preserve the legacy of the Downingtown area via our ever-growing archival collection.