



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

November 8, 2018

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The Downingtown Center By-Pass

It was called a “bad traffic situation.” It described the bottleneck created when cars, trucks, and buses coming from West Chester and other points south came into Downingtown via Brandywine Avenue. But it wasn’t describing the situation at is now in 2018, but rather in 1930!

In 1929 the section of State Highway Route 5 (also called the “Lakes-to-Sea Highway”), was completed between Downingtown and West Chester (it was re-designated Route 322 later in the 1930s). Along with the Lincoln Highway this created a second direct route between central/western Pennsylvania and Philadelphia.

The completion of the road also contributed to the demise of the West Chester-Downingtown trolley. A trip between the center of the two towns on the trolley was scheduled at 25 to 30 minutes but could often take longer. By car on the new highway the trip could now take closer to 15 minutes.

But with the opening of the highway the “bad traffic situation” soon developed in Downingtown. Back-ups along Brandywine Avenue from the Lincoln Highway south to beyond the Pennsylvania Railroad’s stone arch bridge became commonplace. The traffic was a mix of local residents returning from West Chester as well as long distance travelers heading to western Pennsylvania. This was a time before secondary roads could handle some of the local traffic, and before the construction of the Pennsylvania Turnpike which would divert most long-distance trips.



The stone arch railroad bridge over Brandywine Avenue would have been completely replaced in the 1930 plan.

The answer to this problem was apparent: the widening of Brandywine Avenue from the Lincoln Highway south to the Downingtown Borough limits. But the cost would be enormous. Widening the road north of the railroad would require taking portions of dozens of properties. In addition, the Railroad’s stone arch bridge would have to be completely torn down and rebuilt with a wider structure, not to mention the other railroad bridge at the same location which accommodated the Railroad’s New Holland Branch. In the end, “the excessive cost to the railroad company and to the taxpayers of Downingtown and Chester County” proved that this was not an option.

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The State Highway Department, however, seriously considered an alternative. Engineers proposed building a by-pass around the center of Downingtown, part of which would be on a new road and part on existing roads. The by-pass would begin near the Davey Paper Company by the Trestle Bridge. It would branch off the main road and go north through farmland to the Brandywine River. A new bridge would be built over the Brandywine and the by-pass would continue into what is now Johnsonstown Park to Viaduct Avenue. The Viaduct Avenue tunnel under the railroad would be widened (officials deemed the widening of this tunnel would be less-costly than re-building the railroad bridge on Brandywine Avenue) and at the Lincoln Highway curves would be built for left and right turns. The by-pass would continue north onto Downing Avenue and end at Manor Avenue (Horseshoe Pike).

Why the by-pass was never built is not explained but was most likely due, at least in part, to the worsening of the Great Depression. The funds may have simply not existed for such a large-scale project. It's also entirely possible the Pennsylvania Railroad may have balked when they considered the impact the project would have had on their operations if the Viaduct Avenue tunnel was widened.

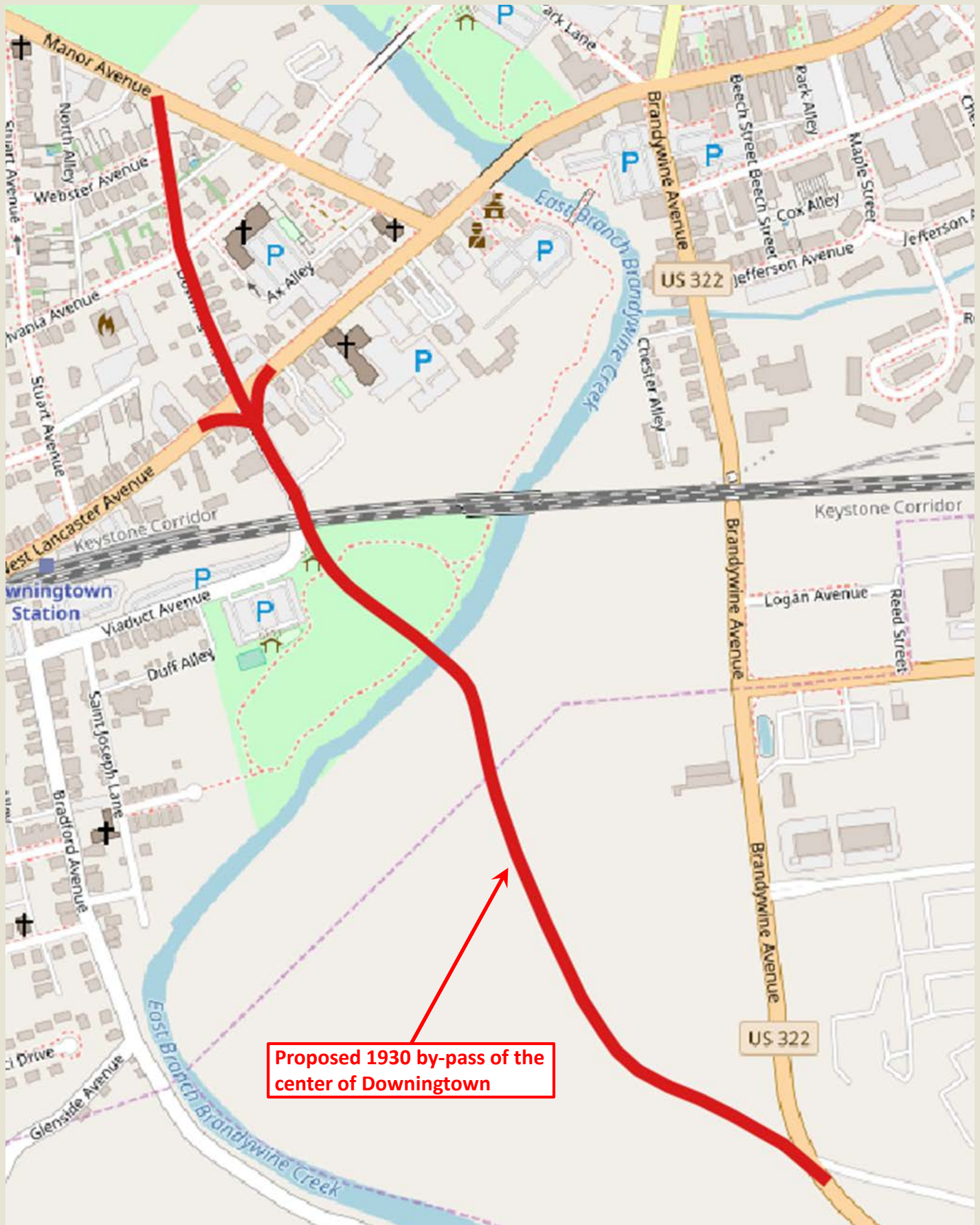


The proposed by-pass would have used a section of Viaduct Avenue but the tunnel under the railroad would have been widened.

So if you sit in rush-hour traffic on Brandywine Avenue, think back to a time 90 years ago when someone, perhaps driving a Model T, was in the same situation.



This Pennsylvania State Highway map from 1930 shows Route 5 between Downingtown and West Chester. Most of Route 5 was re-designated as Route 322 in the late 1930s. In West Chester, Route 5 continued to Philadelphia (this piece was re-designated as Route 3). Route 5 was a major highway in Pennsylvania that was also called the "Lakes-to-Sea Highway" that connected Erie and Philadelphia. Route 5 and the Lincoln Highway (Route 30) connected western portions of the state with Philadelphia and contributed to significant traffic through Downingtown.



The proposed by-pass of 1930 is seen here in red on a modern map of Downingtown.

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Luminaria Supplies

The holidays are fast approaching, and the Historical Society will again make it possible for people to be part of this Downingtown tradition by selling luminaria candles and bases. Orders can be made individually to the coordinator, Carol Grigson, at 610-269-5413 or via email at dths1709@gmail.com. Prices remain the same: 75 cents for each candle and bag, and 75 cents for each plastic base.

Pickup of orders will be available at the Ashbridge House, our headquarters next to the Chick-Fil-A Restaurant on Route 30 in East Caln, on Sunday, December 9, 1-3 pm or Sunday, December 16, 1-3 pm. Call 610-269-5413 if you have any questions or need different pickup times. It would be helpful to have orders by December 1, but we will try to accommodate later orders.



Downingtown Area Group Photo



At the Downingtown Paper Company in 1956, (from L to R) James Fryberger, Frank Hart, Frank Wilson, and Joseph Dougherty take a break from their work in one of the mills.

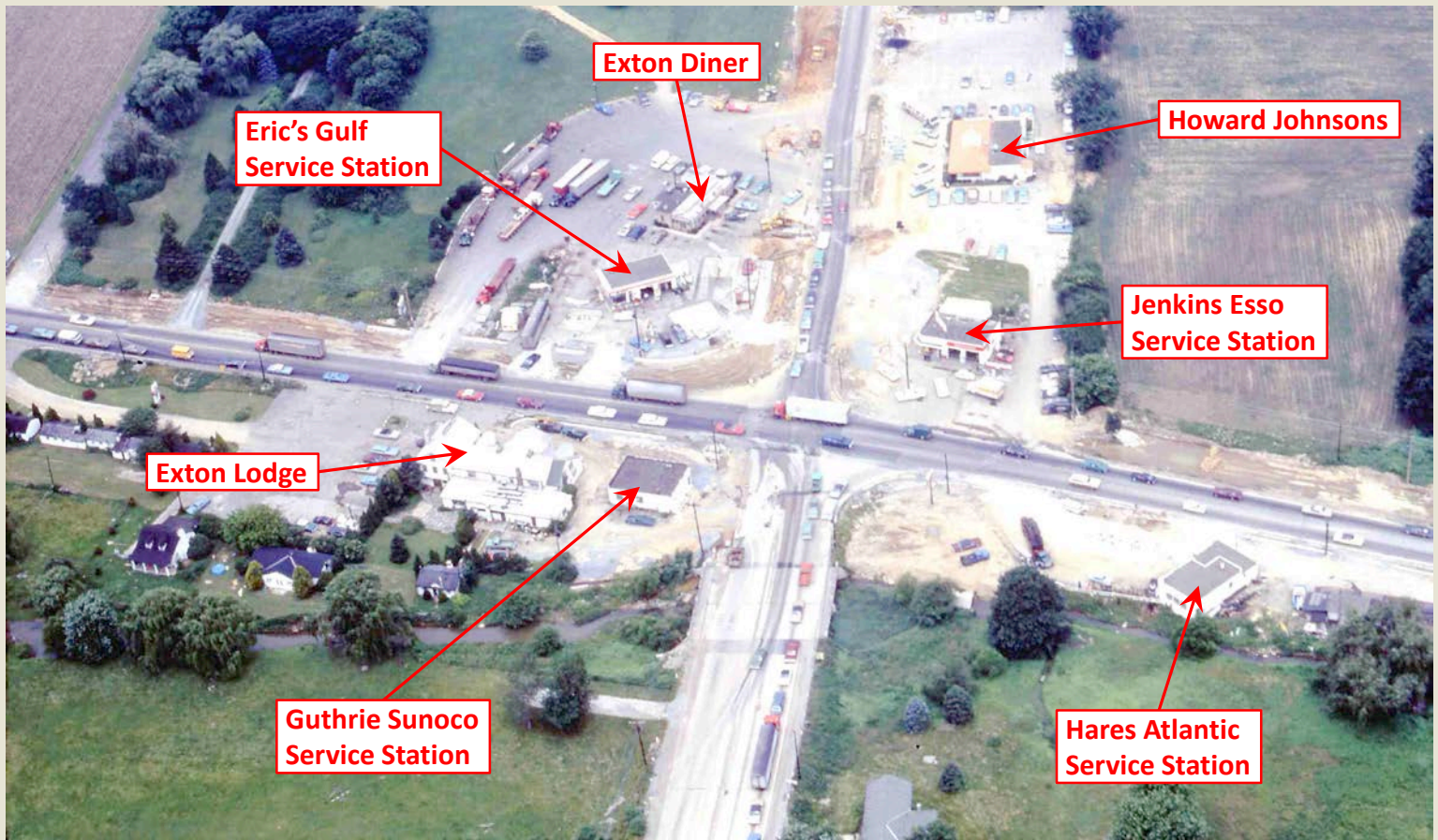
Ashbridge Artifact

This leaf made of iron and painted green is about a foot tall was part of the signage of the Greenleaf Pharmacy at 207 West Lancaster Avenue. The building is now home to the Station Taproom.



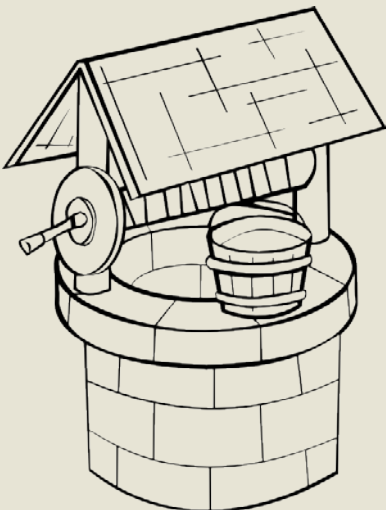
Exton ca. 1970

In our archives is an aerial photograph of the intersection of Routes 30 and 100 in Exton taken about 1970. The area has certainly changed a lot in the last 50 or so years. Labeled are some of the businesses near the intersection.



In The (Old) News – William Baum's Miraculous Escape

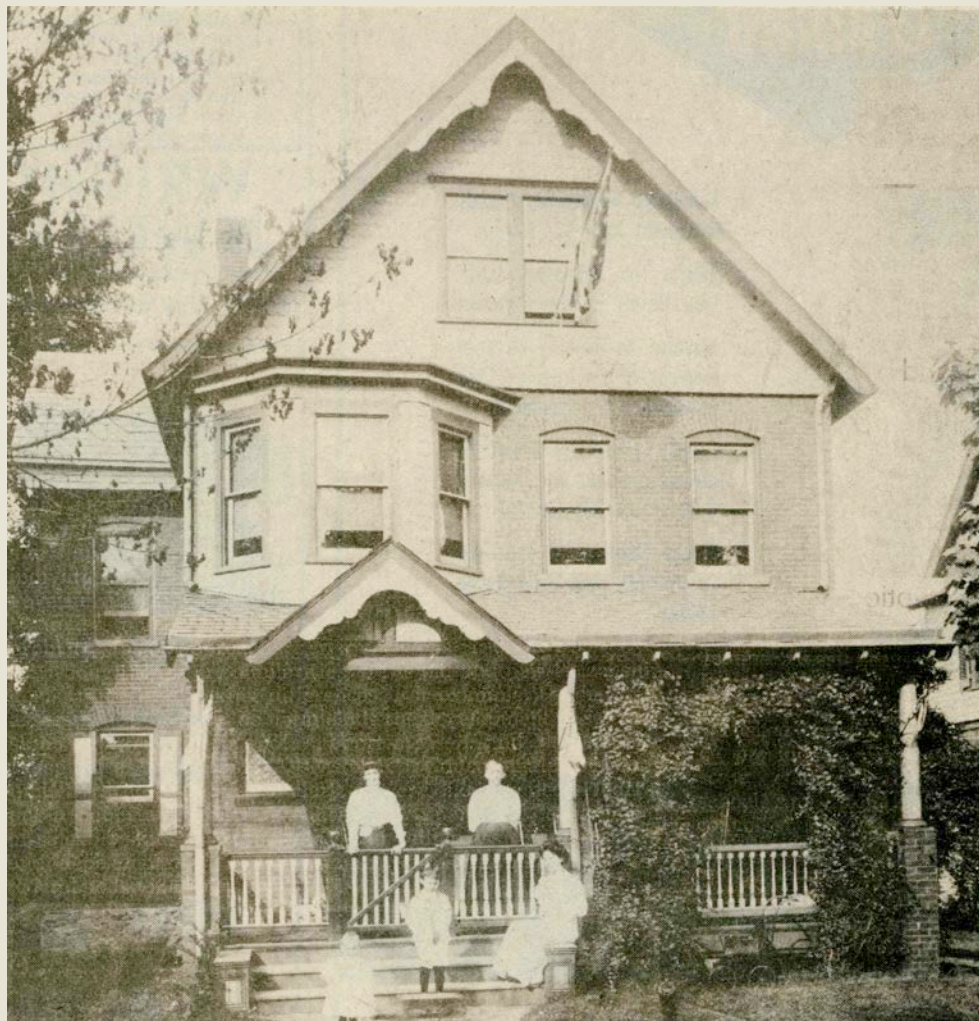
The story on the right appeared in several newspapers around the country in October 1874. William Baum was probably age 18 at the time.



"William Baum, son of David Baum, of East Brandywine Township, Pa., descended to the bottom of a thirty-five foot well on the premises of Mr. Baum, to get an axe which had fallen in, there being but eight inches of water in it. When within one foot of the bottom the wall began to cave in. A man at the top looked down, only to see a mass of stone settling down and 'literally squashing' the pump stalk, which was a cucumber one. After the noise had ceased, he called to the young man to know if he was living, to which the young man replied 'Yes, I'm alive, and not much hurt.' The man at the top of the well gave the alarm, and by that time the young man's father was seen coming. When help arrived they had not the proper machinery for removing the stone. Messengers were dispatched to secure windlass and well buckets a distance of one and a half miles. While they were gone, those who were there removed several feet of stone by hand. After the machinery came, and while removing the stone, the young man called to them that he had given up all hope of being rescued. The men encouraged him, and after five and half hours of terrible labor, during which time 200 windlass buckets of stone were taken out, he was found partially wedged among the stone, nearly frozen. Great was the joy and surprise of those at the top when the tidings reached them that William had sustained no serious injury."

Downingtown Area Mystery Pic

Can you identify the location in the photograph below? The first person to correctly identify the location of this photo will be recognized as a truly perceptive scholar. Bonus points if you can name the family pictured!! Please send your response to: dahs19335@gmail.com.



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

John Carbo is truly a perceptive scholar because he was the first to identify the location of the Mystery Pic in the last issue. The photograph taken in the late 1950s and shows several buildings on the west side of Brandywine Avenue in Downingtown next to Downingtown National Bank.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

West Caln Historical Society

The West Caln Historical Society will hold a meeting on Tuesday, November 20, 2018 at 7:00 PM in the West Caln Municipal Building at 721 West Kings Highway in Wagontown. The subject will be ***They Conquer Who Endure***, a book by Jeanne M. Rap about local veterans and the Downingtown Veterans Memorial.

Fall 2018 East Brandywine Historical Commission Speakers Series. All programs are held at 3:30 p.m. at the East Brandywine Township Building

Sunday, November 18th - "Historic 1700's Pennsylvania Cooking" presentation by Nancy Bialy Daversa who has worked as a historic consultant for movies and television show, and has been called the "Hollywood Herbalist."

Chester County Marine Corps League Detachment

BINGO on the first and third Saturday of every month, 420 Chestnut Street. Public welcome. Kitchen opens at 5:30, Bingo Cards on sale at 6:00, Early Bird Special 6:30. Food available for purchase. Funds used by the Marine Corps League and Marine Corps League Ladies Auxiliary to help veterans from all branches of the service as well as others in the community.

Community Luncheon

Central Presbyterian Church, 100 W Uwchlan Ave, Downingtown, holds a monthly Community Luncheon from 11 AM until 1 PM on the first Thursday of each month, October through May. Their popular chili, chicken corn noodle, vegetable beef, and cream of potato soups are sold, along with sandwiches, salad platters, homemade desserts and beverages. For take-out service, call 610-269-1576 and ask for the kitchen. Bring a friend, meet a neighbor, or come alone and enjoy good food and fellowship.

Uwchlan Township Historical Commission

The Uwchlan Township Historical Commission will open the Edith P. Moore schoolhouse on the first Sunday of the month from May to November. The hours are 2pm-4pm. The schoolhouse is located on North Village Avenue in Lionville.

Lyme Disease Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania

The Lyme Disease Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, an education and support group for patients and caregivers who have been affected by Lyme Disease, meets quarterly on the 3rd Wednesday of January, April, June, and October at 7PM at the Kennett Friends Meeting House on PA Rt 82 (125 W. Sickel St. Kennett Square, PA 19348). Meetings are free and all are welcome. Check www.lymepa.org for directions and programs.

Greater Downingtown Business and Professional Women (BPW)

Meets monthly on the 2nd Wednesday evening, at 6 pm, in the Thorndale Inn for a dinner, networking, program and meeting. All area women are welcome. Most nights there is a program such as a speaker. Call Mary Coyne for your reservation for dinner at 610-380-8869. We meet each month from September to June.

Joseph's People, Downingtown chapter

An ecumenical support mission to help unemployed or underemployed people. The group is entirely conducted by volunteers, and has been at St. Joseph's since 1995. Meets at 7:30 PM on the 2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the month. All are welcome. Visit web page, <http://josephspeople.org/our-chapters/downingtown/>, or just come to a meeting at St. Joseph's Parish Meeting Room behind the school, 460 Manor Ave., Downingtown. Call 610-873-7117. Leave Message. Leader: Cheryl Spaulding, Email: cheryl.spaulding@josephspeople.org.

Clipping Events

Did you know that as part of our archival collection we have about 14,000 cards in our files that contain newspaper clippings? During most months there are two opportunities at the Historical Society to help clip and paste newspaper articles for this collection. The sessions are held at the Ashbridge House, our 309-year-old headquarters, next to the Chick-Fil-A restaurant in the Ashbridge Square Shopping Center on Route 30 in East Caln. The two sessions are usually:

- **The first Sunday of the month, 1:00-4:00 PM**
Next one December 2nd @ 1:00 PM
- **The first Tuesday of the month, 6:30-8:00 PM (with pizza!)**
Next one December 4th @ 6:30 PM

Historical Society's Wish List

The Downingtown Area Historical Society is a non-profit organization proudly maintaining the 309-year-old Ashbridge House and a large archives. The society can always use gifts in kind with an immediate need for:

- General household items and office supplies including:
 - Light bulbs
 - Paper towels
 - Large and small trash bags
 - Glue sticks (used for our newspaper clippings)
- Amazon gift cards or gift cards to Home Depot or Lowes. Sometimes we need to make quick purchases so gift cards would come in very handy.

To make a tax-deductible cash donation, use this link
or send a check to the address below. Thank you!



Downingtown Area Historical Society

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www.downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org

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Follow us on Twitter:



Check out our *Then & Now* series on YouTube:



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