



# Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

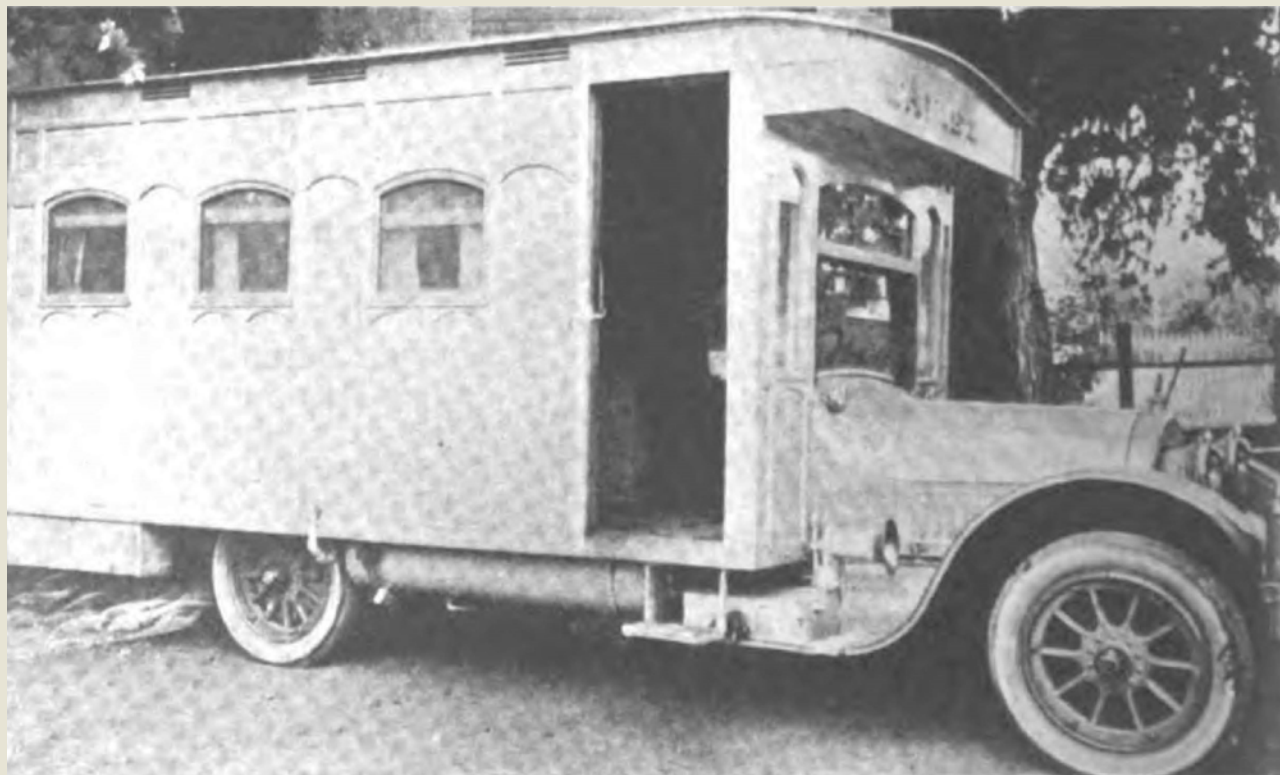
January 24, 2019

Volume 2, Issue 2

## The Bicking's Cross Country Trip (Part 2)

In our last issue of *History Notes* we introduced you to Downingtown's Parke and Gladys Bicking who took a cross-country trip in a custom-made "house car" in 1925. The Bickings left Downingtown on May 21st and arrived in California in late September of that year. Their trip was documented in a very detailed travel diary which is in the archives of the Downingtown Area Historical Society.

The Bickings were driving an early version of a recreational vehicle (RV), but they didn't go to an RV dealer to purchase it. It was custom-made, being built all or partly by Parke Bicking himself, probably in Downingtown. The body of the RV was mounted on an automobile chassis and the vehicle was described as a "small house with all the comforts of home." A picture of the Bicking vehicle was published in a September 1922 issue of *Motor Age* magazine when the Bickings drove it on a 1922-1923 winter tour of the southern United States. We can assume this is the same one the Bickings drove out west in 1925, though it could have been modified from what is shown in the picture.

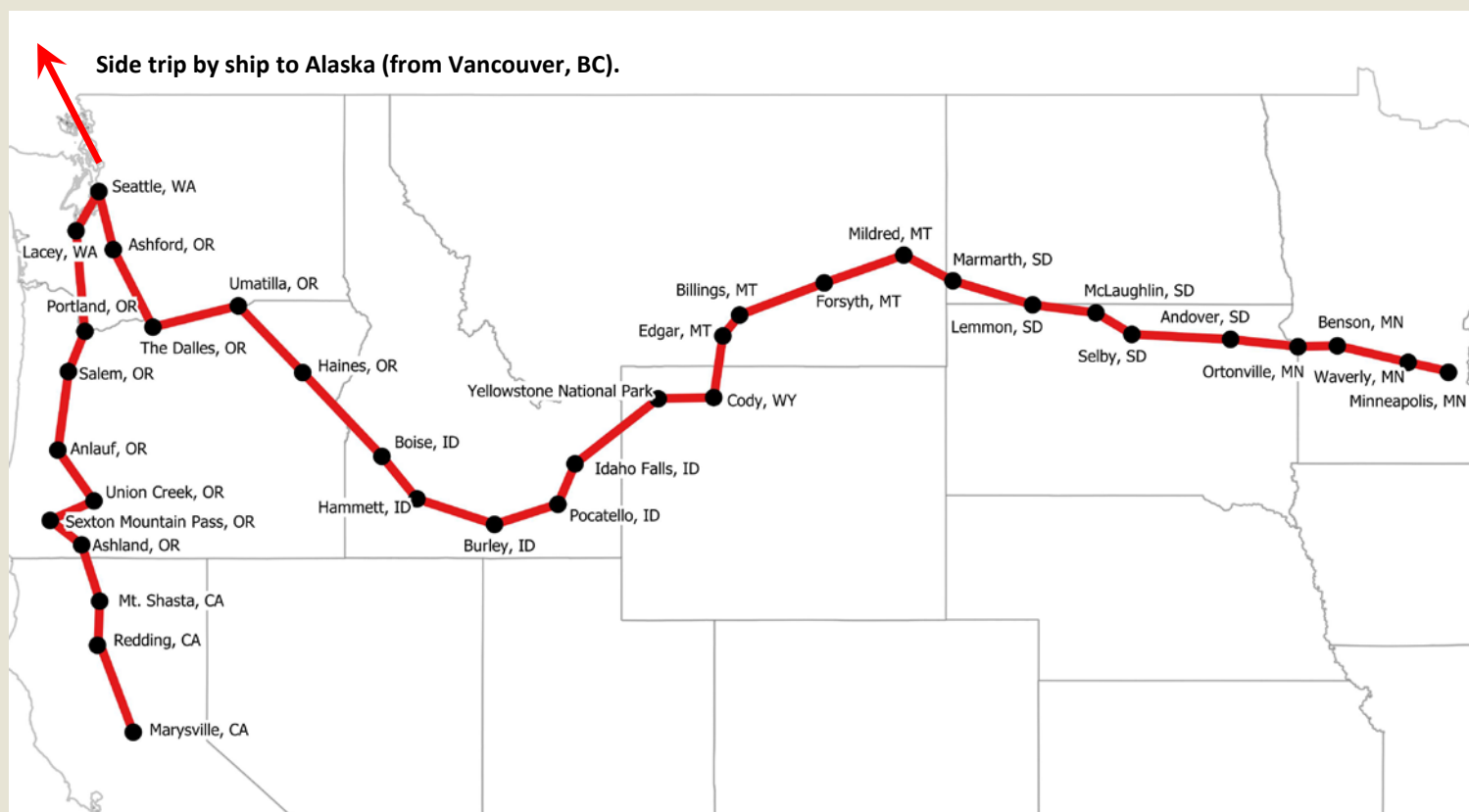


*The Bicking's "house car" as seen in a 1922 issue of Motor Age magazine.*

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In the last issue the Bickings were in Minneapolis where they stayed for nearly a week. They left the city on June 25th . Here are some highlights of the remainder of their trip out west:

- Several times after leaving Minneapolis the Bickings noted in the diary about the poor road conditions, especially in South Dakota and Montana. In some instances they couldn't travel until the roads dried out after heavy rains. Another time they noted they were traveling on "just a trail for a road."
- They weren't as many campgrounds out west for parking their RV overnight, so one time the Bickings received permission from a farmer to park on his land. Another time they paid fifty cents to park in a school yard.
- On July 18th the Bickings paid an entrance fee of \$7.50 and drove into Yellowstone National Park. They stayed in the park for two weeks. Nearly two-dozen pages of the travel diary are filled with their adventures and vivid descriptions of sites in Yellowstone.

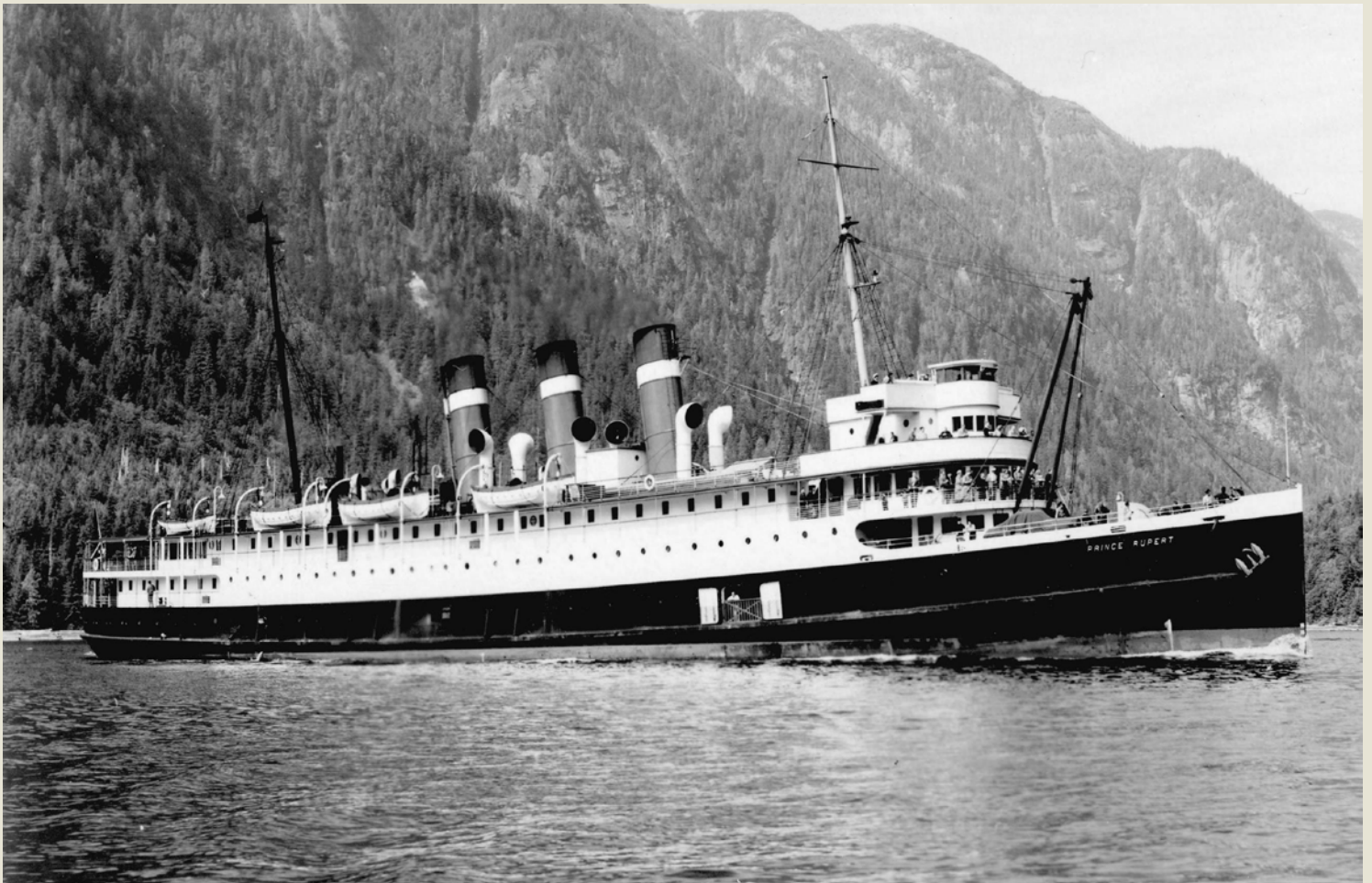


*The second half of the Bicking's cross-country trip took them from Minneapolis, MN to California. This included a side trip by ship to Alaska (from Vancouver, BC).*

- "Hot air was like that of a bake oven," was how Gladys described the weather when they stayed in Hammett, Idaho on August 8th. In another part of Idaho several days later she complained that "the camp was awful hot and dusty."
- The Bickings and Morrisons (who were traveling with the Bickings) were constantly working on their cars. Both the engines and other parts of their vehicles needed constant attention, especially due to the rough roads. Fortunately, Henry Morrison was a highly-skilled mechanic and Parke Bicking had mechanical aptitude as well, so they were often able to do the work themselves. But several times they had work done at garages along the way. In Billings, Montana, the Bickings remodeled the top of their vehicle, lessening its total weight by an estimated 600 pounds.

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- The Bickings arrived in Seattle on August 24th and they immediately looked into ships going to Alaska. The first available accommodations were on the S.S. Prince Rupert leaving Vancouver on August 31st. The Bickings found a lot near Seattle's YMCA where they could park their RV for the next week.
- While in Seattle, Parke Bicking purchased a \$65 suit to wear on their trip to Alaska. The couple also did quite a bit of sightseeing in the city including a trip to the Public Market and Ye Olde Curiosity Shop, both of which are still around today. They treated themselves to dinners at some of the fancy hotels near where their RV was parked.
- The Bickings and Morrisons stored their RVs in a Seattle garage before leaving on a train to Vancouver. The train ride to Canada took six hours and the group enjoyed the view of Puget Sound until it grew dark. A planned sightseeing trip around Vancouver the following morning was canceled due to heavy rain.
- The trip on the Prince Rupert lasted nine days and the Bicking's travel diary is filled with pages and pages of the beautiful sights they saw along the Alaskan coast. A stop was made in Skagway where the couple enjoyed a day trip on the White Pass and Yukon Railroad.
- The Bickings arrived back in Vancouver at 8:45 a.m. on September 9th and were back in Seattle at 3:00 p.m. the same day where they got their RV out of garage storage. "We found ourselves back to the simple life," Gladys wrote in her travel diary that night.



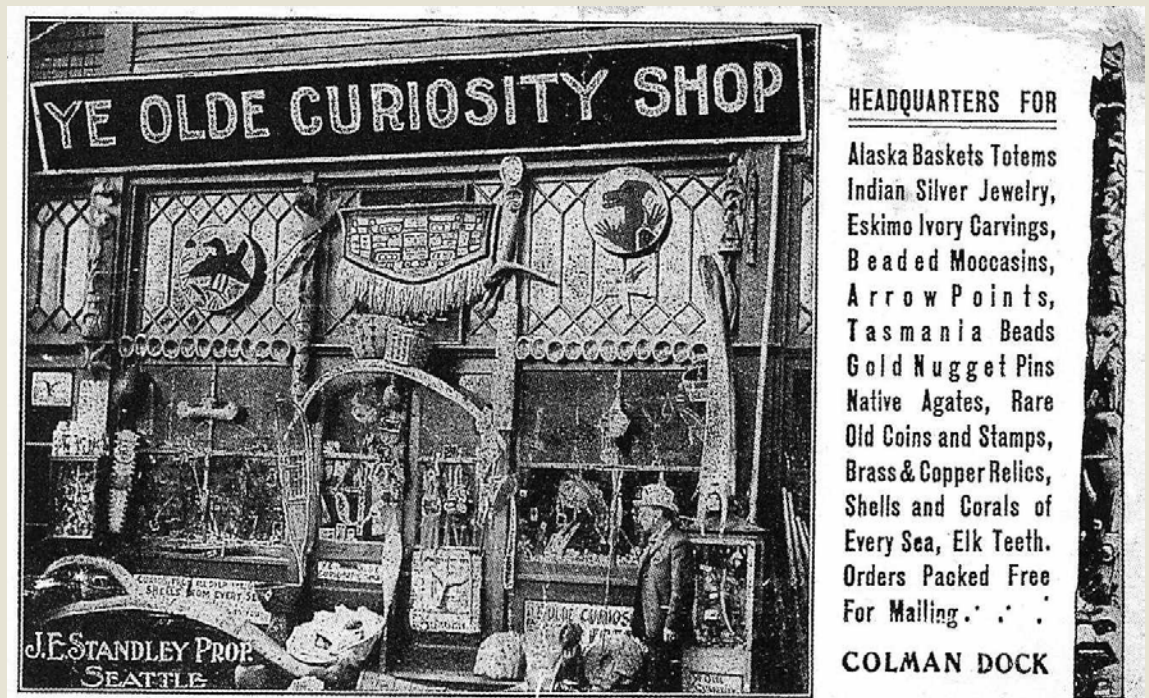
*The Bickings took the S.S. Prince Rupert on a side trip to Alaska from Vancouver, BC.*



- The Bickings spent another few days in Seattle. On September 11th they visited a local doctor “to have gums treated.” They left Seattle the following day which was their 17th wedding anniversary.
- On September 24th the Bickings parked their RV about 22 miles from Crater Lake, Oregon. Parke didn’t want to take the RV up to the lake itself due to the roads, so he arranged for the “garage man to take us in his touring car” the next morning.

The diary abruptly ends on September 29th near Marysville, California followed by many blank pages. Towards the end of the diary the entries start again, but these begin on April 19, 1926 in Monrovia, California where they write, “Homeward bound for Pennsylvania.” We do not know where the Bickings were between October 1925 and April 1926. It’s possible that they stored their RV in California and took a train back to Pennsylvania since by that time they were gone for months. Or they could have wintered in California the entire time, perhaps staying in other places than in their “home on wheels.”

*The Bickings visited “Ye Olde Curiosity Shop” when they were in Seattle. The store is still in business today. Besides national parks, the couple stopped at a number of tourist attractions in their 1925 trip which are still open today.*



## Downingtown Vintage Ad

The Pennsylvania Railroad often ran special excursion trains throughout its system. This ad was in the Downingtown Archive and advertised a round trip, one day excursion to Atlantic City from Downingtown on two summer days in 1925. The fare of \$2.95 would be about \$43.00 today.

# \$2.95

ROUND TRIP

**ONE DAY  
SEASHORE  
EXCURSIONS**

## Atlantic City

**Thursdays, July 30, August 20**

Special Train Via Delaware River Bridge

All Rail Route To The Seashore

Eastern Standard Time

Leaves Downingtown	- - - - -	7.17 A. M.
Arrives Atlantic City	- - - - -	9.55 A. M.
Returning, leaves Atlantic City [S. Carolina Ave]	- - - - -	6.15 P. M.

Proportionate Fares from other points between  
Parkesburg and Narberth

## Pennsylvania Railroad

The Standard Railroad of the World



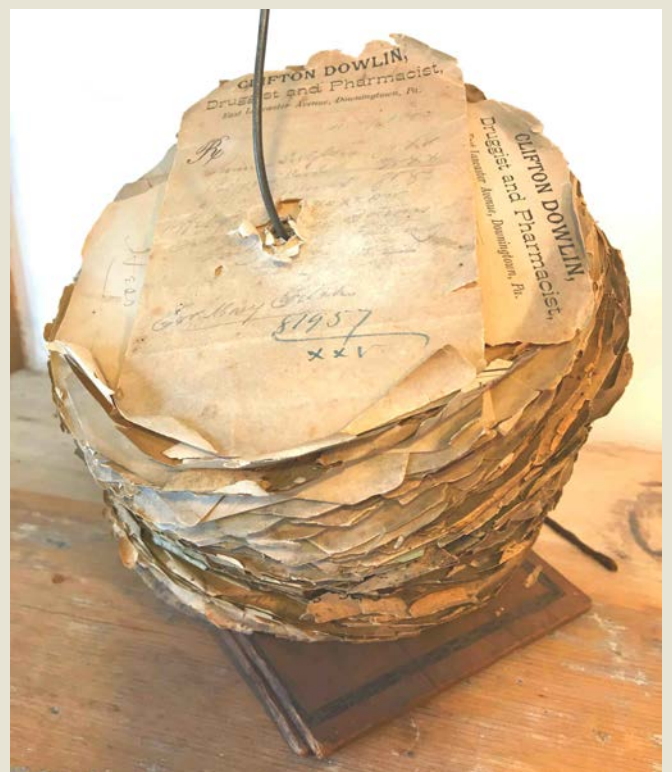
## Downingtown Area Group Photo



Several members of the Alert Fire Company are seen here in their truck on Lancaster Avenue during the July 4th parade in 1968. The photograph was taken from Borough Council window.

## Ashbridge Artifact

At the Ashbridge House we have hundreds of prescriptions filled by Clifton Dowlin in the 1880s. Dowlin was a druggist on East Lancaster Avenue, and similar to how restaurants put their checks on "check spikes", Dowlin put his filled prescriptions on a wire that was attached to the top of an old Havana cigar box. It's interesting to see what was prescribed to patients by local physicians back then. Dowlin (1857-1928) eventually got his medical license but ended up farming in East Brandywine Township.



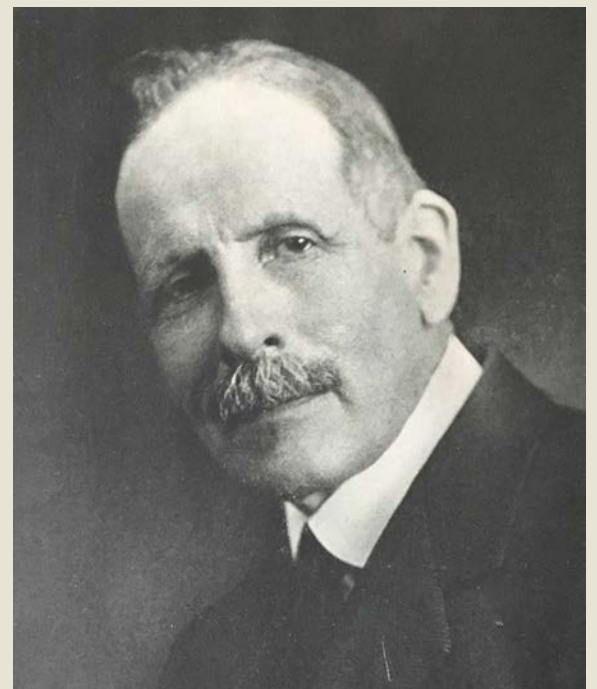


## Downingtown Did-You-Know?



Did you know that a rock along the Brandywine River south of Downingtown and a little north of the Sugars Bridge area is said to have the face of an Indian chieftain? Well, that's what Wilmer MacElree heard from locals when he followed the river course in preparing his 1906 book, *Down the Eastern and up the Black Brandywine*. In his book, MacElree looked at the rock and perhaps wasn't convinced as he wrote, "It needs an agile fancy and a keen, bright eye, to see this outline clearly..." But we went out to see the rock for ourselves and the face seems very clear to us. It certainly helped that it was a bright sunny day and we were facing the rock from across the Brandywine which perhaps gave us a better perspective than MacElree had when he went past in 1906. Can you make it out in the image above?

Wilmer MacElree (1859-1960) was a lawyer and historian who lived in West Chester most of his life. He practiced law until he was 93! His other books include "Along the Western Brandywine," and "Around the Boundaries of Chester County."



Wilmer MacElree



# In The (Old) News – Items that Made Headlines Back in the Day

**1882** – According to the October 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Harrisburg Daily Independent, “It is not often that a cat attacks anyone, but a few days ago a Thorndale man was carrying a piece of meat home when his Maltese flew at him and bit his hand so severely that he now carries the injured member in a sling.”

**1891** – Joseph Walton, a respected West Bradford farmer, was arrested and held on \$300 bail in April after selling cider to his nephew who was a minor. The nephew George Walton was the complainant in the case, and made the charge against his uncle after his uncle chastised him for disorderly conduct.

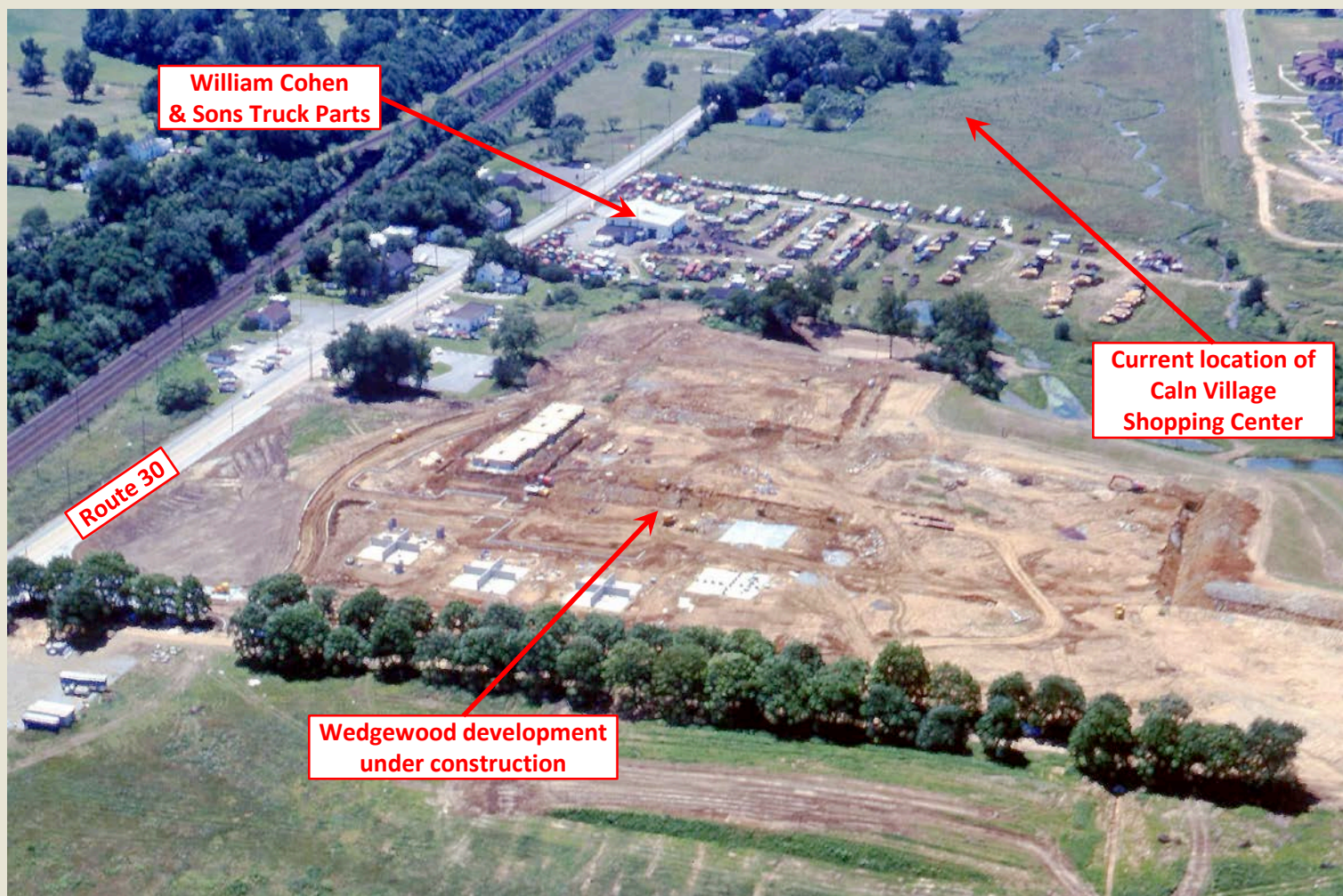
**1914** – It may have been a slow news day for The News Journal (Wilmington, DE) on May 14<sup>th</sup>, but the newspaper mentioned that Thomas Furlong of Downingtown killed a five-foot black snake.

**1922** – The restaurant of Charley Baen was broken into early on a Sunday morning in February. According to Baen, the only items he could find that were missing were two pieces of pie.

**1936** – On May 4<sup>th</sup>, Downingtown painter Earl Griffith was paroled from Chester County prison after serving two years of a three year sentence. During his time in the prison, Griffith painted the prison twice, both inside and out, saving the County an estimated \$1,000.

## Downingtown Area From Above

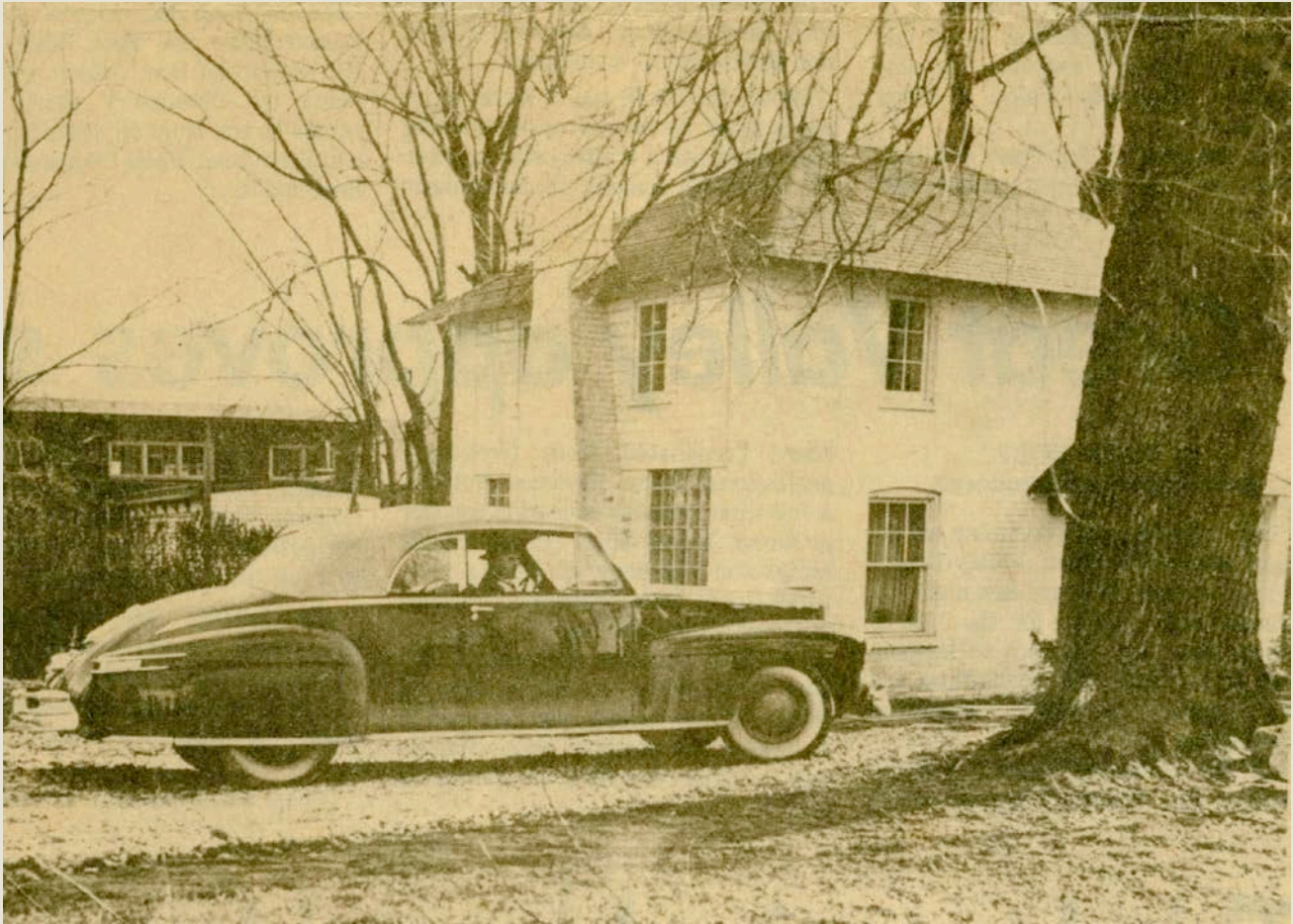
This photograph was taken over the eastern end of Caln Township facing west in the early 1970s.





## 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. Please send your response to: [dahs19335@gmail.com](mailto:dahs19335@gmail.com).



## Last Issue's Mystery Pic

**Bonnie Radford** is truly a perceptive scholar because she was the first person to correctly identify the village of Glenmoore in this ca. 1910 postcard image.

The image faces north and shows Creek Road and the tracks of the Downingtown and Lancaster Railroad. The white post by the tracks is probably milepost marker '9', meaning that point was nine miles north of the railroad's intersection with the Main Line in Downingtown.





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# Advertisements for Non-Profits

## ***Wallace Township Historical Commission***

The Wallace Township Historical Commission will be holding two workshops:

The first will be *Genealogy for the Beginner* which will be held on February 9, 2019 from 2pm-4pm at the Wallace Township Building, 1250 Creek Road, Glenmoore, PA. The cost of the class is \$5.00. Registration can be made at the Township building or by calling 610-942-2880. Leave your name and phone number in case of bad weather. The workshop is limited to 20 people.

The second workshop is *Scherenschnitte* (paper cutting) which will be held on March 16, 2019 from 2pm-4pm at the Wallace Township Building, 1250 Creek Road, Glenmoore, PA. Registration can be made at the Township building or by calling 610-942-2880. Leave your name and phone number in case of bad weather. The workshop is limited to 10 people. Participants should bring an 8x10 photo frame, a pair of sharp pointed scissors, and an X-ACTO knife. All other materials will be provided.

## ***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.

## ***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](mailto:cheryl.spaulding@josephspeople.org).



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## Historical Society's Wish List

The Downingtown Area Historical Society is a non-profit organization proudly maintaining the 310-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:
  - Pens and pencils
  - Scotch tape and masking tape
  - Copier paper (both color and white)
  - 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!



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### Downingtown Area Historical Society

P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335

610-269-1709

[dths1709@gmail.com](mailto:dths1709@gmail.com)

[www.downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org)

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Follow us on Twitter:



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



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