



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

September 13, 2018

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Historic Computers

At the Historical Society we love history and historical items. But what we don't care for are old computers, and we could use several new ones at our headquarters at the Ashbridge House.

No, our PCs aren't quite as old as this one here! However, they are getting up there in age. We would certainly welcome a donation to purchase new computers, or if anyone is aware of an opportunity for a non-profit to acquire them at low-cost please let us know.



Correction - it was 1978

Anthony Fusco contacted us and thought the McDonalds on East Lancaster Avenue opened in 1978 rather than 1976 as we stated in our last issue. He is correct. It appears that after the groundbreaking took place in November 1975, the project stalled as Borough and McDonalds officials went back and forth over items such as signage, traffic, and site access/egress. At one point the Borough even wanted the drive-up window taken off the plans but McDonalds would not budge on that request stating in a January 1978 meeting, "every McDonalds that goes on the street today will have a drive-up facility."

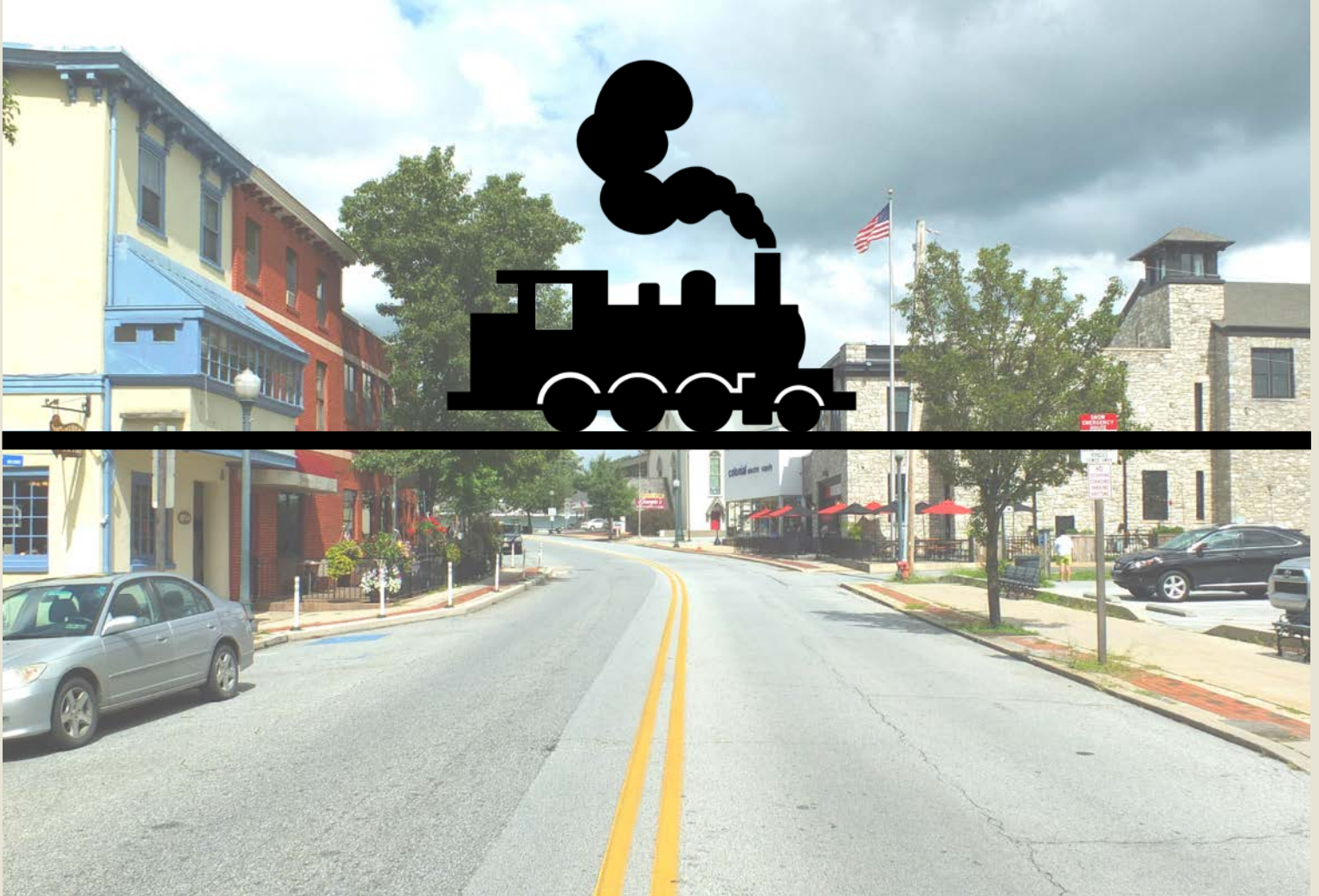


Also as part of the project, Green Street was extended to Mill Alley so cars could exit the site to Lancaster Avenue at a stop light rather than directly from the McDonalds parking lot. In 1984 Green Street was further extended to Pennsylvania Avenue.

So it appears that in early 1978 the Borough approved the plans and McDonalds opened probably in the spring or summer of that year.

A Railroad Bridge Over Lancaster Avenue?

It could have happened. In 1924, the Pennsylvania Railroad was planning on elevating the tracks of their New Holland Branch in the center of Downingtown. For efficiency of operations, raising the tracks about 15 feet would not only put them at the same level as the Main Line tracks a short distance to the south, but it would also eliminate a busy and sometimes dangerous road crossing at Lancaster Avenue. Not only would there be a bridge over Lancaster Avenue but there would be one over Washington Avenue too. The higher grade would be extended northward so that the future extension of Pennsylvania Avenue from Wallace Avenue would be jeopardized by a ten foot high railroad grade. If this happened one idea that was floated would be to raise Pennsylvania Avenue on a 30 foot-high trestle to go over the railroad tracks!



It's unclear why the Pennsylvania Railroad never went through with their plans. Perhaps they could see that rail traffic on this line – both passenger and freight – was not going to grow, or the costs of such a large-scale project simply outweighed any potential benefits. Either way, it's interesting to imagine how such a project would have impacted Downingtown, then and now.

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

(a canine focus)

1873 – Over a period of three nights in November, wild dogs killed 64 sheep in West Bradford Township.

1876 – In early February, the 18-month old daughter of Thomas and Sarah Whitely was playing on the edge of Ringwalt's mill race when she fell in. Their dog barked and caught the attention of Sarah who rescued her daughter from the water. The dog most likely saved the girl's life.

1876 – According to a newspaper in April "in Guthrieville, at the residence of James G. Branson, is a pigeon that has fed and roomed with a dog for nearly a year past, and if the dog is approached by any one, it will fight equal to any game chicken. It does not associate with anything but this dog."

1900 – In January the Borough had a public sale of 27 dogs seized for non-payment of taxes.

1904 – On an October day, Pennsylvania Railroad employees in Downingtown went to retrieve a dog caged in the baggage car of a train but were so afraid of the "bow-legged, lantern-jawed, liver and white bulldog" that they had to have someone from the SPCA get him out. SPCA agent Mrs. Kate Covert came to the rescue, retrieved the dog, and brought it back to the SPCA where it was eventually claimed by its Philadelphia owner.

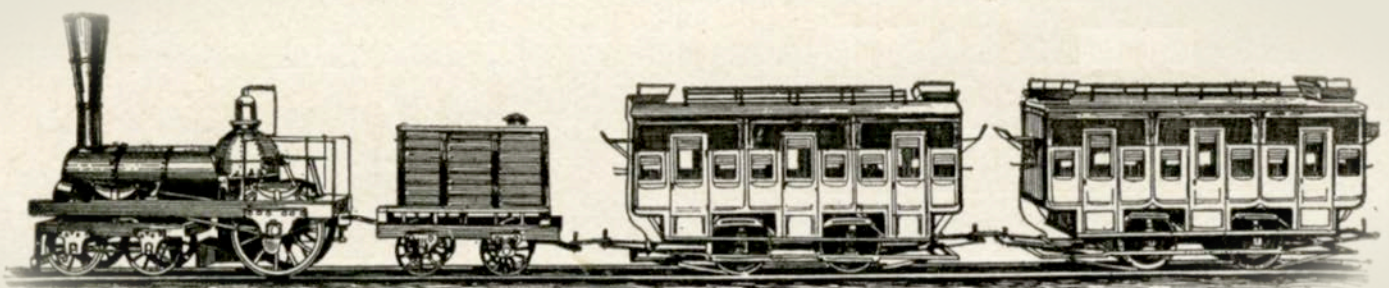
1907 – According to a newspaper in September, "all dogs in Downingtown that do not wear license tags are to be killed by the borough authorities."

1936 – In May, Downingtown was advertising for a dog catcher but apparently no one wanted the job. According to Burgess Calvin Ax, "we have been advertising for a week, but as yet we have had no luck. One man did apply for the job, then changed his mind. There's good money in it, \$1 per dog caught."

Downingtown Did-You-Know?


Did you know that Downingtown's first commuter train to Philadelphia could have operated as early as 1843? It started from Parkesburg early each morning and made stops in Downingtown, Oakland (Whitford), Paoli and a few other locations before arriving in Philadelphia. It was operated for the benefit of way (local) passengers as well as farmers who needed to bring their produce to market in Philadelphia. One of the amenities for passengers was "cool ice water."

A trip by train from Downingtown to Philadelphia in 1843 probably took two to three hours. However, this was much faster than just a decade earlier where taking a wagon or stagecoach along the Lancaster Turnpike to Philadelphia could take up to half a day. It was now possible to leave Downingtown in the morning, do business in Philadelphia, and return the same day.



Downingtown Vintage Ad

If you're new to Downingtown you may not know that the building where Pomodoro Pizza and Italian Restaurant is on Chestnut Street had other businesses in there as well. It started out as a gas station then was home to Woody's Deli for many years. These advertisements were from the 1977 and 1978.



WOODY'S

**200 Chestnut St.
Downingtown**

Serving *"Personalized Sandwiches"*

HOAGIES & STEAK SANDWICHES ALSO A WIDE VARIETY OF OTHER SANDWICHES

• Pizza	• Gourmet Trays
• Stromboli	• Big Selection of candy
• Freshly Baked Pies	• Groceries
• Ice Cream	• Cigarettes
• Newspapers	• Magazines

CALL AHEAD AND AVOID WAITING! 269-5580
OPEN 7 DAYS FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE
Mon.-Fri. 7 a.m.-10 p.m., Sat. 8 a.m.-10 p.m., Sun. 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

**OPEN LABOR DAY
MON. Sept. 5 9 a.m.-3 p.m.**

WOODY'S DELI

Luscious Steak Sandwiches, Delicious Hoagies plus a large variety of other sandwiches all made fresh to order.

THIS WEEK'S SPECIALS:

SWEET LABANON BOLOGNA
CLEARFIELD CHEESE
BEEF BOLOGNA
ROAST BEEF

PLUS:



HOMEMADE DONUTS!

(Ready by 10:30 a.m.)
at **Reg. \$1⁵⁰/doz.**

WOODY'S DELI

Open 7 Days 200 Chestnut St. Downingtown **269-5580**



Route 30
Rte. 322
Green St.
Chestnut St.
WOODY'S

Downingtown Area Group Photo



This group photo was taken in 1957 of employees of the Downingtown Paper Box Company, each of whom had 20 or more years at the company.

Sitting left to right: Dorothy Brookover, Margaret Balentine, Jean Dewees, Pauline Reburn, Elizabeth Lacey, Helen Willard, Adeline DiCola.

Standing left to right: Oscar Fazzini, Louis Guglielmo, James DiAntonio, Alan Pierce, Ron Keech, Chris Mento, John Fahey, Edward Fahey, Robert Reburn, Leo Hamilton, Theodore Noll.

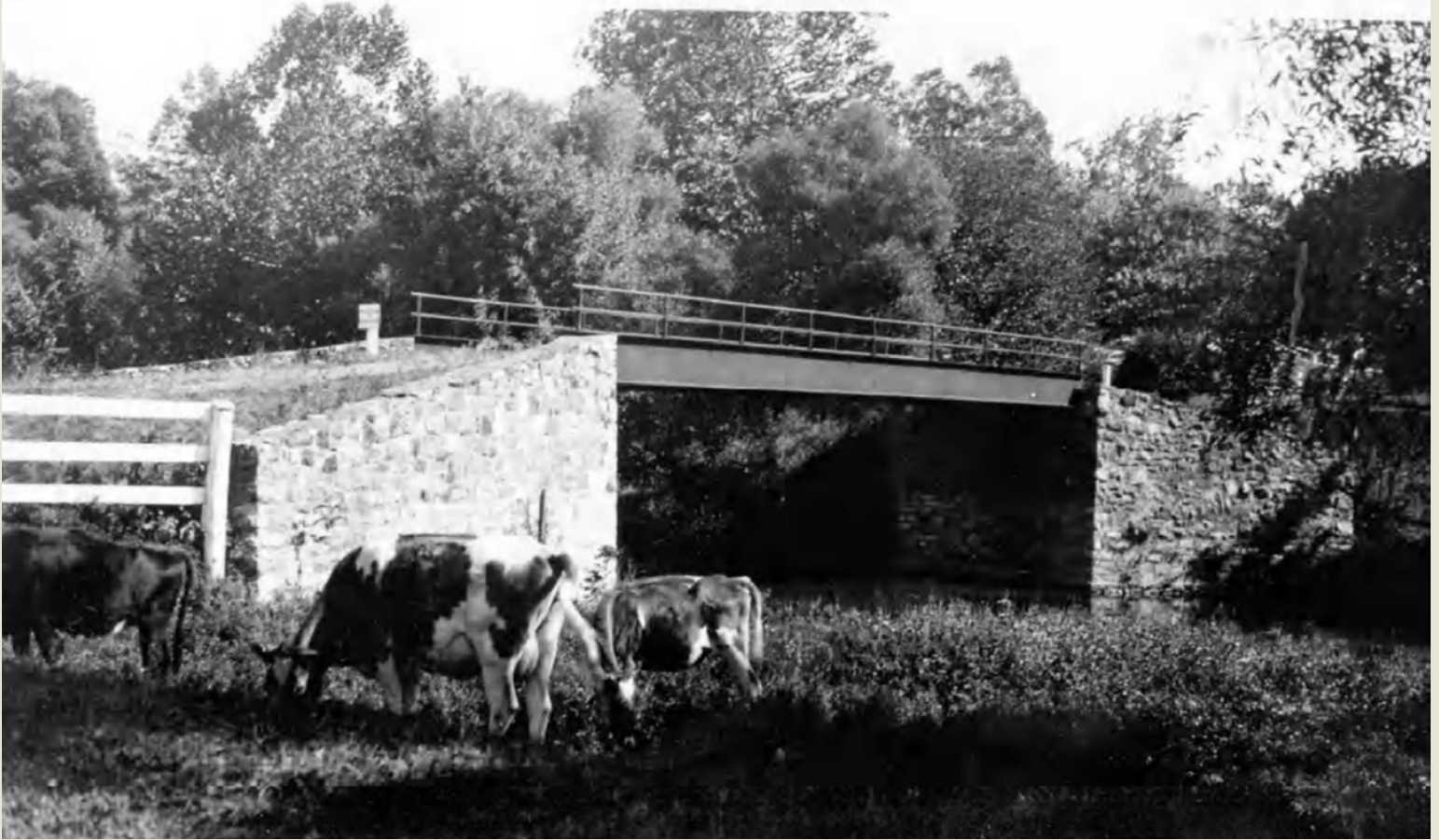
Ashbridge Artifact

Remember SEPTA's blue R5 destination signs? These were placed on the side of train cars and displayed the final destination (or turnarounds) of that particular train. For many years Downingtown was the westernmost stop for SEPTA trains on the Main Line. In the 1990s SEPTA extended service to Coatesville and Parkesburg for a period. However, service was truncated back to Downingtown because of low ridership at Coatesville and Parkesburg, and also for the fact that trains had to go well into Lancaster County in order to cross over from the westbound to eastbound tracks. In 1999 SEPTA opened the station at Thorndale and this stop is the furthest west SEPTA trains currently operate. SEPTA's Regional Rail "R" numbering system was dropped in 2010 and service to stops on the Main Line are called the "Paoli/Thorndale Line."



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. Unfortunately we may get many responses so we aren't able to respond to each one individually. Sorry!



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Nancy Duca is a truly perceptive scholar because she was the first of a number of readers to correctly identify the location of last issue's Mystery Pic as Glenside Avenue. It was probably taken in the late 1950s.

The car in the picture is a Willys Jeep station wagon. We were told the back end didn't change much from the late 1940s to the early 1950s so it's difficult to pinpoint an exact year.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

West Caln Historical Society

The West Caln Historical Society will have a presentation by Matt Bochanski "Banjo Matt" on the History of Banjo in Mummers Parade. It will be held on September 18, 2018 at 7 PM at the West Caln Municipal Building, 721 W. Kings Hwy., Wagontown, PA. The meeting is open and free to the public, and all are welcome and invited.

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

Sunday, September 16th - "Buffalo Bill Cody" presentation by John H. Miecht, a retired Social Studies teach from the Downingtown Area School District. John is also a tour guide with the Brandywine River Museum of Art.

Sunday, October 21st - "John Hershey's Vision" presentation by Dale Hendricks, a self described "itinerant preacher on ecology and trees who tries to communicate new ideas, bring the young folks along, and have a little fun." He is the owner of Green Light Plants in Landenberg.

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."

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 on the 3rd Wednesday of every month 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 Cindy Markley for your reservation for dinner at 610-363-1404. 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 October 7th @ 1:00 PM
- **The first Tuesday of the month, 6:30-8:00 PM (with pizza!)**
Next one October 2nd @ 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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610-269-1709

dths1709@gmail.com

www.downingtownareahistoricalociety.org

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



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