



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

March 26, 2020

Volume 3, Issue 6

Downingtown Burgess Arrested for Breaking Quarantine

Downingtown Burgess John McFarlan didn't think he was doing anything wrong by going to church for both the morning and evening services on Sunday, February 1, 1914, but doing so got him arrested and fined. McFarlan was arrested, not for attending worship services, but because he broke the quarantine laws of the Borough.

In 1914, the daughter and grandchildren of John and Mary McFarlan were living with them in their Downingtown home. On the Thursday prior to McFarlan's arrest, his grandson Emmett Sener fell ill and went to see Dr. Laban Bremerman whose office was on Lancaster Avenue. Bremerman diagnosed the boy as having a mild case of chicken pox and warned the family not to go to any public places including church. Thomas Gray, who was not only Downingtown's Chief of Police but also the Board of Health Officer, was alerted to the situation and placed a placard on the McFarlan home at 217 Brandywine Avenue announcing the presence of chicken pox. At the same time, Gray handed Emmet's mother Elizabeth a copy of the law regarding quarantine.

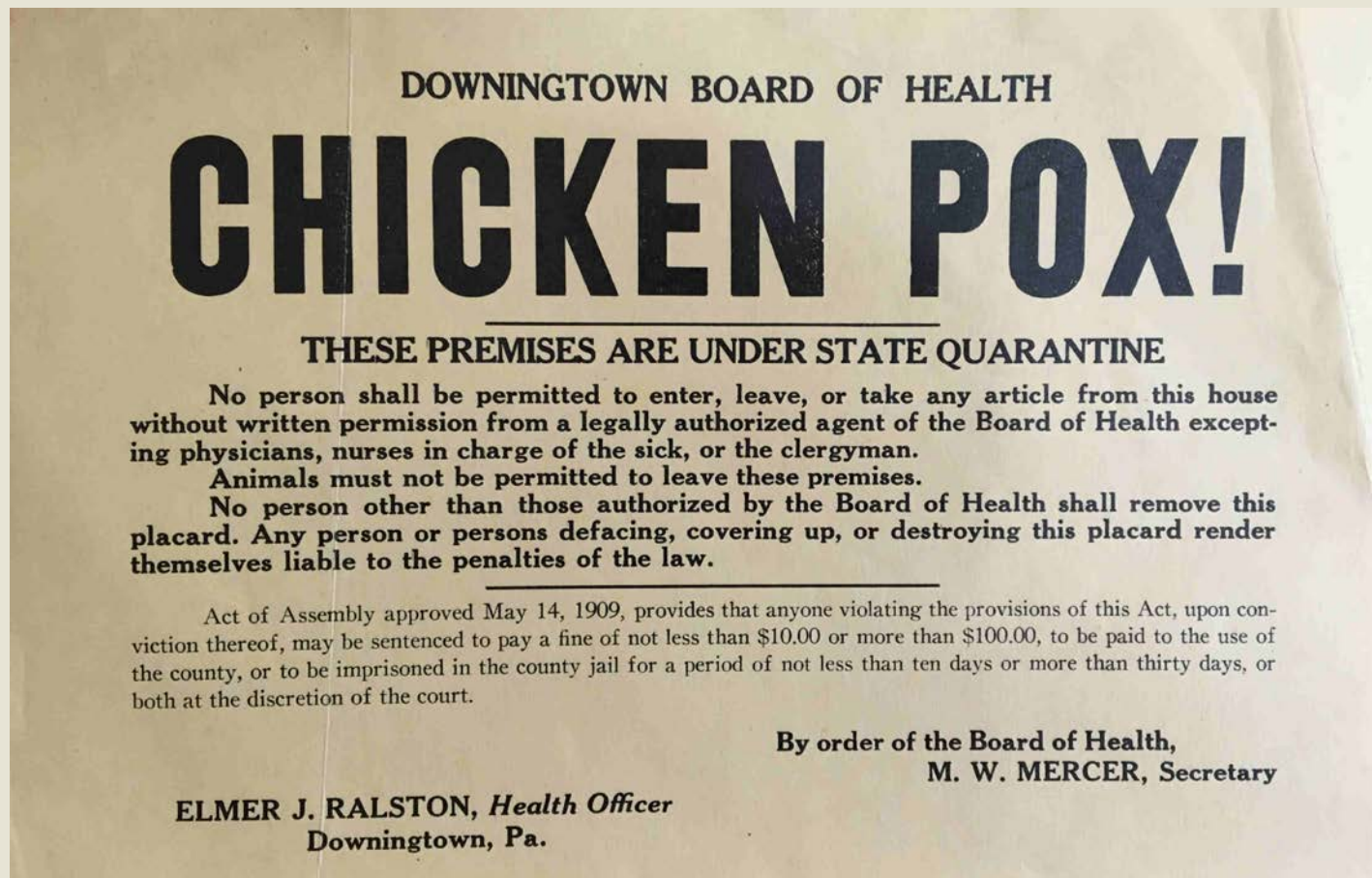
John McFarlan was present at the time the notice was given to his daughter but felt the quarantine didn't apply to him because his grandson was kept apart from the family and he was not in any physical contact with him. The Burgess also felt that the illness was of a "harmless nature" and recalled when he had chicken pox as a child he mingled with other children and went about his days as if nothing was wrong. As a result, when Sunday came, the 72-year-old McFarlan felt he was doing nothing wrong when he went to church.



For a period in the early 1900s, Downingtown Burgess (Mayor) John McFarlan and his wife Mary lived at this home at 217 Brandywine Avenue in Downingtown. The McFarlan's daughter Elizabeth Sener and her three children (Emmett, Mary, and George) also lived in the home with the McFarlans.

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But others saw it differently. On Monday, Harry Worrall, the President of Downingtown's Board of Health was alerted to McFarlan's breaking of quarantine and hastily called a meeting of the Board. It was determined that even though McFarlan was Downingtown's Burgess (the *Burgess* title was eventually changed to *Mayor* for Pennsylvania Boroughs) the law must still be upheld. As a result, a warrant was issued for McFarlan's arrest. Downingtown's Constable Cecil McMichael served the warrant to McFarlan soon after the Burgess arrived home following a Borough Council meeting that evening.



Placards were placed on the doors of homes in Downingtown where an occupant had a communicable disease such as chicken pox, mumps, measles, whooping cough, or scarlet fever. This one probably dates from the 1940s.

Two nights later John McFarlan appeared in the office of Magistrate J. Hunter Wills for a hearing on his arrest for breaking quarantine. Witnesses included Worrall who stated that he was instructed to bring the suit for violation of the Board of Health Laws, and Officer Gray who said that McFarlan was present when he served the quarantine notice on the mother of the sick boy. The third witness was Dr. Bremerman who was unable to be at the hearing but was called on the telephone. After the oath was administered, he was asked many questions by Magistrate Wills who relayed the answers to the large, standing-room-only crowd that had assembled in his office. McFarlan's attorney neglected to cross examine Bremerman at the time given the strange circumstances of having a witness testify by phone. However, after re-thinking the situation, he decided he needed to question the physician so Dr. Bremerman was called a second time.

After all testimony was taken the verdict was in the hand of Magistrate Wills. He paused for a few moments while he deliberated the matter, then pronounced McFarlan guilty. He said, "John McFarlan, you are unquestionably guilty of having violated the laws of the Board of Health governing the matter of quarantine and it is my unpleasant duty to do as the law prescribes – fine you. I honor a man that goes to church, but that does not relieve you of the fact that you should have known better in the circumstances. The fine I shall make the minimum, which is \$5 and the costs of the case."

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After hearing the pronouncement, Burgess McFarlan stroked his long white beard for a moment then loudly stated to all who were present, "I will appeal this case and fight it to the last ditch." Magistrate Wills, however, stated "this is not a case that you can appeal. You either pay the fine or go to jail. That is all there is to it." McFarlan then grudgingly reached into his coat pocket, pulled out his checkbook, and wrote a check for \$10.84 which included the \$5.00 fine \$5.84 in court costs.

After the hearing McFarlan and his attorney stood outside Wills' office along with several of the Burgess' friends. He still vowed to appeal the case. McFarlan also said that his arrest was "politics all the way through." The recent election for Burgess was a nasty one and he claimed some were exacting revenge. According to McFarlan, the fine was not the issue, but rather that his dignity was hurt by the proceedings. As he walked toward his Brandywine Avenue home, he had one last statement: "Well, thank God I have four years yet to serve as Burgess, and I will certainly let some know that I am in office."



The Downingtown Methodist Church (above) was only a short distance from his home, but Downingtown Burgess John McFarlan was arrested and fined for attending services there when his home was under quarantine for chicken pox. The Measles placard below is in the archives of the Downingtown Area Historical Society.

DOWNINGTOWN BOARD OF HEALTH

Measles!

THESE PREMISES ARE UNDER STATE QUARANTINE

No person shall be permitted to enter, leave, or take any article from this house without written permission from a legally authorized agent of the Board of Health excepting physicians, nurses in charge of the sick, or the clergyman.

Animals must not be permitted to leave these premises.

No person other than those authorized by the Board of Health shall remove this placard. Any person or persons defacing, covering up, or destroying this placard render themselves liable to the penalties of the law.

Act of Assembly approved May 14, 1909, provides that anyone violating the provisions of this Act, upon conviction thereof, may be sentenced to pay a fine of not less than \$10.00 or more than \$100.00, to be paid to the use of the county, or to be imprisoned in the county jail for a period of not less than ten days or more than thirty days, or both at the discretion of the court.

By order of the Board of Health,
M. W. MERCER, Secretary

ELMER J. RALSTON, *Health Officer*
Downingtown, Pa.

Downingtown Then & Now

Furlong's Food Market was one of a number of small grocery stores in Downingtown that catered to a local neighborhood. It was located on the northwest corner of Chestnut Street and Jefferson Avenue. We are not sure of the date of the older image, but it may have been taken in the 1940s.



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

1914 – On June 1, a lion escaped from its cage while in a freight car of a circus train parked on a siding in Thorndale. A large posse of men armed with rifles and shotguns scoured the woods for miles around Thorndale. There was no word if the animal was ever caught.

1921 – In May, the Pennsylvania State Compensation Board decided Robert Batson of Downingtown should be compensated for his injuries after falling from a cherry tree at the YMCA camp south of town. Even though Batson was picking cherries for his Sunday dinner, the board determined it was part of his employment as he was allowed to get fruit from the trees.

1939 – Children attending the Montrose school in Upper Uwchlan Township may have been hoping for a mid-winter vacation when fire damaged the school on February 13 due to an overheated stove pipe. However, after a school director's meeting, it was decided to send the older children to other schools in the township while the younger ones would be taught in the home of the Montrose schoolteacher Helen Fisher.

1940 – On June 19, Charles Stahlnecker, the Pennsylvania Railroad ticket agent in Downingtown was on his way to work when he noticed a tractor trailer stalled on the main line railroad tracks. He quickly notified points east and west to hold all trains. Stahlnecker's quick thinking that day could have avoided a serious wreck on the railroad.

Downingtown Area Group Photo

The image below was taken of a group of parade watchers during Downingtown's 1959 Centennial parade. The group is standing in front of what is now (or was) Pat's Pizza on West Lancaster Avenue. Notice the S&H Green Stamps sign. Lambert's Mobil Station can be seen behind the crowd. If you look close enough, the girl on the far right is holding a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes!



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

No one was able to identify the location of last issue's Mystery Pic (right). This barn was located on the north side of Route 30 in Caln Township between Downingtown and Thorndale on a farm called Foxcroft. It was torn down in the 1960s.



Downingtown Area From Above

The photo below was taken by former Borough Manager Don Greenleaf in the 1960s of a model showing what the center of Downingtown could have looked like through an ambitious urban renewal project that never got off the ground. The gray model buildings were existing at the time and the white model buildings were proposed. Notice how Jefferson Avenue was extended across the Brandywine.



Downingtown Vintage Ad

Known mostly as a discount clothing store, **Barmay Store** (below) was located at the corner of Pennsylvania and Wallace Avenues in Downingtown. The advertisement on the right appeared in the East Branch Citizen in August 1981.



BARMAY STORE
Sat. August 15th only!

Presenting our new
REFLEXIONS
Portrait Package

~~95¢~~ / ~~\$12.95~~
(Deposit) (Total Package Price)

20 Prints: 2-8x10's,
3-5x7's, 15 wallets

NO DEPOSIT TOTAL PACKAGE SAVE \$3.00 \$12.00

- No additional charge for groups
- Additional packages only \$12.00/ no deposit
- Poses our selection
- Beautiful backgrounds available
- Ask about our Decorator Portrait

Photographer's Hours:
Saturday 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Lunch 1-2

BARMAY STORE
Wallace & Penna. Ave. Downingtown 269-0860

Downingtown Area Mystery Pic

Can you identify the location in this photograph? 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.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

Central Presbyterian Church Community Luncheon

Central Presbyterian Church, 100 W Uwchlan Ave, Downingtown, PA 19335, holds a monthly Community Luncheon on the first Thursday of each month, October through May from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Their ever-popular chili, chicken corn noodle, vegetable beef, and cream of potato soups are sold along with sandwiches, salad platters, homemade desserts and beverages. Gluten free options are available. 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.

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 will meet on the following dates in 2020: January 15, April 15, June 17, and October 21. Meetings are at the Kennett Friends Meeting House on PA Rt 82 (125 W. Sickie St., Kennett Square, PA 19348). Meetings are free and all are welcome. Check www.lymepa.org for directions.

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 is 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.

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.

Historical Society's Wish List

The Downingtown Area Historical Society is a non-profit organization proudly maintaining the 311-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 tools including:
 - Spade shovel
 - Light bulbs
 - Paper towels
 - Large and small trash bags
- 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

P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335

610-269-1709

dths1709@gmail.com

<https://www.downingtownhistory.org>

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



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