



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

June 27, 2019

Volume 2, Issue 12

The Jet Plane Crash in a Lionville Orchard

We had some back-and-forth emails with one of our readers Doug McCord about plane crashes in central Chester County after we mentioned one in a past issue of History Notes. Doug was in contact with Sam Matthews who remembers as a boy, seeing the wreckage of a jet plane in a Lionville orchard in the early 1950s. With more information from Sam, and scouring old newspapers, we were able to piece this story together. Thank you Doug and Sam!

On May 18, 1950, a routine flight of a U.S. Air Force jet trainer plane from Indianapolis, Indiana to Langley Field, Virginia almost turned deadly over Chester County. At the controls of the plane, a Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star, was Major Richard H. Burnor, age 31. Also in the two-seat plane was Lieutenant Henry A. Crescibene, age 23.

It was nighttime when the plane reached northern Virginia and approached their destination. But as they neared Langley Field, the fliers began to have difficulties with the plane's radio. The tower at Langley could not give the pilots a fix on their location. As a result, the two airmen tried to search for another station that could give them their location. They received a strong signal from a station near Washington, DC so they began to head in that direction. But at Washington they had the same problem they had at Langley, so they turned the plane north to find yet another station to get a fix on their course and find a safe place to land.

At right is a two-seat Lockheed T-33 "Shooting Star" similar to the one that crashed near Lionville on May 18, 1950. Between 1948 and 1959 over 6,500 of these planes were built.



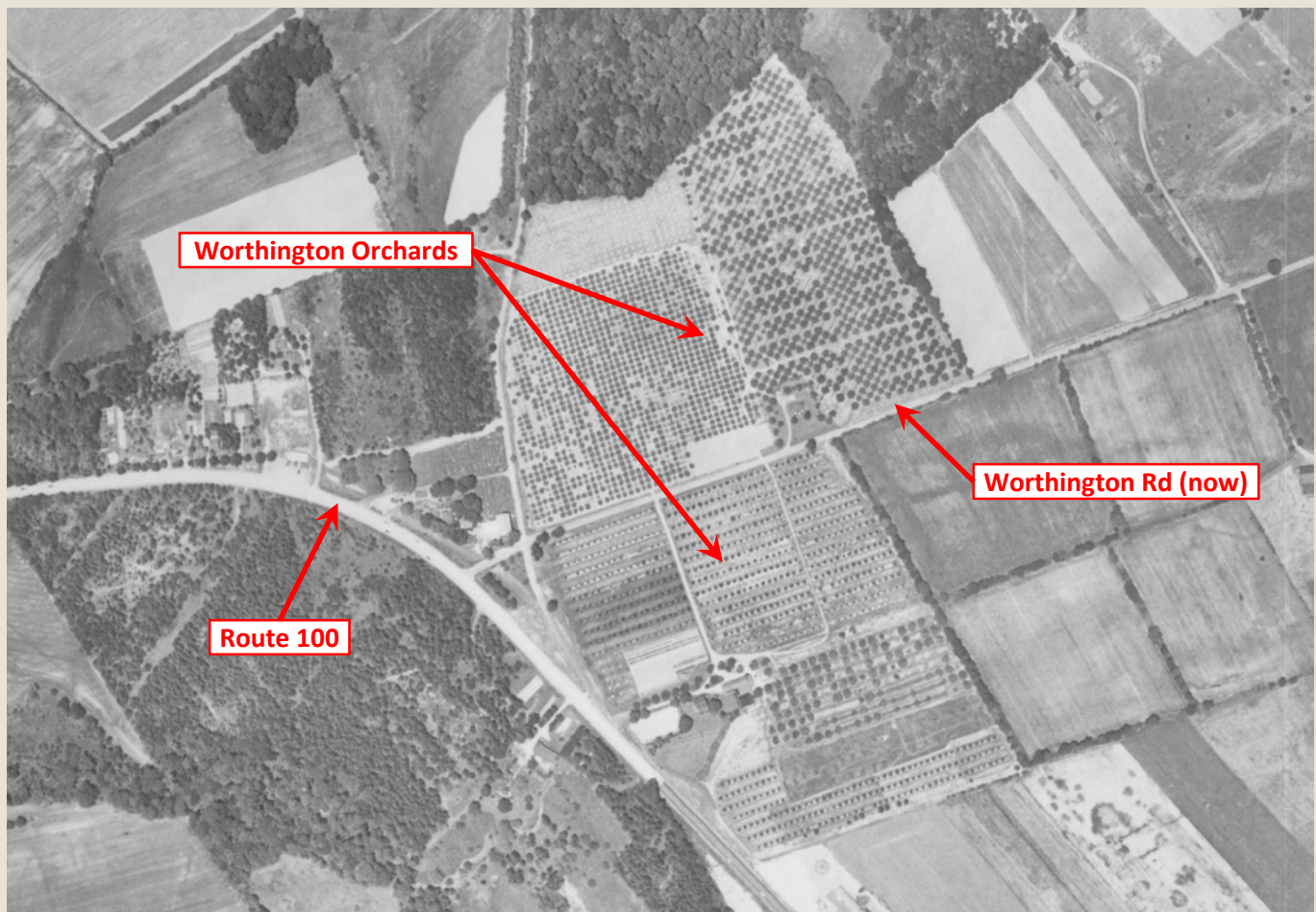
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The two fliers continued north over Maryland, Delaware, and into Pennsylvania where they were still unable to find a station that could give them their location. As they approached West Chester it was now raining heavily and the plane began to run out of fuel. Crescibene radioed the Civil Aeronautics Authority stations in Salisbury, Maryland and Millville, New Jersey that they needed to bail out. According to a newspaper article, after Burnor throttled the jet to its slowest speed...

“...Major Burnor jettisoned the canopy, pulled the plane up, rolled it on its back, put forward trim on it and the air sucked them both out of the cockpit. The chute buckle hit Crescibene across his face, cutting his chin and almost knocking his teeth out.”

They jumped out at 15,000 feet at approximately 10 PM. Despite the darkness and heavy rain, the airmen parachuted to safety, landing north of Exton. Except for Crescibene's cut chin which required three stitches, the men were uninjured. After landing on the ground, the two walked a short distance to Route 100 and began to wave down cars for a trip to the closest town. Three cars passed them before they were picked up and taken to a hotel in West Chester.

The plane itself crashed with an explosion in the apple orchard of H. Russell Worthington, about a mile east of Lionville. Witnesses said the plane was on fire when it hit the ground. Fortunately, it barely missed the home, garage, and water tank of Worthington's son Henry. The Lionville Fire Company responded to the scene and doused the flames.



The 1957 aerial photograph above shows the area east of Lionville along Route 100. The jet plane crashed in the Worthington orchards but we do not know the exact location.

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Local law enforcement and the Pennsylvania State Police, however, did not know the airmen safely bailed out of the downed plane. For several hours they were looking for the two throughout central Chester County. Eventually they received word that the men got picked up and were now in West Chester.

The following day souvenir hunters and the curious in general descended on the site including Sam Matthews and other local kids. Sam remembers the crater in the Worthington orchard and that the government had the site cordoned off. His account matches that of newspaper articles which mentioned guards being posted at the crash site, not only to keep pieces of the wreckage from being taken, but also to protect the Worthington's property. The crater Sam remembers was described in news accounts as ten feet wide and five feet deep. Other than the crater and a few lost apple trees, there were no other damages.

The following day Burnor and Crescibene were driven by the State Police from West Chester to the scene of the wreckage in Lionville. After examining the site they were then taken to the State Police barracks in Devon where Air Force personnel picked them up.

Richard Burnor retired as a Lieutenant Colonel from the Air Force in 1963. He was a veteran of World War II, having flown combat and aerial reconnaissance missions in North Africa and Sicily. While flying a small plane from Sacramento, California to Pocatello, Idaho on February 16, 1975, he reported having icing problems. When he was radioed to turn west and climb in altitude, there was no response. His body was found in the wreckage of his plane nearly two years later near Reno, Nevada.

Henry (Hank) Crescibene joined the U.S. Army Air Corps at age 17 on October 24, 1944. The Second World War ended by the time he finished basic training. Still, he was sent to Japan as an Army clerk with the occupation forces. He was eventually discharged but re-enlisted in 1949 with the U.S. Air Force as part of their Aviation Cadet Program.

At the time of the crash in Lionville, Lt. Crescibene was on temporary duty from the 31st Air Force Group out of Albany, Georgia. His assignment was ferrying new F-84 Thunderjets from Mitchell Field, New York to National Guard units throughout the United States. Crescibene had just delivered a new F-84 to a unit near Tulsa, Oklahoma, and was "hitching" a ride back to the East Coast with Burnor, first stopping in Indianapolis, when they had to bail out over Pennsylvania

Crescibene later saw combat action in Korea flying an F-86 Sabre jet fighter. He was discharged in 1953. He later joined the New Jersey Air National Guard and flew transport planes in Vietnam. He also flew as a pilot for several airlines. Crescibene is 92 and lives in Colts Neck, New Jersey.



At right is are two photographs of Henry (Hank) A. Crescibene. The top image (courtesy of the San Diego Air and Space Museum) is undated but shows Crescibene in the cockpit of at F-84 jet fighter. The bottom image was taken in 2017 and is courtesy of the State of New Jersey, Department of Military and Veteran Affairs.

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A week after the crash, a photograph of the wreckage appeared in the weekly Downingtown Archive.

Wreckage of Jet Plane



Piled up against one of the orchard trees on the farm of Henry J. Worthington, Pine Creek R.I., one mile south east of Lionville, the wreckage shown above is the largest part left of the jet fighter that exploded when it crashed last Thursday evening.

The pilot, Major Richard H. Burnor, of Washington, and passenger Lt. C. H. Ceribene, of Georgia, parachuted to safety minutes before the jet plowed into the orchard, scattering wreckage over more than a 600 yard area.

A Gift of History!

The Historical Society would like to thank Barbara Hughes of Aberdeen, Maryland for donating a very large number of historical items to us! Barbara is the great niece of Emily Lewis who lived on Washington Avenue and passed away in 1991. Emily's niece (and Barbara's mother) Deborah Lewis Adams inherited the items and preserved them. They were subsequently passed onto Barbara.

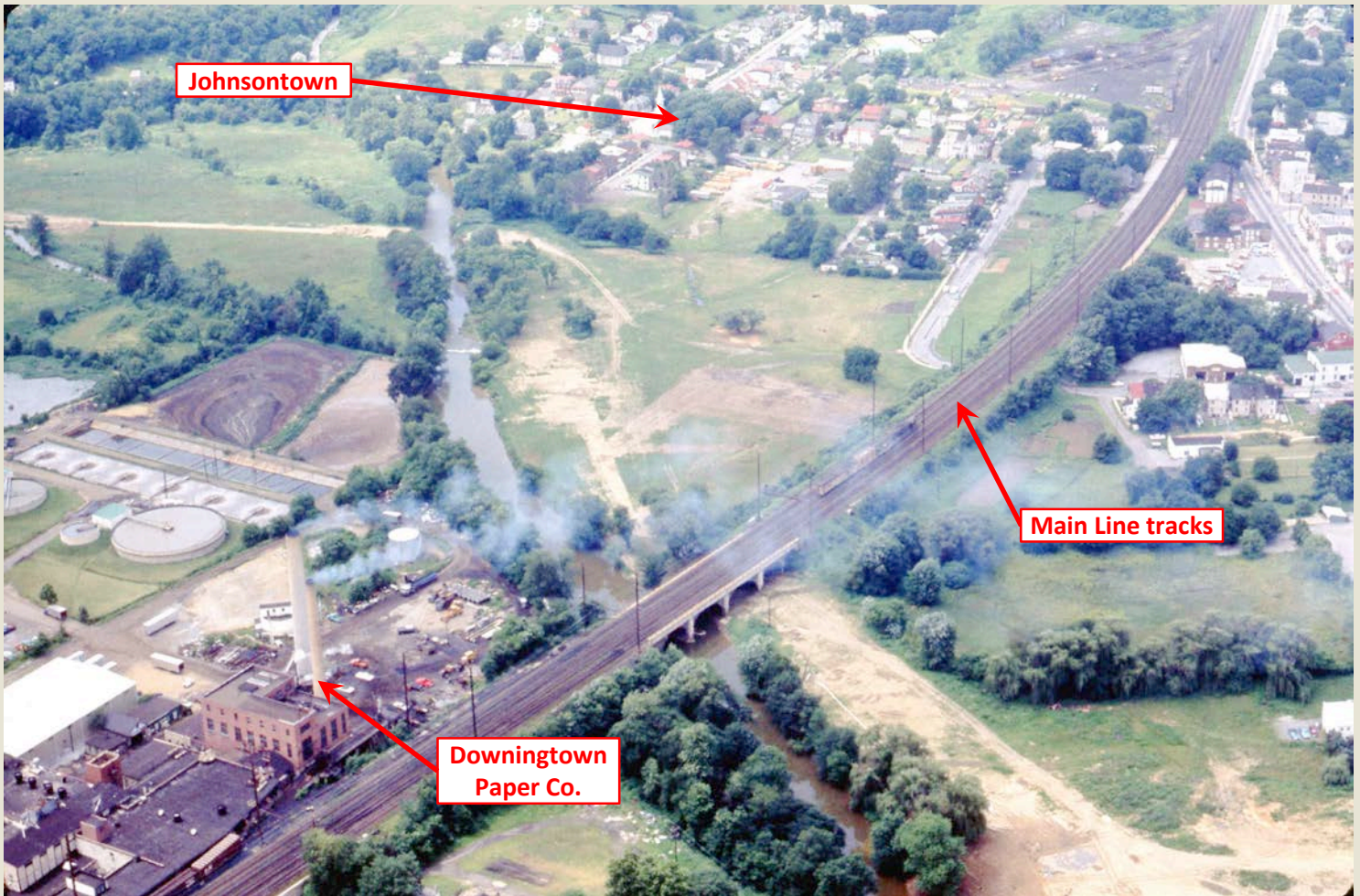
Barbara knew the importance of these items and for them to be kept locally in Downingtown. The gift includes photographs, letters, journals, deeds, certificates, and many other items with a Downingtown history. Some date back to the Revolutionary War! Including Lewis, other family names on documents in the collection include Pollock, Irwin, and Cope. From time to time we will be featuring an item from this collection in future issues of History Notes.

If you have any items related to Downingtown that you feel are of historic value and are looking for a place for them, please consider the Downingtown Area Historical Society. Again, thank you Barbara!



Downingtown Area From Above

This photograph was taken of Downingtown facing southwest in 1967.



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

1875 – In July, a new road was being constructed in Upper Uwchlan Township and a large oak tree needed to be cut down that stood in the way. As workers were pulling out a large root from the tree, they discovered a rusted axe head below it. The oak was two feet in diameter and the workers guessed the tree must have been at least 100 years old, and the axe buried before it started to grow.

1878 – On February 20, Downingtown's William Gable, a brakeman on the Pennsylvania Railroad, was caught between two cars and "had his head badly squeezed." When visited by a newspaper reporter soon after, Gable said he felt his skull was fractured. Some of his teeth were also loose. However, Gable was well known locally as having survived several railroad accidents, including this one. "If he had been any other fellow, he would have been killed long ago" the article said.

1893 – In August, Jesse Quay, who was a well-known resident of Upper Uwchlan Township, was driving his horse and buggy when he spotted Charles Garvine along the road. As a friendly gesture, Quay reached out and tapped Garvine with his whip. Garvine caught the whip and pulled it from Quay. The following day Garvine sued Quay for assault and battery. But Quay then sued Garvine for "highway robbery" for stealing his whip. According to the newspaper article, "from this friendly salute a bitter fight has grown, and all the friends and neighbors of the two men have got into it and the community is divided against itself."

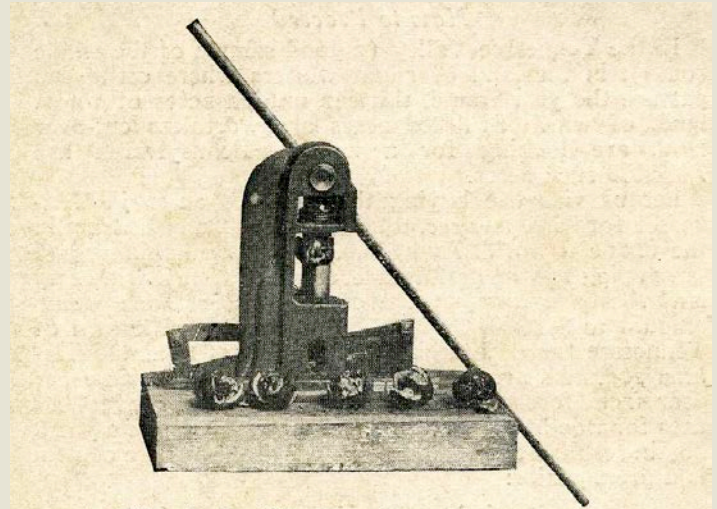
1924 – According to the March 2 issue of the *Reading Times*, "Downingtown has a 'Jack the Peeper' and the women are getting nervous over the matter."

Downingtown Vintage Ad

In a History Notes issue last year we featured a 1924 advertisement for the John W. Hershey Nut Tree Nursery that was located on East Lancaster Avenue across from the Downingtown Friends Meeting. We included the ad to coincide with an article published around the same time in the Philadelphia Inquirer about Hershey:

<https://www.phillymag.com/articles/2018/07/07/downingtown-food-forest-urban-farming/>

The ad on the right is from one of Hershey's price list booklets for his trees. The booklet is in our archives.



The John W. Hershey Nut Cracker

The Hershey Nut Cracker is designed to crack the hardest nuts—all walnuts and hickories—in such a way that the kernels may be taken out in quarters with the fingers. A pick is required for only an occasional piece. The machine will so increase your speed in cracking and picking that it soon pays for itself. Five to seven bushels a day is the average cracking, and one pound of kernels per hour for picking. Price, \$7.00. *Dealers Wanted.*

Ashbridge Artifact

Below is a certificate for 15 shares (at \$5 per share) purchased by Edge Lewis for the Downingtown Baptist Church's New Parsonage Fund in 1906.



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Paul Backenstose is a truly perceptive scholar because he was the first person to identify the location below as the Pennsylvania Railroad's Coal Wharf in Thorndale. The image faces north and the Main Line tracks can be seen in the bottom left.

The image is courtesy of the Hagley Museum and Library. Hopefully in the not-too-distant future we would like to do an article on the coal wharf. It was an amazing structure!



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.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

West Caln Historical Society

The West Caln Historical Society will hold a meeting on Tuesday, July 16, 2019 at 7 P.M. in the West Caln Municipal Building, 721 West Kings Highway, Wagontown, PA on the subject of: **A Tenuous relationship: Abraham and Mary Lincoln**. The speaker will John M. Meicht, educator, historian, and veteran. The presentation will deal with the lives of two enigmatic and influential people in our history. Their lives are intertwined with love, tragedy and war. How did they handle this most difficult time in American history and face the consequences presented to them as husband and wife? The meeting is free and open to all.

Uwchlan Township Historical Commission

The Uwchlan Township Historical Commission will open the Edith P. Moore Schoolhouse (9 North Village Avenue, Lionville) and the John Cadwalader House (21 North Village Avenue, Lionville) on the first Sunday of each month, April through November. Hours for both are 2PM-4PM.

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 Wednesday, April 17, 2019 at 7PM at the Kennett Friends Meeting House on PA Rt 82 (125 W. Sickel St., Kennett Square, PA 19348). This will be a special support meeting to answer your questions, share your experiences, and meet others who are battling Lyme Disease. 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 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
- 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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<https://www.downingtownhistory.org>

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



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