



# Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

April 26, 2018

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## The Flood of 1942

*Downingtown has certainly had its share of floods, but 75 years ago this past summer, on August 9, 1942, it had its most forceful and destructive flood ever. The following story is a reprint of a news article which appeared in the August 13, 1942 issue of "The Archive", a newspaper published weekly in Downingtown.*

Downingtown is slowly digging itself out from the results of the history making flood which completely inundated one third of the Borough last Sunday morning. Terrific rains throughout the previous night caused the Brandywine to be roaring through town at 8 A.M. Danger was not anticipated as the rain had stopped. Therefore, no effort was made to guard against the flooding that occurred an hour later which completely covered all the streets in the low lying parts of the town and began seeping into cellars and basements. An hour later Downingtown was facing a situation never before experienced in the Borough's recorded history.

An alarm was sounded and all firemen, auxiliary firemen and other Defense units were called out to cope with the rapidly increasing danger facing citizens and businesses. All traffic was halted and remained stalled until after past 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

Thousands of people quickly gathered at advantageous spots to watch the whirling devastating rush of the flood which continued to rise for an hour before reaching its peak. Residents began a frenzied effort to rescue automobiles, furniture, and all kinds of merchandise, but losses will be enormous.



*At the time of the flood, this building housed a Buick dealer and Atlantic gas station. The building now houses a glass business and cleaners*

Practically all the industrial plants in and around the borough were affected, and in some places the loss will reach many thousands of dollars. Perhaps the worst sufferer will be the Davey Paper Company, where many valuable motors and other machinery have been ruined as well as quantities of finished stock. At Bicking's Paper Company No. 1 [former Fire Creek/Milito's building] mill some 60 tons of finished stock was ruined and considerable machinery badly injured. The No. 2 mill escaped any material damage. The No. 1 mill of the Downingtown Paper Company, which has been idle for some weeks, incurred a loss from submerged machinery. The water rose three feet in the auxiliary plant of the Downingtown Iron Works [current location of Rite Aid] and destroyed blueprints and other office equipment. Conditions at the plant of Collins & Aikman were not as bad as first reported, and the plant is operating as usual, although the highway in its vicinity was washed out.



*The corner of Washington and Brandywine Avenues*

Shryock Bros. Paper Mill at Dorlans also suffered extensively when flood water submerged the lower part of the mill, ruining much machinery and stock. The Creek Road [Rt. 282] is closed to traffic due to demolished bridges and numerous road cave-ins.

In Coatesville the conditions were similar. The water in some places reached a depth of twenty-five feet and completely inundated the Luken's Steel plant shutting down operations. The damage there may reach a million dollars.

At the present time it is impossible to estimate the damage caused by the flood in Downingtown, but it will easily reach several hundred thousand dollars.

One of the hardest hit was Edward L. Towson, whose funeral home is located in the basement of his residence on Lancaster Avenue. Owing to the rapid rise in the water he was unable to rescue his hearse, a number of caskets and much other funeral paraphernalia. However a body prepared for burial was safely removed to the Keim and Wilson parlors.

J.W. Maxwell's hardware store and the Hess Restaurant were damaged considerably with three feet of water. Hundreds of dollars worth of merchandise in Maxwell's was completely ruined. Four feet of water flooded the basement of the Municipal building including the jail, which fortunately had no occupants at the time.



*This car was a victim to the flooding on Lancaster Avenue in front of Borough Hall.*



The vaults in the concrete basement of the Downingtown National Bank were submerged causing a large quantity of money and checks deposited by merchants late Saturday night to be completely ruined.

At the showrooms of the Downingtown Motor Co., twenty-five new autos and stored autos were ruined by mud and water, and nearby Vollrath Coffee Shop was put out of business until Tuesday. The damage there was great.

Ray G. Sheeler's Chevrolet garage also suffered heavily. The driveway was completely wrecked and pumps put out of commission.



Brandywine Avenue was hit harder than any other section of the town. In scores of homes water rose well above the first flood ruining furniture, rugs, etc. and a great many walls will have to be repapered. The Roosevelt Theater was submerged and was closed for several days. The grocery store of G.H. Wagner [corner of Washington and Brandywine Avenues] suffered heavily from water soaked merchandise as well as the grocery store of Max Morris on Lincoln Highway. Mr. Morris' loss will reach close to \$1,000.



*This photograph of the flood was taken from the railroad tracks facing northeast toward the center of Downingtown. The Borough Hall can be seen on the left of the picture.*



Both the Baptist and Methodist churches suffered greatly from six to eight feet of water in their basements. It is feared that the new pipe organ at the Methodist Church has been ruined.

The only section of West Downingtown to be seriously affected was the lower end of Stuart Avenue where residences were submerged well above the ground flood. The situation here was similar to that experienced by the householders on Brandywine Avenue.

*Above is the old A&P store, now the location of the Downingtown Police Department building. Below is facing the old Downingtown Baptist Church at the northeast corner of West Lancaster and Manor Avenues.*



## Downingtown ~~Group~~ Individual Photo

While going through old issues of the Downingtown Paper Company's monthly publication the *Dopaco Diaries* that are in our archives, we came across an article in the September 1957 issue on Harry Helms, Jr. who had recently joined Dopaco. We are featuring him in this issue because at age 92 Harry has been, and continues to be, an active member of the Society's Board of Directors. Thank you Harry for all your service!



HARRY N. HELMS, JR.

**O**UR NEW Instrument Engineer, Harry Helms, hails from Upper Darby, Pa. He was graduated from West Catholic High School in 1943 and as you can guess, spent some time with Uncle Sam's Infantry. In

Europe, in 1944, he suffered an accident which caused him to be hospitalized and sent home. He received his discharge in March, 1946. Taking good advantage of the G.I. bill, Harry enrolled at Villanova College. Four years and one degree later he emerged from college and accepted a sales-service position with the Jayes Equipment Company in Lansdowne, Pa. He had to get right to work because just a year before he was graduated, he married Miss Jeanne Smyth (no relation to Diary Editor).

Other companies he has been associated with are Westinghouse Electric Company where he worked in the test section of a jet engine manufacturing department and Moore Products Company, manufacturers of Industrial Instruments.

As we mentioned earlier, Harry is our new Instrument Engineer, reporting to George Wagner. He will be responsible for the efficiency of Instruments in all three mills and the power plant.

When not with his family, which now includes Mark (7 yrs.), Maureen (5 yrs.), Michael (3 yrs.) and Margaret (6 mos.), Harry enjoys golfing or participating in Boy Scout activities. Although they are at present living in Drexel Hill, Pa., he said they are keeping their eyes open for a home closer to Downingtown. Can anyone help out a new associate? . . .

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

**1864** – On April 25<sup>th</sup>, a recruit for a New Jersey Civil War regiment died after he jumped off a train near Downingtown as it headed west. He was among a group of other soldiers described as “professional bounty jumpers.” The men would enlist in a regiment, claim any bounty money for enlisting, then desert at the first opportunity. In his possession was \$800 in bounty money and a watch he stole from one of his companions.

**1873** – A cow in East Brandywine Township belonging to Mrs. James Roberts gave birth to four calves in one year. It was also stated that this same “motherly bovine” furnished ten pounds of butter in one week.

**1882** – And speaking of cows, one newspaper reported that on August 29<sup>th</sup>, “David Shelmire, of Downingtown, was surprised the other morning when he got up, to find a cow quietly rubbing her back against the mantel in his parlor. Somehow or other the front door had been left open and the cow seeking a quiet place to pass the night had wandered in. She had chewed up a plug hat and two straw ones that were hanging on the hat rack, had eaten part of an umbrella, a section of the baby's couch, and for desert had taken about half of the plush covering off the sofa. She had slept part of the night on the best rug and from the way things looked around the parlor had made herself thoroughly at home.”



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



## Last Issue's Mystery Pic

**Nancy Duca** and **Ford Greenleaf** are truly perceptive scholars because they were the first to identify the location of the photo on the right as the Ludwig's Corner Horse Show that was probably taken in the early 1960s. We received Nancy's and Ford's responses at exactly the same time so it might have been impossible to determine who pressed 'send' first!





## Ashbridge Artifact

In the Downingtown Area Historical Society's archives at the Ashbridge House we have a Downingtown Paper Company time book from the early 1900s. It's an interesting historical artifact because it gives us a glimpse of the hours worked and wages at the time for the mill's workers. The snapshot below shows the last week of June and first week of July 1900. Most workers put in 12 hour days, but somehow George Martin, who lived right up the street on Brandywine Avenue, put in a full 24-hour day on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Martin and a few others also worked on July 4<sup>th</sup> when most workers were off.

NAMES	M 25	T 26	W 27	T 28	F 29	S 30	M 1	T 2	W 3	T 4	F 5	S 6	No. of Days	Wages per Day	Amount Paid	Amount Due
<i>Two Faddis</i>	3	12	12	12	12	6	6	12	12		12	12	123	14		1722
<i>Phill Kull</i>	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12		12	12	12	132	14		1848
<i>Chas. Brown</i>	8							12	12		12	12	56	14		784
<i>Harry Harvey</i>	6	12	12	12	12	12	6	12		12	12	12	132	14		1848
<i>Geo. Thomas</i>	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12		7	12	24	147	12 1/2		1838
<i>Geo. Martin</i>	12	12	12	12	12	24	12	12	12	12	12	8	164	12 1/2		2050
<i>Frank Wilson</i>	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12		12	12	12	132	12 1/2		1650
<i>Gas. Horat</i>	12	12	12	12	12	12	9	12		12	12	12	129	12 1/2		1613
<i>Geo. Burke</i>	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12		12	12	12	132	11 1/2		1518
<i>Chas. Martin</i>	12	12	12	12	10	10	12	6		6	12	12	116	11 1/2		1334
<i>Gas. Faddis</i>	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12		12	12	12	132	11		1452
<i>John Cranston</i>		12	12	12	12	12	12	12		12	12	12	120	11 1/2		1380
<i>Wayne Haldeman</i>		12	12	12	12	12		12		12	12	6	114	11 1/2		1311

## Downingtown Date Stone

This date stone is located near the top of 116 East Lancaster Avenue. William McFarlan (1827-1906) was a prominent merchant in Downingtown in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the building was often used as a meeting place during that period. We are not sure where the name "Coral" came from. Long-time Downingtown residents will remember the building as the location of Hutchison's Drug Store.



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# Advertisements for Non-Profits

## ***Old Caln Historical Society***

A craft/antique/flea market will be held on May 12th (rain date May 19th) from 9-2 pm on the lawn of the Caln Township Municipal Building, 253 Municipal Drive, Thorndale. Table space is available. For information call Joan 610-384-9496 or Lois 610-384-8153.

## ***Alert Fire Company Golf Outing***

The Fifth Annual Alert Fire Co. No. 1 Golf Outing will be held on May 7, 2018. Information about sponsorship and registration can be found on [www.alertgolfouting.org](http://www.alertgolfouting.org)

## ***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.

## ***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.

## ***Spring 2018 East Brandywine Historical Commission Speakers Series***

The final program in the Spring series will be held on Sunday, May 20 at 3:30 PM at the East Brandywine Township Building. Pamela Powell, Photo Archivist at Chester County Historical Society will present a program called "How Old is That Picture" that will introduce methodology used to assign a date range to historical photograph. Ever wondered how old is that picture in the attic? What date are those family photos? Photographing process and visual clues along with costume and background details will be explained. Time will be allowed for questions and individuals may bring one image with them to be dated.

## ***Farmers Market***

Downingtown Farmer's Market will be located in Kerr Park every Saturday from 9 AM to 1 PM.

## ***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.

## ***Brochure on DARC Classes & Activities***

You can gain access to the latest Downingtown Area Recreational Consortium brochure, listing all classes and activities, at: [www.darc.info/](http://www.darc.info/). For more info, call 610-269-9260, or stop by the DARC office (8:30 AM-4:30 PM, Monday thru Friday), 114 Bell Tavern Road, Downingtown.

## ***Library Newsletter***

You can sign up to get the Downingtown Library's newsletter via: <http://downingtowntownlibrary.us12.list-manage.com>

## ***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/downingtowntown/>, 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).

## 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 May 6<sup>th</sup> @ 1:00 PM**
- **The first Tuesday of the month, 6:30-8:00 PM (with pizza!)**  
**Next one May 1<sup>st</sup> @ 6:30 PM**

Please check future issues of History Notes or our Facebook page for exact time and dates.

## 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:

- A wide, multi-drawer flat file to store maps, and over-size photographs and prints.
- General household items and office supplies including:
  - Light bulbs
  - Paper towels
  - Large and small trash bags
  - Glue sticks (used for our newspaper clippings)
- Gift cards to Home Depot or Lowes. Sometimes we need to make quick purchases so gift cards would come in very handy.

**Thank you to the individual (who wished to remain anonymous) for the Home Depot gift card! It will be used to purchase items that we use on a regular basis to keep the Ashbridge House running.**

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

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

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