



# Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

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## The Shooting of Reverend Paris Stauffer

In 1936, 69-year-old Reverend Paris Stauffer, described by some as a recluse, lived in a cabin on six acres in East Brandywine Township. He had lived there since retiring from the ministry eight years earlier, after having served Lutheran congregations in Pennsylvania, Mississippi, and Washington, DC. The former pastor earned extra money at his "isolated woodland patch" by repairing clocks and watches.

Irwin Stoudt was born in 1919 at Coatesville where his father worked in a blast furnace. At some point in the early-to-mid 1920s the family moved to Philadelphia. His mother Lillian died there in 1927. His father Oliver died soon after, so that by 1930 Irwin along with a brother and two sisters were housed in the City's foster care system. In 1936 at age 16, Stoudt ended up back in Chester County, working on a farm in East Brandywine Township.

The worlds of Paris Stauffer and Irwin Stoudt collided on the evening of June 10, 1936 at Stauffer's cabin in East Brandywine. Stauffer had left his property for a shopping trip and when he returned, he found Stoudt inside his cabin pointing his own .22 caliber rifle at him. Thinking that Stauffer had money, the teenage Stoudt went to the secluded cabin to burglarize it but was surprised when the owner returned. With the youth threatening him, Stauffer smiled and began to approach Stoudt, trying to quell the situation. "Don't smile and throw up your hands," Stoudt said. But Stauffer kept approaching the youth. Stoudt fired the gun and hit Stauffer in the chest, wounding him severely.



*Paris Stauffer owned six acres in East Brandywine Township off Hopewell Road. After being shot by an intruder he crawled a quarter mile to his neighbor David Crawford for help.*

(continued on next page)

Stoudt fled the scene and the bleeding Stauffer crawled a quarter of a mile to the home of his neighbor, Constable David Crawford. Crawford summoned Downingtown's Chief of Police Chester Glisson who drove up to East Brandywine and brought Stauffer to Chester County Hospital in West Chester. Before undergoing surgery, Stauffer told a county detective that he recognized his assailant but did not know his name. But officials were quickly able to identify Stoudt as a prime suspect since he worked on a farm near Stauffer's cabin and fled right after the crime. A warrant was immediately issued for his arrest. Paris Stauffer died at the hospital three days later.

Several weeks later a man fitting Stoudt's description was seen getting on a North Carolina bound truck in New Jersey, but despite their efforts up and down the East Coast he couldn't be found. The trail eventually grew cold.

In Philadelphia in 1941, a gas station attendant named Frank Watson was sought in connection with the robbery of the station's safe. Detectives went to the home where Watson was boarding and could not locate him, but when searching his room they found faded newspaper clippings of the 1936 murder of Stauffer. They eventually caught up with Watson and brought him in for questioning of the robbery. When the detectives brought up the clippings they discovered in his room, Watson confessed to Stauffer's murder. Frank Watson was in fact Irwin Stoudt, and he had been living under an alias in Philadelphia for several years.

Upon hearing of Stoudt's capture and arrest, Chester County authorities immediately went to Philadelphia and brought him back to West Chester for trial. After his arrest, the now 22-year-old Stoudt admitted "I'm glad I have been caught. I haven't been able to get this thing off my mind all these years and I haven't been able to sleep." Stoudt pleaded guilty to the charge of first-degree murder and was sentenced to life imprisonment. It is not clear if Irwin Stoudt was ever released on parole. He died in 1975.



*Irwin Stoudt's mug shot is seen above. He was still wearing his gas station attendant's uniform when he was arrested in Philadelphia in 1941 for the murder of Paris Stauffer in East Brandywine Township.*

## Downingtown Vintage Ad

This ad for Pollock's Feed Mill appeared in the Downingtown Archive in 1923.

The Historical Society was recently gifted the upper half of a Dutch door that was on the old mill and fortunately rescued before the building collapsed. What makes the door especially interesting is that it is covered in carved dates and initials, some of which date back to the early 1800's! We will be featuring the door and its history in a future issue of History Notes.

## Still Doing Business At The Old Stand !

1765



1923

*The tract on which this mill stands was sold from the "Aston Terrace" Property by George Aston to Rodger Hunt in 1739. The road in front of mill was laid out in 1752 and run from Center Square to Lancaster, passing by Nine Dozen and Caln Meeting House. Present Mill was built in 1765, and has been in continuous operation since that time.*

*The first addition made in that time being a Roller Process Flour Mill, added by John T. Pollock. The old mill stones still used in the mill are of the same type Samson pulled for the Philistines, and for the quality of work done have never been improved upon. Presto! The twentieth century craze for speed: an up-to-date Electric Mill has been added by the present owner, but without removing the old stones. On these stones was ground some of the flour used by the American soldiers at Valley Forge.*

*To the north, and within sight of the Mill, there still exists over 200 feet of trenches thrown up by Revolutionary soldiers about the time of the Battle of the Brandywine.*

*Anyone interested in the old landmarks of Colonial history are welcome to visit the Mill at any and all times.*

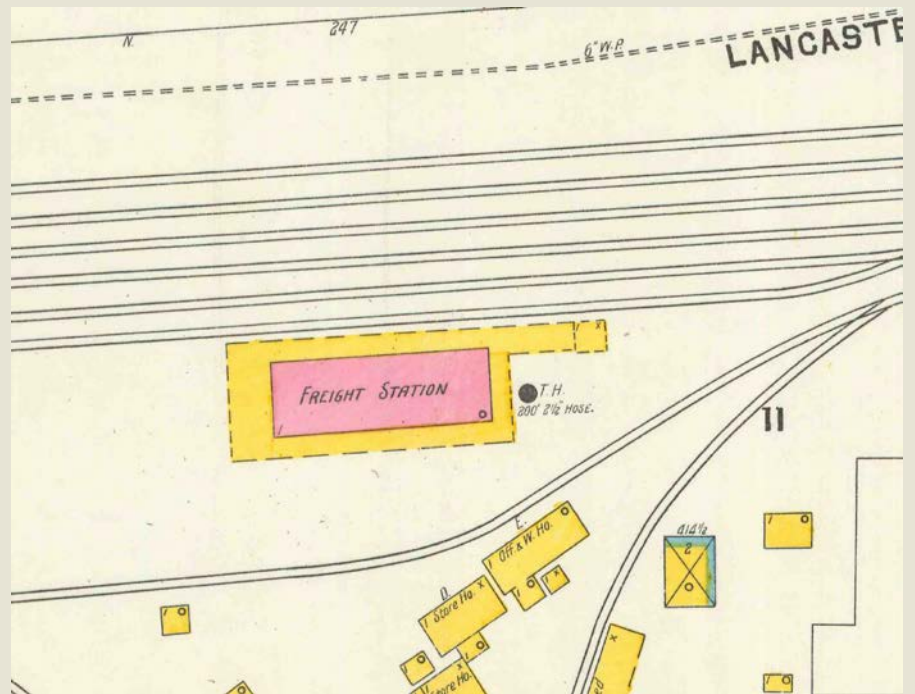
**POLLOCK'S FEED MILL**



## Downingtown Did-You-Know?

Did you know that the Pennsylvania Railroad sent its unclaimed freight to its freight station in Downingtown? Very often shippers marked their goods improperly and as a result the railroad could not forward the items to the proper consignee at the appropriate destination. In 1907 alone, the PRR sent 18,000 packages to Downingtown that were unmarked!

The freight station was located in the rail yard about 100 yards west of the passenger station.



## Downingtown Area Group Photo



This is the Future Farmers of America (FFA) club from Downingtown High School at their Downingtown Farmer's Market display in 1955.



# Downingtown Area From Above



This photograph was taken of the southeast section of Downingtown facing south in 1968.

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

**1915** – Under the headline ***Robbers' Victim Turns Tables on Highwaymen***, the following article appeared: "Leon Taylor Alexander of Downingtown, Pa., was held up and robbed by five highwaymen. He then in turn held up the quintet of robbers himself and recovered all the valuables taken from him. The Alexanders were returning from Wilmington to Downingtown in their car, when the owner and driver saw a red light in the road. Stopping the machine he walked over and was suddenly seized by one highwayman, while two others held their hands over his mouth and rifled his pockets of \$50 in money, a gold watch and chain and diamond ring."

"After being released, Alexander returned to his car and said nothing about the hold-up. He had only proceeded 100 yards, however, when he went back to the scene of the robbery. Flashing and electric light on the gang of five, who were dividing the spoils, he covered them with an automatic pistol and demanded the return of his property. It was all handed over."

**1931** – According to one newspaper "Mrs. Richard L. Fox of Downingtown is being treated for a broken nose because of a bee. It flew into her car and scared the chauffeur so badly he crashed through a fence and hit a tree."

**1938** – In December, Aubrey Cummings divorced his wife Rebecca Cummings of Downingtown due to "slovenly housekeeping." In court, the husband stated that his wife constantly left piled dishes in the sink. "Sometimes they were piled two feet high", he stated. He further complained, "they were never washed until needed for another meal." The couple had separated in 1926 but the divorce wasn't finalized until 12 years later.

Note: Rebecca Cummings died in 1952 and her death certificate reads "Invalid for 25 years" under Occupation, a detail not mentioned in the article.



# 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).

**Do you have an old photograph taken in the Downingtown area that you think might stump your fellow readers as to its location? We would love to include it as a Mystery Pic if you wish to share it. Contact us at [dahs19335@gmail.com](mailto:dahs19335@gmail.com).**



## Last Issue's Mystery Pic

**Patricia DiPietro** is truly a perceptive scholar because she was the first (and only) person to correctly identify the location of last issue's Mystery Pic as the 400 block of Grant Avenue. Patricia lived on the block from 1961 to 1975. The photograph was taken in 1954.



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# Advertisements for Non-Profits

## ***West Caln Historical Society***

The West Caln Historical Society will hold a meeting on Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at the West Caln Municipal Building, 721 West Kings Highway, Wagontown, PA at 7 PM. The program will be "Random Historic Thoughts." The speaker will be Barry Rabin, attorney, singer/songwriter. All are welcome as the meeting is free to all.

## ***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).

# 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!



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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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