



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

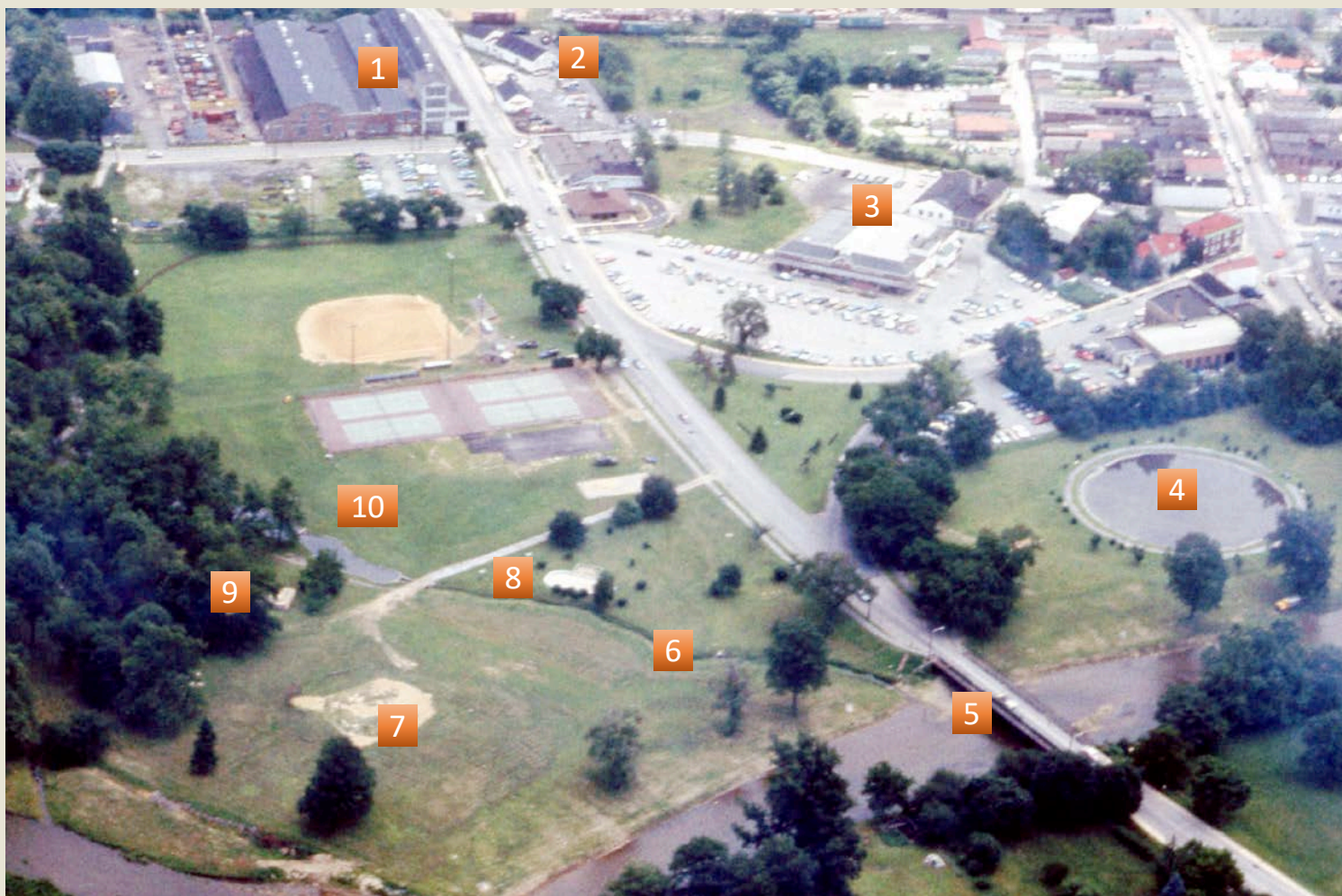
February 13, 2020

Volume 3, Issue 3

Kerr Park 50 Years Ago

The image below of the Kerr Park area was taken fifty years ago this summer. Here are ten things in and around this area that are no longer there or have significantly changed.

1. Former Downingtown Iron Works building (occupied by another company in 1970).
2. J. W. Maxwell & Sons (plumbing and hardware)
3. A & P grocery store (now part of Roberts Honda)
4. Skating rink
5. Pennsylvania Avenue bridge (formerly the trolley bridge located on Lancaster Avenue)
6. Stream from ponds to Brandywine Creek (now piped and covered)
7. Softball diamond
8. Wading pool
9. Bandstand
10. Third pond (now trout pond raceway)



Survey Says!

Thank you to those who took our recent History Notes survey. It was sent to our email subscribers and asked for opinions on content, frequency, and length of our bi-monthly newsletter. The survey also asked about visits to our website and subscriber's presence on Facebook. Two open-ended questions asked for topics that one would like to see in History Notes, as well as general overall comments. We received 335 responses and we really appreciate the feedback!



Why did we do the survey? There were several reasons:

- The Historical Society has a passion for local history, and we want to share that history with all those who have an interest in the Downingtown area. We are looking for the right balance between using a newsletter, social media, website (or perhaps even other modes) in communicating that history. We are also trying to determine what the best mode(s) will be in the future.
- Through the survey, we wanted to see how our readers feel about the current length and frequency of a typical History Notes newsletter, as well as learn about readership characteristics.
- We wanted to gauge readers' thoughts on the current content, especially how relevant History Notes is. We also asked for topics readers would like to see more of, and we invited readers to submit any overall comments they might have.

What were the specific results? In summary...

- More than 90% of respondents read most or all of each History Notes issue.
- 61% feel the ideal frequency should remain as it is (bi-weekly). About 21% would be satisfied with a monthly newsletter, but 15% would like it to be published weekly.
- 91% of respondents feel the length of a typical issue is about right, though 6% are of the opinion that it is too short.
- 63% feel the content is very relevant, while 27% feel it is somewhat relevant.
- We asked readers to rate their overall satisfaction with History Notes on a 0 to 10 scale. The average rating was 9.1. Nearly half (49%) rated it a 10, 25% a 9, and 18% an 8. About 4% rated their overall satisfaction at 6 or below.

What have we learned?

- Most readers were satisfied with the current length, content, and frequency of History Notes. Many especially enjoy the Mystery Pic, Then & Now, and Group Photo sections.
- A number of readers want more recent content (i.e. the 1950s through the 1970s). We agree, and it has been a goal of ours as well. Many of our subjects in History Notes have been from the 1800s or the first half of the 1900s. This is mostly due to many older sources being available electronically. In addition, interesting stories from the 1800s and early 1900s that occurred in Downingtown were often written up in large area newspapers including those published in Philadelphia, Wilmington, Lancaster, and Harrisburg. Starting in the mid-20th century this occurred less and less.

What have we learned (cont.)?

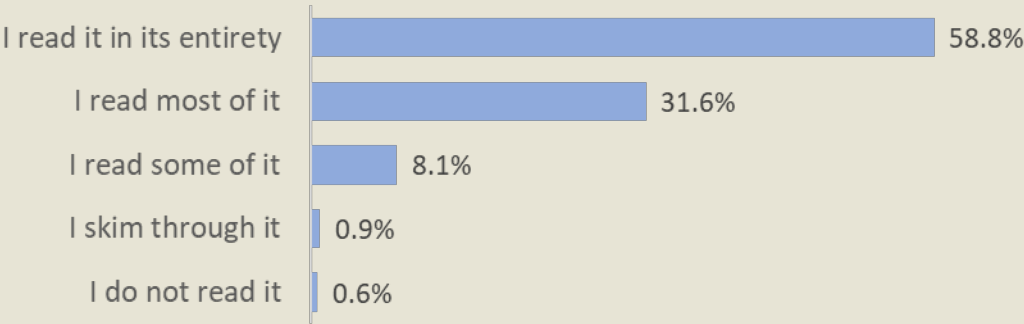
- There were suggestions for more content on other areas in the Downingtown area including Marshallton, East Brandywine, Exton, Romansville, Glenmoore, and Lionville.
- Some respondents preferred the format and content of the Hist-O-Gram which preceded History Notes. We loved the Hist-O-Gram and our former president Parry Desmond did a wonderful job publishing it nearly every week from 2010 to 2017. We wanted to continue with a publication when Parry could no longer do the Hist-O-Gram, but there was no way it could be duplicated. We decided the History Notes format and content would be easiest for us at the time, given our resources. You can read more this change in the final [Hist-O-Gram](#).
- As an historical society we have wanted to do more research on the African American experience in Downingtown. We also received feedback about this in our survey.
- A number of respondents would like to see more articles on schools, local businesses, sports/athletes, and the history of specific areas of Downingtown.
- From time to time, including with our recent survey, we have received feedback that there are sometimes typos, punctuation errors, grammatical errors, and sentences that could have had better word usage. We agree, and we often catch those after-the-fact. But we appreciate the feedback.

What are we going to do and how you can help?

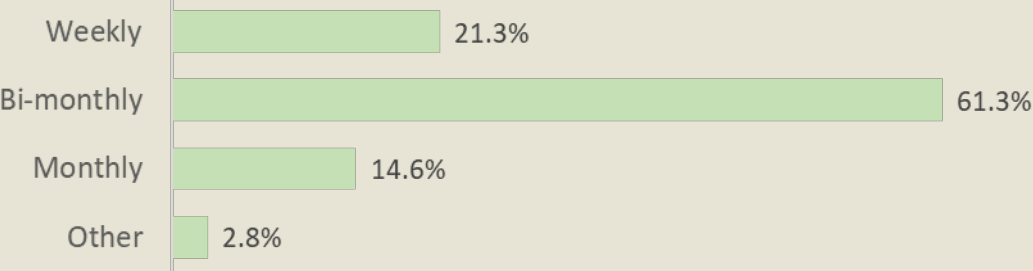
- History Notes is a labor of love, but it does take time to put each issue together. We are not making any changes to the frequency of History Notes now but are considering publishing it monthly at some point. We understand most readers enjoy receiving it twice a month, and there is a not-so-small number who would like it weekly! But we are a small, all-volunteer non-profit with limited resources. If we put out History Notes monthly, we will most likely expand each issue with additional content.
- Many great suggestions were received, and we are going to try to incorporate as many as we can into future History Notes. This includes stories and anecdotes from more recent history that many of our readers will remember. But would you like to contribute in this area? Do you have stories or remembrances that you would like to share?
- Do you have pictures or mementos of the Downingtown area that you would like to share with us? Sometimes an entire story can be developed from just one historic item. Do you have a picture or two that you think would be a challenging Mystery Pic? Are there photo albums or slides you have tucked away? If you do not want to part with anything that's ok! But we would love to make high-quality scans for our archives and return the items to you.
- We would love to do an oral history project with older African American residents on what it was like to grow up in Downingtown. Would you like to help with that project? Do you know of an older resident who would be willing to be interviewed and to share their experiences?
- Some readers asked about contributing monetarily to the Historical Society and that would be great! If you would like donate, please visit our [website](#).

Below are a few charts showing the percent of responses for some of the questions in our survey.

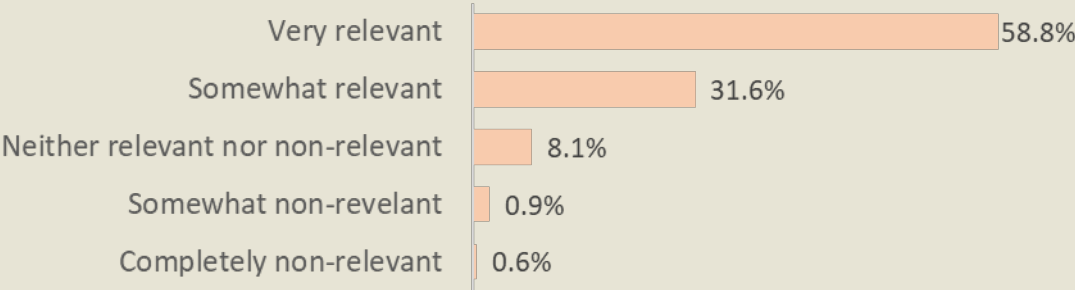
When you receive History Notes which best describes how you read it?



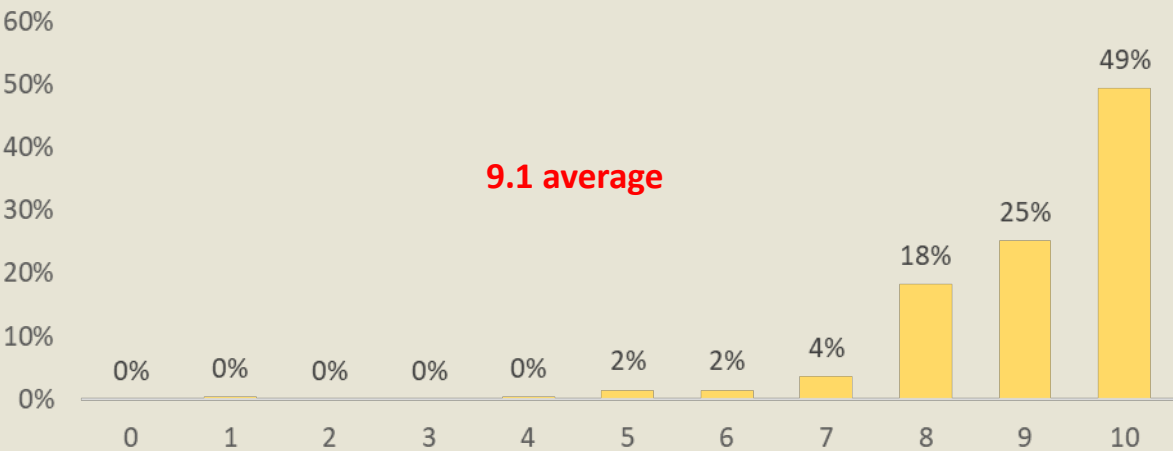
What do you feel the ideal frequency of History Notes should be?



How relevant is the content of History Notes?



On a scale from 0 to 10, overall how satisfied are you with History Notes?



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

1870 – In February, David H. Branson drove 13 steers from his West Brandywine Township farm to Downingtown to load onto a special cattle train for the Philadelphia market. Each steer averaged 2,000 pounds.

1916 – In June, a case of smallpox in Downingtown was reported to the State Department of Health. The patient's name was Clifford Jefferson and in May he came to Pennsylvania from North Carolina. Jefferson was sent to Chester County hospital and 24 members of the railroad track gang he was working with were vaccinated and put under the observation of health authorities.

1927 – In April, one newspaper noted "A barber in Downingtown, Pa., has ruled that 'this town will have one he-man barber shop' and has barred the feminine trade. There could be no surer method of attracting it."

1931 – During the summer a "swimming pool" was built by students of the Downingtown Industrial School in East Brandywine Township by damming the Brandywine Creek that flowed by the school and constructing a stone wall along both banks. The pool was about six feet deep, ten yards wide, and 30 yards long. According to a newspaper article, "dozens of visitors, seeking an inexpensive escape from the heat of the city, daily seek the cold, refreshing water of the pool. They come from West Chester, Coatesville, Downingtown, Chester, Wilmington, Philadelphia and other towns."

Downingtown Area Group Photo

The photograph below is of Grade 3 for the 1961/1962 school year at Beaver Creek Elementary School. Can anyone help identify the kids?



Downingtown Did-You-Know?

Did you know that in 1956 flower boxes were installed on the Lancaster Avenue Bridge over Brandywine Creek? The boxes were built and painted by industrial arts students at Downingtown High School and installed by borough workers. The project was overseen by the Landscape Committee of the Downingtown Improvement Committee. The Girls Scouts, Downingtown Woman's Club and others planted the flowers during the spring of that year.



Downingtown Vintage Ad

This advertisement for Philip Broschard's "Hair Cutting and Shaving Saloon" appeared in the March 17, 1888 issue of the *Chester County Archive*. Broschard is seen in the image below (on the right) standing in front of his business.



HAIR CUTTING
AND
SHAVING SALOON
—(: O :)—
GENTLEMEN will find elegant and comfortable
accommodations at my saloon.
LADIES AND CHILDREN will receive polite
and prompt attention.
Patronage solicited. Charges moderate and
satisfaction guaranteed.
PHILIP BROSCHARD.
OPPOSITE PENN'A R. R. STATION,
DOWNINGTOWN PA.

How Did That Get There?

Several years ago the roof of a Church Street home was being replaced when the bullet on the right was dislodged and fell into the gutter. Someone at the time identified it as a .50 caliber Maynard round dating from the 1800s. If anybody can confirm please let us know. We wonder how it got there in the first place!



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Rahn Brackin is a truly perceptive scholar because he was the first person to identify last issue's Mystery Pic as the home on East Lancaster Avenue in Downingtown where McDonald's is now (as seen in the bottom image taken from the same vantage point). The photograph was taken in the early 1900s when it was owned by the Shelmire family. It was later owned by the Bicking family and was the offices for a period of time for the Bicking Paper Company.



Downingtown Then & Now

Below is the old railroad bridge (or “flyover” in railroad parlance) that goes over the Main Line tracks at the Whitford Train Station. The top image (courtesy of Barriger National Railroad Library) was taken from the back of a train in the 1940s or 1950s. The small station building at Whitford can be seen on the left, but in the bottom image which was taken a couple of years ago, it is completely obscured by trees and brush. Service on this section of railroad (called the Philadelphia and Thorndale Branch) ended in the late 1980s.



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.



East Brandywine Historic Commission Program

**Sunday, March 15, 3:30 p.m. -
"Aren't You Hot in Those Clothes?"**

Have you ever seen women and men at reenactments and historic sites dressed up in clothing of another time period and wondered just how they were tolerating the heat of a summer day in that getup? This lighthearted presentation will explain the whys and wherefores of clothing worn during the 1700s.



Elizabeth Bertheaud is the Historic Site Administrator for Ephrata Cloister, 632 West Main Street in Ephrata. Started in 1732 the community's unique lifestyle allowed the creation of incredible architecture, original music, significant publications, and remarkable art.

Programs are held at the East Brandywine Township Building on Route 322 in Guthriesville.

Advertisements for Non-Profits

West Caln Historical Society

The West Caln Historical Society will hold a meeting on Tuesday, Feb 18, 2020 @7PM at West Caln Municipal Building, 721 West Kings Highway, Wagontown, PA. The subject will be: Local Effects of World War II. The speaker will be Bob Ford, military collector and historian.

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 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:
 - 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

P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335

610-269-1709

dths1709@gmail.com

<https://www.downingtownhistory.org>

Like us on Facebook:



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



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