



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

July 26, 2018

Volume 1, Issue 14

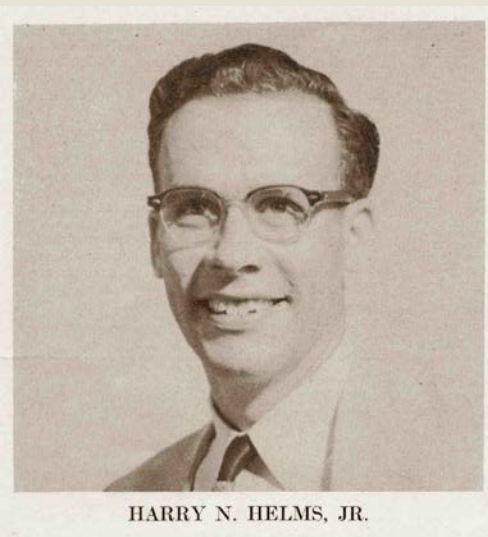
Harry Helms Retires from Historical Society Board

Downingtown Area Historical Society member Harry Helms recently retired from the Society's Board of Directors. Harry, who is 93, had been on the Board for the last 20 years. He was born and raised in Upper Darby but graduated from West Catholic High School in Philadelphia in 1943. Following high school, Harry served in the Army for two and half years, after which he attended Villanova University on the G.I. Bill.

Harry worked for several companies following his graduation from college including Jayes Equipment, Westinghouse Electric, and Moore Products. Harry's expertise in automatic control equipment at Moore Products eventually led to a teaching position at Dobbins Technical School in Philadelphia. Then, in 1957, Harry came to Downingtown when he took a job with the Downingtown Paper Company as an instrument engineer.

Harry was married to his wife Jeanne for 64 years before she passed away in 2013. They had six children. Harry now lives in Freedom Village in West Brandywine.

We wish Harry all the best and again thank him for two decades of service to the Historical Society.



HARRY N. HELMS, JR.

This photo of Harry appeared in the September 1957 issue of the Dopaco Diary after he started working for the Downingtown Paper Company as an instrument engineer.

Downingtown Area Vintage Ad

This 1924 ad is for John W. Hershey's nut tree nursery that was located across Lancaster Avenue from Downingtown Friend's Meeting. You can read about Hershey in a recent article in Philadelphia Magazine.

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

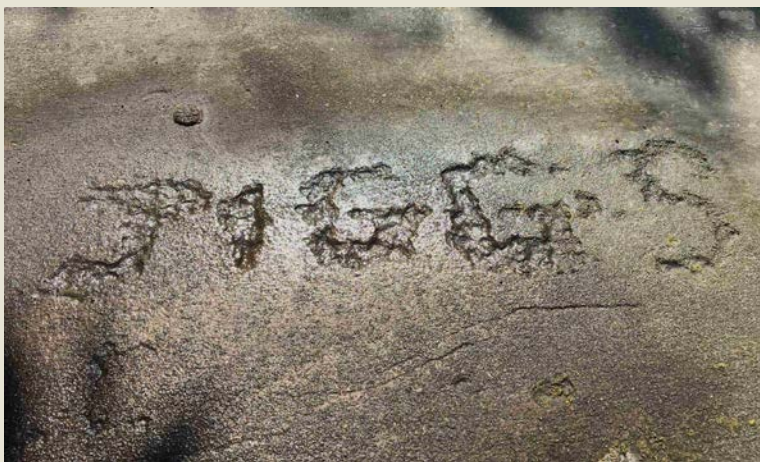
WE WISH TO ANNOUNCE
To Lovers of Trees, and land owners, that they will be welcome at the
Nut Tree Nursery July 4th
or on any Saturday, and learn about the value of grafted Nut Trees for Ornamental Purposes. As the demand far exceeds the supply we would advise immediate placing of orders for early planting. At present can supply any fruit tree, and have a nice list of ornamentals.
REASONABLE PRICES
JOHN W. HERSHEY
Lincoln Highway, at East Borough Line, Downingtown

Names On A Bridge

Historical Society board members were discussing the temporary closure of the Lloyd Avenue bridge over Beaver Creek a few weeks ago when member Donna Capriotti mentioned she thought her father's initials, along with many others, were chiseled on the bridge's capstones. With the bridge out of service at the time, board members Mike Dunn and Jim Sundman decided to take a closer look to see what they could find. Chiseled on the capstones were not only the nickname of Donna's father, but many other locals as well, including a family of three that were identified with a little bit of detective work.

Lewis "Jiggs" Capriotti grew up on Bradford Avenue in the Johnsontown section of Downingtown. He was in the Navy during World War 2 and afterwards had a long career with the Downingtown Manufacturing Company. The photograph on the right shows Lewis with his father Bernardo and dog Brownie in 1942. Donna Capriotti isn't sure when her father chiseled his nickname on the bridge but she thinks it might have been done in the late 1940s.

A little bit of water helped make "Jiggs" more readable on a bright day.



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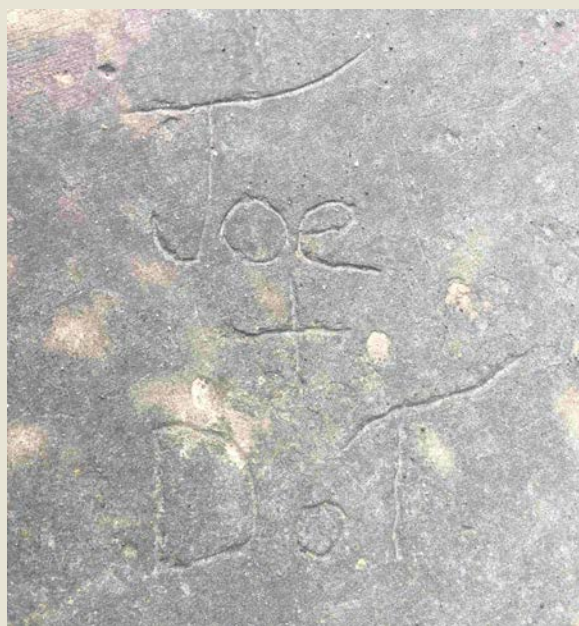
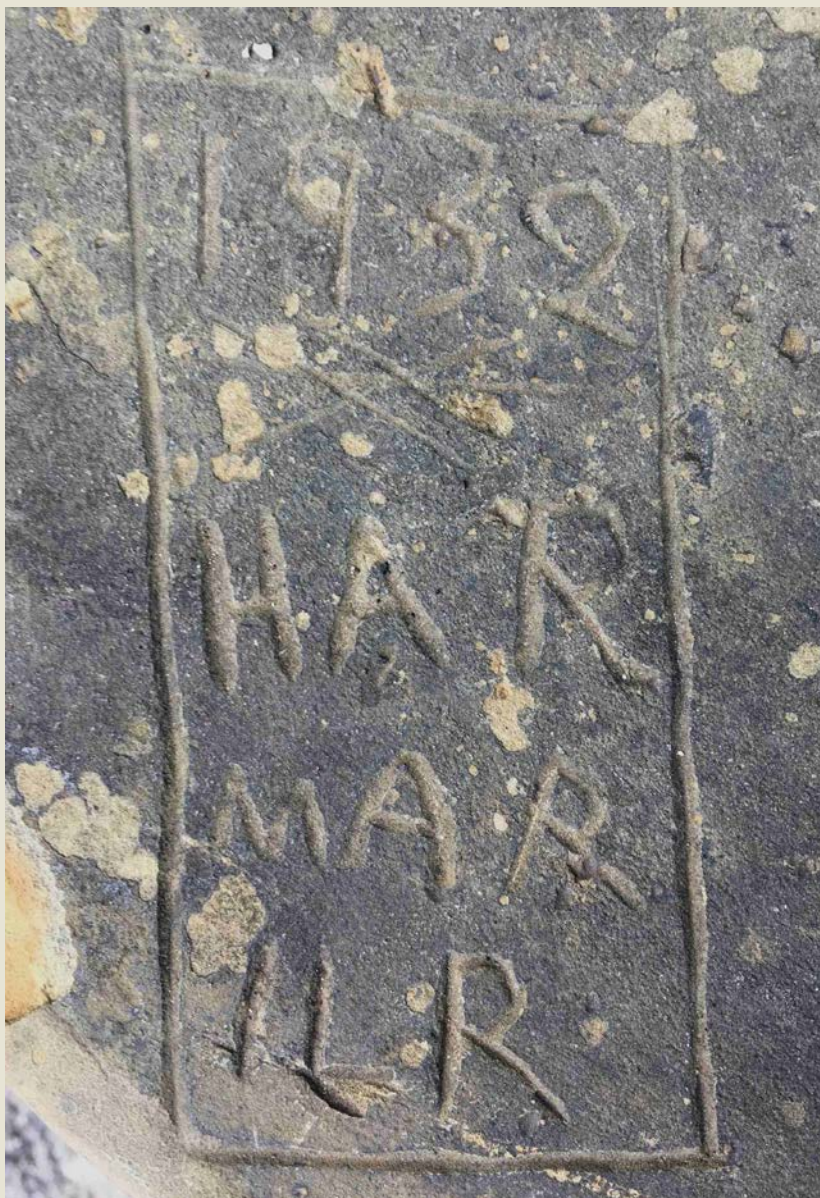
Photo courtesy of Donna Capriotti

These initials carved on the Lloyd Avenue Bridge in 1932 (right) got our attention, so we decided to do a little detective work to see if we could identify who they were. With all the names ending in 'R' we assumed they were from the same family, so we went to the Downingtown Census files. The Historical Society has an electronic database for the Borough for the Census years 1860 to 1940, so it was simply a matter of filtering the data until we (hopefully) got a hit.

First, we filtered the data so we only had the 1930 Census year which was the closest one to when these initials were carved. Second, we filtered the 1930 data for last names beginning with 'R.' Next, we filtered this data for all names beginning with 'H', 'M', and 'I'. And last, we looked for households that contained the same last name and had all three first names that began with these three letters. BINGO! Only one family remained.

It was the Ralston family who lived at 244 Highland Avenue, less than a mile from the bridge. HAR is Helen A. Ralston who was 11 in 1932. Helen was the daughter of Mabel A. Ralston (MAR) who was born in 1902, and Irvin L. Ralston (ILR) who was born in 1898.

Irvin died in 1973 and was a veteran of both World Wars. His wife Mabel died in 1978. Helen died in 1983.



The capstones on the Lloyd Avenue bridge over Beaver Creek are covered in carved names and initials, many from the 1930s and 1940s. Let us know if you have any idea who Joe and Dot are!

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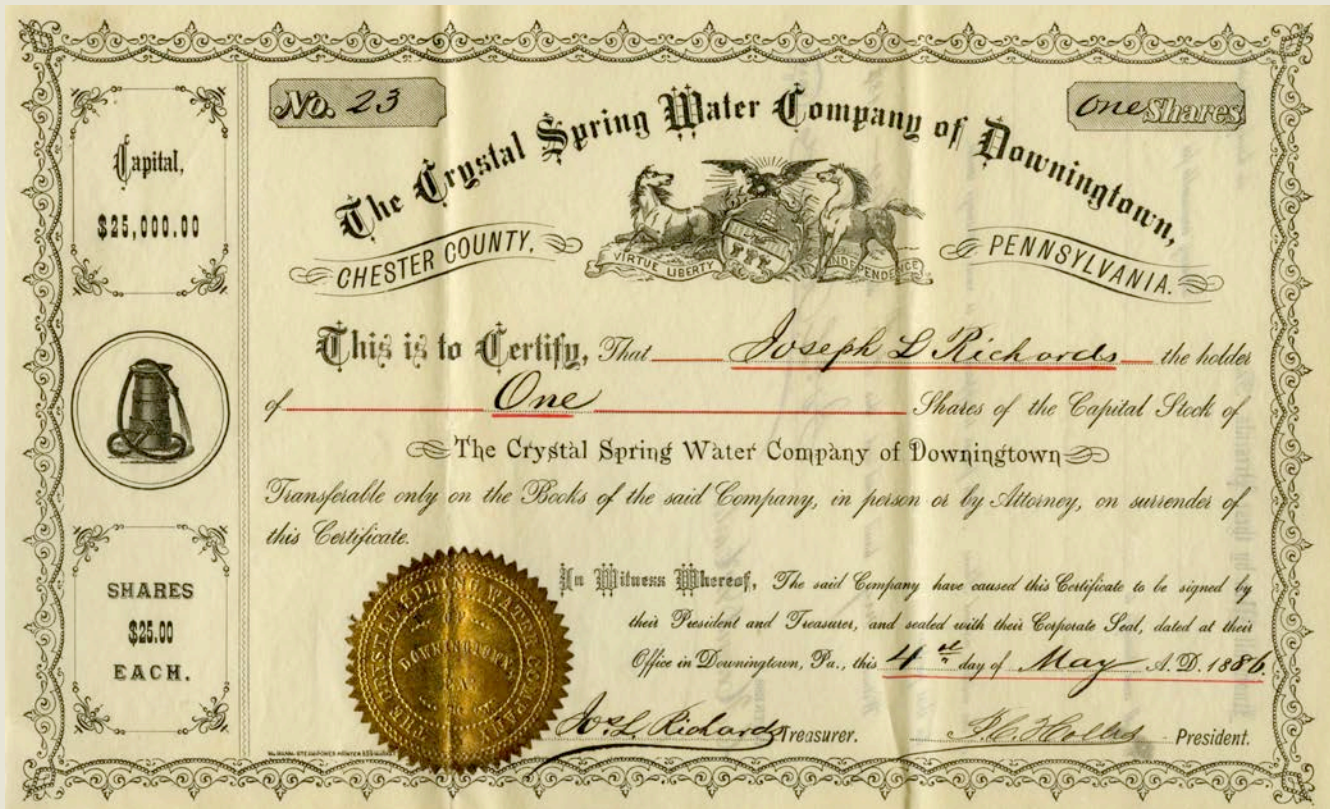
The Lloyd Avenue Bridge over Beaver Creek is County Bridge No. 286 and was built in 1919. Many of the names and initials carved in the bridge's capstones were done in the 1930s and 1940s. There was certainly much less traffic over the bridge back then than there is now!

Downingtown Area Group Photo



We're not sure what was going on in Kerr Park when this photograph was taken in the 1960s (Girl Scouts perhaps?). Pictured is the old band stand in the park. Please let us know if you have any information or if you recognize anyone. Email us at: dahs19335@gmail.com.

Ashbridge Artifact



The **Crystal Spring Water Company** used a spring on Bradford Avenue to supply area homes with fresh water. John R. Johnson (for which Johnstown is named) and Richard M. Boldridge (the owner of the Pennsylvania House Hotel) began the company in 1875. Here is one of the company's stock certificates from 1886.

Downingtown Did-You-Know?

Did you know that from October 29, 1989 to October 25, 1991 Amtrak operated its Metroliner service on weekdays from Downingtown to Washington, DC?

Metroliner service began under the Penn Central Railroad in 1969 and continued when Amtrak took over the Northeast Corridor in 1971. Metroliners service, which operated between New York City and Washington, DC, was generally targeted to business persons. Trains departed the respective cities on the hour during peak periods with some frequencies making the trip in as little as 2 ½ hours. Metroliners began to be phased out starting in 2000 when Amtrak's Acela service debuted. The last Metroliner ran in 2006.

The short-lived Downingtown Metroliner was probably geared to business persons on the Main Line who needed to be in the nation's capitol early in the morning. Oddly, there was no return Metroliner in the afternoon.

Metroliner to Washington

Train Number ►		201
Days of Operation ►		⑦ ExSaSu
Train Service ►		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> R <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> S <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> D <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> T
Downingtown, PA (ET)	Dp	R 6 00A
Malvern, PA		R 6 11A
Paoli, PA		R 6 16A
Ardmore, PA		R 6 32A
Philadelphia, PA ● ⑨		6 50A
Wilmington, DE		7 12A
Baltimore, MD ●		7 56A
Washington, DC ● (ET)	Ar	8 35A

Source: Amtrak

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



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

This was another difficult mystery pic, but **Walter Plank** is truly a perceptive scholar because he was the first to identify the building under construction as the Downingtown Savings and Loan (now BB&T) on the corner of Pennsylvania and Manor Avenues. Nearly all the guesses were in the right area (as the old West Ward School in the background was an identifying feature), but most thought it was either St. Joseph's School on Pennsylvania Avenue or the old Post Office (now Priori Mattress) on Lancaster Avenue.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

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, meets on the 3rd Wednesday of every month at 7PM 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 and programs.

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.

Farmers Market

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

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/. 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://downingtownlibrary.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/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.

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 August 5th @ 1:00 PM
- **The first Tuesday of the month, 6:30-8:00 PM (with pizza!)**
Next one September 4th @ 6:30 PM

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)
- Gift cards to Home Depot or Lowes. Sometimes we need to make quick purchases so gift cards would come in very handy.

A very special Thank You to Hank Hamilton, owner of Dane Decor, for donating two much-needed flat files for storing our maps and large photographs.

Thank you Hank!

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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610-269-1709

dths1709@gmail.com

www.downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org

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Follow us on Twitter:



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



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