



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

December 26, 2019

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Train Passengers Invade Downingtown

On Monday, July 26, 1948, a bridge fire over railroad tracks in Eddington, Bucks County had a significant impact on Downingtown 50 miles away. The fire occurred on the Street Road bridge over the Pennsylvania Railroad's busy main line tracks which connected New York and Philadelphia. It took firefighters more than an hour to bring the fire under control by which time the intense heat dropped the electric lines that powered the trains onto the tracks below. Embers falling from the burning bridge also ignited the wooden ties. As a result, train traffic was completely halted.



The Downingtown train station area is seen in this image which was probably taken in the late 1920s or early 1930s. The photograph was taken from the rear of the train just after it departed from the station. Courtesy of the John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library.

(continued on next page)

Due to the fire, the Pennsylvania Railroad's crack passenger trains from New York to points west including Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Detroit, had to bypass Philadelphia. When these trains reached Trenton, they were re-routed onto the PRR's Trenton Cut-Off to Glen Loch where they joined the Main Line to Pittsburgh. In order not to strand its Philadelphia passengers booked on these trains, the Pennsylvania Railroad shuttled them to Downingtown where they would get off and wait for their intended trains to the west.



Greenleaf Pharmacy was directly across West Lancaster Avenue from the Downingtown train station. The building is now the home of the Station Taproom.

Downingtown station agent Bob Peters had closed the station and gone home for the day when he got an urgent call to return to work. He hurried back to the station from his Brandywine Avenue home. His assistant Charlie Stahlnecker got a similar call and rushed back as well. As confused passengers got off the shuttles from Philadelphia, the two employees were needed to direct them to the Limiteds or to keep them informed as to when their train would arrive. At one point during the evening it was estimated that 1,500 passengers were in and around the station area.

Businesses by the Downingtown station never saw so many customers at once. As they waited for their trains, hungry passengers flocked to local grocery stores and restaurants including Cozzone's Soda Fountain, Roland's Café, and Mittel's Grocery Store. Greenleaf Pharmacy in particular, which was just steps from the station, was an exceptional draw with its soft drinks and ice cream.

PRR track crews repaired the damaged wires and tracks in Eddington by the end of the night, but by then all the re-routed Limiteds had arrived and departed Downingtown. The next day station agents Peters and Stahlnecker received a 'job well-done' by their superiors at the Railroad's headquarters in Philadelphia. And local businesses were counting what were probably record receipts. "Business was never so good," said Ray "Doc" Greenleaf.

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

1910 – In December, a man named John Anderson was traveling through Chester Springs looking for a warm place to stay. He approached West Pikeland Township's Constable Harry McBride and demanded McBride take him to the Chester County Home at Embreeville. McBride responded that he needed to be committed first, at which Anderson said, "Well, I'll be in the county home or jail before night." Anderson then found a hammer and broke windows of the Chester Springs Post Office and the hall of the Patriotic Order of the Sons of America. He was arrested and sentenced to fifteen days in a warm jail.

1924 [during Prohibition] – In May, a Chester County judge ruled that nine barrels of wine confiscated from Downingtown residents during raids must be returned to them. The owners claimed in court that when the wine was seized it was not intoxicating and therefore unlawfully taken. The court agreed and the wine was returned to Downingtown at the County's expense. However, the wine had sat in the basement for some time and by the time it was returned had begun to ferment, "every day adding to the strength of the fluid."

1928 – On August 2, two thousand potato farmers from the East Coast gathered near Downingtown for a two-day conference on growing and marketing potatoes.

Downingtown Area Group Photo

The image below shows Downingtown's Christmas Committee meeting one evening in late 1947 at the office of Everett J. Hoopes Realtor, 143 East Lancaster Avenue.



Luminaria Fundraiser a Success!

We would like to thank those who purchased luminaria from the Historical Society during our recent fundraiser. If you took pictures of your luminaria, we would love to have copies to include when we have next year's fundraiser. Thank you!!!!



Downingtown Vintage Ad

This advertisement for the Pennsylvania Railroad's electric service appeared in the January 13, 1938 issue of the Downingtown Archive. The Main Line was originally electrified to Paoli (in 1915) but in the mid-1930s the project was continued to Harrisburg. The first scheduled electric passenger service took place on January 15, 1938. The electrification project also included the PRR's low-grade freight line which went over the Trestle Bridge south of Downingtown.



Saturday, January 15, 1938
Pennsylvania Railroad
brings
Electrified Service
to Downingtown

Another forward step in railroad history becomes a fact! Downingtown is now linked by electrically operated trains with Harrisburg, Philadelphia and New York. Every mile of the way you flash under the wires behind sleek streamlined locomotives powered by electricity.

Thus Pennsylvania Railroad extends its great area of electrified mileage...first between New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington... now between Harrisburg, Downingtown, Philadelphia and New York—more than 40% of the electrified

standard railroad trackage in the United States. This electrified service (inaugurated January 15) will be in full operation by January 30. After that date all trains between Harrisburg and Philadelphia will be electrically operated.

First Electrified Trains

Saturday, January 15, 1938

EASTBOUND — Pennsylvania Limited

Leave Downingtown	2:34 P.M.
Arrive Paoli	2:52 P.M.
Arrive North Philadelphia	3:26 P.M.

The first electrically operated train, westbound—The Metropolitan—will pass through Downingtown at 10:53 A.M.

PENNSYLVANIA



RAILROAD

Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Russ Faller is a truly perceptive scholar because he was the first person to identify the building on the right as the Lionville Fire Company's first firehouse. The image was taken in 1965 and appeared in the *Downingtown Archive* with the following description: "ORIGINAL FIRE HOUSE. Lionville Fire Company officials can't bring themselves to tear down the original quarters. It was replaced in 1929 by the present quarters, and stands forlornly in a field."

Russ also made us aware of another photograph of the firehouse that is on the website for the Lionville Fire Company (below). This and other historic photographs can be seen here:

[Lionville Fire Company](#)



Downingtown Then & Now

This Then & Now of the old Johnson house on Church Street was part of a larger Then & Now video which we put together for Chester County's Town Tours and Village Walks this past August and was shown at the walk's assembly area in St. Anthony's Lodge. This longer video can be seen on [YouTube](#).



Downingtown Area Mystery Pic

Can you identify what is being shown 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.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

West Caln Historical Society

The West Caln Historical Society will hold a meeting on Tuesday, January 21, 2020 at 7 P.M. in the West Caln Municipal Building, 721 West Kings Highway, Wagontown, PA on the subject of: **Stagecoach Trolley through Lancaster and Chester County**. The speaker will be Herb Fisher, historian and photo collector.

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. Sickel 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>

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



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