



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

September 12, 2019

Volume 2, Issue 17

Johnsontown Walk a Huge Success!

On August 22, Chester County's *Town Tours and Village Walks* series came to the Johnsontown neighborhood of Downingtown. The tour was sponsored by the Downingtown Area Historical Society, Downingtown Historic Commission, and St. Anthony's Lodge. We weren't sure how many patrons would show up to the tour, but we were hoping for at least 250 persons. The official count of those who registered was 320, but we know that there were quite a few other participants who didn't register. The total count, including over 50 volunteers, was well over 400 attendees! Though it was a bit hot that evening, we were fortunate that the rain held off until later in the night.

The tours began at St. Anthony's Lodge and included 11 stops (though that changed to 12 stops when we split a stop to include two presentations). At most stops we were fortunate to have speakers who had a personal connection with their location. After providing an historical context, the speakers were able to share their remembrances and how the location was important to them.

On the following pages are some photographs of the event. The Historical Society, Historical Commission, and St. Anthony's would like to thank all of the attendees to this event.

Right, at St. Anthony's Lodge, a number of volunteers are getting ready for the tours. Our volunteers included a guest speaker(s) at each location, walkers that led each group through Johnsontown, and several core contributors at St. Anthony's who provided water and snacks.



(continued on next page)

Right, as visitors waited for their tours to begin, they were able to go inside St. Anthony's Lodge where old photographs and other historical information about Johnstontown and St. Anthony's were displayed. Especially popular (bottom) was a "Then & Now" video series of images taken in the Johnstontown area. The video can be seen on YouTube here:

[Johnstontown Then & Now](#)



(continued on next page)

Right, a tour is about to begin at St. Anthony's Lodge. Bottom, Joe and Rick Petrella are giving a presentation at the corner of Church Street and Bradford Avenue, in front of what was once the store of their grandfather, Arthur Petrella.



(continued on next page)

In late July we did a walk-through of the tour. The top image below was taken at East Church Street where Michelle Smith practiced her presentation in front of the other volunteers. A little further on in the walk-through Diane Horsey gave a wonderful presentation (bottom image) in poem form on the history of Bethel AME Church on Prospect Avenue.



(continued on next page)

In the top image, Pasquale Bucci gives an overview of the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union Hall at 132 Bradford Avenue. Below, Joe Bird presents at the former St. Joseph Church on Bradford Avenue. The Church of Deliverance, which currently owns the building, graciously opened the church for us as part of the tour.



Downington Did-You-Know?

If you have driven on Boot Road in East Caln Township you may not have thought much about (or even noticed) this non-descript driveway that leads back to several businesses. The driveway is near Quarry Road just east of the bridge over the Amtrak/SEPTA tracks. But did you know that this was the original railroad bed for the Main Line, starting with the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad and then the Pennsylvania Railroad?

When the railroad was originally surveyed and constructed in the early 1830s, going around a hill (though it resulted in longer trackage) was cheaper and faster than excavating through a hill. Such was the case with this section of railroad in East Caln which was laid out in an 'S' curve to avoid significant excavations into the hill through which Valley Creek flowed.

With short, slow trains, a curvy track was more of a nuisance than a real problem. But as trains became faster and longer, curves were problematic, resulting in significant slow-downs as well as taking a toll on equipment. As a result, around 1880 a major project was undertaken by the Pennsylvania Railroad to reduce the curve (though it is still significant) in the Valley Creek Area. This resulted in the abandonment of the piece of trackage seen in the accompanying image. In a future issue of History Notes we will go into greater detail on this project and how it was extremely costly, especially in human lives.



Downingtown Thief Caught in Wisconsin

Paul Lucas was described by Downingtown Chief of Police Joseph Newlin as “a nice young fellow” when he moved into a suite of rooms in the Swan Hotel in the center of town in April 1955. Lucas had just moved to Downingtown as a result of a job transfer to the Downingtown Iron Works on Wallace Avenue from the company’s parent, the Pressed Steel Corporation of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The 25-year-old research engineer had been employed with the company in Wisconsin for more than a year before his transfer to Pennsylvania.

Lucas quickly gained the trust of the Swan’s owner, Charles Shihadeh, as he was able to borrow Shihadeh’s car on August 11 for an errand he said he need to take to Coatesville. But Lucas was never seen again. Along with Shihadeh’s Lincoln sedan, Lucas stole \$1002 that was in an envelope in a filing cabinet drawer in the hotel. A week later the car was found in a Harrisburg garage.

Nearly seven months later, Lucas was caught by the FBI in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was picked up in a stolen car – one that he had taken in the State of Washington and driven back to the Midwest. After his arrest, the FBI revealed that Paul Lucas’ real name was Richard Leroy Scott. He had a lengthy criminal record. Scott ended up being tried in Milwaukee for fleeing Pennsylvania to avoid prosecution, and on the stolen car charge in Washington State.



Richard Leroy Scott (alias Paul Lucas)

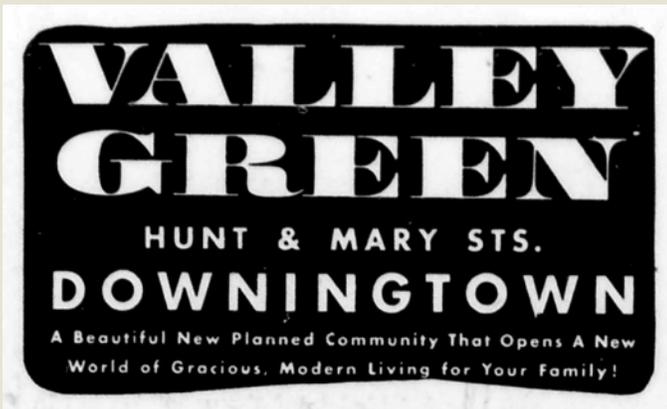
Do You Need a Filing Cabinet, or Two, or Three...?

A while back the Historical Society was given two lateral (wide) filing cabinets which we used for our newspaper clipping archives. As a result of this, and along with some consolidation and organization of our files, we have a number of these “tall” filing cabinets that we are not using and that are taking up precious space in the Ashbridge House. If you would like one (or more), please let us know. Or if you would like to take them off our hands, perhaps as scrap metal, that would be great too. If interested, please email us at dths1709@gmail.com.



Downingtown Vintage Ad

The "Valley Green" homes on Mary Street were advertised in the Downingtown Archive during the spring of 1960.



Spacious, Modern, All Masonry 3 - Bedroom Luxury Homes

The charm of Chester County and its suburban tranquility are combined with the finest architectural design for relaxing, convenient living at Valley Green—Downingtown's newest community. Spacious lawns lead to a charming colonial doorway and into a split-level entrance (with guest closet in the foyer), and then into a spacious living room, full size dining room, and a modern full size kitchen fully equipped including an eye-level oven. The second floor has a large master bed-

room with immense walk-in closet, two additional sunny bedrooms with spacious closets, and modern ceramic tile bathroom. Full size garage with overhead door, a large recreation room, city sewer and water, and planted shrubbery are among the other features. All masonry construction on solid concrete foundation.

\$10,950

FHA APPROVED

Downingtown Area Group Photo

The group photo below shows the winners of the second annual Pepperidge Farm bowling tournament in May 1963. Pictured in the front row (L to R) are Donnie Mull, Ken Jury, Bob Carpenter, Art Hoopes Jr., Marian Barry, and Fred Reutter. Back row (L to R) are Daniel Marcocci, Freda Shingle, Nettie Forgione, Janice Hatfield, Frannie Reutter, and Lily Connor.



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Gregg Nelms is a truly perceptive scholar because he was the first to identify the image on the right as East Lancaster Avenue in East Caln Township. The homes seen here were torn down to make way for the Ashbridge Square shopping center where Home Depot is located. These homes were along the road west of Ashbridge House, in front of where Chick-Fil-A is now.

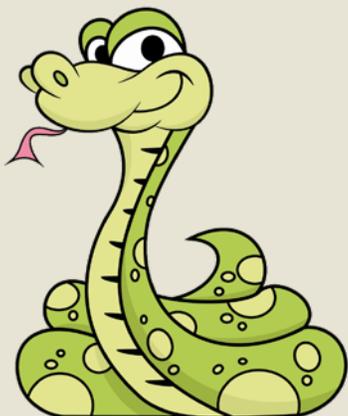


Downingtown Area Mystery Pic

Can you identify the location or the event in the photograph below? Hint: the date was June 6, 1960. 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.



West Bradford's Monster Snakes



In 1900, two monster snakes were reported in West Bradford Township. One, which kept growing in size as the story was re-told, lived on the farm of George Rodeback. Accord to Tryon Pugh, "a truthful resident of the locality" the snake would leave a trail "as big as a wide wagon tire" in the dust when it crossed a road. The snake was said to have waited for horse teams to approach on the road then crossed ahead of them in order to scare the unsuspecting animals. It also was said to have lost several inches off his tail as he played this game.

Another West Bradford snake took a plow hostage. Frank Pugh and Harry Wickersham were plowing in a field near Embreeville when they stopped for their noon dinner. When they returned, they discovered an enormous black snake was sunning itself on the plow they left in the field, having wrapped itself around the handles. As Pugh and Wickersham discussed the situation the snake unwrapped itself, at which time the pair made a "grand charge" and chased the reptile around the field. After a 15-minute pursuit, the snake got away.

Advertisements for Non-Profits

West Caln Historical Society

The West Caln Historical Society will hold a meeting on Tuesday, September 17, 2019 at 7 P.M. in the West Caln Municipal Building, 721 West Kings Highway, Wagontown, PA on the subject of: **History of September Farm (A Cheesy Success Story)**. The speaker will be David Rotelle, co-founder of September Farm. David was honored by Chester County Commissioners as the Chester County Farmer of the Year in 2013. David and Roberta Rotelle say the business began in their Kitchen, and now they produce many cheeses and yogurt, which are the cornerstones of their business.

Fall 2019 East Brandywine Historical Commission Speakers Series. All programs are held at 3:30 p.m. at the East Brandywine Township Building

Sunday, September 15th - "Property Research in East Brandywine Township." The speaker is John E. Smith III, Assistant Archivist for Chester County Archives. Chester County Archives.

Sunday, October 20th - "Penn and the Lenape." The speaker is Doug Miller, Director of Pennsbury Manor – William and Hannah Penn's home.

Sunday, November 17th - "History of the American Flag." The speaker is Michael Rapp. Michael and his wife Jeanne owned Brandywine Flags from 1995"

Uwchlan Township Historical Commission

The Uwchlan Township Historical Commission will open the Edith P. Moore Schoolhouse (9 North Village Avenue, Lionville) and the John Cadwalader House (21 North Village Avenue, Lionville) on the first Sunday of each month, April through November. Hours for both are 2PM-4PM.

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 Wednesday, October 16, 2019 at 7PM at the Kennett Friends Meeting House on PA Rt 82 (125 W. Sickie St., Kennett Square, PA 19348). This will be a special support meeting to answer your questions, share your experiences, and meet others who are battling Lyme Disease. 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:
 - Pens and pencils
 - 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:



Follow us on Twitter:



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



DAHS Board of Directors

President: Phil Dague

Vice President: Jim Sundman

Recording Secretary: Marion Piccolomini

Corresponding Secretary:

Treasurer: Lauren Fagan

Directors: Mike Dunn, Robin Ashby, Jordan Staub,
Karen Steinbach

Presidents Emeritus: Roger Grigson, Parry Desmond