



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

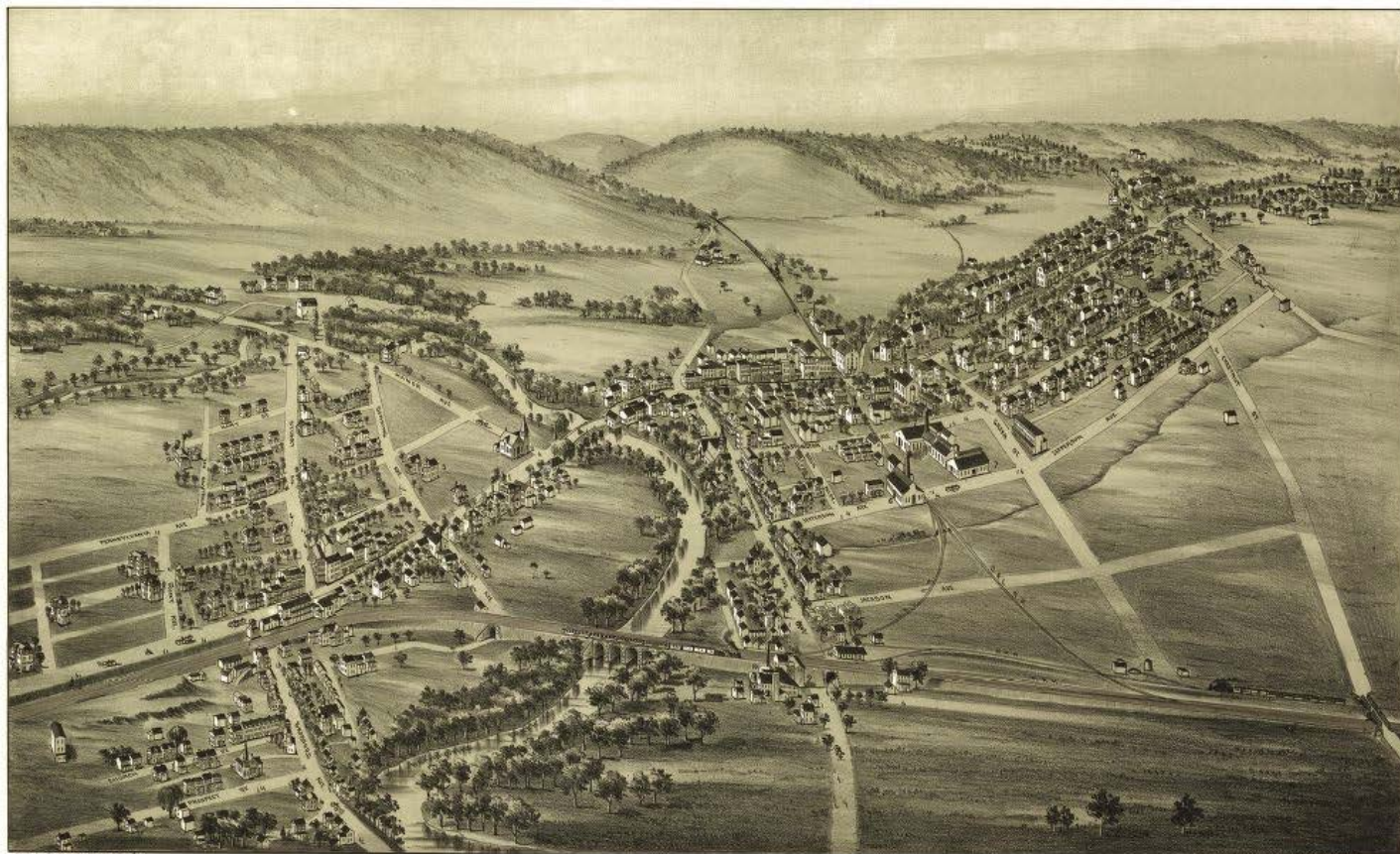
January 25, 2018

Volume 1, Issue 2

Thaddeus M. Fowler's 1893 Bird's Eye View of Downingtown

In 1893, a man barely five feet tall hobbled up and down the streets of Downingtown sketching in precise detail each building and landmark he passed. Thaddeus Mortimer Fowler, age 51 and crippled from an old Civil War wound to his foot, came to Downingtown that year to draw the town from a bird's eye view, or panorama.

Fowler's artistic work began soon after being discharged from the Union army in February 1863 due to his disability. It was at that time he took up photography, and eventually went to work in his uncle's photographic studio in Madison, Wisconsin. During his time in Madison he became acquainted with other artists who were experimenting with aerial drawing. Fowler took up the skill, and after perfecting it, left Wisconsin and set out on his own, going from town to town drawing bird's eye views and selling the prints to earn a living. (continued on next page)



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Ghiesler County Pennsylvania.
1893.

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M. E. LAMSON.
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Downingtown
1893. 1893
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Fowler eventually married and settled in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, but spent much of the time on the road. In some years he would draw dozens of towns, but would try to stay in one geographic area to keep travel to a minimum. In one particular place, a resident asked him how it was possible to sketch from this perspective. He simply replied, "I just imagine I'm a bird flying over the town."

When he came to Downingtown in 1893, Fowler was at about the mid-point in his career. He would end up drawing over 400 panoramic views throughout the United States and Canada. Of these, about half were of Pennsylvania towns. It is believed that Downingtown is the only Chester County town he drew.

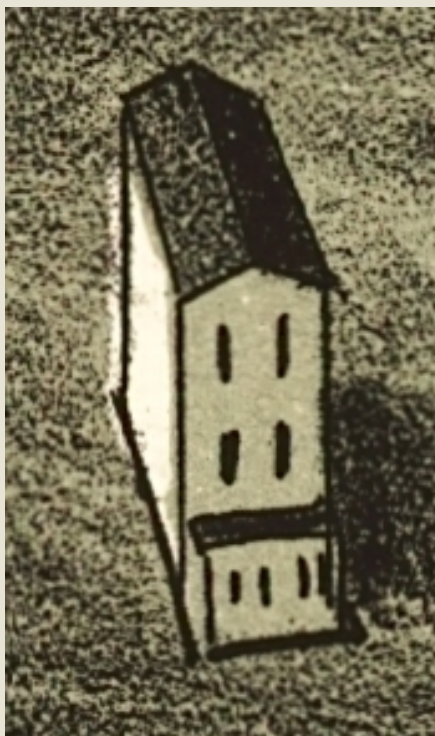
Like most of Fowler's drawings, Downingtown's is very accurate and detailed, and offers us much in the way of historic value. While the panorama is not entirely to scale, and there is some artistic license, the overall appearance is superb. It's not only a beautiful image to view in its entirety, but can also be examined in detail. In some ways it's like a 19th century version of Google Street View. If you live in a home in Downingtown built before 1893, it is most likely shown on Fowler bird's-eye-view. Fortunately, if you would like to get a copy at a high-resolution it can be downloaded from the Library of Congress' website here: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3824d.pm007620/>

Fowler's 1893 Bird's Eye View In Detail

Fowler's detailed work is especially noticeable on East Lancaster Avenue (right). The building labeled "9" is the Shelmire Mill (where Georgio's Restaurant is now located). The building labeled "B" is the old Central Presbyterian Church (now Dane Décor). The home east and north of the two respectively is where McDonald's is now located.



Below is the only known view of the shoe factory that was at the top of Church Street.



Below, the triangle-shaped dormers on these Church Street row homes can still be seen today.



Downingtown Mystery Pic

Can you name the street shown in this photograph on the right?

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



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Steve Marcocci is truly a perceptive scholar because he was the first person to identify the location of the Atlantic Service Station in the picture on the left. It was on West Lancaster Avenue where Turkey Hill is now located. The station opened in 1940 on Easter Sunday.

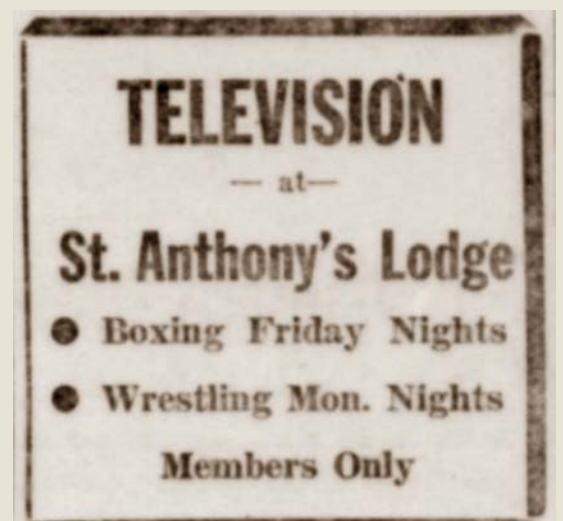
This must have been a standard design because there were guesses of other Atlantic station locations along Route 30.



Downingtown Vintage Ad

In 1950, about 9% of American homes had a TV. In 1947, when this ad was published, it was even less. So it can be assumed that very few Downingtown homes had a TV in the late 1940s.

But if one was a member of St. Anthony's Lodge (or perhaps of another organization in town), they could watch the latest boxing and wrestling bouts!



Downingtown Group Photo



This photo was taken on a school field trip to the old water works on Poorhouse Road. However, we do not know the school or the year (it might be the late 60s). If someone can help us, please let us know. Email us at dahs19335@gmail.com.

Downingtown Date Stone

This issue's date stone from 1860 is located on the brick base of the Downingtown United Methodist Church's signpost at 761 East Lancaster Avenue. The 1860 building was actually located about a half mile to the west on Lancaster Avenue, about where the parking lot for East Ward School is now.

The church's first building was built in 1833 across from where the 1860 structure was built. In 1890, the church moved to a much larger building on Brandywine Avenue which served the congregation until they moved to its current location in 1982.

It looks like there may have been some type of inscription in the space above the date.



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

1834 – The Downingtown Spectator reported on Abner Sterne, a laborer on the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad, who jumped off the newly-completed railroad bridge over the Brandywine River at Coatesville with the aid of a parachute. With 2,000 spectators watching on July 4th, Sterne “took his seat in the parachute, displaying evident feelings of regret at his undertaking, and descended to the waters below, a distance of one hundred feet.” He was uninjured and when he reached the Brandywine’s shore received a warm embrace from a woman.

1877 – Passengers riding on the railroad noted an unusual phenomenon on December 6th. For a distance of fifteen miles to the east of Downingtown there was a continuous coating of snow on the south side of the tracks, but not a flake of snow on the north side.

1888 – The Philadelphia Times reported on July 22 that in Downingtown, “the heat of the week is driving many of our people to the seashore or mountains and the town is consequently unusually dull.”

1900 – Miss Mary Walker of Downingtown along with a large crowd, waited anxiously at St. Joseph’s Church for her fiancé, Joseph Coughlin of Philadelphia, to show up for their wedding. After waiting more than an hour, Father Reilly dismissed the congregation. It is especially mysterious because the couple had a furnished home ready for them in Philadelphia. No word on whether the couple ever tied the knot.

1924 – As the West Chester-Downingtown trolley approached a curve near the trestle bridge south of the Borough, it ran into a registered Jersey cow owned by John Kerr. According to one newspaper, “a near panic occurred among the passengers and one woman fainted but the car kept the rails and was but slightly damaged.” There was no word on what happened to the cow.

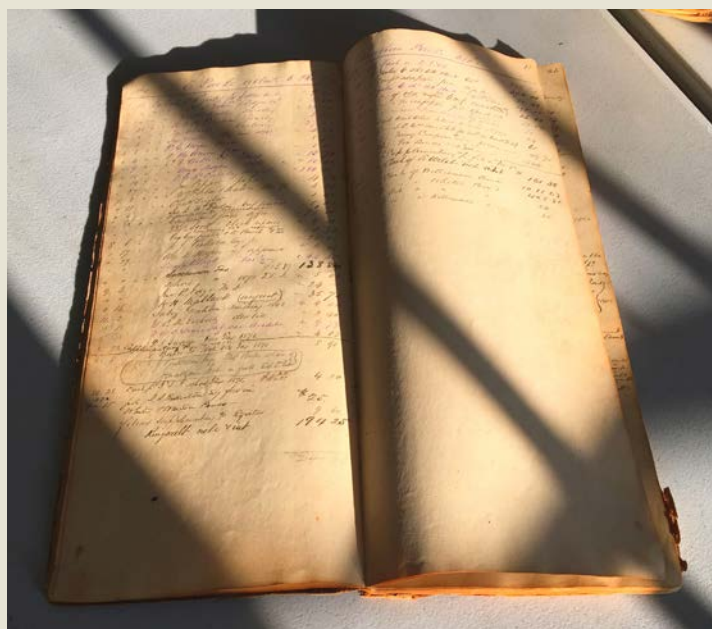
1946 – On December 17th, a small plane piloted by Carl Evers landed in the farm field of Frank and Elizabeth Smedley in East Caln Township. Evers was flying from Texas to New York City when he encountered thick fog and put down his plane just east of Downingtown. After breakfasting with the Smedleys, the fog lifted and Evers continued his flight.

Ashbridge Artifacts

Interesting and historic items kept at our Ashbridge House headquarters

A friend of the Historical Society recently sent us this ledger of Jacob E. Parke from Downingtown that was passed down in their family. Some entries go back to the 1860s. Parke did a lot of business in town and it is interesting going through the ledger and noting the value of household items, farming implements, and real estate in the mid-to-late 1800s. A lot of familiar Downingtown names are in the ledger including other Parkes, Downing, Tutton, Ringwalt, Edge, and Cox.

We are grateful when we receive any gift that has a tie to Downingtown. If you have photographs, letters, or other items, and would like to gift them to the Society, we would certainly love to have them as part of our archives.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

Farmers Market

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

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. 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.

Senior Center Programs & Activities

You'll find information about the Downingtown Area Senior Center programs and activities at: www.downingtownsensors.org

Lyme Disease

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 third Wednesday of every month at 7 PM at the Kennett Friends Meeting House on Route 82 (125 W. Sickie St. Kennett Square). Meetings are free and all are welcome. Check www.lymepa.org for directions and program information.

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>

Banquet Room for rent

The Downingtown (Williamson) Masonic Lodge, a non-profit organization located at 210 Manor Ave. has a Banquet Room for rent. The area is perfect for parties of up to 80 people and has a full kitchen. Rental fees are reasonable. Call 610-269-3555 for more information.

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

Please check future issues of History Notes or our Facebook page for exact time and dates.

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:

- A wide, multi-drawer flat file to store maps, and over-size photographs and prints.
- 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.

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

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www.downingtownareahistoricalociety.org

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



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