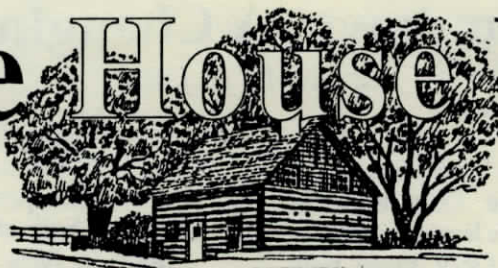


The House Log



Volume 6, Number 1

Winter, 2001

A PUBLICATION OF THE DOWNINGTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The President's Message

by Roger Grigson

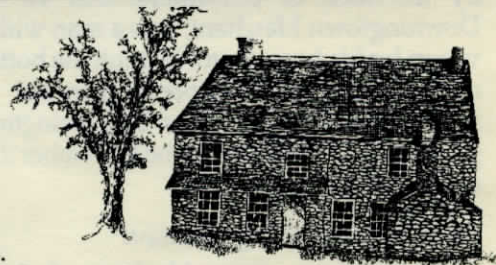
We are well into the Ashbridge House project and though slow, things are developing positively.

We must be doing something right—membership has doubled to 185 to date. The contribution of some of our members has been outstanding. Ernie Jameson has gotten us some electric outlets and cleaned up and covered with Plexiglas, the first floor windows. Bill Woodruff, through the Luminaria Christmas project, not only secured \$2400, but gave Downingtown 21,000 candles December 24, a feat of great magnitude.

Our youth programs are barely getting off the ground, but the digs on November 11 with 24 Downingtown school children, under the direction of Debbie Estep, Tom Waters and Nancy D'Angelo were very rewarding.

Our "Raising the Roof" fundraiser on September 16 was successful in raising money for the roof and having 125 people attend. Many people contributed to make it such a success, such as the student guides

and the reenactors of the 97th Volunteers.



The Downingtown Historical Society hosted the Downingtown Chamber luncheon on November 20, with Susanna Brody giving tours of the Ashbridge House. Other ongoing activities include the formation of an increased archival committee to handle the increasing inquiries on genealogy and history of the area.

The challenges of the Society are enormous. With the help of volunteers, over 8 tons of junk was removed from the Ashbridge House over the summer. If we are to grow, 10-20 active members will no longer do the job. We need the wide range of skills our membership possesses to move on.

Please call me with any questions at 610-269-1167. Hope to see all of you at our March meeting!

Historic Hike, Dec. 9th

The East Caln parking lot was the assembly place for 15 students and adults on December 9 who were in quest of 40 Revolutionary Soldier graves, by tradition said to be buried near the barn of Joseph Downing. Armed with maps and compasses, the group broke into 3 teams to begin their work.

During the Revolutionary War, meetinghouses and especially large barns were commandeered for use as hospitals. Entries from the diary of Rev. Spraat, visiting clergymen to troops housed in these makeshift hospitals, suggest that on August 5, 1778, he put his horse at the commissary in Downingtown and held services for 71 patients on August 7, 1778. Tradition holds that 40 men died at the barn and were buried next to it.

After much exploration, the group found the barn foundation, but are still not certain of the location of the graves themselves. Hans Schmidt of the DOWNINGTOWN LEDGER, a reporter who wrote of the hike, wants to be the first to know when the actual graves are found.

Our Website: Thanks to the diligent efforts of Jay Byerly, DHS has an attractive, informative and expanded-upon website which is connected to several Chester County links by simply keying in "downingtown historical society" or http://members.xoom.com/dhs_pa



The House Log, Vol. 6, No. 1, ©2001 Downingtown Historical Society. Articles and information on events of historical interest welcomed, subject to editorial revision and approval. Send articles to DHS, P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335. Membership: \$10 individual; \$15 family; \$5 senior, \$3 student.



Officers: Roger Grigson, president; Don Greenleaf, vice president; Nancy D'Angelo, secretary; Wesley Sollenberger, treasurer. Board: Joyce Benfer, Jay Byerly, Barbara Cornwell, Harry Helms, Ernie Jameson, Ruth Lowe and Bill Woodruff. *House Log* Editors: Carol Grigson and Ruth Lowe.

Downingtown, A Changing Town

by Ruth E. Lowe

Favorable Forecast

The year 1897 had not been prosperous for Downingtown businessmen. The Downingtown Manufacturing Company, the town's largest employer had been idle for six months. Only three new houses had been built. Local merchants were affected by the lack of customers. But H. B. Sides, a Downingtown Merchant, was a man with hope and a vision for his hometown. "I think the bottom has been reached in business depression in our town as we look forward to the New Year bringing an era of prosperity," said Sides in the December 22, 1897 issue of the Daily Local News.

Ideal Manufacturing Location

Downingtown was an ideal manufacturing location in 1900. Besides being on the Brandywine Creek, it had three different railroads, two free turnpikes and one trolley road passing through the town. Downingtown was the hub of Chester County. In addition, railroads were convenient to the coal regions, as well as the main cities of the East Coast. Land was available in town for building manufacturing plants and houses for workers. There were a variety of stores and fine fresh farm products to meet the worker's basic needs, and Downingtown had a beautiful setting, being surrounded by rolling hills and dales.

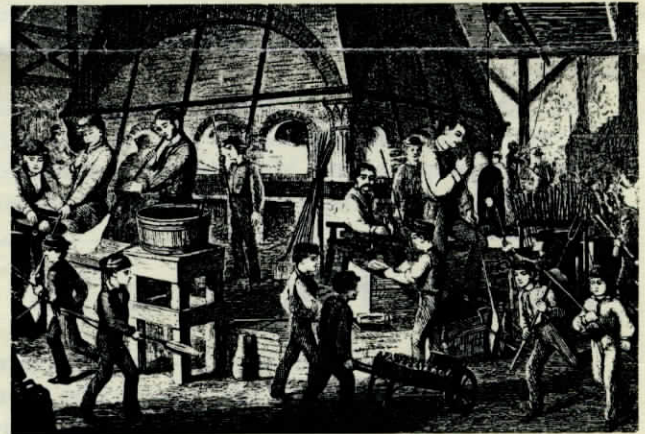
The Glass Works Comes to Town

Mr. S. Lawrence Bodine, president of the Cohansey Glass Company of Bridgeton, New Jersey, had a vision to expand his company. He saw the possibility of establishing a glass works on an available suitable tract of undeveloped land along the P.R.R. in Downingtown. The Cohansey Glass Works at Bridgeton was established in 1856 and incorporated on March 17, 1870. It was one of the largest glass works in the United States in 1900, producing a general line of blown hollow ware in flint, amber and green glass. The Downingtown Board of Trade negotiated concessions made by the borough to encourage the new business to locate in Downingtown. A char-

ter was issued for the Cohansey Glass Company in May 1900 with a capital of \$10,000. The Directors for the new company were S.L. Bodine and William B. Milliken, both of Philadelphia and William Bodine of Bridgeton, New Jersey.

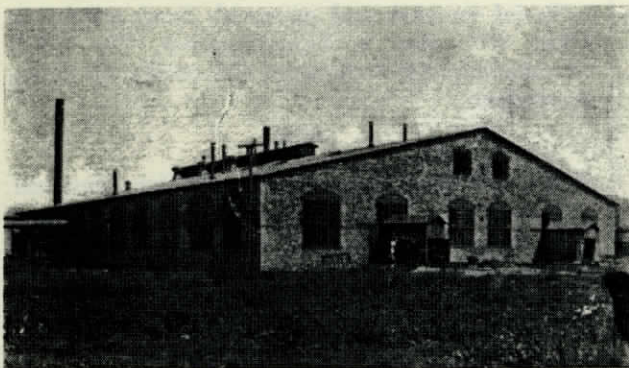
Work began immediately on the new glass works. Fences were removed from the 17-acre lot located between Chestnut Street and Whiteland Avenue. By the end of August, two of the seven large stone buildings for the glass works were finished and a large smoke-stack was raised. The siding which ran from the P. & R.R.R. on the east and west sides of the building was complete. Clay was imported from Germany. It was the only kind of clay that could be used on the interior part of the furnace, as the greater the heat, the harder it became.

By September, the fires were lit in the furnaces, and the glassblowers arrived in town seeking boarding houses. Firebrick was laid underground and had to be heated thoroughly before any glass could be manufactured. By the end of 1900, there was a ruddy glow from the glass furnaces and a busy stir of many men and boys.



Blowers and boy runners working around furnaces

The shrill whistle signals the start of the dayshift in 1901 at the Cohansey Glass Works. Fifty blowers were waiting to mount the platform to take their places. Pipes in hand, the blowers began rolling the molten glass on a marble slab until it was just right. Next, they dropped it into a mold. A boy instantly closed the mold, then the blower blew into the mold and the bottle was made. But it was not finished. From the mold, it was placed on a scale and weighed. If it was the correct weight, it was passed into the glory hole, where the neck was attached, and from there it was transferred to the lehr by boys where it passed through a red hot oven to temper it. Coming out at the other end of the lehrs it was given to one of the packers, and if no bubble or flaw was found, it was packed in a box soon to be shipped to any part of the



Cohansey Building, former Pepperidge Farm on Chestnut Street

United States. If a bottle was not perfect, it was thrown in with the imperfect ones and again melted into molten glass. The process of bottlemaking was repeated day and night. Furnace No. 1 employed about 100 blowers. Furnace No. 2 had twice the working capacity as No. 1. The flint furnace was fired first and later green and amber furnaces were fired.

Outside it was dark and damp on a nightshift in November 1902. Inside there was an inviting ruddy glow from the glass furnaces, a warm and comfortable temperature, and a busy stir of many men and boys. The roaring, glaring furnaces surrounded by a myriad of men and boys, ran night and day, and had an output per week of many million bottles of all descriptions and sizes. The large circular furnaces were surrounded by the blowers, whose long tubes protruded into molten glass to form a bottle, which was laid to rest and picked up by a small boy, passed to another furnace where it was "healed", and on it went through many hands to be trimmed, dressed, cooled and sorted.

The packing process would be done by a group of girls during the daytime. The blazing furnaces were fed in the background by perspiring men, shoveling into these red-hot fiery furnaces broken glass, flint, sand, soda, lime and arsenic in quantities to suit the type of glassware being made. Sand was supplied by freight from New Jersey and local sand quarries. Limestone was plentiful in the area, too. In 1902, the firm accepted an order for "Castoria" manufacturers for three million bottles, to be delivered in a month. The glass works was a boom to Downingtown's economy.



*Bottle produced by
Cohansey Bottle Works*

Housing Boom

By the summer of 1901, fifty new houses were under construction. One hundred more houses were needed. What caused this building boom? The glass blowers and fellow workers at Cohansey Glass Works needed lodging. The several hundred glass blowers would come from their homes in New Jersey and board in Downingtown homes from mid-September to mid-June. "Never in the history of Downingtown has she needed 150 houses in this short space of time," said Mr. Johnson, a member of the Board of Trade. Three-fifths of the houses were rented for \$10 to \$12 per month and the remaining two-fifths for \$6.50 to \$8.50 per month. Most of these houses were located near the glass works.

(to be continued in the next issue)

A Brief History of the 97th Pennsylvania

By: Neal T. Hurst

At dawn on Friday, April 12th, 1861 Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant (P.G.T.) Beauregard, ordered the bombardment of Fort Sumter. Determined to hold the Union together, the 16th President, Abraham Lincoln, called on the remaining States loyal to the Union for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the southern rebellion.

Many Pennsylvanians joined the army to preserve the Union. One regiment came primarily from Chester County. This was the 97th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry (P.V.I.). The 97th was recruited in West Chester and was initially stationed at two camps. These camps were Camp Wayne and Camp Everhart. Dormitories at West Chester University stand where Camp Wayne was located. This location was named in honor of General "Mad Anthony" Wayne, who lived in Paoli, Pennsylvania. Camp Everhart is still in existence today as a park in West Chester and was named after Dr. George Everhart, Surgeon for the 97th. Henry R. Guss, the first colonel of the 97th, was to have the unit ready to march in 21 days. The boys spent long hot hours training; every afternoon, the regiment had a dress parade through West Chester. On November 20th, 1861 the 97th boarded a train bound for Washington, DC.

While staying in Washington DC, many lowly privates in the Union Army first experienced military life in the field. The men of the 97th were issued brand new 1861 Springfield Rifles and were assigned to the Department of the South which consisted of both South Carolina and Florida. The 97th spent most of its early years in the sweltering Florida heat near Fernandina, just south of the Georgia State line. The 97th had its first encounter with the enemy on June 10th 1862. The Department of the South was to attack Charleston, South Carolina, and take the city if possible. The 97th was camped 18 miles south of the city. On June 10th the enemy was found heavily entrenched at Secessionville, South Carolina. That morning the 97th advanced towards the Rebel position. They charged the enemy fortifications and broke the Confederate line into two. The Rebels, however, held onto this position with the help of several pieces of heavy artillery, resulting in a Federal defeat. Captain Dewitt Clinton Lewis earned the Congressional Medal of Honor from this battle for returning to save a private from his company after cannon fire of canister shot. This is the highest honor a United States Soldier can get. The next major engagement for the 97th was the siege of Charleston. During this siege, the 97th help set up the famous battery of cannon known as "The Swamp Angel".

(continued on back)

A Brief History (cont.)

After the siege of Charleston, the 97th went into inactive service until the siege of Petersburg and the Wilmington Campaign.

During the Wilmington Campaign, the 97th was the lead unit in attacking the last remaining fort of the Confederacy, Fort Fisher, located at the mouth the Cape Fear River near town of Wilmington, North Carolina. Fort Fisher was constructed from sand and sat in a swamp, which was impossible to cross. At this point in time, Lt. John Wainwright commanded the 97th. Colonel Galusha Pennypacker, also from the 97th, led the 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Division of the 10th Corps. Pennypacker was a prominent citizen from West Chester, who also owned a brickyard. The 97th PVI was in the brigade led by Pennypacker, along with the 203rd and 76th Pennsylvania and the 47th and 48th New York.

Upon landing on the beach, the 97th was bombarded by heavy artillery fire from the fort. The artillery shot was flying through the air and laying a blanket of death on the Federal troops. Pennypacker, leading his men gallantly, charged up the parapet and into the fort. Pennypacker planted the shredded Pennsylvania flag upon the parapet and was instantly wounded five times and was thought to be dead. Pennypacker survived his wounds, however, and on

April 28, 1865 was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General, one month before his 20th birthday, becoming the youngest General in United States history. The 97th suffered from major losses and soon returned home to West Chester. These men helped preserve the Union and represented the state of Pennsylvania during a time of crises.

The author is a student at Downingtown High School, an historian and re-enactor with the 97th Pennsylvania. He has been re-enacting for three years and plans on doing it for many years to come. If there are any more questions about this regiment or reenacting visit the 97th's web site at http://REBEL_1864.tripod.com.

Upcoming Events:

Mark your Calendar for the March Meeting:

March 5, 2001 at Simpson Meadows,
101 Plaza Drive, Downingtown

7:00 refreshments, 7:30 speaker

Speaker: **Francis Brown**, author of *HISTORY
OF THE DOWNINGTOWN MEETING*

A lifetime resident of Downingtown,
Francis will discuss the history of the area.

Downingtown Historical Society
P.O. Box 9
Downingtown, PA 19335

The House Log

Volume 6, Number 2

Spring, 2001

A PUBLICATION OF THE DOWNINGTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

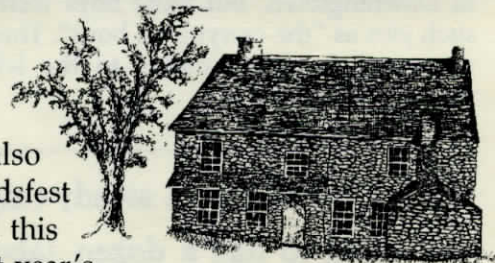
The President's Message

by Roger Grigson

The restoration of the Ashbridge House is moving right along. The roof, porch, pent roofs are completed, along with copper rain pipes. We are next addressing the doors and pointing.

Realizing the need to raise large sums of money, a steering committee has been organized. After working for several months, a report was made by them at the April Board Meeting. Their suggestion is to not only restore the house, but raise enough money for an endowment to keep the house in repair, once it is finished. They hope to begin a capital campaign in fall.

The activities of the next few months are numerous and varied. The annual dinner, where I hope to see each of you, will be held on May 19. (Details elsewhere in this newsletter).



We are also part of Kidsfest on June 2 this year. (Last year's event brought out over 6000 people.) The Downingtown Historical Society is sponsoring a walk through the County Parks and Recreation Department on June 14, which will begin and end at the Ashbridge House. Hundreds of people usually turn out for these walks. We also hope to have a presence at Good Neighbor Day on July 4 in Downingtown. All of these activities, to be successful, will need the involvement of each of you. Please respond to the questionnaire found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Downingtown Good Neighbor Day (July 4)

We need a minimum of four 2 person teams serving 2 hours each. These people will hand out brochures, membership information and explain the Ashbridge Project.

Work Sessions

Every Saturday morning in May, from 9 to noon, we will have work sessions to prepare the Ashbridge House for the tours on June 14th. General cleanup, scraping walls and woodwork, basements, etc. Everyone please plan to attend.

Our Website: Thanks to the diligent efforts of Jay Byerly, DHS has an attractive, informative and expanded-upon website which is connected to several Chester County links by simply keying in "downingtown historical society" or <http://www.downingtownhistoricalsociety.org>

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Downingtown, A Changing Town

(continued from the previous issue)

by Ruth E. Lowe

The Working Boys

As many as six hundred people were employed at the Cohansey Glass Works. Of these, about one hundred fifty to two hundred were boys ranging in age from eight to fifteen. Some of the boys lived at home in Downingtown. But more boys were needed for such jobs as "the carrying-in boys". They carried the glassware from the molds to thelehr, where it was tempered.

We can give steady employment to half a dozen laborers, bringing two or three boys each.

COHANSEY GLASS M'FG CO.,

EAST DOWNINGTOWN, PA.

fb24n1w -

Newspaper Ad for recruiting boy workers

In November of 1900, Mr. Bodine, president of the company, said the plant would close unless a sufficient number of boys were secured, as it was impossible to run the plant successfully without them. Boys were imported and the company built a boarding house on the premises in 1901. The first group of forty boys aged 10 to 12 years were from the Catholic Protectory at Flatlands, near Norristown in Montgomery County. Another fifty or more boys were brought to Downingtown from the Catholic Protectory at 18th and Vine Streets, Philadelphia and fifty boys from the House of Refuge, Philadelphia. Father James O'Reilly, rector of the St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Downingtown, oversaw the boys' needs, living and working conditions. The boys were warmly-clad and well-fed. The Downingtown School Board approved a night school so the boys could work during the day and attend school in the evening. About twenty-five young men, aged fifteen to twenty years were brought from Philadelphia and they also boarded in the company's boarding house.

Twenty-five or more boys from eight to fifteen years, of all colors and nationalities, boarded the trolley in West Chester in the morning for the glass works and returned in the evening. They took their lunch with them and stopped work at 5 o'clock. They raced

each other to catch the next trolley car, which was three-quarters of a mile from the glass works. One boy had the record for generally "beating out" his fellow workers. The boys reached the trolley car out of breath by the race.

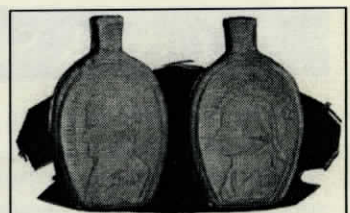
Summer Vacation

In June of 1902 as usual, the fire of the furnaces were put out for summer vacation. Most of the glass blowers stayed. Those who couldn't find housing for their families returned to their homes, mostly in New Jersey. They hoped that when they returned in September, there would be enough houses to accommodate everyone. Many houses were under construction. Summer at the glass works was a time for necessary repairs and improvements. Each summer the furnaces were rebuilt, as they only lasted one season due to the intensity of the heat. In 1904, an electrical plant was installed at the glass works. They ran wires for electric lights to the boarding house for the boys and to their main office at 408 East Lancaster Avenue. Summer was also a time of filling orders for glassware in stock. During the summer of 1904, the demand for glassware of all kinds was heavy and the stocks were depleted. The furnaces were fired in early September in the flint and green furnaces. The fire had to be started a week ahead before the glass was ready to be blown.

Setbacks, Rumors and Reality

Minor setbacks occurred during 1902, such as a shortage of coal, scarcity of boy runners, late shipments of carloads of sand and occasional flooding from nearby Parke Run, which caused blowers to cut back to half - otherwise blowers couldn't work. Several carloads of coal were used daily in the production of gas which was essential to heat the glass to the required temperature. In spite of these setbacks, Downingtown had entered into an era of business prosperity that had far surpassed the previous year.

In March of 1905, rumors were afloat that the Cohansey Glass Company would leave Downingtown and return to New Jersey. The rumor was denied by a member of the firm saying that the glass works was doing more business this year than any other time since locating here, and that they were going to extend their building. It did not look like they were leaving. The firm gave a contract to G. T. Guthrie to build a new wareshed 80x100 feet



Cohansey Bottles

of stone. The great increase in the company's business caused them to make this improvement. All of the furnaces were running day and night and turned out large quantities of bottles daily. The firm shipped an average of two carloads of bottles daily.

As the furnaces closed down for the summer in June of 1907, the company reported that this work year had been the most prosperous and successful so far for the company. Extensive improvements were made over the summer, employing a large work force, so that everything would be repaired and cleaned up for a fresh start in September.

Trouble was eminent in 1909. In February and March, the glass works were only running two furnaces, but did not close down as had been rumored. A hundred men and boys were without work for several months. In June, the glass works closed down for the summer as usual. In September, the glass works did not resume operations. The start was delayed to October 1st and then to November 1st. The delay wasn't caused by a lack of orders as the company had enough orders to keep the factory running steadily until the next spring.

During this time of shutdown, several meetings were held between the workers and the firm. The matter was discussed, but a reply failed to be given. Many of the men left town for work in other plants. This was the first serious unemployment that had occurred at the glass works.

Finally in late November of 1909, the official announcement came by the head of the Cohansey Glass Works. The plant would not run that year and the factory would be boarded up indefinitely. This was sad news for the town. Many merchants lost

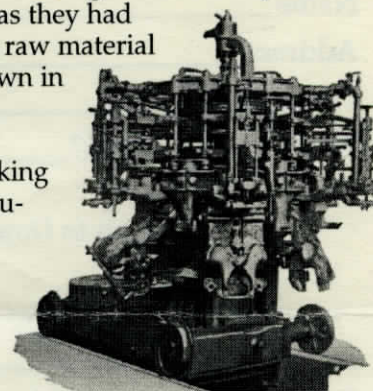
hundreds of dollars, having trusted the glass blowers to pay as soon as the plant opened. The men had been leaving town for weeks and there was a clearing out, many going to Bridgeton, New Jersey where there were large glass works. During December, the apprentices, who had been learning glass blowing, were summoned to the office, paid off and given their papers as journeymen, being advised to look for work elsewhere.

One of the biggest bottle contracts by a patent medicine firm, which for nine years were made at the Downingtown plant, had been transferred to Salem, New Jersey, and the men who worked on the medicine bottles had left Downingtown and others followed.

Why Did the Plant Close?

Simply put, the work could be done cheaper in New Jersey. Material for the glass was cheaper and close-at-hand, whereas they had difficulty in securing raw material (sand) at Downingtown in the quantity desired.

Michael J. Owens invented a bottle-making machine which revolutionized the bottle-making industry. By 1909, he had developed a ten-arm machine, capable of producing more bottles per day with less workers.



Type of bottle-making machine used in 1904 and 1906 in glass factories.

References: *American Bottles Old & New* by sWilliam S. Walbridge, 1920; *A Treasury of American Bottles* by William C. Ketchum, Jr., 1975; *The Glass Gaffers of New Jersey* by Adeline Pepper, 1971; News Clippings from Chester County Historical Society.

June 14th Walk, "Along the Turnpike" (Flag Day)

The Downingtown Historical Society is sponsoring a walk "Along the Turnpike" on Thursday evening, June 14, 2001. It will be the second tour of the Town Tours and Village Walks 2001. You'll be traveling down the first turnpike in the nation which was constructed by the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike Company in the 1790's. Your tour will begin at the Ashbridge House (Route 30 in Ashbridge Square) which witnessed Washington's troops going to the Whiskey Rebellion, the westward wagon trains, the funeral train of Lincoln, and the horse-less carriage. After visiting sites along the turnpike, you will return to the Ashbridge House for refreshments. Ray Carr will display vintage vehicles at the Ashbridge House.

We are responsible for the walk on June 14. We will need volunteer guides at each of the stops, people to lead the groups from stop to stop, registration, refreshments, tour guides for the Ashbridge House.

Please mark your interest in the following categories:

Leaders to take groups of 20 from stop to stop (no interpretation, just leading them to the next stop.)	6-8 needed	_____
Refreshment Committee	4-6 needed	_____
Guides to explain the stops	10 needed	_____
Guides for Ashbridge House tour	4-5 needed	_____
Registration	3-4 needed	_____



Downingtown Historical Society Annual Dinner

Saturday, May 19, 2001

St. Anthony's Lodge • 259 Church St., Downingtown

5:30 pm cash bar • 6:00 pm dinner

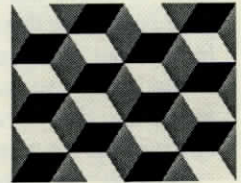
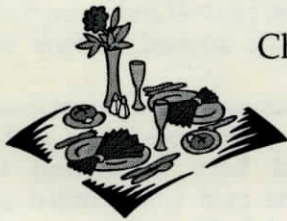
Choice of: Stuffed Chicken Breast, Stuffed Pork Tenderloin

Appetizer, vegetables, dessert and beverage included

Miniature Quilt Raffle—Benefits Ashbridge House

Program: ASHBRIDGE HOUSE: Past, Present, Future

\$22 per person (inclusive) • Reservations/payment before May 10, 2001



-----REPLY FOR ANNUAL DINNER-----

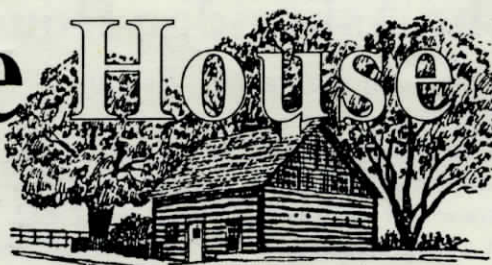
Name _____ Number Attending @ \$22 _____
Address _____ Amount enclosed \$ _____
Phone _____ Number of Chicken: _____
Need Transportation? _____ (Call 610-269-1167) Number of Pork: _____

Return to *Downingtown Historical Society*, PO Box 9, Downingtown, 19335

Downingtown Historical Society
P.O. Box 9
Downingtown, PA 19335

The House Log

Volume 6, Number 3



Summer, 2001

A PUBLICATION OF THE DOWNINGTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The President's Message

by Roger Grigson

Our presence in Downingtown and the surrounding area continues to grow. Our activities have encouraged people to join and the restoration of the building encourages people to ask who we are and what we are doing.

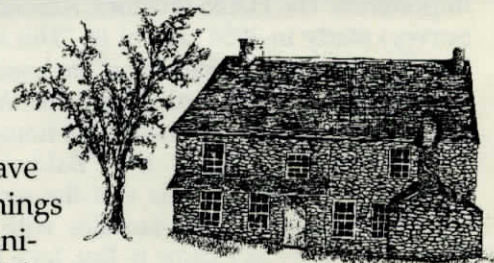
June was a busy month beginning with our sponsorship of activities with Kidsfest on June 2 in Kerr Park. Designed as a free activity for kids and their parents, the Society sponsored cookie decorating. As members helped the students decorate, other members of the Society talked with parents about the Society and its goals.

As part of the summer Town Walks, sponsored by the County Parks and Recreation Department, the Downingtown Historical Society sponsored a walk on the Lancaster Turnpike. Almost 50 members helped make the June 14th walk a huge success. Over 120 people toured the turnpike, its houses, the Ashbridge House and stayed for refreshments.

June also brought the good news of the award of another grant of \$40,000 for interior heating, air conditioning, water and sewage for the Ashbridge House. On June 29, the announcement was made by the County Commissioners and the Chester County Conference and Visitors Center. This is a matching grant and will have to be matched with funds raised by the Society.

Good Neighbor Day in Kerr Park gave the Downingtown Historical Society a chance to meet people and talk about our plans. With the draw of a raffle, we were able to get new memberships and talked about possible acquisitions with several people.

Particular thanks go to Dr. Richard Lehr for his generous donation of filing cabinets and other office furniture for use in the Ashbridge.



We now have the beginnings of an organization which

is planning the use of space, as well as the programs, for the library/research center.

Make plans now to attend the first meeting on September 11. Following tradition, this first meeting of the year will be the first showing of the Chester County Day slides and will be held at Simpson Meadows at 7 p.m.

Watch the next newsletter for news of the new programs we will be undertaking, the further plans for the restoration of the Ashbridge House and the plans for a capital campaign to make all of it possible. ♦

Our Website: Thanks to the diligent efforts of Jay Byerly, DHS has an attractive, informative and expanded-upon website which is connected to several Chester County links by simply keying in "downingtowntownhistoricalsociety" or <http://www.downingtowntownhistoricalsociety.org>

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The Ashbridge House

by Francis G. Brown

This is what we call it today. But when I was young I knew it only as the home of Clement Rutter and his wife, Elizabeth. I'm not sure I even knew that she was an Ashbridge. The house was simply a rough-looking old fieldstone building. Not until recent years when I got interested in research did I realize its historic importance. The HABS (Historic American Buildings Survey) study in 1958 said of it, *"This house probably best illustrates the development of the home of prosperous Quaker farmers in the Great Valley better than any other."*

In terms of its actual history the house more accurately be referred to as the "Baldwin, Sharpless, Ashbridge" House for this was the sequence of the families who owned it—families with related ties. Here is the story as I know it. But, let it be said at the outset that, while the ownerships are known, there are many "gaps" in terms of who actually lived there.

John Baldwin, an English Quaker who came to this country in 1682, became a prosperous merchant in the town of Chester. In 1702 he purchased 500 acres of land in East Caln Township. ("East" after the original Caln Township was divided in 1728.). At his death in 1731 he willed this land equally to his two grandsons, John and Joshua Baldwin. In 1751 John Baldwin, settled on the east portion of the 500 acres. Other than being a tin-plate worker, not much is known about him.

Joshua Baldwin who took over the western half but just when this occurred is not known since he was not born until 1721. In 1744 he married Sarah Downing, daughter of the original Thomas Downing who lived nearby and for whom Downingtown would be named. Joshua and Sarah were likely living there by that year.

The house is documented as being built in 1709. Perhaps the original John Baldwin did so but this is doubtful since he, himself, never moved here. In any case, Joshua Baldwin lived here until his death in 1800. Sarah, his first wife having died in 1745, he would marry twice more. It was during his ownership that the house was enlarged to its present size through several additions and alterations, the first occurring in 1755 when the hall and east rooms were added.

This takes us to the Sharpless family. It started with Nathan Sharpless, whose family lived near present West Chester. There is an interesting story about him. At the time of the Battle of Brandywine, 9/11/1777, the Americans had taken over the Birmingham Meeting House as a hospital. A substitute location for meeting had been found in a wheelwright shop at Sconnetown. On the morning of the battle, the British army marched by. By coincidence this was the time of the midweek meeting of the Quakers. Because of the excitement, the meeting was adjourned prematurely. When about to leave, Nathan Sharpless discovered that his horse—a fine animal—was missing.

He followed the troops and found the horse which, to quote Futhy and Cope, *"...had been appropriated to his use by a British officer."* Nathan firmly remonstrated and at length prevailed, whereupon the officer, *"...gave up the steed!"*

In 1783 Nathan Sharpless married Rachael Baldwin, daughter (by his second wife) of Joshua Baldwin. Ten years later, in 1793, Nathan and Rachael moved to his father-in-law's farm. A year later Joshua Baldwin conveyed title to the house and farm to Nathan where he and Rachael spent the rest of their lives.

It should be noted that 1794 was a tough year for the Ashbridge farm. For that year the Philadelphia/Lancaster Turnpike was built which starkly divided the house from its barn and spring-house. Prior to this, access to the property would have been from the north, doubtless by lane from the King's Highway which ran along the north valley hills. It happens that the "29th" milestone on the new road is located immediately east of the house. (The actual marker will be returned to this site.)

Nathan and Rachael had numerous children. One, Dr. Jacob Sharpless, inherited the house though it is not likely that he ever lived there except during his youth. He studied medicine in Philadelphia under Dr. Philip Physick, known as "The Father of American Surgery," and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1817. Soon after, he returned to Downingtown where he lived and practiced until his death in 1863. He was highly respected and beloved. Yet he seems to be "lost" in our history of Downingtown. At least he is not a household name. Where did he live and practice? What we do know, however, is that he was much concerned with helping slaves escape to freedom, often putting up his own funds in that cause. I like to speculate that he used his farm house and barn as part of his "underground railroad!"

Jacob Sharpless acquired title in 1837, the year his father died. He, himself, died in 1863. He and his wife, Mary (Downing), willed the property to their daughter, Elizabeth D. Sharpless—this probably not taking effect until Mary's death in 1875. Since they, themselves, lived in town, the question naturally arises, who lived at their farm? I, for one, simply do not know. Both Dr. Sharpless and Mary are buried at Downingtown Meeting.

This brings us to the Ashbridge family. Elizabeth Sharpless had (in 1853) married Abraham S. Ashbridge. So, together they now own the Ashbridge house. But here the plot gets a bit murky. It so happened that Abraham Ashbridge had inherited from his father another house (and farm)—an adjacent property across the highway, to the east, which stood

on the site of the present Brandywine Mall. This house was called "Ondawa." Some thirty years ago it became the center of a motel/conference center, called the "1796 House"—presumably for the year the house had been built. When this house (unfortunately) was destroyed by fire some years ago, the property was developed into the present shopping mall.

While owning both "Ashbridge" Houses, Abraham and Elizabeth would live all their lives at "Ondawa." In 1900 they willed both properties to their two sons, Richard L. and Joseph S. Ashbridge, who, at the latter's death in 1943, left them to their younger sister, Eleanor.

By this time, our "Ashbridge" House had apparently become a two-family dwelling for in the early 1900s two Ashbridge families were living there: the Rutters (mentioned earlier) on the east side with Joseph Ashbridge and his wife on the west. From about 1930 on, the house apparently was rented to tenants, including George Baker who would take over the farming operations. In 1953 Eleanor Ashbridge sold the house to Ray Sheeler, well-known citizen who owned the Chevrolet agency in Downingtown. This marked the first time in its long history of the Ashbridge House going out of the (extended) "family." It then

went through several ownerships—at the end reduced to a haven for derelicts—until the owner of the new mall (appropriately named, "Ashbridge Square") recently gave it to the Downingtown Historical Society.

The Ashbridge House is now safe—and will be preserved! ♦

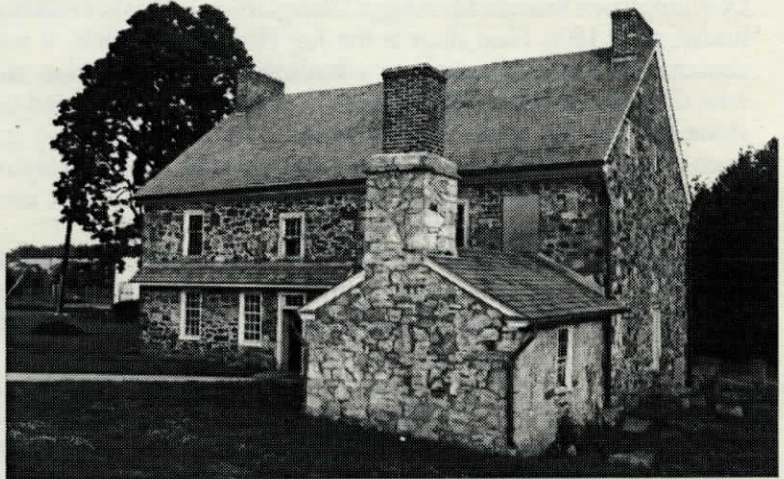
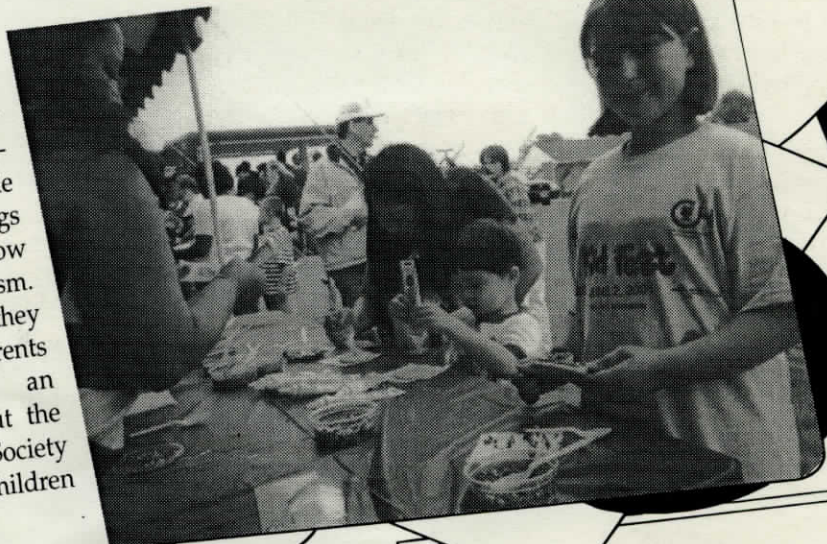


Photo taken May 2001 by Jay Byerly. Thanks to the generous grants received, the roof and chimneys have been restored.

Kid Fest 2001

The Downingtown Historical Society took part in Kid Fest held on June 2 in Kerr Park. Many children enjoyed using their creative talents decorating a cookie with a variety of colored icings and sprinkles. A brief rain show didn't hamper their enthusiasm. The tent sheltered them as they created colorful cookies. Parents and grandparents had an opportunity to learn about the Downingtown Historical Society and its activities as the children decorated their cookie.

Photo taken by Debbie Casagrande



Town Tour and Village Walk

On a warm, sunny June 14th evening, over 125 people enjoyed a walk along a portion of the nation's first turnpike, the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike. Visitors from near and far walked along this historic road which first opened in 1795. Participants stopped at various sites to look, listen and learn about homes and business through the centuries.

Traveling down the south side, the group stopped at Downingtown Friends Meeting, a Georgian-style Quaker meeting house, circa 1806. Next door is the Jug House, circa 1804. It was constructed for Joshua Kersey, a leading Quaker physician and who did not condone consumption of spirits. When he denied the stone masons the spirits as they worked on his house, they got even by carving a chunk of limestone shaped like a jug and laying it in the front facade. Across the street was Toll Gate No. 7, used to collect fees to maintain the turnpike.

The visitors travelled down the alley to the John Taylor Farm, circa 1738. Deborah Miles gave them a tour of the original portion of the house, and her father, Francis Brown, explained the history of the farm which had dairy cows until recently.

Other sites visited were B. F. Leaman and Sons, Cohansey Glass Works Office, General Washington Inn, Breesey Court, Hat Rack Cottage, and ended with a tour of the Ashbridge House with authentically dressed reenactors from the Civil War era.

Music, antique cars and refreshments were enjoyed by all who attended the event. ◆



Don Greenleaf explains the history of the Jug House. Photo taken by Debbie Casagrande.



Back view of house and porch at the John Taylor Farm. Photo taken by Debbie Casagrande.

Downingtown Historical Society
P.O. Box 9
Downingtown, PA 19335

The House Log

Volume 6, Number 4

Fall, 2001

A PUBLICATION OF THE DOWNINGTOWN AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The President's Message

by Roger Grigson

We have decorated the Ashbridge House for our open house on December 15. The theme is 1860 Christmas with the period decorations, reenactors, tours, and caroling with Catherine Selin's group. Francis Brown will sign copies of his book on the East Caln Meeting and Bruce Mowday will sign copies of his new book on the Brandywine River. Come see the progress and just visit from 10 to 4 with free cider, coffee, hot chocolate and cookies. We will even have a Federal army recruiter and exhibit in the smokehouse! Bring your family and friends.



Drawing, courtesy of Adrian Martinez.

Enjoy the progress we have made and the good spirits of the season. ♦

Ashbridge Donations

John Renshaw, who is with Phillip Bradley Antiques, has an original oil painting of a Col Richard Thomas (of Whitford), c 1810, that will be on display at our December 15 Open House. The artist, Samuel Moon, was a blacksmith next door to the Ashbridge House. Seems Richard Downing (who lived next door) paid to have Moon go to Philadelphia to improve his art skills.

Mr. Renshaw has had a fraktur reproduced by Piece Design, Downingtown. It is a sheet of a school song book, c. 1808 from the Vincent School in Chester County. The profits are being donated by Renshaw for the restoration of the Ashbridge House.

Our Website: Thanks to the diligent efforts of Jay Byerly, DHS has an attractive, informative and expanded-upon website which is connected to several Chester County links by simply keying in "downingtown historical society" or <http://www.downingtownhistoricalsociety.org>

The House Log, Vol. 6, No. 1, ©2001 Downingtown Area Historical Society. Articles and information on events of historical interest welcomed, subject to editorial revision and approval. Send articles to DHS, P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335. Membership: \$10 individual; \$15 family; \$5 senior, \$3 student.

Officers: Roger Grigson, president; Don Greenleaf, vice president; Nancy D'Angelo, secretary; Wesley Sollenberger, treasurer. Board: Jay Byerly, Barbara Cornwell, Carol Grigson, Harry Helms, Ernie Jameson, Bob Kahler, Dr. Richard Lehr, Ruth Lowe, Melissa Newton, and Bill Woodruff. *House Log* Editors: Carol Grigson and Ruth Lowe.

Holiday Shopping in Downingtown 1897

by Ruth Lowe

As you and your family drive through Downingtown on your way to the mall it is difficult to realize that many local residents did all of their holiday shopping in Downingtown fifty years ago. Let's go back a hundred years or more. Imagine it is the year 1897. You and your family either walk, take the train, or ride into town in your horse-drawn carriage.

Having read and noted the ads in the *Morning Republican*, the local newspaper, and shopping list in hand we begin in the central square shopping area.

Griffith & Wollerton is the only hardware store in Downingtown. It is one of the largest hardware stores in the county, and it has a wide variety of reliable goods that can always be found in stock. Fair dealing is their motto.



East Lancaster Avenue, Downingtown's central square shopping area.

Miller Brothers are the only persons in town who carry custom-made and ready-made clothing. Their tables and shelves are stacked with excellent clothing and the gents goods include hats, caps and ties. They claim their assortment and prices cannot be surpassed in the country.

Fine shoes or slippers of leather and rubber are fresh from the shops of the best makers for men, women and children at William Kurtz's store. Prices are very reasonable. And they also repair shoes.

Charles Chandler's Cash Store carries the largest quantity and variety of quality goods in Downingtown. All the pretty things are in the upper and lower rooms of this two-story shop. The immense stock includes the latest novelties in fancy china and glassware, dolls, lamps, celluloid novelties, brick-a-brac, games of all kinds, express wagons for children and numerous Christmas tree ornaments. These are only some of the thousand articles displayed throughout the store.

Hutchinson's Pharmacy is full holiday attire. Holiday goods consist of dressing cases, books, fancy boxes, stationery, paper knives (letter opener), fountain pens, purses, pocket cutlery (pocket knives), scissors, razors, aluminum novelties and perfumery in cases and bottles of unique designs.

Judson Armour has the best selection of sleighs, all-wool blankets and robes in a great variety of styles and prices. There is a special sleighbell display. Harnesses of all kinds are always on hand at their warerooms in East Downingtown.

Choice chocolates are 25¢ a lb. at William M. Martin's in the Shelmire Station Building and they sell the best grade in the county. You can also buy your Christmas tree ornaments that flash like diamonds and the prices are low. Fine confectionery, nuts, tropical fruits, boxes of cigars and many kinds of games for children are available here.

John L. Weldin in addition to his undertaking business, has a fine line of furniture. One of his chairs would make a nice present for father or mother.

Christmas Greeting

❖To all our Friends and Patrons.❖

By way of observing appropriately the gladdest holiday of the year you will want to make some present to your relatives and friends. No store in Chester county contains more goods than ours. Any of the following articles would make a nice present:

Rogers Silver Ware, Sugar Spoons, Cream Holders, Butter Dishes, Berry Spoons, Cream and Gravy Ladles, Carving Sets, Silver Nut Picks, Knives, Forks and Spoons.

A Carpet Sweeper would be a nice present for your wife.

See our Winter Robes and Horse Blankets before purchasing these goods.

REMEMBER the boy with a pair of Skates or a Flexible Flyer Sled for a Xmas present. A nice display of

Pocket Cutlery, Razors and Scissors.

Best Building Hardware, Tornado Fodder Cutter, Ohio Fodder Cutter.

Complete line of Blacksmith Supplies, including The Never-Slip goods.

ROSENDALE-CEMENTS-PORTLAND

GRIFFITH & WOLLERTON,

DOWNINGTOWN, PA.

For clocks, watches and jewelry in gold and silver go to H. B. McFarlan's store. His stock are masterpieces of the jeweler's art and trade. These holiday bargains shine like diamond's in his window.



William McClintock, owner of Downingtown Marble Works, is offering tombstones at rare bargain prices just to keep his men working. The tombstone can be put up in the spring. With the savings, you can buy a nice Christmas present.

Wonderful bargains are offered at John D. Hauptman's Cut Rate Confectionery Store. Sheet music, books, magazines, stationery, games and the daily newspaper are available here. Two hundred novels have been reduced from 25¢ to 10¢ each. A new shipment of Christmas candies at the lowest prices has just arrived. And don't forget to stop in and hear the graphophone.

Let's go to the west end of town to finish our shopping. Mrs. A. B. Downey has a very popular place for lady shoppers. She has a fine stock of handkerchiefs, gloves, mittens, fascinators (scarves), notions and Christmas novelties. The entire winter millinery, stock is reduced for the holiday shopping season.

Don't forget to place your order for fine quality Christmas candies, cakes, pastry or elegant fat oysters for the holidays at the Downey & Pawling store.

Miss Sara McGraw has a fine Christmas display of goods in her window. In addition to handkerchiefs in fancy boxes, collar and cuff boxes, card cases, pocket books, novelties in perfumery, umbrellas she has nice suspenders for the gents.

Jesse H. Roberts is a holiday emporium with gifts for everyone at reasonable prices.

Next to the Post Office is Ash Bros. They have shoes for every walk in life, and they are inexpensive and comfortable, too. They also have a splendid line of gents' furnishing goods.

A HINT When looking around for a Christmas present, why not get something useful as well as ornamental. We can show a nice line of Mackintoshes, Umbrellas, Slippers, Neckwear, Underwear, Hosiery, Handkerchiefs and many other articles that would make useful presents. Call and see us.

Fine Repairing a Specialty
—Nothing but best Leather
Used.

ASH BROS.,

Next Door to P. O.
Downingtown, Pa.

Peter Sheridan, merchant tailor, is an expert in the making of gentlemen's suits. He guarantees a perfect fit at reasonable prices.

There are many general merchandise and grocery stores to choose from for comparison shopping. Wm. P. Ryan is moving to a new store on West Lancaster Avenue, after New Year's and doesn't

want to move his stock, so the prices are reduced considerably. Goods include Christmas candies, nuts, grapes, bananas, groceries, flour, salt meats, sausage and scrapple, fine cakes and canned goods.

Charles A. Snader is an agent for the Grand Union Tea Company selling the finest teas, coffees, spices, baking powders and extracts on the markets. With each purchase, you receive a prize.

Both Nathan Wilson and Howard E. Simmons will deliver goods purchased at their stores. They have a large variety of merchandise available. Check their ads and visit their stores to make your selections.

The Blue Front Grocery Store,

Cor. Bradford Ave. and Church Street, Downingtown, Pa.

HOWARD E. SIMMONS, Prop.

Christmas buyers will find it to their advantage to purchase at our store, it is a bee-hive of business. We are dealers in Dry Goods, Boots, Shoes, China, Glass and Queensware, Carpets, Oil Cloths, Rubber Goods, Lamps, Meats, Provisions and Groceries of the highest standard of excellence at lowest prices. A big stock of Candies and Nuts for Xmas. Goods delivered free to all parts of the town. Your patronage solicited. H. E. SIMMONS.

1897

SEE OUR STOCK OF

1897

Good Things for Christmas

AT THE BRADFORD AVE. GROCERY STORE you can get the finest line of Poultry in the town. You want a nice juicy turkey or chicken for Christmas and we can furnish them at reasonable prices.

FRUITS, NUTS, CANDIES. Your Christmas bill of fare will not be complete until you have a supply of Fruits, Nuts and Candies. Our stock of these goods is complete.

BOOTS, SHOES, RUBBERS, UNDERWEAR. The cold weather is here and to prevent colds and sickness you want to keep well clad in both body and feet. You will have no difficulty in getting suited from our large line of Boots, Shoes and Rubbers. The prices of these goods are as low as they can be sold at a profit. In our dry goods line we have a large assortment of goods to select from.

A FULL LINE OF STAPLE GROCERIES. We are constantly provided with a big stock of staple groceries of all kinds. If you stop in and give us an order we will deliver it promptly.

NATHAN WILSON,

Cor. Vinquet and Bradford Aves. Downingtown, Pa.

For fresh and salted meats stop at Thomas C. Hoopes, the oldest dealer of meats in town or at The People's Meat Market opposite the Swan Hotel where E. H. Hunt is the butcher.

H. B. Sides, a pharmacist on West Lancaster Ave., gives a box of Christmas candies to the first 500 children of his customers on Christmas morning.

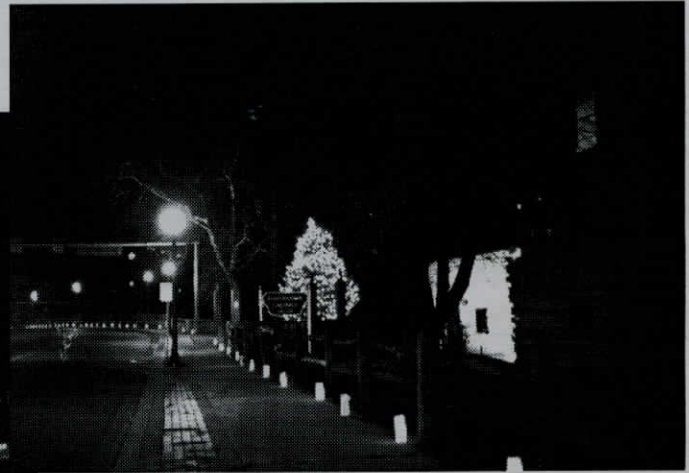
Last stop is A. P. Ringwalt's Greenhouse in West Downingtown to get a holly wreath or cut flowers, and look at other kinds of Christmas decorations.

After a full day of shopping in town and finding something for everyone on our list, we head home. Maybe the next time we're in town we'll stop at John McGraw & Sons or B. F. Evans to order a ton of coal or a load of wood. ♦

20th Anniversary of the Luminaria

On Friday evening November 30, 2001, Bill and Madeline Woodruff had boxes containing paper bags, plastic candle holders and candles ready for family, friends and Downingtown High School students to fill orders for the Luminaria. Borough residents place orders and pick up their luminary kits by early December. On Christmas Eve, many people in Downingtown set up their luminaries

on the sidewalks in front of their places and light the candles. This year marks the 20th year for the Christmas Eve Luminaria. Thank you Bill and Madeline Woodruff for illuminating Downingtown with the good neighbor spirit. ♦



Luminaries displayed along Lancaster Avenue.

Photos by Jay Byerly.

Downingtown Area Historical Society
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