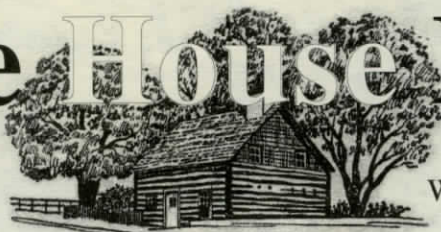


# The House Log

Volume 3 Number 1



Winter 1998

A Publication of the Downingtown Historical Society

## About the Downings, by Harlan B. Morrison

In 1684 Thomas Downing of Devonshire, England married Grace Andrew. Their first two children died in infancy but their third and only other child, Thomas Jr. born in 1691, lived to be eighty one!

Thomas Jr. married three times and it was his second wife, Thomazine, who bore him eleven children which was the beginning of the Downing "dynasty." As was the case with his father, his first two children, born in England, died in infancy. By the time his third child, Richard, was born in 1719, he had emigrated to America. In 1741 Richard married Mary Edge who probably was the niece of his father's third wife. Another son, Joseph (1734-1804), built the gray stone house that still stands on Park Lane.

Thomas Jr. first settled in Concord Township in 1718. In 1733 he moved to Sadsbury and after three years "he settled at a place since known as Downingtown."

The lives of son Richard and his wife Mary were not without tragic episodes. In 1752 their first three children, ages seven, nine and eleven, died within fifteen days of each other, probably of smallpox or some other communicable disease. Their fourth and ninth children died in infancy and their tenth child, four-year-old George, drowned in a mill race, most likely the same mill race that still runs through Downingtown and emerges behind the Downingtown National Bank. In 1743 Richard's sister, Jane (born 1723), married John Roberts (born 1721). She died in 1765 and John was executed on November 7, 1778 after being con-

victed of spying for the British during the Revolution.

Marriage within the family, common during that time period, apparently bore no stigma. Samuel Downing, (1794-1876), grandson of Richard, married his first cousin Deborah Ann Downing (1800-1896). In 1776 Hannah Downing married John McPherson, her second cousin, and Edward Downing, (1843-1920), the great-grandson of Richard, married the widowed Elizabeth Downing Cornog (1847-1910) who was Richard's great-great-granddaughter.

Few Downings are known to have lived in the Log House. Richard's son, Joseph R. Downing and his wife lived there and their sons, William, Charles, and Samuel were born there between 1791 and 1798. Charles was the first president of the Downingtown National Bank, and his son Edward (1843-1920) was president from 1889 until 1917. William's son Eugene (1830-1914), who was a carpenter by trade is also known to have lived there in 1870.

In 1876 John Downing (1817-1879), great-great-grandson of Thomas Jr., moved with his family to Kansas. Present day descendants of George Downing (1785-1854), great-grandson of Thomas Jr., live in El Paso Texas, while the descendants of Mary Ann Downing (1822-1875) are to be found in Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Idaho and Iowa. Other descendants of Thomas Jr. are in California and Florida.

*(con'd on p. 4)*



"I.W. 1777"  
Can you identify  
this datestone?  
Answer, page 2.

**Monday, March 9**, Beverly Shepperd presents a slide show on "The Homefront in WWII", Society General Meetings, open to the public: 2nd Monday of March, Sept., & Nov., 7 p.m.  
Central Presbyterian Church, Downingtown. Free admission.





Photo: Jim LaDrew

### Miller's House Covered

*The House Log* is pleased to inform its readers that the Miller's House, adjacent to the Roger Hunt Mill, has had its roof and windows protected from the elements by tarpaulin and plastic. The structure, long unoccupied but not beyond restoration, ranks among the most historically significant buildings in Downingtown. Although of uncertain origin, it is believed to date from the early 18th century and has a sub-ground level arched stone hearth not unlike the 1704 Barns - Brinton House in Chadds Ford. Recently the inscription "I.W. 1777" was discovered carved on one of the stones in the southwest corner, as pointed out by Francis Brown in the photo above.

The project was funded by the Downingtown Historical Society and the task was undertaken by volunteers Francis Brown, Mike Young, Graham Miles (*left to right, below*) and Jim LaDrew. It is the Society's hope that sufficient funding can eventually be raised to one day achieve full restoration of the Miller's House.



Photo: Jim LaDrew



## "Smile Whenever You Can," -- Lil Zook (1846-1865)

*The following is the fifth chronologically of a series of five letters surviving today in the possession of the Chester County Historical Society. They were written by Union Army nurse Elizabeth Zook to her brother Jacob between 1862 and 1865. Elizabeth and her family lived in the Zook House, located on what is now the Exton Square Mall, and were members of the Downingtown Friends Meeting. The fourth of this series appeared in The House Log, Vol. 2, No. 4, the third in 2:3, the second in 2:2, and the first in 2:1. An article by Gail Kunkel about Elizabeth Zook appeared in 1:3. The House Log expresses its appreciation to the Chester County Historical Society for granting its permission to publish these letters. An obituary is reprinted on page 4. -- Jim LaDrew*

U.S. Gen. Hosp. N. Va  
Aug. 12, 1865

Dear Brother,

I was rejoiced at receiving thy letter this morn. Had been thinking it was about time thee was writing but supposed the reason was harvesting and as the Yanks say, "haying" etc. Thy letter found me very well again. For some time past I have been feeling bilious and kind of draggy. But a walk last eve proved very beneficial and a small sail on the Hampton Creek added thereto also. There is a very kind family of Germans about half mile from the hos[pital]. I visit sometimes. It tends to revive me. The duties now are not arduous. Have considerable time as thee says, "One may as well enjoy the easy as to leave just now." There is a great change since Dr. McClellan left, for the better. I shall most probably remain so long as anyone is needed.

Evening, 5 O'clock

I was called away to bake green corn fritters and cake. Took my dinner out. Seemed much like home. While I write, I'm watching the movements of two old mother pigs, with faces about half yard long, regular rangers. She came along and with the end of her nose, overturned a barrel full of slop. Now she and another are enjoying with their children, 4 striped little rangers, the fruits of her labours. The Virginia pigs look precisely like the pictures of wild hogs. So hideously [*sic*] ugly. One of my boys killed and roasted one this week. Now I hate the sight of them.

Jacob, about our Jimmy, he expects his discharge next week and says after a visit home will come to Aham A. I think he would find him a very good boy. Says he was coachman for his master and attended his horses. His master was a Sporting man and kept fast horses. Jimmy always drove for him. He tells me he's 21 years old though don't look more than [?]. I can recommend him so far as I know him.

He's very good and does everything I tell him. There are several I could recommend. Indeed as a general thing I find the Colored soldiers much superior in point of refinement and manners and obedience - to the geneality [*sic*] of white. I like them twice as well. They

are so respectful, particularly those from the southern states. Kentucky's are the best. Jimmy is from the Eastern Shore Md.

You will miss Mary very much. She has been a mother truly to the other children. Tell her to write to Aunt Lil. You spoke about my coming home. Yes, I might as well have some little easy times. I am enjoying myself real well. Go out considerable and do just as I please. The most of the ladies have left. Only 7 remain. We are very aristocratic. Take our meals on the ward. Send for them.

**You spoke about my coming home. Yes, I might as well have some little easy times. I am enjoying myself real well. Go out considerable and do just as I please.**

How about Mr. Wheeler and Ell. Do they think of entering the mercantile business? I see a letter to that effect. And Jesse Jun. I trust he may do something toward keeping his family. It will be the first time. Often I think of Mary and feel thankful I'm not in her place. Unless I had an enterprising Hus[band] I'm better off as I am. Nothing to trouble me. No one to care or think of me. Who couldn't be independent and

happy with plenty to eat and a good bed for sleep.

I have always been cared for so far and a kind Providence is ever near to guide and direct. I often feel as though I knew not what I was going to do or where go when my time is out in the hos[pital] - only live from day to day. I just now finished giving out supper. Stewed tomatoes, bread and butter, and farina pudding is the bill of fare for the patients.

Minnie has got well again. I'm glad! Does she intend commencing housekeeping this fall? and where. I wish Wheeler could commence some lucrative employment off the road. I just now got a flea bite. I never see such poisonous insects. Their bite stings and pains same as wasps - so poisonous and they are so many. I frequently have to undress during the day to find them. Fleas and sand is pretty plenty.

Well brother lest I tire you, I will close with much love to all.

I remain Affect. Sister

Lil

Smile whenever you can -



*The House Log*. Vol. 3, No.1. ©1998 Downingtown Historical Society. Articles and information on events of historical interest welcomed, subject to editorial revision and approval. Send articles to DHS c/o Jim LaDrew. Membership: \$10 individual; \$15 family; \$5 senior, \$3 student.

**Officers:** Harlan Morrison, acting president and vice president; Jay Byerly, secretary; Doris Keen, treasurer. Board: Dave & Joyce Benfer, Ann Gee, Don Greenleaf, Roger Grigson, Jim LaDrew, Bill Woodruff, Mike Young. *House Log* Editor: Roslyn Blyn-LaDrew.

### Obituary of Civil War Nurse, Elizabeth Zook (1846-1865)

The following obituary appeared in the *Village Record*, a West Chester newspaper, on Sept. 12, 1865: "*Death of Miss Zook* -- Miss Elizabeth Zook of West Whiteland, Chester County, died at Hampton Hospital, near Fortress Monroe, on the 4th inst. The deceased was a daughter of John Zook, and was one of those patriotic women who devoted themselves to the cause of the sick and wounded soldiers. Faithfully did she fulfill her

mission in the various hospitals of the Potomac Army, and now she has herself fallen a victim of the unholy rebellion; but she lived long enough to share the joy of seeing the government saved. She died of billious [sic] fever. Her body was embalmed, and in charge of Mr. Hickman James, was forwarded to her father's house."

(see p. 3 for her last known letter home)

#### *About the Downings, con'd from p. 1*

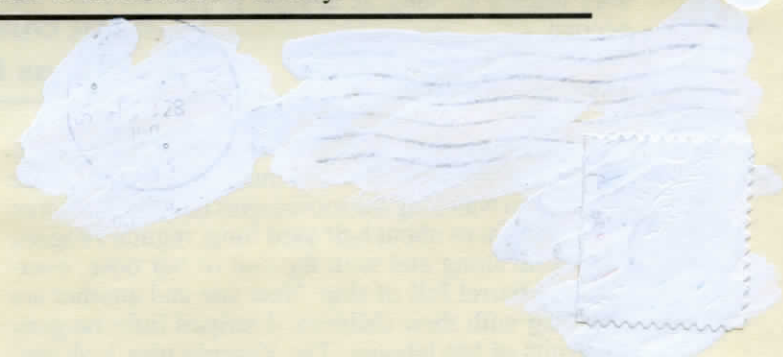
There are thirty four Downings listed in the local phone directory, five in Lancaster and twelve in Wilmington. And there are certainly many more not bearing the name of Downing.

This past October I had the pleasure of spending several hours with Charles and Sandra Farney and their son Joseph. They have since supplied names and dates taking the Downing genealogy back to 1560.

The Farneys had flown in from Tulsa, Oklahoma for the express purpose of visiting Downingtown and related sites. Charles is a tenth-generation descendant of Thomas Jr.

More recently Richard Downing, Jr. of Denver, Colorado donated the two hundred year old Quaker marriage certificate of Richard Downing and Elizabeth Miller to the Historical Society.

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





# The House Log

Volume 3 Number 2

Spring 1998

A Publication of the Downingtown Historical Society

## *A Message from the President*

*by Roger Grigson*

The Downingtown Historical Society was incorporated in 1978 to serve the community of Downingtown. I feel the community is not fully aware of what we have to offer. A publicity campaign will be developed once more progress is established in the acquisition of the Miller's House adjacent to the Roger Hunt Mill.

We will be initiating an archeological dig with the participation of local schoolchildren at the site of the Roger Hunt Mill Miller's House.

I personally need to re-establish the oral history project, gathering information from our senior citizens before it is too late.

We hope to get more support personnel in the Archives room at the Borough Hall for residents interested in researching their homes, genealogy and local industries and businesses.

Hopefully we can resolve the location of the forty Revolutionary soldiers' graves who were patients in a local barn. Also, research work is needed at the Black Lindley Hill Cemetery, where fourteen Civil War soldiers are buried. Additional research is needed on the commissary and fortifications in Downingtown during the Revolution.

I would also like to thank local historian Paul Rodebaugh for his excellent and informative talk to the Downingtown Historical Society at the Annual Banquet on May 16. His talk on "Chester County Expatriates" shed insight on those Chester Countians most well known for their activities outside the County. For more information on Paul's books, please see page four of *The House Log*.

-- Roger Grigson

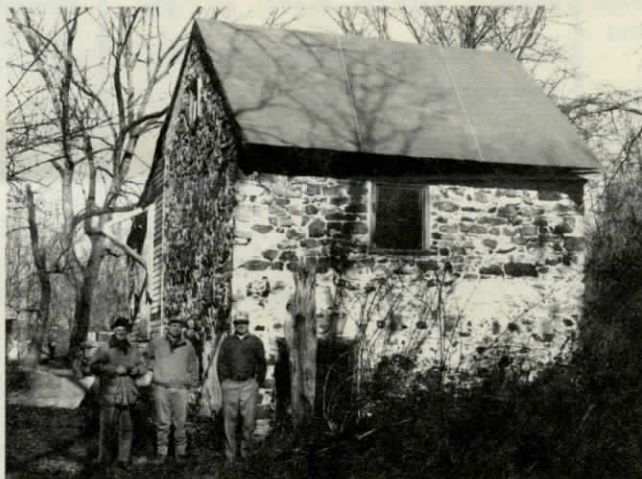


Photo: Jim LaDrew

Volunteers Francis Brown, Mike Young, Graham Miles (left to right) at the Roger Hunt Mill Miller's House

### *Downingtown Bibliography: A Continuing Series*

#### *Joseph Plumb Martin: Eyewitness to 1778 Downingtown and Its Role in the American Revolution*

While very little of Downingtown's history during the American Revolution has been compiled in a single source, the town played a significant role during the birth of our nation. The period of greatest military activity occurred between late 1776 and mid-1778. In December of 1776,

as a result of authorization by the Continental Congress, orders were issued to establish "magazines" or storage facilities for twenty thousand men at three locations: four months' supply at York, two months' supply at Lancaster, and ten days' supply at Mill Town (Downingtown). In a

*continued on page 2*



## **Joseph Plumb Martin: Eyewitness to 1778 Downingtown and Its Role in the American Revolution**

March 5, 1777 military dispatch, George Washington referred to a forage magazine then being constructed in Downings' Town.

It must be remembered that when the American Revolution occurred, the leaders involved in the revolt against British authority were faced with the problems of conducting a war while, at the same time, building a government from the ground up. Paramount among those problems was that of financing a government at war. It quickly became apparent that, in order for the Continental Army to have effective mobility in opposing the well fed and well financed British Army, it had to forage. These forage facilities were set up in strategic locations so they could be drawn upon as the army moved about.

With the magazine established in Downings' Town by the middle of 1777, the town saw heightened war activity when in August, the British Army under General Howe was making its way up the Chesapeake to occupy Philadelphia. Anticipating the enemy's advance through Downings' Town, Washington ordered militiamen from Philadelphia along with three-eighths of the city's artillery to guard the little town along the Brandywine. An earthwork fortification was erected on James Webb's farm to defend against the British advance from the west.

Instead, on September 11, the British clashed with Washington's Army in and around Chadd's Ford in what became the Battle of Brandywine. Casualties were heavy on both sides. Unable to maintain a defense of Howe's flanking maneuver, Washington's men formed an organized retreat and the British Army occupied Philadelphia by the end of the month.

In December of 1777 Washington chose Valley Forge as the winter encampment for his army. The forage magazine in Downings' Town remained in place and it is at this time that Joseph Plumb Martin enters the scene.

The accounts of Joseph Plumb Martin's experiences as a soldier in the Revolutionary War were

written by him in a book entitled, *Private Yankee Doodle - Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier.*

The narrative was written when Martin was seventy years of age and, as pointed out by the editor, George F. Scheer, it is difficult to imagine how, after fifty years, one could recall with such clarity "not only the events but also the sensations, reactions and emotions of youth." But Joseph Plumb Martin was a remarkable man with a remarkable story to tell.

**"We were immediately furnished with rations of good and wholesome beef and flour, built us up some berths to sleep in, and filled them with straw, and felt as happy as any other pigs that were no better off than ourselves."**

Born on November 21, 1760 in Becket, Massachusetts, he moved with his father to Connecticut where, from age seven he was raised by his maternal grandparents. In June 1776 he enlisted for six months at age fifteen in a regiment of the Connecticut state troops. Mustering out in December of that

year, he went home for the winter but in April of 1777 he enlisted in the Continental Army under which he served until it was disbanded in 1783.

Private Joseph Plumb Martin arrived at Valley Forge on the evening of December 18, 1777. He and his fellow troops had been marching for days, had not been fed and were inadequately clothed for the approaching winter. Parched with thirst and unable to find water in the dark, Martin begged for water from a passing soldier with a full canteen. The soldier refused until Martin offered to pay him three pence in Pennsylvania currency, all the money that he possessed. The deal was made and Martin got his water.

For two days he remained at Valley Forge with nothing to eat but half of a small pumpkin which he cooked in a fire. Then Martin got lucky. He was assigned to report with a number of others to the Quartermaster General's office where he was told he would be part of a foraging expedition, which, as he put it, "... was nothing more nor less than to procure provisions from the inhabitants for the men in the army and forage for the poor perishing cattle belonging to it, at the point of the bayonet." (Martin 1962: 104).



Martin's party consisted of a lieutenant, a sergeant, a corporal and eighteen privates. After a day's march, he writes, "...we arrived at Milltown, or Downingtown, a small village halfway between Philadelphia and Lancaster, which was to be our quarters for the winter. It was dark when we finished our day's march. There was a commissary and a wagon master general stationed here, the commissary to take into custody the provisions and forage that we collected, and the wagon master general to regulate the conduct of the wagoners and direct their motions. The next day after our arrival at this place we were put into a small house in which there was only one room, in the center of the village. We were immediately furnished with rations of good and wholesome beef and flour, built us up some berths to sleep in, and filled them with straw, and felt as happy as any other pigs that were no better off than ourselves." (Martin 1962: 105).

The chapter involving Joseph Plumb Martin's time spent in and around Downingtown provides the reader with a fascinating glimpse of Pennsylvania Colonial life through the eyes of a young soldier experiencing adventure. But Martin was clearly sensitive and ambivalent about his role as forager when he writes, "Our duty was hard but generally not altogether unpleasant. I had to travel far and near, in cold and storms, by day and night, and at all times run the *risk* of abuse, if not of injury, from the inhabitants when *plundering* them of their property, for I could not, while in the very act of taking their cattle, hay, corn and grain from them against their wills, consider it a whit better than plundering -- sheer privateering. But I will give them the credit of never receiving the least abuse or injury from an individual during the whole time I was employed in this business. I doubt whether the people of New England would have borne it as patiently, their 'steady habits' to the contrary notwithstanding." (Martin 1962: 113-14).

And Martin was certainly made aware of certain cultural differences when "We stopped at a house, the mistress of which and the wagoner were acquainted. (These foraging teams all belonged in the neighborhood of our quarters.) She had a pretty female child about four years old. The teamster was praising the child, extolling its gentleness and

quietness, when the mother observed that it had been quite cross and crying all day. 'I have been threatening,' said she, 'to give her to the Yankees.' 'Take care,' said the wagoner, 'how you speak of the Yankees. I have one of them here with me,' 'La!' said the woman. 'Is he a Yankee? I thought he was a Pennsylvanian. I don't see any difference between him and other people.'" (Martin 1962: 113).

Martin and his fellow troops remained in Downingtown until the end of April, 1778 when they were replaced by southern troops and ordered to return to Valley Forge. The remainder of the narrative follows his adventures through the end of the war.

While much remains to be discovered about Downingtown and its role in the Revolutionary War, it is personal accounts such

as those of Joseph Plumb Martin which breathe life into history and lead to a deeper appreciation of our heritage.-- *Jim LaDrew*

**...we arrived at Milltown, or Downingtown, a small village halfway between Philadelphia and Lancaster, ...**

#### *Bibliography*

Davidson, Jane L.S. 1982. *A History of Downingtown, With a Pictorial History by Joseph E. Miller*. Downingtown: Borough of Downingtown.

Martin, Joseph Plumb. 1962. *Private Yankee Doodle, Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*, ed. George F. Scheer. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. (First published in 1830).

#### *Suggestions for Further Reading*

Martin, Joseph Plumb. 1995. *Yankee Doodle Boy: A Young Soldier's Adventures in the American Revolution Told By Himself*, ed. George F. Scheer. Holiday House. Reissue. Pp. 190 pp. Level: Young Adult.. ISBN 0823411761.

Murphy, Jim. 1996. *A Young Patriot: The American Revolution As Experienced by One Boy*. Clarion Books. 101 Pp. Level: Ages 9-12. ISBN 0395605237.

**Editor's Note:** The Downingtown Historical Society and *The House Log* welcome reviews and references to books, magazine articles and other publications regarding Downingtown's history. All submissions are subject to editorial approval and revision. -- *editor*]



*The House Log*. Vol. 3, No.2. ©1998 Downingtown Historical Society. Articles and information on events of historical interest welcomed, subject to editorial revision and approval. Send articles to DHS c/o Jim LaDrew. Membership: \$10 individual; \$15 family; \$5 senior, \$3 student.

**Officers:** Roger Grigson, president, Harlan Morrison, vice president; Jay Byerly, secretary; Doris Keen, treasurer. Board: Dave & Joyce Benfer, Ann Gee, Don Greenleaf, Jim LaDrew, Bill Woodruff, Mike Young.  
*The House Log* Editor: Roslyn Blyn-LaDrew.

### **Suggested Reading:**

**Books by Paul A. Rodebaugh, local historian:**  
*Chester County Notebook*, West Chester, Pa. 1987 (a series of 55 articles on local history which appeared bi-weekly in the *Last Edition* beginning in 1984).

*More Chester County Notebook*, West Chester, Pa., 1990 (61 articles continuing the series above).

**Downingtown Historical Society Publication:**  
*The Story of the Downingtown Log House*, by Harlan Morrison (Downingtown Historical Society Occasional Papers, No. 1.) by mail (send check for \$4.25 to the Society; price includes postage).

### **Books of Local Interest**

*The History of Dowlin Forge*, by Susannah Brody. This publication, featured in the summer 1996 *House Log*, is available from the Uwchlan Twp. Admin. Offices (send check for \$15 indicating which publication is requested to 715 N. Ship Rd., Exton, PA 19341 (postage included).

*Please Mom, Let Me Go*, Downingtownian Paul Di Matteo's WWII experiences; available at the Chester County Historical Society.

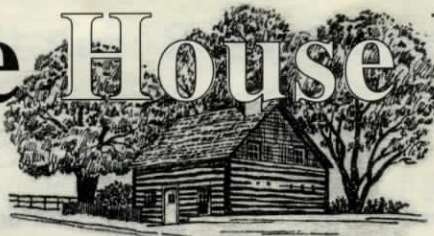
**Historic Downingtown Bed & Breakfast:**  
Glen Isle Farm, Proprietors: Tim Babbage/Glenn Baker. For further information, please call 610-269-9100 or 800-269-1730. Glen Isle Farm can also host your picnic or special event.

**Downingtown Historical Society**  
P. O. Box 9  
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# The House Log

Volume 3, Number 3



Summer, 1998

A Publication of the Downingtown Historical Society

## President's Message

by Roger Grigson

I think the variety of activities available through membership in the Downingtown Historical Society is unlimited. For example, on August 20, 287 people saw six historic buildings in the eastern part of Downingtown as part of the summer walking tour, cosponsored by the Society. Members Francis and Enid Brown made available their 1738 house as part of the tour, and were present to take people through it. Jim LaDrew, my wife, Carol and I led three of the five tour groups. At the end of the tour we were set up to receive the visitors at the Friends Meeting school house. Folk music was performed by Jim and Roslyn LaDrew. Providing refreshments for the walkers were Ann Gee, Dorothea Parker, Joyce Benfer and Doris Keen. Reds Morrison and Dave Benfer manned the display table and explained the activities of the Society during the refreshments.

Plans are for a group of volunteers to clean up the site of the Miller's House on Race St. in preparation for restoration. We are also going to need a powerful team to address the raising of funds necessary to fully restore the building.

We will be assembling a research team to be headed by Jim LaDrew to compile documentation on many of Downing-

town's pre-Revolutionary buildings.

In December much help will be needed to assist Bill Woodruff with the candles for luminaria. Assistance takes the form of counting out the thousands of candles on Friday evening and distributing the orders from the Junior High on Saturday. I am sure our membership can help expand the tradition into the new developments so that an even greater area will be lit on December 24.

In July the Society had to retain a lawyer to deal with the Borough of Downingtown concerning our property in the Borough Archives room and the denial of access to that property. Although not entirely resolved, progress is being made. As a temporary solution, we will be using some room offered by the Chester County Archives in their building on Westtown Road. As you may or may not know, the Borough has also taken back the maintenance and running of the Log House as of October, 1997. We no longer run the tours or annual activities there.

To make this a viable organization, we need the interest and support of all its members. To get you started in the right direction, call me at 269-5413.

### September 14 Meeting: Annual Chester County Day Slide Show

Central Presbyterian Church, 100 W. Uwchlan Ave., Refreshments, 7 pm, Meeting 7:30 pm, free  
Speaker Harriett Whittaker presents highlights of this year's tour of the southeaster quadrant of  
Chester County, to be held on October 3



## Grigson's Discovery on Downingtown's Role in American Revolution

Among the many historical research projects which our President, Roger Grigson, has undertaken, a recent one has been to uncover more information on Downingtown during the Revolutionary War. Both Roger and his wife Carol donate much of their time as volunteers in the Chester County Historical Society and Carol is in the habit of keeping an eye out for any relevant information of value to Roger's Downingtown research. Recently she uncovered an intriguing bit of information concerning Downingtown's historic Ship Inn (near Lancaster and Lloyd Avenues) and a forgotten role it played in the American Revolution.

While cataloguing the papers of eminent William Penn biographer, Albert Cook Meyers, for the Chester County Historical Society, Carol came upon the typewritten text of a Revolutionary War document which caught her attention. Determining that the original document was in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Roger and Carol made the trip into Philadelphia to find it. With the helpful co-operation of several staff members they were successful.

Dated December 15, 1780, the heading of this handwritten document described it as a "List of Hospitals wherein Dr. Francis Alison did duty during his Appointment as Senior Surgeon of the Middle Department." The first entry, apparently beginning in September of 1777, states that Alison was at "Concord Church Meeting House, Birmingham and Springfield Meeting Houses in the Vicinity of the field of Action, Brandywine." From there he went to Philadelphia where he "had the Charge and removal of the Wounded Officers to Burlington and Bristol."

It is the next entry which is of particular relevance to Downingtown's history. From Burlington and Bristol he was ordered "to the Ship Tavern in Chester County to remove the Wounded of General Wayne's Division Massacred at the Paoli..."

From there Dr. Alison went to Lancaster where he was summoned to attend the wounded from the Battle of Germantown and on to numerous other field hospitals in Pennsylvania.

Until now little seems to have been uncovered about any activity which may have occurred in and around the Ship during the American Revolution.

In fact, the prevailing belief, based solely on oral tradition, was that it was run by Loyalist sympathizers. This oral tradition, published in at least two histories of Downingtown, is that rebel patriots shot numerous holes in the signboard of the Ship in retaliation for the Loyalist activities of those who ran it.

The validity of this story may now have to be re-evaluated. It was not the practice of the Continental Army to place their sick and wounded under the roofs of known Loyalist sympathizers. They would typically be housed with those sympathetic to their cause or ostensibly neutral, such as Quaker meeting houses as is seen in Dr. Alison's list of the field hospitals he visited.

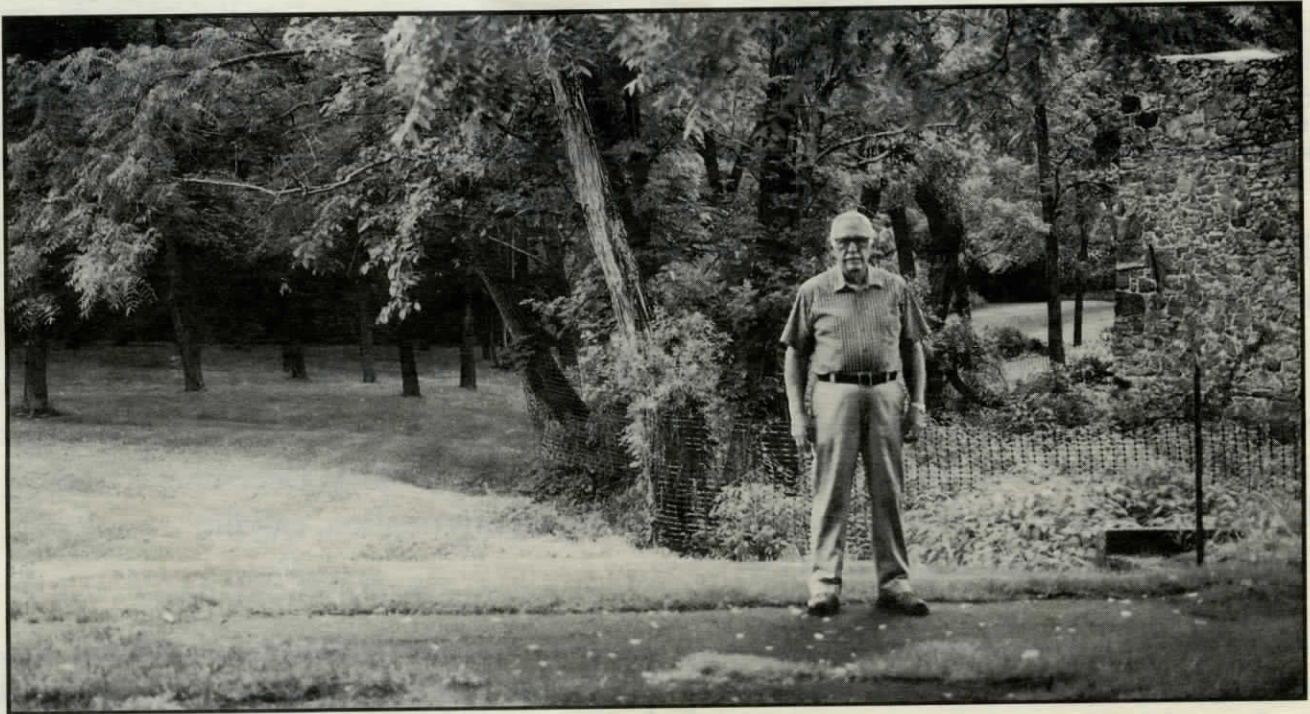
Research in the Chester County Archives records of tavern petitions also sheds some light on this issue. From 1774 to 1788 the proprietor of the Ship was Jonathan Valentine (1730 -1811). He was a nephew of Abel Parke who received the first license to operate the Ship in 1735. Valentine's name also appears in some other official records during the American Revolution. The muster roles of the Pennsylvania State Militia have been compiled in bound volumes of the Pennsylvania Archives. The fifth series, Volume 5 lists a company in Chester County of the State Militia, commanded by a Captain Barker, whose recruits included many men from the Downingtown area. Among them are Samuel Hunt, son of Roger Hunt, James Webb, then owner of the Roger Hunt Mill, Joseph Downing, Thomas Downing Jr., Richard Downing Jr. and Hunt Downing. Also included is Jonathan Valentine. The date of this muster is May 24th, 1779. Subsequent roles in 1781 reveal him serving in a company commanded by Captain Isaac Thomas.

Based on this new evidence, it now seems more likely that the Ship was a center of activity in support of the American Revolution and that the oral tradition of the trigger-happy patriots is probably untrue.

Historical research on a local level is often tedious and unrewarding. It calls upon those who pursue it to spend a great deal of their time pulling material from various unrelated sources, more often than not, with few conclusive results to show for their efforts. But it is little gemstones of discovery such as the one Carol made for Roger's project that make it all worthwhile.

--Jim LaDrew





## John Ballentine, Volunteer, Maintains Mill Grounds

Take a walk or drive down Race Street in Downingtown. As you view the ruins of the old Roger Hunt Mill, you will no doubt be struck by the beauty of the grounds surrounding it.

Approximately one acre of land surrounding the mill is groomed like a country club and, in appearance, rivals any park in Downingtown. The community has only one man to thank for this service. His name is John Ballentine.

In 1972 Ballentine moved with his family to Race Street into the large old stone farmhouse across from the mill. For over seventy years the farm and mill had been owned by the Pollock family but had been recently acquired by Daniel Tabas, who had made the farmhouse available for rent.

By this time the mill had not been in operation for over twenty years and had deteriorated from neglect. Weeds and brush had overtaken the land surrounding it. About two years after moving in John says he began the process of cutting down the overgrowth, each year reclaiming a little bit more and keeping it mowed just because "I like the way it looks."

In 1992 the Downingtown Water Authority acquired the mill property with Tabas retaining the farmhouse and about four and a half acres surrounding it, and in 1994 the mill property title was transferred to the Borough of Downingtown. For nearly twenty-five years Ballentine has donated his services and equipment keeping the area around the mill mowed and trimmed simply for the satisfaction it gives him.

A Chester County resident all his life, John was born in Glenmoore, spent his early years in Lyndell and his later youth in Eagle. He says being raised on a farm taught him the importance of keeping grass mowed and looking neat. Now semi-retired, he currently mows about two acres on both sides of Race Street every 7 to 10 days in the growing season.

Downingtown as a community owes a debt of gratitude to John Ballentine and the countless hours he has contributed to the beautification of this important piece of Downingtown's history.

Hats off to John!

-- Jim LaDrew



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**Officers:** Roger Grigson, president; Harlan Morrison, vice president; Jay Byerly, secretary; Doris Keen, treasurer. Board: Dave & Joyce Benfer, Ann Gee, Don Greenleaf, Jim LaDrew, Bill Woodruff, Mike Young. *House Log* Editor: Roslyn Blyn-LaDrew.

### We're on the Web

Thanks to the efforts of our secretary, Jay Byerly, we now have a website. Next time you're browsing, check us out at [http://members.xoom.com/dhs\\_pa](http://members.xoom.com/dhs_pa)

### Christmas Will Be Here Before You Know It

So keep in mind the following event: The Friends of the Downingtown Library will be presenting *Boughs and Bows, A Christmas House Tour* on Sunday, December 6 from 12 to 5 pm. Tickets are \$10 per person. For additional information, call the Downingtown Library at 269-2741

**Downingtown Historical Society Publication:**  
*The Story of the Downingtown Log House*, by Harlan Morrison (Downingtown Historical Society Occasional Papers, No. 1) by mail (send check for \$4.25 to the Society: price includes postage).

**Historic Downingtown Bed & Breakfast:**  
Glen Isle Farm, Proprietors: Tim Babbage and Glenn Baker. Further info, please call: 610-269-9100 or 800-269-1730. Glen Isle Farm can also host your picnic or special event.

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



# The House Log

Volume 3, Number 4

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A Publication of the Downingtown Historical Society

## The President's Message

Thanks to the untiring efforts of Don Greenleaf, we should soon be taking possession of the Miller's House at the Roger Hunt Mill. The subdivision was approved at the December 28th meeting of Borough Planning Commission.

Harlan "Reds" Morrison, Tom Waters and Jim LaDrew have begun digging a test hole (21" by 21") and have recovered 81 objects next to the Miller's House. Call Reds (phone 273-9053) if you want to sign up for the next dig.

Nancy d'Angelo has logged 41 history books into our Accession Book, a donation from the Downingtown Library. We also have a recent generous donation from Elmer Talierco. (see below). Next time you do the spring housecleaning, remember us - diaries, maps, photos, etc. You could qualify for an IRS deduction.

Ruth Lowe and Carol Grigson are involved in updating the clipping files of Downingtown at the County Historical Library. Since these years cover 1890 to 1929, new and exciting history should emerge. More volunteers are needing for pasting in this large project. Anyone willing to help should call 269-5413.

Harry Helms was able to move some 30 boxes of our undisputed property from Downingtown Borough Hall

to the Chester County Archives, where space has been provided for us. These objects will be in safe keeping until we can establish a permanent home for them.

Jeff Rollison, Chester County Archivist, helped Jim LaDrew and I get two computers donated by the County. A team has been established to computerize our property while they are stored in the County Archives. Call if you can help with this project.

John Schuman will help kick off our first fund raiser for the Miller's House with an appraisal for antiques and collectibles on January 23 at the Central Presbyterian Church. (Rain/snow date is January 30). John, a member of the Society, is the author of several books and has a weekly article in the *Daily Local News*. Now is the time to find out what that platter or sword is worth

Bruce Mowday, former managing editor of the *Daily Local News*, will be speaker for our February 19th meeting. Bruce has recently completed a book on Ft. Delaware and will share his insights with us.

As we move toward a new century, the Downingtown Historical Society is committed to preserving the past. All sorts of new ventures are opening. All projects can use many minds and willing hands. Come join us in our exciting activities!  
-- Roger Grigson

## Society Receives Pewter Donation

Elmer Talierco has graciously donated to our Society over 30 pewter items, some dating back to 1750. As a pilot for Pan American Airlines, Elmer was able to pick up this pewter in London and Paris.

Some background on the Talierco family is very interesting. His father, John was born on the island of Ischia, near Naples, Italy. He came to America in 1915; he worked in the Downingtown Iron Works and married in 1918. The family of three children resided at 527 W. Lincoln Highway, Downingtown. The home was one of six identical three-story mansard roofs, built in the western section of Downingtown around 1880.

They were referred to as the "Plate Glass Houses," as the mortgages were held by the U.S. Plate Glass Insurance Company.

Elmer graduated from Downingtown High School in 1943 and became a fighter pilot in the Army Air Corps. He holds the distinction of being one of the first jet fighter pilots in the Air Force, stationed in Germany.

## Antiques Appraisal

The Downingtown Historical Society is pleased to announce that John Schuman, noted authority on antiques, will be offering appraisals (\$10 per item). Proceeds benefit Miller's House restoration. Central Presbyterian Church, January 23, 1 to 5 p.m.



# ***Where Did the Early Downingtown African-American Population Live?***

*by Renee F. Carey*

Looking back into the history of some 70 years ago, Downingtown, Pennsylvania was among several Chester County towns which African-American families called home. These families were known to have homesteaded in cluster groups that also contained other branches of family members living together as one nuclear family. The ability of African-Americans to own their own homes during this era was a luxury not afforded by many, even within their own communities.

During the early 1900's, most of the African-American families lived basically in certain parts of Downingtown. One of these areas was and still is known today as Johnstown, entered by passing through a railroad underpass on Viaduct Avenue, to the south side. About a block from this underpass and across Business Route 30 on the north side is the once famous diner featured in the movie *The Blob*. Johnstown by its name gives no indication that this area of town was home to a significant African-American population along with their places of worship. A small street known as Prospect Avenue became the homestead area for many local African-American families. Several of these families also made their homes along the railroad tracks in this area of the town. In the center of this mini-community, clustered together in small closely built homes, neatly tucked in a row, most of the families on this street knew each other as relative or friend. In the center of this the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (predecessor to the Zion Church - Lindley Hill, Caln Township), became the focal point

**Another area of Downingtown that became an African-American cluster community was the "Brick Yard."**

for the Prospect Avenue community as well as for many other African-American families in Downingtown. Prospect Avenue stopped at the top of the hill at the Warwick

family house, which still can be found standing and livable. Prospect Avenue today is not the same as the Prospect Avenue of yesterday, but at the same time, it is similar. Many of the older houses still remain with families of the original African-American owners who bought them in the early 1900's. As time went by, this population expanded and the families eventually bought property in the area surrounding

Prospect Avenue. Today, while taking a stroll through Johnstown and its streets, including Prospect Avenue, you can see the expansion of the African-American population.

Another area of Downingtown that became an African-American cluster community was the "Brick Yard." The Brick Yard was located near today's Ebenezer Baptist Church. To insure he had a steady work force, the owner of the Brick Yard, Mr. H. Walker, built houses for his workers to live in while employed by him. Many of the employees and residents that lived in the Brick Yard were of African-American descent. The houses were built in two rows known as the front and back rows. Walker, later sold his houses to those who worked for him; most of these buyers were African-American. Among the families which lived in the Brick Yard were the Thomas family and several other families still living in the Downingtown area were also residents then. Some members of this population who lived on Whiteland Avenue,



listing their occupation on the 1920 Census as "Brick Workers," were Walter Brown, Madison Brown, Frank Clark and Floyd Lomax.

Moving on to another area of Downingtown, one could also find African-American families in a clustered setting on Washington Avenue. Several of the families which lived here in the early 1900's and were listed on the 1920 Census were the Mr. John P. Thomas Family - Paper Mill, Mr. Golden - Paper Mill, the John R. Miller Family - Contractor, the Pauline Vanlear Family - Paper Mill, Carl H. Vincent - Paper Mill, and the Rebecca Gibbs Family - Private Family Work.

One could also find African-Americans clustered on the east side of Downingtown on Whiteland Avenue. A contractor named John Fisher also built houses for his workers. Constructed of brick and not cinder block, each of the Fisher houses was built with two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs, with an outhouse nearby. As time went on, Mr. Fisher allowed his workers, mostly African-American, to buy these houses. During this time period the residents of the lower end of East Whiteland Avenue were troubled by a creek located across the street from the houses. In heavy storms this creek would flood its banks and flow towards their homes, sometimes entering their basements. Behind the creek were more houses, some of which were large and some, called Bungalows, were small. These houses were also affected by the creek's overflowing. Many of the workers who bought the houses later built additions which included bathrooms. As years went on many of the bungalows were torn down or had fallen down from neglect and disrepair. The Holiness Denomination Church, built by Rev. Butcher and his congregation, was a focal point of this community. Among the

family names from Whiteland Avenue in the early 1900's were Ferguson, Williams, Price, Fields, Thomas, Parker, Miller and Smith. Most of these families were related and/or close friends. On the 1920 Census, Whiteland Avenue families listed were Lomax, Brown, Wilson, Cuff, Kennard, Peyton, Clark and Williams.

Whiteland Avenue in the early 1900's was known by the African-American community as "The Hollow."

**T o d a y  
Whiteland Avenue is still referred to by many as "The Hollow."**

Today, strolling down Whiteland Avenue, one can still see many of the original houses still standing and in good condition. Many of the owners of these homes today are direct descendants of those who purchased them from the builder, Mr. Fisher.

On the outskirts of town, near the Downingtown border, during the early 1900's, one could find several African-American families living and working on farms. There were few jobs for them during this period except domestic service (servants, waiters, coach drivers, cooks, laborers) and farming was one other productive way to support a family. Workers on these farms later were given the opportunity to buy parcels of land on which they would build their own homes for their families, although they would continue to work for the farmers. As time went on, often they would acquire more acreage from the farmers for crops and farming for themselves.

Many of those workers and families were laid to their resting places at Lindley Hill Cemetery in Caln Township, just north of Downingtown. A visit to this cemetery gives pause to reflect on Downingtown's African-American heritage and its living presence today.

-- Renee F. Carey





The above print depicts a young Downingtown African-American girl shelling beans. Taken by renowned Downingtown photographer William South in about 1915, the original is an early color print using a process invented by South. Since his studio and school of photography was located in Johnsontown, it is likely the subject of this photo was a local resident of Johnsontown. *The House Log* would be interested to hear from any of its readers who may recognize this girl, perhaps as a mother or grandmother. The current owner of this photograph, Don Greenleaf, inherited it from his father who was a friend of William South. Don thinks her nickname may have been "Sissy" but knows little else about her. Please call Roger Grigson if you have further information (269-5413).



# Of Limestone and Lime Kilns

A ten-mile-wide belt of limestone passes through Montgomery, Chester and Lancaster Counties. Ample evidence that it is the bedrock of the Chester Valley may be seen in the two large quarries on either side of Quarry Road east of Downingtown.

Limestone is the legacy of the myriad of ancient sea creatures - corals, shells and skeletons - that populated a great shallow sea that covered most of North America some 375 million years ago - give or take a few million!

Little used today as a building stone, limestone was the preferred material for local buildings in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries because of its durability and local accessibility. In Downingtown there are more than twenty five houses and other buildings of limestone along Lancaster Avenue. Most notable of these are the Friends Meeting, the Jug House, the Thomas Moore house, the Public Library, the Joseph Downing house on Park Lane, and the Downingtown Municipal Building.

But were it not for the by-product of limestone, none of these buildings would have been possible, for lime was and is a necessary ingredient of plaster and cement mortar that holds the stones together. Limestone is composed of from sixty to more than ninety per cent calcium carbonate and, when heated to a sufficiently high temperature, carbon dioxide is driven off and the product that remains is calcium oxide or lime. In the latter 18th century and throughout most of the 19th century, lime was of greater importance to the farmer for the control of soil acidity than for building purposes.

During that period individual farmers produced their own lime by burning limestone in lime kilns which had been introduced from Europe. An early traveler in the area described a typical farm as consisting of a house, a barn and a lime kiln. In 1880 there were more than sixty lime kilns in Chester County. Most were over or nearby that belt of limestone.

By the end of the 19th century most of these privately operated kilns were dormant as commercially produced lime became available with a selling price of twelve and a half cents per bushel. Having had no maintenance or restoration for over a hundred years, it is surprising that any are still standing but a few are. One of the best examples can be seen on the west side of Quarry Road just north of Boot Road. Adjacent to this kiln is a second in poorer condition facing Quarry Road but which can be seen only in the winter when the leaves have disappeared.

A description of lime kiln construction on the property of Thomas S. Downing in West Whiteland Twp. was published in 1861. This kiln, located south of Rt. 30

and west of the Oakland Corporate Center, is difficult to find in a heavily wooded area.

"The typical kiln at that time was stone, oval in shape, 18 feet high and tapered, being in diameter at the bottom and twelve feet at the top. It was banked into a hill on three sides. The flue at the bottom measured approximately 2 feet (wide) by 1 foot (high). For lime burning, the lime kiln was stocked with kindling wood and upon that were heaped alternate layers of coal and limestone. Burning took four days. At its completion, this process awarded the limeburner with 1400 bushels of lime at the cost of a mere 4 cents per bushel."

There were four lime kilns between the Downing kiln and the present Rt. 30. No trace of these exist today but evidence of the adjacent quarry remains. Further east there is a triple kiln east of Whitford Road about a mile south of Rt. 30. That these were commercial kilns is indicated by the remains of a rail spur that leads to the old Chester Valley Railroad.

North of Rt. 30 and west of Bell Tavern Road was the kiln on the property of Richard I. Downing in 1880. Any remaining evidence of this kiln was probably destroyed by the Rt. 30 bypass.

Closer to Downingtown were three kilns on Rt. 322. Two of these were on either side of the road just past Rock Raymond Road. The quarry, located on the west side, and now overgrown with trees, is clearly visible in the winter. The third kiln was in the area where the Rt. 30 bypass crosses Rt. 322.

With twenty lime kilns in the vicinity of Downingtown it should not be surprising to find there were two kilns within the borough limits. These were on the west side of Brandywine Ave. immediately south of the Amtrak overpass on land presently occupied by to Sonoco Products Co. This would have been a commercial operation, taking advantage of the proximity of the road and the railroad.

Most people know little or nothing about lime kilns and yet their importance in the latter 18th and throughout the 19th century cannot be overstated. Lime was a godsend for the farmer. No longer did he have to relocate after several years because of reduced crop yield due to depleted acid soils. Cement and plaster would not be possible without it. The iron furnaces of Hopewell, Warwick, Johanna and others depended on lime as a flux to remove impurities from the iron. It also gave the farmer and others a cheap do-it-yourself "paint" in the form of whitewash.

Fortunately lime is white -- what if it was pink?

-- Harlan Morrison



## Downingtown Historical Society

Annual Membership Rates: \$10 (individual),  
\$15 (family), \$5 (senior), \$3 (student)

*The House Log*. Volume 3, Number 4. © 1998.  
The Society's quarterly publication, *The House Log* welcomes submissions of articles and information on events of community or historical interest. All contributions are subject to approval by the Society and editorial revision. Please send contributions to the Society c/o Jim LaDrew.

## Officers

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Vice President: Harlan Morrison

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d'Angelo

*The House Log* Editor: Roslyn Blyn-LaDrew

## Society Calendar

**Antiques Appraisal:** Saturday, January 23, 1 to 5 p.m. Central Presbyterian Church. Conducted by renowned antiques authority, John Schuman. \$10 per item. Proceeds to benefit Miller's House restoration.

**General Meeting:** Monday, February 22, 7:00 p.m., Central Presbyterian Church. Guest speaker, Bruce Mowday, will talk about his recently completed book on Ft. Delaware, which during the Civil War, was a Union prison for captured Confederates.

Downingtown Historical Society  
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