

The House Log

Volume 1, Number 1



Winter 1996

A Publication of the Downingtown Historical Society

A Message from the President

It is with great pleasure that in this first issue of *The House Log*, the Downingtown Historical Society presents to its members and the general public a newsletter devoted to the rich history of our community.

Few of us fully comprehend just how rich our history actually is. We know that Milltown or "Downings Town," as it was variously called in its early days, was in a very strategic location from the point of view of transportation. Situated east-west in the heart of the Great Valley, it was immediately on line connecting the great eastern city of Philadelphia with Lancaster and points west. Indeed, for a long spell it was the western-most settlement beyond which only Indian trails penetrated the forests. It is believed that the Log House, standing at the East Branch of the Brandywine, was the last trading point marking this juncture. In subsequent years what was to be called the Lincoln Highway (Route 30) became this corridor and then, subsequent to that, the main line of the mighty Pennsylvania Railroad paralleled it. North and south, the valley cut by the Brandywine also became a natural corridor.

To serve travelers, particularly those going east or west, numerous taverns or inns came into existence in the early days. These seemed to be at regular intervals as one journeyed west from Philadelphia. Three of these were built in what is now Downingtown. Two of them remain today: the General Washington Inn on the east end and the Ship Inn to the west (now on the south side of the Railroad at Glen Isle). The Half-Way House formerly stood at a site across from McDonald's present location; it was so named as the still-standing stone mile marker states: "30 m. to P/30 m. to L." There

was later a fourth—the Swan—which our older citizens will well remember across Brandywine Avenue from the main office of the Downingtown National Bank. Lots of lore and history connects with these links of travel which also served as centers of socialization and communication.

From its earliest days, because of the availability of water power from the Brandywine, Downingtown became a center for mills and industry, notably paper-making. One of the earliest mills—still standing, but barely—is the Roger Hunt Mill on Race Street off Rt. 322. Built in 1738 or '39, this early mill ground grain not only for the Revolutionary War but also for the French and Indian War some twenty years prior.

Much is known of this early history but much more may come to light through further research. There are undoubtedly old letters, journals, and pictures in the attics of many of our citizens which can fill in our knowledge of our nearly 300 years past. It is our hope that through regular issues of this newsletter, information of this sort can be widely shared. Knowledge of the past is more than a record of earlier times. History, we believe, serves a contemporary purpose in that it provides "rootage" for present generations.

Interest in history has been explosive throughout American life in recent years, as attested by the formation of historical societies such as ours everywhere. Few communities, however, can claim more authentic early American history than here in central Chester County of William Penn's colony of Pennsylvania.

by Francis G. Brown, president

Literature in Review

(De)Romancing the Log: Mercer Challenges Claims to Origin of American Log Construction

In 1924, Henry C. Mercer read a paper entitled *The Origin of Log Houses in the United States* at a meeting of the Bucks County Historical Society. Although never precisely stated in the work, Mercer appears to be addressing the popular misconception that log structures were universally used in the American colonies, emerging suddenly as a building style among populations who had not used such a style in their Old World habitat. The popularity of the image of settlers in log cabins turned it into a romantic, almost iconographic (though anachronistic) symbol of colonial life.

There is in fact virtually no documentation of a contemporary native building style of horizontal log construction in England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales, the homelands of many of the earliest settlers, which had been largely denuded of most of their forests by this time. Traditional native building materials for these areas were typically stone or wattle and daub; timber was scarce and was used sparingly for structural support or decoration (as in the Tudor half-timber style).

Mercer traces the origin of the new building style from its Swedish antecedents to its later adaptation by British colonists. His primary interest is in the use of logs for the construction of dwellings but he also treats log forts, since in some areas these predate log houses. He discusses other ethnic groups who used either a significantly different

con'd on p. 3

Log House Notes

In The Beginning

In the first century A.D., Vitruvius Pollionis wrote the following: "evergreen trees having been laid level on the ground to the right and left, a space between them being left as far as the lengths of the trees extend, upon them at their ends other transverse pieces...are placed thereupon with alternate beams ... on all four sides. And so walls of trees are erected perpendicularly upward ... and the intervals which are left ... they stop up with chips and mud." This is possibly the earliest description of a log cabin.

The Swedes introduced the log house concept to the Delaware Valley, probably in 1638 when Peter Minuit built Fort Christina (now Wilmington) on the Christina River. During the succeeding years, what was originally referred to as the Swedish log house became known as the American log house. This resulted from the national and ethnic diversity of the settlers, their personal tastes and individual abilities, and the availability of materials.

The Downingtown log house is constructed of saddle-notched oak and chestnut logs, a method which dates as early as 1000 A.D. in Sweden. Dr. Henry C. Mercer wrote in *The Origin of Log Houses in the United States*: "The Delaware Valley log dwelling appears not as a permanent home, carefully and elaborately built, but in its cheapest and simplest form, as a temporary, careless, somewhat makeshift [house], soon discarded by the builders."

The above is an appropriate description of the Downingtown Log House, especially when the construction of the house is compared with that of the 1704 Brinton House

south of West Chester, the 1709 King of Prussia Inn or the 1714 Barns-Brinton Tavern in Chadds Ford.

Both Wesley Sessa and Norman Glass, the restorers of the Downingtown Log House, agree that the house was a temporary structure intended to last for no more than a generation or two. That the Log House has survived for nearly 300 years makes it all the more remarkable.

-- by Harlan Morrison

Borough Hall's Archive Room

On September 10th, a dedication was held for the newly refurbished Borough Hall building. Guests toured the offices and meeting rooms but were unaware of one more area still in the planning and design phase -- the new Historical Archive room and library.

The community is fortunate to have a vast collection of historical records, archives, research material, books and relics. In a joint effort with the Borough and the Downingtown Historical Society, these treasures will now be properly housed in the new room.

The new space will not only be used for storage, but this well organized archive room will also be accessible to the public in the hope that the information available will encourage people to learn about and participate in our community. This public information outlet will help home-owners needing information on rehabbing their homes, individuals seeking geneological references, and others interested in the history of Downingtown.

This learning center about the history and heritage of Downingtown will be an important addition to the resources of this community.

-- by Mike Young

News from the Underground

Downingtown's role in the history of the Underground Railroad has often been overlooked. The Underground Railroad was an informal affiliation of private citizens whose opposition to slavery was so strong that they personally helped escaped slaves find freedom in the North. Chester County had dozens of "conductors" using their homes as "stations" to hide escaping slaves until they could be more conveniently transported to safety further north. Downingtown had two such "conductors," Dr. John K. Eshleman and Zebulon Thomas. Slave catchers, employed by the slaves' former owners, often pursued the escapees into Chester County and occasionally succeeded in recapturing them. On May 2, 1848, West Chester's *Village Record* printed this article, which illustrates the perils of assisting the Underground Railroad.

Daring Outrage

The village of Downingtown was thrown into a state of excitement, on Tuesday last, by the abduction of a colored girl, under the following circumstances: On the evening previous, a company of five or six men, arrived in the village, and put up at Parke's tavern. They came in two vehicles. At daylight, on Tuesday morning the party were in motion ... They drove off, and halted at the residence Zebulon Thomas, Esq. an acting magistrate, where they alighted, and went into the kitchen. As our informant states, a black boy was kindling the fires, and had a candle lighted. They took the candle and proceeded upstairs, to a room which was occupied by the servants; and there they found a colored girl 16 or 18 years of age, in bed or about rising. The girl was seized and hurried downstairs and into the wagon, and was immediately driven off at all speed. The noise alarmed the other members of the family, and the

desparadoes were encountered in the house by Esq. Thomas, at whom they presented a pistol, and threatened to shoot him if he attempted a rescue of the girl ... The mother of the girl ... was up and observing the men, concealed herself, and thereby made her escape. Mr. Thomas pursued the men, as far as West Chester, but did not succeed in overtaking them. It is presumed they belong to Delaware or Maryland. No doubt they were led on by some informer, resident in the neighborhood. So bold an invasion of the domicile of a citizen of our State, demands the fullest investigation and most condign punishment of the law.

Since the above was in type, we have learned additional details concerning this outrage, and which characterizes the act as one of the most flagitious ever perpetrated. The men arrived in two parties at Parke's tavern, and seemed to be strangers -- one party at 9 on Monday evening -- and the other at 11. At daylight, on Tuesday, they left, and after entering Mr. Thomas' house, four of the men proceeded to the garret, forced the door, which was bolted, and took the colored girl, dragged her down the stairs and into the carriage -- having placed a gag in her mouth to prevent her from giving the alarm. The name of one of the parties is McClean, from Cecil County, Maryland; and he was accompanied by a police officer of that county. Mr. Thomas, when trying to make resistance, was seized by two of the ruffians, one of whom presented a revolver at his head, and threatened to blow out his brains.

The rights of our citizens and the dignity of the Commonwealth, demand that the most energetic measures should be adopted by the authorities of the State to bring the men

to justice. It is not to be tolerated, that a band of armed ruffians shall enter the domicile of a peaceable citizen, and without warrant of law, at an untimely hour, search its most secret chambers, alarm the members, and carry off whoever they may please. ... Ruffians from other States may prowl about, abuse and insult our people, and break in upon their dwellings with impunity. An example should be made that will be a warning and remembrance.

The Delaware County Republican reported the conclusion of this incident on May 19, 1848: The colored woman recently kidnapped from the dwelling of Mr. Thomas of Downingtown ... has been redeemed from slavery by Dr. Sharpless, who advanced sufficient funds to purchase her freedom.

-- research by Jim LaDrew

(De)Romancing the Log con'd type of log construction, such as the Spanish in Florida, who used vertically placed (palisade-style) logs, or the Dutch, who built log forts but whose dwellings were generally either of stone, or when makeshift, of frame covered with bark.

Mercer's work is short (31 pp.) but intriguing. Although he points to many areas in need of further research, the aspect that might be most interesting from a Downingtown perspective is his comment that he visited 25 to 30 examples of log cabins in the Delaware Valley. Although the Downingtown Log House is not mentioned as one of these sites, Mercer may well have visited and photographed the House in the early 20th century, and his notes on this project might be available in the Mercer Museum and Library in Doylestown, awaiting renewed interest.

-- Roslyn Blyn

Downingtown Historical Society

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

The House Log. Volume 1, Number 1. © 1996.

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

President: Francis Brown

Secretary: Bill Walton

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Board Members: Bill Woodruff, Dorothea
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Jay Byerly, Harlan Morrison, Don Greenleaf

The House Log Editor: Roslyn Blyn

Society Calendar

General Meetings: Second Monday of March, September, and November held at Central Presbyterian Church, Downingtown, at 7 p.m. Guest speakers lecture on topics of local interest; open to the public.

Annual Dinner Meeting and Lecture: held in May (date to be established).

March 11: Jane Davidson, celebrated local historian and author of *A History of Downingtown*, will speak on early roads through Downingtown and the surrounding area. Central Presbyterian Church; open to the public.

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Downingtown Historical Society

P. O. Box 9

Downingtown, PA 19335

The House Log

Volume 1, Number 2



Spring 1996

A Publication of the Downingtown Historical Society

Historian Davidson Speaks on Early Chester County Roads: Never Mind the Potholes! What About the Bears!

On March 11, Chester County's Heritage Preservation Coordinator, Jane Davidson, presented a lecture on early roads around and through Downingtown. She discussed three main routes which early settlers used to penetrate Chester County. One group coming from Philadelphia took boats up the Schuylkill, settling around Phoenixville; others, from Newcastle approached northern Chester County using the Nanticoke Indian Path, which approximates today's Route 10; and a third group, those settling the eastern part of the county used a road roughly equivalent to today's Route 3, which was documented in 1692-93 as being plagued by bears! These routes all predate the somewhat newer Lancaster Turnpike, also known as Lincoln Highway or Route 30.

One Distillery for Every Seven Families

What was life like for these earliest settlers? And what evidence of their existence still survives in Downingtown?

The eastern part of the county was settled first by Quakers in the late 1600s. Life was rugged — with not even the water being considered safe to drink, hence the whisky consumption. Most settlers were squatters who cleared the land, paid taxes, and eventually applied for land titles in the city of Chester.

West Chester was a minor settlement and centrally located Downingtown did not even appear on maps until after the early 1700s. Most residents were farmers, with about 10% of the population employed as teachers, millers, or merchants.

Roads were laid out following settlement and 6% of private land was appropriated for road use. Roads connected settlers to three important centers of commerce and social life: the grist mill, the market, and the church or meetinghouse.

West of the Brandywine

Until 1715, all roads stopped at the Brandywine. Eventually, one road west to Gallagherville was built; its route approximates contemporary Hazelwood Avenue. Its destinations included Compass, Maytown, and the Susquehanna.

Another route with a modern equivalent was Old King's Highway, today's Route 340, segments of which coincide with the Old Wilmington Road on the Chester/Lancaster County line. By 1806, parts of Strasburg Road were also in existence; as late as the Civil War era, travelers along it were reportedly inconvenienced by tree stumps in the road.

Downingtown's Importance Grows

During the French and Indian Wars (1754-60), Downingtown's strategic location contributed to its growth. Wagon trains of grain from Roger Hunt's Mill were sent west to feed troops in Carlisle. And during the Revolutionary War, Downingtown was a center for the transportation of troops and supplies. However, its seeming importance fooled Washington into thinking that General Howe's troops would attack Philadelphia from Lancaster, traveling partly on Routes 82 and 322. Howe instead used the old Baltimore Pike, resulting in the critical defeat at Chadds Ford. More fighting took place near the intersection of Routes 926 and 100, leaving approximately 1200 Americans dead there and the Brandywine running red for three days.

33 To P - 33 To L: First American Turnpike

Downingtown was important as the halfway point in the first turnpike (toll road) in the United States. The Turnpike was completed in 1792 and took two years to build. The 66-mile route ran from Philadelphia to Lancaster and Downingtown was a convenient overnight stopping point.

An inn called The Halfway House stood near the milepost on Route 30 in the middle of Downingtown, just west of the present Dane Decor property. Downingtown had many inns at the time. John Downing complained of having to accommodate travelers stopped because of "freshets on the Brandywine;" he decided to open an inn to exploit their inconvenience.

Cabbage for Breakfast

Three classes of inns were available at the time: first class or stagecoach inns, such as the Ship Inn in West Whiteland Township; second class, and third class or drovers' inns where you slept on your own pallet and received cabbage for breakfast and feed for your horses.

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Archive News

Did you know the Downingtown Historical Society is soon to have an archive room and Library? Plans are underway to make it open to the public. Let me tell you about it.

Since 1978 all marriages and deaths printed in the Daily Local News are recorded in the files at the Municipal Building. Anyone whose obituary lists him as attending Downingtown High School is included in our genealogy file.

We also have a full listing of all homes of all the streets of town as of 1930. These files show a picture of the home, the location, the style of architecture, the owner, and when it was built if the information is available.

For anyone buying a home in town -- the search for a house's background begins here.

There is a large file of photographs if you want to see early pictures of the stores, people and buildings as they used to be. There are also some of the town as it was before the roads were paved and when a trolley went through town to West Chester from Coatesville.

There are lots of pictures of buildings that aren't there anymore—like the Swan Hotel, the Improvement Building, the Grange Bank, the Halfway House and the Pennsylvania House.

We have been lucky to receive many articles which are a part of our permanent collection. Many people have donated clothing from children, adults brides etc. representing families from other times.

Locals are urged to contribute mementos from their homes and families that tell the story of early Downingtown.

by Doris Keen

Log House Notes

Who and When

Articles and publications about the Log House invariably begin by saying the house was built by either Jeremiah Collett or John Hickman.

Collett acquired the property in 1703. It should be remembered that he was not a newcomer to the colonies, but had been a merchant in the area for twenty years and would most likely have been living in a more substantial house which offered considerably more comforts than what could have been provided by the Log House.

Collett had little reason to build a small log house at the end of what would have been no more than a cart path ending at the Brandywine Creek. West of the Brandywine a forested wilderness extended to the Susquehanna River and beyond, interrupted only by the many Indian trails that crisscrossed the area.

Historian Davidson Speaks on Early Chester County Roads: Never Mind the Potholes! What About the Bears!

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Railroads Enter

In 1832, the first railway went through this area, diversifying transportation routes. Although we may think of bypasses and their impact on local businesses and traditional shopping areas as a contemporary problem, similar situations existed historically. An early victim of occupational isolation was the first Ship Inn, originally located near Poorhouse Road and Route 30, which was cutoff by the railroad.

Conclusion

Davidson's talk stimulated active discussion and several members of the audience contributed information on sections of historic routes with which they were familiar from Siousca to Blow Horn Corner. Attentive listeners came away with possible itineraries for their own exploration of Chester County's early roads. But watch out for those bears and tree stumps!

written by Roslyn Blyn

Collett sold the three hundred and seventy five acres to Hickman in 1705 and, while it would appear that Collett held the property for two years, the sale could have taken place in as little as thirteen months. It is not unreasonable to conclude that it was Hickman who built the Log House, probably between 1705 and 1706.

The word "message" (mess-wij) -- or the absence of it -- may be the most convincing reason to believe the house was built by Hickman. Message, which Webster defines as a "dwelling house with additional buildings", appears in all succeeding sales of the Log House. Only the sale of the property by Collett to Hickman makes no mention of message.

(this article is the second in an ongoing series by Harlan Morrison)

* * * * *

Log House Visitors from Japan and Australia

Gayle Kunkel has had a busy season leading Log House tours. In addition to local visitors, on January 18, she hosted a group of 17 secondary school students from Australia, and on March 22, a group of 22 Japanese exchange students.

Library Sells Prints of The Doorways of Downingtown

The Friends of the Downingtown Library cordially invite all members of the Downingtown Historical Society to attend a preview of the "Richard Webster House, c. 1830," the first in a series of prints based on Mabel R. Stauffer's original watercolors, "The Doorways of Downingtown."

This event will be held on Tuesday, June 11, 1996, between 7 - 9 p.m. at the Downingtown Library. A limited number of prints will be available for purchase at a cost of \$35.00 each.

Refreshments will be served!

Who Owned the Roger Hunt Mill?

The Roger Hunt Mill spans over 250 years of Downingtown's history. During that time its ownership has changed hands some fifteen times. From 1894 until the 1950s it was owned and operated by various members of the Pollock family and, for many long time local residents, it is known as Pollock's Mill. Built in 1739 by Roger Hunt, it was the second grist mill operating in Chester County's earliest village, a community that was soon to become known as Milltown. Roger Hunt operated the mill until his death in 1764 when it passed to his son William Hunt. In 1767 it was seized by County Sheriff John Morton for money owed to creditors, and put up for auction at John Downing's Tavern. The information below is a record of deed transactions of the Roger Hunt Mill and the surrounding land starting in the year 1894 and going back to 1767.

G-11, p 292

5/31/1894

50 acres, 110 perches

Sale price: \$8500

Grantor: Abiah P. Ringwalt

Grantee: John T. Pollock

Note: This deed refers to water rights granted by Samuel Hunt to William Hunt on 2/11/1767

A-11, Vol. 248, p 587

11/13/1891

50 acres, 110 perches

Sale price: \$1

Grantors: Benjamin R. Phelps, wife Anna M. (Ringwalt) Phelps and Jane E. Ringwalt

Grantee: Abiah P. Ringwalt

Note: Deed refers to the will of Samuel Ringwalt proven 5/27/1875 naming children Jacob P., Abiah P., Anna M., and Jane E. as heirs to this land

Misc. Deed Book 17, p.189

4/26/1878

50 acres, 110 perches

20 acres in W.Bradford Twp.

Sale price: \$5909.32

Grantors: Jacob P. Ringwalt, wife Laura H., and Abiah P. Ringwalt

Grantee: Anna M. Ringwalt

Note: Refers to will of Samuel Ringwalt mentioned above. Also mentioned are the Hunt brothers' water right agreement of 1767.

G-5, Vol. 104, p. 397

3/21/1846

50 acres, 110 perches

20 acres, 147 pchs in

W. Bradford Twp.

Sale price: \$10,800

Grantors: James McConnell and wife Harriet

Grantee: Samuel Ringwalt

Note: Deed describes Hunt brothers' water right agreement of 1767.

Mentions two "messuages" and grants land "together with all and singular the houses, Mills, improvements, ways, waters, water courses, etc."

O-4, Vol. 86, p. 488

4/14/1838

50 acres, 110 perches

20 acres, 147 perches in

West Bradford Twp.

Sale price: \$10,000

Grantors: Samuel Miller and wife Mary

Grantee: James McConnell

Note: Hunt brothers' water agreement described. Land "together with all and Singular the Mills, improvements, ways, water courses, liberties, privileges, etc."

I-3, Vol. 57, p. 403

3/3/1814

45 acres, East Caln Twp.

6 acres, East Caln Twp.

20 acres, 147 perches,

WestBradford Twp.

Sale price: \$15,000

Grantor: Robert Roberts

Grantee: Samuel Miller and wife Phebe

Note: Deed describes land "together with the Merchant a Grist Mill, Plaister Mill and Oil Mill thereon and also a water right and privilege appertaining to said Mill originally granted by Samuel Hunt to William Hunt."

D-3, Vol. 52, p. 474

6/22/1810

45 acres, East Caln Twp.

6 acres, East Caln Twp.

20 acres, 147 pchs, W. Bradford Twp.

Sale price: \$10,000

Grantors: Samuel Haines and wife Phebe

Grantee: Robert Roberts

Note: Deed describes land and "all that certain Messuage of Tenement and Merchant of Grist Mill, Plaister Mill and Oil Mill."

I-2, Vol.33, pp. 50, 54

9/30/1793

45 acres, East Caln Twp.

Sale price: 2000 Pounds

Grantor: James Webb and wife

Grantee: Samuel Haines

Note: Deed contains a detailed description of the water right agreement between Samuel Hunt and William Hunt. It also describes the seizure of this property, then consisting of 30 acres, in 1767 by High Sheriff John Morton. It consisted of the land along with a "Water Corn or Grist Mill and a certain messuage or tenement." All was transferred to James Webb who purchased it at auction on 7/27/1767 along with an additional 188 acres.

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May 11: Annual Dinner Meeting and Lecture: Susan Brody, author of a recent book on the history of Dowlin's Forge, will talk about her research.

June 11: Sale of Stauffer prints of Downingtown Doorways at Downingtown Library, 7 - 9 p.m.

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

The House Log

Volume 1, Number 3



Summer 1996

A Publication of the Downingtown Historical Society

Walt Whitman's "Little Lil" Zook, by Gail Kunkel

Her name was Elizabeth Zook. Her home and birthplace was the familiar Zook House in the Exton Square Mall. If you can imagine the Zook House minus the Exton metropolis, with vast greenery and clumps of gigantic oaks; with deer trooping in silent herds across the field; the hare bounding away to the covert; or the pheasant suddenly bursting upon the wing. This was the early life of Elizabeth Zook.

The Zooks were an Amish family that had come east from Lancaster County, generations before and become Quakers. The family worshiped at the Downingtown Friends Meeting.

In 1862, at the endearing age of 16, Elizabeth with her parents' permission, joined the U.S. Army of Nurses at Georgetown Hospital, Washington, D.C. Her letters to her family displayed a tenderness and affection for the soldiers she treated. Military hospitals were run by medical officers who were commanded by the Surgeon General. Sixty-year-old Dorothea Dix was in charge of the Army Nurses. Dix disliked female nurses. Still, somehow Elizabeth earned a posi-

tion in the hospital and won the approval of the hospital surgeon. Dix put her in charge of a ward of black soldiers, mostly former slaves. For some, Elizabeth arranged jobs in Chester County.

In a November 1862 letter she wrote: "I've talked with many a soldier and never have I heard one say they would enlist again. It's all very well to talk and be patriotic, I've done it myself, but I tell you such a place as this is where the beauty is taken off." Elizabeth could have gone home any time

but chose to stay. Another nurse working with Elizabeth was the famous writer Walt Whitman. In his Civil War journals, he refers to a fellow nurse named "little Lil"-- our own Elizabeth Zook!

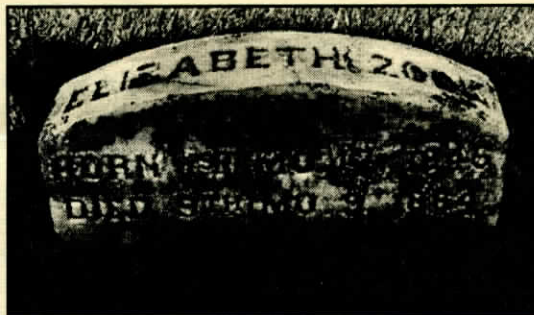


Photo by Roslyn Blyn

Little Lil died in Hampton Hospital near Fort Monroe, probably of dysentery; her age was not quite nineteen. It is not known if she returned home before her death. She is buried in Downingtown Friends Cemetery. Facing the cemetery, looking south, her resting place is in the third row from the west, the nineteenth stone.

(Sources: Paul A. Rodebaugh, Historian, personal communication; Douglas R. Harper, *If They Must Fight*, West Chester: Chester County Historical Society, 1990)

A Message from the President

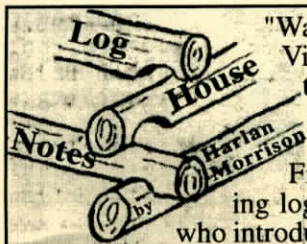
Good Neighbor Day is always payday for me. It is payoff for all the work done throughout the year and 1996 was as good as I can remember. The 600 people who toured the Log House were all complimentary, commenting that "The flowers are beautiful ... the rooms and artifacts all look great ... the musicians are wonderful ... the Log House looks better than it ever has".

I would like to thank Harlan Morrison for his hard work that is evident in every corner and display. He and Doris Keen are there whenever the House is open. Thanks to Dorothea Parker and Ann Gee

for their work as guides, to Jim LaDrew and Roslyn Blyn for their live music. Thanks also to Gail Kunkel who gives tours to school groups all year.

We are fortunate to have the Log House as an enduring symbol of Downingtown. Good Neighbor Day is well named; the people of Downingtown are good neighbors. Their interest and support make our efforts worthwhile. I hope my sons and their children will have as much appreciation for this community as I do and that the Log House will be there for them to enjoy for many Good Neighbor Days to come.

--Bill Walton



"Walls of Trees" -- thus did Vitruvius Pollionis describe the construction of a log house some 1900 years ago. For the Swedes and Finns, who had been building log houses for centuries and who introduced them into the colonial Delaware Valley, such construction was "old hat".

A house built of logs was completely foreign to the early English, Welsh and Scots-Irish settlers whose post-and-beam houses had walls made of clay covered wattle which required constant repair. At Jamestown and elsewhere they surrounded their settlements with defensive vertical-log stockades but apparently never considered adapting horizontal logs to build more permanent houses. They did not abandon their traditional methods until the Swedes arrived in 1638.

At the beginning of the 18th century the Downingtown Log House was on Pennsylvania's western frontier. Of the 11 properties that surrounded the Log House, less than half were occupied by the owners. While log house construction was relatively simple, it was more than one man could handle. Hickman, who built the house around 1705, must have recruited help from his neighbors. For the foundation, fireplace and chimney, the vicinity was scoured for fieldstones, or a rock outcrop might have been quarried for stone. For the logs, 62 trees were felled, trimmed and dragged to the site where they were cut to the desired length and notched. Since no nails were used in the construction, cutting the notches was critical for the house's stability. As the walls got higher, other logs were used as skids up which the higher logs were pushed and pulled into position. The spaces between the logs were filled with daub which in the case of the Log House was composed of lime, sand and clay. Doors and windows were cut out only after the walls were completed.

The Log House is a mixture of Swedish, English and central European (Germanic) architecture. The saddle-notched round logs and the low 5'5" off-center door is Swedish. The floor plan is one recommended by William Penn to the settlers in his province: "a partition near the middle and another to divide one end of the house into two small rooms". The present large back room of the Log House was originally divided by a wall and so the floor plan matched Penn's recommendation. The Swedes built corner fireplaces and the English placed their fireplaces against one wall. The center fireplace of the Log House is Germanic.

Saddle-notched structures were intended to last for a generation or two. Those that have survived to the present day are rare indeed -- and the Downingtown Log House is one of them.

History on the Struble Trail:

Dowlin Forge, by Susannah Brody

(This is an abridged version of Ms. Brody's speech at the Society's annual dinner, May 11, 1996 -- ed.)

In 1785, Samuel Hibberd of Willistown established Mary Ann Forge in Uwchlan Township, along the Brandywine's east branch. Iron was an important local industry by this time. In 1791 southeastern Pennsylvania had 16 iron smelting furnaces and 37 forges for refining pig iron. Settlers quickly discovered that iron was plentiful. All the resources needed for successful ironworks were abundant in Chester County: iron ore, limestone, timber and water power.

Making Iron: Blast furnaces (which smelted iron ore) were about 30' high and built into hillsides so they could be charged from above and tapped from below. A charcoal fire was begun in the furnace. Once in full blast, iron ore, limestone and charcoal were continually dumped into the top of the furnace. The heavy molten iron separated from the rest and settled at the bottom, while the waste (slag) floated above the iron. The iron was drawn off into "pigs" or poured into molds. Blast furnaces produced large quantities of iron but it was brittle. It could be molded or cast but it could not be worked into wrought iron items such as horseshoes, sickles or nails.

So an intermediate operation was developed at the iron forge. Refining pig iron at the forge was the most complex process in the charcoal iron industry. The pig iron was heated in a charcoal fire to form a pasty lumpy ball (a "loop") which was hit with sledge hammers to remove excess charcoal and to roughly shape the mass into a "square" or "bloom" which was then cut in half. Then the half blooms were reheated and hit with the water-powered tilt hammer to form barbell-shaped "anchonies". The ends of the anchonies were reheated and hammered out into long thin bars which were used for wrought iron. Charcoal was essential in early ironmaking. It ensured the consistent hot temperature, needed for the iron to separate properly, which wood did not provide. Also the charcoal's high carbon content aided the chemical process in both furnace and forge.

Making charcoal was the most important auxiliary craft connected with the iron industry. The collier and his assistants stack 25 to 50 cords of wood in a large round pile with a chimney up through the center, covering the pile first with leaves and then with dirt or charcoal dust. When the fire is well lit in the chimney, the top is also covered so that the wood fire burns from inside out, with little exposure to oxygen. Everything in the wood burns except the carbon. Colliers spent much time chopping and piling wood. Several hearths were built and fired at the same time. Hundreds of acres of woods were consumed each year to maintain an iron furnace or forge. While the forge did not require the huge quantities needed at the furnace, an iron forge still needed several hundred cords of wood coaled annually.

Mary Ann Forge: Mary Ann Forge was a medium-sized finery forge with 2 waterwheels, 2 tilt hammers and 3 stone fireplace hearths. Just imagine the atmosphere within: fires glowed; sparks flew; iron was stirred, lifted, and hammered; bellows flapped, waterwheels thudded, water splashed, and hammers pounded, while fire cracked and hissed! The many processes of refining pig iron into wrought iron were carried on simultaneously in the midst of great noise and an almost endless fireworks display.

For the first 15 years, the Mary Ann Forge was owned by the Hibberd family. Hibberd, a blacksmith specializing in making sickles and scythes, invested in the iron forge to help his business, but never lived in Uwchlan, leaving the daily operations to others. On his death in 1793, his family leased the Forge for 7 years to Dennis Whelen who had probably already been managing it. Unfortunately, no records survive to describe the first years of operation.

Dowlin to O'Devlin and Back Again: Many documents describe the Forge under the Dowlins' ownership. John was the oldest son of a poor Irish weaver who first settled with his wife on a 100-acre land grant near today's Hopewell Road and Route 282 (now East Brandywine Township). Roger could not afford to keep the land and in 1768, it was sold to his neighbor William Owen. The O'Devlins continued to live on Owen's land and in 1779 were able to purchase their home and about 5 acres. Before he died, Roger changed his name to Dowlin, probably returning to the original Scottish family name after several generations of the family had lived in Ireland, using "O'Devlin" to avoid persecution. As Scotch-Irish immigrants in Pennsylvania, they no longer feared religious persecution, so they changed the name back to its Scottish form. From 1793 on, the entire family used Dowlin.

John Dowlin and his siblings grew up poor. In 1781, when he turned 18, John enlisted in the army and served until the war ended. He returned home and married a local woman, Jemima Powell, who was 10 years his senior. He had learned how to make charcoal and became the forge collier sometime in the 1790s. By 1800, John had been collier for at least 5 years and may have been manager. In 1801, he purchased the Forge from Hibberd's daughters. Jemima was from a prominent East Brandywine family and John was probably able to purchase the Forge either by a loan or an inheritance from the Powells.

John had previously purchased land on other occasions. In 1791, he bought 78 acres known as "Sarah's Bower". This land was located near what is now Dowlin Forge and Rock Raymond Roads. In 1795 John purchased a nearby 168-acre farm and in 1797 built a large new stone house and barn. The barn ruins can be seen along Dowlin Forge Road. John and Jemima had 2 sons and 2 daughters. His older daughter Elizabeth married the Forge clerk William McFarlan; the younger married Russell McGlaugh-

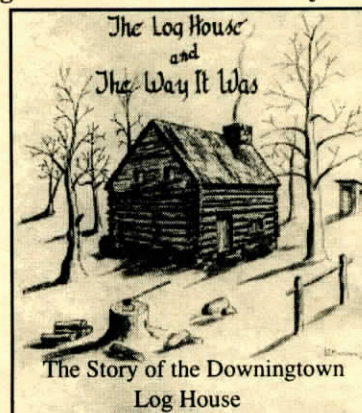
lan. Both daughters lived on and inherited farms in East Brandywine. Although the Mary Ann Forge began in 1785, it was John Dowlin who developed the community which later bore his name. He continued to increase his land holdings so that when he died he owned over 2000 acres. In addition to the Forge he owned mills, farms, a lime kiln, company store, and quarry. For his workers he operated boarding houses and leased small lots or rented houses.

John Dowlin began his ownership of the Forge making bar iron for local blacksmiths, but in the 1820s he began to make plate iron for rolling steam boiler plate. Brandywine Ironworks in Coatesville, begun by Isaac Pennock, eventually became known as Lukens Steel. As manager of the Brandywine Iron Works, Pennock's son-in-law Charles Lukens was the first American to roll boiler plate. Three generations of Dowlins maintained steady business dealings with 3 generations of the Pennock/Lukens family. Quite possibly the first boiler plate rolled in America was made of Mary Ann Forge plate iron.

John Dowlin trained his sons James and William to run the Forge. Both actually worked with the ironworkers making anchovies and drawing bar iron. William sometimes also served as blacksmith. For many years his son-in-law William McFarlan served as clerk for the Forge and store. His oldest son James fought briefly in the War of 1812, married in 1813, but died in 1814 before the birth of his son.

John's wife Jemima died in 1823 at age 70. Soon after her death John married a widow with 4 children, Elizabeth Kerlin Ludwick, and had 3 more daughters. In 1829 John remodeled one of the early farmhouses, away from the Forge itself, and he and Elizabeth retired to farming. In the 1830s and early 1840s, the Forge was run by a partnership that included John, his son William, his brother Jacob, his grandsons Augustus Dowlin and James McFarlan and his nephew Levi Dowlin. (continued on p. 4)

Downingtown Historical Society Announces



by Harlan B. Morrison

Downingtown Historical Society Occasional Papers, No. 1
Available at the Log House when open or by mail
(send check for \$4.25 to the Society; price includes postage).

Downingtown Historical Society

The House Log. Volume 1, Number 3. © 1996. 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 articles to the Society c/o Jim LaDrew.

Officers: Bill Walton, president; Ann Gee, secretary; Doris Keen, treasurer. **Board Members:** Dave Benfer, Joyce Benfer, Jay Byerly, Ann Gee, Don Greenleaf, Roger Grigson, Jim LaDrew, Harlan Morrison, Bill Woodruff, Mike Young

The House Log Editor: Roslyn Blyn

Annual Society Membership: \$10 individual; \$15 family; \$5 senior, \$3 student.

Society Calendar: General Meetings, second Mondays of March, September, and November, 7 p.m., Central Presbyterian Church, Downingtown. Guest lecturers on topics of local interest; open to the public.

Sept. 9: Harriet Whittaker presents slides of homes featured on Chester County Day, first Saturday in October

John was known for his wealth, politics and generosity. He provided land for the first school in the community and he contributed to the Forks of the Brandywine Presbyterian Church. He also provided some of the land for a cemetery at Hopewell Church and the school at Hopewell and Rock Raymond Roads. When he died in 1845, his will divided his 2000 acres among his children and grandchildren, but his son William inherited 1000 acres including most of the Forge community. By 1846, William was 60 years old, so his sons were actually doing most of the work. When John Dowlin owned the Forge, the equipment was well maintained but not modernized. In 1850, William and Augustus began improvements, including replacing a cold-blast stone hearth with a new brick hot-blast fireplace that could smelt iron ore and refine pig iron. In 1854 William helped bring in the railroad which together with the post office formalized the name "Dowlin Forge".

Decline and Revival: By this time, however, the charcoal iron industry was in its final decline due to the Industrial Revolution. After William's death in 1867, Augustus continued the Forge for several more years, but his sons were not interested, so it was closed in the

late 1870s. Some of the old houses fell into ruin, but Dowlin descendants continued to own the lands near the Forge. In recent years, preservation efforts have increased greatly. Some of the oldest properties have been renovated and are inhabited by today's Dowlins.

In 1979 Chester County opened the Struble Trail. In the early 1980s Uwchlan Township began a campaign to purchase land for open space, eventually including Dowlin Forge Park. The Township's Historical Commission initiated research and the Uwchlan Conservation Trust helped raise funds for restoration. Paul Lysko of Boy Scout Troop 105 documented Forge artifacts for his Eagle project. Much of the land has returned to its natural state but the Park also shows the history of a thriving rural industrial community. Today, seeing the scenic watershed, the parklands and the recent residential developments, it is hard to imagine these lands as an industrial site. But 150 years ago they were alive with the sounds, smells and activities of the mills, farms, charcoal hearths, waterwheels and the Mary Ann Forge.

--Susannah Brody, author, *The History of Dowlin Forge*, Chester Co.: Uwchlan Twp. Historical Commission, 1995

Downingtown Historical Society

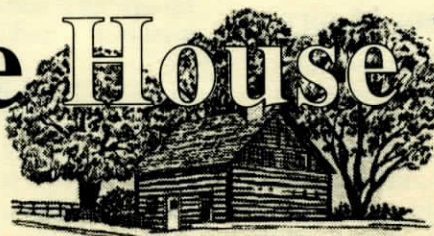
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The House Log

Volume 1, Number 4

Fall 1996

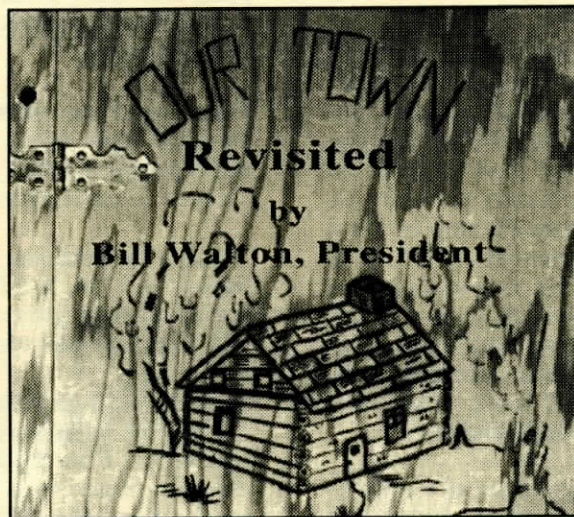


A Publication of the Downingtown Historical Society

Shortly after 1947, the Junior Historians Club of Downingtown High School compiled a book on local history and named it *Our Town*. I came across this book in the Junior High Library while showing a slide program on the history of Downingtown to 7th grade students in 1994. The book, bound in wood with the title and a drawing of the Log House burned onto the front cover, chronicles Downingtown's early history, leading citizens, schools, churches and businesses and describes Downingtown as [going]:

... on its casual way from day to day, its business people opening their shops at 8 a.m., the mill workers riding and walking, coming and going to and from the mills.

Our little borough government doing its job to regulate the town's approximately 5000 people, the children on their way to school, the farmers leaving their cows out to pasture and the chirping of our friendly feathered friends. The peace and quiet of the town's



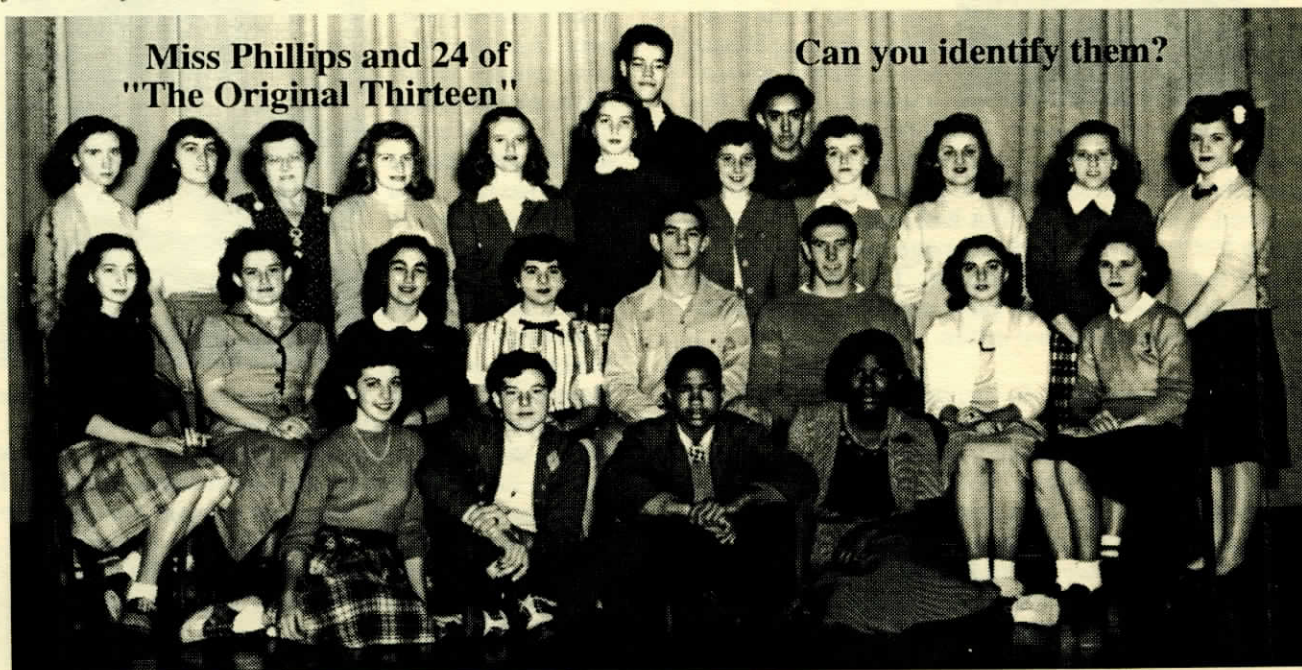
Original "Our Town" Woodwork

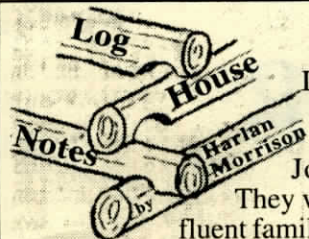
surrounding woods gives, to a welcomed stranger, the impression that he has come upon a little town which was blessed by God and set by Him in the midst of a beautiful valley. It is this, for which men died and died willingly, to preserve. A town, typical of everything that is peace and quiet.

This work presents an interesting picture of Downingtown through the students' eyes and will be featured again in the *House Log*. It was sponsored by Miss Marion V. Phillips. Only four members' names are listed: Bette Moore, Ruth

Schrumpf, and Agnes and Frank Pomanto. The Club portrait shows 24 students and Miss Phillips under the caption "Original Thirteen."

Initial attempts to locate the people listed by name have been unsuccessful. If anyone has information about them or can identify others in this picture, please contact Bill Walton at 269-8590. We would like to know more about the authors of this wonderful book.





More about Moore

In 1713, Thomas and Mary Moore became owners of the Log House which John Hickman had built.

They were probably the most affluent family in the neighborhood and Thomas was possibly the area's first entrepreneur. He promptly expanded his 375 acres to nearly a thousand and in 1716 he built a grist mill, the first industry in the area.

But before the mill there was his trading post. By 1713-14, the wagon trail that once ended at the Brandywine now extended west through present day Coatesville, Gap, Strasburg and beyond to the Conestoga Creek by which name the road came to be known. Where Hickman had seen only the rare pioneer traveler or a neighbor who might stop by for a visit, Moore saw an increasing number of travelers, packhorses and wagons passing his door on their way west. He converted the back west room to a store-room and Hickman's gunport was now opened for trading and to sell such items as flour, cornmeal, salt, vegetables, gunpowder, shot and tools, along with hardware for repairing wagons and harnesses.

In 1717 Moore petitioned the governor of the province to have "a publick house of entertainment" and "to sell strong liquor." A photocopy of the petition now hangs in the Log House. Several alterations of the house were needed to accommodate both the trading post and the tavern. These will be discussed later in the installment on architecture and restoration.

White washing The Log House by Bill Walton

In this age of computers and virtual reality, it may take a 295-year-old house to ground us to the past. When the Log House was first white-washed, I'll be the first to tell it was a shock. It had been a "log house" to me and the whitewash took a while to get used to, even though I had seen the old pictures with it white-washed. I knew that the logs had only been exposed since 1947 and that much damage had occurred because the logs were unprotected. This is why it had been whitewashed in the past, and now, like everyone else, I was used to it white.

The problem was how do you make whitewash? The first mixture used to cover the house after the recent restoration was a thick mixture that covered the logs but did not bond to them. This caused moisture to be trapped between the logs and the whitewash, which flaked off. We were alarmed to find insects under the flaking and knew we had to find another way to make whitewash. Reds Morrison researched the problem and found an old recipe:

Moore now had his trading post, the tavern and the grist mill -- and the road west passing his front door.

In 1718, Peter Bezellion was commissioned to lay out a road from the Susquehanna River to Thomas Moore's. Peter's Road or Old Peter's Road as it came to be known, followed the Conestoga Road from Moore's house to the vicinity of Thorndale, but from there it turned to take a more northerly route. It crossed the west branch of the Brandywine north of Coatesville and continued through Wagontown and Compass, eventually ending at Conoy Indian Town on the Susquehanna, approximately seventeen miles south of Harrisburg.

Peter's road was superior to the Conestoga. It avoided swampy areas, steep hills and was well drained. As more people learned of Peter's Road, the traffic increased -- and it all had to pass by the Log House.

There is no evidence that Moore renewed his tavern license in 1724. In 1729, he moved into his new two and a half story gray stone house which still stands at 341 East Lancaster Avenue.

In 1726, George Aston was granted a license for a tavern, the location of which is not known, except that he lived "on the Great Road leading from Philadelphia to Conestoga in the Township of Calne." And by this time, Bezellion had a trading post in the vicinity of the Coatesville Veterans Hospital. With Moore having moved from the Log House and with Aston's tavern and Bezellion's trading post nearby, it would appear the "glory days" of the Log House had come to an end.

-- Harlan B. "Reds" Morrison

To 1.8 quarts of water add 1/2 lb. of salt, add 2 and 1/2 lbs of hydrated lime with constant stirring. Let the mixture stand overnight. Before using, add 1 oz. of alum and 6 table spoons of molasses. Add sufficient water to make 1 gallon.

This mixture has the consistency of milk, making painting sloppy, but when it dries, it bonds to the wood. The first time we used with this formula it lasted two years. When the Log House was whitewashed again this fall we found no insects and no moisture problem. I had heard the saying "too poor to paint, too proud to whitewash," but that saying doesn't apply here. Thanks to Reds' recipe, we now have the right mix - probably the same as the one Thomas used almost 300 years ago.

(Photo credits: left, Phyllis Walton; right: Bill Walton)



Reds with
Steven Walton

Glen Isle Farm Bed and Breakfast: Historic Hospitality in our own Backyard!

by Roslyn Blyn-LaDrew

Many historic properties undergo changes in function through the centuries, usually in order to escape demolition and to remain economically viable. Many of the conversions are familiar -- barns to homes, mills to restaurants, old schoolhouses to museums, and even vintage gas stations into video stores! It is less common for a historic site to resume its original function, but happily, this is what has happened at Glen Isle Farm, albeit in a pleasantly upscale format.

The farm is one of the oldest homes in Downingtown, with the original building dating to 1730. Located on today's Lloyd Avenue, just south of the railroad tracks, the original property was part of the early Pennsylvania land grant system. In 1727, it was purchased by the Parke family, who in 1735, applied for a licence to open it as a tavern. Known originally as "The Sign of the Ship," the business (or perhaps just its wooden sign) was transferred to Ship Road in Exton in 1795.

Washington Did Sleep Here!

Important guests have included George Washington, whose diary entry for June 3, 1773 describes his visit, James Buchanan, and members of the Continental Congress. During the Civil War, the home was a "safe house" on the underground railroad.

Bed and Breakfast

Today you can sleep here and enjoy the old-fashioned

elegance and excellent cuisine -- even if you are not a revolutionary war leader or governor. For about 150 years, the farm had returned to private use as a home for the Edge, Eshleman, and McIlvaine families, but now the estate once more welcomes overnight visitors and groups for parties, picnics, and special events. Although Washington may not have been

able to enjoy videos in the cozy TV room, you can -- or you can stroll through the gardens and groves of spruce, dogwood, cedar and hemlock, including a stump which tradition tells us is the remains of a hemlock planted in honor of Lincoln when his funeral train passed by.



Photo: James LaDrew

Glen Isle Farm, formerly the original Ship Inn, managed by Tim Babbage and Downingtown's own Glenn Baker.

From small details, such as homemade pumpkin muffins with the gourmet break-

fast, to the massive French Normandy barn whose tumbling walls overlook the house, Glen Isle Farm welcomes, charms, comforts and intrigues -- reminding visitors that the future of the past is in our hands. Proprietors Tim Babbage and Glenn Baker are working hard to save this important site which might otherwise be demolished. But even as they plan ways to enhance its appeal and usefulness to the community, its very survival is threatened by serious challenges such as roofing and drainage problems. The barn may be beyond salvation, although its roof still clings tenuously. One way to support their efforts is to patronize the business, which in turn brings visitors to enjoy all of Chester County's bounty. For more information, please call 610-269-9100 or 800-269-1730.

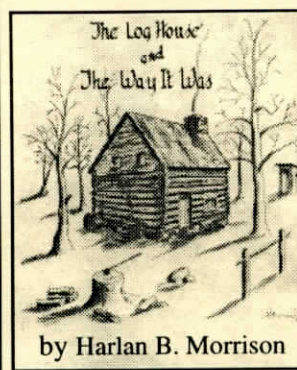
The History of Dowlin Forge, by Susannah Brody

This publication was featured in the previous issue of *The House Log* and is available from the Uwchlan Township Administrative Offices (send check for \$15.00 clearly indicating which publication is requested to 715 N. Ship Rd., Exton, PA 19341 (price includes postage).

Please Mom, Let Me Go, by Paul Di Matteo

Available at the Chester County Historical Society. *The House Log* would like to review this Downingtown resident's recent memoir of WWII naval experiences. If you would like to contribute a review, please contact the Downingtown Historical Society at P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335.

The Story of the Downingtown Log House



Downingtown Historical Society Occasional Papers, No. 1.

Available at the Log House when open (1st Sunday each month, 1-4), and by mail (send check for \$4.25 to the Society; price includes postage).

Downingtown Historical Society

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Nov. 11: Harlan Morrison speaking on the Downingtown Log House

Central Presbyterian Church, Downingtown, 7 p.m.

Dec. 7 (6:30-8:30 pm) and December 8 (1-3)

Down the Chimney at the Downingtown Log House
Santa Claus in person!



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