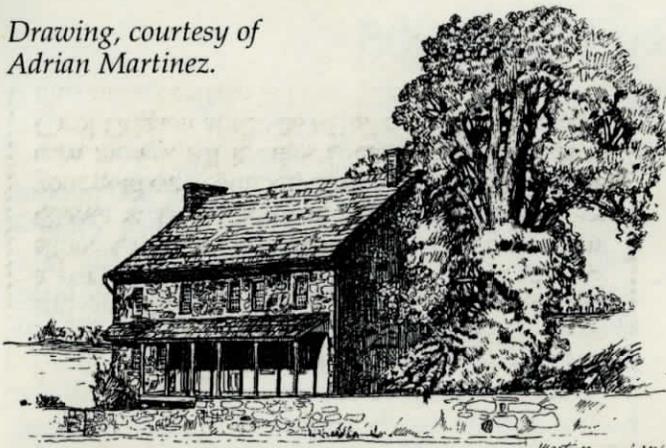


Drawing, courtesy of  
Adrian Martinez.



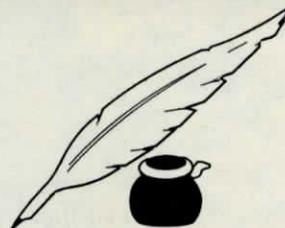
# The TURNPIKE TIMES

Volume 10, Number 3  
Winter, 2006

A PUBLICATION OF THE DOWNINGTOWN AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## The President's Message

by Roger Grigson



The holidays are just memories, but they were exciting at the Ashbridge House. We co-sponsored a Christmas Party with the Downingtown Area Chamber of Commerce. To prepare, volunteers filled and hoisted the oversized wreath on the side of the house, as well as decorate the interior of the house. Others got the chance to see the beauty of the house during the Open House held on December 10th.

Luminaria was again a successful fund-raiser. Chairperson Linda Wittig, with the help of her husband Greg and Carol Grigson, counted out 13,500 bags and candles, to make them ready for

pickup. Some of our block captains have been forced to retire because of age. If candles did not burn on your block, it was due to no block captain. If you are willing to represent your block, please call 610-269-1167.

We were greatly saddened by the death of Senator Robert Thompson. When the Ashbridge House was pretty much a wreck with pigeons flying through the attic, he helped us in our efforts to receive the matching Keystone Grant of \$90,000 to begin the restoration of the building. He was a friend in many ways, and he will be missed. ❁

### CROPPERS NEW NAME

Croppers has changed names to Giunta's Shurfine Market. After John Cropper sold his store to Shurfine, there was no family involvement. We welcome the Giunta Family to Ashbridge Square and hope we can be good neighbors for each other.

For our purposes, Giunta will continue to honor the gold cards. If you registered with us last year, you are re-registered for this year. Both Croppers and Giunta honor the gold card which gives DAHS a percentage of your purchases. If you shop at either Croppers in Guthriesville or at the new Giunta in Downingtown, and have not given us your gold card number, there is still time to help us earn money. All it takes is either a phone call to Carol Grigson at 610-269-1167 or send a note with the number on it to PO Box 9, Downingtown. If we all join together on this, we may earn enough money to heat and air-condition our large building.



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

*The Turnpike Times*, ©2003 Downingtown Area Historical Society. Articles and information on events of historical interest welcomed, subject to editorial revision and approval. Send articles to DHS, P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335. Membership: \$15 Individual, \$25 family, \$10 senior, \$7.50 students.

**Officers:** Roger Grigson, president; Ernie Jameson, vice president; Carol Grigson, secretary; Ralph Hall, treasurer. Board: Lauren Fagan, George Gale, Harry Helms, Bob Kahler, Jean Kahler, Dr. Richard Lehr, Ruth Lowe, Pam Nicolini, Thomas Roberts and Doris Zelina. *The Turnpike Times* Editors: Carol Grigson and Ruth Lowe.

# Chester County Day, 2005

By Carol Grigson

From the humble beginnings of a large one room house with a loft, the majestic Ashbridge House took on new life on October 1, 2005, the date of Chester County Day. The walls of the Ashbridge House could probably tell many tales of events held there over the years, but sheer numbers would make 2005 stand out.



*Ashbridge Back Patio on Chester County Day*

Though a work in progress, over 500 people came to see what was once the stone wreck of a building, which stood in front of the old Farmer's Market. As the restoration has been slowly completed since 2000, all sorts of wonderful discoveries have taken place.

Many volunteers turned out to show off the house, and its newly completed patio. To those who had seen it in such dire circumstances over the years, the house never looked so good. Display cases contained objects of the area's history and pictures were scattered throughout the first floor rooms.

The day was a long one, but a very satisfying one. We learned that most of the people who went through the house had never visited before. The most frequent comment heard was that it was much larger than it appeared outside.

With pride, the volunteers closed down the house that night, knowing that the beautiful house, with all its features, was saved from the wrecking ball and is regaining some of its previous stature. ❁

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## History Club at Downingtown Middle School

By Carol Grigson

When you are a student in middle school, and have reached the ripe old age of 12, 13, or 14, your concept of "old" and "different" differs drastically from those over the age of 50.

For the entire first semester of this school year, the History Club at Downingtown Middle School has taken, as their area of research, the differences in school today and "in the old days". Under the direction of teachers Anthony Basilio and Sharon Jackson, the students met on Mondays after school to develop an outline to help them learn from interviews. Once they had the rubric, they then had to decide how they were going to present it.

It was decided that interviews would be obtained to learn what school was like at different decades, from the 1940's until the

present. Unlike most of us when we were in school, the students decided to create a website, which would be part of the Downingtown Middle School website. All the results of the research will soon be available to anyone who visits the school website.

In addition to Carol Grigson, from the Downingtown Area Historical Society, acting as consultant and liaison with the club, two of our members became the subjects of the interviews. Ernie Jameson was interviewed, as was Jim Mc Gowan. In addition, DAHS was able to provide old photographs of school activities, which the students incorporated into the website.

The website is not completely finished, but when the address is known, it will appear in our newsletter. ❁

# DOWNINGTOWN PAPER COMPANY

*Continued from Summer 2005 Issue*

*By Carol Grigson*

The story thus far—Frank Miller started his paper company in 1881. Solitude Mill was too isolated, and 14 acres of land was purchased on Brandywine Avenue in 1887, and the paper mill moved. Great expansion took place in 1894, when additional capital was gotten from his relative, J Gibson McIlvaine.

From the time of expansion in 1894, the Miller Paper Company continued to produce a large inventory of paper. No one anticipated the size of the tragedy, which would occur in January, 1900. At 9:40 p.m. on the night of January 30, Downingtown was awakened by a shrill whistle. Those close to the paper mill, immediately recognized the alarm as coming from the paper mill itself. Within 2 minutes, the alarm was given throughout the East Ward. Crowds emptied out of houses onto to Brandywine Avenue, all heading to the mill.

The members of Alert Fire Company were not sitting in idleness. They quickly realized that the horses could not be brought to the fire house and harnessed to the engine with enough speed. Members of the fire company grabbed the engine and began running with it to the fire. The engine arrived in less than ten minutes with the many of the men winded after running at top speed.

There they found that the fire was confined to a stock house, adjoining the main buildings on the east. The stock building was frame, was two stories in height and stood about 65x50 feet. It was totally filled with paper stock stored in bales, and it was completely filled with flame.

Before the arrival of the Alert engine, the East Ward hose cart had been hurried to the scene, and a long stream of water had been directed on the burning mass, thus preventing the flames from spreading. However, this was discontinued after a short time, because all the water from the plug had been drained by the fire.

Suddenly the mill was in total darkness.

The electric wires providing light had burned through. The only thing visible was the outline of the mill produced by the flames.

Once the Alert engine arrived, the roof of the main building was scaled and a stream of steady water kept hitting the seething mass of flames. Thus, the fire did not jump to the main portion of the mill.

At the same time, another stream of water was aimed through the lower part of the eastern end, where water was hitting the western corner of the stock house. This, effectively, contained the fire to the stock house.

When the fire started, the adjoining siding of the Pennsylvania Railroad was filled with empty railroad cars, which had been unloaded at the mill that day. An engine was quickly sent to pull the empty cars to safety. This was accomplished with no time to spare, as the cars were directly alongside of the burning building.

The cause of the fire was unknown. The signal was given by a workman, who promptly blew the whistle. The firemen battled the fire until 4:00 that morning in very difficult circumstances. The weather was extremely cold, and the townspeople supplied hot coffee and sandwiches for the firefighters.

In that fire, 900 tons of paper stock burned. One newspaper claimed that the flames could be seen as far away as Philadelphia, that it was amazing that anything was left standing.

In one of the strange coincidences of the day, Frank Miller had been attending the meeting of the Alert Fire Company and had left 20 minutes before the alarm. He had not yet reached home when the first alarm was sounded.

Production started within 2 days after the fire, although the last of the smoldering paper was not removed from the crumbled warehouse until June.

The Frank P Miller Paper Company was back in business! ❁



*Disaster Strikes – Fire of 1900*

## Election of Board Members

As prescribed in the new bylaws, adopted in May, 2004, election of new board members took place just prior to the annual meeting in October, 2005. The election gave three year terms to: Carol Grigson, Bob Kahler, Jean Kahler, Tom Roberts, George Gale and Ralph Hall. One third of the present board will face reelection, and the other third the year after.

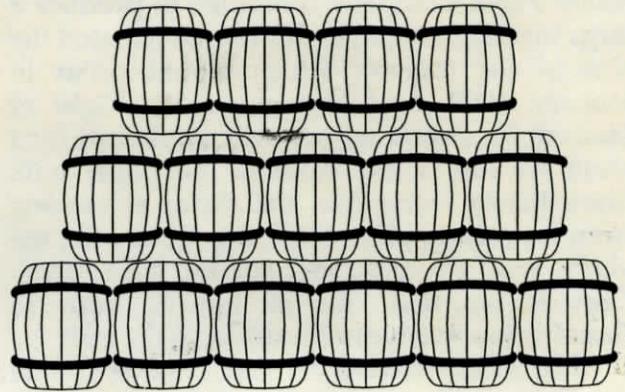
At the November, 2005 meeting, the board elected its Officers for the year, each serving a one year term. The results of the election: President: Roger Grigson, Vice-President: Ernie Jameson, Secretary: Carol Grigson, Treasurer: Ralph Hall. ❁



## Spring Water

And you thought the demand for spring water was new . . .

According to a news article in the March 28, 1899 Morning Republican, John Wanamaker owned a farm in Wallace township. So taken was Wanamaker with the water produced by the farm spring, that he arranged for 15 barrels of the water to be shipped to his Philadelphia store daily. ❁



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