

Drawing, courtesy of
Adrian Martinez.



The TURNPIKE TIMES

10
Volume ~~9~~ Number 2
Winter, 2005

A PUBLICATION OF THE DOWNINGTOWN AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The President's Message

by Roger Grigson

We will have a program meeting this March 14 at Simpson Meadows, 101 Plaza Drive. The meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m., which is free and open to the public. Susannah Brody will be discussing her latest book of Civil War letters which were written by Will and Joseph Downing to his sister Sarah, who lived in Lionville. Hope to see you there.

The date for the annual dinner has been set for Sunday, April 24. Formal invitations will be out in a few weeks. Hope to see all of you

there. We are trying to avoid graduation conflicts this year.



We have installed motion detectors, along with smoke/heat alarms. As soon as weather permits (and township permits), we will be installing a sidewalk and patio. With these improvements, we will be able to double the amount of people who can attend our functions.

Reminder: some of the 2005 dues are still outstanding. *

CROPPERS GOLD CARD

Croppers and their parent company, Shurfine Markets, is again planning on giving \$30,000 to non-profit organizations each six months. To date, they have donated over 1/2 million dollars to non-profit organizations. The only store that is part of this in the Downingtown area is Croppers.

A whole new program started this January, 2005. Anyone who had previously signed up and did not reregister, is not signed up. As a non-profit organization, we had to resubmit all the paperwork last November.

However, the procedure has been streamlined. As program administrator, I have the capability of registering people for the program. (I have been told that the stores will no longer take registrations on paper.) The Downingtown Area Historical Society then receives, as a contribution, a percentage of the amount spent on groceries.

We are asking anyone who has a card and who shops at Croppers to either call Carol Grigson, 610-269-1167 with your number or email her at carol.k.grigson@verizon.net with the number. These will be kept on file with your name so that if any reregistering needs to be done, it will automatically be done by Carol, as program administrator.

Here is your chance to help an organization without digging into your wallet. Just by doing your normal shopping, DAHS will benefit.



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

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

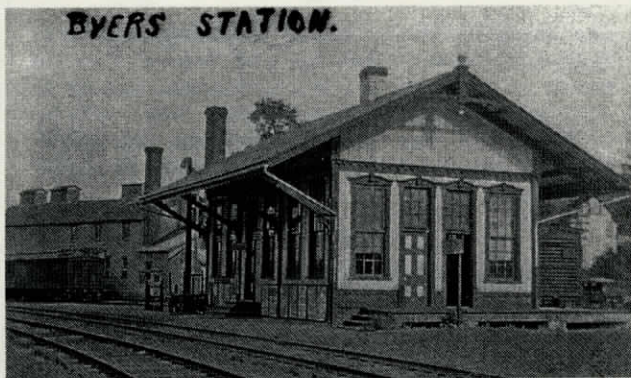
Byers Station, Upper Uwchlan, 1871-1946

By Ruth Lowe

Byers Station, located in Upper Uwchlan Township, was the last station on the Pickering Valley branch of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, which ran between Phoenixville and Byers. The railroad had been planned to extend to Warwick for the iron mines. Unfortunately, Charles E. Byers, the engineer, who was constructing the railroad died. Construction stopped and Byers Station became the western terminal which was named for Byers. The Pickering Valley Railroad was 11.3 miles long and was completed in 1871.

In 1871, a local newspaper stated that the railroad built a commodious depot and loading form, an ore platform, cattle pens and a warehouse at Byers Station. The first turntable could only accommodate the engine and was replaced in 1881 with one that could turn both the engine and tender in one sweep.

Uwchlan and Pikeland farmers circulated petitions to the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company to construct a line to give the farmers access to a larger market for their products. Elias Oberholtzer and his son, John, millers of Anselma; Charles Dean of Chester Springs, and John H. Todd, farmer and cattleman convinced the railroad company that money could be made on a branch into the fertile farms of upper Chester County. Milk, hay, grain and wood were transported by train to Philadelphia. From 1871 to the early 1900's, horse drawn carriages and wagons were used as transportation in Philadelphia. The horses needed to be fed grain and hay. Roads from the farmland to the city were poor, mostly dirt and sometimes impassable for the wagons. The freight train aided both the farmer and the city consumer.



Byers Station House with the Pennsylvania Graphite Company in the background, ca. 1910. Courtesy of Robert Simpson Copied from pg. 69 of "The Upper Uwchlan".

By 1873, the growing village of Byers had two lumber and coal yards supplied by the railroad, two grain lots supplied by local farmers, one store, stockyards that held auctions every two weeks with 25-40 head of cattle which were brought in by train and sold. In 1895, the Mt. Pickering Lodge Masonic Hall on the westside of Route 100 near Fellowship Road relocated to Byers. A hotel was built by A.M.F. Sittler about 1880 and by 1946, it was abandoned and became a boarding house.

At one time there was an engine house at Byers and a crew that kept the engine ready for the early morning milk train. It is told that one of the crews on a Saturday night thought of Phoenixville and the congenial friends to be found in a certain place on Saturday nights. The more they thought, the more they decided that a trip was necessary for minor repairs to the engine. They went to Phoenixville and returned to Byers. When they reached the end of the line, they forgot to apply the brake and went through the end of the engine house.

The first train to arrive at 6:10 in the morning was the milk train. That was not needed when a receiving station was built. Milk was cooled and pumped into huge vacuum tank trucks and taken to the dairies in Philadelphia where it was processed. The Graphite mines were closed when a better grade could be produced cheaper elsewhere. A wooden ware factory which produced card tables, ironing boards, and rolling pins flourished for a while. As the popularity of the automobile grew, passenger service dwindled and ended in 1934. Freight service continued although it decreased to three times a week.

The last passengers were the WPA workers brought out from Philadelphia during the depression to rebuild Route 401. Some of those men never saw apples growing on trees before and took some home for evidence. In one day they stripped a small orchard of fruit.

All of the materials for paving Route 100 in 1923 came by way of Byers Station. Carloads of pipe came by rail to Byers Station in 1942 when Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation laid the Chester County segment of the pipeline.

The Reading Railroad decided to close the Pickering Valley line in 1946 because it was no longer profitable. The station with its slate roof, built of the finest materials available, was sold to Alvin Moore who dismantled the station to use the lumber. *

"DEAR SISTER"

A Collection of Civil War Letters Written by Joseph and William Downing to their Sister Sarah of Lionville, Pennsylvania

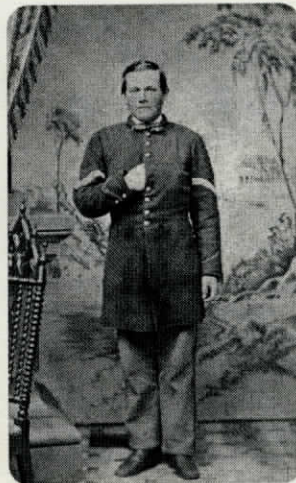
Submitted by Susannah Brody

On March 14, 2005, Susannah Brody will be at Simpson Meadows, 101 Plaza Drive, Downingtown, to discuss the book, "Dear Sister", written by Constance Happersett, Patricia Gaines and Susannah Brody. The meeting is at 7:00 p.m. and is free and open to the public. Copies of the book will be available at the meeting.

Several years ago Connie and "Bud" Happersett found a packet of old letters in a dresser drawer. There were fourteen letters in all, twelve written by brothers Joseph and William Downing during the Civil War and two letters written early in the twentieth century by Joseph and his sister Phebe. The Civil War era letters dated from October 1861, shortly after Joseph joined the Volunteers, to June 1863. Although both brothers mentioned writing to several family members, no other letters have been found to date. The letter writing ceased because Sarah, the sister to whom they were written, died in September 1863. The early twentieth century letters indicated that sister Phebe found the letters to Sarah among family records and sent them to Joseph. Joseph read them and forwarded them to another sister Deborah Downing Trimble. The letters were apparently passed down through Debbie's daughter and granddaughter to her great-grandson Humphrey Happersett. After reading the letters, Bud and Connie thought others might find them interesting, so Connie shared them with fellow members of the Uwchlan Township Historical Commission. Learning about the Downing brothers became an adventure in research. Connie and fellow members Susannah Brody and Patricia Gaines investigated the Downing family as well as the 49th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers to learn more about the people, places and events mentioned in the letters.

Joseph Downing was born on November 14, 1843 in Lionville, Chester County, Pennsylvania. His parents were Thomas and Mary Lightfoot Downing. Joseph volunteered for military service soon after the Civil War began. He enlisted on August 15, 1861 at the age of seventeen, joining Company B of the 49th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers. Although the original Company B of the 49th was comprised of men from Chester County, most of the Regiment's soldiers came from Juniata County, in central Pennsylvania. They trained at Camp Curtin in Harrisburg before being sent by train to Camp Griffin in Washington, D.C. Joseph wrote to family members throughout the war. Of the five surviving letters to his older sister Sarah, the first four were written between October, 1861 and May, 1862. Joe's last letter was written in June 1863, while he was stationed in Mifflintown, Pennsylvania. Joe spent several months in 1863 serving as an army recruiter. During his stay in Mifflintown, he met Harriet (Hattie) Magruder. On June 23, 1864, while on leave due to a serious wound, Joseph and Hattie were married. For several years after the war Joseph and Hattie lived in Altoona, Pennsylvania. In 1873 they moved to Philadelphia. By the dawn of the twentieth century they were living on Bouvier Street, near Girard College. Hattie and Joe had no children. After Hattie died in 1909 Joseph married Susan Smith. Joseph died of kidney failure in 1917 at his home on Bouvier Street. He was buried at Westminster Cemetery, near Philadelphia.

William Downing was born on February 8, 1842 in Lionville, Chester County, Pennsylvania. His parents were Thomas and



William Downing



Joseph Downing

Mary Lightfoot Downing. At the age of seventeen William became an apprentice to William Thomas, miller in West Whiteland Township. When the Civil War began in 1861, while Will's brother Joseph joined the 49th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, Will remained in Chester County, bound by his apprentice contract to miller Thomas. After completing his apprenticeship in June 1862 Will joined his brother and his cousin Ben Downing in Company B. He wrote seven letters to his older sister Sarah from the time of his enlistment until Sarah's death in 1863. In his letters, Will described much of the army's daily routine, but rarely discussed the horrors of battle. Will was seriously wounded in his first battle at Antietam in September 1862 and a year later he faced a court martial for "Conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline." In November Will was captured and confined to Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia. He escaped in January 1864 and found his way back to his regiment camped near Brandy Station, Virginia.

Some of the Civil War's worst fighting came in May 1864 near Spotsylvania Courthouse. The 49th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers suffered great losses through the two weeks of heavy fighting. On May 10, the 49th Regiment participated in part of the battle known as "Upton's Charge." Twelve regiments successfully charged the Rebel works, only to be repulsed when enemy reinforcements arrived. The 49th suffered high casualties. Of the 474 men from the 49th who engaged in the charge, 67 died, 171 were wounded and 8 were taken prisoner. Some of the casualties were left on the field for more than a week due to the enemy's control of the area. Many of the bodies could not be identified. William Downing was one of the casualties, killed by gunshot. He was twenty-two years old. He was eventually buried in one of the many mass graves marked only by numbers at Fredericksburg National Cemetery.

Much has been written about the War Between the States. In focusing on the Civil War letters of these two young men we consider the lessons to be learned. Family and the small bits of information about home were very important. Mutual respect between commanding officers and the enlisted men was evident. In his May 7, 1862 letter, Joseph wrote, "We got quite a compliment from General McClellan the next day after the Battle. He said we did all that could be expected of men to do & he thanked us heartily." The horrors of war were also noted. As Will mentioned in his July 17, 1862 letter, "I don't care how soon it is over for war is awful." The letters of Joseph and William Downing contribute to the history of the Civil War in a very personal way and offer a local connection to one of the greatest conflicts of our nation. *



PARTNERSHIP BANKING Program

*D*NB First's Partnership Banking program provides a meaningful and rewarding way for DNB First and you to give something back to the community where you live and/or work.

- DNB First will make a monetary contribution to the Downingtown Area Historical Society, Inc. based on the number of new accounts opened and designated to the Downingtown Area Historical Society, Inc.
- DNB First will make an annual (and perpetual) contribution equal to 5 basis points on the year-to-date average ledger balances of all accounts designated to the Downingtown Area Historical Society, Inc.

All you have to do is open a new account at any DNB First office and designate it to the Downingtown Area Historical Society, Inc. If you already have an account with DNB First, you can also have that account designated to the Downingtown Area Historical Society, Inc. Please contact any DNB First branch manager or call Shirley Smith, AVP/Market Manager at 484-359-3161 or email ssmith@dnbfirst.com. Go to www.dnbfirst.com for office locations, phone number and hours.

DNB First traces its origins to September 3, 1860 when the Downingtown Bank was organized under the General Banking Law of Pennsylvania to meet the needs of its local community.

The Bank became a national bank on December 30, 1864 and continued to grow and prosper, as did its community. Today

DNB First is the oldest bank in Chester County and it remains strategically located in the heart of one of the most dynamic growth areas in Pennsylvania. It has nine convenient branch locations to serve its customers and community.

From Roger Grigson, President of DAHS:

For existing accounts at DNB:

You can designate all checking, savings, and CD's for the Historical Society. The only stipulation is that the accounts must be personal rather than commercial/business. What the above is saying is that at the end of each year, the bank will make a contribution to DAHS based on the number of new accounts and a small percentage of the average ledger balances of all the accounts which have been designated to DAHS.

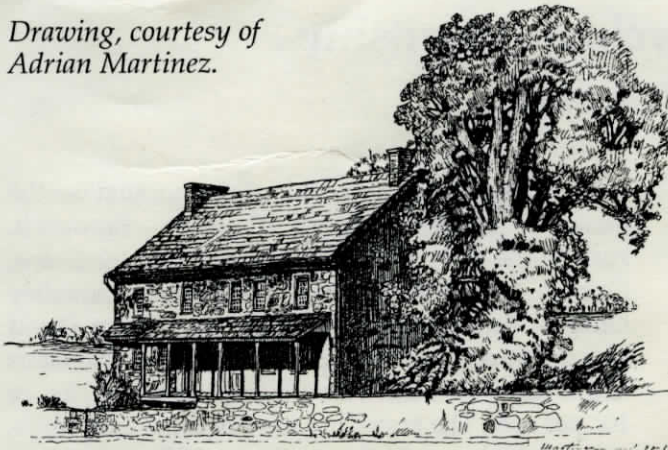
This can be done at customer service at any of the branches. If you have physical/medical problems getting to the bank, you can call us at 610-269-1167, and we will mail a form to you. Once the bank receives the form, your account will support DAHS. ✨

SAVE THE DATE!!

To eliminate all the conflicts with graduations, the annual dinner will be held on April 24, 2005. Again, this year, we have reserved space in the upper room of St. Anthony's Lodge. Many of the details are still to be worked out and you will receive an invitation with the particulars. The cost will remain the same, \$25, which includes taxes and gratuities.

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

Drawing, courtesy of
Adrian Martinez.



The TURNPIKE TIMES

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The President's Message

by Roger Grigson

The Downingtown National Bank is making a donation to DAHS for bank accounts noting our organization as a charity of choice. In particular, new accounts—a suggestion of high school graduates, or funds in a trust for perhaps grandchildren. We now have 78 families who have signed up for Croppers/Guinta gold card, monies we can use.

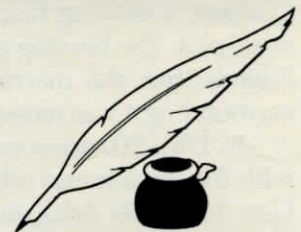
I have a pair of black rimmed reading glasses that were left at St. Anthony's dinner on Sunday, April 24. At present they are unclaimed.

Our new brick patio, new sidewalk and canopy will help make possible future activities

more successful. Chester County Day, October 1, 2006, will include the Ashbridge House this year. Some 20,000 people participate—a feather in our hat.

Again, with the new facilities, we welcome collections, pictures, and business records of the Downingtown area. The Downingtown Woman's Club is turning over 5 file drawers of their records/history.

We deeply mourn the sudden loss of our treasurer, Wes Sollenberger, who died at age 52. He will be greatly missed.



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For our purposes, Giunta will continue to honor the gold cards. We presently have 73 signed up, whose purchases will produce money for the Downingtown Area Historical Society. 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.



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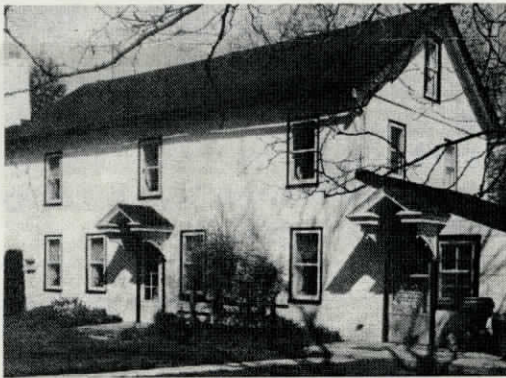
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A 1921 Look at Uwchlan Township

Retold by Ruth Lowe

The name "Uwchlan" is Welsh and means "Higher than or above the valley," the original spelling being Youchlan. It was principally settled by Welsh Friends. About 1712, David Lloyd of Chester bought 1766 acres around the present village of Lionville, which he divided and sold to settlers. John Cadwallader purchased 250 acres in 1715 and in 1716 he sold the same to Thomas Fell, except a small piece of ground on the side of King's Road. This land was set aside for a burying ground for the people called Quakers, a meeting house to be constructed on the same plot. The burying ground is still owned by the Friends, but the meeting house and the ground surrounding it was recently sold to Uwchlan Grange.

In 1761, 200 acres were sold to Dennis Whelen, with the brick house which was known as the Red Lion Inn. This brick house became the Lionville Hotel - the bricks are said to have been made on the farm. In 1901, a portion of the house was torn down and the rest remodeled. The place was owned in 1921 by Humphrey Happersett.



"Lionville" named after The Red Lion Inn

Whelen laid out a town on the King's Road with lots 60x250 ft., the town was to be called "Welshpool," and when 200 lots were taken the town was to have ten acres for a common. Whelen's expectations were not realized and instead of the populous town of Welshpool, we now have the village of Lionville.

Uwchlan Friends first met at the house of John Cadwallader in 1712, later building a log meeting house. The present meeting house was built in 1756 and remodeled in 1875; the wall around the burying ground between 1771-1775. In 1778, some physicians demanded the key to the meeting house so the building could be used for a hospital for the Continental Soldiers.

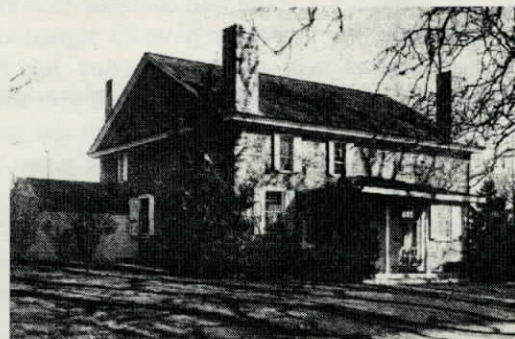
Among the graves in the burying ground lies the maternal grandmother of Theodore Roosevelt. Among the early settlers buried there are the Evans, Phipps, Meredith, Thomas, Lewis and Smedley families. Among the large landowners were David Lloyd 1766 acres, the Phipps 2000 acres, the Thomases of the Valley 5000 acres for which was paid 100 lbs. or 10¢ per acre. The boundary lines of those early days, some which could be seen in 1921, remained unchanged. One still can be seen on the line between the farms of Edwin Smedley and Frank March.

The Uwchlands were divided about 1857 or 1858, the survey being made by Joseph W. Hawley, who became Col. Hawley of the 97th Regiment of Penna. Volunteers during the Civil War. In 1921, James Simpson occupied Hawley's house.

Some of the familiar early residents in 1921 were Judge William Butler of the Chester County Courts, afterwards Judge of United States Court in Philadelphia; who was one time State Treasurer; and his son Thomas S. Butler, 1921-Present Congressman and Sara Vickers Oberholser, of Tioga, the poetess.

Among the industries besides farming were two tanneries, one pottery, some grist and saw mills, a hat factory owned and operated on the property where Ellis Smedley resided in 1921; a local shoemaker made all the boots and shoes worn; there was a cotton factory at Dowlin's Station, also one forge, charcoal being a great industry. At the Vickers Pottery was one of the stations of the underground railway. There were four schools, men with salaries ranging from \$26 to \$30 per month doing the teaching, subjects were reading, grammar, algebra, surveying and trigonometry. The first County School Superintendent was Robert Cowan and his salary was \$300 a year.

Information for this article is based on a paper prepared and read by Ellis Smedley at a meeting of the Uwchlan Grange in 1921.



Uwchlan Meeting House

History Club at Downingtown Middle School

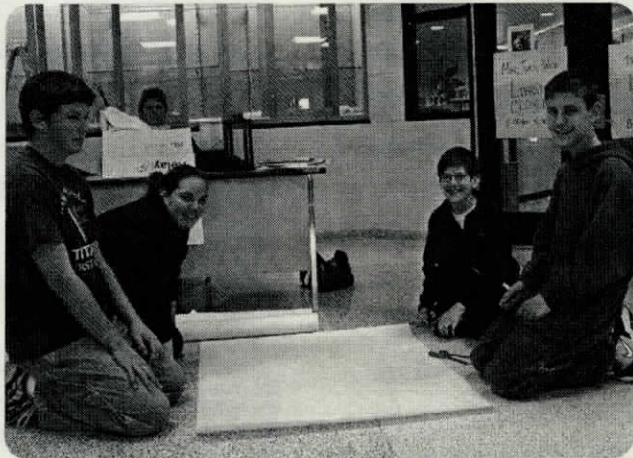
By Carol Grigson

One of the points of the mission of the Downingtown Area Historical Society is to reach out to students, to help them appreciate the past and to better understand the area in which they live. DAHS was approached last fall by Anthony Basilio, teacher at Downingtown Middle School, who was starting a History Club, which would meet after school on Mondays.

The goal of the club was to pick several themes to explore and show students how to do the research. None had ever dealt with original documents prior to membership in the History Club. Because students were fairly restricted to research at the school, items from DAHS collection, as well as information from the Chester County Historical Society was brought to the school by Carol Grigson, who met with the group every week.

Students decided to research three movements, and wanted to see how these movements affected the lives of the people in Downingtown. The three chosen were Industrialization, Temperance, and Abolition. Abolition brought in the Underground Railroad and the places around Downingtown that served as stations, protecting slaves. Temperance was a theme picked up by all the Churches and groups within the school system. Newspaper clippings provided much original information.

Industrialization proved to be an exciting topic to



Middle School Students Making Banner

research. So much was going on in Downingtown. Paper mills were flourishing, as well as brick factories. The Cohansey Glass Works produced a million bottles a year. Materials and pictures from this period gave the students much information and a greater understanding of how the city developed.

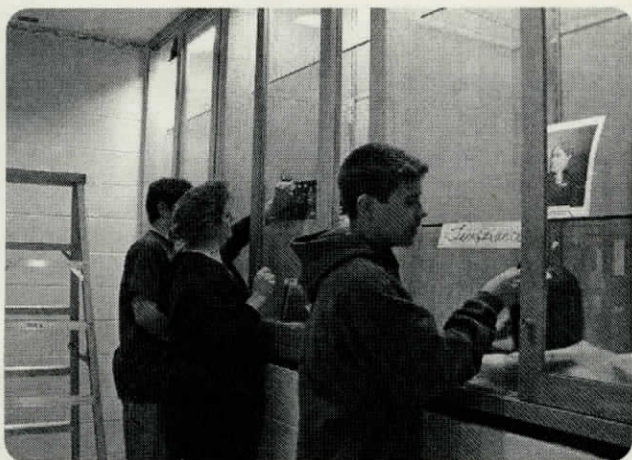
The students were taught how to produce an annotated bibliography to go along with the booklet written by them. The

principal encouraged all their work and published the story with the bibliography.

In April, 2005, the students put together a display, which took up the entire display area in the entrance to the building. How rewarding it was to see the look of pride on the faces of the students, as they worked with teachers Anthony Basilio and Sharon Jackson! After so many months of work, the students had something tangible for the entire school to see.

When leaving after the display was completed, Carol Grigson told the 8th graders, how much DAHS enjoyed being part of their club. She also asked them to give us a call next year, that we would be able to help them design a project which would complete their graduation requirements.

Though plans are not completed for the fall, it is hoped History Club will continue with a different project and DAHS will again be there to help. ❧



Middle School Students Putting Up a Display



Middle School Students and Teachers

In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that we report the death of our treasurer since 2000, Wesley Sollenberger. Wes volunteered his time at the Downingtown Area Historical Society, but was employed full time as an assistant librarian with the Chester County Historical Society.

During his time in office, we acquired the Ashbridge House. Wes, with his background in library sciences, was very instrumental with good ideas for the research/library section of the Ashbridge House. He was very much a part of the planning for the uses of the house and willingly researched many of the ideas which emerged from discussion.

Wes was looking forward to the summer launching of our capital campaign. He was full ideas and enthusiasm for the project. With the outside restored, and a patio going in at the present, Wes was

concerned about the finishing of the interior and the opening of the library/research room. Wes lived most of his life in Downingtown and was a graduate of Downingtown High School in 1970.

Memorial contributions in Wes's memory are being accepted. Checks can be made payable to "Ashbridge House Restoration" and can be mailed to DAHS, PO Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335. ❀

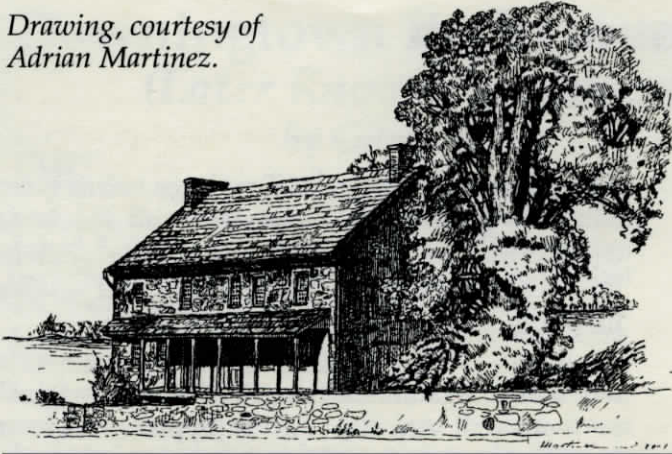
Call for Helpers!

The fund raising committee, designed to get the funds to complete the interior, is becoming well organized. Goals have been set and the committee is in the process of breaking down the various tasks and assigning people for those tasks.

We are interested in getting as many people involved as possible. If you think you could help in this important work, please call the chairperson, Harry Helms, at 610-363-7826.

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Drawing, courtesy of
Adrian Martinez.



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As the renovations continue, we are honored to be a stop on the Chester County Day tour of houses on October 1. Though advertised as a "work in progress" we are excited to share the first floor and the great history of the house to the public. So many people have wondered and asked about the house since the Farmer's Market was torn down. Now is their chance to see the house that has been standing since 1709.

We have been contacted about a collection of diaries, written by Mary Bacon Parke, wife of Dr. Thomas Parke of Downingtown. The years covered include 1890-1927. Purchased at an auction, the owner is not willing to just donate them, but is looking for a purchase. Presently,

all this is in negotiation. This would be a fine addition to our manuscript holdings, as the Parkes were a moving force in Downingtown at the turn of the century.

We have received a check from Croppers/Giunta gold card for the first 6 months of this year totally \$495. This amount was based on the total food purchases of \$22,000. Keep up the good work.

We are looking for people to serve as block captains for Luminaria, our major fund raiser. Since its inception, we have earned more than \$52,000. If you or if you know anyone who can serve in this capacity, please call me at 610-269-5413. ☼

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Chester County Day

By Carol Grigson

The oldest continuous day devoted to house tours in the country is that of Chester County Day. Well established in Chester County, most know it is on the first Saturday of October, a date chosen as the least likely for rain. The county is divided into quadrants; a different quadrant is featured each year.

The year 2005 celebrates the northwest quadrant, which has Lancaster Avenue as the southern boundary. One of the oldest houses in this quadrant is located at 849 Lancaster Ave and was there at least by 1709 (as shown in the deed). Though the house is now called Ashbridge House, but was originally owned by the Baldwins. The front door of the house originally faced towards the Old Kings Highway, but when the Lancaster Pike was built, the position of the front door was moved to its present location.

The house is quite unique and the rectangular shape was completed in 3 phases, all of which were built in the 18th c. The original structure was a one room and a loft, with a large beehive walk-in fireplace. Before 1750, the loft was turned into a room, making the house two storied.

After 1750, the house took on an L-shaped appearance. The original stone wall is still the wall between the old and new section. The staircase

became wide and straight. Two large rooms were added to both floors, connected with the large entranceway on the first floor. Another walk-in fireplace was placed on the first floor and smaller fireplaces were placed in the other two rooms.

Before 1800, another set of inhabitants remodeled again, knocking down the original northern wall. Another walk in fireplace was built in this new room, making the house the now-familiar rectangular shape. (This brought the number of fireplaces in the house to 9.) The last building occurred in the middle of the 19th century when a summer kitchen was added to the house.

We are pleased to show off the house as a stop on Chester County Day. The people who lived in the house (continuous habitation since 1709 to 1997) all followed the fashions of the day and made changes to the house. Fireplaces were continually made smaller, Franklin stoves for cooking, along with stove pipes found their way into all the rooms. Somewhere in the 19th century, the house became two families, probably when the large Ashbridge house, Ondawa, was built across the street (now the home of Brandywine Square and the Downingtown Country Club). We are constantly finding new information about the house.

Though the renovation is not complete, and only the first floor will be open, visitors will be able to see the many changes and plans for the house. In addition, we will have display cases with some of the many items from our collection.

In these final weeks before Chester County Day, we are busy cleaning the house once again (much construction has been going on) and making it look its best for the day. We want everyone to be as excited about the house and history of the house as is the Downingtown Area Historical Society.

Several thousand people are expected to walk through the house on October 1. We are looking for members who would be willing to watch a room while people are walking through it. If you can help, please call 610-269-5413. Chairs and refreshments will be available for all our workers. ☀



Nancy D'Angelo, DAHS archivist, preparing items for display. Among the items in the case she is preparing is the waffle iron used at the Tea House, a William South photograph, civil defense night stick used in World War II and a bible of George Ashbridge

Downingtown Paper Company (Later Known as Sunoco)

By Carol Grigson

With the recent fire in Downingtown of Sunoco paper, located on the present route 322, the end of paper-making arrived. It is ironic that the first paper mill in Downingtown borough, was also the last to stop making paper. As the plant was closing down, not to be reopened, the Downingtown Area Historical Society became the recipients of many items. The photograph in this article shows the large variety of things we received: a Sunoco hard hat, a 19th c. time book, many ledgers, civil defense signs from the time it was designated as a shelter, and many photographs. There are many more things received which are not in the picture, such as an 19th century wood dolly used to move the paper and many leather bound ledgers.

Since mills are so much a part of the Downingtown area, this will be the first article of several about the paper mills in Downingtown.

Though the Brandywine area was home to paper companies, the first paper mill did not come to Downingtown until 1881. Frank Miller, who had begun a machine shop with his brother (later known as Downingtown Manufacturing) felt that if he understood machines and how machines could be applied to performing tasks, he could make paper. His initial training was as a machinist, and he studied mechanics in a Pennsylvania Railroad Shop in Renovo, Pennsylvania for 4 years. After working with his brother for 2 years, Frank broke out his own and started his paper company.

His first mill, Solitude Mill, was named for its location—too far from everything. Frank found it impossible to haul supplies and finished products to the railroad. Thus, in 1887, he purchased 14 acres of land on



Brandywine Ave, close to water power and close to the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Miller operated from this site until 1894 with 7 men and produced a ton of paperboard a day. It was a unique mill, in that the machinery used was manufactured at Downingtown Manufacturing, right in Downingtown and was run exclusively by steam.

In 1891, he convinced his in-law, J Gibson McIlvaine, to invest money in the plant. McIlvaine, busy with the family business in Philadelphia, was pretty much a silent partner. The day-to-day running of the business was continued by Miller.

In 1893, a large addition was added to the plant, which enabled it to produce all grades of folding boxboards and also produce white line board used in lithographing. In 1894, they built a 2 million gallon filtering plant for the water, which had to be used by the plant and then recycled back into the Brandywine. (Though not known by many people, this was a time of many lawsuits, especially by the city of Wilmington, against those who polluted the waters of the Brandywine, drinking water for so many.)

In our next installment, we will discuss the first of the many fires, which so plagued the paper companies. ☀

EAGLE SCOUTS HELP WITH RENOVATION

In 2004, the board of DAHS was approached by Bennion Sykes about the possibility of using the Ashbridge House for his Eagle Project. He studied the house and wanted to find ways to get people to help with the renovation. At the time Bennion came to us, the walls had been scraped, but they were not primed or painted. There was also the task of moving some of the stone, which had originally been part of the wall extending from the smoke house. Lastly, our collections had been in storage at the Chester County Archives, and since rooms would be renovated, it was time to move the 70 boxes back to the headquarters of the Downingtown Area Historical Society, the Ashbridge House.

Bennion laid the plans and determined the amount of materials needed. He organized the labor details. On several Saturdays, the Scouts arrived with brushes, paint, etc., to paint the ceilings and walls of three of the rooms upstairs. They also worked very hard in moving the stone, which remained on the ground from the wall.

When all was complete, Bennion organized his crew

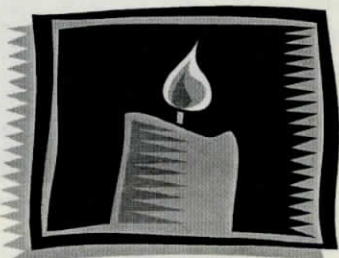


Eagle Scouts painting upstairs at the Ashbridge House.

to move the 70 boxes from the County Archives to the Ashbridge House. With all of the labor provided by the Scouts, the renovation was moved forward by leaps and bounds, rather than just small steps. We are indebted to Bennion for this project and thank all who worked with him on it. ☀

Luminaria Tradition

Can Christmas be just around the corner?
The calendar may say September, but it will soon be time to be thinking about the Downingtown area tradition of Luminaria. Once you have seen, it you never forget it—thousands of candles in bags all over town. In addition to celebrating a holiday, it also gives one a sense of community.



Letters to block captains will go out in October and the order forms will be due in November. We are always looking for block captains, so if you can help us, please call 610-269-1167. ☀

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

Under the new bylaws which were proposed in March, 2004 and approved in a general meeting on May 16, 2004, the board of directors carry on the daily business of the Downingtown Area Historical Society. Once a year in October, the general membership is invited to a meeting to hear a report on the activities of the past year. The first of these annual meetings will take place on October 17, 2005, at the Ashbridge House, home of the Downingtown Area Historical Society, located at 849 E Lancaster Ave. This meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m. and is open to the entire membership.



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