



Downingtown Area Historical Society
Hist-O-Gram

Interesting local history, accessed from our archives

www.downingtownareahistoricalociety.org

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Where and What Is This?



The first person to correctly identify the site of this photo will be recognized as a truly perceptive scholar. Please send your identification entries to:

Info@downingtownareahistoricalociety.org.



St. Joseph's new church was dedicated on Saturday.

Old bell rings in a new era at St. Joseph's

When the new St. Joseph's Catholic Church was dedicated on Saturday, June 15, a throng of people had an opportunity to see—and hear—a connection with a parish

tradition once again. We're talking about the bell, which has been an integral part of St. Joseph's for nearly 120 years.

Now, the bell hangs in the belfry of the new church, which was built because the parish has experienced explosive growth in recent years. Today, there are some 4,600 families in the parish, making it the second largest congregation in the Philadelphia archdiocese. That's why the new structure, whose design is reminiscent of the original St. Joseph's church on Bradford Avenue in the Johnsontown section of Downingtown, can accommodate 1,200 souls. The total cost of the church's construction, which was begun in March 2012, is projected to be \$9.6 million.

The bell originally became part of the parish shortly after Rev. James O'Reilly was appointed pastor of St. Joseph's in 1894, and he started renovating the church, which had been built a year after the parish was founded in 1851.

The remodeling project included the addition of a sacristy and vestibule, plus the installation of nine stained glass windows and new Stations of the Cross. Other enhancements at the time were two side altars and three statues from Europe, which were donated by Mr. and Mrs. Michael Murphy.

But the gift that had the greatest impact for many years was the bell, which the Murphys gave to the church 1894.

According to the parish history, published in 2001, "Father O'Reilly was so proud of the bell that he insisted that it be rung exactly on time. The rope pullers—young boys of the parish—knew better than to be late for duty. It was rumored that the bell was so accurate that townspeople set their watches by its tolling."

The youthful bellringers continued to pull the ropes at St. Joseph's for many decades, until a new church was opened on Manor Avenue in the borough in 1971. Then the bell rested silently in a steel cradle on a brick pedestal for four decades outside that modern church building, which will be razed to create a larger parking area.

The 953-pound bell was lifted to the bell tower of the new church in late March, after it was refurbished by the McShane Bell Foundry in Glen Burnie, MD.

More of this saga will be published in next week's Hist-O-Gram, when we will provide details on the life of Michael Murphy, the millionaire-philanthropist, who was an Irish immigrant, Civil War vet, nemesis of Standard Oil's John D. Rockefeller, and breeder of champion horses on his country estate near Downingtown.

For photos of the dedication ceremonies, see: <http://catholicphilly.com/2013/06/local-news/photo-features/second-largest-parish-in-the-archdiocese-dedicates-new-church/>.

Downingtown area news in July 1961

Noted below are news items originally published in local newspapers 52 years ago.

Three-legged race winners in various age groups at **Good Neighbor Day** in Kerr Park included: Alvin Groff and Ronald Paup, Janet Mento and Margaret Staneski, Ronald Willis and Ronald Lawler, Donna Usher and Sheryl Stong, Jonathan and David Stott, Charlou Van Lew and Pat Brown. And chariot race winners were: boys, Robert Horsey, Bob Murphy, Paul Boggs and Howard Smith; girls, Sherry Dick, Rosemary Gazzerro, Patricia Farnum, Marcella Echhoff and Margaret Staneski.

In the baking contest, Mrs. Charles Langham got first prize for her cake, and Mrs. Earl Neuhauser won for her banana split pie.

Members of the **Downingtown Optimists Club** who organized the Fourth of July event were Fran Swisher, chairman, Don Collier, Clair Langham, Al Hughes, Albert Burkhart and Ray Doan.

Officers elected to lead the Young Adult Bible Class at **St. Paul's UCC Church**, Lionville, were Mary Lou Walters, president; William Owens, vice president; and Doris Witherow, secretary-treasurer.

Teachers at the **Glenmoore Methodist's Vacation Bible School** were Mrs. Esther MacDougal, Mrs. William Zulker, Mrs. Ann Trego, Denise Ayers, Mrs. Jeanne Roberts, Mrs. Betty Nagle and Mrs. Evelyn Ferguson.

Downingtown Council heard the first reading of three street names proposed for the Highland Crest development in the west end of the borough: Gabel Avenue, Copeland Place and Beaver Place.

Raymond Baugher, **Downingtown superintendent of schools**, appeared in Chester County Court, seeking permission to increase the real estate tax rate to 43 mills. State law required court permission when a millage increase would generate 10 percent more tax revenue than in the previous year. The court approved the increase after Baugher testified that there had been rapid growth in school enrollment, requiring the opening of new schools and hiring more teachers.

A group of 40 residents of Upper Uwchlan Township announced plans to protest against the state Department of Forests and Waters' proposal to erect a dam on Marsh Creek, and create a 3,000-acre park and recreation area. Flood control and water conservation were also targets of the proposal. The group, which met at Windsor School in Upper Uwchlan, formed the **Marsh Creek Area Taxpayers Association**. Leaders of the association were B. Franklin Peirson, president; Frederick Higham, vice president; and Morris Jackson, secretary-treasurer. The association claimed that Upper Uwchlan would suffer a major loss of taxable property and create a significant burden for the remaining land owners.

Two buildings at the intersection of East Lancaster and Wallace Avenues in Downingtown were demolished. They were the **Coffee Cup restaurant** on the northeast corner and the **Center Square Inn** and apartments on the northwest corner. Both buildings were owned by Nick Zaferes of Downingtown.

The 11 young people from **Messiah Lutheran Church**, Downingtown, who won half camperships to attend the Lutheran Leadership Training Camp in the Poconos, were Suzanne Robertson, Sherry and Robert Geist, John and Ruth Keller, Steve and David Shirk, Robert Henne, Jim Hostutler, Caroline Kline and Darrell Umberger.

Members of the faculty of the Bible School, conducted by **Hopewell Methodist Church** in East Brandywine, were Mrs. Edward Plank, Donna McElroy, Mrs. Hannah Harper, Jeanne Watts, Mrs. Ralph Whitely, Bonnie Schmitt, Mrs. George Krapf, Marcia Krapf, Mrs. Vincent King, Joan Klase, Mrs. Robert Piersol, Mrs. Arnold Kring, Mrs. Donald Bower and Rev. Donald Bower. The school's enrollment totaled 170 youngsters.

Ninth grade students who attended the Bible School since they were four years old were Ken Furlong, Joan Seeds, Connie Smedley, Phyliss Harrison, Arthur Anderson, Richard Watts and Karen Cockerham.

It's on Lionville Station Road in Uwchlan



Philip Hemcher is the truly perceptive scholar who was the first person to correctly identify this as one of two 18th Century farmhouses on Lionville Station Road in the Chester Springs section of Uwchlan Township. The historic houses are located on the 242-acre tract that Philip Street sold to Shared Medical Systems (now Siemens) in the 1980's. The Downingtown School District bought the property ca. 2007, with intentions of building a third middle school and third high school there. That plan was abandoned, and now the School District is trying to sell the property.

Events and Activities in the Downingtown Area

Free Concert in Kerr Park

Grab your blankets and chairs for the first of this summer's free Downingtown's Concerts in Kerr Park, at 5 PM Sunday, June 23. Gina Belnomi Miller's "Just Us" band will be playing at the gazebo. If the weather looks iffy, check www.downingtowntownconcerts.com before you head for the park. Borough rules don't allow alcohol or digs in the park.

Community Festival at St. Joe's

Every night will be Family Night at the Community Festival at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, on Manor Avenue in Downingtown, through Saturday night, June 22. In addition to an opportunity to going on rides all night long for \$20, attractions include: food, bingo, live music, a beer garden, a bake sale and a cheer wheel. There also will be tours of the new church.

Lions Club Golf Outing

Downingtown/Lionville Lions Clubs will have a golf outing on Monday, August 19 at the Downingtown Country Club, to raise funds for the Lords Pantry, Downingtown Area Senior Center and The Chester County Association for the Blind. For more information, contact Herb Mays (610-389-3747) or Don Greenleaf (484-954-2273).

Downingtown Farmers Market

The Downingtown Farmers Market at Kerr Park is open from 3-7 PM every Thursday. All of the farmers and food artisans at the market must grow, raise or make what they sell – meriting its classification as a "producer only" market.

Offerings include: local fruits and vegetables; pasture raised meats (beef, pork, lamb, veal) and poultry, fresh eggs; dairy products, including cheeses; whole grain breads and other baked goods; handmade pasta and sauce; honey and maple syrup; small-batch frozen desserts; artisan chocolates; hummus and salsa; jams and jellies; roasted coffee and hand-blended teas; fresh ground nut butters; field grown flowers; handmade soap; and doggie treats.

The market will also feature weekly musical guests and activities for children. Consistent with the market's social mission, food drives will be held periodically to benefit the Lord's Pantry and other organizations in need of food donations. Additionally, market space will be made available to non-profit groups if their mission is similar to that of the market.

There is plenty of parking in the Kerr Park lots, as well as in the Borough Hall parking lot.

Savings opportunities available at DARC

Discount Movie Tickets: \$8, cash only. Honored at all Regal Entertainment Group locations (Regal Cinemas, United Artists Theatres, and Edwards Theatres). Valid for all show times. There may be a \$2.50 surcharge for the first 12 days of select films or a \$2.50 surcharge for IMAX Giant Screen Theatres.

For more info/complete price list on these opportunities and upcoming programs, go to the DARC website www.darcinfo.com, or call 610-269-9260, or stop by the DARC Office (8:30 AM-4:30 PM, Monday thru Friday), 114 Bell Tavern Road Downingtown.

Banquet Room for Rent

The Downingtown (Williamson) Masonic Lodge, a non-profit organization located at 210 Manor Ave. has a Banquet Room for rent. The area is perfect for parties of up to 80 people and has a full kitchen. Rental fees are very reasonable. Call 610-269-3555 for more information.

Joseph's People, Downingtown Chapter

An ecumenical support mission to help un/underemployed people; run entirely by volunteers. We have been at St. Joseph's since 1995. Meets 7:30 PM on the 2nd & 4th Tues. of the month. All are welcome. Visit web page, www.josephspeople.org or just come to a meeting at St. Joseph's Parish Meeting Room behind the school, 460 Manor Ave., Downingtown. Call 610 873-7117. Leave Message. Leader: Cheryl Spaulding, Email: JPCheryl@verizon.net.

Hist-O-Grams are emailed weekly to members and friends of the Downingtown Area Historical Society. If you want to make a comment, add your email address to the sign-up box on the home page of our website. We won't share or sell any email addresses. Or if you want your email address deleted from the list, contact us at:

Info@downingtownareahistoricalociety.org