



Downingtown Area Historical Society **Hist-O-Gram**

Interesting local history, accessed from our archives

www.downingtownareahistoricalsociety.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@downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org

Michael Murphy was a winner in the oil and horse racing businesses

(Editor's Note: This is the second part of the story about the bell, pictured below, and Michael Murphy, who donated it to St. Joseph's Catholic Church in 1894, when it was located in the Johnsontown section of Downingtown. Murphy went to Mass at St. Joseph's, when the Philadelphia millionaire was spending time at his racehorse training farm several miles north of Downingtown. Today, the bell hangs in the belfry of the recently dedicated St. Joseph's Church on Manor Avenue in Downingtown. The first part

of the story can be accessed by clicking on:

www.downingtowntareahistoricalsociety.org/Histograms/2013%20Hist-O-Grams/June%2020%202013%20Hist-O-Gram.pdf)



Michael Murphy donated this bell to St. Joseph's Catholic Church in 1894.

The saga of Michael Murphy's rise to the top of the heap began when he was a 13-year-old Irish immigrant who arrived in Philadelphia in 1855. Ultimately, he became one of the city's richest, most powerful men.

Murphy's quest for the best started when he was an apprentice cooper (barrel maker) in Philadelphia. He apparently caught on to the cooperage business quickly, but that pursuit was interrupted in 1861, when he responded to President Lincoln's pleas for young men to join the Union forces during the Civil War.

According to a chapter on Murphy in *The Story of Milford Mills*, written and published in 1989 by Catherine and Stuart Quillman, newspaper stories noted that Murphy met Lincoln twice while he served four years in the Civil War.

The first time, Murphy was stationed on a gunboat in the Chesapeake, and he and Lincoln were rowing a boat together toward a flagship. That's when Lincoln suggested, "Bub, place your feet against mine, and give yourself a brace."

The second encounter occurred when Murphy had been directed to go to Washington "for the mail," according to a 1906 article in the *Daily Local News*. "He must have been on foot since he was said to have been overtaken by the President, who leaned out of his carriage and invited Murphy to join him. The President drove Murphy to his destination."

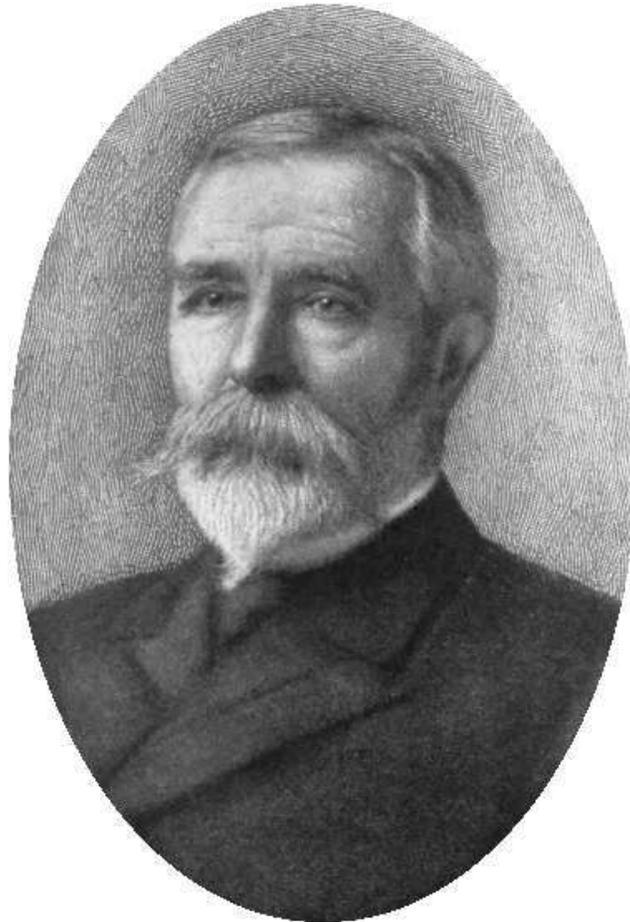
Following his discharge from the service, Murphy went back to his cooper's bench, and made barrels for oil producers. Soon, his involvement in the oil business evolved into exporting oil from fields he opened or helped finance in western Pennsylvania, West

Virginia, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, and was shipping the oil to bulk tank farms in Germany, Holland, Belgium and England.

By the 1890s, Murphy was one of the leaders of the Producers Protective Association, a cooperative comprised of independent oil men who refused to buckle under to their implacable enemy, Standard Oil's John D. Rockefeller. Murphy also helped organize and became president of the Pure Oil Co. and the U.S. Pipe Line Co.

He also was on the board of directors of the Keystone Telephone Co., and the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Co., the world's largest trolley system at the time.

Chester County author Wilmer MacElree provided a perspective on Murphy, when he wrote in *Down the Eastern and Up the Black Brandywine* (1906): "A shrewd Irishman is Mr. Murphy—a speculator in oil—the richest man in the community—brief in speech and decisive in action—a warm friend and a bitter foe—a fighter who can take knocks and give them."



Michael Murphy

Murphy buys Chester County property

Although Murphy was a rich and powerful philanthropist, who avoided limelight, he caught much attention in 1880, when he bought the Milford Mill, a former textile factory near Lyndell, whose interior had been gutted by fire earlier that year.

The mill had been owned and operated for four decades by Dr. Joseph McClure, who graduated from Jefferson Medical College, but joined the family cloth manufacturing business in 1848, instead of practicing medicine. The mill primarily manufactured denim,

and during the Civil War, it won a large contract to produce woolen goods used to make uniforms for soldiers in the Union Army.

Murphy made a major commitment to having one of the nation's premiere horse training facilities, when he constructed large box stalls on the first two stories of the former mill. He also built three tracks behind the stables, including a one-eighth-mile ring covered by a roof. His investment in upgraded facilities bore fruit; many of his horses won many major races in an era when horse races were America's most popular spectator sport.

And in 1886, Murphy acquired the neighboring McClure mansion. It was "an imposing Victorian structure of 40 rooms on the slope overlooking Marsh Creek," according to a report prepared in the 1960s for Upper Uwchlan Township's Planning Commission.

Murphy usually stayed at the country retreat from June through November. He commuted to his Philadelphia office, by taking a milk train, operated by the Waynesburg and Downingtown Railroad, from Lyndell to Downingtown, where he caught a ride on the "Pennsy" to the city.

The mansion remained vacant for nearly a decade after Murphy died in 1917, at age 76, in his Lower Merion home. Then, during the Prohibition era, Max "Boo Boo" Hoff, a notorious Philadelphia bootlegger, took over the property for several years. After Hoff and his gangsters left in the early 1930s, several owners operated the mansion over the next two decades, with limited success, as a resort hotel and restaurant. The former showplace was vandalized and severely damaged by fires while it sat vacant for many years, until Upper Uwchlan's supervisors got rid of the problem in the late 1960s, by authorizing the Lionville Fire Co. to set the place on fire and use it as a practice exercise.

Meanwhile, the mansion was back in the news, when plans for the Marsh Creek State Park project were unveiled in the early 1960s. Despite local citizens' protests and legal actions against eminent domain condemnations of more than 100 structures—including all the residences and barns that comprised the hamlet of Milford Mills—were razed as part of the State Park project. The park, opened in July 1979, was developed for drought and flood control, as well as recreational purposes.

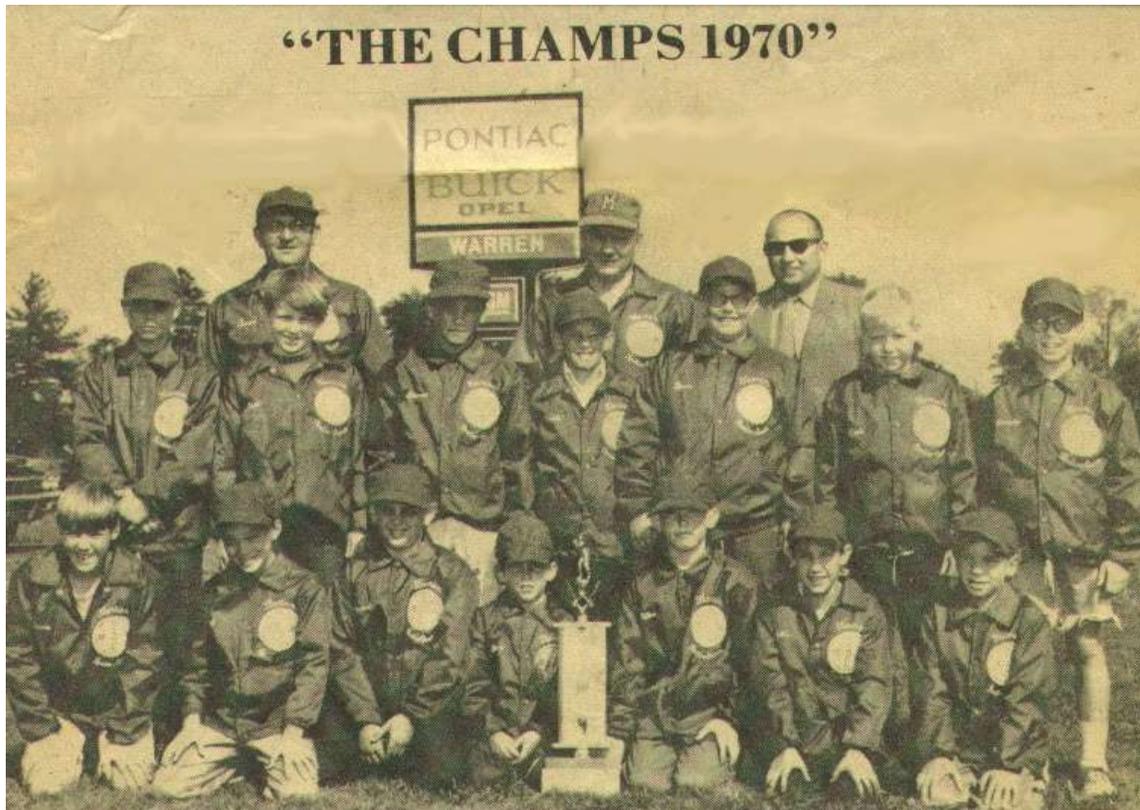
The mansion's foundation and front steps, and portions of the stone walls for the estate's outbuildings can still be seen near the boat dock on the west side of the lake. And sailboats whip across the lake, while remnants of Milford Mills residents' homes are far below under water.

Family Files now number 8,000

Through the great devotion of the Sunday and Thursday afternoon clipping/pasting crews, and the tireless efforts of Michael Homan who inputs all the data, the number of large Family Files cards in our Archives now totals 8,000. That total means we have Family File cards on more than 8,000 individuals, since the cards are filed by a last name, and the first letter of the first name. And many cards contain more than one article. The articles that are clipped from newspapers and pasted on Family File cards include engagements, weddings, deaths, retirements, achievements, promotions, etc. Though most of the articles were published in papers sometime after 1969, we have begun collecting older articles from local newspapers which are on microfilm.

To see if we have any information on your family members, click on the online indexes on our website, www.downingtowntownareahistoricalociety.org. You may be surprised.

This is what they looked like 43 years ago



DOWNINGTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE (MINOR) 1970 CHAMPS

Front Row (l to r) Kevin Morris, Philip Dague, Dennis O'Neill, David Osborne, Mike Moore, John Ippolito, Matthew Mingione.

Second Row (l to r) Steve Helm, Nick Cortlessa, Daniel Castaldi, Chad Mc Neil, Glen Schmid, Ricky Woodall, Randy Schmid.

Rear (l to r) George Schmid, asst. coach; Rich Woodall, coach; Warren Strawsnyder of the sponsoring agency.

MISSING (but mighty important) Eric Milano, Mike Whitman and George Quinn.

Warren Pontiac-Buick is proud to have sponsored this year's championship team. We are however equally proud of all the teams we have sponsored in this great program in many years past. To all involved in little league efforts everywhere, our very sincere congratulations.

1771 E.
Lincoln
Hwy.



Phone
363-7790

It's 216 Brandywine Avenue in Downingtown



Teresa Talucci is a truly perceptive scholar because she was the first person to correctly identify this as a photo of the house at 216 Brandywine Avenue in Downingtown. It's owned by Chris Wrenn, who bought the place in 1990. He says it was built in 1881, based on a notation written on a second floor wall. When excavating the dirt floor in the basement, in order to pour a concrete floor, many bottles and ceramic pieces were found, most of which were donated to the Historical Society. The carriage house behind the house was originally a stable. It was converted into an antique store, and 20-30 years ago, it was made into a residence, adds Chris.

Events and Activities in the Downingtown Area

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 (484-354-2273).

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@downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org