



Downingtown Area Historical Society
Hist-O-Gram

Interesting local history, accessed from our archives

www.downingtownareahistoricalociety.org

Vol. 4, No.11

March 14, 2013

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.

Local news in March 1961:

Plans for new Post Office ‘undesirable’

Warren Strawsnyder, chairman of the Downingtown Planning Commission, told members of the local Chamber of Commerce that the U.S. Post Office Department’s proposal to locate the new Post Office at 45 W. Lancaster Avenue (Currently the site of Priori’s Mattress Warehouse) was wrong.

Although the Planning Commission recognized that the borough needed a new postal facility because the current Post Office had outgrown its space in the municipal building, Strawsnyder claimed that planned location on Route 30 was “undesirable.”

The Commission, added Strawsnyder, believed the proposed location was unwise because it would be on a major thoroughfare, already burdened with heavy traffic; and the traffic problems would be exacerbated by the additional trucks and cars going in and out of the Post Office’s parking lot. The Planning Commission wanted postal officials to consider several other locations.

The location of the Downingtown Post Office had been a controversial lightning rod in the borough since the late 19th Century, because of decades-long dissension between residents of the East and West Wards.

The Borough’s East Enders felt deprived because the town’s Post Office had been located, for decades, on West Lancaster Avenue, across from the Pennsylvania Railroad Station. That location was a matter of convenience and efficiency, because the railroad transported much of the mail coming into and going out of the borough.

The discord, which had lingered for more than three decades, reached such a crescendo that on March 27, 1890, Congressman Smedley Darlington persuaded the U.S. Postmaster General to allow Downingtown to become the only borough in the United States to have two post offices.

Buoyed by their success on the postal front, the East Enders then tried to officially split the borough in two, with the Brandywine Creek being the demarcation line. Thankfully, that proposal was shot down by Borough Council because splitting the town would have been expensive as well as more divisive.

The dissension began to disappear in the mid-1920s, when borough councilmen Allen Keim and Guyon Miller were determined to build a municipal building that would help heal the psychological split in the borough. They also thought the growing town needed a central seat of government. Borough Council had been holding its meetings in the Alert Fire Co. since 1892.

The councilmen’s dream became a reality when members of the Downingtown Businessmen’s Club, forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce, agreed to underwrite the construction of a new Borough Hall, adjacent to the east side of the Brandywine.

More important, plans for the municipal building included the U.S. Post Office’s Department agreement to consolidate the two Post Offices into a single space in the Borough Hall for a nominal lease fee.

And to sweeten the deal, federal postal officials also agreed to start delivering mail to all borough homes and businesses at no extra cost.

Additional local news in March 1961

The **DHS Concert Band**, under the direction of William Ifert, gave its first concert at the new high school. Student directors Lt. Lewis Wilson and Capt. Thomas Yerkes, respectively, led the band when "Colonel Bogey" and "The Black Knight" were played. And Christian Crane played a marimba solo.

Norman Frank was elected president of the **Upper Uwchlan Farmers Club**. Mrs. Oscar Darlington was elected secretary-treasurer.

The **Marshallton Horse Show**, last staged in 1939, was to be held in May at the Charles Cann residence on Lucky Hill Road. Sub-committee chairmen were: Mrs. Donald Moore, prizes; Ladies Auxiliary, West Bradford Fire Co., refreshments; William Hill and Nils Edwards, grounds and jumps; Henry C. Baldwin, prize list; Ernest Fling and William Bittle, prize booth; Edwin Hill, publicity.

Committee chairs for the Fair at **East Ward School** in April were: Mrs. S.D. Hutchison, bake table; Mrs. Edward Campbell, fancy table; Mrs. Hallan Usher, snack bar; Mrs. Robert Flagg, games; and Mrs. Kenneth McCardell, pony rides.

Mrs. Edward Klink was elected president of the **Auxiliary of the Brandywine 845 Post, VFW**. Other officers are Mrs. Weston Touchton, senior vice president; Mrs. Earl Merrill, junior vice president; Mrs. William Wilmot, treasurer; Mrs. Mary Witmer, chaplain; Mrs. Charles Hilton, conductress; and Mrs. Mary Jane Laird, trustee.

Members of **Lionville Intermediate Girl Scout Troop 57**, led by Mrs. Peter Klesko and Mrs. Arthur Bradberry, made Easter baskets for needy children and scrapbooks for children in Chester County Hospital. Girls who helped were Linda Hill, Susan Just, Holly Poole, Debbie Wright, Frances Slesko, Shirley Sorenson, Mary Lou Blake, Patty Dunn and Beth Bradberry.

New officers of the **St. Anthony's Lodge Women's Auxiliary** were Jerry Marino, president; Pat Ruffini, vice president; Theresa Bogush, recording secretary; Mary Celii, corresponding secretary; Molly Taraschi, treasurer; and Mary Ciarlone, hostess.

Participants in a play at **Hopewell Methodist Church** were Mrs. Gladys Jefferis, Kathy Kring, Barbara Thompson, Barry Piersol, Sandy and Linda Lammey, Mrs. Mary McCausland, Mrs. Nelda Kring, Mrs. Frances Shank, Mrs. Elsie Sinex, Mrs. Kathryn Boyd and Rev. Donald Bower.

For the first time, all employees of the **Downingtown Paper Co.** could buy stock in the company, via a five-year payroll deduction plan. Available at \$22.25 per share, a total of 5,000 shares of common stock were made available, initially. The response so successful, nearly 1,600 additional shares were made available.

And members of 940, Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulfite and Paper Mill Workers and the **Packaging Division of Downingtown Paper** reached an agreement on a three-year contract, which called for improved medical benefits, life insurance for retirees, and four weeks vacation for employees with 25 years service or more. The union's negotiating team included Alfred Giannarino, James Ambroziak, William Eshleman, Augustus Farnum, Lester Kauffman, Elizabeth Lacey, Pauline Reburn and Donald Welsh.

Members of the **DHS girls' basketball team** who earned certificates and letters were Gayle Davis, Nancy Gindin, Paula Tweed, Barbara Thompson and manager Ruby Carr.

Uwchlan Township Republicans who filed petitions for the spring primary election included; Russell Miller and Charles Martin, supervisor; Harry Happersett and Mrs. Charles Trego, tax collector; Grace Gordon and David Sharp, auditor; Edith Oberholser, assessor; Jonathan Windle and Robert Devaney, judge of election; and Warren Supplee, school director.

It's Breesey Court in Downingtown



Bud Bruton was the truly perceptive scholar who was the first person to correctly identify this as a photo (taken by Mike Dunn) of Breesey Court, 517 E. Lancaster Ave. in Downingtown.

Based on the history, provided by Richard and Hilda Donovan, the current owners, the house was built in 1909 for Mrs. Martha Curtin Breese, daughter of Andrew G. Curtin, Pennsylvania Governor during the Civil War. At the time, she was a widow with three grown children

After construction of the main house, a carriage house and a stable was completed, servants' quarters were added in 1913.

The 20-room house and its additions were designed by Wilson Eyre, an architectural firm in Philadelphia and New York. John Gilbert McIlvaine was a draftsman with the firm at the time. He became a partner and the firm was renamed Wilson Eyre and McIlvaine.

McIlvaine married Mrs. Breese's daughter, Elizabeth in 1912.

A member of a prominent Downingtown area family, McIlvaine was one of the founders and chief architect of the Chester County Boy Scout Council's Camp Horseshoe. And in 1920, he designed the original School Award Medal for the local Charles F. Moran American Legion Post. Downingtown's School Award Medal was adopted by the American Legion as a national program in 1926 to foster the ideals of citizenship and Americanism, and now it's given annually at thousands of schools across the United States.

In 1922, Mrs. Breese moved into the "Hat Rack," a smaller house designed by McIlvaine on an adjacent property, at 521 E. Lancaster Ave.

The Donovans bought the main house in 1979, and have converted it into apartments and an office suite. In 1991, they bought the Hat Rack, and it's now the location of Bruton Financial Partners.

Both properties are on the National Historic Registry

Coming events & activities in Downingtown area

DHS Alumni Assn. banquet

The banquet will be held from 5-10 PM Saturday, April 20 at Whitford Country Club. The honored guest is Ron Ditzler, former choir director from 1969 to 1977. More information can be found on the website: www.downingtowntalumni.org.

DHS West Post Prom Party

The 10th annual DHS West Post Prom Party will be held at the Lionville YMCA. All seniors are invited, and they don't have to go to the Prom to come to the party. This year's theme is "Passport to the World." The YMCA will be transformed into a night filled with fun and activities, including the indoor pool, using exciting places to tour throughout the world, while providing a safe and fun environment for all. Last year's event drew over 250 seniors and their guests.

The event is coordinated and funded by parents and members of the community. All funds that are raised will be used for the event and are utilized in securing activities, games, food and prizes.

Volunteers are needed for all committees, and parents of students in all grade levels are encouraged to get involved. Please do not wait until your child is a senior to get involved. Those who wish to help are invited to join us at 7 PM at meetings being held in Room 139 at DHS West on March 19, April 16 and May 14.

Please check out the P3 website: www.dwestpostprom.com for more details and to sign up as a volunteer.

Savings opportunities available at DARC

Discount Movie Tickets: \$7.50, 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.

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