



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

*Interesting local history, accessed from our archives*

[www.downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org)

*The past is never done. It is not even past--William Faulkner*

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## Where and What Is This?



The first person to correctly identify the site in the photo above will be recognized as a truly perceptive scholar. Please send your response to: [Info@downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:Info@downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org).

### **Local historians solve 134-year-old mystery of unknown immigrant**

On the morning of July 18, 1881, an unknown immigrant was struck and killed instantly by the eastbound Pennsylvania Railroad's "Harrisburg Express," rumbling down the tracks in Caln Township, near the location of Coatesville Area High School. Subsequently, the victim's body was transported to the freight warehouse at the neighboring Downingtown Station, probably because that was the largest Pennsylvania Railroad facility between Philadelphia and Lancaster at the time, says railroad historian Jim Sundman, of Downingtown.

Meanwhile, a family in the village of Balzers in Liechtenstein (a small principality sandwiched between Switzerland and Austria) awaited news of their father and husband, Fidel Buchel. A 49-year old stone mason, Fidel had left his home in April of 1881, traveling with others from the village to Guttenberg, Iowa – where other relatives had previously settled. He was to send for his wife and five children once he could afford their transport. After just three months, the family learned he had decided to return home.

Instead, a telegram, written in English, arrived in Belzars. Fidel's worried wife took the paper around the village until she found someone who could translate the news that her husband had been killed. With only this document, the family lacked details of his death for 134 years, until his great-granddaughter, Sue Buchel, from Boise, Idaho, and her second cousin, Anna Hilti, an artist from Liechtenstein, pursued the mystery in 2015.

A retired museum curator for the National Park Service, Sue first heard about Fidel's death when she visited Liechtenstein in 1971. She also learned that the telegram from the U.S. was lost. The sketchy information she heard about Fidel's death from relatives seemed to be more legend than fact. One tidbit gave York, PA as the location of Fidel's death.

That sliver proved untrue when Sue contacted York County officials upon her return home. She continued to search the Internet periodically over the next decades, but never found any clues as to her ancestor's demise.

For Anna's part, this story of a lost ancestor in a foreign land had inspired her to create an art installation in Liechtenstein's capitol, Vaduz, last summer, focused on the experience of immigration. The two cousins decided to try to solve their family's mystery during a trip to the United States, which Anna had planned for the Fall of 2015.

In preparing for the research trip, Sue again searched the Internet, and this time located an article in the July 20, 1881 edition of the *York Daily* newspaper. The brief article noted, "An unknown German was killed Monday [July 18] by express train at Coatesville. PA. The body was taken to Downingtown for identification."

Thinking this might be their great-grandfather, Sue and Anna made plans to visit several historical archives in Chester County. Carol Grigson, volunteer archivist at the Downingtown Area Historical Society showed them the bound register of the Northwood Cemetery, listing details on the burial since the cemetery was incorporated in 1871. Bingo! Grigson found an entry for an unidentified person buried in the cemetery's potter's field on July 19, 1881, one day after the unknown immigrant's death. While viewing the register, Grigson and the researchers noticed that some 130 other people have been buried in unmarked locations at the cemetery– a not uncommon practice in earlier years.

During their research, the women found more clues at the Chester County Archives, with the help of Cliff Parker, and at the Chester County Historical Society, aided by Pam Powell. In the ledger books of the original Chester County Poorhouse at Embreeville, they found a payment of \$6 to J.T. Carpenter, the Downingtown undertaker and furniture maker with a shop on West Lancaster Avenue, to pay for a plain coffin and the digging of a grave. They also found that a coroner's inquest had been held regarding the train accident, at the Downingtown train station. But the coroner's report, sent to the state capital, had been destroyed along with many other documents, by a flood at the State Archives in Harrisburg.

Though those documents illuminated the sequence of events surrounding the death of an "unknown immigrant," nothing actually connected the women's relative by name. However, while looking through microfilm at the Chester County Historical Society, they found an article in a West Chester newspaper, the *Village Record*, published on July 23, 1881, which gave details

of the coroner's now-lost report. From this article, they learned what had occurred the morning of the accident, what this train accident victim looked like, and that he had only 8 cents in his pockets and carried a letter from home.

Then, remarkably, the news article went on to include an English translation of the letter found in the victim's pockets. By scanning the letter, seeing the name of their ancestor's village, the names of his children, and his wife's signature, the nearly-defeated researchers knew they had finally found their great-grandfather. Now they knew that Fidel Büchel had, indeed, been that unknown immigrant!

From the letter, they also learned that Fidel and his wife, Franciska, had mutually decided to abort their plans to emigrate to America. Rather than travel home in relative comfort, however, he chose to send his savings home to his family, and then walked or hopped on a freight train, to make his way over the 1,200 miles back to the eastern seaboard and board a ship home.

Sue and Anna kept members of the Buchel family--in Liechtenstein as well as those in the United States--posted as they retrieved each shred of information in Chester County. It seems as if all 37,000 residents of the tiny principality now knew about Fidel, as a result of their e-mail updates. The family's enthusiastic reaction to the news about their forebearer has led to a large family gathering in the home village and plans for a private family gathering near the tracks near Coatesville on the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fidel's accident.

Not forgetting that Fidel's resting place is only one *among over 130 unmarked burials* at the Northwood Cemetery, the family also determined that he and all the others deserve a marker in tribute to their lives. The European contingent of the family decided to raise funds to send a gravestone from Fidel's village to serve this purpose. Balzers boasts a granite quarry, which happens to be owned by a descendant of Fidel, while a local stone cutter is also a relative. The stone was quarried, chiseled and shipped to the Exton stone yard of Luminella Monuments. The one side of the huge stone, which stands five feet tall and four feet wide, gives Fidel Buchel's life information, and on the other side is incised, "In Tribute to all who rest here, unmarked, but not forgotten."

A short, public dedication of this potter's field monument will be held at Northwood Cemetery, at 10:30 AM Tuesday, July 19—the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fidel's burial.

Ronald Selin, the cemetery's caretaker, coordinated the memorial's installation, and helped arrange the dedication. Luminella Memorials of Downingtown arranged for the transportation of the gravestone from their stone yard in Exton to Downingtown, and Miller's Concrete installed the cement base at the gravesite for the 3,000-pound stone.

In addition to members of the Buchel family, including many from Liechtenstein, Chester County residents who helped with various aspects of this project and the initial research will attend the dedication. One special guest is expected to be Claudia Fritsche, the Principality of Liechtenstein's Ambassador to the U.S. since 2002. This will possibly be the ambassador's final public appearance before she retires. The local public, especially people who have family members buried in the potter's field at Northwood, are invited to attend the program.

Following the dedication, the Buchel family and invited guests will attend a reception at Ashbridge House, the Downingtown Area Historical Society's 307-year-old headquarters on Route 30 in East Caln.

## Group Photo of Week



There was much wailing by local high school students before 1928, because the bigger high schools—West Chester and Coatesville—had marching bands, but DHS didn't. "We admired these other bands," acknowledged the editors in the 1929 DHS *Cuckoo* yearbook. "Not only did they make a fine appearance, but they produced music that caused their schools to be justly proud of them. We had champion football teams, champion typists, prize-winning glee clubs, but no band to even 'try' for a championship."

But all the whining ceased in the spring of 1928, when a band was organized at DHS, with Amos Miley (on the far right in the photo above) as director. Shown above, in their splendid new uniforms, are the members of the first band, which had practice sessions on two nights a week.

The band's 33 musicians included, in no particular order: Theodore Dowlin, James Mahan, Galusha Marsh, Park Moore, Richard Robinson, Joseph Sciaretta, Mary Eva Dowling, Mabel Haberly, James Elston, Carroll Moore, Ada Miley, Donald Shultz, William Ash, Weldon Bicking, Stuart Pollock, Tony Carbo, Eugene Watts, Wilson Pollock, Horace Hutchison, Albert Fitzgerald, Jack Lamping, Leroy Pawling, Carrie Miley, Lois Brown, Mildred Deputy, Howard Baldwin, George McCowan, Jack McNab, Howard Moore, Carmen Travaglini, Marion Laird, Naomi Hashinger and Jack Pannebaker.

## Here's how YOU can receive a Hist-O-Gram every week

If you occasionally receive a pass-along copy of our Hist-O-Gram from a subscriber, you'd like to receive a copy of our FREE Hist-O-Gram directly every week, you can do that by accessing our website: [www.downtowndareahistoricalociety.org](http://www.downtowndareahistoricalociety.org), and typing your email address into the sign-up box on the home page. We won't share or sell any email addresses. And you can access previously published Hist-O-Grams at: [www.downtowndareahistoricalociety.org/Histograms.html](http://www.downtowndareahistoricalociety.org/Histograms.html).

## What locals were talking about 36 years ago

Noted below are items originally published in the latter part of July 1980 editions of the *East Branch Citizen*.

- Seven candidates to replace Lew Wilson, retired **Downingtown police chief**, were interviewed. Some 75 applicants were interested in the position, according to borough officials.

- Tony Madiro, a member of the **Minquas Ambulance Corps** performed an emergency baby delivery. He was assisted by corpsmen Howard Freas and Steve Shirk, when Mrs. Lynn Mitchell gave birth to an 8-pound daughter, Grace Elizabeth at home, 227 Mary St., Downingtown.

- The Lionville Youth Association's **Lionville Park**, a 21-acre site, east of Route 113, was dedicated by Uwchlan officials. The LYA developed the park, which includes three baseball diamonds and will ultimately have three soccer fields. The volunteer group accomplished that by raising more than \$15,000 from private sources, plus \$15,000 contributed by local businesses, over the past five years. The LYA sponsored 63 baseball and softball teams, 60 soccer teams, 100 wrestlers, and 46 basketball teams.

- Upper Uwchlan Township residents complained, at a supervisors' meeting, that traffic problems caused by visitors at the **Marsh Creek State Park** were a nuisance. Some weekends, reported Police Chief William Brice, the police had to turn away 400-500 cars in about two hours because the park's parking lot was filled.

- Anthony Fiore and Carl Hurst, members of **Boy Scout Troop 216**, earned the rank of Eagle, awarded at a court of honor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Lionville. Also promoted were David Honey, tenderfoot; John Dockstader and David Johnson, second class; and Tim Honey, first class.

- Jennifer Ely was the champion in the "connect four" competition at the **Wagonseller Park playground** in Glenmoore. Mary Jane Poluch came in second and Dana Kohler was third. Winners in the bingo contest at **Beaver Creek playground** were Becky Broomall, Sherri Evans, Lee Keen and Ann Terpstra. Awards for their crayon projects at the **Johnsontown playground** were presented to Tina Eastwood, Jimmy Mailliard and Rachel Hernandez. Winners in their age bracket in the broad jump competition at **East Ward playground** were Mark Norris, Byron and Jason Hazzard, Ed Shroeder, Jimmy Doedderlein, Stephanie Eldridge and Kris Goddard.

- Recent **property transfers** included: 1 Rose Tree Drive, Uwchlan, \$84,500; 79 Chatham Court, East Brandywine, \$50,500; 412 Bianca Circle, Caln, \$48,500; 508 Grant Avenue, Downingtown, \$49,500; 114 Woodland Circle, East Caln, \$105,000; 1342 Sherwood Drive, West Bradford, \$60,750; 710 North Reeds Road, Upper Uwchlan, \$93,500; 1398 Ship Road, West Whiteland, \$70,000.

- Installed as officers of the **Downingtown Rotary Club** were: Richard Thatcher, president; Frank Brouse, first vice president; Bruce Bredickas, second vice president; Albert Homan, secretary; David Kirkner, treasurer; Charles Zittle, sergeant-at-arms; and Dr. Joseph McCahon, William Mason, Leon Bixler, Charles Bruton and Robert Cropper, directors.

- Representatives of two large packaging firms visited the **Milprint plant** in Downingtown, which was a division of the flexible packaging division of Reynolds Metals in Richmond, VA. But both representatives claimed they had no intention of purchasing the local facility, which was only operating at 25 percent of its capacity.

## It was Lionville Fire Company's original pumper



Jeff Trego is a truly perceptive scholar because he was the first person to correctly identify the hand-pulled pumper in photo above as the first firefighting apparatus used by the Lionville Fire Co. It was purchased in 1911, the year the company was established, and was used until 1923. The pumper was originally stored in several buildings in Lionville. In 1915, its permanent home in a one-story, frame garage, built by Aaron Slonaker on land provided by Christian Oberholser. The initial rental fee was 25 cents per year. The garage had a belfry with a bell donated by James Quaintence, which was used to summon firefighters when an emergency occurred. The hand-pulled pumper and belfry are still possessed by the fire company. You'll find more info on the fire company's history at: [www.lionvillefire.org/content/firehistory/](http://www.lionvillefire.org/content/firehistory/).

*Officers of the Downingtown Area Historical Society are: Parry Desmond, president; Ernie Jameson, vice president; Marion Piccolomini, recording secretary; Francine Dague, treasurer; and Donna Capriotti, corresponding secretary. The board of directors includes: Harry Helms, Mike Dunn, Phil Dague and Dennis Walton. Carol Grigson is the archivist.*

## Vintage Ad of the Week

**FREE . . . REFRESHMENTS FOR ALL**

**PHILLIPS 66**

**PHILLIPS 66**

**YOU'RE INVITED TO OUR**

**GRAND OPENING**

**FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JUNE 12 & 13**

- 5 GRAND PRIZES
- FREE GIFTS FOR EVERYONE
- FIRE ENGINE RIDES FOR THE KIDDIES

**Free Carrier "KING" Size Coke**  
WITH EVERY 8 GALLON PURCHASE

**BALLENTINE'S "66" SERVICE**

RT. 100- $\frac{1}{2}$  MI. N. OF TURNPIKE      UWCHLAND, PA.

- COMPLETE CAR SERVICE
- STATE INSPECTION

This ad was originally published in the *Daily Local News* on June 12, 1964

## Free Ads for Non-Profits

### *Shakespeare in the Park*

The Downingtown Parks and Recreation Board will present "Midsummer's Night Dream," performed by the PA Leadership Charter School at 6 PM Saturday, July 23 at Kerr Park's gazebo area. For more details on the free program, see:

<http://downingtown.org/Documents/Temporary%20Documents/Shakespeare%20in%20the%20Park%20flyer.pdf>.

### ***Wall That Heals***

Hopewell United Methodist Church and East Brandywine Township will host to *The Wall That Heals*, a 250-foot replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Part of a national tour, the replica memorial wall and accompanying mobile education center will be on display throughout the day and night, from Thursday, July 28 until Sunday, July 31, at East Brandywine Township Community Park, 440 Dilworth Road. The Wall will take a one-hour escorted route, beginning at 10 AM on July 27, from Calvary Fellowship Church on Route 113, Lionville, into Downingtown, where it will stop for a few minutes for wreath placement at the Veterans Memorial in Kerr Park, and then continue on to East Brandywine Community Park. For more details, see: [www.ebrandywine.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=74](http://www.ebrandywine.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=74).

### ***Bats For Matt Softball Tournament***

Softball teams that want to participate in the 2016 Bats For Matt Tournament--to be held Saturday, July 16 and Sunday, July 17 on the Downingtown Little League Field on Manor Avenue—can enter by sending an email to: [BatsForMattSoftball@gmail.com](mailto:BatsForMattSoftball@gmail.com), [KrazzieLazzie224@yahoo.com](mailto:KrazzieLazzie224@yahoo.com) or [Bigciarlone@gmail.com](mailto:Bigciarlone@gmail.com). For more details, see: [www.batsformatt.com/](http://www.batsformatt.com/) or [www.facebook.com/BatsForMatt/](http://www.facebook.com/BatsForMatt/).

### ***Links for the Library Golf Outing***

All proceeds for this golf outing at the Downingtown Country Club on July 25 will benefit the Downingtown Library. For info on packages, sponsorships and dinner, see: [www.downingtowntownlibrary.org/](http://www.downingtowntownlibrary.org/).

### ***Controversial Presidential Elections***

Ross Kershey, historian and professor, will speak on Controversial Presidential Elections at 7 PM Tuesday, July 19 at the West Caln Municipal Building, 721 W. Kings Highway, Wagontown. The free program is sponsored by the West Caln Historical Society, and the public is welcome.

### ***Give Something Back Day Golf Outing***

A golf outing will be held at Whitford Country Club on Monday, July 18 in support of the Fund for Chester County and the Whitford Charitable Fund. For more details on sponsorships fees and the day's events, check out: [events@chescofc.org](mailto:events@chescofc.org).

### ***Farmers Market***

The Downingtown Farmers Market has returned to Kerr Parks. It will be open from 9 AM to 1 PM on Saturdays. For more info, see: <http://growingrootspartners.com/downingtowntown-farmers-market>.

### ***Brochure on DARC classes & activities***

You can gain access to the latest DARC brochure, listing all classes and activities, at: [www.darcinfo.com](http://www.darcinfo.com). For more info, 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 reasonable. Call 610-269-3555 for more information.

### ***Joseph's People, Downingtown chapter***

An ecumenical support mission to help unemployed or underemployed people. The group is entirely conducted by volunteers, and has been at St. Joseph's since 1995. Meets at 7:30 PM on the 2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the month. All are welcome. Visit web page, [www.josephspeople.org](http://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](mailto:JPCheryl@verizon.net).