



**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).

## What locals were talking about in the summer of 1926

Noted below are news items that were published in the *Downingtown Archive* 90 years ago:

- “The largest crowd that has visited the borough in many years was on hand last Saturday evening, when the **Ku Klux Klan** held a large parade and celebration” in Downingtown, claimed the September 2, 1926 edition of *The Archive*. The parade included over 1,000 KKK members who marched over the town’s principal streets. Burgess (mayor) Calvin Ax had given the KKK an unrestricted permit for the parade. “The paraders wore tightly drawn masks about their faces, in the first parade of this kind held in the county,” added *The Archive’s* report. “At previous parades, members of the Klan, at all times, were required to march without the visors they wear at meetings of the mystic organization.”

The local newspaper also noted: “The streets were thronged with spectators, and the largest crowd in the history of the borough was present. Visitors started to arrive as early as 5 o’clock, and by the time the parade started, it was almost impossible to get along Lancaster Avenue. Good order prevailed throughout the entire evening, and not one disturbance took place during the parade or at the meeting” in a field in the northwestern section of the borough. It included the burning of a “huge cross,” which could be seen in all parts of town.

After several KKK members spoke briefly, the principal speaker, a man identified as Rev. Grube, “held the attention of the 3,000 persons gathered around him.”

- In a profile on Tommy Gray, **Downingtown’s longtime police chief**, the reporter noted that Gray was originally hired in 1894 as a “high constable” as well as police chief. He was in his 30s, and his salary was \$15 a month. He recalled that in those early days, there often were 20 drunks in the borough lockup on a Saturday night.

- The **Northwood Cemetery** purchased 13 acres of adjoining wood lot from the Thomas Downing estate, at a cost of \$66 per acre. However, part of the cost of the acquisition would be reduced by selling timber harvested from the wood lot.

- Bids for the concrete paving of 3,650 feet of **Bondsville Road** in East Brandywine Township were projected to be \$30,000. Half of the cost was to be paid by the State Highway Department, and the balance would be split evenly between the county and the township.

- The **Caln School Board** planned to build a consolidated elementary school on Route 30, on a 5-acre plot, next to the Chester County Rod and Gun Club. Plans called for construction of a one-story, eight-room school.

- The **Minquas Fire Co.** ordered a new pumper from the Hale Co. in Conshohocken, and the **Alerts** ordered a new Seagraves chemical truck. Also, the Minquas’ membership had exceeded 500, and there was hope that there would be more than 600 on the rolls by September.

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

### Group Photo of the Week:



Members of the Home Economics Club at DHS in 1977 included, left to right: Kimberly Brian, Wendy Bates, Patty McCue, Dawn Davis and Karen Martini.

## Items published in local newspapers 68 years ago

Noted below are items, which were retrieved from newspapers published in the latter part of September 1948.

- Film legend Jimmy Stewart; Ezra Stone, who was the star of the “Henry Adlrich” radio show; and the reigning Miss Pennsylvania got a rousing welcome in Downingtown when the “**Pennsylvania Week Train**” made a stop in the borough. An estimated 3,000 cheering spectators and the DHS marching band came to the Downingtown Railroad Station to greet the celebrities who entertained the throng. The special seven-car train was an integral part of a state-wide effort to promote the commonwealth’s businesses and industries. The entourage started its week-long, 15-stop jaunt in Philadelphia, and Downingtown was the first stop beyond Philly. Arranged locally by the Downingtown Chamber of Commerce, the Pennsylvania Week events also included public tours of local industries.

- Chester Glisson, **Downingtown Police Chief** for 21 years, resigned. In his letter of resignation, Glisson said he had recently bought Sheehy’s Restaurant on East Lancaster Avenue in the borough. The establishment had been owned and operated as a restaurant and taproom for many years by John Sheehy, who had decided to retire. His son, Joseph Sheehy, who had been involved in the business, recently purchased a taxi business in Downingtown from Anthony Cozzone. Although the elder Sheehy reportedly was seeking \$40,000 for the business, he declined to confirm that sale figure.

- Youths from throughout the borough had an opportunity to watch TV shows on Friday nights in a social room at Downingtown’s **Messiah Lutheran Church**. A campaign to raise

money to buy the TV set was spearheaded by Dr. George Bousum and Joseph Streamer, co-superintendents of Messiah's Sunday School.

- Mrs. Atley Ney, president of the **West Ward School Mothers Club**, appointed these committee chairmen: Mrs. David Ross, membership; Mrs. Gerard Manz, hospitality; and Mrs. Peter Short, publicity. Also, Mrs. David D'Attilio was appointed club secretary, replacing Mrs. William Boylan who moved from the area.

- Youngsters who advanced in the Sunday School at **St. Paul's Evangelical and Reformed Church** in Lionville included: Joseph McClure, Jimmie Rennard, Peggy Ann White, Eddy Matthews and Geraldine Whitely, to the primary class; and Virginia Walters and Schuyler Rennard, to the junior class.

- Mrs. Ernest Martin, president of the **Marshallton School PTA**, appointed the following members to the executive committee: Anna Niels, Mrs. Paul Hoffman and Donald Mitchell. Appointed as committee chairmen were Mrs. Henry Ramsey, membership; and Mrs. Wilson Young, literature and magazines. Mrs. Harry Wickersham was elected vice president, to replace Gloria Chapman, who moved from the school district.

- Edward Spamer was elected president of Downingtown's **American Legion Post**. Also elected were Leon Gable, first vice president; Duer Smedley, second vice president; Harlan Clavier, financial officer; Rev. David Stewart, chaplain; Paul Dague, historian; Jonathan Windle, sergeant-at-arms; and Francis Summers, adjutant.

- First and second grade students in the **Wallace Township School District** attended classes in the lower room at Indiantown School and were taught by Mrs. Miriam Fillman. Third and fourth graders went to the Lincoln School, where they were taught by Mrs. Freda Johnson. And fifth, sixth and seventh graders were taught by Mrs. Mary Eppihimer in the upper classroom at Indiantown School.

- Officers of the **East Ward School Mothers Club** were: Mrs. Ralph Hedricks, president; Mrs. Laverne Moore, vice president; Mrs. James Charles, secretary; and Mrs. Leebert Chambers, treasurer. Committee chairmen included Mrs. Edward Klunk publicity; Mrs. Ogier Norris, hostess; Mrs. Thomas Lee, hospitality; Mrs. Newlin Moore, homeroom mothers; and Mrs. John Swarner, ways and means.

## Our Wish List

The items listed below in our Wish List notes the materials with a Downingtown connection the Historical Society especially needs to reach its archival goals.

- Vintage uniforms worn by members of the DHS or Junior High sports teams or marching bands, and those worn by members of local fire departments in parades.

- Any yearbooks or newspapers published by DHS, or by Downingtown and Lionville Junior High Schools.

- Any printed materials related to: the Downingtown Young Whippets, Downingtown Little League, Downingtown Babe Ruth League or the Downingtown American Legion Baseball teams, and the Downingtown Girls' Softball League, the Lionville Youth Association, the West Bradford Youth Association, or the East Brandywine Youth Athletics.

If you need more info about any of these requests, please send an email to:

[Info@downingtowntareahistoricalociety.org](mailto:Info@downingtowntareahistoricalociety.org).



# It was the Charles News Agency



Dan Lindley was the first of many people who correctly identified the site in the photo above as the interior of Charles News Agency, 107 E. Lancaster Ave., Downingtown. H. E. Groff bought the news agency from Raymond Greenleaf in 1926. After Groff died two years later, Sam Charles and his wife, Groff's daughter Alice, managed the business until Alice died in 1939. Sam Charles ran the place for Mrs. H.E. Groff until 1944, when he remarried and bought the business from Mrs. Groff. Sam and, subsequently, his son, Bob, continued run the agency until 1999, when the store was closed.

## Free Ads for Non-Profits

### *Easter Egg Hunt*

St. Paul's UCC Church, 101 Worthington Road, Exton, will have an Easter Egg Hunt for kids 10 and under at 2 PM Saturday, March 19.

### *Lecture series in E. Brandywine*

East Brandywine's Historical Commission will present the following lectures at 3:30 PM on the Sundays noted: **March 20**, at the township building, 1214 Horseshoe Pike in Guthriesville. Greg Pilotti, heirloom furniture maker will discuss his work, furniture care and building techniques; **April 17**, at Bondsville Mill Park, 1647 Bondsville Road, Bryan Thompson Nowak, Horticulturalist at Morris Arboretum, will take you on nature walk and sheds some light on our local landscape; **May 15**, Mathew Kalos will discuss what he's uncovered in his archaeological digs in Chester County, at the East Brandywine Township Building, 1214 Horseshoe Pike, Guthriesville.

### ***Readers on the Run***

The Downingtown Library's Readers on the Run road races will be conducted on Green Street in the borough on Saturday, April 9. They will start at 8 AM with a 5K run, followed by a 1-mile race at 8:15, and then a 100-yard dash for kids at 9 AM. Entry fees for the 5K and Walk are \$25 before April 2 and \$30 on race day. The Kids' Dash costs \$10. To register online and for more info, access: [www.racemenu.com/readers](http://www.racemenu.com/readers).

### ***Oldies Dance Party***

The Downingtown Area Senior Center will have an Oldies Dance Party fundraiser, featuring Philadelphia disc jockey Jerry Blavat, also known as "The Geator with The Heater" and "the Boss with the Hot Sauce." You're encouraged to join the fun, from 9-11 on Saturday, April 9 at the Covered Bridge Room in Kimberton. Tickets are \$75 each and that includes food, beer, wine and raffles. Contact the center at 610-269-3939 to reserve your tickets.

### ***True Story of Amelia Earhart's Disappearance***

Richard (Ric) Gillespie, historian, author, executive director of TIGHAR and aeronautic researcher will present Finding Amelia - The True Story of the Earhart Disappearance in a West Caln Historical Society program at 7 PM on Tuesday, April 19 at the West Caln Municipal Bldg., 721 W. Kings Hwy., Wagontown. The program is free and open to all.

### ***World War II Weekend***

The Borough's Historic Commission will have a World War II Weekend in Kerr Park, Downingtown, from Friday, April 22 through Sunday, April 24. No rain date. The main event—military displays, encampments and vehicle displays—will open at 10 AM on Saturday. Admission is \$5 for adults and kids over 12. WW II vets get in free. There will be a "USO Dance" at 7 PM on Saturday night. Tickets are \$5/person or \$8/couple.

### ***Alert's Golf Outing***

Downingtown's all-volunteer, Alert Fire Co. will host its third annual golf outing at Ron Jaworski's Downingtown Country Club as a fund-raising event, and they are asking for local and national sponsorship for this event. The outing will take place on Monday, May 2. You can access more details on the outing via [www.alertgolfouting.org/](http://www.alertgolfouting.org/).

### ***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).