



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

February 22, 2018

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An Elopement on the Downingtown Trolley (and an angry father chasing in a locomotive)

George Dailey was on the job as a train car inspector at Thorndale on Monday, June 20, 1910 when he got an urgent message from the railroad switching tower at Caln. The Caln tower was relaying a desperate call they received from Dailey's oldest daughter Marie that her younger sister Anna (age 16 and George's second oldest daughter) had just eloped with George Lee, age 18, of West Caln. The couple was going by trolley, that included two connections, from Coatesville to Wilmington, Delaware to get married.

Since the first leg of the couple's trolley trip ran parallel to the railroad tracks from Coatesville to Downingtown, Dailey saw an opportunity to head them off when he spotted a locomotive all steamed up and ready to go at Thorndale. Quickly finding an engineer friend who was more than willing to oblige in the pursuit, Dailey and the engineer climbed aboard the locomotive and the two sped off, racing the trolley to Downingtown.

The locomotive won the race to Downingtown, but by the time Dailey climbed off and reached Lancaster Pike, the trolley had left and was on its way to West Chester. The angry dad telephoned ahead, but by the time the West Chester authorities reached the trolley depot, Anna and George had made a connection to another trolley and were headed to Kennett Square, and then to Wilmington. Meanwhile, George Dailey boarded the next trolley at Downingtown and was on his way to West Chester to continue the pursuit.



The trolley is seen here in the 1920s in Downingtown crossing the bridge over the Brandywine River.

Anna and George reached Kennett Square, then transferred to another trolley on their final leg to Delaware. Right before Wilmington, the trolley stopped at Brandywine Springs Park and the allure of the sights prompted the young couple to get off and look around. An alert guard at the park, who was given their description from Wilmington police who were telephoned of the elopement, detained them until George Dailey arrived. (continued on next page)

Dailey, who was always one car behind the elopers since Downingtown, reached Brandywine Springs Park and took his daughter back home, followed by a vehemently protesting George Lee. When waiting at Kennett Square for the trolley to West Chester, Dailey finally lost his temper with Lee and had him arrested for “enticing his daughter from home.” Lee was eventually sent to Chester County Prison where his father, Harry Lee, a farmer in West Caln, got his son released after coming up with \$400 bail. Meanwhile, Dailey brought his daughter Anna back to their Caln home despite her vows to marry Lee.



The trolley is seen here south of Downingtown heading towards West Chester in a photograph taken in the 1920s.

The eloping couple received some sympathy back home, and there were even a few instances of copycat elopers going by way of trolley to Delaware. But notwithstanding Anna’s prognostications, she and Lee did not marry. She married James Merkt in 1913 and they made their home in Downingtown for the rest of their lives. Anna died in 1971. There is no record of what further punishment, if any, George Lee received. Unfortunately, he died in 1918 at age 26 in West Chester from pneumonia that was contributed by the influenza epidemic that was ravaging the nation at the time.



The front and back of a West Chester Street Railway Company ticket is seen here. The trolley started running from West Chester to Downingtown in 1903. In 1906 it was extended to Coatesville. The ticket is in the collection of the Downingtown Area Historical Society.

In The (Old) News – Items that Made Headlines Back in the Day

1836 – A locomotive on the new Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad got loose from its tender at Downingtown, and with no one on board, went “demon-like” (according to one newspaper) at a high speed towards Coatesville. It ran right through Coatesville and proceeded “alone in its glory” to Parkesburg where it finally ran out of fuel.

1853 – One newspaper made note that there was an ox in Downingtown that weighed 3,000 pounds.

1871 – There was a grand celebration among the African-American population in Downingtown on September 22 celebrating the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. An address was to be delivered by William Howard Day, editor of *Our National Progress* who was described as an “eloquent orator” who “will do full justice to the occasion.”

1889 – According to the Philadelphia Times “a curiosity of nomenclature exists in a family in Downingtown which, perhaps, has not its equal. There are four children in the family – two girls and two boys. The girls’ names are Centessa Valencia and Vesta Tell. The boys rejoice in the euphonious names of Festus Corliss and Sesesne Lynn. Their nicknames are Tes, Ves, Les, and Fes.”

1895 – In August, Downingtown resident James Harbison, age 85, married Elizabeth Haldeman, “a blushing bride of 75,” at the courthouse in West Chester. The ceremony was held in front of all the courthouse officials, and at its conclusion Mr. Harbison invited all of them out for ice cream.

1929 – Downingtown submitted an application to join the Eastern Basketball League. The new franchise, however, was given to Wilmington, DE.

Downingtown Vintage Ad

**INDOOR
ICE SKATING
EVERY DAY & NITE
INCLUDING SUNDAYS**
**DOWNINGTOWN INN
INDOOR ICE RINK**
DOWNINGTOWN, PA
(215) 269-2000

Dan Tabas
Presents
SHOWBOAT
Every Fri, Sat, Sun Nite!
DINNER & SHOW \$10.95
(Sat. Nite \$12.95)
**DOWNINGTOWN INN
DINNER THEATRE**
DOWNINGTOWN, PA.
(215) 269-2000

**SUNDAY
ROAST BEEF
BUFFET**
ADULTS \$6⁹⁵. KIDS \$4⁹⁵
**DOWNINGTOWN INN
1796 HOUSE**
DOWNINGTOWN, PA.
(215) 269-1000

The Downingtown Inn was located where the Brandywine Square Shopping Center (Wegmans) is. This ad is from 1973.

Downingtown Mystery Pic

Can you identify the location of the building in the photograph on the right?

The first person to correctly identify the location of this photo will be recognized as a truly perceptive scholar. Please send your response to: dahs19335@gmail.com

Unfortunately we get so many responses we aren't able to respond to each one individually. Sorry!



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Anthony Farnum is truly a perceptive scholar because he was the first person to identify the location of the photograph on the left. It shows the grand opening of the new A&P store (around 1963) in a building now occupied by Roberts Honda. This was the third location of the A&P store in Downingtown. Prior to this it was in a building where the Downingtown Police Department is located. After this it moved to what was the new Downing Center.



Ashbridge Artifacts

Interesting and historic items kept at our Ashbridge House headquarters

On display at the Ashbridge House is a paper scale with a patent date of 1919 manufactured by the E. J. Cady Company of Chicago. Paper samples were placed in the holder and the scale gave a reading of both kilograms and pounds per 500 sheets. E.J. Cady is still in business today.



Downingtown Group Photo



This photograph taken on May 4, 1953 of East Ward School's fourth grade class was lent to us by Joe McConaghy. Joe is sitting on the far right, fourth from the front. Student names written on the back of the photograph include Harvey Burkey, James Hurth, Robert Mack, Gloria Boggs, Eileen Moyer, Jackie Thomas, Jason Dreibelbis, Marianne Griffith, Curtis Dowlin, David Webb, Michael Miller, Sue Swarner, John Massimini, Ruth Lowe, and Kenneth Draper. The teacher is Mrs. Dopp.

Downingtown Date Stone

This date of 1916 is seen on the old Downingtown and Lancaster (D&L) Railroad bridge over Shamona Creek north of Downingtown in Uwchlan Township. The Struble Trail now crosses the bridge.

There are probably five or six concrete bridges on the old D&L just in the Downingtown area dated the same year. For efficiency, the railroad probably closed the line for a period in 1916 while all the old bridges (most likely built of iron or wood) were replaced at the same time with bridges made of concrete.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

Spring 2018 East Brandywine Historical Commission Speakers Series. All programs are held at 3:30 p.m. at the East Brandywine Township Building

Sunday, March 18 – “Remember Paoli” – Jim Christ, Vice President of Paoli Battlefield Preservation Fund will give a presentation on the nation’s first battle cry on the night of September 20, 1777. Learn how British General Charles “No Flint” Grey lead around 2,000 men at night into the Great Valley to surprise over 2,000 of General Anthony Wayne’s men and 2100 Maryland Militia in one of bloodiest battles of the Revolutionary War. We’ll explore why this battle is called the ‘Paoli Massacre’ and common myths about the battle.

Sunday, April 15 – “Historic Preservation” – Students of Dr. Lisa G. Doan-Harley at Coatesville intermediate High School have been studying historical research and preservation and are eager to share their findings at this presentation. As you’re driving or walking in East Brandywine you can become more mindful of the buildings – what to look for that indicates the age and condition and give you insight into as to why it is important to save these parts of our history as seen through the eyes of these young people.

Sunday, May 20 – “How Old is That Picture’ – Pamela Powell, Photo Archivist at Chester County Historical Society will present a program that will introduce methodology used to assign a date range to historical photograph. Ever wondered how old is that picture in the attic? What date are those family photos? Photographing process and visual clues along with costume and background details will be explained. Time will be allowed for questions and individuals may bring one image with them to be dated.

Farmers Market

Downingtown Farmer's Market will be located in Kerr Park every Saturday from 9 AM to 1 PM.

Community Luncheon

Central Presbyterian Church, 100 W Uwchlan Ave, Downingtown, holds a monthly Community Luncheon from 11 AM until 1 PM on the first Thursday of each month, October through May. Their popular chili, chicken corn noodle, vegetable beef, and cream of potato soups are sold, along with sandwiches, salad platters, homemade desserts and beverages. For take-out service, call 610-269-1576 and ask for the kitchen. Bring a friend, meet a neighbor, or come alone and enjoy good food and fellowship.

Senior Center Programs & Activities

You’ll find information about the Downingtown Area Senior Center programs and activities at: www.downingtownsensors.org

Brochure on DARC Classes & Activities

You can gain access to the latest Downingtown Area Recreational Consortium brochure, listing all classes and activities, at: www.darc.info/. 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.

Library Newsletter

You can sign up to get the Downingtown Library’s newsletter via: <http://downingtownlibrary.us12.list-manage.com>

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, <http://josephspeople.org/our-chapters/downingtown/>, 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: cheryl.spaulding@josephspeople.org.

Clipping Events

Did you know that as part of our archival collection we have nearly 14,000 cards in our files that contain newspaper clippings? During most months there are two opportunities at the Historical Society to help clip and paste newspaper articles for this collection. The sessions are held at the Ashbridge House, our 309-year-old headquarters, next to the Chick-Fil-A restaurant in the Ashbridge Square Shopping Center on Route 30 in East Caln. The two sessions are usually:

- **The first Sunday of the month, 1:00-4:00 PM**
Next one March 4th @ 1:00 PM
- **The first Tuesday of the month, 6:30-8:00 PM (with pizza!)**
Next one March 6th @ 6:30 PM

Please check future issues of History Notes or our Facebook page for exact time and dates.

Historical Society's Wish List

The Downingtown Area Historical Society is a non-profit organization proudly maintaining the 309-year-old Ashbridge House and a large archives. The society can always use gifts in kind with an immediate need for:

- A wide, multi-drawer flat file to store maps, and over-size photographs and prints.
- General household items and office supplies including:
 - Light bulbs
 - Paper towels
 - Large and small trash bags
 - Glue sticks (used for our newspaper clippings)
- Gift cards to Home Depot or Lowes. Sometimes we need to make quick purchases so gift cards would come in very handy.

A special thanks to Michael Kelly for recently dropping off several boxes of light bulbs for us at the Ashbridge House as a donation!

To make a tax-deductible cash donation, use this link or send a check to the address below. Thank you!



Downingtown Area Historical Society

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dths1709@gmail.com

www.downingtownareahistoricalsociety.org

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Follow us on Twitter:



Check out our *Then & Now* series on YouTube:



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