



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

December 12, 2019

Volume 2, Issue 23

A Mystery Solved?

There are a number of little mysteries in the Downingtown area that have caught our interest, one of which is the origin of a small house on Washington Avenue. If you have ever driven through this area you may have noticed this unique, one-story structure on the north side of the street behind Dane Décor. This house is 255 Washington Avenue and has a three-sided front, tall windows, and decorative roof corbels. One side of the three-sided front has a door with an overhang. The structure has a flat roof. Attached on the west side is a simple flat-roofed addition that lacks that character of the main portion of the house though it appears to be from the same era.



The above image of 255 Washington Avenue in Downingtown was taken from the 2012 Google Street View.

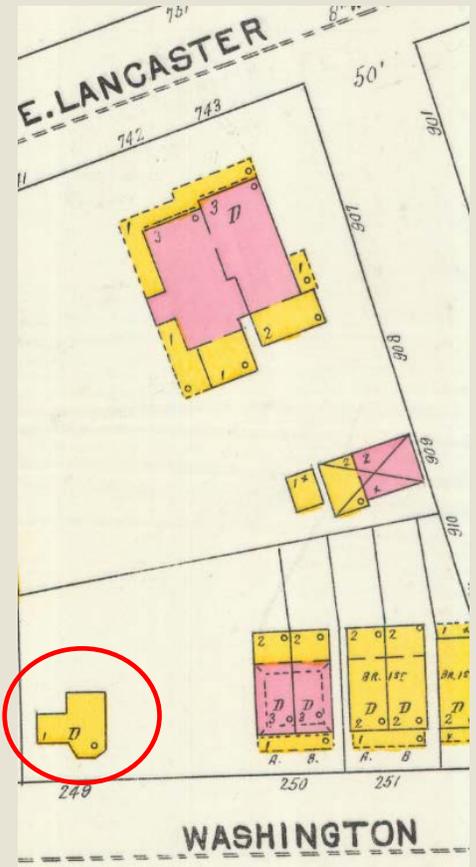
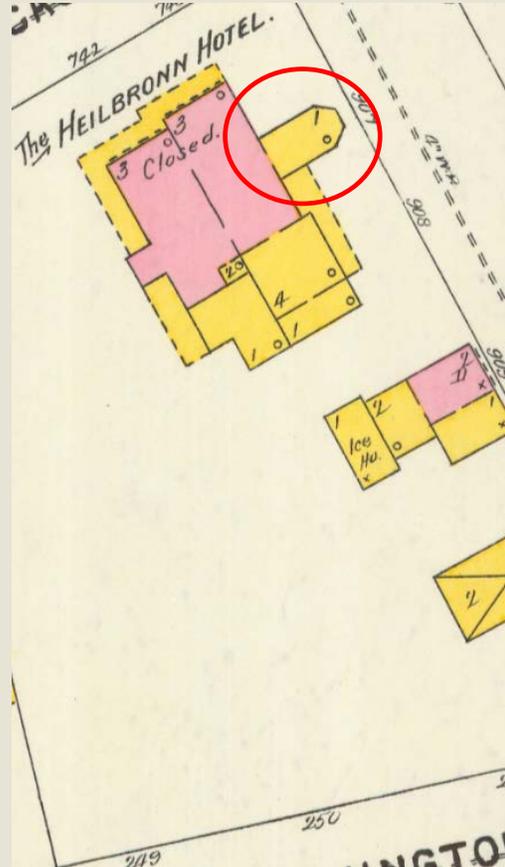
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In our June 13, 2019 issue of *History Notes* we included a picture of the house as part of our “Tracing the Trolley Line” series. We included it because we heard from several sources that the house was somehow related to the trolley (perhaps as a ticket office) and had been moved to Washington Avenue at a later time. However, we noted that the house was a mystery, and that we did not have any documentation tying it to the trolley. But we think the mystery has now been solved. The house was not a trolley ticket office but was an office for another business.

1898

1903

We believe the house at 255 Washington Avenue was the office for the Heilbronn Hotel and that it was moved to this location when the hotel was sold in 1900 and reverted to a single-family home. We featured the Heilbronn in the last issue of *History Notes*. The Heilbronn Hotel building was originally constructed as a single-family home in the early 1800s, was a boarding school from 1870 to 1886, the hotel from 1887 to the late 1890s, and became a single-family home again in 1900. It was torn down in 1938.



The two Sanborn Insurance maps above show what is probably the same structure but in two different locations.

Theodore Griffith was a prominent businessman in Downtown who purchased the old hotel in 1900 and turned it back into a single-family home. After taking ownership, he tore down additions at the rear of the structure. Attached on the east side of the building facing Green Street was a one-story structure that was the hotel’s office. It was probably built in 1887 when the building became a hotel. The interior of the building most likely lacked space suitable for a hotel office, so adding one to the side of the building where there was enough space was probably the best option. Instead of tearing down the old office in 1900, Griffith moved it to the rear of his home facing Washington Avenue. After it was moved into place, a small addition was built on its west side for more living space. Here are three reasons why we believe this house was the office for the Heilbronn Hotel:

1. An article from 1929 in the *Downtown Archive* newspaper on the hotel property states that “the present bungalow on Washington Avenue was the office for the hotel and was on the Green Street side of the house.” The bungalow referred to is most likely the house at 255 Washington Avenue. No other structure past or present fits that description.

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2. The 1898 Sanborn map of Downingtown shows this office on the east side of the old hotel facing Green Street. The 1903 Sanborn map shows this structure is no longer there, but one of the same size and shape is about 75 yards away on Washington Avenue where our subject house is located.
3. The corbels, flat roof, and tall windows of the house at 255 Washington Avenue are features that were on the Heilbronn. When it was constructed, the office was most likely built to blend in with the existing hotel's architecture. If the home was built on Washington Avenue, it is unlikely that it would be built with such features.

Downingtown has had its share of beautiful buildings that became victims of the wrecking ball. This includes old East Ward School, West Ward School, the Methodist Church on Brandywine Avenue, the Mittal Building at West Lancaster and Stuart Avenues, the Swan Hotel in the center of town, and the Heilbronn Hotel at East Lancaster Avenue and Green Street. But fortunately for the Heilbronn, we at least have (what we believe) is a small piece of this once grand structure still in our midst.

Downingtown Area Group Photo

The image below was taken in the summer of 1929 during a party given by sisters Peggy and Lucy Lloyd. Peggy Lloyd is in the center holding onto the rowboat. On this hot day the youngsters attending the party were cooling off in Beaver Creek which flowed through the southern portion of Valley Brook Farm. The farm was owned by the sisters' grandmother Ruth Lloyd but operated by their father William Lloyd. William Lloyd was a stockbroker in Philadelphia but whose occupation was a "gentleman farmer" in the 1930 census. The Lloyds donated this section of their property to Caln Township and it eventually became Lloyd Park. This portion of Beaver Creek seen here appears to be in what is now the dog park of Lloyd Park.



Downingtown Vintage Ad

This advertisement for Highland Crest appeared in the July 6, 1961 issue of the Downingtown Archive. Highland Crest was located on Highland Avenue in the west end of Downingtown.

HIGHLAND CREST *Homes*

LOCATED IN LOVELY DOWNINGTOWN, PA. JUST 7 LEFT IN 1st. SECTION

Enjoy the seclusion of suburban living in Chester County's Outstanding SINGLE HOME Community. Less than a block away from modern school, churches, shopping and transportation. Two beautiful single homes to choose from . . .

"The Highland"

- Full 3 Bedrooms
- Concrete Foundation
- Borough Sewer and Water
- General Electric Eye-Level Hostess Kitchen
- Ceramic Tile Bath
- Basement Powder Room
- Large Closets
- Hostess Kitchen

\$13,590 **FHA Financing only \$390 DOWN**

★ ★ ★

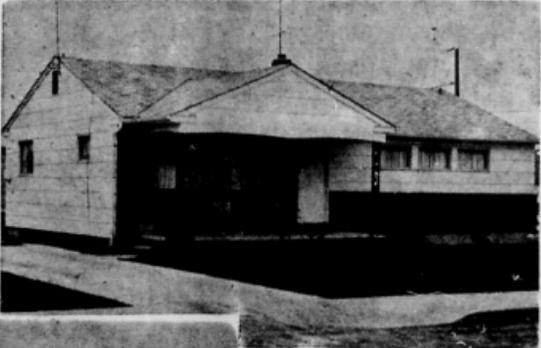
SAMPLE HOMES

Completely Furnished by

LIPKIN'S Furniture Store

Coatesville

★ ★ ★

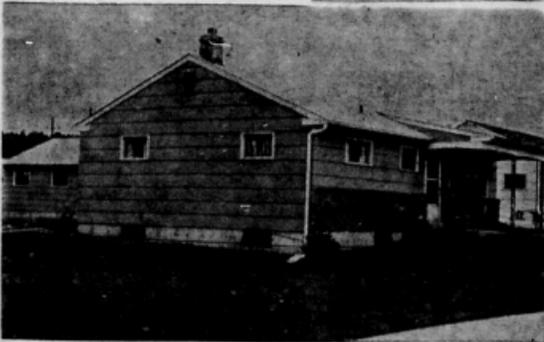


"Highland Crest"

- 3 Spacious Bedrooms
- 1½ Tile Bathrooms
- Concrete Foundation
- Borough Sewer and Water Facilities
- General Electric Eye-Level Hostess Kitchen
- Large Living Room with adjoining Dining Room.

\$14,990

FHA Financing, only \$640 Down



Open 12:00 noon to 8:00 P. M. Weekdays
SATURDAYS & SUNDAYS 1 P.M. TO 5 P.M.

Located On Highland Ave. — West End Of Downingtown — Off Route 30

Smedley & Aumiller, Agents—38 West Lancaster Ave., Downingtown

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

1870 – According to the *Downingtown Journal*, in March “a good-natured looking Dutchman got off a through train [in Downingtown] and as soon as he touched the ground he began dancing around and shouting at the top of his voice, ‘Vere ish de man?’ The bystanders thought the man crazy, and gave him plenty of room, when suddenly he burst into a loud laugh, explaining, ‘Ah, ha! I find him – I find him!’ and immediately darted into Nagle’s beer saloon. In a few minutes he returned, and placing one hand on his ‘provision chest,’ with a sly wink at the crowd, said, ‘Goot – very goot,’ and took his seat in the car.”

1931 – According to the *Reading Times*, “Edward Gleason of Uwchlan, Chester County, had a narrow escape from drowning, by skating into a hole that had been made by ice cutters.”

1922 – In August, two Downingtown borough council members visited Carlisle, Pennsylvania to understand why some of the costs in Downingtown, such as garbage disposal and concrete street paving, were significantly more in Downingtown than in Carlisle. Downingtown’s garbage disposal costs per household were twice as much as households in Carlisle. The concrete paving cost in Downingtown was \$4.45 a square yard compared to \$2.26 in Carlisle.

Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Tom Mento is a truly perceptive scholar because he was the first person to identify the location below as the loading dock area of the old Downingtown Post Office at 45 West Lancaster Avenue. Priori Mattress has been in the building now for many years. The image shows the dedication of what was then the new Post Office on November 25, 1962. Mayor Creston Shoemaker is seen addressing the crowd.



Below, the 'POSTMASTER' placard is still on a door in Priori Mattress. Right, the Post Office building as it was in 1994. It closed in 1995 when the new Downingtown Post Office opened on Boot Road in East Caln Township. The new Post Office was among the first hundred "Postal Stores" in the U.S., which was an effort by the USPS to act more like a business "to compete with fax machines, bicycle messengers, and Federal Express."



Downingtown Then & Now

A recent Downingtown Then & Now, which we posted on Facebook and YouTube, compares an image taken of 238 Brandywine Avenue in Downingtown around 1963 with one taken recently. The top image shows Canby Oil Company which also sold appliances, installed kitchens, and were heating and AC contractors. We believe the building was constructed in the 1940s when they were called Canby & Son. It was last occupied by Gaydos Flooring. In March 2018, the parcel was conveyed to PennDOT for the eventual new train station and road improvements. We are up to 104 short "Then & Now" videos in our series which can be seen on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).



Downingtown Area From Above

If you're new to the Downingtown area you might not recognize any buildings in this photograph that was taken in 1975. Pictured below is the stretch of Route 30 in East Caln Township by Wegmans and Home Depot. Except for the Ashbridge House and a couple of other buildings in this image, everything else is gone.



Dial Telephones Being Installed In Downingtown

In mid-1954 telephones with dials began to be installed in Downingtown in preparation for dial service by Bell Telephone in late 1956 or early 1957.

Phone customers were told that the dial instruments should be used in the exact same manner as the manual instruments, except that care should be taken not to move the dial during a conversation. Moving the dial could result in a call being disconnected.

Downingtown Area Mystery Pic

Can you identify the location of this photograph? 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.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

West Caln Historical Society

The West Caln Historical Society will hold a meeting on Tuesday, January 21, 2020 at 7 P.M. in the West Caln Municipal Building, 721 West Kings Highway, Wagontown, PA on the subject of: **Stagecoach Trolley through Lancaster and Chester County**. The speaker will be Herb Fisher, historian and photo collector.

Central Presbyterian Church Community Luncheon

Central Presbyterian Church, 100 W Uwchlan Ave, Downingtown, PA 19335, holds a monthly Community Luncheon on the first Thursday of each month, October through May from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Their ever-popular chili, chicken corn noodle, vegetable beef, and cream of potato soups are sold along with sandwiches, salad platters, homemade desserts and beverages. Gluten free options are available. 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.

Lyme Disease Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania

The Lyme Disease Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, an education and support group for patients and caregivers who have been affected by Lyme Disease will meet on the following dates in 2020: January 15, April 15, June 17, and October 21. Meetings are at the Kennett Friends Meeting House on PA Rt 82 (125 W. Sickie St., Kennett Square, PA 19348). Meetings are free and all are welcome. Check www.lymepa.org for directions.

Chester County Marine Corps League Detachment

BINGO on the first and third Saturday of every month, 420 Chestnut Street. Public welcome. Kitchen opens at 5:30, Bingo Cards on sale at 6:00, Early Bird Special 6:30. Food is available for purchase. Funds used by the Marine Corps League and Marine Corps League Ladies Auxiliary to help veterans from all branches of the service as well as others in the community.

Greater Downingtown Business and Professional Women (BPW)

Meets monthly on the 2nd Wednesday evening, at 6 pm, in the Thorndale Inn for a dinner, networking, program and meeting. All area women are welcome. Most nights there is a program such as a speaker. Call Cindy Markley for your reservation for dinner at 610-363-1404. We meet each month from September to June.

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.

Historical Society's Wish List

The Downingtown Area Historical Society is a non-profit organization proudly maintaining the 310-year-old Ashbridge House and a large archives. The society can always use gifts in kind with an immediate need for:

- General household items and office supplies including:
 - Pens and pencils
 - Scotch tape and masking tape
 - Copier paper (both color and white)
 - Light bulbs
 - Paper towels
 - Large and small trash bags
- Amazon gift cards or gift cards to Home Depot or Lowes. Sometimes we need to make quick purchases so gift cards would come in very handy.

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



Downingtown Area Historical Society

P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335

610-269-1709

dths1709@gmail.com

<https://www.downingtownhistory.org>

Like us on Facebook:



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



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