



Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

February 28, 2019

Volume 2, Issue 4

Downingtown Police Chief Catches Chicken Thieves

Sometimes we come across Downingtown incidents that deserve more than a brief mention. Here's one of them...

Harrison LaRue and James Cherry hopefully learned their lesson not to steal chickens in Downingtown, especially under the watchful eye of police chief Chester Glisson. On June 23, 1931, Glisson noticed a car with out-of-state license plates turn onto Viaduct Avenue from Lancaster Avenue, cross under the railroad tracks, then proceed slowly through Johnstown. The naturally inquisitive chief followed the men and upon doing so found a bag of chickens tossed onto the side of the road.

Glisson then caught up to the men, pulled them over, and took them into custody for stealing the chickens. In court, the pair claimed to have purchased the chickens and were going to sell them to a Downingtown restaurant. However, being such a hot day that day, and not wanting to see the chickens suffer in their warm car, the kindhearted duo tossed them out to give them some fresh air. Glisson contacted William Lloyd of Valley Brook Farm and Lloyd confirmed that the chickens were stolen from him a night or two prior to the thieves being caught.

In a West Chester courtroom, spectators had a good laugh when they heard the story, but the jury, of course, didn't buy it. The men were found guilty and LaRue was sentenced to one and one-half to three years in prison at the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia and ordered to pay a \$200 fine. Cherry was sentenced to six to twelve months in Chester County Prison and ordered to pay a \$100 fine.

This wasn't the first time LaRue was caught stealing chickens, hence he got a longer sentence than Cherry. He was previously incarcerated for stealing chickens from a farm in Marshallton and was unable to convince the jury in that case that "the chickens came to him on account of his affectionate disposition." He was on parole from that crime when Glisson caught them in Downingtown.



*"Chicken Thieves" etching by Dutch artist
Adriaen van Ostrand (1610-1685)*

Former Ashbridge House Residents Stop By The Historical Society

The Historical Society has owned the Ashbridge House since 1999 and from time to time we have heard from former residents who used to live in the historic home. This happened most recently when we had the privilege of a visit by Charles Perkins and his sister Karen Perkins Hutchinson whose family rented the right half of the home in the 1970s and 1980s. Charles and Karen, who now live in Georgia and Florida respectively, spent their early childhood years there, and asked to see the house on a recent visit to Downingtown. It was the first time in the Ashbridge House for both since 1983, and as they began walking through the home memories began to flow...

- Karen pointed to the spot on the stairs where her belief in Santa Claus was dashed. One Christmas she peered over the stair railing and saw her parents (not Santa Claus!) placing gifts under the tree in the living room, which was the front room facing Lancaster Avenue.
- The ceilings in each room were actually the floor boards in the room above. Charles remembers that some cracks between boards were large enough to be able to see what was going on in the rooms below.
- Charles recalled his sister frying a pet goldfish on a radiator in the living room. By the time the Perkins lived in the home the nine fireplaces, which were the only source of heat for most of the home's history, were boarded up.
- Down in the basement Charles pointed to where the washer and dryer were located and Karen said it still felt "creepy" down there.
- Upstairs, Charles identified whose room was whose and clearly remembered where his bed and nightstand were in his bedroom. His window faced north toward the old Downingtown Farmer's Market where he had a good view of the July 4th fireworks and where he could clearly hear the auctioneer during the market's Friday night auctions.
- Going up to the attic the pair paused and recalled that the Christmas presents each year were "hidden" on the first few steps of the stairs behind the attic door. Once up in the attic Karen quickly remembered it had the same smell as when she lived there!
- Outside, Charles remembers where he played football and the spot where his grandmother would sit on the front porch. He clearly recalls Karen getting a bad case of poison ivy which grew on the east side of the house. Charles was outside playing in 1976 when he saw the Downingtown Farmer's Market was on fire. He ran in and told his mom.

Certainly many more of their memories could be written, but we appreciate Charles and Karen contacting us, visiting us, and giving us the opportunity to learn more about the Ashbridge House.



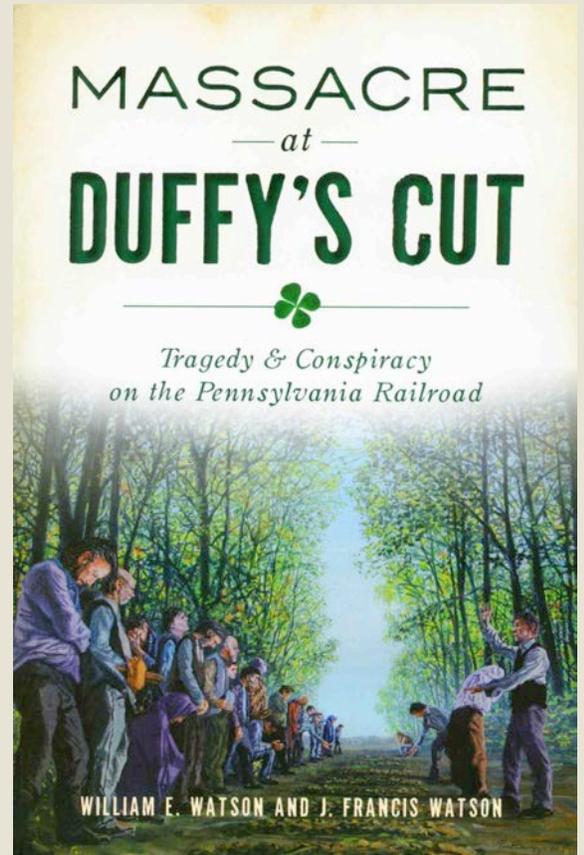
Left top, Charles is seen here with his mother during Christmas 1974 in front of the living room's boarded-up fireplace. Left bottom, in the same location, Charles and his baby sister Karen are pictured during Christmas 1977. Above, the two stand in front of the same fireplace on their recent visit to the Ashbridge House.

Duffy's Cut Presentation

It was a privilege to have brothers William Watson and Frank Watson at the Historical Society on Sunday, February 24, for a presentation on Duffy's Cut. Duffy's Cut is the name given to a section of tracks along the Main Line near Malvern. In 1832, railroad contractor Philip Duffy hired 57 newly-arrived Irish immigrants to work this section of what was then the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad. Within two months all the workers had died. Most died from cholera but archaeological excavations by the Watson's and others proved some were murdered.

During the presentation, the Watson's gave an overview of the history of Duffy's Cut, the on-going archaeological excavations, and plans they have to study another possible mass grave of Irish workers near Downingtown, who may have died from cholera during the same period. They also signed copies of their new book for the good crowd came out.

You can get their new book and help the Historical Society at the same time when you purchase it through Amazon Smile [HERE](#)



Above, the cover of the Watson's new book on Duffy's Cut. Left and below, William Watson (left) and Frank Watson (right) gave the audience at the Historical Society an overview of the past and planned excavations at Duffy's Cut.



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

1873 – In February, the Upper Uwchlan Farmer’s Club came to the conclusion that “the planting of oats brings no adequate return for the outlay.”

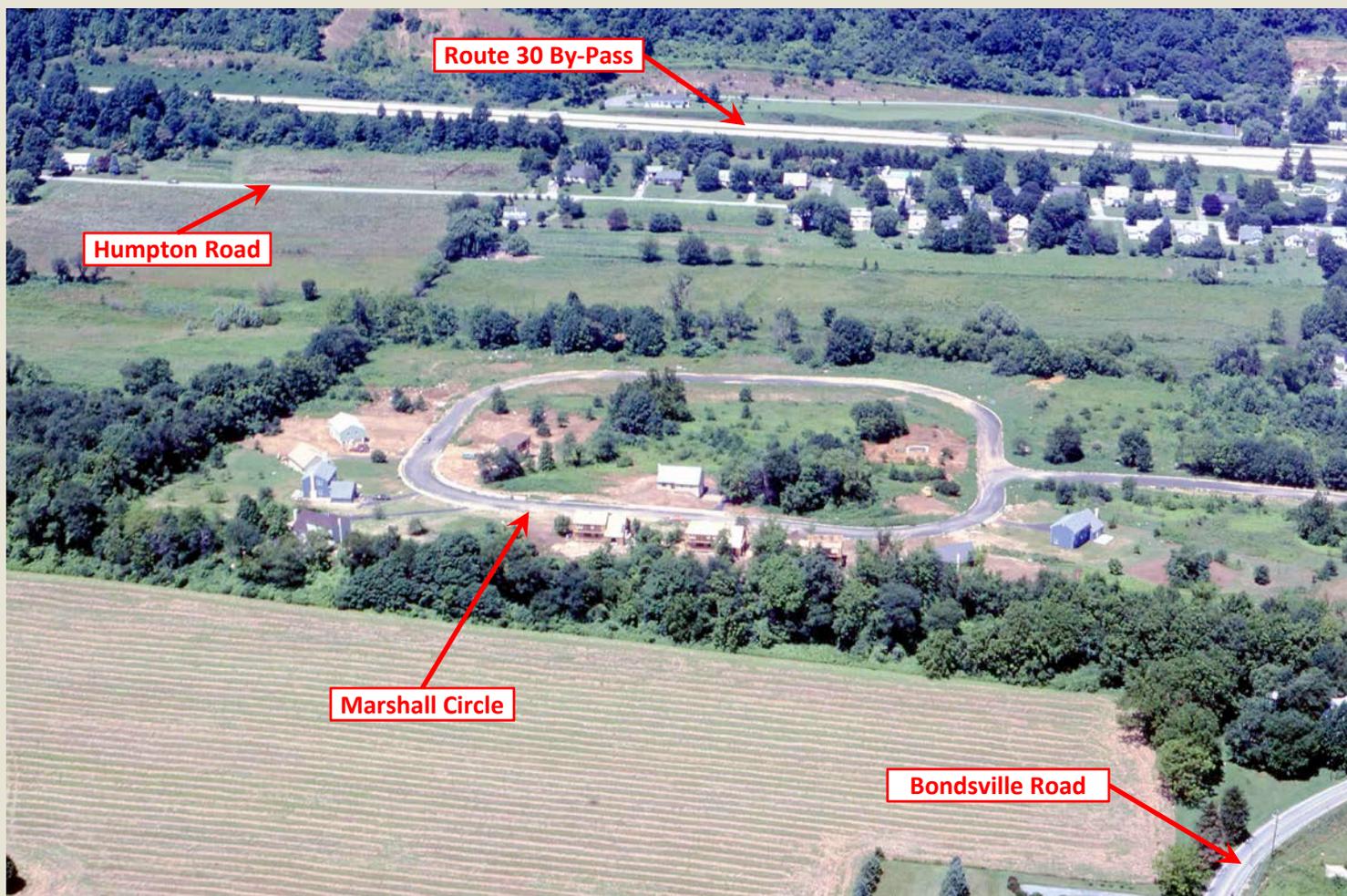
1877 – In July, Jacob Keeler of Thorndale was mowing his field with a scythe when he accidentally cut a bees nest in half. According to the article, “this enraged the little honey makers very much and they soon made it warm for Mr. Keeler.” As he swatted and ran about trying to keep from being stung, Keeler accidentally came in contact with the scythe and ended up with a huge gash above the elbow.

1899 – A “Wild West” craze among young boys in Downingtown resulted in the accidental shooting of ten year-old Maurice Smith of 326 Washington Avenue. Fortunately, Maurice was only slightly injured.

1948 – Downingtown’s John Englerth retired as one of Chester County’s “all-time great stone masons” and found himself a unique hobby: being the self-appointed squirrel-supplier of Kerr Park. At his home on East Lancaster Avenue, Englerth set out traps baited with walnuts and a couple of times each week would bring captured squirrels to their new home. “After all, what is a park without squirrels to feed,” said Englerth.

Downingtown Area From Above

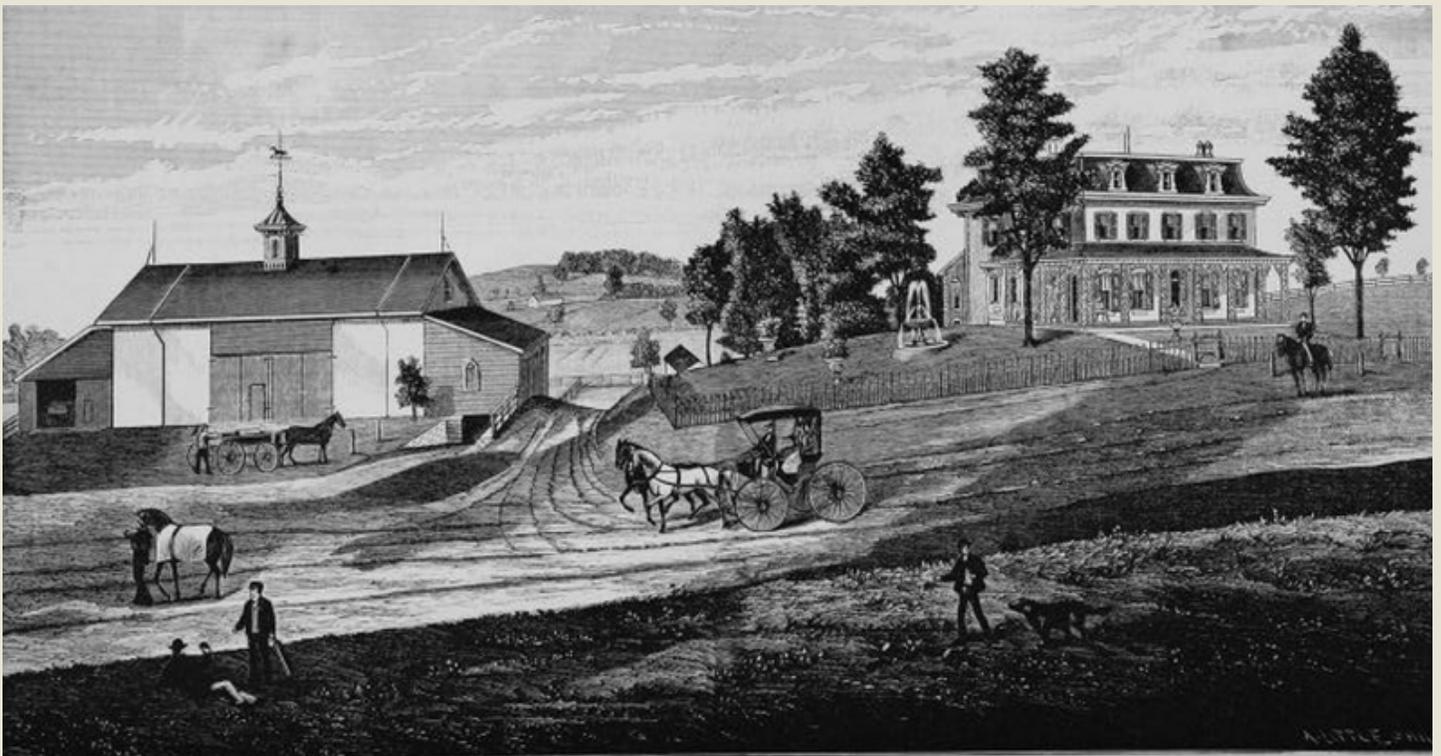
This photograph was taken in 1975 over Caln Township. The image faces north and shows the Route 30 By-Pass, Humpton Road, and homes under construction on Marshall Circle.



Last Issue's Mystery Pic

Last issue's Mystery Pic turned out to be easier than we thought it would be, as we received quite a number of correct responses as to its location. However, **Jeanne Rapp** was the first to identify the location as the farm on Little Conestoga Road in Upper Uwchlan Township which was operated for many years by the Styer family.

We also asked if anyone could identify the school that was located in the home in the late 1800s and **Tom Kelly** was the only one who could. Edgefield Institute was a day and boarding school operated by Abraham Fetters. The bottom image is from John Smith Futhey's and Gilbert Cope's *History of Chester County, Pennsylvania*.



EDGEFIELD INSTITUTE.
RESIDENCE OF A. FETTERS,
UPPER UWCHLAN.

Downingtown Area Group Photo



Above are members and coaches from Downingtown's 1946 baseball team celebrating their Chester County championship at Palumbo's Restaurant in South Philadelphia.

Downingtown Vintage Ad

Baen's Barber Service was located at the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and Beech Street as seen in this 1932 ad. The proprietor was 39-year-old Archie "Baenie" Baen, who lived with his wife Sara and three children on Jefferson Avenue. He was a barber all his adult life, except for one year during World War 1 when he served in the army as a bugler. His one employee was 20-year-old Howard Pennell "Blackie" Black who also lived on Jefferson Avenue.

BAEN'S BETTER BARBER SERVICE

"We Serve and You Save"

Where Friendly Prices prevail in a Sanitary, Comfortable and Courteous Shop, with skilled Barbers at your command



"Baenie" "Blackie"

LICENSED BY THE STATE

BAEN'S BARBER SERVICE

Washington and Beech :-: :-: DOWNINGTOWN, PA.

Downingtown Area Mystery Pic

Can you identify the location in the photograph below (yes it is still standing!)? 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.



Downingtown Did-You-Know?

Well, not exactly the immediate Downingtown area, but did you know that the Exton train station stop was once called "Whiteland" and before that "Walkertown"? This undated image from the John W. Barriger III Railroad Library shows the diminutive shelter and platform at Whiteland, a far cry from what it looks like now as a major Exton Station project nears completion. In the far distance you can make out the bridge of the Philadelphia and Thorndale branch crossing the Main Line tracks at Whitford.



Advertisements for Non-Profits

Wallace Township Historical Commission

The Wallace Township Historical Commission will hold a *Scherenschnitte* (paper cutting) workshop on March 16, 2019 from 2pm-4pm at the Wallace Township Building, 1250 Creek Road, Glenmoore, PA. Registration can be made at the Township building or by calling 610-942-2880. Leave your name and phone number in case of bad weather. The workshop is limited to 10 people. Participants should bring an 8x10 photo frame, a pair of sharp pointed scissors, and an X-ACTO knife. All other materials will be provided.

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 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.

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.

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 Mary Coyne for your reservation for dinner at 610-380-8869. 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
 - Glue sticks (used for our newspaper clippings)
- 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>

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