

## BACK IN TIME

# Fighting congestion for 75 years

By DICK SHEARER

Getting around downtown Lansdale is no treat these days, thanks to all the road construction projects that have been under way for the past year.

The Vine-Wood Connector Route, the most ambitious of these plans, is designed to get some traffic off West Main Street and redirect it around the railroad to South Broad Street.

Traffic congestion has been a problem for decades and probably will be long into the future. There really is no way to keep vehicles moving when the town's two major streets are bisected by the busiest suburban rail route in the SEPTA system.

It might be difficult for 21<sup>st</sup> century motorists to believe, but traffic congestion was every bit as bad – maybe worse – back in the 1930s when a network of one-way streets some still in use today was implemented at the urging of Police Chief Sam Woffindin.

Prior to World War I, most Lansdale residents walked to downtown stores several times a week to buy what they needed. Out-of-towners came by train or trolley. But through the Twenties into the Thirties, most families owned at least one car which folks used all the time to go shopping.

Lansdale's downtown was ill-equipped for this societal change. It had no parking lots – the Madison lot didn't come along for another 15 years – so motorists jockeyed for the limited number of parallel parking spaces on Main Street and nearby side arteries. Waiting for drivers to parallel park snarled traffic flow. Side streets barely allowed room for cars to pass. And to make matters worse, the trolley ran right down the middle of Main Street and Railroad Avenue, forcing

cars to bob-and-weave out of the way.

Back in 1938, towns didn't hire traffic consultants to figure out these problems. They were often left to the police chief since he'd have to implement the changes and live with them.

Woffindin's solution was a series of one-way streets that would at least keep traffic moving in the same direction as motorists circled the blocks look-



**THIS VIEW** of the A&P Supermarket at Susquehanna and Courtland circa 1940 shows Susquehanna as a one-way street northbound. As you can see, Courtland was originally one-way west-bound.

ing for one of those valuable parking spots.

His plan included making Wood and Green Streets one-way southbound, away from Main Street, with Susquehanna Avenue becoming one-way north toward Main. Courtland Street – yes, it was once a two-way street – was originally set up for westbound only travel.

In Woffindin's words, "There may be some confusion at first and some people will have to drive around two extra corners to get to (their destination), but the result will be an all-around speeding up of traffic and much safer conditions."