



Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

August 2010

Summer Visitors Share Memories of Neighborhood-

On June 16th local resident Oliver P. Snowden, Jr. and his son, in town from Oregon, Oliver Snowden III visited the Schoolhouse and related family stories about their connections with the building.

Oliver, Jr.'s grandfather-in-law, Victor Baker, is given credit for designing and building the schoolhouse. (He is also given credit for naming the Wissahickon School District - a compromise for residents of Ambler, Whitpain, and Lower Gwynedd.) He lived on the Baker farm which is now Whitpain Hills in Center Square. Oliver, Jr. told how his wife Rhoda grew up on the farm and loved school - especially since it helped her get away from the hard work of the farm. She told of getting a new dress and shoes to start school and that the school had better heating than her home.

Oliver grew up on Cathcart Rd. and attended the nearby Quaker school at Gwynedd for first through fourth grades. He then walked to Lower Gwynedd for fifth through eighth grades. He chose to attend Whitpain High School as it was the closest high school available. There he met Rhoda who helped him adjust to the new school and inspired him to work hard at school. They graduated from Whitpain High School in 1936.

Oliver remembered that vegetables to be sold at the Norristown Farmers' Market were grown in the area. A special treat was fresh picked unhusked corn on the cob - dipped in water and put on hot coals to cook.

Oliver III attended kindergarden at the 1895 Schoolhouse and could remember that students who got in trouble were sent to the cloakroom. He also had memories of attending Shady Grove when it opened as a Middle School.

The Snowdens donated 3 men's jackets, a woman's dress, a dress jacket, and a boa from the Baker home on Skippack Pike northwest of DeKalb Pike.

We were recently invited to tour the house across School Rd. from the Schoolhouse - Skippack Pike. The owner has been researching the house's history by using county records available in Norristown, by talking to local historians, and, most recently, by doing some hands on research in the house. Through holes opened in the sheet rock walls, it is possible to guess at changes that were made in the house over the years. The building, in fact, may have been a local store or a storage building for the local farm. In the cellar there is a narrow stone stairway constructed so that barrels could be rolled down. The current owner is eager to find out more about the house - which doesn't turn up on tax records as early as the construction suggests.

Several members of the Conard family visited the Schoolhouse during the Conard family reunion weekend in June. They were especially interested in two Conard family quilts - one from the 1850/1860's and one from the family's 75th reunion. They enjoyed seeing as well as the Conard augers and a Civil War bullet with family connections. They would like to share both quilts at their next reunion.

Society News -

- * Condolences to the family of Elsie "Perky" Detwiler who passed away in late July. Perky and her husband were members of the society in the 1990's. She was also a Plant Ambler volunteer and a long time teacher in the Upper Dublin School District.
- * Welcome to new member Peggy Diorio.
- * Thanks to Rep, John Rafferty who provided a new American flag and stand for the Schoolhouse. Thanks to Josephine Sawicki for coordinating the gift.
- * Items for the Oct. 9 Market Day can be left off at the schoolhouse any Thursday morning or brought to the September 13th meeting.
- * Josephine is also collecting old towels and flip-tops from cans for local charities. Label and bring to the Schoolhouse.

Check your calendar -

- * September 13 - monthly meeting at the 1895 Schoolhouse. Program - "Catching Up". This is a chance to hear about the society's updates, learn of numerous new donations, meet new and old members/friends, and plan for the year's activities. 7:30 p.m.
- * Our annual Market Day is scheduled for Saturday, October 9. Josephine and Mabel have collected and organized donations, but members can help before and on the day. Baked goods are also welcome. Contact Josephine for details.
- * August 30 - Board meeting, 7:30 p.m., Belleavance home. The society needs a recording secretary and a librarian. If you are interested, please contact Russ Belleavance.
- * The Schoolhouse is open most Thursday mornings from 10 until noon. There is always something interesting going on - a new donation to catalogue, a visitor to show around - plus good company.
- * On Tuesday, August 31 at 7:30 the Historical Society of Whitpain will host a program entitled "Early History and Methods of Chair Caning" at the Wissahickon Valley Public Library.
- * On Sunday, September 19 the 1895 Schoolhouse, the Franklinville School, and Evans Mumbower Mill will all be open for tours from 1 to 4 in the afternoon.



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