



Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

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Summer Picnic
at Bob and Gloria Myers' Home
June 13

This is our last get-together of the year.

Come for good food and
good conversation
shared with good friends.

Doors open at 5;
dinner at 7;

followed by the traditional corn auction.

Please bring a "fun" wrapped item to be auctioned by our
own Frank Russo, Jr.

The Myers home is at 1280 Pinetown Road, Fort Washington. It is between
Susquehanna Rd. and Highland Ave. This is a pot-luck picnic so if you haven't
signed up to bring an item, please call Gloria who has the master list. Their
phone number is 215-628-4949.

If you need a ride, please call Peg Johnston, 215-542-7753.

May Meeting:

Those who joined us for the May meeting at Boxwood, home of the Historical
Society of Whitpain, learned about the Battle of Brandywine from speaker Bruce
E. Mowday. Mr. Mowday described several crucial events of the battle - including
a close call for Gen. George Washington. The meeting was also an opportunity
for members of the Historical Society of Whitpain and the Wissahickon Valley
Historical Society to socialize. Many thanks to our neighbors for their hospitality.

Tracing History of an Item through Patent

Jeff Hahn recently donated a charming wooden box that contains sewing machine attachments. The box opens to a flat board which makes the attachments easily accessible. I wanted to know if these attachments complements the treadle sewing machine that we have in our collection. On the outside of the wooden box, there is an imprint stating "Patented - 1889 - February 28". I wondered what this meant and what it could help me learn about the box.

What exactly is a patent? by Jim Johnston

Sometimes when you look at an object in the collection of the WVHS, you find an inscription saying, "US Patent 3,462,790" (well, actually, not exactly that number, but some specific seven-digit number.) So what is a patent, exactly?

Patents are a right given by the government to an inventor for a limited period of time. It allows the inventor to exclude anyone else from practicing/using an invention, provided that the inventor has disclosed to the public a description of the invention sufficiently detailed to enable someone of average ability to carry it out. Thus the inventor can monopolize the production and sale of the invention for the period of the patent. The government does this to advance the development of technology by making the details of the invention available to the public, including other inventors. Under current law, the inventor's monopoly runs for twenty years from the date of filing the application. Since it usually takes several years from filing to commercialization, the practical period of the monopoly is often less than ten years. After the patent period has expired, anyone can use the invention in the open market.

To get a patent, the inventor must not only describe the invention but must show that it is new and non-obvious (at the time the application is filed) and useful. Some things cannot be patented - business methods, treatments of the human body, and mental acts are excluded. The specific things that the inventor can monopolize are listed in the patent's Claims. You can read any issued U.S. patents at www.USPTO.gov but you must download special software to see patent drawings and to see patents issued before 1976.

Patents usually fall into three broad categories: design, process, and composition of matter. A new, patented drug, for example, would be a new composition of matter - a chemical substance that has never before been found on earth. A new light switch, like the clap-on, clap-off switch, would be a design patent. In this case, the invention uses parts that were previously known, but that had never before been put together in a way to create a new, useful, non-obvious device. A process patent might be a new, non-obvious way to manufacture a material, such as a latex house paint. The first patent granted in the U.S. was a process patent. It was issued on July 31, 1790 to Samuel Hopkins of Philadelphia for a method of producing potash (potassium carbonate), an essential ingredient used in making soap, glass, and gunpowder.



Okay, now I need to go to the government web-site and do some research about the wooden box. It is a design patent - whose patent period has expired, but who designed it? On the other hand, modern patent imprints carry the patent number. The one on the box is only a date. The Free Library of Philadelphia has early patents on microfiche. I'll share what I learn in the next newsletter. Two boxes of patent documents were recently uncovered in the Society's library. They'll require some research too. Anyone interested in a project?

Welcome to New Member

Emlen H. Evans

48 E. State #2

Montpelier, VT 05602

Mr. Evans visited the Schoolhouse on May 26 to research the Evans/Calwalader family who was among the earliest settlers of the area. Mr. Evans is the 6th great-grandson of Calwalader Evans. Watch for a future article about the early Welsh settlement which was centered around the Gwynedd Friends Meeting. The group came from Llanfor in northern Wales.

Mr. Evans recommends the website of Gwynedd Friends for those researching local family histories.

Society Receives Video Donations

Thanks to Ben Rohrbeck LLP, West Chester the Society recent received the donation of two videos about local trolleys. *The Liberty Bell Route* and *Eastern Traction* will both be added to our library. Members will have a chance to see one of the videos at a meeting next year. The program will also include some personal trolley remembrances from several members.

Fifth grade enrichment students at Blue Bell Elementary and Lower Gwynedd Elementary produced a video this year about local history. Focusing on local myths and legends, it included stories about Hope Lodge, Gwynedd Mercy College, Dr. Mattison's stained glass panel, Dawesfield as well as our own 1895 Schoolhouse. Members Bob Whittock, Joe Schneider, and Peg Johnston participated. A copy of the video is coming to the Society.

Try these U.S. Citizenship Questions

The March 28 /April 4 issue of Newsweek contained some of the 100 questions contained in the U.S. Citizenship test. Here are a couple to try.

1. When was the Declaration of Independence adopted?
2. Who was President during World War I?
3. The House of Representatives has how many voting members?
4. We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?
5. Name one U.S. territory.
6. Under our Constitution, some powers belong to the federal government. What is one power of the federal government?
7. How many justices are on the Supreme Court?
8. What do we call the first 10 amendments to the Constitution?
9. How many amendments does the Constitution have?

Answers on page 4.

Answers to Citizenship test questions:

1. July 4, 1776
2. Woodrow Wilson
3. 435
4. 6 years
5. Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Northern Marianas
6. To print money, to declare war, to create an army, to make treaties.
7. 9
8. The Bill of Rights
9. 27

Looking Ahead to Market Day

As you clean out sheds and garages over the summer, keep in mind the Society's fall Market Day. Items can be delivered to the 1895 Schoolhouse. The Schoolhouse is open Thursday mornings from 10 to 12 or by appointment. There are still openings for a books chairperson and a jewelry chairperson. Contact Josephine Sawicki for details or to volunteer.



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