



Wissahickon Valley
historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

March 2008 Newsletter

Happy Spring! And St. Patrick's Day!

A Note from
the President:

From the President's Desk:

Hello!

This is my first communication to you as the new President of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. I am honored to have been elected to lead the Society and look forward to working with our various talented members on Society events and projects. At the February meeting, the Society elected members to several positions, all effective as of January 1, 2008. In addition to my election, we elected Donna Cogan to the post of Newsletter Editor, Peg Johnston as Curator and John Simon to the new post of Development Director.

As we discussed at the February meeting, the Society has many assets, the major one being the enthusiasm of its members. We have a lovely and historic building, our status as a 501(c)(3) charity, the building's new status as an historical site, some generous recent grants to deal with some of the needs of the building, our extensive (if eclectic) collection and an excellent series of programs. We also face some challenges, which must be expected in today's world. Our building does need work and we need to do better in recruiting new members, especially in attracting a new generation of residents of Whitpain, Lower Gwynedd and Ambler who will be interested in sustaining the Society over time. Meeting that challenge will require the concentrated effort of all of our members and friends.

The best way to start to meet the challenge of increasing our membership is by inviting friends and neighbors to our programs. The month of March

would be a great time to start. We will be honored to have as our speaker the Reverend Charles Quann, the Senior Pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Penlynn, and a prominent member of our community.

Pastor Quann will talk about the place of his church as an important institution for our African-American population, and its current role as a multicultural church serving a congregation that extends well beyond the boundaries of Lower Gwynedd. I know that I am very much looking forward to his talk and to the opportunity to ask him questions.

As an example of his involvement, Pastor Quann is a member of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention, USA; Vice President of the Board of Baptist Children Services; former Board member and moderator of the Philadelphia Baptist Association; Board member of the Wissahickon Faith Community; Former President and present Board member of the American Red Cross, Penn Jersey Region; Member of the Montgomery County Bar Association Community Outreach; Board member of the Montgomery County Housing Authority; Board member of the Inter-Faith Housing Alliance; member of the Blue Bell Rotary; Board of Directors of the YMCA of Ambler; member of the Reverend Martin Luther King Memorial Fund, Steering Committee; member, Cultural Diversity Committee of Montgomery County Community College; Board member of the New Horizon Montessori School; and Board member of the Inter-Faith Center.

So, come to the March meeting, and remember to bring a friend!

WISSAHICKON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Clarion Call for Revolution – Thomas Paine's Common Sense

Written by Arthur Driedger

From April of 1775 when the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord, there were mixed feeling about our relationship with England. Men with such diverse tempers as Washington, Jefferson and John Adams wanted reconciliation with England, while others wanted a clean break and independence.

By the end of 1775, all British troops were out of the colonies. In early January of 1776, an anonymous eighty page pamphlet called Common Sense was published. At first it was thought to be written by either Franklin, John or Sam Adams. Actually it was written by an Englishman, Thomas Paine.

There are several parts to Common Sense. The first describes the nature of society. Society is produced by our wants, government by our wickedness. Government, like dress, is a sign of lost innocence, a necessary evil; the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise. The concept of monarchy and heredity were bitterly attacked by Paine. The entire concept was introduced by heathens and George the 3rd, was the Royal Brute of Great Britain. The king, according to Paine, performs no useful function except to make war and give away places. He is worshipped and is allowed 800,000 sterling a year. Paine having made fun of the monarchy, then attacked the economic argument for belonging to England claiming that we did not need England for economic prosperity and would probably have greater prosperity if we were separated.

Paine claimed England had protected us against other powers for the benefit of England and that we were involved in wars in which we had no business. Paine also claimed that the American colonies were an asylum for those seeking religious and civil liberty from all of Europe and not just England. He found it ridiculous that an island should rule a continent 3,000 miles away. He painted a picture of how we could reinvent the world and that we had the manpower, manufacturing experience and natural resources to wage war, if necessary. Paine asserted that America was like a man who continues to put off what he knows must be done, hates to set about it, wishes it were over, and continually haunted by thoughts of its necessity.

The response to Common Sense was immediate. Within three months 120,000 copies were sold, and total sales were estimated to reach a half million.

This was the greatest best seller, relative to the population of all time. It convinced people that independence was the best course, and in less than six months on July 2nd, not the 4th as many people believe, we declared our independence

Paine was a master propagandist. He also wrote the crises letters of which his first is the most famous.

On a drum head by candle light in Washington's famous retreat through New Jersey he wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell is not easily conquered and yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we often esteem too lightly."

The crisis papers were read by practically everyone in or out of the army.

Dear Members, This is the first edition of the newsletter that I have had the privilege to write. Any news, announcements, or items of interest that you would like in the letter, please contact me via the phone, 215-643 8689, or e-mail, d.cogand@comcast.net.