

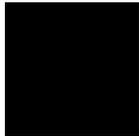


Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

April 2008 Newsletter



Happy Spring!!!

From the President's Desk,

It may not feel it, but signs of spring are everywhere you look. That's always good news for us, in part because it means reduced heating bills for the 1895 Schoolhouse! It also means that we have to start planning for next year, especially for the year's programs. At the next two meetings, I will be asking for volunteers to serve on the program committee for next year. Our programs are both one of our most important functions and one of our best ways of attracting new members. Please consider serving on the committee – you will only have to fill one or two monthly time slots.

Our next Board meeting will be Monday, March 31 at 7:00 in the Community Room of the Blue Bell branch of the Wissahickon Valley Public Library. Our next monthly meeting will be on Monday, April 14 at 7:30 at the 1895 Schoolhouse. The speaker will be our own Peg Johnston, who will be discussing Second Empire architecture (think of the Philadelphia City Hall). This should be a fascinating topic, as many of the buildings and other amenities that we admire so much in Paris are Second Empire. Invite a friend and be prepared for an entertaining presentation.

Last month Reverend Quann was unable to find us. His assistant had mistakenly put in for Schoolhouse Lane rather than School Road, so he drove around for quite a while. We will invite him back in the Fall, but in the meantime, he has invited us to come over to their new church at the former Beth Or site at Dager Road and Penlynn – Blue Bell Pike for a personal tour and lunch. I will arrange a date with him and let you all know when that will be.

John Simon and I attended the work session of the Whitpain Township Board of Supervisors in order to start the ball rolling for an early renewal of the Lease. It would be imprudent of us to spend money for a new roof and other improvements without a new lease term. We are also asking them to participate in funding agreed upon capital projects such as the roof replacement. The Supervisors appeared to appreciate the position that we are in, and the need to spend money on capital projects to maintain the integrity of the 1895 Schoolhouse. We will be submitting a formal proposal to them just after the March 31 board meeting. Stay tuned for further developments.

That's all for now. I hope to see you all on April 14.

[See www.wvalleyhs.org](http://www.wvalleyhs.org) for more information about The Wissahickon Valley Historical Society.

WISSAHICKON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SERVING AMBLER • LOWER GWYNEDD • WHITPAIN COMMUNITIES www.wvalleyhs.org

The following article is submitted to our members for their interest and enlightenment.

Frederick Jackson Turner and the Frontier Thesis, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"

Written by Arthur Driedger

For the first three centuries of the American existence the frontier of the United States changed Europeans to a different race of people. The effect of the frontier was recognized by the changes in the culture, expressed in the writings, art forms and stories of the time. In the 1890 census it was reported that there no longer existed a continuous frontier and that it had been broken into small isolated regions. There were various interpretations as to what a frontier actually was, but Turner accepted the definition of the census bureau, which was there had to be less than two people per square mile.

Until this time, American history had followed the "Germ Theory" strong at John Hopkins in which it was thought that we had merely expanded what had been found in Europe. American historians concentrated on politics, constitutional issues and ignored social, geographic and economic issues. Turner used the new census figures to show the importance of a frontier in American history and in the formation of the nation. In a paper read in Chicago on July 12, 1893, at a session of the American Historical Society, Turner stated that the frontier was the major influence in shaping the nation and the character of the American people. With the closing of the frontier we would now be more like Europeans.

He felt that the frontier had resulted in:

Social Equality: The west judged a man by what he could do; not his family, race, religion or nationality.

Hatred of special privilege: Government was the servant of man, to carry out the wishes of the people. Universal suffrage, direct election of senators, initiative referendum and recall were all started in the west.

Nationalism: The frontiersman depended on the national government for cheap land, territory expansion and protection from hostile Native Americans.

Faith in the future: The frontiersman saw the development of the west, for example, towns and the railroads were developed. This resulted in faith in the future.

Economic Independence: The west provided raw materials for the country and for the eastern cities the west was a market for goods and a place for investment of surplus capital. We could, therefore, follow a policy of isolation.

The Safety Valve Theory: If wages of eastern workers were low, they could migrate to the west. This delayed the formation of labor unions.

Inventions: Eastern factory owners developed machinery to replace high priced workers. Western farmers used to the machinery to farm vast expanses of land.

Wasteful agriculture: The cheap land resulted in farmers not taking proper care of the soil. Much of it was unwisely cultivated.

Turner must have been a very dynamic teacher, for his students took his case far beyond what he intended. They found everything in America was due to the frontier, far beyond what Turned had intended. There was a lot of justified criticism of the thesis and by the end of the Twenties it was not longer considered valid. There was a revival of it in the early sixties and the effect of the thesis cannot be disputed. However, a well reasoned point of view would hold that industrialism, the factory system, agriculture and the frontier have all helped shape modern America.

See www.wvalleyhs.org for more information about the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society.

Events, Announcements and Items of Interest

Ambler

From the People's Point of View - This extraordinary public screening of the history of Ambler is a documentary created by Mrs. Ruchubinski's 4th grade enrichment class from Lower Gwynedd Elementary School. The documentary celebrates Ambler and its interesting history. The screening will take place on Saturday, May 3, 2008 at 10:00 a.m. at the Ambler Theater, 108 E. Butler Avenue, Ambler.

April Meeting of WVHS

Features Peggy Johnston member extraordinaire of the WVHS presenting "Buildings of the Wissahickon Valley and the Stories They Tell." The slide presentation will feature stories of local homes, inns, mills, and buildings in the area. The meeting will commence at 7:30 p.m. April 14th at the schoolhouse. Peggy is quite knowledgeable and this important lecture will prove to be extremely interesting.

Docents

On April 6th, 2008, Frank Russo, Jr. and Bonnie Schmid will be the docents for the museum at the schoolhouse. On May 4th, the docents will be Pete and Donna Cogan, and on June 1st, Bob and Mable Whittock will be the docents.

Refreshments

For the April meeting the refreshments will be served by Helen Missfeldt and Janice Driedger. The May meeting's refreshments will be served by Peggy Johnston and a needed volunteer. Anyone interested in helping in May, please contact Marie Russo.

Website

John Simon, our Website Creator (and computer expert), has done a marvelous job of our website. Please take a look at this interesting and informative site at www.wvalleyhs.org.