

Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

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Volume 14, Issue 9

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April 2013

Spring Outing to the Lansdale Historical Society's Headquarters

Saturday, April 13
Meet there at 10:30 a.m.



137 Jenkins Ave. Lansdale -
the 1770 era, Federalist-style
farmstead -the society's
headquarters in center of
Lansdale.

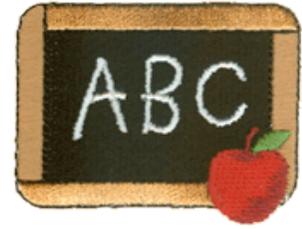
Directions are on Google or GPS.
Their website is lansdalehistory.org.

Please call **Russ Bellavance** (215-643-5048) with any questions
- or just to let him know that you plan to attend. If you need a ride,
Russ is also willing to coordinate transportation. If members (and
guests) are interested in going somewhere for lunch afterward,
Russ is researching an inexpensive place that can seat a group.

Living History - Schoolhouse Class for Kids

On April 14, members of WVHS and the Historical Society of Whitpain will present "Living History - Schoolhouse Class for Kids" at the Blue Bell Library. Participants will learn what school was like in the late 1800s during an interactive program.

If you know any elementary aged students, please consider bringing them to this program which will help to introduce the library's summer reading program and to share our local historical resources.



Dot Conard Remembered

by Lei Barry

I met Dot the day I moved to Blue Bell in July 1978. She and Hank lived across the street from our new home (actually it was 250 years old). Dot wasted no time letting me know about the book that WVHS was helping to produce called "Whitpain - Crossroads in Time". She immediately asked me if I would research our home for inclusion in the book. She knew I had just moved in, had 6 children plus a full time job but that didn't stop Dot. In fact, there was no stopping Dot when she set her mind to something....and it was always with a great big irresistible smile. So off I went with her directions to the county historical society and then to the bowels of Philadelphia City Hall to find old deeds and any other information I could find. I don't know how, but we managed to make the deadline for the book.

One evening Dot called us to ask if we would come over to meet her daughter who was visiting from NYC. Of course we went right over and, lo and behold, Dot had an ulterior motive. Dot's daughter couldn't keep her dog since she had moved into a small apartment and since Dot felt our family was not complete without a dog.....yes, you guessed it.....we came home that night with Sur, a sweet Afghan Setter.

The Conards were like adopted grandparents to our children, but they took a special liking to our youngest son, Michael, who was about 8 years old when we moved in. Since Michael frequently found himself fighting over the goodies at home with his 5 siblings, he quickly discovered that if he visited the Conards, Hank always had a box of Vanilla Wafers for him and they had fun talking on Hank's ham radio set during his visit.

The Conards were truly old fashioned neighbors where you just pop in to say hi or borrow a cup of sugar. We created lots of wonderful memories with Dot and Hank when they lived at "The Cloot" and they left an indelible impression on my family. When I last visited Dot at Ft. Washington Estates, she still had that fabulous smile. May she rest in peace.

Market Day Set for Oct. 12

The WVHS's annual Market Day, our biggest fund raiser of the year, is set for Oct. 12. As mentioned in a previous newsletter, the board has decided to sponsor the Market Day but not have its flea market inside of the building. The flea market has been a lot of work and hard on the building. Also **Josephine Sawicki**, the amazing flea market chairperson, has moved to the Coatsville area. Considering the hours that both Josephine and **Mabel Whittock** invested in the Flea Market in years past, they would be impossible to match.

We will be looking for booths for the Market Day. Please keep an eye out for possible vendors for our event and share the date and place with them. The Society will have its bake sale and cafeteria plus an expanded membership table with Society items for sale.

The board also decided to have a rain date - Oct. 13.

Supporting our Centre Square Fire Company

Our Centre Square Fire Company is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The Society will help sponsor the 100th Anniversary Book.

On Sunday, April 14 the Fire Company is holding a pancake breakfast from 8 to 11:30 at the Prophecy Creek Park manor house. This is a chance to support the Fire Company and to see this historic Whitpain facility.

Advanced Notice: On May 18 the Fire Company will sponsor a parade on Skippack Pike. Details in the next newsletter.



Wissahickon Senior Project Progresses

The Foulke Mansion and the Penllyn community have been the focus of an intensive study by Wissahickon High School senior **Erin Annunciato** as part of her senior project. After researching and interviewing residences, she is compiling a booklet of her work and has laid the groundwork for making an application for a state historic designation for Penllyn and the Foulke Mansion and the role both have played in local history. Watch for an article in a future newsletter.

Current Museum/Library Activities

Several Society members meet each Thursday morning at the Schoolhouse to work on the museum and library collections. Currently they are reviewing items in the collection - making sure they are properly accessioned, organized, and listed. This is an important step to putting the collection on-line.

On April 14, **Peg Johnston** will attend an orientation on PastPerfect, a data management program. The event is sponsored by the **Historical Society of Pennsylvania**.

Ambler's Postal History



While working on the above mentioned survey of our collection, the Oct. 21, 1987 edition of the Ambler Gazette turned up. It contained an article about the mural in the Ambler Post Office. The article also traced the history of the Ambler Post Office. The article was written by reporter **Marge Cathey**.

A previous newsletter article summarized the mural's story. Created as a WPA project, it depicts Pennsylvania history - including coal mining, agricultural, and industry surrounding a family. It was one of over 2000 paintings commissioned by the WPA. Ambler's was painted by **Harry Sternberg** who went on to become a prolific artist.

According to Cathey, the Ambler Post Office had its origin in 1826 as the Upper Dublin Post Office. **Iassac Thomas** was the postmaster and for 35 years he conducted postal business from a room in his home on the east side of Bethlehem Pike.

In 1861 **Joseph Wilson** took over the duties and ran the post office from his store at Butler and Main. He sold his business to **Samuel Comly** two years later.

Between 1873 and 1855, **Elizabeth Knight**, **Benjamin Hillis**, and **Mary Ambler's** son, **Evan** served in succession as postmaster. It was in 1883 that the name was changed from Upper Dublin to Ambler.

In following years the post office could have been found in an office on the second floor of what is now Deck's Hardware, a saddling shop, and a home on the west side of Main Street.

When Keasbey and Mattison came to Ambler in 1881, post office business increased. When the Opera House was constructed on Butler Pike near the railroad, space was reserved in building by **Dr. Mattison** for a post office.

The postmaster at the time, **Thomas Bitting**, and some residents resisted the move to the west side of the tracks. The next postmaster, **Abraham Stillwagon** also resisted the move and operated out of his home and business on the northeast corner of Butler and Spring Garden.

Because of the resistance to the move, Dr. Mattison chose to boycott the Ambler Post Office. He bought his stamps at the Fort Washington office but mailed items through the Ambler office. (Ambler received no money but had to do the work.) Mattison continued to boycott until 1898 when the post office was finally moved to the Opera House.

Door to door delivery in Ambler was instituted in 1902.

From 1929 to 1933 the post office was on the first floor of the Wyndham Hotel and from 1933 to 1938 it was in the garage at 133 E. Butler Ave.

What is now the Ambler Borough Hall was the post office from 1939 until 1987. The Sternberg mural was installed when the building opened.

Both the post office and its mural were moved to its current site on the west end of Ambler - across the railroad tracks - just as Dr. Mattison desired in 1987. Our historical society played an important role in making sure the mural was moved and preserved. Check it out next time you visit the Ambler Post Office.



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