



Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

WVHS, Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002

www.wvalleyhs.org

info@wvalleyhs

Vol. 19, Issue 4

215-646-6541

You and your family are cordially invited
to the
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society
Holiday party.

Sunday, Dec. 10, 2017 from 2 to 5 p.m.
Russ and Jeannie Bellavance's home
148 S. Bethlehem Pike,
Ambler, PA 19002
215-643-5048

Baked ham and roasted turkey provided
(\$5/adult and \$2.50/child)

Please bring a side dish to share.

RSVP by Dec. 9 - 215-643-5048

or bellavance@verizon.net

Guests are welcome. It will be a grand time.



From the President's Desk

by Russ Bellavance

Please mark your calendars for our meeting on Monday, February 12 (Abraham Lincoln's birthday), 2018. In addition to our program, we will be voting on new Amended and Restated Bylaws for the Society. We have been meaning to do this for some time. Our existing Bylaws did not really fit the way we have been operating and did not reflect our changed situation since our merger with the Historical Society of Whitpain. We looked at recent bylaws from other small societies for some good ideas and developed a set of bylaws that would fit what we are now and how we have been operating.

Briefly, the new bylaws provide that the members of the Society will elect all executive officers (president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary) every 2 years. These officers will also serve as 4 of the members of the board. The remaining board members will also be elected by the members of the Society for 2 year terms at the same time as the officers. There are no limits on the number of terms executive officers or board members may serve. The board may appoint other non-executive officers, such as curator, archivist or librarian, and may appoint replacement executive officers and board members if there is a vacancy during the 2 year term. The board will continue to make operational decisions for the Society, but certain major decisions (such as a merger with another society) require the consent of the members of the Society.

We have posted the complete text of the proposed Amended and Restated Bylaws on our website - www.wvalleyhs.org. We invite you to read them, and, if you have any questions, please address them to me at rebellavance67@gmail.com. We ask you to vote in favor of the Amended and Restated Bylaws at the February meeting. If you cannot attend the meeting, we ask that you sign a Proxy Vote and give a copy to one of the Board members or mail it to P.O. Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002.

Thanks for you continued support of our Society. Together, we have made great strides these past several years, and we look forward to working together on future improvements.

PROXY VOTE

The undersigned member of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society hereby casts my vote in favor of adoption of the Amended and Restated Bylaws of the Society in the form posted on the Society's website - www.wvalleyhs.org

Signature_____Date_____

Printed name_____

Amchem Products Reunion

by Gary Fuess

On October 28, 2017, forty-six former employees of the dissolved company Amchem Products, Inc., that was based in Lower Gwynedd Township (on the edge of Ambler), joined together for their 10th reunion. Reunions began in 1996 and now occur every two years.



Socializing and a wonderful buffet lunch took place at Old York Road Country Club. This year following lunch, the group travelled to the company's original office and plant site that is now owned by Ambler Yards. Mr. Matt Sigel, Co-Managing Partner of Ambler Yards, conducted a tour of the site so that former employees could see firsthand the renovations that have been made or are in progress to their former employment locations. There was much excitement to witness the changes and a follow up tour is planned in 2019 at the next reunion to

view the progress of the renovations. (Ambler Yards offers office space, lab space, etc. for small businesses. It is an excellent example of repurposing.)

Included in the group touring from Amchem Products was Mr. James Harvey Gravell, the grand-nephew and namesake of the company founder. Mr. Gravell was accompanied by his wife Diane.

A Short Background of Amchem and Mr. Gravell

As a young man, James Harvey Gravell helped develop a chemical treatment for preventing rust and peeling on painted metal. He purchased the patent for "Deoxidine" and started his own company, the American Chemical Paint Company, in 1914. He moved the factory to Ambler soon after and expanded it into an agricultural chemical and paint chemical manufacturing and research facility. He was an engineer, innovator, and philanthropist who made national headlines for paying off all his employees' debts and mortgages for Christmas in 1936. After Gravell died in 1939, the company went through some restructuring, including a name-change to Amchem Products, Inc. During the 1960s and 1970s numerous Wissahickon High School students interned and worked at Amchem. The company was acquired by Henkel in 1980.

World War I Program in November

Peter Williams (below) presented a very interesting program about Philadelphia before and during World War I at our November meeting. Peter presented a visually rich talk to a good crowd.

An exhibit of World War I artifacts from our collection and items



loaned by Bill Montelius (above, with wife Joan) was well received. Bill modeled a WWI naval uniform.

The U.S. entered World War I in the fall of 1917. The war ended in 1918 on the 11th day of the 11th month at the 11th hour.



Recent Donations

Recent visitors to the 1895 Schoolhouse were Dick and Peg Shelly who were accompanied by member Ginny Sinn. In 1964 Dick accepted the job of Secretary for the YMCA of Greater Ambler Extension of the Abington Branch. Over the next couple of years Dick was responsible for organizing efforts for the Ambler YMCA. Peg kept notebooks of the group's efforts. In 1966 the YMCA purchased the site on Bethlehem Pike which was its center until the 2000s. Peg and Dick donated the notebooks as well

Serving the the communities of Ambler, Lower Gwynedd, and Whitpain
www.wvalleyhs.org

as commemorative plate, towel, and tile to our collection. Many thanks. One of the neat memories is that in the early days, swimming lessons were given in private pools in the area. Dick also remembered carrying a desk down Butler Pike when they were setting up the first office.

Frank Scardino, Jr. recently donated a history of one of the home noted on last month's Penllyn Village walk - 347 Old Penllyn Pike. It was originally the Teahouse Pavilion built for the Sesquicentennial Celebration in Philadelphia in 1928. Owned by Mr. and Mrs. Sinzheimer until 1941, Sunday School meetings were held there in the 1930s. Over the years the property had numerous uses - a party house, an appliance business, living quarters, The Scardinos owned the house in the 1970s and rented it as an apartment and studio area. In 1978 it was purchased as a private home. Every house does have a story!



Jim Tufano Shares Artifacts and Expertise

Thanks to Jim Tufano for assembling the December display for the Wissahickon Library in Blue Bell. The case is filled with informative and enlightening artifacts from the Lenni Lenape Indians of the Delaware Valley. The display includes a lacrosse stick - did you know that lacrosse was a native American game? There is also a peace pipe made from stone from the Midwest - did you know that trade was carried on throughout the continent? Stop by the BlueBell library and check out the interesting display.

Jim will be presenting at the WVHS meeting on January 8 at the BlueBell library. The topic is the Lenape trails that became today's streets and roads. The display is up through the end of December. It is a good preview for January's program.

Mark Your Calendar

Saturday, Dec. 2 - Wentz Farmstead - candlelight walk - 3 to 9 p.m. - free

Saturday, Dec. 2 - Open House at Hope Lodge - 11 to 5 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 10 - WVHS Holiday Party - see page one for details. Please consider bringing a friend.

Monday, Jan. 15 - WVHS monthly meeting - Blue Bell library - Program: Native American Trails of the Delaware Valley

Tuesday, Jan. 16 - Fort Washington Historical Society - 7:30 p.m. - Program: Plymouth Meeting's Abolition Hall

Heads Up

Check out AroundAmbler.com for news of Ambler. It recently had a piece on the Amchem reunion. Its editor is Ben Bergman.

Some podcasts recommended by the Montgomery Township Historical Society:

Stuff You Missed in History Class

Hardcore History

We the People

Crash Course - US History.

Congratulations to the citizen's group F.W. Rescape. At last week's meeting, the Whitmarsh Planning board rejected the text of the proposed multi-story building on Bethlehem Pike across from Rich's Deli. Mentioned in the decision were the flood prone property as well as the historic character of the Village of Fort Washington. More information at fwrescape@gmail.com

If you haven't had a chance to send in your WVHS dues for the current year, please join us in our work in preserving the history of Ambler, Lower Gwynedd, and Whitpain.

Wishing you all a peaceful and joyfilled holiday season.