



Wissahickon Valley

*historical society*

Ambler  
Lower Gwynedd  
Whitpain

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# The Underground Railroad in Southeastern Pennsylvania

Presented by  
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Historical Society of the  
Phoenixville Area



Mulsby Barn and Abolition Hall  
See page 2 for details.

Wissahickon Public Library - Blue Bell  
Skippack Pike and Pennlyn Blue-Bell Pike  
Monday, January 9 at 7:30 p.m.  
Public is invited.  
Please consider bringing a guest.



## Abolition Hall

Maulsby Barn (left) and Abolition Hall (built 1856) on Butler Pike near Germantown Pike. (Photo from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.) Both buildings are part of the Plymouth Meeting Historic District.

George and Martha Maulsby Corson's property was a major station on the Underground Railroad. They provided food and shelter to escaped slaves who were traveling north.

Later Abolition Hall was the studio of son-in-law Thomas Hovenden who was associated with Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and has a painting (The Last Moments of John Brown) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The village of Plymouth Meeting was designated a Pennsylvania historic district in 1961. The district encompassed 66 historic structures.

In 1971 and again in 2014 there were proposals to widen Butler Pike and to build on the open spaces which would have severely affected the district - especially the Abolition Hall and Maulsby Barn. Both attempts were denied by Whitemarsh Board of Supervisors after active community input.

## History of Ambler Schools

According to information in *Early History of Ambler* by Dr. Mary Hough, the Ambler Independent School District was incorporated in 1881. Ambler's 35 or more children had had to travel to schools in Lower Gwynedd, Whitpain, Whitemarsh, and Upper Dublin before that time.



A newly elected board chose a site on Forest Avenue (Hart Avenue in the contract and Spring Garden Street (Lehigh Avenue in the contract). The contract for the large one room building lists its cost as \$2683. (left) To accommodate an increased number of students, in 1884 the large room was divided into two classrooms. Additions were made to the building in 1891 and in 1896.

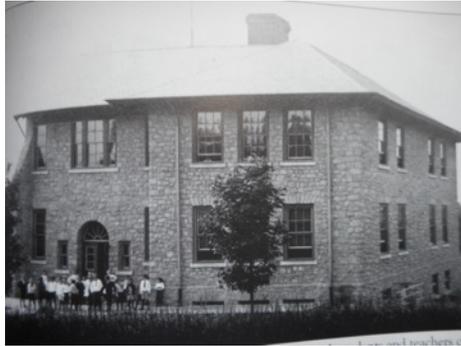
(right) The building was completely destroyed by fire in 1926.

A new building was constructed on the site and was at one time used as a junior high school. A senior citizens' center now uses the building as its headquarters.

There were several private and parochial



schools in what is now Ambler. At the corner of Butler and Main (right) was Sunnyside School which was established by George Knight's daughters in 1869. Knight owned a farm from S. Main to Bannockburn Avenue. The school building now houses businesses and apartments.



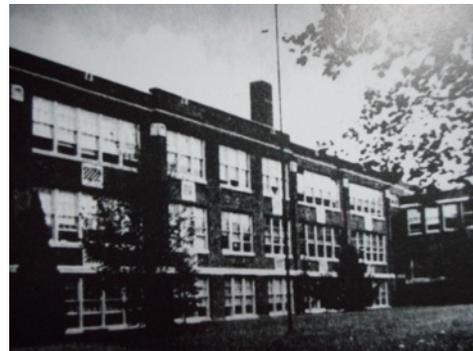
St. Joseph's Catholic church and St. Anthony's Catholic church each had schools. (Their schools became Ambler Catholic in the 1970s and recently was consolidated with St. Alfonso's.)

The original Mattison Avenue School (left - built in 1902) was located on Mattison Avenue at the junction of Ridge Avenue and Poplar Street. It was replaced by a more modern building in 1967.

In recent years it

served neighborhood kindergarten through third grade students. It now serves as Borough Hall.

The original Ambler (Junior and Senior) High School was located at Tennis Avenue and Hendricks Street. (right) The first section was completed in 1922. The second section (far right) was built partly with federal funds in 1933. The final section was completed in 1957. The site included a football stadium, tennis courts, and a track. In 1973, the current high schools was completed and the Tennis Avenue site was closed. It was demolished in 1978 and is now the site of a housing development and public park.



Ironically, after its rich educational history, there are now no public or private schools within Ambler Borough. Wissahickon High School and Middle School are in Lower Gwynedd. Ambler elementary public school students attend either Lower Gwynedd or Shady Grove.

Sources: *Early History of Ambler* by Dr. Mary Hough (1936), *A Brief History of the Wissahickon School District* by John J. McKenna (1980), and Frank Russo, Jr.

## WVHS Shares Local School History

In January an exhibit about Wissahickon School District history will be installed at the Ambler Savings Bank. It is the joint effort of WVHS and Wissahickon School District.

The display cases at Ambler Borough building and at Lower Gwynedd Township building feature their local school history.

These efforts celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wissahickon School District. The WVHS has received some wonderful artifacts from the district's history.

Some of those artifacts will be on display at the Wissahickon Valley Library -Blue Bell in March. Katherine Meyer of the Wissahickon School District has been working with us on this project.

## Projects at 1895 Schoolhouse Almost Completed

There has been lots of interest and many positive comments about the new stucco job for the 1895 Schoolhouse. The stucco, though, is just the final touch. In next month's newsletter the various aspects of the project will be featured.



There will be some painting projects (windows, trim) to come. The painting can easily be broken down into sections, and, hopefully, at least parts of it will be volunteer projects that can be done over the spring and summer.

Many thanks to Whitpain Township for their support in refurbishing the building. Ron Cione, Whitpain's Director of Public Works, has been a great liaison and facilitator.

## Mark Your Calendar

Monday, January 9 - WVHS Monthly meeting at the Wissahickon library - Blue Bell - 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, January 15 - WVHS Open House - 1 to 4 p.m. - Check out the WWI exhibit and recent donations.

Tuesday, January 17 - Fort Washington Historical Society meeting - Clifton House - Program: Washington's Headquarter at Moland House - 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, January 19 - Historic House Architecture Workshop - sponsored by Fort Washington Historical Society - 7 to 9 p.m. - call Robin Costa, 215-887-1945



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