



Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002
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September 14th WVHS meeting at the 1895 Schoolhouse 7:30 p.m.

Meet and Greet

Member Share

Program includes a short tour of the building.
Light refreshment and good conversation to follow.

Open House

at Franklinville School and at the 1895 Schoolhouse
on September 20 from 1 to 4 p.m.
Consider bringing a guest to visit both schools.



Mark Your Calendar

September 12 - Old Goshoppem Reformed Church 138th Annual Oyster Picnic - noon to 6:30 p.m. - entertainment all day - (recommended by Bob Whittock)
September 14 - WVHS monthly meeting - 7:30 p.m. at 1895 Schoolhouse
September 17/20 - Pennsylvania National Quilt Extravaganza at Oaks, Greater Philadelphia Expo Center
September 19 - Old-fashioned Mill Day at Evans-Mumbower
September 19 - Coffeehouse at Calvary United Methodist Church, 16 E. Park Avenue, Ambler - Program: Mesothelioma Lecture
September 20 - Open House at Franklinville School and 1895 Schoolhouse - 1 to 4 p.m.
September - Board meeting
October 12 - WVHS monthly meeting - Program: The History of Ambler by Buck Amey

From the President's Desk - Russ Bellavance

This has been a busy summer for the WVHS on many fronts. One focus area has been making long-term plans for the 1895 School House. Although we spent a lot of money a few years ago on a new roof and other necessary repairs, we have long recognized the need to address other building issues. Late last year we opened a dialogue with the Supervisors of Whippen Township about the property, because the Township actually owns the property and leases it to us. The Supervisors were extremely receptive to the idea of long-term planning, and members of their knowledgeable and responsive staff (led by Ron Cione) have met with us several times.



Recently, the Supervisors approved a contract with Ed Lane's engineering company, DataFac, to prepare a comprehensive report. John Simon and Bob Whittock have led our efforts and have been meeting with Ron and with Ed and other DataFac's personnel. The report will address a variety of issues relating to the preservation of the 1895 School House, including safety issues such as the parking lot and the electrical system, and will also address issues that affect both the preservation of the artifacts stored in our museum, and our ability to open the building for public use during hot and cold weather.

Once the report is issued, we will ask to meet with the Supervisors to discuss its recommendations and how to proceed from there. We want to express our appreciation for what the Supervisors have already done, and we look forward to continuing to work with them in ensuring that this important property and its contents are preserved and made available to the public for many years.

InsideOut Art Exhibit/First Friday/Octoberfest in Ambler

Ambler is one of five communities in the Philadelphia area selected as part of the InsideOut program by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This fall on a walk through Ambler one can enjoy eleven different reproduction of masterpieces from the museum's collection. Maps are available at the library, Ambler Savings, and other businesses in Ambler. The library is, in fact, a good place to start your tour. It hosts *A Reading from Homer* by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema on its outside front wall. Additional paintings can be found on Lindenwold, Butler, Ridge, and Main. **Plant Ambler** planted sunflowers in several sites to complement *Sunflowers* by Vincent vanGogh which is at Forest & Main Brewing Co. on Main St.

October's **First Friday** will be a special artists' celebration with a Food Truck Rally complete with beer garden and artists painting "en plein aire" all over town. The celebration will continue with the 24th annual **Oktoberfest** on Saturday, October 3. WVHS will take part in this celebration with a children's activity and information table. Members who would like to participate can call Russ Bellavance for more information.



Concert Honors Joe Schneider

Thanks to Sally Malley for the photo at left of the concert by The Wissahickon Pops at Pickering Field on July 27th. The flag was provided by Fort Washington Fire Co. and the Wissahickon Fire Co. in honor of Joe Schneider who passed away this summer. Joe was a long-time WVHS member.

The Wissahickon Pops is a summer program sponsored by the Wissahickon School District and the group traditionally plays outdoor concerts around Ambler. Each August, Joe would host the band members at his Ambler home.

Recent Addition to AmChem Collection

Frank Scardino, Jr. stopped by the 1895 Schoolhouse on a recent Thursday morning. He had been referred to us by Buck Amey and brought with him numerous items and stories that complement our AmChem collection that was donated several years ago by Gary Fuess and other AmChem retirees.

Frank related that in 1918 his father was the first employee of Harvey Gravell when the industrial operation was in South Philadelphia area. In fact, as we looked through an old album of photos from the Philadelphia operation, Frank identified his father in several photos. His father later was in charge of operations in the Ambler factory.

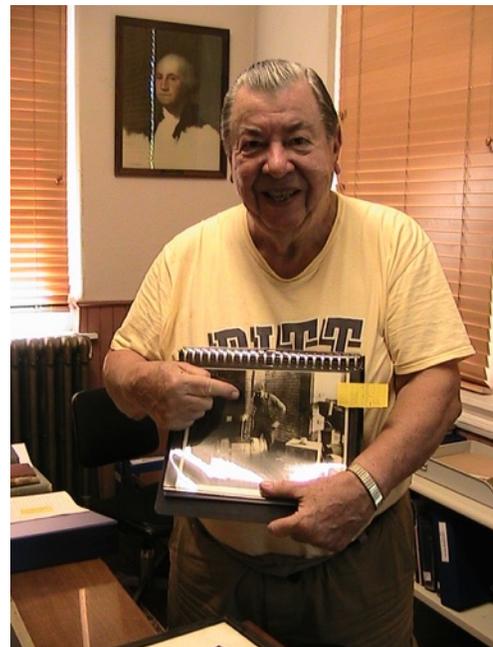
Frank shared a story of Mr. Gravell's famous care for his workers. When the operation was moved from Philadelphia to Ambler, Frank's father borrowed \$500 from his mother-in-law to cover transportation costs. When Mr. Gravell heard of the loan, he gave Mr. Scardino \$500 to repay the loan.

The Scardino collection includes copies of several AmChem's patents. Perhaps the most important was for a process for cleaning and slightly pitting metal with a phosphoric acid solution so that paint would bond with the metal. This solved a problem that Henry Ford had with early cars but also had wider applications.

As an example of Mr. Gravell's wide interests, a second patent was for a rotochord - a tool for easily changing the key of a piece of music. Mr. Gravell played the organ - beginning as a young child and continued throughout his life.

Frank Jr. attended elementary school in Fort Washington and Ambler High School. He told of working under his father as a teenager. Rather than working in the office as other sons of management, Frank's father had him work on the floor of the factory. When asked why, Frank's father said that it was important that "he should know that no-one is better than an anyone else".

Thank you, Frank, for the documents that complement our collection - and also for the stories. Frank will be presenting a program about AmChem at the Fort Washington Historical Society. We will include dates, etc. when their schedule is set.



Mystery Site

Last month's mystery site was Washington Square Hotel - later Mr. Ron's. It was located at the intersection of Township Line Road and the present DeKalb (formerly State Road.) By the late 1800s, a small community had grown up around the intersection. According to **Whitpain Township - Three Hundred Years** (compiled and edited by Wayne A. Huss), in 1888 this included the hotel, a schoolhouse, a blacksmith shop, a turnpike tollhouse, and five dwellings. By 1900 a general store, butcher shop and a general repair shop for wagons had been added.



Washington Square Hotel

In 1902 the Norristown Trolley ran along DeKalb Pike as far as Franklinville. Its power station was across Township Line Road from the Washington Square Hotel. It is an attractive brick building that has gone through several re-inventions over the years.

In 1890 the first commencement for the Whitpain Township Schools sixth graders was held in the hotel meeting room.

In 1998, the Washington Square Hotel, then known as Mr. Ron's, was torn down and replaced by a drug store. According to the story, it was torn down on a Sunday to avoid additional resistance by local residents interested in preserving it. "Remember Mr. Ron's" is often heard when there are discussions about preserving historic buildings.



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