



Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

www.wvalleyhs.org

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P.O. Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002

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The Wissahickon Valley Historical
Society presents
**A Magical Mineral
History Tour**

The program will tell the story of local area minerals,
where they are found, and
how they have affected our history - from Ambler's
asbestos to Wissahickon Creek's garnets
to the ore of Oreland.
Amateur lapidary Jim Johnston will spin the tale of the
minerals and their history.

**Where: Wissahickon Valley Public
Library at
Blue Bell - Rt. 73**

When: Mon, February 10 at 7:30 p.m.

What: a slide show/talk - questions welcome

Consider bringing a friend or neighbor.

Update on St. Mary's/Lindenwold Estate Development

There have recently been several open meetings about the plans for St. Mary's/Lindenwold Estate. Three were informational meeting for neighbors where the developers shared their plans and asked for feedback. On January 28 at a more formal meeting before the Upper Dublin Planning Commission, the developers presented an early draft of their plan. Some of the highlights of the the plan are the removal of the dam and the maintenance of a smaller lake with a more natural flow of water, the

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retention of the exterior wall, and the reclamation of some of the formal gardens. They were asked about any specimen trees and responded that they have hired a tree service to survey the collection. The main access to the development would be on Bethlehem Pike across from Mattison Avenue. The gate houses would be retained and either sold or rented.

Four types of housing would be constructed: 34 carriage homes on the Lindenwold Avenue side of the estate, 128 townhouses and condos on the opposite side of the entry way, and 250 senior housing units where the dormitories and school building are currently. The above would house a total of from 900 to 1000 residents.

The developer shared plans for retaining the castle which would include bringing it up to code. The castle would be used for offices and as common rooms for the residents - though not for housing. A homeowners association would be responsible for the roads, landscaping, etc.

This presentation was the first of a number of meetings. Ambler's mayor and several members of the Fort Washington Historical Society were at the meeting.



The following is part of a letter (edited for length) sent by WVHS member **Chris Raines** to the Ambler Borough Council concerning the project - reprinted with her permission.

Dear Borough Council Member:

The development of St. Mary's Villa that the Endeavor Property Group, Guidi Homes and Goldenberg Group is proposing could be devastating to Ambler residents. The increase in traffic through Ambler, greater volume of floodwater that will damage homes reducing property values, and increased demand on the water supply to the entire community makes this plan harmful to our borough.

The plan proposes more buildings packed within a small space than exist in the standard urban setting. The proposed streets are too small for on-street parking. A standard bus could not enter the property because there is not adequate turn-around space.

There is only one exit and this exit lets out directly in front of Mattison Avenue. The developers have made this one-exit proposal in order to reduce Upper Dublin residents' resistance to the plan. They will inconvenience Ambler because our borough cannot fight this development as well as Upper Dublin residents can fight it.

Perhaps the 300 section of Mattison Avenue between Bethlehem Pike and North Street could be made one-way exiting onto Bethlehem to reduce traffic from the development into Ambler.

The loss of open space and the fact that the developers are planning only on-site underground water retention methods will increase flooding significantly in Ambler. While properties in Southeast Ambler, close to Bethlehem Pike may experience flooding for the first time (water flows downhill), and homes in the southern section that have had a great deal of flooding already could get significantly more once this very packed development is in place!

Some Ambler customers have already complained about their poor water pressure. This increase in demand could cause more of us to have poor water pressure. I would like to know if Ambler Water could refuse to be the water provider for this new development on the St. Mary's Villa property.

In conclusion, the increase in flooding, increase in traffic and burden on the water supply, not to mention the loss of an historic property and open space in this area make the proposed plan a problem for Ambler borough."

Towards the end of the zoning commission meeting, it was announced that an Historic Resources Inventory of the property and the proposed development would be carried out by the Heritage Conservancy. Additional meetings are planned but not scheduled at this time.

Work Continues on the Collection

About thirty percent of our museum collection has been entered on the computer - thanks to the Thursday morning crew. Beginning in the early 1990's, items were accessioned as they were donated to the historical society. This is an opportunity to learn some stories as well as check the condition and storage of items.

One of the first items entered was the block and gavel which is on the desk used by President **Russ Bellavance**. The accession sheet tells its story or provenance. An article by **Bernadette Dougherty** adds more details.

"It was back in 1978, August 11 to be exact,

that a freak hailstorm passed through the Ambler-Whitpain area and left a path of downed wires and trees.

"One such tree was the 300 year old Penn Charter Oak, located on the Mitchell property on Plymouth Road in Whitpain Township.

"Normally that would be the end of the story and the wood would find its way eventually to someone's fireplace.

"In this case, however, the Mitchell's gave a portion of the ancient oak to Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. The members of the



Society decided a fitting use of the wood would be the making of a block and gavel to be used by the President at all Society meetings.

*"One Society member, **Joseph Coscia**, teaches a wood-working class at Olney High School in Philadelphia. Coscia had his students take this on as a class project and the result was a beautiful block and gavel."*

Every week we uncover several treasures and their stories. Work continues Thursday mornings from 10 to 12 at the 1895 Schoolhouse. There are lots of interesting things to do as well as good conservation - and a few good laughs. Please join us.



Many, many thanks to **Bob Whittock and John Simon** for above and beyond the call of duty efforts in response to the recent cold weather.

Mark Your Calendar

February 10 - February Meeting at the Wissahickon Public Library, Blue Bell, 7:30 p.m., Program: A Magical Mineral History Tour

February 16 - Open House, 1895 Schoolhouse, 1 to 4 p.m.

February 18 - Fort Washington Historical Society, Clifton House, Bethlehem Pike, 8 p.m., Program: African Americans During the Civil War.

Next Newsletter - Update on the possible joining of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society and the Historical Society of Whitpain. Members' questions and opinions are welcome.



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