



www.wvalleyhs.org

P.O. Box 96, Ambler, PS 19002
Volume I, Issue 2

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Learn about the History of the Area's Colonial Taverns

at our March 9th meeting
at the 1895 Schoolhouse
on SKippack Pike
Light refreshments at 6:30,
program at 7 p.m.
presented by Russ Bellavance



Three of the oldest colonial taverns in the area are the William Penn Inn and Spring House Tavern in Lower Gwynedd Township and the Blue Bell Inn in Whitpain Township. Delve into the history of these three taverns with Russ Bellavance, who is apparently no stranger to colonial taverns.

Looking ahead: On Sunday, April 19 numerous historic sites (including our 1895 Schoolhouse) located along Skippack Pike will be open with special activities for families. Look for developing details on www.wvalleyhs.org.

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Getting Involved with WVHS

There are several ways to get involved with WVHS's activities and efforts to preserve our local history.

Become a volunteer - We have many volunteer opportunities available. Some are a one-time commitment; others allow you to work with the collections and other WVHS members. These opportunities include acting as a docent on days when we are open to the public, helping to maintain our buildings and collections, working on new accessions to our museum and library, collecting oral histories, planning programs and our annual fundraising wine and cheese events, updating and providing content for our website and Facebook page, and researching questions of local history. At right, member Marie Goldkamp accessions a collection of antique spice containers - and enjoys the scent of cloves. If you have an interest in joining our group of active volunteers, please e-mail us at info@wvalleyhs.org.



Become a member - You can become a member either by downloading, printing, filling out, and mailing our Membership form (www.wvalleyhs.org) or by submitting the information and payment online at <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved>. Renewals are due each September - the beginning of our "school year."

Present a program or submit an article - We are always interested in new content about the past. We especially appreciate new content that has a local tie, either to our immediate service area or to southeastern Pennsylvania more broadly. That is not a requirement; many of our programs appeal to anyone who is interested in the history of American or Western Civilization without regard to any local connection. If you have an interest in developing a program or an article, please e-mail us at info@wvalleyhs.org.

Become a Corporate Sponsor - You can become a corporate sponsor and have a link to your business on our web-page by submitting the information and making the payment online at <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved>.

The Story Behind a Recent Donation

by Russ Bellavance - WVHS president

Thanks to Montgomery Newspapers who recently donated an original framed copy of the front page of the January 7, 1886 issue of The Ambler Gazette. It is a window on journalism of the time.

Labeled Volume IV, No. 4, it is subtitled "A Local Paper Devoted To The Interests Of The People". The first page offers a fascinating insight into what people were reading in 1886. There was no real national or state news - nothing about politics or big business - on the page. Instead it contains a mix of fiction, poetry, and strange reports from exotic lands.

Newspapers served a very different role in the late



19th century. They were the least expensive source of mass entertainment, and they did not worry much about the reliability of their sources. Of course, a number of well-known authors (Charles Dickens, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, among others) released some of their popular works as serials in newspapers in the mid- to late- 1800s.

On our 1886 Ambler Gazette page there are seven columns. Columns 1 and 2 contain a very short poem and then a fictional story entitled Love-Making. Columns 3 and 4 contain mostly international “news” about the fighting in the Balkans and a tale of a Russian princess. Columns 5 and 6 have articles about cremation, a river of West Africa, the philosophy of ritual burials, and a story entitled “A Woman Duelist”

Finally, column 7 is dedicated to local news and to promoting both the paper and its advertisers. The final section, “Town Talk”, contains some local puffery about the bright future of Ambler. This is evidenced by the continual rise in the price of residential real estate. If only they could have seen the prices of homes in Ambler today!

For additional information about the content of the January 7, 1886 issue of the Ambler Gazette and additional photos, please check out our website at www.wvalleyhs.org.

A Short History of the Ambler Gazette

The Ambler Gazette published its first edition in 1882 - six years before the borough of Ambler was incorporated. The Gazette was the successor to the Ambler Times, which had been founded in 1879 by Dr. Rose. Irvin S. Weber took over the paper in 1882 and renamed it Ambler Gazette. Arthur K. Thomas took over the paper in 1885 and, in 1886, after a fire destroyed the paper’s printing plant, he opened a larger printing facility. In 1909 Thomas sold the Gazette to J. Morris Haywood who ran the paper for more than 38 years. Mrs. J. Maurice Haywood (Elizabeth Godfrey Haywood) continued to publish the paper until her death in 1951.

Watch for a future article about the Haywood estate on Bethlehem Pike - based on Joseph Haywood’s farm diary of 1882-83. Parts of the diary were translated by Connor Waite this past summer. Thanks to members of the Haywood family who donated the diary to our collection. The diary, in part, describes the construction and furnishing of the Haywood home. The house is now part of Artman Home. (See photo at right.)



Thanks to a joint effort of the Wissahickon Valley Public Library and the Fort Washington Historical Society, we can read issues of The Ambler Gazette from 1894 through 1944. The collection can be accessed through the web-site of the Wissahickon Valley Public Library by selecting **eLibrary** in the top bar. Then select **Visit e-Resource**.

The collection is the only extant print copy of the paper. In many cases this is the only record of the development of the southern half of Montgomery County. According to local historian Buck Amey, when the Ambler branch of the library is reopened, it will take the rest of the collection now stored by the Fort Washington Historical Society and make them available to those doing research.

The Genealogy of a House

by Joe Langella, WVHS board member

My wife Donna and I decided on living in the Upper/Lower Gwynedd area with the hope of buying an older fixer-upper (or as a realtor might describe it, “something quaint”) with a bit of extra backyard. What we ultimately bought (in 1996) was an old Lower Gwynedd stone farmhouse, circa 1786, that needed much attention and that sat on close to three acres of heavily-wooded, overgrown land.

We purchased our home from long-time Lower Gwynedd resident **Mary Bassett** (of Bassett’s ice Cream fame). Mrs. Bassett occupied the home for close to sixty years, twenty of those years as a widow. She lived mostly on the first floor - to “save her legs,” she told us - allowing the “bramble and briar” to take over. At settlement, Mrs. Bassett proudly handed us a list of those she believed were the previous owners of the home, going all the way back to 1789! There were gaps of time on this list, specifically a significant one from 1789 to 1876, but many of the owners’ names harken back to old Gwynedd’s past. Not to mention that a few are downright peculiar.

The first owner on the list, and perhaps the person who built our home, was named **Cadwalader Jones**. According to *Wikipedia*, the name Cadwalader, used as a name or surname, is decidedly Welsh and often spelled with two “L’s”. It “was used most notably held by **Cadwaladr**, a seventh-century King of Gwynedd, who was also the last Welsh King to claim lordship over all of Britain.”

Other former owners with interesting (as well as alliterative) names included **Conrad Clemmer, Selina Slaymaker, and Charles Credo**.

In addition to these owners, at least one owner had a quite colorful past: **George S. Mitchell, Jr.**, who is listed as owning our home from 1916 until at least 1919. According to his obituary (published in the *North Penn Reporter* 1929. Mitchell was variously “an Indian fighter, scout, close friend of **William “Buffalo Bill” Cody**, a railroad conductor, and a hero of the Johnstown Flood.” At the age of eighteen, he enlisted with **General George Custer**’s cavalry and rode with Buffalo Bill in what were then called the “Indian Wars”.

When his brief military career ended, he joined the Pennsylvania Railroad and spent the next 49 years as a train conductor. When, in 1889, the South Fork Dam on the Little Conemaugh River broke, devastating Johnstown, Pennsylvania, he was tapped to restore train service to the area. His swift work saved hundreds of lives. Our online research also revealed that his son, **John H. Mitchell**, was a life-long resident of Gwynedd and served for a time as Tax Collector, Justice of the Peace, and a director of the Ambler Trust Company. Both father and son are memorialized by a mausoleum at the Lansdale Cemetery (See photo)



The original section of our house, made of field stone, is an ell - with the straight, somewhat Georgian-style, two-story front, turning back at the right. On both sides of our front door, various former residents and visitors have taken the liberty to carve their names into the stone, with some carvings showing more detail than others, and some even including dates.

The most discernible engravings say **Andrew Godfrey 1882, Samuel T. Godfrey 1882, and Lilies H. Warwick**. The maps in the book Fair Land, Gwynedd by Phil Johnson Ruth (1991) indicate that the Warwick family lived in our home from some time in the mid-1850s through the mid 1870s. Incidentally, two relatively recent carvings are **Claudia E. Langella and Maura R. Langella 2011**.

Those that own an old home know that living in one has its drawbacks and its benefits. And one of the most delightful benefits of all — with a little detective work by its occupants — is an old home’s penchant for revealing its past!

Sources for this article include FindAGrave.com and Wikipedia. Check out an expanded version of this article and additional photos on our website.

Please note that our April 13 meeting program is entitled *Researching Historic Properties* presented by Jeanne Sorg, Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds.

Mark Your Calendar

March 8 - Sunday - Charter Day at Hope Lodge - 12 to 3 p.m. Info. at historichopelodge.org

March 9 - Monday - WVHS monthly meeting at 1895 Schoolhouse - refreshments at 6:30, program at 7 p.m.

March 11 and 18 - Researching Your Home - two part program. 5 p.m. Historical Society of Montgomery County, Norristown information at 610-272-0297 and contact@hsmcpa.org

March 15 - Sunday - Open House at 1895 Schoolhouse - 1 to 3 p.m.

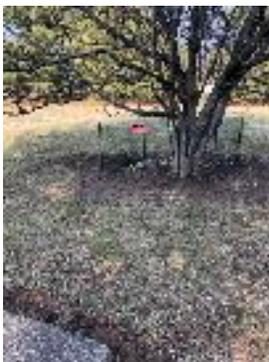
~~March 17 - Tuesday - Fort Wash. Hist. Society - program "Music in Early America" - 7:30 p.m.~~

April 13 - Monday - WVHS monthly meeting - "Researching Historic Properties"

April 19 - Sunday - Skippack Pike historic sites open -

Please check www.wvalley.hs for updates on listed events.

Franklinville Gets Safety Update



As a one-room school of the late 1800s, our Franklinville School site had an out-house and a well. Both were filled in when the school was closed.

After years of weathering, the fill had settled and the protective fences needed updating. In recent days, local handyman Aaron Quinn cleaned out the old brush and debris. He removed the broken fence and old boards, and replaced them with new fence and pressured treated wood. River rock was added to the area. ‘No trespassing’ signs were placed on the fence. The update looks good and is a welcome safety improvement.

Recent Donations

A new acquisition honors local veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice in World War II and the Vietnam War. The WVHS recently received a wonderful donation from the American Legion Downs-Amey Post 125. It is a large framed composite of individual photographs of young men from this area who lost their lives serving in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines during World War II and the Vietnam War. The family names will be familiar to long-time residents. The men looked so confident and determined and full of promise for a future that they would never see. Please watch our web-site (www.wvalleyhs.org) for an article about the Downs-Amey Post and a list and photos of those honored on this collage.

A second recent donation consists of two models of typical buildings of the late 1800s. They represent a general store dated 1849 and a farm workshop with a woodworking shop and a welding center. Both complement our current displays of life during that period that is located in the center area in the basement. The models were built and donated by Dr. Leon Strohecker. He donated a larger barn model to the Worcester Historical Society.



WVHS Shares Exhibit at Blue Bell Library

An exhibit featuring Women of the Wissahickon was on display at the Blue Bell Library during the month of February. Thanks to Glenda Radine, Marie Goldkamp, and Peg Johnston for creating and installing the exhibit. This is a yearly opportunity for us to share information with the community. We look forward to being able to do the same in the Ambler library which is currently undergoing renovations.

Beginning with the April meeting announcement, WVHS's newsletters and announcement will come from info@wvalleyhs.org. Watch for it in your in-box at the end of March.



**Wissahickon Valley Historical Society
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