



Wissahickon Valley Historical Society
presents

The Marquis de Lafayette,
the Battle of the Brandywine,
and Saving our Historic Sites

by Gene Pisasale
(who last year presented our program on Hamilton)

Monday - April 9
at the
1895 Schoolhouse
Program at 7:30



Lafayette stands as a symbol of friendship between France and the United States. He sailed from France to join the American Revolution in 1777 where he was commissioned as a major-general without pay and without command and became part of George Washington's military family. He was present at Valley Forge and later was active in the French Revolution. In 1824-25 he had a triumphal revisit to America.

Open House - Sunday, April 15
1895 Schoolhouse - 1 to 4 p.m.

Mark Your Calendar

Sunday, April 8 - Hope Lodge, Bethlehem Pike, Fort Washington - House Tours - 12:30 to 4
Hope Lodge is a fine example of Georgian architecture - having been built in the mid-1700s as the home for the Samuel Morris family. It is managed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the very active The Friends of Hope Lodge.

Monday, April 9 - WVHS monthly meeting at the 1895 Schoolhouse - 7 p.m.

Thursday, April 12 - program - Mills of the Wissahickon - 7 p.m. at the Four Mills Barn (WVWA headquarters) - register on line at info@wwwa.org.

Saturday, April 14 - Kids Fishing Derby - Graeme Park, 859 County Line Road, Horsham, 9 a.m. to noon. Graeme Park. A 42-acre park, it is the site of the only surviving residence (Keith House) of a Colonial Pennsylvania Governor. The house has survived in it almost original state.

Sunday, April 15 - Whitpain Rotary's annual pancake breakfast - Manor House, Prophecy Creek Park - 8 to 11:30 a.m. This is a chance to support a local group as well as visit a local historic site.

Sunday, April 15 - Open House at 1895 Schoolhouse - 1 to 4 p.m.

Tuesday, April 17 - Historical Society of Fort Washington monthly meeting - Program: Along Bethlehem Pike by Robin Costa and Buck Amey - 7:30.

Saturday, April 21 - Ambler Earth Fest =10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Ambler Borough Hall

A Walk Down Butler Ave., Ambler



Entering Ambler from the south west, one notes the former train station on the left. It is a good example of repurposing of a building. Built in 1877, this Victorian frame structure served Ambler for the North Pennsylvania Railroad and later the Reading Railroad. In the 1980s, SEPTA was modernizing its stations and was set to tear down this building. Thanks to the intervention of the newly formed WVHS, the building was saved. The historical society leased and rented out the building as a restaurant. The model proved very successful as a number of former stations along the R5 became restaurants.

Shop. Built in 1890 in the Second Empire Victorian style. It housed a drug store and soda fountain. It later became



Walking up Butler to Main, one notices several historic buildings. On the left, is former Rees C. Robert's Apothecary

Brenneman and Brady's Drug Store and later still the Green Owl Cafe in the 1940s.

On the right was, in turn, a private home and general store and then a private boarding school for girls run by the Knight sisters. It later housed the drug store of Joseph Angeny and then DelConte's jewelry store.



At the next intersection (Spring Garden Street), on the left is handsome stone building that was built in 1900 in the Colonial Revival style. It housed the

Bell Telephone Exchange in the days before direct dialing. It later served as the Ambler Borough Offices and Police Station until 1993.

(The borough offices were moved to the former post office further up Butler Ave. and most recently to the former Mattison Avenue school building.)

Across Butler Ave. is the original 1926 building of the First National Bank of Ambler. It was the site of a 1933 bank robbery. Robbers stole \$33,000 and were captured within one hour in Roxborough.



On a third corner is the Wyndham Hotel. It was built in 1893 at a cost of \$35,000 and contained 45 rooms including 28 bedrooms. There was an arcade of shops on the first floor. It served as a boarding house in the late 1900s - with large, old tree offering shade to the grounds. After some difficulties in reconstruction, it has been repurposed as a popular restaurant.

At the corner of Butler and Ridge is the popular summer stop - Rita's Water Ice. Do you remember when this was a fish store and before that a gas

station? (Another summer favorite is SweetBriar on Lindenwold. It replaced ConeHeads. When I was planning a tour of local historic sites in Wissahickon School district with my class of 4th graders, among the sites they wanted to visit was ConeHeads. ConeHeads served them each a cone on our visit - just after we visited the Ambler jail. A reminder that perspectives can be different. Many miss McDonalds - and the old Ambler Savings building - and, now Candidas. While I was taking photos, I noted that it was closing and took some shots.)



Moving along Butler Ave., there is a handsome building on the left. Built in 1910, it was the first service station for Ambler. It later was an indoor 18-hole miniature golf course, an Acme supermarket, and during the 1930s, it became the Gills Variety Center. In recent years it has hosted numerous businesses - including the current Twisters (upstairs) and Vida & Comida (downstairs).

The Ambler Cinema building dominates the opposite side of Butler Ave. Built in 1928 by Harrison Brothers, this unique

Moorish-style building housed the movie theater, the Ambler Drug Co., and Neigut's grocery. Many Amblerites remember attending Saturday matinees at the theater. In our collection, we have some of the renovation plans and a glass pitcher won at a matinee prize drawing.

Further up Butler on the right is the building that was first the Ambler Post Office, then the Borough Hall, and now an office building.





WVHS Hosts Model A Antique Car Club

A lively group visited the 1895 Schoolhouse on March 24. They represented the Model A Antique Car Club. President Russ Bellavance shared a program about our society, and the group also toured the school. Several had local stories to tell - having attended Wissahickon Schools and/or worked in local stores. Many thanks to Neal Bradley for sharing his car collection.

World War I History Symposium Planned

WVHS member Barry Johnson has organized a full-day program on The History of the First World War at Carlisle's United States Army Heritage and Education Center for Saturday, May 12. The day, sponsored by the Pennsylvania World War One Centennial Committee, will feature four speakers - including one on Hog Island Shipyard and its role in the war effort.

The event is free but to register contact -Pennsylvania@WWICentennial.org.

Remembering Frank Russo, Sr.

Condolences to the family of Frank Russo, Sr., a founding member of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society who passed away on March 16. Frank always had a smile and was willing to do any job with good nature, working on rehabbing the 1895 building, helping Marie in the kitchen, encouraging everyone with good humor. Our museum includes Frank's barber shop tools, and it often brings up good stories from museum visitors.

The family generously suggested donations to the WVHS in Frank's memory. Funds will be used for a special Ambler related exhibit.

From the President's Desk

We have some exciting news that I wanted to share with you. For quite some time the board has recognized that the 1895 Public School - which houses our headquarters, museum and library - has very much needed an interior makeover. Now that the Whitpain Township has done a great job with exterior and structural work, we can turn our own efforts to the inside of the building. Joan Duxbury will be leading the effort. Under her steady hand, we are still planning the exact scope of the project, but we already know that the work is sufficiently extensive we will have to close the building to the public and box up our collections. We do not have exact dates yet, but our current thinking is that we will close the building after the April 15 open house. We have moved the May meeting to the Blue Bell branch of the Wissahickon Valley Public Library, and we thank the WVPL for being so willing to accommodate us.

Our expectation is that we will be able to expand our display area into a portion of the basement, and we plan to upgrade our display equipment and technologies. The interior will get a brand new coat of paint - after all the nicks and dents have been repaired. We will also be replacing the signage outside the building. I have had people tell me that they drive by the building and wonder what it is. We hope better signage will share who and what we are.

We intend to have a Grand Reopening in the Fall, and we hope to make a real community day of it. As a board, we are very excited to move forward with these improvements and we will be delighted if you will join us at the Grand Reopening in celebrate our new facilities.

(If you are interested in being involved in the coming month's efforts, we will need help labeling, packing, and then setting up the new displays. Please contact Peg Johnston if you would like to help with these jobs.)



Spring seems finally to have arrived.

Thanks to Dot MacDermott for planting the pansies at the 1895 Schoolhouse.



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