



Wissahickon Valley
historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

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WVHS, Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002
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215-646-6541

The Wissahickon Valley Historical Society
presents

Dawesfield - A Family Story

by Phoebe Griswold

a 7th generation grand-daughter of
Abraham and Mary Dawes

Built in 1726, Dawesfield is located on Lewis Lane, BlueBell. It hosted George Washington and his troops in the fall of 1777 before they moved to their winter camp at Valley Forge. Dawesfield was passed down through the family until the late 20th century. Dawesfield is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.



Monday, May 14 at 7 p.m. (Program begins at 7:30)
at the Wissahickon Public Library - BlueBell

Mark Your Calendar

May 4 - First Friday in Ambler

May 5 - Open House at Centre Square Fire Company's new building, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

May 11 - Second Saturday Sales at historic St. Thomas' Church, Camp Hill Road and Bethlehem Pike in Fort Washington, 8 a.m. to noon.

May 12 - Coffeehouse at historic Gwynedd Friends' Meeting - 8 p.m. - Tours of this historic building are given at intermission.

May 14 - WVHS Monthly Meeting - at Wissahickon Valley Public Library, Blue Bell, 7 p.m. See page 1 for details.

May 15 - Historical Society of Fort Washington - Clifton House, 473 S. Bethlehem Pike, Program: The History of Public Radio

May 19 - Ambler Auto Show, 1 to 6 p.m. on Butler Pike

May 20 - Open House at the 1895 Schoolhouse, Franklinville Schoolhouse, and Evans Mumbower Mill - 1 to 4 p.m.

May 21 - Historical Society of Montgomery County, Norristown - Program "The Works of Benjamin and David Rittenhouse" - 6:30 p.m.

June 6 - Outdoor concert at historic Hope Lodge - by Ambler Symphony Orchestra - 7 p.m.

Notice of Biannual Membership Meeting of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society

The Wissahickon Valley Historical Society will hold its Biannual Membership Meeting on Monday, June 11, during the picnic at Pat Plumb's home at 910 Valley Road, Blue Bell, PA 1900s. The picnic begins at 5:30 and the meeting will begin at approximately 7:00. The principal business of the meeting will be the election of Officers and Board Members. All members in good standing are eligible to vote.

Preliminarily, the Board has proposed the following slate: President - Russ Bellavance, Vice President - MaryLou McFarland, Treasurer - John Simon, Secretary - vacant (no nominee)
For Members of the Board: Joan Duxbury, Marie Goldkamp, Peg Johnston, Dottie MacDermott, Emmy Simon, and Pat Plumb.

This proposed slate is preliminary only. If any member has an interest in serving as Secretary (which is a Board position) or as a Board Member, please let Russ Bellavance know as 215-643-5048 or rebellance67@gmail.com. If we receive any expression of interest in advance of the Meeting, the Board may propose a different final slate of nominees. The final proposed slate, and any other candidates who have expressed an interest in advance of the meeting, shall be considered to have been nominated and shall be on the ballot. We will also accept additional nominations from the floor. If there are contested positions, we will vote by paper ballots. If there are no contested positions, we will vote by acclamation.

Wish List

As work proceeds on plastering, painting, and updating the interior of the Schoolhouse (see page 3), the WVHS has a wish list of items and expertise that include:

A school wall clock -

Low shelves for elementary school books -

Drop clothes -

Children's school clothing of 1895 era - or patterns to make them -

Examples of local stones and minerals -

Mannequins

We have several antique typewriters that need some minor repairs. If you have knowledge/skill with typewriters, please let us know.

As members work around the schoolhouse several questions have come up. Above the chalk board on the first floor there are what looks like long curtain rods that match the length of the boards. They are close to the wall. Does anyone know what they were for? Or when they were installed and/or use?

There are stories of the basement being used for the school's cafeteria. Does anyone know if cooking was done there or did the children bring their lunches? There has also been mention of coal being stored in the basement. Was there a coal chute?

In the downstairs meeting room, there is a pump organ. Does anyone know how it works? We even have some sheet music to practice with.

And finally, there is a spare slide projector (remember them?) that is looking for a home. If you are interested, please give a call to 215-646-6541. All of our slides have been transferred to CDs - thanks to a Quester grant.

Frank and Marie Russo Memorial

With numerous generous donations in memory of Frank and Marie Russo, the WVHS board has decided to purchase a welcome/information sign for the front of the 1895 Schoolhouse, a versatile small vacuum cleaner, and an updated display featuring the tools from Frank's barber shop with stories of the Russo family. These items honor Frank and Marie's hard work and gracious hospitality.

Recent Donations

Antique ice skates - a wooden platform with laces and iron blades (see right). Thanks to Ginny Sinn for rescuing these skates. Were they used on the lake behind Dr. Mattison's Lindenwold castle? From neighbor Marlene Scatera - 2 wooden sleds with iron runners, a charming wooden child's rocking chair, metal forms for holding shoes while being made or repaired, a patched/tied quilt. From Buck Amey - an electric typewriter to add to our hands-on exhibit for children. Young visitors are drawn to the typewriter - a little like a computer keyboard but not.



Quester Grant Received The WVHS recently received a \$1000 grant from the Bayberry Quester group. Part will be used to frame a collection of antique bank notes that were donated by Phoebe Wetzel a number of years ago. They can now be used as part of an exhibit about historic money.

The remaining grant money will be used to frame one of our historic documents. Local framer No Bare Walls is doing the framing. At left, WVHS President Russ Bellavance accepts the grant check from Bayberry Quester representative Mary Shelly.

Thanks to Bayberry Quester group.

Notes on the 1895 Building

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, after a year plus of securing and updating the outside as well as updating indoor/outdoor electrical systems of the 1895 Schoolhouse (thanks to Whitpain Township who owns the building), work is now focusing on the inside of the building.

Joan Duxbury and Sally Zeller have been working with Whitpain Township employees on spackling and painting plans. Joan and Sally have spent numerous hours cleaning the basement where they have found many treasures and memories of members who have worked on the building in the past. Bill Missfeldt's file cabinet contains carefully labeled tools and gadgets. Bill was the building supervisor for a number of years. Some of the items will be donated to Habitat for Humanity's resale shop. We will keep a set of tools and store some equipment (saw horses, etc.) in the garage.

New member Elizabeth Bogel, who has extensive museum experience, has joined the team working on the plans and implementation of the museum reorganization. We are hoping to use the basement area for exhibits and storage - thanks to John Simon for dealing with the heating and humidity issue. There are a couple of items that need someone with carpentry skills.

Veterans Honored on Memorial Day

The Daniel W. Dowling American Legion Post #769 was formed in 1945 by 18 returning African American World War II veterans. Located on Maple Avenue in West Ambler, the Post was dedicated to Daniel W. Dowling, the first African American from the area to volunteer for Civil War service with the Union Army's 24th US Colored Troop Infantry Regiment.



Years later, Mr. Dowling's son Charles Dowling, would be the first African American in the area to be drafted for service in World War I. The Dowlings and nearly 100 other African American war veterans from Ambler, Penllyn, and neighboring towns are buried at the Rose Valley Cemetery. Every Memorial Day, the Post honors their service and all of American's fallen warriors with a traditional grave-site ceremony.

Check the Post #769 website for information about its annual Memorial Day observation. The post is open to all veterans and their families.

Memorial Day was first called Decoration Day when it was first marked in 1866 in the South of the United States. in 1868 it was celebrated in the the North. It did not mark the date of any battles, but honored those who had died while serving. The date was also chosen because it was a time when there was an optimum of flowers to place on grave sites. The holiday was formalized as Memorial Day after World War II.

The red poppy is often associated with Memorial Day based on the poem In Flanders Field by Lt. Col. John McCrae in which red poppies were noted in the cemetery near the WWI battlefield.



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