

# The 1895 Public School

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Photos courtesy of Alex Lowy Photography, LLC and WVHS

You've driven by it a thousand times: that kind of Moorish looking old building on at the corner of Skippack Pike and School Road. Maybe you've even noticed the 1895 sign on it and wondered what the story was. Well, for our first monthly column, we'd like to tell you the story.

This building, which is on the National Register for Historic Places, has a special place in the life of Whitpain Township. In the 1800s, Whitpain operated its own schools, and children from the 8 distinct villages of Whitpain attended one of four one-room schools. As the century went on, the town decided it needed something better. Why not consolidate the small schools into one big 2-story, 2 classroom school? A local contractor was hired to design and construct the building and it was dedicated in 1895, with grades 1 to 8 on the first floor and the high school upstairs. The cafeteria was in the basement, and the outhouses were out back. Teachers contributed to the \$3,698.54 cost of construction through a reduction of their "generous" monthly salary from \$45 to \$40.

The 1895 public school was used as a school through the 1940s. In the early 1950s, the local schools in Whitpain, Ambler and Lower Gwynedd were consolidated into the Wissahickon School District (WSD), and shortly thereafter the WSD stopped using the building. For a while, it was used for other public purposes including offices for Whitpain Township and as a branch of the Wissahickon Valley Public Library. But by the early 1980s no one was using it, the building was badly in need of repair, and its days were numbered.

What followed showed how public and nonprofit institutions can work together to benefit the community. The Wissahickon Valley Historical Society (WVHS) contacted the WSD and Whitpain Township and all three agreed to help save this important part of local history. The WSD conveyed the building to Whitpain Township, who leased it to the WVHS for \$1 a year. The WVHS moved its headquarters there, re-created the first floor as a late 19th century schoolroom, created a local history museum on the second floor and put both its money and its energy into repairing and preserving the structure.

In 2009, the WVHS was able to have the 1895 public school enrolled on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, we use the building for programs (which are free and open to all) and open it up to the public both regularly and on request. School groups from Blue Bell Elementary School visit as part of their study of local history. Please come see us some time. We are usually open from 10 to noon on Thursday mornings. Please also visit our website at [wvalleyhs.org](http://wvalleyhs.org) to learn more about the 1895 public school and for our program information.



*This is the first in a series of articles about local history brought to you by the WVHS. If there is a topic you would like to propose for a future article, please contact me at [rcbellavance67@gmail.com](mailto:rcbellavance67@gmail.com). If you enjoy these articles, you may want to consider membership in the Society. Please see our website at [wvalleyhs.org](http://wvalleyhs.org) for more information.*

