
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 1, Number 2



A Holiday Card from the WVHS Museum

The museum for the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society holds thousands of objects important to the history of our area. Among them sits a special treasure, the 1929 holiday card, pictured below.

The WVHS is working to preserve the one-room school on Morris Road, which today appears on the National Register of Historic Places. The WVHS owns the property and has furnished the interior as it would have appeared in the 1800s.

In the United States, the first Christmas cards were sent in the 1840s, but they were quite expensive. In the early 1900s, more cards were sent because printing and postal delivery improved. (Hallmark began in 1915, using offset printing, then a new process.)

The Franklinville School card from 1929 was certainly not mass-produced. The five-inch square card, printed on fine ivory-colored paper, shows the school (built in 1858) as it might have looked during a snowy day in the mid-19th century. The teacher, wearing an ankle-length blue dress, stands primly on the porch, greeting her students. One of them arrives on his sled, which is pulled by a red "one-horse open sleigh," driven by a man wearing a top hat.

This card was sent by the wealthy owners of the magnificent Normandy Farm, a couple who held nostalgia for our area's history and who recognized the importance of the Franklinville School. The inside of the card reads, "Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Beaver Strassburger of Normandy Farm [in] Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania, Extend The Season's Greetings, 1929."

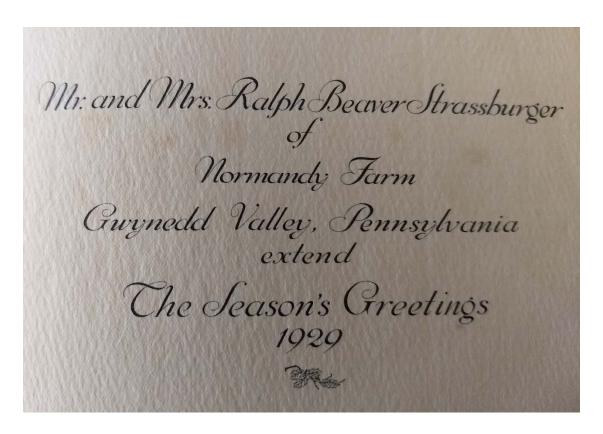
It was the Strassburgers' appreciation of old things that inspired them to cherish the Franklinville School.

A future article will summarize how the Strassburgers became so affluent and how they demonstrated their love for local history.

(Portions of this article appear in this month's *Blue Bell's Finest*, the social magazine for Blue Bell Country Club residents. Its publisher, Kevin Burke, is a WVHS member. The publication promotes WVHS with a monthly history article written by President Carol Kalos.)



A 1929 Holiday Card, showing the Franklinville School, now owned by WVHS.



The inside of the card, sent by the Strassburgers (probably around the world because Ralph Strassburger was a U.S. diplomat, and the couple owned estates in France).

Mark Your Calendar for these WVHS Activities in 2022:

December Holiday Open House cancelled due to COVID

January No meeting. Stay warm

February 7 Great topic! (This program is the first Monday of the month, not the

second. Please note the change-of-date to avoid conflict with

Valentines' Day.) Author Tamra Phillips will speak on The History of

Blue Bell's Grace Baptist Church on its 150th Anniversary. An

amazing story. Location to be determined. See the church photos

below.

March 14 Jenn Bilger, Executive Director of Wissahickon Trails

April 11 Speaker to be determined

April 24 Wine and Cheese Fundraiser on Sunday, 1-3 pm, depending on

COVID restrictions

May 9 WVHS elections and speaker to be determined

June Picnic—date and location to be determined

Also being planned:

Demonstration sponsored by Wissahickon Trails of the Evans-Mumbower
 Mill in April or May

Get-together at Bluestone Country Club

(Please note that the December Open House has been cancelled due to the pandemic restrictions.)

Next meeting is on Monday, February 7, at 7:00 PM, with location to be determined. A History of Whitpain Township's Grace Baptist Church, on its 150th year!



(Above) The majestic 1891 Baptist Temple on North Broad Street, once the largest Protestant church in the U.S. and now Temple University's Performing Arts Center.



The Grace Baptist Church moved in 1975 to its new location in Blue Bell.

WVHS Holiday Wish-List: We have faced challenges this year, but we feel successful, having answered hundreds of research questions and managed, safely, to hold two membership meetings and an Open House with its Special Exhibit about WWII. In addition, we have started repairs at the Franklinville School.

Now it's the end of the year, and time for tax-planning and gift-giving. WVHS has a "wish list," which includes a variety of items. Acknowledgement of your gift will appear in next month's *Valley Crier*. We appreciate your support! We are wishing for the following:

- A doormat for the Franklinville School to protect our perfect poplar hardwood floors, \$150
- Acrylic easels for use in our display cases, already showing off our collection at our local schools, libraries, and three municipal buildings, \$10 each or \$35 for a box full
- Archival boxes, acid-free, for safe storage of paper and fabric, \$50

- Any amount toward providing air conditioning at the 1895 School, estimated years ago at \$13,000, to protect our collection from the destruction created by heat and humidity
- No donation is too small. They add up, and all gifts are appreciated!

Contributions and your choice of gift should be sent to PO Box 96, Ambler 19002, or online scroll to "Donate" at the bottom of this webpage:

https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/

WVHS welcomes seven new members over the last month! Thanks to the efforts of several members and officers who staffed a table at the area's three community street fairs, WVHS has found more local history-lovers:

- Allen County Public Library, Allen County, IN
- Bruce and Cathy Bernard
- Thomas F. Boyle
- Peter Kress
- Sheila Phillips
- Dr. Kathleen Roeder
- Warminster Historical Society

New Roof on the Garage at 1895: WVHS uses the 1895 Public School as its museum and headquarters, but the building is leased from Whitpain Township, who continue to take care of major repairs. In December, the township's contractor will be replacing the roof of the garage on the back of the school (where the school district's first school bus was kept in 1916)! So if the weather cooperates with the roofers, please do not park near the school on Monday and Tuesday, December 6th and 7th to make space for their equipment.

Open House displays show off many of WWII artifacts. The captions on the photos below tell the story:



The WVHS 1895 Public School, ready for the Open House and WWII Special Exhibit

See more photos below....



Flags line the sidewalk to honor WWII veterans



A vintage car displayed at the WVHS Open House by Neal Bradley



A 1917 Dodge Touring Car, restored and owned by Neal Bradley

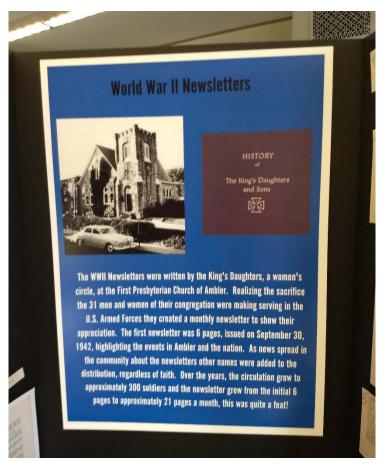


Above, a WWII uniform donated to WVHS by PVT James Detweiler



Bill Montelius and his wife, Joan, showed off twenty items from their private collection of WWII Coast Guard memorabilia. Bill appears here in his uniform, demonstrating some pipe (whistle) calls, used aboard ship.

See more photos below...





Above, a poster explaining the WWII Newsletters, published by an Ambler church, and under the poster, part of the Montelius Coast Guard collection

Volunteers log over 100 hours to prepare for WWII Exhibit: Suppose a museum is closed for almost two years, and suppose a special exhibit is being planned: How long would it take to prepare for the festivities? At the 1895 School, volunteers recorded 98 hours of their time to clean the building and the display cabinets, spruce up the permanent displays, and arrange the new items brought in by private collectors and other historical societies. Individuals worked in pairs and left notes for each other about what they had accomplished and what yet had to be done. They kept track of their hours to fulfill the requirements of any prospective grant requirements. Joan Duxbury and Sally Zeller instigated the project, preparing the first floor to highlight the King's Daughters' WWII Newsletters (https://www.wvalleyhs.org/the-kings-daughters-wwii**newsletters/**); Peg Johnston was above and beyond while Secretary Marie Goldkamp, President Carol Kalos, and Vice President Joe Langella also worked as part of the crew. On the day of the event, additional volunteers took turns as docents: Jeannie Bellavance, Marie and Tom Goldkamp, Ethel Hutchinson, Margie and Phil Koller (brand new members!), Dot and Don MacDermott, Chris Raines, and Frank Russo. Thank you for your help!

WVHS Volunteers Needed: Prior to the pandemic, a group of volunteers met on Thursdays to do chores at the 1895 School, and they created many friendships. If you have a little or a lot of time to assist the society, please let us know (info@WValleyHS.org). Volunteers learn about the community, the society, its collection, and they meet interesting neighbors. New volunteers will be trained. The following "jobs" are available:

- At the top of the list and most important is sending the monthly Valley Crier to the
 28 members who do not use email. Download the newsletter, make copies, stuff envelopes, stamp and mail. WVHS will reimburse your expenses.
- At the Library's "Municipal Collection," create a list of topics and prepare an index
- At the Photo collection, create a list of topics and prepare an index

- At the Library's "Children's Collection," prepare articles about the authors
- For an educator or artist--Use craft materials to create kids' activities and/or present children's programming
- Cleaning—take over larger projects, such as cleaning the blinds
- Accessioning—investigate each contribution, describe it, assign a collection number, send a thank-you note or deed of gift, and place the item in storage
- Textiles—refold them yearly and keep the closet organized
- Keep the items in storage closets (frames and documents) clean and organized
- Assist and/or be responsible for the display cases in four categories (4 or more people):
 - o at the Wissahickon schools (elementary, middle, and high school);
 - o at the Wissahickon libraries (monthly);
 - at the municipalities (change displays four times per year);
 - o at the 1895 School.

December 7, 80 years ago. "The day that will live in infamy." At last month's WVHS Open House, a special exhibit about World War II, an old-style voting booth was displayed on second floor, appropriate because November is a voting month. (The booth was used at the Center Square Fire Company.)

The booth also noted the importance of the national election in 1940. Its winners determined who would lead against the rise of Hitler in Europe. In 1940, Roosevelt was nominated for a third presidential term.

The president received some criticism for running again because there was an unwritten rule in American politics that no U.S. president should serve more than two terms. The custom dated to George Washington, who in 1796 declined to run for a third term.

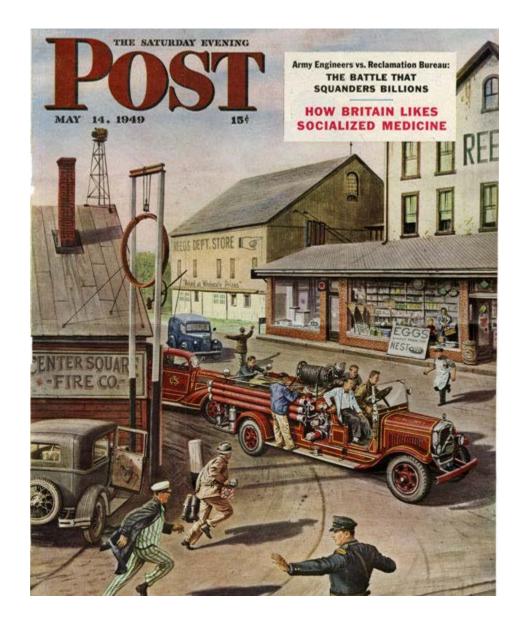
However, Roosevelt, running on the promise of keeping America neutral, believed it his duty to lead the country through the growing crisis in Europe. By a landslide, the president defeated Republican Wendell Wilkie, who had been nominated at

Philadelphia's Convention Hall. Then on December 7, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Public opinion changed to favor the war, and FDR's third term was dominated by America's involvement in World War II.

In 1951, the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution was passed. It states that a president can serve no more than two terms. Adapted from *History.com* (November, 2020)



An old-style voting booth used at the Center Square Fire Department when it was located at the corner of Dekalb and Skippack Pikes across from Reed's Store, a location made famous in 1949 by the Saturday Evening Post, shown below.



The Saturday Evening Post, 1949, showing the local fire department in action, across from Reed's Store. The WVHS voting booth came from this location.

Wartime Bride's Gown on Display at Open House: The society's November Open House, featuring a WWII Special Exhibit, included many items borrowed from private collections and other historical societies. Among these was a spectacular ivory satin bridal gown, borrowed from the Cheltenham Historical Commission and pictured below. Its curator's notes offer the history of the gown and reflects the sacrifices of citizens and

soldiers during the war: "The gown was worn by a bride who traveled from Wyncote [PA] to Wisconsin, arriving on Christmas Eve. She was married at an army camp on that day. Her soldier husband left the day after Christmas for overseas duty. The gown was never removed from the box until it was donated to The Richard Wall House [the Museum in Elkins Park, PA, managed by the Cheltenham Township Historical Commission] in the 1990s." A first-time guest at the 1895 School to visit the Open House was Tom Wiekowski, president of the Commission, who appreciated the WVHS displays.



PA License Plate Intrigues Visitors: Displayed at last month's Special Exhibit of WWII memorabilia was a 1942 license plate with an unusual little '43 plaque in the upper right corner. During the war, metal was especially precious, so instead of printing new plates each year, the little "sticker" was added to show that the license plate had

been renewed for another year. (We saw the same idea repeated on our PA registration stickers until 2016 when they were eliminated.)



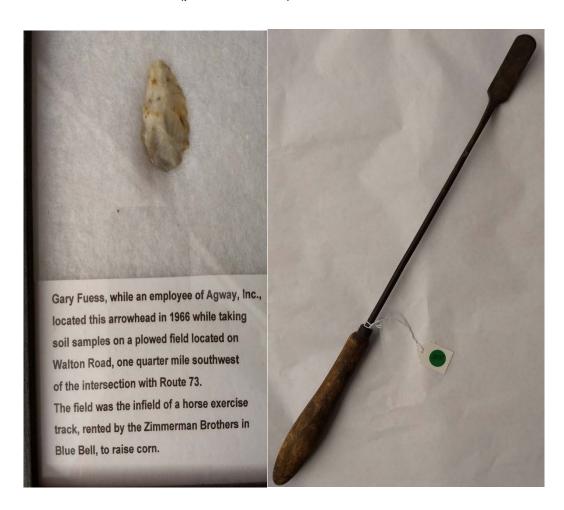
Wissahickon Trails Invites WVHS to Its Mill Open House: The leadership of Wissahickon Trails and WVHS met recently to compare notes and look for ways to assist one another. As a result, Jenn Bilger, Wissahickon Trails' Executive Director, has agreed to speak at the March 14 membership meeting. Also, WVHS members will receive an invitation to the Evans-Mumbower Mill for a special open-house demonstration of the mill in operation. This event will be scheduled for spring's warmer months.

New Items Enter the WVHS Collection:

Ambler High School Memorabilia—In addition to a complete set of the
yearbooks, mentioned in our prior issue, there are the following high school
items: Two newspapers (1930 and 31); the program from "Naughty Marietta"
(1930); commencement programs (1930); a yearbook containing the graduation
photo of Royal Mattison; and a literary magazine, "The Pennacle," from 1915.

And two additional items: An article from the *Ambler Gazette* (1901) about the "Church of the Beautiful Windows," describing Trinity Memorial Church, and a Whitpain High School Yearbook (1950)—all from Buck Amey

- A file rasp, a tool used by a farrier to file/adjust a horse's hoof (pictured below)—
 from Gary Fuess from his father's collection
- A native arrowhead, framed, including a description from Gary Fuess, telling how and where he found it (pictured below)



Please continue reading...

Highlights from the Board of Directors' Meeting in November:

- As a result of our volunteers answering individuals' questions, and the WVHS
 representation at this fall's three municipal street-festivals, eleven new members
 have joined the society.
- Many former members have not yet renewed their dues for 2021-2022, so another dues notice will be sent.
- After some investigation, the board has confirmed that the society's electronic records are backed up on discs.
- President Carol Kalos and Treasurer Tom Goldkamp have met with contractors regarding estimates for work to be done at the Franklinville School. They are obtaining bids for repairs to the doors, the front porch, and its roof. The porch floor is presently rotting (caused by a leaking roof), so it is unsafe for visitors. Funding for the work will be sought from private donors to supplement the \$30,000 grant from the Keystone Communities Program.
- The board plans to gather on a winter Saturday afternoon to discuss long-term planning.
- The image of a quill pen (a stock image of a feather pen with an ink "trail") was approved for use on the new masthead for *The Quill* with the first issue to be published in early 2022.



If you would like to discontinue receiving the WVHS Newsletter, please click on "Reply," and mention your request.