
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 4

The Valley Crier



The next WVHS Meeting is Monday, April 11, at 6:30 pm at the Wissahickon Valley Public Library at Blue Bell: Mark Ashton, lawyer and longtime WVHS member, will talk about the Golden Age of Piracy in the Americas and muse about how a class of people - noted mostly for rape, robbery, and other hanging offenses -- are still celebrated by the Pittsburgh and Tampa Bay sports franchises. The meeting will end promptly at 7:45 because the library closes at 8 pm. At the meeting, chairs will be placed for social distancing. Vaccinations are required and, following the new Montgomery County guidelines, masks are optional. However, at the request of our higher-risk members (and of individuals who are caring for someone who is at higher risk for COVID-19), **WVHS prefers our guests wear a mask.**



Tampa Bay Buccaneers Flag

Please help with Open House on Sunday, April 24, 1-3 pm: The 1895 Public School will be open for visitors on Sunday, April 24, from 1 until 3 in the afternoon. **We need many volunteers.** To greet visitors and to watch over the collection, we post two volunteers on each floor. **The job is easy: Simply say hello** to the guests as they enter the floor you are assigned. If many people volunteer, then each assignment will be for a short time. **Please contact WVHS:** info@WValleyHS.org or 215-646-6541, to help us plan for the event.

Grant Announced to Renovate the Front Porch of the Franklinville School: State Representative Liz Hanbidge has officially announced the \$30,000 grant from Pennsylvania's Keystone Communities Program, made possible by her office. WVHS appreciates her help to secure this funding! Details about the grant appear in her article: <https://patch.com/pennsylvania/ambler/wissahickon-valley-historical-society-receives-30k-state-grant>



The rotting floor on the front porch at the Franklinville School

Private donors also contributed to the project, which includes replacing the porch roof and rotting porch wood, and more donations are needed. Why does it cost so much just to fix a porch? The cost of building materials is quite high, and due to the state's grant requirements, WVHS is paying what is called the "prevailing wage." The next project at the Franklinville School will be to replace the one-room school's cedar-shingle roof.

News for History Researchers -- 1950 Census Data to be Released on April 1, 2022. From the **National Archives**: "Taken every 10 years since 1790, the United States census provides a snapshot of the nation's population. Because of a 72-year restriction on access to the records, the most recent census year currently available is [1940](#). On **April 1, 2022**, the 1950 Census will be released, and users will be able to access it for free through a dedicated website. A link to the website will be available starting on April 1. This population census is the 17th decennial [ten-year] census of the United States. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has digitized and will provide free online access to the 1950 Census population schedules for U.S. states and territories, enumeration district maps, and enumeration district descriptions." For details, please go to <https://www.archives.gov/research/census/1950>



Coming in the next issue of *The Quill*: Look for four articles. (1) The financial implications of historic preservation (Preservation pays!); (2) A spotlight on an Ambler

woman's 1900s dress -- With two side-articles: Washing clothes on the farm and The changing styles in 1900's corsets; (3) Owen Evans, one of the first Gwynedd leaders; and (4) The spectacular barn at Whitpain's Normandy Farm.



For sale: Owen Evans' 1710 Home with 15+ acres and outbuildings

Ambler Storytellers Need Your Presence to Save Historic Buildings: Some Ambler homeowners tell how they are approached regularly by developers, wanting to replace a lovely old building with modern construction. Ambler's Borough Council is considering an ordinance that would delay the demolition of historic buildings. Officials are debating about which buildings to include in the ordinance. A delay (possibly 90 days) would allow time for the owner to find another buyer for "adaptive reuse," thus hindering a demolition. However, several Ambler business owners have spoken against any such ordinance. (They incorrectly believe that preservation is unprofitable, but studies show

that preservation increases the value of a property and those around it.) There is presently nothing to stop a demolition! The big box building might be coming!

One way to persuade the officials to preserve the character of Ambler is to attend its Planning Commission meetings on the fourth Tuesday of each month, at 7 PM, at Borough Hall. A small group, representing WVHS, is there regularly, speaking at the end of each official meeting, emphasizing the importance of historic preservation. Please tell your friends and plan to fill every seat to show that residents support historic preservation. Your and your friends' attendance at these meetings shows the officials that the public cares about history and preserving Ambler's cultural heritage.

Ukraine Museums Struggle to Protect Their Collections: Museums in the Ukraine are fearful that the invading Russian troops will destroy remnants of the Ukrainian cultural heritage, especially their art and religious icons. The museums also preserve Russian masterpieces. On February 16, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that all collections are in danger. As museum directors began to pack their collections to move them to protected areas, they were slowed by employees leaving their jobs to fight or find safety. On March 15, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* explained how outdoor statues are being covered to protect them, and one museum has been surrounded with razor wire. Some paintings have been moved to underground bunkers while other artwork already lies under the rubble of bombed-out museums. The article points out that, under UNESCO rules, "deliberate destruction of a country's or culture's heritage is considered a war crime" (page A6).

In Appreciation: A thank-you goes out to member Neal Bradley who did two good deeds for WVHS recently. (Neal rents the garage space at the 1895 School, where he restores his antique cars.) For WVHS, one day he repaired an antique chair and, on another day, he reported that our furnace was leaking water.

Appreciation for Leak Repairs: Thank you also to Whitpain Township, who contacted Moyer Services to repair the furnace leak. Both worked quickly to stop the flood in the garage and followed up when a second leak appeared a few days later. Likewise, much appreciation goes to member and former board member Joan Duxbury, who cleaned the furnace room and the WVHS storage space after the flood. With Joan's help, WVHS has recycled some items, and the room is neat.



Remnants of the furnace-room leak

Ambler-made Glass at the March Library Exhibit: We see much green in March to mark Saint Patrick's Day, so WVHS is showing off part of its collection of Marsden Glass at the Wissahickon Valley Public Library in Ambler. (Most of the WVHS pieces are green, but we also have a few yellow and white pieces.) Manufactured at what is now Ambler Yards from 1924 until 1933, the kitchenware was popular in the Midwest.

The *Ambler Gazette* reports that train-cars full of glassware were sent there. Depression-era cooks appreciated the Marsden Glass. For instance, the glass was patented, like today's Corning Pyrex, to withstand changes in temperature. In addition, many of the containers had a lid, useful when wax paper, first available in 1927, was expensive. (Aluminum foil was available, starting in the 1940s.)



***Marsden Glasswork's kitchenware and memorabilia
on display at the Ambler Yards***

Two discoveries have added to the WVHS collection of Marsden dishes. First, the kiln's building blocks, which sparkle with the remains of molten green glass, were discovered underground during a driveway renovation near the old glass plant. Now the

blocks are on display in the Turret at the WVHS museum. Later, Marsden's machinery drawings were discovered, abandoned, in an Ambler bank vault! Now they are on file with WVHS. Part of the WVHS Marsden glass collection is on display in the lobby at the Ambler Yards.

Wissahickon Trails Created Much Discussion: Jenn Bilger was the March speaker for about 28 members and guests at the Blue Bell Public Library. It was a warm evening, so several guests stayed to talk to her in the parking lot after the library had closed. In her presentation, she summarized her group's mission, the importance of water conservation, and how residents can preserve their local environment. She pointed out that Wissahickon Trails uses paid staff and volunteers, and she recommended that the audience members read the extensive website for more details about her presentation: <https://wissahickontrails.org/>

She explained that the organization was founded to preserve the land near the creek and to avoid flooding. The creek affects over 200,000 because it starts, underground, at the Montgomery Mall and ends as it empties into the Schuylkill River. Relying mostly on grants, her group coordinates with PECO, the Lenape (the first stewards of the watershed), wastewater treatment plants, Philadelphia's Friends of the Wissahickon, and others. Finally, she noted how nature and the past are connected. She described several historic sites along the trail, highlighting how Camp Woods on Morris Road was a Revolutionary War army camp, known today as a source for the soldiers' artifacts and for its tall, old trees (uncut since the Revolution). She invited all members to hike the creek's 21-mile Green Ribbon Trail and to attend the upcoming special WVHS Open House to be held at the historic Evans-Mumbower Mill. All are welcome on Saturday, May 14, 1-4 PM. Visitors will see the giant water-wheel produce power to grind corn!



***The Crossways Preserve, on one of the
Green Ribbon Trail's "Hike Itineraries"***

WVHS Is looking for volunteers to attend municipal meetings: Each of our three municipalities discusses how it will preserve historic properties. If you would like to be a regular "reporter," attending your supervisors' meetings, please email WVHS:

info@WValleyHS.org

Do you have a story or recollection about local history? Please let us know, so it can be preserved and presented in *The Valley Crier* or *The Quill*:

info@WValleyHS.org

If you know of a speaker you think WVHS members would enjoy, please send us an email: info@WValleyHS.org

Be certain to share your email address with WVHS: It costs WVHS over \$200 a year to mail *The Valley Crier* and *The Quill*. In addition, because 28 members do not share their email address with WVHS, they are missing the last-minute reminders about WVHS programs!



America 250 News: To celebrate July 4, 2026, called the “Semiquincentennial,” the activities will begin in 2025. (Under “New Items for Our Collection,” printed below, the 1926 celebration, held in Philadelphia, was called the “Sesqui-Centennial.”) The national organization has announced the program’s goals: to reach new audiences, to promote inclusiveness, and to make the past meaningful. There is also a *Pennsylvania 250* organization, and here is its logo:



New Items for Our Collection: From Richard and Elie Wood, of South Salem, New York: A box of five wonderful books -- an early 20th-century Bible; an 1892 children's book; a 1925 genealogy book, *Early Friends of Upper Bucks County*; a book to promote the 1926 "Sesqui-Centennial," *Byways ... in ... Philadelphia*; and a 1911-2011 commemorative book from Temple Ambler's School of Horticulture for Women.



Broad and Walnut Streets, looking north to City Hall, in about 1925 (a photo from the book promoting the 1926 Sesqui-Centennial)

Welcome to Our New Member:

- Colette Obzejta

Highlights of the March Board of Directors' Meeting:

1. The 1895 Public School needs air conditioning and the Franklinville School needs a new roof. Funds must be found.
2. A missing 18th-century Milestone has been located at the Centre Square Fire Company, and WVHS will help the fire department with a public ceremony when the Milestone is re-positioned along Skippack Pike after the highway construction is completed.
3. Barry Johnson has volunteered to clean the blinds at the 1895 Public School.
4. If the pandemic cooperates, regular Thursday morning "volunteer work sessions" (11 AM – 1 PM) will resume in May.
5. Joan Duxbury and Sally Zeller have put caps on all the folding chairs to protect the 1895 Public School's original pine floors, a two-day project.
6. The Amchem Reunion Committee will include a private tour of the 1895 Public School in its October reunion activities.
7. A quote from WVHS Board Member Charlie Miller: "Once it's gone, it's gone forever!"

Mark Your Calendar:

- April 11 -- Mark Ashton, lawyer and longtime WVHS member, will present the Golden Age of Piracy in the Americas and muse about how former villains have become sports mascots. 6:30 PM at WVPL in Blue Bell.
- April 24 -- 1895 Public School Open House, Sunday, 1-3 PM. Originally scheduled as the Wine and Cheese Fundraiser to be held later.
- May 9 -- Election of WVHS officers and speaker Jeff Marshall, a

retired President of the Heritage Conservancy, who has worked for over 40 years in historic preservation and land conservation. He serves on the Board of the National Barn Alliance and was a founder and president of the Historic Barn and Farm Foundation of PA. He will present his recent publication, *Barnstorming in Eastern Pennsylvania & Beyond*, which will cover many examples of historic barns throughout our area. This meeting will be held at the Wissahickon Valley Public Library in Blue Bell, 6:30-7:45 PM.

- **May 14 (Saturday), 1-4 PM -- Special Open House for WVHS at the Evans-Mumbower Mill**, located at the junction of Swedesford and Township Line Roads in Upper Gwynedd. Wissahickon Trails has invited WVHS as guests to see the mill in operation!
- **June 13 (Monday), 6-8 PM -- WVHS Picnic**, a pot-luck dinner at the 1895 School. (Details will be available in the next *Valley Crier*.)
- To Be Announced -- A get-together for WVHS members at the Bluestone Country Club

We are an all-volunteer organization. Although receiving funds from occasional grants, WVHS depends on our generous donors. Please support us!

WVHS works to promote and preserve the history of Ambler Borough, Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township: www.WValleyHS.org.

If you would like to discontinue receiving *The Valley Crier* from WVHS, please choose “Reply” and mention your request.