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*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 5*

# The Valley Crier



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**May 2022**

There are two WVHS activities in May:

**On May 9 (Monday), 6:30-7:45 PM—WVHS Meeting and Speaker at the  
Wissahickon Valley Public Library in Blue Bell --**

- Election of WVHS Officers and Board of Directors for Society Year 2022-2023 (See below for details.)
- 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.

**On 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! For directions and to register, please go to

<https://wissahickontrails.org/events/mill-open-house>. For this date, WVHS are guests of the Wissahickon Trails. The public is also invited on this day (and the mention of the voluntary donation is directed to them).

At the meeting, chairs will be placed for social distancing. At the meeting, chairs will be placed for social distancing. For both of the May events, 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.**

**Also Mark Your Calendar:**

- **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

**WVHS Board Members Will Serve on Lower Gwynedd's Historic Commission:**

Board member Matt Metcalf and Vice President Joe Langella, both residents of Meetinghouse Road in Lower Gwynedd, have been asked to serve on their township's newly-formed historic commission. They were appointed by the township's Board of Supervisors. Earlier this year, the township passed a historic preservation ordinance as a first step in officially preserving historic properties in the township.

**Pignut Hickory Trees Planted:** The *Whitpain Wire* reported in March that "three pignut hickory trees were planted near the Wentz Run Nature Trail to replace the fallen state champion pignut hickory tree. The former state champion tree, which had been growing since the 1770's, was lost during a strong storm in June of 2020." (The details of the tree's history appeared in the *WVHS Newsletter* in June 2021.) "With good care, time, and little luck these new pignut hickory trees will be admired by future generations."



***Pignut Hickory Trees, recently planted  
at Whippain's Wentz Run Nature Trail  
to replace the 1700's PA champion tree***

**Election of Board of Directors at the May Meeting:** WVHS holds its Election in May of even-numbered years. A Society Year extends from September 1 until August 31, and board members serve for two Society Years. The WVHS Bylaws require that the slate of officers be listed in the meeting announcement (May newsletter). Volunteers are

- Carol Kalos, President
- Joe Langella, Vice President
- Marie Goldkamp, Secretary
- Tom Goldkamp, Treasurer

- Mary Lou McFarland, Board of Directors
- Matt Metcalf, Board of Directors
- Charles Miller, Board of Directors
- Frank Russo, Board of Directors

**Thank you for Helping with Open House Preparations:** WVHS truly appreciates the hours spent to host the April 24 Open House. Thank you to Joan Duxbury, Sally Zeller, Marie Goldkamp, Dotty MacDermott, and Joe Langella. And thanks also to those who volunteered to act as Docents for the event: Jean and Russ Bellavance, Marie and Tom Goldkamp, Ethel Hutchinson, Marty Kalos, Matt Metcalf, Frank Russo, and Jen Zwetolitz.

**Pirates:** In history classes, we learned about the Spanish explorers, about ocean trade, about South America's gold and silver going to the Far East to be exchanged for tea and ceramics, but we learned little about pirates. Member and attorney Mark Ashton filled us in on why: With no other possible job, pirates were the bottom of society, and their atrocities were not fit to describe to children (cut off your lips, fry them in front of you, and then make you eat them!). And pirate ships were crowded, sometimes holding up to 300 men (and some women) because the point was to overwhelm an enemy to steal food, cargo, and sailors. So why become a pirate? Just about any sailor took his turn on a pirate vessel because the pay was worth it—up to 100 times more than usual. And they did not get caught because ships could change flags easily, and the actions of pirates were secretly endorsed by royalty. Ashton used old maps to show where pirates hid to avoid the authorities and being “hanged and quartered.” In time, the policies changed, and the cargo changed; tobacco reigned, and by 1717 piracy was ending. A few pirates remained in Philadelphia in 1776 because it was a place where wealthy criminals could spend their money. Ashton concluded by pointing out that piracy provided our country with a knowledge of democracy. On board a ship, pirates voted on the ship's actions; only in combat situations did the captain act as an authority. Thus, democracy may be one of the legacies of those vicious pirates.

## A Norristown Newspaper Landmark, Recently Demolished, Had Local Ties



The *Philadelphia Business Journal* reports that “the 35,621-square-foot building at 410 Markley Street is no more, as Bennett Properties have purchased the building and had it torn down” (MONTCO.Today).

“The *Times Herald* building in Norristown [was] razed in spring 2022 to become the site for a \$50 million apartment building. Digital First Media, owner of *The Times Herald*, an iconic landmark in Norristown, Montgomery County, for more than 80 years at the location above, and the 12th oldest newspaper in the country, est. in 1799...,” according to the NiemanLab at Harvard. (MONTCO.Today, text and file photo)

The *Times Herald* was once owned by Ralph Strassburger, also the owner of Whippen Township’s colossal Normandy Farm. “In 1911, Strassburger married May Bourne, the daughter of Commodore Frederick G. Bourne, the president of the Singer Sewing Machine Company....The couple received four million dollars from May Bourne

Strassburger's parents as a wedding gift. It is believed that this money went to the purchase of Normandy Farms in 1913 and the *Norristown Herald* newspaper in 1921. Strassburger found his own way of making money. He was involved in the trend of newspaper consolidation. In 1922, just one year after he purchased the *Norristown Herald*, he purchased the *Norristown Times*. On January 1, 1923, he consolidated the two papers, thus forming the *Times Herald*" (quoted from *Normandy Farm & Its Barn*, by Maghan MacWilliams, written for the Conservancy of Montgomery County, 1996. Available at WVHS Archives).



***The former Times Herald building in Norristown***

**This Month's Library Exhibit, "Spring Planting—Field Crops and Kitchen Gardens":** The April display at the WVPL in Ambler features items from the WVHS collection regarding a favorite April tradition in this area, spring planting. The exhibit includes three gardening tools; a description of a farmer's preparation for planting; an explanation of the (superstitious) planting instructions provided by the *Farmers' Almanac*; books about the women's horticulture program at Temple University Ambler; and old photos about the Grange, a fraternal organization for farm families.

**Highlights from the Board of Directors' April Meeting**

1. President Carol Kalos was notified that Mary Ambler's headstone is missing.
2. WVHS spends about \$18 per day on absolute essentials, such as heat and electricity.
3. The Board is discussing fund-raising for next year, and new ideas are needed.

**Proposed Dates for the next Society Year, 2022-2023:**

- Sep 12            Speaker Matthew Kalos, Battle of Paoli
- Oct 17
- Nov 14
- Dec 12            Holiday Party
- Jan                No Meeting
- Feb 13            Show and Tell?
- Mar 13
- Apr 10
- May 8
- Jun 12            Picnic

***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](http://www.WValleyHS.org).***

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