

# Franklinville School's Connection to Normandy Farm

part two

around town

By St. Andrews Resident Writer Carol Kalos

Today Normandy Farm, once the Strassburger's farmstead (house, barn, and outbuildings) and the nearby one-room Franklinville School, both appear on the National Register of Historic Places.

The last issue of *Blue Bell's Finest* described why people built the Franklinville School in 1858 and how the owners of Normandy Farm sustained it until the late 1950s. Then it was left to deteriorate.

However, in 1983, the Historical Society of Whitpain (now merged with the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society, serving Ambler Borough, Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township) began working on the school. When Peter, the owners' son, died in 1993, they sold the farm's remaining acres, but the 36-acre farmstead was set aside for historic preservation. Later, the society purchased the school from a land developer -- for one dollar.

In 2000, Hansen Properties acquired the property, the Normandy Farm Hotel and Conference Center. Whitpain Township describes the renovations at Normandy Farm as "an impressive...adaptive reuse." Today, the Franklinville School sits near the



Located adjacent to BBCC on Morris Road and DeKalb Pike, the farm has a long and rich association with thoroughbred racehorses, reflected by the statue of its famous sire, "Fair Play."



The large residence built by John Heist (1782-1854) and Catherine Levering (1789-1872) was named Franklin House or Franklinville, and they operated it as a tavern on the newly constructed road between Norristown and Doylestown.

Conference Center and shares its white-rail fence with the homes at Windemere. The school still mirrors the white stucco and red trim that the Strassburger's chose for their farmstead's historic house and structures.

Recently, the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society has been raising funds for necessary renovations at the Franklinville School. WVHS plans to use the school as a gathering place for student and community groups. (Meetings there will be short. The original building had a well, so the building has no running water and thus no restroom.) We furnished the school's interior as a one-room classroom, available for groups to learn more about Whitpain Township's history and 19th-century education. Additional photos and information about the Franklinville School are available at the WVHS website, [WValleyHS.org](http://WValleyHS.org).

The historical society still needs to replace the roof and the porches, add HVAC, and then paint, inside and out. Thousands of dollars are required, so donations are appreciated!

*To find out more and help save this local treasure, please visit the society's website: [WValleyHS.org](http://WValleyHS.org). Carol Kalos, Saint Andrews, serves as the interim president of WVHS.*

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