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*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 9*

## *The Valley Crier*



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### **September's Meeting--The American Revolution's Battle of Paoli:**

*The battle cry among the colonial troops for six years from the date of the battle and throughout the American Revolution was "Remember Paoli!"*

*What happened at the Battle of Paoli (September 20, 1777) to create such emotion? Although it is called one of the bloodiest battles of the American Revolution, it was not a traditional battle. No opposing troops lined up to shoot muskets at one another. Instead, an elite group of British and Hessian soldiers attacked at night, by surprise, against an encampment of Pennsylvania regiments and Continental troops. The Crown's troops, using only bayonets, slashed 53 Patriots to death and wounded hundreds more. In short, they violated the "rules" of war. The Paoli Battlefield is special to archaeologists because it is one of the last remaining American Revolution sites not to be developed.*

**First speaker of the new Society Year: Monday, September 12, at 6:30**

**PM promptly at the Wissahickon Valley Public Library, Blue Bell (650 W Skippack Pike).** Matthew Kalos, PhD, whose specialty is American

**Revolution archaeology, will speak on the Battle of Paoli.** (Yes, he is the son of WVHS President Carol Kalos and Marty Kalos.)



*A Monument at the Paoli Battlefield marks the mass grave of 53 Patriots.*

**Save the Date! Saturday, Oct. 15, at Noon, at the William Penn Inn--A Luncheon to Honor WVHS Past President Russ Bellavance.** All are welcome! Please make reservations by replying to your invitation, which was recently emailed to you.



*The William Penn Inn, founded in 1714, is the oldest continuously-operated inn in Pennsylvania.*

**Please Join Us to Celebrate Our Area's Colonial History! On Wednesday, September 14 at NOON, WVHS and the Centre Square Fire Company will hold a brief ceremony at the historic roadside Milestone in front of the fire station on Skippack Pike. (The rain date is September 21.)** Then visit the fire house for light refreshments. The 1760s marker was moved by the fire company during the recent road repairs. It was not an easy feat! Hear about the history of the area's Milestones and this Milestone's adventure as it was lifted, stored, and then returned to its original location (but with a slight twist)!



***The 1760s Milestone, safeguarded by Centre Square Firefighters.***



**The Beginning of the Centre Square Fire Company:** The volunteer fire company began in 1913 when a group of Whitpain residents met at the Centre Square Hotel (most recently Reed's Country Store). They called for a town meeting at Odd Fellows Hall (now torn down), where 35 volunteers offered their services to fight fires, and a charter was created to maintain the fire department "perpetually." The township began financial assistance to the volunteers in 1958, and the company built new facilities in 2016.



*The fire department still cares for the 1919 REO fire truck, shown here at the former fire station.*

**Docents are Needed for the Sunday, Oct 16, Open House (1-3 PM):**

You need no special training for this day, just be a friendly face for our visitors. For details or to volunteer, please email to [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org). With enough volunteers, you will have a one-hour shift with another docent. The special exhibit will be the WVHS Amchem collection.

**Amchem, A Brief History:** The employees of Amchem will hold a reunion on Saturday, October 15, when they will visit an Amchem exhibit at the 1895 Public School. WVHS has a great collection of Amchem memorabilia, and all of it will be proudly displayed for this special weekend. The company has an interesting story.



It began as the American Chemical Paint Company in Philadelphia in 1914. Its founder was James Harvey Gravell, who helped to develop a chemical that prevents rust on metal. His company became successful because he sold that product to Henry Ford for his Model T's. Gravell moved to Ambler in 1923, purchasing the Marsden Glass Company. The name became Amchem in 1958 when the company began to make agricultural chemicals; then the company purchased other companies. Its successor, BASF, stayed in Ambler until 2015 when the site became Ambler Yards, a property presently used as offices and commercial space available for rent.

## **Will SEPTA demolish part of the historic Ambler Train Station?**

SEPTA states that the Freight House is beyond repair due to what started as water damage under the building. As mitigation, SEPTA has agreed to publish a booklet for WVHS on the history of the train station, and SEPTA has already sent to WVHS much of its history research for the WVHS archives. Presently, Bernadette Dougherty, a WVHS member, is trying to find a way to move the Freight House to a location where it can be preserved. Dougherty has been a resident of Ambler Borough for 47 years, and she had the three Ambler Train Station Buildings added to the Inventory of Historic Places back in 1977. When a practical plan for preserving the Freight House is determined, she says she is counting on everyone's financial support.



***The 1875 Freight House with sagging floors due to water damage.***

**Ambler Storytellers Continue to Push for Historic Preservation:** The group's efforts made the front page of the *Ambler Gazette*, raising awareness in Ambler about the need for historic preservation policies, and now, despite a set-back, the Ambler Storytellers are working on two projects. First, its members are preparing a walking tour of Ambler, which will feature 18 historic properties and end at Tannery Run Brew Works for a free beverage. Also, the group is investigating having the Ambler Downtown Commercial District placed on the National Register of Historic Places, based on Ambler's 2019 Open Space Plan. The designation would make funding available for property owners, but create no restrictions on how they update their properties.

**Quotes from Members of the Ambler Borough Council:** At its regular June meeting, the council members voted on a motion which ended discussion of the Ambler Planning Commission's "demolition ordinance." It would have delayed all demolitions for 90 days to allow time to plan for a threatened property's "adaptive reuse." Sadly, comments from some of the Council members included the idea that an ordinance to preserve historic properties is unnecessary: "Demolitions like ... [taking down historic buildings] don't happen in Ambler." "We rather prefer discussions than the ordinance."

**Work Begins on Franklinville School:** On August 16, the school received a new, shiny, red porch roof, trimmed with brilliant copper flashing. The roofers report finding no major wood damage as they removed the old roofing material. There is still carpentry work to be done, especially on the porch floor, to make the area safe. As that job progresses, thanks to the WVHS request in last month's *Valley Crier*, member Russ Hunter kindly volunteered to do some primer painting. Although a Keystone Communities Program grant covers much of the cost for this work, WVHS is obligated to pay for additional expenses. Please consider donating to make the Franklinville School usable again.



***The setting sun gleams off the copper flashing on the Franklinville School's new red porch roof, August 2022.***



## **The U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission may help Pennsylvania:**

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reports on July 30th (“America’s 250<sup>th</sup>”) that “Philadelphia gained massive infrastructure projects in each of the last three national 50-year celebrations of the American Revolution: Fairmount Park was developed in part for the 1876 Centennial, the South Philadelphia stadium district for the 1926 Sesquicentennial, and Independence Mall in advance of the 1976 Bicentennial.”



## ***America250Pennsylvania* -- Programs, Projects and Events Include A Variety of Initiatives:**

- Challenging college students to create marketing campaigns,
- Partnering with the National Liberty Museum to implement civics education,
- Installing bronze bells at historically significant locations,
- Commissioning PA artists to design replica fiberglass Liberty Bells for each county,
- Partnering with the Freemasons to plant a Liberty Tree in each county,
- Participating in “PA Day”—July 20<sup>th</sup>, a day to volunteer,

- Placing American flags on PA Veterans' gravesites,
- Spotlighting service members on social media,
- Encouraging healthier exercise habits, and
- Telling the stories that made Pennsylvania.

**An Example of “Adaptive Reuse”:** *AroundAmbler.com* states, “25+ years ago, Ambler was a blighted community with multiple abandoned industrial facilities. Ambler was in economic decline and was suffering from the relics of its industrial past.” However, today the former Keasbey & Mattison Asbestos Plant is entering a second phase of redevelopment to become a 114-unit apartment community.

The K&M company moved to Ambler in 1881 to be close to the railroad. Making insulation and shingles, it became the world's dominant producer of asbestos! With its many employees, Ambler became a “company town” with the business building the town's library, water system, electric company, an opera house, and many of its houses. The company was sold in 1934 in part due to the Great Depression.



***Apartments at the former 1920s Keasbey & Mattison Asbestos Plant.***

**Volunteers Needed for Fall Festivals:** WVHS (with its new canopy!) will be represented at a table at our **three community fall events. Volunteers are requested for one-hour shifts.** (Note that WVHS usually breaks down its table at about 4 PM.) No training needed. Just greet the passersby. To help with a fall event, please email to [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)

- *Lower Gwynedd Fall Festival*, Saturday, Sept 17, 11AM-5PM, at the Wissahickon High School
- *Whitpain Community Festival*, Saturday, Sept 24, 12-8:30PM, at Montgomery County Community College
- *Ambler Oktoberfest*, Saturday October 8 on Butler Pike, 11AM-8PM

**History Affects the Blue Bell Library:** Until 1994, the library building was a roller-skating rink. Currently, WVHS has an exhibit of children's toys at the library (WVPL, Blue Bell). The theme is "School's Out; Let's Play." Among the toys is a pair of roller skates worn in the 1950s by a local resident who skated at the rink. When one librarian read about the skates, she said that she thinks the library is sinking. Her evidence: Across the children's reading area, one can feel the edge of the rink under the carpet!



***The Wissahickon Valley Public Library, Blue Bell,  
once located at the 1895 Public School.***

**Skippack Historical Society, Encampment, Oct. 1-2:** See “Washington’s Encampment at Skippack” where Continental Troops will drill, fire muskets, and tell how, in 1777, General George Washington and 10,000 troops were camped in Skippack for four days before the Battle of Germantown. Crafters, demonstrations, a colonial school room, and activities for all ages. Saturday, October 1, 10 AM – 5 PM *and* Sunday, October 2, 11 AM – 4 PM

**As WVHS begins a new Society Year, we are thankful to our donors.**

In 2021-22, 42 donors contributed over \$5200.

- to defray our everyday expenses,
- to save the Franklinville School, and
- for other projects now underway.

We appreciate *all* donations. Your generosity has made an impact! Please consider making a donation along with your annual dues.

**WVHS Museum, Library, and Archives are open by appointment:**

Please send your request to [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)

**Additional News from the Board of Directors’ August Meeting:**

1. The Board is investigating the purchase of insurance to cover the contents of the 1895 Public School.



2. WVHS was invited to have a table at the last Open House at the historic Evans-Mumbower Mill.
3. Regular Thursday “Volunteer Work Sessions” will resume in October.
4. The Board was invited by the Lower Gwynedd Historical Committee to visit its historic Claytor-Ingersoll House (sometimes mistakenly called Clayton-Ingersoll), unoccupied for about forty years! They are considering how the property might be used.



***The historic Claytor-Ingersoll House—once known as Spring House Farm, owned by Lower Gwynedd Township and unoccupied for about forty years.***

**Save these Dates -- for WVHS Activities in Society Year 2022-2023:**

- **Sep 12** (Monday at **6:30 PM**) Speaker Matthew Kalos, PhD, Anthropology Professor at Brookdale Community College: on archaeology and the Battle of Paoli. (At Blue Bell Library)
- **Sept 14** (Wednesday at Noon) A community event at the Centre Square Fire Company, to mark their preservation of the historic MILESTONE along Skippack Pike. Rain Date is Wednesday, September 21.
- **Oct 15** (Saturday) Noon at William Penn Inn. Luncheon to honor WVHS Past President Russ Bellavance (Reservations Required). An invitation has been emailed.
- Oct 16 (Sunday 1-3 PM) Open House at the 1895 Public School, featuring a special Amchem exhibit (Please note this date.)
- Oct 17 (Monday at 6:30 PM) Tom Wiekowski, PhD, Chair of the Cheltenham Historical Commission and Vice-President of the Old York Road Historical Society: on his new book about three generations of the Barkers, influential 19-century bankers
- Nov 14 (Monday at 6:30 PM) Jeff Marshall, retired President of the Heritage Conservancy and President of the Historic Barn and Farm Foundation of PA: on his book, *Barnstorming in Eastern Pennsylvania & Beyond*
- Dec 12 Holiday Party
- Jan No Meeting
- Feb 13 Show and Tell?

- Mar 13 Steve Tull, Vice President of AECOM: on Archaeology in Center City Philadelphia
- Apr 10 TBD
- May 8 TBD
- Jun 12 Picnic

*WVHS works to promote and preserve the history of Ambler Borough,  
Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township*

*We are a member-driven, all-volunteer organization. Although receiving funds  
from occasional grants, WVHS depends on our generous donors.*

*No amount is too small. Please support us!*

*<https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/>*

*Many people like to include a gift to charity in their will or estate plan to support  
causes that are important in their life. Please consider including a gift to WVHS to  
benefit the promotion and preservation of our local history for future generations.*

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