
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 11

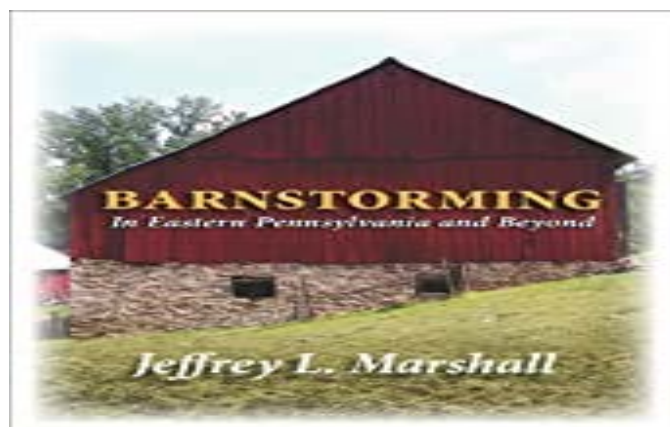
The Valley Crier



Please join or renew for 2022-2023: A dues notice was emailed at the beginning of the Society Year, September 1. Member dues are an essential source of WVHS income (80%!), and additional contributions are welcome. If you overlooked the dues notification, it is not too late! Checks made out to "WVHS" can be mailed to WVHS, Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002; or to use a credit card, go to <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/>

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**Speaker on Monday, November 14, 7 PM at the 1895 School:** Jeff Marshall will speak about Pennsylvania barns, the topic of his latest book, which he will offer for sale. He is the retired president of the Heritage Conservancy and President of the Historic Barn and Farm Foundation of Pennsylvania.



**WVHS Holiday Party will be held on Monday, December 12, at 7 PM** at the 1895 School. The event is POTLUCK-- appetizers and desserts. Members are asked to bring a dessert or small pick-up foods. More details will appear in the December *Valley Crier*.



***The Quill:*** *The Quill*, with local ghost stories, was emailed several days ago. We hope you are learning much and having fun with your reading. The next issue is planned for February.



***A Halloween Headless Hessian, haunting Camp Woods***

**Russ Bellavance Honored at WVHS Luncheon:** In October, Russ's guests and our society's members enjoyed a Saturday lunch at the William Penn Inn as they heralded Russ for his decades of work for WVHS. In addition, today he is quite active in his church, taking on many responsibilities. President Carol Kalos acted as emcee and spoke on the intertwined histories of Russ's involvement in WVHS and the history of the society, based on the society's minutes. Vice President Joe Langella described the rich history of the William Penn Inn, and Past President Frank Russo offered his personal insights about his own fifty-year involvement with WVHS and about Russ and the society. Russ closed the event with words of thanks and a generous contribution. Many individuals also contributed to honor Russ, and business sponsors for the day were Star Painting, Minuteman Press, Ambler Savings Bank, Russell Roofing, *Stroll Blue Bell* by N2 Publications (Kevin Burke), and Lei Barry of Keller Williams Real Estate. Proceeds from the event will be added to the fund to install air conditioning at the 1895 School. Contributions to recognize Russ (and to add to the air conditioning fund) are still being accepted.



***Past Presidents Frank Russo and Russ Bellavance at the WVHS Luncheon to honor Russ, October 2022, at the William Penn Inn***



**October Open House:** A special thank you to the docents who welcomed our guests at the 1895 School: Russ Bellavance, Joan Duxbury, Marie and Tom Goldkamp, Ethel Hutchinson, Marty Kalos, Joe Langella, Dorothy and Don MacDermott, Frank Russo, and Sally Zeller. About 40 people stopped by to see Neal Bradley's antique car, the antique fire engine (driven from the Centre Square Fire House by Neal), and the Amchem exhibit, carefully put together by Joan Duxbury, Sally Zeller, and Gary Fuess. The WVHS has an outstanding collection of Amchem memorabilia, including everything from patents, photographs, and employee pins to an entire collection of the employee *Amchem News*, which is available and searchable on the WVHS website.



***Treasurer Tom Goldkamp and Past President Russ Bellavance at the October Open House***

A highlight of the exhibit was the showing of five Amchem films, once large, professional 16mm movies. They were recently cleaned, restored, and transferred onto thumb drives for ease of use by Gary Fuess and Joan Duxbury. The "old" films have been preserved but are much easier to show in their "new" format. The 1920's films reveal a variety of Amchem departments and employees at the original plant in Philadelphia and at the Ambler location. The films appear as "home black-and-white movies" from that era. They also show color images of Amchem and its lines of business through the 1960s. The films are incredibly interesting.



***Centre Square Fire Company's fire truck, driven to the 1895 School by WVHS member Neal Bradley***



**The October WVHS Amchem Exhibit and the Amchem Employees' Reunion (by Joan Duxbury):** The WVHS Open House coincided with the 12th Amchem Employee Reunion, called "Going Back Home." It was held on October 15th at The Lunch Box on the Ambler Yards, the former location of the Amchem Ambler Campus. The attendees mingled in the Lobby and viewed the *History of Ambler Yards*, a wall display, while others watched the first of the Amchem movies. It was especially important to Gary Fuess and Joan Duxbury that Frank Scardino, Jr., a former Amchem employee when he was a teenager, was able to watch the first of the Amchem movies and see his father.



***Taken at the 1895 School's Open House, this photo captures a moment in the restored 1920's film about Amchem. Note the worker's "bobbed" hair. The blouse on mannequin is Victorian with pearl buttons.***

Frank Scardino, Sr. was the first employee hired by Harvey Gravell, the founder! Amazingly, his son was able to name other people in the movie, so Joan and her helpers will be having a special screening at the WVHS to obtain more names and any possible information regarding the movies. Then the movies will be uploaded to the WVHS website for everyone's enjoyment. Anyone interested in attending the special screening of the movies at the WVHS, please email [Joan.Duxbury@comcast.net](mailto:Joan.Duxbury@comcast.net). No date or time has been established yet.

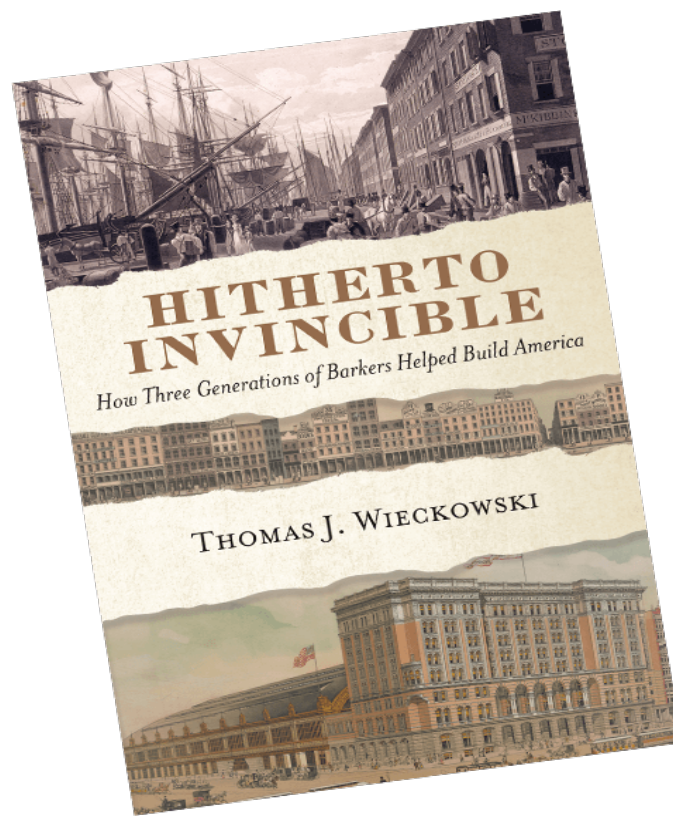
The attendees strolled through the Ambler Yards campus, reminiscing of their time at Amchem and how the site has been customized to meet a variety of new office needs. A special "thank you" to Matt Sigel and Marc Policarpo, Principals at Ambler Yards, for allowing the reunion to take place where it all started in 1924 at the Ambler location (1914 in Philadelphia). Employees remembered the space, now the Lunch Box, where the Amchem Data Sheets were originally stored and controlled by Max Zebich, and there they enjoyed a fresh, delicious Italian buffet, served by its helpful, professional staff. *Good food, good company, and a lot of laughs!*

**October's Speaker Presents Amazing History:** The meeting was our first at the 1895 School since the beginning of the pandemic. Dr. Tom Wieckowski is Chair of the Cheltenham Township Historical Commission and Vice-President of the Old York Road Historical Society. Having graduated from Villanova and Catholic University, he is a retired professor and associate dean from Drexel University. He currently devotes his time to historical research and writing, and he is the author of three local history books. He discussed his latest book, *Hitherto Invincible*, the story of three



generations of the Barker family, influential 19<sup>th</sup>-century Philadelphia bankers. Among the spectacular things he discussed:

- Jacob Barker was wealthy, but a driven worker; his family met Jefferson and Hamilton.
- Abraham Barker, his son, made \$50,000 before he was 21, the equivalent of millions today.
- Wharton Barker, Abraham's son, a Penn trustee, built the Reading Terminal, but lost his wealth due to fraud.
- When Alexander Graham Bell demonstrated the telephone for Barker, onlookers said it had "no practical value."
- Cheltenham Hills (Cheltenham Township), with its country estates, contained the wealthiest square mile in the nation.



**Historic Walking Tours Help Ambler Preservation:** For three Saturdays in October, the Ambler Storytellers, a WVHS committee, led groups of about ten from the Ambler train station down Butler Avenue and back, pointing out historical sites along the way. Showing off about 20 special sites (There are many!), the tour guides emphasized what the structures looked like originally and how they have been adapted for reuse. The purpose of the tours is to raise appreciation for the history of Ambler and to gain public support for preservation efforts. New tours are being planned for the spring season. If you would like to be included in the preparations or to be a tour guide, please contact WVHS: [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org). Special thanks to the WVHS members and tour organizers: Mary Spross, Michael Frost, and Zbigniew (Zibi) Bieniaszewski!

***Ambler Storyteller Mary Spross compares today's Ambler Theater to a photo of its appearance before restoration***

**Free Access to Online Genealogy Records:** Did you know that [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) is available free of charge at the Wissahickon Valley Public Library (Ambler and Blue Bell)? The “Ancestry Library Edition” is available for use *at the library*. (A WVHS member suggested that if researchers cannot print a screen, they can simply take a picture of the screen with their phone’s camera.)



**Saturday Evening Post:** Is there a third local site? WVHS knows about the cover showing the Centre Square Fire Company (May 14, 1949) and the cover showing the Gwynedd Valley Station (Oct 7, 1961). But rumor says that *there is a third cover from our area?* Please let us know:

[info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)





**“Nick Nack Shoppe” 1950’s photo wanted:** A former resident of 997 Skippack Pike is looking for a photo of the house *with its front porch*. Starting around 1949, her grandmother used to sell toys, candy, and ice cream from her window-enclosed porch, called the “Nick Nack Shoppe.” (She calls its Nick Nack, but it may have been Knick Knack?) It had a lighted sign along the street, supplied by the Breyers Ice Cream Company. In the 1980s, the property became the Dwyer real estate firm. When the porch was removed is not known. Please contact WVHS if you have information: [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)



***The house, built in 1872, missing its front porch***

**Thank you to Russ Hunt:** Volunteers are essential to WVHS! At the request of our contractor, Russ painted a primer coat on the many boards that will become part of the Franklinville School’s front porch. It was a slow process because neatness was required (no drips on the sides), and Russ spent several afternoons at his task. Kudos for his work!



***Russ Hunt, painting boards for the front porch at Franklinville School***



***A pile of boards, waiting to be painted***



**History Society Trivia:** The American Association for State and Local History reports that there are 21,000 historical organizations in the U.S.



**November is National American Heritage Month:** On August 3, 1990, in a bill honoring America's tribal people, President George H. W. Bush declared the month of November as National American Indian Heritage Month, later commonly referred to as Native American Heritage Month. The bill called upon “Federal, State, and Local Governments, groups, and organizations and the people of the United States to observe the month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.”



**WVHS Exhibit at the Library:** “Back-to-School” was the theme for a display in October at the Wissahickon Public Library in Ambler. It included ink bottles, pencil boxes, and the like, plus a history of textbooks, and it



featured the covers of some textbooks from the WVHS Library, as well as sample pages of their lessons. (Only copies of the books' covers and pages were displayed to prevent the rare books from fading.)



**The “Back-to-School” display at Ambler Library, showing WVHS’ old textbooks and school supplies**

**Volunteer Photographer Requested:** A volunteer is needed to take interior photographs of Reeds Country Store.



***Site of the American Revolution's Waggon Inn  
(Yes, that's the correct spelling.)***

**Ambler Volunteer Needed:** WVHS has a display case at the Ambler Borough Hall, and the society needs someone to create and change the exhibit every three months.

**A Thank-you:** To former Treasurer John Simon, for renewing and funding the WVHS domain name from its beginning years! Treasurer Tom Goldkamp will take over the responsibility.

## **WVHS Museum, Library, and Archives are Open by Appointment:**

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

## **Welcome New Members!**

- Tomas Byrne
- Thomas Rivel
- Carolyn Trupp
- Jennifer Lundberg
- Kelli Scarlett

## **From the October Board of Directors' Meeting:**

1. There is still no news about SEPTA's proposed demolition of the Ambler Train Station's Freight House.
2. WVHS may return to the Blue Bell Library for its monthly Speakers' Series, depending on the seriousness of the COVID pandemic. Meeting locations are listed each month in the *Valley Crier*.
3. The Board rejected investigating the ownership of a historic, decorative silo roof (called a Witch's Cap), located in Chester County and measuring over 14 feet wide. Although a good example of old agricultural architecture, the item would present issues, such as how to transport it and the expense of maintaining its cedar-shingle roof for decades to come.
4. Vice President Joe Langella will learn the accessioning process, but more volunteers are needed.



5. The history department at Montgomery County Community College is bringing several of its students to the 1895 School for a WVHS Orientation. Interested students will return to be trained and to work as volunteers at the museum.
6. Vice President Joe Langella spoke to the Women's Club of Whitpain at their October meeting on the topic of old gravestones, and the group kindly donated \$100 to WVHS.

### **Mark Your Calendar for WVHS 2022-2023 Events:**

- Nov 14, 7 PM, 1895 School—Speaker Jeff Marshall on PA Barns
- Dec 12, 7 PM, Holiday Party (potluck) at 1895 School
- January No meeting
- Feb 13 “Show and Tell”
- Mar 13 Steve Tull, on “Archeology in Center City Philadelphia.” Steve is Vice President of AECOM
- Apr 10 TBD
- May 8 Josh Kasper on “Privateering.” Josh is Assistant Executive Director of the American War of Independence (AWI) Privateer Museum, Schooner Pursuit Historical Society
- Jun 12 WVHS Picnic
- June TBD—A Patrons’ Event

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

*We are a member-driven, all-volunteer, non-profit organization. Although receiving funds from occasional grants, WVHS depends on our generous donors. No amount is too small.*

*Please support us!*

*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 choose “Reply” and mention your request.**