
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 11

The Valley Crier



*****Holiday Party at the 1895 School! Please Respond:*****

- For WVHS members and a significant other
- Monday, December 12
- 6:30 PM (Note the start time)
- POTLUCK, so please bring pick-up foods (appetizers) or desserts
- Bring items ready to serve (for example, on a platter)
- Bring the serving utensils you will need
- RSVP to info@WValleyHS.org to let us know you are coming
- WVHS will supply beverages and paper goods. BYOB
- Available to set-up or clean-up? Let us know: info@WValleyHS.org
- If you have not paid your 2022-2023 WVHS dues, please pay at the meeting (\$20 per individual or \$30 per couple/family).



Work Continues at the Franklinville School: Russell Roofing has completed a new roof for the front porch, and they sent us the photo below. Then workers from the Irwin H. English Co. repaired the doors, removed a broken chemical toilet, and replaced the porch floor and some other disintegrating rafters. Unexpectedly, employees from both companies said they found little rotted wood. Future projects will be to provide a new cedar-shingle roof and HVAC, needed to preserve the interior plaster.



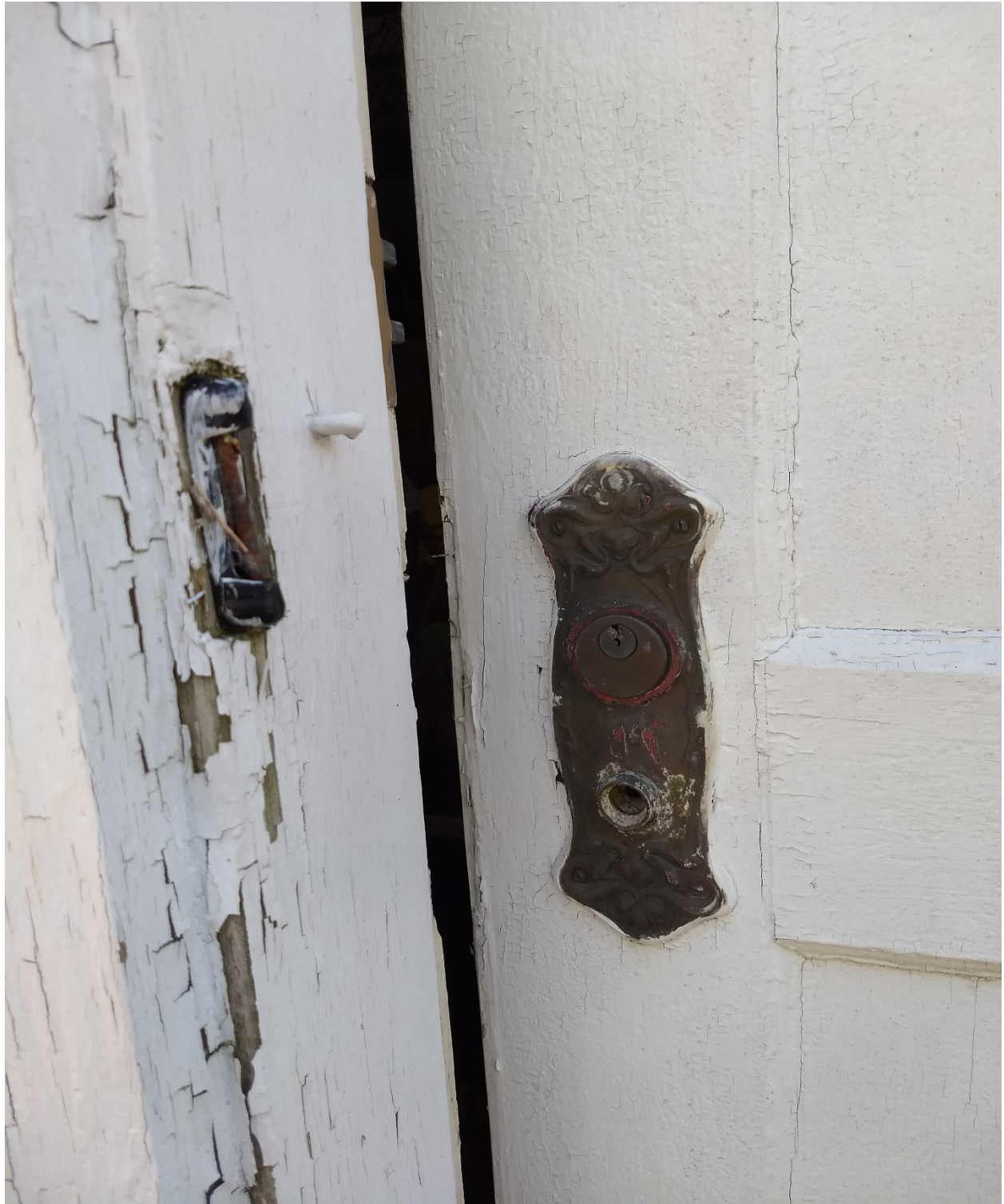
Franklinville School, showing off its new red roof and lovely copper flashing

What Happin' That-There Varmint? When the carpenters from the English Company dismantled the porch's old floorboards, underneath they found the skeleton of a possum with its nose pressed into the outside corner of the porch. (They moved the carcass so they could work, but then returned the possum to its eternal resting spot, recognized on the National Register of Historic Places.) What happened to this poor animal, now so

honored? Perhaps it got sick? Please speculate, and send your response for publication in next month's *Valley Crier*: info@WValleyHS.org



The new porch floor being built at Franklinville School. It still has to be painted.



To be replaced--a missing 1930's doorknob at the 1858 Franklinville School's back porch. This rear section of the school was added to create a movie projection room. The Strassburgers, owners of Normandy Farm, showed movies during the Great Depression for local families.

Ambler Historic Walking Tours Will Resume: The tours, conducted by the Ambler Storytellers and emphasizing the importance of preservation, will be held at 3 PM on the following Saturday dates (if there is interest)—December 3 and 17; January 7 and 21. Registration is required (**Register at [SignUpGenius](https://www.wvalleyhs.org/committees/)**), and a \$10 donation is requested. For details, go to <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/committees/>



*The Ambler Storytellers in front of today's Gypsy Blu,
showing pictures of the building when it was the Wyndham Hotel*

Location of 1800's Ambler Quarry: At one of the Ambler Walking Tours, someone asked why the sides of the buildings on Butler Avenue are brown stones and the fronts are gray stones. WVHS Past President Frank Russo provided the answer. The stones came from two quarries nearby, one at the corner of Highland Avenue and Cedar Lane. The second quarry was located where the Ambler Opera House used to stand (now the Chase Bank at 90 West Butler Avenue on the corner with Railroad Avenue). The Opera House was torn down to build a gas station, recently replaced by the bank building. See below for three photos of Ambler's "then" and "now."



Ambler Storyteller Named to Township Committee: Congratulations to WVHS member Zbigniew Bieniaszewski (Zibi), who was recently appointed to Whitpain Township's new Environmental Advisory Council, which will assist the Board of Supervisors to deal with natural resources, preserving open space, and educating the public about conservation issues. Zibi volunteers at Weavers Way and, as a beekeeper, he appreciates the environment.



November's Speaker and the Beauty of Old Barns: Jeff Marshall, past president of the Heritage Conservancy and President of the Historic Barn and Farm Foundation of Pennsylvania, spoke about the aesthetics of barns and their historical significance. He noted that barns are no longer useful for their original purposes, and that, sadly, zoning and economics work against their preservation. Using photos of Pennsylvania barns, he pointed out that barns were "overbuilt," meaning a farmer created a functional, magnificent barn to show off his prosperity and to prepare a structure that his grandchildren and future generations would use and admire. Today we appreciate their engineering and craftsmanship, as well as the emotion

they can create when we enter these historic structures. Marshall explained one example of both good engineering and a fun fact: At the granary room, barns were designed to add air flow, so breezes pushed chaff away from the seed during threshing. A granary's "threshold" is a board along the bottom edge of the threshing floor which holds the threshed seeds inside the room as the chaff is wafted out the door by natural air currents. Today, all our doors have thresholds!



Jeff Marshall meditating on barns!

Third Local Magazine Cover Found: Last month's *Valley Crier*, showing two covers of the Saturday Evening Post with a local connection (Centre Square Fire Company and Gwynedd Valley Station), asked readers to identify a third local cover. A response came from WVHS member Mabel Whittock, who provided the answer, the cover from March 24, 1956. Called "Dog Walks Down Aisle of Church" by George Hughes, it illustrates a

curious dog (named Towser), entering a Sunday service at Blue Bell's St. John Lutheran Church. The congregation has remodeled a bit, but note in the two photos below, the shape of the side of the pews.



Cheltenham and Willow Grove Turnpike Company Milestones:

By Ben Kranefeld with Editing and Layout by Paul W. Schopp

(In September, WVHS honored Whitpain Township and Centre Square Fire Company for preserving the fire station's 1760's Milestone during road construction. It turns out that Ben Kranefeld has been doing his own Milestone research, and his findings appear below.)

Although relatively “new” in comparison to many of the other mile markers I have seen and photographed, these particular stones date to 1803, when the Cheltenham and Willow Grove Turnpike incorporated. The route began at Rising Sun, which was just over three miles from Market Street in Philadelphia. Known presently as Old York Road (Route 611), the road has four remaining milestones, three of which are in their original locations in Jenkintown and Abington, respectively. A fourth underwent relocation to the grounds of the Richard Wall House Museum (built 1682) in Elkins Park.

Each stone is marked with two sets of distances; i. e., “5 to RS 7 to P” translates to “Five Miles to Rising Sun, Seven Miles to Philadelphia.



The 7/9 stone stands in front of the Jenkintown Library, while the 8/10 stone is across the street from the Abington Presbyterian Church. The 9/11 stone is on the north side of the Edge Hill Road overpass. The Cheltenham Township Historical Commission relocated the 5/7 stone to the garden surrounding the Richard Wall House Museum, which the commission began operating in 1993.

The Heart of the WVHS Museum Is Newly Organized: A few weeks ago, member Alyson Amsterdam and President Carol Kalos brought order to one of the society's second-floor closets. It contains labeled boxes of some of the WVHS precious items: papers, clothing, and collectibles of all sorts. Although the closet is not yet perfect, the boxes can be identified, and their rows and stacks are neat once more. Thank you, Alyson, for your organizing skills!



Most WVHS members have not seen the many historic items in our closets, most packed in archival boxes.

A Newly Accessioned Item: Donated by Gretchen Hall, who lives at Foulkeways, a 1911 boxed set of German Anchor Blocks for children. The set was given to her grandfather and used by four generations!



Welcome New Members!

- *Robin Costa*
- *John & Diana Geisler*
- *John Harmer*
- *Mary Beth Hopson*

The Museum and Library at the 1895 School are open by appointment: Please email your request to info@WValleyHS.org

Writers are welcome to add to *The Quill* and *The Valley Crier*:
Please send your ideas to info@WValleyHS.org

WVHS Monthly Speakers and Topics: Please feel free to send your recommendations for either a special speaker or a special topic to info@WValleyHS.org

From the Board of Directors' Meeting:

- The owner of a Toll Booth, formerly located along Skippack Pike, has notified WVHS that the historic item may be available to WVHS. Originally located diagonally across from the Blue Bell Inn (and the last remaining relic of its kind), the structure has stained-glass windows. President Carol Kalos and Vice President Joe Langella have visited the Toll Booth and found it sturdy. WVHS might take responsibility for the Toll Booth, based on a variety of factors.
- Some of the local-history remarks from the Russ Bellavance Luncheon will be printed in the next issue of *The Quill*.

- The Bellavance Luncheon raised funds toward air conditioning at the 1895 School, but WVHS will seek new cost estimates for that work.
- There has been no news about the Ambler Train Station's Freight House, threatened with demolition by SEPTA.
- Small posters which summarized the data collected for the Milestone event were delivered to Whitpain Township and Centre Square Fire Company for their bulletin boards.
- WVHS will invite a "guest organization" to attend the next Open House event (not yet scheduled).

2023 Coming Events:

- January No meeting
- Feb 13 "Show and Tell" (Bring a historic item to the meeting and briefly tell us about it)
- 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

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. 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.*