
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 2

The Valley Crier



WVHS February Meeting is “Show and Tell”: Just like middle school. Bring an antique, curious, and/or treasured item and tell the group about it. Each person will be offered about five minutes to describe the importance of their item. Special refreshments and social time are planned for after the presentations. It will be a fun evening!

Volunteer Work Sessions to Resume in February: Those Tuesday “Volunteer Sessions” have been moved to **Thursdays, 11 AM until 1 PM.**

Volunteers in the past have worked in the library, organized the display cases, and refolded fabrics. There is always dusting to be done. Come one and all to help at the 1895 School! The Volunteer Work Sessions will begin on Thursday, February 2 (Groundhog’s Day).



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Announcing: *The Quill*-- with new articles about the history of Ambler Borough, Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township (and more) – is coming your way in February **for Presidents' Day.**



WVHS Officers and Whitpain Township Continue Plans for Moving the Skippack Pike Toll Booth: President Carol Kalos and Vice President Joe Langella met with Tom Farzetta, Whitpain Township's Director of Public Works, to discuss a location for the Toll Booth, once used by the Skippack Turnpike Company. It maintained the roadway from 1853 until 1901.

The township has generously agreed to create a site plan, prepare the structure's foundation, and possibly complete repairs and painting. Mr. Farzetta is pleased that his discussions with other township officials. Plans have moved quickly and smoothly. He says the township is thankful that WVHS has grabbed this opportunity to bring history to our citizens.

The Toll Booth has a door at each end and sliding windows on both sides, where the toll was collected. The doors are surrounded by a transom and sidelights with stained-glass panes, each about four-inches square. The old building's security (due partly to its stained-glass windows) is an issue. The township has chosen a site in Prophecy Park because this

location allows for parking and security lighting. Also, the structure will be assured a permanent home on township property. The next step is that township workers will visit the Toll Booth to take measurements and to consider its condition. WVHS is shopping for the best way to move this old structure.

The building once stood at the Chambers' House (earlier called the Black Horse Inn), diagonally across from the Blue Bell Inn. John Chambers, who now lives on a farm in Eagleville, donated what was originally Blue Bell's Dinner Bell and Toll Booth back to Whitpain Township! The Dinner Bell, pictured in January's *Valley Crier*, has already been moved.



In spite of needing paint, the 1800s Skippack Pike Toll Booth is a gem, the only surviving structure of its kind.



The doors at each end of the structure are surrounded by stained glass windows.

Another Leak at the 1895 School's Heating System: On December 30, a pipe in the furnace room was discovered spraying water. The township called their repair service, which drained the steam system, attended to two leaks, and restarted the system on January 5. Fortunately, the heat was off during the December "heat wave" when temperatures remained warm. One worker explained that these pipes are cast iron, so the acid in the water inside the pipes eats through the pipes, and these leaks are inevitable.



At the 1895 School's furnace room, water spurts from a leaking pipe onto the wall. (The white rectangle above is a light fixture.)



The repaired heating system with new, covered pipes.

Other Heating and Air Conditioning Woes at the 1895 School: WVHS can't save money fast enough! Although the museum's thermostat is set at 58 degrees, the last monthly oil bill totals over \$1,000 due to the increased price of oil. (Fifty-eight is the lowest recommended temperature to protect the old plaster.) In addition, the recent estimate for installing air conditioning was \$25,000, almost double the older estimate! (The board will look for additional estimates.)

New Homes Threaten Historic Lower Gwynedd Property: In 1710 Owen Evans, a Welsh Quaker, built a log cabin along Sumneytown Pike. Over the years, he became a community leader, serving as a representative in Harrisburg for several terms. As he prospered, he enlarged his home and used a portion of it as a store. The old house, a barn (now a residence), and its 15-acre site are now for sale, and a builder has submitted preliminary plans for 10 new houses on the property. Neighbors have expressed concerns about increased traffic, excess water run-off, the destruction of natural habitats, and, above all, the possible demolition of the historic and unprotected home. (A several-page article about Owen Evans appeared in the June 2022 edition of *The Quill*.)



The Owen Evans house at 1348 Sumneytown Road, Lower Gwynedd, with 15 acres, is dated 1710, but may have an older structure under it.

Ambler Freight House: SEPTA has threatened to tear it down, but Ambler's Bernadette Dougherty, a former board member, has found a mover and has contacted SEPTA to get their permission to reset the structure to another location on SEPTA's property. The purpose of the move would be to position the 1800's Freight House away from a creek, which frequently floods. Recently, Emma Diehl from PA SHPO (the state's office for historic preservation) has been assisting Bernadette.



***The Freight House at Ambler's Train Station (Photo from SEPTA).
Many speculate that ornate wood trim is hiding under the newer siding.***

Ambler Storytellers are investigating creating a National Register Historic District for Ambler's charming downtown business area. An "application" was submitted in 2002, but the comments on the document were not addressed, and it remains incomplete. The group, with Mary Spross leading this project, is looking into modifying the original document to meet today's criteria. Mary and President Carol Kalos have met with April Franz, the local National Register reviewer, who was recommended by Megan McNish, the Eastern Region Community Preservation Coordinator for PA SHPO.

Please note that the Ambler Storytellers will not meet in February, and they will resume the Ambler Historic Walking Tours in April. The Storytellers report that since their Ambler Historic Walking Tours began in October, about 80 people, some of them WVHS members, have taken a tour.



Ambler Theater is one of the historic sites along Butler Avenue, once a residential street (when Main Street was commercial).

A Request from Lower Gwynedd's Historical Advisory Committee:

From its Chairman and WVHS former board member, Matt Metcalf: “[We are] planning to unveil several historical markers leading up to America's semiquincentennial in 2026. We are currently compiling a list of possible places (including landscapes), events, and people/organizations for which markers would be appropriate. The recommendations of the Wissahickon

Valley Historical Society would be much appreciated. Would you consider offering suggestions in advance of our next meeting (February 16th)? A partial list would be valuable (with supplemental suggestions also welcome in the months following).” Please send your ideas to metcalf_matt@hotmail.com

Words to Remember:

**WVHS Board Member Charlie Miller often warns,
“Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever!”**

Board Agrees to Send One Wissahickon Public Library Invitation: For January, the Wissahickon Public Libraries planned speakers on history topics, described in two flyers. At the library’s request, the WVHS Board agreed to email the invitation to its WVHS mailing list. However, in the future, similar appeals to use the WVHS email list will be decided on a case-by-case basis, so that individuals on the WVHS mailing list are not overwhelmed with too many messages.

Old Springhouse Sits on Morris Road Property: Four acres, containing a house, built in 1969, are for sale at 578 Morris Road in Blue Bell. A lovely springhouse and water pump, evidently part of an old farm, sits alone on the property, hidden from the house and the road.



*Springhouse and water pump, part of a bygone era,
hidden along Blue Bell's Morris Road*

If you would like to sign up for a BLOG about PA State Historic Preservation, go to

https://pahistoricpreservation.com/?mc_cid=602cf1b058&mc_eid=763285db5a



Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

The National Trust for Historic Preservation Presents Tips for Insuring Historic Homes: https://savingplaces.org/stories/7-insurance-tips-for-historichomeowners?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=weekly

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is offering free Virtual Backgrounds/Wallpaper, showing preserved historic sites:

https://support.savingplaces.org/page/47955/data/1?&utm_content=PROST&utm_campaign=FY23JanuarySustainers&utm_medium=email&utm_source=fundraising&transaction.othamt1=EA23C1SDPROC&ea.tracking.id=EA23C1SDPROC&ea.url.id=1594748



The National Park Service Provides Advice on Preserving Old

Houses: Should we preserve, rehabilitate, restore, or reconstruct a historic building? Great reading appears here:

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/index.htm>



Looking for some winter learning? See the wonderful *YouTube* presentations, created by the *Museum of the American Revolution*, available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joDGIOXWgJU>



The U.S. Congress has an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP): “The U.S. Senate confirmed Sara C. Bronin as chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on December 22, 2022. Ms. Bronin will ... advise the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy. Bronin is a Mexican American architect, attorney, and policymaker specializing in historic preservation, property, land use, and climate change. She is a tenured professor at Cornell University. Bronin holds degrees from the University of Texas, University of Oxford, and Yale Law School.”



The WVHS 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: The Board is scheduling programs for 2023-2024. Please feel free to send your recommendations for either a special speaker or a special topic to info@WValleyHS.org

The Historical Society of Montgomery County Will Sponsor a Class, “Introduction to Genealogy,” on Tuesday, March 14, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM. They say, “Looking to get started on researching your family tree? Then you won’t want to miss our ‘Introduction to Genealogy’ class, which will introduce you to a few tricks and tools you’ll need to get started as a genealogical detective! This class is FREE for members and \$15.00 for Non-Members. The class will be held at 1654 DeKalb Street from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.” To purchase tickets and/or RSVP, contact 610-272-0297 or email: contact@hsmcpa.org.



Welcome New Members:

- **Fawn Ostriak**
- **Melissa Genovese**
- **Ethan O'Reilly**

From the Board of Directors:

1. An Open House event will be held during the spring at both the 1895 School and the Franklinville School, probably on separate dates.
2. A future event will display Past President Frank Russo's Woolworth's lunch-counter collection and feature ice cream treats.
3. Lower Gwynedd Township's history committee has a new official name, the Lower Gwynedd Historical Advisory Commission.
4. Mark Ashton has volunteered to be the April speaker. (See below.)
5. The board decided not to send a representative to Ambler or Whitpain municipal meetings unless a historical issue is to be discussed. Lower Gwynedd Township's meetings will be covered by a representative of the new LG Historical Advisory Committee.
6. WVHS will sponsor an Open House at the 1895 School for the Wissahickon School District's Transportation Department employees, who work from the school district's office, located across the parking lot from the 1895 School.

2023 Events:

- Feb 13 "Show and Tell" (Bring a historic/memorable item to the meeting and briefly tell us about it)
- Feb 14 Valentine's Day. Ambler Storytellers will not meet

- Mar 13 Steve Tull, on “Archeology in Center City Philadelphia.” Steve is Vice President of AECOM
- Apr 10 Past President Mark Ashton, on Philadelphia Architect Thomas Walter, known for his work at the U.S. Capitol’s Dome and House and Senate Chambers, as well as Philadelphia’s City Hall
- 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—location to be announced
- A spring-season Open House will be added to this list

*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.**