
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 4

The Valley Crier



Announcing our April Speaker:

**Mark Ashton on Monday, April 10, at 7 PM at the 1895 School about
Architect Thomas Walter, who designed the U.S. Capitol Dome:**

THOMAS U. WALTER, from West Chester to Washington

Ashton writes, “In the early 19th century America, the occupation of ‘architect’ was just becoming recognized, and as North America’s wealthiest city, Philadelphia was the place to be when it came to building ‘big’ or with a cutting edge. Early Philadelphia was home to Benjamin Latrobe, William Strickland, and John Notman, each of whom has left us with a remarkable architectural legacy. But perhaps the pre-eminent architect of ante-bellum America did almost as much work in suburban West Chester, Pennsylvania, as he did in the city. Then, Thomas Ustick Walter departed for Washington, where he built iconic buildings, including the House and Senate Chambers of the U.S. Capitol, as well as its majestic dome.”

Retired attorney and “reformed” pirate-lecturer Mark Ashton recently presented an exhibit of Walter’s work in the U.S. and abroad at the *Altman*

Gallery of Historic Yellow Springs in Chester Springs, PA. He will give us an armchair tour of Walter's work in our region and abroad, as well as explain the architect's financially chaotic life in a day when banking and investment were fairly described as "unregulated."



The U.S. Capitol Dome, designed by Thomas Walter's firm

All Are Invited to a Special Weekday Open House at the 1895 School: Wednesday, April 26, 10 AM – 12 Noon. This Open House event was developed for the Wissahickon School District's bus drivers (and the office staff) who park in "our" parking lot every day and who have never been to the museum. All the employees at the Wissahickon Bus Center have been

invited, but additional guests are welcome. Thank you to our volunteers for that day: Jeannie and Russ Bellavance, Briana Callahan, Marie and Tom Goldkamp, Ellen Hickman, and Ethel Hutchinson.

Ambler Storytellers' *Historic Walking Tours* Resume: With spring, new dates for the tours have been announced, all Saturdays: April 15, May 6, May 20, at 3 PM. Two additional dates will be available in June. **Please volunteer to help** by emailing to amblerstorytellers@gmail.com. For details about the tours and to register, please go to: <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/committees/>

Volunteer Day at the 1895 School: Thursdays, April 6, 13, and 20, 11 AM – 1:00 PM. (Please note—**No Volunteer Day on April 27.**)

SEPTA rejects the WVHS plan to save the Ambler Historic Freight House: SEPTA claims that the building is structurally unsound because it sits on a stream which floods. On March 28, SEPTA notified WVHS that it had considered the Ambler Storytellers' plan to save the 1800's Freight House from demolition. The Storytellers proposed moving the Freight House several feet away from the stream onto nearby SEPTA property.

However, after consulting its Legal, Real Estate, and Engineering Departments, SEPTA still wants to tear down the Freight House, previously the warehouse for a model train store. As mitigation, SEPTA has offered to provide WVHS with a booklet about the history of the train station. A representative from the PA State Historic Preservation Office has asked SEPTA to explain why it has rejected moving the structure, so it can be saved.

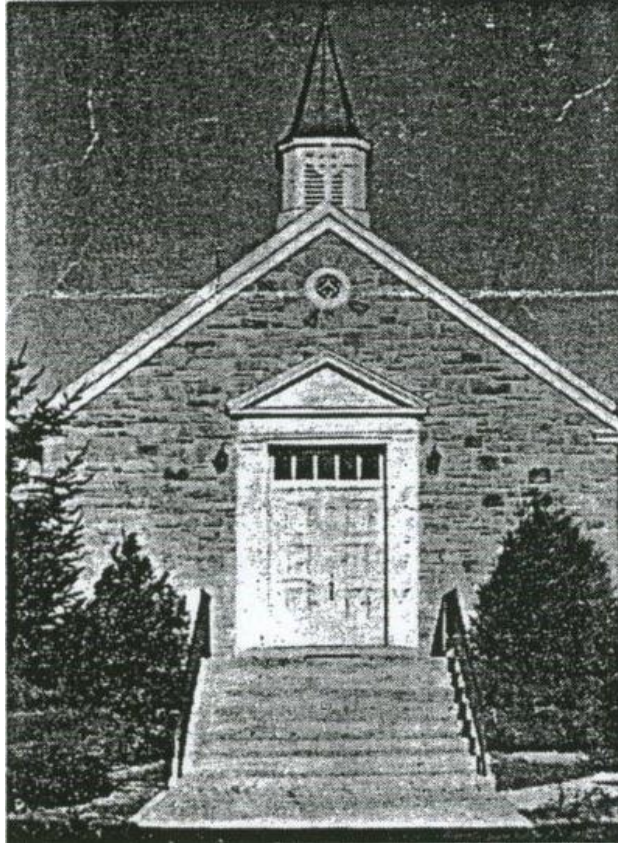
Lenape Items Donated to WVHS: One of our members' favorite speakers before the pandemic was Jim Tufano, who fascinated us with his explanation of Lenape culture. For decades, his hobby has been collecting Lenape books and artifacts, and now, as he downsizes, he will be donating part of his collection to WVHS. Thank you, Jim Tufano!

Is It Acceptable to Say "Indian?" *American Indian, Indian, Native American, or Native* are acceptable and often used interchangeably in the United States; however, Native Peoples prefer to be referred to by their tribe when possible. Is there confusion with residents from the country of India? Around the world, people refer to those from India as "Indians," but to avoid confusion, in the United States, we refer to them as "Asian Indians."



**Just some of the Jim Tufano Lenape Collection
recently donated to WVHS**

WVHS Searches for a Bell: Frank Russo reports that WVHS owns a church bell, saved from a Main Street, Ambler church when it was demolished. However, no one knows the location of the bell! The church is pictured below. Happily, the search has confirmed that *the bell at the Franklinville School is original*, according to the document associated with the school's listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

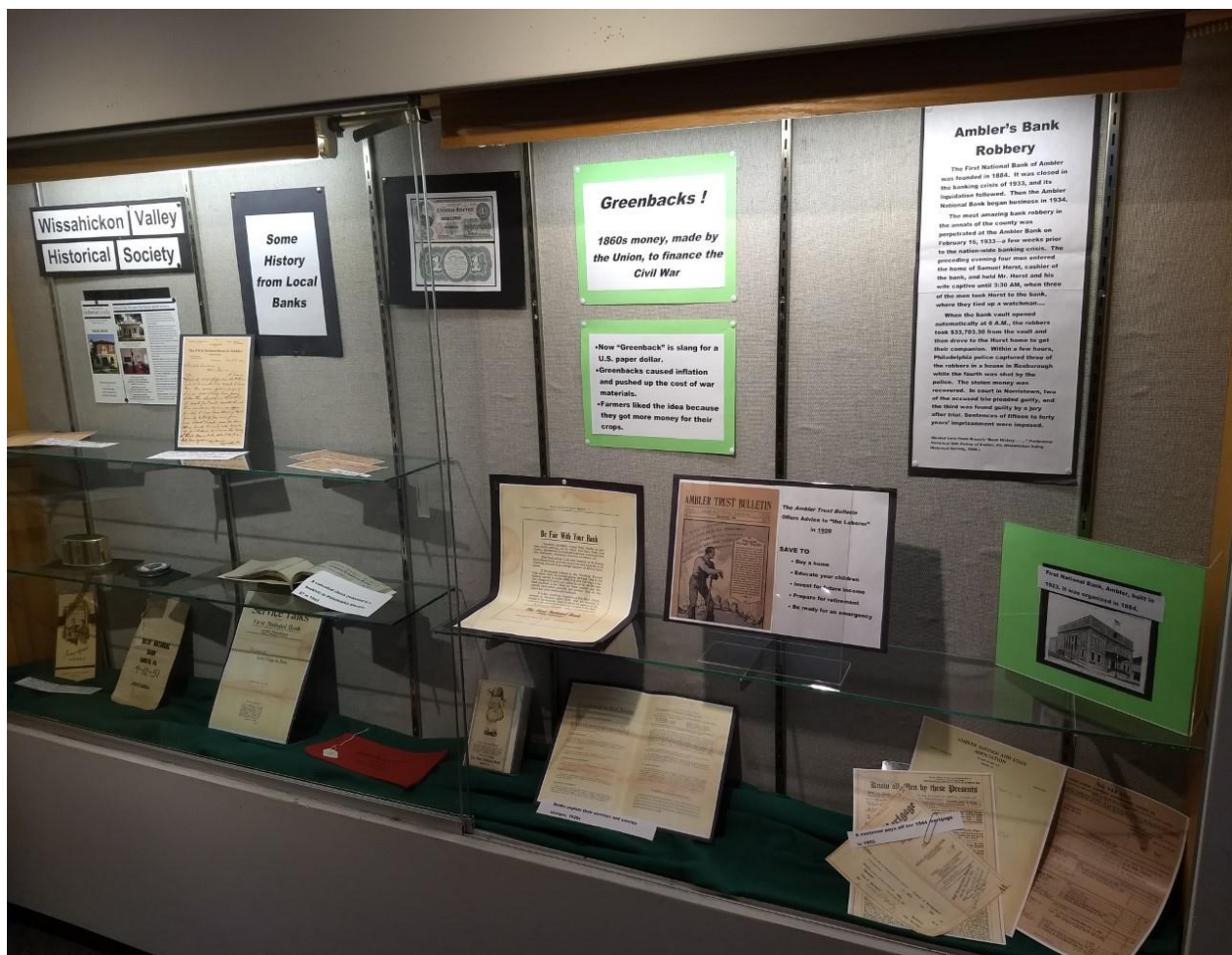


Does anyone know the name of this Main Street, Ambler church?

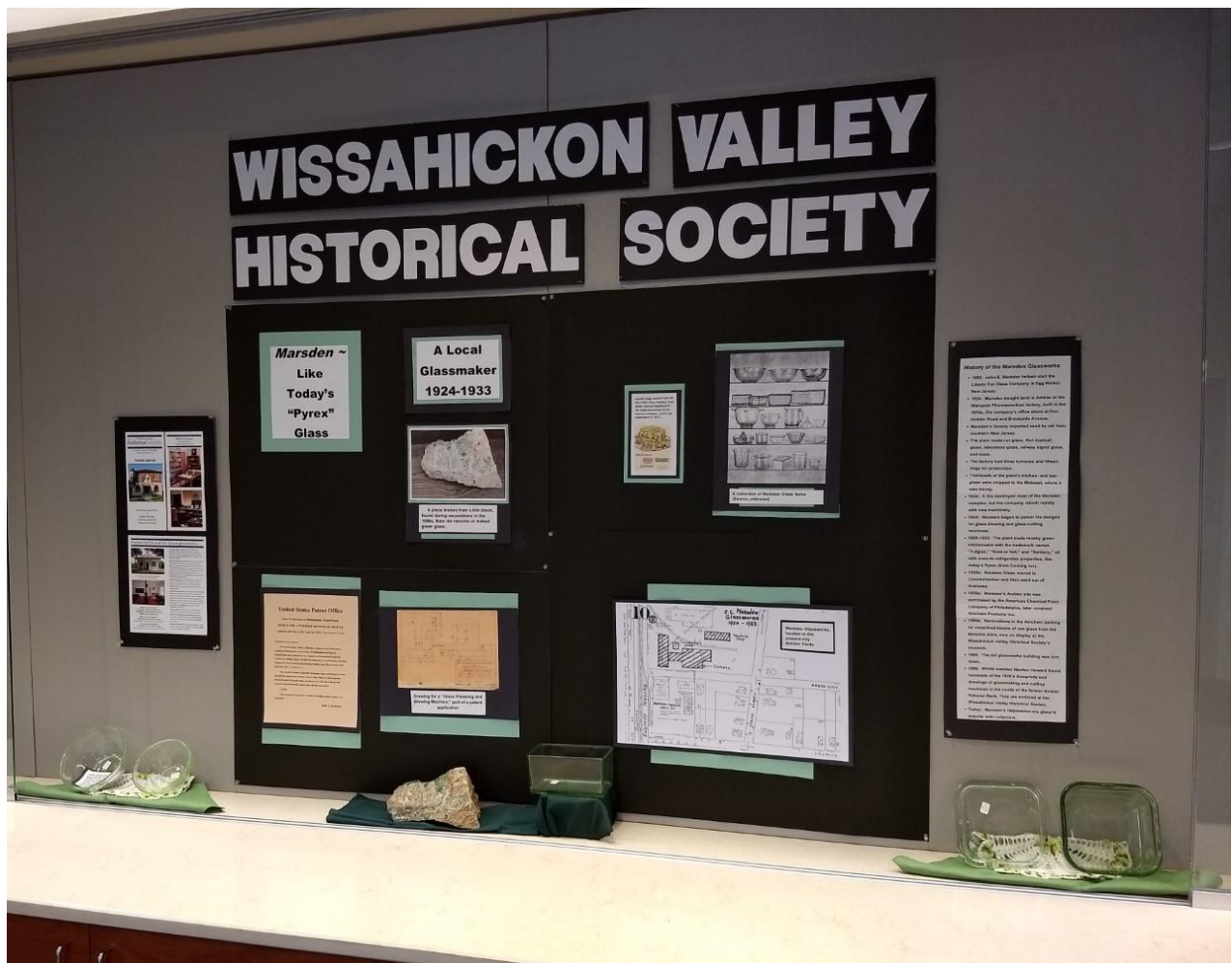
A Curious Coincidence: Jen Zwetolitz sends to some of our WVHS members the “snail mail” version of the WVHS *Valley Crier* and *Quill*. She reports, “I had a funny experience at the post office when [in February] I was mailing *The Quill*. The total charge for mailings was \$17.76!”



WVHS Library Display Features Bank Items: Called “Greenbacks,” the March exhibit at the Wissahickon Valley Public Library in Blue Bell shows some of the old banking memorabilia from the WVHS collection, including many personal banking documents from the early-20th century and some souvenir items that banks once gave their customers. See exhibit below.



WVHS Bank Display Features Green Marsden Glass: In March at the Ambler Savings Bank, WVHS presents Marsden Glass items, such as patent applications, a factory map, examples of the glassware, and a piece of the old kiln, which reveals its once-molten glass. See exhibit below.



Archaeologist Shares Old City Philadelphia Experience: The WVHS speaker for March was Steve Tull, a vice president of AECOM, in charge of its Cultural Resources Management. Tull first explained how federal

regulations require a search for artifacts before certain projects can begin. It was an idea promoted by Jackie Kennedy and passed in 1966 as The National Historic Preservation Act, which requires a scientific study be completed when the ground will be disturbed, or the character of a building will be changed. Next, Tull explained what it was like to conduct a “dig” in Philadelphia and what he has found, emphasizing the need for his workers’ safety. He highlighted his talk with unusual incidents he had encountered. For instance, at a new site, the “President’s House (1790-1800),” at a press conference, Philadelphia’s Mayor Street wanted to be the first to operate the backhoe! Today Tull’s firm is working along the I-95 corridor.



Archaeologist Steve Tull speaking to our members in March

He explained that Center City Philadelphia was once covered with streams and inhabited by successful Native Americans with many resources. Those streams are now underground, and centuries of construction have leveled the soil's naturally rolling surface, but the land underneath produces relics dating from 8000 B.C. to the remains of 20th-century industry. For example, one factory, which Tull investigated, manufactured glass, and its workers took home sophisticated glass objects and threw them away when they broke. Today the pieces reveal how Philadelphia can brag about competing with Pittsburgh and Boston as a major glass creator. Tull's group especially likes to study the remains found in old privies. With no trash removal, they were the dumping grounds of every household and now still indicate much about everyday life from decades ago. *Recommended are two AECOM websites:* Go to www.riverchronicles.com to see maps, details of the digs, photos of what was found, and the items' analysis; and go to www.diggingi95.com to read about different sites, what they yielded, and to examine the artifacts, presented in 3-D.

College Intern Assists WVHS: Since December, Briana Callahan, a history major at Montgomery County Community College, has been helping with the WVHS Collection. She came to us via Dr. Anna Raskin, Professor of History and Program Coordinator at MCCC. Briana plans to complete a bachelor's degree in museum studies and become a curator.

Each Wednesday afternoon, she works at the 1895 School, assisting President Carol Kalos. They have organized items in the library, re-folded many of the fabrics, and each month re-dressed the first-floor mannequin.

Kalos has also created “lessons” about museum jargon, acquisitions, accessibility, etc. Briana graduated from Southern Lehigh High School and took classes at Lehigh Carbon Community College before moving to this area. She expects to graduate from MCCC in spring 2024. For now, she is taking online classes and working at Wegman’s, making pizzas. She says she became interested in museum work in middle school when she visited the Franklin Institute, where she saw the Titanic exhibit and remembers feeling the cold of a fake iceberg!



***WVHS Intern Briana Callahan on the trail near Lake Wallenpaupak
in the Pocono Mountains.***

Two of the Best Old Taverns in the U.S. Are Nearby: *The Blue Bell Inn* was ranked tenth in the nation. George Washington slept there when its lodgings were called—the White House! And ranking twelfth is *Brittingham's* in Lafayette Hill, once a stop on the Underground Railroad. (According to their websites, both sites began in 1743.) With photos and complete descriptions of the 19 oldest taverns, the full article appears at “Restaurant Clicks”:

<https://restaurantclicks.com/oldest-bars-in-america/>



“Historic Hallway” at the Blue Bell Inn, established in 1743

How would the U.S. Constitution be different if you were in the room when it was written? *PA Humanities* asks this question in preparation for *America250*, our country's birthday celebration. The mission of *PA Humanities* is "to champion the humanities as a means to spark civic engagement, build community, educate, inspire, and make long-lasting change." Learn more at <https://pahumanities.org/intheroom/>



March was Women's History Month—The Smithsonian is Raising Funds for a Women's History Museum: To kick off Women's History Month, the Smithsonian Institution revealed that it has raised over \$55 million towards an American Women's History Museum, to be constructed in Washington, DC. Details:

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/02/28/more-than-55m-raised-toward-smithsonians-planned-american-womens-history-museum>

Historical Society of Montgomery County Is Opening a New Exhibit, *Historical Wedding Expo*: Thursday, April 20, 5-8 PM. This event is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served.

The Historical Wedding Expo



They say, “Weddings are often full of traditions, but have you ever thought about where those traditions originated? Many wedding traditions have been around for centuries, while others have changed over time. Even the iconic white dress was not always the color of choice for a bride’s wedding day.

This exhibit will show how weddings and wedding traditions have changed over time. Visitors can expect to see items such as clothing, photos, and portraits in the gallery. One wedding dress was made from a World War II parachute.”

This exhibit opens at 5:00 PM on Thursday April 20, 2023, and will run through the end of March 2024. The address is 1654 DeKalb Street, Norristown, PA 19401

Are You Available to Help with Moving a Large

Wooden Map? WVHS has a valuable wood map, now stored in the furnace room. We would like to move it to a dryer location--probably the first-floor hallway of the 1895 School. If you can help lift and carry, please let us know:

info@WValleyHS.org

Crooked Billet History Fair: Saturday, April 29, 10 AM until 3 PM. This is a fair featuring local historical societies, and it is free and open to the public. See below for details.

To help at the WVHS table for an hour or two, please respond to info@WValleyHS.org.

CROOKED BILLET
HISTORY
FAIR



Saturday • April 29TH • 2023

To be held from 10 AM to 3 PM at the *(former)*
Pennypack Elementary School Auditorium
130 Spring Avenue, Hatboro 19040

Exhibit with local historical societies and organizations.
You are invited to join us with other like-minded organizations
to exhibit your displays, historical books, photos, maps,
artifacts, and other memorabilia.
Tables & chairs provided.
PARTICIPATION IS FREE.
Pre-registration is required.
Details and registration at:
millbrookociety@gmail.com



ORGANIZED BY
THE MILLBROOK SOCIETY OF HATBORO
P O BOX 506 • HATBORO • PA 19040

Welcome New Members!

- Lisa Hasson
- Lisa Knapp-Siegel*
- Christine Raines

**Lisa Knapp-Siegel is President of the Montgomery Township Historical Society*

From the WVHS Board of Directors' March Meeting:

1. The board is still trying to find a way to move the Toll Booth.
2. The Owen Evans property is still listed for sale.
3. Volunteers are needed to do the Display Cases at the three municipalities' lobbies.
4. A motion-detector light will be installed at the back of the Franklinville School.
5. The theme for the fall 2024 Open House will be Woolworth's; no focus has been chosen for the spring 2023 Open House.
6. An Open House at the Franklinville School will be planned for a date after its porch floor is painted, and WVHS is still looking for a painter who pays Prevailing Wage to meet our grant requirements.
7. The board is searching for speakers for 2023-2024.
8. Board members want to clean and move the map from the furnace room to the 1895 School's hallway. Helpers will be needed.
9. The board discussed adding more plants at the Franklinville School, but there is no source of water there.

Mark Your Calendar:

- April 10 (Monday), 7 PM, at the 1895 School: 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
- April 26 (Wednesday), 10 AM-12 Noon—1895 School Open House for Employees at the Wissahickon Bus Center (next door). Guests welcome
- May 8 (Monday), 7 PM, at the 1895 School---Josh Kasper on "Privateering." Josh is Assistant Executive Director of the American War of Independence (AWI) Privateer Museum, Schooner Pursuit Historical Society
- A May Open House is being planned for the 1895 School and possibly a June Open House for the Franklinville School. Stay tuned for details.
- June 12 (Monday), 6:30PM--- WVHS Picnic with details to be announced
- Volunteer Days (Thursdays), starting at 11 AM, at the 1895 School. Help is needed with cleaning and archiving.

*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 we receive funds from
occasional grants, we depend 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*
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request.