

# *The Valley Crier*



*June 2023*

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## **Announcing the WVHS June Picnic and “Fun Fund-raiser”: Monday, June 12, at 6:30 PM**

Join us for a Potluck Picnic on Monday, June 12, starting at 6:30 PM (the usual second Monday of the month, but starting a little earlier than usual).

- Bring your favorite *picnic dish*, and WVHS will supply the plates, utensils, and beverages.
- The entertainment will include the traditional “Corn Auction.”
- Guests will *purchase raffle tickets* (10 for \$10) and use them to bid on wrapped items. Be prepared; please bring cash.
- *Bring a wrapped “gift”* for someone to purchase—It can be a valuable thing or something to make us all laugh. It’s up to you, but the buyer will not know.
- *If you plan to attend*, please send us an email, so we can be ready:  
[info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)

**May Open House Shows Off Scouting Exhibit:** The exhibit featured the WVHS scout collection along with several of our members’ vintage scout uniforms. The exhibit also included badges, patches, handbooks, field books, scrapbooks, and troop records. Girl Scout leaders arrived from Abington to donate their history items and to plan troop visits to the WVHS

museums. Of special note was the red vest (pictured below), worn by new member Peter Wilson as part of his Class B uniform at camps and powwows, a place to reveal achievements and camp patches. He was the Scoutmaster for his son's Cub Scout Pack 122 from 1996-2001 in the San Gabriel Valley in Arcadia, California. The pack's patch features the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the San Gabriel Mission to illustrate the missions of the past and the future. (The patches that show the space mission were designed by his sister, Debrah Lord, a renowned Disney imagineer!) During Wilson's time as a scout leader, he was awarded the Lord Baden Powell award for Cub Scoutmaster, and his pack was recognized with the Quality Unit award for all five years. On the 1895 School's lawn, to attract attention, Neal Bradley brought out his two antique cars and the Centre Square Fire Company's 1919 REO fire truck. Thank you to our docents Briana Callahan, Marie and Tom Goldkamp, Beverly Hahn, Ethel Hutchinson, Marty Kalos, Joe Langella, and Dottie MacDermott.

***Please see scout pictures, next page.***



***Boy Scout Robbie, grandson of the Goldkamps, is ready for a ride in member Neal Bradley's 1917 Dodge Brothers Touring Car.***



***Scout uniforms on display. The red Scoutmaster's vest came all the way from California with new member Peter Wilson.***

**School Bus Drivers Welcomed to 1895 Open House:** The 1895 School held a rare weekday Open House to accommodate the schedules of the Wissahickon School District employees who work next door at what they call the “bus transportation center.” These men and women park next to the 1895 door every school day, so they were thrilled to see three floors of museum space on the inside of the 1895 School. Several guests arrived early and spent the full two hours, taking in all the details of our local history. A special exhibit included photos of the old schools in our area. WVHS is grateful to our docents for the day: Jeanne Bellavance, Briana Callahan, Marie and Tom Goldkamp, Ellen Hickman, Dottie MacDermott, and Fawn Ostriak.

***Please see pictures, next page.***





***Bus driver Natasha and WVHS Secretary Marie Goldkamp have fun playing an old-fashioned game of hoops in front of the toy display.***



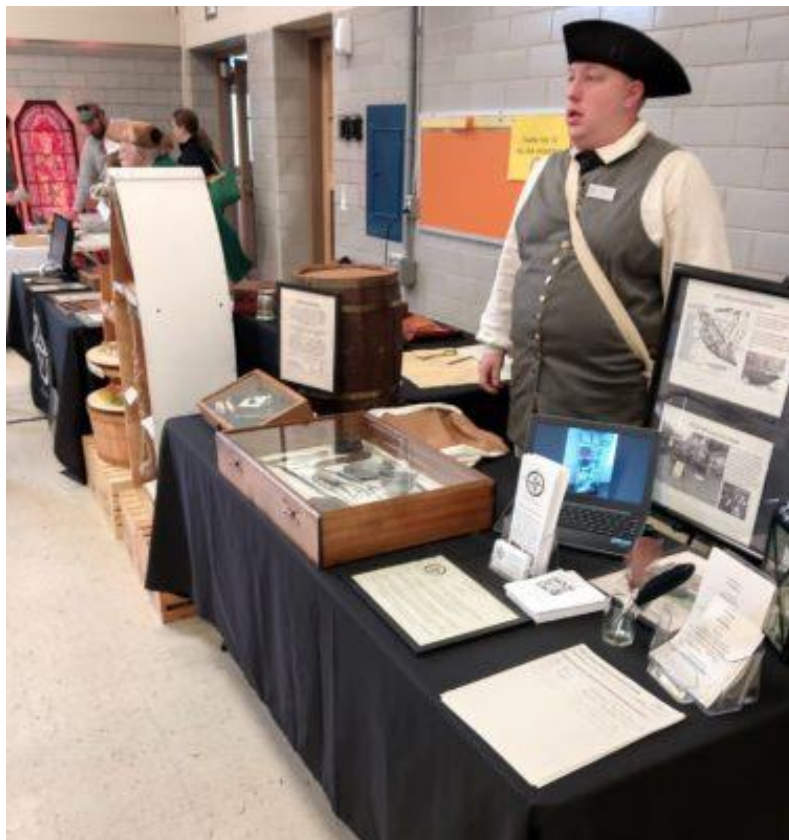
***Three Wissahickon School District employees, our WVHS neighbors at the bus transportation center***

**WVHS Represented at Regional History Fair:** A total of 27 historical societies were represented at the Crooked Billet History Fair at the Pennypack Community Center in Hatboro. The event was hosted by the Millbrook Society, Hatboro's historical society. WVHS was on hand to greet the hundreds of visitors and to show off our NRHP museums and our local history. History-themed lectures and puppet shows were also offered throughout the day. (A special thanks to member Michael Zebe, who helped with carrying the heavy loads of WVHS items to the car at the end of the long day!)



***Note the Civil War nurse in the upper right of the photo, one of many re-enactors at the Crooked Billet History Fair***

**May Speaker Offers Details about Privateering:** Dressed in colonial garb, Josh Kasper, from the newly-named American War of Independence Privateer Museum, offered many details about the legal pirates who sailed the oceans (and the Delaware River!), fighting the British. Larger in number than the new nation's official Navy ships, they were licensed to sail by the colonial government. The privateer vessels "stole" the enemy's cargo and split it among their crew. Kasper described who made up the crew (A third were required to be "landsmen," so they would find employment and learn the sailing craft.). He included how the crew spent their time, the risks of the occupation, the rules of conduct (No badgering the gentlemen, those captured British officers). Kasper concluded by explaining that his group is a museum without walls; instead, they take their extensive privateering exhibit to historical re-enactments.



***Josh Kasper, a "legal" pirate reenactor, who was the WVHS May speaker (Pictured at the Crooked Billet History Fair, May 2023)***

## **Ambler Storytellers Continue Efforts to Save Historic Ambler:**

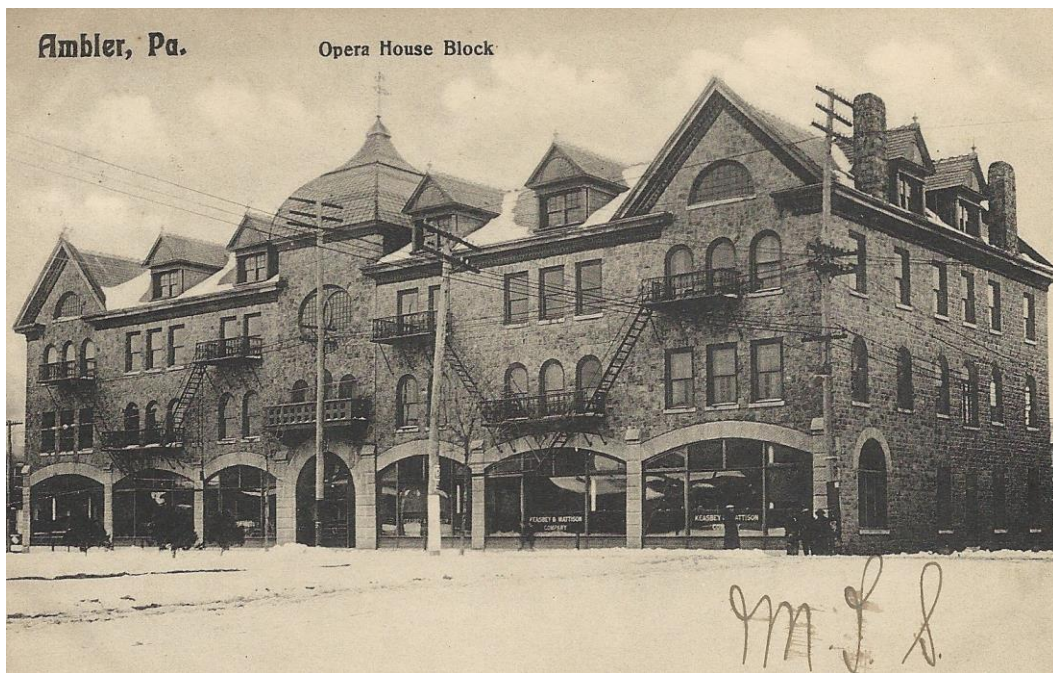
- WVHS has heard no word from SEPTA about its plan to demolish the historic Freight House.
- Ambler's Historic Walking Tours have included over 70 guests since they started in October of 2022, and they will resume in September.
- The Storytellers note that In Ardmore, where new construction might create four-, five-, and six-story buildings along the railroad tracks, the township commissioners have changed the zoning regulations in response to "pushback from residents," who want to avoid height and density.
- In response to recent Facebook posts by Ambler citizens, concerned about the construction of a large residential and commercial building along the railroad, WVHS emailed to you a summary of the Ambler Planning Commission meeting, where the contractor presented his plans and the public, including the Storytellers, responded.
- As a result of that meeting, the architects are re-working the drawings to better suit the wishes of the commissioners.
- Few local citizens appreciate that **what is now the Pizza Box location used to be the site of the Ambler Hotel**, and across the street from it stood the **Opera House**.

***Please see Ambler Hotel and Opera House pictures, next page.***





**A postcard from the WVHS website, showing the Hotel Ambler, which burned down on Christmas Eve 1926. It faced Butler Avenue, and a bank building (today's Harry's Taproom) was later built to the right of the photo.**



**The Opera House, besides its auditorium, had stores on first floor and offices for Keasbey and Mattison on the upper floors. It was torn down in 1966 due to "disrepair."**

## **The History of How Asbestos Helped Ambler, and then How Ambler**

**Achieved a Healthy Environment:** In April, our community celebrated Arbor Day and Earth Day, both set aside to emphasize environmental issues. Some Ambler residents are embarrassed by the destruction that asbestos caused to the local environment, but Ambler's leadership should be proud of all that was accomplished to return the area to a healthy place. The article below presents details about what happened.

## **Some Philosophical Questions about the Environment, Raised by**

**Ambler's History with Asbestos:** Ethan Reilly met Ambler Storyteller Zibi (Zbigniew Bieniaszewski) when Ethan and his family took an Ambler Historic Walking Tour. Later, the two talked again, and, with common interests in environmental issues, they emailed back and forth. Now, at Zibi's recommendation, WVHS has posted on the WVHS website one of Ethan's college research papers about Ambler. The research, conducted at Vanderbilt University in 2017, cites reliable sources, provides the history and background of how Ambler became the leader in the manufacture of asbestos, and, most importantly, examines some of the complex environmental questions that remain. Reilly's conclusion goes beyond the asbestos issues to ask what part of Earth each of us is destroying as we live our lives. Find out **more about Reilly, his endeavors, and his entire paper.** See *The White Mountains of Ambler*, at

<https://www.wvalleyhs.org/the-white-mountains-of-ambler/>

***Please see asbestos picture, next page.***





***An unknown woman and child stand in front of the “White Mountains” (asbestos waste) of Ambler, ca. 1963–1964. (John Marincola, ScienceHistory.org)***

**Nonprofits Attend Chamber of Commerce Event:** The Eastern Montgomery Chamber of Commerce recently hosted WVHS and representatives from about 30 local not-for-profits to discuss “Strategies to Help Fundraising.” The speaker was Traci Connelly Goidas, Director of Development at Montgomery County Community College.

**Whitpain Township has repaired the ruts in the front yard at the 1895 School:** They resulted from installation of new lighting several month ago. Now the area has been rolled and reseeded. Thank you, Whitpain Township!



***Whitpain Township maintains the lawn at the 1895 School, this spring rolling and reseeded.***



**Spring Has Sprung!:** Thank you to Dottie MacDermott for planting the lovely flowers at the front of the 1895 School!



***New buds welcome visitors at the 1895 School's front door***

**Maintaining the WVHS Collection: Why are fabrics difficult to preserve?** They are fragile and susceptible to insects and light damage (fading). Frequent use can decrease their lifespan. WVHS uses museum boxes, which keep out light, insects, and (some) water, and which are acid-free. (Acid causes yellowing and permanent decay.) Ideally, fabrics should be held at a constant 70 degrees and about 50% humidity. For this reason, the WVHS Board of Directors is investigating air conditioning at the 1895 School.

If you like military history, you will like this website for the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center: [www.armyheritage.org](http://www.armyheritage.org)



American diplomat and historian George Kennan came to see the First World War as "*...the great seminal catastrophe...*" of the 20th Century. If you like reading about WWI, investigate the online "Dispatch," published by the Doughboy Foundation:



For Pennsylvania's role in the First World War, see <https://ww1cc.org/pennsylvania-ww1-centennial-home.html>

**Two Sites Are Listed on Most Endangered List in U.S. by National Trust for Historic Preservation.** Read about Philadelphia's Chinatown and the Tanner House: <https://www.inquirer.com/news/tanner-house-chinatown-philadelphia-national-trust-historic-preservation-endangered-places-20230509.html>

**From the National Trust for Historic Preservation:** Many of us don't realize the importance of preservation until we see it firsthand in our own communities. Preservation reaches so far beyond simply painting a building's exterior or planting flowers outside for curb appeal—it tells stories, honors legacies, shapes neighborhoods, uplifts communities, and cultivates the next generation of leaders. And it's especially vital for places where significant Black history has occurred, which have all too often been overlooked and under recognized for their role in shaping American culture.





### **New Accession: Boy Scout paraphernalia from member Brenda Doll**

#### **Welcome New Members:**

- Judy Chesnick
- Albert Comly

#### **From the Board of Directors:**

1. At the Franklinville School, Dominic J. Ciliberto, Energize Electric Service, will be adding a motion-sensor light above the back door and upgrading the existing flood lights to LEDs. He was recommended by Whitpain Township.
2. An Open House is being planned for the Franklinville School (with its new front porch) for September 2023. During the summer months, the



one-room school museum is open by appointment. Email to

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

3. Alderfer's Glass replaced the missing glass in a display case at the 1895 School.
4. WVHS has provided a signature to receive its \$500 HARC grant for purchasing acid-free boxes for its library. The grant monies should arrive soon.
5. A special fall Open House is being planned for the 1895 School for Sunday, September 17, when the theme will be Woolworth's Lunch Counter, showing the private collection of past president Frank Russo.
6. Board members are compiling the list of speakers for next year and 2025--when the USA will begin to celebrate 250 years. The events in 2025 are meant to provide education and anticipation for the big festivities on July 4, 2026, also the year that WVHS will turn 50!

***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.***

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