
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 5

The Valley Crier



**Speaker for our May Meeting--
Monday, May 6, at 7 PM at the 1895 School:**

Josh Kasper is the Assistant Executive Director of the American War of Independence (AWI) Privateer Museum, Schooner Pursuit Historical Society. He says, "I have been involved in living history in one form or another since I was born and have been with the AWI Privateer Museum since 2017... I have also worked as a historical interpreter at Washington Crossing State Park between 2019 and April of this year." Recommended to WVHS by Frank Russo, Josh will tell us more about his organization, its mission, and the important role of privateers during the American Revolution.



Election to fill WVHS Board Opening: Barry Johnson has agreed to sit on the WVHS Board of Directors. At the May 6th meeting, members will be asked to officially elect Barry, following the WVHS By Laws. (A regular election for all officers will be held in May 2024, an even-numbered year, for the Society Year beginning on September 1, 2024.) Johnson says he grew up in Missouri and graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a degree in history, but he became a software developer. He moved to Blue Bell in 1978 to work at Sperry, and he retired from Philadelphia's Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in 2013. A WWI re-enactor, he joined WVHS after visiting the Franklinville School. Since then, he has assisted WVHS by making digital images of our maps and other items, and he has been making videos of the monthly speakers' series. One of Johnson's favorite sayings is "We are tomorrow's history."

May's Open House at the 1895 School to Feature Scouting: Join WVHS at Open House on Sunday, May 21, 1-3 PM, at the 1895 School for a special exhibit about all things scouting. Our collection and some private items will show Boy and Girl Scout uniforms, handbooks, troop histories, and more. Also, if you have items you would like to donate or loan for this exhibit, please contact WVHS: info@WValleyHS.org



Boy Scouts of America, now Scouts USA (starting 2019)

Volunteers are needed to change the WVHS exhibits at the municipal buildings. Each case is 22 X 36 inches (an easy space to fill), and WVHS tries to change the topic every three months. Training will be provided. Please contact info@WValleyHS.org



Display case Whitpain Township Municipal Building

The Franklinville School's porch has been painted: In April, WVHS found a painter who pays Pennsylvania's Prevailing Wage, a requirement for our state grant, so the work has been completed, and the grant monies have been spent. (A few hundred dollars will return to the state coffers.) But work is never done; a security light will be added soon, and the building now needs a new roof (and more)!



Old Photo Shows Tree-Planting at Franklinville School: Sandi Feight-Hicks, who is Parks and Recreation Director at Lower Gwynedd Township, recently sent this newspaper article about Arbor Day being celebrated by students from Stoney Creek Elementary School in about 1983 or 1984. (1983 is the year that the Historical Society of Whitpain was established with the goal of restoring Franklinville School. She found the photo in a box in her attic and relates that she remembers the day. Note the empty fields behind the school; the Windemere housing development had not yet been

built. The students are standing where the white rail fence stands today. Still surviving, the tree is now two stories tall.



LEARNING . . . Joseph Constable, right, principal at Stony Creek Elementary School, presides over the Arbor' Day planting of a tree at the old school house on Morris Road near Normandy Farms. Helping Constable with the ceremony is Mickela Dernhein, left, holding the American flag.

Arbor Day Tree-planting at the Franklinville School in about 1983



That Little Tree Has Grown!

Spring Cleaning Can Uncover Lost Treasures for WVHS: As you clean out your attic and closets, please remember that WVHS can use items of local historic interest. We especially like photographs showing local sites as they used to appear or showing local events in years gone by.

WVHS Past President (1987-88) speaks at April's meeting: Mark Ashton is still serving our society because last month he presented the biography of Philadelphia architect Thomas Ustick Walter (1804-1887). In those days, with no official training available, Walter began as an apprentice at age 15 to the famous Philadelphia architect, William Strickland (1788-1854). Walter designed the Water Works; Girard College, the largest building in

the U.S. and with a marble roof; and Moyamensing Prison, which had central heat and water, unlike most homes at the time. Ashton gave a long list of Walter's amazing accomplishments and used many illustrations. Ashton included Walter's work in Washington D.C. and a discussion of the design of Philadelphia's City Hall. It is the largest masonry building in the world with eight stories (four stories above-ground and four below-ground) and 700 rooms. Constructed before electricity, it took 30 years to build!



Moyamensing Prison, designed by Walter, demolished in 1967 and now the site of an Acme! (See "HiddenCityPhiladelphia.org.")

SEPTA Still Threatens Ambler Historic Building: To save the Train Station's Freight House, WVHS asked that SEPTA move it to a new position, where it would be safe from creek flooding, rather than demolish it. After consulting its legal, real estate, and insurance offices, SEPTA recently refused to accept the idea of moving the Freight House but gave

no reason. PA SHPO has asked SEPTA for more details, and WVHS is also waiting for the reply. In the 1980s, WVHS saved another historic Ambler Train Station building, using hundreds of volunteer hours and raising \$50,000 for improvements through grants, donations, and fundraising. Today, it features the lovely La Provence restaurant, pictured here:



***A rainbow appears outside the historic Ambler train station's La Provence restaurant, saved by WVHS in the 1980s.
(Photo from Facebook, Ambler Then and Now, April 2023)***

Ambler Storytellers have resumed their history tours and National Register documentation: A special thanks to Mary Spross, who has created a tour flyer with a QR code and distributed it throughout Ambler. Please sign up online if you missed taking a tour during the fall (and invite your friends and neighbors). The Storytellers hope that Ambler citizens who understand the town's rich history will want to preserve that history! The

Storytellers also continues its research to put Ambler on the National Register of Historic Places. They meet on the second Tuesday of each month at the Ambler Public Library, and all are welcome. The Ambler tour registration is here: www.wvalleyhs.org/committees/

Do property owners on the National Register face restrictions? The National Trust for Historic Preservation states, “Owners of National Register-listed properties do not face any restrictions—including from demolition—unless the property is involved in a project receiving federal assistance (funding, for example.)” More details about the process and its benefits appear here: <https://savingplaces.org/stories/10-tips-to-build-your-national-register-knowledge>

Tree removed at 1895 School: On an April afternoon, an arborist removed the last remaining tree that stood between School Road and the parking lot:



WVHS June Picnic to start at 6:30 and include an auction: Plans have begun for the end-of-year picnic to be held on our regular meeting night in June, but with an earlier start time-- Monday, June 12 at 6:30 PM. We will enjoy a "pot-luck" supper, followed by a fun/fund-raiser auction. (It's a corn auction with a twist.) If you are attending, help the Board with planning. If you have not already, please let us know what type of menu item you will

be bringing, main course, side dish, or dessert. For the auction, please bring a wrapped item, either something useful, something hilarious, or both!

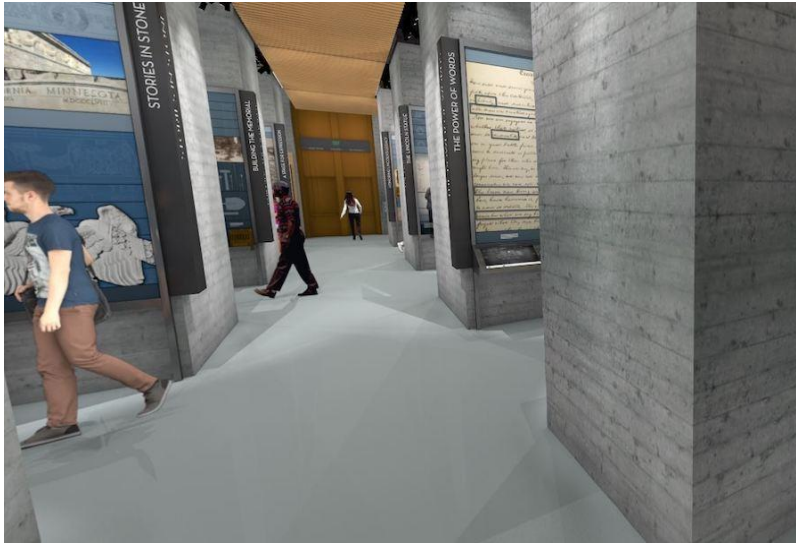
Volunteer Days are Thursdays, 11 AM-1 PM: Stop by the 1895 School to help with cleaning and organizing our Collection and our lovely building.

Montgomery County seeks opinions for its new Comprehensive Plan: Leave a comment [on Padlet](#). “Padlet is an online spot for sticky notes... and suggestions. It is organized by topic...” *(Please mention that you support the preservation of history and historic properties.)* Padlet offers a good rainy-day activity...



Lincoln Memorial Getting New Museum: Located underground, the museum will provide exhibits and multi-media presentations that highlight the structure’s construction, history, and how the Lincoln Memorial has become the nation’s backdrop for civil rights demonstrations. It will open in 2026, when the United States marks 250 years of independence.

<https://www.enr.com/articles/56084-69m-project-adds-immersive-museum-underneath-lincoln-memorial>



A Planner's Vision of the New Lincoln Memorial Museum

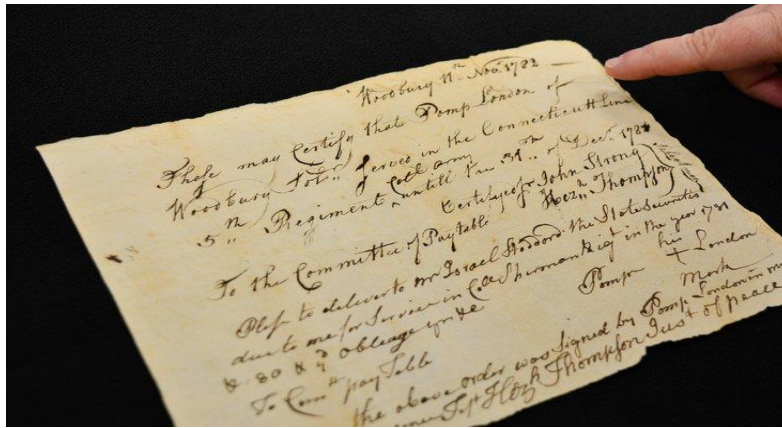
Those who like reading about WW I will like the “Doughboy Dispatch”: Sign up here: Dispatch@contact.doughboy.org



The Museum of the American Revolution is Digitizing Documents of Black and Indigenous Soldiers:

<https://www.phillyvoice.com/museum-of-american-revolution->

ancestry-patriots-of-color-archive-digital-black-native-american-veterans/?utm_source=mem-min-button&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mem-min-button-email-03042023



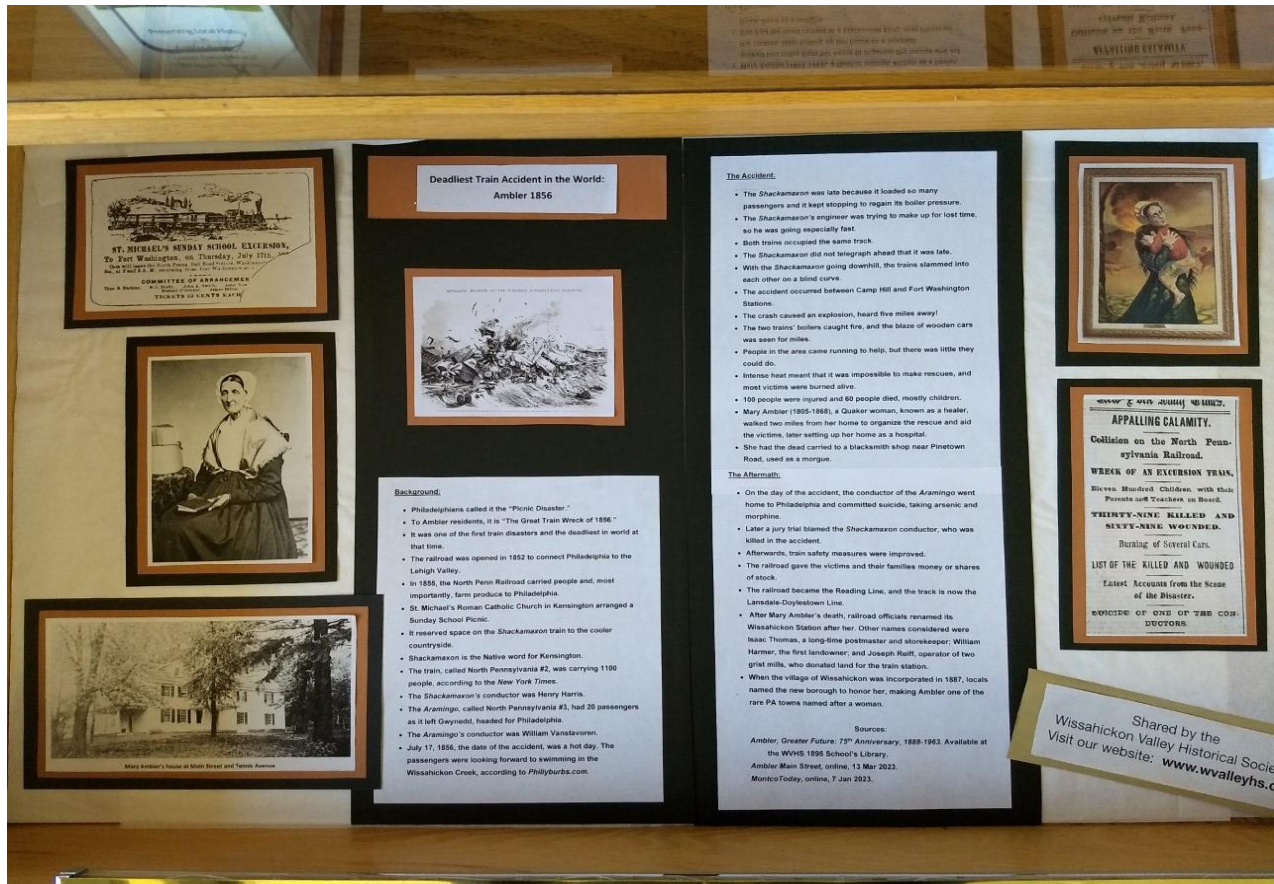
An Example from MOAR's "Patriots of Color" Archive

WVHS Exhibit at Ambler Library explains "Spring Cleaning": It features the WVHS 1917 vacuum cleaner (which does not run on electricity!) and an old ad for that very machine. The exhibit's text includes a list of why Americans clean in the spring, describing history and science, i.e., ethnic/religious traditions, as well as our physical and psychological reactions to warmer, longer days.



Spring Cleaning Display, Circa 1917!

WVHS has Created a New Display at the Ambler Borough Office, Featuring the “Great Train Wreck of 1856”: The exhibit will continue until the end of June. It explains why the accident occurred and its horrible aftermath. The train wreck was the *worst in the world* at the time, and it led the town to be named after Mary Ambler because of the aid she brought to its victims.



**Heroine and Ambler Namesake—
Mary Ambler and her story on display in the Ambler Borough offices.**

Display at Whitpain Township Features Franklinville School: This display appears in the lobby outside the Whitpain Township Police offices. Prepared by Marie Goldkamp, the case includes rare photographs of the school throughout the decades.



Photos of the Franklinville School on display

The Smithsonian has placed 4.5 million historic images into the public domain! “Available on a platform called Smithsonian Open Access, anyone can download, reuse, and remix these images at any time—for free under the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) license,” according to an online source; the world’s largest museum has attracted much attention.



“Harriet Tubman” from the Smithsonian. Taken in 1868 or 1869

by Benjamin F. Powelson.

Thank you for paying your 2022-2023 dues. Those funds are vital to WVHS! And if you have yet to pay member dues starting with the Q4 2022 fiscal year, it is not too late. Please go to <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/>

Welcome New Members!

- **Peggy Diorio**

From the April Board of Directors' Meeting:

- Tom Goldkamp is making arrangements to have repaired the broken glass in one of the display cases.
- An electrician will be hired to add a motion-sensitive light at the Franklinville School.
- Board members are still searching for bookcases to be used on second floor.
- An effort will be made to clean and move the 1850s map from the furnace room to the 1895 School.
- The Board continues to schedule WVHS events and find speakers for 2023-2024.

Mark Your Calendars:

- 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, plus a special election
- May 21, 1-3 PM---Open House at the 1895 School with Scouting exhibit
- Possibly a June Open House for the Franklinville School. Stay tuned for details.
- June 12 (Monday), 6:30PM--- WVHS Pot-luck Picnic with an Auction
- Volunteer Days (Thursdays), 11 AM until 1 PM, at the 1895 School. Help is needed with cleaning and archiving.
- First meeting for 2023-2024--- Monday, September 11 (with a fantastic speaker already planned)!

*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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