The Design of Whitpain's 1895 School

BY CAROL KALOS, ST. ANDREWS RESIDENT WRITER AND WISSAHICKON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESIDENT

WHITPAIN'S 1895 PUBLIC SCHOOL: PART I, ITS DESIGN
Owned by Whitpain Township, the *1895 School,* listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is today the headquarters, museum, and library for the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. Inside, visitors discover three floors of displays about the history of Ambler Borough, Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township. The first floor hosts monthly speakers, and on the second floor, besides more exhibits, visitors find a 19th-century classroom with double seats. The lower level contains several special displays and a work area. Most of the building is original.

Local craftsmen built the structure, using local materials and following a design by architect Milton Bean. He was responsible for many Philadelphia buildings of the era, including Lindenwold Castle and the turreted stone houses of Ambler. Experts in 1895 described this school as being "a rather artistic modern … building, having somewhat of a Moorish appearance." The *1895 Public School* reflects a distinctive style due to the Moorish design, the heptagonal (seven-sided) turret on the front of the schoolhouse, and the Gothic-style inscription at the front of the building, stating "AD Public School 1895."

Originally the schoolhouse had a tall Gothic bell tower with a catwalk inside and a quill-pen weathervane. In 1923, during a severe storm, lightning struck the bell tower; then the repairmen created the present, shorter turret design. Last year, inspired by the weathervane, WVHS took *The Quill* as the name for the society's research journal, available to its members.

Next month's issue will explain the costs of building the elaborate structure and, surprisingly, who paid for the expenses.

The author, Carol Kalos, a resident of Saint Andrews, is President of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. For information or for an appointment to see the 1895 Public School, please contact *info@WValleyHS.org*.