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*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 2, Number 6*

# *The Valley Crier*



*July 2023*

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## **Announcements:**

- **Bellavance to Speak about Old Deeds:** WVHS Past President Russ Bellavance will speak at the Blue Bell Library (Wissahickon Valley Public Library, Blue Bell) on Thursday, August 17, at 2 PM. He will describe how historic deeds tell a story, using some of the deeds in the WVHS collection as examples. Please see Russ's flyer with the details about his presentation on a later page of this *Valley Crier*.
- **The next meeting of WVHS will be on Monday, September 11, at 7 PM.** Our speaker will be the energetic Bernadette Dougherty, former manager of Ambler Main Street and present-day remarkable preservationist. Details will appear in a future issue of the *Valley Crier*.

**What is the Value of History?** The answer is supplied by the Pennsylvania Heritage Foundation (associated with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission): "We call on organizations to endorse,

share, and use the below statement on the value of history in contemporary life. With common agreement, commitment, and open conversation about why history is important, **we believe the historical community can change the common perception that history is nice, but not essential.**” Please read more at

<https://www.paheritage.org/who-we-are/value-of-history.html>



**Lower Gwynedd Residents’ Survey-- for History:** Former WVHS board member Matt Metcalf has contacted WVHS, representing the Lower Gwynedd Historical Advisory Committee. You can help your township by advocating for local history. If you are a LG resident and have not yet completed the LG survey, please do so. It is available here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LGwynCompPlan>

**Local High School Student Receives WVHS Scholarship:** Wissahickon High School student Abraham Matisoff, who graduated recently, received the WVHS Scholarship. Pictured is WVHS Vice President Joe Langella, congratulating the 2023 Society Scholarship recipient at the high school’s annual honors ceremony. The scholarship is given each year to a WHS senior who has excelled in the study of history. Matisoff plans to attend

Millersville University in the fall. The scholarship is generously funded by long-time WVHS members Jim and Peggy Johnston.



*Vice President Joe Langella with the WVHS History Scholarship winner*

**Broken Window at the 1895 School:** In May, a ball went through the hallway window at the 1895 School, and Whitpain Township workers repaired it quickly, using vintage glass. A lacrosse ball was discovered on the floor inside the hallway which leads to the basement door while shattered glass was spread across the length of the hall. The shards of old glass found on the floor were about 1/4-inch thick.





***The broken window at the 1895 School, June 2023***



*Whitpain Township repaired the window with vintage glass.*

**Damage to a 1768 Milestone:** On June 5, Vice President Joe Langella learned that someone had knocked over the old Broad Axe milestone, marked “15 miles to Philadelphia.” It sat for centuries on the Whitemarsh side of the border between Whitpain and Whitemarsh Townships just below Butler Pike, where a subcontractor was paving. Both townships sent workers to look for the precious item, but it was missing! However, the milestone was found the next day; a road crew had picked it up. Whitemarsh officials say that it was hit by a vehicle. Now they are looking into repairing the milestone. WVHS has shared with them the experience of



the Centre Square Fire Company, who carefully moved their mile marker in 2018, and then replaced it along Skippack Pike after road repairs were completed. In September 2022, WVHS, Whitpain Township, and the fire company held a ceremony to bring attention to the importance of this historic local landmark. The stones, standing along Morris Road and Skippack Pike and dating to the 1760s, were used by the colonial post office as distance markers to the old Philadelphia Court House. The odometer used to measure the distances was invented by Ben Franklin.



***This broken Whitmarsh Township milestone signifies “15 miles to Philadelphia.”***

**WVHS “Picnic” Creates Fun and Funds:** About 25 members and guests attended the June potluck “picnic,” held indoors due to a terrible rainstorm. Everyone agreed the food was delicious, and, with Russ Bellavance auctioneering, a “corn auction” raised \$190 to help the WVHS treasury. Best of all, the gathering was entertained by the sometimes delightful (and sometimes funny) wrapped items they had purchased.



***Mike Zebe delights as he unwraps his new ceramic basket while Naomi Wilson enjoys his reaction.***



**U.S. Flags at the 1895 School on Memorial Day:** “Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility.”- Eleanor Roosevelt



***Memorial Day at the 1895 School, 2023***

**New Lighting at the Franklinville School:** A motion-sensitive light was added at the back of the Franklinville School. It was suggested by the Whitpain Township Police Department to provide security. In addition, the flood lights on either side of the building were changed to come on at dusk. In the photo, also note that the screen door has a new screen, probably its



first one since the 1930s. Until recently, the back door of the building could not be opened!



*A new screen and a new light fixture at the back of the Franklinville School*

**WVHS Member Added to History at the Franklinville School:** Member Lynn Cooney fondly remembers the archaeological dig at the historic one-room school, where she and Carol Wurzer volunteered during July of 2001. Lynn says she had a true feeling of accomplishment as she worked on the dig, and she has always recognized the importance of what they were doing. The items they found are on permanent exhibit at the 1895 School in the Whitpain display case: a piece of coal, a portion of a clay pipe, a blue-

glass bottle, a metal bottle cap; portions of two graphite pencils; and a brown ceramic bottle, probably an ink bottle. An 1876 U.S. quarter was also found at the property. Marie Goldkamp, then President of the Historical Society of Whitpain (prior to its merge with WVHS), describes how just about all of the society members came out to help with the dig. The school is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its role as a community center, and it is one of the only remaining one-room schools in the area. Thank you, again, to Lynn for her work in 2001 and for sharing her memories with us.



***The original, damaged floor at the Franklinville School was removed in July of 2001 (shown above) and replaced with lovely poplar wood. The archaeological dig was completed while the soil was exposed.***

**How to Start a Genealogy Search:** The Historical Society of Montgomery County offered advice at a June program, sponsored by the Wissahickon Valley Public Library at Ambler. Here are some highlights:

- Focus on one ancestor at a time.
- Collect what you know; then interview older relatives.
- Rely on government and public records (primary sources). For example, the U.S. Census began in 1790 and takes place every ten years.
- Start local. See churches, cemeteries, county tax records, local newspapers ... (WVHS has local records, including the first area phone book, a blacksmith's business ledger, and the Oddfellows Lodge initiation records!)
- The National Archives offers blank genealogy charts and other forms: <https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms>
- *Ancestry.com* is available free of charge *in the public library and at home* with a Library Card ID#.
- Keep detailed records of your search.
- Share your records with someone as a "back-up" in case your records are lost.
- See the librarian for help when you are stuck!

**Searching a deed can help with genealogy research:** Especially the older deeds are valuable because they include taxes, occupations, and the like. The WVHS website on this topic has been recently updated, and it contains links to other helpful websites. For further information, go to <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/researching-historic-deeds/>

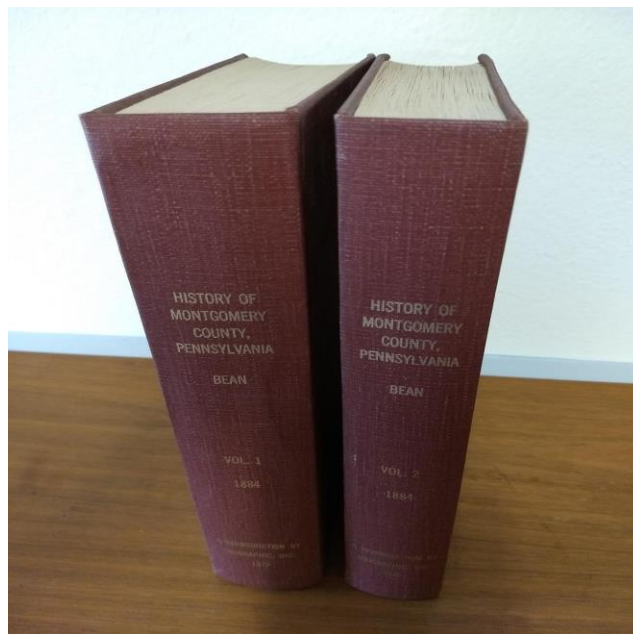


**Local Mill to Hold Open House:** The Evans-Mumbower Mill, located nearby at Swedesford and Township Line Roads, will be open on Sunday, August 13, 1-4 PM. The mill dates from 1835, and demonstrations there will show how its stones, weighing 2500 pounds and pushed by the stream, could grind corn.



***The nearby Evans-Mumbower Mill will demonstrate how it grinds corn.***

**Famous 1800s Historian Took His Own Life:** The website of the *Historical Society of Montgomery County* states: “Theodore Bean was born on May 14, 1833. He was raised in Norristown and educated by the public schools. At the age of 17, he was apprenticed to a blacksmith. In January of 1860, Theodore married Hannah Heebner and would eventually have three children. When the Civil War erupted, he enlisted. He fought with Company L of the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry. After the war, he became a lawyer. Theodore had a great sense of history. In his time, he would author three works: a history of Valley Forge, a history of the 17th PA Cavalry and the classic *History of Montgomery County*, for which he is best remembered. Theodore was also instrumental in the creation of the Historical Society of Montgomery County. Tragically, overwhelmed with numerous concerns, Theodore W. Bean took his own life on January 20, 1891.”



***Bean's two thick books, filled with facts about the history of Montgomery County and available at the WVHS Library.***

**Spring Cleaning?** Please remember that items reflecting local history are needed for the 1895 School's collection. We especially appreciate receiving old photographs of our area's people, places, and things. For questions, email [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org).

**“Volunteer Days” Cancelled for August:** The usual Thursday “Volunteer Day” for work at the 1895 School will be cancelled for the month of August. They will resume in September. Thanks to our “regulars,” board member Barry Johnson and member Dan Myers, for their efforts with accessioning over the last several months.

**Recently Accessioned:** A 1956 typewriter was donated by member Mabel Whittock to WVHS, so children visiting the museum could experience the fun of tapping its keys and experiencing the forerunner of the computer keyboard. Neal Bradley recently replaced its ribbon (Remember those?), and it is ready to perform. That turquoise color was everywhere in 1956. Here are two examples:

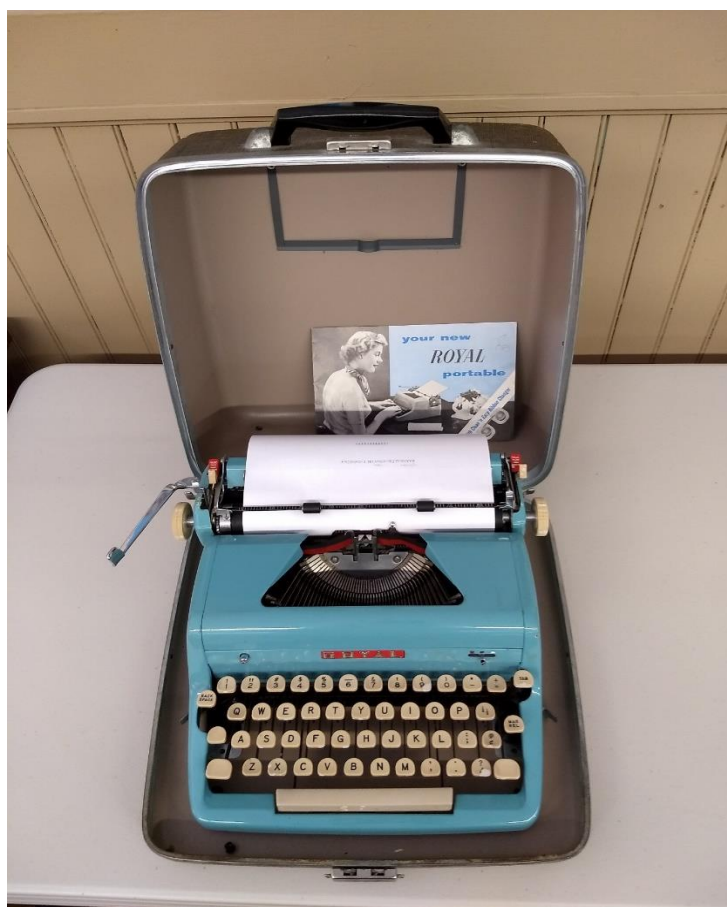


*A 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air (Photo from GT Auto Lounge, online)*





***A 1956 turquoise kitchen range (Photo from eBay).***



***Donated by Mabel Whittock, the 1956 turquoise Royal typewriter in its case, to be used by our museum guests***

**News from the Board of Directors:**

1. For purposes of a potential grant, there was discussion about the digitation of the collection's yearbooks, so they could be placed online for use by genealogists and others.
2. In 2025, WVHS will turn 50, so a society history should be written for publication.
3. Speakers for 2023-2024 are being contacted.
4. A rededication at the Mary Ambler headstone is being planned for some time this summer.

## ***EVERY DEED TELLS A STORY***

***from Russ Bellavance***

The Wissahickon Valley Historical Society has a wonderful collection of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century property deeds, including some that trace the ownership of a property through several generations. Many of these deeds tell interesting stories about the people involved and the times in which they lived. Please join Russ Bellavance, past President of the Society, on a journey of exploration of these beautiful hand-written deeds, some of which will be available for you to see up close. The program will be given at the Blue Bell Branch of the Wissahickon Valley Public Library on Thursday, August 17, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.



**One of the WVHS deeds was acknowledged by Thomas McKean, then Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. McKean, for whom McKean Road in Lower Gwynedd was named, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was President of the Congress of the United States under the Articles of Confederation and was later a Governor of Pennsylvania.**

*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.**