
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 3, Number 2
The Valley Crier



October 2023

Announcements

- **Sun, 10/8, 1-3 pm, Franklinville School Open House (See details below)**
- **Mon, 10/9, 7 pm, 1895 School, Speaker on the Muhlenbergs (See details below)**
- **September 1st marked the beginning of the WVHS Society Year, so dues are due. (See details below)**

Sunday, Oct 8, 1-3PM, Franklinville School Open House. 1701 Morris Road near Normandy Farm (**Oct.15 rain date**): This one-room school, proudly owned by WVHS, will be open for the first time since the pandemic and construction issues closed its doors. Now it boasts a lovely, repaired, front porch. Furnished as a 19th-century classroom, the building appears on the National Register of Historic Places, not just because it is old (1858), but because it was once an important neighborhood center. Learn more about how thousands of local residents traveled to enjoy its community picnics! (Park on the lawn. Please enter through the white rail fence and park to the right. Due to parking issues, if the lawn is wet, the event will be postponed until Sunday, October 15.)



The Franklinville School. Photo taken in April, 2023

Monday, October 9 at 7 PM (1895 School)-- Lisa Minardi, a specialist on Pennsylvania Germans, **to speak about Historic Trappe and the Muhlenbergs**: Lisa Minardi is the executive director of Historic Trappe, home to several house museums associated with the Muhlenberg family and the new Center for Pennsylvania German Studies, and she is also the executive director of the Lutheran Archives Center at Philadelphia. She worked as a curator at Winterthur Museum for over a decade. Her PhD

research involves the German-speaking community in early Philadelphia. She is the author of many books and articles on Pennsylvania German art and culture, including *Pastors & Patriots: The Muhlenberg Family of Pennsylvania* and *A Colorful Folk: Pennsylvania Germans & the Art of Everyday Life*. Her latest book, just published in late September, is *Native Son: The Life and Art of David Ellinger*, and it serves as the catalog for Historic Trappe's latest exhibition.

Lisa will present on the Muhlenbergs, described online as “a political, religious, and military dynasty.” The title of her presentation is *Historic Trappe and the Muhlenberg Family of Pennsylvania*.



Historic Trappe's Henry Muhlenberg House

WVHS at Ambler's "Octoberfest 2023," Saturday, Oct 7, starting 11

AM: Look for the WVHS table at Ambler's annual fall festival. The day features food, vendors, music and much more along Butler Avenue and its side streets.

Your dues are due: The Society Year began on September 1, so it's time to pay your dues: \$25 per individual; \$35 per couple. In addition, this is a good time to "round up" as you make a contribution! Our society relies on dues and contributions to pay for oil, electricity, insurance, and other rising expenses. Your generosity is appreciated! For the snail-mail address or PayPal details, go to <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/>

Open House Special Exhibit Wows Visitors: The WVHS September Open House drew about 60 visitors, all intrigued by Frank Russo's outstanding display of Woolworth's memorabilia, which included dishware, insignia merchandise, and even a waitress's uniform. The exhibit also related how, in the 1960s, a Woolworth's lunch counter in North Carolina was the site of one of the first Civil Rights sit-ins. In the 1895 School's front yard, member Neal Bradley parked several antique cars and Centre Square Fire Company's antique fire truck to help draw attention to the event. And the "sale" of "lunch-counter" pie and coffee created generous donations to WVHS.

A former WVHS President, Russo's hobbies include collecting memorabilia and historic items. He says his interest in Woolworth's was created years ago when he met his mother for lunch every day at the Plymouth Meeting Woolworth's. A March 2018 *WVHS Newsletter* states that another Woolworth's stood in Ambler next to the present Denny's Electric, starting in 1931.



Woolworth's display highlights the September Open House

Bellavance speaks about Lafayette: At the WVHS September meeting, WVHS Past President Russ Bellavance presented on Lafayette's final visit to the United States in 1824. After the Battle of Yorktown, Lafayette returned to France, where he was caught up in the politics of that country's revolution and, although a hero of the French revolution, he spent years in prison.

His visit was meant to show U.S. unity at a time when the issue of slavery was already causing political divisions. Treated as a hero, he was the last surviving major general of the American Revolution. Along his route, he visited the Brandywine Battlefield, where he had been wounded, and he

traveled to meet again with Presidents Monroe, John Adams (by then 89 years old), and his commander, George Washington, whom he considered a father. The farewell between the two was quite emotional. Lafayette, an orphan, was just 19 when he first served under Washington, so the two became close. After the tour, many towns, streets, and other locations were named after Lafayette; 13 states declared him a “natural born” citizen. Details of the trip were kept by his secretary, Levasseur. After returning to France, inspired by Jefferson, Lafayette wrote *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*.



Russ Bellavance spoke in September about Lafayette's 1824 U.S. Tour

WVHS Museums Open by Appointment: Our society's two museums, the Franklinville School and the 1895 School, are open by appointment. Fall is a great time to visit. To use our library and archives or to simply see the exhibits, please feel free to request a date and time:

info@WValleyHS.org

Historic Mile Marker Appears on Google: Last month's *Valley Crier* reported that Whitemarsh's historic mile marker at the border with Whitpain had been knocked over but would be repaired. Board member Barry Johnson has discovered that Milestone 15, the one that was broken, shown on *Google Maps* with the *Street View* feature, appears as it looked before the traffic mishap. The picture is labeled *Apr 2003*.



***Milestone 15, dated 1768, in a screenshot of Google, stating “15 M to P”
(15 Miles to Philadelphia)***

WVHS Map Men Finally Successful: A long list of gentlemen volunteered to help move a cumbersome, historic map from the 1895 School's furnace room to its lobby. Several dates were chosen throughout the summer, but in each instance, rainstorms postponed the attempt at the big move. Finally, before the September meeting, Joe Langella and Dan Myers (under the leadership of about a dozen “sidewalk superintendents”) carried the precious item to its new home. It dates from 1860, and experts have deemed it rare. Although the map is valuable, it is too large to hang in any convenient spaces. Now it needs to be hung and given better lighting, but it

sits away from the “dangers” of its prior location. Our appreciation goes to the Map Men for volunteering their time!



***Vice President Joe Langella and Frequent Accessioner Dan Myers
carry the 1860 map***



“Map of the Vicinity of Philadelphia from actual Surveys... 1860”

New Sign at Franklinville School: Board Member Barry Johnson has repaired the address sign at the 1858 school. Coincidentally, 1701 is the year Whitpain Township was formed!



WVHS represented at Lower Gwynedd’s (9-23-23) and Whitpain’s (9-30-23) Fall Events: Vice President Joe Langella, also the WVHS Membership Chair, has learned that one of the best ways to promote our society is our presence at these community programs. Thousands see our booth, and by the end of the season, hundreds have stopped to talk about

the wonders of our local history. (Ambler's event, Oct. 7, is mentioned above.) The visitors ask questions or, better yet, offer information about local history not available in any book. This year, because of the rain, Lower Gwynedd's festivities were moved inside to the Wissahickon High School. Despite the quick change of location, the event ran smoothly.



WVHS table at the Lower Gwynedd's First Indoor Fall Fest

Announcement from the Skippack Historical Society: Skippack Days will be October 7 and 8. See their website for details.

Back to School, Sept 2023—Data from PA SHPO: Did you know that there are over 350 K-12 school buildings in Pennsylvania, individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places? The first to be listed in November 1971 is the [Beggartown School](#) in the Mt. Airy section of Philadelphia (top). The most recent is the [Frantz School](#) in Ross Township, Monroe County, which was listed in September 2022.



Back to School -- from PA SHPO (Sept 8, 2023)

Lower Gwynedd Township to sponsor History Marker Program:

The township wants to recognize those who may not be eligible for state or national recognition, so the leadership is starting its own program. If you would like to apply for a historic marker to identify an outstanding Lower Gwynedd event, place, person, group, or innovation, please visit this website for details and an application:

<https://www.lowergwynedd.org/resources/news/article/?id=6588>

Oldest House in Pennsylvania: <https://a-z-animals.com/blog/the-oldest-house-in-pennsylvania-is-more-than-years-old/>



Oldest House in Pennsylvania, pictured in a lovely fall scene

National Register of Historic Places Is Misunderstood: The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers has issued a report on how we recognize our historic places, with attention on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). NRHP is often misunderstood and has not been widely used to recognize places of importance to many Americans whose history, sites, buildings, and neighborhoods may have been intentionally or unintentionally overlooked or not considered. [Read the report.](#)

Correction: Frances Morris Treisbach has written to WVHS, alerting us that the walking stick pictured in last month's *Valley Crier* was not old or her grandfather's, as stated. The error occurred when a relative sent items to the 1895 School on her behalf. However, Treisbach did donate several useful historic photos, and the one below shows Treisbach in third grade.



***Frances Morris Treisbach, student #19 in Whitpain School District's
Section 3B in October 1952***

From the September Board of Directors' Meeting:

- Ambler Storyteller Bernadette Dougherty attended the beginning of the board meeting to discuss the status of the Ambler train station's Freight House. SEPTA has threatened to demolish it, and Dougherty received the board's further assistance to save the historic building.
- In September, the Heirloom Questors will be visiting the 1895 School's museum.
- Gwynedd Hall will turn 200 years old in 2024, so a celebration will be planned.
- A Lenape display will be set up in the "extra" display case at the 1895 School.

- Joe Langella is preparing to have the Toll Booth moved, and he is sending reminders that dues were due on September 1st.

Calendar of Events, 2023-2024

- **Oct 8, 1-3 PM, Franklinville School, Sunday Open House** (weather permitting)
- **Oct 9, 7 PM, Lisa Minardi, PA German specialist, on Historic Trappe and the Muhlenbergs**
- **Nov 13, 7 PM, Megan McNish, PA SHPO (PA State Historic Preservation Office), The Effects of Historic Preservation**
- **Dec 11, 6:30 PM, Holiday Party**
- **Jan 8, 7 PM, Show n Tell**
- **Feb 12, 6:30 PM, Dr. Friederike Baer, Penn State Professor and author of new, award-winning book, *Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War* (location to be announced)**
- **Mar 11, 7 PM, To be announced. Topic: Lower Gwynedd**
- **Apr 8, 7 PM, Robert Harley, His Family's Boxwood Farm and His Grandfather, Dick Harley, Professional Baseball Player**
- **TBD—Spring Open House, Eli Moniz, painter**
- **May 13, 7 PM, Bernadette Dougherty, "The Deck Family: 100+ Years of History in Ambler" and Election of Officers**
- **Spring Outing, To be announced**
- **Patron's Party, To be announced**
- **June 10, 6:30 PM, Picnic**

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.

#####