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*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 3, Number 3*

# *The Valley Crier*



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**Announcing Our November Speaker on an Important Topic!**

**Megan McNish from the *PA State Historic Office of Preservation***

**Monday, November 13, at 7 PM, at the 1895 School**

**Understanding the Programs of the Pennsylvania  
State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO)**

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PA SHPO is part of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), which is the commonwealth's official history agency. PA SHPO administers the commonwealth's historic preservation program as authorized by the Pennsylvania History Code and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. PA SHPO administers a variety of programs, including the National Register of Historic Places, Certified Local Government, and Keystone Grants, which can benefit communities across the commonwealth. Understanding the programs of the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office explains the PA SHPO's responsibilities, initiatives, and how they can benefit Pennsylvania's communities.

With an office near WVHS, at Hope Lodge, Megan McNish is the Eastern Region Community Preservation Coordinator for the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). As the Eastern region's community preservation coordinator, she provides technical assistance to Certified Local Governments and community preservation partners. Prior to joining the SHPO, Megan was a historic preservation planner for the City of Columbia, South Carolina, where she reviewed preservation projects at the local level. A graduate of Gettysburg College, where she received her bachelor's degree in history, and West Virginia University, where she received her master's degree in public history, Megan is passionate about helping communities find ways to preserve their historic places.

In November, PA SHPO will be touring Ambler Borough with the Ambler Storytellers, setting boundaries for a new historic district to help define Ambler as a "company town." This is just one of several steps in the process of gaining recognition. In addition, Megan has also been helpful to WVHS as SEPTA threatens to demolish Ambler train station's pre-Civil War Freight House.



**SEPTA Delays Demolition of 1855 Ambler Freight House:** This delay is temporary, and as of this writing, representatives of SEPTA and WVHS have scheduled a meeting. PA SHPO has assisted WVHS. SEPTA's engineering studies show that the building may fall onto the nearby track and that repairing the building will cost a huge amount. WVHS, receiving

much public support, knows that studies completed in every state show how preservation of old buildings, rather than their demolition, is always more economical and better for the environment, and it will better maintain a town's unique character. For updates, see the WVHS homepage:

[www.WValleyHS.org](http://www.WValleyHS.org)



*Ambler Train Station's Pre-Civil War Freight House  
Sits on the Crumbling "Honey Run" Culvert*

**Readers, if you have ideas or insights** about how to save this structure, please let WVHS know: [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)

**Ambler Storytellers Continue Plans to Place Ambler Borough on National Register of Historic Places:** On November 3, Ambler Storyteller Mary Spross will escort PA SHPO officials (the National Register Review Staff) around Ambler to help establish the boundaries for a future historic district. WVHS is applying for Ambler to be recognized as a "company town," acknowledging the social, economic, and political influence of manufacturer Keasbey & Mattison. The company employed most of the town's citizens, provided utilities, and offered reduced rates on housing. Of

special importance for preservation are the old Butler Pike and Main Street structures and the stone executive mansions built for K&M employees (some in Upper Dublin), now privately owned.

**Franklinville School Open House Event is Postponed, Postponed, Postponed!** In case you didn't notice, it's been raining every Saturday and/or Sunday, making the lawn at the school too soggy for parking. So, the Open House was postponed for three weekends. It is an important event since the precious structure has been closed--first by the pandemic and then for repairs to the front porch. Both the Franklinville School and the 1895 School museums are OPEN BY APPOINTMENT, so please ask for a private tour: [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)



***Franklinville School's Open House, October 29. Pictured are Docent Ethel Hutchinson, Board Secretary Marie Goldkamp, and Ambler Storyteller Mary Spross. Note the lovely poplar floors.***

**Improvements at Franklinville School:** First, Neal Bradley and his son, Joe, are rehabbing the school's sign. Old paint has been removed, and a fresh coat of red and white will be added. The building was a public school, and then it was purchased by the Strassburgers, who owned Normandy Farm. They used it as a private school for their son and then as a community center for their farm's tenants. Those red and white colors coordinate with the other Normandy Farm buildings. Last month, Barry Johnson repaired the school's address sign. In addition, he is now experimenting with installing a dehumidifier. Most importantly, a contractor has been hired to replace the leaky roof.

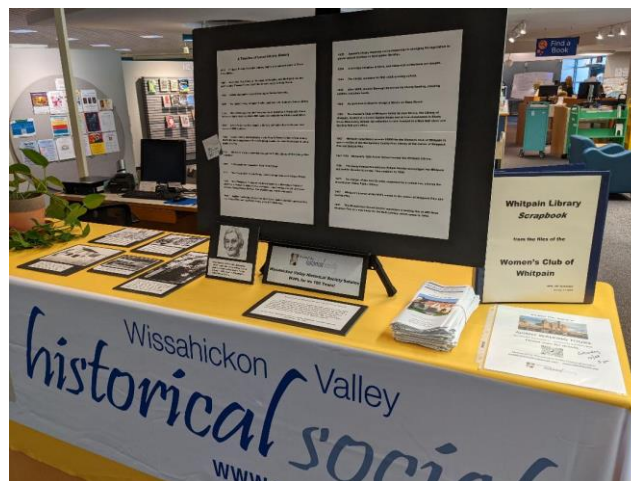


*The “Before” of the sign with its old paint removed*

**Dinner Bell Rehabbed:** Neal and Joe Bradley cleaned and will soon paint the dinner bell, which John Chambers gave to WVHS. It came from his Eagleville farm when he donated the Skippack Pike Toll Booth, still to be moved to Whitpain Township. The bell is getting a new, sturdy post too. Neal and Joe restore antique cars (some stored at the 1895 School), so they have tools and know-how.

## **WVHS Salutes the Local Libraries at 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:** The

Wissahickon Valley Public Library, with branches in Blue Bell and Ambler, just turned 100 years old. The Ambler Library began in 1923 when the Colony Club's literary committee purchased 12 books to rent to readers. After the Wissahickon Valley School District was formed, it merged with a library sponsored by the Women's Club of Whitpain. In earlier years, the Ambler Library also absorbed the books from the Union Library in Upper Dublin and another Union Library in Ambler that was run by Keasbey and Mattison. At the celebration in WVPL's two locations, WVHS created a table display for each with a timeline of the library's history and photos showing some of its many locations. Through Marie Goldkamp, WVHS had access to the Women's Club of Whitpain and its library file, showing a treasured scrapbook of newspaper clippings.



**WVHS Braves the Ambler Octoberfest:** Past President Russ Bellavance and President Carol Kalos greeted visitors and sold old Ambler maps during a day of changing weather patterns: warmth, followed by chilly breezes, then cold winds, next a sprinkle, and finally a downpour.



**New Display for Whitpain:** Marie and Tom Goldkamp recently changed the WVHS presentation at the township building, using the topic of Reed's Country Store. During the American Revolution, the site was owned by a Tory. He soon went out of business, but a Patriot took over and was successful, reflecting, we assume, the political view of the surrounding farmers.



***WVHS Display at the Whitpain Township Building, showing Reed's Country Store at a site important during the American Revolution***

**Raffle Winner Announced:** The lucky winner of the WVHS Raffle, held at September's Whitpain Community Festival, were long-time WVHS members Julia and Alan Tempest. The prize was a framed, signed and numbered print of Reed's Country Store by John Westcott.



***A Print of the Historic Reed's Country Store***

**Another Mile Marker Down:** Joe Langella was recently notified of yet another broken milestone in our area. WVHS was notified that the historic mile marker on the property of Gwynedd Mercy University--to the right of its Sumneytown Pike entrance-- had been damaged. WVHS VP Joe Langella hurried to investigate, finding the mile marker broken in two! The break seems to have occurred at a previous repair of the marker. WVHS is working with Lower Gwynedd Township to repair the marker. A mile marker in Whitemarsh was broken several months ago and is also being repaired. (Please see the photo below of the recently-broken marker.)





***(Another) Broken Mile Marker. This one at Gwynedd Mercy University***

**Heirloom Questers Visit:** Eleven members of the Heirloom Questers visited the 1895 School in October. President Carol Kalos spoke to the group, showed them around, and answered their questions about WVHS, our museums, and the accessioning process. This group is no longer affiliated with the larger Questors organization; they are simply women enjoying history and friendship.

**Thank you, Whitpain Township:** As the weather chills, the thermostat at the 1895 School is set at 58 degrees, warm enough to keep our ancient plaster in good shape, but cool enough to make every dollar count. Recently, township workers checked the radiators and heating system. WVHS appreciates their help!

**Executive Director Describes Historic Trappe:** The September speaker, Lisa Minardi, offered wonderful stories about Historic Trappe and its three properties: (1) the Dewees Tavern with galleries of PA German folk art and furniture; (2) the Speaker's House, home of Frederick Muhlenberg, the first Speaker of the U.S. House, which is being restored. (Minardi showed pictures of its Victorian mansard roof being lifted by a crane); and (3) the Muhlenberg House, the home of retired pastor Henry Muhlenberg. Minardi explained that Henry wanted to be a missionary in India, but instead he organized Lutheran congregations in New Hanover, Trappe, and Philadelphia. She noted that the German Lutheran Church in Philadelphia, at the time called the Zion Lutheran, held the largest audience of any public building in the U.S. Thus, Franklin's and Washington's memorial services were held there. In Henry's retirement, he kept a journal while 32 people lived in his house during the American Revolution. How does Minardi raise the funds? Admission events, a yearly gala, and community and government grants.



***At Historic Trappe, restoration of the  
(First U.S.) Speaker's House, August 2023 (Facebook)***

**Receiving *The Quill* is a benefit to becoming a paid member of WVHS.**

The first issue for Society Year 2023-2024 was emailed recently. It includes three articles associated with local history:

The first article reviews a 1940s novel, which describes the Philadelphia area and which inspired James Michener to become a writer, creating novels based on his intense history and geography research. The book also mentions William Penn's toes!

Next is an article about Nicholas Wainwright, who lived with his family in a local historic house for three generations, who was a prolific history writer, and who was president of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. He was an important character who lived down the street....

The final article, fitting for an October publication, tells a ghost story, set at a local speakeasy, where a murder occurred.

These articles will bring their readers local history, inspiration, and entertainment.

**WVHS dues were due on September 1<sup>st</sup>.** To date, over 70 returning members have renewed their membership for 2023-24, and over 50 of them included a contribution with their dues payment. Thank you, Members!

**WVHS welcomes its new members:**

Jimmy Chong Family  
Kathy and Jim Morris  
Karleigh Burns  
Diane Horan  
Jeff Biel / Russell Roofing

Lower Gwynedd Township  
Community Ambulance of Ambler  
Paige Menton  
Douglas Dinwoodie  
Paul Andreas  
Tiffany Hurtado  
James Black  
Colette Varano  
Michael Liebrandt

**Want to Write for WVHS?** If you have been reading or researching history and would like to write an article or request an article for the WVHS *Crier* or *Quill*, please send an email with your idea: [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)

### **From the Board of Directors--Date and Place Set for WVHS 50<sup>th</sup>**

**Anniversary Party:** We are planning ahead! In 2025, WVHS will be 50 years old, and we want to host a great celebration! *Save the Date* for Sunday, September 14, 1-4 PM, at the William Penn Inn in **2025**. (This year is not a typo.)

### **Calendar of Events, 2023-2024:**

- **Throughout the year—** Volunteer Days (Most Thursdays), 11 AM until 1 PM, at the 1895 School.
- **Nov 13, 7 PM, Megan McNish, PA SHPO (PA State Historic Preservation Office), Understanding the Programs of PA SHPO**
- **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* (at the **Ambler Library**)
- Spring Outing, possibly to Historic Trappe, TBD
- Mar 11, 7 PM, Lower Gwynedd topic at 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, Elli Moniz, painter
- May 13, 7 PM, Bernadette Dougherty, "The Deck Family: 100+ Years of History in Ambler" and Election of Officers
- 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.**

