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*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 3, Number 6*

# *The Valley Crier*



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*February 2024*

**ANNOUNCING --**

**WVHS and Friends of the Ambler Library Will Host a Special Speaker:**

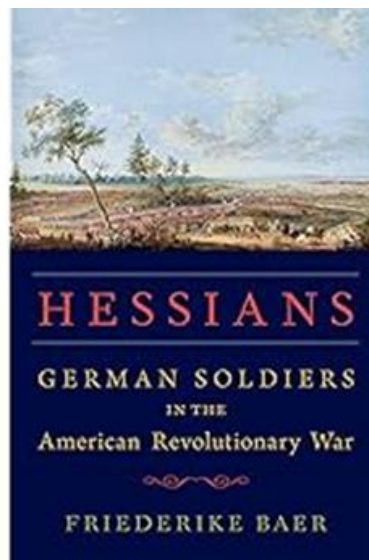
**Monday, Feb 12, 6:30 PM, at the Ambler Branch of the  
Wissahickon Valley Public Library, author and scholar  
Dr. Friederike Baer on Hessian Soldiers**

Between 1776 and 1783, about a third of those fighting for the British were Germans, today called the Hessian soldiers. Some died in Whitpain Township. What was the Revolutionary War like for these German soldiers who fought alongside the British? What did they think of North America? What did they gain or lose by their service? And what happened to them after the war?

Dr. Baer's research has earned her the Society of Cincinnati Prize for an outstanding book about the American Revolution.

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In her new book, [\*Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War\*](#), published by Oxford University Press, historian Dr. Friederike Baer offers a groundbreaking reimagining of Britain's war against American independence from the perspective of German soldiers as well as civilian members of the corps. The book relies heavily on German-authored private and official records from both German and the U.S. archives, including a large body of material that has not previously been examined by scholars of the Revolutionary War. Rather than being a traditional military history, the book draws on these German-authored impressions of the American war as well as descriptions of the built and natural environment, local customs and manners, slavery, and encounters with Native Americans, to offer an original, richly textured account of this pivotal time in American history. (German Society of PA)



**Show-and-Tell Warms the January Meeting:** As a New Year's Tribute, President Carol Kalos began the meeting by thanking a list of 23 WVHS members who were exceptional volunteers during 2023. Then WVHS members and friends presented their Show and Tell:

- Several World War I items, Barry Johnson
- Hosiery boards (forms) from a Kensington textile mill, Ethel Hutchinson
- Her grandfather's souvenir cup from 1892 Atlantic City, Mary Spross
- Two bayonets from Brown Bess muskets, Jennifer Zwetolitz
- A collection of 1950's children's schoolbooks, Christine Raines
- A collection of documents associated with horticulturalist Martha "Jane" Garra, including a drawing of a bouquet made for the Queen of England and landscaping plans for the Wainwright family at Gwynedd Hall, Judy Baigis
- A pre-1950's stuffed-lion push-toy from the Wainwright's, Paul Andre (a neighbor of the Langellas) (See the photo below.)
- A label from a Carter's Ink bottle, 1897, found near Wissahickon Creek, Zbigniew Bieniaszewski (Zibi)
- A Philadelphia fire insurance plaque, 1810, Edith Janssen (a friend of Zibi)
- A collection of Communist-scare documents and pins depicting Chairman Mao, Mike Zebe
- A thermometer, labeled "G.M. Deck & Co," found in the loft of an old Susquehanna Road barn, David Kings

- A detonator and a telegraph key, used to send Morse Code, Dan Myers
- Her great-grandfather's antique conch "seashell horn," Carol Kalos



***A pre-1950's toy, recently donated by Paul Andre. At Show and Tell, he offered details of how he trash-picked it years ago from the former Wainwright household (Gwynedd Hall)!***

## **Funds Still Needed for Engineering Study of Ambler's Old Train**

**Station's "Freight House":** WVHS needs another \$1000 to meet the expenses of the engineering study, which should be ready soon. The study will estimate the cost of repairs and suggest ways to use the structure, its adaptive re-use. In October, SEPTA announced plans to demolish the pre-Civil War Freight House. However, Pennsylvania has determined the Freight House to be eligible for national register historic recognition in two ways: the Ambler Borough Commercial District and the North Pennsylvania Railroad Linear Historic District, including the three buildings at Ambler's Old Train Station.

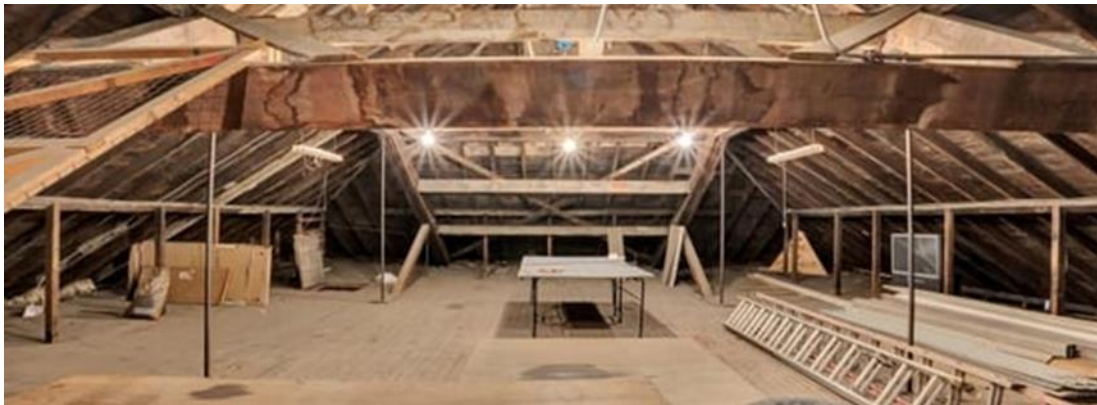
Private donors have assisted the effort, coordinated by the historical society, to find a new, useful purpose for the old structure. You can help WVHS by

- >>> making a contribution or
- >>> buying some beers in Ambler.

**"Freight House Red"** is an American Amber Ale. It is a special brew created at Tannery Run Brew Works to benefit WVHS and the "Save the Freight House" campaign, and it is now available at **Bar 31, Harry's Taproom, and Tannery Run Brew Works**. Beer glasses depicting the Freight House are also available at the three bars (while supplies last). All proceeds will help to save the old building. New research shows that it is older than previously stated, and it may be the first train building in Ambler!

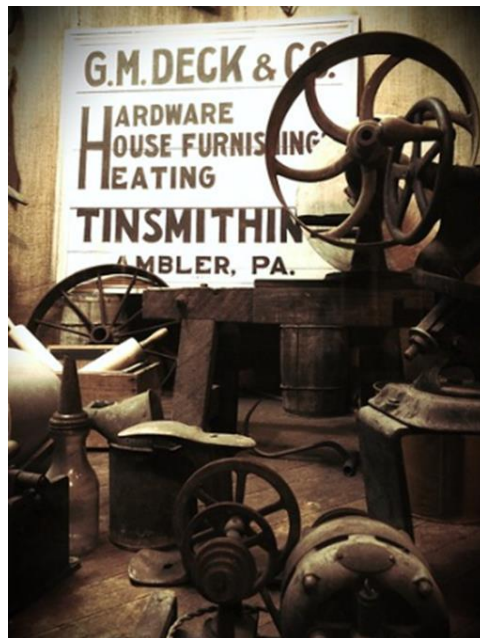


***“Save the Freight House” glasses, available in Ambler at Tannery Run Brew Works, Bar 31, and Harry’s Taproom***



***The attic of the old Ambler Hotel’s stone stable, now occupied by Amazing Decks, but marked for demolition. Near Decks Hardware, it sits across West Race Street from the Freight House. Its builders in the 1800s used trusses, like a bridge, over the Tannery Run Creek, which also flows under the Freight House. The Ambler Hotel was destroyed by fire on Christmas Eve, 1946.***

***Around Ambler reports:*** Deck’s Hardware, an Ambler Main Street staple for more than a century, closed its doors for good on December 23. The family-owned hardware store was founded by Garnett M. Deck in 1908. “The store itself is actually a conglomeration of buildings, the centerpiece of which dates to 1875. The other interconnected sections of the store include a former stable that wasn’t added until later,” [Hidden City Philadelphia](#) wrote earlier this year.



**Note that the early Decks Hardware was known for its Tinsmithing**

**WVHS Display at Blue Bell Library in December:** A 1929 Christmas card, depicting students arriving by sleigh at the Franklinville School, set the theme of the display, Jingle Bells. The display also showed other local holiday traditions, including caroling; the reason for sleigh bells; the song, “Jingle Bells”; and the German tradition, belsnickeling.



*December's WVHS display at the Blue Bell Branch, Wissahickon Valley Public Library*

**Gwynedd Hall (on the NRHP) will be 200 Years Old Soon:** A task force is being formed to plan the fund-raiser celebration, and volunteers are needed. Please contact [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)

**“America 250” releases its new design:** It is similar to the 1976 Bicentennial symbol because both were made by the same branding and graphic design company, and both use a “ribbon-based pattern.” For the 2026 anniversary pattern, Chermayeff & Geismar & Haviv explains that it used red, white, and blue ribbons to “signify commemoration, celebration, and purpose. The number 250 is formed from a single continuous sweep of the three ribbons, suggesting unity, cooperation, and harmony while serif lettering spells out ‘America.’”





***U.S. Postage Stamps, 1976 and 2026***

**Online List of WVHS Library Holdings:** The University of Pennsylvania's website lists the holdings of local history groups, including WVHS:

[https://findingaids.library.upenn.edu/records?f%5Brepository\\_ssi%5D%5B%5D=Wissahickon+Valley+Historical+Society](https://findingaids.library.upenn.edu/records?f%5Brepository_ssi%5D%5B%5D=Wissahickon+Valley+Historical+Society)

**Library of Congress, Photos of Historic Buildings in Whitpain Township:**

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/hhh.pa3020.photos/?sp=11&st=image>

**A Short Video about Blue Bell:** [https://montco.today/2024/01/oldest-bars-montco-list/?cat=food-and-drink&utm\\_source=MONTCO+Today&utm\\_campaign=bc59ad2890-SaturdayEmailCampaign-Montco&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_ef7c125e39-bc59ad2890-275574418](https://montco.today/2024/01/oldest-bars-montco-list/?cat=food-and-drink&utm_source=MONTCO+Today&utm_campaign=bc59ad2890-SaturdayEmailCampaign-Montco&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_ef7c125e39-bc59ad2890-275574418)



***WVHS is grateful to Dottie MacDermott  
for her holiday decorating at the 1895 School!***

**Thank-you for Contributions:** Many thanks to the following generous members who have contributed to our “Preservation Campaign” to provide archival materials, preserving our museum’s books and fabrics. With their help, WVHS met its goal and purchased several large archives boxes, dust-proof and acid-free, to protect the recent donation of military uniforms and other items. Donors were

- Russ and Jeannie Bellavance
- Tom and Marie Goldkamp
- Joe and Donna Langella



***Early 1900s books in the WVHS Library,  
now housed in archival boxes***

**The Museum and Library at the 1895 School are open by appointment:**

Take a private tour. Invite your friends. Please email your request to

[info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)

**Writers are welcome to add to *The Quill* and *The Valley Crier*:** Please send your ideas to [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org)

**From the Board of Directors:**

--Art groups from the area have been invited to partner with WVHS as we host watercolorist Ellie Moniz at our March 17<sup>th</sup> Open House.

--WVHS will be accepting a portrait of a historic Union Meeting home.

--Temple University, Ambler, has contacted WVHS about teaching history to a group of K-3 students.

--A Whitpain Township official met with WVHS officers to discuss preliminary plans to widen School Lane, install a traffic signal at the

corner with Skippack Pike, and meet ADA requirements. The 1895 School's stone wall may have to be moved closer to the building.

--Wayne Huss, who compiled and edited *Whitpain Township, A Tricentennial Reflection, 1701-2001*, has contributed boxes of his Whitpain history research.

--Ambler Storytellers' tours of Ambler will begin in April.

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

- 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**)
- Mar 11, 7 PM, To be announced
- Mar 17, 1-3 PM, 1895 School-- Open House with artist Ellie Moniz
- Apr 1, Reservations are due for guided tour of Historic Trappe
- Apr 8, 7 PM, Robert Harley, His Family's Boxwood Farm and His Grandfather, Dick Harley, Professional Baseball Player
- Apr 20, 1-3 PM, WVHS tour of Historic Trappe with Executive Director Lisa Minardi. Reservation in advance, \$15
- May 13, 7 PM, Bernadette Dougherty, "The Deck Family: 100+ Years of History in Ambler." Election of Officers and a special tribute
- Patron's Party, To be announced
- June 10, 6:30 PM, Members' Picnic
- Sept 14, **2025**, 1-4 PM, William Penn Inn, WVHS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration (Save the Date)

**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.**