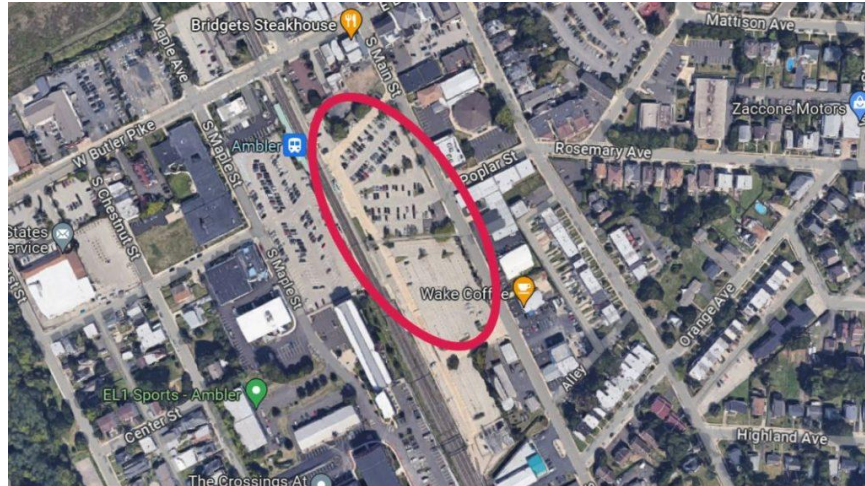

Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 3, Number 5

The Valley Crier 

Please bring an item for SHOW and TELL: WVHS Meeting on Monday, January 8, at 7 PM. The meeting will be a “Show and Tell,” so bring one of your historic or special items to the meeting and be prepared to tell the group about it—just 3-5 minutes. Prior Show-and-Tell programs were great fun with a chance for guests to learn new things and enjoy each other’s company. Light refreshments and social time will complete the evening.

Public Meeting about SEPTA changing its Ambler Train Station’s parking lot: SEPTA has proposed offering a major portion of the train station’s parking lot to a developer. Ambler Borough Council has already changed its zoning code to accommodate new construction. For you to find out more and to express your opinion to SEPTA officials, SEPTA has scheduled an open house on **Tuesday, January 30th at 6:30 p.m. at the Ambler Borough Hall Gymnasium** to show the “Ambler Station Area Concept.” The purpose of this open house is to “solicit input from riders, residents, and businesses about the possibility of development on portions of the SEPTA train station parking lot.” **(See below for more about SEPTA’s plans to demolish the Freight House.)**



Map of Ambler, showing where parking will be replaced with development

Efforts Continue to Save Ambler Train Station’s Freight House: 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, where it consists of “three major components” (the three buildings at Ambler’s Old Train Station).

A meeting of SEPTA and WVHS officials created a demolition delay, so that WVHS could find a way to save the structure. After that meeting, WVHS announced its understanding that “both groups prefer that the building should remain where it is positioned now.” Then WVHS hired J&M Preservation Studio, a women-owned engineering firm, to complete a structural assessment and to propose plans and estimate costs for re-use of the building. WVHS made arrangements for SEPTA to open the building on December 18, when J&M began its study of the broken timbers under

the Freight House. It was a “weather advisory” day with pouring rain in the morning and a strong, cold wind in the afternoon.



Interior of the Freight House, 12-18-2023. Note the beadboard walls.

The Brew Is Ready: “Freight House” beer, a special brew created at the Tannery Run Brew Works to benefit WVHS and the “Save the Freight House” campaign, 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 and with proceeds helping 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!)

Individual Donors Fund Engineering Study to Save Freight House:

WVHS is grateful to the individuals and businesses who have helped raise the funds to pay for the engineering study conducted by J&M Preservation. A future issue of the *Valley Crier* will list the donors. A total of \$7,840 is needed, and thanks to the leadership of former WVHS board member Bernadette Dougherty, much of that amount has been raised. Everyone can do their part! It’s not too late to send your check. Also, last month’s

Valley Crier showed pictures of the “Save the Freight House” holiday ornament and the beer glass (mentioned above), which the Ambler Storytellers have been selling. Although in limited supply, the ornaments are for sale (\$20) at Bussingers Train and Toy Store, 57 N Main St, Ambler. Or to use a credit card, go to “Donate” at www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/ and then take your proof of purchase to Bussingers to pick up your ornaments.



Side 1

A pen and ink drawing of the Ambler Freight House

Campaign Continues to Preserve Old WVHS Books: WVHS has received grant funding from Pennsylvania to help preserve its 1800s books and private ledgers. Each is accessioned, wrapped in acid-free paper, and stored in an acid-free, dust-proof, water-resistant box. These boxes are wonderful, but expensive! **Additional funds are needed to preserve WVHS's collection of treasured paper and fabrics.** To donate, please email to info@WValleyHS.org

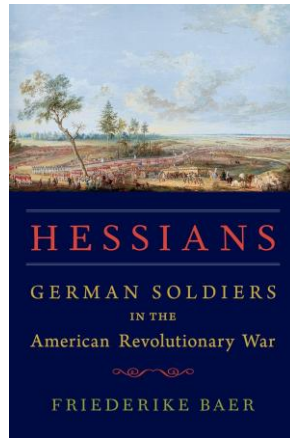
WVHS Holiday Party: About 35 members shared a relaxing evening with lots of good treats. President Carol Kalos congratulated them on their many accomplishments during calendar year 2023, including programs, parties, and most importantly, promoting and preserving history.



A pretty holiday-party centerpiece, created by member Dottie MacDermott

Special Speaker for February Meeting at Ambler Library, starting at

6:30pm: Dr. Friederike Baer, a Penn State history professor, will relate the story of German (Hessian) soldiers during the American Revolution. Many served with the British in Whitpain Township! (Supposedly, several still haunt Skippack Pike's Camp Woods.) These men were not mercenaries; entire units were hired to fight for the British cause. Dr. Baer's book relates the Germans' personal impressions of not just the battles, but the Colonies' people and places. Her book, *Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War*, was honored to win the Society of Cincinnati prize as the year's best book on the American Revolution. (Members of that Society are descendants of officers of the Continental Army.) Friends of the Ambler Library will also be invited to this important WVHS program.



WVHS Presents Exhibit at Blue Bell Library: During December, WVHS displayed local, historic holiday-themed items from its collection. The display's central feature was a 1929 Christmas card, showing an 1800s horse-drawn sleigh at the Franklinville School. The greeting card was sent by the Strassburgers, then the owners of the 1858 one-room school, now on the NRHP. In keeping with the sleigh theme, a description of the "Jingle Bells" melody reveals the nature of the original lyrics, written for a minstrel show! One example is that "got upshot" meant got drunk. Also, the "Belsnickel," a Pennsylvania German tradition, is described. He's a Santa's "helper," who finds out if children are naughty by threatening them with switches. He is often shown wearing antlers and old clothes and with a beard and sooty face.



A modern portrayal of the "Belsnickel," who, in the Pennsylvania German tradition, threatens naughty children at Christmas

Bell Needs New Post: Our new dinner bell, donated in conjunction with the Skippack Pike Toll Booth, was recently cleaned and painted, but its post needs to be replaced. If you know of an expert, please email WVHS: info@WValleyHS.org



A dinner bell, newly cleaned and painted, but in need of a new post

Mystery Solved as Lower Gwynedd Township Preserves Broken Mile

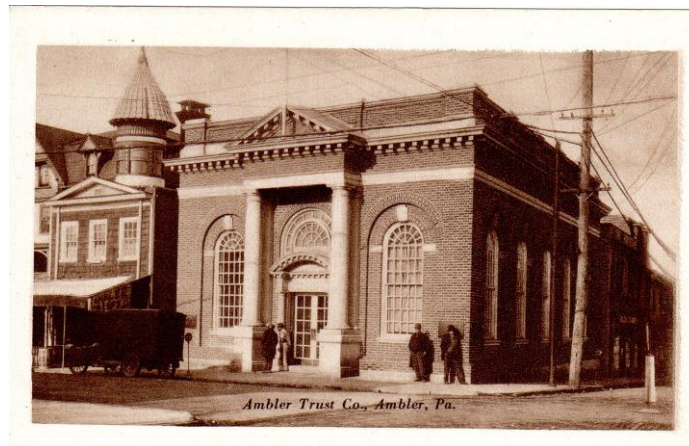
Marker: The broken milestone at Gwynedd Mercy University has been moved from its usual location, so that it can be repaired. The photo in November's *Valley Crier* revealed the marker curiously stating "17 MTC." Vice President Joe Langella, who visited its location on behalf of WVHS, recognized that part of the mile marker was broken off. He figured out that it used to say, "17 MTCP," or "17 Miles to the City of Philadelphia!"

June Meeting in Pittsburgh on Genealogy: The Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society will celebrate its 50th year on June 21-22 at the Wyndham Pittsburgh University Hotel. For details, please contact info@WValleyHS.org.

Photographer Helping WVHS: Charlie Stewart of Inhabit Media has volunteered to help WVHS by taking photos of historic buildings. He is planning drone photos of the block of properties to be torn down in Ambler, and he took interior photos of what is now Amazing Decks but what used to be the stable for the historic Ambler Hotel, which burned down on Christmas Eve 1946. The hotel's stone-walled stable, which spans a creek, Tannery Run, appears in the lower left of this picture. It is held up with trusses, like a bridge. It sits across the street from the Freight House, which covers part of the Tannery Run culvert.



What is today Harry's Taproom, the former Ambler Trust Company building, stands to the right of the Hotel Ambler site along Butler Avenue.



**A postcard, showing the Ambler Trust Company (now Harry's Taproom).
A turret from the Ambler Hotel appears on the left**

Happy New Year! 10 Best History Books of 2023: Smithsonian Magazine presents this list for a year of good reading:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-ten-best-history-books-of-2023-180983266/>

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

Writers are welcome to add to *The Quill* and *The Valley Crier*: Please

send your ideas to info@WValleyHS.org

Welcome to Our New WVHS Members:

- Thomas Deininger
- Deborah Miller
- James B. Quinn

Date and Place Set for WVHS 50th 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 a Luncheon on Sunday, September 14, 1-4 PM, at the William Penn Inn in **2025**. (2025 is not a typo.)

From the Board of Directors:

- Joe Langella is investigating finding a sign-maker to update the sign at the 1895 School.
- A location is needed for a spring Patron's Party.
- The board is creating a list of possible speakers for 2024-2025.
- In the fall of 2024, WVHS will host a fund-raiser event at Gwynedd Hall (on the NRHP) to mark its 200th anniversary!

Calendar of Events, 2023-2024:

- 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**)
- Mar 11, 7 PM, To be announced, a program with Lower Gwynedd Township (Exciting details to follow!)
- Mar—TBD—Open House with artist Ellie Moniz
- 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 (Carpooling will be arranged.)
- 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, 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.
