
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 3, Number 7

The Valley Crier



March 2024

Announcing---Two WVHS Events in March (Plus a reminder about April)!

1. Monday, March 11, at 7 PM, at the 1895 School:

Speakers -- Fred Conner, Historian at Ambler's

Daniel W. Dowling American Legion Post #769, and Flo (Florence) Wise, Historian/Chaplain of the Post's Auxiliary. Conner is a former chair of the Whitpain Township Board of Supervisors.

Topic—"The History of Ambler's *Daniel W. Dowling* Legion Post: An Important Community Center." Its website explains that its mission is to mentor young people, sponsor programs, promote patriotism, and support veterans and active-duty members.

2. Sunday, March 17 (**St. Patrick's Day**), 1-3 PM, at the 1895 School:

Open House, "History Meets Art" (with Irish snacks).

- Featuring Watercolorist Ellie Moniz, famous for her "portraits" of historic sites and more. Ellie will be on hand to discuss her art and answer your questions.

- In addition, WVHS will exhibit some of its rarely-seen art and other framed history and introduce a newly-accessioned house portrait!



A Moniz Watercolor of the Ambler Theatre, recently donated to WVHS

AND—Please enjoy a special **“WVHS Spring Outing” to Historic Trappe** on Saturday, April 20, starting at 1 PM in Trappe. Please meet at the parking lot next to the Dewees Tavern. This trip is a follow-up to our speaker, Lisa Minardi, Executive Director of Historic Trappe, who spoke in October about the Muhlenbergs and the three historic sites she oversees. Tickets are \$15, and the deadline for reservations is April 1. Take an escorted, small-group tour of three historic properties (including the Speaker’s House, usually closed to the public due to renovations!). Trappe is a 30-minute drive from our area (301 W Main St., Trappe, PA).

At the March meeting, bring cash or check, payable to WVHS, for \$15 each. See Treasurer Tom Goldkamp, who will be selling tickets at the

March meeting, or make payment with a credit card online at “Donate”:

<https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/>

Historic Trappe’s website describes what it offers:

Our Center for Pennsylvania German Studies, located in the **Dewees Tavern**, has five exhibition galleries featuring a wide variety of furniture, fraktur, textiles, and other objects.... The **Henry Muhlenberg House** is a fully-furnished museum, interpreting the families of Lutheran pastor Henry Muhlenberg and his son, General Peter Muhlenberg. The **Speaker’s House**, home of Frederick Muhlenberg, [the first Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives!] is an ongoing restoration project.

Street parking may be limited. If you need a ride, or if you can offer a ride, please contact info@WValleyHS.com.



The Dewees Tavern

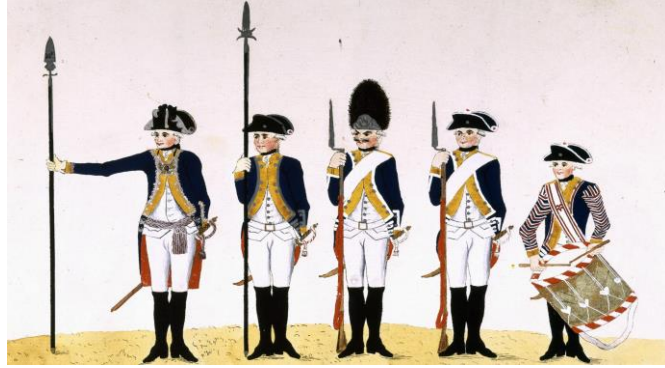


Henry Muhlenberg's House



The Speaker's House

Audience Impressed by Hessian Research: Dr. Friederike Baer, a Penn State Abington Professor, has spent the last few years searching for first-hand data about Hessian (German) soldiers during the American Revolution. They made up about a third of the British forces in the Colonies, and they brought to the Colonies their wives, children, servants, laborers, and others. Not mercenaries, they were rented out by their rulers in *units* to fight for the British King. Winning awards for her research, Baer examined diaries and personal papers to discover who they were, why they served, and their opinions of the Colonists. For instance, they did not understand why the Colonists were fighting against their king because the Colonists lived in prosperity (with jobs and good land), compared to Europeans. Held at the Ambler Library, Dr. Baer's presentation was co-sponsored by Friends of the Library, Ambler. Over 70 guests attended.



Well-groomed, disciplined Hessian soldiers. According to Dr. Baer, they regarded the Colonial soldiers as rag-tag, cowardly fighters, unpolished and virtue-less (Web photo).

WVHS Receives Historic Portrait: Mrs. Miriam (George) Murdock gave a portrait of her home at 1198 Union Meeting Road to the historical society. According to *Whitpain...Crossroads in Time* (1977), although it has modern additions, the core of this house dates to 1714, part of the historic Roberts-Miller Tract. The artwork and a history about the farmhouse will be exhibited at the society's March 17 (Saint Patrick's Day) Open House, 1-3 pm.



A photograph of the "Farmhouse," depicted in the artwork donated to WVHS and part of the Roberts-Miller Tract (February 2024)

February WVHS Display at Ambler Library: It illustrated the history of the Ambler Train Station, featured old photographs of train station structures, and included a timeline of the railroad's development.



The WVHS display at the Ambler Library, February 2024, showing the history of the Ambler Railroad Station

More Bluestone Country Club History: In June 2022, the historical society's paid members were guests at the Bluestone Country Club for drinks and a history tour. Now more information is available online about the property. Further details about the land and mansion, including photographs, old maps, and newspaper clippings, are posted on WVHS member Yen Ho's *Blog*, available on the WVHS website:

<https://yenh77.wixsite.com/wissvalleyhistorian/post/before-there-was-the-bluestone-country-club> .



Bluestone Country Club (Web Photo)

WVHS Announces Dates for Ambler History Walking Tours: An Ambler Storytellers' tour covers the history of Ambler, especially its Butler Avenue properties. Dates for the spring tours have been announced for **Saturdays** at **3 PM** (until approximately 4:30): April 6, April 20, May 4, May 18, June 1, June 15.

- Reservations are required; groups are capped at 12 guests.
- No fees; a \$10 donation to WVHS is suggested.
- Register here:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E44ABAC23A0FECE9-historic2>

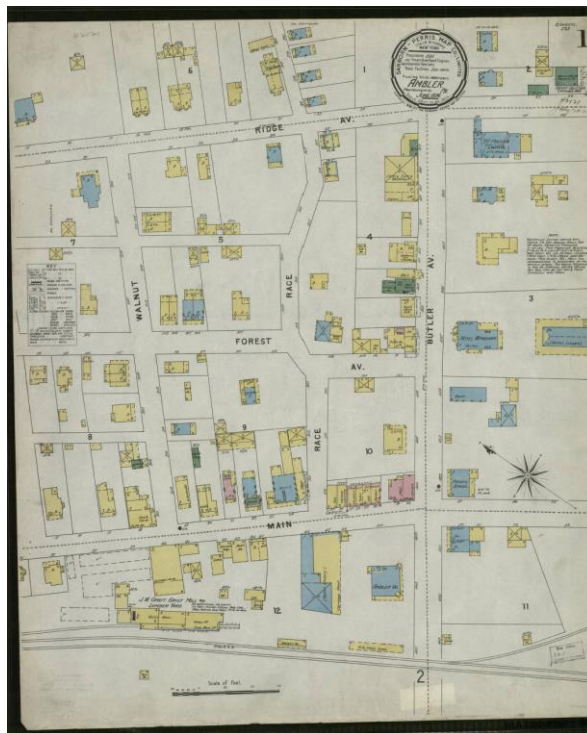
- Questions? Contact ***amblerstorytellers@gmail.com***



Ambler Storytellers Examine Sanborn Maps: Ambler Storytellers are in the process of deciding on a “period of significance” and “boundary lines” as it prepares to request that Ambler be honored on the National Register of Historic Places. The group’s “Letter of Eligibility” defined Ambler as a “company town,” pointing out the influence of Keasbey and Mattison. In January 2024, Peter Wilson and the Ambler Storytellers pieced together parts of five Sanborn maps, pictured above, to show the historic housing along the area’s streets. The rows of blue squares on the maps indicate stone buildings, many of them the 400 historic K & M Houses. The recognition would place no regulations on the homeowners of historic properties, but it would make grant money available and be a point of pride for the town.

The Sanborn maps were designed to “assist fire insurance agents in determining the degree of hazard associated with a particular property and

therefore show the size, shape, and construction of dwellings, commercial buildings, and factories.” The earliest Ambler Sanborn map, below, is helpful to researchers because it shows the location and make-up of buildings in 1896. Starting in March, the group will work from large, modern maps, kindly provided by the Montgomery County Planning Commission. (If you would like to help with this project, please contact ***amblerstorytellers@gmail.com***)



A page from a Sanborn map of Ambler, 1896, with blue squares indicating stone construction. (At the bottom of the page, the two blue structures near Main Street are the Ambler Hotel, destroyed by fire, and its stable, currently Amazing Decks.)

WVHS assisted in 1999 with Ambler’s survey of historic properties:

From the Ambler Borough Open Space Plan, 2006, (page 14)--

HISTORIC RESOURCE COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF AMBLER BOROUGH (online)

This survey was conducted in 1999 by the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society and the Conservancy of Montgomery County. It surveyed properties that were built prior to 1940 to determine if each property could potentially be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and whether each property would contribute to a National Register Historic District. The survey was conducted by volunteers, using Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey forms, photography, and field observations. Technical assistance was provided by a consultant, who answered questions from volunteers, reviewed all survey forms, determined architectural style and National Register evaluations, and prepared the final report and evaluations.

Thank you for your generosity to “SAVE the Freight House”:

- Diana Acostandel
- Zbigniew Bieniaszewski
- Caddick Utilities (Dave Caddick)
- Elaine Ciufo
- Ruth Chang
- Bernadette Dougherty
- Jane Douglas
- Kathleen Henry
- Matthew Hilbush
- Barry Johnson
- Peg Johnston
- Wynn & Anne Lee
- Judith Maida

- Mary Lou McFarland
- Mary Margaret Monser
- Linda Newsom
- Leo Posner
- Frank Russo
- Robert Signore
- Mary Spross
- Oliver Will
- Liesl Woelfel, Animal Communicator
- Anonymous
- Bussinger Model Trains and Toys
- Cash contributors and purchasers of ornaments
- Tannery Run Brew Works, Bar 31, and Harry's Taproom

(List is incomplete.)

Note that funds for “Save the Freight House” are *still needed*:

Although WVHS is close to meeting its goal, it is not yet able to cover all the expenses to date, including the major one, the engineering study to save the 1855 Freight House. Please make your check payable to "WVHS" and mail to WVHS, P.O. Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002. Or you can donate using *PayPal*. At <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/>, click “Donate” and follow the prompts.

Still Available: “**Freight House Red,**” an **American Amber Ale**, and its custom beer glasses, are still being sold at Bar 31, Harry's Taproom, and Tannery Run Brew Works (who brewed this special batch for the Freight House's benefit).

NEW LOCAL BREW!
Try Our Very Own
FREIGHT HOUSE BEER



Circ 1855

Buy a Pint and Support a Good Cause...

For Every Beer Sold, a portion of the profit will be Donated
to Help Save The Old Ambler Freight House
at The Old Ambler Train Station

For Every Beer in a Freight House Glass Sold,
a portion of the profit will be Donated
to Help Save The Old Ambler Freight House
and You Get To Keep The Glass!

Available At:



Brewed By Tannery Run Brew Works, Ambler Pa.

Happy Holidays, Please Drink Responsibly.

Questers Donate Scrapbooks: The Questers have donated a crate-full of their scrapbooks, detailing the history of the local chapter. A Pennsylvania scrapbook is also included. The PA Questers website states that the group

is “dedicated to promoting education, history, antiques, and the preservation of historic sites and artifacts.” The scrapbooks contain newspaper clippings and homemade greeting cards. Over the years, local Quester groups have generously donated to WVHS, providing funding for special exhibits.



A sample page from a Questers scrapbook with personal notes and newspaper clippings



A page from the 1960s Questers Scrapbook, showing hand-made greeting cards



Excessive rain and rising tides are threatening Philadelphia's Fort Mifflin, an American Revolution historic site. (Wikicommons)

The Quill Was Emailed: The third *Quill* for the 2024-2025 WVHS Society Year went out to paid members on Presidents' Day, February 19. It included three articles, "The Dedication of the New Mary Ambler Grave Marker," "A Short History of the Ambler Railroad Station," and "Two Winter Traditions [Sleigh Bells and *Jingle Bells*]: Not What You Think." If you did not receive the *Quill* and you are a paid member, please send an email reporting the error to info@WValleyHS.org

Indexing the Collection: A group of WVHS experts will meet to consider how to best index the WVHS collection to make it more accessible to researchers, placing more data on the website. Much of the software is quite expensive, so alternatives are being investigated.

Members Consider How to Hang WVHS Art and More: Sally Zeller and Joan Duxbury, along with President Carol Kalos, recently visited the

Historical Society of Montgomery County to discuss the mechanics of hanging our WVHS framed pieces without damaging our historic structure.



A Chandelier at the Historical Society of Montgomery County, originally from a Norristown home (February 2024)

Welcome to WVHS New Members!

- Stephen Gruszka
- Garth Seidel

Thank You for Contributions: Many thanks to the following generous members who have contributed to our “Preservation Campaign” to provide archival materials to preserve our museum’s books and fabrics. With their help, WVHS met its goal and purchased several large archival boxes, dust-proof and acid-free, to protect the recent contribution 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

Home-School Coop: A group of 18 home-schooled students, grades K-3, meet weekly at Temple University Ambler. With WVHS’s direction, the group’s leadership will prepare a curriculum with fun experiences, designed to teach students about the WVHS collection, how a museum works, and local history. WVHS and the parents will design “lesson plans,” and the program will begin in academic year 2024-2025.

Oops, but No Firetruck: Board member Barry Johnson has been doing much cleaning at the 1895 School in preparation for our March 17 Open House. (Thank you, Barry!) One day, working in the basement, when he turned on the Shop-Vac, clouds of powder arose from its exhaust, and the new fire alarm went off! Luckily, no fire truck showed up at the door, and a township representative later advised our volunteers to put the fire-alarm system on “test” before any future dust adventures.



St. Louis Public Schools classroom exhibit in the Palace of Education at the 1904 World's Fair. (WikiCommons)

Philadelphia To Be a Global Spotlight for *America 250* Celebration:

The Major League Baseball All-Star game will be hosted by Philadelphia in

the summer of 2026. In addition, in June 2026, Philly will host six matches of the World Cup. The round-16 game will coincide with the 250th anniversary of America's founding, held on July 4, 2026!

Volunteers Needed: Volunteers meet at the 1895 School every Thursday, 11-1, to clean and do accessioning. Stop by for fun and a feeling of accomplishment.

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

The Franklinville School will be open when spring arrives and the weather cooperates.

Interested in how to pay WVHS dues? The 2023-2024 “Society Year” began on September 1, 2023. For details, please go to www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/

Writers are welcome to submit articles to *The Quill* and *The Valley Crier*: Please send your ideas to info@WValleyHS.org

From the Board of Directors:

- Plans are continuing for a 200th anniversary celebration at Gwynedd Hall.

- The Board has been notified that Boehm's Church, one of the most historic properties in Whitpain, has a dwindling membership and needs repairs.
- A member of Ambler's Borough Council reported that SEPTA's plans for development at its parking area, south of Butler Avenue, are still in the advanced stages, far in the future. (The 1855 Freight House is located at the Old Train Station, north of Butler Avenue.)
- Lower Gwynedd Township's new Historic Advisory Committee will place six historic markers in the coming months, including one in each of its four "villages." They are Penllyn, Gwynedd (formerly known as Gwynedd Corners), Gwynedd Valley, and Spring House.
- WVHS and Lower Gwynedd Township will hold a short ceremony at the township's repaired roadside Milemarker when it is re-set in the spring.

Calendar of Events, 2023-2024:

- **Mar 11, 7 PM, 1895 School-- Fred Conner and Flo Wise—History of Ambler's "*Dowling* American Legion Post"**
- **Mar 17, 1-3 PM, 1895 School-- Open House with artist Ellie Moniz and more: "History Meets Art"**
- **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. Reservations in advance, \$15**

- May 13, 7 PM, Bernadette Dougherty, “The Deck Family: 100+ Years of History in Ambler.” Also 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 50th 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.
