
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 3, Number 8

The Valley Crier



May 2024 Announcing 3 Events

- Speaker, Bernadette Dougherty about Deck family of Decks Hardware
- Dedication, monument for local sports hero
- Speaker, Russ Bellavance about Lower Gwynedd history

Monday, May 13, 7 PM, at the 1895 School: Bernadette Dougherty will speak on “**The Deck Family: 100+ Years of History in Ambler.**” She has been promoting the history of Ambler for decades. She was the Ambler Main Street manager for many years, and you know her as the WVHS member who has worked the hardest to “Save the Freight House,” the 1855 passenger station, now threatened by demolition. She has had experience with saving precious sites because she is credited with saving the historic Ambler Theatre. For this, *Legendary Locals of Ambler* calls her “Miss Persistence.”

For our May meeting, Bernadette will present on Ambler’s Deck Family, owners of Deck Hardware, which closed recently after serving the community for over 100 years! She has conducted interviews and looked for new information, so their story can be preserved.



***The Ambler Theatre, saved by Bernadette Dougherty,
Ambler's "Miss Persistence" and May's speaker***

In addition, the meeting will begin with an introduction of Roman Pronczak, Whitpain Township's manager, who will retire soon. WVHS will offer a short tribute to Roman and the township in recognition for their contributions to WVHS. During Roman's administration, the township completed renovations to the 1895 School. Also in attendance will be several township officials: Scott Badami, Chair; Jeff Campolongo, Secretary; Joyce Keller, Treasurer; Sara Selverian, Assistant Secretary.



***WVHS will thank Roman Pronczak, retiring Whitpain
Township's Manager, at its May meeting***

WVHS to Dedicate Harley Monument, Saturday, May 11 at 12:30 PM: All are welcome to join Bob and Sue Harley, Whitpain Township, and our community's Connie Mack baseball players (ages 13-17) for a short ceremony at Harley Field in Wentz Run Park, 1000 Anvil Lane, Blue Bell. For details about the Harleys, please see below: **"April Meeting Revealed Generations of Harley-Family History."**



Tuesday, June 4, 6:30 PM, Bellavance to speak at Lower Gwynedd Township Building: Lower Gwynedd Township and WVHS will host speaker Russ Bellavance and his presentation: *Gwynedd, Our Fair Land Through the Years*. The program will be held at 1130 North Bethlehem Pike in Spring House as the Lower Gwynedd Historical Advisory Committee and the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society present a program about the history of Gwynedd. Bellavance is a retired history teacher and the Past President of the WVHS who resides in Lower Gwynedd. He will note how, since its settlement by a group of Welsh families in 1698, the land which those settlers called Gwynedd (Welsh for "Fair Land") has seen many changes. Some are due to the individuals and families that settled there, with their unique cultures and traditions. Others are due to the reactions of

residents to political and technological changes in the larger community. Today, Lower Gwynedd, Upper Gwynedd and North Wales Borough enjoy the inheritance of these earlier residents.



***WVHS past president Russ Bellavance
at a luncheon in his honor, held at the William Penn Inn***

Spring Outing to Historic Trappe: Past President Frank Russo reports that on Saturday, April 20, twenty-one WVHS members took part in the society's first outing, post Covid. The group traveled to Historic Trappe, where they were met by the smiling faces of their guides for a two-hour tour of the amazing collections. They divided into two groups with one group starting at the Dewee's Tavern and the other at the Mulhenberg House. The focus of the museums are the Pennsylvania German collections, such

as Furniture, Fracktur, and the like, and what a tremendous collection it is. The members were mesmerized by how each building is superbly maintained and furnished. A great time was had by all!



Historic Trappe Fraktur, birth and baptismal certificate, 1805

April Meeting Revealed Generations of Harley-Family History: Many of us know the baseball field at Wentz Run Park as Harley Field. The 63-acre farm was never subdivided, so the land is now enjoyed by the entire community. The Harleys owned the Boxwood Farm on that property for three generations. Speaker Bob Harley has traced the story of his Harley ancestors beyond these generations to Ireland and outward to include their siblings. Bob explained how he searched old Census records and Philadelphia directories to find those family stories. He said Irish women always “fudged” their age, and he found the family have been weavers, grocers (with a store for decades on Market Street), bottlers (a “porterhouse” made beer), and farmers. The second portion of Bob’s presentation included details about the career of his grandfather, Dick Harley, known for his speed, at-bats record, and his “circus catches,” who played in the early 1900s on a handful of professional teams, and who later

coached at Villanova, Penn State, and University of Pittsburgh. The audience enjoyed Bob's discussion of his family memorabilia, especially Dick Harley's lovely, professionally-restored Georgetown College diploma.



Dick Harley, major league player from the Boxwood Farm on Skippack Pike

Ambler Storytellers: History Walking Tours of Butler Avenue are planned for May and June, usually on Saturdays at 3 PM although a Sunday date is being added. You will learn much! For details, go to <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/committees/>

Historic District for Ambler: A group of six diligent WVHS members, led by Mary Spross, meets weekly to fulfill the requirements for recognition through the National Register of Historic Places. Of four "Criteria," they will be submitting in the architecture category. They met recently with Megan McNish from PA-SHPO, who recommended a good book for all history lovers to see: Virginia McAllister's *Field Guide to American Buildings*.

Update on Ambler Train Station's 1855 Freight House: A WVHS

investigation shows that the building has historic importance because it was Ambler's *first passenger depot*. (Mary Lou McFarland even wrote to the Library of Congress for details.) Today the structure, with its distinctive architecture, is unsafe because it straddles the broken Tannery Run culvert walls, and SEPTA says it must be moved, so that repairs can be made to the culvert. Representatives of SEPTA and WVHS met at the Freight House in April to discuss the issues. As a result, SEPTA has set a deadline of August 1 or else the lovely old building will be demolished! A Go Fund Me effort and other fund-raising and grant-writing are planned, so the Freight House can be relocated, maybe onto a trailer, until a permanent site can be found. (Estimate for the move is over \$40,000!) WVHS representatives have proposed that the Freight House may be repurposed to become a retail store or a focal point for a farmers' market near the railroad tracks. A special thank-you to Mark Chadwick, a retired architect, who has supplied ideas and drawings of how the Freight House might be used.

Ambler Planning Commission is considering new zoning ordinances for the area of SEPTA development along the train tracks:

<https://aroundambler.com/initial-step-taken-to-amending-zoning-ordinance-in-ambler-to-allow-for-new-development-around-train-station/>

WVHS Docent/New Member Orientation: If you are a new member and/or want to be a docent, please plan to attend a short “training” session at a time convenient for you. RSVP to Info@WVHS.org

Stereograph Photo Arrives in the Mail: WVHS recently received this card, marked “C.W. Woodward, Rochester, NY,” and entitled “Wissahickon Creek Scenery, Penna.” Another phrase states, “1082 Wissahickon Valley” (meaning unclear). The item was sent by Kurt Riegel of Riegel Restoration in Sidney, New York, who writes

I am a local history buff, professional historic preservationist/restoration professional, and amateur archivist. Whenever I am out and about... and I find local history items that are not from my local area, I try to rescue them and return them back to where they belong. I try to put them back into a local museum where they can be appreciated and used for research purposes in their original community. Please accept this donation to your museum....

The Yale University website identifies the item as a "Stereograph orange card" from about 1875. It shows a hay wagon, pulled by a horse, being led by a man, and headed, we assume, toward a covered bridge in the background. If you can identify the location, please let WVHS know:

Info@WValleyHS.org



A stereograph photo from 1875, showing today's Wissahickon Valley Park

Mapping MontCo Black History, An Ongoing Project: The Historical Society of Montgomery County is creating an interactive map where people can explore the history of people, events and places connected to the county's Black history, and 45 sites have been identified so far. If you have sites to add to the map, please contact Karen Ploch at karenp@hsmcpa.org. The map is available by a Google search for "Mapping MontCo. Black History."

The PA Historic Preservation Office published its new blog in March. It contains an inventory of historic properties recently identified. From the blog site, readers can sign up for newsletters and more:

https://pahistoricpreservation.com/baseline-survey-adds-almost-8000-places-year-3/?mc_cid=275354326e

Philadelphia's Computer History Showcased in New Interactive Map:

The “Compuseum,” a nonprofit, is focused on computer history.

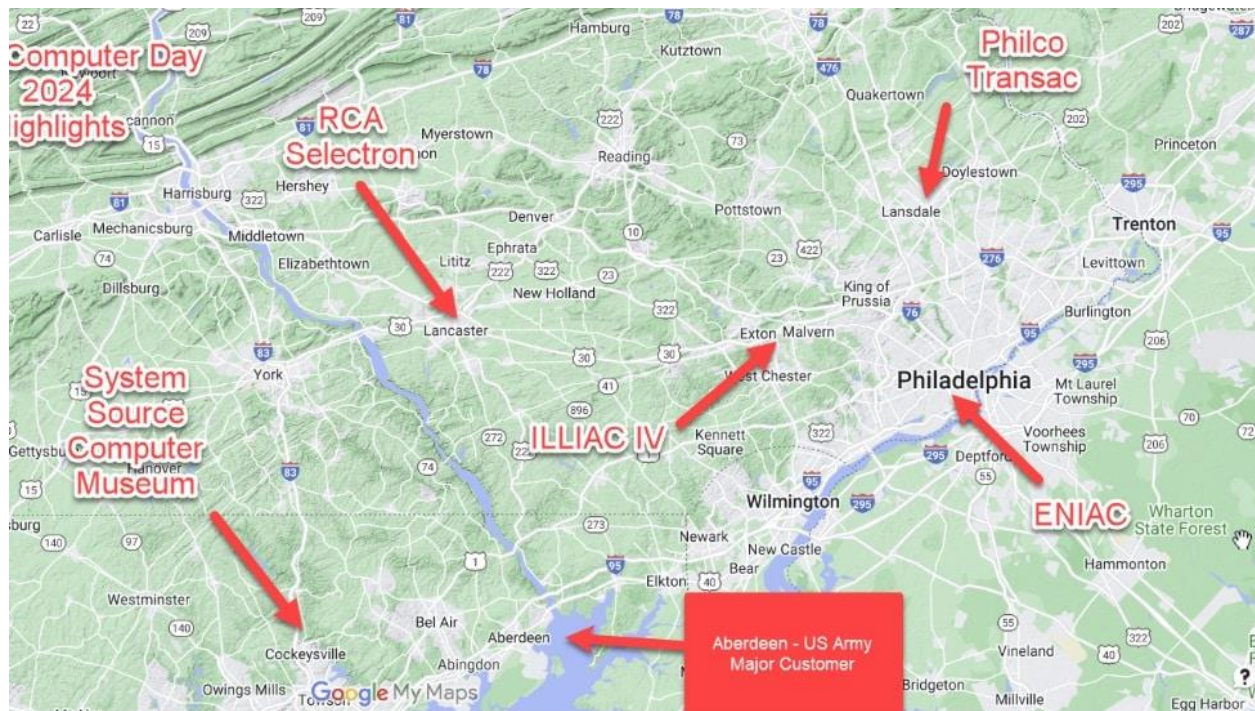
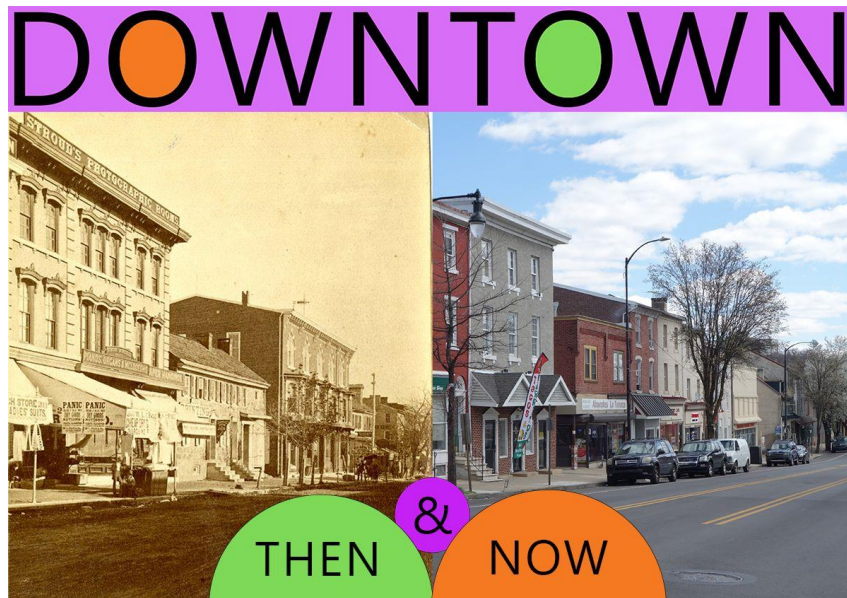


Exhibit at Historical Society of Montgomery County: Free and open to the public until *March 2025*, “Downtown, Then and Now.” See photographs, objects, and papers connected to downtown life in Montgomery County, including how it has changed and how it has stayed the same. Please see

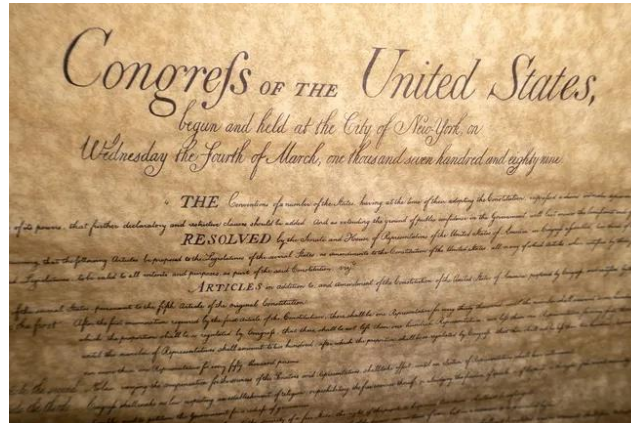
the website for hours and GPS data. (The historical society is located on a one-way street.)



April is Women's History Month. The Commonwealth has millions of pages about women, organized in the state's Archives and available online through the website for the PA Historical and Museum Commission. An amazing quantity and quality of sources awaits the researcher here:
<https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Womens-History.aspx>

WVHS Ambler Walking Tours Promoted in Pittsburgh: Thanks to Mike Leibrandt of Lightmedia, who has been helping WVHS with public relations. He reports that the Ambler Walking Tours were mentioned in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*.

Reason for using an “f” instead of an “s” in old typeface: *Smithsonian* (March 2024) says that old printing presses used only the round “s,” the one “we use today, ...for the *end* of words....” The other “s” was an “f” without the left crossbar. As more people could read, more people were confused, so the practice ended.



WVHS appreciates your contributions: 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.

Welcome to Our New Members: William Knox and Anne Lowry

From the Board of Directors:

- Planning continues for the celebration of Gwynedd Hall's 200th year
- A safe location is still needed for the newly-painted dinner bell
- Speakers are being scheduled for our next Society Year, 2024-2025

Calendar of Events, 2023-2024

- May 11, 12:30 PM, at Wentz Run Park's "Harley Field." Rededication of the Dick Harley monument
- May 13, 7 PM, at 1895 School: Bernadette Dougherty, "The Deck Family: 100+ Years of History in Ambler." Also Election of Officers and a special tribute
- June 4, 7 PM, (Tues) Russ Bellavance, at Lower Gwynedd Twp Bldg, "Gwynedd: Our Fair Land Through the Years"
- Patron's Party, To be announced
- June 10, 6:30 PM, Members' Picnic, 1895 School
- 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.
