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*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 4, Number 4*

# *The Valley Crier*



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*December 2024*

**End of Year Request! Donations are needed:** Much has been accomplished to save the Franklinville School. In the past two years, WVHS has replaced the electrical panel, added drainage from the crawl space, replaced the front porch floor, repaired the porch roof, and replaced the roof. WVHS has done its best to find and use grant funding. However, **water is still causing damage to the Franklinville School's walls.** We need to repair broken windowsills and paint and seal the outside walls.

**As 2024 draws to a close, please consider a generous gift to WVHS, marked for the Franklinville School.** "Giving Tuesday" approaches. Please make your check payable to "WVHS" and mail to WVHS, P.O. Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002. Or you can donate using *Venmo* or *PayPal*: At <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/>, click "Donate" and follow the prompts.

## WVHS Holiday Party and Food Drive:

Please Join Us—

WVHS Pot-Luck Holiday Party: Monday, Dec 9, at 6:30 PM

Dues-paying Members: Free

Others: \$15 per person (Or pay your dues, \$25 per individual/\$35 per couple, at <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/join-us-2/> )

Bring: appetizer, side-dish, or dessert (and serving utensils)

WVHS Providing: ham, beverages, and wine samples

Also: BYOB

Please respond by Dec 5 with your number of guests and food contribution to [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org)

On our usual meeting night, please join us for our annual “pot-luck” December party on Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 PM (Note the early start time.) The party is free for paid members, and \$15 per person for nonmembers. As a change of pace from last year, the historical society will supply a spiral-cut ham, so please bring either an appetizer, side-dish, or dessert, and serving forks and spoons. Also note that this party is a **BYOB**! In addition, the historical society will serve samples of the wine from the Gwynedd Hall Celebration.



It will assist our planners when we know how many guests to expect and what you plan to bring. **Please email to WVHS to tell us (1) the number of guests and (2) what you plan to bring: [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org).**

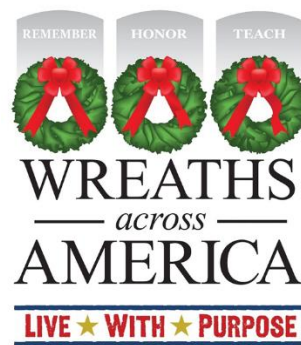


**At the party, WVHS will collect donations for the Mattie N Dixon Community Cupboard:** Please bring nonperishable food items. A “wish list” appears on their website: <https://www.community-cupboard.org/files/ugd/0e00be7adaf653592e45a6868620616e715f9d.pdf>



### **Honor Veterans with “Wreaths Across America” at Boehm’s Church:**

On Sunday, December 15, at 11:30 AM, the public is invited to participate at a wreath-laying and short ceremony for U.S. Veterans at the Boehm’s Church Cemetery, 571 Penllyn Blue Bell Pike, Blue Bell. This event is sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution, Valley Forge Chapter; and the Sons of the American Revolution, Philadelphia Chapter, who will present a color guard.



**Please note: There will be NO WVHS Meeting in January 2025**

**Volunteer Day is Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 12-3 PM.** At the 1895 School, volunteers meet to clean, accession, and organize the collection. Please offer some of your time. You will learn more about local history and have fun too.

**Franklinville School’s Open House a Success:** Held on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the event was well-attended with ten guests stopping by to recall “Back to School” Days. Thank you to our docents: Russ and Jeannie Bellavance; Tom and Marie Goldkamp; Joan Duxbury, and Sally Zeller.

**November's speaker:** Michael Martorelli, appropriately on Veterans Day, detailed how the United States' coastline has been successfully defended by coastal artillery from the time of the American Revolution (Fort Mifflin) until 1952. A retired banker and now a history writer, Martorelli is a docent and re-enactor at Fort Miles (Lewes, Delaware). He explained how forts and guns have defended both coasts of the United States, including our own Delaware Bay, with fire towers that used triangulation to aim at an enemy ship at sea. To defend themselves, later-built forts were stronger with bigger, masonry-protected guns. During the Civil War, iron guns could shoot a mile. In 1901, the Coast Artillery Corps was formed as a separate branch of the U.S. Army. During WWI, the German navy had 300 vessels, prepared to disrupt shipping, but the British navy kept them fighting in the North Sea. At that time, two thirds of all of the U.S. equipment to help Europe was shipped out of the Delaware Bay. In those years, 60,000 soldiers manned 57 U.S. coastal forts! Those coastal defenses could fire a gun 10-25 miles to hit a target at sea while ships, too, could fire 25 miles toward the shore. In 1952, the forts were deactivated, and today the Army Air Defense Artillery has taken over.



***Board member Barry Johnson and speaker Michael Martorelli, in his reenactor's uniform, discuss artillery. Note his denim hat on the desk.***



*Honoring Veterans Day, a 1942 Navy Nurse Uniform, newly accessioned*

**Work Continues at the Franklinville School:** The warm, dry days of the fall season allowed for tasks at the WVHS-owned one-room school on Morris Road. Board member Barry Johnson did much cleaning and painted a roadside marker. One day he climbed a ladder to examine a clogged downspout, taking a great picture of the school's original bell. (Not every



school district could afford a bell!) WVHS will raise funds to patch holes, paint, and then seal the outside walls to keep them dry.



***Newly-painted marker along Morris Road at the Franklinville School, which stands behind the white rail fence, above.***



***A photo of the Franklinville School, taken September 1, 2022, by Joan Duxbury. Leaking windowsills and peeling paint continue to be an issue. Funds are needed for waterproofing, painting and sealing the outside walls.***





***At the Franklinville School, one of four screen-covered vents to the crawl space under the floor, recently restored by Steve Vereb. Note the cracked stucco under the window.***



*Steve Verco's masterful stucco repair at the Franklinville School. Note the phone connection on the right, installed for one day's use in 1928 for a large community picnic!*

**Franklinville School's "National Register Nomination" Explains Why It Needed a Telephone for One Day:** The school is recognized not just because it is old, but because of its role in the community. The following, **reprinted as it appears in the original**, explains: In the mid-1920s the

*Norristown Times Herald*, under the ownership of Ralph Strassburger, began a marketing campaign which appealed to Ralph Strassburger's love of history. An application form was placed in the newspaper c.1924 for what was referred to as "the Fifty Year Club." A criterion for entrance to the "club" was that one must have lived in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania for at least 50 years.... In 1928 on August 7, the *Times Herald* announced that membership in the Fifty Year Club had increased to 5,000. On August 14, 1928 a front page article announced "Double Tent Capacity for the Fifty Year Club Members at Fourth Annual Meeting." A subsequent article on August 15, 1928 stated that noted historian and State Librarian Frederic Godcharles was scheduled to deliver a "Patriotic Address" at the Franklinville School on Normandy Farms.

Frederic Godcharles was an important guest and highly regarded. He was not only the director of the Pennsylvania State Library and the State Museum at the time, he was also a founding member of the Pennsylvania Archaeological Society. For Godcharles' speech and other festivities at the Franklinville School, buses and automobiles would begin transporting attendees from the Times Herald building on August 16, at 10:00 A.M. The article further stated that for the convenience of the picknickers, Thursday, at Normandy Farms, a special telephone has been installed at the Franklinville School House by the Bell Telephone Company... "Telephone users who wished to place a call to the phone were told to use the North Wales exchange and ask for the Fifty Year Club picnic. The event was described as "mammoth...."





***A one-of-a-kind, close-up view of the bell and belfry at the Franklinville School,  
November 8, 2024, taken by Barry Johnson***





United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 110<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 154 WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

No. 144

## *House of Representatives*

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Madam Speaker, I come before you today to congratulate the Historical Society of Whitpain on the 150th anniversary of the Franklinville School. The Franklinville School, a one room schoolhouse, was originally constructed in 1858 to serve the small area of Franklinville and served in that capacity until 1916. After its closure, Ralph Beaver Straussburger, a Naval Academy Graduate and aide to President Theodore Roosevelt, purchased the schoolhouse as part of a small estate when he married into the Singer family, of the Singer Sewing Machine Company.

Mr. Straussburger modeled his estate after a French manor house and named it Normandy Farms. The Franklinville School was an integral part of Straussburger's estate, serving as a school not only for Straussburger's children but also for the children of the employees of the estate.

In the following years, the schoolhouse was abandoned and fell into a state of dilapidation and disrepair. In 1983, The Historical Society of Whitpain was founded for the purpose of restoring the old schoolhouse. Over the next 14 years, volunteers tirelessly worked to raise money to restore the schoolhouse and in 1997, the Historical Society gained title to the Franklinville School.

The Society has worked tirelessly to finish the restoration of the schoolhouse, including replacing the building's unsafe flooring. Prior to the completion of the restoration, the Society commissioned an archeological dig and recovered a number of artifacts that exemplify America of the 1850's, including medicine bottles, inkwells and an 1876 Liberty Head quarter.

Madam Speaker, once again I congratulate the members of the Historical Society of Whitpain on their tireless efforts to reclaim and restore the history that has made our country what it is today. It is through such efforts that we can hope to learn more about our nation's past and ensure that our extraordinary history is accessible to future generations.

***The "Congressional Record" from 2008, honoring the restoration of the Franklinville School***

**Sold-Out Ambler Walking Tours:** Led by the WVHS Storytellers, one tour is scheduled for December, but is sold out, and there is a waiting list. Tours will resume in the spring, but with a registration fee to deter the many “no-shows.”

**Whitpain Township Continues Improvements at the 1895 School:** The township has recently removed loose, flaking plaster from the outside stairwell and from the inside basement walls at the 1895 School. The work reveals the original stone walls and the base of the chimney. WVHS is grateful for the township’s assistance and their great clean-up work.

**New WVHS Display at Ambler:** WVHS recently updated our display at the Ambler Borough Hall, which now highlights details about the 1715 Mary Ambler House. Hidden by vegetation, it stands on North Main Street at Reiffs Mill Road. A datestone confirms that Andrew and Mary Ambler added a wing in 1831, doubling the size of the house.

Near this site in about 1728, William Harmer, the first settler in Ambler, built a fulling mill, used to weave wool cloth. The grist stones each weighed about a ton and a half, and one is reported to have come from France. During the Civil War, the mill supplied blankets to Union troops. It was destroyed by fire in 1869.

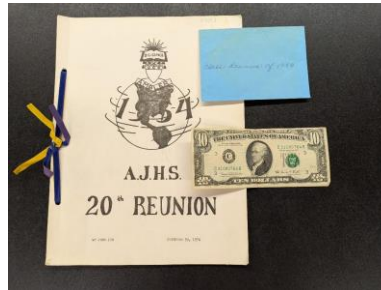




***WVHS Display Case at the Ambler Borough Hall, November 2024,  
featuring the 1715 Mary Ambler House***

**Pennies from Heaven appear at 1895 School:** Recently, high school intern Stefan Preutu was accessioning items from historian Bob Whittock's files. Working on the "Schools and Education" pile, Preutu opened a program from Ambler Junior High School's 20<sup>th</sup> Class Reunion, held on November 30, 1974 (wisely planned for the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend). Was Whittock in the Class of '54? Tickets were listed at \$15 each for the reunion, held at the William Penn Inn. Most surprising, tucked

inside the pages was a pristine blue envelope, marked “Class Reunion of 1954” and containing a crisp ten-dollar bill. No finders’ keepers on this day: Stefan, after learning that history research leads to surprises, kindly delivered the bill to the WVHS treasury.



**A Must-Read!** For everyone interested in preserving history, this website from Pennsylvania’s “Community History dialog” offers pointers on how you and WVHS can preserve local history:

<https://www.pa.gov/en/agencies/phmc/pa-state-archives/news-and-programs/community-history-dialog-series/past-dialogs.html>

**Ambler’s Lindenwold Castle for Sale:** Tied to Ambler Borough’s history, but located in Upper Dublin Township, the Lindenwold Castle will go up for auction at \$1.5 million. The property is approved for conversion to smaller units. According to Preservation Alliance, an agreement has been signed to prevent changes to the exterior. [Read more](#)





***Upper Dublin's Lindenwold Castle, Surrounded by New Development***

**Do You Need a Holiday Gift?** "Save the Freight House" ornaments are still available, now reduced to \$10. Sales will continue at the December Holiday Party, and only a few remain, so be prepared with cash or check book. They make great gifts, while providing funds for a great cause! The Freight House is a precious historic building, which will be dismantled and stored while Ambler residents make plans for its future.

Side 1



Side 2



***Holiday ornaments will be sold at the December party.***

**Local History Treasures Wanted:** Do you have items tucked away in your attic or basement that reflect life along the Wissahickon in decades gone by? WVHS is on the lookout for artifacts, photos, documents, or any pieces of history related to our area's past. Whether it is a family heirloom,

an event t-shirt, an event program, or a vintage photograph of a building or landscape, we would like to hear about them! Help us celebrate our community's rich history. Please contact [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org).



**1895 School and Franklinville School Are Open for Tours:** For an appointment for a tour of either (or both), please email to [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org).

**WVHS Volunteer/New-Member Orientation:** If you are a new member and/or want to be a volunteer to help with an Open House, please plan to attend a short “training” session at a time convenient for you. RSVP to [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org).

**On “Giving Tuesday,” Funds Are Needed for Franklinville School, and 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 *Venmo* or *PayPal*. At <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/>, click

“Donate” and follow the prompts. Funds are still needed to make the needed repairs and prepare for painting. Painting will not simply look better; it will protect the 1858 structure. Please consider contributing. “Giving Tuesday” is coming up on December 3. It is a day set aside for gratitude and generosity. Show your gratitude to WVHS and be generous!

**Local Mansion Mimics Others:** “The Cadwalader Mansion is of interest as a structure that began as a vernacular stone farmhouse and evolved through several stages to become a Greek Revival style mansion. This evolution reflected the changing aesthetics of its owners and the general revival of interest in classical models from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.” (From HABS Survey PA-6045)



***Cadwalader Mansion at 137 Stenton Avenue, Blue Bell***



## **From the Board of Directors' November Meeting:**

- The next issue of *The Quill*, emailed to paid members only, will feature articles about the history of the lovely Gwynedd Hall, the result of the research conducted for its 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.
- Steve Vereb from Verco Painting is doing emergency stucco repairs at the Franklinville School. Painting will begin when the funding is available, and contributions are needed.
- Plans are continuing for special projects for the *America 250* celebration.
- A committee will be formed to work on the WVHS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party (Sunday, September 14, 2025, at William Penn Inn). The search for sponsors will begin in April 2025.

## **Calendar of Events for 2024-2025**

- December 9 (Monday) 6:30 PM—Members' Holiday Party, Pot-luck with ham and wine
- January—no meeting
- February 10 (Monday) 7 PM—Show n Tell—Members bring in and tell about a favorite or meaningful object
- March 10 (Monday) 7 PM—Scott Bomboy, Lost Covered Bridges of Montgomery County
- April 14 (Monday) 7 PM—Mike Jesberger, Battle of Germantown
- April 27 (Sunday) 1-3 PM—Open House, 1895 School
- May 12 (Monday)—Anthony Selletti, History of Lazaretto Quarantine

- May 18 (Sunday) 1-3 PM—Open House, Franklinville School
- June 9 (Monday) 6:30 PM—Pot-luck Picnic
- Sept 14, 2025 (Sunday) 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.*

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