
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 4, Number 9

The Valley Crier



May 2025.....Celebrating our 50th Year

Lazaretto Quarantine, Topic for May Speaker: On Monday, May 12, at 7 PM, Anthony (Tony) Selletti will complete the WVHS Speakers' Series for the 2024-2025 Society Year. (The June meeting will be the annual Pot-Luck Picnic and more.) Selletti and his wife, Barbara, have been involved with historic preservation and living history in the tri-state area for over 50 years. As a member of the board of directors of Saving Hallowed Ground, he created the award-winning Follow the Flag program. Selletti is a digital creator, film maker, and has worked in front of the camera in multiple productions. He authored *Fort Mifflin: A Paranormal History*, and he and Barbara are anticipating the publication of a history of the Lazaretto.

The Lazaretto Quarantine Station, located in Tinicum Township, appears on the National Register of Historic Places. It was Philadelphia's Ellis Island, where ships and passengers were "checked" before they were permitted to enter the city. Built in 1793 during a Yellow Fever epidemic, it served Philadelphia for 94 years. Ships believed to be "contaminated" were cleaned and held, sometimes for weeks, but thousands of lives were saved.

New Director at Montco Historical Society Will Greet WVHS at its May

Meeting: Originally scheduled for the April meeting, Dr. David Young will instead attend the May meeting to preview our WVHS exhibits and to introduce himself. Dr. Young was recently hired as Executive Director of the HSMC. In prior years, he oversaw Germantown's Cliveden (where he wrote a prize-winning book) and then was Executive Director of the Delaware Historical Society.

Members to Vote on Proposed WVHS Bylaws Changes: At the start of the May meeting, a brief business meeting will be called to consider changes to the WVHS Bylaws. The proposed edits are meant to clarify the wording of five sections (with no changes to the society's usual procedures). They were emailed to all Dues-Paying Members, located at the end of April's *Valley Crier*, and they are available now on the WVHS website at [Bylaws] "Committees."

May 18, Franklinville School Open House: Owned by WVHS, the Franklinville School continues to be restored. If you have not visited the school recently, be sure to stop by on Sunday, May 18, from 1-3 PM. The structure is one of the last one-room schools in our area. Furnished as a typical 19th-century classroom, the school also features displays of education-related items. The school's address is 1701 Morris Road. Enter through the opening in the white rail fence. While you are there, find out...

- Which governor's portrait hangs at the front of the classroom?

- The US flag contained how many stars in 1858 when the school was built?
- Which of the school's desks are original to the school?
- Why were over 1000 one-room schools built in Pennsylvania in the mid-19th century?

Franklinville School *Still* Desperate for Funding: The campaign continues to raise enough to make the needed repairs at the Franklinville School, owned by WVHS and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Verco Painting has already been hired and some work has begun. A shutter was removed and all the shutters have been examined for rotting wood. The two oldest shutters will be replaced, at a cost of over \$1000! The photos below, taken in April, help to explain the repairs that need to be completed. Please, your donation of any size would be appreciated to preserve this important local site! **As a Nonprofit, WVHS is grateful for donations:** 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.



The hardware holding the shutters allows water to leak into the wood, causing damage.

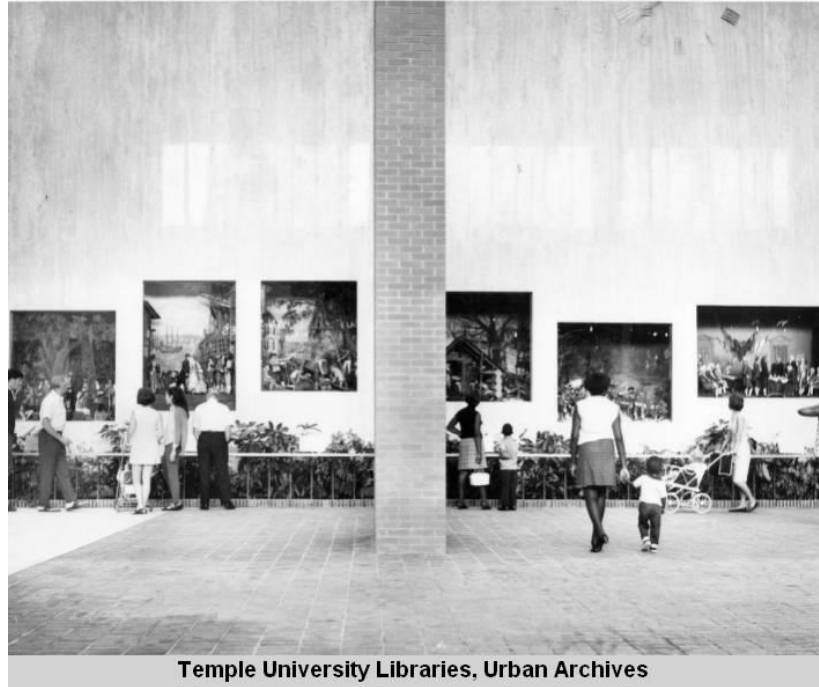


***Showing a missing shutter
and some of the rotting
wood, the photos above
were taken by Board
Member Barry Johnson in
April 2025.***



Jesberger an Outstanding Speaker in April, and he is returning for the 50th celebration in September:

Michael Jesberger, an historian and re-enactor, began his talk by noting that as a child, he was introduced to American history at the Neshaminy Mall's "Freedom Wall," seven interactive panels depicting important scenes from history (now gone). His favorite button to push was the panel depicting the Battle of Germantown with its Patriot soldiers climbing the front stairs to enter the Chew Mansion, where the British were fortified. Washington's intent was to defeat this relatively small British unit since they were separated from their comrades, waiting in Philadelphia, the nation's capital. Jesberger later noted that the Patriots had problems during the battle: they were trying to coordinate four columns of soldiers; the air was thick with fog and gun smoke; Washington moved on, leaving in the rear the Chew house, occupied by the British; and then there was friendly fire. In the end, however, General Anthony Wayne proclaimed that, because his men had fought well, he considered it "a glorious day!" Jesberger noted that Patriot troops marched an amazing 230 miles before they arrived at Valley Forge. He concluded that "Revolution Road" (today's Skippack Pike) does not get the recognition that it should because troops moved past our 1895 School's location six times, going to and from the battle and camping in Blue Bell. It is hallowed ground.



Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives

***“Freedom Wall” at the Strawbridge and Clothier in Neshaminy Mall, 1968
(photo: Philadelphia Evening Bulletin)***



Michael Jesberger shows an American Revolution cannonball as he describes how Patriot troops attacked the British at the Chew Mansion.

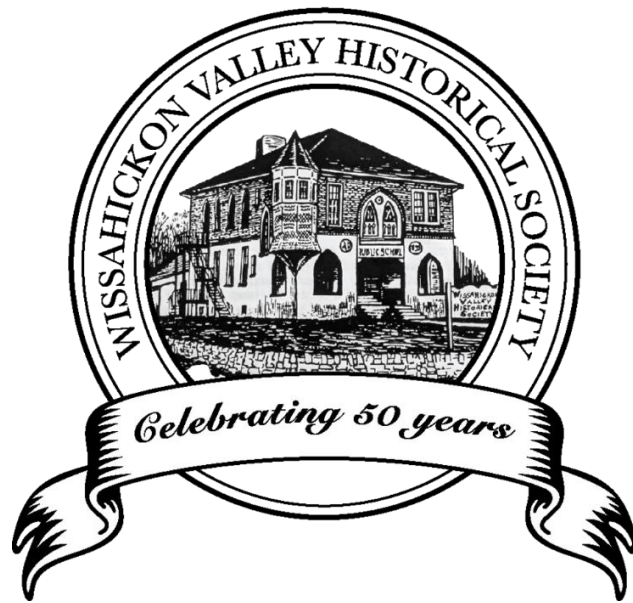
Open House revealed 50 years of WVHS: On Sunday, April 27, guests and docents alike delighted in leafing through the dozens of books on display, telling the story of WVHS, which began in 1975. Member Neal Bradley again parked the vintage REO fire truck and his antique cars around the 1895 School to draw in visitors. Some members volunteered to act as docents for the first time, and their help is especially appreciated: Paul Capone, Natalie Macy, Sue Roth and Carla Beck. Also assisting were Judy Baigis, Sandy Zebe, David Kings, past president Russ and Jeannie Bellavance, and board members Joe Langella, Frank Russo, Barry Johnson, and Marie and Tom Goldkamp.





Antique Cars on Display at the Open House

Introducing Our 50th Anniversary Logo: To commemorate this special occasion, WVHS is proud to unveil our new 50th Anniversary logo! This design honors our 1895 School and proclaims that we are indeed celebrating. Look for the logo mark at upcoming events, in our communications, and throughout the neighborhood. Many thanks to member Fawn Ostriak for creating the design! And thank you to the other members of the committee: Russ Bellavance, Bernadette Dougherty, Barry Johnson, Marty Kalos, Joe Langella, Frank Russo, Peter Wilson, and Mike Zebe. Details about the celebration will be announced in the next *Valley Crier*.



WVHS Displays at Two Wissahickon Valley Public Libraries: In May, see the exhibit at the Ambler Library, showcasing items from our collection used primarily by women for cooking, cleaning, and laundry. In honor of Mother's Day, the theme is "A Woman's Work is Never Done." In April, WVHS's exhibit featured the history of Centre Square. It included the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* from May 14, 1949, showing the Centre Square Fire Department and Reed's Store (originally the Centre Square Hotel), and an 1880's ledger book from the general store at the opposite corner. The display highlighted the narrative of General Washington's 10,000 troops, marching through the area to and from the Battle of Germantown. A tavern located at the Reed's Store site is central to the story. Sadly, the former Reed's building may be replaced by a car wash.



April's display at the Blue Bell Library featured the history of Centre Square.

WVHS Appreciates Its Volunteers: Two volunteers at the 1895 School deserve a round of applause. **Neal Bradley** rebuilt one of our museum's mannequins, fixing her broken leg and creating a new stand. She now displays a play nurse's uniform, located on the second floor. And **Dottie MacDermott** has again planted flowers in our flowerpots. Their bright colors greet visitors at the front door.



Child's nurse costume, worn by the newly-repaired mannequin



WVHS is ready for spring, thanks to Dottie MacDermott

Mysterious Leak at 1895 School Originated from Radiator: Joan Duxbury noticed a small crack in the plaster over the window; then she and Board Member Barry Johnson began to look for a water leak. Finally, Barry wrapped newspaper around the suspected culprit, an old radiator valve, and soon the paper revealed a water stain. WVHS is grateful to Whitpain Township for quickly stopping the leak.



Damp newspaper reveals a water leak at the radiator valve, quickly repaired by Whitpain Township.

Interested in Old Shutters? Four old shutters with some rotting wood were removed from the Franklinville School and are available for sale. For details or to make an offer, please email: Info@WValleyHS.org

American Association of State and Local History (AASLH): The organization has announced the cancellation of federal grants to support the National Park Service, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The National Endowment for the Humanities has lost 80% of its staff.

Help Us Spread Our Local History News: If you have friends, neighbors, or family who would like to receive the *Valley Crier*, please let us know and we will include them on our email list: Info@WValleyHS.org

The 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.

***As a Nonprofit, WVHS is grateful for donations:** 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 Volunteer/New-Member Orientation: If you are a new member and/or want to be 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.

Volunteer Day is Thursdays, 12-3 PM: Please come to the 1895 School to spend an hour or two assisting WVHS. We need help with cleaning and accessioning.

From the Board of Directors' meeting in April:

- Casey Berg and Chloe Zhou, high school students, will be assisting at the 1895 school over the summer.
- Member Peter Wilson will be conducting short interviews for the new WVHS Instagram account.
- WVHS has ordered two Franklinville School replacement shutters from Timberlane in time to avoid additional tariff charges.

Calendar of Events for 2025

- May 12 (Monday)—Business Meeting, Introduction of Dr. David Young, and Speaker Anthony Selletti on the History of Philadelphia's Lazaretto Quarantine
- May 18 (Sunday) 1-3 PM—Open House, Franklinville School
- June 9 (Monday) 6:30 PM—Pot-luck Picnic and "Corn" Auction
- Sept 14, 2025 (Sunday) 1-4 PM --William Penn Inn, WVHS 50th Anniversary Celebration (Save the Date). Speaker, Michael Jesberger

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.
