
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 4, Number 11

The Valley Crier



July 2025.....Celebrating our 50th Year

WVHS 50th Anniversary Luncheon: Tickets are now available! Sunday, September 14, 1-4 PM, at the William Penn Inn. The featured speaker will be historian and lecturer Michael Jesberger on “Blue Bell’s Skippack Pike and the Road to Valley Forge.” Celebrate history with us! Buffet lunch; cash bar, raffle baskets.

To donate or **to purchase tickets (\$65)**, please make checks out to “WVHS” and mail to PO Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002, *or* for *Venmo* and *PayPal*, go to [Donate – Wissahickon Valley Historical Society](#). Then at “Donate,” choose “50th Anniversary Tickets” and follow the prompts.



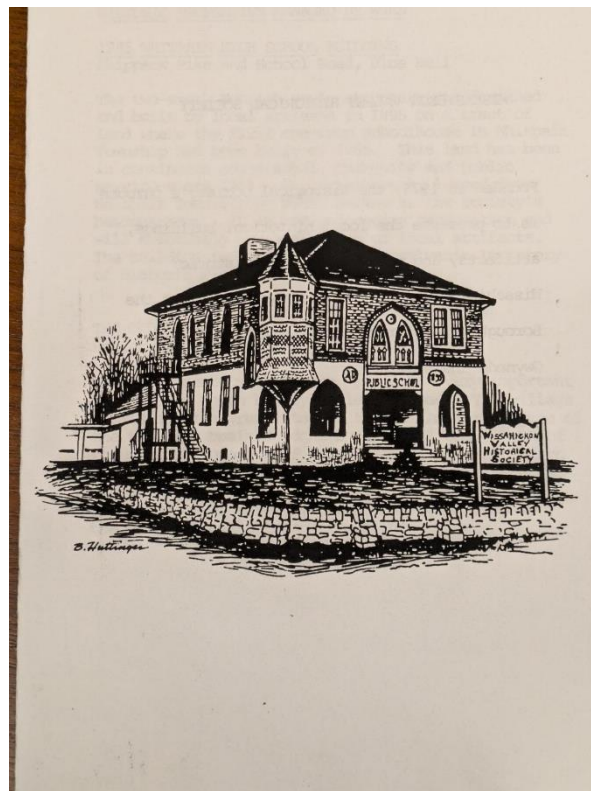
WVHS Needs Help with Sept Open House: On Sunday, September 28, 1-3 PM, Open House is scheduled at the 1895 School. Please let us know if you can help. Info@WValleyHS.org

Picnic and Auction Conclude the Society Year: June marked our annual pot-luck picnic, filled with delicious dishes, and a “corn auction,” which netted over \$200 for the WVHS general fund. Thanks to Sally Zeller and Joan Duxbury for organizing and serving the event. And a special thanks to past president Russ Bellavance for his role as an amusing auctioneer.



Russ Bellavance entertains as he auctions members' “gifts” to the corn auction, some elegant, some weird.

The 1895 School's Front Wall Will Be Moved: Recently Joan Duxbury and Carol Kalos met with the Whitpain Township's engineer, Jim Blanch, to discuss PennDOT's \$1.7 million plan to improve the intersection at Skippack Pike and School Road. A traffic light will be added, and School Road will be widened to create a left-turn lane. As a result, the school's front wall will be moved closer to the building by 21 feet. The WVHS sign will also be moved, and, although the school will lose a section of its side yard along School Road, the area's drainage from the school's downspouts will be improved. The township is presently looking for a stonemason qualified to move the wall.



A pen and ink drawing by Becky Huttinger, showing the wall surrounding the 1895 School (Whitpain...Crossroads in Time, 1977)

WVHS Completes HARC-Funded Preservation: HARC Grant

Requirements Met: In 2022, Wissahickon Valley Historical Society received a HARC grant (Historical and Archival Records Care), funded by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, to preserve some of the old books stored at the 1895 School's Library/Archives, and the society has filed its final report on the project. The volumes illustrate an array of local history, including membership records from the Oddfellows Lodge, personal scrapbooks, dozens of ledgers from local businesses, and other books, all dating from the 1800s and early 1900s. They will supply valuable primary source material for researchers. For instance, a blacksmith's record shows how he started by shoeing horses, then repaired carriages, and finally replaced the running boards of the area's first automobiles.

Prior to the grant funding, the books were stacked on bookshelves, exposed to dust, light, and moisture. The grant funding (over \$500) supplied dozens of archival boxes where the books are now safely stored. The process included measuring each book, accessioning and indexing it, labeling each box, and finding storage space for the boxes within the museum's collection. President Carol Kalos and Board Member Barry Johnson volunteered many hours to work on the project, which was completed prior to the April 2025 Open House at the 1895 School. A list of the books appears on the WVHS website at "Local History."



WVHS Congratulations *Stroll Blue Bell*: Each month, WVHS provides a local history article to the magazine, called *Stroll Blue Bell* (formerly *Blue Bell's Finest*), for the residents of Blue Bell Country Club. In August the publication will be ten years old. Our hope is that every BBCC resident will be proud of their local history and appreciate the lovely old buildings which give our neighborhood its character. Using sources from our WVHS Library, each month's article describes one historic site, its architecture, its history, its owners, and a fascinating fact about it, such as (in the March 2023 *Stroll*), how George Washington, eating a pear he picked from a local grafted oak tree, declared that it was luscious. That unusual tree grew on a farm, now the campus of the Montgomery County Community College! Over the years, WVHS has posted 62 *Stroll* history articles on the WVHS website, available here: <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/blue-bells-finest/>.



Congratulations to *Stroll Blue Bell*, soon 10 years old!

Ambler Train Station's Freight House News: Former WVHS officer Bernadette Dougherty took charge of storing the remains of the Freight House, but she is already working on finding a new site for what was once Ambler's first passenger depot. During the demolition, one of the workers

found this old, hand-made nail (with its square head) among the demolition materials and saved it for President Carol Kalos. It now appears in the Ambler display at the 1895 School.



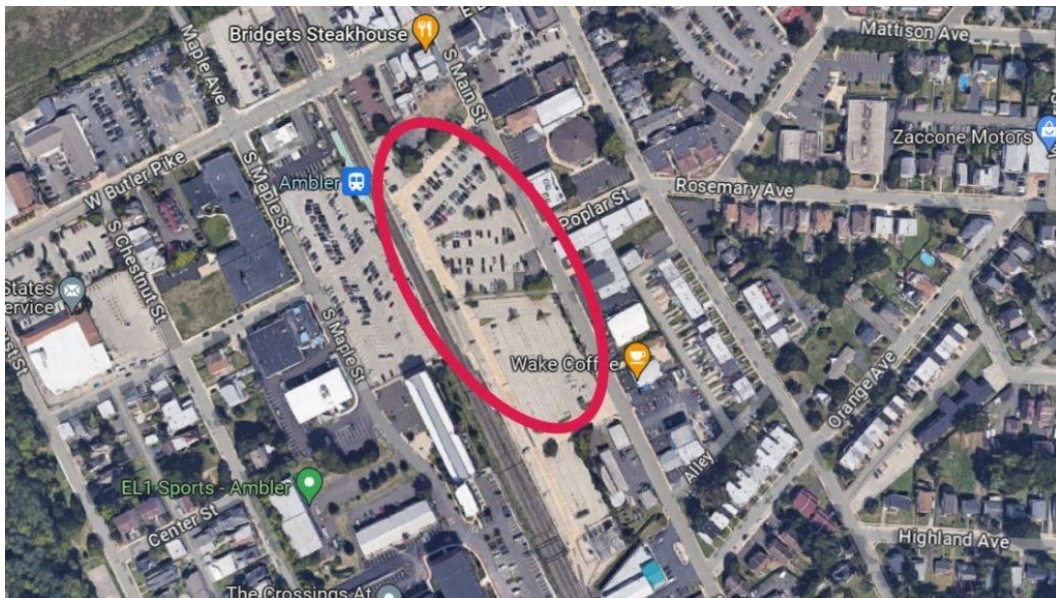
Hand-made Nail from the Freight House



The Site of the Ambler Train Station's Freight House. The orange fencing lines the edge of the tracks (June 21, 2025)

SEPTA seeking developers for building residences and retail at

Ambler Train Station: *Montco Today* announced in June that SEPTA will use over 3 acres of the train station's parking lot along Butler Pike for "housing, retail, and pedestrian-friendly activities." Over 200 parking spaces will remain. Details appear in the *Philadelphia Business Journal* or see *Montco Today*: https://montco.today/2025/06/septa-housing-development-ambler/?utm_campaign=montco-today-morningcampaign&utm_edition=202506211100&utm_m



Franklinville School Restoration-- and Funding Needed:

The campaign continues to raise enough to make the repairs needed at the Franklinville School, owned by WVHS and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Painting has begun and the WVHS Board is considering how to improve the appearance of the back deck. The estimate for demolition of the concrete alone is about \$4,000. 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 it 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. See the photo below.



At one time, bricks covered a concrete deck at the Franklinville School's back door. (Photo taken in March 2021)

***Mary*, an Ambler restaurant, soon to have a WVHS connection:**

Located on Butler Avenue, the restaurant, opened in 2024, just made headlines in *Philadelphia Magazine* with an article entitled, “Philly’s Hottest Club Is a Members-Only Fried Chicken Joint” (June 2025). Read the August *Crier* to learn more about the WVHS project there. We are telling Mary Ambler’s story.



***Interior of Mary, a new Ambler restaurant, where WVHS
will promote local history***

WVHS Student Intern Visits the Smithsonian History Museum:

Laura Corbett, a history major at Montgomery County Community College, is one of the interns at the 1895 School for the summer. She plans to study museum studies after transferring to a four-year university. She and four of her friends from MCCC went on an end-of-semester daytrip to Washington DC, spending most of it at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. She offers the following observations:

For two members of the group, it was their first trip to the nation's capital, and sadly, due to the city's current atmosphere, they observed many landmarks and key pieces of US history for the first time between tall police gates and blocked-off streets. Despite this, DC was undeniably alive, full of tourists and students like us, soaking in the beauty of the city despite the barriers. The highlight of the trip was the museum, chosen in celebration of the American History class our group shared. Each student found an exhibit that spoke to their academic interests, from the displays of First Lady dresses and Democratic History to the exhibit on Forensic Methodology and History. It offered a multifaceted approach to American History, balancing the things that make up America to shape our culture from its many different cultural identities and movements to the importance of technology, namely transportation and entertainment. It was also interesting to observe which exhibits were the most popular, with the entertainment area being the most crowded. The guided tours focused there because the average visitor recognizes the costumes and props of their favorite singers, shows, or movies. Overall, the trip was a wonderful experience and although not perfect, it gave an interesting perspective of

the city that reflects the country itself, one balancing the line between change and the history many are trying to honor.



Student interns are refolding the WVHS collection's fabrics, such as this 1900s mourning dress. Pictured are Patrick Hennessey, Casey Berger, and Laura Corbett. Not pictured is intern Chloe Zhou.

Another Town with Asbestos: At one time, Ambler manufactured more asbestos than any other place in the world. Its experience can be contrasted to that of Bloomington, Illinois, which made asbestos from 1951-1972. Until the 1960s, Ambler's Keasbey and Mattison company created

jobs and boosted the local economy; however, the waste from their process was placed in piles where children played, not knowing the dangers of asbestos. Then scientists realized that asbestos floating in the air is inhaled, causing lung damage. The full explanation appears on the WVHS website: <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/the-white-mountains-of-ambler/>.

Soon the EPA remediated Ambler's asbestos mountains, and today residents are proud of their efforts to overcome a problem to create a lovely, historic, vital town. Home prices have risen because the neighborhood with no big box stores, has character with its quiet, old streets. But evidently bitterness remains in Bloomington. Its McLean County Museum of History has a new display, indicating that workers are still in litigation with their employer over asbestos. A portion of the display, shown online, describes their grievances:

<https://mchistory.org/exhibits/permanent/a-deadly-deception-the-asbestos-tragedy-in-mclean-county>.

Many thanks to all our volunteers during this Society Year, 2024-2025!

You are great!

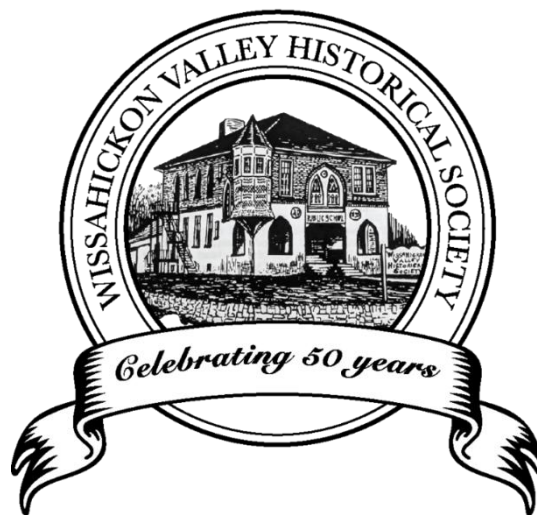


Gone, and Perhaps Forgotten: Coal chutes, razor holes, milk doors, telephone nooks, and wood paneling.



Milk Doors

50th Anniversary Planning Committee Continues Its Discussion: The group of eight members has discussed the menu, the agenda for the day, decorations, souvenirs, and much more. Of special importance is the sale of advertising. For further information about purchasing an ad for the printed program, please contact Joe Langella: jlangellajr@gmail.com



Radiator Leak Damage: Have you noticed this little spot on the wall (pictured)? It's from a radiator leak on the second floor. Whitpain Township has repaired the leak and is in the process of repairing the damage. WVHS is grateful for their help.



PA SHPO's Services May End: The Historic Preservation Fund, which fuels the PA State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), may soon be eliminated due to lack of federal funding, according to PA Humanities, a 50-year-old nonprofit, championing the humanities. In the past few years, SHPO has provided two grants to WVHS for work at the Franklinville School.



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: You can generally deduct the amount of your donation from your taxable income if you file an itemized federal return. 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 learn more about WVHS. RSVP to Info@WValleyHS.org.

Volunteer Day is Thursdays, 12-2 PM during the summer: Please come to the 1895 School to spend an hour or two assisting WVHS. We need help with cleaning and accessioning.

Calendar of Events for Society Year 2025-2026

- Sept 14 (Sun), WVHS 50th Anniversary Celebration
- Sept 25 (Thurs), Dine & Donate at Tannery Run Brew Works, Ambler
- Sept 28 (Sun), 1-3 PM, 1895 School Open House, featuring WVHS 50th
- Oct 13 (Mon) 7 PM, Chris Reardon, Battle of the Clouds
- Oct 19 (Sun) 1-3 PM, Open House, Franklinville School
- Nov 10 (Mon) 7 PM, Douglas Miller, Pennsbury Manor
- Dec 8 (Mon) 6:30 PM, Holiday Party
- Jan—No meeting
- Feb 9 (Mon) 7PM, “Show and Tell”
- Mar 9 (Mon) 7 PM, Tom Keels, Phila’s Golden Age of Retail
- Apr 13 (Mon) 7 PM, TBD
- May 11 (Mon) 7 PM, TBD
- June 8 (Mon) 6:30 PM, Pot-Luck Picnic & Corn Auction

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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