
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 4, Number 12

The Valley Crier



Aug 2025.....Celebrating our 50th Year

WVHS 50th Anniversary Luncheon: Tickets are now available! **JOIN**

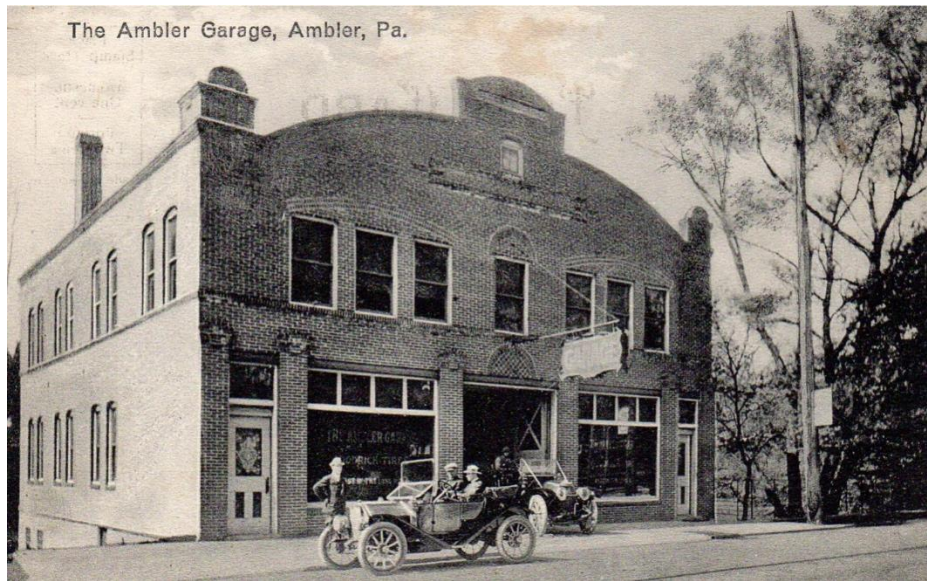
US! Sunday, September 14, 1-4 PM, at the William Penn Inn. The featured speaker will be historian and lecturer Michael Jesberger on “Blue Bell’s Skippack Pike and the Road to Valley Forge.” Buffet lunch and raffle baskets.

Celebrate history with us!

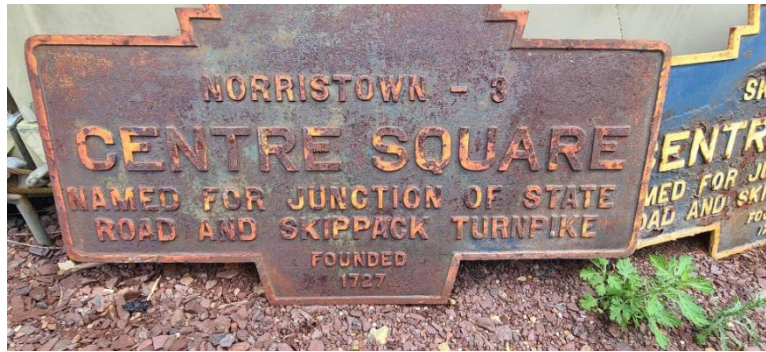
To donate or **to purchase tickets (\$65)**, please make checks out to “WVHS” and mail to PO Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002, *or* for *Venmo* and *PayPal*, go to [Donate – Wissahickon Valley Historical Society](#). Then at “Donate,” choose “50th Anniversary Tickets” and follow the prompts.



WVHS Fundraiser at Historic Ambler Brewery: “Dine and Donate” on Thursday, September 25, 4-10 PM, at Tannery Run Brew Works (a former garage, shown in the photo). 131 E. Butler Ave., Ambler. 10% of all proceeds will benefit WVHS!



Then and Now...



Two roadside plaques, “discovered” in Whitpain Township storage.

A Mystery Solved, sort of: In April 2025, WVHS created an exhibit at the Blue Bell Public Library about Center Square (originally spelled Centre Square). The display featured photos of Reed’s Country Store and other buildings that once stood at the crossroads of today’s Skippack Pike (the former Skippack Turnpike, a toll road) and Dekalb Pike (the former State Road.) Especially missed is the corner’s post office and general store, complete with potbelly stove, a community center where residents congregated almost every day.

While researching the history of Centre Square, President Carol Kalos came upon a 1977 newspaper article which described Washington’s troops marching by the Waggon Inn (the original spelling), the site of the present Reeds Store. It mentioned that Centre Square was “already old in 1777,” based on the corner’s blue and yellow roadside plaque (now missing). In

recent years, roadway construction has torn up the crossroads, so she contacted Whitpain Township to see if anyone there knew the location of that old sign. And sure enough, Tom Farzetta, Director of Public Works, sent her the photos above. He had *two* signs, stored for years, both indicating that Centre Square was “founded in 1727,” and with one stating “7 miles [to the village of] Skippack” and the other stating “3 miles [to] Norristown”! Skippack Turnpike was “freed” (released from tolls) in 1921, becoming Skippack Pike. And then it was paved in 1923. Could it be that these plaques were placed in 1923? Are over one-hundred years old? The Commonwealth’s Historic Markers program began in 1913, so it is possible. Could they be replaced in 2026?

The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, in “Historical markers reviewed” (Dec. 29, 2021), describes how the state’s 2500 “markers can educate the public,” but for decades, they left out the underrepresented. As a result, some markers were replaced for using sexist or racist language while new ones emphasize overlooked groups.

Work Progressing at the Franklinville School: The latest news? There are carpenter ants eating the windowsills! However, mark your calendar to see the new paint. WVHS will hold an Open House on Sunday, September 28, 1-3 PM, to show off our new appearance.



Tarps Cover the Interior Floor of the Franklinville School, July 2025

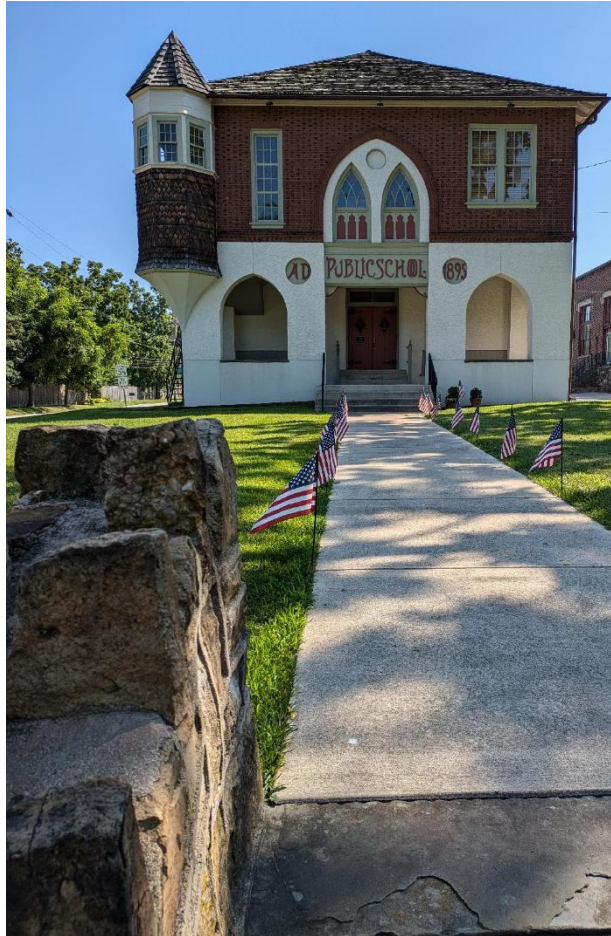


Windowsill, Where Shutter Hardware Was Attached, July 17, 2025



Shutters Removed for Painting, July 17, 2025

Our Nation's 249th Fourth of July: Flags lined the entrance to the 1895 School. In the photo, note the wall, which will be moved some time next year when a traffic signal is installed at School Road.



July 4, 2025, at the 1895 School

List of Open House, Special Exhibits: WVHS Offers an Open House at the 1895 School at least twice each year with each featuring a special exhibit from its museum collection. Here's a summary of those topics:

Nov 2021 WWII and the *Kings Daughters Newsletters*

Oct 2022 Amchem Collection

Apr 2023	Wissahickon Schools, a special daytime Open House, scheduled for the School District's Transportation Employees
Sep 2023	Woolworth's Lunch Counter
Mar 2024	"History Meets Art" with artist Ellie Monitz
Oct 2024	Remembering the 1960s
Apr 2025	WVHS and its 50 Years

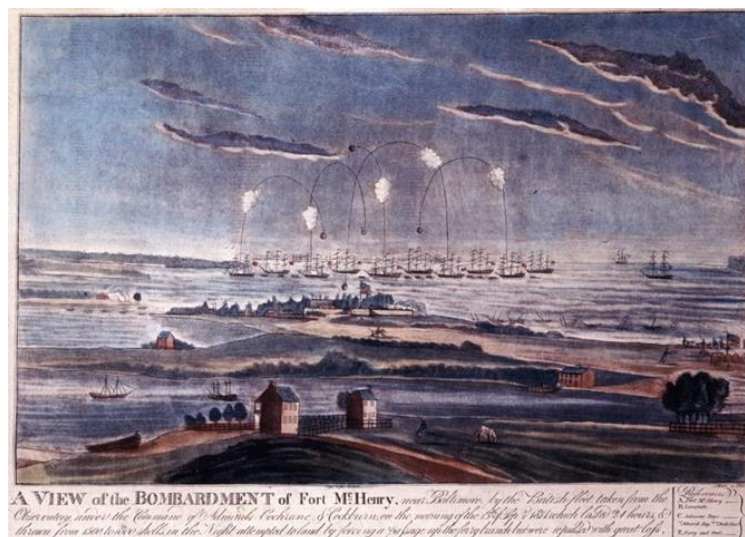
Student Interns Working Away: Despite the heat at the 1895 School, the interns have been showing up and working diligently, mostly on the accessioning of the Bob Whittock Collection, several boxes of papers about Whitpain history.

Immigrants to the Philadelphia Port: In May 2025, the WVHS speaker presented on the Lazaretto Quarantine Station in today's Tinicum Township, where thousands of immigrants entered Philadelphia. They were detained, checked for disease, and then traveled north on the river to their destination. *Real Philly History, Real Fast* (2021) explains what happened next. They traveled to Pier 53 at the Washington Avenue Immigration Center, in use from 1873 until 1915. From there, many took the nearby train to wherever they were headed. About one million immigrants entered Philadelphia from Europe to the Washington Avenue Station, compared to about 12 million at Ellis Island. The trip from Europe to Philly was 200 miles longer than getting to New York, so the Philadelphia Immigration Center closed due to declining numbers.

Ambler Walking Tours Successful: Spring tours brought us 50 people with net sales of \$610, funds set aside to help relocate the train station's Freight House.

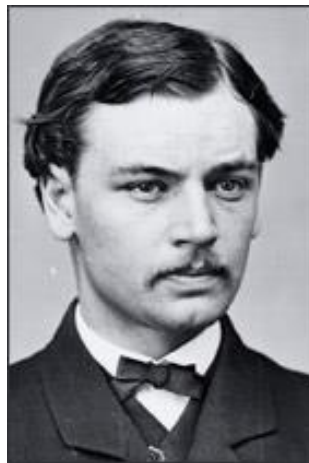
How to Pronounce “Gwynedd”: The Welsh name Gwynedd is pronounced "GWIN-əth" with a soft "th" sound at the end. The "gw" is pronounced like the English "gwin," and the "edd" is pronounced like "eth," according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*.

US Anthem was a Drinking Song: The Star-Spangled Banner has roots far more rowdy than patriotic, states Barrymore Laurence Scherer for *The Wall Street Journal*. The melody was originally written by English composer John Stafford Smith as a popular drinking song, “To Anacreon in Heav’n.” Francis Scott Key wrote the lyrics, and it became the national anthem in 1931. The article appears here: <https://www.wsj.com/arts-culture/music/the-star-spangled-banner-a-rowdy-tune-turned-rousing-anthem-cf0c8104> .



Comic Strip Reveals True, Unusual History: The Sunday “funny papers” on May 11, 2025, carried “Pearls Before Swine” by Stephan Pastis in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The comic strip showed two characters, Goat and Nancy, trying to make conversation. Goat concludes, “I’m poor at small talk.” But before that, in exasperation he expounds, “In 1864, Abraham Lincoln’s son, Robert, fell onto some railroad tracks and the man who reached down and saved his life was the brother of John Wilkes Booth.” That is true! At the train station at Jersey City, New Jersey, Robert was on his way home to Washington, DC, from Harvard College. He fell onto the track, but Edwin Booth yanked him to safety. The story appears here:

<https://www.historynet.com/edwin-booth-saved-robert-todd-lincolns-life-2/>



Robert Todd Lincoln, the President’s oldest son and a Harvard student, was saved by Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes Booth.

America250 with Ken Burns: Ken Burns's *THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION* is coming to PBS this November. Stay tuned for details.

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
A FILM BY KEN BURNS, SARAH BOTSTEIN & DAVID SCHMIDT



Calendar of Events for Society Year 2025-2026

- Sept 14 (Sun), WVHS 50th Anniversary Celebration
- Sept 25 (Thurs), "Dine & Donate," Tannery Run Brew Works, Ambler, 4-10 PM
- Sept 28 (Sun), 1-3 PM, Franklinville School Open House
- Oct 13 (Mon) 7 PM, Chris Reardon, Battle of the Clouds
- Oct 19 (Sun) 1-3 PM, 1895 School Open House, featuring WVHS 50th
- Nov 10 (Mon) 7 PM, Douglas Miller, Director, 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 Dr. Philip Mead, Chief Historian and Curator, Museum of the American Revolution (Philadelphia)
- 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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