
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 5, Number 4

The Valley Crier



Dec 2025.....Celebrating our 50th Year

Pot-luck Holiday Party, Monday, December 8 at 6:30 PM (Note the

time): WVHS will supply the paper goods and a spiral-cut ham.

Guests are asked to bring an appetizer, side dish, or dessert. (And BYOB.)

To help with planning, **PLEASE RSVP—**

Email to Info@WValleyHS.org . Please tell us two things:

- Number of guests
- What you plan to bring



Helpers Wanted: WVHS needs help! Since the pandemic, we have been losing volunteers, and most of the activities are completed by the board members. They need help! As part of the weekly “Volunteer Day,” Thursday work sessions (or any time!), **the board is looking for those who can assist to**

- Write articles for the *Valley Crier* and *The Quill*
- Create displays for the exhibits at the three municipal buildings
- Create occasional displays for the two Wissahickon Valley Public Libraries
- Attend and report on municipal planning-committee discussions
- Accession new items and documents
- Re-fold the fabrics in the collection
- Set-up and take-down for events
- Present programming for children
- Dust, vacuum, wash floors, wipe stairs and woodwork, clean bathroom, wash outdoor benches, sweep the porch
- Find and communicate with speakers
- Send press releases

Please Renew Your WVHS Dues. Society Year 2025-2026 began on **September 1**. Since our dues are low, please consider “rounding up.” Many members do. Please see the details for payment at

<https://www.wvalleyhs.org/join-us-2/>

A Membership List Will Be Published Soon: Based on dues received by December 15. Please renew *now* to be included. A future email will explain how members can “opt out” if they prefer not to include their name and/or other data.

“Wreaths Across America” will honor Patriots’ graves at Boehm’s Church Cemetery on Sunday, December 14: A wreath-laying ceremony for those who fought in the American Revolution is set for 11:30 AM (571 Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike), sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution.



Boehms’ Church, Wreaths Across America, December 2022
(Facebook Photo)

November Speaker Reveals William Penn: Douglas Miller, the director at William Penn's home, Pennsbury Manor, spun the tale of the Penn family at the WVHS November meeting. Starting with Penn's grandfather, he talked about the family's grapples with religion and debt, as well as his own effort to create a colony based on creating a better world, reflecting virtuous ideals. Penn gave our country the spark for trial by jury and religious tolerance. The Great Fire of London, which destroyed 2/3 of that city, inspired Penn to design Philadelphia with wide streets. Fun Fact: During the Great Fire, the Penn family saved...its wine...by burying it!



Douglas Miller, WVHS Speaker, November 2025

Nametags a New Habit: Members have been asking to return to wearing nametags at the meetings. Since the September meeting, guests and members old and new have been wearing nametags as we continue to welcome each other to the 1895 School.

Franklinville School's Exterior Renovations: Verco Painting continues to complete its work at the one-room school. The porch floor was recently painted. The two shutters at the back have been re-hung, and a vent over the back door is being repaired. (See the photos below.) Imagine students from decades ago walking through the sunshine on the front porch.



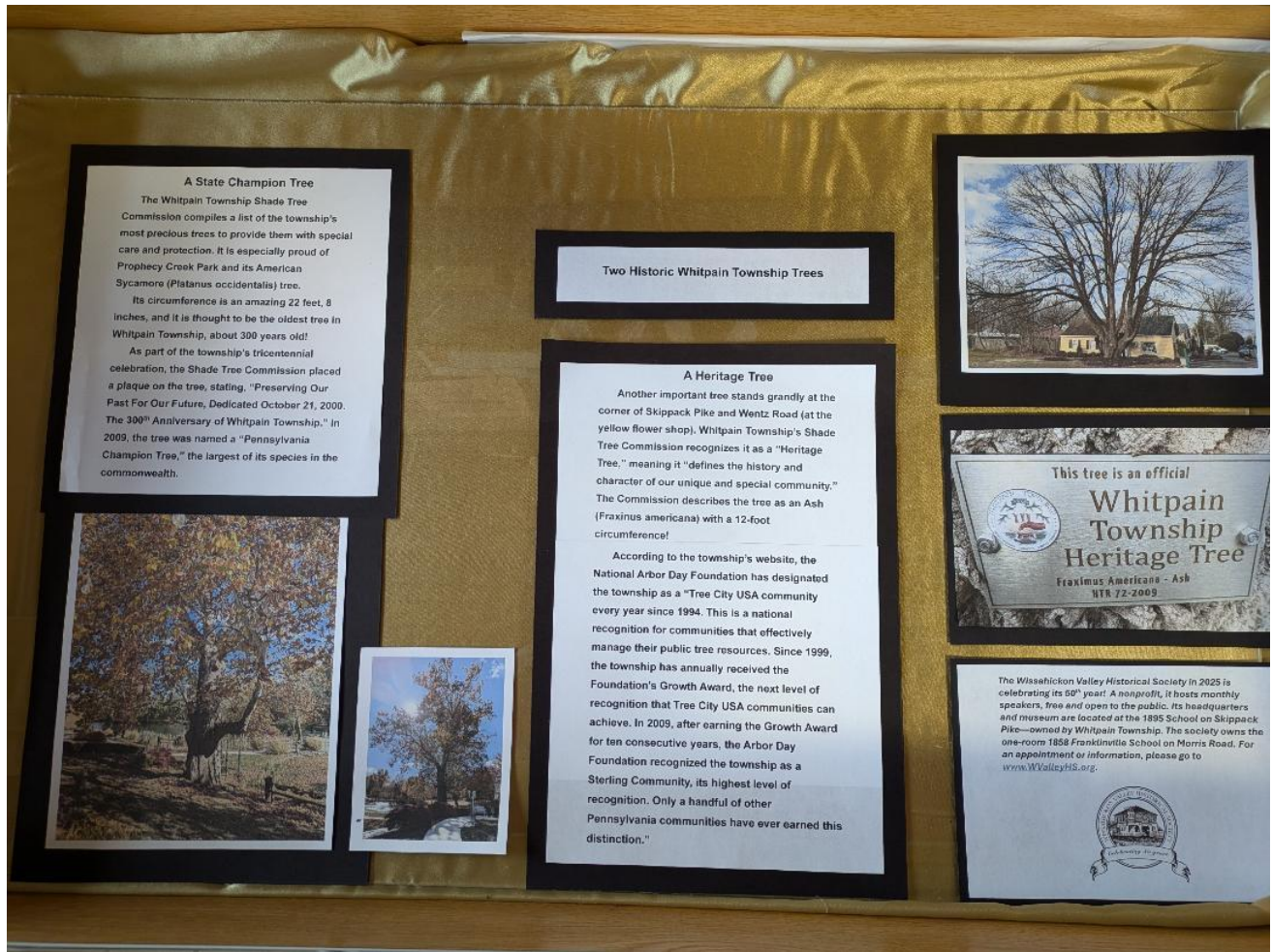
Newly painted front porch, Nov 11, 2025



***The two photos above show the vent above the rear door and the rot behind it,
Nov 12, 2025. Wood from 1858?***

Still More Repairs at Franklinville School: The Franklinville School was built in 1858 and used as a public school until 1916. The back portion of the school was added around 1930 to be a “Projector Room.” The owners of the school at the time, the Strassburgers, who owned Normandy Farm, showed movies at the Franklinville School on Saturday nights for the local farmers, so the room was built for the projectionist, according to the NRHP nomination. Thus, the Franklinville School was not just a one-room school; it was also a community center, making it eligible for the national recognition. (There were a thousand one-room schools in Pennsylvania, according to *Explore PA History, 2023*, so not every one-room achieves NRHP status.) Recently, our contractor from Verco Painting noticed that the floor in that projector room is “spongey,” so it will require a repair.

Whitpain Township Cherishes Its Historic Trees: WVHS maintains display boxes at the administration buildings for Ambler Borough, Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township. Although WVHS sometimes falls behind, the display is changed about every three months. The new display at Whitpain describes the township’s efforts to preserve its many very-old trees. Two are pictured here: On the left is a huge, state champion tree, an American Sycamore, at Prophecy Creek Park; and on the right is a Heritage Tree, an Ash, at the corner of Skippack Pike and Wentz Road. (Volunteers are needed to prepare and/or install new topics at the display cases. For more details, please email to Info@WValleyHS.org .)



New WVHS Display at Whitpain Township Admin Building: Two Historic Trees

Giving Tuesday is Dec 2. WVHS appreciates our donors: To show gratitude and start the new holiday season, now is the time to show your appreciation for the efforts of WVHS and its officers to promote and preserve local history. No amount is too small. Your donation can be made at <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/donate/>.

A Garden Delight: Those mums you see in our flowerpots at the 1895 School were planted *last* year. They wintered over, survived the summer heat, and are starting to bloom again. Thanks to Dottie MacDermott for planting, and thanks to Sally Zeller for the pumpkins!



Fall pumpkins at the 1895 School (November 2025)

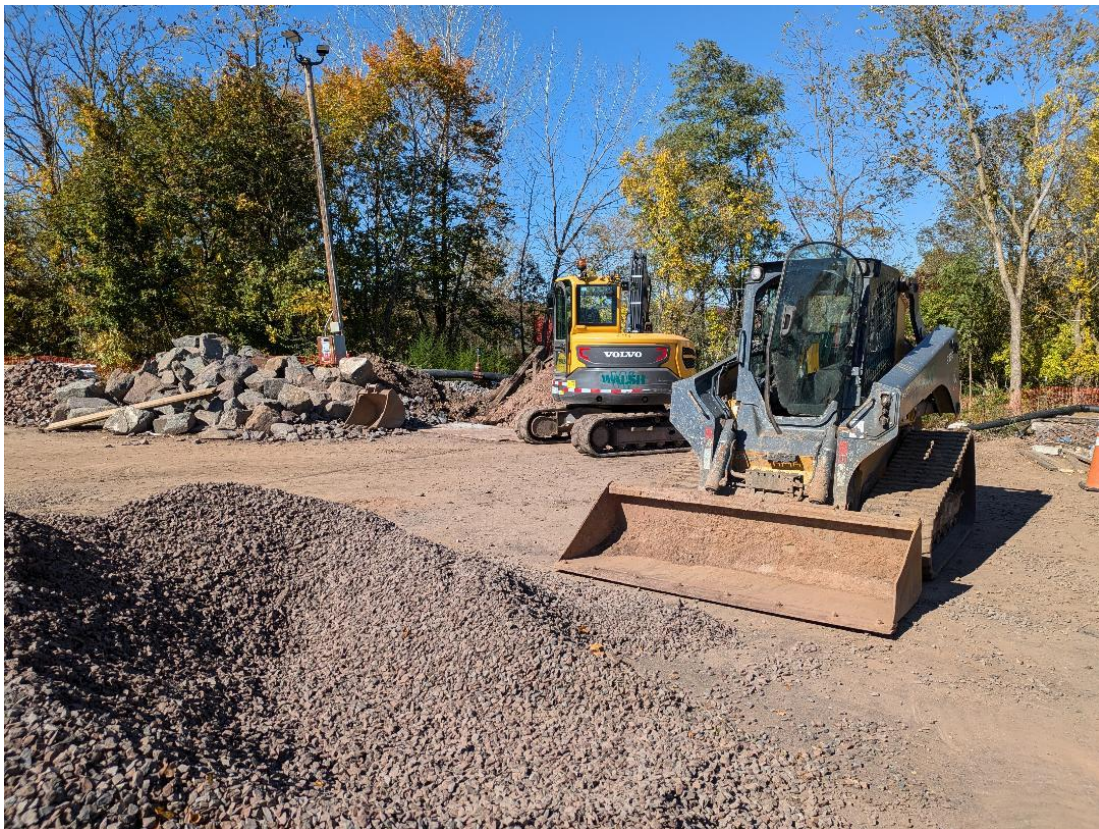
Ambler Walking Tours: The Storytellers, a WVHS committee, is completing its fall tours. For groups of 12, these tours along Butler Avenue are held on Saturdays, starting at 3 PM and ending at about 4:30. Tour guides point out many details about the architecture and history--Unusual tales, guaranteed! Tickets are \$15 and online reservations are required. All proceeds help to rebuild the Ambler Freight House, and guests receive a coupon from Tannery Run Brew Works. The remaining tour date is

December 6. Registration is here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ambler-downtown-walking-tour-fall-2025-tickets-1626330872419?aff=oddtcreator>

Want to lead an Ambler Walking Tour? The Ambler Storytellers, a committee of WVHS, offers tours of Butler Avenue on Saturday afternoons during the fall and spring seasons. If you like history, this is for you! Training is provided and tour guides choose their tour dates. You can begin as an assistant. The tours offer a great way to have fun and to help the community save its historic landmarks. For details, please email amblerstorytellers@gmail.com

Work Continues at Ambler Train Station's Culvert: Do you remember the Ambler Freight House? Gone today, it was Ambler's first passenger depot and part of a National Historic District. SEPTA insisted it be torn down immediately in 2022, so that the culvert under it could be stabilized, but Ambler residents worked to save the old structure. The collapse of the culvert, SEPTA said, would dam up the Tannery Run Creek, causing

flooding from the culvert along Butler Avenue. However, WVHS begged that the building be saved. By 2023, SEPTA still wanted to demolish the building, offering to erect a plaque to memorialize the structure. With the help of private donations, it was gently removed in the spring of 2025 and today its pieces lie in storage, waiting for a new location. Finally, SEPTA is rebuilding the culvert under the tracks and beyond. Construction has continued for weeks as workers reinforce the culvert and the sides of the stream bed. Someday, near the train station, WVHS will help cut the ribbon at the newly restored Freight House.



Equipment rebuilding the culvert at Ambler train station, November 2025



At Ambler Train Station, where the Freight House used to stand, work on the culvert will continue. A metal liner has been ordered (Photo, Nov 7, 2025).

Hand-made Rug Raised Funds for WVHS in 1992: The WVHS Minutes from December 9, 1992, report that, “to pay for a heater,” Peg Stern made and donated a hooked rug, depicting the Ambler Train Station, to raffle off. The prize winner was later reported in the minutes as Maro’s Carpet of Ambler (presently Maro’s Floor Covering). The store owner, who recently said he paid \$100 for the raffle ticket, has always kept the lovely rug in pristine condition, and he was pleased to re-tell its story. The rug came with a page of care instructions, which he has kept. The front of the envelope states, “Congratulations! You now own an HEIRLOOM.” (In the WVHS Minutes, no further mention about the heating system is made until years later.)



Hooked Rug, showing Ambler Train Station

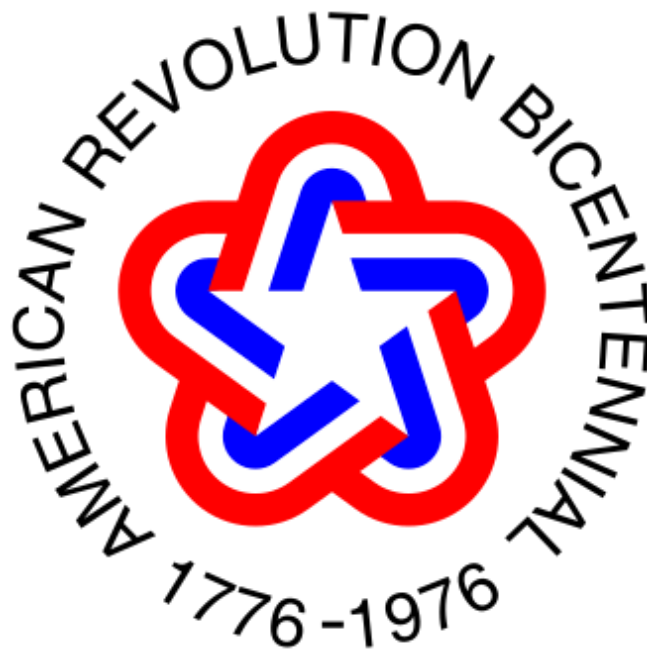
(Photos Taken in Oct 2025 at Maro's Floor Covering, Ambler))

Want to read about Whitpain History? Each month, President Carol Kalos writes a short article (250 words) about a historic location in or near Whitpain, and the article, along with photos, appears in *Stroll Blue Bell*, a magazine for residents of the Blue Bell Country Club. The articles are later posted on the WVHS website, available to everyone and making good winter-day reading:

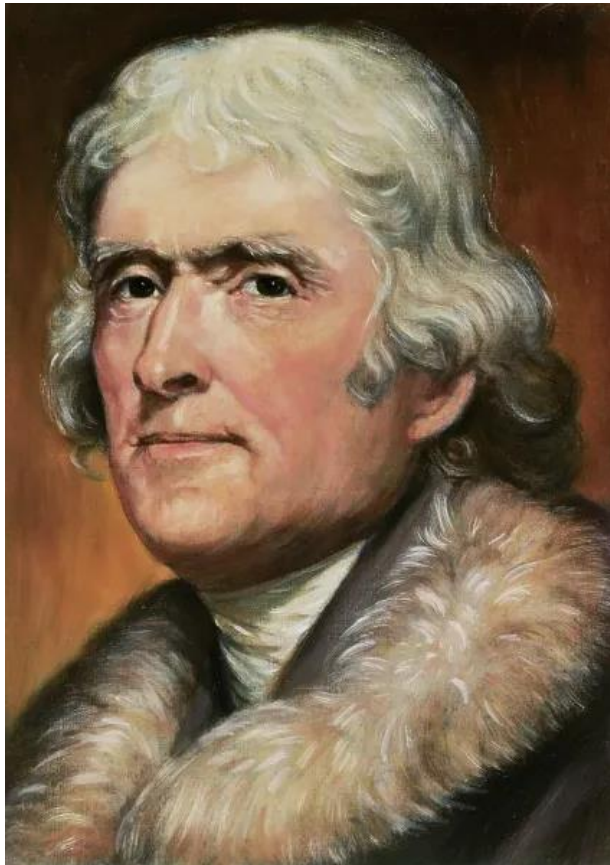
<https://www.wvalleyhs.org/blue-bells-finest/>

A Repeated Request: Do you have 1976 US Bicentennial souvenirs?

Please consider if you have items around your house from the US 200th celebration. WVHS is putting together a display for the spring of 2026, so the society may want to borrow some of your keepsakes.

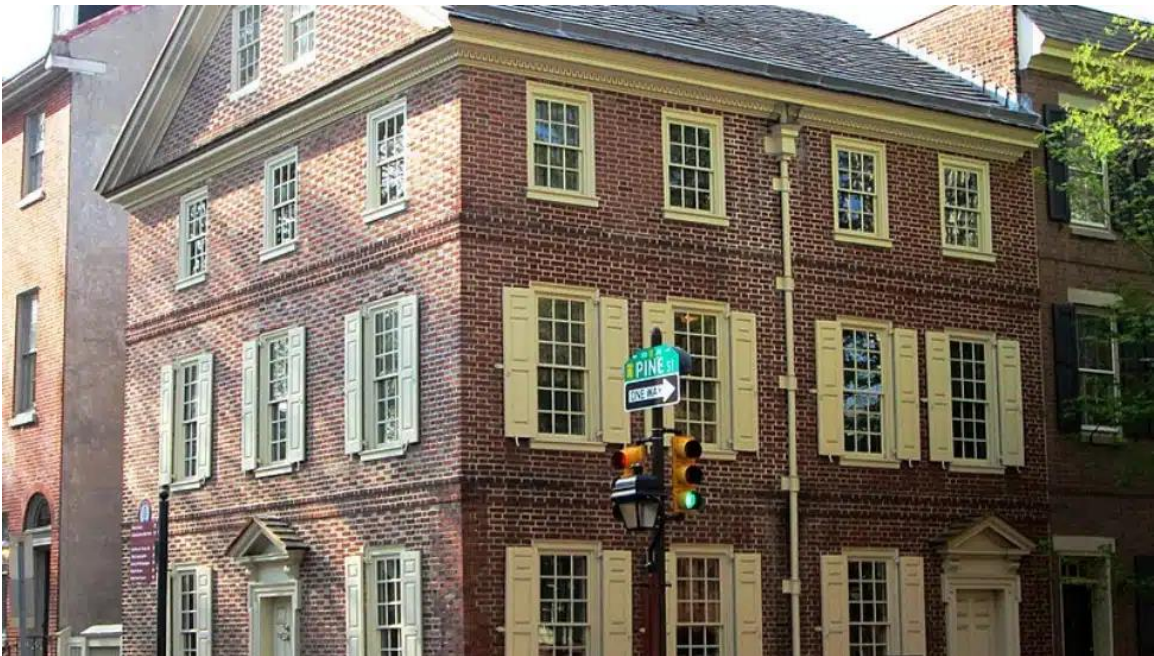


Local History Treasures Wanted: Do you have items tucked away in your attic or basement that reflect life along the Wissahickon in decades gone by? WVHS is on the lookout for artifacts, photos, documents, or any pieces of history related to our area's past. Whether it is a family heirloom, an event t-shirt, 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.



Why was Thomas Jefferson wearing this fur collar? Answer appears below.

Thaddeus Kosciuszko was a Polish-born Revolutionary War hero and military engineer. He was jailed by Catherine the Great, but her son freed him and gave him a fur-trimmed coat. Then Kosciuszko gave it to Jefferson, who wore it for portraits!



*The Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial in Philadelphia,
the smallest national park*

White House's East Wing Recorded: It will be replaced by a large ballroom. Steward McLaurin, president of the White House Historical Association, a non-profit, nonpartisan organization, announced that before the East Wing demolition, a 3D digital record was made. Thus, “every nook

and cranny” was “captured to the -nth degree.” According to an article, the White House “curator and their staff had to remove, catalog and store the art, the official portraits of former first ladies, and furnishings” from the East Wing. In the process of demolition, items were found under the floors and wall coverings that no one remembered (Darlene Superville for AP, Oct 29, 2025). The White House Historical Association was begun in 1961 by First Lady Jackie Kennedy to preserve history and make it accessible.



*THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION*

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.

Volunteer Day is Thursday: Thursdays have been set for the WVHS weekly “Volunteer Day” at the 1895 School. There are a variety of chores, including dusting, refolding fabrics, and cataloguing/accessioning new donations to the museum. For times (they sometimes vary) and details, email Info@WValleyHS.org.

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.

From the Board of Directors’ November Meeting:

- Because construction is planned for School Road, the 1895 School is investigating a new sign.
- Providing funding for work at the Franklinville School is a continuing issue.

Hope Lodge Events (See the website to buy tour tickets):

- Dec 4 (Thurs) 4-10 PM, “Dine & Donate” at Tannery Run Brew Works
- Dec 6 (Sat) Guided Mansion Christmas Tours, at 12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5:30, and 7 PM
- Dec 13 (Sat) 11-4, Self-guided Tours, Santa and Mrs. Claus, Ambler Symphony Orchestra, and a colonial “tavern”

Calendar of Events for WVHS Society Year 2025-2026

- 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, Michael Martorelli, Colonial Newspapers

- April 19 (Sun) 1-3 PM, 1895 Open House
- May 11 (Mon) 7 PM, Biennial Membership Meeting and Dr. Philip Mead, Chief Historian and Curator, Museum of the American Revolution (Philadelphia)
- May 17 (Sun) 1-3 PM, Franklinville School Open House
- 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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