
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 5, Number 6

The Valley Crier



Feb 2026.....Celebrating our 50th Year!

- Please come! On Monday, February 9 at 7 PM is
“Show N Tell”

Enjoy a fun evening. Refreshments will be served.

Come one and all for “Show N Tell,” one of the year’s favorite programs. Each guest brings something important from home to SHOW the group as they briefly TELL about the item. Although we are a history society, these need not be history-related items. And anything significant to you today will be of historical importance to someone in the future!

Please enjoy a fun, relaxing evening together.

- **Calendar Change: Please note that the May 2026 meeting has been changed to Monday, May 4, at 7 PM**

Members Working to Preserve 1700s Mile Markers: Russ Hunt and Carol Stuart-Buttle have volunteered to record the longitude and latitude for the nine milestones on our area, placed by the crown. Barry Johnson has also volunteered to work on the project. The goal is to provide data to the PA Historical and Museum Commission (at PA SHARE, a GIS tool), so the milestones can be preserved. WVHS is collecting data to have the roadside markers, once used to designate the postal rates to colonial Philadelphia, receive appropriate recognition. Here is a photo of one of the mile markers from 2022, indicating “19 Miles to Philadelphia.”



Colonial Milestone at St. John Lutheran Church, Skippack Pike, Blue Bell

Membership List Sent to WVHS Paid Members: Thanks so much to Judy and Skip Baigis for preparing a list of paid members and their contact information. This list will be emailed soon to our members with *a warning to use the data for personal use only*. The list was compiled because members requested the emails and phone numbers, just as the data was published years ago in a Membership Directory. Then it also contained a speakers' list, which now appears at the end of each monthly issue of *The Valley Crier*.

Planning Committee Needed for Fall Fund-raiser: WVHS is making arrangements to host an event at the historic Whitpain Farm's Manor House in the fall of 2026. If you are interested in serving on the planning committee, please let us know. This year, we will not be selling ads for a program book. To help, email to Info@WValleyHS.com .



Walk-in fireplace at the “1704 Room,” Whitpain Farms

Sad News: Our society mourns the passing of Frank Russo's uncle, Robert Notoris, on January 27. He is fondly remembered; for many years, he ran our Market Day.

No *Stroll Blue Bell* history article in January: Due to space limitations, there was no WVHS history article published in the January 2026 issue of the magazine. These articles describe the history of local landmarks, especially those in Whitpain Township. All the prior articles are available on the WVHS website: <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/blue-bells-finest/> .

Historic Home to Be Torn Down: Lower Gwynedd Township has given permission to Gwynedd Estates, an ACTS community, to demolish an old farmhouse, located on its property at 781 Tennis Avenue and last owned by the Homiller family. No work has been done to maintain the structure in decades, so it is in disrepair although it contains architectural details of some value, such as fireplace mantels and board-and-batten doors with their original hardware. To save the house, WVHS suggested the space be restored and leased for professional offices. However, Gwynedd Estates intends to use the space for a small park with benches.

At the Montgomery County office of the Register of Deeds, member Dan Myers has investigated the deed to the property, which sits next to the Old York Road Country Club. The country club relocated its golf course from Abington Township in 1962 to Lower Gwynedd's former Bennerbrook Farms, where its manor house became the club house. Evidently, the Homiller land was not part of the Bennerbrook Farm or its predecessors

(appearing as Park Creek Farm in the map below). Myers found that the original parcel belonged in 1793 to John and Elizabeth Eberhard. Later, in 1888, the original 150-acre farm was split in half.

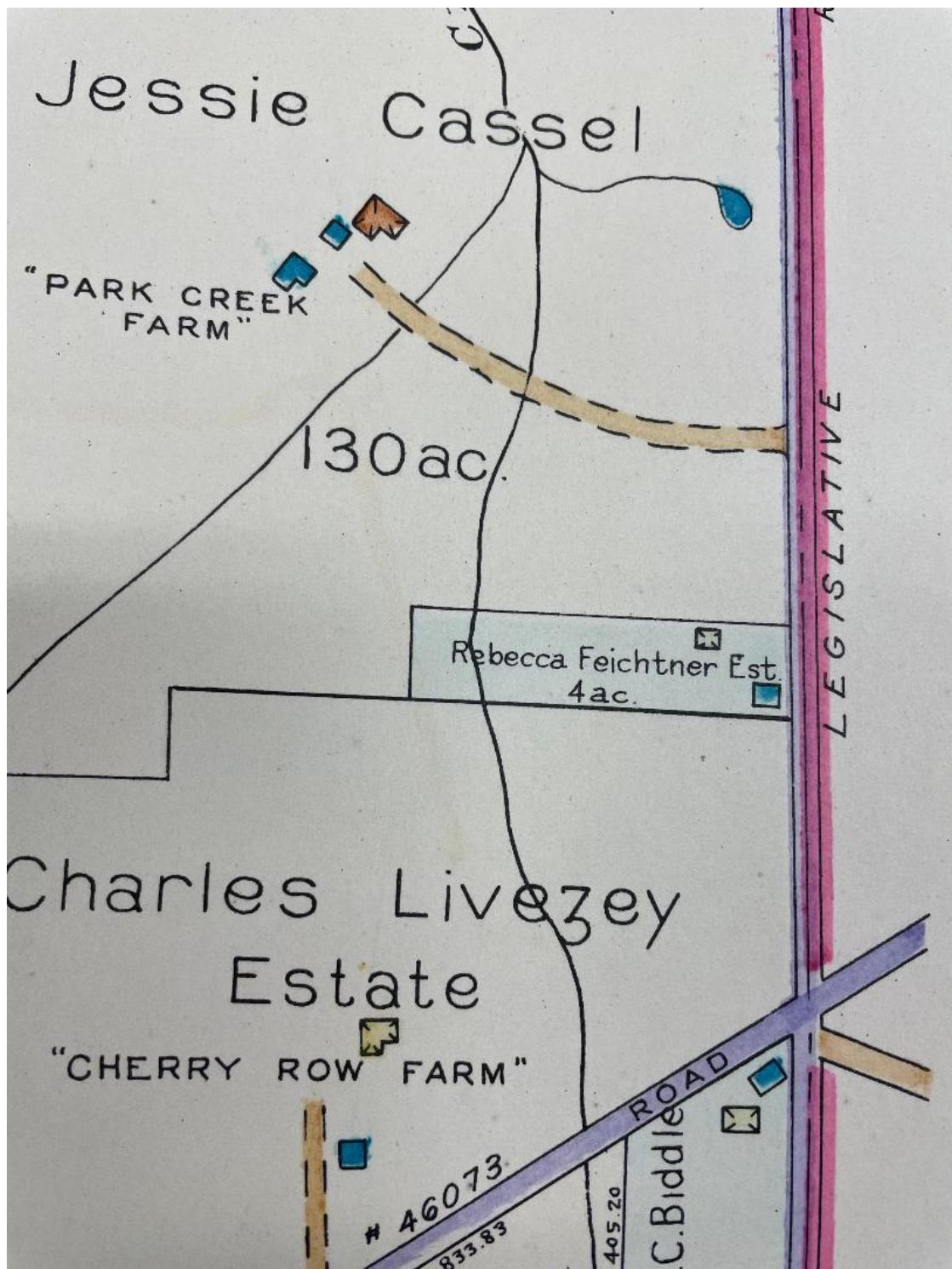
Gwynedd Estates now owns what appears on the map from 1934 as the Charles Livezey Estate; Old York Road Country Club owns the Jessie Cassel property; and the “Homiller House” sits on the former Rebecca Feichtner Estate on “4 ac.” (*Property Atlas of Montgomery County, Penna., Volume A, Including the Townships of Lower Moreland, Upper Moreland, Horsham, Montgomery, Lower Gwynedd, Upper Gwynedd and the Boroughs of Bryn Athyn, Hatboro and North Wales*, Franklin Survey Company, 1934.)



“Homiller House” at 781 Tennis Avenue (The small sign states, “No deliveries.”)



At the “Homiller House,” the board-and-batten door, typical of houses built in 1830-1850, with its original hardware. Note the peeling paint in the lower left of the photograph.



An atlas from 1934 shows Rebecca Feichtner owning the property

An observation about historic preservation: According to board member Mary Lou McFarland, most of our historic resources are here by the grace of God, pure luck or chance. It really depends on who owns them and how much they care to continue preserving.

WVHS Helps Philadelphia Art Museum: Scholars at the museum are researching local individuals who inspired the story of Rocky Balboa. WVHS was pleased to send them a photo of a local football player that they requested. (We do not know the connection between the player and Rocky.)

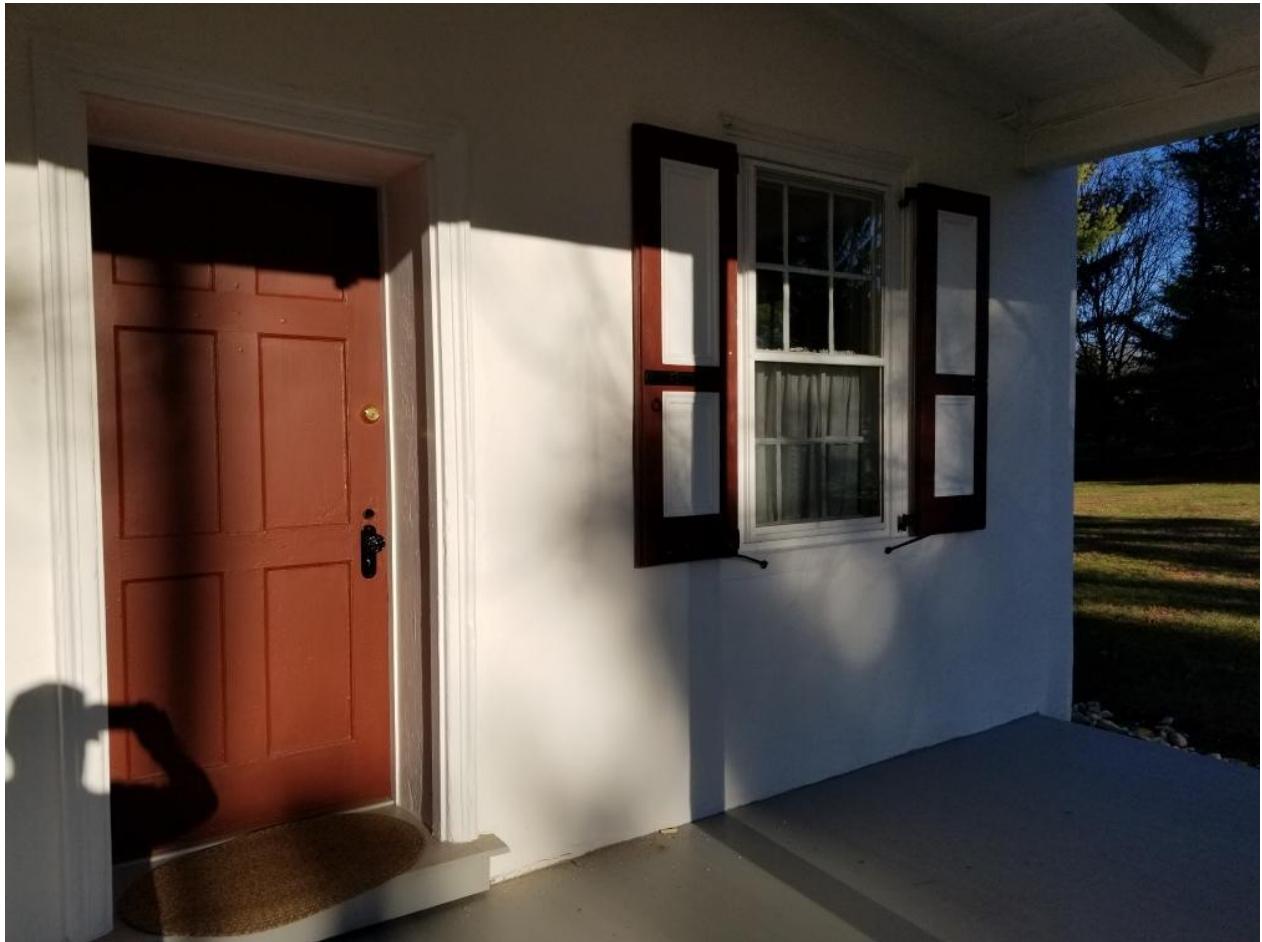
2026 marks the 50th anniversary of the first *Rocky* film. Using the Rocky statue as its centerpiece, the museum's special exhibit, opening in April, will examine issues important to historians: the role of public monuments, along with identity, power, memory, and community.



The Rocky Statue, soon the center of a special Philadelphia exhibition

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.” Repairs at the school far exceeded the original estimates due to rotting wood.

Verco Painting continued to check on the school during December's windstorms. Thank you, Steve!



*Front porch at the Franklinville School, December 2025
(Photo from Joan Duxbury)*

Year-end Data, Ambler Walking Tours: During the calendar year 2025, 55 guests took the tour, learning more about Ambler's rich history and raising \$672 to restore the Ambler Train Station's Freight House, created from its first passenger depot. The tours have been postponed until springtime.

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: The Ambler Freight House was the first passenger depot and part of a National Historic District. SEPTA insisted it be torn down, so that the culvert under it could be stabilized. With the help of private donations, the Freight House was gently removed, in pieces, in the spring of 2025, and it rests in storage. Recently, workers at the site report that a new liner for the culvert has been ordered. The photo below shows the opening to the culvert and the new concrete along the Tannery Run. Note the Deck's Hardware sign in the background. The building to its right is the lovely stone stable, built for the Hotel Ambler (1867), which used to stand near the train station. The temporary orange fencing marks approximately where the Freight House used to stand.



The Culvert at the Ambler Train Station, December 28, 2025

Helpers Wanted: WVHS needs help! Since the pandemic, we have been losing volunteers, and most of our group's responsibilities 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

A Quote to Remember: “A civilization flourishes when people plant trees under which they will never sit.” A Greek Proverb

Historians Likely to be Replaced by AI?: The website *Inc.com* says that research by Microsoft (July 2025) reveals the professions most and least likely to be affected by AI. Interpreters (number one on the list) and Historians (number two) are likely to be replaced while “builders and mechanics” (those who make or repair things) will not be replaced. Someone has forgotten that historians *interpret* data, not just compile it! The full article is here: <https://www.inc.com/bruce-crumley/microsoft-study-identifies-jobs-most-and-least-affected-by-ai/91221483>

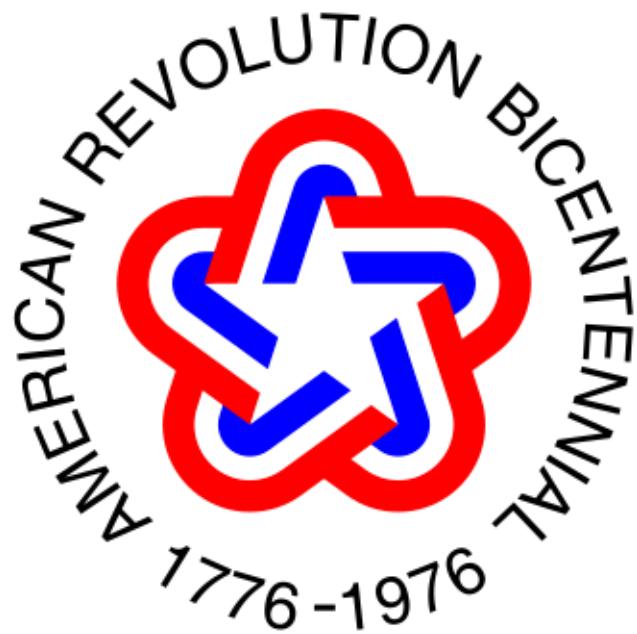
Please Renew Your WVHS Dues. Society Year 2025-2026 began on September 1. Since our dues are low, please consider “rounding up.” Many members do. Please see the details for payment at

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

A Quote to Remember: “A civilization flourishes when people plant trees under which they will never sit.” A Greek Proverb

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.



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.

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.

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. Note that visitors at the Franklinville School park on the grass, so tours times are limited in the winter months.

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.

Announcing the Northeast Philadelphia History Fair: Sponsored by the Northeast Philadelphia History Network, it is scheduled for Saturday, April 11, from 10 -3. It showcases local historical societies, speakers, and more. See the History Fair website for more information.

From the Board of Directors' January meeting:

- Providing funding for work at the Franklinville School is a continuing issue.
- The Battle of Germantown took place in 1777, so 2027 will include programs to remind us of its significance to our area.

Calendar of Events for WVHS Society Year 2025-2026

- 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 4 (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.

.....