
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 5, Number 7

The Valley Crier 

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

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

Monday, March 9 at 7 PM -- Based on their book *Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail*, Tom H. Keels and Lawrence M. Arrigale will highlight how the retail giants, at the beginning of the 20th century, attracted customers to their stores with "That's Retailtainment." The speakers will examine John Wanamaker, Ellis Gimbel, along with Isaac Clothier and Justus Strawbridge, and others, who lured shoppers using art, celebrities, and technology. The stores' efforts have become part of our area's beloved traditions, such as the Thanksgiving Day parade.



Philadelphia Thanksgiving Day Parade

Tom Keels is the author of seven books on Philadelphia history, and he enjoys lecturing on Philadelphia history and architecture. (www.thomaskeels.com). Lawrence Arrigale has been part of the Philadelphia theatre scene for years, and he has used his stage talent to create local history programs, such as the ones at the Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion and the Laurel Hill Cemetery Mansion. The WVHS Speakers' Series is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

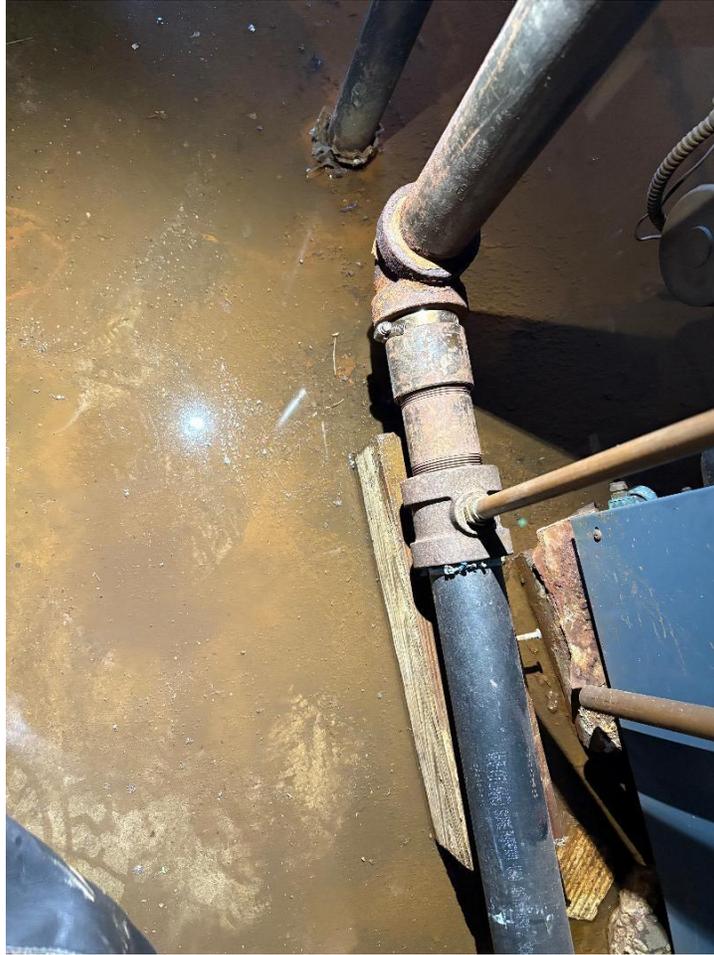
Show N Tell Night: Sadly, the February "Show and Tell" program was cancelled due to the icy sidewalks, howling winds and record-low temperatures.

Colonial Mile Marker Project: It's cold outside, so our volunteers have not been visiting these important historic sites. But spring is on its way!

Should a Colonial Milestone be Painted? The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission recommends against it. However, a 2013 issue of the WVHS newsletter indicates that WVHS “received permission from PennDOT to paint the milestone closest to the 1895 Schoolhouse along Skippack Pike.” At the time, it was meant as a “family project” for students from the Blue Bell Elementary School.

Membership List Sent to WVHS Paid Members: If you paid your dues and you did not receive a copy, please check your spam and then email to Info@WValleyHS.org .

Pipe Break in Boiler Room: Neal Bradley rents garage space for his antique cars from WVHS. One day he walked in to find water on the floor. A water pipe for the boiler system had broken, and water was squirting out. Neal kindly fixed the leak, and then Whitpain Township came in later to complete the job. Luckily, the 1895 School never lost its heat. WVHS appreciates Neal and his expertise! (See photo next page)

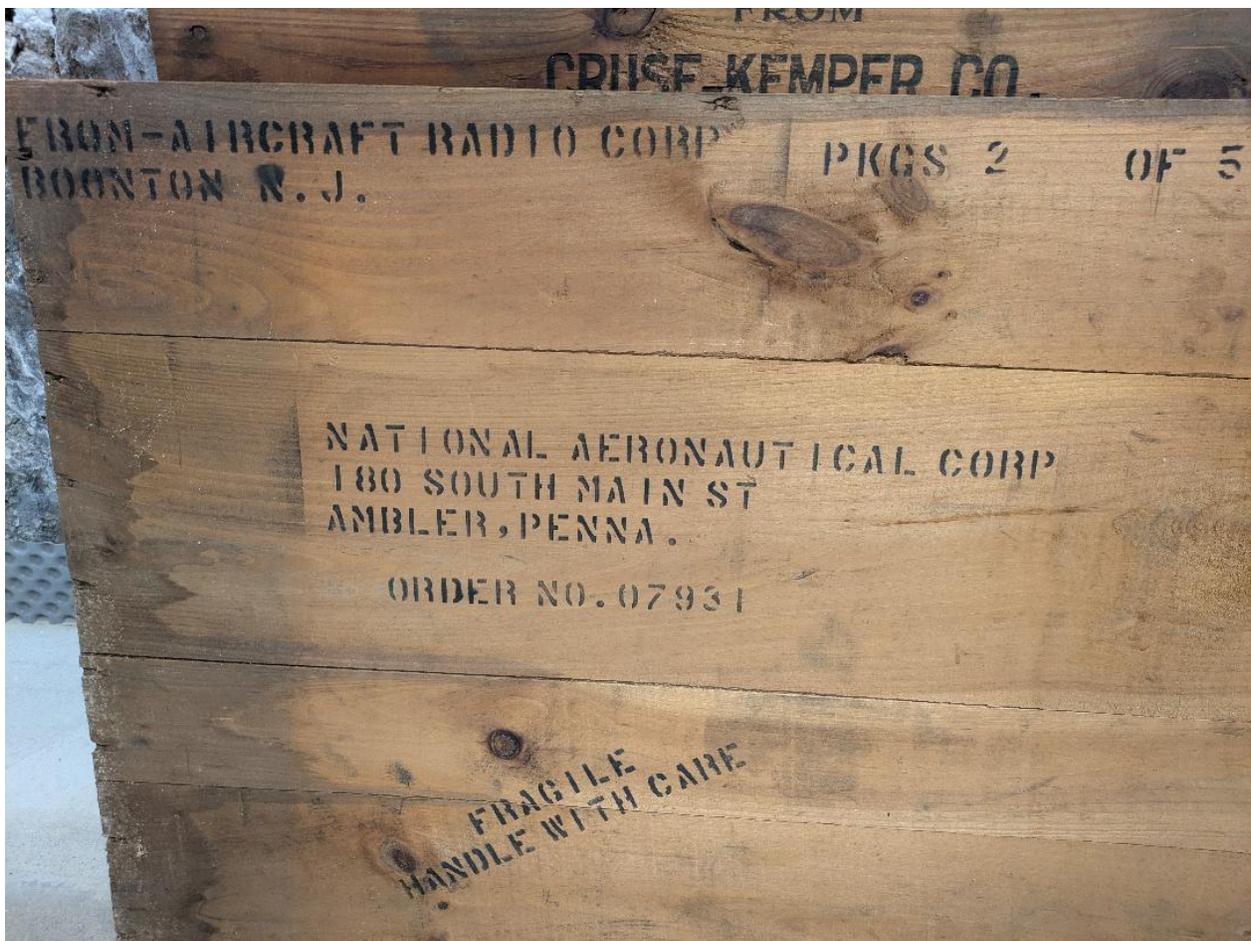


Looking down at the repaired pipe over a puddle of water

Wood Boxes from Cruise-Kemper Co: This company, according to a 1931 newspaper article (*The Lansdale Reporter*), built a giant gas holder for the Philadelphia Electric Company. And that same newspaper reported in 1936 that the Keasbey and Mattison plant, “the borough’s largest industrial establishment,” hired 100 additional workers while “the Cruse-Kemper Company, tank manufacturing firm, hired a large number of additional men.” An ad for the company described it as “engineers, contractors, and manufacturers...making steel tanks, plate work, and structural work.”



Bernadette Dougherty donated these Ambler artifacts, four wood boxes, to the museum, and we have been investigating to learn more about the company. Thank you to Sally Zeller for her helpful search at newspapers.com. A second box, pictured next, is still a mystery.



Does anyone know anything about the National Aeronautical Corp of Ambler?

History Display at Ambler Library: The historical society has offered to supply displays to both of our public libraries. Sometimes they are scheduled months in advance, and sometimes we receive a last-minute request. For February, a display was quickly put together to fill a last-minute void, this one featuring Ambler architect Milton Bean. Although not much detail is known about him, it shows some autobiographical data and photos of some of the outstanding structures he designed for our area.



February Display about Ambler architect Milton Bean at the Ambler Library

New Light Bulb at 1895 School's Entrance Foyer: A big thank-you to Barry Johnson for replacing our light bulb and cleaning the antique glass fixture. Have you noticed it? His photo below shows the results of his good work.



1895 School's Foyer, February 2026

Farewell to the Homiller House: When the Homiller House is demolished, our neighborhood will lose another reminder of the past. While its virgin wood goes to the landfill, the house should be documented to remember the craftsmanship of its builders. As a former WVHS board member used to say, “Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever!” The National Trust for Historic Preservation suggests that to “document” a house, to preserve its history, means to record details about it, as if it might be reproduced someday. That includes measuring the house, taking wide-angle photos to show its context and relationship to its environment, taking close-up photos of the house, and describing the house in writing (starting big and then going to details). WVHS is grateful for artist John Westcott, who created a print of the lovely farmhouse and of a nearby stone barn. (Situated inside the Springhouse Innovation Park complex, the barn is not part of the house property.)

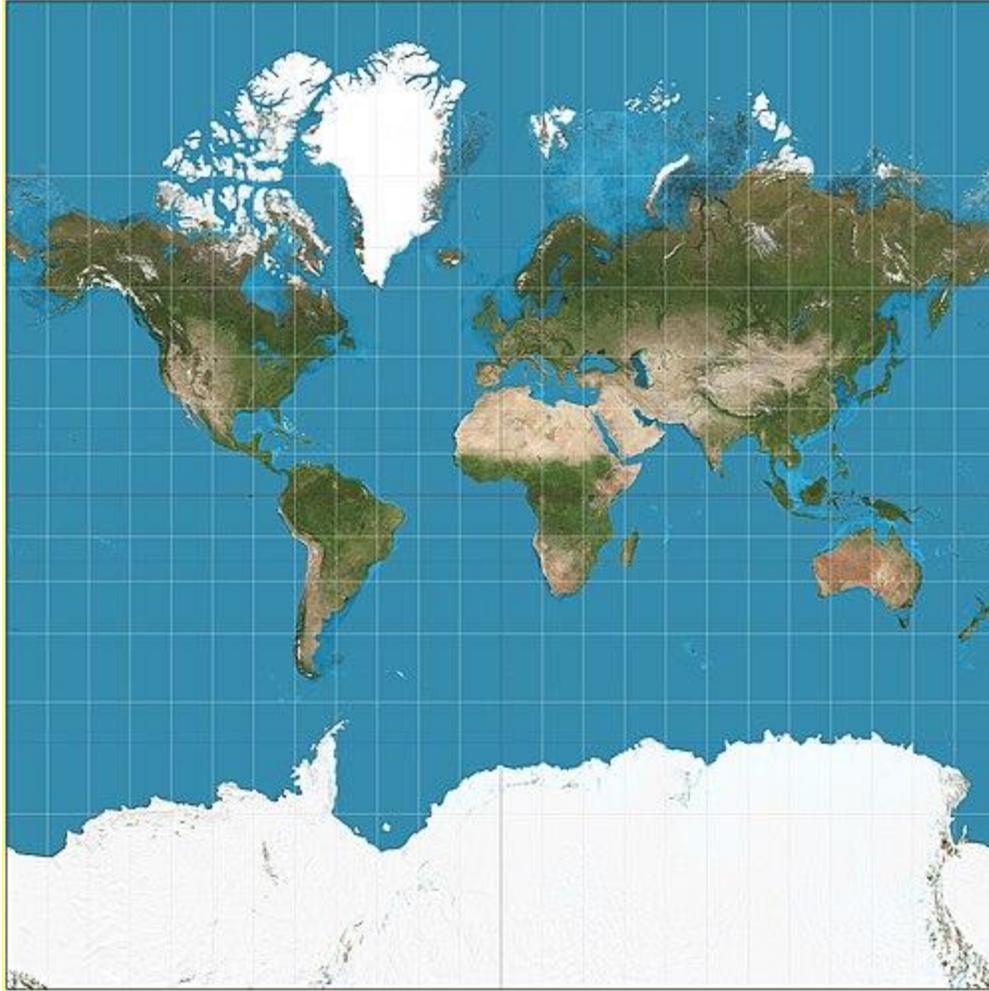


John Westcott's print of the lovely Homiller House, located next to the Old York Road Country Club at 781 Tennis Avenue



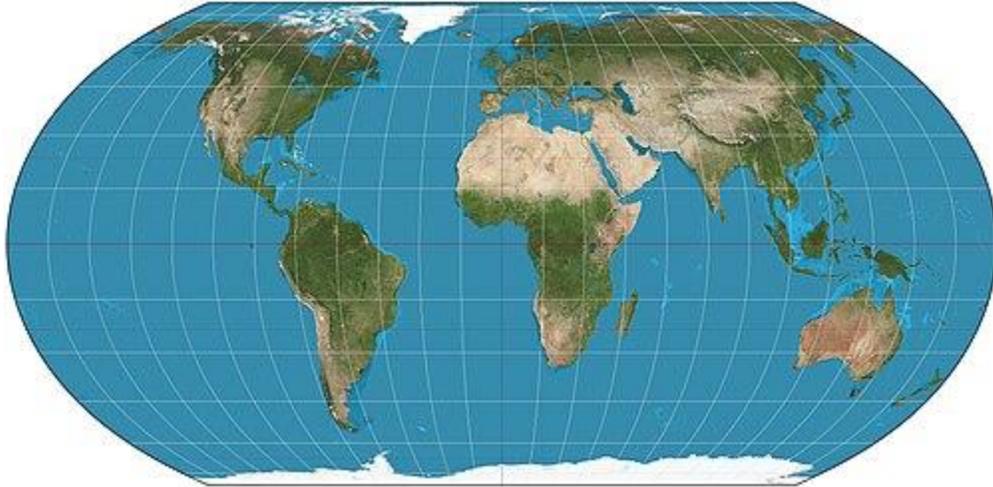
Another print by Westcott of a barn near the Homiller House

Redrawing the World Map: Remember the world map that hung in your school classroom? It was undoubtedly a Mercator map, like this one:



The Mercator map makes the U.S. look big

The Mercator map (from 1569) is useful because it creates straight lines to illustrate our curved Earth, making it the most popular map used today. In contrast, the African Union would like us to use an Equal Earth map (created in 2018) because the Mercator map increases the size of land masses above the equator and decreases the size of those at the equator. So the Mercator map makes the United States (and Greenland) look big, but the Equal Earth map shows Africa as larger than the United States. The change of maps would adjust how the world understands Africa.



The Equal Earth map makes Africa look large

For Genealogists, Two New Lists of Ships' Manifests: The speakers at last May's WVHS meeting were Barbara and Tony Selletti, who spoke on Tinicum Township's Lazaretto, where ships and their foreign passengers were screened for disease before they entered Philadelphia. The couple is compiling data about the ships' manifests from the Philadelphia Archives, PA Archives, the Seaport Museum and various historical societies. In addition, Barbara has sent us two *new* online sites listing ship records:

<https://www.immigrantships.net>

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/2299396>

PA Celebrates 250 Years: Readers may have noticed some of the new state license plates, showing blue numbers, an image of the Liberty Bell in the center, and the phrase, "Let Freedom Ring." There are also some new

highway signs showing “1681,” the year Penn founded the commonwealth, and the Liberty Bell. However, in this case, its iconic crack is mistakenly shown turning to the left.



The Liberty Bell's crack should be on the right

What Makes a Commonwealth? It means an entity, founded by law, for the common good. To the commonwealth's founders, it was a government created by consensus to benefit every citizen—to advance the meeting of the needs of all. “Commonwealth” became the aspirational term they used in their initial constitution. Besides Pennsylvania, there are Massachusetts, Virginia, and Kentucky.

Wedding of George and Martha Washington: They were married on January 6, 1759. Martha's shoes, shown below, were purple. For details, go to <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/4688hpr-252a59ba2c77015/> .



Lady Washington's purple wedding shoes

Why do People Collect Memorabilia? The motivations for collecting memorabilia can be dissected through various lenses, including psychological, sociocultural, and economic perspectives. Psychologically, the act of collecting serves as a coping mechanism, allowing individuals to navigate their identities and experiences. According to attachment theory, objects can become imbued with emotional significance, acting as a repository for memories and facilitating nostalgia. This is particularly

relevant in times of change or loss, where memorabilia can provide a sense of continuity and belonging.

From a sociocultural standpoint, memorabilia collections often reflect broader societal narratives and collective memory. The concept of "cultural capital," as posited by Pierre Bourdieu, suggests that these collections serve as a means of social distinction, where the act of collecting becomes a marker of identity. In this context, memorabilia not only fulfill personal desires but also aligns with sociopolitical contexts and historical movements.

Economically, the collectibles market is influenced by supply and demand dynamics, with various trends impacting valuation. Factors such as celebrity endorsements, media portrayals, and public interest can lead to fluctuating prices, creating a complex interplay between emotional attachment and market viability. Understanding these dimensions provides a comprehensive view of why individuals are drawn to collect memorabilia. (Quoted from "Explain It Daily")

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.

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.

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

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**

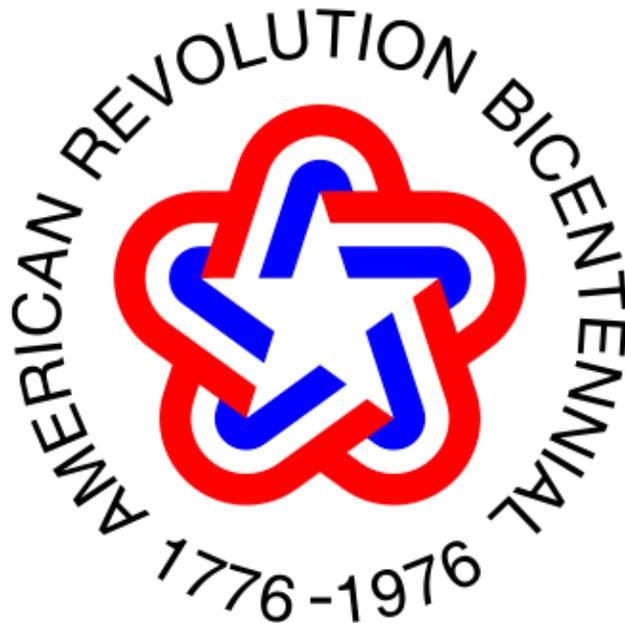
- Write articles for *The Valley Crier* and *The Quill*
- Create displays for the exhibits at the three municipal buildings
- Create occasional displays for the two Wissahickon Valley Public Libraries
- Attend and report on municipal planning-committee discussions
- Accession new items and documents
- 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

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 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.

The 1895 School Is Open for Tours: For an appointment for a tour, please email to Info@WValleyHS.org. Work is still being completed at the Franklinville School.

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' February meeting:

- Providing funding for work at the Franklinville School is a continuing issue.
- President Carol Kalos met with Whitpain Township representatives to begin planning a program to mark the 250th year after the 1777 Battle of Germantown.

Calendar of Events for WVHS Society Year 2025-2026

- Mar 9 (Mon) 7 PM, Thomas H. Keels and Lawrence M. Arrigale, *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.

