**********

*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 5, Number 8*

# *The Valley Crier*

**********

## *April 2026.....Celebrating our 50th Year!*

April Dates: Monday, 4/13, 7 PM Speaker

Sunday, 4/19, 1-3 PM Open House, 1895 School

*Ambler Walking Tours* begin in April

**Important News---No April Fools---Help WVHS Earn $5,000!** A WVHS member will contribute $5,000 **if WVHS can raise at least $500 to match it.** These funds are for the Franklinville School.

Please **do your part to raise the $500**. No amount too large or too small! Venmo, PayPal, or check: ***https://www.wvalleyhs.org/donate/*** **. Please mark your contribution "FS" (Franklinville School).** WVHS is grateful for your generosity!

**Speaker, Monday, April 13, 7 PM – The topic is "The Evolution of Newspaper Publishing in Colonial America."** Speaker Michael Martorelli writes**, "**I spent more than 50 years in the investment industry. Along the way, I earned an MA in History. For the past dozen years, I've been researching, writing, and speaking about various history topics. My presentation will discuss the evolution of newspaper publishing in Colonial America." Refreshments will be served.

**Sunday, April 19, 1-3 PM, 1895 School Open House! In honor of *America250*,** a special display will include

- 1976 US Bicentennial memorabilia,
- Some of our society's old deeds, and
- Some of our society's old US flags

***A 49-Star Flag, official from July 4, 1959-July 4, 1960***

**Calendar Change: Please note that the May 2026 meeting has been changed to Monday, May 4, at 7 PM. We are expecting a special speaker, Dr. Philip Mead, former executive director of the Museum of the American Revolution.**

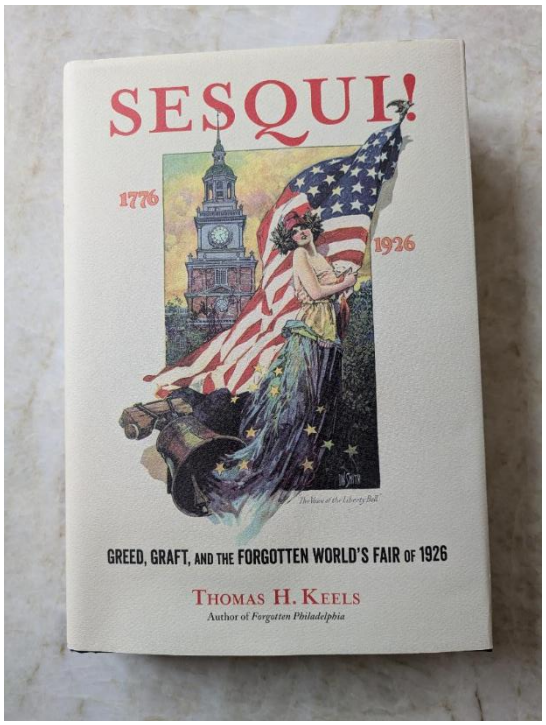
**WVHS Ambler Walking Tours: Dates for spring season have been announced:** Please note these dates, all Saturdays, on your calendar, so you can invite your friends and neighbors: April 11, April 25, May 15, May 30, June 13, and June 27. The tours, run by the Ambler Storytellers, are $10, and proceeds benefit the Ambler Freight House. Groups are limited to 12 guests. Tours begin at 3 PM and last about an hour. Guests receive a coupon for a free beverage at Tannery Run Brew Works. For registration and payment details, please link to

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ambler-downtown-walking-tour-spring-2026-tickets-1983734385949?aff=oddtdtcreator

**March Program, *Retail-Tainment* a Big Hit:** Tom Keels and Larry Arrigale made the WVHS audience of about 45 guests chuckle and nod their heads in approval. Most of us remember some aspects of shopping at Wanamaker's or Gimbel's department stores in Center City Philadelphia. Based on their book, *Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail,* the speakers offered the history of the city's retailers: Wanamakers, Gimbels, Snellenburgs, Lit Brothers, Strawbridge and Clothier, and more. They noted

that Wanamaker was the first to display merchandise and to eliminate haggling by using price tags. Strawbridge and Clothier, starting Clover Days in 1906, were Quakers, so they regarded their customers as friends. Lit Brothers trimmed hats at no charge, and those words are still etched in concrete at their old store. Over the decades, although where Philadelphians shop has changed, how they celebrate the Christmas holiday is still influenced by the traditions established by the local department stores, especially the arrival of Santa at our Thanksgiving Day parade.

***Tom Keels takes his turn at the podium, explaining Philadelphia's retail history***




***Tom Keels, the March speaker, donated a copy of his book* Sesqui: Greed, Graft, and the Forgotten World's Fair of 1926 *to the WVHS library***

**Colonial Milestone Project:** WVHS has contacted every historical society in Montgomery County (35 of them!) to ask for the location of their mile markers. To date, we have heard from eleven. Our purpose is to create a list of the precious stones, along with their exact location, that will be preserved by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. One of the most interesting is the collection already in Lower Merion. The group has been restored and some relocated to keep them safe. For the details, go to ***https://collections.lowermerionhistory.org/home/full-text/contents/milestones/*** **.** *Also,* Historic Trappe sent us this image from its collection, showing a Colonial Milestone, which reads, "40 miles to Philadelphia."

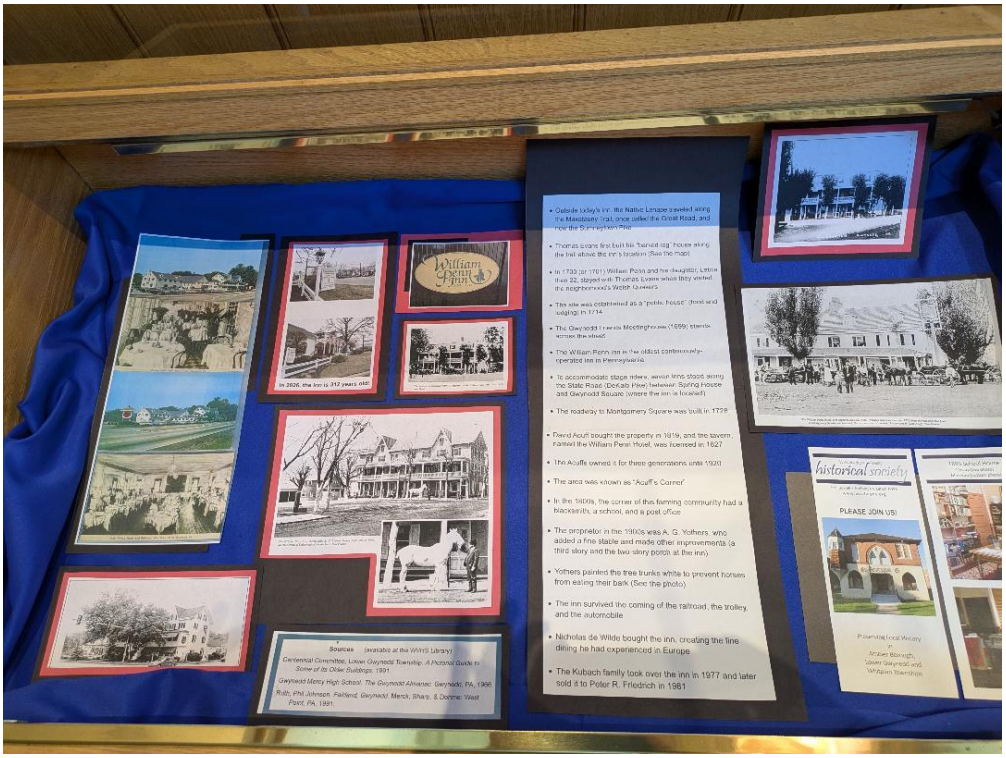
***Painting of a horse-drawn carriage, by Charles C. Hofmann, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, 1874. Courtesy Historic Trappe, 2020.002.0013 (Photo: Michael E. Myers)***

***Milestone photo from the Mennonite Heritage Center in Harleysville***

**Want to help with the fall fund-raiser lunch?** It will be held at the Whitpain Farm Manor House on a Sunday in September or October. The committee will design the program, set the fees, and consider other details. Please volunteer by emailing to ***Info@WValleyHS.org*** or sign the clipboard at the April meeting.

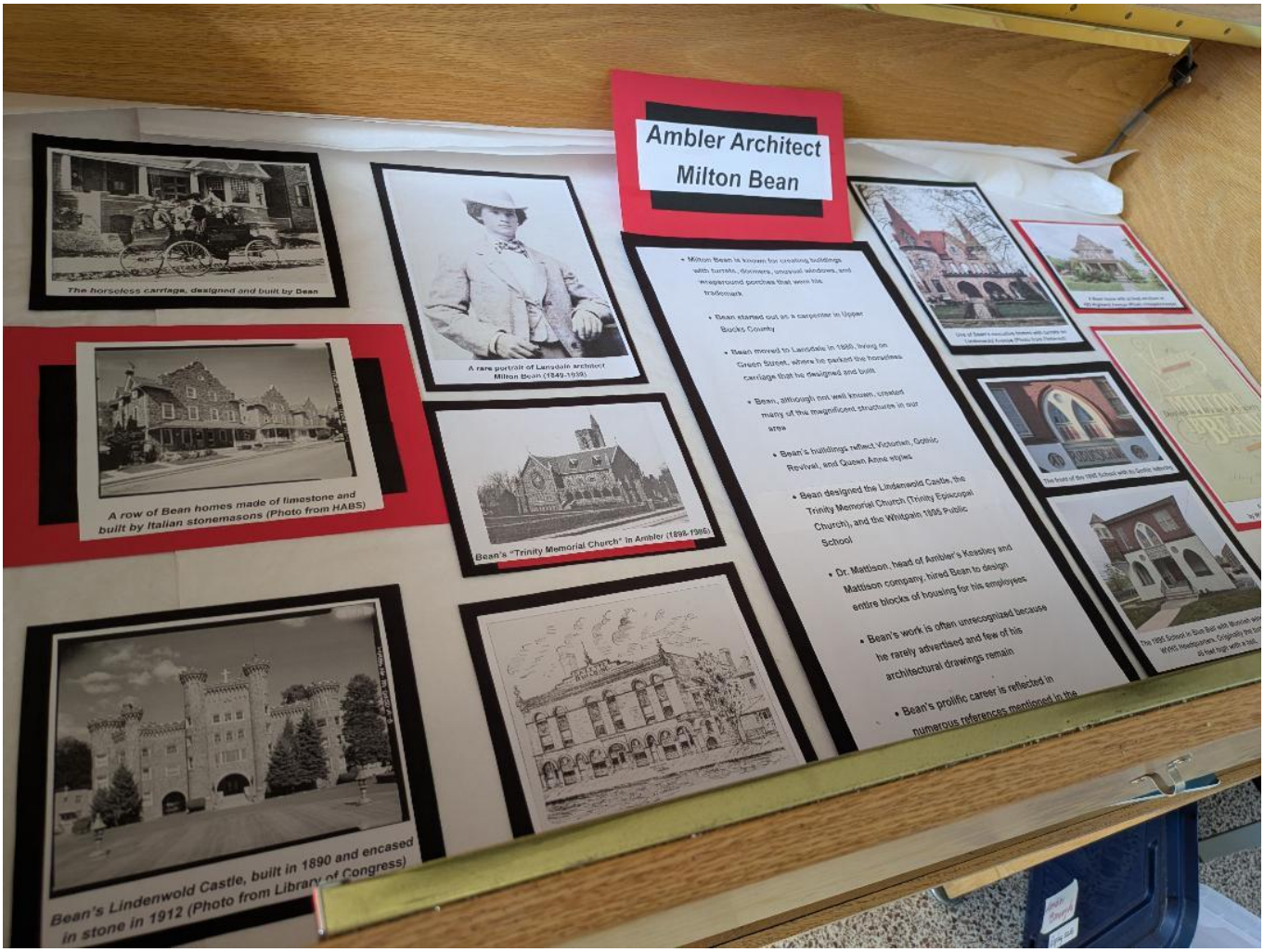
**Meet a great WVHS volunteer:** Emily Pope has been coming in weekly to help with accessioning at the 1895 School. And she works like an old pro! Her degree is in history, and she is working on a master's degree in library and information science. She started her museum volunteering in 2019 at the Mercer Museum and then added the Doylestown Historical Society until 2021. In the past few years, she volunteered for Old York Road Historical Society as an archivist while she worked full time at local libraries. Presently she is an administrator and history researcher at the Joseph Ambler Inn. She has been a good source of expert advice for our library and archives, and she has been attending our monthly meetings. Please say hello to her at our April meeting.

**New History Display at Lower Gwynedd Township Municipal Building:** WVHS is responsible for the history display in the lobby of each of our three municipal buildings. The new exhibit for Lower Gwynedd offers the history of the William Penn Inn. It's over 300 years old! The display includes the building's history, old photographs, and several antique postcards.




***History of the William Penn Inn at Lower Gwynedd Municipal Building***

**New History Display at Ambler Borough Hall:** WVHS has recently changed its Ambler display. The new topic is architect Milton Bean, who designed the WVHS 1895 School. In Ambler, he worked for Dr. Mattison, creating Lindenwold Castle, the Trinity Church, and many of the stone residences owned by Keasbey and Mattison and used by the company's workers. Bean was known for his turrets, dormers, and arched windows, and examples of his work can be found in Lansdale and throughout our area.




***Ambler's latest WVHS display about Milton Bean***

**1895 School to Lose Some Lawn—From the *Whitpain Wire, 3-26-2026:***

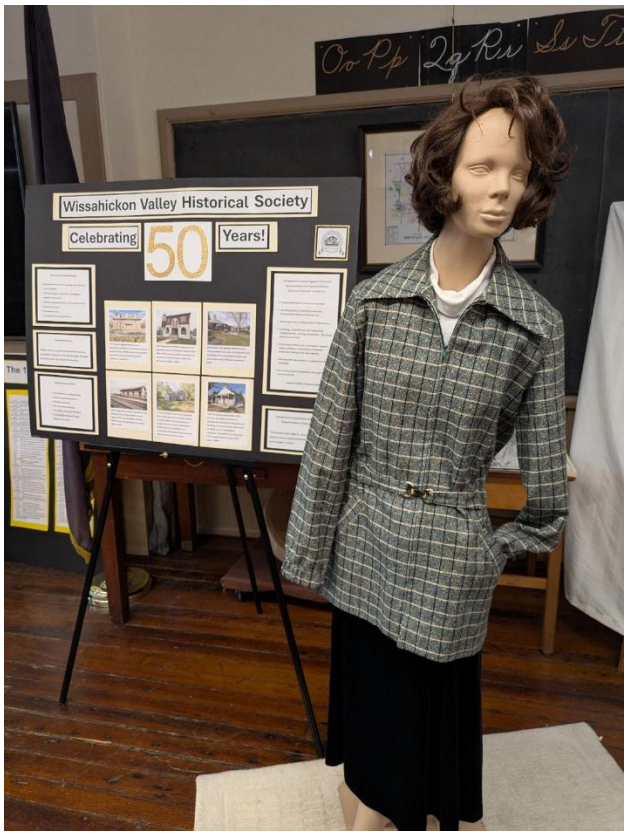
"Work is set to begin in mid-April on intersection improvements at School Road and Skippack Pike. The project will place a traffic signal at the intersection and will also add dedicated turning lanes on School Road.

The overall project cost is approximately $1.5 million with design, permitting, and construction. Roughly 80% of the project is funded by a Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF) grant from PennDOT. The remaining 20% of the project is funded by the Township.

In addition to traffic signalization improvements, ADA curb ramps, pedestrian crossings, advanced video detection and emergency preemption systems are also part of the project. It is anticipated that the improvements will be in place and the signal will be active in the fall of 2026." *The 1895 School will lose some of its front and side lawns, and the front wall will be pushed back.*

***An old postcard, showing the wall at the 1895 School (ebay)***

**Mannequin Wears 1970's Designer Jacket:** To celebrate the WVHS 50th anniversary, WVHS has exhibited 1970s fashions throughout the year.



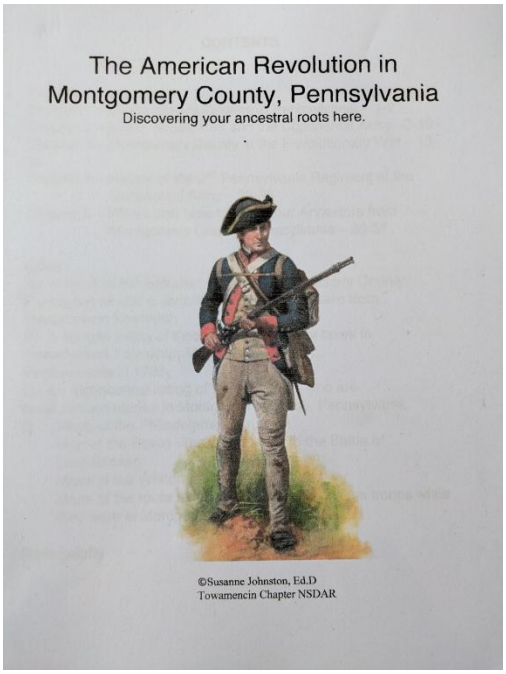

***A 1970s wool jacket, exhibited for the WVHS 50th year***

**WVHS election and special speaker at May 4th meeting:** The May meeting will be our official "biennial" meeting with the election of officers. The following slate will be nominated: Carol Kalos, President; Joe Langella, Vice President; Emily Pope, Secretary; Tom Goldkamp, Treasurer; and Marie Goldkamp, Barry Johnson, Mary Lou McFarland, and Frank Russo, board members.

**Franklinville School Makes the News in 2000:** The newsletter for the Historical Society of Whitpain in April 2000 included an article from *The Reporter*, dated April 10, 2000, titled, “Preserving the past, a Half Century ago.” It describes the old one-room schoolhouses, noting that many had been “knocked down” or converted to other uses. Then it praises the Franklinville School: “Today, only a few examples of the classic one-room schoolhouse remain in our region. One is the Franklinville School on Morris Road near the old Normandy Farms estate in Whitpain Township. We applaud the township’s historical society, which is in the process [of] renovating the 1858 school. They hope to open it next year as an informal museum. It will be a valuable addition to the rich historic heritage and a benefit to future generations.” 26 years later, WVHS agrees!

**Old Green Books Contain Arsenic:** Penn State Libraries report that in the 1800s, books with bright green covers (designed to appeal to children) were dyed with arsenic. Today they are called “poison books.” Does WHVS have such a green book? Probably it does as part of our collection of rare children’s textbooks. We plan to look closely next time we climb the ladder to clean those top shelves in our library.

**Book Added to WVHS Library:** President Carol Kalos has added this reference book, filled with facts for local history researchers. Prepared by Susanne Johnston, EdD, of the DAR, it contains lists of local Revolutionary soldiers, of the county’s battalion leaders, of where Patriots are buried in our county’s cemeteries, and more.




***Johnston's book offers much data about American Revolution soldiers who lived in our area***

**Who owns Pennsylvania's historical records?** The state gave the records (birth and death certificates, for example) to Ancestry to digitize, so the data could be placed online for all to see. However, Ancestry charges a subscription, meaning citizens have now to pay for the documents. Is this fair? A court will decide this issue. Read more here: ***https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2026/02/ancestry-digital-records-commonwealth-courrt-capitol/***

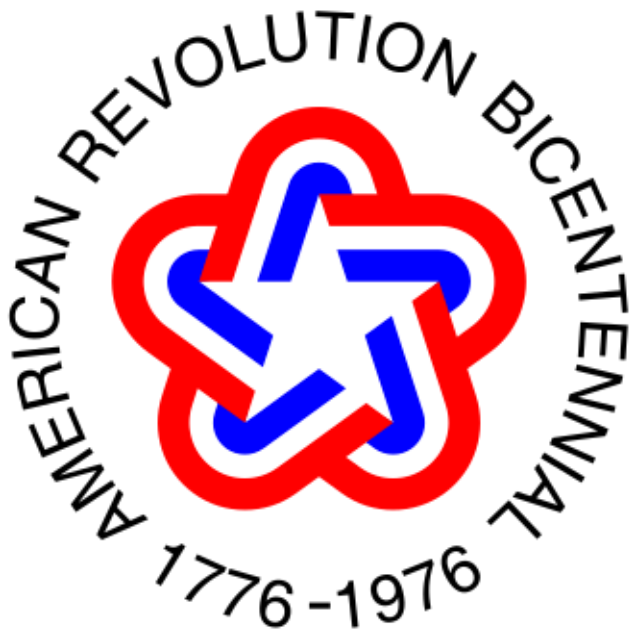
**Want to lead an Ambler Walking Tour?** The Ambler Storytellers, a committee of WVHS, offers tours of Butler Avenue on Saturday afternoons during the fall and spring seasons. If you like history, this is for you! Training is provided and tour guides choose their tour dates. You can begin as an assistant. 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

**The April 19th Open House: A Few 1976 US Bicentennial Souvenirs:**
Thank you to those who found items for the temporary exhibit.




**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 help with an Open House, please plan to attend a short "training" session at a time convenient for you. RSVP to ***Info@WValleyHS.org.***

**Please Pay Your Dues:** If you have not yet paid your dues (just $25!), now is the time. If you have questions, please email to ***Info@WValleyHS.org.*** Pay by Venmo, PayPal, or check at ***https://www.wvalleyhs.org/join-us-2/***

**From the Board of Directors' March meeting:**

- The board is seeking speakers for next year
- The board is starting to plan some programming around Sally Wister for 2027 anniversary year
- The board is investigating ways to advise homeowners about how to preserve their historic homes

**Calendar of Events for WVHS Society Year 2025-2026**

- 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
- Ambler Walking Tours, Designated Saturdays, April – June

***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.***

---