



A Note from the President:

Happy Spring!

We are finally out of the deep freeze and before we know it spring will be sprung. I look forward to seeing everyone at our General Membership Meeting on **Monday, March 12th** at 7:30 PM. Our program for the night will be a visit from Clara Barton.

What better way to celebrate **Women's History Month** than a visit from the founder of the American Red Cross. We all seem to take the work of the Red Cross for granted, but where would we be throughout our national disasters without the work of the American Red Cross



coming to our rescue. Let's take a look back at the story behind the Red Cross through the eyes of our first person historian Ms. Waskie.

The work of Clara Barton goes back to the bloody days of the American Civil War where she nursed our wounded troops throughout the long war. Her story ends just outside our Nation's capital in Maryland. Today her home in Glen Echo, Maryland is preserved as a historic landmark.

There has been much to celebrate as a member of WVHS. You are our best advertising; get out there and let somebody know that you belong to an "exclusive" club. We're a lot of fun, have great educational programs, and a good deal for the money. Spread the word.

We owe our thanks to **Bill Missfeldt** for addressing our expenses and getting lower prices for our yearly expenses.

March General Membership Meeting

**Monday,
March 12, 2007
at 7:30pm**

At the Historic 1895
Schoolhouse

*This Month's
Hospitality:
Donna Cogan and
Peg Johnston*

Bill, our hats are off to you! Keep our checking account FAT. We appreciate all you do.

*Sincerely,
Frank J. Russo, Jr.
President*

Welcome Our Newest Member

A warm welcome and congratulations go out to our newest member of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society family:

Mr. Joseph A. Schneider 215-646-8254
330 Mattison Avenue, Ambler, PA 19002

Please include his information into your membership booklet. We're glad to have you aboard (and thank you for the wonderful family contributions!

Celebrating Women's History Month ...

A Look At The Life Of Mary Johnson Ambler

Born in 1805, Mary Johnson Ambler was the daughter of Abigail and Benjamin Johnson of Richland Township, Bucks County. She married Andrew Ambler on May 14, 1829.

In 1830, the couple moved to the village of Wissahickon in Upper Dublin Township. They purchased the old Fulling Mill property on North Main Street. (*I say old because the house on the property was built prior to 1720 and nearby stood a fulling mill. A fulling mill processed sheep wool into blankets.*) The Amblers continued the mill operation. During their time there spanning 30 years, the couple sired seven children, one of which became a bank president, one a general store keeper and one a miller.



Mary J. Ambler was a Quaker and was known throughout the region as a practitioner of Pow-Wow or folk medicine. Many people would travel to her home for her laying of hands.

According to local history lore, a terrible train wreck occurred on July 20, 1856, near the Oreland station of the North Pennsylvania Railroad. The collision was between a regular passenger train and an excursion train heading out of Philadelphia to Fort Washington. The two trains, traveling on the same track in opposite directions, collided and killed between 59 and 67, and injured over 100. The trains, which were made of wood, burst into flames.

Mary Ambler could see the flames from her home on Main Street. Without hesitation, she immediately prepared bandages (from tearing bed sheets) and gathered other supplies including herbals and camphor. She headed to the scene of the accident being the first to arrive and began rescue operations. While many of the injured were taken to her home on Main Street, those who perished were taken to a make-shift morgue at Wentz's Barn. It was the worst railroad catastrophe in the world up to that time and became one of the signature events of its era.

Mary Ambler died on August 18, 1868.

In 1869, the North Pennsylvania Railroad station called Wissahickon changed its name to Ambler to honor her heroic work, the village nearby grew into our town of Ambler, incorporating in 1888. Mary J. Ambler ... Our hats are off to you as our local heroine during Women's History Month.

Village of Wissahickon

Ambler was originally known as the Village of [Wissahickon](#), named for the North Pennsylvania Railroad depot established there in the mid-1850s. The town was renamed to Ambler in 1869 in honor of Mary Johnson Ambler, a local Quaker woman who heroically assisted during [The Great Train Wreck of 1856](#), a local [train accident](#) in which 59 people were killed instantly and dozens more died from their injuries.

WVHS Receives Donation of Collection

Our Society recently received the Schneider Collection from the family of **Joseph Schneider** of Ambler, PA. The materials include the real estate tax record books from Lower Gwynedd Township from circa 1837 – 1950's. These records are a valuable tool for those researching families and historic houses in Lower Gwynedd. Also included in the collection are a series of photographs of Reading Railroad stations from the 1920's, old local advertising, and many wonderful objects for our library and archives.

We are very grateful to the family for this wonderful addition to our collections.

WISSAHICKON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SERVING AMBLER • LOWER GWYNEDD • WHITPAIN COMMUNITIES

A Story About The Battle of Iwo Jima

According to the census of 1940, Lower Gwynedd had a population of 1,948; Whitpain 2,450; and Ambler 3,949 — a total of 8,347 people.

On February 19, 1945, a battle started on an island in the Pacific that in the next 36 days more than three times the population of our communities were American casualties — this is the battle of Iwo Jima.

Iwo Jima, which means Sulphur Island in Japanese, is one of the Volcano Islands, was midway between Saipan and Tinian; it is also the area in which our B29 bombers took off to bomb Japan and serve as a warning to the Japanese that the American bombers were on the way.



In the calm seas, two American divisions of Marines landed and started to attack. Previous to them landing on the island, it had been heavily bombarded. Japanese Lieutenant General Kuribayashi, along with 22,000 men, let them land unmolested. After an hour, with the beaches crowded in the soft sand and volcanic ash, the Japanese let loose with their guns and mortars, killing dozens of men and making junk out of the military equipment that had just arrived. The enemy was unseen for he was dug in, in many caves and underground pillboxes and defense works.

In some cases, the Americans would clear out an area only to have the voices of the defender heard under their feet, for they were on the roof of a defensive position without knowing about it.

After 37 days of fighting, the Island was conquered — although two defenders, hiding in caves, held out until 1949, four years after the end of the war. Much has been written and depicted in movies about this battle. Probably the most dramatic scene was the raising of the flag after several days of fighting.

On February 23, the raising of the flag was dramatized because a photographer, Joseph Rosenthal, accidentally turned around and took the picture at the crucial moment. The men of the 5th Marine Division thought they were just doing their duty but the photograph and the stories that went with it overwhelmed many of the true facts. Three of them lost their lives in the days that followed.

The Company ordered to climb Mt. Suribachi were followed by the eyes of hundreds of men and when they reached the top they raised a small flag, eventually replaced with a larger one. When the first small flag went up, 800 ships blew their whistles and men all over the island cheered.

The Japanese responded with renewed fighting vigor but the flag on top of the hill was an inspiration to all American troops. The surviving men were brought home and became the focus of the Seventh War Bond drive, which was oversubscribed. The battle ended March 26, 1945.

This is the only battle in the Pacific where the defenders had fewer casualties than the Americans. These Americans were not gods, nor were they perfect, but for the most part, they had living mothers, sweethearts and looked forward to a full life and a family. They paid the ultimate sacrifice so you and I can have a family and the life we lead. They should not be worshipped but they should not be forgotten.

Americans:	Total Marines killed: 25,845; total Navymen killed: 2,798 =	28,643
Japanese:	Total killed: =	22,000

<http://www.iwojima.com/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Iwo_Jima

Pictured above is the infamous photograph taken by Joseph Rosenthal; pictured to the right is Mt. Suribachi, the most prominent geological feature on the island of Iwo Jima.





Wissahickon Valley Historical Society Calendar of Events ~ March 2007 and upcoming events!

- Mon., March 12 **General Business Meeting**..... **7:30 PM**
“Clara Barton Impersonation” – Ms. Waskie, speaker
- Mon., March 26 *Board Meeting* 7:00 PM
- Mon., April 9 **General Business Meeting**..... **7:30 PM**
“History of Firefighting in Whitpain Township” – Speaker to be announced
- Mon., April 23 *Board Meeting* 7:00 PM
- Mon., May 14 **General Business Meeting**..... **7:30 PM**
“History of the Delaware Canal” – Susan Taylor, speaker

*The Wissahickon Valley Historical Society Newsletter is published once a month during the membership season.
General Membership Meetings are held the 2nd Monday of each month, and are open to the public.*

Wissahickon Valley Historical Society • 799 Skippack Pike, Blue Bell, PA 19422 • 215.646.6541



Wissahickon Valley Historical Society
P.O. Box 96
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March 2007 Newsletter

Our Meeting:

“Clara Barton Impersonation”