



Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

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Wissahickon Valley Historical Society, P.O. Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002
August 2017

Vol. 17, Issue 1
215-646-6541

Mark Your Calendar
Monday, Sept. 11 - 7 p.m.
at the 1895 Schoolhouse

Join us for
Program: Member Share and
Lite Refreshments and Conversation
Museum/library tours

This is the start of another year:
We'll talk about 2017-2018 programs and activities and
WVHS by-laws.

Watch for membership renewal information in the mail.
Dues help pay for preservation materials, programs, and out-reach
activities.

Open House
1895 Schoolhouse
Sunday, August 20
1 to 4 p.m.

A Ramble Down Ambler's Race Street

In a recent newsletter we took a drive down Lewis Lane in Whitpain and learned of its history. This month let's take a walk down Race Street in Ambler. It represents a lot of Ambler's history and reflects Ambler's community spirit. We'll start at the corner of Butler Pike and Race Street - where, on the right, workers are actively preparing for the fall opening of Ambler's Weaver's Way. Bringing a full-fledged grocery store back to Ambler is the result of a hard-working, focused local group of volunteers.

As one walks up Race Street, on the right is the Wissahickon Fire Company building. The Company moved to this site on November 3, 1958. Earlier headquarters were on Butler Pike (1917-1958) and 9 North Main Street (chartered in 1891). Today's fire company has more than 50 volunteers and serves Ambler and Lower Gwynedd. Thanks to Buck Amey for this information.



Next to the fire house, is a modern building housing the APRD Resources, Inc. The building was designed by world famous Philadelphia architect Robert Venturi, winner of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, and Denise Scott Brown. They are considered "post-modernists" - integrating some classic elements into "modern architecture". They designed the Seattle Museum of Art and numerous buildings around the world. Easy to



drive-by is their distinctive Vanna Venturi House in Chestnut Hill.

The Wissahickon Valley Public Library - Ambler is the next building on the right. With its busy schedule, it is a hub for Ambler. Its tea and scone program, its computers, and its



after-school tutoring program, draw many residents to the building. It currently is looking to enlarge the building. Plant Ambler volunteers maintain the landscaping - as they do at other sites along Race Street.



Further up Race Street at the corner with Ridge Street is a building with a sign for the Colony Club. Organized in 1912, the Colony Club was one of the oldest women's groups in the area and well-

known for its benevolent works. In earlier times, the building, though served as the First Methodist Church of Ambler, the North Penn Community Center, and the Ambler Public Library. The building is currently seeking yet another repurposing.

Across Race Street is a small business site. For a number of years it housed The Tennis Stringer. One can tell that it started out as a house - much like others along that side of Race Street. The glassed in addition on the street side can be seen on several buildings along Race and on Butler - transforming houses to business sites. The



houses on Race Street were built in the late 1800s. The basements of these homes were part of the old mill race from the Clover mill which stood on Spring Garden and Race.

Crossing Ridge, one faces St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. According to *Images of America - Ambler*, the church was founded by the Reverend Samuel F. Tholan, who was then the pastor of the Upper Dublin Evangelical Lutheran Church located at Puff's Corner (Butler Pike and Susquehanna Ave.). The church was organized in 1908 and first met at the Ambler Opera House until the church was constructed in 1912-1913.



Next to the church on Ridge is the mid-19th century house that became the parsonage of St. John's. It is one of oldest standing structures in Ambler. In its front yard is a plaque honoring Lyman Rohr, an Ambler resident, who was killed in the Second Battle on the Marne in France in 1918.

Rambling on down Race Street, one faces a three story brick building on the right which houses the Verizon switching station. It was originally the Ambler's Bell Telephone Exchange.

Looking back at the back entrance of Denny's Electric one can has two glimpses of the actual race. (lower left) A race is the channel for water before and after a waterwheel at a mill. The water-flow behind Denny's was the race for the Clover Mill.



According to Frank Russo, the creek flowing under Ambler is Tannery Run. In early days, it was pretty much an open sewer for runoff from the Faust tannery just below Bethlehem Pike and Butler Pike - where Fletcher Motors is located today. People

often complained about the smells coming from the creek. Oyster shells were thrown into the creek from restaurants on Butler and can still be found along the Wissahickon below Butler Pike. Over the years, the creek was enclosed - except for the small race exposures behind Denny's. Occasionally after heavy rains, the overflow of the channeled Tannery Run causes flooding in West Ambler.



Moving down Race, one passes the back entrance of Deck's Hardware which has been a core Ambler business since 1908 when Garnett M. Deck purchased the business from the Reeds. A third generation of Decks runs the business today. There are several displays of early tools and building materials in the front windows but, better still, is a visit inside. Ask for an item - and, if you are lucky, you'll get to follow the clerk "upstairs and around in back" - past wonderful wooden cases and interlocking shelves - in search of it.

Race Street T's into the SEPTA track - though the underground waterway continues into the Wissahickon. Of course, on Saturdays one can visit the Farmers' Market in the Trax's parking lot.

Next month, we'll stroll along a Lower Gwynedd street/road. If anyone wants to describe a favorite walkway, please let us know. We can arrange for photos if you provide stories and directions.

Additions to our Library

Emmy Simon has been organizing and accessioning several interesting collections. The records of Boy Scout Troop #390 which was sponsored by First Presbyterian Church in Ambler was recently transferred to the WVHS. The troop was sponsored by the church in Ambler from the 1930s through the 1960s. Community service projects and troop activities are recorded.

Emmy has also organized and accessioned several collections from Bob Whittock. Agnes Baker Jefferson graduated from Whitpain High School and Ursinus College. In addition to teaching in Whitpain Township schools, Mrs. Jefferson taught private piano and organ lessons and was an organist for 50 years in area churches. She wrote prolifically about the history of Whitpain for several books.

In 1950 the last class graduated from Whitpain High School. Bob Whittock was integral to the celebration of the 50th anniversary in 1999. The papers related to this event and a collection of complementary items is now catalogued at the 1895 Schoolhouse. Included are several interviews with graduates of the class of 1950. Bob also recorded numerous interviews with Whitpain residents. The interviews have been transferred from video tapes to DVDs.

As Emmy organizes and catalogues the items in these collections, she makes an index of the items. These indexes will be made available on the society's website making research easier for both those seeking information and those locating it in our collection.



#ThrowbackThursday #Whitpain

As mentioned in the July newsletter, our librarian Joan Duxbury is providing historical photos and short captions to Whitpain Township for their Twitter feed. A recent submission was this photo of:

the class at the original Shady Grove School in

1912. teacher, on left, Edith Phipps

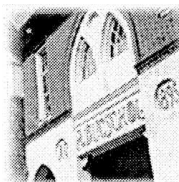
(The one-room school was located in the woods on right side of Lewis Lane behind the present day Shady Grove school. The site is now part of Prophecy Creek park.)

Check out a new photo and caption each Thursday.

Mark Your Calendar: August 5 - Dog Days in Ambler, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

September 10 - Lower Gwynedd Pike Fest - 10 a.m.

September 23 - Whitpain Community Festival at MCCC - 11 to ???



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