



**February WVHS Meeting
Monday, Feb. 12
7 p.m.**

**at the 1895 Schoolhouse,
799 Skippack Pike, Blue Bell**

Program:

**The Presidency Under the Constitution
presented by Russ Bellavance**

What does the U.S. Constitution say about the duties and powers of the President and the Executive Branch?

The program will explore the issue of sources and limits of Presidential power.

The program is free and light refreshments will be served.

A vote will be held on the proposed By-law revisions. (see page 4 for details)

The program by Jim Tufano about Native American trails of South Eastern Pennsylvania (scheduled for Jan.) has been rescheduled for March and will be held at the Blue Bell Library at 7 p.m. on March 12.

Snow Stories of Years Past by Peg Johnston

Though I am more than glad to have the neighbor kids come over to help me shovel our driveway after each snow, I'd like to think that they enjoy a snow day half as much as I did as a child.

I grew up on a farm. After a good snow, we'd get out the horse and skis. One of us would ride the horse; another would be pulled by a tow rope behind on the skis - being pelted by clots of snow that were thrown off by the horse's hooves. The fallow corn field made for a challenging ski!

I asked others for their winter stories:

Buck Amey remembers a good snow in Ambler meant sledding on Hendrick Street. Perhaps the highest point in Ambler is at the corner of Hendrick and Forrest. Streets were blocked from the St. Anthony's down toward Tennis Avenue with kerosene smug pots at each intersection. One goal was to slide all the way to Tennis; another goal was to stay out of the Rose Valley creek.

Marie Goldkamp wrote that she and her friends loved to ice skate during the winters. They skated on the Wissahickon at Valley Green when the weather allowed. Once they experienced a sleigh ride on the bridle path - starting at the Valley Green Inn. She remembers using many blankets to keep from freezing during the hour long ride.

Marie also skated at a large pond at the Red Rose Estate in Villanova. She recently learned that Violet Oakley lived at the Red Rose Inn. Oakley is a well-known illustrator, portraitist, and muralist. Her beautiful murals are in our state capitol building in Harrisburg. Violet and two fellow artists called themselves the Red Rose Girls.

Emmy Simon grew up in Manhattan, New York City during the 1930s and 40s. There were few cars on the road and fewer parked along the streets. Emmy remembers them getting over a foot of snow. They would build tunnels through the snow along the curb. When about 6 years old, Emmy got stuck in one of the tunnels and had to be rescued by her uncle.

Joan Duxbury grew up in the Fort Washington area. She remembers her father making a snow ramp in the back of St. Paul's church on Bethlehem Pike - before the connector road was built. The area was owned by Mr. Duncan and called Duncan's Field. Joan and her sisters and friends would sled down the hill - hoping to get as far as the Sandy Run after her father had checked that the ice was safe. The best sleds were CocaCola signs (see right) slicked with wax paper. She also remembers her father building igloos with blocks of snow.

Donna Hartman recounted a childhood memory of "skating" on a creek on her uncle's farm. First you would put bread bags over your shoes and then rubber boots - and you were ready to go.

Russ Bellavance grew up in southeastern Massachusetts, which is much colder than southeastern Pennsylvania. His report: There were quite a few very small ponds in the area, and we would get there to skate as soon as the ice was thick enough. One of my first memories is of testing the ice to see whether it was safe to skate. We would do this by throwing a rock and listening to the ring of the ice. Since we were empty-headed kids, this was not a particularly effective method, and I do recall the ice cracking a few times. We sometimes just skated, but if we could get enough kids, we would play hockey. We had pucks and hockey sticks, but no other equipment. I was one of the younger kids, so I got to play goalie without even pads - much less a mask. Now that I think of it, that wasn't very smart either.



Keeping a Watch on Local Historic Sites

The program at the recent Fort Washington Historical Society meeting featured a short history of Abolition Hall in Whitmarsh Township and a longer discussion of what is being done and should be done to preserve it. A short video on Abolition Hall is viewable at szab@comcast.net. Whitmarsh planning commission was scheduled to meet Jan. 23 to reconsider the developer's plans.

Most of the Townships and Boroughs seem to be dealing with proposed sales and developments that threaten historic zones and buildings. It is hard to monitor the activity; harder still to respond to it effectively.

Five additional sites of long term concern in the area are:

Dr. Mattison's Lindenwold Estate on Bethlehem Pike and Lindenwold Terrace - Feb. meeting TBA

Bethlehem Pike in Fort Washington - Whitmarsh Township - proposed high rise apartment building

398 North Wales Road - completed sale of a large open space and historic buildings - Labeled the Wallace Carlson Property in *Whitpain...Crossroads in Time*, the barn, house, and outbuildings date from 1712, 1722, and 1730. The house has had numerous inhabitants over the years. The barn and attached garage are all pointed field stone. A spring house had living quarters above it. The stone was quarried in a field on the land.

Dawesfield and the open fields along Lewis Lane - both are currently for sale.

The Merrill farm - Driving up Bethlehem Pike into Lower Gwynedd, one notices that Merrill Farm buildings will soon be torn down. Featured in *Lower Gwynedd Township - A Pictorial Guide to Some of Its Older Buildings by the Centennial Committee*, the original farm included property on both side of Bethlehem Pike. The farm was purchased by William O. B. Merrill in 1871 from Henry Fleck. It had its own gas plant which was used to light the house. It also had several wind mills. Merrill was famous for illuminating the house from top to bottom every night.

At that time Bethlehem Pike was not paved and had two narrow lanes. The Merrill house lost its porch when the Pike was widened and paved. The stone barn (see right) was converted to a residence but has been uninhabited for several years. WVHS has a recent set of photos of the farmstead to add to its collection of local homesteads that are being lost. Most of the trees and buildings are already gone, and construction of The Village at Gwynedd Walk (a mixed use village of retail and office space) and 23 townhouses will begin this spring.



One bright spot is the preservation and repurposing of Boxwood on Skippack Pike. It was formerly the headquarters for the Whitpain Historical Society. Thanks to Whitpain Township.

We often learn about proposed changes to local historic properties through members and the public noticing signs and/or subtle changes as they drive around the area. Often that is too late to have much influence on proposals; at the very least we can ask questions and take photos.

Recent Donations

Bob Bradley has donated a detailed study of the Mary Ambler house that he completed in 2008 as a course work requirement. It is a model for reseraching and recording an historic site. A copy is available in the WVHS library.



Buck Amey has shared a detailed history of the Clifton House, currently home to the Fort Washington Historical Society.

Two elaborate valentines, an early 20th century set of sewing needles, and a unique darning egg (this one has no handle - it **is** egg shaped) were recently donated by Deborah Whiteley.

Marie Goldkamp shared two pins (see left) from the Young's Regency rink which is now the BlueBell Library on Skippack Pike. Watch for Young's Regency to be featured on the AroundAmbler.com site

Looking for Local Quarries and Mines

The WVHS recently received an e-mail request for information on local quarries and mines in our area. The request came from Ronald A. Sloto of the Department of Earth and Space Science at West Chester University. Topics of interest include quarries, mines, lime-making, lime kilns, clay, brick manufacturing, iron ore, iron mining, and copper mining.

The area is rich in sites. Note that the stone for the above mentioned house on North Wales Road came from a quarry on the site. The fossil footprint in our collection came from a quarry off of Skippack Pike and Whitehall Road. Many of the buildings sponsored by Dr. Mattison came from a quarry on Bethlehem Pike which is now a park. There was a outcrop of lime near the lime-kiln off of Germantown Pike which is now now covered with grass. Oreland's name comes from the rich iron ore outcroppings in the area.

If you know of any local sites, please contact Peg Johnsnton (pegathome6@yahoo.com).or you can contact Mr. Sloto at West Chester University directly. We can be "citizen historians/scientists".



Wissahickon Valley Historical Society
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Reminder

In the December and January newsletters the proposed By-Law changes were explained by President Russ Bellavance. Members attending the February meeting will be able to vote in person on the changes. Those who are not able to attend can complete the following proxy vote and return it to any board members or mail it to P.O. Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002. A copy of Amended and Restated Bylaws of the Society is available on the Society's website - www.wvalleyhs.org

PROXY VOTE

The undersigned member of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society hereby casts my vote in favor of adoption of the Amended and Restated Bylaws of the Society in the form posted on the Society's website - www.wvalleyhs.org.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed name _____

