



Wissahickon Valley

historical society

Ambler
Lower Gwynedd
Whitpain

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Join us for the first meeting of the new year.

Monday, Sept. 11
7 p.m. - (Note new time)
at the 1895 Schoolhouse

Program: Member Share and Social Time

Please consider bringing an item
that has a story....doesn't need to be local.

Learn about some recent donations.

Lite refreshments and museum tours
will be available

Parking Lot Repaved

The parking lot at the 1895 and 1916 Schoolhouses was regraded and repaved last week. This should give additional support to good drainage as well as make for safer walking in the parking lot. This is one of the last steps to making our building safer and up to long-term preservation standards.



Dawesfield Property For Sale

Several members have brought to the society's attention that Dawesfield - perhaps the most historic property in Whitpain - is for sale. There is no sign on the property but details can be found on-line. Several members expressed interest in the background of the property.

Dawesfield, located on Lewis Lane, was the headquarters for George Washington for several days in the fall of 1777 before he led his troops to Valley Forge. On October 20, 1777, General Washington arrived at Dawesfield, the home of Quaker James Morris, occupying the front room on the second floor. General Le Marquis de Lafayette was quartered in the entrance hallway of the first floor due to a leg wound received at the Battle of the Brandywine. In the north parlor, Brigadier General "Mad" Anthony Wayne was court-martialed and acquitted for his role in the Paoli Massacre.

On November 2, the army marched out of Camp Wippen and into Whitemarsh before making its way to winter quarters in Valley Forge. A large area from Skippack Pike to Morris and down to Butler was part of the encampment for 10,000 soldiers. Dawesfield itself is listed on the National Historical Register.

James Morris was the son-in-law of Abraham Dawes, Jr. He had come into possession of the land upon which Dawesfield was built in 1731 upon the death of his father, Abraham Dawes, Sr.

James Morris was married to Abraham Dawes, Jr.'s daughter Elizabeth. *Whitpain... Crossroads in Time* has an excellent article about the passage of the property through various generations. Interestingly enough, the property always passed to a female descendent.

A very detailed history of the property with personal impressions is found in *Reminiscences of Dawesfield* by Saunders Lewis. It was written in 1896 and editions of it are available at the 1895 Schoolhouse.

The house passed out of the Dawes/Morris/Lewis family in the late 20th century. The property has several additional original buildings - including a springhouse with a date stone of 1786 and a barn dated 1796. A additional barn was built in the late 20th century.

The property for sale includes all the buildings on 22 acres. Please take time to drive by this historic site. It is important to know the history of our area and to speak up in favor of wise use of these important resources.

We are in the process of arranging a program about Dawesfield - given by someone who grew up as a neighbor. Watch for details.



A Girl Scout Gold Project In Progress

Annie Cassidy, a senior at Gwynedd Mercy High School, has begun a project with the WVHS to complete her Gold Award. This award is equivalent to an Eagle Scout project for Boy Scouts. Annie will be developing a set of displays for the township and borough buildings, the elementary school libraries, and the Wissahickon Valley public library. The displays will be set up as kits that can be rotated and modified for different sites. The Gold Award stresses, among other things, an element of sustainability. Once the labels and lists of artifacts are gathered, the displays can be reused with ease.

The first display is now at the Whitpain Township Building. It features the Franklinville School. Annie is also hoping that the Gwynedd Mercy High School will accept a display as well.

A Walk Down Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike

This month we'll start a walk from Bethlehem Pike on the historic Penllyn-Blue Bell Pike. The road continues all the way through Lower Gwynedd and Whitpain. We'll start this month at Bethlehem Pike at SpringHouse Tavern and continue on to the edge of Penllyn. Next month we'll follow the road into Penllyn and further on to Morris Road

The SpringHouse Tavern was licensed to operate as a tavern in 1761. Supposedly it saw colonial troops stationed there during the Revolutionary War. The original building burned down in 1888. It was immediately rebuilt by L.W. Kitzelman. By the way, crab cakes are a SpringHouse speciality.

It is possible to walk all the way to Penllyn on public footpaths - parts of which welcome bikes and horses. The path is on the south side of the pike and not always visible from the road. It is paved in sections and gravel in others.



As you proceed, watch for the impressive building on the right that now houses Silver Stream Nursing Home. It was the residence of George Reiger and took three years to build. The carriage house has a date-stone of 1897. Reiger was a brewmaster for Bergdoll Brewery. Except for slight changes in the porches, the building has maintained its original exterior character.

At the corner of the Pike and Dager is the impressive mansion that was built in 1906 by Henry B. Coxe, one of the wealthiest men in the country. He called the estate "Haffod" which is Welch for "House in the Field". It contained a 40 foot ballroom. In 1974 Beth Or Synagogue purchased the property and made several additions. It was sold to the Bethlehem Baptist Church in the 1990s and serves as their headquarters.



A sign right on the Pike announces "Meadow Farm". This estate was established in 1922 by Albert Smith. The 125 acre property included a 1 1/2 mile steeplechase course. Some of the open farm land is now a Gwynedd Township park, and Wissahickon High School occupies a large part of the original property. Unless one walks the path, it is hard to appreciate how much open space still exists in this area. The gate house still stands and has a charming chicken yard right next to the path. The main house (which was subdivided) and the stable (now a house) are not visible from the path.

A bit further on, on the north-west side of the Pike is a house - set back a bit from the road but with a sign - "Orthodox Cottage". In 1827, the Gwynedd Meeting Quakers split into two factions - the conservative Quakers (Orthodox) relied primarily on the authority of the Scriptures while the more liberal Quakers (Hicksite brethren) placed more emphasis on direct communion with God and were willing to accept a variety of religious convictions. This house was used as a meetinghouse for approximately 40 years. Adjoining the property is a small graveyard with plain, small stones to mark graves - family names include Ambler, Foulke, Shoemaker, and Walton. Watch for poison ivy!

A creek runs with the path and several bridges take a walker over the creek and back. The creek, of course, eventually flows into the Wissahickon Creek.



Mark Your Calendar -

- Sept. 11 - WVHS monthly meeting -
7 p.m. at the 1895 Schoolhouse
- Sept. 16 - Lower Gwynedd Pike Fest - 10 a.m.
- Sept. 17 - Open House at WVHS and Franklinville School -
1 to 4 p.m.
Also Open House at Evans-Mumbower Mill
- Sept. 23 - Whitpain Community Festival at MCCC - 11 to ???
- Oct. 7 - Ambler OctoberFest - 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Oct. 14 - WVHS outing to Manderley Farm (details to follow)
- Oct. 14 - Peter Wentz Farmstead - Home and Harvest: War Comes
to Worcester - 10 to 3 - meet General Washington from 11 to 3



WVHS will have tables at the Pike Fest, Community Festival, and OctoberFest. Please let Russ Bellavance know if you can spend a few hours at any of these events. Our table will be covered and have activities for children.

Wissahickon School District Plans Veteran Recognition Program

Wissahickon School District is gathering information on former students who served in the military. They plan a recognition program - the details to be determined. They are interested in having students interview veterans. They plan to include students of Whitpain and Ambler High Schools. If you are a veteran and would be willing to help with this project, please let us know. If you know of a veteran, please ask if he or she would be willing to be interviewed and/or know of other veterans.

To start the project, we are sharing Bob Whittock's published list of veterans from Whitpain.

Several photos from the mid-1900s show a large sign in the front yard of the 1895 Schoolhouse that lists veterans from Whitpain. It has been missing for years. If you have any idea where it might be, please let us know.

Watch for WVHS renewal notices for the 2017-2018 year in the mail.



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