
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 3, Number 8

The Valley Crier 

April 2024 >>>>> with 2 events

Monday, Apr 8, 7 PM, Robert Harley, a great story-teller, will speak about his family's Boxwood Farm (formerly the Olson Farm in Blue Bell) and his grandfather, Dick Harley, a professional baseball player. Dick graduated from Georgetown University in 1896 and went right to the pros. In later years, he was a coach. A plaque at Wentz Run Park honors him.

Bob, a retired court reporter, has traced his family roots to Philadelphia in the 1830s and Whitpain to 1868, and he will show his great-great grandfather's 1853 Naturalization document and his great-grandfather's 1865 Civil War Discharge, and more.



Part of the permanent “sports” display at the 1895 School, including a photo of Edward Harley and his three sons (top) and a photo of pro baseball player Dick Harley with his teammates

Saturday, Apr 20, 1-3 PM, Spring Outing: WVHS tour of Historic Trappe with Executive Director Lisa Minardi. Please enjoy a special “WVHS Spring Outing” to Historic Trappe on Saturday, April 20, starting at 1 PM in Trappe. Please meet at the parking lot next to the Dewees Tavern. This trip is a follow-up to our speaker, Lisa Minardi, Executive Director of Historic Trappe, who spoke in October about the Muhlenbergs and the three historic sites she oversees. **Tickets are \$15, and the deadline for reservations is April 1.** Take an escorted, small-group tour of three historic properties (including the Speaker’s House, usually closed to the public due to renovations!). Trappe is a 30-minute drive from our area (301 W Main St., Trappe, PA). **WVHS has guaranteed 20 guests.**

For tickets-- Use cash or check, payable to WVHS, for \$15 each. Or, to make payment with a credit card, go online to “Donate” at the WVHS website: <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/>

Historic Trappe’s website describes what it offers:

Our Center for Pennsylvania German Studies, located in the **Dewees Tavern**, has five exhibition galleries featuring a wide variety of furniture, fraktur, textiles, and other objects.... The **Henry Muhlenberg House** is a fully-furnished museum, interpreting the families of Lutheran pastor Henry Muhlenberg and his son, General Peter Muhlenberg. The **Speaker’s House**, home of Frederick Muhlenberg, [the first Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives] is an ongoing restoration project.

Street parking may be limited. If you need a ride, or if you can offer a ride, please contact info@WValleyHS.com.



The Dewees Tavern

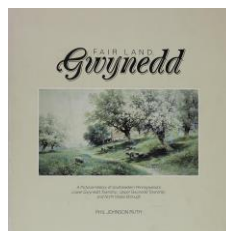


Henry Muhlenberg's House



The Speaker's House

Bellavance to Speak on Gwynedd History: Please mark your calendar--WVHS past president **Russ Bellavance will speak on Tuesday, June 4, at 7 PM at the Lower Gwynedd Township Municipal Building** at a program sponsored by Lower Gwynedd Township and the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. His topic is "Gwynedd: Our Fair Land Through the Years."



March Speakers Describe the Local American Legion Post: The *Daniel W. Dowling* American Legion Post #769, known as “The Black Post,” was the focus of remarks from Fred Conner, the post’s historian and a former chair of the Whitpain Township Board of Supervisors, and Flo Wise, the historian and chaplain for the post’s Auxiliary. Flo grew up in Ambler in the 1960s, and she related how Blacks and Italians on her block visited each other’s homes and, although poor, nurtured the area’s children. She also emphasized how the poem *Flanders Field* reflects the sacrifice of World War I veterans and how the Auxiliary’s poppy sales continue to provide veterans’ benefits. Conner and Wise explained that the American Legion, created in 1944 by the GI Bill, is the largest veterans’ service group. The Dowling Post, located in West Ambler, is named after one of the area’s 18 Black Civil War volunteers who were assigned to the 24th U.S. Colored Infantry. They trained at Camp William Penn in Cheltenham. Daniel’s grandson, Charles, and many Black veterans are buried at Ambler’s Rose Valley Cemetery. Today the Dowling Post supports its members, offers dozens of college scholarships, and sponsors area youth programs.



***Fred Conner and Flo Wise, relating the history of the American Legion
and Ambler's Daniel W. Dowling Post***

1895 School's Open House Highlights "History Meets Art." Many first-time guests enjoyed the exhibits and conversation with watercolorist Ellie Moniz, who paints historic structures. The exhibit included on second floor, a variety of framed art from the WVHS Collection, and on first floor, Moniz's watercolor demonstration, the premiere showing of the house portrait of 1198 Union Meeting Road, and the 1938 wedding gown worn by Ambler artist Eva Martino. (See the photo below.) A special thank-you goes to Joan Duxbury and Sally Zeller for preparing our Irish-themed snacks as a fund-raiser during the event. Many thanks to Neal Bradley, for positioning his old car and the Center Square antique firetruck on our lawn. And thank you to the docents, our members who helped with the event: Russ Bellavance, Marie and Tom Goldkamp, Ward Hickman, Ethel Hutchinson, Marty Kalos, David Kings, Frank Russo, Sandy Zebe, and many others.



Shown, (left to right), a print of the Ambler Theatre by our guest artist, Ellie Moniz; on the podium, the wedding portraits of Eva Martino and a book about the artists in the Martino family; and the Eva Martino 1938 wedding gown.

WVHS Exhibit at Ambler Borough Hall: WVHS maintains display cases for Ambler Borough, Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township. A new exhibit has recently been presented at Ambler, showing the 1889 “Old Train Station,” north of Butler Avenue, which had its beginning with Ambler’s first depot in 1855, located south of Butler Avenue.

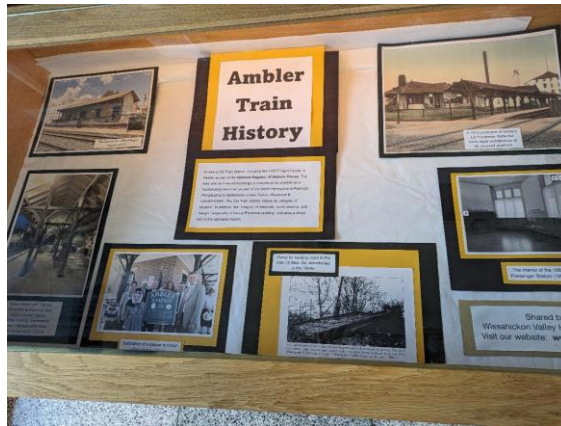


Exhibit at Ambler Borough Hall Shows the Development of Train Structures, 1855 until Today

Storytellers Now on Facebook: WVHS member, Peter Wilson, writes, “Ambler Storytellers’ *Facebook* page is live. Looking forward to making it as good as it can be...!” Check it out

here: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61557506034654>

“Dunce” to you! From the WVHS Archives: Historian Dr Mary P. Hough tells how one April Fool’s Day a child played a joke on Mary Ambler, saying “April Fool.” Reflecting the Quaker tradition of not naming the months, who honor heathen gods, Mary responded, “Don’t thee know that it is wrong to say April Fool? Thee should say, ‘Fourth Month Dunce!’”

Historic Stone Bridge to be Replaced: Located on Old Bethlehem Pike in Lower Gwynedd, it will soon be torn down. The road from Spring House to Boehm's Church was built in 1760.



Photo from Inhabit Media (one of many contributed to WVHS by member Charlie Stewart), taken February 2024

Dr. Huss Donates 1802 Survey Drawing: At last month's Open House, Dr. Wayne Huss kindly donated a file box of research about local Civil War soldiers and an 1802 framed surveyor's map showing the Zimmerman property. These items will enhance our exhibits and become wonderful additions to our archives, available for future researchers. Dr. Huss is a retired professor of history at Gwynedd Mercy University and the editor of the 2001 *Whitpain Township: A Tricentennial Reflection*. This is his second recent contribution to WVHS.

Ambler Storytellers to Offer History Walking Tours: The tours are free, but the tour guides ask for a \$10 donation to WVHS. Each guest receives a coupon for a free beverage at Tannery Run Brew Works. Register online; group size is limited to 12. Tours will be offered at 3 PM on the following Saturdays: April 6 & 20; May 4 & 18; June 1 & 15. www.WValleyHS.org

Ambler Storytellers Working on NRHP: The group continues to meet weekly to make decisions and take on individual assignments.

If you are interested in “Docent Training” or if you would like a “Members’ Tour” of the 1895 School (or a combination), please let us know. We will schedule around your availability: Info@WValleyHS.org

Heritage Trees Coming to Google Maps (from the *Whitpain Wire*, 3-14-2024): The *Shade Tree Commission* is in the process of putting notable Heritage Trees onto Google Maps. Heritage Trees are trees that the Shade Tree Commission has deemed worthy of preservation due to their “species, age, size, rarity, or historical importance.” In order to find a Heritage Tree, just type “Whitpain Heritage Tree” into the search bar on Google Maps. You’ll see a list of Heritage Trees with their species and location. In addition, the next time you are in a park like Prophecy Creek, Mermaid Lake, or Armentrout Preserve, looking at the park on Google Maps will show the Heritage Trees in your area.

Check out the American sycamore tree behind the Manor House at Prophecy Creek. It is on the list of largest trees in Pennsylvania and has a

23-foot circumference! We will be adding to the list as the year progresses, so keep checking in. If you have a tree that you think deserves to be added to the list, download the Heritage Tree application.

PA's State Archivist Discusses How to Save Your Documents: In February 2024, he offered a Question/Answer session about historical records. He noted that some townships have lost all their old records! For WVHS, he stated that archivists are not librarians, so they do not sort by subject; they sort by *origin*: how an item was used by its creator. As a finding aid, we should rely on a list (an index), at least *by box*, not by folder or individual item.

Some advice that individuals can use for their own household records and memories include the following:

- Handle photographs using cotton gloves
- Handle papers with well-washed hands
- Do not laminate any items
- Avoid plastic boxes; they get sticky
- Use acid-free folders (and acid-free boxes when possible)
- Protect your items from fire, flood, and hacking
- Scan or take photos of important items
- Avoid storing items in the attic or basement to avoid large fluctuations of humidity and temperature. They cause expansion and contraction, making paper brittle.

The World is Better Because of Museums (Adapted from the American Alliance of Museums website):

- Museums create great places/communities to live
- Museums serve people of all backgrounds and locations (and online)
- Museums partner with schools
- Museums are trusted to preserve data and priceless objects

PA is Tops in Hardwood: The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources reports that Pennsylvania ranks first in the nation in the production of hardwood lumber. The state's Latin name means "Penn's Woods."

Volunteers Needed: Volunteers meet at the 1895 School every Thursday, 11-1, to clean and do accessioning. Stop by for fun and a feeling of accomplishment.

Interested in a Springtime Evening Volunteer-Time? Sunset is late and the days are long. The cobwebs at the 1895 School are showing. If you are available to help with cleaning -- after work or for an evening, please offer us some dates and times: Info@WValleyHS.org

Origins of April Fool's Day: According to *History.com*, in 1582, the Gregorian calendar moved the beginning of the new year from January to April. Those who kept celebrating in April, who were behind the times, were called "April fools." They became the victims of pranks. Even earlier, in ancient Rome, some people celebrated the holiday called Hilaria at the end of March by making fun of others.

Total Solar Eclipse every 375 Years: On April 8, millions across the U.S. will have the once-in-a-lifetime chance to view a total solar eclipse. *Astronomy.com* explains that since only certain places get an eclipse's full show, it will be worth your while to travel because "from any one location on Earth, it is roughly 375 years between solar eclipses."

The Museum and Library at the 1895 School are open by appointment: Take a private tour. Invite your friends. Please email your request to info@WValleyHS.org

Franklinville School will be open when spring arrives and the weather cooperates.

Interested in how to pay WVHS dues? The 2023-2024 "Society Year" began on September 1, 2023. For details, please go to www.wvalleyhs.org/get-involved/

Writers are welcome to submit articles to *The Quill* and *The Valley Crier*: Please send your ideas to info@WValleyHS.org

Events for History Enthusiasts: (See websites for details)

- April 4, Huntingdon Valley Public Library Lecture, 12:30, on John Wanamaker
- April 10, Old York Rd Lecture, 7:30, on Lord's New Church
- April 13, Northeast History Fair in Philadelphia, 10-3
- April 27, Crooked Billet History Fair in Hatboro, 10-2
- May 8, Old York Rd Lecture, 7:30, on a book: *Strawbridge & Clothier*
- May 9, Cheltenham Historic Commission Lecture, 7:00, on Lynnewood Hall

Welcome, New Members! John and Cornelia Fruncillo

From the Board of Directors:

- The board is choosing speakers for the 2024-2025 program year.
- The board discussed the best, safe location for the Chambers' Dinner Bell. No final decision was made.
- The board considered changes to the WVHS website.
- WVHS may assist with the dedication of the Harley plaque at Whitpain's baseball field.
- The township will add shelving to a closet at the 1895 School.
- The board is preparing to get bids for outside painting at the Franklinville School.
- A location for the Patrons' Party has not been found.

Calendar of Events:

- **Apr 8, 7 PM, Robert Harley, His Family's Boxwood Farm and His Grandfather, Dick Harley, Professional Baseball Player at the 1895 School**
- **Apr 20, 1 PM, (Sat) WVHS tour of Historic Trappe with Executive Director Lisa Minardi**
- **May 13, 7 PM, Bernadette Dougherty, "The Deck Family: 100+ Years of History in Ambler." Election of Officers and a special tribute**
- **June 4, 7 PM, (Tues) Russ Bellavance, at Lower Gwynedd Twp Bldg, "Gwynedd: Our Fair Land Through the Years"**
- **June 10, 6:30 PM, Picnic**
- **Patron's Party, To be announced**
- **Save the Date: WVHS 50th Anniversary Celebration, Sept 14, 2025, 1-4 PM, at William Penn Inn**

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.
