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*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 3, Number 9*

# *The Valley Crier*

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## *June 2024 Two Events:*

- *Monday, June 10, 6:30 PM, Picnic at 1895 School*
- *Russ Bellavance to speak on Tuesday, June 4, 6:30, at the Lower Gwynedd Municipal Building*

**WVHS End-of-Year Pot-Luck PICNIC:** Please join us on Monday, June 10, at **6:30 PM** at the 1895 School for our annual Pot-Luck Picnic, a BYOB event. (Note that we will begin at 6:30.) Thank you to Sally Zeller and Joan Duxbury for their help in running this event! The historical society will supply beverages and paper goods, so please bring a food contribution. To help with planning, **please respond that you will attend:**

[Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org).

**WVHS and Lower Gwynedd Township—Co-sponsored Speaker:**

Congratulations to Lower Gwynedd Township for creation of its Historical Advisory Committee. To mark the committee's one-year anniversary, the township supervisors and the historical society are sponsoring Russ Bellavance as a speaker on Tuesday, June 4, at 6:30 at the Lower Gwynedd Municipal Building. His topic is *Gwynedd, Our Fair Land Through the Years*. The joint program is an effort to promote and educate local citizens about the rich history of the township.

**Bernadette Dougherty**, a former board member, spoke on “**The Deck Family: 100+ Years of History in Ambler.**” A former Ambler Main Street Manager, Dougherty knows its residents. She is given credit for saving the Ambler Theatre by what one source calls her “poking, prodding, and knack for creating coalitions.” Her remarks focused on the Deck family: who they were, where they lived and worked, and their outstanding contribution to Ambler. For over 100 years, three generations of the Deck family ran the hardware store, which began at the location where it finally ended a few months ago. Dougherty described the family tree and provided never-before-seen family photos. She also described their home and provided several old Ambler maps. Many guests in the audience stated that they appreciated Deck's neighborhood atmosphere and the friendliness and expertise of the family and their employees, who provided something special for Ambler that its area residents truly appreciate.



*The Deck business started as tinsmithing*

**Thank You to Township Manager Roman Pronczak:** At the May meeting, members lauded Roman Pronczak, Whitpain Township's Manager since 2011, who will retire soon. In her remarks, President Carol Kalos noted that his administration did an outstanding job of caring for the 1895 School, the WVHS headquarters and museum. She listed the yearly projects completed, such as the new roof at the garage and the new fire-alarm system. In accepting a token gift from the society, an ink drawing of the Franklinville School, Pronczak noted that WHVS does much to enhance the reputation of Whitpain Township.

The *Whitpain Wire* on May 16, 2024, acknowledged how the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society recognized Township Manager Roman Pronczak for his years of service to Whitpain and for building a strong partnership with the historical society. Roman is set to retire on June 4 after a long career with Whitpain that began in 1996 when he was appointed Township Engineer. Pictured below are (left to right) Wissahickon Valley Historical Society President Carol Kalos, Supervisor Jeff Campolongo, Board Chair Scott Badami, Township Manager Roman Pronczak, and Supervisor Sara Selverian.



**Special Day at Wentz Run Baseball Monument:** A monument to Dick Harley (a professional baseball player who was born and raised at the Boxwood Farm on Skippack Pike) was first installed in 1996. Recently the Harley family resurfaced the plaque, so WVHS held a rededication ceremony to mark the occasion. On hand were Bob Harley, the speaker at our May meeting and the grandson of Richard Joseph Harley; Bob's wife, Pat; Dick's great-granddaughter, Tonya; and great-great-granddaughter, Emma! The festivities were planned when two Connie Mack Baseball League teams (most were 13 years old) were scheduled to play: the Central Perkiomen Rarebreed and the Wissahickon Warriors. Vice President Joe Langella bought Cracker Jacks for the players, President Carol Kalos summarized the history of the Boxwood Farm, and Bob Harley offered highlights of his great-grandfather's career as a player and a coach. An outfielder, he was known for his speed and his circus catches.



***Connie Mack League Players hear about the history of the Boxwood Farm, now the Wentz Run Park***



*Harley Field at Whitpain Township's Wentz Run Park, named after local professional baseball star, Dick Harley, an outfielder with outstanding speed and circus catches*

**The First Known Reference to Baseball Being Played in the United States:** According to *Smithsonian* (April-May 2024), it was an 1869 history of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which referred to a 1791 document that mentioned the sport as "a nuisance."

**WVHS Seeks Help from Ambler Borough Council:** President Carol Kalos addressed their May meeting regarding the future of the train station's Freight House, which SEPTA says must be removed from its present location by August 1. To save the structure, plans are to place it on a trailer and move it. At the meeting, WVHS asked that it be moved to the parking lot across the street, owned by the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority, who approved the plan, and leased to the borough. No final decision has been reached.

**Lower Gwynedd Township Honors Its History:** Thanks to the work of its Historic Advisory Committee, four history plaques are scheduled to be installed. They will be located at Penllyn Baptist Church, Penllyn Segregated School, Equity Corners, and the Penllyn Schoolhouse.

**When were screen doors invented?** The Franklinville School has a screen door at its back door, but none at its front entrance. Was that screen original to the building (1850s?) or added when the Strassburgers owned the property (1920-1980s)? Checking online led to some information. According to 4FeldCo, screens were used starting in the 1860s. Before that, residents hung cheesecloth at their windows to keep out insects.

**Gwynedd Hall, on the National Register of Historic Places, is 200 Years Old!** A festive celebration is planned for September. If you are interested in helping, please let us know. More details will appear in next month's *Valley Crier*. Email to [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org)

**Nonprofit Saves Philadelphia’s TV Music:** The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts is a nonprofit, which started in 1977, doing preservation work of various types. It recently treated and sealed the sheet music for the *6abc Action News* theme song. We all know this tune! A four-minute video showing the conservation work (with melody) is here:

<https://6abc.com/conservation-center-for-art--historic-artifacts-ccaha-wpvi-action-news-theme/14688219/>

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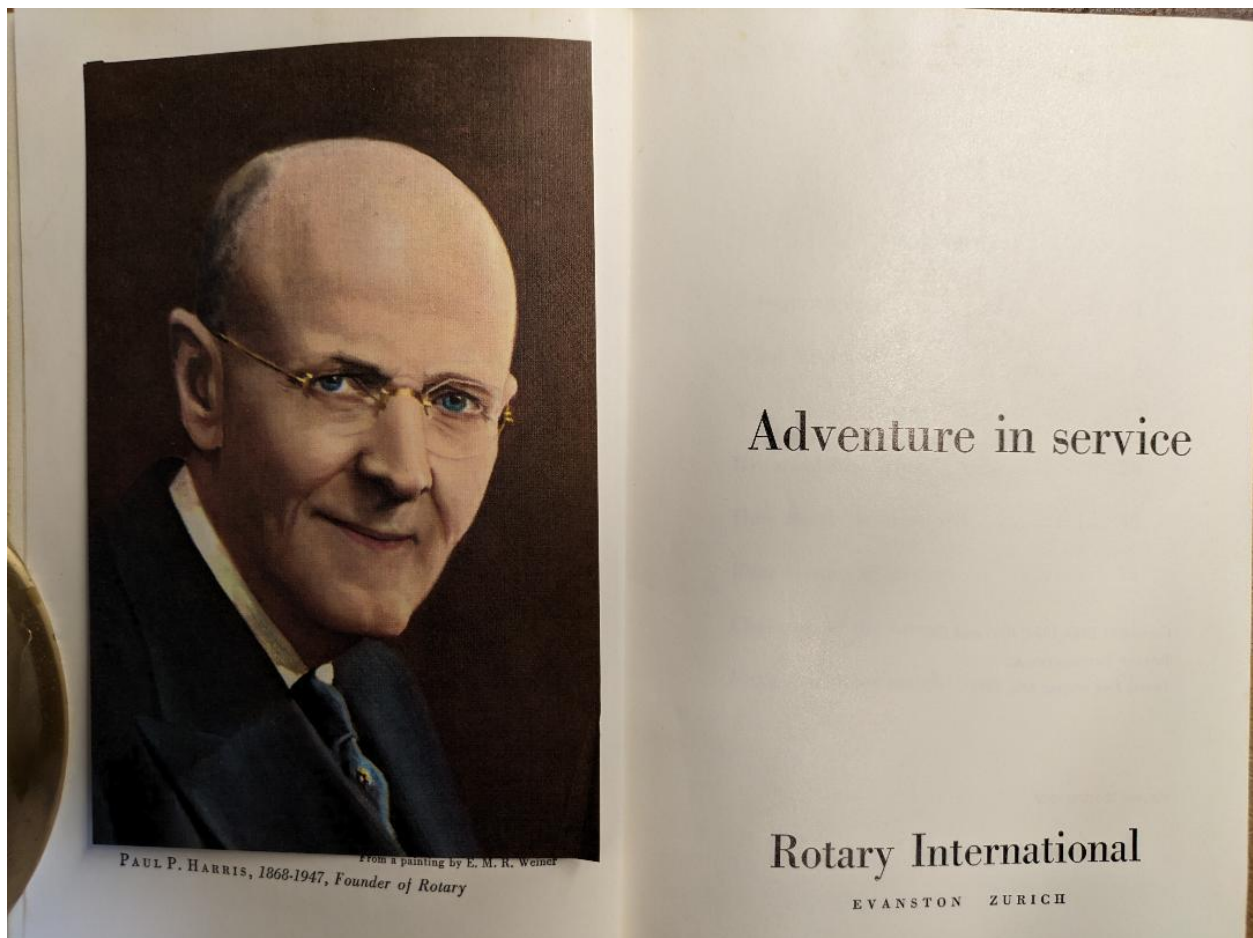
**Flowers Provide Cheer to the 1895 School’s Visitors:** Many thanks to Dotty MacDermitt, who planted bright flowers (marigolds, geraniums, and ageratums) for WVHS. Dotty happily prepares our pots for every change of seasons.





**New Acquisitions:** Thank you to Mike Zebe, who rescued two old books from the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* holdings: *A History of the German Society [of Philadelphia], founded 1764* and the School Directors' Association's *A Brief History of Montgomery County, 1923*.

Thank you also to Verri Allyn, who in December 2023 donated *Adventure in Service: Rotary International*. The inside cover of the book notes that it was a gift to father, Steve McCracken, as he entered Rotary, and Verri says her children, Charles Kennedy McCracken and Jean Baxter McCracken Alvarez, grew up on Penllyn Pike. The book features a portrait of Paul P. Harris, 1868-1947, the founder of Rotary, shown below.



**Freight House Future in Danger:** SEPTA has given WVHS until August 1 to move the Freight House or SEPTA will demolish it. Plans are to move it onto a trailer, and Bernadette Dougherty is providing leadership to find a location for the trailer. President Carol Kalos presented a request to Ambler Borough Council to move the trailer across the street to a parking lot leased by the borough. No final decisions have been made, but fund-raising will begin soon

**Storytellers' Ambler Tours Sold Out:** All the Storytellers' tours were popular during the spring season, and they are sold out. Word is getting around! They will resume in early fall. The Storytellers also continue their work to place parts of Ambler on the National Register of Historic Places. If you are interested in helping with either of these projects, please let WVHS know: [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org)

**Local History Treasures Wanted:** Do you have items tucked away in your attic or basement that reflect life along the Wissahickon in decades gone by? WVHS is on the lookout for artifacts, photos, documents, or any pieces of history related to our area's past. Whether it is a family heirloom, a vintage photograph of a building or landscape, a program of an event, or an event t-shirt, we would like to hear about them! Help us celebrate our community's rich history. Please contact [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org).

**1895 School and Franklinville School Are Open:** For an appointment for a tour of either (or both), please email to [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org).

**WVHS Docent/New Member Orientation:** If you are a new member and/or want to be a docent, please plan to attend a short “training” session at a time convenient for you. RSVP to [Info@WVHS.org](mailto:Info@WVHS.org)

**WVHS appreciates your contributions:** Please make your check payable to "WVHS" and mail to WVHS, P.O. Box 96, Ambler, PA 19002. Or you can donate using *PayPal*. At <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/>, click “Donate” and follow the prompts.

**Welcome New Members!** Phil Williams, Mayreen Schreiber, Sara Frye, and Carol Ingald

**From the Board of Directors:**

1. An Open House at the 1895 School and the Franklinville School are scheduled for October. The date, a Sunday afternoon, will be announced soon, depending on the football schedule.
2. A board committee is investigating the next step of renovations at the Franklinville School. It will probably include outside painting.
3. Board members were re-elected for another term, the next two Society Years, 2024-26.
4. In a special meeting, the Board reached consensus that it would not take financial responsibility for moving and storing Ambler’s Freight House. Although the value of the structure is recognized because it is Ambler’s first passenger depot, the historical society’s priority is the Franklinville School. Donations for the Freight House will still be tracked through WVHS until a Friends of the Freight House can be formed.
5. Board members are still contacting potential speakers for the 2024-2025 Society Year.

**Mark Your Calendar:**

- **Monday, September 9, 7:00 PM, First Meeting for 2024-2025.** The speaker will be Jim Rubillo, a Lower Gwynedd resident and officer of Old York Road Historical Society. He has presented often on local history topics throughout our area, and his remarks will mark an outstanding kick-off to another WVHS Speaker Series for the coming Society Year.
- **Monday, October 14, 7 PM,** Speaker is Dana Dorsey, Executive Director of the Highlands Gardens and Mansion
- **Sept 14, 2025, 1-4 PM, William Penn Inn, WVHS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration (Save the Date)**

**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.**

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