

A 1900s Baseball Great, WHO GREW UP DOWN THE STREET



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A MONUMENT TO A LOCAL baseball great, Dick Harley, stands at Blue Bell's Wentz Run Park. The township's residents are fortunate to have this nearby park because, surprisingly, this large tract remained intact, without subdivisions, for centuries. Three generations of the Harley family cared for this land, followed by the Olson family, who sold to Whitpain Township.

Richard Joseph "Dick" Harley (1872-1952) attended today's St. Joseph's Preparatory School, then Georgetown University. After playing both football and baseball, he graduated in 1896 as the vice president of his class. Then he played for St. Louis and several other major league teams. (In those days, professional players moved around often, looking for the highest pay.)

An outfielder, he was known for his speed, his at-bats record, and his "circus catches." Later he coached at several schools, including Penn State, University of Pittsburgh, and Villanova.

Harley was born and raised at the Boxwood House, former offices of the Historical Society of Whitpain Township and now the office of our State Representative, Liz Hanbidge, at 1098 West

Skippack Pike. The historic building with its tall windows and green shutters was built in 1852 (the original section in 1730).

Edward Harley, Dick's grandfather, an Irish immigrant, first purchased land in Whitpain Township in 1868. In 1871, he bought the 47-acre Boxwood Farm, where the Wentz Run Park is today. He also owned a 10-acre tract, now the Center Square Shopping Center.

The author, Carol Kalos, is president of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society, which works to promote and preserve the history and historic resources of Ambler Borough, Whitpain Township, and Lower Gwynedd Township. In May, the society honored Dick Harley at a dedication of his monument at Harley Field, attended by township officials, Harley relatives, and the Connie Mack League's baseball players. Discover more at www.WValleyHS.org.