
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 4, Number 1

The Valley Crier

September 2024

First Speaker of the new Society Year--on Monday, Sept 9, 7 PM, at the

WVHS School: WVHS welcomes Jim Rubillo, a retired educator and the Vice President of Old York Road Historical Society, who will speak on “Little Known Revolutionary War Naval Encounters: Philadelphia to Cape May.” His presentation will examine three encounters between the British Navy and Colonial Forces. Although significant to history, these are events overlooked in history classes. Light refreshments will be provided by the WVHS Board of Directors.

New Whitpain Township Manager Will Attend September Meeting: Eric Traub, Whitpain Township’s new manager, will begin the 2024-2025 Society Year with brief remarks at our first meeting of the season. Traub also plans to tour the building, owned by the township. WVHS offers a hearty welcome!

Save the Date--WVHS Fundraiser to Celebrate Gwynedd Hall's 200th

Anniversary: A committee of WVHS members have been meeting to plan a weekend of activities at this grand old house in Lower Gwynedd Township, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. **Plan to attend on Friday, October 4, 4-7 PM, (beer, wine, and a signature drink) or for the Sunday Open House, October 6, 1-4 PM. On both dates, guided history tours will offer a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see the interior of this lovely 17-room residence** and its gardens, located on Meetinghouse Road. Gwynedd Hall is the residence of former WVHS board member Matt Metcalf. Due to the limited space, valet parking will be required. For both dates, light refreshments will be served. Business casual attire. Details about this major fund-raiser's reservations/ticket sales will be available on the WVHS website. Also, look for an email invitation, coming soon.



WVHS Fund-raiser Will Celebrate Gwynedd Hall's 200th Anniversary

Two WVHS Open House Events Scheduled for the Fall Season. Both of our museums are listed in the National Register of Historic Places:

- **Sunday, Oct 20, 1-3 PM, 1895 Open House, “The 1960s”:** See the historical society’s best examples of the 1960s, from ephemera to a private collection about NASA space exploration, to a recent donation to the society—a large collection of magazines and newspapers about the Kennedy family and the Kennedy assassination.
- **Sunday, Nov 3, 1-3 PM, Franklinville School:** See Whippain’s 19th-century education. Hear about thousands of guests arriving for a picnic and the tale of why a phone line was installed there—for just one day! And more...

WVHS Dues are Due: September 1st marks the beginning of a new school year and the beginning of the WVHS Society Year, 2024-2025. Dues remain the same as last year. Although WVHS is an all-volunteer organization, it still has expenses, so many members “round up” to help WVHS with its expenditures for speakers’ fees, insurance, heating oil, archival supplies, and the like. For details about Membership Levels and Payments (online or by mail), please go to

<https://www.wvalleyhs.org/join-us-2/>

Ambler History Walking Tours Begin in September: The Ambler tours include a walk down Butler Avenue, filled with history and fun stories. Presented by the Ambler Storytellers, one of WVHS’s most active

committees, all tours are on Saturdays, starting at 3 PM. This season's dates:

- Saturday, Sept. 21 and 28
- Saturday, Oct. 12 and 19
- Saturday, Nov. 2 and 16
- Saturday Dec. 7

Registration is required: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ambler-downtown-walking-tour-tickets-974142525517>.

New Publication Promotes WVHS' Ambler Walking Tours: *Wiss.com* on August 18 published the list of fall tour dates. In the article, WVHS member (and Storyteller/tour guide) Peter Wilson summarized the reasons for the tours, saying “[The tours show] how magical the company town was, by showing architecture that is hidden or that has been replaced, and how the town came to be.”

Traffic Light Planned for Skippack Pike and School Road at 1895

School: The state has approved \$1.4 million in funding to make traffic improvements and to install a traffic light near the 1895 School. Whitpain Township notified WVHS of the plans in January, explaining that School Road at Skippack Pike will be widened to meet ADA requirements. As part of the project, plans are underway so that the 1895 School's stone wall and steps along Skippack Pike (original to the building, according to our NRHP

nomination) will be removed and the stones set aside for WVHS. Then a contractor to rebuild the wall will have to be found. The township engineer has kindly agreed to “facilitate approvals and waive any permit fees.” If you would like to see the project drawings, please email to info@WValleyHS.org

Magazine Applauds WVHS Officer: For several years, President Carol Kalos has been writing a monthly article about a local historic site for *Stroll Blue Bell* (formerly *Blue Bell's Finest*), the social magazine of the Blue Bell Country Club, and the articles are then archived on the WVHS website (www.wvalleyhs.org/blue-bells-finest). The *Stroll's* August 2024 issue covered the WVHS May meeting, which honored outgoing Whitpain Township Manager Roman Pronczak, calling him the “glue for Whitpain,” and it recognized WVHS President Carol Kalos, stating, “While volunteerism is declining, we applaud everyday heroes who invest their time in worthy causes, like history. We are one of the oldest townships in Montgomery County, and a rich history surrounds us.” The *Stroll* plans to honor a new volunteer each month with Carol becoming the first volunteer to be honored as a “Community VIP.”

Historic Ingersoll House to be a Residence: Lower Gwynedd Township has announced its auction sale of the 1760s Claytor-Ingersoll House, once called Spring House Farm. (The datestone on the barn reads 1787.) The

house has been unoccupied for over forty years! The deed will be recorded with a restriction that the façade not be changed without permission.



Lower Gwynedd's Claytor-Ingersoll House, Purchased for Restoration

History of Spring House Farm: WVHS Vice President Joe Langella also serves on the Lower Gwynedd Township Historical Advisory Committee. In an article on the Lower Gwynedd website about the history of the property, he notes that it is associated with the Leni Lenape, the spy James Bond, and the Ingersoll family, descendants of Jared Ingersoll, an American

Founding Father, member of the Continental Congress, and signer of the United States Constitution. See his details at

<https://www.lowergwynedd.org/information/ingersoll-house-barn-auction/>.



Vice President Joe Langella at the Ingersoll House, examining the shelves built into the fireplace mantel surround (August 2022)

Philadelphia Magazine Lauds Ambler Dining: In its July issue, Ryan Genova describes “Where to Live in the Philadelphia Area if You Love Walking to Great Restaurants.” *Around Ambler* summarized the article, stating, “The seven-block stretch of Butler Avenue extending east from [the] Ambler Regional Rail station offers live theater, movies, concerts, art festivals, and a slew of globe-trotting restaurants.”

A New Display at the Whitpain Township Building: Recently Marie and Tom Goldkamp changed the display case to photos and articles about “The Boxwood,” originally built in 1730, and presently the offices of Pennsylvania Representative Liz Hanbidge. It was the former headquarters for the Historical Society of Whitpain, begun in 1983 to save the Franklinville School, merging with WVHS in 2015.



New Display at the Whitpain Township Building Highlights “The Boxwood.”

Efforts to Preserve Historic Documents: Philadelphia has “billions of old documents [to be preserved],” according to Erica Sloan, the archivist, who reports, “We have a Will Index on microfilm that covers the first 10 deed

books from 1784-1863. After that we may have a handful of wills sprinkled throughout our collections, depending on their provenance.”

<https://hiddencityphila.org/2024/01/where-theres-a-will-theres-a-way-efforts-to-preserve-historic-philly-documents-begin/>

A Thought to Consider: “Doing” history means interpreting documents and objects.

National Trust for Historic Preservation Provides New Flexible

Approach to Historic Building Exteriors: The National Park Service has changed its guidelines, so that products like Hardie® siding “meets revised federal guidance for the use of substitute materials in historic preservation.” The National Trust for Historic Preservation explains its thinking: “In the past, the federal guidance focused on repairing buildings with the original materials. Certain materials may no longer be available, there may not be skilled workers capable of installing them, or it may not be economically feasible to purchase and maintain them over time. Building and fire codes also changed. [So] the National Park Service expanded its list of suitable materials....”

Receiving *The Quill* a Benefit of WVHS membership: In July, Paid Members received the year’s second issue of this WVHS publication. While *The Valley Crier* covers WVHS monthly news and announcements, *The Quill* presents the results of history research on a local topic and includes

citations to aid future researchers. The most recent issue investigated why the Franklinville School and other one-room schools in our area were built and why they were architecturally similar. The answer is Ancient Greece! Members will have to read the article to make all the connections.

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.

1895 School and Franklinville School Are Open: For an appointment for a tour of either (or both), please email to 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

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.

Skippack Historical Society Has Announced Its Fall Events:

- Oct 5 and 6, 10 AM – 5 PM: Skippack Days
- Oct 26, 11 AM – 4 PM: Fallfest

From the Board of Directors' August Meeting:

- The original 1858 records of the Franklinville School are in distress. Presently at the Historical Society of Montgomery County, the ledger containing the description of the Whitpain School Board's decision to build the one-room school is moldy but its staff reports that the book is being treated; it is in a freezer.
- The Franklinville School should be painted, inside and out. Verco Painting, who painted at the 1895 School, has provided an estimate. Fund-raising is being planned.
- Board members will assist with registration at the Gwynedd Hall 200th Anniversary Celebration.

Calendar of Events for 2024-2025

- September 9 (Monday), 7 PM, at the 1895 School—Introduction of new Whitpain Twp Manager + Speaker, Jim Rubillo, a retired educator and Vice President of Old York Road Historical Society, on Revolutionary War Naval Encounters

- October 4 and 6—Gwynedd Hall 200th Anniversary Celebration. Friday, 4-7 PM; Sunday, 1-4 PM (See article for details)
- October 14 (Monday), 7 PM—Dana Dorsey, Executive Director of the Highlands Garden and Mansion on the mansion's history and its current role
- October 20 (Sunday) 1-3 PM, 1895 School, Fall Open House, “The 1960s” is the theme
- Nov 3 (Sunday) 1-3 PM, Franklinville School Open House
- November 11, 7 PM Michael Martorelli, Evolution of the Coast Artillery from the Revolutionary War time period to just after WW II
- December--Holiday Party, Pot-luck
- January—no meeting
- February—Show n Tell—Members tell about a favorite item
- March, April, May--TBA
- June—Pot-luck Picnic
- Sept 14, 2025, 1-4 PM, William Penn Inn, WVHS 50th 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.
