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*Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 4, Number 2*

*The Valley Crier* 

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*October 2024*

**Our Speakers' Series Continues on Monday, Oct 14, 7 PM, at the**

**WVHS School:** WVHS welcomes Dana Dorsey, Executive Director of the Highlands Garden and Mansion, who will present on the mansion's history and its current role. Its website describes The Highlands Mansion and Gardens, dating from 1796, as "44-acres with a late 18<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian mansion and two-acre formal garden. Surrounded by massive stone walls, the gardens offer a beautiful example of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century estate-gardening with an unusual blend of horticulture and architecture. The site features nine outbuildings, including a bank barn, springhouse, greenhouse, smokehouse and Gothic Revival gardener's cottage."

Light refreshments will be served, and volunteers are still needed to bring snacks. (Please email to [info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:info@WValleyHS.org) )



*The Highlands Mansion in Fort Washington*

**WVHS Fundraiser to Celebrate Gwynedd Hall's 200<sup>th</sup> 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 and his family. 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 are available on the WVHS homepage: [www.WValleyHS.org](http://www.WValleyHS.org)** . Also, look for an email invitation.



*WVHS Fund-raiser Will Celebrate Gwynedd Hall's 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with Tours*

**Two WVHS Open House Events Are Scheduled for the Fall Season. Both of our museums are listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Volunteers are needed for both):**

**Sunday, Oct 20, 1-3 PM, 1895 Open House, "Remembering the 1960s":**

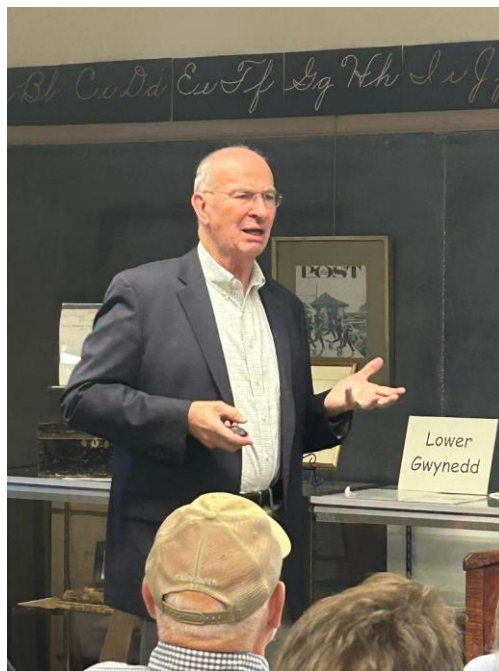
See the historical society's best examples of the 1960s, from ephemera to a private collection about NASA space exploration, to a recent donation to the society—a large collection of magazines and newspapers about the

Kennedy family and the Kennedy assassination. “Remembering the 1960s,” has been assembled to highlight artifacts and documents recently donated along with artifacts from the WVHS collection and from private collectors. Centre Square’s vintage fire truck will be there, too!

**Sunday, Nov 3, 1-3 PM, Franklinville School Open House:** “Back to School in the 1800s.” Ever wonder what it was like to attend school before the American Civil War? Continued renovation projects by the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society to the historic Franklinville School have provided the community with the only one-room schoolhouse in the region that is open to the public. Once an early 20th-century gathering space for community picnics and sometimes thousands of guests, the Franklinville Schoolhouse was first utilized in 1858, originally part of Whitpain School District. The school was bought by The Strassburgers, owners of today's Normandy Farm, who saved the school through a purchase in 1916 and added a movie projection room in the rear of the structure in the 1930s. The Franklinville School is listed in the National Registry of Historic Places. The address is 1701 Morris Road, Blue Bell, PA. (Submitted by Michael Leibrandt, lightmedia)

**September Speaker Informs and Entertains:** Jim Rubillo, a retired educator and officer at Old York Road Historical Society, spoke on “Little Known Revolutionary War Naval Encounters: Philadelphia to Cape May.” His presentation examined three battles, often overlooked by history

classes, between the British Navy and Colonial Forces: the Battle of Turtle Gut, the Siege of Fort Mifflin, and the Battle of Cape May. He explained that the Colonies had no navy, so they commissioned privateers to protect the coast. In most cases, the sailors were pirates who backed the ideals of the Revolution, but also made a profit by selling “stray” cargo. Although outgunned, these Colonial forces used trickery and persistence to win battles. After his amusing narrative, he concluded that both the pirates and General Washington were successful in defeating the British because the Patriots pestered and demoralized their opponent.



***Jim Rubillo Discusses The Battle of Turtle Gut...and More***

**New Whitpain Township Manager Attends September Meeting:** As WVHS guests offered a hearty welcome, Eric Traub, Whitpain Township's new manager, introduced himself to WVHS. He summarized his career, noting that he had been the financial officer for Lower Merion Township before coming to Whitpain. Originally from New York, he holds a master's degree in public administration and, important for WVHS, a bachelor's degree in history. The 1895 School is owned by the township, and in years past, WVHS held a little ceremony to pay the required one-dollar rent. This ritual was "lost" during the pandemic but revived this year because it's not every year we have a new manager. Prior to taking Traub on a brief tour of the building, President Carol Kalos presented Traub with a framed dollar bill. A portion of the certificate appears here:

*WISSAHICKON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

IN SOCIETY YEAR 2024-2025

WELCOMES

WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP'S NEW MANAGER

**ERIC TRAUB**

AND

GRATEFULLY OFFERS THIS *ONE DOLLAR* TO

**WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP**

IN PAYMENT FOR RENTAL OF

**THE 1895 PUBLIC SCHOOL**

A TRADITION SINCE 1982



***New Whitpain Manager Receives \$1***

**WVHS Dues are Due:** September 1<sup>st</sup> marked 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/>

**Whitpain Township Seeks Volunteers for New Township Commission:**

A new Arts and Culture Commission is being formed. **So that this group presents some history programs, history lovers who are residents of**

**Whitpain Township** should apply to become part of the commission! The township states, “The purpose of the Arts and Culture Commission is to organize and promote initiatives in the Township to celebrate the rich artistic and cultural heritage of Whitpain Township and provide meaningful artistic and cultural experiences to the residents of Whitpain Township.” To apply, see the township’s website:

<https://www.whitpaintownship.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=914>

**Ambler History Walking Tours for Fall Season:** 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 start at 3 PM. This season’s remaining dates:

- 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>.

**Continuing NRHP Research for Ambler Borough:** A small group of Ambler residents, part of the Storytellers, meet each Wednesday evening at the Ambler Library to complete the application for Ambler to be listed on the NRHP. They have prepared a map, showing all the “old” buildings in the borough, and they are compiling the town’s history to meet the requirements.



## **WVHS works daily to ...**

- Preserve the Franklinville School, owned by WVHS
- Bring visitors to the area
- Make history accessible (Events are free and open to the public)
- Conserve and curate our Collection with care
- Offer our Collection online
- Communicate with the community and municipal officials
- Research the past
- Advise on the preservation of historic structures
- Honor the Native Lenape
- Build community and offer it access
- Share our diversity (and common) experiences
- Find and develop new leaders
- Conserve resources and save the environment
- Build an endowment fund
- Develop a broad audience

We truly appreciate your donations and your volunteer hours!

**Whitpain History is Available on the WVHS Website:** *The Stroll*, a magazine for residents of Blue Bell Country Club, publishes a local history article each month, written by President Carol Kalos. The articles are then

posted to the WVHS website. The last two issues present information about the nearby Boehm's Church:

<https://www.wvalleyhs.org/blue-bells-finest/>

**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).

**Refreshments Needed at WVHS Monthly Meetings:** If you wish to contribute a snack item, please send a note, mentioning the month, to [Info@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org) . Donations are needed for the upcoming October meeting, as well as for November, February, March, April, and May.

**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@WValleyHS.org](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.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’ September Meeting:**

- The board is considering a speaker for the WVHS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Luncheon at the William Penn Inn, 9-14-2025.
- 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.

## **Calendar of Events for 2024-2025**

- October 4 and 6—Gwynedd Hall 200<sup>th</sup> 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 (Docents are needed)
- 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 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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