
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 4, Number 3

The Valley Crier

November 2024

Speaker on Monday, Nov 11, 7 PM, at the WVHS School, as we celebrate Veterans Day when WVHS welcomes Michael Martorelli, who will speak on the Evolution of the U.S. Coast Artillery from the Revolutionary War time period to just after WW II. It morphed in 1952 into the Air Defense Artillery with Nike and Hawk missiles. Martorelli holds a BS and MBA from Drexel University and a MA in history from American Military University. He has worked as an investment analyst and banker and as a college instructor; for the last 15 years, he has been writing about history. Light refreshments will be served (and volunteers are still needed to bring snacks. Please email to [Info@WValleyHS.org.](mailto:Info@WValleyHS.org))



Symbol of the U.S. Army Coast Artillery Corps

At our November 11th meeting, WVHS will hold a live auction of “Lunch and a Show,” a leftover item from the Gwynedd Hall Celebration, valued at \$100. Bring cash or your checkbook to be prepared. The item includes

- A \$25 gift certificate for Applebees AND
- At the Ambler or Keswick Theater (Renew Theaters), a YEAR's Couples' (Dual) Membership with a value of \$75.



The Ambler Theater, built in 1929, part of Renew Theaters

Franklinville School Open House this Sunday: Join us on Sunday, November 3, 1-3 PM, at the Franklinville School, owned by WVHS. On the National Register of Historic Places, the structure has not changed since it was built in 1858. However, find out about why a movie projection room was added to the rear of the structure in the 1930s. (It still has no heat and no water, so be prepared.) Learn about “free public education,” in the United States, a new concept first presented in Pennsylvania with its 1843 legislation.

The school is located at 1701 Morris Road, near the entrance to the Normandy Farm Conference Center. Look for an opening in the white rail fence, and drive up and over the grass, parking to the right. Due to guests parking on the lawn, this event may be postponed in case of severe rain.



Interior of the 1858 Franklinville School, one of the last one-room schools in our area.

WVHS Dues Were Due on Sept 1: September 1st 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/>

Volunteer Day is Thursdays, 12-3 PM: Note the new time. Please come to the 1895 School to spend an hour or two assisting WVHS. We need help with cleaning and accessioning.

Spotlight on Fort Washington's Highlands Mansion and Gardens: At the October meeting, Executive Director Dana Dorsey, who has resided at The Highlands Mansion and Gardens for thirteen years, presented the mansion's history. Its website describes The Highlands Mansion and Gardens, dating from 1796, as "44-acres with a late 18th-century Georgian mansion [16,000 square feet] and two-acre formal garden. Surrounded by massive stone walls, the gardens offer a beautiful example of early 20th-century estate-gardening with an unusual blend of horticulture and architecture." The site features eleven outbuildings, unusual since at most historic homes, they have been demolished.

Using no notes and no power point, Dorsey mesmerized our guests with stories about The Highland's owners. For instance, Anthony Morris, the first homeowner, described the property as his "American Dream." He worked for Presidents Madison and Monroe. (Dolly Todd was introduced to Madison at The Highlands.) Later, owner George Sheaff added the fancy trim: marble mantels, great columns, and the 18-foot walls at the garden. His daughter, Ellen, took copious notes about daily life, and they are all preserved, but digitizing, completed by one volunteer, took years! (WVHS past president Frank Russo saved Sheaff's desk from the basement of Clifton House!) Another owner, Caroline Sinkler, lost her fiancé because he fell through the ice; she never married. The most-recent history of the property is just as intriguing. For instance, neighbors gave \$4 million out of

the \$15 million needed to preserve the adjoining Highlands' acreage from a housing development.



WVHS Fundraiser Celebrated Gwynedd Hall's 200th Anniversary: A committee of WVHS members planned two events at this grand old house in Lower Gwynedd Township, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Marked by its excellent weather, the festivities helped to raise funds for WVHS, educate the community about our wonderful history and historic

buildings, and create a memorable event for guests to celebrate this lovely mansion. On Friday evening, live music, the Ken Ulansey Trio, spilled through the tall, open windows to greet our guests. It is noteworthy that all the WVHS presidents were there: Frank Russo, Mark Ashton, Russ Bellavance, and Carol Kalos. Guests also appeared on Sunday afternoon for a leisurely stroll through the house and gardens. For both days, raffle baskets provided prizes, donated by members, local nonprofits and businesses.

WVHS tour guides Russ Bellavance, Megan Diehl, Jane Douglass, and Carol Kalos led small groups (70 guests in all) throughout the 17-room house, pointing out aspects of the architecture and relating the stories of the home's prosperous owners. Past President Russ Bellavance noted, "People who like old houses are truly interesting people!"

Today Gwynedd Hall is the residence of former WVHS board member Matt Metcalf and his family. A hearty thank-you to them for opening their private residence to the public to support and celebrate local history!

Nicholas Biddle Wainwright (1914-1987), who once owned Gwynedd Hall (at the time called Wainwright Hall), was President of the Library Company of Philadelphia and Director of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. As a history researcher, he compiled much history about his own property, and his wife prepared the nomination for the National Register of Historic Places. The next issue of *The Quill*, emailed to WVHS paid members, will offer the history of Gwynedd Hall and its proprietors, the result of the research conducted by the Wainwrights and others and compiled by Matt Metcalf as he prepared the notes for the events' tour guides.



WVHS Celebrates Gwynedd Hall's 200th Anniversary

WVHS is grateful for the talent and dedication offered by three special members who volunteered to make this event successful:

- Neil Binkley, a graphic designer and photography consultant, for his design of the printed program booklet
- Charlie Stewart of Inhabit Media, for his outdoor photography of Gwynedd Hall
- Christine Raines, for her photography to preserve the two events

Thank you to the businesses who donated food and beverages:

- Cantina Feliz Ambler
- Deterra Restaurant and Wine Bar
- Panache Woodfire Grill
- Tannery Run Brew Works

Thank you to the Ken Ulansey Trio! Seated on the front veranda, the trio from Elkins Park greeted our guests and brought us all marvelous tunes throughout the October 4th evening. **Bravo!!!**

Thank you to the Event Committee:

- Judy Baigis
- Jeannie Bellavance
- Russ Bellavance
- Megan Diehl
- Jane Douglass
- Marie Goldkamp
- Tom Goldkamp
- Ward Hickman
- Alex Howard
- Carol Kalos
- Joe Langella
- Matt Metcalf
- Mike Zebe
- Sandy Zebe
- Sally Zeller

Thank you to the members who contributed funding for this event:

- Judy Baigis
- Russ and Jeannie Bellavance
- Jane Douglass
- Tom and Marie Goldkamp
- Marty and Carol Kalos
- Joe and Donna Langella
- Matt Metcalf and Alex Howard

Thank you to the individuals and businesses who contributed Raffle Baskets:

- Jeannie and Russ Bellavance
- Blue Bell Inn
- Chanticleer, A Pleasure Garden
- Jane Douglass
- Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site
- Grand Opera, Wilmington
- Carol and Martin Kalos
- NuWaves Salon & Day Spa
- Philadelphia Museum of Art
- PJ Whelihan's Pub and Restaurant, Blue Bell
- Reading Fightin Phils
- Renew Theater, Ambler and Keswick Theaters
- The Rose Group, Applebee's
- Theatre Exile
- Wharton Esherick Museum

- Winterthur
- Woodmere Art Museum
- Sally Zeller

Thank you to those who purchased ads for the program booklet:

Platinum Level—

- The Chong Law Firm
- Verco Painting, Steven J. Vereb
- Russell Roofing and Exteriors

Gold Level--

- Jane Douglass Team, Berkshire Hathaway/Fox & Roach, Realtors
- Foulkeways at Gwynedd
- Marie and Tom Goldkamp
- Schneider's Heating & Air Conditioning
- Spring House Travel

Silver Level—

- Lei Barry, Realtor, Keller Williams Real Estate
- Pleasantville United Church of Christ
- Star Painting & Wallcovering
- Tannery Run Brew Works
- Ken Ulansey Ensemble
- The Woman's Club of Whippany

Lists may be incomplete



Marie Goldkamp and Fawn Ostriack prepare snacks for Gwynedd Hall's anniversary celebration. That's Megan Diehl and Sandy Zebe in the background.

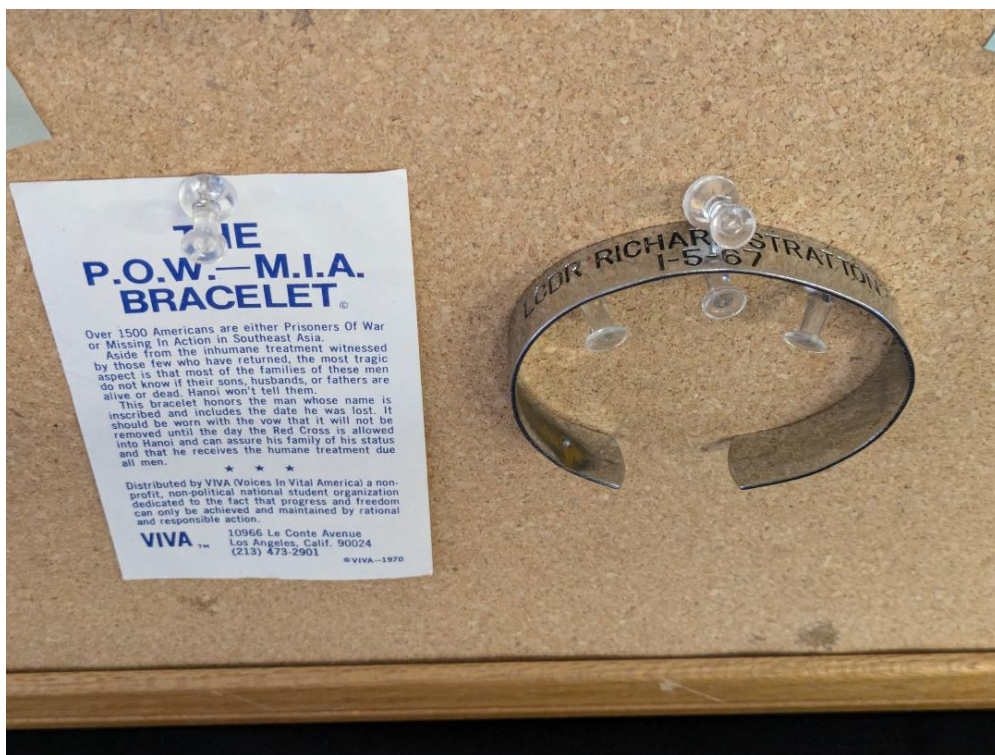


Gwynedd Hall date stone for Warder and Elizabeth Cresson, 1824



Matt Metcalf leads guests on a tour of his Gwynedd Hall home and gardens.

“Remembering the 1960s” Marks 1895 Open House: On Sunday, October 20, the 1895 School looked spectacular with exhibits about the 1960s, including ephemera, Civil Rights, Motown music, and more. Of special interest was a collection of space-exploration photographs belonging to Marie Goldkamp’s brother, who worked for NASA. Another is a POW bracelet for Richard Stratton, who endured imprisonment in North Vietnam for over 2000 days, now a retired counselor. Members Neal and Joe Bradley brought over the Centre Square Fire Company vintage fire truck, and Neal pulled out three of his antique cars to adorn the front lawn.



Vietnam-era POW-MIA Bracelet, meant to be worn until the Hanoi government allowed the Red Cross to see the prisoners. This bracelet was designated for Richard Stratton, held and tortured for over 2000 days! Today he resides in Florida. (His biography appears online.)



Center Square Fire Company's vintage fire truck, parked at the 1895 School, October 20, 2024.

Please Donate Nonperishable Items for Holiday Food Drive: WVHS members have requested that our group conduct a food drive. Please bring your items to the November and December WVHS meetings. The "Wish List" includes apple sauce cups, body wash, coffee, cat food (dry), cooking oil, dish soap, fruit cups, laundry detergent, strawberry jelly, shampoo, mayonnaise, pancake mix, ramen, SPAM, and taco mixes/kits. Is there a volunteer who will deliver the items to the Mattie N. Dixon Community Cupboard in Ambler? Please let us know: Info@WValleyHS.org.

New Fall Flowers at 1895 School: Many thanks to Dottie MacDermott, who planted new flowers at our front door. They provide a lovely greeting to our WVHS visitors.



Here's what *Thrillist* had to say about the most charming small town in the entire state: "Old brick buildings, pubs, boutiques, a dance company, a painting studio, and a playhouse that puts on spectacular live productions—Ambler has the quintessential small-town Main Street, only better. The Ambler Theater, located in a Spanish Colonial-style building with a hidden gargoyle on the roof, regularly plays old movies and new indie flicks like *Citizen Kane* and *Where the Crawdads Sing*. The town's restaurants are incredible...." WVHS is working to preserve those old brick buildings and more, the history of Ambler, revealed in its great, historic buildings! When you are interested in helping, please let us know:

Info@WValleyHS.org.

Continuing Walking Tours and NRHP Research for Ambler Borough:

A small group of Ambler residents, part of the Storytellers, meet most Wednesday evenings at the Ambler Library to complete the application for Ambler to be listed in 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. The group also oversees the Ambler History Walking Tours. Reservations are required and there is a waiting list for some dates, but tours will continue in the spring. For details, please go to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ambler-downtown-walking-tour-tickets-974142174467>



Post card showing Butler Avenue, Ambler, mistakenly labeled Main Street

Do You Need a Holiday Gift? “Save the Freight House” ornaments are still available for \$20. Sales will continue at the November meeting, so be prepared with cash or check book. They are great gifts, which provide funding for a great cause! This precious historic building will be dismantled and stored while Ambler residents make plans for its future.

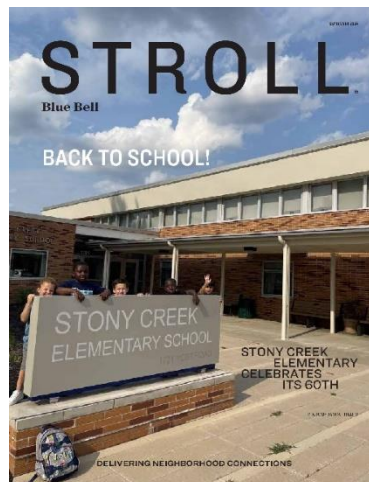


Holiday ornaments will be sold at the November meeting.

Ambler's Rail Parking Lot to be Developed: SEPTA and Ambler Borough are continuing the plans for creating housing at the train station. Details are here: <https://whyy.org/articles/septa-ambler-regional-rail-station-plans/>

Whitpain Township's Historic Sites Available on the WVHS Website:

Stroll Blue Bell, a magazine for residents of Blue Bell Country Club, publishes a short local history article each month, written by President Carol Kalos and illustrated with her own photos. The articles, describing structures in Whitpain, are then posted to the WVHS website. Two recent issues present information about the nearby Boehm's Church, a Patriot hospital after the Battle of Germantown: <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/blue-bells-finest/>



Each month Stroll Blue Bell features an article about local history, written by President Carol Kalos. They are available on the WVHS website.

UPC Barcodes are 50 Years Old: Grocery stores accepted the barcode in the 1970s to better track inventory. As a result, today a wider variety of products appear on shelves, and superstores are possible. Barcodes have moved to libraries, the car industry, and shipping--FedEx and UPS. Most technology vanishes after a few years, but barcodes continue (theconversation.com).



shutterstock.com - 1490283347

Barcodes are surprisingly old, around since the 1970s

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, an event t-shirt, a program of an event, or a vintage photograph of a building or landscape, 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 Tours: For an appointment for a tour of either (or both), please email to 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. Donations are needed for several upcoming meetings: November, February, March, April, and May.

WVHS Volunteer/New-Member Orientation: If you are a new member and/or want to be a volunteer to help with an Open House, please plan to attend a short “training” session at a time convenient for you. RSVP to Info@WValleyHS.org.

On “Giving Tuesday,” Funds Are Needed for Franklinville School, and 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 *Venmo* or *PayPal*. At <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/>, click “Donate” and follow the prompts. Funds are still needed to make the needed repairs and prepare for painting. Painting will not simply look better; it will protect the 1858 structure. Please consider contributing. “Giving Tuesday” is coming up on December 3. It is a day set aside for gratitude and generosity. Show your gratitude to WVHS and be generous!

“Wreaths Across America” will honor Patriots’ graves at Boehm’s Church Cemetery on Sunday, December 15: A Wreath-Laying Ceremony at 11:30 AM (571 Penllyn-BlueBell Pike) is sponsored by the DAR and SAR.

From the Board of Directors’ October Meeting:

- The next issue of *The Quill*, emailed to paid members only, will feature articles about the history of Gwynedd Hall, the result of the research conducted for its 200th Anniversary Celebration.
- WVHS will improve the outdoor sign at the 1895 School after the highway construction at the corner of Skippack Pike and School Lane.
- Plans are continuing for special projects for the *America 250* celebration.
- Plans for the WVHS 50th Anniversary Party (in September 2025) have begun. The search for sponsors will start in April 2025.

Calendar of Events for 2024-2025

- 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 9 (Monday) 6:30 PM--Holiday Party, Pot-luck with wine
- January—no meeting

- February 10 (Monday) 7 PM—Show n Tell—Members tell about a favorite item
- March 10 (Monday) 7 PM—Scott Bomboy, Lost Covered Bridges of Montgomery County
- April 14 (Monday) 7 PM—Mike Jesberger, Battle of Germantown
- April 27 (Sunday) 1-3 PM—Open House, 1895 School
- May 12 (Monday)--TBA
- May 18 (Sunday) 1-3 PM—Open House, Franklinville School
- June 9 (Monday) 6:30 PM—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.
