
Wissahickon Valley Historical Society ~ Volume 4, Number 6

The Valley Crier

February 2025

Our next meeting is on **Monday, February 10, at 7 PM for “Show and Tell”**: Bring an object that is meaningful to you and be prepared to briefly tell us about it. It does not have to be old. Where did it come from? Where do you store it? What is it used for? Why is it important to you? Moreover, consider if, in 200 years, since it’s important to you, it may appear in a museum.



Committee Forming to Plan WVHS 50th Anniversary: 2025 will mark 50 years for WVHS. On Sunday, September 14, starting at 1 PM, WVHS will celebrate at a luncheon at the William Penn Inn. WVHS has scheduled Michael Jesberger to speak about the Battle of Germantown at the regular WVHS April meeting, and he will continue his narrative about events after the battle when he speaks at the WVHS 50th Anniversary Luncheon. **If you would like to be on the committee for this or other special activities throughout the year, please let us know: Info@WValleyHS.org**



Campaign to Preserve Franklinville School: The WVHS Board of Directors must raise thousands of dollars to paint and make repairs at the Franklinville School. The one-room school, built in 1858, is owned by WVHS and appears on the National Register of Historic Places. The structure was saved and renovated in the 1980s by the Historical Society of Whitpain, which merged with WVHS. Furnished as a 19th-century

classroom, the historic structure is one of the gems of Whitpain Township. It has been used for community meetings and as a destination for local school trips. WVHS in recent years has replaced the roof, repaired the front porch, improved drainage, and replaced the electrical panel. For the continuing work, WVHS has already raised about half the total amount needed to replace some rotting windowsills and to paint and waterproof the outside. Although grants have been investigated, no funding is available. As a result, many contributions are needed, and every member is asked to donate (with no donation too small)! Checks made out to “WVHS” can be mailed to P.O. Box 96, Ambler PA 19002. Or go online to <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/donate/> and follow the prompts. Please designate your donation as “School.”

Ambler Freight House Saved from Septa’s Demolition: The Freight House was Ambler’s first passenger depot, built in about 1855 and part of a National Register corridor. In January, Hartland Restoration began to “tag and dismantle” the historic structure, labeling each piece, so the building can be rebuilt at a new site. However, asbestos was found, delaying the work. Once it is complete, Septa will repair the culvert which sits under the building. Sadly, much of the original German Dutch clapboard from underneath the more modern clapboard (identified by Bernadette Dougherty) cannot be salvaged, but some pieces will be stored and reused. (Please see the photos below, taken about January 8, 2025.)



Dates Set for Ambler History Walking Tours: The Ambler Storytellers are planning Saturday tours, starting at 3 PM, for these dates-- April 5, April 19, May 3, May 17, June 7, and June 21. Registration has not yet begun.

New WVHS Display at the Lower Gwynedd Township Municipal Building:

Building: A new display features the history and architecture of Gwynedd Hall, which in 2024 celebrated its 200th anniversary with two events hosted by WVHS. The house began as a fieldstone farmhouse, but as wealthy Philadelphians moved to the area to become “gentlemen farmers,” in 1854, Miers Busch added the Greek Revival portico and pillars we recognize today. The lovely house appears on the National Register of Historic Places.



Reed's Country Store—A Revolutionary War Landmark May Become a

Car Wash: The Reeds Country Store, now closed, sits on 1.5 acres at the corner of Dekalb Pike and Skippack Pike (Routes 202 and 73). There has been debate between representatives of Whitpain Township and potential developers about what type of business properties will be placed at the site. Government officials have stated that “certain aesthetic criteria were desirable for future buildings to be developed there.” They are also concerned not just about appearance but about traffic safety, environmental issues, and more. The Board of Supervisors has passed an ordinance that is being appealed. More details are here: <https://aroundambler.com/car-wash-company-appeals-adoption-of-ordinance-in-whitpain-believes-township-acted-to-prevent-its-redevelopment-of-reeds-country-store-property/>

The Reeds Country Store is located on a busy corner that first held an inn. It was not just a roadside tavern, but a central meeting place for the local community. The property's first owner was William Penn, who sold to a man who sailed on the ship along with Penn to Pennsylvania in 1682.

The first establishment at this site, called the Waggon Inn (with two “g’s”), was built in 1758. Its road sign depicted what looked like a Conestoga wagon (first made by Lancaster County farmers to haul their products to Philadelphia).

In the fall of 1777, during the American Revolution, George Washington directed his troops along Skippack Pike, so they marched by the Waggon Inn on their way to the Battle of Germantown. When the owner of the inn, John Porter, announced that he did not like “rebels” as customers, Washington ordered guards to stand at the door “with drawn swords while

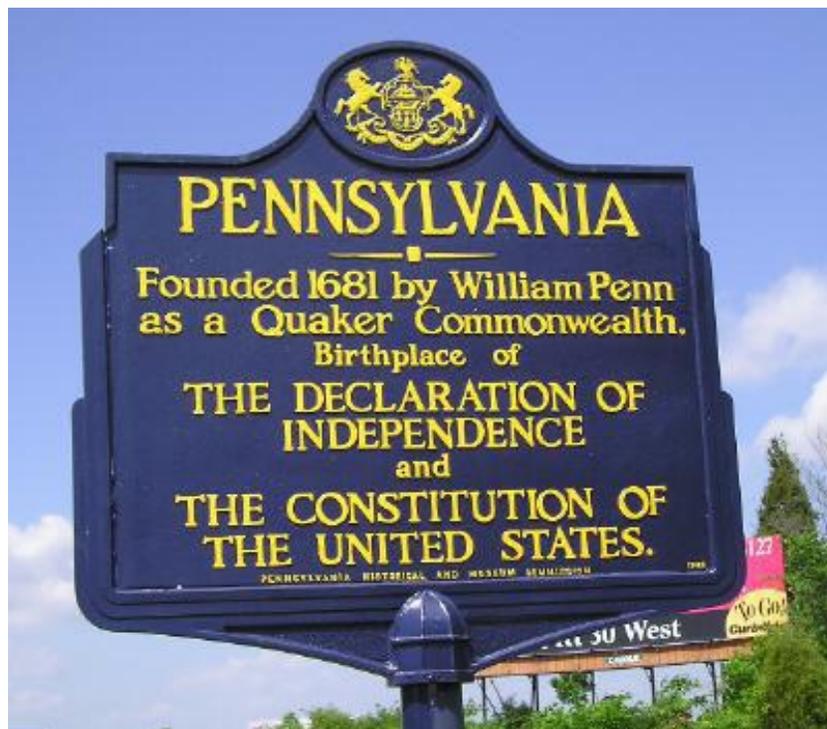
the Army passed” to keep out any soldiers yearning for an ale on their way to war! Evidently, Porter favored the Redcoats: Neighbors called him “Tory John Porter”; thus his business failed. With new owners, the inn continued successfully.

Over the centuries, the corner went from being the location for an inn, to a hotel, to a store. In 1804, the old building was replaced by the new Centre Square Hotel, famous as a site for government and political meetings. (Its red barn dates from about 1870.) In 1925, the Reed family bought the property, operating it at first as an all-purpose store and later as a furniture store, making the Reed business almost 100 years old when it closed its doors in 2019. [Portions of this article first appeared in *Stroll Blue Bell* (formerly *Blue Bell's Finest*) in May 2022. A complete list of all the articles describing Whitpain Township's historic landmarks are linked to the WVHS website: <https://www.wvalleyhs.org/blue-bells-finest/> .]



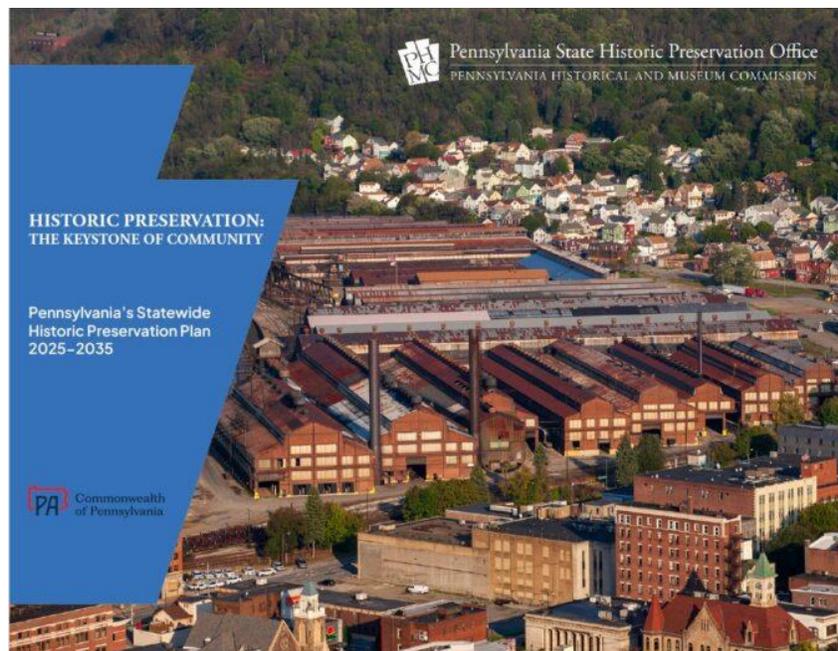
PA State Historical Markers: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) has placed about 60 historical markers in Montgomery County. They are listed here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Pennsylvania_state_historical_markers_in_Montgomery_County. The chart includes the date each was dedicated, its location, and more. There are eleven criteria for selection, and the most comprehensive says, “The person, place, event, organization, or innovation to be marked had a significant impact on its times, and has statewide and/or national, rather than local or regional, historical significance....”



Pennsylvania Presents Its New Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, 2025-2035. Be sure to click on this link to see the photography! It is 99 pages long, presenting a short description of the **top 50 historic sites in the Commonwealth** along with a lovely photo of each one. The text explains the next decade's new plan and how it creates a framework for future historic preservation, which will affect "education, placemaking, identity, tourism, and economic vibrance." Its theme is showing the "connection" between preservation and agencies involved with "environment, climate resiliency, land use, local and regional planning, history and culture, design, and economic development."

https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/phmc/documents/preservation/preservation-plan/documents/historic%20preservation%20the%20keystone%20of%20community%20pa%20statewide%20plan%202025-2035.pdf?mc_cid=c32cbce620



More Contractors Needed for Historic Sites: The *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Dec 8, 2024) reports that “as the area’s buildings are aging and more get the distinction of being historic structures, the demand for contractors with restoration knowledge is increasing.” An historic structure is one that looks the same as when it was built, is associated with a significant person or event, and is at least 50 years old (1975!). The online *Forum for Historic Harvard* points out that “*historic* is a word which implies judgment, since by definition it describes something significant. But *historical* is an essentially neutral term, describing anything which has to do with the past.”

California Wildfires Destroy Two Historic Sites Operated by the State Parks: According to *Smithsonian Magazine* (online), a ranch owned by the comedian Will Rogers and a motel owned by publisher William Randolph Hearst were lost. Rogers’ ranch covers over 300 acres and contained a 31-room mansion, extensive stables, and other buildings. Park officials were able to save horses and “some artifacts and artwork.” Hearst’s Topanga Ranch Motel, built in 1929, sat across the street from Topanga Beach. Designated for restoration, its 30 bungalow-style rooms had been used by builders of the Pacific Coast Highway (1919-1950) and then by tourists.

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, an event program, 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.

The 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.

WVHS Volunteer/New-Member Orientation: If you are a new member and/or want to be 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.

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.

Topics from the Board of Directors' meeting in January:

- Outdoor lighting at the Franklinville School
- WVHS projects to celebrate *America 250*
- Incorporating children's programming to add to the WVHS Calendar of Events

Calendar of Events for 2025

- February 10 (Monday) 7 PM—"Show and Tell"—Guests bring in and tell about a favorite or meaningful object
- 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)—Annual Meeting *and* Anthony Selletti, History of Lazaretto Quarantine
- May 18 (Sunday) 1-3 PM—Open House, Franklinville School
- June 9 (Monday) 6:30 PM—Pot-luck Picnic
- Sept 14, 2025 (Sunday) 1-4 PM --William Penn Inn, WVHS 50th Anniversary Celebration (Save the Date). Speaker, Michael Jesberger

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.
