



Lower Merion
Historical Society

Milestones

January 2026

Happy New Year!

Year in Review

2025 was a year of action and preparation for your Historical Society!

During our Wednesday evening open hours and private research appointments, we welcomed and assisted over 70 researchers. We fielded a wide variety of research inquiries about homes, streets, people, events and everything in between. We grew both our membership and our archives, and we debuted both a [new website](#) and new [collections management software](#).

We engaged with our community through 12 public events, ranging from informational tables at community events to collaborative events with partners. Next year, our [Tintype Portrait day](#) returns in April (stay tuned for news!) and we look forward to hosting a series of informative programs highlighting both new and familiar stories about the history of Lower Merion and Narberth, as our nation celebrates 250 years.

This work is only possible because of your memberships and donations, and we are so grateful to our community for your ongoing support!



Our warmest wishes for the year to come, from the tintype versions of the Board and Staff of the Lower Merion Historical Society! Top row (L-R): Jim Bevlock, Dennis Montagna, Kate Jiggins, Brad Upp. Bottom row (L-R): Paige Bartello, Linda Tasker, Elizabeth Laurent, Lois Cronholm, Erin Betley, Scott Reynolds, Jamie Singer.

A heartfelt thank you to our wonderful volunteers!

Our Administrative Coordinator Paige Bartello and our dynamic volunteers have been diligently reorganizing, rehousing, and cataloguing our collections. In November, we hosted our volunteers for an appreciation reception, celebrating the over 400 hours they have collectively spent supporting the Society during the past year.



Curious about what our volunteers are up to?

Heres one example: volunteer Simon Bank, student at Haverford College, contributed a [guest blog](#), focused on the remarkable wartime story of WWII veteran Mario Barone, as documented in letters sent to his former teacher at Lower Merion High School, part of our [Byerley Memorial World War II Collection](#). Simon has dedicated time in between his coursework and soccer games to rehouse almost the entire Byerley collection!

Even with a few hours, you can make a significant contribution to preserving our local history. To learn more about volunteering with the Society, please contact us at info@lowermerionhistory.org.

Upcoming Programs

Thursday, February 12 | 6:30 PM - 7:30 PM

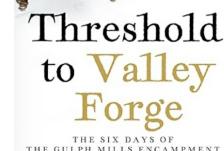
In partnership with Natural Lands, Board member Erin Betley will [present her research](#) on the remarkable women who shaped the story of the Stoneleigh estate.

Sunday, April 19 | 2 PM - 4 PM

In partnership with the Bala Cynwyd Library, listen as author Sheilah Vance brings to life an untold chapter of Pennsylvania's Revolutionary War history at a critical turning point in America's fight for independence.



Sheilah's [new book](#), *Threshold to Valley Forge: The Six Days of the Gulph Mills Encampment*, uses an image from our collection on its cover. Register for this free program [here](#).



Sunday, April 26 | 2 PM - 3:30 PM

Save the date for our Annual Meeting! We will dedicate a new memorial bench on the porch of the Lower Merion Academy in honor of Presidents Emeritus Jerry Francis and Ted Goldsborough, and longtime volunteer Max Buten, and hear a presentation on the history of Lower Merion's earliest library from former Board member Denise Francis.

And in Case You Missed It...

To close out the year, the Historical Society hosted several programs showcasing our growing community collaborations.

In October, we welcomed local author Dr. Joe Lex, volunteer guide at Laurel Hill Cemetery and host of the "[All Bones Considered](#)" [podcast](#), to discuss the history of this local landmark, including stories from his [new book](#) about 52 fascinating women who are buried there (below, top left).

Our library collaborations continue, as we partnered with Bala Cynwyd Library on two programs, kicking off with an [evening program](#) on the history of the library presented by former Board member and librarian Denise Francis, with the support of Board member Erin Betley (below, bottom left and right). In November, a standing room only audience journeyed through 135 years of Horn & Hardart's local history, from the

Automat's groundbreaking beginnings to its exciting revival (below, top right).

Along with Ludington Library, we partnered with Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds Jeanne Sorg for a presentation about the different types of documents that you can access through the Recorder of Deeds office and the interesting historical details you can find in those documents (below, center).



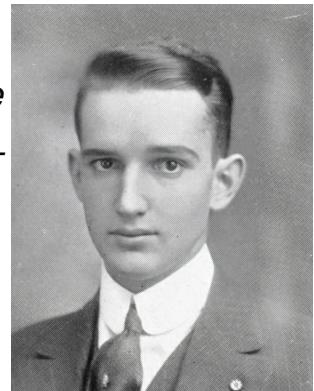
"In our course through life, we shall meet the people coming to meet us", Charles Dickens, 1857. What a joy to meet the people at Narberth's beloved annual Dickens Festival in December! In our final event of the year, Board member Brad Upp gifted 19th century buttons from his vast collection to each visitor to our table.



Historical Society Rewind

Many of you have noticed a re-invigorated presence for the Society on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), thanks to the efforts of Board member [Jamie Singer](#). It may be no surprise that our top performing post of the year was about Lower Merion's connection to the tragedy of the Titanic. Below we feature an excerpt of her work:

The 1912 Titanic disaster hit Merion hard. The Thayer family, railroad executive John Borland Thayer II, his wife Marian, her maid Margaret, and their eldest son, 17-year-old Jack were on board. The family's 4-acre estate, "Braintree," was on Latch's Lane in Merion (now N Latches Lane).



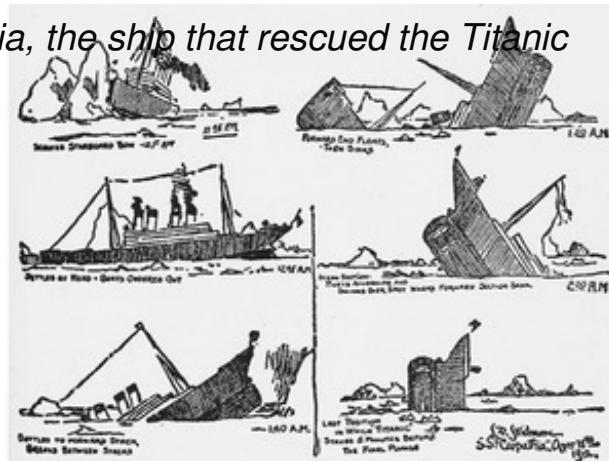
When the Titanic hit the iceberg, Jack lost sight of his father in the panicking crowd. His mother and her maid got on a lifeboat. But young Jack was not allowed to go on a lifeboat. "No more boys," barked the second officer.

As the Titanic sank, young Jack took a huge risk. He jumped off the ship into the frigid water. As he tread water, he saw the ship sink deeper and deeper. And then the horrific sight of the ship breaking in half and the sounds of the 1,500 passengers as the water closed over them.

Jack was able to cling to an upended lifeboat with other men for many hours through the night until they were rescued. Jack, his mother, and the maid survived. His father did not, and his body was never identified.

When Jack was on board the Carpathia, the ship that rescued the Titanic passengers, he described his recollection of the sinking, and a passenger sketched his description.

Later, Jack had his memories put into a little self-published book that was intended just for his family and friends. And for decades, oceanographers believed that the Titanic had sunk in one piece. But Jack's little memoir proved to answer some huge questions.



In 1985, when oceanographer Robert Ballard finally located the ship's remains, he discovered that it had, in fact, broken into two on the surface before sinking, just like Jack recalled. Other survivors had always maintained that the ship went down in one piece.

Ballard also used Jack's writing to determine the wreck's location, 2.5 miles down on the ocean's bottom.



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Mission Statement of the Lower Merion Historical Society

The Lower Merion Historical Society is an organization dedicated to *Preserving Our Past for the Future*. This is accomplished by stewardship of local history, education of the community, preservation of historic resources,

and outreach to promote awareness of the cultural heritage of the Township of Lower Merion and the Borough of Narberth.

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