

## Underground Railroad site at Butler and Germantown Pikes— 10½ acres now slated for a townhouse development

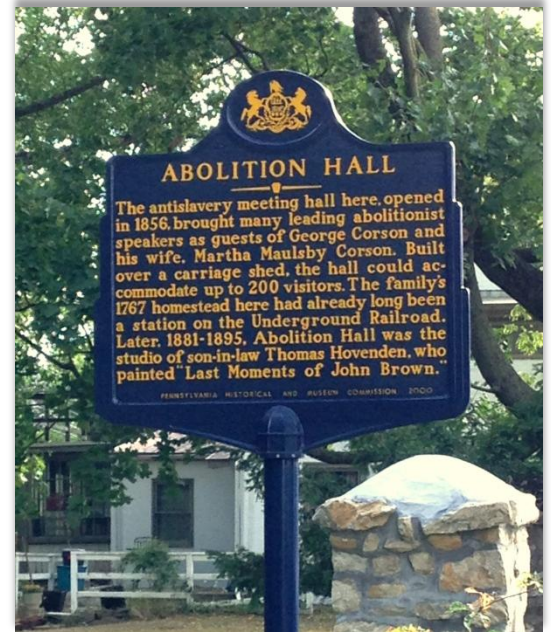
### Abolition Hall deserves better!

#### Background

- This historic homestead was a busy stop on the Underground Railroad. The Maulsby and Corson families were ardent abolitionists, and opened their home to fugitive slaves. They also were conductors on this pathway to freedom, and journeyed under cover of darkness to deliver men, women, and children to the next safe house.
- There are three historic structures on the property—the Hovenden House (at the corner), the stone barn (which fronts onto Butler Pike), and Abolition Hall (behind the barn and visible primarily from Germantown Pike).
- The entire homestead is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- George Corson built Abolition Hall as a safe and welcoming gathering place for anti-slavery activists. It could hold 200 people, and among those who spoke here were William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Mott, and Frederick Douglass. Corson died in 1860, and William Still included a eulogy in his *Journal of the Underground Railroad*. [see middle of p. 721]
- In 1881, the artist Thomas Hovenden married George Corson's daughter Helen. The couple converted Abolition Hall to their art studio. It was here that Hovenden painted *The Last Moments of John Brown*, which hangs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

#### Townhouses planned, but Township approval needed

- The heirs to the Corson homestead have signed an agreement of sale with K. Hovnanian builders, and the firm wants to construct [67 townhouses](#) on the fields adjacent to the historic buildings.
- The zoning allows townhouses, but only with the approval of the Whitemarsh Board of Supervisors.
- In November 2017, the developer filed an application for Conditional Use Approval. The Township Supervisors are now holding public hearings on this application.



State Historic Marker, Butler Pike, in front of the stone barn. Abolition Hall is attached at the rear of the barn. The Hovenden House is at the corner.

- A citizens group, Friends of Abolition Hall, has stepped forward to object to the developer's application for approval; we hired an attorney to argue our position during the public hearings.

### **Friends of Abolition Hall wants a plan that respects the legacy of this homestead**

- We are not opposed to development, but we believe this site deserves a special plan, one that protects the hallowed land closest to the historic structures.
- We are asking that Whitemarsh Township use its [Open Space Fund](#) [see p. 35] to preserve approximately two acres next to Abolition Hall for a publicly accessible Welcome Park.
- We want Montgomery County to support the creation of a link to the Cross County Trail that will bring visitors to the Welcome Park.
- We are enlisting the help of our state elected officials to bring additional resources to the table to protect the extraordinary legacy of this homestead.

### **You can help protect this Underground Railroad site**

- Make a tax-deductible donation to the Friends of Abolition Hall fund, which is managed by [Preservation Pennsylvania](#). If you prefer to write a check, you can find details on that same page [www.preservationpa.org, click on Programs, and scroll down to Donate to Abolition Hall].
- Attend the ongoing public hearings before the Whitemarsh Township Board of Supervisors. The next hearing is scheduled for August 16 at 7 p.m. Check the Township website for schedule changes: [www.whitemarshtwp.org](http://www.whitemarshtwp.org).
- “Follow” @PlymouthMeetingAbolitionHall on Facebook, and share our posts with your friends.
- Contact Senator Vincent Hughes—this homestead is in his district. In a recent WURD Radio interview he told host Michael Coard “we must do something transformational” with this site. Call his office at 215-879-7777 and let his staff know you are counting on him to help.
- Contact the Montgomery County Commissioners—Dr. Valerie Arkoosh, Chair, [val@montcopa.org](mailto:val@montcopa.org); Kenneth Lawrence; and Joseph Gale. Let them know this site is important to you, to our county, and to our nation.

## **Abolition Hall deserves better!**

### **Join us in pressing for a plan that respects the legacy of this homestead.**

The Friends of Abolition Hall is a grassroots association of concerned citizens.

***Visit us on Facebook @PlymouthMeetingAbolitionHall***