WILKES-BARRE LANDMARK REOPENS AS STEGMAIER AT FEDERAL SQUARE

by Larry Newman

The Stegmaier Brewing Company occupies a pivotal position at the eastern gateway to Wilkes-Barre's central business district. Once an elegant and proud symbol of the city's industrial might, the brewery mocked repeated attempts at renewal, becoming a perverse reminder of the community's decline.

The frustrations of the last two decades have come to an end, however, as a coalition of private and public entities complete a rehabilitation which will once again make this important historic landmark into an object of civic pride for the Wyoming Valley.

The brewery complex, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, was constructed in stages from 1863 to 1939 by the Stegmaier Brewing Company, which grew to become one of the largest brewers in the Northeastern United States. In 1979, four years after the merger of Stegmaier and another Wilkes-Barre brewer, the vacant five-acre complex was sold to the City of Wilkes-Barre for one dollar.

For the next fifteen years, the city tried unsuccessfully to entice development to the brewery buildings. From 1979 onwards, over a hundred prospective developers would tour the abandoned buildings with city officials - all to no avail. Proposals for apartments, festival marketplaces, specialty hotels, archival storage, museums, and factory outlets came and went. Some developers were only interested in tackling the complex's smaller buildings. At one point, a local resident addressed City Council and suggested that the abandoned shell become a giant aviary.

In the meantime, the condition of the brewery buildings, which had never been properly secured from the elements, deteriorated rapidly. Trees grew from building roofs, and the structures had become havens for the homeless. A portion of the old boiler house was gutted by fire in 1991. Would-be developers openly called the brewery prospects hopeless.

By 1992, Wilkes-Barre City Council was frustrated enough that it passed a unanimous resolution asking the Bureau for Historic Preservation to remove the brewery structures from the National Register so that they could be demolished. The Bureau denied the request, stating that the buildings retained their integrity. In 1992 the brewery was also listed as an endangered property by Preservation Pennsylvania.

Finally in 1994, city officials and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry decided to try again, undertaking a study to assess the constraints and opportunities posed by the configuration of the historic structures. Their efforts led to an $18 million project, undertaken by a public-

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LEGISLATIVE REPORT

National

Historic Homeownership Tax Credit
Tax bills passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate did not include the Historic Homeownership Tax Credit. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a new analysis of the credit - issued just before the bills were to be voted on - increased the estimated revenue loss from $239 million over five years to $1.5 billion over ten years, effectively killing the bill’s chances of passage. The scoring issue must now be the focus of national advocacy efforts, so that the credit will stand a better chance of passage in a future Congressional session.

ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) Reauthorization
No new action on ISTEA reauthorization is being reported at this time. There continues to be concern, however, for the future of the enhancements program, which has provided substantial funding for historic preservation projects. Contacting your representatives and senators while they are in their home districts during the August congressional recess and letting them know of your strong support for continuation of the historic preservation enhancements is critical to the future of this important preservation funding source.

American Heritage Rivers Initiative
Introduced by President Clinton in his 1997 State of the Union Address, the American Heritage Rivers Initiative proposes to select outstanding stretches of river for participation; provide grants and technical assistance and access to federal programs and national expertise to communities working for the revitalization of designated rivers. The period for citizen comment on the initiative continues until September 9. For more information and to submit comments, contact: Executive Office of the President, Council on Environmental Quality, Old Executive Office Building, Room 360, Washington, DC 20501; phone 202-395-7417.

Supreme Court Strikes Down Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)
On June 25, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its opinion in City of Boerne (Texas) v. Flores. The case challenged the authority of the city to apply its landmarks law to a church property. The decision, which struck down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) as unconstitutional, is regarded as a significant victory for communities using preservation laws to protect historic religious properties. The National Trust for Historic Preservation participated in the case as amicus curiae in support of the City of Boerne, Texas.

Preservation Action Appoints New Executive Director
Susan West Montgomery is the new executive director of Preservation Action, the national advocacy organization for historic preservation. Before coming to Washington, she worked for five years as executive director of the Buffalo Friends of Olmsted Parks, advocating the preservation and restoration of the city’s Olmsted-designed park and parkway system. In D.C. she has prepared a preservation plan for the Anacostia Historic District, helped develop preservation guidelines for the District of Columbia, and is a masters candidate in the Historic Preservation Program at George Washington University. Montgomery replaces Nellie Longsworth. For more information on Preservation Action contact: 202-659-0915.

State

Municipalities Planning Code Changes
Four bills that would have significant impact on how Pennsylvania plans for its future have been introduced in General Assembly.
LATINOS AND PRESERVATIONISTS MEET IN NOVEMBER WORKSHOPS

Through a grant from the National Park Service, Preservation Pennsylvania will hold two workshops in November to bring together the Latino and historic preservation communities. The workshops, which will take place in Philadelphia (November 5) and Lancaster (November 6), will explore the impact of Latinos on historic districts and the impact of historic preservation designation and regulations on Latino residents.

The goal is to increase understanding and sensitivity of preservationists to the culture and history of the Latino community; and for the Latino community to the benefits and advantages of historic district designation to their neighborhoods. Arleen Pabon, former SHPO for Puerto Rico, will be a featured speaker at the workshops. Partners in planning the conference include the Bureau for Historic Preservation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Additional financial assistance is provided by Mellon Bank. For more information contact Preservation Pennsylvania.

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Pennsylvania Heritage Club members contribute a minimum of $2,500 annually to Preservation Pennsylvania.

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For information on becoming a member of the Pennsylvania Heritage Club, contact Preservation Pennsylvania.
ANNUAL PRESERVATION AWARDS

Preservation Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission present annual awards recognizing outstanding efforts in historic preservation across the Commonwealth. The 1997 awards were made at a ceremony in Harrisburg during the Heart of Tourism conference in April.

Preservation Pennsylvania Awards

Otto Haas Award

Henry A. Jordan, M.D., received Preservation Pennsylvania’s highest award for his many and outstanding achievements on behalf of historic preservation both within Pennsylvania and nationally. From his involvement in saving historic resources in Chester County, to serving as president of Preservation Pennsylvania and most recently as chairman of the board of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Dr. Jordan is a leader whose contributions and vision continue to shape how we protect our heritage.

President’s Award

A special award was made to honor the efforts of retiring Chief Justice Robert N.C. Nix, Jr. of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Chief Justice Nix’s distinguished career as a jurist has included three decisions that have significantly influenced the legal structure that supports historic preservation. The 1993 decision of United Artists Theater Circuit v. City of Philadelphia, Weinberg v. City of Pittsburgh Review Commission (1996), and Park Home v. City of Williamsport (1996) give preservation a firm constitutional footing in the Pennsylvania courts.

Initiative Awards

Awards for special initiatives, services or commitment to preservation values were made to the following:

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Deborah Lamborn, executive director of Partners in Neighborhood Revitalization, was recognized for her work in revitalizing low-income historic neighborhoods in Altoona.

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

Binney & Smith, Inc. has led revitalization efforts in downtown Easton, through the 1996 opening of The Crayola Factory at Two Rivers Landing in a partnership with the National Canal Museum and the Delaware and Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor.

GOVERNMENT

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation initiatives have resulted in the rehabilitation of the eastern span of Harrisburg’s historic Walnut Street Bridge (District 8) and in a successful public outreach and education program in conjunction with an archaeological study as part of the Route 219 highway project in Meyersdale, Somerset County (District 9).

MEDIA COVERAGE

Frances Borsodi Zajac covers wide-ranging preservation subjects for Fayette County’s Herald-Standard. Her prolific coverage of heritage-related topics has strengthened the sense of pride for owners of historic properties in the region and educated the public on the importance of their heritage.

PRESERVATION EDUCATION

In a new awards category for 1997, the Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park Discovery Guide was cited as an excellent curriculum package aimed at the elementary level. The package was produced by the Allegheny Ridge Corporation in partnership with teachers from Somerset, Cambria, and Blair Counties working through Intermediate Unit 8’s ACT Lead Teachers Center.

PRESERVATION PUBLICATIONS

Historic Houses of the Sewickley Valley chronicles the history of domestic architecture in the western Pennsylvania community of Sewickley. Published by Edgeworth Preservation; written by Stephen Neil Dennis; with photographs by William J. Penberthy.

STEWARDSHIP

Barbara Barksdale and the Friends of Midland were honored for their efforts in uncovering and preserving Midland Cemetery, an African American burying ground dating to the 1700s and located in Swatara Township, Dauphin County.
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission Awards

Construction Project Awards

Public/Institutional Buildings


Commercial Buildings

Rehabilitation of the Algrunix Building (1894), Titusville. Consultant: Titusville Main Street Design Committee. Owner: Jack Steinbuhler, Jr.


Industrial Buildings


Single/Residential Buildings or House Museums

Rehabilitation of 19th century row houses at 301-315 E. King Street, Lancaster into 24 units of affordable housing. Architect: Tippets, Weaver & Others, Architects. Owner: East King Street Apartment Associates.


Other Historic Properties


Archaeology Project Award

Treichler’s Bridge Archaeological Site (36 Nm 142), Phase III, Data Recovery Project, Lehighton Township, Northampton County. Consultant: Michael Baker, Jr., Inc. Owner: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PennDOT). The site is significant for information dating from the Middle and Early Archaic occupations (dating from 7500 BC) as well as from Late Archaic through Late Woodland occupations (3000 BC to 1600 AD).

PHMC 1998-99 Scholars in Residence Program

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) invites applications for its 1998-99 Scholars in Residence Program. The program provides support for full-time research and study at any Commission facility, including the State Archives, the State Museum, and twenty-six historical sites and museums. Residencies are available for four to twelve consecutive weeks between May 1, 1998 and April 30, 1999 at the rate of $1200 per month. The program is open to all who are conducting research on Pennsylvania history, including academic scholars, public-sector professionals, independent scholars, graduate students, writers, filmmakers, and others. For further information and application materials, contact: Division of History, PHMC, Box 1026, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1026; 717-787-3034. Deadline is January 16, 1998.
The National Trust for Historic Preservation announced the closing of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office effective in mid-August. Based in Philadelphia since the mid-1980s, the office has been the Trust's liaison with state and local preservation efforts in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Responsibility for these states will be reassigned, with Pennsylvania becoming part of the Trust's Northeast Region, which is headquartered in Boston. Patrick Hauck will serve as the staff person for Pennsylvania. He will continue to be based in Philadelphia. The closing is part of overall cost cutting at the Trust in response to the end of federal funding for the organization.

A recent example of adaptive reuse of a large downtown commercial building, the former Kantar Department Store in downtown St. Marys (Elk County) recently underwent rehabilitation to reopen as the Marienstadt Center. The building now houses the Community Education Council higher education computer lab and classroom facility for Pitt and Penn State Universities, a book store, antique co-op, a conference center, and several other nonprofit based organizations. Built in 1929, the four story 18,000 square foot, corner brick structure is located in the historic Diamond area of downtown St. Marys. The rehabilitation project was undertaken by the Marienstadt Corporation, a nonprofit revitalization organization, with support from the state, city block grant funds, the redevelopment authority, the Stockpole Hall Foundation, Elk County Development Loan Fund, local contributions and bank financing.

The Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority, through a grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Lackawanna County, and the National Park Service, has begun work on converting the former Dickson Iron Works/United Silk Mill building into the Lackawanna Trolley Museum at Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton. When it opens in 1998, the museum will feature trolleys and related memorabilia, and there are plans for a trolley excursion that will take passengers to nearby Roaring Brook.

The May-June issue of The Pennsylvania Lawyer features an article on law firms housed in historic buildings. Offices of firms in Indiana, West Chester, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Carlisle, and Jim Thorpe are highlighted. Former Preservation Pennsylvania director John Bonya, interviewed for the article, believes historic buildings offer a more congenial, aesthetically pleasing atmosphere. Bonya's firm is housed in an 1880's Victorian located in Indiana's historic district.

The recently released 1996 Pennsylvania Travel and Tourism Report, prepared for the Pennsylvania Office of Travel, Tourism & Film Promotion, identifies visiting historic sites as one of the top three activities - theme/amusement parks and touring by auto/bus were the other two - among most segments of Pennsylvania's travel. Among Pennsylvania residents, however, hiking/biking was slightly more popular than visiting historic sites. The report, which was compiled by D.K. Shifflet & Associates, Ltd., presents results on both leisure and business travel for the entire state and within eight regional markets.

The American Association for State and Local History will present its 1997 awards at the organization's annual conference in Denver, Colorado on October 3. This year's awards, announced in June, represent 111 organizations and individuals from the United States and Canada. Pennsylvania's 20 winners include: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for Pennsylvania Heritage magazine; Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation Regional Internship Program; Allegheny Ridge Corporation curriculum packet, "Discovery Guide"; Edgeworth Preservation for Historic Houses of the Sewickley Valley; exhibition/publication awards to the Union, Erie, and Chester County Historical Societies, and the Heritage Center Museum of Lancaster County; Greater Pittsburgh Museum Council for the joint museum marketing program "Discover Hidden Treasures; and to Ernest J. Morrison for the book J. Horace McFarland: A Thorn for Beauty.

PEOPLE

Janet Klein, who also serves on the board of Preservation Pennsylvania, has been appointed Chairman of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission replacing Timothy Buchanan who resigned in May.

Charles E. Peterson, FAIA, one of the most notable figures in historic preservation in the United States, is the recipient of the James Biddle Award presented by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia in recognition of outstanding lifetime achievement in the field. The originator of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Mr. Peterson has had a distinguished career with the National Park Service and was deeply involved in the revitalization of Society Hill, where he has lived since 1952.

Patricia Wilson Aden, former director of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, has accepted the position of senior vice president for programs and advocacy with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.

Louis J.G. Buehler, longtime preservation advocate for historic buildings in Allentown, is the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Allentown Preservation League. In recognition of Mr. Buehler's efforts during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, the award will be known, hereafter, as the Louis J.G. Buehler Award.

John Herbst, executive director of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (HSWP) since 1986, has left the Pittsburgh-based organization to pursue other interests. Betty Arenth, director of advancement for HSWP, will serve as acting director during the new search for a new executive director. Also announced was the election of Martin McGuinn as chairman and CEO for the organization. Mr. McGuinn is Vice Chairman of Mellon Bank Corporation. HSWP's newly elected president is William C. King, retired Gulf Oil vice president and long-time Trustee of the society.

Michael Eversmeyer, historic preservation planner for the City of Pittsburgh for the past twelve years, has left that position to join the architectural firm of Perkins Eastman Architects. A registered architect, Eversmeyer will be developing historic preservation projects for the firm, whose Pittsburgh offices are located in the former Union Station building.

Gloria Schleicher, former director of marketing for the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania in Strasburg, is now marketing manager for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg.

Bruce Bomberger, formerly with the Bureau for Historic Preservation, is now curator of agricultural history and industrial technology at Landis Valley Museum in Lancaster.

Shay Miller is the new executive director of the Easton Heritage Alliance.

Chris Magoe, former executive director of the Allegheny-Kiski Valley Historical Society, is now a museum educator at the Erie Maritime Museum.

At Old Economy, Mary Ann Landis has been named Acting Site Administrator and Ray Shepherd, former Site Administrator, is undertaking a special research assignment.
Stegmaier.....continued from page 1

private joint venture led by the U.S. Postal Service Realty Division, Keating Development of Bala-Cynwyd, and spearheaded by Congressman Paul E. Kanjorski and Wilkes-Barre Mayor Thomas D. McGroarty, which is creating 120,000 square feet of new Federal office space in the former Brew House, the largest and most prominent of the complex’s structures, along with a new addition. The six-story Brew House, constructed in 1894 to the designs of Philadelphia brewery architect A.C. Wagner, is notable for its massive cupola-topped brew tower and elaborate “Brewers’ Baroque” Romanesque Revival detailing, all rendered in red brick, terra cotta, and local Laurel Run Redstone.

The new facility’s lead tenant will be the Postal Service’s Information Systems Service Center, which has outgrown its space in Wilkes-Barre’s Federal Courthouse. The Postal Service will lease the balance of the structure to the General Services Administration, which will move the regional offices of the Social Security Administration, Department of Labor, Internal Revenue Service, Small Business Administration, and Office of Surface Mining into the renovated building. The project, designed by Wilkes-Barre architects Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, will be completed in September.

“Architecturally, the challenges have ranged from designing a suitable addition to complement the historic building while abiding by the Guidelines for Historic Preservation and meeting the project budget, to dealing with a building with six distinct floor-to-floor heights and four additional offset floor levels in the Brew Tower, as well as troubleshooting the mix of unknowns and problems that arise in the renovation of a hundred year old building within a sixteen month schedule,” said Jim Bell, project manager for Bohlin Cywinski Jackson. Bell also acknowledges the importance of the renovation to the city in which his firm is headquartered. “The renovation and rebirth of the Stegmaier as a state-of-the-art Federal office building is a hopeful sign of positive change in the City and demonstrates for the wider community the value of preserving significant historic buildings for future use, no matter how uncertain,” said Bell.

In order to make the project possible, a Memorandum of Agreement was completed between the developers, the Bureau for Historic Preservation, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Two smaller historic buildings on the site - the 1913 Administration Building, and the 1939 Boiler House - are being rehabilitated for commercial use. Three other brewery buildings were demolished, following extensive documentation by the developers. In addition, the home of Christian Stegmaier, son of the brewery’s founder, was jacked up and moved approximately two blocks to a new site.

Because the strengths of a historic building were allowed to speak for themselves, Wilkes-Barre is now seeing the rehabilitation of a beloved local landmark. Reaction has been almost uniformly positive, and it is evident that the renewal of the Stegmaier complex will trigger new investment in surrounding properties.

Wilkes-Barre’s mayor, Thomas D. McGroarty, links the renovation of the Stegmaier to renewed interest in downtown development and he applauds the partnerships that made the project a reality. “The revitalization of this historic property is a vital link to the revitalization of our Downtown,” said McGroarty. “The project not only restored an old brewery, it created a viable economic resource that beautifies one of our main thoroughfares and sets the tone for future development in the downtown area.”

McGroarty credits Congressman Paul Kanjorski and the efforts of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District and the Luzerne County Board of Commissioners with making this dream a reality.

The Stegmaier, long one of Wilkes-Barre’s greatest development challenges, is about to serve as a reclaimed gateway to downtown and a monument to the virtues of historic preservation.

Larry Newman is Economic Development Director for the City of Wilkes-Barre.

51st NATIONAL PRESERVATION CONFERENCE

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Sweeney Convention Center
Santa Fe, New Mexico

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CALENDAR

1997


September 6-7  Chadds Ford Days. Open air colonial fair sponsored by Chadds Ford Historical Society. Contact: CFHS, 610-368-7376 or http://www.de.psu.edu/cfhs/home.html

September 7  Holmes-Foster Neighborhood Historic House Tour; State College. Tickets $10. Contact: 814-237-9030 or 234-2816.


September 13  An Evening in Chester County. Annual black-tie gala dinner dance and silent auction to benefit the Chester County Historical Society. Contact: CCHS, 610-692-4800.

September 16  Tour of the Botanic Trail and Dinner at 30th Street Station, Philadelphia. 5:50 p.m. Contact: Friends of Philadelphia Parks, 215-879-8159.


September 23  Inside Girard College (tour), Philadelphia. 5:30 p.m. Contact: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, 215-546-1146.


October 5-7  Pennsylvania Planning Association Annual Conference, State College. Contact: PPA, 717-236-2039.


October 15-19  National Trust for Historic Preservation Annual Conference, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Contact: 202-588-6100.


October 19  Rudy Brothers Art Glass Tour, Pittsburgh. 2-5 p.m. Contact: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, 412-471-5808.


1998


April 19-21  Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations annual conference, Johnstown. Contact: FFMHO, PO Box 1026, Harrisburg 17108-1026; 717-787-3253.

May 3-5  Historic Preservation & Heritage Partnerships Conference Williamsport
Contact: Preservation Pennsylvania, 717-234-2310.
JOHNSTOWN’S CAMBRIA IRONWORKS ADDED TO STATE ENDANGERED LIST

The Cambria Ironworks in the heyday of its operation. Rolling mills and blast furnaces, mine foundry, machine and other shops line the banks of the Conemaugh River.

A National Historic Landmark and one of only two 19th century steel mills still standing in the nation, the Cambria Ironworks appeared to be on its way to reuse as part of a broad plan to incorporate the buildings into heritage tourism initiatives in Johnstown and the Southwestern Pennsylvania region. On July 18, however, a faxed letter to the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority ended year-long negotiations between the Authority and the property’s current owners, Bethlehem Steel. In the letter, Bethlehem Steel announced their intention to retain ownership of the property and to demolish the historic structures within thirty days.

The Cambria Ironworks dates to 1854 and has structures surviving from the 1860s. Proposed for demolition are an 1864 octagonal Blacksmith shop, the brick and timbered frame Car Shop (circa 1881), the Brick Pattern Shop (circa 1870), an Iron Foundry Building (1865), and a huge machine Shop that dates from 1906.

In response to this imminent threat to one of the Commonwealth’s most significant historic properties, Preservation Pennsylvania moved quickly to place the Cambria Ironworks on the listing of Pennsylvania’s most endangered historic properties. At a rally in Johnstown on July 30 to protest the demolition, Preservation Pennsylvania issued a statement announcing the listing and calling on Bethlehem Steel to reconsider their proposed action. “We challenge them to look at Cambria Ironworks as their most important partner in telling the fullest possible story of steel making in Pennsylvania. The trail of industry links the steel sites in Bethlehem and Johnstown - each is significant in its own right and each needs the other to tell the story of steel,” said the statement.

Also at the protest rally, which drew a crowd of more than 350 people, support came from noted historian David McCullough, Pennsylvania native and author of The Johnstown Flood. “There is no question about the importance of the old Cambria Ironworks,” McCullough said. “The age of steel in America can fairly be said to have begun here, and so those buildings aren’t just landmarks in the story of Johnstown, but in the history of our county. Within those walls Johnstown technicians and Johnstown ironworkers - true pioneers - transformed the production of steel, and steel transformed America. What a sad day it will be when the wrecking ball swings and such an historic treasure is gone forever.”

Johnstown Area Heritage Association (JAHA), leaders in organizing the July 30 rally and the campaign to save the Ironworks, have called for a letter writing campaign to the board of directors of Bethlehem Steel Corporation asking them to reconsider the demolition of the National Historic Landmark. According to Richard Burkert, executive director of JAHA,
local partners are hoping not only to encourage Bethlehem Steel to save the historic buildings, but to have the property sold to the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority as soon as possible. Over the past year, at the request of Bethlehem Steel and as part of the ongoing negotiations for the property, the local coalition which includes Johnstown Redevelopment Authority, JAHA, and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission, have produced a condition report, business plan, and marketing study on the proposed redevelopment of the site. If successful in gaining control of the property, these groups will then commence to finalize plans for the site that would mix industrial and commercial reuse with tourism development.

What You Can Do

To express your opposition to the demolition of the Cambria Ironworks and your support for the local coalition that is poised to undertake the revitalization and reuse of this significant historic resource, you can write to:

Curtis H. Barnette
Chief Executive Officer
Bethlehem Steel Corporation
1170 Eighth Avenue
Bethlehem, PA 18016-7699

Historical Significance of the Cambria Ironworks

Johnstown’s Cambria Iron Company, founded in 1852, was regarded by its contemporaries as the greatest of the early modern iron and steel works. The company attracted the best and brightest minds in the industry and was the site of several major technological innovations during the latter half of the 19th century.

Many of the leading figures in the history of iron and steelmaking in American worked at Cambria, including William Kelly, George and John Fritz, Daniel J. Morrell, Robert W. Hunt, William R. Jones, and Alexander Holley. In 1857, John Fritz developed the first three-high rolling mill in the United States at Cambria, a method that was soon adopted throughout the industry. Between 1857 and 1862, William Kelly experimented with a Bessemer-like process for making steel from iron. The nation’s first commercially produced Bessemer steel rail was rolled at Cambria in 1867. The Ironworks became one of the nation’s largest steel producers by the early 1870s and, in 1876, it was the top producer of rails in the United States, manufacturing fully ten percent of the nation’s rails at this one plant.

Johnstown’s iron and steel industry also became the driving force in the local economy. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the population of the city doubled every decade, as migrants and immigrants arrived to find employment in the mills and mines. At its peak, the Cambria plant had 18,000 employees.

The industry’s impact on the city went beyond the iron and steel it produced for the ever-growing nation. The company also provided economic and social resources for the community by constructing and maintaining schools, libraries, and hospitals for the benefit of local residents.

In 1923, the Cambria plant was acquired by Bethlehem Steel Corporation, which continued to operate the facility until its closing in 1992.

In 1988, the Historic American Engineering Record, maintained by the National Park Service, identified the Cambria Ironworks in Johnstown and the Bethlehem Iron Company in Bethlehem as having the most intact structures dating from the early period of integrated iron and steel companies in the 1850s through the 1880s. The Cambria Ironworks was listed as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service in 1989, and remains the only American steel mill to have received this designation.

Background information on the history and significance of the Cambria Ironworks was prepared by the Johnstown Area Heritage Association (JAHA). For more information contact: JAHA, PO Box 1889, Johnstown, PA 15907; 814-539-1889.