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P R E S E R V A T I O N S P O T L I G H T

Transforming the Borough of Ridgway

by Jim Kriegel

For those who wish to power the engine of community revitalization, I have a studied recommendation — fill the tank with emotion. As a former resident of Ridgway, Pennsylvania who left to go to college and did not permanently return until 38 years later, I have seen the stagnation, decline and now the emerging recovery of this most meaningful place in my consciousness. It's a history common to many small towns in Pennsylvania and those who love the houses, schools and grocery stores of their youth as much as I do long to preserve these visual proofs of their pasts. Yes, I said visual. While a community succeeds or languishes on the strengths of the endeavors of its citizens, it is the look of the place that usually causes visitors to form a positive or negative opinion... especially if they are considering whether or not they would like to live there.

Before Ridgway's transformation began, its Main Street combined aging, decay, incongruous structural modifications and improper use of color and materials to create a physical environment worthy of the "Omigosh" feature of an architectural journal. Today, after an investment of little more than \$300K, the same street elicits smiles and positive comments from both those who saw it at its worst and those who are seeing it for the first time. The facades of more than sixty downtown buildings have received fresh restorations that combine rich

Victorian color schemes with structural improvements that enhance their original architectural beauty. I enjoy walking past them, savoring the improvements and imagining more positive things to come.

A funny thing happened in the middle of all this beautification. A number of Ridgway's older, more elaborate homes began to experience significant restorations and acquire carefully planned color schemes. Then another funny thing happened and a trend began to emerge. Retiring boomers who left Ridgway as I did began to come back for more frequent visits. A significant number have elected to buy homes...and their numbers are increasing. And then another funny thing happened; professionals working in nearby communities chose to live in Ridgway, partly due to the availability of stately older homes but also because of the overall community

ambiance. There are more funny things, but I think you are getting the drift here.

Nothing succeeds like success. The regenerative nature of Ridgway's march toward good health relied on surprisingly little money but benefited from a substantial amount of emotion. The people who continue to work this small miracle love our town and never give up. They refuse to be fatalistic or ever consider quitting. They raise money, volunteer their time, enlist others with their vision and infect everyone with their enthusiasm. For a long time it wasn't clear that the effort was going to have a meaningful impact. That's no longer the case.

Much remains to be done and it's an endless journey, but the outcome is assured. With this kind of heart, I predict that the next five years will be even more exciting than the last.

For more information and pictures of Ridgway, please see page 6.



At right, the 1855 Greek Revival George Dickinson House is the oldest extant house in Ridgway. Rehabilitated by Tim Leathers, co-founder of the Ridgway Heritage Council, for use as his home

Editor's Note: Jim Kriegel, a Ridgway native, wrote this article. After retiring, Jim and his wife Sherri restored a historic house in Ridgway for use as a summer residence. They are both active downtown revitalization volunteers.

Send us your stories of positive preservation activity in your community for a future feature in the "Preservation Spotlight."

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MISSION STATEMENT

Preservation Pennsylvania through creative partnerships, targeted educational programs and advocacy programs, advisory assistance, and special projects assists Pennsylvania communities to protect and utilize the historic resources they want to preserve for the future.

Another Successful Year for the Philadelphia Intervention Fund

Preservation Pennsylvania's Philadelphia Intervention Fund, made possible by the generous support of The Pew Charitable Trusts, recently completed its fifteenth year of providing grants for historic properties facing crisis-related projects. Seven projects were funded during the past year:

Philadelphia Historical Commission received a grant of \$16,000 for the structural analysis of the 1897 Church of Christ in response to an application for demolition from the church.

Historic RittenhouseTown received a grant of \$2,985 for chimney repairs on the c.1720 Abraham Rittenhouse Home that serves as the site's visitor's center.

Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust replaced the furnace at Glen Fern with the assistance of a \$7,000 grant and received a \$20,000 grant for the stabilization of the 1756 Woodford following a devastating fire in July 2003.

Friends Center Corporation received a \$10,000 grant to repair the skylight at the 1856 Race Street Meeting House.

Kosciuszko Foundation, Philadelphia Chapter will conserve the 1858 monument "Mother with Infants" by Polish sculptor Henry Dmochowski-Saunders, located in the Laurel Hill Cemetery, with a grant of \$6,700.

Campbell AME Church received a \$15,000 grant for window repairs. This was an unexpected preservation need discovered while the church was in the midst of a long-term rehabilitation.

*Campbell AME Church
rehabilitation.
Photo; Gray Smith, AIA, AICP.*



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Spring Workshop Series

“Rehab, Revitalize and Reuse: Preservation & Heritage Working for Pennsylvanians”

In spring 2004, Preservation Pennsylvania will present a series of four workshops instead an annual conference. The one-day workshops will cover four different topics and will be held in different locations around the state. We will again join with our heritage partners to bring timely and useable information to a diverse cross-section of preservation and heritage professionals as well as community volunteers, interested citizens, neighborhood groups and related professions and organizations.

A brief description of each workshop is below; the workshop brochure will be out soon so watch your mailbox and the Preservation Pennsylvania web site for more detailed information and registration forms.

“Paint the Town” Saturday, March 20 - University of PA, Philadelphia. Everything you ever wanted to know about historic paint colors and painting historic buildings. Roger Moss, author of “Victorian Exterior Decoration,” “Historic Houses of Philadelphia” and Editor of “Paint in America” will begin the day’s events. The workshop will provide practical information for owners of historic homes, HARB members and professionals.

“History Makes Cents on Main Street”, Saturday, April 3, Jim Thorpe. Learn how to promote

economic development with preservation and heritage in your downtown business district. Mary Means, who was instrumental in developing the national Main Street program, will be a featured speaker. The distinctive town of Jim Thorpe will serve as a backdrop for this informative workshop.

“Demystifying the Building Code”, Saturday, April 24, Fallingwater. The new PA Building Code features more opportunities for the rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings; gain a better understanding of the building code and its interpretation. Special guest speaker will be Robert Silman, the Chief Engineer for the restoration of Fallingwater. Also featured will be a behind the scenes tour and reception at Frank Lloyd Wright’s western Pennsylvania masterpiece, Fallingwater.

“Make Your Voice Heard”, Tuesday, May 4, Harrisburg. Join us to learn more about being an effective advocate for historic preservation, take this opportunity to visit your local legislators at the Capitol, and learn how your colleagues from around the state deal with preservation challenges. This workshop will be an excellent chance to learn about current state and federal preservation issues and become more comfortable with being personally involved in the process.

Young Preservationists at Work

Be sure to check out the activities of the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh (YPA). This youthful group (that includes preservationists of all ages) is active throughout the Pittsburgh region making historic preservation a topic of discussion and providing a creative force for the rehabilitation and recognition of a wide variety of historic resources.

Visit their web site at www.communityconnections.heinz.cmu.edu/ypa for more information about the group’s activities.



Stained glass window from the Packer Memorial Church, Lehigh University, Bethlehem. Winner of a 2003 Preservation Construction Project Award.

2004 Pennsylvania Preservation Awards Harrisburg, May 4, 2004

In celebration of National Preservation Week (May 2–7) the 2004 Pennsylvania Preservation Awards will take place at 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 4, 2004 in the auditorium of the State Museum in Harrisburg. This annual event presented by Preservation Pennsylvania in partnership with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission showcases the best of

preservation projects, initiatives and programs from around the Commonwealth. The Preservation Awards ceremony features the presentation of the F. Otto Haas Award for outstanding achievement in historic preservation. The award is given annually in honor of noted Pennsylvania preservationist and philanthropist F. Otto Haas (1915–1994.) Please plan on joining us for the festivities!

Pennsylvania's Historic Preservation Tax Credits Get Closer to Reality

House Bills 951 (introduced by Rep. Tom Tangretti-D and Rep. David Argall-R) and 952 (introduced by Rep. Dan Frankel-D), that would provide state tax incentives for both residential and commercial property were approved unanimously by the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in October. Senate Bill 820, introduced last summer by Sen. Jeff Piccola (R-Dauphin) and Sen. Allen Kukovich (D-Westmoreland), combines the language of the two house bills. S.B.820 has not yet come to a vote of the full Senate.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RESIDENTIAL TAX CREDITS:

- For buyers and sellers of historic residential properties and homes in historically significant neighborhoods.
- A 20% state income tax credit to individuals who purchase and restore older residential properties in historic districts or neighborhoods.
- A waiver of state sales tax for owner- occupants on the cost of materials and services used to restore historic residences.
- An exemption from the state share of the realty transfer tax for owners of historic residences who sell to someone who agrees to restore it and live in it for five years.
- Owner must agree to live in the property for at least five years.

HIGHLIGHTS OF COMMERCIAL TAX CREDIT

- A 20% tax credit on eligible redevelopment costs. The tax credit can be used to offset corporate net income tax, personal income tax, utility tax, insurance tax, bank and financial institute tax, and capital stock and franchise tax.
- The statewide annual cap for the tax credits is \$20 million.
- Individual projects may not receive more than \$4 million.
- A geographic allocation strategy will be developed to ensure equitable distribution throughout the state.
- Tax credits will be awarded on a competitive basis. The focus is on projects that create a strong economic impact, while at the same time targeting buildings of the greatest historic, cultural, and architectural importance.

What can you do to help? You can contact your state senator and urge him/her to support Senate Bill 820. The advocacy page of our web site (www.preservationpa.org) has a link to find your state senator.

Preservation Pennsylvania is confident that 2004 will be the year that Pennsylvania passes this legislation. State tax incentives promise to be very useful in rehabilitating historic properties across the state and in helping to revitalize our historic communities.

Preservation Pennsylvania Staff Changes

In May 2003, after a fifteen-year tenure as Assistant Executive Director, Susan Shearer assumed the position of Executive Director of Preservation Pennsylvania. Former Executive Director Patrick Foltz is now the Executive Director of Antique Automobile Club of America Museum in Hershey. Shearer is well known throughout the Commonwealth for informative and well-planned preservation conferences and workshops as well as her efforts to bring attention to over 130 endangered historic properties with the publication of the annual *Pennsylvania at Risk* list. Susan's goal is to help make Preservation Pennsylvania one of the strongest and most effective statewide preservation organizations in the country and to expand our partnership with organizations, agencies and individuals that share that vision.

In August Susan Cabot joined Susan Shearer and Executive Assistant Carol Bostian to take the position of Deputy Director. Cabot was previously with the PA Historical & Museum Commission, Bureau for Historic Preservation, where she worked with the Certified Local Government program and preservation education initiatives. Susan came to Pennsylvania two years ago after spending ten years as a Historic Preservation Planner in Kentucky. Her chief interest is preservation education and her goal is to increase membership and expand the electronic preservation information network.

Warning! When you call Preservation Pennsylvania, make sure you know which "Susan" you want to speak with. If not, don't worry, Carol will help you through the choices!

Educational Workshop "Historic Preservation: Good Medicine for Tough Times"

Bucks County Community College and the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Bureau for Historic Preservation, will sponsor a preservation workshop on Saturday, March 27, 2004 in Newtown from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The workshop will address some of the issues of sprawl and its consequences with effective approaches

used by local officials, preservationists and environmental activists have used to address:

- Infill construction in historic urban areas
- Environmentally friendly development
- Reusing historic buildings
- Protecting historic resources

- Citizen activism
- Transportation planning

Many regional and statewide professionals and practitioners will be on hand to provide information, experiences and insights. For further program information, please contact Michel R. Lefevre at 717-787-0771 or mlefevre@state.pa.us.

Family Trees

by Kirk Felix,

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources

Up a rise, around a bend, and there it is — a silent, lonely, deteriorating monument to a bygone era. Motorists passing this unassuming sawmill tucked away in a typically hilly section of the southern Pennsylvania Alleghenies likely never give it much of a glance, except to subconsciously note it fits in with the rest of the rural, economically-challenged landscape. It is not noteworthy in and of itself. But in its day...

This is where the woods handed over to William Penn became something big: bridges, houses, barns, railroad ties, mine props, chicken coops. This is where sweat, muscle, and earthly know-how fought back the poverty of the Great Depression, helped America's industry shine during both a world and a cold war, and filled a niche in an increasingly collectivized, sleekly modern, urban American society. This is where one of the many natural resources Pennsylvania has been blessed with was used to fulfill the sometimes-overlooked needs of a mid-century, rural community. This is where conservation, land use, private land management, wise timber harvesting techniques and yes, environmentalism, came together to keep producing, creating, enhancing our lives. Trees go down but barns and... *more trees* go up again. A community has grown — literally. But all the trees, all the 2x4s, all the nails, all the manpower were used to build an America that seems too quaint, too uncool these days.

So much so that when an artifact of this era — a picturesque covered



bridge traversing one of Bedford County's small streams — burns to the deck thanks to a few pyro kids looking for more excitement than their video games or music file-sharing or other modern pastimes apparently provide, many people yawn or never even notice. But I noticed.

This 1880s era bridge that was purposely burnt down in 2002 had been rehabilitated by my great-grandfather and his sawmill in the 1950s. My father helped out by trying to pound a 10-inch spike *straight* through a 3-inch oak plank as a youngster. Sweat, muscle and know-how built something that is now destroyed and can never be rebuilt by this sawmill.

My great-grandfather died 30 years ago this fall. The bridge was a legacy to his life and his sawmill's mission to produce, to create. After this destruction, Bedford County now has 13 covered bridges left — all of them in worked on by someone's great-grandfather. Let their multi-century legacies not immolate in less than an hour like George Felix's.

In Memoriam

Elaine Ewing Holden, one of Preservation Pennsylvania's founding board members and a leader in Lancaster's preservation community, passed away on October 29 at the age of 80.

Elaine's strong commitment to preservation led to her assuming leadership of the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County in 1978, and during her tenure the Trust evolved from a fledgling organization to a powerful proponent of preservation within the community. In 1982 she was instrumental in the creation of the Preservation Fund of Pennsylvania (later to become Preservation Pennsylvania), and she later served as acting president and then vice president of the organization.

In recent years, Elaine focused her attention on farmland preservation issues in Lancaster County and continued to be a strong advocate for the county's heritage as a member of the Lancaster County Planning Commission.

Her energy, determination, and leadership will be missed by the preservation community.

***Editor's note:** This article first appeared in the September 2003 issue of "resource", a publication of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and is reproduced here by permission. Special thanks to author Kirk Felix. This covered bridge was known as the Ryot Bridge, formerly located in West St. Clair Township, Bedford County and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.*



Top left: Jerome Powell Home, c. 1865, The Towers Victorian Inn; top right: William Healy Home c. 1888; lower left, Harry Thayer Home, c. 1906; lower right, one of the downtown businesses on Main Street.

Determined to counteract downtown blight and reverse the loss of business, Dale Lauricella and Tim Leathers founded the non-profit Ridgway Heritage Council in 1997. The facade improvement grant program began in 1998 in cooperation with the Borough of Ridgway and the Stackpole-Hall Foundation. Eighty-five projects have been completed to date, including every Main Street building except one. Community enthusiasm spread to the residential neighborhoods and historic rehabilitation is now a welcome activity.