



Old Morlatton Village MESSENGER

The Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County

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Trust Plans Restoration Effort on Mouns Jones House



Mouns Jones House (1716) - West Eaves Wall (to be restored) 2013

The surviving Mouns Jones House was constructed and first occupied in 1716 by Mouns and Ingeborg and their six children. Mouns had been residing at the site since 1704, presumably in a log or hewn-timber structure. He was the first European settler in present-day Berks County, then on the northwestern frontier of Philadelphia County. The Jones family and their neighbors lived on and farmed land they called their “plantations”, some of which extended over two miles from the river to the present-day boundary between Amity and Oley Townships.

The surviving stone house is a 20’ by 34’ gable-roofed, two-and-a-half story, one-room deep, three-bay, hall-parlor plan typical of numerous dwellings constructed in southeastern Pennsylvania in the first

quarter of the 18th century. Its floor plan and original façade symmetry are similar to a many houses built by or for Quakers in the expanding Philadelphia region.

The modern popular name “Old Swede’s House” pertains only to the ancestral nationality of its earliest owners, and not convincingly to any uniquely Swedish architectural influence or characteristics. Recent DNA testing of descendants of Mouns and Ingeborg’s ancestors establishes that they were both ethnic Finns.

The early masonry consists of locally quarried sandstone and shale laid-up in roughly coursed beds. Wall thickness varies from 16” at the eaves to 24” in the foundation ranges. Based on a published 1886 woodcut perspective view, the doorway in the river-front elevation had been moved from the center of the wall to the northern bay by that date. Removal of 20th century plaster from the inside of the wall revealed the outline of the original doorway under the date-stone.

Early horizontal hinged or sliding casement windows remained until late in the 19th century and will be restored. It became obvious from observation and measurements that the central segment of the masonry wall facing the Schuylkill River has become distended from a vertical alignment by as much as 6 or 7 inches. The “bulge”, visible on inside and outside surfaces of the wall, covers about 250 square feet. The unstable stonework has moved several inches away from the floorboards since the 1965-70 restoration. The 2014 restoration campaign will stabilize the house and return the door-window alignment to its structure and appearance of 298 years earlier.

Are you planning an event?

From weddings and birthday parties to small meetings and gatherings, the White Horse Inn may be the perfect setting for your special occasion. Located in historic Morlatton Village, Douglassville, the White Horse has a modern kitchen and seating for up to 60 guests. For more information about renting this fully restored 18th century Inn, please contact the Trust’s office at 610-385-4762 or info@historicpreservationtrust.org.

From the President

The past few months have been busy at the Trust! On December 4th of last year, the Trust held its Annual Christmas Tea at the house and farm of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Pook of Oley Valley. The beautifully restored house and grounds made a welcome setting for the tea, and the interior was nicely decorated to put us all in the Christmas spirit! The tea was well attended and a grand occasion for all. We wish to thank the Pooks for opening their home to us, thanks goes to all the volunteers who worked many hours to make the event such a huge success.

In addition to the Tea the Trust presented several events and fundraisers last year, including "Muster Day" on May 18, 2013, "Fall Into History" our Open House Tour on September 28, 2013 and a farm picnic at The Keim Homestead the following day. The Keim Farmstead was opened as part of a tour of the Oley Valley and on October 27 Charlie Adams presented his Ghost Stories program at The White Horse Tavern. Just this past weekend we held our first ever "Tavern Times" afternoon event on the eve of St. Patrick's Day where a full house enjoyed sipping homemade beers and applejack while playing cards and tavern games near the old Inn fireplace.

On a sad note, included in this newsletter is a memorial to Vivien Price Bellairs. Vivian was an enthusiastic and active member of the Trust Board, serving as Secretary for many years. I always enjoyed her vivacious company and will miss her greatly.

The Trust has been in touch with descendants of the Jones, Keim, Hottenstein and DeTurck families. We are seeking to contact as many of such descendants as possible as part of a program to engender interest and support in and for their ancestral homes among these families. DNA technology and research has made it possible to develop extensive information about the origins of the original owners of the Trust properties and the heritage of their descendants. We have been in communication with numerous descendants of the original owners of Trust properties as they explore their ancestry.

Ongoing archaeological work at the Mouns Jones House, in addition to finding numerous interesting artifacts, including coins, has uncovered a sub-grade masonry wall approximately three feet from the western wall of the house. We are finally finding concrete evidence of earlier parts of the Mouns Jones House or even earlier structures. Archaeological studies of digs for the construction of new electric lines and cable near the White Horse Inn have also yielded interesting artifacts. The Morlatton sites are a potential treasure trove for archaeological artifacts and information.

Work has continued on the restoration of the George Douglass House and the Keim Farmstead. We are undertaking a project involving the restoration of the west wall of the Mouns Jones House and also the relocation of the doorway in that will to its original centralized location. Much research has been done on the architectural history of all three buildings in the context of the architecture of other buildings in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

The Trust has been active with numerous events, restoration and preservation work on its buildings, and archaeological work. Although we have recently made substantial progress with respect to the history, care and maintenance of our buildings, we have major needs for volunteers and funding. We are currently seeking a treasurer and financial secretary and seek volunteers for these positions. The buildings are expensive to insure and maintain. We always have need of funds, and I reiterate the plea for contributions for the continued work of the Trust as we celebrate our 50th year!



Trust Seeks A Treasurer

The Trust is in need of a Treasurer to maintain all of its financial records. Responsibilities include depositing receipts, disbursing funds, and providing monthly financial reports to the Board of Directors. This is a volunteer position which would require membership in the Trust. Knowledge of QuickBooks would be helpful. If you (or someone you know) have accounting or bookkeeping experience, and are interested in volunteering, please contact the Trust office for more information (610-395-4762 or www.historicpreservationtrust.org).

The Trust is Looking for a used Lawnmower

WANTED:

We need a lawn mower, and/or a volunteer to provide lawn mowing services for the approximately 6 acres of lawn at the Morlatton Village. If you would like to donate a lawn mower we request that it is a zero turn type and have a minimum cut of 52". Any help with locating a mower or mowing service is greatly appreciated!

Trust Aligns with County Planning Commission

As the only countywide agency focused on historic preservation, we believe it is important for the Trust to be an advocate for preservation and a resource for others who care about architecture and history in Berks County. To this end, the Trust has entered into working agreements with the Berks County Planning Commission and the YMCA of Greater Reading.

As part of the county comprehensive plan, the BCPC is updating their extensive record of historic structures, they advise municipalities about actions that can be taken to protect historic structures in their jurisdiction, and they comment on proposed threats as they become aware of them. The Trust and BCPC have recently begun working together to advance those goals. If you are aware of a threat to one of our historic resources, let the Trust know; we may be able to be helpful to the property owner and the community.

We are in the midst of such an effort in western Berks. The YMCA has a facility between Sinking Spring and Wernersville which includes a magnificent historic building. The enormous stone farmhouse on 422 in S. Heidelberg township has been the subject of extensive research and clean-up work by Eagle Scout Mitch Boyer. His efforts have been featured in local press coverage and the info he compiled is available to anyone interested. The Trust has identified a prospective user for the building. Working within the historic stone structure, they are planning to retro-fit the building for modern uses, a practice known as "adaptive re-use". The Trust will provide whatever support we can to further the process.

Historic Berks: Lost, Found and Threatened!

Berks County is favored in having one of the largest numbers of 18th and early 19th century stone buildings in the state of Pennsylvania. Many of them are designated as historic structures. Several have been preserved or even restored by private owners or organizations. However, a number of equally significant historic buildings have been forgotten with time and are yet to be identified among the "found." Unfortunately, many of these are genuinely "threatened." Immediate action is required before they become categorized among the demolished or "lost!"

Prominent in this category is an early 19th century Hain family house, locally known as "the Krick House," located at 4914 Penn Avenue (Route 422 West), Sinking Spring, next to the former Westside Tennis Club.

The Hain family, once one of the most prominent families in the Wernersville area, settled in Western Berks in 1723, leaving a legacy of beautifully constructed stone houses, which were occupied by successive generations. Starting with the George Hain, Jr. house with its circa 1755 elegantly rendered ceiling frescoes—which now grace the Winterthur museum of American decorative arts in Winterthur, Delaware—through the 1700s and into the early 1800s, the Hain family built high-style, lavishly detailed homes in and around Wernersville.

The 1815 Hain/Ruth house is solidly built of limestone with large 12-over-12 windows and a classic center-hall design. The remaining elegant interior federal-style woodwork, including the graceful staircase, is the work of master carpenters who completed fine carpentry in other Federal-era area houses.

Unfortunately, the house has been neglected and was left unsecured, resulting in some interior vandalization, surface damage, and the theft of all the valuable fireplace mantles. Despite this tragedy, the structural foundation, remaining architectural elements, and the roof are in salvageable and sound condition. The house remains dry and solid, but requires stabilization to arrest further deterioration and is in need of complete cosmetic restoration.

Presently, the Hain-Ruth house is gravely threatened. Now owned by the YMCA, the house is tentatively on the market for purchase or lease. The Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County is endeavoring to find partners in an initial effort to secure the building, and then find buyers/tenants for a possible commercial venture in this large structure. Shops, a restaurant, or headquarters for an architectural or drafting firm are among possibilities being explored.



Hain-Ruth House, (1815) on Rt. 422 in Sinking Springs

“Tavern Times” at the 18th Century White Horse Inn, Sunday March 16



History truly did come alive at the historic White Horse Inn Sunday afternoon! It was everything that one would expect among the convivial crowd that gathered there for music, dance, food, drink, presentations, and tavern games! There was music, laughter, lively conversation, ac-

tivities, and fun in every room! People kept coming in all afternoon, and stayed! The venerable White Horse seemed to awaken from its deep slumber, and its fireside and candlelit ambience was magical, and everyone there caught the spirit!

Costumed interpreters lent an air of authenticity as they sat in the tavern room playing a Colonial game of "Whist", and visitors were happy to play 18th century games such as "Farkle", "Nine Man Morris", and "Teetotum". Also available were authentic libations like the 1727 "Chambermaid's Punch", and homemade 18th century beer and applejack, and mulled cider. Food was plentiful with freshly baked scones, Irish Soda Bread, cheese, crackers and meats, nuts and fancy chocolate cookies.

Music was provided by our very own Dr. Helen May who played the harpsichord, and accompanied the Amity Colonial Dancers as they "stepped lively" to their Colonial Era reels and dances. We were happy to welcome back the "Rohrbach Sisters" who played exquisitely on the harp and cello.

In keeping with our mission to interpret and educate, several programs were offered. Eleanor Shaner, a key founder of the Trust, gave a brief talk about the early years of the Trust and the various historic structures it has restored and maintains. Those interested in beer making (and tasting) enjoyed homebrewed Indian Pale Ales, Stoudts, Applejack and Rye Whiskey prepared by local brewmasters Frank McMahon and friends while Frank gave a lively presentation about 18th century Taverns and Pastimes.

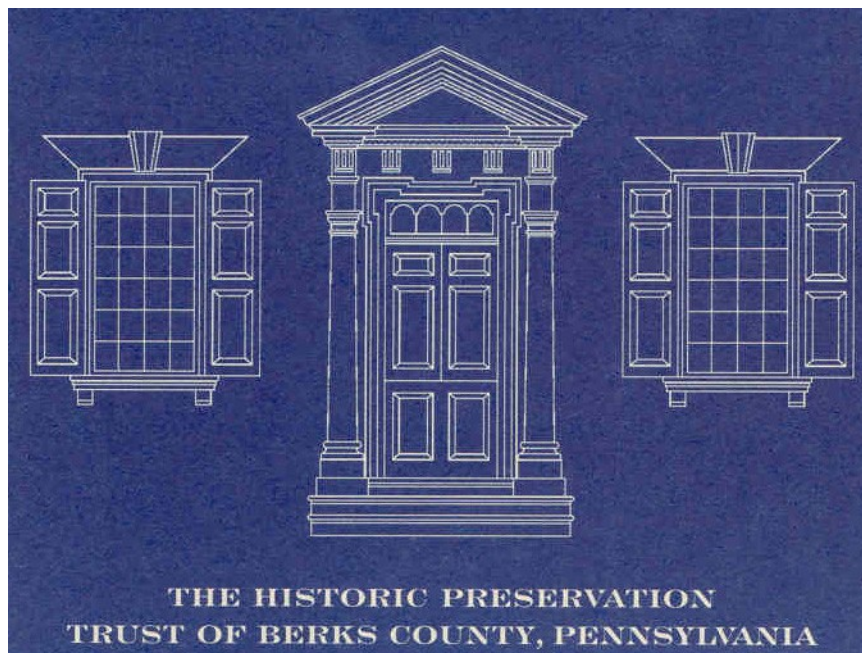
Lastly, mention must be made of the various Trust members who planned this event and helped make it the success it was! Special mention goes to Linda Hughes, Eleanor Shaner, Hilary Fraley, Michelle Lynch and Priscilla Walsky. Again, special thanks to Frank McMahon and friends for the wonderful libations!

We made \$350. from the event, a tidy profit! What gratified me the most, and I think everyone at the Trust, was the way everyone enjoyed themselves, both visitors and costumed interpreters, and the way the White Horse "came alive"! People loved every aspect of what we presented, and they wanted to learn more about the Trust, and many asked "are you going to have more events?" It was a wonderful opportunity for the Trust to present itself to the Community!



We Need Your Help to Insure our Architectural Heritage

The cost to insure the Trust's historic buildings against fire, flood, and other hazards is about \$20,000. per year, which far exceeds all annual revenues from membership dues, event receipts, merchandise sales, and visitor donations *combined*. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution toward this essential preservation obligation. You may direct that your donation be applied to the premiums on one or more buildings you designate.



Your tax deductible contribution toward this will be 100% MATCHED by a local benefactor.

Your check may be sent to
The Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County,
P.O. Box 245
Douglassville, PA 19518.

Save the Date

SUMMER FESTIVAL & ANNUAL MEETING

The Trust will hold a summer festival in conjunction with its annual meeting of members on **Saturday, June 21, 2014** at 5:00 PM. at the White Horse Inn., where there will be an unveiling of the recent sign project and a pig roast. The festival will be open to the public, as well as members, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Trust. After dinner there will be a presentation on the history of the Trust and its buildings. We will also act on certain amendments to the Trust's by-laws. More information about the pig roast and the proposed by-law changes will be provided in the future.

The Trust Mourns the Loss of Vivian Price Bellairs (1923-2013)

Eleanor A. Shaner wrote: I recently attended the Memorial Service for Vivian Price Bellairs at First Presbyterian Church in Reading. When I served as President of The Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County (1994-1996) Vivian began her 10 years of service as Secretary of The Board of Directors and also as Editor of our Newsletter. The remembrances of Vivian's family members and friends at this worship service were a celebration of her life and the joy and enthusiasm she shared with them. When we served on The Board together and participated in Trust activities, working with Vivian was always a fun-filled experience. Both she and her late husband, Herb, were involved with our fall Country Fair at Old Morlatton Village and made much of the hard work seem easier.

After Herb's death and Vivian's moving to North Carolina to be closer to her daughter and family, we continued to keep in touch. Whenever there was a Trust fund-raising event Vivian would call to discuss how plans were progressing. An avid Thespian, she often shared her fond memories of working as a costumed docent at The Mouns Jones House, whether for a school group or The Country Fair. I'm sure all the Trust members who remember working with Vivian join me in sending our condolences to her family, and know that our lives are richer because of her life.

For more about Vivian's life see Richard Shaner's wonderful article, Salute to Vivian Bellairs in the Berksmont News, November 28, 2013.

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Trust seeks PHMC Grant Money

The HPTBC is pleased to announce that it recently completed and submitted a grant application to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) for much-needed repair and reconstruction work at the 1716 Mouns Jones House, the oldest standing dwelling in Berks County. These grants are part of the Keystone Historic Preservation Program, and the deadline for the proposal was March 3, 2014. This grant program “provides funding support for projects that identify, preserve, promote and protect historic and archaeological resources.” While there are various types of grant categories, the HPTBC applied for a construction project grant for the amount of \$32,810. This amount sought from the PHMC is only half of the total project cost of \$65,620, and the remaining half (\$32,810) will be 100% matched by the Shelley Fund. If won, the Mouns Jones House project would restore the west eaves wall, restore the structural relationship between the wall planes and the rafter plates, re-locate the doorway from its extant nineteenth century location to its original 1716 alignment. Following these steps, the project would fabricate and install four casement windows to their original locations.

The Mouns Jones House repair and reconstruction project will allow the building and its grounds to be re-opened to the public. The HPTBC received letters of support for the proposed Mouns Jones House project from Kurt Zwinkl, the Executive Director of the Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area; Professor J. Ritchie Garrison, Director, Winterthur Program in American Material Culture; and Professor Robert W. Reynolds, Department of History at Kutztown University. Congressman Gerlach, Senator Schwank, Senator Rafferty, Representative Maloney, also wrote letters of support for the project. The grant is highly competitive, with many other organizations seeking funds. The PHMC will announce the successful grant recipients in July 2014, and projects must begin by September 2014.