50th Anniversary of Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County

In the mid-1960's a group of concerned citizens under the leadership of Mrs. Theresa Beard identified the earliest buildings remaining in Berks County. Of these buildings, threatened by development in the area, the one identified as the oldest remaining in the county was the one built in 1716 by Mouns and Ingabo Jones, along the Schuylkill River in Amity Township. Determined to save this structure, Mrs. Beard and others formed the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County in April 1964, with Dr. Arthur D. Graeff serving as the group's first President. The Roy Schurr family donated this two and one-half story sandstone house to the organization, which began fund raising to restore the structure. ~~County~~ Country Fairs were held in Old Morlatton Village as well as Christmas Teas in homes of members. Following the success of these events and the restoration of this building, the Schurr Family donated a second building, now known as the Michael Fulp House, to the organization, as well as additional acreage.

In 1967, with financial assistance from the Woman's Club of Oley Valley, the Trust acquired a 100 year lease with the Gottwal family for the Johan & Deborah DeTurk stone cabin, located in Oley, built in 1767. Students from Oley Valley High School assisted in clearing debris in and around the house.

Under the leadership of President Raymond Elliott, the Trust bought the White Horse Inn, along Old Philadelphia Pike in 1971. Following the flooding which occurred during hurricane Agnes in 1972, the Trust cleaned the buildings along the River and began work on the Inn, which included putting an apartment on the 2nd floor to be used as a caretaker's quarters. In 1975 the Trust received a grant through HUD, which was used to help install a modern kitchen and handicapped accessible restrooms. In 1976 the Trust was approached by Dr. David F. Hottenstein concerning his gifting of the 1783 David & Catherine Hottenstein House near Kutztown to the Trust. This gift included the Hottenstein family cemetery located across Route 222 from the house. Dinners were held as fund raisers to help with the restoration of these properties.

In 1978 the Trust accepted the gift of the Jacob Keim farmstead in Pike Township from Mr. & Mrs. M. Richard Boyer, of Pine Grove. This included the stone manor house, dated 1753, a smaller 18th century ancillary cabin, a 19th century barn, the Hartman Cider Press(which had been moved to the site in 1975), two family cemeteries located across Boyer Road and 13 acres of land. Donations and purchases of red clay roofing tiles were placed on the roof of the small Keim cabin and also on the DeTurck house.

In 1988 the Trust purchased the George Douglass Mansion from Betty Webster, who continued living in the house until the Trust began its restoration work. With funding from President Mary Pendleton, the Trust established an office on the 2nd floor of the Tavern and hired a part-time administrator. Volunteer members of the Executive Board have served as docents for events held in the properties, included tours by historical groups as well as school groups; Keim & Hottenstein family reunions have been held on their family properties. We have also hosted weddings, wedding receptions, bridal showers, birthday parties, and anniversary parties in our buildings. Recently, funds from the Donald Shelley Foundation have been used for major restoration projects.

During the 50 years of the Trust's efforts, we have had many dedicated members and officers giving many hours of their time to continue the work begun in 1964 to preserve & restore these 18th century buildings. We hope that the future generations living in Berks County will learn about and appreciate the heritage that surrounds them.

Eleanor Shaner, Past President & Bd. member for 39 years