

Old Morlatton Village MESSENGER

The Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County

*JACOB AND MARIE YODER HOUSE
SITE OF THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION TRUST OF BERKS COUNTY
2009 CHRISTMAS TEA*

Jacob and Marie Yoder built the main section of the house which bears their date sign in 1829. The couple were married in 1797, and are buried in a private cemetery in Lobachsville with two of their 11 children.

The Jacob and Marie Yoder House was situated between a branch of the Manatawny Creek and a steep hill on a 200 acre plantation accumulated by Jacob's father, the senior Jacob Yoder, by 1780. The site clearly evidences the concerns of settlers in a frontier environment—a plentiful source of water, fertile soil, and protection from the elements. The house is located a half mile north of the Keim Farmstead, developed by his mother's father, Johannes Keim, the first European settler in the Oley Valley, a site which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and now owned by the Berks County Historic Trust.

When the elder Jacob Yoder died in 1804, his sons Daniel and the younger Jacob divided the parcel between themselves. Daniel took the northern portion; Jacob took the southern portion on which his 1829 house would be located. When the younger Jacob died, his portion of the original parcel was sold in four parts to neighbors. The acreage with the

house became part of the Jacob Keim farm.

The Jacob and Marie Yoder plantation comprises a summer kitchen, the main house, which fronts Lobachsville Road, and a keeping room, which is located between the first two structures.



Outbuildings include a stone barn with a stone arch on the first floor on the creek side, a former stone piggery, which may well have been the first barn on the premises, a three story stone spring house with a walk-in fireplace, and a stone tannery. The latter two structures are built into a steep hill behind the outbuildings, and both take advantage of the springs in the hillside. The spring house provided water for the premises until modern concerns for water quality resulted in a well in 2005. The tannery, a distinctive two storied structure with bowed side walls, a vaulted masonry ceiling with iron hooks, and dirt second floor, was probably

built by the younger Jacob, a tanner by trade. In front and below the tanning house were four pits filled with stones and green, blue, purple, and orange colored ground from the various tannins and acids used in the tanning process. In fact, a tanning processing line is evident from the sequence of outbuildings from the creek alongside the barn and ending with the tannery.

Dedicated to maintaining and preserving historically and architecturally significant properties



The summer kitchen, a limestone structure, is said to have been built in the 1760s. A smoke room sits behind a walk-in fireplace

equipped with a bake oven. Half of the smoke room space is occupied by the bake oven's bee-hive with its squirrel tail vent system. A sleeping loft occupies the second floor. It has had a clay tiled roof, distinctive of the Oley Valley, since at least the 1940s.

In front of the summer kitchen is a one and half storied stone structure, referred to as the "keeping room". This building is in the same configuration as the summer kitchen, but larger and without a smoke room. The walk-in fireplace is more massive than that in the summer kitchen. The keeping room also exhibits a more refined interior space, with a closet alongside the fireplace, surrounded by a winder stairway rebuilt in 2005 from the shadows of the original stairway left on the interior of the side and rear stone walls. The fireplace has been dated back to the last quarter of the 18th century.

The keeping room was initially built as an independent structure, and it clearly predates the 1829 house now in front of it. However, in the south wall of the keeping room's second floor can be seen a sawed off log and a log plate beam. This has suggested to one historian that a two storied log house was present in front of the keeping room probably with a circumference which conformed to the configuration of the original, partial basement of the 1829 house. Indeed, Yoders had been living on the premises for at least 60 years before that house was constructed, and the summer kitchen and the keeping room were too small for a family of at least 12, perhaps more if some members of the first two generations of the family lived on site.

In any event, the Jacob and Marie Yoder House blends Georgian and Federal periods of architecture in what has been described by one historian as an informal, German fashion. The door and windows across the front are not symmetrical, the central door being off-center and not in line with the central window of the second floor. The foundations and

walls are of limestone masonry, built as an entire unit and not as an extension of a previous smaller house.

The floor plan of the original stone house consists of two rooms on either side of a central stair hall; the second floor is similarly divided. The floors are of wide pine boards, the walls are plastered. A wooden chair rail is evident in all the original rooms. The chair rail in the northwest bedroom is remarkable for the German script which includes a name and the date 1838, which coincides with the last Yoder in the house. There are peg hoards in the second floor bedrooms as well as the rear of the living room for hanging clothes.

The house was renovated in a slightly Victorian style toward the end of the 19th century. Two over two windows replaced the originals, and period chandeliers were hung from ceilings, which in the center hallway and living room were covered with Philadelphia railing.

The latest renovation to the main house was completed in 2005. A telescoped wing was added to the east side of the house to provide on the first floor for a modern family room, dining room and kitchen, although all the rooms have been constructed from period materials, and a full bathroom and dressing area on the second. A wing was added on the west end of the house, also from period materials, for a library and half bath. The former porch between the summer kitchen and the keeping room was enclosed with period materials to make a mudroom and cloakroom.

This Yoder House makes an intriguing selection for the site of this year's Preservation Trust's tea. An historic house in an historic setting, it has been preserved to pay homage to its origins. Yet, this historic house provides for all comforts of contemporary life. It links today's lifestyles with those of the first European settlers in the Oley Valley.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

In the last newsletter I quoted Roseanne Roseannadanna from Saturday Night Live of yore. I'll continue with the pop cultural references this time and quote the Beatles...Let It Be.

Years ago, a project of mine was featured in the Reading Eagle and I was asked to give advice to old house owners. One of the key things I mentioned was that "it is often better to do nothing than to do something wrong."

Clearly the most irrevocable mistake a property owner can make is demolition, either by intent or by neglect. Our area has seen some dramatic mistakes recently. Even the well-heeled and well governed communities such as Bryn Mawr and Wyomissing are powerless to protect a property from its owner. A significant property, in both architectural and historical terms, was effectively demolished to accommodate an addition in Wyomissing. There was little to no outcry from citizens, perhaps because things happened so quickly. Perhaps things happened so quickly to muzzle the community.

Not so with La Ronda, an 80 year old, rather garish mansion on the Main Line. Despite well organized opposition, the Spanish Revival mansion designed by Addison Mizner was demolished in early October. Below are a couple links to websites, be forewarned, they are not for the faint-hearted preservationist.

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/front_page/20090915_Investor_identified_as_La_Ronda_s_mystery_owner.html

<http://www.philebrity.com/2009/10/01/la-ronda-demolished-one-mans-place-in-hell-firmly-reserved/>

<http://hystericalpreservationist.blogspot.com/2009/09/la-ronda-story-of-selfishness.html>

I often try to assuage my guilt and temper my anger over losses such as these with the adage: You win some, you lose some. Given the recent losses of The Ironmaster, the circa 1775 Peter Jones House, the Irey Mansion in Douglassville, the demolition of the Grundscheier barn in Spring Township, the gutting of downtown Morgantown, perhaps it should be: You win some, you lose most.

The news gets worse for those of us who care. State budgets have forced the closure of the Conrad Weiser & Daniel Boone Homesteads, Hope Lodge, Graeme Park, and others. The owners of Bahr's Mill outside of Boyertown are looking for someone to care for their treasure. I would like to propose the Trust tackle them all.

I won't, but I sure would like to.

Matt Barnhart

E-MAIL

Become a better informed member of the Trust by sharing your e-mail address with us. Doing this not only will keep you current on the latest happenings it will also help us reduce our printing and mailing expenses. Every little bit helps. Please send the information to Priscilla Walsky at walskyinvest@verizon.net or call 610-372-3807. Thank you, and thank you to all who have already responded.

MOUNS JONES COUNTRY FAIR 2009

The Mouns Jones Country Fair is but a memory, albeit a successful one. The Pottstown High School students who helped with setup were quite a refreshing crew. They were, in addition to being diligent workers, quite interested in our buildings. The Scout troop left the Fair with cash for their coffers and plan to return to the hot dog stand next year. They did a fine job with our flag raising and closing ceremonies. The luncheon in the White Horse was well attended. Charlie Adams regaled fair goers with ghostly tales in the tap room. The auction was profitable and all donations toward it

were greatly appreciated. We will be fine-tuning the auction for next year.

For those of you who wish to receive a written acknowledgement for items donated, please contact Linda Hughes (610-779-6554). A huge thank you to all who participated in any manner with the Fair and, as always, we look forward to your support next year. Please feel free to volunteer for any of our functions, especially the Fair and Tea – additional help is always welcome.



John Bieber, auctioneer extraordinaire



Tammy Wilkenson with her lovely pottery



Scott Stepp peeping out from behind his wares



Bev Steven's beautiful handcrafted Santa

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers have been so invaluable to the success of the Trust over the years. The money that is raised through the efforts of our volunteers (friends) creates opportunities for the board to receive matching funds so that we are able to maintain and restore the eight historic buildings entrusted to us.

The body of volunteers it takes to create the Christmas Tea is magical and has created a camaraderie among members that is looked forward to every year. The friendships that have been established are bonded and life long. Other fund raising events throughout the year are the Spring Luncheon and Plant Sale which is held in May the Saturday before Mothers' Day, the Mouns Jones Fair in September and the Christmas Tea on the first Wednesday in December.

The board has established a Friends Committee which is a group of friends that through their efforts support these events. If you would like to join the friends group and be a part of a worthwhile effort please call Anne Coldren (610-987-9249). We would love for you to join us.

IN PRESERVATION WE TRUST

Work continues to progress at the DeTurk Cabin. The walk-in fireplace has had its huge lintel or "fireplace tree" removed and restored. Steel beams now provide the actual support, with the original "tree" visible from the outside. The fireplace support pier and the chimney support masonry are complete.

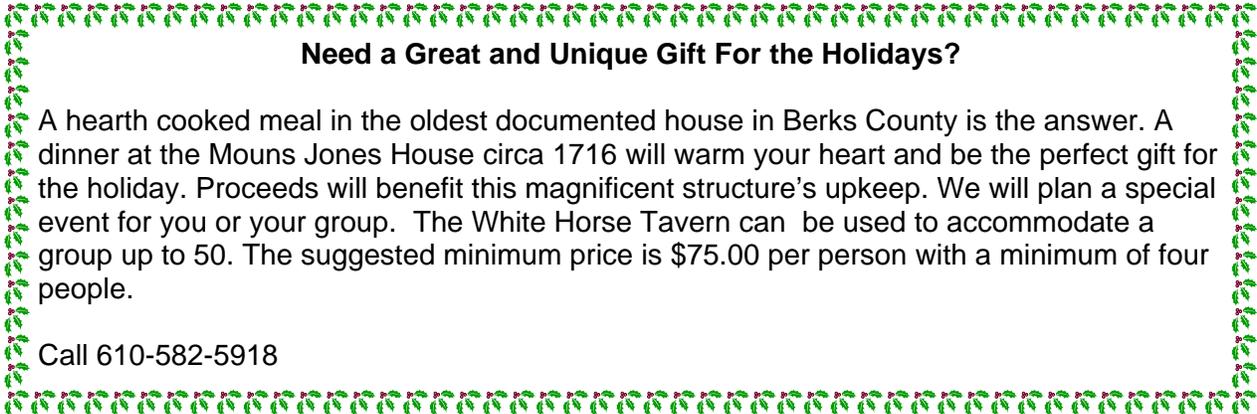
All major structural restoration has been finished including the root cellar vault. 80% of the work scope has been accomplished. The missing tiles have been replaced and the roof is weatherproofed.

The last phase of work at this time includes exterior drainage to move the water away from the building. We are working on a plan for this. Stay tuned.....

The interior of the Mouns Jones house has been whitewashed in the last several weeks. It badly needed a freshening up . In the spring we will move toward exterior repair of woodwork and paint.

We would like some reproduction furniture for the Mouns Jones House. We need a farm type table or trestle table to seat 8 or more. A dry sink and a tall closed cupboard would be great too. If anyone can donate these in any condition please let us know. A hearth cooked meal in the Mouns Jones House will be your "reward"! The happy cooks will love you forever.

We could also use some good oak or ash firewood for the dinners to support our work. We can pick it up.



Need a Great and Unique Gift For the Holidays?

A hearth cooked meal in the oldest documented house in Berks County is the answer. A dinner at the Mouns Jones House circa 1716 will warm your heart and be the perfect gift for the holiday. Proceeds will benefit this magnificent structure's upkeep. We will plan a special event for you or your group. The White Horse Tavern can be used to accommodate a group up to 50. The suggested minimum price is \$75.00 per person with a minimum of four people.

Call 610-582-5918

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Believe it or not..... A lemon tree outside the Mouns Jones House discovered by Scott Stepp, property chairman, a few weeks ago in the woods 100 feet from this landmark. Right here in Berks County! The lemons are about the size of golf balls.

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