

Warrington Township Historic Commission Annual Report for 2016

The Warrington Township Historic Commission (HC) serves the Board of Supervisors (BoS) in an advisory capacity in matters related to “identifying and preserving historical sites, buildings, papers, documents and relics of historical significance to Warrington Township.”¹ Current members of the Commission include Constance L. (Connie) Ace, chair, Stuart Cohen (vice chair), Harry Lukens, David Sharp and Shu-I Tu (secretary). There are currently two unfilled vacancies. Supervisor Millie Seliga served as our liaison to the Board of Supervisor.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES:

The HC developed and presented to the BoS a set of bylaws under which they operate. This document clarifies roles and responsibilities as outlined in the Warrington Township Code of Ordinances and makes the following changes:

- Quorum: the Ordinances had defined a quorum for the HC as four members. This was changed to “a majority of currently appointed members.” Prior to the appointment of Mr. Lukens, the absence of any single member prevented the Commission from conducting an official meeting or taking any actions.
- Presiding officer: The presiding officer will be the Chair, not the Chairman.
- Name: the Commission formally requested the name of the Commission to be the more grammatically correct “Historical Commission” rather than “Historic Commission”. Historical connotes that the group addresses issues related to historic events, properties and artifacts while Historic means that the Commission itself is old. Per Township Manager Barry Luber, these changes will be incorporated into the Ordinances as they are currently being revised.

HISTORIC PROPERTIES

The HC maintains a list of priority historic sites within the Township. Site visits were made to the following properties:

- Broadlawns/ Stone Manor: (1574 Easton Road): This historic French colonial style mansion, with its distinctive mansard roof, built in 1872, was for many years the home and office of Dr. John S. Prickett. It has been carefully restored and now serves as the offices for Walter Smerconish (Stone Manor Corp.). An adjoining development has been proposed on the property and the Commission suggested ways that the development could precede with minimal risk to the historic structure. Additionally, it was recommended that Dr. Prickett be memorialized in the new building, for instance by naming the community room in the complex after the late physician.

¹ Warrington Township Ordinances §866

- Irwin Hale House: This 1806 building was painstakingly restored by Mr. Jerry Hall and currently serves as the offices for HomeStarr Realty. Interesting structures within the building include hand carved beams still bearing the original roman numerals used to identify each during construction and an intriguing basement chamber which suggests that it might have once been used as slave quarters.
- Eble House and outbuildings: this expertly restored residence was build circa 1840 and currently is the home of Dr. and Mrs. Denis M. Eble. The site also features a partially restored working barn and a vintage corn crib, both in excellent condition.
- Mill Creek School: one of five historic schools houses which once served the Township. Built in 1929, it features a classic vintage art deco façade.
- School House at 10 Folly Road: The HC continues to work with the Warrington Historical Society on the restoration of the old school house located at 10 Folly Road. While much of the work has been internal and structural in nature, painting of the exterior and restoration of the original shutters signaled to the community that work on the property was proceeding. The historic William Penn oak, which has stood on the site for centuries, was severely damaged by a storm in 2014. Wood from the tree was recovered and has been used to make beautiful pens. Sales of the pens by the Historical Society are helping to fund the restoration work.
- The Commission continues to monitor the status of the historic 1840 home located at 2436 Street Road. Discussions were held with a potential buyer; however to date no sale has been finalized.

HISTORIC MARKER

Loss of the historic Penrose farmhouse was a major loss to the Township. Built in 1734, it was the first known house built in the area. The farm was originally over 600 acres and stretched from County Line Road to Street Road along Easton Road. Over the years, portions of the farm had been sold, but the core of the property remained in the Penrose/Paul/Hallowell family from 1734 until 2006. The remaining portion of the property is the current site of the Valley Gate Shopping Center. Agreements with the Valley Gate developer to preserve and protect various historical artifacts from the building, for their eventual inclusion of these articles into a township museum, were not honored, due to claimed theft of the materials. With the loss of these important artifacts, it was decided that some other commemoration of the original Warrington homestead was needed. A historical marker was erected in July 2016.

STREET NAMES

With development threatening many of the historic sites throughout the Township, the HC recommended to the BoS that early settlers of the area be commemorated by naming new streets after them. While the naming of news streets and roads is currently under the discretion of the developer, awareness of the BoS's desire to preserve the legacy of the area would help steer developers toward adopting historic names. Examples included Holbert Road or Wagon Shop Way for the proposed road which would run behind the current LukOil gas station at Bristol and Easton Roads. The original Holbert

family's general store and wagon shop stood on the property which would be bisected by the proposed road.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS

In its advisory role to the BoS, the HC reviewed and provided feedback on the following development proposals:

- Geerling property (3091 Street Road): the HC opposed any development which necessitated the destruction of the 1860 farmhouse on the site.
- Malcomb property: no historic structures were impacted by the proposed development
- Eble property: the proposed development (subdivision of the 9 acre parcel to add 2 potential building lots) was planned in a way to preserve and protect the existing home, barn and outbuildings. The Commission supported an historical preservation easement for the property, agreed to by the owner, which would protect the buildings in perpetuity. The BoS denied the subdivision request so the easement was never enacted.
- Broadlawns/Stone Manor: A proposed 4-story apartment complex adjoining the historic house was reviewed with the property owner and an architect working with the developer. Recommendations were made to the BoS and to Mr. Roy Rieder for measures which would help protect the historic home.
- The following proposals were reviewed and it was determined that there were no significant impacts on historic structures or properties:
 - Keene Tract (Kelly Road)
 - Highgrove Manor (Corner of Anderson Way and Easton Road)
 - Shihadeh Minor Subdivision - Grady Avenue

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Warrington Day: The HC shared a booth with the Warrington Historical Society (WHS). This year's exhibit featured a history quiz and a scavenger hunt where participants sought historic facts displayed on placards placed throughout the venue. The winner of the hunt received a copy of the recent Warrington Revisited, published in 2015.

Barclay School: members of the HC and WHS made their second annual visit to the Barclay Elementary School to present a program on Warrington History and to help the school celebrate the birthday of its namesake and early Warrington leader, John Barclay. Mr. Barclay's 1799 home currently houses the Hatboro Bank. (corner of Bristol and Easton Roads)

ZONING HEARING BOARD ACTIVITIES

The Commission continued to monitor the Zoning Hearing Board proceedings against Victory Gardens' mulch manufacturing operations on Pickertown Road. These proceedings impact three of the historic

properties in the Township: Brown's Folly (982 Folly Road), Yankee Farm (1067 Folly Road) and Winding Brook Farm (3014 Bristol Road).

ONGOING PROJECTS:

The Commission continues to consider on a proposal for "Welcome to Historic Warrington Township" signs to be placed on major roads as they enter the township.

Work continued on a proposed "Award of Merit" program intended to acknowledge persons and/or businesses who have expended extraordinary efforts to protect and restore historic properties.

All properties on the HC list of priority historic properties will be visited and photographed, in order to update records on these locations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The HC acknowledges the BoS for their support in efforts to preserve and celebrate the history of the Township. In particular we thank Ms. Millie Seliga for her support and advocacy on behalf of the Commission.

We also thank the following Township employees for their support and assistance:

Mr. Roy Rieder, Township Zoning Officer, for ensuring that the HC was aware of and had opportunity to review development proposals for their possible impact on historic sites and/or structures.

Mr. Joe Knox and the Township Public Works Department for their support in multiple activities relating to the restoration of the 10 Folly Road schoolhouse. Particular appreciation is given for their assistance in emptying the oil tank in the basement of the building and preparing it for removal, for hauling stone from a township-owned site to the school house site to be used in reconstructing the walls and windows in the building.

Mr. Barry Luber who has advised the HC on a number of questions.

Ms. Barbara Lavrone, who always enthusiastically supports the Commission by locating documents and arranging various administrative functions.

Respectfully submitted by

Constance L. Ace, Ph.D.

Chair, Warrington Historic Commission