

# **Morris County Trust for Historic Preservation**

## **News for Our Members**

### **Greetings, Members and Friends!**

It's been a while since we shared any information about our round of chores: defending resources, taking positions, joining in on preservation planning, and in general exercising the reputation you've helped us earn to make the preservation message heard.

### **New Morris Co. Trust Web Site, with Trustee Designer**

You will, we hope, be glad to hear that the communication vacuum we've had for several years has been filled. A new trustee, Sue Riccardelli from Morris Plains, has joined us. Sue is a web site designer, and we're already putting out some new material for the world to see. Not only have we invested in an independent site that people can find easily, but now we can put news briefs up as they happen. Whenever we speak at a hearing or file objector comments on a threatening project, you'll get the news right away. Not only will that improve on our old quarterly newsletter schedule, it will help to compensate for today's reportorial wasteland.

### **New Trustees for the Trust**

Another change on the board is the addition of Joshua Kay, our new treasurer. Josh is not a preservation insider, but he's a constant communicator, and sets a new standard of timely arrival. He was recruited by Heather Dobbs, our former office manager, who came with a background in environmental regulatory work. Sadly for us, Heather has now gone back to the world of real jobs, but she's agreed to join our board, where her preservation course at Drew will benefit all of us.

### **New Office Manager**

Our current office manager is JoAnn Bowman, who was known to us for some years through her work with the DAR on the Schuyler-Hamilton House in Morristown. JoAnn is a computer insider as well as a history buff. She hit the ground running – or lifting – in the middle of our transfer of the Trust's office to a new, bigger room, closer to the beating heart of things. She's another in our string of super-tidy managers.

## **Trust Works with NJ Highlands Coalition**

For the last few years, we've multiplied our energies by working closely with the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. They are a large, highly visible group comprised mostly of environmentalists. Their job is to support and improve the Highlands Act, which has turned out to be very unpopular with those landowners in the Highlands region who were pinning their hopes on the possibility of unfettered development in Hunterdon, Morris, Sussex, and Warren Counties. The Coalition could be strong, if the Highlands Act were implemented effectively. Because voices in the Coalition are few on the cultural side of the table, we have emerged as the primary defender of cultural resources. In fact, the plan of implementation, as devised by the Highlands Council staff, is incomplete-to-weak in this area. We were hoping to lead a Coalition effort to urge specific improvements to this section of the plan, but now it remains to be seen where the changed politics of the state will take the entire protective effort. Be advised that both cultural and natural resources in the Highlands are in very serious danger at the moment.

## **News of Preserve Historic Hackettstown, Our Mentored Organization**

Another continuing effort is our connection with the group Preserve Historic Hackettstown (PHH), which we helped to form almost ten years ago. They have been an energetic voice for preservation in the political wilderness, presenting educational programs and speaking very effectively to a most unresponsive local government. Notably, they have been trying to persuade the community to save a reuse a complex of 19th-century brick mill buildings that could be a defining anchor of the Hackettstown historic Main St. Despite a historic district - surveyed but not nominated - and a local commission, preservation in the town remains less than a guiding principle. We serve on the board of PHH, and help when we can with experience in the world of NJ preservation.

Unexpectedly, the town of Hackettstown decided to petition for conformance to the Highlands plan. And just as unexpectedly, the petition was denied. Until that happened, no town that stepped forward had been denied the right to proceed. We were particularly cheered because the town based its application on two related areas: economic development and historic preservation. This is a place ideally located to be a regional center, as in fact it has been throughout its history. And there is no more distinguished inventory of handsome historic houses, strong commercial buildings, and significant industrial sites. The denial was met with gasps of astonishment, as indeed was the next event: town officials got on the phone for help to PHH. We have been

working with them ever since, hoping at last to establish this small grassroots organization at the point of influence where it belongs.

### **The Greystone Site**

A couple of years ago, we were invited to mentor a new group called Preserve Greystone, which was forming to protect the Kirkbride building in Greystone Park. The issues are widely familiar in Morris County: The freeholders have already taken over the lower half of the old park, and demolished most of the buildings there regardless of their formally recognized historic status; the State owns what is left, which consists of 130 acres of largely open space and the huge, deteriorating Kirkbride that is nationally significant. Public entities shy away in horror from the responsibility of either rehabilitating or demolishing this important structure, though they believe that voters would like it to be replaced with ball fields. Enter Preserve Greystone, which is organizing community support for a sophisticated rehabilitation project, one that will provide an economically viable base for preserving the remaining acreage for genuine passive recreation. Preserve Greystone has great graphics and communications people, who will be happy to make a presentation to your organization (just call Adam McGovern at (973) 586-6904). People in and out of the county are rushing to help with their signatures, their membership, and their time. Meanwhile, there is hope at the State level for finding a developer with the sophisticated experience needed to succeed with a project of this daunting size. Expect significant income-producing components; this isn't just a museum.

The governor announced earlier that the State would send out an RFP for complete site demolition, and many who heard him thought that was the end of hope for preservation. But it is not. What the State needs to know is the cost of all alternatives. When they hear the number for demolition, they will certainly be caught up very short. But another piece in the puzzle is the NJ Historic Trust grant given to Treasury (who control the Kirkbride building) for a feasibility study covering possible adaptive reuses of the site. In the right hands, this study too will be a surprise. Investigation will go on for at least another year. Do not despair yet!

### **Energy Corridors Threaten Cultural and Natural Resources**

A universal threat to all kinds of resources, natural as well as cultural, in northern and central New Jersey, is the ubiquitous energy corridor. Running scared ahead of new limits to dirty energy production – like coal-fired plants and fracking – the big providers are crossing all the spaces between their production sites and the heaviest markets for

consumption. The huge grid of which Susquehanna-Roseland is just a part carries very high-wattage power from the coal plants of Ohio to, ultimately, Jersey City and then across the river to light-bulb nirvana. Other power lines join it in transit. And then the gas lines, one under temporary embargo from the president, follow the same paths across the mountain tops of beautiful northern New Jersey, bringing in heavy construction vehicles across delicate habitat, shallow archaeological sites, and Register-listed ruins from our state's early years of development. Consultants over the years haven't even begun to find all the natural and cultural resources in its path, yet the beautiful vistas and uncounted remains of our iron industry heritage would be overrun with construction equipment and lost before they are discovered. This kind of destruction cannot be mitigated, not by site compensation, not by replacement, not by cash. Energy providers insist that they are heading off blackouts in future years, but all studies show that the demand for power is declining. We cannot allow our self-indulgent use of resources to destroy the quality of our natural and built environments. Turn off your TV and ride your bicycle!

### **Preservation at Picatinny – NOT**

And finally, there's Picatinny. Years ago we paid the base an informal visit, urging them to complete the survey of historic resources which is, after all, the obligation of every federal agency. As far as we heard, nothing happened, but at some point it was determined that the entire base constituted a single district. Then - still with no local input - the Army negotiated a split into several smaller districts, arguing that the connecting fabric (which consisted of an internal railway and most of a spectacular aboveground steam delivery system) had been removed, i.e. they had destroyed it. Further, although there are many findings of eligibility for individual buildings, they never proceeded with actual nomination. Under Sect. 106 of federal law, though, eligibility is enough to impose protection obligations on a federal agency. Now the Army is pursuing extensive demolitions, based on inability to adapt old buildings to modern purposes, contamination of sites, and the assumed expense of rehabilitation up to standards. Over a couple of years, a group consisting of both local historical people and representatives from Washington, including the National Trust, as well as Indian tribes, met at the site or by conference call to work out a programmatic agreement. This has been most edifying. The eventual agreement recognizes Picatinny's many striking scenic vistas, and develops a formal set of practices to treat cultural landscapes. These innovative concerns set a standard that we can usefully apply in many local cases. The experience was eye-opening and disheartening. Federal historic preservation law has no teeth, so that its effect can be felt only in negotiations, which sometimes lead applicants to agree

on some mitigations, if opponents can be weakened or silenced in this way. We note that there was no possibility of turning for support to our elected officials at the federal level. The bottom line: demolition is proceeding apace.

## **Dam Removal**

We applaud the efforts of watershed associations to restore the quality of rivers like the Musconetcong, which forms the border between Morris and Warren Counties. Like many others on the eastern seaboard, this is a river with a long historical function as the main avenue of commerce in the area. It is rich with industrial archaeological remnants like building foundations, water diversion traces, and, above all, crumbling dams. The environmental and recreational arms of the watershed movement are anxious to remove all traces of these dams so that fishermen and kayakers may enjoy the river freely. Using arguments about water health and original condition, they have carried the day with preservation interests, even in cases where the ruins were Register-listed. Meanwhile, proponents of local power development – a true sustainable goal – have pointed out that these remnants may be adaptively reused as small hydropower plants.

A group has formed to address the preservation perspective, hoping to achieve, eventually, a state-wide policy for protection and adaptive reuse of character-defining dams. This is going to be a long discussion.

## **We Need Your Help**

Please join us for another year of preservation on the ground. Tell your colleagues about us; we need their support as well. If your town commission has operating questions, we want to be their go-to source, and if they don't yet exist, we can help them get started. If you're fighting political battles over preservation issues, give us a call. We can help with homeowner questions, too. Or send us an email and be a part of the solution to sprawl, overdevelopment, and loss of community character.