

THE FRIENDS OF WORCESTER

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Fall 2004



Our Mission

Friends of Worcester recently revised our mission statement to more accurately reflect the group's focus.

FRIENDS OF WORCESTER Mission Statement

Recognizing the uniqueness of Worcester's rapidly vanishing farmlands, woodlands and historic structures, and understanding that the preservation of these areas contributes greatly to the quality of life, now and for future generations, we have joined together under the name "Friends of Worcester." Our vision is compelling: preserve open space and conserve our rural agricultural, natural and historical heritage.

Friends of Worcester works to educate and inform citizens and government of the value of open space preservation and the need for citizen involvement. As advocates for open space and historical preservation, we work to promote the implementation of Worcester's Comprehensive and Open Space Plans.

Historic Fairview Village Home Destroyed

WHAT HAPPENED?

This summer, one of the oldest houses in Fairview Village was torn down in order to make way for yet another chain drugstore. During demolition of the Bunner/Rittenhouse/Sower house, located at the corner of Germantown Pike and Valley Forge Road, a stone marker dated 1738 was found.

The teardown was lamented in an August 9, 2004, letter to the editor in The Times Herald. The writer, Doug Rotondo, a local architect and Worcester resident, described the history of this pre-revolutionary structure and asked that Baldrige Real Estate, the developer, reconsider its plan for demolition.

Just prior to the publication of Mr. Rotondo's letter, FOW was contacted by a researcher in West Virginia regarding the significant history of this house. He had come to Norristown to speak to the Historical Society of Montgomery County, to request that a historical marker be erected in

front of the house. Imagine his shock when he found that the house was to be demolished!

Unfortunately, the deal had been done. Baldrige Real Estate had been working on the development of this site for over a year. (In our spring newsletter, FOW reported on this project.) By the time concerns were raised about the historical significance of the house, the final land development plan had already been approved by the supervisors.

There had been protests, but not about taking down the house. The drugstore exceeds the maximum allowed size for a commercial building, and the impervious coverage of the parcel is 73.5 percent, well above the 50 percent allowed for buildings and parking by Worcester's zoning ordinances. In December 2003, our Zoning Hearing Board granted the developer the necessary variances. At that time, there was no mention that the house to be torn down was historic.

A letter from the Montgomery County Planning Commission dated December 18, 2003, objected to the development for a number of reasons. The letter alluded to the "1780 dwellings" on the property and voiced concern if "the oldest house in the strip is demolished for the proposed intense, suburban, retail use..." The letter also noted that "the applicant's plan has already been granted variances to allow more building and impervious surface coverage than permitted [by the township's ordinances]."

WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED INSTEAD?

- Residents who knew the history of the house could

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have spoken up at public meetings when the project was discussed.

- The project could have been reviewed and recommendations made by Worcester's Planning Commission first, before variances were approved by our Zoning Hearing Board. (Conversations with ZHB chairs in some surrounding townships indicate that this is their policy.) Had this been the case, the Planning Commission would have been able to address the county's concern that the building was historic.

HOW CAN WE PREVENT A SIMILAR EVENT?

Township residents should be aware that a developer's plan often includes demolishing historic resources that are "in the way" of development – such things as historic buildings, old walls, stone foundations, large trees, etc. A solution would be to ask our supervisors for an ordinance that would require developers to identify all historic resources on the property BEFORE they are destroyed. The ordinance could also offer incentives to developers to retain the structures instead of razing them. Such an ordinance would not affect current property owners. It would apply only when a property was proposed for land development.

An important first step is for Worcester Township to identify as many historic resources as we can. On November 9, residents will be asked to share their knowledge of important local sites at a township public meeting. If you miss this opportunity, contact township Open Space Coordinator Susan Caughlan at 610-584-5619 to add your information to the maps. The completed maps of important local resources will be included in our revised Open Space Plan and will be available to township staff, our elected and appointed officials, and the public as reference points when future developments are proposed.

We cannot bring back the old Bunner house, but we can be more informed the next time a developer comes into our township. *They build here, but we live here.* We have a responsibility to protect Worcester's cultural heritage. We must take that responsibility seriously and pay attention when our historic resources are threatened.

Once it's gone, it's gone forever! 🙄

Worcester Historical Society Hosts Open House at Farmers Union Hall

The Worcester Historical Society opened the doors of

Farmers Union Hall on the first weekend of October and invited area residents to imagine how their family would have lived 100 years ago in Worcester. The society's collection of household and farm implements dates from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, when machinery was beginning to play an important role in running a household and farm.

The WHS collection is unique, and one of the society's goals is to increase public access to the collection. The second- and fourth-grade children at Worcester Elementary visited the collection this past spring as part of their history curriculum; however, there are many more school children and adult groups who would also enjoy seeing the farm tools, household items and other artifacts at Farmer's Union Hall.

Children are fascinated to learn how toast was prepared before it popped out of the toaster automatically, and to understand how the butter they spread on it gets from the cow to the table. The work of the farm family, from making their own shingles to making their own clothes, required many specialized tools. Seeing these tools increases one's appreciation for how they spent their days. What kept the flies off the plow horse's back? How did they make linen from the flax they planted in the field? Where were the schools, and how did kids get there? What did people do for fun? The society's collection holds the keys to a tremendous amount of information about life in our corner of America 100 years ago and more.

Fortunately, WHS has a core group of enthusiastic supporters. They are busy planning for better interpretation of the collection through signs and new displays; using updated archival techniques to ensure a long life for the artifacts; cataloging the numerous materials in the museum library via computer; and recording oral histories from residents who attended dances at Farmer's Union Hall, shopped at Allebach's General Store, and remember a quiet intersection at Valley Forge Road and Germantown Pike. The ideas and necessary processes are all in place. Manpower, womanpower and even teenpower are all that's needed! Anyone who can spare a few hours a month is welcome. You could be trained as a guide for school tours, help plan a meeting, prepare a mailing, work on publicity or fundraising, and more. The opportunities are numerous.

For more information on the historical society's pro-

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grams and on how you can get involved, contact Penny Dwyer at 610-584-8895, and come to the society's General Meeting on Monday, November 15, at 8:00 p.m. at Farmers Union Hall. Following a short business meeting, several members will present a program highlighting the work of Harry Houpt, Worcester's last blacksmith. 🐼

Voices from the Past — Some Things Haven't Changed

Recently, Worcester residents Letty and Austin Schultz were kind enough to donate to FOW their file of newspaper articles and other materials relating to Worcester's recent history.

Thirty-five years ago, Worcester had just written its first Comprehensive Plan. The township was facing its first wave of development pressure, thrust upon it by its proximity to the Pennsylvania Turnpike and the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Several large landowners were proposing to have their properties rezoned to build large developments in the township, including a 680-unit apartment complex and 1022 twin houses adjacent to a 12-acre shopping center.

Here are excerpts from one resident's view of these proposals:

On snowy Jan. 6, in the Farmers' Union Hall, to the music of hissing radiators and mumbled ordinances, our township supervisors actually entertained two petitions to change the zoning on two specific properties. The change would enable approximately 50 acres of Worcester to be sold for enough apartment complexes to almost assuredly double the township population! How's that for a population explosion?

Surely the Worcester township public opinion survey conducted in July 1966 by the Montgomery County Planning Commission, in which 61.7 per cent turned a decided thumbs down on the development of garden type apartments in the township and 74.2 per cent against the development of high rise apartments, indicates something!

When you ask why the existing zoning can't remain as it is, ... the answer seems to be a shrug of the shoulders, vague references to "tremendous pressures," and the reluctance of people to try to "fight City Hall." Well, it isn't City Hall! It's the Farmers' Union Hall and blessed are the families of Worcester that it is. Also blessed because we live in a rural, green and lovely area with other fine peo-

ple, and have comparatively few problems.

Go to the top of Whitehall, Berks or Valley Forge Road and look down at the farmlands and open fields. If you're high enough, you'll be able to see neighboring townships with their little white boxes marching toward you! Think of the fascinating possibility of keeping this rural beauty from the bulldozer, the garden apartment and the over-zealous developer who lives in another township.

Allow yourself the luxury of dreams that include resisting the "out-to-make-a-buck" guys and saving the open green spaces for future generations. Is it possible? Why not?

The Union Hall may not be glamorous and it may shudder a little when the heat goes on, but you are fortunate enough to have supervisors who will listen to you there if you care enough to make yourself heard. We are a manageable group of citizens (about 3200) and we have something great to fight for.

Self-aggrandizing residents, nonresident spoilers, sleeping and lazy citizens, government officials, too polite supervisors -- maybe we can shake them hard enough to pop a little sense, intelligence, good planning, altruism, caution and concern for the child born in the year 2000 into them -- this child who ... will surely need open spaces and loveliness to survive!

*Mrs. William C. Lowry III
Stony Creek Farm
Worcester, PA*

(Reprinted from a local newspaper, circa 1973.) 🐼

Worcester Honors Peter Schlotterer for Open Space Contributions

This summer, Worcester was proud to honor long-time resident Peter Schlotterer for his dedication to open space preservation. At the July 21 Board of Supervisors meeting, Peter was presented with an engraved plaque in recognition of his contributions to open space preservation in the township. In a room full of his friends and former colleagues, Peter received a standing ovation as he was congratulated by the Board and also by State Representative John Fichter.

As a member of the Planning Commission during the

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1990s, Peter watched as farm after farm fell to development pressure. He was determined to do something about it. When the 32-acre Gerstemeier farm next door to him was threatened with development, Peter turned to the Montgomery County Lands Trust for help in preserving the property.

It took years to complete the deal. At one point, when it looked as if the property would be sold for development after all, Peter actually committed his own funds as a security deposit to hold the land until an appropriate purchaser could be found. Today, because of Peter's generosity and his untiring efforts, this property has been permanently preserved through a conservation easement. Peter commented, "I always liked the idea of open space." As he had hoped and worked for, this land will never be developed.

What Peter envisioned for the Gerstemeier farm, he then implemented on his own 17-acre property. This summer, Peter completed the donation of a conservation easement on his land, which he has been restoring to its native forest habitat. He has planted hundreds of oak, hickory and cherry seedlings and hopes that the land eventually will revert to the woodland it was 300 years ago.

We admire and applaud Peter's generosity, his dedication, and his sense of responsibility to the land and to those who will come after us. "There's still a lot of ground that could be put into conservation easements," Peter noted. Donation of a conservation easement is an excellent way for landowners to preserve their land from development,

whether they want to continue to own it or to sell it as an estate property. Interested landowners should contact the township's Open Space Coordinator, Susan Caughlan, at 610-584-5619 for more information. ☺

Slip Ramp – Is It Really Gone?

As a result of the recent toll hikes on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, PennDOT is moving forward with several turnpike improvement projects, but the slip ramp is not among them. A slip ramp in Worcester at Schultz Road has been talked about since the late 1990s. Defeating this slip ramp was one of FOW's early issues. Over 100 people came out to public meetings and told PennDOT why a slip ramp at Schultz Road would be devastating to our goal of preserving Worcester's rural heritage.

This fall, Turnpike Commission representative Walt Green told members of the Montgomery County Planning Commission that this slip ramp will not be built because of opposition from residents and municipal officials in Worcester.

FOW thanks everyone who came out to the meetings, signed petitions and sent letters to convince PennDOT that a slip ramp in Worcester would be a terrible idea. If the issue arises again, Worcester can count on its residents to meet the challenge. ☺

Friends of Worcester would like to thank the family and friends of Worcester resident Louis Strohm for their generous contributions in his memory.

SUPPORT FRIENDS OF WORCESTER

FRIENDS OF WORCESTER is a non-profit organization made up of new and long time residents of the township. All involved residents share an appreciation for the rural quality of Worcester and share a common concern for its future. FOW seeks to influence that future. All funds received are used to support our efforts to preserve open space, maintain the rural lifestyle of the community and keep our neighbors informed through our minutes and newsletters. All Friends are involved on a strictly volunteer basis. Friends receive our monthly agenda and minutes as well as phone chain notification of important township events.

- Supporter - \$30 Contributor - \$50 Benefactor - \$75 or more Other

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

All residents, contributing or not, are always welcome at FOW monthly meetings.

Please send your tax deductible contributions to:

FRIENDS OF WORCESTER
P.O. BOX 545
WORCESTER, PA 19490

Peter Wentz Farmstead Events

MINCEMEAT FOR THE SEASON

Saturday, November 20th from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

This period dish was kept for pie making throughout the winter season. Come learn more during this open-hearth cooking demonstration.

****NO mincemeat available for purchase.****

CANDLELIGHT TOUR

Saturday, December 4th from 3 to 9 p.m.

Experience the Farmstead by the soft glow of candlelight and learn how the 19th century inhabitants of the Farmstead, the Schultz family, celebrated during the winter holiday season.

**** Last tour of the house at 8:30 p.m. ****

The Peter Wentz Farmstead is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., with guided tours every forty-five minutes. Admission is free. The Farmstead is located off Rt.73/Skipack Pike in Worcester, PA.

Raffle Thank-You

FOW would like to thank the following local businesses that donated items for our 2004 raffle. We appreciate their generous support.

Allen Antiques	Maryann Boyd
Asher's Florist	O & F Farms
Café at Cedars	Posh Pet
Center Point Pond	Risher Van Horn Florist
Curves	Second Glance Salon
David Brothers Nursery	Slim & Tone
Elohino Massage Therapy	Williams & Co. Jewelers
His & Hers Hair Salon	Worcester Golf Club
Looks Salon	

Worcester Township Meetings Worcester Township Community Hall (1031 Valley Forge Rd, Fairview Village)

Board of Supervisors – Mondays 8 a.m. Nov. 1, Dec. 6;
Wednesdays 7:30 p.m. Nov. 17, Dec. 15

Zoning Hearing Board – Tuesdays 6:30 p.m. Nov. 23, Dec. 21

Planning Commission – Thursdays 7:30 p.m. Nov. 4, Nov. 18, Dec. 2, Dec. 16

Paravati Catering

at

Worcester Golf Club

1600 Greenhill Road
Collegeville, Pa. 19426
610-222-0200



A Public Golf Course
Winter Special - Play all you Want
November 14- March 31
\$12.00 to Walk or \$17.00 to Ride
Any Day over 50° F



Now featuring 2 banquet rooms
Specializing in Weddings
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Have your Holiday Party Here
On and Off Site Catering
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10% discount to all Worcester Residents

FRIENDS OF WORCESTER OFFICERS

Kim David - President (610/584-1805)
Rob Hayes - Vice President (610/584-0371)
Wini Hayes - Treasurer (610/584-0371)
Barbara McMonagle - Secretary (215/257-1436)

Join us at these upcoming meetings and events
WE WELCOME YOUR SUPPORT

Nov. 11 7:30 PM Bean Road Nursery
Thursday Whitehall & Bean Roads
610-584-1805

Dec. 30 5:00 PM Holiday Potluck Dinner
Thursday Home of Wini & Rob Hayes
3033 Fisher Rd
RSVP by Dec. 28
610-584-0371

FOW PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Congratulations to the winners of the 2004 Friends of Worcester Photo Contest for Methacton High School students. The theme was "Worcester Up Close." The winners' photos are displayed on FOW's web site, www.friendsofworchester.org. We would like to thank Mr. John Bosler at Methacton High School for his help in organizing the event this year.

Traditional:

First Place – Daniel Doyle, Audubon
Second Place – Libby Shaw, Audubon
Third Place – Susan Benner, Eagleville
Honorable Mention – Mim Schantz, Worcester


Digital or Digitally Enhanced:

First Place – Meghan Pitcock, Norristown
Second Place – Kim Warliga, Norristown
Third Place – Steve Hamaday, Collegeville
Honorable Mention – Libby Shaw, Audubon

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