



Executive Summary and Project Recommendations

Project Background

An intensive-level field survey of the property was undertaken on May 21 and 24, 2004. The examination included a detailed architectural investigation and condition analysis.¹ The resource was photographed, and measured drawings of both interior and exterior dimensions were taken. The fieldwork was augmented by historical research. Personnel participating in the project included Robert J. Wise, Jr., Principal; Seth Hinshaw, Senior Planner; and Pam Jordan, graduate intern from the University of Pennsylvania seeking a joint Masters degree in architecture and historic preservation. Assisting the team was Bradley DeForest from the Skippack Historical Society.

Structural History

The Hunsicker House, like many houses its age, has undergone several building campaigns. The south section appears to be the original house, constructed c. 1770 (probably soon after Isaac Hunsicker the “Elder,” a Mennonite, purchased the property in 1768). This single-cell house (severely altered over the years) originally had a large kitchen fireplace and chimney in its southeastern corner. Around 1845 it was enlarged to the north thus providing a link into the three levels of the c. 1834 section (see below). This enlargement necessitated the removal of the northern wall and the reshaping of its original gabled roof to the current off-centered roof. The flooring was eventually replaced, probably after the fireplace was removed. The aforementioned fireplace / chimney was removed at this time as well.

The Hunsicker House was dramatically enlarged by Isaac Hunsicker (the “Younger”) c. 1834 when the center (brick) section was constructed. Many architectural details corroborate the inscription “1834” found in the basement plaster, including the section’s muntins, nails, the remaining original door, and door framing. (Unfortunately, the datestone on the northern end of the house, now covered by the north addition’s attic, has been removed.) The two story brick element was four bays wide and two rooms deep. Though now linked to the original house (see above), originally the two units shared a corner, as was sometimes the practice when constructing a totally new house to a smaller living structure. As was popular in many Montgomery County houses, the larger c. 1834 section was constructed into a hill, necessitating an above ground porch element on the east side.

It should be noted that the c. 1834 section has walls in the basement that some have assumed to be an older building. In reality, these are piers having a dual purpose of supporting the summer beam as well as serving as a partition wall.

¹ This report is not a structural analysis. Architects and structural engineers were not retained for this investigation.



Within a decade or two, a two-story, two-bay stone section was added to the north end of the c. 1834 section. This unit contained a small kitchen fireplace with decorative panel and mantle elements in the basement. The addition also provided additional living space on the first floor and two bedrooms on the second floor. The northern section elongated the c.1834 section by approximately seventeen feet, while maintaining its width and height dimensions.

As stated, the north addition was constructed around the same time that the original house was enlarged, linking it to the c. 1834 section. The “connection” provided a hallway between the south section and the center section. Its windows are cheeked like those in the north section, providing evidence that they were constructed near the same time.

After the construction of the north section, the entire house was painted white, including the exposed brick of the center section. Henry G. Hunsicker, the resident in the later nineteenth century, left the Mennonite faith, and later he “modernized” the house to reflect then current architectural trends. A bay window was added onto the west elevation of the center section, and the porch was altered to accommodate the window. Conversion of the house into apartments in the early twentieth century resulted in the addition of a frame section (thus enclosing part of its porch) on the east side of the north section and the addition of the rectangular bay window on the south end. Later, additional partition walls were added to the c. 1834 section to create three separate living units as found in the present interior configuration.

Inside the house, the rooms retain varying degrees of integrity. Some of the rooms, such as the kitchen in the center section, are highly altered, while other rooms, such as some bedrooms, are minimally altered. Overall, these alterations coupled with the removal of the fireplaces, replacement of windows, and creation of apartments have greatly altered the interior. Restoration, then, would attempt to retain specific architectural elements, such as floors, molding and plan, as opposed to strictly preserving every element.

Rehabilitation Recommendations

Although Wise Preservation Planning is not an architectural or engineering firm, our observations of the building’s condition (as well as its general plan) appears to make the building a strong candidate for restoration or rehabilitation. The house has a comfortable ceiling height on the first floor, large rooms, hardwood floors, and plenty of natural light to enable it to be used for residential or office use. Its flooring, walls, plaster work, and molding are, for the most part, in excellent condition. (Most damage has occurred under the chimney flashing points.) Modern use, no doubt, will require many changes, yet few of these changes should (or need to) negate the general architectural integrity of the building, particularly the exterior. That said, and given the circumstances of this particular resource, the Historical Society understands that this will not be a “restoration” in the strictest sense of the term. Major changes will take place, particularly as the building changes from abandoned residential use to modern commercial office use. We recommend then that the exterior of the Hunsicker House



be restored and the interior be rehabilitated, thus allowing some changes to occur.² Given the alterations that have occurred, particularly on the interior, a closely supervised rehabilitation with agreed upon goals appears to be an appropriate means of preserving and protecting the Isaac Hunsicker House. WISE recommends that the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Historic Preservation and Rehabilitation be used to "guide" this project and that the exterior of the house complex be restored to its appearance c. 1860 recognizing that major interior changes will probably be needed.

Rehabilitation Goals and Strategies

It is necessary to establish project goals in order to ensure all parties understand the Historical Society's expectations. The overall goal, of course, is to ensure that the building is rehabilitated as an economically viable project and investment. Second, the rehabilitation should not undermine the general historic appearance of the Hunsicker House – with a special emphasis, of course, on its exterior. To that end, the Historical Society should understand that changes to the interior must be made for both modern use and code compliance. Third, landscaping must be sensitive to the resource, with an understanding that much of the space west of the house will be used for parking and access.

Finally, a time line should be developed, including the transfer of ownership and the donation of a facade easement. The easement would, of course, restrict the owner and future owners to maintaining the house in its appearance and condition upon the completion of the work. Though we recommend maintaining the existing building footprint, there may be other options set forth in the easement to foster the long term economic viability of the house. The terms of an easement (or restrictive covenant) are not discussed in this Executive Summary.

Once the rehabilitation goals are established, the Historical Society should take an active role in monitoring the progress of the restoration work. Any clues to the history of the house revealed during the work should be communicated to the Historical Society by the contractor / developer, including such things as masonry seams or older historic fabric which has been obscured by later accretions.

There are three general rehabilitation strategies, applying mainly to the exterior of the house:

1. First, the house could be rehabilitated "as is." This would involve rehabbing or restoring all sections of the house as they exist today and represents the least intrusive rehabilitation option. The various sections of the house would continue to reflect all periods of the history of the house and would continue to reflect the building's existing fabric. While this strategy is often employed, it may not be suitable for a change of use such as that planned for the Hunsicker House.

² It should be noted that the developer could apply to list the building on the National Register of Historic Places and apply to certify the building for rehabilitation tax credits. Restoration tax credits would enable the developer to deduct 20% of the rehabilitation costs from income tax. The rehabilitation, however, must be carried out under strict Secretary of the Interior Guidelines as administered by the PHMC.



2. Second, the house could be rehabbed to its c. 1900 appearance. This would retain the Victorian-influenced alterations but remove the twentieth century elements. The three main sections of the house would be rehabilitated essentially as they appear today. Among other things, this would involve the demolition of the enclosed porch (east façade, north section) and its replacement with an open porch.
3. Third, the house could be restored to its appearance c. 1860. Such a project would involve removing the large bay window system on the west façade, replacing the porch there to its original shape, and replacing the enclosed porch (east façade, north section) and replacing it with an open porch per strategy two above.

Other options, involving the demolition of one or more large sections of the house, are not recommended. Given the various options, we would recommend either of the two latter strategies: either rehabilitating the exterior to its appearance of c. 1860 or c. 1900. Either would eliminate the unsightly enclosed porch on the east façade while maintaining the essential and major elements of the house. The south section would remain essentially as is.

The following table outlines three main strategies.

	Current Appearance	c. 1900	c. 1860
Center Section	Restore	Rehabilitate	Rehabilitate, but remove the two bay windows
North Section	Restore as is	Rehabilitate as is	Rehabilitate
South Section	Restore as is	Rehabilitate as is	Rehabilitate as is
Frame Section	Restore	Remove	Remove
Porch – East	Restore	Replace frame section with open shed porch	Replace frame section with open shed porch
Porch – West	Restore	Restore	Rehab to original shed profile, without bay



EXTERIOR CONSIDERATIONS

The table below presents recommendations for the rehabilitation of various exterior architectural elements. These recommendations should be evaluated based upon the final rehabilitation strategy. Some recommendations are listed as options the developer should consider, while other more important recommendations are vital to preserving the architectural integrity of the house.

Element	Recommended	Optional	Not Recommended
Roof	Wood shingles (historic treatment)	Asphalt shingles (current treatment)	Slate (due to the weight)
Chimneys	Repair existing chimney on north end of center section	Repair existing chimney, rebuild other chimneys	Remove chimney
Porches	Restore porches: 1. Remove frame section, extend porch across east elevation. 2. Remove wrap section on north façade. 3. Rehab porch on west elevation to c. 1860.	Remove concrete porch, south elevation.	Remove east or west porch.
Walls – c. 1834 section (painted brick)	Repair brick and repaint in original (or nearly original) color	Remove bay on west elevation of center section and replace with window. Stucco over brick if it has been determined that the brick has experienced general failure.	Remove paint and expose brick
Walls – stuccoed areas	Patch stucco matching existing stucco texture and technique; repaint in original (or near original) color		Remove stucco and expose stone
Walls – scored stucco (under west porch)	Patch stucco and re-score	If the porch is to be removed, paint brick per color above	Expose brick
South Section	Rehabilitate as is.	Replace window arrangement with single unit on west elevation, first floor	Demolition; partial demolition



Element	Recommended	Optional	Not Recommended
Doors	Keep all original doors where possible; replace where needed.	Install historically appropriate doors	Install insensitive doors.
Doors (Continued)	Install doors matching the molding patterns found in original doors		
Shutters	Rebuild shutters with panels matching period doors: c. 1834 section: see second floor, northeast room; north/south sections: see exterior doors.	Rehabilitate house without shutters.	Inappropriate commercially made shutters
Windows	Remove windows and storm windows and install 6x6 custom windows with muntin profiles similar to those in the remaining original windows (see north section, basement, south elevation). Restore (where possible) existing attic and basement windows.		Inappropriate replacement windows.
Exterior woodwork	Repair and / or replace in kind.		
Paint color	Retain historic colors*		

*Note: The project did not include a paint color analysis. Most woodwork appears to have been painted white, including the windows and doors. Some of the exterior baseboard molding was painted black. The original shutters were probably painted green or black, the two most common colors of that era. Shutter hardware was usually painted the same color as the shutters.



INTERIOR CONSIDERATIONS

Restoration of the interior should be left to the discretion of the new owner. Since the house is planned for office use, the removal or relocation of several partition walls may be necessary. Many partition walls are not historic. If any historic fabric is planned to be removed during renovation work, the Historical Society should have the option of taking it before it is disposed of. There are some interior features, however, that, when possible, should remain.

The following table summarizes recommendations for renovation of the interior.

	Recommended	Not Recommended
Ceiling and walls	Retain original plastered walls' appearance where possible.	Faux wood paneling
Basement plaster	Plaster inscriptions in basement should be retained.	
Floors	Retain and expose hardwood floors	Removing historic hardwood flooring
Doors	Retain historic doors and use as pattern for replacement doors	Installation of hollow core doors
Historic partition walls	Retain as needed, especially molding and historic door frames. Retain historic floorplan as much as possible.	Removing all or most partition walls; removing inscriptions in plaster in basement
Basement	Repair joists as needed (particularly 1834 section), retain mantle and woodwork in north section	
Chimneys	Stabilize chimneys	
Stairs	Retain stairs in c. 1834 section and north section	
Lighting	Non-glaring fluorescent lighting	
Paint color	Use original colors	

LANDSCAPING

The reduction of the land surrounding the Hunsicker House makes landscaping a critical issue. Given the size and topography of the property, parking must be located west of the house, which will necessitate removal of some trees. We recommend that the two largest trees be retained. Retained trees should be trimmed to keep branches off the roof and large branches from overhanging the building. Planting of trees should be carefully planned so as not to totally obscure a view of the east elevation from the road. This is the best and most historic view of the house from Heckler Road. Infrastructure improvements, such as parking areas and driveways, should be sensitive to the historic appearance of the building; utility lines should, if possible, be buried. Landscaping should be minimal to reflect age of house. Consulting a



landscape architect to develop a site plan prior to proceeding with rehabilitation is strongly recommended.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Most of the land surrounding the Hunsicker House has been disturbed by the adjacent development, which complicates an archaeological survey. The land immediately surrounding the house has not been disturbed and may provide important clues to the building's history. Archaeological work in the basement may provide additional clues. If an archaeological investigation is to take place, the following is recommended:

1. Complete the study before beginning rehabilitation of the house
2. Concentrate on the foundations and immediate area of the south section to (hopefully) provide a better understanding of its history
3. Examine the well just west of the house and try to locate the former privy.
4. Any artifacts found during site work should be cataloged; contractor should immediately notify Historical Society and determine if work should proceed at that specific location.
5. An archeologist should be contacted to determine the best course of action and budget.