

Proposal To Create An Historic Farm Park In Skippack Township

PREPARED BY THE CREAMERY HISTORIC COMMITTEE OF THE SKIPPACK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November 17, 2005

Vision

The main objective of creating an Historic Farm Park at the Cholet Property is to preserve and interpret a rural farm setting in a suburban environment for the educational, cultural, and recreational enrichment of the residents of Skippack Township and surrounding communities.

The park would be owned by Skippack Township and operated by the Skippack Historical Society. It would be an educational facility open to the public that preserves and interprets farming life and processes from the 1800's and 1900's. The barn would be turned into a museum of farm equipment and tools spanning the two centuries. This farm museum would present the great advancements that were made in agricultural technology during the years this farm operated.



Allebach Farm - Photo of barn complex and house sometime before 1950. View up Creamery Road towards Creamery.

Background

There is a strong desire in Skippack Township and across Montgomery County to have a rural and agricultural component in our growing communities not just in outlying areas but right in and around our neighborhoods.

Evidence of this came in the 2003 election where residents in Skippack Township and municipalities across Montgomery County voted overwhelming to support the Open Space Referendum.

"All 62 townships and boroughs endorsed the \$150 million bond question with an overwhelming 78% of voters saying "yes" to the proposed Green Fields – Green Towns Open Space Program and a new ten-year open space program. This powerful vote shows that the people of Montgomery County care deeply about their communities and are willing to spend tax dollars to save their special open spaces and to assure that their neighborhoods are green and livable. Endorsed by 54 municipalities prior to the vote, the referendum had bi-partisan support from both political parties and from all four candidates running for county commissioner." (Montgomery County Lands Trust)

Architectural Significance

The property contains two structures that date back to the second half of the 1800's. These two structures were the heart of this Victorian farmstead that was farmed by at least three separate Skippack Township families in the 19th and 20th Century including the Alderfer, Allebach, Kratz, and Cholet.

House

The main house appears to have been constructed sometime after the Civil War during the 1870's in an architectural style best described as "Plain Victorian". The floor plan of the house is in the form of a tee and appears to have been built all at one time with the exception of the summer kitchen and bake oven which were probably constructed at a different time and perhaps remain from an earlier structure.

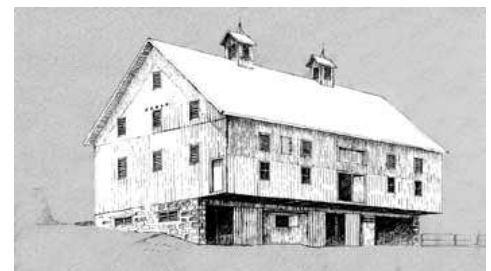


Photo of house in 1962.

The exterior walls of the house are constructed with stone and covered with stucco. In the basement one can see the original hand hewn wood floor beams and plastered cold food storage rooms. The original roof structure visible from the attic is in excellent condition and consists of timber beams joined together with wood pegs at the ridge. From the attic it is quite clear that the original wood shingle roof remain under subsequent layers of more modern roofing. The shingles appear to be smooth indicating that they were hand split and planed with a draw-knife or draw-shave and not manufactured with a circular saw.

Barn

The barn on this property is of a type known as a Pennsylvania-German bank barn, or Swiss barn, one of the primary barn types found in the United States before 1880. The Pennsylvania bank barn is a unique structure imported from Germany. The name derives from the fact that a barn is most accessible when it's constructed into a slope. An earthen ramp allows a farmer to drive a wagon onto a second floor to unload the forage. That fodder is in turn lowered through trapdoors to bins down below on the first floor where the livestock are kept. It is essentially a dual-purpose structure that houses both grain and animals in one building while maintaining sanitary conditions.



Farm Park Loop Trial

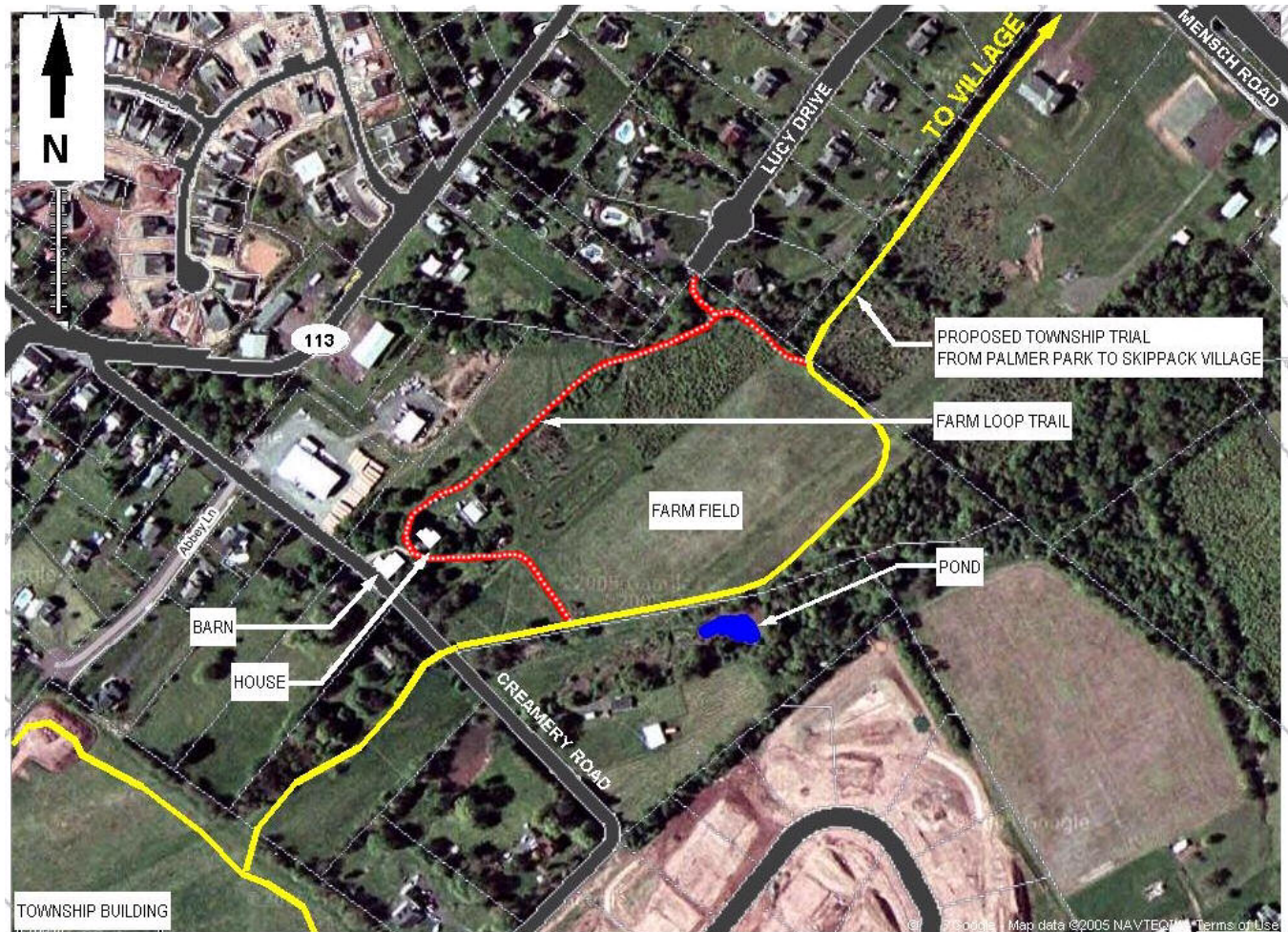
The overall proposed Township trail plan shows the trail passing through the Cholet property on its way to Skippack Village. Our proposal for a Historic Farm Park would create a loop trail off the main trail that would circle around the farm property.

This loop trail would veer from the main trail near the crossing of Creamery Road and travel between the historic Barn and House where public parking would be available. The loop trail would then continue around the north side of the house passing by the summer kitchen and bake oven heading toward the end of Lucy Drive. After making a secondary connection to the nearby neighborhood at Lucy Drive the trail would continue around



the north end of the main farm field before reconnecting with the main trail.

This trail would provide varied and numerous views of the historic farmhouse, barn, and fields, along with the other elements of a 19th & 20th century farmstead.



Caretaker

The Historical Society would hire a caretaker to live in the house with the responsibility of regular maintenance. Having someone live in the house would provide security and a level of constant care a house of this age requires.

The Skippack Historical Society would establish a Caretaker lease agreement between the Society and the Caretaker based on waiving rent payments for the Caretaker's services. The Caretaker would be responsible to pay all utility costs and provide general housekeeping services in and around the house. They would also be required to open the house to the public on a regular basis for tours.

Local Examples

Heckler Plains Farmstead

Located in Lower Salford Township at Landis Road & Morris Road. This historic farmstead is home to a 36-acre township park which includes a playground, ball fields, bike path, nature trail and pavilion. This is an 18th century farmhouse and barn owned by Lower Salford Township and operated by the Heckler Plains Folklife Society.

Norristown Farm Park

Located in East and West Norriton Townships and Norristown Borough, the main entrance is off Germantown Pike. The Farm Park is owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is operated and maintained by Montgomery County. The park blends recreational opportunities and agricultural activities.

Peter Wentz Farmstead

Located in Worcester Township near Route 73 on Shearer Road. This historic site is owned and operated by Montgomery County and has been restored to reflect its appearance at the time of the American Revolution. The Wentz Farmstead is surrounded by 90 plus acres that are managed as an eighteenth century working farmstead. A reconstructed barn houses farm animals that are typical of the period. There are gardens, orchards, and fields cultivated as they would have been in the period.

Funding

The Skippack Historical Society would lead an effort utilizing our 501c3 non-profit status in seeking the funds from various public and private sources necessary for the creation of this historic farm park and eventual restoration of the house, barn, and farm fields.

As discussed in this proposal the caretaker position and lease agreement would provide for the daily care and maintenance including the utilities of the house.

The following is a partial list of the public and private funding sources for the project that that have been identified at this point in our research:

- Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission Grants
- Montgomery County Green Fields/Green Towns
- Montgomery County Lands Trust
- Skippack Township
- Corporate Sponsors
- Local residents & businesses
- Perkiomen Valley School District
- Heritage Conservancy
- 113 Heritage Corridor Project

Implementation Steps

1. Lease agreement between Skippack Township and Skippack Historical Society (SHS) that allows the Society to sublet the House.
2. Create endowment for the maintenance and restoration of the property.
3. SHS to raise funds from public and private sources for the purpose of stabilizing the house and barn.
4. Renovate and rehabilitate the main bathroom & kitchen in the house for use by Caretaker.
5. SHS to sublet House to a caretaker in order to cover regular maintenance and utility costs.
6. SHS to have Historic Structures Report completed.
7. SHS to complete and submit a PA Historic Resource Survey/Inventory Form to the Bureau for Historic Preservation. The Bureau will evaluate and determine eligibility of the property for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.
8. Skippack Township to construct loop trail.
9. SHS to raise funds from public and private sources for the purpose of rehabilitation and restoration of the house and barn.
10. Restoration and rehabilitation of Barn consistent with Historic Structures Report.