

Originally Published: 5/19/2011

Historic Douglassville house gets new look and name

Douglassville building is renamed for Michael Fulp

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Reading Eagle

<http://readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=308949>

The Bridgekeeper's House in Douglassville, a historic structure that dates to the Revolutionary War era, has a new look and a new name.

Located in historic Morlatton Village, the 228-year-old stone structure was recently rededicated as the Michael Fulp House.

Fulp, a yeoman farmer and Revolutionary War veteran, built the two-story house along the Schuylkill River in 1783. He lived in it until his death in 1808.

"It made sense to name the house after the man who built it and lived in it for 25 years," said Laurence Ward of West Reading, a historic preservationist.

Ward is part of a team that coordinated the \$75,000 restoration of the house, which is owned by the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County.

Decades of flooding in the marshy flatland had taken a toll on the house, weakening portions of its stone foundation.

After an evaluation by architect Richard Ortega of Malvern, Chester County, the trust undertook a major restoration last year.

Master mason Joe Forrest, 75, of Juniata County supervised a team that rebuilt portions of the foundation and the entire south wall over the winter.

"It's beautifully done," observed Susan Speros, a trust board member who participated in the rededication.

The house is somewhat unique because it belonged to a common 18th-century farmer rather than a wealthy landowner.

A combat veteran of the Revolutionary War, Fulp farmed 40 acres along the Schuylkill in Douglass Township.

After the war, he built a modest house in what was still a sparsely settled area of Berks. While others of his class lived in log cabins, Fulp built his house of durable fieldstone.

"Preserving it is important because it gives us a glimpse into the life of an ordinary person in the 18th century," said Speros, a researcher at the Berks County Heritage Center.

In 1832, about 24 years after Fulp died, a covered bridge was built across a shallow portion of the Schuylkill River. The bridge would become a conduit for settlers pushing up from the Philadelphia area into Berks County.

Fulp's house became the Bridgekeeper's House, a name that endured long after the bridge was dismantled for safety reasons in 1951.



Renovations as they were under way at the 1783 Michael Fulp House in Douglassville



Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County

Adjacent to the 1716 Mouns Jones House, the oldest stone structure in Berks, the Michael Fulp House is part of historic Morlatton Village. Nearby is the White Horse Inn, once run by George Douglass, for whom Douglassville was named.

On May 28, Ward said, a team of archaeologists will begin to unearth an area near the Mouns Jones House in search of 18th century artifacts.

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