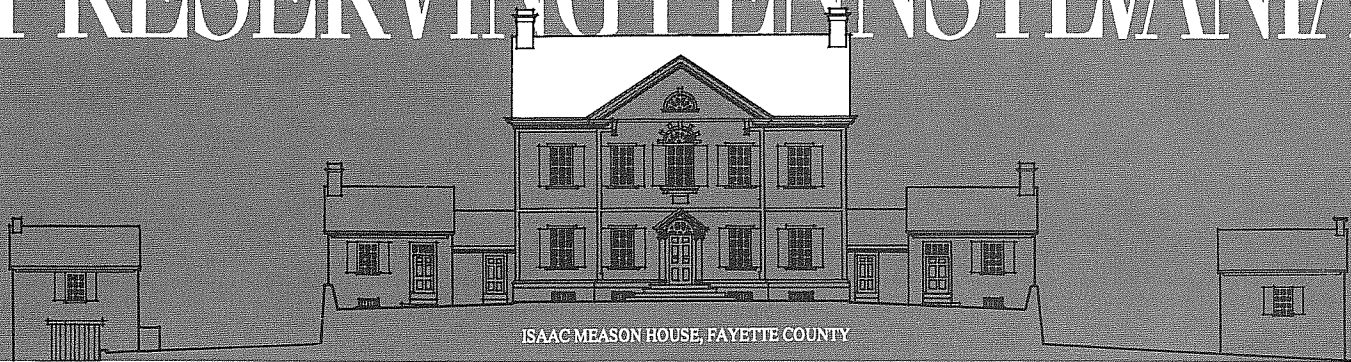


# PRESERVING PENNSYLVANIA



ISAAC MEASON HOUSE, FAYETTE COUNTY

Volume 8, Number 1

1994

## PENNSYLVANIA AT RISK 1994

The winter of 1994 was a difficult one for Pennsylvania, as it was for much of the nation. Not only did the snow and ice that bombarded us for three months take a toll on our patience and our morale, it also brought damage and destruction to countless historic buildings, some already at risk from general neglect and disrepair. This winter reminded us that Pennsylvania's rich heritage of historic sites and structures is at risk from the effects of nature as well as from the actions or inaction of people.

With spring finally at hand, Preservation Pennsylvania offers our third annual *Pennsylvania at Risk*. Once again, we call your attention to our Commonwealth's historical and cultural legacy of places and structures in jeopardy from a range of forces that include neglect, vandalism, inappropriate development, and uncertain plans for the future. As in past years, the sites described on the following pages are representative of the types of resources that are threatened and the types of threats faced by historic properties across the state.

We also include reports on threatened properties listed in past years. Your concern and your efforts on behalf of many of the sites listed in this special annual issue have produced positive results. Perhaps most notably, the movement to save the Star Barn in Dauphin County which has rallied support from local citizens to nationally renowned artists.

But as you will see again this year, there is still much to be done. These and many other important sites and buildings -- some previously listed, some not yet listed -- need our help.



Entrance, Armstrong Cork Company, Pittsburgh.  
Photo: Lockwood Hoehl; UDA Architects.



*Glosser Brothers Department Store, Johnstown  
Photo courtesy Johnstown Area Heritage Association.*

## Glosser Brothers Department Store, Johnstown

Glosser Brothers Department Store, built in 1905 as the Franklin Building, is the oldest and one of the largest department stores in the Downtown Johnstown Historic District. It occupies a prominent site on Johnstown's Central Park. Built in the Romanesque Revival style of architecture, the four-story building is distinguished by brick colonnades and projecting bay windows. In 1906, Glosser Brothers occupied a small one-room shop in the Franklin Building. The business expanded incrementally through the years until in 1921 it occupied the entire first floor and in a few more years the entire building. In 1927, a five-story addition was added at the rear of the building. The building was expanded again in 1931 with an Art Deco addition which features vertically aligned window bays and glazed terra cotta sheathing incorporating shell and plant motifs. Glosser Brothers purchased the building in 1936. The firm branched out in the late 1950s, developing chains of Gee Bee Department Stores and grocery stores.

The building survived the 1936 and 1977 floods but it has remained unoccupied since the late 1980s when the company vacated the building. It is threatened by neglect and unresolved development plans.

## Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (PSFS) Building, Philadelphia

The PSFS building, located at 12th and Market Streets in Center City Philadelphia, is a National Historic Landmark first listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. Recognized as the first International Style skyscraper built in America, the building's design evolved from the European functionalist style of the 1920s. Architect George Howe, who had been responsible for the design of other Philadelphia buildings in the more traditional styles of the day, formed a partnership in 1929 with Swiss architect William Lescaze, who brought experience in modern European design to the practice. Together, with extensive participation by then PSFS president James M. Willcox, the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society, one of the city's oldest and most conservative financial institutions, commissioned and built what was heralded at its completion in 1932 as the most radical departure from traditional bank architecture in a century. The thirty-six story structure's innovative design went far beyond the exterior, which was determined by interior economic and structural functions including stores and office spaces in addition to the banking areas. Design elements were controlled down to the smallest detail, from the use of varied marble panels, bathroom fixtures, graphics used for signs, elegant woodwork in the 33rd floor board rooms, to the clocks which were manufactured by Cartier. Furniture, designed by the architects, completed the architectural statement. For years the tallest office building in Center City, PSFS dominated the Philadelphia skyline with its distinctive PSFS sign of 27-foot high letters until the recent building boom and the end of an era in which no structure exceeded the height of the William Penn statue above City Hall.

The future of the PSFS building has been in doubt since the closing of the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society in 1992. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, through a grant from Preservation Pennsylvania's Philadelphia Intervention Fund, has rescued some of the architect-designed furniture, which will be added to the museum's collections. The future of the building, now held in receivership, and other interior detailing remains uncertain.

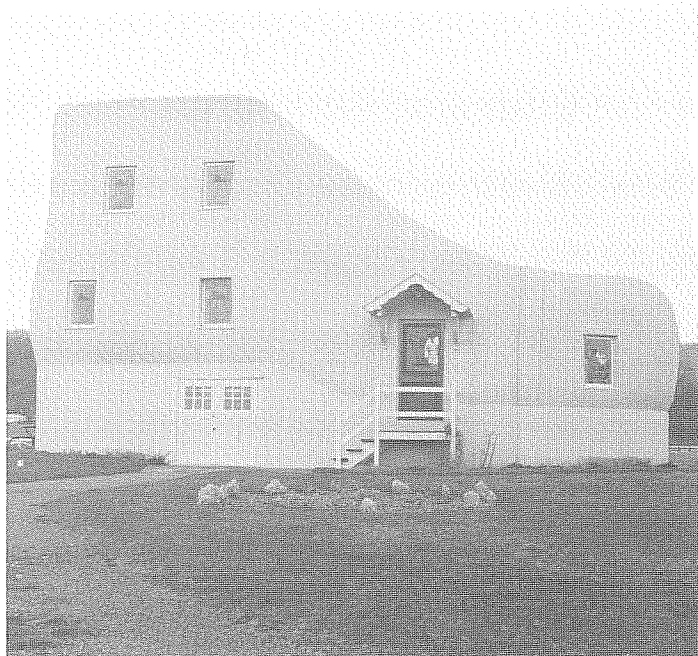


*PSFS Building, Philadelphia.  
Photo courtesy of the Philadelphia Historical Commission.*

## Shoe House, Hellam, York County

The Shoe House, built in 1948, was conceived as a giant advertising and promotion gimmick by an eccentric York County shoe store owner, Mahlon N. Haines. The building is located just east of York, on a hillside overlooking Route 30. Modelled after a high-topped work shoe, the building is a wood frame structure covered with wire lath and coated with a cement stucco. Measuring 48 feet in length, 17 feet in width at its widest part and 25 feet in height, the interior contains three bedrooms, two baths, a kitchen and a living room on five different levels. As a nationally known example of programmatic architecture, the Shoe House carries the shoe motif throughout the building from the stained glass windows, to exterior fence details. The building was originally used as a guest house by Haines who would make it available at no charge to honeymooners or elderly couples celebrating special anniversaries. After Haines' death in 1962, the building was sold to a local dentist who operated it as an ice cream parlor for more than twenty years. In 1987 the property was purchased and the building restored by a member of the Haines family who opened the property for tours during the summer months. The Shoe House has been determined eligible for the National Register.

Personal issues for the current owner make continued ownership problematic. The building has been on the market for the past few years, but as yet the Shoe has not found a new owner. Although the building has covenants held by Historic York, Inc., its future remains uncertain and is dependent on how long it remains unoccupied, who acquires the property, and what new use might be proposed.



*Shoe House, York County.*

## Vera Cruz Jasper Quarry, Upper Milford Township, Lehigh County

The Vera Cruz Jasper Quarry is one of the most significant archaeological sites in eastern Pennsylvania. The earliest Native Americans, known as Paleo-Indians, quarried and shaped its stone for tool making as early as ten thousand to twelve thousand years ago. Their descendants continued to quarry and work this stone until the time of their first contact with Europeans in the 17th century.

The jasper that occurs in Vera Cruz is part of a larger formation found in portions of Berks, Lehigh, Northampton, and Bucks Counties. The quality of the Vera Cruz jasper, however, is exceptional. The quarry's jasper is ideal for lithic tool making, owing to its internal crystalline structure. When struck during tool production, it cleaves in regular, predictable pieces, a valued characteristic in lithic reducing, shaping, and edge making. Native Americans widely recognized this quality, as evidenced by the long period of time during which they mined the quarry and by their carrying or trading the jasper over a wide region. Artifacts made from this jasper have been found on archaeological sites throughout eastern North America. The quarries were determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

Important to the culture of prehistoric Native Americans, and archaeologically valuable for the implication on the movement of people and materials, the Vera Cruz and related quarry sites are unfortunately among the most threatened cultural resources in the state. Vera Cruz and other quarry-related resources have become endangered due, in part, to the opening of Interstate Highway Route 78, which has promoted commercial and industrial development in the region. In addition, this area is now within commuting distance of the Philadelphia and New York metropolitan areas. While a portion of the Vera Cruz quarry is preserved and maintained as a park by Upper Milford Township, the remainder of the site is privately owned and threatened by increasing residential construction.



*Vera Cruz Jasper Quarry, Lehigh County.  
Photo courtesy of the State Museum of Pennsylvania.*



## Armstrong Cork Company Complex, Pittsburgh

The former Armstrong Cork Company buildings are an architecturally outstanding industrial complex, built to serve a firm that rapidly expanded into an international corporation during the early 20th century. Prominent Pittsburgh architect Frederick J. Osterling designed this Romanesque Revival style manufacturing plant, which was constructed between 1901 and 1913, and improved through World War II. The two seven story structures and ten story tower are unified by large scale, regular fenestration and high connecting walkways. Brick corbeling and monumental arches are principal elements of their Romanesque Revival detailing.

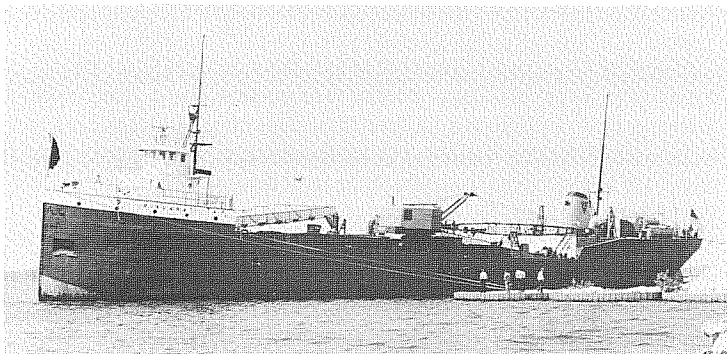
From a small mid 19th century cork cutting business that made primarily bottle cork, Thomas Armstrong and his successors expanded rapidly through the late 19th and early 20th centuries to include cork board and the burgeoning industry of manufactured floor coverings. Armstrong bought competing cork product makers and by the 1920s operated eight plants in the United States and seventeen plants abroad. Until 1929 this Pittsburgh complex was the headquarters for Armstrong's entire corporation.

Armstrong vacated the complex in 1971, and in 1975 a salvage company removed the machinery and elevator equipment. A decade of development proposals have failed to materialize into rehabilitation projects. Despite the city's activism in promoting reuse of the buildings, no viable plan and developer have as yet been found.



*Armstrong Cork Company, Pittsburgh. Courtyard elevation of the Warehouse Building.  
Photo: Lockwood Hoehl; UDA Architects.*

## Motor Vessel/Steamship *Niagara*, Erie

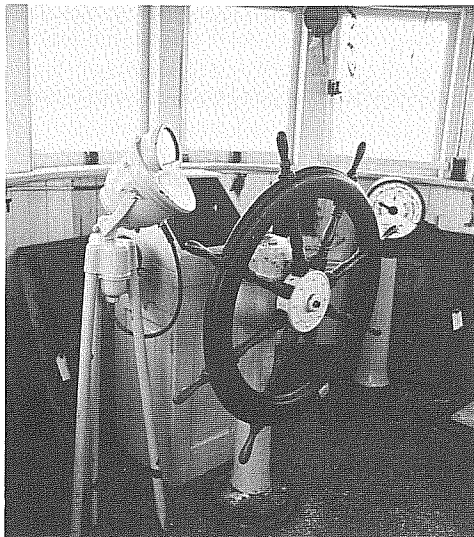


*Steamship Niagara, Erie*

The Motor Vessel *Niagara* is a rare and significant example of a late 19th century Great Lakes freighter, adapted for changing and continued use in the early and mid 20th century. Built as a two hundred eighty-one foot, steel-hulled bulk freighter in 1897, she first carried pulpwood for the Niagara Falls Paper Company. From 1900 to 1925, she carried coal and ores, first from the Erie Anthracite Line, and then for the Boland and Cornelius Company. The latter, intending to prepare her for service on the St. Lawrence Seaway, which necessitated passing through the two hundred seventy-one foot locks of the Welland Canal, removed a twenty-four foot length section from the middle of the vessel during 1925-1926. Work for her on the St. Lawrence, however, did not materialize, and she was sold for a new and different service.

Conversion of the *Niagara* for sand and gravel operations, while altering her original integrity, enabled her to perform new labors for another fifty-five years of service on the Great Lakes. In 1927 the Gravel Products Corporation of Buffalo converted her into a suction dredge by replacing the cargo holds with two large hoppers, and installing suction pumps, pumphouse, and sluices to screen and distribute sand and gravel. The wooden pilot house and master's cabin were also modified. Bought by the Erie Sand Steamship Company in 1959, she was homeported in Erie and assigned to supply sand to the Chevrolet Motor Division metal casting plants in Michigan. To perform this work, her new owner replaced her steam propulsion plant with a diesel engine and mounted a diesel crane on her deck. After Chevrolet switched to land-based sand for casting in 1982, she was sold for scrapping in Ontario in 1985.

A last minute rescue by a group of Erie citizens saved the *Niagara* and brought her back to Erie in 1986 with hopes of preserving her as a museum ship. Steamship Niagara Museum, Inc. now owns the vessel, which was listed in the National Register in 1987. Although currently moored rent free at the Erie Sand and Gravel Company wharf, the *Niagara* and her backers lack funds for preservation and desperately-needed maintenance.



*Detail View of Pilot House*

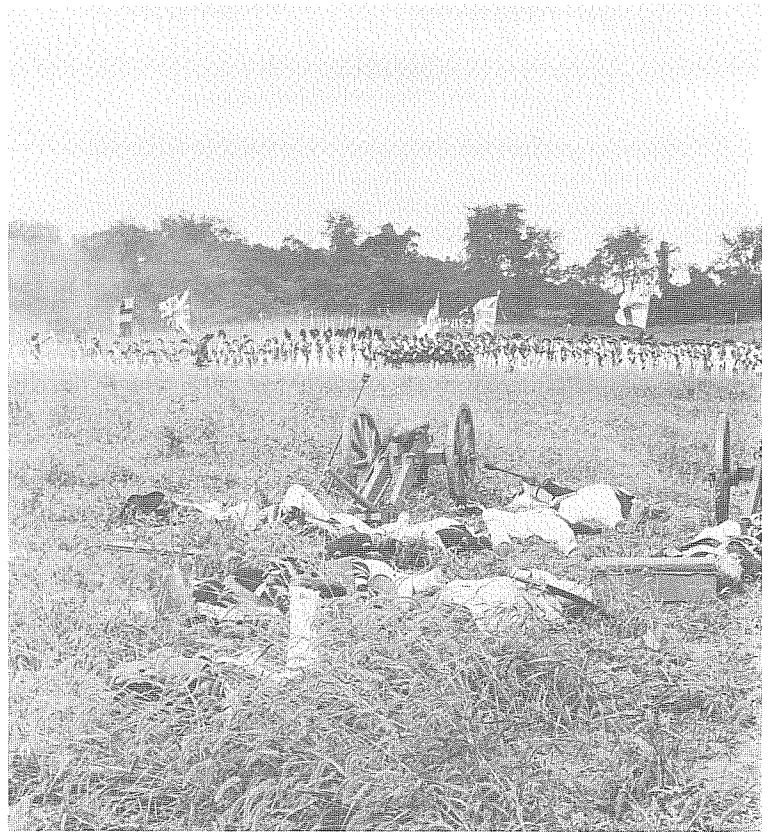
# Brandywine Battlefield, Chester & Delaware Counties

When General George Washington positioned his army in the path of the British march on Philadelphia on a hot September day in 1777, he set the stage for the Battle of Brandywine. He arrayed his army on the eastern bank of the Brandywine Creek at Chadds Ford to bar a water crossing. Washington's army resisted fiercely, but was forced to withdraw when British General Howe divided his larger army, forded the creek upstream, and outflanked the rebel general. Significantly, Washington avoided entrapment by waging a guarded retreat that sprung his army to wage four more years of guerilla attrition against British rule.

The battle demonstrated the deadly resolve of American resistance to risk its army in blocking the path to the Congressional capital. Washington realized that he could not hold Philadelphia or any other fixed piece of American territory against superior British forces, and in fact, risked losing the entire war by confronting the main British army. The projected morale loss of giving up the capital without a fight, however, dictated a military stand. Brandywine became one of the most costly battles of the American Revolution in terms of deaths and casualties to both sides. It proved a costly minor victory for the British, and signalled to potential ally France, American determination to wage a protracted struggle.

Brandywine Battlefield was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1961 and entered the National Register in the year of the Register's creation, 1966. Above and beyond recognition of the site's historical significance, the setting still conveys remarkable integrity with the battlefield district encompassing twelve individual buildings and two villages extant since the battle. Roughly seven thousand acres comprise the landmark, and the Brandywine Battlefield Park Commission and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission jointly administer a fifty acre park interpreting the setting and history of the battle. Although construction and development have certainly occurred since the battle, within the district, rural and woodland character still defines the setting.

The size of the battlefield, however, complicates its long-term preservation. The area covers parts of five municipalities and two counties, dispersing land use decisions among several local governments. Despite public involvement and a competent resource management study, significant areas of the landmark and the setting viewshed are being eroded by suburban sprawl radiating from Wilmington and Philadelphia. The



*Reenactment of the Battle of Brandywine, September 1977.  
Photo courtesy of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.*

National Park Service has identified Brandywine Battlefield as a Priority One endangered NHL in its annual report to Congress.

Of the battle's estimated two thousand American, British, and Hessian casualties, remains of only three hundred fifty soldiers have been found, typically buried at or near where they fell. Currently, a residential development is proposed on two hundred acres of the northernmost corner of the NHL in the vicinity of the location of the British attack on the right flank of the Continental Army, a scene of intense fighting. In addition to this site's strategic military significance, there is a high probability that it contains graves.

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Susan Shearer ... Acting Executive Director/Editor  
Mark Dittman ..... Administrative Assistant

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### **Mission Statement**

Preservation Pennsylvania through creative partnerships, targeted educational and advocacy program, advisory assistance, and special projects, assists Pennsylvania communities to protect and utilize the historic resources they want to preserve for the future.

## Bomberger's Distillery, Heidelberg Township, Lebanon County

Bomberger's Distillery was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1980, on the basis of its unique preservation of early distillery buildings and continuous, old-style distillation methods. The distillery complex has produced pot still whiskey almost continuously since before the middle of the 19th century. Its rare circa 1840 core complex includes a still house, warehouse, and jug house. Prior to the construction of these buildings, whiskey making on the same site is traced back to the mid 18th century. Successive generations of proprietors continued to distill whiskey here until Prohibition, and again after its repeal through the present.

Bomberger's represents an historically significant, although now virtually vanished, industry. Once, distillation was a common activity of early American farmers, because it was a transportable and profitable means of disposing of surplus grain production. Bomberger's was one of a few farm stills that was upgraded to a self-sustaining commercial enterprise. Few of these early commercial distilleries operated and prospered to the end of the 19th century. Fewer still survived the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the making of "intoxicating liquors".

Although Prohibition caused the Bomberger proprietors to sell the business they had operated since 1861, its repeal enabled new owners to resurrect and improve the distillery. From 1933 to 1950, new owners erected several larger-scale buildings at the distillery, at the same time, retaining the original buildings and distillation processes.

While in the past, long proprietorships under the same owner have helped to preserve the physical integrity and processes of the distillery, it has changed hands more frequently in the latter part of this century. As a result of bankruptcy and intercession by the Resolution Trust Corporation, Bomberger's Distillery has been sold without consideration for its historical significance and National Historic Landmark status. It is not known at present whether the historic complex and its distillation process will be preserved.



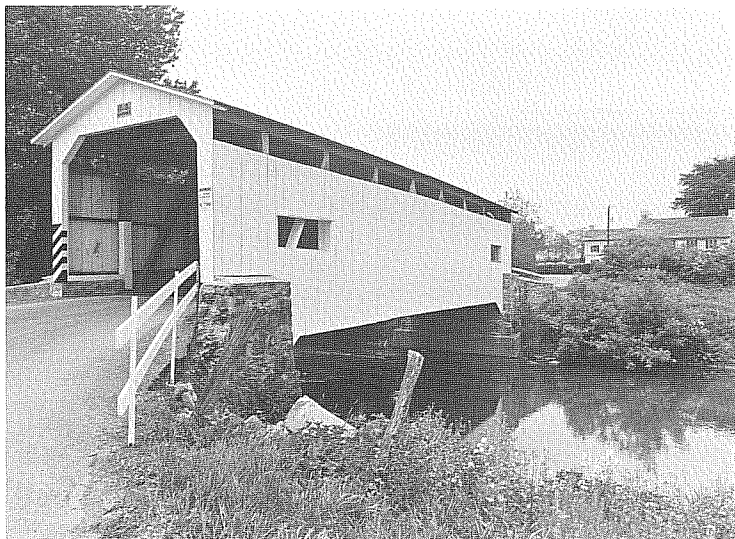
*Bomberger's Distillery, Lebanon County.*

## Keller's Covered Bridge, Ephrata Township, Lancaster County

Keller's covered bridge is an excellent example of a late 19th century Pennsylvania covered bridge. It was constructed by Elias McMellen in 1891 to span the Cocalico Creek, replacing an earlier bridge on this site. Its seventy-six foot long span utilizes a Burr arch-truss structural design, patented by Theodore Burr in 1804. The Burr truss employs great reinforced timber arches with multiple, diagonally-braced kingpost trusses. Keller's Bridge was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 as part of a thematic nomination of covered bridges statewide. Of an estimated fifteen hundred plus covered bridges that once served Pennsylvania travelers, less than two hundred twenty survive. In the last ten years, about ten covered bridges have been destroyed.

The historical and architectural significance of Keller's Bridge is not diminished by the fact that Pennsylvania had more covered bridges than any other state, still has the most, and that the region in which it is located, the lower Susquehanna drainage area, retains more covered bridges than any other area of the state. Rather, it well represents a type of historic resource that is best understood and valued in terms of its historical numbers. These bridges reflect the state's well-watered landscape, and the historical need of its citizens and travelers to cross this landscape in their industry and commerce. In the case of Keller's Bridge, it forded water at a grain and saw-milling site.

The nature of the threat to Keller's Bridge is symptomatic of the broad threat to many covered bridges, to other types of rural bridges, and to other rural historic transportation features. Ongoing residential development in the vicinity of Keller's bridge has resulted in substantially increased traffic duty and wear and tear to the bridge. An option under consideration by county engineers is to move the bridge elsewhere and replace it with a new bridge. Such an option would not only disassociate the bridge from its history and setting, but would erode the context of the adjoining Keller farm and milling site, which is also listed in the National Register.



*Keller's Covered Bridge, Lancaster County  
Photo: John Herr.*

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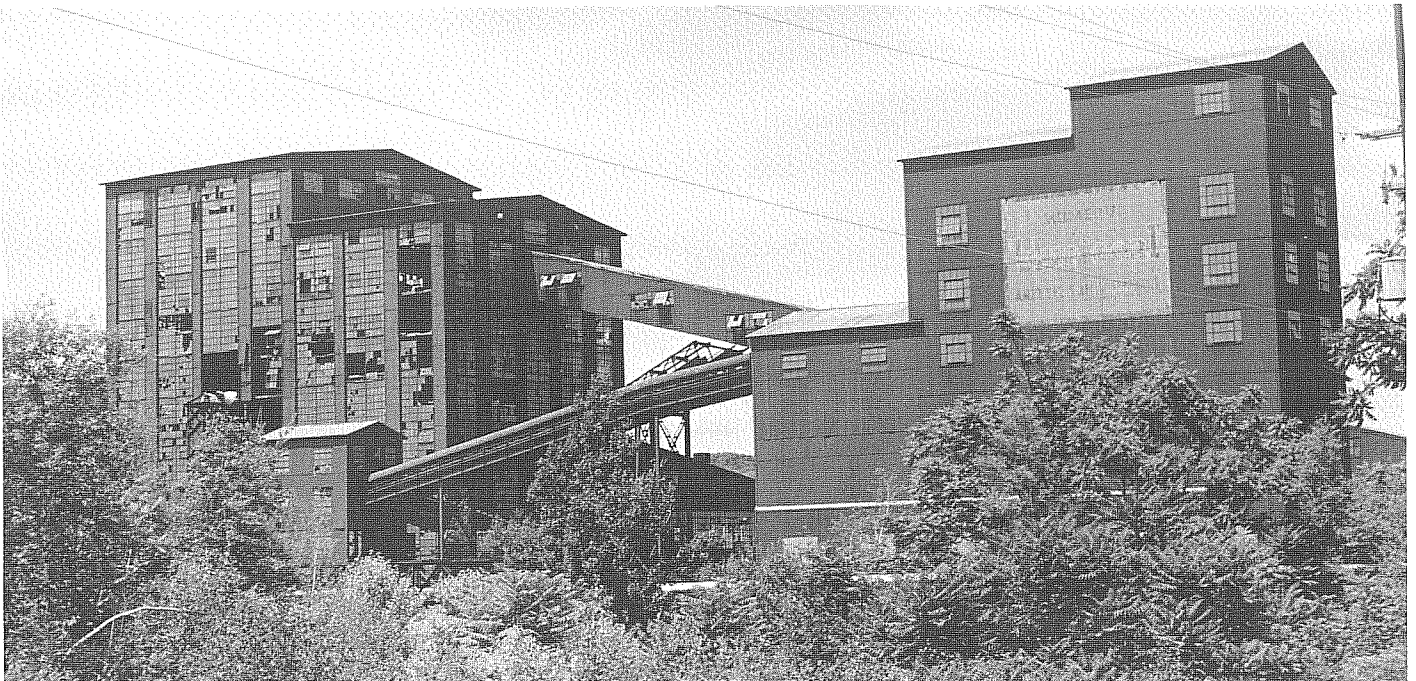
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## Huber Breaker Ashley, Luzerne County

The Huber coal breaker is an outstanding pre-World War II industrial facility erected by a leading anthracite company of the era to centralize and modernize its production. The Glen Alden Coal Company built the power plant and breaker from 1937-1938, naming it after their chairman of the board. It utilized state-of-the-art washing and separating technology to process the product of several collieries into seven thousand tons of marketable coal daily. It achieved greatly increased efficiency and provided the ability to deliver purer coal in the new smaller sizes marketed in the 20th century. Although the Huber was improved through the middle decades of the century by replacing and supplementing some of its equipment with improving technology, the facility could not overcome strong trends in the overall energy industry. These trends included competition from other energy sources, and the switch from shaft to strip mining, which required different processing technology.

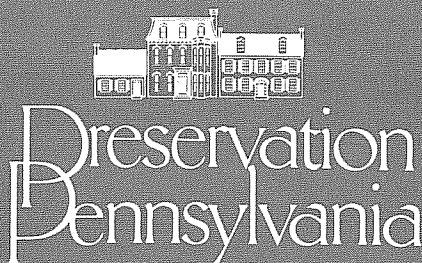
Since the shutdown of the breaker in 1976, the Ashley Breaker Preservation Society has coalesced to save it, and the Historic American Engineering Record has documented it through photographs and drawings. The continuity of anthracite industrial history at the site is strong, where generations of breakers have processed coal since the mid 19th century. The context of the setting, fully embraced by the town and its preservation of historic buildings and shopfronts across the street from the breaker, impart an irreplaceable sense of time and place.

The breaker, ravaged by vandals, salvagers, and the natural elements, is still owned by a coal-processing company which has not committed to preserving it. If the Preservation Society can assume control or ownership, it will face a Herculean task in seeking to stabilize the complex for public interpretation.



Huber Breaker, Luzerne County.





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## UPDATE: Pennsylvania at Risk

The following properties were listed previously as endangered Pennsylvania landmarks. Preservation Pennsylvania welcomes any information you may have on changes in the status of sites and buildings included in this or any past issue of *Preserving Pennsylvania*

• **Star Barn, Dauphin County.** Friends of the Star Barn have established headquarters for their upcoming capital campaign at the Historic Harrisburg Resource Center, 1230 N. Third St., Harrisburg, PA 17102; telephone 1-800-STR-BARN. Other recent activity moving the group closer to its goal of acquiring and restoring the barn are an award of a \$1,000 grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and locating the whereabouts of the weathervanes removed from the barn and carriagehouse.

• **Lynnewood Hall, Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County.** The fate of this important Neoclassical Revival estate continues to be uncertain. In mid-1993, sale of the property to a buyer sympathetic to the building's preservation seemed imminent. Before the sale could take place, however, the owners received financial help allowing them to keep the property. In the meantime, a local historic district has been created with provisions to protect the exterior of identified historic structures. Interiors, however, have no such protection; and reports indicate that architectural elements continue to be removed from Lynnewood Hall.

• **Borg Warner Complex, York.** Demolition of certain buildings within the Borg Warner Complex in York should begin later this spring. As part of the memorandum of agreement allowing demolition, Historic American Building Survey (HABS) documentation was required on portions of the complex slated for removal. Demolition, which will take buildings primarily in the rear of the property, should not affect the streetscape along the perimeter of the complex. The Atrium building, a major focus for preservationists in determining the future of the site, will be retained and rehabilitated for offices.

• **Erie County Library, Erie.** Plans continue to evolve for the purchase of the Erie County Library building by the General Services Administration (GSA). If approved by GSA and OMB and if Congress allocates the needed funds, the library would become part of a broader renovation and expansion of the U.S. Courthouse and Post Office at South Park Row and State Streets in downtown Erie and work could begin as early as October of this year. The project includes restoration of historic facades and spaces, courtroom construction and restoration, new systems and other rehabilitation work.

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