

Forks Township Historical Society

Spring House

About 1773 a large tract of land was purchased by David Wagener which appears to be the original Wagener homestead. He was well known in his day and in his later years known as Judge Wagener as he served as associate judge of Northampton County.

On this tract a significant and architecturally unique stone structure dating to the days of the American Revolution stands along the Bushkill Creek in the 3300 block of Bushkill Drive. Built over a free flowing fresh water spring and commonly referred to as a spring house, the building served as a dwelling with a loft for sleeping while shelter for livestock, then later a barn was constructed. The structure also could have served as a safe house during a time when some Native Americans remained hostile toward the settlers.

Ultimately a substantial stone house was erected nearby with the stone probably quarried from adjacent rock outcroppings. Later during the Civil War era, a two story frame addition was added to the residence. Over the years ownership of the property went through several hands and the spring house ultimately fell into disrepair. The farmland including where the spring house is located was purchased by William Sydney Beitel and his wife. Recognizing the uniqueness and concerned by the deteriorated condition of the spring house Beitel engaged George Hahn, a respected contractor, to do the restoration work. Hahn being a local historian determined the building dated to the American Revolution.

The lower level of the spring house where the spring was located also served as a "milk house" when the farm had a dairy herd. Following milking operations cans of milk were hauled to the spring where the milk was cooled prior to delivery to a dairy. One must remember this was prior to the days of mechanical refrigeration. The first floor was used as an art studio from 1962 to 1977, then as a cabin for a fly fisherman as the adjacent creek was regularly stocked with trout. Later reconstruction of Bushkill Drive had a severe effect on the spring by substantially impeding the flow.

Following the death of his wife, the former Minnie Stocker, Beitel sold the farm property including the spring house to Lafayette College. Still after over two centuries the spring house survived while road reconstruction, the raising of neighboring buildings and a succession of owners that have come and gone. Had it not been for the preservation efforts of William Beitel this historic spring house most likely would have been gone also.

Forks Supervisors and members of the Forks Township Historical Society met and discussed the need to preserve the structure. Lafayette College representatives and the Supervisors negotiated an agreement to maintain the spring house. The Forks Supervisors in turn accepted the Historical Society's offer to upgrade the surrounding area and improve the interior so as to be suitable for public tours.

A walkway and partial landscaping has been done as an Eagle Scout project by Alec Buchanann and Dan Leskosky. Interior rubble has been removed; wall surfaces sand blasted removing non-historic paint, the fireplace and damper repaired and appropriate signage erected. The Society has been successful in obtaining a grant for these purposes from the Pennsylvania Department of Community Development with the assistance of State Senator Robert Wonderling's office. Open house sessions and group tours will be offered as interior work progresses.