

# **CHAPTER 4**

## ***HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES***

Muhlenberg Township has a rich and diverse heritage that is reflected in the historic and cultural resources that are integrated within the existing land use patterns. The preservation of these historic and cultural resources is essential to establish a community bond from past generations to future generations. Since these resources are not renewable, it is essential to recognize their value and promote a future land use plan that is based upon fundamental principles in an effort to preserve, protect and enhance their presence within the community.

### **A. HISTORICAL PROFILE**

The following chronological list of historical events is considered significant in the overall growth and development of Muhlenberg Township over the past 285 years:

**1718:** The land area now occupied by Muhlenberg Township is sold to William Penn as part of a deed of release by the Lenni Lenape Indian Tribe in September of 1718.

**1737:** The first European settlers, mostly of German and English descent, begin to occupy and settle parts of Muhlenberg and the surrounding communities.

**1745:** All of the land area, which is now Muhlenberg Township is initially incorporated as Alsace Township.

**1752:** Berks County is established as Pennsylvania's seventh county.

**1761:** The Schuylkill River is recognized as a vital transportation system as the British Parliament passes an ordinance forbidding any damming or obstruction.

**1776:** Settlers within the area participate in the Revolutionary War, viewing it as an opportunity to gain their independence from the British. Captain Daniel deTurek, whose family owned a large tract of land within Muhlenberg, commanded the Third Company of the Forth Battalion of the Berks County Militia.

**1815:** The Schuylkill River Navigational Company is established to construct a canal along the Schuylkill River, between Port Carbon (Schuylkill County) and the City of Philadelphia.

**1823:** The original Felix Dam is constructed as part of the Schuylkill River Navigational Project.

**1825:** The Schuylkill Navigational Project is completed, providing a system for transporting coal, iron, lumber, merchandise and produce along 108 miles of canal with a vertical drop of 618 feet. As part of the design, 3 of the 92 locks are located within Muhlenberg.

**1833:** Leisz's Bridge is constructed as a toll road between Muhlenberg and Bern Townships. The bridge served as a vital crossing over the Schuylkill River until 1890 and was eventually destroyed by a fire in 1952.

**1836:** Mt. Laurel Furnace commences operation as a local iron manufacturer, located along Laurel Run at the base of Irish Mountain. The company ceased operation in 1892.

**1838:** A local post office is established at Schuylkill Bend, now known as Tuckerton.

**1838:** Hyde Park starts to be developed as a small hamlet containing a combination of residential, commercial, public and institutional uses.

**1842:** The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad commences with operation between Port Carbon and the City of Philadelphia providing vast competition with the Schuylkill Canal.

**1849:** Residents from the eastern and western portions of Alsace Township are at odds with each other over the taxes that are required to improve and maintain roads between their respective areas. Aaron Albright, Denis O'Brien and Henry Schoener (residents of Alsace Township) were appointed as a commission to make a recommendation concerning the division of the eastern and western portions. On June 14, 1849, the commission issued a report recommending that eastern and western portions should be divided and that the western portion should be named as Neversink Township.

**1850:** A second commission consisting of M.S. Richards, Richard Boon and Benjamin Tyson produce another report and survey, which supports the previous recommendation for dividing the eastern and western portions of Alsace Township. The second report indicated that the division line should be established along the defined ridge of Deer Path Hill and recommended that the western portion should be retained as Alsace Township and the eastern portion should be named as Manor Township.

**1851:** Muhlenberg Township is officially established as a municipality within Berks County. The western portion of the original municipality is named after the Muhlenberg family and the eastern portion of the original municipality retained its name as Alsace Township. The Muhlenberg family consisted of many well-known dignitaries dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and members of the family were instrumental in settling the land known today as Muhlenberg Township.

**1851:** Due to statewide law at the time, the Muhlenberg School District was officially established with a one-room school (Schlottman School) located on Kutztown Road.

**1853:** The Temple Hotel (previously known as Solomon's Temple) is established as a hotel and restaurant.

**1854:** The Gehret Mansion is established as a local stagecoach shop. This facility was later known as the Leshner Hotel, Whit-Mar Inn and Apple Inn. It was later demolished in 1999 to make room for a Wawa Convenience Store.

**1855:** A larger dam and lock are constructed along the Schuylkill River, downstream from the original Felix Dam in order to accommodate larger coal barges.

**1857:** A local post office is established in Temple.

**1857:** Stoudt's Ferry Bridge is constructed as a toll road between Muhlenberg and Bern Townships, in the vicinity of Tuckerton. The bridge replaced the ferry operation operated by the

Stoudt family and served as a vital crossing over the Schuylkill River (250 foot span) until it collapsed in 1948.

**1860:** The first decennial census of Muhlenberg Township revealed a total population of 2,069 persons.

**1867:** Temple Iron Company commences operation as a nationally recognized iron manufacturer located along the railroad in Temple Laurel Run at the base of Irish Mountain. The company employed a significant number of local residents, however the operations became obsolete and inefficient in comparing improving technologies and eventually ceased operation in 1924.

**1870:** The Schuylkill Canal becomes obsolete and is eventually abandoned in favor of other improved regional transportation facilities and systems.

**1881:** Tuckerton begins to resemble a small village containing 30 dwellings, a church, tavern, general store, warehouse and post office.

**1884:** Pennsylvania Railroad line opens through Muhlenberg Township.

**1895:** The public road system includes three (3) principal arteries including Kutztown Road, Pottsville Pike (State Route 61) and Stoudt's Ferry Bridge Road.

**1884:** Pennsylvania Railroad extends service lines into and through Muhlenberg Township.

**1901:** The Reading-Temple Electric Railway Company establishes a trolley line from Reading to Temple.

**1902:** The trolley line is extended from Temple to Kutztown.

**1906:** The Goodwill Fire Company is organized as a volunteer group providing fire protection service.

**1907:** The dairy industry begins to flourish with a number of prominent dairy farms in Muhlenberg Township including those known as Fairfield, Fink, Keystone, Luden, Muhlenberg, St. Lawrence, Dietrich and Clover Farms.

**1910:** The total population of Muhlenberg Township reaches 3,200 persons.

**1910:** The Temple Fire Company is organized as a volunteer group providing fire protection service.

**1914:** The Reading Fair is relocated to the Reading Fairgrounds in Muhlenberg Township and becomes an annual event until 1978.

**1914:** Rosedale Knitting Mills commences operation as a manufacturer of men and women's stockings. By 1921, Rosedale employed nearly 3,000 persons who settled close to the site of operations within areas that eventually became Laureldale Borough. Rosedale Knitting Mill eventually ceased operations in 1952.

- 1915:** The residential community of Muhlenberg Park commences with development.
- 1916:** The last coal barge traverses through Muhlenberg Township along the Schuylkill Canal in route to Philadelphia.
- 1916:** Muhlenberg Dairy commences operation as a manufacturer of dairy products.
- 1922:** Temple Borough is officially incorporated as a municipality.
- 1924:** The first automobile race is held at the Reading Fair. By 1935, the Reading Fairgrounds holds weekly racing programs until 1978.
- 1926:** The residential community of South Temple commences with development.
- 1926:** Dietrich's Dairy commences operation as a manufacturer of dairy products.
- 1930:** A bus route is established along the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Highway (Business Route 222) from Reading to Temple. Subsequently, the trolley line from Reading to Kutztown was discontinued.
- 1930:** Laureldale Borough is officially incorporated as a municipality. The name "Laureldale" was selected since "Rosedale" was already an existing community in Chester County.
- 1932:** All boat traffic utilizing the Schuylkill Canal officially ceases.
- 1934:** The Laurel Theater located at 1107 Elizabeth Avenue operates as a movie theater until 1959.
- 1935:** The mushroom cultivation industry begins to flourish through a partnership of local families including Paci, Morganti and Cinelli. Today, most of operating mushroom houses are owned by either Giorgio Foods or the Gaspari family.
- 1936:** Clover Farms Dairy commences operation as a manufacturer of dairy products.
- 1940:** The Muhlenberg Township Authority is established to develop a reliable, efficient and economic system for distributing water.
- 1946:** The residential community of Riverview Park commences with development.
- 1948:** The Muhlenberg Police Department is established to provide police coverage services.
- 1949:** The residential community of Cherokee Ranch commences with development.
- 1949:** The Schuylkill River Navigational Company conveys its holdings to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which initiates a massive desilting operation to remove coal deposits from the Schuylkill River.
- 1952:** Western Electric occupies the former Rosedale Knitting Mills and is a leading manufacturer of electronic and communication components. The ownership and operations of Western Electric eventually changes in succession to Bell Labs, AT&T, Lucent Technologies and finally Agere.

**1954:** The Muhlenberg Township Planning Commission is established to oversee growth, subdivision and land development activity.

**1960:** The total population of Muhlenberg Township reaches 10,995 persons.

**1960:** The Muhlenberg Community Library is established.

**1961:** A municipal wastewater collection system is installed to provide sanitary sewer service to most residential, commercial, industrial and institutional uses.

**1963:** The Muhlenberg Area Ambulance Association is organized by the Muhlenberg Lion's Club to provide service to the residents of Muhlenberg and Laureldale.

**1966:** As a result of a voter referendum, Muhlenberg Township becomes a First Class Township.

**1968:** The Muhlenberg Township Parks and Recreation Department is established to monitor, develop, manage and maintain recreation facilities, programs and services.

**1977:** Construction on the Warren Street Bypass (now known as State Route 12) commences, which eventually provides a vital transportation link with other major traffic routes.

**1978:** The contractor responsible for constructing the Blue Marsh Dam is hired by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to repair a 20 foot wide gap in Felix Dam.

**1978:** The Reading Fairgrounds is sold to the developer of the Fairgrounds Square Mall.

**1995:** The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania declares the Schuylkill River as a "Heritage Corridor".

**1998:** Representatives from Muhlenberg Township and Temple Borough discuss the feasibility of a municipal merger. On July 20, 1998, an ordinance approving a joint agreement to merge Temple Borough with Muhlenberg Township was agreed upon with the registered voters endorsing the municipal merger as part of the general election held on November 3, 1998.

**1999:** Temple Borough becomes part of Muhlenberg Township on January 1, 1999 and is renamed as the Village of Temple.

**1999:** As a result of Hurricane Floyd in September of 1999, portions of Felix Dam give way and the volume of water contained within the upstream portion are reduced significantly, whereas active recreation uses are no longer viable along this segment of the Schuylkill River.

**2000:** The latest census of Muhlenberg Township revealed a total population of 16,305 persons.

**2001:** Muhlenberg Township celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a municipality.

**2003:** The new Muhlenberg Township Municipal Building is completed.

A more detailed historical record of Muhlenberg has been published as *The Muhlenberg Story*, which was prepared in 2001 as part of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Muhlenberg Township.

## B. HISTORICAL SITES AND RESOURCES

Muhlenberg Township contains numerous buildings and sites that have historical significance. The Berks County Conservancy had previously completed municipal surveys to document the location, historical significance and architectural features of each site. However, these surveys must be comprehensively updated to account for recent changes in the municipal landscape. This future planning effort should be considered as a high priority since an effective historical and cultural resource plan will promote community pride, economic vitality and tourism. The following table provides a brief description of these historically significant sites and Figure 8 depicts their locations.

<b>HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS AND SITES</b>	
<b>Map #</b>	<b>Description of Historically Significant Area or Site</b>
<b>H-1</b>	Stone grist mill and brick house constructed by John Bernhart in 1856 at the site of an earlier grist mill. The tract of land was purchased by the City of Reading in order to obtain water via a large reservoir.
<b>H-2</b>	Federal-style stone farmhouse constructed in 1810 on the grounds of the Laureldale Cemetery.
<b>H-3</b>	Federal-style stone house constructed in 1825. The house was overlooks the Schuylkill River and was once utilized as a mule station along the Schuylkill Canal.
<b>H-4</b>	Germanic-style log and stone house constructed in 1750.
<b>H-5</b>	Gothic-style brick church constructed in 1849 on the lands of William Hinnershitz. The church was dedicated in 1850 as the Good Shepherd United Church of Christ.
<b>H-6</b>	Federal-style Flemish bond brick house constructed in 1800 near the former Leisz's Bridge.
<b>H-7</b>	Stone arched aqueduct constructed between 1825 and 1833 in order to convey the Schuylkill Canal over the Laurel Run. The aqueduct now serves as a functional bridge along River Road.
<b>H-8</b>	Colonial German-style stone farmhouse constructed in 1812 by Daniel Zacharias. The land and remaining buildings are now owned by Muhlenberg Township.
<b>H-9</b>	Georgian-style stone farmhouse constructed in 1800 along the banks of the Laurel Run.
<b>H-10</b>	Colonial Revival stone house constructed in 1850. The property was a farm belonging to Daniel Zacharias.
<b>H-11</b>	Romanesque Revival-style stone house constructed in 1921 and has undergone several additions. The property is currently the site of St. Michael's Convent.
<b>H-12</b>	Alsace Lutheran Church was founded in 1740 and is considered the oldest site of a church and burial ground in the vicinity of Reading. The third church, a brick building erected in 1850, was raised in 1907 when the Lutheran and Reformed congregations split and built separate churches.
<b>H-13</b>	Federally-style brick house constructed in 1850 located along the path of the former Schuylkill Canal.
<b>H-14</b>	Colonial-style stone farmhouse constructed in 1766 by Mennonites near the former Stoudt's Ferry Bridge.
<b>H-15</b>	Pennsylvania German-style stucco and stone farmhouse constructed in 1850.
<b>H-16</b>	Big Spring Valley Hotel constructed in the 1850's.
<b>H-17</b>	Freymoyer's Hotel constructed in 1876.
<b>H-18</b>	Miller's Store constructed in the 1870's.
<b>H-19</b>	Mount Laurel Furnace originally constructed in 1836 and later rebuilt in 1872.
<b>H-20</b>	Site of the former Stoudt's Ferry Bridge constructed in 1857 and collapsed in 1948.
<b>H-21</b>	Ritz's/Rothermel's Lock # 42 along the Schuylkill Canal at Felix Dam. The foundation was originally a lock-keeper's house.
<b>H-22</b>	Kelly's Lock
<b>H-23</b>	Peacock's Bridge constructed in 1850 as part of the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroad.
<b>H-24</b>	Site of the former Leisz's Bridge constructed in 1833 and was eventually destroyed by a fire in 1952.
<b>H-25</b>	Site of the Temple Hotel (formerly known as Solomon's Temple) constructed in the 1853
<i>Source: Berks County Conservancy, Berks County Planning Commission and Muhlenberg Township</i>	

## C. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES PLANNING

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has enacted the following two (2) laws, which provide the legal foundation for municipalities to protect and preserve historical resources:

**Pennsylvania Act 167:** The Pennsylvania Historical District Act (PA Act 167 of 1961), authorizes municipalities to establish local historical districts in an effort to protect and preserve the historic and architectural character through regulations for the erection, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, demolition or razing of buildings or structures within the historical district. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) must certify the creation of the historical district and the municipalities are required to appoint a Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) to advise the local governing body of building or construction activity within the historical district.

**Pennsylvania Act 247:** The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PA Act 247 of 1968, as amended) authorizes municipalities to use zoning regulations to protect and preserve places of historical resources. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code specifically provides for the regulation of places having historical, architectural or patriotic interest or value to the community. Historic preservation zoning provisions may be applied to specific sites within an historic overlay zone. Special permits and review procedures may also be established by the municipality.

In order to implement the community planning goals for historical protection and preservation established in Chapter 2, the following strategies are recommended:

1. Formulate and adopt an official policy statement for the protection and preservation of historical resources within Muhlenberg Township.
2. Appoint a local and/or regional HARB to initially document the historical and cultural resources within Muhlenberg Township.
3. Coordinate planning efforts with the PHMC, Berks County Conservancy, Berks County Planning Commission, Schuylkill River Greenway Association, Sierra Club and other state, county or local group who share similar visions for the protection and preservation of historical and cultural resources.
4. Conduct a municipal survey of all known or potential sites, buildings, structures, objects, districts and land areas, which have historical and cultural significance. The PHMC provides local assistance in the preparation of such surveys. The recommended procedures and survey format are further documented in *Guidelines for Historic Resource Surveys in Pennsylvania*.
5. Solicit qualified consultants in the fields of historic preservation, architecture and planning to review the results of the survey and prioritize the significance of the historical and cultural resources.
6. Develop a draft list of short term and long term strategies that will protect and preserve each historical and cultural resource.

7. Establish a community education program on the benefits of effective historical protection and preservation efforts. As part of this effort, meet with the owners and tenants of the historical sites with the highest significance to gain support and discuss preservation strategies.
8. Identify potential funding opportunities, which could provide financial assistance for historic preservation activities within Muhlenberg Township.
9. Consider establishing historic overlay districts for selected areas that have historical significance. Appoint a local or regional HARB to advise the local governing bodies of building or construction activity within the historical district. As part of this process, develop ordinances with standards and specifications for historical protection and preservation.
10. Consider the adoption of effective zoning, subdivision and land development amendments, which consider provisions for buffer yards, scenic vistas, adaptive reuse, landscaping, signs and other visual enhancements within historic overlay districts.
11. Promote tourism opportunities within established historical districts.

