HISTORICAL RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION IN LEHIGH COUNTY

By MELVILLE J. BOYER*

HISTORICAL preservation and restoration in Lehigh County began in a rather formal manner about ten years ago, although the Lehigh County Historical Society celebrates its Fiftieth Anniversary this year.

The year 1952 saw most progress. The work in the county has been sponsored by three main groups: the Society itself, one large local industry, and most recently a private group. Antedating the past decade, the City of Allentown itself might be added as a fourth group in the restoration of four important old residences and log houses, one of the latter dating back to 1744 and a former dating back to 1770. Trout Hall, our headquarters, was restored some thirty years ago.

Let me review briefly the work of the first-mentioned groups. The Society received, in addition to the deed to the property (the Troxell-Steckel House), almost $14,000 between 1942 and 1950 for restoration of a very large stone house built in 1756. Another $9,000 was received in 1953 from the same donor, Mr. A. P. Steckel, who made the entire restoration possible. We have to date spent almost $10,000 for final restoration, and maintain the balance as an endowment for future maintenance needs. The added gift of an adjacent six-room brick house and fourteen acres provide caretaker services at no cost to the Society.

On another fine old home, the country residence of George Taylor, signer of the Declaration of Independence, built in 1768, we have spent almost $9,000 on exterior restoration alone and shall probably need another $10,000 for interior work. We spent some $4,700 of the $9,000 during 1953. A cement gun stucco job was applied on an exterior of heavy stone full of holes. Our

*Mr. Melville J. Boyer is Secretary of the Lehigh County Historical Society, Editor of its Proceedings, and Assistant Editor of Pennsylvania History.
The architect proved that the house had originally been stuccoed. Except for a gift of $2,000 the Society has financed the cost thus far.

The second extensive program of restoration in Lehigh County has been undertaken by the Trojan Powder Company on properties owned by it in the area of its plant. Twelve old barns, some of them minutely described as to architectural construction and illustrated in Vol. XIX of our PROCEEDINGS, have been restored. Also a dozen old residences, such as the Troxell House of 1744, have been restored by the company. The chief engineer of the company
happens to be one of the directors of our Society. Vols. XVIII and XIX of our recent publications, thanks to Mr. David Williams, are major contributions to architectural restoration. Both volumes contain some 230 photographs and 26 plates of drawings.

The private group sponsoring restoration mentioned above comprise in one case the work of an owner, the Blank family, restoring at its own expense a very unique log house. We hope that another owner, who until recently had been indifferent to the idea of restoration, will soon become a convert. A Ritter family owns Grouse Hall, the colonial home of Lynford Lardner. Lastly, there has been organized in the county a new society, the Shelter House Society. There are some fifty members who have a definite program. They have acquired the property of ten acres of woodland with a two-story log house built between 1735-1740. The log house, the *zuflucht haus*, is regarded as the first shelter north of the South Mountains. In fact restoration has advanced to the point where furnishing it has already started. Former State Senator Henry L. Snyder has been the guiding genius behind this movement. Membership was at first restricted to those who were descendants of pioneers who moved into the county prior to 1800. The property will serve as a retreat for those who are historically-minded.

The most recent step in preservation about to be undertaken will be the furnishing by the Lehigh County Historical Society of the Lynford Lardner log cabin in Trexler Memorial Park. The bequest to the city of Allentown of the entire parkway with its beautiful colonial log cabin will be commemorated in April on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Gen. Harry Clay Trexler. The cabin will be furnished and maintained as a museum, open to the public, in a park where annually thousands of visitors enjoy nature and the wild life conservation area inhabited by hundreds of wild ducks.