



MEADOWCROFT

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A Legacy of Preservation

More than half a century ago, Meadowcroft founders Albert and Delvin Miller had a vision to preserve elements of what they saw as a vanishing way of life. They understood that the rural ways and hallmarks of their youth (before indoor plumbing and electricity had come to their family farm) had succumbed to the relentless duo of progress and time. They began saving historic buildings that were threatened with destruction. Some faced imminent threats by bulldozers while others were destined to suffer the slow fade of neglect.

In 1962, before historic preservation had become commonplace, the Miller brothers saw the completion of their first project: relocating the Pine Bank Covered Bridge to the Meadowcroft property. As reported in this column previously,¹ the 1871 bridge was recently rehabilitated after residing more than half a century at Meadowcroft. This project received statewide recognition by winning the Ralph Modjeski Award for Excellence in Transportation Design, Preservation, and Archaeology at the 2018 Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Awards.

With generous funding from The Allegheny Foundation, other preservation projects have been completed this year in the museum's 19th-century village area, including work on its schoolhouse.

The Miller Schoolhouse is a one-room school built following the passage of Pennsylvania's Common School Act of 1834, which created statewide free public education. The schoolhouse was constructed on the property line between the Miller's Bancroft Farm and the neighboring Pettibone family farm, each owner donating its respective piece of property for the school. Both Miller brothers attended school in the building until it was closed following the 1921 school year. Sometime later, after securing ownership of the structure from the township, the Millers moved it completely onto their farm to be used for storage of grain. In 1964, it was relocated once again, moved one mile to become part of Meadowcroft.

According to Albert Miller's records, which reveal evidence found in the attic before he moved the building, the school has had many types of roofs in its lifetime. These include coverings of oak, cedar, and slate shingles; metal roofing; and

even asphalt shingles. The new roof is standing-seam metal with hand-folded seams, a durable material that is historically appropriate for the late-19th century and comparable to the metal roofing seen in the earliest existing photograph of the school from 1913.

In addition to the change in roofing material, a new chimney was constructed. Since the time the building was moved to Meadowcroft in 1964, the heating stove in the center of the room had been vented by a stove pipe that extended through the roof. The new chimney is based on the 1913 photograph, which reveals a brick chimney at the roof peak.

Finally, some work was completed on the school's belfry to add standing-seam roofing and to correct some drainage problems. The original belfry seen in the 1913 photograph did not survive, so when Miller moved the school to Meadowcroft he acquired the belfry from another local schoolhouse to complete his project.



The Miller Schoolhouse as it appeared in 1913. Note the brick chimney, standing-seam metal roof, and original belfry.

Albert Miller Papers and Photograph Collection at Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village.

The legacy of the Miller brothers continues today as we work to preserve these tangible elements of our past. Historic buildings like the Miller Schoolhouse help us provide a rich learning experience for visitors of all ages. When you walk out of the schoolhouse, smell the wood smoke, and hear the bell ringing, you are connected to the past in a way that creates a deep and lasting impression. 🌟

¹ "Rehabilitating the Pine Bank Covered Bridge," *Western Pennsylvania History*, Summer 2017.



Miller Schoolhouse following the recent preservation work.

Photo by author.

The school being dismantled for its relocation to Meadowcroft in 1964. Note the slate roofing, a later chimney iteration, and the barn doors for access to the grain storage.

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