

Historians Work to Save 200 Year Old Structure

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by Helen Ash

The Allendale Historical Society and other concerned parties worked feverishly last week in an effort to save a nearly two century old building in town from destruction.

The building, located at 350 Brookside Avenue, is the Smith Millhouse. The earliest recorded proof of its existence dates back to 1827. However, Pat Wardell, founder of the Allendale Historical Society and local historian, feels that the house may have been built during the Revolution, and thus could possibly be the oldest and first residential structure in Allendale.

Last week, however, its future existence was even more uncertain than its past. On May 8, Pat Wardell noticed that several large trees in the front had been cut down. Concerned, she inquired and soon learned that the house was slated to be demolished by Chestnut Ridge Associates, the developers of a 20-acre tract of land adjacent to the house. Subdivision plans filed and approved at both the local and county levels called for the removal of the house. The date of the demolition was set for May 10.

Just before noon on May 10, this reporter found the house still standing. Sawdust was still near the tree stumps in front of the house and a number of wooden posts with orange flags marked strategic locations to the developers.

Within a few minutes, Claire Tholl of the Bergen County Office of Cultural and Historical Affairs arrived to study the house, its structural details in particular, to determine if it could be moved. The Upper Saddle River resident spoke freely about what she knew of the situation.

"Buying Time"

"The most important thing for the historical interests to do now is to buy time in order to save the building. The problem is that this is the first time that the Allendale Historical Society or the Bergen County Historical Affairs Office has heard about this demolition. This house is on a list of some 600 buildings in Bergen County with historical significance, and although it may not be of primary importance, we wouldn't want to see it torn down without first investigating other alternatives. Perhaps it can be taken apart and stored, or moved to another location. I don't know exactly — we'd just like to see it saved."

Seeing people at the site, Russell Anderson came over and introduced himself as vice-president of Chestnut Ridge Associates, and the person in charge at the construction site. He explained the reason for the anticipated demolition of the structure, which he had now set back to Monday May 14:

"Storm drainage facilities, and perhaps some future road widening are the only reasons. Although the storm drain could go anywhere, it was designed to go directly below what is currently the corner of the structure. Since our plans, which specified the removal of the building, were long ago approved by the Borough of Allendale and the County Planning Board, it appeared to us that no one was interested in saving the structure."

Although Russell Anderson at first questioned the "eleventh hour" actions of the historical groups, he understood their concerns. "It is our desire to work with whatever organization or agency to preserve or move the building. Our problem, though, is economics. We can't hold off forever."

Last weekend found many concerned interests and individuals contacting one another as to the fate of the structure. As of Monday afternoon, the house was still standing. Marion Strangfeld, president of the Allendale Historical



In the life of this old millhouse on Brookside Avenue, the span of a few short days became more significant than the decades which preceded them.

Society, stated that Allendale Mayor Edward Fitzpatrick had become involved and was working hard to keep the building from being destroyed, which was the primary short-term objective of the Society. Mayor Fitzpatrick told *The Town Journal* that he had spoken with the developers over the weekend, and that they would, for the time being, keep from tearing down the house. Russell Anderson also stated personally to *The Town Journal* that he was willing

to delay the demolition as long as possible. But he pointed out that "in the construction business, you build from the bottom up, and since the storm drains are the first to go in, time is limited."

Ultimate Fate

As to the ultimate fate of the building, no one can be certain. It may just be moved back on the property it now rests on, or it may be moved to another location in town, or perhaps another town. But if the Allendale Historical Society and any other interested people have anything to do or say about it, it certainly will not become just a memory.

Editor's note: The Allendale Historical Society is appealing to all residents and friends to make any suggestions to the preservation plan. If you would like to add your voice, write the Allendale Historical Society, PO Box 294, Allendale, or call 327-3510.

ALLENDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Box 294, Allendale, N.J. 07401
327-3510

THE ALLENDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IS DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED

After two weeks of feverish efforts to save the 200 year historical building at 350 Brookside Avenue, the future of the building is still in doubt. The Historical Society had first learned of the planned demolition of the oldest known structure in Allendale after the trees were cut down in front of the building.

The many attempts to reach the realtor Joseph J. Murphy, who is also Chestnut Ridge Associates, the developer of the 20-acre tract of land behind the historical house, were unsuccessful. A letter from the Allendale Historical Society Board, stating the presently known historical facts as far back as 1827 and pleading for time to research further back, has not been answered. But all this could be forgiven if the minutes of the Planning Board meetings during which the future of the historical building was discussed, did not reveal that someone had misinformed the Planning Board.

On March 14, 1978, Mr. McCann, secretary to the corporation as well as attorney for the applicant Joseph J. Murphy of Chestnut Ridge Associates, stated that the "applicant is in the process of

filing an application to have a building on lot 15 preserved as a historical landmark." During the Planning Board meeting on April 20, 1978, Mr. McCann talked about moving the historical house, and that "they are in the process of getting estimates on moving the historic site." On May 23, 1978, the question centered around the "disposition" of the historical building. The attorney also advised "that the County wanted it to be removed with the understanding that it is not demolished until a decision is made by the Historical Society."

It remains a puzzle which Historical Society would advise the County to give approval to demolish a house that is on a list of some 600 buildings in Bergen County with historical significance.

And finally, during the Planning Board meeting on March 15, 1979, the attorney for the developer, Mr. Edmund McCann stated that "the building which was considered as a historic dwelling was turned down by the Historical Society and it is to be removed." -- This, of course, is an insult to the Allendale Historical Society beyond comprehension. The Board of the Allendale Historical Society was never contacted by phone or by letter. Such a statement by the attorney for the developer is, as far as the Allendale Historical Society is concerned, pure fantasy.

The Allendale Historical Society pleads with all friends and concerned citizens to write letters expressing their sentiments to: Mr. Joseph J. Murphy, Chestnut Ridge Associates, c/o Joseph J. Murphy Realty, Inc., Barnstable Court, Saddle River, New Jersey 07458. It is hoped that all principal parties concerned will finally get together to decide what should be done to preserve this historic landmark.

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