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Progression vs. Preservation;
Illustrated by the Spread Eagle Inn

The issue presented in this research project is the conflict of contemporary development and historic preservation. This conflict arose out of the continuous industrialization of our Nation. Progression was seen as a problem for some, while at the same time a significant opportunity for others. Many changes came about in the city of Philadelphia including the overall makeup and the equally changing occupational structure. The swift change from a manufacturing city to mainly providing professional service increased the level of segregation and the inequalities of family income. Among the unfortunate were minorities such as the Italians, Polish and Russians as well as African Americans. With the changing structure of the city, numerous groups were forced further below the poverty line; while others at the same time benefited quickly and took advantage by moving out of the city. The people of Philadelphia were now facing the idea of "street-car" suburbs. These suburbs gave people a chance to live outside the city and work within. They offered quiet surroundings with ample amounts of land and larger homes. In addition, many new jobs were being created in these areas. This provided new job opportunity because of the changing occupational structure. The idea was obviously attractive to many in the middle and upper class who could afford these added luxuries, so very soon many were commuting their way into work each day. The thought that this vicinity and others like it could have remained this way was all too doubtful, because just as the city made a dramatic change we could safely assume the same for the surrounding counties.

A close and populous surrounding region of Philadelphia is Bucks County and within this region, there are many Townships with historic and educational landmarks. For example, just a walk in Newtown Township will subject you to buildings and houses over 200 years old. Some places, such as the hardware shop, and old movie theater, are precious buildings to these neighbors because they've been a part of the surroundings for so long; they feel they have that extra something when looking around them. Perhaps it's the feeling they get when sitting in the chairs at the movie theater, the smell of the hardware store or just the structure of the beautifully constructed buildings, but whatever it is the people of this town would like it to remain. Evidently, the region has changed quite extensively over the years with the added population, but these buildings let them know they can still take great pride coming from a community bursting with history. This is not to say the city of Philadelphia is not equally historic. In fact, it is almost impossible not to notice its history while walking around the city and seeing the landmarks, such as the Liberty Bell and the numerous amounts of educational museums. But the fact remains that Bucks County has somehow managed to preserve the many landmarks of the area keeping it's historic air, while at the same time progressing just as the city had. Bucks County's progression has been slow compared to the city's, but within the past few years with the surge in population growth there is no slowing down now. In addition, it is with this new development and progression that these invaluable landmarks are threatened. We now begin to see the conflict of contemporary development and historic preservation arises.

The Spread Eagle Inn located in Richboro, Bucks County provides a prime example of how progression has infiltrated a community abundant with history. The 200-year-old structure has gone through phases of almost being demolished, to now getting ready to be moved because of Bucks County's continuous development. Bucks County, as well as many other surrounding areas of Philadelphia, has evolved considerably over the years largely due to the rapid increase of population. To date from 1990-2000 Bucks County's population has had an increase of 12%, while Philadelphia has had a decrease of 4.7% (PA State Data Center). Add to that the fact of Bucks County having an increase of greater than 10% in the number of housing units for the same period, and the only obvious outcome is change (U. S. Department of Commerce). Along with the rapid change and increasing population come many people with new ideas for the area. There



are no longer little mom and pop stores on the corners. Instead, we see an abundance of fast-food restaurants, gas stations and commercial drug stores all over the place.

Of course there were always little shopping areas being built here and there all over the County but now, hardly a day goes by where some piece of land isn't being stripped in order to make new housing developments or to make a school bigger. For example, the well-known Council Rock public high school is in need of expansion and because of the growing population a second school is in the process of being built. Now there will be North and South Council Rock to accommodate the ever-growing County. At first glance, the school may seem large enough to most people, but with graduating classes reaching over the 1000 mark, it was necessary for a second school to be built. This small factor alone is very hard for the people of this area to accept. People of the area, especially those who have lived in the County for an extended period, treasure the fact that parks and wildlife surround them. And now land everywhere is being torn down for the new shopping centers and schools. Moreover, the community is facing an even worse situation; the historic Spread Eagle may be demolished in the name of progression.

The Inn has been in the hands of numerous proprietors over the years and as a result gone through many changes both on the inside and out. There is evidence of the Inn being built in Richboro as early as 1793, by a man named Enoch Addis. At the time the town was known as "Beartown" or "the Bears", as a result of the Inn originally being called the White bear (Deluca Blumenthal, p.4). Along with the White Bear there was also another Inn a bit further down the street called the Black bear that has since been torn down. Now a car dealership is located on the property.

Throughout the years the structure has been passed down generation to generation, been sold to different proprietors while at the same time accumulating more land. In 1837, while Andrew Jackson Beaumont was the owner, a meeting was held during which, "party leaders were chosen to fight Negro Suffrage" (DeLuca Blumenthal, p.6) This moment can be viewed as one of the various significant roles this significant building has played in history. Not only was it of service to weary travelers on their way to the bustling city of Philadelphia, but it also served a purpose to those in political parties in that it was a commonplace for meetings. Author DeLuca Blumenthal also notes that after the Civil War the Spread Eagle was of much significance, specifically to the Republicans who held numerous meetings there.

In 1900, the Inn was sold to the Yeakle family and it is believed that during this time a number of changes were made to the Inn including the name. The structure was no longer known as the White Bear but rather McCool's Tavern, a place where an assortment of additions and luxuries were added. Such as a bathroom and a heating plant (DeLuca Blumenthal, p. 8). In addition, during the Yeakle ownership a threatening fire broke out which lasted about 5 hours and required numerous interior renovations. After 30 years of ownership the property was sold to Harry E. Benner, and along with the previous changes made by the Yeakle family "extensive renovations were made to the exterior of the building" throughout the 50 years of the Benner family ownership (DeLuca Blumenthal, p. 9)

It was because of these changes, in 1989 Bucks County officials refused to list the building as a historic landmark. This lack of acknowledgment is the direct cause of the present action against the building. Rather than looking for what physicality remained of the

previous structure, it should be taken for its historic value. Unfortunately, all too many times we look at everything from the outside instead of for the many things we have yet to learn about the inside. In speaking with Doug Crompton, president of the Northampton Historical Society, it was revealed that some items of particular importance that had been removed from the Inn were the original mantelpieces.



Picture - Second floor southeast corner fireplace (Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

They had been sold to an antique dealer in the nearby town of New Hope, and had since been resold and placed in some very lucky person's house (Crompton, Doug interview).

Prior to this revelation by Mr. Crompton, he had been quoted vowing "we're going to have to locate them and get them back" (Coughlan, A. L., Bucks County Courier Times).

Shortly after officials refused to list the Spread Eagle as a historic landmark, a real estate salesman bought the land from the previous owners, renovated and reopened the Inn. This again adding to the many changes from years prior. The price of all that was included in this project was more than the salesman had bargained for, and he was forced to close the property.

Through the years, many options had come along as to what should be done with this area of land. First, the building was going to be raised and the already existing parking lot was to be expanded, which the owner of Giuseppe's pizza would have enjoyed. Tony Giaimo has shared the land with the Inn for quite a while, and as will be explained later, has not been the best neighbor. The next proposal for the large area of land came from Amoco Oil Company. They were going to purchase the land and put up a gas station, which would mean out of the four corners of the tight intersection three would have gas stations on them. This further corroborates previous statements. Bucks County, in removing historical buildings such as the Spread Eagle and replacing them with contemporary structures, is slowing becoming more like Philadelphia. Many in the area had hoped the Township would come around and realize they would be throwing away a significant part of Richboro's history by removing the structure.

The Northampton Historical Society has taken on the project as a result of the community's fortitude to save the building. Determined to keep the building on the corner of Second Street Pike where it has resided for hundreds of years, the Society meets monthly to discuss plans for saving the Spread Eagle. Doug Crompton became integrated with this particular project and decided to take it head on six years ago. There are about 150 members of the society, many from the immediate surrounding areas who know first hand the importance of the building. Most recently, the Township of Richboro has taken over the land, and a growing proposition for the structure was to simply move it back 1520 feet from the intersection it resides on now. This idea, although attractive to those in



the society and the Township is causing many problems with the owner of Giuseppe's Pizza, Tony Giaimo, who also owns part of the large lot of land. The Township's main concern is to widen the road to relieve the on-going traffic along the intersection of 332 and 232, which would require movement of the Inn (Stanton, James E., Bucks County Courier Times, 1C). According to Mr. Crompton, this isn't the first time Mr. Giaimo has caused both the Township and the Society troubles. Unwilling to recognize the value of the building and where it stands, he would just as soon tear it down and increase the size of his already mammoth parking lot. The only other small shopping center that existed on the same lot has been removed and the parking lot expanded, the Spread Eagle to him is no different. Now the new plan is to move the building south on route 232, which would block the entrance to Mr. Giaimo's pizzeria and restaurant. But no matter which way the Inn is moved south on 232 or 332, because Giuseppe's "fronts on both highways" and is "located behind the Spread Eagle" an entrance is almost guaranteed to be blocked (Stanton, James E., Bucks County Courier Times, 1C). As of right now the building stands where it has for years, on the corner, waiting until an agreement is made as to which direction it should be moved.

To those of the Historical Society it's not so much that the building stays the same with regards to the physical nature, but rather that it remains at its corner prominence (Crompton interview). This domain is important because, in the eyes of Society members the Inn doesn't belong anywhere else. It has resided there for hundreds of years and has become a landmark of the Township; to remove it would be like stripping the building of all significance. As stated before, extensive renovations and additions made during the Yeakle and Benner family ownerships have already altered the appearance of

the building; all that's left of its originality is the fact that it has remained on that particular corner for a span of over 200 years. A tempting idea proposed by the Historical Society was to modify the inside of the building and make it into a Starbucks coffee shop (Doug Crompton interview). Mr. Crompton envisioned this when he visited a similar structure in Doylestown Township that resembles the Spread Eagle Inn. The building had been preserved in that exact nature, with the lobby being transformed into a coffee shop. While this was a definite possibility in the eyes of the Society, the Township for some reason or another decided against it. This further proves that Doug Crompton and the Historical Society's focus is on preserving the location of the building, not the physical features. Many share the view of resident Larice Burt who claims, "it (the Inn) should remain near the corner, where it has always been a landmark" (Stanton, James E., Bucks County Courier Times 1C). Now the building, Doug Crompton, the Historical Society, Tony Giaimo and residents of Bucks County must all wait as the future of the Spread Eagle has yet to be decided. The structure just sits where it always has, but now it is "elevated on trusses, waiting for directions" (Stanton, James E., Bucks County Courier Times 1 C). The issue of the Spread Eagle Inn was depicted to further demonstrate the continuing conflict between historic preservation and contemporary progression. In addition, it helps to illustrate how many are involved when an area is faced with such a problem. Most would think that growing population and progression go hand-in-hand. However we have seen that numerous people and groups such as the Historical Society don't agree with this idea and would much rather keep their landmarks in tact. Again, it is not that simple. The conflict will go back and forth, just as the ideas have bounced

back and forth as to what will be done with the Spread Eagle. Bucks County, just as Philadelphia, is a place full of history and that should be seen as precious in today's society. Who's to say that twenty years from now children of the future will be able to walk down a familiar road and see a building that has been standing for over two centuries?