

# HARRISBURG HERITAGE



Newsletter of Historic Harrisburg Association • April–May 2002

## PRESERVATION WEEK 2002 Annual Preservation Awards • Mary Bradley Presentation • Dine Downtown 2002

During the week of May 13 – May 17, 2002, Historic Harrisburg Association will celebrate National Preservation Week. **‘Preserving the Spirit of Place’** is the theme. To honor this week, HHA has 2 wonderful evening activities planned.

On **Monday, May 13, 2002, 7:00 pm**, we will host our Annual Preservation Awards presentation at the Historic Harrisburg Resource Center. Our guest speaker for the evening will be Mary Bradley, a columnist for *The Patriot News*. Her topic will be **“Harrisburg in its Heyday – Then and Now”**, which will focus on the social aspects of the Harrisburg area in the 1920’s, 1930’s and 1940’s as compared to present day. This is sure to be a very informative and enjoyable evening (Please see related article on Mary Bradley on page 2). Following Mary Bradley’s presentation, we will present our annual Preservation Awards and Grants. Immediately following will be a reception serving light refreshments. **We hope all of you can attend!**

On **Wednesday, May 15, 2002, 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm**, we are featuring a brand new event, called **“Dine Downtown”**. This event will showcase the following 13 downtown restaurants:



**Appalachian Brewing Company**

**Brickhaus**

**Crowne Plaza Restaurant**

**Firehouse**

**Fisaga**

**Garrason’s Tavern**

**Mangia Qui**

**Nick’s Café**

**Passage to India**

**Raspberries at the Hilton**

**Scot’s Bar and Grille**

**Stock’s on Second**

**St. Moritz**

This event shows HHA’s commitment to celebrate the renaissance of downtown and the appreciation we have for our business owners. According to Don Brown, Jr., owner of *The Firehouse and Fisaga*, **“it is important to be supportive of organizations such as HHA, who are committed to showcasing the many assets of our downtown, in this case the restaurants. It will be a great opportunity to bring in more people to the city and help boost our economy.”**

The participating restaurants will give a portion of the proceeds from the evening’s food sales directly to the Historic Harrisburg Association. Revenue from the event will be instrumental in funding educational programs and services that HHA offers. **“This is sure to be a fun and enjoyable evening and we encourage everyone to save their appetites, bring your friends and family, and enjoy a night out at a participating restaurant to support historic preservation!”** said Penny Poerksen, Executive Director.

For further information or questions, please call the HHA offices at 233-4646.

**PLEASE SUPPORT  
DINE DOWNTOWN 2002!**



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**www.historicharrisburg.org**

Historic Harrisburg Association is a non-profit, volunteer community organization dedicated to the restoration, preservation and enjoyment of historic neighborhoods and landmarks. HHA is funded by voluntary contribution from members, friends and businesses. Additional support is provided by the Allied Arts Fund, Inc.



**HARRISBURG HERITAGE  
– APRIL/MAY 2002 –**

Editor: Penny M. Poerksen

*Harrisburg Heritage*, the newsletter for the Historic Harrisburg Association, Inc., is published as a membership benefit.

# 2002 Spring Lecture Series Continues

As we continue with our Spring Lecture Series, we are very happy to have **Linda Shopes, Historian, for the Pennsylvania Historic Museum Commission, who will be speaking on Monday, April 22, 2002 at 7:00 pm at the Historic Harrisburg Resource Center. Ms. Shopes will be discussing oral histories and their importance and impact.**

A special thank you to **Reverend A. Martin Landis**, our speaker in February, who shared very interesting information about the life of his father who was in the Civil War and very instrumental in helping slaves find the Underground Railroad. It was a truly delightful evening!

## HHA Has Successful Phone-a-thon

In the February/March newsletter, I stated that one of my goals for 2002 was to increase our membership. Our first effort was on February 21, 2002, when several HHA volunteers came in over a 2-hour period and called HHA members whose memberships had lapsed over the past three years. I am very happy to report that we got 32 renewals! We were very pleased with the result, as we had not conducted a phone-a-thon in a few years. A special thanks to all who renewed their memberships, you are the reason our organization continues to exist!

Another special thank you to **Michele Bainbridge, Senior Customer Outreach Representative from UGI Utilities**, who discussed energy-saving techniques for owners of historic homes. This was extremely helpful and informative.

All of our Spring Lecture Series events are held at the Historic Harrisburg Resource Center, 1230 North Third Street, Harrisburg beginning at 7:00 pm, **unless otherwise noted**. The Lecture Series are free and open to the public, light refreshments will be served afterwards. **Please come join us!**

### A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL WHO VOLUNTEERED AT THE PHONE-A-THON:

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Diane Beible    | Renee Lieux      |
| Chris Bryce     | Lindabeth Parker |
| Lora Hirschhorn | Daisy Prosser    |
| Kathy Lemke     | Charlie Wilson   |

REMINDER: To those of you whose membership has lapsed, please consider renewing. A membership application can be found on the back of this form. You can pay by check, cash or credit card. We need your support and involvement. Our organization has come a long way over the years and this is in great part due to those of you who continually support us.

## Mary O. Bradley

Mary Bradley has been a journalist since 1968. She is a graduate of both York College of Pennsylvania and Millersville State University. She joined the staff of The Patriot News in 1969, and was one of the first women journalists hired. She has worked as a reporter in many different departments of the newspaper, such as a social writer, police reporter, and writing feature stories on family, real estate, entertainment, business and travel. Currently, she writes the news articles for the **Best and Brightest** program, which honors 20 outstanding high school graduates each May. Ms. Bradley started a weekly column in 1996 about local books and authors, called **Booklings**, which appears each Sunday on the Books page in the Sunday Patriot News. In 1997, she began writing a column called, **Cornerstone**, which focuses on historic people, places and events in the area. Mary recently started a third feature called, **Nooks and Crannies**, which spotlights interesting and unusual collections owned by local residents. Mary resides in the City of Harrisburg, with her husband of 30 years, Jim Bradley, owner of Mother Cumberland Publications.



# THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

By Penny M. Poerksen, Executive Director

I must say that 2002 is moving along at a very good pace. In these first three months, we have completed the first phase of our sky-light restoration, enjoyed interesting speakers from our Spring Lecture Series and getting plans underway for Preservation Week and our House and Garden Tour.

During February and March, HHA hosted 2 wonderful speakers as part of the Spring Lecture Series, Reverend A. Martin Landis and Michele Bainbridge, who presented very interesting information. Thank you to both! (Please see related article).

Our annual Preservation Week festivities are well under way. Mary Bradley, from the Patriot News will be our guest speaker, during our annual preservation awards ceremony. We are also very excited to present

a new event called, "Dine Down-town". We invite each and everyone of you to come out and support our new event. (Please see article on cover page).

Exciting plans are under way for the House and Garden Tour in June. Many lovely homes and gardens will be showcased in the Capital Area Neighborhood. We look forward to seeing you there! (Please see related article).

Please welcome Minnie Morrison, our new HHA receptionist from AARP. Minnie started with us on March 11 and is a welcome addition to our staff.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to Historic Harrisburg Association. Please feel free to call me at 233-4646, if you have questions or need assistance. I can also be reached by email at: [ppoerksenhha@onemain.com](mailto:ppoerksenhha@onemain.com).

Thanks to all!!!!

Penny M. Poerksen  
Executive Director

## 12<sup>th</sup> Annual House and Garden Tour

The Historic Harrisburg Association (HHA) will be hosting its **12th Annual House and Garden Tour** on Sunday, June 23, 2002, from 12:00 Noon to 5:00 pm in the lovely Capital Area Neighborhood. This quaint downtown neighborhood will showcase several lovely homes and gardens. This is sure to be a delightful afternoon, so please mark your calendars. Tickets will be \$12.00 in advance and \$15.00 on the day of the tour and will be available in mid-May. We will include a complete list of ticket locations and further information about the tour in our June/July newsletter. Any questions, please call the HHA offices at (717) 233-4646. **We hope all of you can attend!**

### CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2002-2003 HHA OFFICERS

On Monday, March 25, 2002 we held our HHA Annual Meeting, by which our HHA officers were elected for the 2002-2003 business year. They are as follows:

**President**

Renee Lieux

**Vice President for Buildings and  
Grounds**

Gregg Warner

**Vice President for Corporate  
Affairs**

Frank Pinto

**Vice President for Education**

Chris Bryce

**Vice President for Membership/  
Community Relations**

Charlie Wilson

**Secretary**

Shirley Blough

**Treasurer**

Mike Galvin

### CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FOLLOWING HHA BOARD MEMBERS THAT HAVE BEEN ELECTED TO A THREE-YEAR TERM:

Evelyn Andrews

Shirley Blough

Chip Brown

Duryea Cameron

Diane McCormick

Kurt Twiford

Charles Wilson

### MIDTOWN MARKET DISTRICT HIRES EXECUTIVE DIR.

I am very happy to report that the Midtown Market District, whose offices are housed in the HHA building have hired a new part-time Executive Director. Her name is Mindy Kelchner and she will be starting in early April. Please stop in to welcome her!

### HOME AND GARDEN TV COMING TO HARRISBURG

*I am very excited to report that Home and Garden TV is planning a trip to Harrisburg in May to do a profile on owners of historic properties and interesting stories they may have uncovered through the restoration process and in learning more about their property. Several properties were being considered for this show and those chosen will be included on a segment called, "If Walls Could Talk". Call HHA offices for more information about show dates and times.*

## Night Moves

## Harrisburg Lost and Found:

BY KEN FREW

If you thought choosing your own electric utility was a recent innovation, think again. Over a century ago, Harrisburg's industrialists were already facing off in a series of power wars all in the name of turning night into day.

Back in 1850, the introduction of artificial, or "town gas," as it was sometimes called, was greatest boon to Harrisburg life since the establishment of its municipal water system. Gas burned more evenly and wasn't as offensive to the nostrils as the old whale oil lamps.

Gas had its place, but in the rush for artificial illumination, the new science of electricity, driven by wizards like Charles F. Brush and Thomas Alva Edison would revolutionize street and house lighting.

Brush perfected arc lighting in 1879. In the arc system a spark jumped between two carbon rods producing, for its time, tremendous candlepower, brighter than anyone had ever seen. Also, unlike gas, electricity was fumeless. Cities including Harrisburg began lining up left and right to install steam turbines.

Harrisburg's first plant, opened in 1883 as PA Electric Co., reportedly failed because the company representatives didn't know how to fully control the generator. The lights flickered off and on, "often as many as three times in one night," wrote Bill Beck in his corporate history of PA Power & Light Co. published in 1995.

Arc was actually too bright for indoor purposes. Homeowners didn't like having to trim the carbon rods all the time.

PA Electric soon sold out to another little utility, Harrisburg Electric Light Co., who were expanding into incandescent lighting. At the same time as Brush's arc lights were lighting the streets, Thomas Edison's perfection of a filament made from carbonized bamboo fiber saw the invention of the light bulb. Edison's Mazda Lamp became the standard of the industry until replaced by tungsten filament early in the 20th century.

In 1884, Edison's parent firm in New York sent their James A. Clark to Harrisburg to stage an exhibition. Forney & Stewart's shoe store on Market St. let Clark use some of their floor space for his equipment. Harrisburgers however, probably due to the earlier arc fiasco, were skeptical. Clark barely managed to win over the building owner, Elias Z. Wallower.

Wallower was also publisher of the Daily Independent, a struggling paper his competitor the Telegraph's Charles Bergner predicted, would unlikely have him "eating hoe cakes three times a day," when it first rolled off the presses in 1876.

Wallower proved him wrong though, just as he would prove everyone wrong about incandescent light.

In the spring of 1885, following a subscription drive, Harrisburg Light Co. began what



Photograph by Ken Frew

*A paxtang Electric Co. manhole cover on Court Street*

proved to be the city's first successful electric utility. Wallower in his 1940s autobiography, tells how rather than use a metering device he instead based his rates on the gas company's contract system. It was a gamble and a keen rivalry, but Harrisburg Light grew in popularity because of its superior illumination and the novelty of electricity.

With Harrisburg Light concentrating on direct current (DC) home and business wiring, city council in March, 1887, gave another arc company, Excelsior Electric, a contract to finally light the streets. Wallower's company decided to head off any attempts into their lucrative storefront and business wiring, engaging a Lynn, Massachusetts firm, Thomson-Houston Electric Co., to build their own 50-light arc machine.

For a while it was a war, with old reliable Harrisburg Gas of course, stuck in the middle. In just five years, poor Excelsior went to the wall. To save themselves they merged with Harrisburg Light.

In 1902, with many in town miffed at the merger, council passed an ordinance authorizing another utility, Paxtang Electric. This time there would be no buy-outs. Even so much as talk of joint management and the City promised to confiscate their plant.

With the throw of a switch in September, 1903, Paxtang Electric was ablaze. Mostly the doing's of William Mayne Donaldson, a wealthy wholesale paper dealer, this Paxtang had nothing to do with the later suburban borough. Donaldson's men located their plant in Lochiel, just below the mouth of Paxton Creek. Paxtang installed arc as well as incandescent lighting and built the city's first system of underground electrical conduits.

And there it was. A battle of titans, the beginning of a ten-year struggle to dominate electricity in Harrisburg. Wallower, however, had one last ace up his sleeve. In the Excelsior merger his company had acquired the soon-to-be-expired streetlighting contract.

Locking horns in a furious bidding war, the smaller Donaldson-led utility wasted precious capital taking on Harrisburg Light. But Wallower's company held on, winning a new five-year deal. Their opponent was demoralized. Ironically in 1913, it was not a local company which persuaded council into repealing the provision preventing Paxtang Electric from merging, but a New York one.

Consolidation was on the rise.

# A Street Called "Home"

*Growing Up on Derry Street 1940-1965*

*by Gina M. Douty*

My father Richard "Dick" J. Lewis, Sr. was born on 1163 Derry Street, Harrisburg in 1940. He lived on that same street for 25 years in five different residences, (1163, 1151, 1146\_, 1235, and 1316 respectively.) Recently, my dad and I took a relatively short car ride from the West Shore to Derry Street in the Allison Hill neighborhood, where my dad fondly recollected a few of his earliest memories of the places and people that were once a part of that community.

Derry Street was the kind of street where everyone knew everyone. Easy to do, considering that in addition to my dad's family of five, his grandparents, uncles and aunts, and countless cousins lived there as well. My dad shared a back bedroom with his older brother in the two-story row house at 1151 Derry Street. His next-door neighbors were Mr. and Mrs. Shopper. Mr. Shopper worked on City Island for the water works and used to bring my dad baseballs he found from the old Harrisburg Senators' games. When my dad's family moved across the street to 1146\_ he now had his own back bedroom, albeit unheated. This place was a three-story row house with 2 staircases—one in the living room and a back stairs in the dining area. Behind this house sat the all girls' Sylvan Heights Orphanage (current the YWCA.) The adults there were quick to chase uninvited visitors from that property. The few times my dad remembers actually entering the building were when the nuns of

St. Francis would call and ask you to pick up food there and take it to the convent.

Derry Street was also the kind of street where everyone walked to everything. My dad remembers Bernstein's Grocery Store, where as a youth he stocked and delivered groceries. Near 13<sup>th</sup> and Derry were the Wee Bite Restaurant, Model Cleaners, and Baskin Tires. Dr. Pitman was the dentist with an office on Derry, as well as Lehman's Furniture, Fackler's Funeral Home, and Peach's Plumbing on the 1200 block. If you wanted to see a movie there were several theaters, including The Roxy on 13<sup>th</sup> Street for 13 cent a movie, and The Grand on the 1500 block of Derry that was 18 cent. Where the Mount Pleasant Firehouse is now, was The Capitol. Shows on Saturday afternoons were at the bargain price of 5 cents. To make some pocket change for the movies, in the early 1950's my dad use to help ladies with their grocery at the old Market House on 14<sup>th</sup> and Market. He and his buddies would get there early in the morning to line up on the brick sidewalk with their wagons. They took turns hauling groceries for 10 cents—or if you were lucky, 25 cents a clip. My dad recalls walking six blocks to 18<sup>th</sup> & Regina for one lady and only getting a dime.

But it wasn't all work...there was play, too. Besides tag in the street, (because the yards were so small), my dad played football for St. Francis Grade School on Sunday afternoons. The team played their games

at McDevitt's Field, behind the Harrisburg Catholic High School, (now Bishop McDevitt High.) They would practice in Reservoir Park, or the "lookout" (as he called it) where now sits the National Civil War Museum.

By the late sixties, most of the extended family moved from Derry Street. Many of the neighbors and shops went as well. Every so often my dad drives to the old neighbor just to see the place. He says, "I have great memories of my time spent there, and that will never change."

Gina M. Douty is a member of Historic Harrisburg Association, and a historic preservation specialist with McKissick Associates in Harrisburg. She loves learning about Historic Harrisburg...especially from her Dad!



(ABOVE) My dad (small boy on the left) with his brother, sister, and mother, in front of 1151 Derry Street, Harrisburg. Circa 1944 (Photo taken by Edio D. Lewis)



(LEFT) Richard J. "Dick" Lewis, Sr., in front of 1151 Derry Street, Harrisburg. 2002 (Photo taken by Gina M. Douty)

# COMMUNITIES UNITED FOR SERVICE

## Earth Day 2002



### Saturday, April 20, 9:00 AM



Join the Capital Area Greenbelt Association, PPL, and your Capital Region neighbors as we honor our nation and planet with a day of service

### Harrisburg - South Riverfront

We will continue to build and enhance the Greenbelt as it moves south from the current end of Riverfront Park - clearing and planting seedlings. Volunteers may also help erect a small memorial to the victims of the 9/11 attacks.

Directions: from Harrisburg, follow Cameron Street south to Sycamore Street. Turn right. Bear left at Front Street and follow the service road between the PennDOT building and the river to the work site.



### Paxtang Parkway

Use your strength and skills to help repair signs and a kiosk, repair and paint bleachers and spruce up the t-ball field and playground, improve side trails to the Greenbelt, and give the area a good cleaning.

Directions: from Harrisburg, follow Derry Street east to the 3300 block. The Greenbelt entrance is next to Our Family Restaurant. Park across the street at VNA or along the parkway. Nearby residents are encouraged to walk.



### Swatara Township Five Senses Gardens

COME to see these unique and wonderful gardens, built on a former dump site. And you'll want to STAY all day to help cultivate the special plants to excite the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Directions: from Harrisburg, take Paxton Street east to 28th Street. Turn right. The road joins PA441. Parking is a short distance ahead on your right, the gardens on the left.



### Thank You for Your Service

All volunteers will receive refreshments and lunch courtesy of Pizza Hut, Dasani Water, and Powerade, as well as Greenbelt merchandise courtesy of CAGA and Wildware.



Volunteers should come prepared for moderate to strenuous work. Wear work gloves and sturdy shoes. Long sleeves and long pants are recommended as you may encounter poison ivy or thorns. If you would like to volunteer for less strenuous work, need better directions, or more information of any kind, please call CAGA at 921-GREEN, email [caga@caga.org](mailto:caga@caga.org), or visit us at [www.caga.org](http://www.caga.org).

### Registration and Donations

I/we would like to register  person(s) to work at the following site:  
 South Riverfront  Paxtang Parkway  Five Senses Gardens  Can't Attend

Please accept my/our donation to help with the cost of these projects:  \$10  \$25  \$50  Other

Please include your name, address, telephone number and email address and mail to:

CAGA P.O. Box 15405 Harrisburg, PA 17105-5405

# CAPITALS AND PILLAR MEMBERS

*HISTORIC HARRISBURG ASSOCIATION* has an active membership of over 1000 individuals, businesses and other supporters. We gratefully acknowledge the support of all members, especially those who have contributed at the following gift levels:

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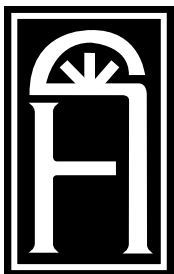
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# HHA Membership Application

Mail to: Historic Harrisburg Association • 1230 N. Third Street • Harrisburg, PA 17102

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Yes, I/we want to help preserve the residential, commercial, economic and cultural life of Harrisburg!  
Please start my membership at the following gift level:**

\_\_\_ **Individual** (\$25 per year)

\_\_\_ **Household** (\$35 per year)

\_\_\_ **Sustaining Member** (\$50 per year)

\_\_\_ **“Pillars of HHA”** (\$100 per year)

All memberships are renewable annually.  
Questions may be directed to 233-4646.

Members of HHA’s “Capital Club” provide up-  
permost levels of support, in the following cat-  
egories, which are based on the classical orders  
of architecture:

\_\_\_ **Doric Order** (\$250 per year)

\_\_\_ **Ionic Order** (\$500 per year)

\_\_\_ **Corinthian Order** (\$1000 per year and up)

**Payment Enclosed**

*Please make checks payable to  
Historic Harrisburg Association.*

**Please Bill Me**

**Please charge my VISA/MC**  
(#) \_\_\_\_\_

**Expires:** \_\_\_\_\_

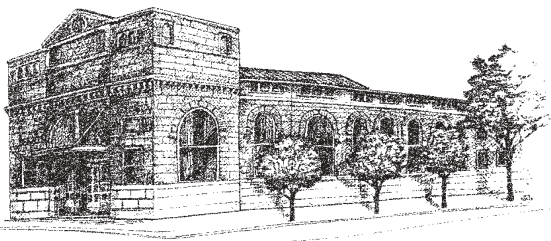
*Authorizing Signature* \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Harrisburg Association is properly registered in Pennsylvania as a charitable organiza-  
tion. A copy of the registration and financial information may be obtained from the PA  
department of State by calling 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

**Please contact me/us about  
Volunteer Opportunities**

**HISTORIC HARRISBURG ASSOCIATION**  
1230 North Third Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17102

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1230 North Third Street*