

**State Rep. Tom Tangretti  
Remarks**

**Opening of statewide preservation forums  
and designation of Academy Hill Historic District**

**May 18, 1999**

Welcome, and thank you all for attending today's events to mark the beginning of our examination of a long-term plan for historic preservation in Pennsylvania.

Joining me today are David L. Taylor, president of Preservation Pennsylvania; Michael LeFevre, community preservation coordinator for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; and Bud Nusselt, president of the Academy Hill Neighborhood Association and the newly designated Academy Hill Historic District.

Within the last 20 years, historic preservation has been transformed from something that relatively few people did in relative obscurity, to a broad, popular movement that is increasingly recognized as having not just historic, but social and economic value, too.

Not only has historic preservation become popular with an increasing segment of the population, but the notion that both private and public entities have a role to play in historic preservation has gained significant support, as well.

The reasons for this support are varied. Some people long to return to the way things once were. They remember the sense of stability and community that used to exist in our towns, cities and neighborhoods, and conclude that today's society could use a good infusion of those values once again.

Others want to know more about America's history, not just by reading books, but by being able to experience that history firsthand – by seeing it, touching it, soaking it all in, so to speak.

In recent years, communities, businesses and governments have begun to recognize that historic preservation can have substantial and positive economic benefits. The preservation of historic buildings, sites, neighborhoods and main streets enhances a

community's quality of life, adds variety and culture to where residents live and work, and attracts new people and new businesses.

Because people's response to historic preservation is so personal, the growth of this movement has been one of the few fueled by the people. It is something that has flowed from the private sector to the public sector, not the other way around.

Still, governments at all levels – federal, state and local, are beginning to recognize that they have an important role to play in this process. In 1966, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act and made the federal government a partner – and more importantly – a leader, in historic preservation.

The NHPA has evolved into a partnership between the federal government, the states and various private groups. That partnership has been very beneficial for historic preservation, and has changed the nature of governments' role from one of indifference to historic preservation, and sometimes as an agent for the destruction and loss of historic places, to one of advocacy and stewardship of historic places and historic preservation efforts.

In Pennsylvania, that spirit of advocacy and stewardship has led us here today. Today, I am proud to be joined by members of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission – the state agency responsible for Pennsylvania's efforts to preserve its heritage, and Preservation Pennsylvania, a statewide, private, non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of historically and architecturally significant properties.

These two entities, with the help of an advisory committee and citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, will, over the next several months, put together a plan of action for restoring, preserving and making sure the public has access to Pennsylvania's

most important cultural, architectural, archeological and natural treasures.

I am proud to be a part of this effort as a member of the advisory committee.

The end result will be the first comprehensive, long-range plan that Pennsylvania has ever produced for involving the public, the legislature, private groups and businesses on a local, regional and state level in the effort to preserve our history and heritage.

I'd like to take a moment to tell you how I got involved in this effort.

My interest in historic preservation grew out of my familiarization with the Academy Hill neighborhood, and the efforts of the Academy Hill Neighborhood Association, right here in Greensburg.

Since 1994, the association has been working to have this unique neighborhood added to the National Register of Historic Places. I am pleased to announce that on April 29, the Academy Hill neighborhood was added to the register as a Historic District. At this time, I would like to present the certificate of designation to Bud Nusselt, president of the Academy Hill Historic District.

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In granting the neighborhood this designation, the register cited its significance in reflecting the architectural style and social trends prevalent in this country during the turn of the century.

What is most remarkable about this neighborhood is that, through the efforts of the Academy Hill Neighborhood Association, the

integrity of that architectural style has been maintained in over 95 percent of the Historic District's structures.

Getting designation was a huge undertaking – one that was performed in true grass-roots style. The members of the neighborhood took up this cause on their own, and except for some free professional architectural guidance, had no help from anyone. The people who own these beautiful structures did everything – from historical and architectural research to the inventory of the properties to the photographing of the neighborhood to the composition of the narratives for the application.

Here is a perfect example of what can result when individuals who truly care about their neighborhood come together to preserve the cultural and historic richness that was here when they arrived, and will still be here for all to enjoy once they leave.

I must tell you, the efforts of the Academy Hill Neighborhood Association inspired me, as I am sure many of you have been inspired just by being in the midst of this neighborhood and its beautiful structures.

That inspiration led to my interest in historic preservation and my attempt to help people in other parts of Pennsylvania do what the residents of Academy Hill have done for their neighborhood and their city.

Members of the Academy Hill Historic District have told me that if they can do it, anybody can. But I am sure they would agree with me that if there is a way for those of us in government to make it easier for others, we should do it.

That's why recently, I re-introduced legislation in the state House of Representatives that would offer tax incentives to help improve

older neighborhoods and make existing but neglected residential areas more attractive places in which to live.

I believe my legislation represents a vital, but so far missing piece, in the state's attempt to address community revitalization and urban sprawl.

The Historic Home and Neighborhood Preservation Bill would offer a menu of state tax credits and exemptions to individuals who agree to purchase and restore homes in traditional neighborhoods and reside in those homes for five years. Current owner-occupants of qualifying properties also could obtain tax incentives for specified improvements completed over a five-year period.

My bill would offer a 20 percent state income tax credit for people who rehabilitate older residential properties in historic districts or neighborhoods designated by municipalities as residential conservation districts.

In addition, the seller of a qualified property that is currently being used for commercial purposes – like apartments -- would be exempt from the state share of the realty transfer tax and from capital gains taxes if the buyer agrees to restore the property and live in it. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission would oversee the restoration work subject to federally established preservation standards.

More than 50 cosponsors have joined me in this effort, and Preservation Pennsylvania and other groups interested in historic preservation in Pennsylvania have been very helpful in guiding this legislation.

Making the revitalization of our older neighborhoods and business districts one of the keys to Pennsylvania's historic preservation plan will bring focus back to the social and economic resources we

already have, and would go a long way toward solving some of the growth problems – like sprawl – that many places in Pennsylvania are now dealing with.

With the official designation of Academy Hill as a National Historic District and the celebration of our community's bicentennial, 1999 is sure to be an exciting year for history and historic preservation in Greensburg.

It seems very appropriate to me that this important series of statewide public forums on historic preservation begins here today. I am looking forward to the exciting input and ideas we will receive this afternoon and in subsequent public forums across the state. I'm also very much looking forward to working with people like those of the Academy Hill Historic District, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Preservation Pennsylvania and all the citizens of the Commonwealth to preserve Pennsylvania's historic past while solidifying for it a healthy and vibrant future.

Thank you.

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