ROOFLINE OF FREDERICK MUHLENBERG’S 1780s GENERAL STORE REVEALED:
DOCUMENTS, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND ARCHITECTURAL INVESTIGATIONS UNCOVER INFORMATION ABOUT THE SPEAKER’S HOUSE

Trappe, PA – Recent research at The Speaker’s House, the home of Frederick Muhlenberg, has led to the discovery of Muhlenberg’s general store, constructed c. 1782 and torn down c. 1867. Muhlenberg, first Speaker of the US House of Representatives lived at the property now known as The Speaker’s House, located at 151 W. Main Street in Trappe, Pennsylvania from 1781-1791.

Says Speaker’s House’s Executive Director, Allison Weiss, “We knew there was a general store on the property but were not certain where it was located. Through primary source research, archaeological investigations, and most recently architectural investigations, we are fairly certain that the store was located on the east side of the house.”

Documentary evidence like tax records and passages in the journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg describe the existence of a general store owned and operated by Frederick Muhlenberg during his ten year residency at the property. Items for sale included candles, soap, woolen gloves, thimbles, pincushions, tea, molasses, wine, spirits and so on. An archaeological survey that took place during the summer of 2007, led to the excavation of hundreds of objects in the vicinity of what was presumed to be the store. Items like thimbles, pins, ceramics and glass were found in such great quantity that the archaeologists concluded that these items were for sale rather than in use by the residents of the house. As written records described the store as a 20’ x 30’ stone structure, the archaeologists could determine where to dig units, in the areas where they would likely uncover the stone foundation of the building. Other investigations revealed that what is now a window on the east side of the house was previously a door that likely led into the general store. There is also a bulkhead door in the cellar that would have allowed for the movement of large items in and out of the store.

In the early 20th century, the entire house received a thick coat of stucco, hiding evidence of the many architectural changes that were made to the house overtime. With a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, The Speaker’s House hired a mason to remove stucco from the east side of the building, which revealed both the pitched roofline of the general store and the imprint of a thick stone wall.

“Discoveries like this enable us to say with more certainty what the house may have looked like during Muhlenberg’s residency,” says Weiss. “All of these projects inform how the house will be restored and interpreted in the coming years.”