RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF THOSE LESS FORTUNATE

SPECIAL FEATURES

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COURT

A Visit to the Speaker’s House
THE SPEAKER'S HOUSE

By Dennis R. Meakim, Esq.

Do you recognize the man presiding over this scene as depicted in the mural on the wall of Courtroom A in our courthouse?

Do you know that he was Speaker of the Pennsylvania General Assembly and was from Montgomery County?

Do you know the first and third Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives was also from Montgomery County?

Do you know the first person to sign the Bill of Rights was also from Montgomery County?

Amazingly, one local person served all three of these significant roles. His name was Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg and he lived in Trappe, PA. In addition to being front and center at these historic events, he served Montgomery County as its first President Judge, Register of Wills and Recorder of Deeds.

Frederick Muhlenberg was born in Trappe in 1750. A son of Henry Muhlenberg, the man widely considered as the patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America, Frederick, along with his brothers, was educated in Germany in preparation for the ministry. He started his adult life as a minister in different locales including New York, but returned to Trappe at the time of the Revolutionary War and entered politics. He and his wife Catherine (Schaeffer), the daughter of a sugar magnate from Philadelphia, maintained a house and general store on Main Street in Trappe from 1781-1791.

The house still stands at its original location, now 151 W. Main Street, and is being restored by a non-profit organization known as the Speaker's House.

Since the colonial era, the property has been a private home, a dormitory for Ursinus College's football team and home of its athletic director, and most recently an apartment building. Now a museum, the house is currently undergoing...
significant restoration which began in 2004 after a group of concerned citizens banded together to save the property from being razed and developed for commercial uses. The Speaker's House is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization dedicated to restoring the house to its original grandeur and raising awareness of Frederick Muhlenberg's legacy.

Lisa Minardi, the current president of the organization, provides a terrific tour and tremendous insights into the history of the property and the Muhlenberg family. She also provided most of the information that went into the writing of this article and is a frequent guest speaker on her book Pastors & Patriots: The Muhlenberg Family of Pennsylvania. Other volunteers assist with the property's educational programs, community outreach, and social media efforts. Historical tidbits, new discoveries, and much more are posted often at Facebook.com/speakershouse. The website is www.speakershouse.org.

Since 2008, the Speaker's House has hosted an archeology field school, now in partnership with Montgomery County Community College. Students from across the country participate annually in this exciting, hands-on program which has located and identified hundreds of artifacts dating back to the colonial era. Highlights include pieces of a dinner plate matching a pattern known to have been owned by George Washington.

The organization is actively seeking new members and volunteers. Currently, the interior of the house has been stripped of the many alterations and modern additions that occurred over 250 years. Standing in the home of such an influential and important person as Frederick Muhlenberg and seeing and touching its plaster and wood — which predate the formation of the United States — is both awe-inspiring and inspirational. Should you visit The Speaker's House, the "feeling" you might get will be reminiscent of the first time you stood inside Independence Hall.

The next major project at The Speaker's House is to return the roof to its original dimensions and pitch as part of the building's exterior restoration. A "Raise the Roof" campaign is underway and there is a gala fundraiser dinner scheduled for April 26, 2015, at the Barn on Bridge. Sponsorship and advertising opportunities are available now, and tickets will go on sale starting January 1. Visit www.speakershouse.org for more information.