

Michael & Margaret Heller House (Heller Homestead) Listed in the National Register of Historic Places

Media Contact:

Jack Cahalan, Lower Saucon Township Manager, 610-865-3291, manager@lowersaucontownship.org

Priscilla deLeon, President, Saucon Valley Conservancy, 610-216-0566, pmdeleon@aol.com

(Lower Saucon Township, Northampton County – July 23, 2010) Lower Saucon Township Council and the Saucon Valley Conservancy are excited to announce that on June 28, 2010, the National Park Service listed the Michael & Margaret Heller House (Heller Homestead) in the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance.

After two and a half years of hard work by township officials, Conservancy volunteers, local historians and other individuals, the Homestead, like the Lutz Franklin Schoolhouse and Ehrhart's Mill Historic District (Old Mill Bridge), has reached a great milestone in its preservation.

“As a rural community, we're proud of our township's history. One of Council's missions is to preserve our historic resources. This was big news to be able to add a third resource to the township's list of properties of national historic significance”, said Council President Glenn Kern. The other two are the Lutz Franklin Schoolhouse and the Ehrhart's Mill Historic District.

Councilwoman and Saucon Valley Conservancy president Priscilla deLeon said “I would like to thank everyone who worked together to preserve another community treasure. The township has set a great example to all by preserving its own historic resources and preserving the character of the Saucon Valley for future generations. We are very grateful for all the hard work of all volunteers and to Bob Wise and Seth Hinshaw of Wise Preservation for their efforts in the documentation of this historic site.”

Township Manager Jack Cahalan said township officials were pleased about the recommendation and hope to link historic sites throughout the area to a regional rails-to-trails project that stretches from Coopersburg to Lower Saucon. “This is adjacent to the rail trails site”, Cahalan said. “One of the things we want to feature on the rail trail is the linkages between the historic sites. This will provide something that is right there on the trail.”

On April 6, 2010, the State Historic Preservation Board determined that the Heller Homestead met the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register as well as the procedural and professional requirements set forth by the National Park Service. The Heller Homestead meets the National Register Criteria “C” for local significance in architecture, and specifically for local builder Stanley Yeager's interpretation of the Colonial Revival style of architecture. (The house was remodeled in the 1930s by Mr. Yeager.) The nomination was forwarded to the National Park Service in Washington DC for final review. The Park service, the official “Keeper” of the National Register listed the site on June 28, 2010.

The core of the farmhouse was constructed circa 1751 by Michael Heller; the main section was added around 1820. The adjacent “Widows House” was constructed circa 1850. The nomination's “period of significance” begins with the construction of the core and extends to the Colonial Revival style renovations of 1934-1935.

The 2.2 acre Heller Homestead is owned by Lower Saucon Township and leased by the Saucon Valley Conservancy. It is part of the 15-acre Heller Homestead Park located one-half mile west of Route 412 and Water Street in Hellertown at 1890 – 92 Friedensville Road (Water Street), Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

In 2007, the township retained the services of Wise Preservation Planning LLC to prepare the Historic Resource Survey Form and the National Register Form.

Of the existing structures, the farmhouse features four rooms that are decorated in different historic periods. Meetings are held in the public meeting room. The restored 1850s Widow's House features a kitchen with a small beehive oven in the fireplace.

The stone root cellar is a relatively rare example of a once prevalent out-building type of the region where cool temperatures kept root vegetables and other foods cool and dates back to the mid 19-century.

Until February of 1998, all four sides of the original stone barn stood erect. In the aftermath of a severe storm, a portion of the roof collapsed. Deeming it a danger, township officials decided to bring down all but about one-third of the barn, preserving its very unusual arch. The Heller barn was actually a complex of two barns – an early English Lake District stone bank barn and a frame bank barn that was constructed considerably later.

Between the barn ruins and the Widow's House is a replicated Pennsylvania German four-square herb garden featuring seasonal vegetables, climbing roses, and medicinal and culinary herbs.

A sawmill was located east of the Widow's House, on the west side of a historic railroad bed. A low wall runs south from the southeast corner of the garage to indicate the east wall of the mill.

The Saucon Valley Conservancy, Inc., a not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) corporation, founded January 7, 1993, is dedicated to work in partnership with government bodies, community organizations, business groups and concerned citizens. The mission of the Saucon Valley Conservancy is to preserve the historic and natural environment of the Saucon Valley as an educational and recreational resource for area citizens and visitors. The major stewardship of the Conservancy is the Michael Heller Homestead and the Saucon Creek corridor.