

International Hands-on Workshops for Architectural and Site Conservation



News

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Masonry Conservation Training at the Speaker's House Yields Big Benefits for All: Trainees Use New Skills to Complete Façade Restoration

Boulder, Colorado, and Trappe, Pennsylvania, June 10, 2009 – Restoration of the Speaker's House received a remarkable boost from a two-week masonry conservation training workshop held at the site in May. Restoration expert Andy deGruchy led a team of two masons and four masonry trainees in restoring the façade of the 18th century home of Frederick Muhlenberg, first Speaker of the House of Representatives

During the workshop – coordinated by The Speaker's House, Heritage Conservation Network, deGruchy Masonry Restoration, Inc., and the University of Pennsylvania – trainees learned how to prepare traditional lime mortar, match it to existing mortar and use it to repoint the original stonework.

The trainees all found the experience extremely rewarding. Philip Clark, a 23-year-old single father from Norristown, Pennsylvania, entered the program hoping to learn a trade in the construction field. After two weeks steeped in history, he has revised his goal and would one day like to own his own masonry restoration business

Without exception, the trainees also agreed that their least favorite part of the work was aging mortar joints with a toothbrush.

The workshop was a significant step in improving the house's physical appearance while also furthering the organization's goal of restoring the house to how it looked during the Muhlenbergs' ownership from 1781 to 1803. Due to neglect and deferred maintenance, the house was pretty run down by the time the Speaker's House purchased it in 2004.

Since then, the organization has spent a great deal of time and effort carefully researching and investigating the house and its history to develop a comprehensive plan for its restoration. Lisa Minardi, chair of the Speaker's House Restoration Committee, commented, "The façade of the house now looks much as it did at the time of its c. 1764 construction." Minardi, who wrote her master's thesis on the house, added, "The restored façade with its raised ribbon pointing helps to convey the grandeur of the house during Muhlenberg's occupancy. Future projects will include the reconstruction of built-in benches that originally flanked the front door and a triangular hood above the front door to complete the façade restoration."

Based on the highly-successful model of the masonry workshop, the Speaker's House plans to develop additional hands-on training opportunities throughout the restoration process, promoting the dual goals of preservation and education. To learn more about the Speaker's House, visit www.speakershouse.org.

About HCN

Heritage Conservation Network is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of architectural heritage around the world. HCN's workshops support community-based preservation projects and give

participant the opportunity to give something back by helping to protect valuable cultural treasures. To learn more about HCN's international workshops, visit www.heritageconservation.net.

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Contact:
Judith Broeker
Heritage Conservation Network
1557 North Street, Boulder, CO 80304 USA
Phone/Fax: +1 303 444 0128
jbroeker@heritageconservation.net
www.heritageconservation.net