

COPY



# CENTRE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## CENTRE FURNACE MANSION

1001 East College Avenue ☞ State College, Pennsylvania 16801 ☞ 814.234.4779

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November 3, 2006

David C. Breon, Chairman  
Benner Township Board of Supervisors  
1224 Buffalo Run Road  
Bellefonte, PA 16823

Dear Mr. Breon,

The Centre County Historical Society Board has been following the discussions over the portion of the Rockview property that is to be transferred from prison ownership to Benner Township with the intention of opening it to the public. We understand that surveys recently done by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy have been focusing on the environmental resources of this property. CCHS strongly encourages that the historic and cultural resources of this property also be included in the inventoried survey and are offering our help in identifying and recognizing those resources.

As I know you and other Benner Township officials are well aware, this portion of Spring Creek served as the location of one of Centre County's most significant early industrial sites: General Philip Benner's charcoal ironmaking operation at The Rock. The following is offered as a summary:

**Benner Spring and the Ironworks at Rock** — The rocky precipice on the south shore of Spring Creek gave its name to the iron works built by General Philip Benner. Benner, in turn, gave his name to the abundant spring located there. Known as one of the richest and most influential of Pennsylvania's early ironmasters, Benner came to this wilderness in 1793 with 100 iron workers from Chester County. During the next seven years, he built two forges, a furnace, a rolling mill, nail factory, grist mill, and a saw mill. Benner shipped his high quality iron made at Rock to Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and New Orleans; in 1815 inventor Eli Whitney described it as "some of the best in the world." Benner's large and handsome limestone mansion stood on a knoll on the northside of the creek facing the Rock. It was razed in the 1940s.

The Centre County Historical Society would like to propose the following in the future development of this transferred land:

- A nomination of this historic site be developed for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

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- An archaeological survey be undertaken that will provide general locations to the various components of this industrial site, with respect given to those archaeological findings in future site development.
- A historic marker or markers be added that will provide the public with background information and a context for this historic and cultural site and its relationship to Spring Creek.

It is our hope that until a final management plan is completed and put into place, there will be some sort of protection and security provided for these historic, cultural, and archaeological resources. Rockview has offered that protection in the past. Is there another state or local agency that could take on enforcement responsibilities, such as the Game or the Fish and Boat Commission, or the Sheriff's Office or University Police?

It is rare for a historic and cultural property as rich as this one to have been publicly "off limits" for so many years. This transfer of Rockview land to the public offers a unique opportunity for Benner Township, Centre County, and the Commonwealth to provide new information about this area's early history in order to share it with present and future residents and visitors.

We are pleased, indeed, that this beautiful portion of Spring Creek will be open to the public. In an effort to assist in making this outstanding new public resource as historically rich as possible, we would very much appreciate your consideration of these CCHS recommendations. Please contact me if you have questions, either by e-mail at [melander@uplink.net](mailto:melander@uplink.net), or by calling 234-4779 (Centre Furnace Mansion) or 238-8247 (home).

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Melander  
President