

Date: 1/8/2012
To: Centre County Historical Society
From: John and Catherine Smith
Re.: On the occasion of our receiving a 2011 Award of Excellence
in Historical Preservation

We are very grateful to the Board and the members of the Centre County Historical Society for this award. It is both a great honor and a great pleasure for us to receive it.

Living and working in ChicoryLane Farm and its log farm house for the past 37 years has given us a new understanding of what to term "historical" means. With regard to the house, from the time it was built approximately 200 years ago, it began to change. Some of that evolution was intentional, as different owners added and subtracted things to suit their needs and desires. Part was accidental, as they fixed things that broke. The important point is that the house has evolved throughout its lifetime. So, as we tear out and haul away materials that we don't want, like layers of lathe and plaster to get back to the underlying logs, we are no doubt revisiting different stages of its history, rather than restoring it to what it was like at some specific, earlier time. In fact, what we have no doubt done is to create a new, contemporary stage of its evolution that reflects our interests and desires while also incorporating snapshots of different earlier times.

With respect to the land, during our time on the farm, we have seen two of at least three historical stages the land has gone through. It has gone from agricultural use, to a post-agricultural stage which, in turn, has enabled us to speculate about what it may have been like some 250 years ago at the end of its pre-agricultural period. In 1974 when we moved to the farm, only 35 of its 68 acres were being farmed. But earlier pictures show virtually all of the land under cultivation in prior years, although much of that land was not really suited for such. In the last half-dozen years, we have taken the land out of agricultural production and are allowing it to go back to more "natural" conditions. We now see some five different kinds of wetlands -- such as a wet meadow, vernal pools, and riparian stream banks -- and three kinds of forests -- including a hardwood planting, a successional forest, and early remnant forest. So, knowing something of its agricultural history and seeing its current, post-agricultural diversity has let us imagine what it may have been like before European settlement.

We have been very fortunate to live with this house and land during a part of its history. We will be beginning a series of workshops and field-days this summer during which we hope to share some of what we have learned and experienced with others. Receiving this award motivates us to continue and to expand this process.

Many thanks,

John and Catherine Smith