



A Newsletter from Pella Preservation Trust

PRESERVE PELLA

HOW I RELOCATED A HOME: ONE MAN'S STORY

Shawn Thomas, Pella Preservation Trust Vice-President

As Winter of 2022 started to settle in, the Trust learned of a few homes that were in danger of being demolished. As a member of the Pella Preservation Trust, we started looking at various options of what might save some homes. As a group we toured the homes, assessing the possibilities of saving any combination of the structures. The challenges ahead, in no particular order were, identifying qualified empty lots, purchasing the lot(s), obtaining city approval, finding movers for the structures, and contractors, and then all of this must fit into only a few months' time table. With diminishing hope as we ran into major hurdles just finding a lot of land, let alone several, I asked the group if I were able to find a lot on my own, if I could adopt a home and take the project on myself. The idea was met with overwhelming support, so its time to get stuck in!

I drove around for several hours looking at empty lots, writing down addresses and deciding on the desirability of each lot based on location, how the house would fit its new neighborhood, and if the home would meet needed city required setbacks. All of these are important considerations as you can just imagine that the costs involved have to make some sense. At this point in time, its time to sell the idea to my wife Cyndi. The poor girl was blindsided, again by one of my many crazy ideas, and that lasted until she walked into the house which I thought would be our best choice. The other home, as wonderful as it was, didn't check all the boxes that we needed, but 404 Main was it! She said, well, where would we move it? So, into the car and a short drive of 0.7 miles to its potential future site. Keep in mind, we know the lot isn't even for sale, but I had a plan - more a hope. She said let's try to make all of this work, so the very next call was to our Realtor to see if the lot could be bought. After several calls went unanswered to the land owner, a final attempt using the trusty postal department. With hope slowly vanishing, and the need to commit to the project getting pushed, we got a phone call from our realtor and said, it's not for sale, but we can make an offer. So, the first offer got their attention, they had a number in mind that if we would step up a bit, they would have a conversation. I gave a new offer, and they discussed it and agreed to sell their lot, the first choice we had, and honestly, all was riding on their "Yes!" So, I spread the news to the group that we had the lot secured, and one home, 404 Main could be saved. I think this portion all took two weeks at most; it went by fast.

(continued on page 2)



March 2023: The Thomas' house makes the turn from Main Street onto Washington Street



April 2023: 160 hungry patrons relived a superlative meal at Strawtown

ODE TO STRAWTOWN

A Poem, by Eunice Kuyper Folkerts

NOTE: This poem was inspired by, and can be read with, Billy Joel's song Piano Man in mind.

In the City of Refuge called Pella
Are some icons of history past.
Known fondly as Strawtown,
These buildings were rescued with purpose to last.

They quietly stand as reminders
Of a time long ago when there came
A Dutch pastor with eight hundred followers,
T'was Domine Scholte by name.

These immigrants, diligent workers
Dug dirt from the soil to make huts,
Using prairie grass fashioned as roofing,
To keep wet weather out was a must!

The names of these huts of first settlers
Now abandoned, replaced or torn down
Was known fondly by those who once lived there
As Pella's first village, "Strawtown!"

(continued on page 3)

HOW I RELOCATED A HOME: ONE MAN'S STORY

(continued from page 1)

The next steps are the parts of the project that we really got lucky. We now had only a few months to fund and close on property, identify the house mover, get a contractor to build the new foundation, get the excavator to prepare the lot and get water utilities under the foundation, draw blueprints, get city approval, get permits, and prepare the structure for the move. January alone was filled with all of these tasks, and with spring in the short future, we had to give deposits, sign contracts and all before the lot even closed escrow. A giant leap of faith had to be put forward and we had a deadline that the building had to be moved by the first week of March. Contractors' schedules were already full, so we had to prevail on everyone's good nature to fit us in, the first concrete poured, the first home moved, all a nervous prospect with an Iowa Winter - not knowing when it would end. So, with our team in place, and me acting as the General for the project, I had a couple months to draw prints, remove all of the electrical, plumbing, rear mudroom, support the front porch overhang, remove the porch, and get the home ready to lift and transport. Much of the work was done in freezing weather, and it was a challenge for two months to complete all of the work. Lot preparation started the end of February, foundation was put in the first week of March, our final pour day was created with snow! While we were finishing the foundation, across town we were raising the home. We started Monday morning, with a Thursday 9:00 am depart time in mind. By Wednesday 5:00 pm, the house was on a trailer and ready to go. The foundation was cured and ready for its new structure, and I was anxious and excited for the next day!

Thursday morning was spent checking on the foundation, driving the route and meeting all of the various agencies to move light poles, cut trees, move street signs, traffic control, you name it. Then to the house and in 15 minutes, we were off, slowly - I mean really slowly! What an accomplishment up to this point. People out watching, people filming, prior residents of the home were with us, my wife in the park with our dear friend and realtor waiting to catch a glimpse of the home coming down Main Street. Swerving through lights, squeezing through streets lined with cars, we reach Washington street, the next big direction change. It's here where my wife jumped in the truck to ride behind the moving home, it's about now that I am feeling we were past the point of no return! But also hoping the measurements were all just right, as the real test was soon to come! As we turn down the final street, and clipping trees along the way, I am starting to understand just what we have done.



They made it! Shawn Thomas (right) and his house-moving crew prepare to situate the home

In my rear-view mirrors, I see streets opening up, signs going back up, cars moving around, people going back into their homes, the new lot was just waiting, people in the park across the street, the old home's families waiting to see their former home make its way to its resting point. Lots of stories were being told, memories shared, so many Thank Yous for saving the home, getting to know our new neighbors was starting, and the house was jockeying into position to slide over the new foundation. A quick lunch and moment to catch our breath, and the home starts lowering down onto its concrete walls. What a sigh of relief, it fit! But now it's time to put away all of the moving equipment, what took three days to build, was put away in three hours! Its 4:00 pm, and the move crew were ready to go home! These guys have become friends in just days, and as crazy as it sounds, I didn't want the project to end. But luckily, the project was just starting!

In the months since the move, it has been peeling back the layers of renovations, fixing materials that gave up to the many years of service, doing some updates to make the home a little more livable, without losing its charm. Each week I am visited by neighbors, old residents, fellow preservation friends, and people offering support and encouragement. The weekly tour with my wife to look over progress, discuss the various stages, and sit back and reflect on how far we have come, keeps me going. The project will have a Conservation Easement on it to protect the home for future generations, and I thank our team for helping this project come to fruition. None of this would be possible without all of their support! Until the next newsletter, when I will update our progress, Happy Holidays! ■



The Thomases have already hosted a number of former residents and their relatives to the home



The home's warmth, charm and beauty remain intact



The Strawtown Inn building as it appeared in 1968 prior to renovation (left), and during its glory years as one of Iowa's premiere restaurants

ODE TO STRAWTOWN

(continued from page 1)

Later by just a few years
New dwellings began to arise.
Washington Street, west of the center,
Grew quickly to no one's surprise!

'Twas Hagens, the new town's first baker,
A business and home did create
In eleven-eleven Washington
Plus, the ovens needed to bake!

Its life had a series of changes,
Even becoming the place
Where students from Central were living
Named "Big Red" their comfortable space!

Then quite suddenly trouble came calling
The 70's arrived bringing change.
The landlords claimed these old buildings
Were obsolete, useless and strange!

"Tear down" soon was known as their motto.
Such destruction as never before
Loomed darkly for precious old buildings
Sneaking silently in through the door!

Then good fortune produced some idea folk
Prepared by their thoughtful, wise minds,
Respectfully came to the rescue
Namely the Kuypers and Kleins!

"This town is in need of a restaurant
to feed locals and others who came
to taste some elegant vitals
and add to this town's claim to fame!"

Now Kleins had been in the business
The *Holland House* their's years ago;
So a restaurant was decided for Pella.
"Let's do it and hope it will go!!"

Creating the business was easy.
Ideas were simple to dream.
And four of us working together
Made quite an acceptable team!

Bob and Stu put the whole thing together.
Good workers were hired at the start.
Even some excited young friends
Volunteered to help do their part!

A kitchen was born by necessity,
The premium place to create
Each recipe's thoughtful production
Since diners must love what they ate!

Each dining room furnished quite simply
With comfortable tables and chairs
So diners enjoying their dinners
Could relax and not think of their cares.

For a number of years there were stars –
Those honors which come with acclaim!
Strawtown was now selected
To "Great Restaurants of Iowa" fame!

This lasted for 20-plus years
But years quickly slip by so fast!
Questions arise for the future,
How long can success really last?

Retirement swallowed the Kleins
Stu Kuyper by a tragic demise,
Leaving the business a challenge,
Would it? could it? survive?

Was a "For Sale" sign a logical choice
For these precious old buildings to save?
Slowly, with reluctance and courage
The decision to sell was then made.

A cadre of possible owners
Made efforts to bring back the past,
But their dreams to succeed were fleeting
And finally succumbed at the last.

But then a phone call was answered
With news of remarkable joy!
Some friends with faith and ambition
Their intentions and hopes did employ!

Their idea, "Weekends at Strawtown"
To develop relationships great
Where couples could share, and thus find
New ways in which to relate!

There were beautiful rooms to relax in,
Amenities chosen with care;
Meals for dining together
By Chef Alma Vermeer prepared!

Eleven-eleven now sparkled
With activity alive at last!
The atmosphere Vermeers provided
The place had a new touch of class!

The reason for telling this story:
History granted the time
When careful decisions were needed
Successful solutions to find!

To finalize history's magic
PPT came up with a need
For a fund-raising project to help them,
Preservation their quest to succeed!

The committee chose Strawtown the venue,
Approaching the owners with plans:
"Have a gala with nostalgic memories
For all who attend would be grand!"

April 3, two seatings, were chosen,
Approved by the Trust! "Save the date!"
And quickly the news spread abroad:
"Get your reservations NOW! Do not wait!"

Eighty tickets produced for each seating
Were eagerly purchased by those
Who remembered "Old Strawtown" fondly
As the restaurant which sadly had closed.

Trust's Gala Committee with vigor
Worked diligently planning the night.
What they produced for the evening
Became a smashing delight!

(continued on page 4)

ODE TO STRAWTOWN

(continued from page 3)

Central College was chosen to cater.
The menus carefully made.
Old recipes selected as entrees
“Cause memories for taste buds don’t fade!

Stuffed Pork Chop selected, one entrée,
Also Chicken Supreme.
Barbecued meatballs as first course,
Plus “bar cheeze” fit for a queen!

Dutch lettuce, chopped bacon and eggs
Bathed with a sweet/sour dressing
Especially chosen for those
Who declared, “the taste was a perfect blessing!”

Dutch Apple Bread from the ovens
Of Vander Ploeg bakers became
A favorite of diners who ate it,
“The best,” they would loudly proclaim!

Tiny butter balls rolled to perfection,
Made to accompany the bread,
You could hardly refuse to use them
So delicious and easy to spread.



Stan and Alma Vermeer continue to utilize and maintain the former Strawtown Inn facilities which are now home to Developing Great Relationships

The tables were donned with black lace,
Heritage products we adore!
Plus tasteful bouquets from Nick
Completing the simple décor.

The dessert, a chocolate mousse
Served with coffee or tea
Crowned the evening’s success.
“Please do this again!” was the plea!

Warmest thanks to both the Vermeers!
Their gift to the Trust we confess.
The evening at Strawtown brought back
Old times for which we’ve been blest!

PPT gave us a way
To celebrate the good times gone by.
Those lovingly saved by remembrance
Give us joy we cannot deny. ■

CENTRAL COLLEGE & PPT TEAM UP TO SAVE HISTORIC HOME

In late 2022, after a disastrous water leak extensively damaged much of the large addition to Central College’s Prins House, the college considered demolition of the structure.

After hearing of the damage and possible demolition, The Trust teamed up with the City of Pella’s Historic Preservation Commission to reach out to Central College’s President Mark Putnam to see if this historic building might be preserved. We were relieved to hear President Putnam respond that the college was open to discussing “available options and the means by which a favorable result might be achieved.”

If you are not familiar with the Prins House, it is located at 906 Independence Street. This structure dates to around 1910, when it was constructed as a private residence. For the next three-quarters of a century, the residence was home to the families of Jella & Minnie Jelsma; Albert & Nettie Van Houweling; Mart & Elva Mae Heerema; and Hop & Joyce Kuyper.

The college acquired the property in the late 1970s and it was used as student housing. In 1980, a large addition was attached to the rear of the home which expanded the number of students accommodated to a total of 30.

The Prins House serves as a symbolic anchor, and gateway, between Central College’s campus and the Collegiate



The Prins House as it appeared in 1922 when it was labeled one of “Pella’s 50 Beautiful Homes” (left) and as it appears in 2023



Neighborhood Historic District. The two-square-block Historic District, which contains the Prins House, is nestled adjacent to Central College and extends east and north from this property. The Historic District is recognized by the National Register of Historic Places and also has the distinction of being the first Historic District organized in Pella. The property obviously has historic value to Pella.

Therefore, it was with gratitude that the Trust learned that the Central College Board of Trustees had agreed to transfer the property to the Trust. The news from President Putnam was received with much joy and gratitude. The Trust is working to determine the best use of the property. One suggestion has been to remove the damaged rear addition and return the building to a private residence. Another suggestion has been to turn it into a research center that could also provide housing to Central adjunct professors, alumni or parents. Stay tuned for further developments. ■

WHAT IS A PELLA HISTORIC DISTRICT?

The city of Pella's Historic Preservation Commission is currently working towards creating its third Historic District. The Historic Preservation Commission, or HPC for short, is not as highly visible as some other city commissions. The commission is composed of five members, who are appointed by the mayor and approved by the council. Currently two of those members also serve on the board of the Pella Preservation Trust: Lila Turnbull and Bruce Boertje.

The Commission's number-one duty, as spelled out in chapter 33 of the Pella Code of Ordinances, is to "conduct studies for the identification and designation of historic districts." At its heart, a Historic District is a zoning overlay; but one which carries significant benefits to its recipients.

The six benefits of Historic Districts are listed in Chapter 165.13.5 of Pella's Code. They are:

1. Protect, enhance, and perpetuate historic districts of architectural and cultural significance;
2. **Safeguard the City's architectural, historic, and cultural heritage by preserving historic neighborhoods;**
3. Provide for design review of new construction, or alteration of existing resources, to assure compatibility with the existing character of historic neighborhoods and preserve the historic integrity of the resource;
4. Stabilize and improve property values by encouraging reinvestment in historic neighborhoods;
5. **Foster civic pride in the legacy and beauty of past achievements;** and
6. Protect and enhance the City's attractiveness to tourists and visitors, thereby supporting and stimulating business.

The second and fifth benefits listed above perhaps best highlight the importance of Historic Districts. This past August, the city council unanimously approved Pella's second historic district: the Scholte Garden Historic District. In 2021, the Collegiate Neighborhood Historic District was approved as Pella's first district.

The process to create a new Historic District is a thorough and rigorous one. Briefly, a potential district is researched and proposed to the commission. Multiple public educational and input meetings are then held with the proposed district's property owners, and any other interested individuals. Signatures from a majority of the district's owners are required to be obtained.

A comprehensive application is then submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office to determine if the neighborhood qualifies as a Historic District. This application includes a complete inventory of the properties in the proposed district, dates of construction, photos and description of the architectural features of each property, and a detailed narrative explaining the unique historical and architectural details of the district.

Upon the state's approval of the application, public comment meetings are again required to be held by the Historic Preservation Commission; then by Planning and Zoning Commission; and finally, by city council. Only at this point does the council vote on the district. This entire process can take two years, or more, to complete.

McClatchey Home and Mill in 1869 (top); 1969 Ad (below); 1865 Ad (below center); c.1900 McClatchey home, then residence of Wiggert Rietveld (below right)



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N10-11.



The proposed McClatchey Mill Historic District is centered around the properties on both sides of Lincoln and Columbus streets that fall between both sides of East First and East Second streets. This currently includes 47 properties.

The district takes its name from the Charles McClatchey Woolen Mill, which once occupied much of the block where the McClatchey house and barn still stand at 1008 East Second Street. The mill operated between 1859 and 1870 and was Marion County's first steam-powered mill. When the mill was first erected, it stood largely by itself in northeast Pella. As more people traveled to the mill, the area between it and the city center became a desirable place to build.

More specific information can be found on each of Pella's Historic Districts on the City of Pella's website: <https://www.cityofpella.com/430/Historic-Preservation>. ■



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Have you ever driven by an old home, business, or school, and wondered what it was like when it was first built, and what happened over the ensuing years in that particular building? What were the joys, the happy occasions, the families, the businesses, the school events like? What were the trials, the tears that were shed, the sacrifices that were made in this place? This year, these thoughts crossed my mind many times as Pella Preservation Trust set out to help fulfill our mission of **Protecting and Promoting Buildings, Landscapes and Sites Important to the Heritage of Pella, Iowa.** It has been quite the year!

We started off by being given three old homes on South Main Street that were slated for demolition. This was initiated by GenLink, to whom we are grateful! Of the three homes, we were able to move one and salvaged some architectural features from the other two.

The one we saved was moved to its new home on March 30, 2023. This home is now sitting on the corner of East Third and Lincoln Street. It is a testament to the strong preservation ties of our vice president, Shawn Thomas. I hope you enjoyed his front-page article in this newsletter. Shawn is a preservation advocate and supporter. He and his wife, Cyndi, are lovingly restoring this old gal to her original glory. He has touched many individuals through his effort and has shown the home to many former residents and others who have ties to this home. As a result, we are finding out some of the wonderful memories associated with this home. Every home has a story!!

In April, we hosted "An Evening at Strawtown". This was an event that was extremely popular. Stan and Alma Vermeer, along with Ebon Carter, opened this beauty up for an exquisite evening of grateful memories, fabulous food, community with others, and seeing the beauty of what this building still embraces. Thank you so much!!! This property has continued to be lovingly upgraded so as to keep the architectural details in magnificent shape! A huge shout out to all that were involved in this meal! You likely read more about this evening in the front-page poem written by Eunice Kuyper Folkerts, one of the original owners of the Strawtown Restaurant. All are sure to enjoy the wit and wisdom of "Eunie".

At this same event, our treasurer, Matt McCulla also opened up his newly refurbished Ameriprise office right next door. Once home to the original Central College, this was later the Strawtown Country Store. This too has taken on a new beauty with all the thoughtful restoration that Matt has done. It has new wood floors, wonderful etched glass doors and windows, a wine cellar that is incredible, and many other features. Thank you, Matt, for keeping this historical structure alive and still looking elegant!

We don't sit still for long, as recently we were able to help save, through a conservation easement, the old red brick beauty at 306 E. 1st Street!!! A young couple has just acquired this unique and magnificent home. They are soon to embark on its restoration. We cannot wait to see what happens with this old home!!!!

Also, we recently were gifted another beautiful old home thanks to the generous gesture of Central College. This was home to quite a few long-time Pella residents, as well as later serving as campus housing. This was last known as the Prins House, the blue painted house across from Hoffman Hall, at 906 Independence Street. This house is also part of the Collegiate Historic District. At this time, final details are still being worked out.

(continued on page 7)



Annie and Jordan VandeKamp and family reveling in their recent purchase of the historic home at 306 East First Street

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
(continued from page 6)

Pella Preservation Trust, along with the City of Pella's Historic Preservation Commission, helped to establish the second historic district in Pella. This new district is called the Scholte Garden District. The boundaries of this district extend north from Washington Street on both sides of Main Street and Broadway. They go all the way to Lincoln School. This is the area where Dominie Scholte, the founder of Pella, and his wife Maria, planted their renowned gardens.

At this time a proposed third historic district is in the works; this one being called the McClatchey Mill District. It is in an area east of Main Street, and north of Washington Street. See the separate article on Historic Districts.

The Pella Preservation Trust board and its members strive to keep an eye out for preserving Pella's unique past. It is not always buildings, as this year Big Rock Park was the recipient of the Trust's annual Historic Landmark Award. We are stewards of what we have been given, so let us all be watchful for historic elements in Pella.

One way to give structures and areas some blanket of protection is to place a conservation easement on the property. If anyone is interested or wants more information about what this entails, please let us know.

In conclusion, wouldn't it be wonderful if the old cliché "If only the walls could talk" happened in reality? Since this is not physically possible, we can only continue to hear stories through old newspapers, pictures, family histories, oral histories, and individuals!!! Don't ever hesitate to write down memories of what you remember about things. We would love to hear from you!!!!

Het aller beste, Ann Summitt



Pella's Big Rock Park was awarded the Trust's Historic Landmark Award

PROTECT & PROMOTE PELLA'S HERITAGE WITH YOUR 2024 MEMBERSHIP

Pella Preservation Trust (formerly Historic Pella Trust), established in 1994, is a non-profit preservation group that helps to preserve Pella's architectural resources so that future generations may continue to be enriched by the historic legacy of Pella's Dutch heritage and culture. **Mission Statement: To Protect and Promote Buildings, Landscapes, and Sites Important to the Heritage of Pella, Iowa.** We appreciate your 2024 memberships and partnership contributions for protecting the architectural resources of Pella, Iowa.

KEEP IN TOUCH

EMAIL: To receive timely Trust updates via email, please provide your email address on the attached form, or send it to: office@historicpellatrust.org.

Please visit PPT on the web and Facebook for local history, information and photos.

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**TUTTLE CABIN, TUTTLE WALKWAY AND
SUNKEN GARDEN WINDMILL FEATURED
ON 2023'S CHRISTMAS TOUR OF HOMES**



*Tuttle Cabin as it appeared at Christmas 2017.
Photo by Troy Hugen*



**PLEASE SUPPORT
THE TRUST**

We are dependent on our supporters' memberships and financial contributions. Please take a moment to join, rejoin, or provide an additional donation to help us preserve Pella's heritage and historic sites. Thank you!!



**Watch for
the second
Strawtown
Restaurant
Reunion
Fundraiser
in 2024!**