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## Preserving an old Friend



Pennsbury's Supervisor of Grounds John Hahn, left, and metallurgist and conservator T. Scott Kreilich meet in front of the statue of William Penn on the grounds of the Pennwood Middle School in Lower Makefield to discuss plans to preserve the outdoor sculpture. The years have not been kind to the statue, donated to the district in 1952 by the US Steel Corporation. Weather has taken its toll and so too have the graffiti artists. A variegated green patina has long since replaced the cooper-alloy that glistened in the sun so many years ago. A painted letter "M" now scars Penn's face, stretching from his left eye/checkbone area to the bridge of his nose. See story on page 13. (photograph by Jeff Werner)

# Effort underway to preserve Penn statue

## Years of weather, graffiti have tarnished Pennwood sculpture

By JEFF WERNER

PENNSBURY — From its perch atop a limestone pedestal in front of the Pennwood Middle School in Lower Makefield, a statue of William Penn has kept silent watch over the district and the surrounding community for the past five decades.

When it was unveiled on June 9, 1952, the cooper-alloy sculpture, a gift from the United States Steel Corporation, glistened in the warm summer sun in front of what was then Pennsbury High School.

Clayton Miller, president of the Pennsbury Joint School Board, delivered a brief address of acceptance and Kay Balsler, Student Council President, speaking on behalf of Pennsbury's 700 students, acknowledged the gift. Dr. Charles Boehm, County Superintendent of Schools, offered remarks and Richmond Miller, Field Secretary of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, delivered the address of the day, a dissertation upon the life and ideals of William Penn.

In the years that followed, Penn kept a silent vigil, harboring secrets of opposing sports teams who targeted the statue with graffiti, and standing, with pride, over the many students who came and went through the doors of Pennsbury High School. He stood by silently as the last high school graduates marched through the doors of the school and as the first middle schoolers arrived in the mid 1960s.

The years have not been kind. Weather has taken its toll and so too have the graffiti artists. A variegated green patina has long since replaced the cooper-alloy that glistened in the sun so many years ago. A painted



T. Scott Kreilich, right, of Oreland, a metallurgist and conservator, works with John Hahn, Pennsbury's Supervisor of Grounds, to develop a plan of action to preserve the outdoor sculpture of William Penn located in front of the Pennwood Middle School on Makefield Road.

letter "M" now scars Penn's face, stretching from his left eye/checkbone area to the bridge of his nose.

The bronze plaques that once graced four sides of the bronze base of the statue, as well as an ax, once part of the design of the statue, have long since disappeared. The statue was headed for an uncertain future.

Now it appears help is on the way.

Through the efforts of Pennsbury's Supervisor of Grounds John Hahn and David Long, an effort is underway to give Penn a thorough upgrade.

"I've driven by this thing 100 times over the years

and it's obvious it's in need of repair. It's too fine of a sculpture to let go," said Hahn. "I've been out here and we've had contractors look at it. I just never felt happy with their analysis of it. I've never felt confident about it. And I didn't want to do anything that would ruin the piece."

That's when Oreland's T. Scott Kreilich, a metallurgist and conservator who specializes in the preservation of outdoor sculptures, stepped into the picture.

Kreilich, who has worked extensively with architects and with the US Park Service in Philadelphia, New Jersey and New York City, and for the Pub-

lic Art Office of Philadelphia, the National Park Service in Valley Forge, and historic sites and parks in the Southwestern United States, was contacted by Long regarding the statue.

After meeting with Kreilich, Hahn said he

finally felt the project was in good hands. "I felt confident with the people involved and I said 'Let's go with it.'"

Kreilich's first move was to call upon the resources of Save Outdoor Sculpture (SOS!), an organization jointly sponsored by Heritage Preservation and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art to document every outdoor sculpture in the United States. Based in Washington, SOS! also provides cash awards for the assessment and conservation treatment of public outdoor sculptures across the nation.

Through Kreilich's efforts, SOS! awarded the school district a grant to complete an initial assessment of the project which paid for Kreilich to examine the sculpture and provide the district with a written report and cost estimates on what needed to be done to preserve the sculpture, the limestone pedestal, the wing benches, the terrace, and the replication of the missing ax.

Kreilich estimates that about \$24,000 worth of work will be required to bring the sculpture back to life.

The district has applied for a second phase 50/50 matching grant from SOS! to pay for the treatment.

"We're hoping SOS! will

kick in half of that," said Hahn, who expects to receive an answer from the organization sometime in February.

"I'm pretty confident we'll get the grant. But after that we still have to raise the other half," said Hahn, who plans on getting the community and the district involved in the effort. "It has to be done. It's at a point where it needs to be done," said Hahn.

"He's a little green, but the corrosion actually isn't too far advanced," said Kreilich. "That's good news...There's some cracks in the bronze base that need to be closed. We would clean everything down. And then we would blast the bronze surface with an air abrasive blast technique, essentially sandblasting but with crushed walnut shells."

The blast technique, according to Kreilich, will take off the active corrosion while taking great care not to take it down to bare metal. After that's completed, workers would coat the sculpture with a micro-crystalyn wax as a layer of protection against the elements.

In an effort to raise public awareness of the project, Kreilich is offering to show the students at the school "what we're doing

*(Continued on page 17)*

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(Continued from page 13)  
and how we're doing it. Just to raise that awareness."

If the district receives the grant and the project is given the go ahead, Kreilich said it would be great to rededicate the sculpture in June of 2002, the 50th anniversary of its installation.

"It's actually a great piece," says Kreilich. "I've seen several sculptures of William Penn. Of course, there's the one atop City Hall in downtown Philadelphia. Personally I like this one better than some."

Titled "William Penn," the sculpture depicts the

"Elm Treaty with North American Indians, Nov. 1682." The bronze figure of Penn stands about 97 inches high atop a five inch tall bronze base.

Kreilich, in addition to developing a plan of action to conserve the sculpture, is tracking down the sculpture's past, 58 years of which are still clouded in mystery.

While it is known that U.S. Steel donated the sculpture to the district as a gift, the whereabouts of the statue between 1894 when it was cast in Philadelphia and 1952 when it was installed in front of the Makefield Road school is largely

unknown.

What is known is that the piece was originally cast in Philadelphia by Bureau Brothers in 1894. It was created by German born artist Harry Manger.

Born in 1833, Manger exhibited one of the earliest busts of Lincoln at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia from 1865 to 1867. But he is best known for his colossal bronze sculpture of Bismark displayed at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. One author called the work "the most important piece of sculpture in the German section."

Two of Manger's works — one of Goethe and one

of Schiller — can be found in Fairmount Park near the Horticulture Center. The William Penn statue, completed right near the end of his life, is the latest known piece by Manger.

Correspondence indicate that former Vice President of U.S. Steel, Earl Moore, an avid collector, sent his assistant, Charles Wyndham, to look for artifacts, according to Kreilich. The William Penn sculpture was allegedly discovered in the garage of a well-to-do collector on the Philadelphia Main Line.

"Some of the clues that we have are that it was acquired by the Main Line collector who was purport-

edly a member of the Clothier family from Strawbridge and Clothiers. I've contacted some members of the Clothier family to see if they can help us out. They're asking distant cousins and checking. If they come with anything they're going to let me know."

Kreilich admits it's a long shot, but any lead is worth following.

Apparently, said Kreilich, US Steel first offered to donate the sculpture to the Fallsington Friends Meeting in 1951. When they declined it, the piece was donated to the Pennsbury School District.

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The district is searching for old photographs of the statue which may show the missing ax or the missing plaques that once adorned the four sides of the limestone pedestal. They also are looking for clues to the sculpture's early history or any anecdotes that residents might have regarding the statue. For information, contact John W. Hahn, Supervisor of Grounds, at 215-428-4153 or send information to his attention at the Pennsbury Administration Building, 134 Yardley Avenue, Fallsington 19058.

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