

Preserving history

Farmhouse renovated into interpretive center, which will host tours and social events.

As it expands for the first time in years with its Providence Park neighborhood, Willow Valley Retirement Communities is also busy preserving Lancaster County's history.

A 1787 stone farmhouse on Willow Valley's Lakes Campus — built by the grandson of Martin Meylin, inventor of the Pennsylvania long rifle — has just been renovated.

The purpose is to turn it into an interpretive center, where the history of Willow Valley's older buildings and the area in general will be told, said John G. Swanson, president of Willow Valley Retirement Management Inc.

The former residence, which features a colonial main house and a Victorian addition, will host tours and social events as well, he said.

This project is "a good example of taking a historic building and blending it" with the present, said Joe Patterson, executive director of the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County.

Everybody loves preserved buildings once they're finished, he said. But "it takes foresight and wisdom to make that happen."

Willow Valley has been the owner of the farmhouse — next to its Cultural Center — for at least 12 years, Swanson said. "We were concerned about keeping it intact," he said. A second-floor date stone confirms that home was erected in 1787 by Martin Meylin III (spelled Meilin at the time) and his wife, Barbara.

Before the six-month renovation, done by the Lancaster company Historic



Exterior of the Martin Meylin farmhouse renovated by Willow Valley. (Inset) This is the date stone on the Martin Meylin farmhouse at Willow Valley.

Restorations, the home had already been winterized, with the windows being removed and refinished.

"Every window is different," said Jim Cluck, vice president of property management and services for Willow Valley Retirement Communities.

"We knew [the farmhouse] was something we'd never tear down," Swanson said. "It was too significant."

He said the West Lampeter Township property, including the residence, a large barn and a tobacco shed, was previously

owned by the Herr family, of Herr Foods Inc. Both the tobacco shed, which had been moved, and the barn are used for storage.

The structure boasts a Pequea slate roof, a product that once was featured at the World's Fair, Cluck said. The roof also had been repaired prior to the renovation.

Historic Restorations cleaned and waxed the original wood floors — made of oak, chestnut and yellow pine, Cluck said. The floors in one room also needed tongue-and-groove work, he said. A brick floor — manufactured to be period-style — was installed in another room, Cluck said.

Upstairs, in unrenovated space, the floors are locust.

The planks vary widely in length. In the attic, which features a smokehouse, they're 30 feet long and 2 feet wide, he said. Also original are two built-in corner cupboards. "We didn't need to do anything" to them, Cluck said. But one of front doors had to be replaced. Historic Restorations constructed a new one out of wood, with strap hinges and a skeleton key.

An additional highlight of the Meylin



farmhouse is black baseboard known as mopboard, he said. "There's incredible intricacy to the woodwork," said Cindy Sawicki, manager of brand and community connection at Willow Valley.

Preserving the past "is important to us as an organization," she said. "It's just a great house," Swanson said. And Historic Restorations does "spectacular work." The building features approximately 10-foot ceilings on the first floor as well as two fireplaces.

Historic Restorations removed wallpaper and layers of paint to expose the original paint colors, which were reapplied in many rooms, creating an eclectic paint scheme.

One of the fireplaces is painted a deep blue, leading some to call it the "Penn State fireplace," after the school's colors, Cluck said.

While many of the original details of the farmhouse have been preserved, some modern amenities have been added, including a natural gas furnace and central air conditioning.



The Martin Meylin farmhouse has approximately 10-foot ceilings on the first floor as well as two fireplaces. (Right) A window with original glass looks out onto the farmland next to the farmhouse.