

Historic and Scenic Resources

Historic Resources

Cultural and historic resources are essential in understanding an area's past settlement patterns and heritage. When protected and preserved, they can also make a significant contribution to the character of a community.

In 1992, the Bucks County Conservancy (now Heritage Conservancy) conducted a historic resource survey throughout the county. Two bridges within East Rockhill Township were highlighted in its findings. Mood's Covered Bridge, built in 1874, crosses the East branch of the Perkiomen Creek. The historic Mood's Covered Bridge was damaged by fire on June 22, 2004, but the devastation was limited to the covered part of the bridge—the fire did not structurally damage the bridge deck. PennDOT has repaired the deck and the bridge is open to motor vehicles. Recently, PennDOT has agreed to rebuild the covered bridge.

Sheard's Mill Covered Bridge, built in 1873, spans the Tohickon Creek. Located along Covered Bridge Road through East Rockhill and Haycock townships, the bridge is 130 feet long and 15 feet wide.

Headman Pottery produced its well-known sgraffito ware in the early 1800s on Muskrat Road near the intersection with Rockhill Road in the village of Rich Hill. Peter Headman was one of the last potters to make the now scarce "tulip ware" of Pennsylvania German tradition. Built in 1846, Hager House, on Old Bethlehem Road serves as a classic example of an early Bucks County farmhouse.

A significant historic resource in the township is the Sheard's–Clymer's Grist Mill. The mill used water power to grind the grain (e.g., corn, rye, or wheat) into meal for either local farmers or for general public sale. While it is not certain when the mill was built, the earliest deeds date back to 1798. In 1844, Levi Sheard purchased the mill and it was later sold to John and Rubin Clymer. The mill ceased operation in 1971; however, the Clymer family ran an apple cider business until 1985.

Villages of East Rockhill Township

There are still over one hundred identifiable villages remaining in Bucks County, but many have been lost or overshadowed by growth and development. Historic villages are a unique resource, and once they are lost are irreplaceable. While municipalities cannot prevent growth, they can alleviate the effects that development can have on villages through appropriate land use policies and regulations. Additionally, residents can work together to maintain or improve the positive aspects of their village.

East Rockhill encompasses four villages: Hagersville, Keelersville, Rich Hill, and Rockhill Station. Township officials should determine if separate village planning studies or specific preservation techniques should be implemented in order to preserve and enhance the historic character of these cultural resources.

Hagersville—situated on the border of East Rock Hill and Bedminster townships. Most properties in the village front Old Bethlehem Road and Fifth Street between Old Bethlehem Road and Dublin Pike (PA Route 313). The village was named in honor of a prominent local politician Colonel George Hager. The Hager family was actively involved with public affairs throughout central and upper Bucks County. In fact, Samuel Hager founded Perkasio Borough.

Hagersville appears to have been a lively settlement in the 1870s, with a store, hotel, blacksmith shop, wheelwright shop, and two coach factories. Today, Hagersville is quiet and quaint, with many trees and flowers adding to its charm. Several of the early homes are well preserved and maintained, with the majority found near the village center. More recently, newer homes have developed along the periphery of Hagersville. Two relatively large apartment buildings in the village center contrast with the architectural style of the older village houses.

Keelersville—a residential community with a riding stable and club as commercial uses. Named after the Keeler family, the village is located in both East Rockhill and Bedminster townships. The original section of Keelersville is along Old Bethlehem Road north of Ridge Road. During the start of the 20th century, Keelersville consisted of a store, hotel, shops, a large tannery, and a leather factory. The Tohickon Union Church was originally built of log in 1745 on the East Rockhill Township side of Old Bethlehem Road. In 1837 the church was rebuilt in Bedminster Township where it remains the primary landmark of the village. Two historic one-room schoolhouses are also found in the village.

Rockhill Station—takes its name from the mountainous ridge that extends across the northwestern parts of East and West Rockhill townships. Rockhill Station is the only village in the township not located at a road intersection, and it is the only one that is not partially located in another municipality. Rockhill Station boasts the only confirmed discovery of gold in Bucks County.

The original homes in Rockhill Station were wood-frame and masonry structures. Although none of the buildings are architecturally significant, together they offer consistency and scale that gives the village a uniform character. The woods, quarry, and railroad tracks surrounding these homes form distinct boundaries.

Rich Hill—located on the border of East Rockhill, West Rockhill and Richland townships. Rich Hill developed along Old Bethlehem Pike, and was bypassed when PA Route 309 was built. The village has remained a small, residential community consisting of a few houses at the crossroad of Rich Hill Road and Old Bethlehem Pike. The stone houses found at the intersection are quite large and have been well maintained over the years. Large shade trees enhance the setting of the picturesque village.

Methods of Preservation

Register of Historic Places

The National Historic Register is the official list of the nation's cultural resources, providing recognition that buildings or districts have historic, architectural, or archeological significance. The National Register does not place restrictions on the actions of private property owners, but

has the effect of alerting landowners to its historic significance. Listing on the National Register does not in any way limit what a private property owner may do to a property.

In 2004, the Heritage Conservancy applied for listing on the national historic register for Sheard's–Clymer's Gristmill, which is located in the along the Tohickon Creek in the northwestern corner of the township. If approved, Sheard's–Clymer's Gristmill will be recognized as a nationally significant historic resource.

Historic Districts

A commonly used planning strategy for historic preservation is the adoption of ordinances that establish historic districts. This planning strategy is most appropriate in those municipalities that have concentrations of historic structures or sites such as villages. The Historic District Act provides authorization for Pennsylvania municipalities to designate historic districts and regulate the alteration of buildings within them based on the historic context. Historic districts created under the authority of Act 167 are not zoning districts but a review process separate from zoning concerns. The National Register program is a credible way to identify a community's historic resources while the local district designation can further protect and enhance them.

Landmark Designation

Often, a municipality's historic structures are not located within an easily defined district. The preservation of individual structures or landmarks is often more difficult than establishing historic districts, but their preservation has been used successfully by various communities. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code allows municipalities to pass ordinances for the "regulation, restriction, or prohibition of uses and structures at, along or near places having unique historical, architectural, or patriotic interest or value."

While the villages of East Rockhill Township do not currently have historical designation, there may be a need to explore village protection strategies and techniques. The preparation of a village planning study can establish a community vision and a set of standards for public improvements and guidelines for future action. In addition, a complete historic resource inventory and study of the municipality may help to strengthen the efforts of protecting and maintaining the rural character of East Rockhill Township.

Scenic Resources

Identifying the aesthetic value of scenic resources is a subjective process. Certain areas are distinguished because of special geologic formations, pristine landscapes, agricultural settings, natural resources, and historic structures. Scenic roads are segments of roadway that contain natural, historic, or cultural resources in proximity or contain an area of concentrated scenic vistas. Scenic vistas are points along a roadway that have sweeping views of the landscape. Scenic resources may be depleted or overshadowed by inappropriate development activities.

The *East Rockhill Township Open Space and Recreation Plan* identifies two scenic forest vistas centrally located in the township (not shown in Figure 7.) Immediately below the Richland Township border, the first vista is roughly bordered by Rockhill Road to the west, Route 313 to the north, and Three Mile Road to the east. The second vista occurs east of Ridge Road and is bordered by Route 313 and Blooming Glen Road.

The *2000 Pennridge Area Greenway Plan* classifies scenic roads and scenic vistas. (See Figure 7.) Within East Rockhill Township, there are six scenic roads identified as follows:

- **Three Mile Run Road**—Railroad tracks to Schwenk Mill Road; includes views of the Three Mile Run Stream Corridor
- **Branch Road**—PA Route 313 to Blooming Glen Road; includes views of the East Branch Perkiomen
- **Rockhill Road**—Three Mile Run to Old Bethlehem Pike
- **Hill Road**—Just north of Stone Edge Road to Rockhill Road
- **West Rockhill Road**—Just east of utility right-of-way to PA Route 313
- **Richlandtown Road**—Covered Bridge Road to Sterner Road

There are two scenic vistas identified in the *Pennridge Area Greenway Plan* within East Rockhill Township are identified as follows:

- **Dublin Pike (Route 313)**—Looking northeast towards Lake Nockamixon and looking southeast along Three Mile Run corridor.
- **Mountain View Drive**—Looking northwest along Tohickon Creek corridor and looking southeast towards Lake Nockamixon.

Two other scenic areas have been identified in Figure 7. Heritage Conservancy's publication, *Route 113 Lasting Landscape* identifies a scenic vista along North Fifth Street between Schwenk Mill Road and Dublin Pike. The other scenic vista is shown along Ridge Road between Schoolhouse and Schwenk Mill roads as identified by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee.

To emphasize the importance of preserving a community's inherent scenic qualities, the township may wish to establish scenic overlay provisions to encourage compatible land uses that complement the existing rural character and provide protection of scenic vistas from roadways, entrances to historic villages, and overall scenic character of the township.

The overlay district concept does not affect the underlying use, density, or area and dimensional requirements, nor is it intended to reduce the development opportunity of the site; however, applicants must provide a scenic resource map, visual analysis, and satisfy performance standards when proposing development within a scenic overlay district.