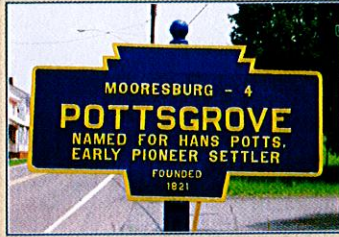
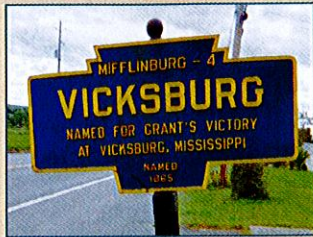


# WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND THOSE TOWN MARKERS?



IT ALL STARTED IN THE 1970S FOR JACK GRAHAM, who had an interest in the historic cast iron town markers that welcome Pennsylvania residents into various communities. Graham was fascinated enough by these prominent navy blue and bright yellow trimmed signs that he started sketching out the information on the many different signs he came across.

Little did he know that three decades later he would be a part of an organization dedicated to locating, restoring, protecting and preserving these town markers.

Graham, a native of Pittsburgh who lives in Perry County, has more than 200 index cards filled with information about these signs. After retiring from the Pennsylvania State Parks system, Graham was approached by Nathaniel Guest, who would later become president of the Keystone Marker Trust.

Guest, who also serves on the board of directors for organizations such as Preservation Pennsylvania and the Schuylkill River Greenway Association, was the first to initiate discussion about ways to revitalize the signs statewide.

"The years have not been nice to these signs," Graham said. "Town markers help create a sense of place throughout towns and communities across the commonwealth."

Throughout the years, the markers have ended up in local buildings, private yards, some even abandoned on the side of the road after a motor vehicle accident. The Keystone Marker Trust works with local municipalities and historical societies, along with other organizations, to restore markers that have been bruised, dented or even chipped.

The trust has many photographs of signs in Northumberland, Montour, Union and Snyder counties. There are others that are

not accounted for. The trust hopes the public will help find and resurrect as many signs as possible.

The trust, which is 100 percent not-for-profit, has a board of eight members. Along with Guest and Graham, they include an active police officer, a railroad mechanic and others with a passion for preserving history. The organization encourages residents to get involved in the process as well. Graham said people should have a vested interest in saving their local history.

"To some, these signs seem to be insignificant pieces of

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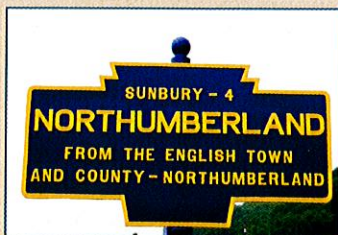
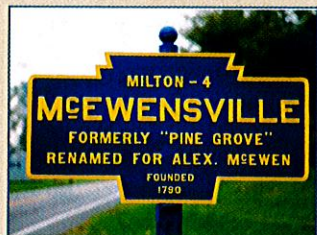
For a complete listing of markers in the commonwealth, try to find a copy of the "Guide to the Historical Markers of Pennsylvania" published by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in 1952, which was "intended as a guide to those markers erected before August 1952." It's packed with information.



# The push is on to locate, restore, protect and preserve them

"Each sign is a tiny little thread in the fabric of Pennsylvania's history."

Story & photos by Joseph J. Fisher



history, but the truth is that they help welcome people to a community," he said. "A sense of warmth is captured."

There seems to be a problem getting people interested enough to take action, however. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, which holds the rights to these signs, has not made them a priority, Graham said. With road and town expansion comes neglect of such pieces of the past.

It is primarily the eight board members who spend countless days, spending money out of their own pockets, driving

through counties and municipalities they are unfamiliar with in a journey to discover yet another sign. Graham admitted he likes the investigative part of the job. He has found these signs, which weigh more than 70 pounds each, in such places as borough basements and homes near where a particular sign originally was located. A lot of searching and questioning goes into finding a sign, a task easier said than done, he added.

About five days a month, Graham goes on an adventure to seek signs in locations he has not traveled to before. The signs



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"Town markers help create a sense of place throughout towns and communities across the commonwealth."

are photographed when they are found. If a sign needs work, members of the trust will talk with the local government and encourage those officials to take on the task. They provide towns, residents and others with advice and even supplies on occasion. One sign at a time, they give back something enriched in historic meaning.

"Each sign is a tiny little thread in the fabric of Pennsylvania's history," Graham said. He encourages others to become active with his team in making these welcoming signs visible and attractive in communities across the state.

Those interested in helping the trust in the preservation effort are urged to either take sign restorations into their own hands or make a pledge at [www.keystonemarkerttrust.org](http://www.keystonemarkerttrust.org). The website contains information and instructions on materials needed to preserve a sign. The trust welcomes photos of newly restored signs in their original locations.

## SOME OF JACK GRAHAM'S FAVORITE PA MARKER STORIES

- Ambler, in Montgomery County just outside Philadelphia, is a long way from Central Pennsylvania but it is nonetheless one of my favorite sign stories. The marker tells us that Ambler is named for Mary Ambler, the "Heroine of a Railroad Accident." In digging a little further, I found that on July 17, 1856, there was a horrible accident on the Pennsylvania Railroad. Many were killed and injured. Mary Ambler helped and nursed the victims of this tragedy. In gratitude, the railroad renamed the train station there for her (Ambler). The just-forming town took the name in turn from the railroad station which in those days was pretty much the center of town activity.

- Mt. Wolf, a York County town, has a marker that says it was named for "George Wolf Governor of Pennsylvania 1830 - 1836." Well, the town folk disagreed. Yes, the town was named for early settler George Wolf, but this was not the George Wolf who later became governor. Since the information was not correct, the town took their markers down long ago. One has since disappeared. The other one is now in the possession of Keystone Marker Trust and we use it as an exhibit at programs about the markers.

- Airville, York County. A marker there states the town was named for the "Pure Air in the Neighborhood." However it stands just about in a baryard and the fragrant scent of cow manure is almost overpowering.

- Ohiopyle, Fayette County. People would think it was somehow named for some place in the state of Ohio but no, the marker says it was named for "The Greek Ohiopiella." Pennsylvania is indeed a melting pot, but there aren't many place names of Greek derivation.

- Tangascootac Creek, Clinton County. Although this double-sided stream marker is broken, how can you not be impressed by a name like that?

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