

The Progress Fund

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Providing a Basis For Renewal *(Historic Properties Slated for Rehabilitation)*

St. Michael, PA. -- On Memorial Day in 1889, The Great Johnstown Flood occurred. It was a disaster heralded as the most violent flood in U.S. history, and it quickly gained national attention. Over 2,209 people were killed in the Little Conemaugh River Valley and in Johnstown, PA. Even Clara Barton, Founder of the American Red Cross, packed her bags and arrived in Johnstown where she spent 6 months tending the wounded. This vicious flood was considered the first major civilian test of disaster relief for the American Red Cross.

Nearby, at the edge of the South Fork Dam that gave way to cause the flood, was a retreat for the industrial wealthy of Pittsburgh—sixty-one financiers and businessmen who used the dam and 500-acre Lake Conemaugh for recreational purposes. A total of sixteen cottages and a clubhouse that stood lakeside became known as The South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club. Several of these historic structures built in 1883 survive today and are an integral part of our state and national history. Entrepreneurs like Henry Clay Frick,

Philander Knox, Andrew Mellon and Andrew Carnegie were reputed to spend much of their summer leisure time at the Club.

Today, in an effort to preserve their legacy and the rich story of a bygone era, The South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Historical Preservation Society and The Progress Fund are hoping to entice a developer to rehabilitate the remains of the club's lakeside resort which includes 2 cottages, the Clubhouse Annex and original Clubhouse. The Department of the Interior has designated these historic structures and five others intrusive to the historic scene as the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Historic District.

“Although one wing (40 percent) of the Clubhouse was removed in the early 1900's, the rest of the three story structure still serves as the focal point of the historic district as it did in the 1880's,” said Society Chairman, Stanley Pinkas. “It is truly a unique building. Originally it contained 27 furnished bedrooms, a dining room that could accommodate 150 people, a billiard parlor and a social hall. It functioned as a hotel until 1989, with the lower floor containing a bar and restaurant and the upper floors containing apartment suites and sleeping rooms.”

Originally, the cottages (a misnomer because nearly all were three stories tall with as many as 17 rooms) were connected to one another and to the clubhouse by a boardwalk, which also ran along the lakeshore. There were also an assortment of boathouses and stables.

“The people of this small town, the society members and our organization are hoping to take 13 years of sweat and tears that have already resulted in the complete rehabilitation of two cottages for use as apartments, and a partially completed Clubhouse and look for that ideal developer or individual that can provide the vision and money to finish the job,” said Christopher Barkley, Director of Sites Administration/Development.

The Progress Fund just finished printing and distributing a color flyer to over 1,100 architects, planners, developers and commercial real estate brokers in 6 states. Links from its website to a property description and rehabilitation cost analysis serve as a way to “do the homework” for a potential developer. Support for the effort came from a generous grant from the R.K. Mellon Family Foundation. The Progress Fund hopes that like a resume functions to get a potential employee in for an interview, the flyer will attract an organization interested in working with the community to preserve and rehabilitate the structures.

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The Progress Fund is a nonprofit corporation working to create economic opportunity in southwestern and south-central Pennsylvania by lending needed capital and providing technical assistance to small businesses. The Progress Fund is a “Westsylvania Partners” affiliate.