

19th Century Buildings Painted In Rainbow Colors Attract Customers For Agricultural Products

SHARTLESVILLE (Berks Co.) — Historic preservation and rainbow colors have given this small rural town a new look and provided a growing outlet for Pennsylvania agricultural and craft products.

After five years of restoration, preservation, cleaning and painting, Barry J. Block and Karen Kinnane have this late 19th century village literally "blooming with color!" It has become a striking advertisement for Pennsylvania products and culture.

In 1986, the pair purchased a tiny 19th century log house in the town's commercial district. A year of intensive restoration brought back the little house's quaint charm. The two then decided to expand their efforts to include several other vacant structures in the Victorian village. Buying an old country store and a Victorian two-family home kept them busy for another year.

"A lot of restoration here is straightforward," Karen said. "We keep peeling off later changes and siding, much like peeling the skin off an onion, to get to the useable inside part. Then we replace any of the original structure which is damaged or missing, especially the decorative gingerbread trim which provides character to these structures. The trim was often removed in mid-20th century "remuddling" in an attempt to modernize old buildings. We also replace all modern asphalt roofing with authentic 19th century style standing seam tin roofs. These two changes alone bring out the Victorian charm of the structures."

"To ensure that passers-by notice the progress, we transform each completed restoration with a "Painted Ladies" color scheme." Karen said, "I don't consider our paint jobs a success unless we see lots of black tire marks in the street in front of a newly painted building. That's how I know people are noticing the improvements." laughed Karen.

"Painted Ladies" is a generic term indicating the use of three or more harmonious colors which emphasize the lacy gingerbread trim on these houses. The "Painted

Ladies" movement began in San Francisco, Cal. in the 1960s, when a hippy commune decided to paint their plain gray Victorian house. A trip to the city dump garnered them 17 partially full cans of paint, each a different color. Proceeding to paint the entire house, they utilized all seventeen colors. Needless to say, their house was noticed! Many owners of similar homes which had been painted one or two subdued colors began to use three or more bright colors to emphasize the architecture of their buildings and the "Painted Ladies" movement was born. It rapidly spread to Cape May, N.J. and now to Shartlesville. "Painted Ladies" buildings are the subject of six best-selling books by Michael Larsen and Elizabeth Pomada as well as a glossy calendar each year. Larsen and Pomada's next book, due out October 1992 will mention the "Painted Ladies" of Shartlesville.

After restoring three of their seven properties, Barry and Karen were faced with the task of putting them to good use. The first structure, a small log house with a tiny barn out back was easy. It was rented as a home. The 19th century store building on Main Street became a general store again, with a unique twist. It is called the Shartlesville General Store. The hot pink and vivid purple building across from the Fire House was reopened as a showcase for all Pennsylvania made products. It features Pennsylvania jam, jelly, pickles, relishes, sauerkraut, stuffed pickled peppers, honey, egg noddles, candy, locally made brooms, quilts, potholders, pin-cushions, woodenware, folk art ornaments, dried flowers, fresh flowers and produce in season. These items are displayed in an authentic 19th century store complete with oak counters, display cabinets, lamp chimney rack, broom holders, even a floor model seed display case. Also for sale is a large assortment of antique advertising such as colorful tins, soap powder boxes, butter churns, seed packets with delightful illustrations of old-time vegetables and flowers, bar soap, early



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The Shartlesville General Store features all Pennsylvania-made products such as jam, sauerkraut, homemade brooms, folk art ornaments, and more displayed in antique cabinets and oak counters.

seed catalogs, lard pails, butcher tools, candy boxes, egg boxes, mason jars, antique toys and vintage fabrics. Youngsters flock to displays of "penny" candy in old fashioned "serve yourself" jars. Favorites like rootbeer barrels, salt water taffey, jawbreakers, dots, pipes, whips, rock candy, red hot dollars, cinnamon bears and fruit slices are all Pennsylvania made.

"Being on the Hex Highway (Old Rt. 22) in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch Country, we have lots of tourists in the store. From the start we refused to sell tacky plastic things that said "Souvenir of Pennsylvania" on top and "Made in Hong Kong" underneath. We wanted to give visitors a real "taste of Pennsylvania" so we hunted up authentic, old-fashioned Pennsylvania jams, jellies, preserves, pickles. It was great fun to "taste test" the potential products. To find suppliers we visited every farm stand and farmer's market we could find," said Karen. "We bought one of every food item that was made in the state. If it passed our rigid "taste test" we added it to our stock. We particularly tried to patronize small, family type operations whenever possible. We stock old timey things Grandma used to make and supermarkets don't carry, like tomato jam, quince jam, grape butter, peach butter, quince

honey, rhubarb jam, jelly, conserve, real homemade catsup, seven-day pickles, sauerkraut, egg noodles, bread and butter pickles and fabulous stuffed pickled peppers which are so gorgeous I sell more of them for shelf ornaments than for eating, even though they are no-fat and no-cholesterol!"

The store's philosophy is that selling only Pennsylvania products gives the tourists an accurate look at Pennsylvania culture, adds money to the local economy, gives the buyer a superior product and acts as free "goodwill" advertising when tourists share their purchases with friends back home who will want to visit that colorful, quaint town where they sell the most fabulous local food and crafts.

"We sell several types of locally made corn brooms, even a child's size, displayed in old-fashioned broom holders. That's a useful souvenir." Karen feels. "We sell quilts, many produced by Old Order Amish and Mennonite women who prefer to work at home on their farms instead of in a store or factory. They also produce quilt tops, crochet and woven rugs, pot holders, pin cushions, patchwork Christmas ornaments, patchwork pillows and animal shaped pillows made from parts of antique quilts. We make patchwork quilts to order in sizes from doll to King. Color combinations

are limited only by the client's imagination. We also repair antique quilts with vintage fabrics. We have delightful wooden berry carriers in various sizes and antique berry baskets are available to fill them.

These berry carriers are individually made by a local woodworker and they are extremely popular with customers because they are so handy around the house. The divided ones are great for carrying cutlery and napkins to elegant, impromptu picnics. The ones without dividers are used by knitters and quilters to carry work in progress and they are great toy carriers for children. Of course they are fine for berry and vegetable picking too. One of the divided berry carriers with a selection of eight locally made jams and jellies is a unique and lasting useful gift. The shop features charming, hand-painted wooden Christmas ornaments which are designed, sawed, sanded and painted by one local woman. These Victorian style ornaments depict an antique teddy bear on a hobby horse, a Pappa mouse and a Mama mouse in period clothing, Amish children, holly, bells, country geese, Santas and an antique sheep pull toy.

After launching the General Store, the couple's next challenge was to restore and utilize a Main (Turn to Page B29)



People cannot resist hunting up Karen Kinnane to find out what kind of person would live in a hot pink and vivid purple house.