PBA Finds a Home in Harrisburg

The PBA was without a home in its early years. Files and records were stuffed in vacant closets or stored in boxes plopped on unused bits of floor space and were moved about as officers changed.

During the 1920s, the PBA rented its first office space on the 14th floor of a building at 1612 Market Street in Philadelphia. In 1933, the association moved to Harrisburg and rented offices across from the state Capitol.

Six years later, 1938-39 PBA President Robert T. McCracken of Philadelphia planted the seed for a permanent home, and he later chaired a committee to buy a suitable building in Harrisburg. The committee came upon the Maclay Mansion. The original two-and-half story limestone structure was commissioned for construction along Harrisburg’s Front Street riverfront in 1791 as a two-and-a-half story home for William Maclay, Pennsylvania’s first U.S. Senator, and his wife, Mary, daughter of Harrisburg’s founder John Harris Sr. The home is an outstanding example of 18th-century architecture, the second stone home in Harrisburg and one of the few structures from the period still remaining in Harrisburg.

Maclay’s original home “grew” over time and was owned from 1827 to 1908 by the Harrisburg Academy (This explains the name of Academy Alley, the one-block road running just north of the mansion.). The property was purchased from the academy by William E. Bailey, a descendent of an early Harrisburg iron and steel industrial family. In 1909 to 1913, major renovations took place. Wings were added to the north and east sides using weathered limestone (secured by purchasing several old farmhouses and barns) to match the original dwelling.

In 1948, the PBA began raising the money to buy the original Front Street portion of the mansion. The total fundraising goal was $100,000, of which $45,000 was for the acquisition and the remainder for redecoration and ongoing maintenance. In 1950, a ceremony was held to officially dedicate the structure for PBA use. Former U.S. Senator George Wharton Pepper (one of the PBA’s founders and the PBA’s 1928-29 president) made the dedication remarks.

Last year, the PBA completed a major restoration and renovation of the mansion’s exterior, which included replacement of the slate roof, windows and shutters, the repointing portions of the stone walls and removal of many layers of peeling paint.


Join the conversation and get the latest updates about the PBA’s 125th anniversary on the association’s social media accounts (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) by using the hashtag #PBA125strong.

An early photo of the Maclay Mansion showing the home much as it would have looked during Senator Maclay’s time. The structure to the left was a later addition to the mansion and was used for a time by the Harrisburg Academy.