



A. Historic Preservation Project: The Silk House Cafe

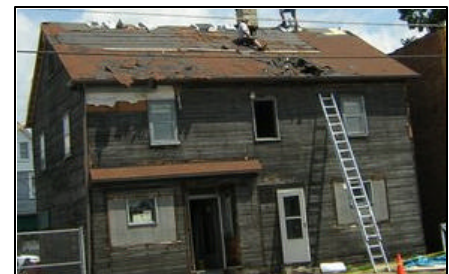
The community has supported (within the last three years) a historic or cultural preservation project that promotes heritage tourism or otherwise fosters economic vitality. The project must have involved a public-private partnership between government entities and at least one civic association, non-profit organization, or business enterprise.

The rehabilitation of [The Silk House Café](#) involved a public-private partnership between the Community Development Program of Beaver County and a local Ambridge businesswoman. Located within the Ambridge Historic District, a National Historic Landmark, and just blocks from Old Economy Village, the former silk manufacturing building built in 1826 played a major role in the Harmony Society's famous silk industry. The project was the initiative of owner Cindy Ridge, who recognized that the revitalization of historic properties would help promote heritage tourism and foster economic



development within the Ambridge Historic District. Purchasing the building for a mere \$15,000, and with the exterior, roof, and interior desperately in need of renovations, Cindy partnered with the Community Development Program (CDP) of Beaver County to obtain a \$40,000 Facade Improvement Grant and personally provided \$34,000 for the exterior work and funded the extensive interior rehabilitation. Working closely with the CDP representatives and the Ambridge Historic Architectural Review Board, she obtained approval for the final

exterior design in accordance with the *Design Guidelines* for the local historic district. After several months of renovations, The Silk House Café opened its doors to Ambridge on August 27, 2005. A stronger sense of community pride and support is evident as The Silk House Café has informally become the gathering place for townspeople. Operating as a coffeehouse, The Silk House Café offers gourmet coffees, desserts, and sandwiches, as well as meeting facilities and wireless internet, all in a warm, cozy atmosphere and has been an inspiration for others to utilize historic resources for business purposes. The





rehabilitation sparked economic development within the Ambridge Historic District, resulting in the completion of eight rehabilitation projects and the creation of six new businesses. The renewed interest in the real estate of the historic district has continued with the recent purchases of several other historic Harmonist buildings by investors planning for rehabilitation and use.

The Silk House Café project has also promoted heritage tourism within the area by becoming a complementary venue to Old Economy Village, providing tourists and townspeople a further appreciation for the architectural past through the structure's modern use, as well as providing a resting place after visiting Old Economy Village.

Earning the Main Street Downtown Design and Downtown Business Development awards in 2006, The Silk House Café is an excellent example of a public-private partnership that has promoted heritage tourism, economic development, and community vitality in Ambridge.



Category 1: Discovering Heritage Through Historic Places

Criterion 1

A community-supported museum, interpretive facility, archive, or local history records collection (private or public).

Ambridge is the home of [Old Economy Village](#), a National Historic Landmark administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The site interprets one of America's most successful 19th century Christian communal societies - the Harmony Society. Old Economy Village also provides public education and preservation of the Society's unique material culture. Founded by George Rapp, it was the third and final location of the Harmonists. Established in 1824, Old Economy - known to the Harmonists as "Oekonomie" - was founded upon German Pietism, which called for a higher level of purity within Christianity. Soon the Harmonists were not only known for their piety, but also for their production of wool, cotton, and silk. As a pioneer in the American silk industry, Economy became known as the American silk center in the



1830's and 1840's. Today, the site maintains seventeen carefully restored structures and gardens that were built between 1824 and 1830. The buildings reflect the unusual life style of the organization, which, by the 1840s, was well renowned for its economic success in textile production. The site also portrays the community's involvement with agricultural production,

railroads, and oil. The recreated gardens encompass more than two acres, providing colorful 19th century flowers. The gardens' formal pathways, stone pavilion, and seasonal flowering hedges are among the striking features. Old Economy's buildings, grounds, library, archives and 16,000 original artifacts are fused to create an interpretive facility for the Commonwealth.

The site is supported by a \$4.1 million Visitor's Center which is located at the gateway to Old Economy Village and the Ambridge Historic District. This community-supported



facility strengthens Category 1, Criteria 1, and can be found in greater detail under Category 3, Criteria 1.



Criterion 2

Active citizen volunteer involvement, such as a docent or guide program for interpretation of local history and culture, or volunteer participation in improving the condition of heritage assets within the community.

In 1956, The Harmonie Associates was established as a volunteer, non-profit educational organization dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Old Economy Village. Now known as the **Friends of Old Economy**, the organization has helped promote participation in programs and site visitation from all age groups and interest levels. Tours, festivals, classes, lectures, and other special programs are an integral part of the site's activities. Membership in the Friends of Old Economy is open to the public. Each year several fundraisers are held to help support programming costs. However, volunteerism at the site is a vital part of the organizations contribution to Old Economy Village.

- **GARDEN DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTAINENCE:** transplant and plant seedlings, make historic garden markers, prune trees and grapevines, assist with aesthetic maintenance, maintain plant life, maintain compost pile, assist with storm damage clean-up, assist with garden tours
- **OFFICE:** assist with bulk mailings, typing, filing, organizing files, transcribe audio tapes of lectures for later publication
- **MAINTENANCE:** painting (fences, shutters, doors, etc.); make, assemble and finish wood lanterns, make reproduction window props
- **EDUCATION:** tour guide, craft demonstrator
- **COLLECTIONS:** accessioning (describing and labeling) collections, inventory, cleaning, typing accession cards, entering collections data into data base
- **LIBRARY:** assist volunteer librarian with cataloging books, typing cards (author, title, shelf and subject), shelving books, inventory, maintain periodicals
- **MARKETING / SPECIAL PROMOTION:** distribute site literature at local venues including hotels, restaurants, businesses, distribute posters prior to special events
- **SPECIAL EVENTS:** ticket sales, information booth, food line captain & crew, clean-up crew, set-up crew, tear down crew, take photographs to be used for publicity for subsequent events, video tape events for site history file , assist with period demonstrations



Criterion 3

Opportunities for children to learn about local heritage in the schools, through either established curriculum or special outreach activities.

Old Economy Village provides numerous opportunities for the children of Ambridge and the surrounding area to explore and enjoy the local heritage of the Harmonist Society.

Programs are offered for students of all ages, from pre-school to college. Younger students learn about some of the basic necessities of early Harmonist life, such as churning butter, baking bread, or pumping water without the use of modern conveniences. Middle school students are able to learn about community life in 19th century Economy, with focus on town planning, the importance of geography and transportation, the role of the craftsman, what it meant to be an



apprentice, the role of the housekeeper in the community, and the importance of education. Older students are taught about the Society's communal organization, economic development, architecture, its German heritage, personalities, and daily life. While much of this curriculum would challenge the attention span of even the most disciplined scholar, students are captivated from start to finish since the learning environment is hands-on and interactive, from pumping water from a 100-year old well, to churning their own butter, or watching docents perform as prominent Harmonist Society figures.



Category 2: Protecting Historic Resources

Criterion 1

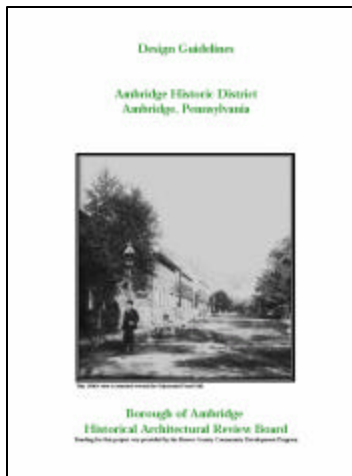
A local governmental body, such as a board or a commission, charged with leading historic preservation activities within the community.

The **Ambridge Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB)** is a seven-member body who advises both the Borough Council and property owners on issues related to the preservation of Ambridge's historic fabric. Members are appointed by the Borough Council to a six-year term. The HARB includes a registered architect, a licensed real estate broker, the Borough's Building Inspector, and persons with knowledge of and interest in historic preservation. At least four HARB members are property owners within the Ambridge Historic District. HARB members are knowledgeable people who are sensitive to the character of the historic district and desire to work with property owners, developers, and tenants in developing successful construction plans.

Criterion 2

A historic preservation review ordinance and volunteer or professional staff to implement it.

In 2001, Ambridge established a further commitment to historic preservation by publishing [Design Guidelines](#). This established standards, both general and specific,



to assist with recommendations made regarding the treatment of historic structures. Developed by the HARB, the *Design Guidelines* were created with funding provided by the CDP of Beaver County. Property owners, tenants, or contractors planning to make any exterior alterations or additions must submit the prospective plans for HARB review in order to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness or Building Permit. Reviews are based upon the *Design Guidelines*, which make provisions for residential, commercial, and institutional architecture. Applicants are notified of the meet date, time and location as to attend a hearing of their plans. Based on this process, the HARB offers its opinion as to the appropriateness of the work and its conformity to the *Design Guidelines*. If appropriate and in adherence to the *Design Guidelines*, a Certificate of

Appropriateness is issued and the project can proceed accordingly.

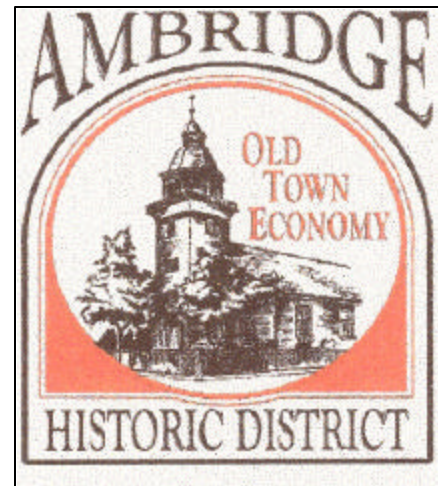


Category 3: Promoting Historic Assets

Criteria 1

A local heritage tourism program or active participation in a regional program, with such promotional material as a walking/driving trail or tour itinerary, map of historic resources, etc.

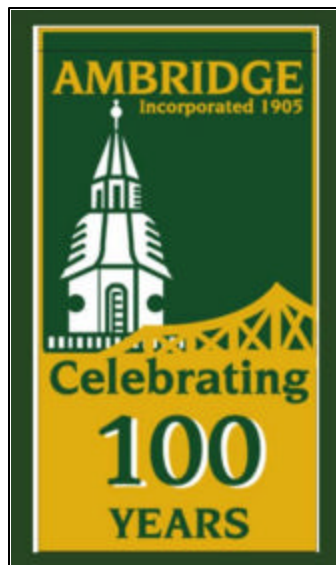
Facing increased development pressure and in response to a heightened awareness of historic preservation, the Ambridge Borough Council passed Ordinance 900 in 1971, which established the then locally-designated **Ambridge Historic District** and extended protection to the district's historic architecture. In 1985, the Ambridge Historic District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and in the following year was designated as a National Historic Landmark, establishing the significance of the district not only to the history of Beaver County and Pennsylvania but to the nation as a whole. The thirty-acre district is significant as the most complete site of the utopian



community known as the Harmony Society.

Furthermore, the district includes over 90 privately-owned buildings, as well as

a four-acre museum complex that is owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Since the dissolution of the Harmony Society in 1905, Old Economy Village has been part of the larger 20th century industrial town of Ambridge.



As previously mentioned, the \$4.1 million Visitor Center is situated in the heart of the Borough's National Historic Landmark and serves as the entryway to Old Economy Village and



the Ambridge Historic District. With Mr. Brent Glass, director of the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. present, the ribbon cutting took place on August 25, 2003. The opening of the Visitor's Center was the culmination of efforts by volunteers and donors that turned a 30-year-old idea into reality.



Criteria 2

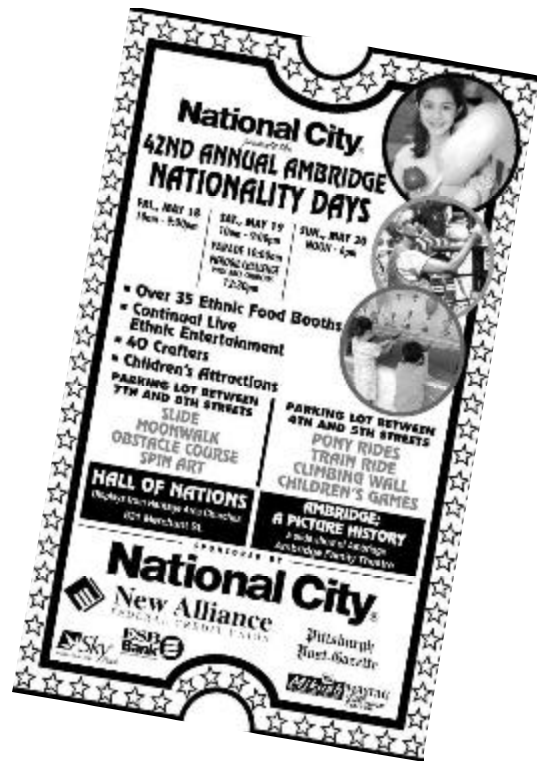
A regularly scheduled heritage observance or event.

Since 1966, **Ambridge Nationality Days** has been an annual heritage festival celebrating the borough’s ethnic pride. Diversity in food, music, and entertainment continues to unite the community in remembering its origins. Organized by the Ambridge Chamber of Commerce, the three-day festival takes place in May and is located



in the heart of the downtown Commercial District. Vendors line the center of Merchant Street as thousands of attendees – locals and tourists – enjoy Italian, Ukrainian, Greek, Polish, German, Croatian, and

Slovenian cuisine. Booths are sponsored by numerous churches in Ambridge, bringing with them the recipes for their cultural dishes such as pirohy, haluski, stuffed cabbage, and borscht. Live entertainment, arts and crafts, and children’s activities are also available.



A regularly scheduled heritage observance or event.

Each October, the community also looks forward to the [Ambridge Church Tour](#), an annual architectural and historical tour of the churches in Ambridge. From its earliest



beginnings, Ambridge’s culture was built on a bed-rock of faith that continues to this day. The influence of the town’s diverse heritage remains evident through the architectural styles of its 23 active places of worship, as well as an Episcopal School for Ministry. The tour was first started in 2005 by the parishioners of several churches and the Chamber of Commerce. Each year, four or five churches are selected as stops on the tour and volunteers serve as tour guides, providing visitors with rich detail on the history of each church and its construction.



Tours range from St. John's Lutheran Church, built by the Harmonist Society in 1838 and one of the oldest churches in southwestern Pennsylvania, to Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church, built in 1917 and known locally as one of the best pirohy makers in the borough. Growing each year, the tour has helped to promote heritage tourism and increased appreciation for the historical religious assets within the community.





D. Three to five images that show people using and enjoying your historic cultural and natural resources



Visitors at Old Economy Village watch as a volunteer reenacts Gertrude Rapp, granddaughter of founder George Rapp.
Photo courtesy of Old Economy Village



Thousands of townspeople and tourists enjoy the annual Ambridge Nationality Days in the Downtown Commercial District on Merchant Street.
Photo courtesy of Ambridge Chamber of Commerce



Children learn how to get water using the vintage water pump at Old Economy Village.

Photo by Bob Donaldson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Locals frequent The Silk House Café, a renovated Harmonist House converted into a coffeehouse

*Photo by Sarah Vaccarelli
goburgh.com*



E. History of the community, founding date, key events, evolution of the economy, and current population

[Ambridge](#) is a borough in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, located 16 miles northwest of Pittsburgh along the Ohio River. The population during the 2000 census was 7,769.

The Harmony Society first settled the area in the early 1800s, founding the village of "Oekonomie" or Old Economy in 1824. Although initially successful, accumulating significant landholdings, the sect went into decline. By the end of the nineteenth century only a few Harmonists remained. The Society was dissolved and its vast real estate holdings sold, much of it to the American Bridge Company, who subsequently enlarged the town and incorporated it as Ambridge in 1905.

Ambridge was widely known for bridge building, metal molding, and the manufacture of iron tubes. The American Bridge Company ended operations in Ambridge in 1983.

Now over 100 years old, the economic identity of Ambridge is changing again. Revitalization has started to occur in the Downtown Commercial District as entrepreneurs and investors have begun to renovate the borough's historic buildings on [Merchant Street](#). Antique shops are opening in the historic district, and a once industrial warehouse area is being converted to condominiums, shops, and parks.



5. ADITIONAL SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Written endorsements by preservation organizations, civic organizations, members of Congress, and other elected officials are encouraged. (Please provide copies of any letters of endorsement.)

Documenting participation in other nationwide preservation programs is encouraged. (Please let us know if your community is a Certified Local Government, a Main Street Community, a recipient of funds under the Save America's Treasures program, a recipient of Transportation Enhancements funding for historic preservation, etc.)

Letters of Endorsement

An endorsement letter from Pennsylvania Senator Lavallo is enclosed.

Certified Local Government

Ambridge is a Certified Local Government. The Certification Agreement for Ambridge was approved on 5 Jun 01.



Local Convention and Visitor's Bureau and State Tourism Office

Attached to your application, please provide the name and title of the head of your local convention and visitors bureau and of your state tourism office, as well as both mailing addresses. If your community is designated as a Preserve America Community, the ACHP will formally notify them of your designation.

Local Convention and Visitor's Bureau

Mr. Tom Patrician, President
Ambridge Chamber of Commerce
552 Merchant Street
Ambridge, PA 15003
(724) 601-3383

State Tourism Office

Mr. Dennis Yablonsky, Secretary
Pennsylvania Tourism Office
Department of Community and Economic Development
4th Floor, Commonwealth Keystone Building
400 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225 USA
Toll Free (for tourism information): 800-VISIT-PA (847-4872)
Toll Free (for office information): 800-237-4363
(voice) 717-787-5453
(fax) 717-787-0687