

The finishing touch

Addition of plaque completes statue conservation project

By Jeff Werner
EDITOR

As conservator Scott Kreilick prepared to attach a plaque to the base of the William Penn statue on Makefield Road, David Long savored the moment.

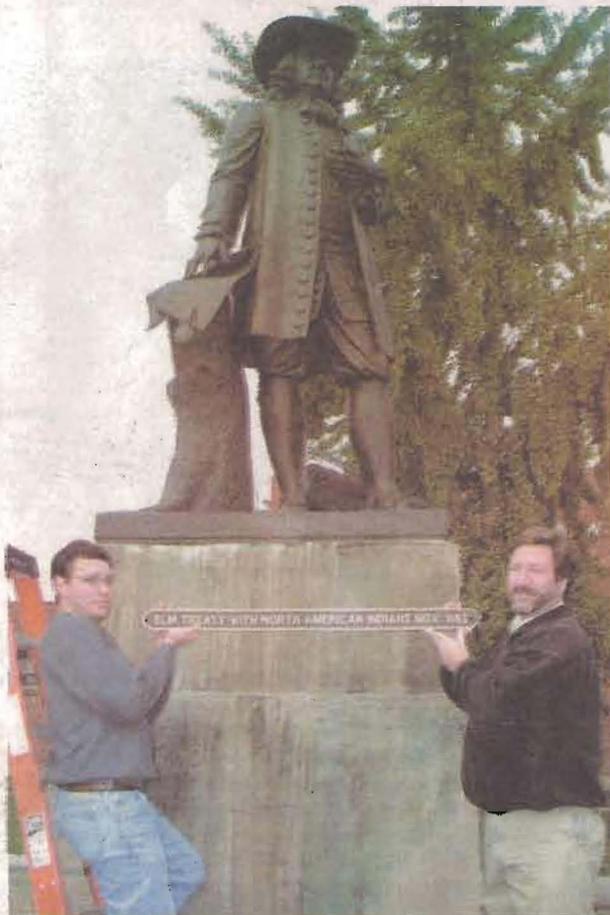
For Long, who initiated an effort to conserve the statue four years ago, the simple event marked the culmination of a project that has been close to his heart.

"It's kind of bittersweet in that we're coming to an end," said Long, watching Kreilick affix the long thin plaque to the front of the statue, which stands in front of the Pennwood Middle School where Long attended school. "At the same time, it's good to see this finally complete."

The installation of the plaque culminates a \$25,000, two-year-long restoration project facilitated by Long and John Hahn, supervisor of grounds for the Pennsbury School District.

The plaque refers to the historic "Elm Treaty," the first signed by Penn and the local Native Americans at what is now Penn Treaty Park in the city of Philadelphia. The treaty was supposedly signed beneath a giant elm tree, which had lived at the site until the late 1800s.

Since the statue's original



David Long, left, and Scott Kreilick, president and CEO of Kreilick Conservation, LLC, display the statue's new plaque.

plaque disappeared years ago, Kreilick had to re-create the marker using a photograph taken at the dedication of the statue in 1952 and a picture that appeared on the front cover of the 1965 yearbook. A shadow left by the original plaque

also gave the conservator a hint at where it should be placed.

"It's important to note that these plaques were not original to the sculpture, but they were original to the dedication in 1952," said Kreilick.

The new plaque is being paid for through donations from the Pennsbury High School (PHS) Combined Reunion Committee 1949-54; the Lower Makefield Historical Society; David Long, a PHS alumnus; and an anonymous donor.

According to Hahn, the entire restoration cost \$25,000, not including the plaque, which carried a price tag of \$1200. Several grants from the state Department of Community and Economic Development helped pay for the project.

The statue was given to the school district by the U.S. Steel Corporation. In 1952, it was dedicated in front of the Pennsbury High School, now the Pennwood Middle School, on Makefield Road.

For all that is known about the statue, a significant portion of its past remains clouded in mystery.

Kreilick said no one is quite sure why the statue was originally cast in 1894 and where it spent the years between 1894 and 1952.

"We heard rumors and mentions that maybe it was in the possession of some higher up person at U.S. Steel for a while and that it was stored in a garage on the Main Line by members of the Strawbridge & Clothier family. I called members of the family and they contacted the oldest

living members of the family who would have known, and they didn't."

There was also speculation that it might have spent time in a warehouse on North Broad Street in the city. Again, Kreilick and the district have been unable to confirm the stories.

Long said he is just happy to see the statue restored.

His emotions, however, were tempered somewhat. Several days before, Long discovered a broken axe and wads of chewed bubble gum stuck to the legs and body of the bronze sculpture.

"We don't know who did it. I'd like to think it was not vandalism," said Hahn, of the broken axe. "I'm hoping it was an accident — kids climbing on it."

Kreilick said it won't be hard to replace the axe. "We made the conscious decision to make it out of fiberglass because of the potential for vandalism. It's much cheaper to replace fiberglass than it is to replace bronze. And we have the mold."

Whoever tried to break off the handle, whether by accident or on purpose, were unsuccessful, said Kreilick, because of long metal rods inside the piece that run the length of the axe.

"Until earlier this week when I saw the broken axe I was feeling pretty good

about the whole thing," said Long. "But I guess no project is ever over."

Still, said Kreilick, Penn's overall appearance is good. When the project began, William Penn's likeness was literally green around the gills and in pretty sad shape following years of neglect.

Hahn said he and Kreilick are in the process of developing a preventative maintenance program for the statue. "We're definitely going to do preventative maintenance on this statue from here on out so it will never return to the condition it was in," said Hahn.

Long, who graduated from Pennsbury in 1986 and attended school at Pennwood, said preserving the piece of local history was just "morally and ethically the right thing to do."

"William Penn would be proud of the way this community took responsibility for this statue," adds Hahn. "People have been coming up to me and saying how nice it looks. With most projects, you're kind of glad it's done. This particular one, I'm not. I've enjoyed this. I did not know much about statues when I started. I'm glad it's restored to its original condition."

Hahn said hopes to put together a re-dedication ceremony. "I would really like for there to be one. I'm hoping for next spring."