

THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF

# SPRINGDALE





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The Honorable RICHARD E. KOHLER, *Author and Editor*

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MRS. ROBERT P. TURNER

MRS. ELIZABETH SCHONAUER

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DURING the 19<sup>th</sup> Century two residential estates were created in the York area that are of great historical significance by reason of their beauty, the social and business prominence of their owners, and the guests of national importance who were entertained there. One was Brockie and the other Springdale.

Brockie, on the south side of Country Club Road, was erected by Jeremiah Sullivan Black in the 1860's. Jeremiah Black was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania; both Secretary of State and Attorney General under President Buchanan; and reputedly one of the greatest legal minds of the United States of his time. After failing Senate confirmation as a Justice on the Supreme Court of the United States

by only two votes, at the conclusion of the Buchanan administration, he decided to settle in York from which to conduct his extensive national law practice and soon thereafter created Brockie. However, about fifteen years later, death concluded his career and not long thereafter Brockie was sold to C. Elmer Smith and thus passed out of the Black family.

Springdale is the more interesting and important from the point of view of York County history because it was the creation of an original York County family and remained in the ownership of that family through five generations and for well over a century. On its grounds and in its halls were held the most elite social events of the entire area. James Buchanan, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and Davy Crockett are just a few of the people of national prominence who were its guests.



*Chas A. Barnitz*

Springdale was commenced in 1823 by the purchase of ten acres of land by Charles A. Barnitz on the east side of the York & Baltimore Turnpike for a summer home. Charles A. Barnitz was, without a doubt, the most prominent member of the York County Bar in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He had been born in York in 1780, admitted to the Bar in 1811, and had married the daughter of Col. David Greer, a famed officer in the Revolutionary Army. As an example of the economic, social and political stature of Mr. Barnitz in the community, let me list a few of his accomplishments:

He was elected to the Senate of Pennsylvania and later to the Congress of the United States as a member of the Whig party and representing York and Adams counties; he was legal counsel for all the heirs of William Penn in their frequent litigation with the holders of property in Springettsbury Manor; he became President of the York Bank, the only bank

then in the area; he helped form the York County Colonization Society for the freeing of slaves and returning them to Africa, and it is said that the barns at Springdale were frequently a part of the famous "underground railroad"; and he formed the York Navigation Company which operated the canal down the Codorus from York to the Susquehanna.

The town house of Charles A. Barnitz was on the south side of the first block on West Market St. and the ten acres he purchased in 1823 for a summer home is what may be referred to as "early Springdale." It was bounded by South George St. on the West, roughly what is now known as South Duke St. on the East, roughly what is now known as Rathton Road on the South, and what is now known as Hersh's Lane, being the first alley north of Springettsbury Avenue, on the North.

The summer home was completed for occupancy in 1828. Through his Whig party political connections Mr. Barnitz had long been a personal friend to Henry Clay and it has long been rumored that Mr. Barnitz designed his summer home along the lines of Clay's home in Kentucky named Ashland.

Mr. Barnitz soon acquired additional lands to the east of the original tract running eastwardly to what is now Newlin Road which he devoted to farming, the raising of a special breed of cattle called "Durhams," and the raising of sunflowers whose seed were used for the making of oil for lamps. He earned a national reputation in the breeding of his cattle and it is interesting to note that their daughter, Jane, in a letter to a friend once noted that the cream from the cattle was so thick that her mother could churn butter in a cup with a spoon at the table.

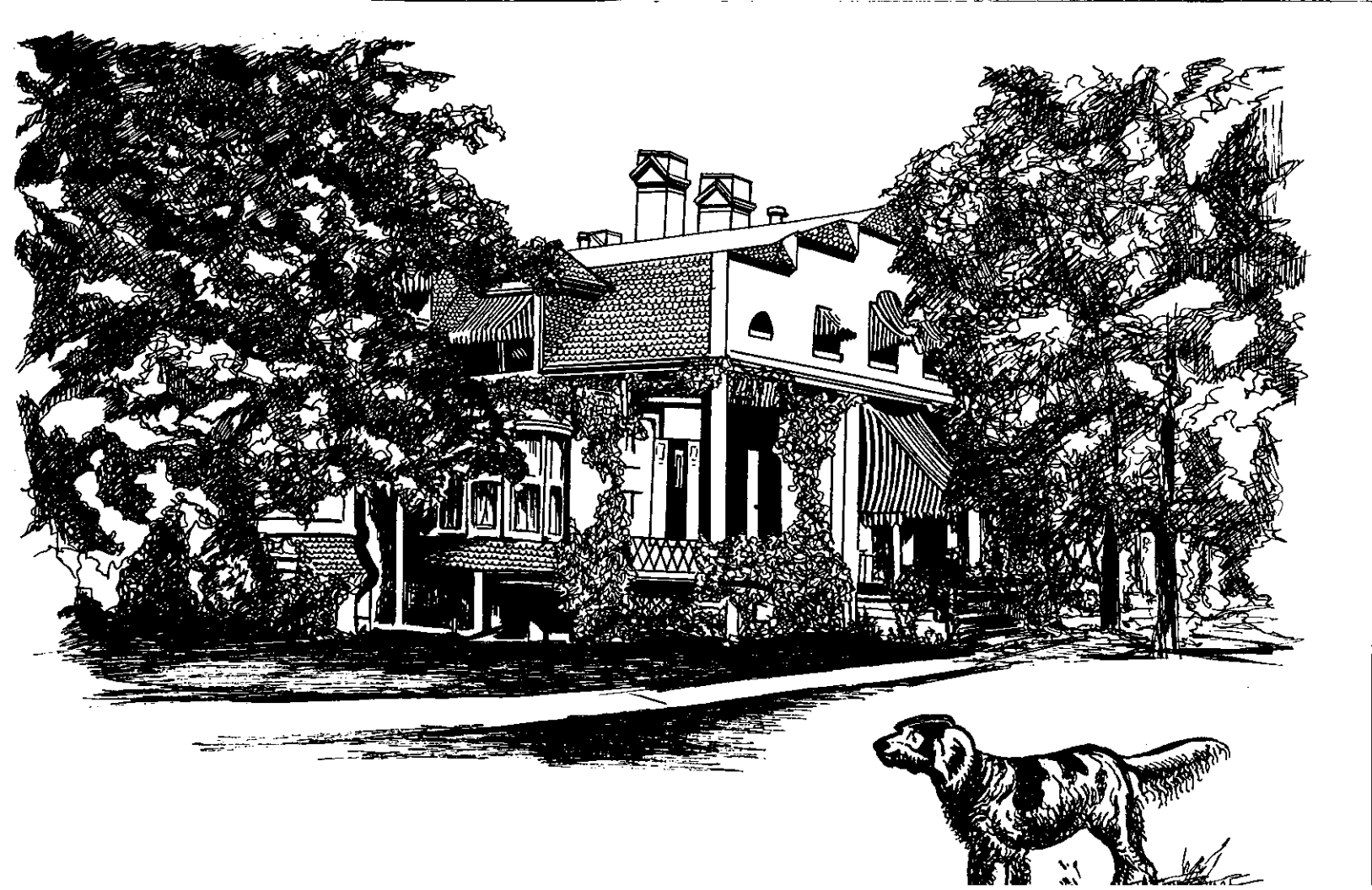
When General Lafayette visited York in 1825 the father of Charles A. Barnitz

was the Master of Ceremonies at the festive banquet in his honor and thus arose a friendship between Lafayette and Charles A. Barnitz. There is in the files of the York County Historical Society an original letter from Lafayette to Mr. Barnitz expressing sympathy at the death of the latter's father and from the very personal tone of the letter the depth of that friendship is revealed.

Mr. Barnitz also had a close professional and social friendship with his fellow attorney in neighboring Lancaster County, James Buchanan, who was often entertained by Mr. & Mrs. Barnitz at Springdale. It is said that Mrs. Barnitz named Springdale from the seven springs existing on the property at the suggestion of James Buchanan. Further rumor has suggested that it was Mrs. Barnitz who suggested the name Wheatland to James Buchanan for his estate in Lancaster but there is no written evidence to substantiate this rumor.

During the term served in the Congress of the United States by Mr. Barnitz he entertained Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and Davy Crockett at Springdale in the early 1830's. A letter from Mrs. Barnitz to one of her nieces in 1835 states: "I was much disappointed with Mr. Webster. He is short, thick, and rather awkward in his manner. Mr. Clay is quite the knitting needle type, very ugly, a time ending mouth and an inveterate sniffer."

The severe business depression of the middle 1830's affected the finances of Mr. Barnitz. Their only daughter, Jane, had married James Lewis and was living with her husband in Philadelphia. Both desired to return to York and it was arranged that James Lewis should purchase Springdale from his father-in-law. The Lewis diary notes: "On Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1837 we moved to Springdale." In correspondence over this purchase between Mr. Lewis and



his father-in-law the former expressed a desire that, as so purchased by him, Springdale should encompass approximately 25 acres extending from what is now George St. eastwardly to Newlin Road, and from Hersh's Lane southwardly across what is now Springettsbury Avenue to what is now Rathton Road. It was so deeded by the Barnitz's to James Lewis in 1841.

James Lewis was the son of Major Eli Lewis, the founder of Lewisberry in York County, and was a brother of Ellis Lewis who became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. He was a prominent attorney and had studied law in the office of his father-in-law, Charles A. Barnitz. He noted in his diary that the first moment he saw Jane walk into her father's office he thought to himself "there is the girl I am going to marry." He had been a co-editor of the York Recorder, a Director of the York County Library Co., York's first attempt at a public

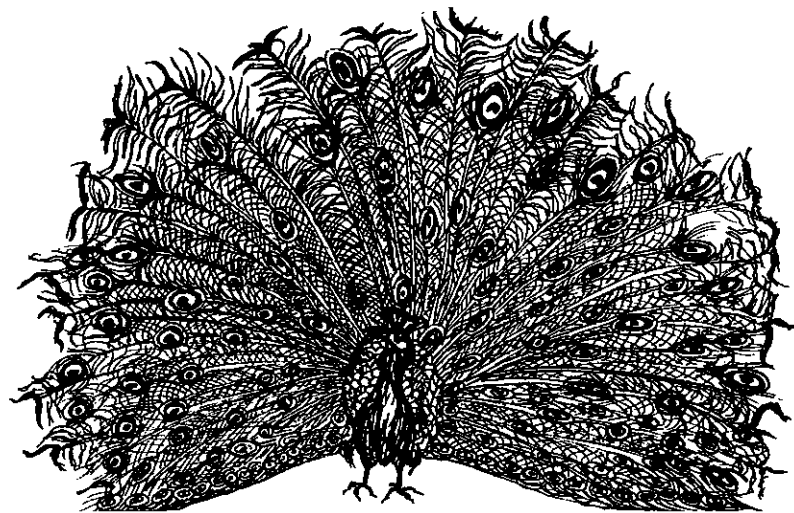
library, and also became a President of the York Bank.

Tragedy soon struck the James Lewis family. Their only child, Margaret Jane, was born in January 1840 but her mother, Jane, died six months later. In four years James Lewis also died and a little five year old girl became the owner of Springdale. Margaret Jane was then reared by the Eli Lewis family who moved to Springdale. Eli Lewis was her paternal uncle and acted as her guardian. Eli Lewis was also a banker and was President of the First National Bank of York.

During the next fifteen years, and the rearing of Margaret Jane, Springdale remained much the same. In 1861 Margaret Jane married Samuel Spangler Hersh. In 1863 two important events in the history of Springdale occurred. First, Margaret purchased the farm of 65 acres immediately to the east of Springdale which extended its



boundaries to what is now Queen St. This is a very historical tract and for many years was known as the Johnson farm named for its owner a very prominent physician, Dr. Johnson, the son-in-law of James Smith, the noted York attorney and signer of the Declaration of Independence. Dr. Johnson had acquired the farm from James Smith. The buildings were at the intersection of what is now Springettsbury Avenue and Arlington Road. The farm house was the summer home of James Smith and was called Peacock Hall, so named for two large peacocks painted on the living room wall just over the fireplace. It has long been tradition that during the session of Continental Congress in York from 1777-78, James Smith frequently entertained members of Congress in its halls.



The second important event in 1863 was the birth of Grier Hersh to Margaret and Samuel Hersh and who was to be their only child to survive. However, tragedy soon again struck Springdale. Margaret Hersh died in 1865. Her Will, written only a month prior to her death, devised Springdale to her son Grier, and again an infant became the owner of Springdale.

Samuel Spangler Hersh, Grier's father, became a very prominent citizen in the York community. He was a Director of the First National Bank of York, the first President of the YMCA, and a founder of the York & Chanceford Turnpike. In 1868 Mr. Hersh added 38 acres to Springdale by purchasing the George Gotwalt farm, now the site of the York Hospital.

Samuel Spangler Hersh died in 1876 leaving Grier, at eleven years of age, a full orphan and the sole owner of all the Springdale lands. In his Will, Mr. Hersh named

George Edward Hersh as Grier's guardian. George Edward Hersh was his paternal uncle, his father's brother, and a very prominent banker as President of the York Bank.

Grier Hersh was educated in private preparatory schools and at Princeton University. The glory of Springdale as a social mecca and as one of the most beautiful estates in Pennsylvania resumed with the marriage of Mr. Hersh and Miss Julia Mayer in 1887. His bride was the daughter of John L. Mayer one of the most prominent attorneys at the York County Bar. The wedding was the social event of that era in York. It took place at St. John's Episcopal Church on North Beaver Street and newspaper accounts described it as "the most brilliant that has taken place in many a day." A special choir was imported from Reading and Mr. Hersh even chartered a special train from York to Baltimore for the bridal couple to commence their honeymoon.

It was at this time that Mr. Hersh embarked upon considering improvements to the house and grounds at Springdale. Not only were improvements made to the mansion house but the carriage house as it exists today was constructed. A coachman's house, formal gardens and a swimming pool were also added.

Mr. Hersh became President of the York Bank, the Maryland Trust Company, the Pennsylvania Banker's Association, the York County Gas Co., and other corporate enterprises in the community. He was the only Yorker to charter a private railroad car in which he often took his family to Palm Beach in the winter where he was one of the founders of the Sailfish Club. His business activities, his social standing and the living of an abundant life made Mr. Hersh, in the opinion of many, the most prominent Yorker during the first quarter of this century.

Mr. Hersh was one of the founders of the Lafayette Club and the Country Club of York. He had brought golf to York in 1894 by the construction, at Springdale, of the first golf course in York County. His private course consisted of nine holes with a total length of 2,281 yards and a par of 34. In those days they used wooden shaft clubs and gutta percha balls which could only be driven about 100 yards. The course extended from the present alley south of Springettsbury Avenue southwardly almost to the present Rathton Road, eastwardly to the present Sleepy Hollow Road and north along Newlin and Arlington Roads to the aforementioned alley. In 1941 Mr. Hersh presented a plan of this original course to the Country Club of York but extensive search has failed to find it in the Club's files.

Mr. Hersh made extensive acquisition of lands so that at one time it was said that





the total land holdings of the Springdale Farms comprised about 400 acres and extended from Boundary Avenue in the city southwardly to Violet Hill. The demands for expansion of a growing City induced Mr. Hersh to sell hundreds of parcels, from time to time, mainly for residential building lots. Finally, in the middle 1920's the development now known as Springdale was created extending from Springettsbury Avenue to Rathton Road and from Duke Street to Queen Street. New streets in the development were opened and improved and many residential lots sold and homes erected largely through the promotions of Mr. Harry S. Ebert and Augustus M. Hake. What we have referred to as "early Springdale" remained intact under the ownership of Mr. Hersh until his death in 1941. In 1925 the land now occupied by York Hospital had been purchased from Mr. Hersh.

Mr. Hersh's wife, Julia, had passed away in 1916. They had two children, Helen Hersh

Torrance, now deceased, and Margaret Hersh Turner who lived near Baltimore. In 1926 Mr. Hersh remarried to Miss Helen Mayer, his first wife's sister, and the latter passed away soon after Mr. Hersh's death.

In 1945 the Hersh estate sold the property to Charles Pechenek who proceeded to remodel the carriage house into a residence for himself and, in 1954, demolished the beautiful mansion house.

The mansion had been constructed of brick, covered by stucco, and contained about forty rooms. These included a large ballroom to the east, a billiard room, an extremely large library, both downstairs and upstairs living rooms, sewing room, laundry room, servant's quarters in the south wing, wine cellars, nursery, and a very beautiful dining room paneled in wood of a soft red, the fireplace in pinkish stone and elaborately carved. There was a center entrance hall with a wide staircase arising



on easy steps to form a gallery. The main bathroom upstairs was done in brown and tan tiles with a bathtub of tile.

Most of the rooms were of wood paneling or tinted plaster. The ballroom was on a lower level than the reception hall reached by wide steps from the entrance. Four large windows at each corner made the room appear octagonal. The leaded windows were called birdseye glass because each pane had a bubble blown in it to resemble a bird's eye. The steps leading down to the ballroom provided a kind of stage by which costumed ladies could make an entrance. The piano was set to one side and a row of chairs ringed the entire ballroom when a party was in progress.

The gardens matched the house. Even today the retaining wall of gray fieldstone hides the sunken gardens from the George Street side. Some of the trees are still shaped as

they were in the old days and part of the privet hedge which once surrounded the property still stands.

The tea house and the bath house, although modernized, including the swimming pool, remain.

York Hospital has purchased the property from the Pechenek estate, has completely refurnished the former carriage house, and is using it for various meetings and for the housing of overnight guests of the Hospital administration.

*(Update: The tea house, bath house, and swimming pool have since been demolished. In 1997 York Hospital, now WellSpan, sold the property to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York. They have constructed a new sanctuary to complement the Carriage House which is now used for administrative and meeting space.)*

When one stands in the center of the estate, where the old mansion house stood, there is silence except for the chirping of the birds and the cawing of a family of crows which now inhabit the property because the noise of city traffic and urban life is obliterated by the distance and the shrubbery. When standing there, in eerie silence of everything except the sounds of nature, one can imagine the glamour, excitement and history that took place on those grounds in years gone by. The beauty and majesty of the lawns and tall trees are breathtaking.

One local historian has described Springdale life as follows:

“Many evenings out of the year formally dressed gentlemen and ladies drove up in carriages to attend dances in the octagonal ballroom. Or they might be attending musicales or theatricals held either indoors or outside in a natural amphitheater. There were formal gardens

to the east. Choice plants were brought inside during the winter and a porch was enclosed in glass and converted into a conservatory. On the north lawn was the croquet grounds. One could even play after dark by the light of candles attached to the wickets.”

It was always said that an orchestra at Springdale never ceased playing, no matter how late, until the last dancer left the floor.

Every old estate should have a ghost story. Of Brockie, it is said that if one walks back Spring Lane, off the Country Club Road, on a moonless night, the headless ghost of old Brawkie, an old settler who owned the land and from whom the name Brockie was derived, will chase you away from the beautiful spring which is just off the roadway.



Of Springdale, it is said that in the 1860's one of the visiting relatives had a suitor with whom she was in love. Sitting in her bedroom in Springdale one evening she glanced toward the wall and was shocked to see his face pictured on the wall. At the same time she is said to have heard his voice say: "Gaze upon my countenance fondly, my darling, for I fear this is the last time you will be privileged to do so." The very next morning she learned of his death in a tragic accident the evening before.

## *Springdale Neighborhood Association*

A neighborhood is more than a collection of attractive homes on tree-lined streets. A real neighborhood exists only when there is also a feeling of community – of good will and common purpose – among those who dwell in these homes.

This kind of community spirit began to emerge in Springdale around the time of the rewriting of the York City Zoning Ordinance in 1975. Recognizing that the trend toward rezoning residential properties for commercial use had to be reversed if the city was to retain any viable residential neighborhoods, the citizens of South York organized and successfully defeated proposed rezoning of key properties within the Springdale boundaries. Later, the somewhat cumbersome South York Neighborhood Association was dissolved in favor of geographically smaller units with more homogeneous zoning. The Springdale Neighborhood Association was formed during this reorganization.

Although zoning concerns remain an important focus of the neighborhood association, residents of Springdale have discovered that getting together with

neighbors, whether for work or play, is also highly enjoyable. Membership meetings, block parties, Halloween get-togethers for the children are a few of the ways that Springdale homeowners now meet together. A neighborhood newsletter, printed by the Neighborhood Association helps to keep everyone informed about neighborhood events. When concerns about traffic and safety began to emerge in the 1980's, traffic counts and studies and Neighborhood Watch programs were initiated by the Springdale Neighborhood Association's elected representatives. The neighbors of Springdale now recognize that working together to solve mutual problems of city living is both effective and enjoyable.

Today, the tree-lined streets of Springdale are alive with activity – small children on tyke-bikes or miniature motorcycles, couples taking an evening stroll together, neighbors talking with neighbors. In addition to the lovely homes with their well-kept yards and gardens, Springdale now has the atmosphere of a warm and friendly neighborhood. It is indeed a great place to live!



Thirty years have passed since this description of the Springdale Neighborhood Association was first written. In 2011, Springdale remains a unique neighborhood and a great place to live. With its individually designed homes and a diverse group of residents, Springdale still provides a high quality of residential living for young families, retired empty-nesters, and individuals from all walks of life. By encouraging neighbors to work together for common goals, SNA has helped to preserve a valuable part of York's architectural history and protect a great residential community.

In the intervening years, SNA has promoted several projects to protect and improve the quality of life and the architectural integrity of the Springdale neighborhood.

In the late 1990's, the recognition of the negative effect of large volumes of traffic, travelling at unsafe speeds on residential streets, prompted a traffic study that eventually resulted in the introduction of traffic circles on Springettsbury Avenue, the addition of four-way stop signs at busy internal intersections, and limited left turns onto Springdale roads from Rathton Road. This also produced some green areas at the circles and at Rathton and Springdale Roads, which Springdale residents maintain along with the triangular lot at Merion, Arlington, and Newlin. Volunteers tend the white roses and other plantings and mow the grass in these garden spots, adding to the beauty of the neighborhood.

A new organization, the Alliance of Neighborhood Associations, was formed shortly after the new millennium began to bring together the various neighborhood organi-

zations within the City of York and to encourage the formation of new neighborhood associations. Springdale was one of the original member associations to cooperate in this venture, with representatives of SNA helping to write the by-laws and serving as officers of ANA.

In 2001 a project was completed that brought attention to the architecture of the Springdale homes with a formal study of the history and architectural details of the neighborhood conducted by Historic York. Plaques proclaiming the houses to be part of an architecturally significant neighborhood can be seen today on many of the houses in Springdale. More information about this project can be found at [http://www.livingplaces.com/PA/York\\_County/York\\_City/Springdale\\_Historic\\_District.html](http://www.livingplaces.com/PA/York_County/York_City/Springdale_Historic_District.html).

SNA has also expanded its social outreach with the addition of an annual Easter egg hunt for the children, a new neighbor social to welcome newcomers to Springdale, and other events like garden tours and Christmas Tree gazing to add fun and fellowship to life in this neighborhood. However, the annual Block Party continues to be the highlight of Springdale activities and now includes a variety of children's activities, as well as live music and the famous Springdale potluck picnic fare.

The architecture of the homes of Springdale along with the diversity and talents of its residents remain the most valuable assets of this neighborhood. This one-of-a-kind neighborhood has been preserved for its future residents and indeed the whole York community. There will never be another neighborhood quite like it!



SPRINGDALE

