

Historic 'Hybla' under threat In York County, PA

Mifflin Farm, an Underground Railroad safe house, faces destruction in Hellam Township

The original 200-plus acre farm overlooking the Susquehanna River is a property whose owners and builders are among the earliest European settlers in this part of the United States.

This property is associated with many notable persons and important events in local, state and national history: from the Westward expansion of the country, to the American Revolution, The Underground Railroad and Civil War.



Mifflin Farmhouse, about 1875

The Case for Preservation

A property of local, state & national historic significance

The land was settled by a branch of the Wright Family, the English Quaker pioneers in Columbia, Lancaster County. The current dwelling and earliest buildings were built circa 1800.

Through about 1845, it was the home and farm of Revolutionary War veteran and international trader, Col. Jonathan Mifflin (1753-1840), his wife Susannah Wright Mifflin (1764-1821) and later their son Samuel W. Mifflin (1805-1885).

This property is clearly eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, according to York & Lancaster County historians. Its historic significance is noted in the Hellam Township Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan.

From 1776 to 1783, Jonathan was a deputy quartermaster general under Gen. Thomas Mifflin, a distant relative later elected governor of Pennsylvania. Jonathan also served under Gen. Washington in New York, New Jersey and was in battle at Croton River, White Plains and Brandywine, according to military records.

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What we know about



★ Early civil rights movement religiously-inspired and racially-integrated.

★ Formed following Revolutionary War & rise of anti-slavery sentiments, 1780-1800.

★ Broadly but secretly-supported, spurred by disgust with human bondage amid a nation built on liberty and freedom.

★ Grew into a movement loosely organized in early years and over time,

became more organized; prominence rose with origin of railroads, c. 1830.

★ Southeastern Pennsylvania — Franklin County to Philadelphia along the Mason-Dixon Line — a key path for freedom seekers; Columbia, Lancaster County and Wrightsville, York County the epicenter in this region.

What you can do to help save this place

Contact your elected government representatives: local, county & state. Share concern this historic place might be lost. E-mail kcvps@pa.net to receive updates on meetings and other activities.

Mifflin/Blessing Farm, Cool Springs Road, Hellam Township, York County, PA



Supporting organizations

Kreutz Creek Valley Preservation Society ♦ Historic Wrightsville, Inc. ♦ African American Historical Society of South Central PA ♦ Columbia Historic Preservation Society ♦ Crispus Attucks Association of York/William C. Goodridge Freedom Center and Underground Railroad Museum, York ♦ Lancaster Friends Meeting ♦ York Friends Meeting (Quakers)

The Case for Preservation = = = = =

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The Mifflin family intended to cultivate orchards of fruit trees and named their farm “Hybla,” after a mountainous area of the Island of Sicily and an ancient village known for flowers and bees.

The Mifflin Family were members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) -- like their close relatives the Wrights. They worked together across the River giving shelter to freedom seeking people of African descent who fled bondage, mainly from large plantations and farms in Maryland and Northern Virginia.

They carried out these anti-slavery activities as early as the first and second decades of the 19th century. As a boy, Samuel is reported to have witnessed many episodes of his parents giving food and shelter in their stone farmhouse, barn, outbuildings and fields to many African Americans passing through York County.

One of their most trusted and notable partners in these illegal activities was Robert Loney, a skilled boatsman who was born enslaved in Virginia in about 1815. In collaboration with the Mifflins, Loney ferried people across the wide Susquehanna River into the care of the Wrights, often at night to avoid detection by the many slave catchers patrolling the area around the Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge.

These accounts are found in one of the earliest and widely-accepted books on this subject: *The Underground Railroad in Chester and Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania*, by Dr. Robert C. Smedley in 1883.

Most of the Mifflins’ “secret guests” were heading east across the Susquehanna River which was spanned by 1812 with what was then the longest wooden covered bridge in the world. Remains of this first bridge are visible in the river when water is low.

Commanding a prominent location 150 feet above the River, the location of the Mifflin Farm was probably a prime factor in the decision by local investors and builders to construct the first river crossing bridge about 3,600 feet directly due east of Hybla, which was one of the few settled farm properties in that area during the early 1800s.

This bridge was destroyed by an ice flow in 1832 and was the first of four built in this immediate area. Freedom seekers at this crossing were destined for Lancaster County where more support could be found, and eventually to Philadelphia and often then to points north, ultimately to Canada. Hence the Wrightsville and Columbia area at the River became a gathering spot, a major corridor or pathway of what became known by the early 1830s as “the underground railroad,” a secret network to freedom.



Samuel stayed at Hybla for some time after his father’s death in 1840, and continuing his career as a civil engineer, he built railroad bridges throughout the Northeast, including for the York and Wrightsville railroad. He is also credited with the design of the Horseshoe Curve over the region’s highest Appalachian Mountain ridge between Altoona and Johnstown.

He and his brother-in-law, William Wright (1770-1846), the notable Underground Railroad activist from Columbia, were early supporters of the Free Soil Party, one of the precursors of the Republican Party. Samuel is buried at Mount Bethel Cemetery in Columbia, with members of the Mifflin and Wright Families.

Hybla is also significant as a Civil War battlefield: the Confederate Army positioned artillery near the front of the house during their unsuccessful attempt to cross the Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge on June 28, 1863. They fired from here on Union militia defending the bridge but were turned back when the bridge was destroyed by fire.

What does the future hold for an historic property surrounded by an industrial park?

A beautiful historic Pennsylvania stone farm house, barn, outbuildings and a small amount of cropland stand as a testament to an earlier time amid a late 20th century industrial park near a limited access highway. Here are some suggested alternative uses if a decision is made to retain some or all buildings, and to provide at least some limited public access and on-site displays to explain the significance of the Mifflin Family, Robert Loney and their connections to the Underground Railroad Movement:

- 1) House as industrial park management and security office .
- 2) House as private home on subdivided lot.
- 3) Use as York County Visitors center with Underground Railroad focus.
- 4) Community meeting space.
- 5) Barn as commercial or residential rentable storage.
- 6) House as private home for employee of an Industrial Park Association; part of employee compensation.
- 7) Dwelling as guest house/B&B for truckers who often stay in their rigs on the grounds for rest periods.

