



Filing in for flapjacks

LEFT: Hundreds line up Tuesday morning for Citizen Fire Co.'s big annual daylong fundraiser in Charles Town where the all-you-can-eat menu included pancakes, whole hog sausage, sausage gravy and eggs. ABOVE: Harpers Ferry resident Madison Lamp, 3, digs into her plate of pancakes Tuesday alongside her mother, Kaila Lamp. The fundraiser began at 6 a.m. and continued until 7 p.m. at the fire hall at 245 Citizens Way.

HONORING HARPERS FERRY AND THOMAS LOVETT, PART 1:

Historic Resources Shaping the new Hill Top House Hotel Concept Plan



From left: A postcard from 1914 shows the hotel as rebuilt by C.S. Holmboe and Robert C. Lafferty. The Hill Top House Hotel following a fire in 1918. A photo of the hotel as it looked rebuilt after the 1918 fire.

The Hill Top House Hotel site and its surrounding properties have been a part of the Harpers Ferry landscape and history since the 1800s. The site includes:

- the remains of a 1919 hotel structure,
- a 1920s stone Lodge with attached 1980s annex rooms, and
- historic Armory Houses built in the early 1800s.

From National Armory workers' residences to a luxurious hotel destination visited by presidents, activists, inventors, novelists, poets and other leaders of their day, every building offers glimpses into our nation's past. Time, modifications and neglect have taken their toll on all of them, but, despite challenges, SWaN is dedicated to undertaking the proper steps to restore the Hill Top site to its active former glory.

In 2008, shortly after the purchase of the Hill Top House Hotel, SWaN was forced to shutter the building after determining it unsafe due to rotting wood, cracked walls and a deteriorating and moving foundation. Several months later, the front façade of the hotel literally crumbled off.

The reasons behind the deterioration are myriad. The current hotel building is the third structure to sit on the site since 1888, when Thomas Lovett opened it as a three-story stick-framed building. He and his wife went on to make several improvements to the property, including the construction of a four-story stone addition to the hotel and the erection of a dance pavilion northwest of the hotel. An 1898 *Spirit of Jefferson* article noted that the new stone addition would include bath tubs with running hot and cold water and electric lights, both of which were rare luxuries for the time.

In fact, the Hill Top House Hotel was considered by far the most modern and luxurious in Harpers Ferry and drew a great deal of business. It was so lucrative that in 1904, for the first time, the Lovetts chose to keep

it open all winter and construct a new dining room addition. In 1905, a steam heating plant was constructed to serve the hotel in winter months.

The first stick-framed version of the hotel was destroyed by fire in 1912, and new construction began immediately on top of the surviving stone foundation.

The second structure was a four-story stone-built structure, originally designed by Ernest C. S. Holmboe and Robert C. Lafferty, featuring vernacular shingle-style architecture popularized by McKim, Mead & White, and an iconic turret with a top-hat shaped roof. The stone hotel, which opened in 1914, later burned, leaving only partial remains of stone exterior walls. The surviving stone walls were re-used to rebuild the current structure, which opened in 1919. This iteration of the hotel did not include the fourth floor or the iconic top-hat shaped roof on the turret. In addition to the fact that there is no evidence that the main hotel building was properly underpinned during either of those two constructions, changes and additions were made to the hotel to accommodate electricity, running water, plumbing and heating.

To add plumbing and heating, for example, portions of the basement were dug out. In the numerous areas where these excavations occurred, foundation walls were destabilized, and main floor joists were notched for the new plumbing. Over the years, the hotel and surrounding buildings have become vulnerable to shifting and twisting, decreased soil bearing strength and soil subsidence.

As evidence of our commitment to historic preservation, SWaN already has invested a substantial amount of money in stabilizing, restoring and preserving the historical integrity of the Armory Houses on the Hill Top site. To that end, we also have contracted with two historic architects since 2008 to complete Historic Resources Plans for the Hill Top House Hotel Site.

The purpose of the studies

was to identify all contributing resources in the study area, from the main hotel structure to the Lodge and its annex to the Armory Houses. These include a description of the overall historic context of the site in order to be responsive to the requirements of Codified Ordinance of Harpers Ferry, Part 13, Article 1302. The 2008 Historic Resource Plan was conducted by Mary Oehrlein, Historic Preservation Officer for the Architect of the U.S. Capitol. The 2018 Historic Resource Plan was created by the Mills Group, LLC, which recently won its Best Architectural Firm in Morgantown award for the second year in a row, was recognized by the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia in 2018 for its efforts and guidance in using historic tax credits for the restoration of the Flat Iron Building in Wheeling and was the 2016 Morgantown Area Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year.

Both Historic Resources Plans were based on detailed fieldwork and archival research of documents available through the West Virginia Division of Culture and History Archives, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Jefferson County Museum and the WVU West Virginia, Regional History Center, among others.

According to their reports, "Due to the undercutting of the foundation walls and resulting structural settlement, and extreme moisture infiltration of the current [main hotel] building, a proposed renovation of the existing building is not realistic. Additionally, extensive interior and exterior alterations that would need to be completed to bring the building up to current code and life-safety standards would further obscure and damage the historic character-defining features of the building."

Beyond structural damage, both plans found that the "exterior of the hotel building has undergone several renovations and additions that have almost completely obscured its historic character, and deterioration has led to the partial loss of sections of the building, and

that the interior of the building also features very little in the way of historic features, such as original flooring, plaster walls and molding due to continued renovations and replacements of these elements through the mid-to late twentieth century."

The Hill Top site as a whole retains the integrity of location, setting, materials and association with the rich history of Harpers Ferry, but the integrity of design, workmanship and feeling have been compromised, largely as a result of deterioration and settling.

SWaN is dedicated to honoring the integrity of the entire site, setting, materials and association. We plan to continue our work performing historic preservation on the Armory Houses and have plans to restore the core Lodge building and rebuild the annex. Based on the reality of the poor condition the hotel has been in for at least 20 years, the existing main hotel building is slated to be replaced with a new structure that will be in keeping with the historic aesthetic the Lovetts brought to Harpers Ferry in the 1914 design of Holmboe and Lafferty. We plan on salvaging historic stone that survived the 1918 fire during demolition and use it in approximately the same place on and around the turret. We will supplement with local stone taken from nearby quarries, utilizing the same type of grouting style. In addition, historic millwork and other materials also will be reused where practical.

To inform and guide us as we plan, Mills Group and others will refer and adhere to a plethora of procedural and technical code and guidelines, from the International Building Code of 2015, NFPA 101-2015 and West Virginia State Fire Code, the Americans with Disabilities Act Architectural Guidelines, The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Buildings (Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer,

1995).

In addition, specifically for the Armory Houses, we will adhere to all applicable preservation laws that provide the framework for all preservation, rehabilitation and restoration work throughout the state, including \$29-1-8, \$20-7A-5, \$20-12-1 through \$20-12-8 and \$29-1-8b of the Historic Preservation Section of West Virginia Code.

We know that we have many supporters who want SWaN to move forward in creating a living, working destination worthy of its incredible surroundings and history. We were very honored to know that Erica M. Harris, a descendant of the Lovett family, "strongly support[s] Swan's plans for the Hilltop Hotel."

As she shared, "The building will be based upon plans from Thomas Lovett's rebuild in 1914. If the building could have been saved, then I'm all for it. However, it is clear that it is unsound ... SWaN's idea to utilize what they can from the old building into the new building and also reflect Thomas from within, is a direct tribute to not only Thomas himself but to African Americans as a whole."

"Given the hotel has had a dozen subsequent owners since Lovett, SWaN could have chosen to rebuild the building without Thomas in mind. They didn't. They understand the historical importance of Thomas and what he meant to African Americans and Harper's Ferry. ... There are three things that stick out to me: John Brown, Storer College and Hilltop Hotel. How can you represent history without one of these? Visitors come to learn about John Brown and Storer College. Why not give them Hill Top House and provide a place to stay to do it?"

We hope to have the opportunity to allow Hill Top House Hotel to once again rise from the rubble and help return the area to its heyday as a sought-after tourist destination, and we want to do that with full respect for and honor of the Lovetts and their contribution to the area.