

History of David Stroup Fountain

The David Stroup Fountain was erected at Bloomsburg's Market Square in 1892. Mr. Stroup was a beneficent local candy merchant who died in 1884 and left money to the local water works. That company informed the Bloomsburg Town Council, that should it choose to expend the two thousand dollars of Mr. Stroup's bequest on a town fountain, it would provide the water free of charge. Town Council accepted the offer and set about purchasing the two-tiered, 18 foot tall fountain from the J. L. Mott Iron Works in New York City.

The landmark fountain operated continuously in its original condition for 60 years. Then, by the early 1950's, the deterioration of a major element in the main stem of the fountain necessitated its truncation by approximately 3 feet. Subsequently, the crane which adorned the top of the fountain deteriorated irreparably and was removed. The operation of the aging fountain continued with a less-than-splendid appearance until 1966. In that year, during the period of so-called "beautification" in America, the fountain, in its entirety, was removed from the Square. A "modern" flagstone plaza with a 16 foot diameter basin was constructed to replace the original 29 foot diameter ground pond. The iron work of the fountain, with the exception of the missing crane, base element of the stem, and decorative iron panels of the ground pond, was taken to a local transportation museum where it was reassembled in a makeshift fashion. After a flood devastated the museum in 1972, the iron work was once again disassembled, placed in crates, and stored in the Town Maintenance Facility.

In the summer of 1982, local residents, Bill Brobst and Jay Fritz, assessed the hundreds of individual fountain parts, many of which were broken or badly deteriorated, for the purpose of restoration, remanufacture, and ultimate reassembly in their original location. This phase of the restoration involved re-fabricating the base element, utilizing a Victorian cherub in place of the original crane finial, and placing the entire assembly in the 1966 basin. It was felt that, although these three major aspects of the restoration were not authentic, this initiative would provide the basis for a totally accurate and authentic restoration sometime in the future.

Within a two year period, the vision of returning Bloomsburg's glorious centerpiece to its rightful location had been realized for less than \$10,000 with the help and financial support of the Town's citizens, civic groups and local businesses. The fountain was made operational in September 1984. This partially restored version of the fountain operated continuously for the next seventeen and one-half years. It should be noted that a restoration of the fountain had been considered in 1976 during America's bicentennial year, but was quickly dismissed due to an \$80,000 projected cost estimate.

In 1993, the Town of Bloomsburg entered into an agreement with PennDOT for the purpose of identifying a Transportation Enhancement Project to be funded by an ISTEA grant. In the course of the next few years, the complete restoration of the fountain was designated as this project. The architectural firm of Becker, Morgan, Moore, Olds and Richter, Inc. was retained to design the restoration, prepare bid specifications, and

submit specific information required by PennDOT under the terms of the grant. During the summer of 1998, Bill Brobst, Bloomsburg Town Councilman and local fountain consultant, visited the firm of Historic Arts and Castings in Salt Lake City, Utah. This company was highly recommended by the architect as a prospective restorer of the fountain. It was during this visit, however, that Mr. Brobst was put in contact with the firm of Robinson Iron in Alexander City, Alabama. This company was actually in possession of the original patterns of the J. L. Mott Company from which Bloomsburg's fountain had been produced! With this discovery, the architect was now able to collaborate with Robinson Iron and complete the necessary details for a totally authentic restoration. This plan would also include state-of-the-art metallurgical treatments, pumping and water filtration, and lighting systems. Scott Howell, Vice President of Robinson Iron, came to Bloomsburg, surveyed the fountain, and deemed it worthy of a total restoration.

Preparations for the project moved forward slowly as revisions were made to documents, new and additional requirements were met, and bid specifications were prepared. Finally, on February 21, 2002, Robinson Iron arrived in Bloomsburg, dismantled the iron work of the fountain, and trucked it to its facility in Alabama. For the next eight months, Robinson refurbished 110 year old parts, remanufactured those parts deemed too worn to be restored, and recreated the missing components from original molds and patterns. All in all, approximately 85% of the restored fountain is original 1892 vintage.

In September of 2002, the Bloomsburg Public Works Department completely removed the 1966 plaza and basin from the Town Square. The gross land area occupied by the fountain in the Square had not been altered over the past 110 years. This preparation allowed Wolyniec Construction, Inc. of Williamsport, PA to immediately begin work on the new 29 foot diameter basin and the accompanying mechanical and electrical infrastructure. The decorative iron side panels of the basin had already been shipped from Alabama, so that the ground pond aspect of the project could be completed prior to the actual arrival of the fountain. On November 5, 2002, Robinson Iron delivered all of the remaining components and assembly commenced with the aid of their craftsmen. Twenty-two days later, on November 27, 2002 with nearly every detail in place, The David Stroup Fountain was water tested and proclaimed "good as new"!

A project, which was begun twenty years ago, culminated with the glorious renaissance of Bloomsburg's most recognized feature of its built environmental history. Thanks to the ISTE A grant, the generosity of citizens, civic groups, businesses, and Town government, the \$300,000 restoration cost has nearly been met. Contributions for this enormously popular project continue to flow in through various fundraising endeavors. A formal dedication of the Fountain was held on April 26, 2003, during Bloomsburg's Annual Renaissance Jamboree.