

BRIDGETON-BASED PRESERVATIONISTS RECEIVE MAJOR NEW JERSEY TRUST CAPITAL GRANT FOR REPAIRS TO “NAIL HOUSE,” A NATIONAL REGISTER SITE AT ENTRANCE TO BRIDGETON CITY PARK

For immediate release

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Bridgeton’s non-profit Center for Historic American Building Arts (CHABA), in partnership with the City of Bridgeton, has received its first major grant from the New Jersey Historic Trust for the initial restoration phase of the Nail House, a nationally-registered historic structure at the entrance to Bridgeton City Park. It is the only Cumberland County historic site project to receive funding in the Trust’s last Capital Preservation I grant round.

The almost-\$94K award will help defray some of the costs of initial repairs under a cooperative agreement with the City of Bridgeton, which owns the over-200-year-old structure. Once the administrative office of the Cumberland Nail & Iron Works, it later served for park administration and as a museum, and was effectively closed to the public in 2011. Since then, efforts to address structural defects have included a Watson & Henry Preservation Plan (2013) and a 1772 Foundation award (2015-2017) for an engineering study by J&M Engineering of Swarthmore, PA, defining the scope of repairs. Work under this last contract helped provide a partial match for the present award.

“This latest Trust grant will cover about three-fifths of remaining essential repair costs,” said Margaret DeMarco, a retired engineer and project manager for the site, “with the rest shared by the City of Bridgeton and CHABA through both in-kind and financial commitments.” These basic repairs will bring the Nail House back to code, she says, which is critical to re-using the building.

The Nail House, also known as the Cumberland Nail Works Museum, is the last remnant of some of Bridgeton’s earliest contributions to American industry. It has long served as a beloved community center and resource for telling the area’s Victorian and 20th-century history.

CHABA director Flavia Alaya stressed the moral support the grant lends

not just to restoration but to other efforts to highlight Bridgeton's importance to both New Jersey and national history. The organization has created an 'intergenerational' children's book, called *This Little Building is HUGE!*, to tell the Nail House story to younger audiences. It strives to capture how the ironworks actually built Bridgeton (including what is now the largest historic district in the state) "nail-by-nail and pipe-by-pipe," and yet somehow managed to spare the upstream watershed that was to become the City Park.

"We like to call it a 'Grunge-to-Green' narrative," says Alaya, "capturing some of the real magic of this place and giving everyone renewed faith in the city's capacity to self-transform."

She also points out that as a preservationist non-profit, CHABA is actually in the business of sustainability. "We sometimes forget that the *built* environment is also key to the stability of the 'ecosphere,'" she says. "It may be more than a hundred years since the Nail Works left Bridgeton, but its backstory is still a pivotal part of the huge Bridgeton historic district, hidden away in the thousands of individual homes they helped build, but also in the Park, which the City's buyback from the Nail Works in 1900 helped preserve—and the Zoo, which came about fifty years later."

"People need to tie these stories together," she says, "to see how the Nail House connects Bridgeton to the other historic and natural amenities of the entire Cohansey rivershed. It's a huge story indeed, and has the potential to make the Nail House a kind of 'portal' to the whole Cumberland County Bayshore."

The process of vetting restoration contractors should begin soon, with repairs projected to be underway by late Spring, 2018.

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Contact: CHABA at 856-369-1300 or <centerhabarts@gmail.com>.

More information on CHABA and this project at http://historicbuildingarts.org/HistoricBuildingArts/NailHouse_Crowdfunding_Project.html

Photos/images, in order of attachment (NOTE: larger images are available on request):

1. A recent photo of the Nail House on Mayor Aitken Drive near the entrance to the

Bridgeton City Park. (Alaya, CHABA, 2015)

2. J&M Engineers consult on structural issues with historic architect Penny Watson of Watson&Henry Associates and James Bergmann, a local craftsman-expert in historic construction (Alaya, CHABA, 2016)

3. J&M Engineers review engineering calculations of the support beams in the Nail House basement. (Alaya, CHABA, 2016)

4. Proposed cover art for “This Little Building is HUGE!” (CHABA)

5. Mid-19th Century etching shows the spread of the Cumberland Nail Works—docks, buildings and barges—on both sides of the Cohansey River at Commerce Street.

6. Early 20th-century postcard showing the Nail House as a kind of magic portal to the Bridgeton City Park, recently created out of the City-purchased and preserved upriver properties of the Cumberland Works.