



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PERRYOPOLIS: A TOWN STEEPED IN HISTORY

Uniontown, PA – Route 51 is one of the busiest thoroughfares in Fayette County. But nestled just to the side of it, about 15 miles north of Uniontown, is the small borough of Perryopolis, a town of less than 2,000 people with an appreciation for its rich history and hopes for a bright future.

Like many towns in southwestern Pennsylvania, Perryopolis has a connection to founding father George Washington, who owned 1,600 acres of land, dubbed “Washington’s Bottom,” in an area that is now a part of the borough. In 1774, Washington built a grist mill on the land, but eventually, he sold the property.

Part of the parcel was then owned by George Meason, who sold land to Dr. Thomas Hersey, Nathan Hersey and Samuel Shreve in the early 1800s. The three planned to lay out a town. Thomas E. Burns, who owned more land just to the northeast of the parcel, added in his piece of land, and the four men executed the charter of Perryopolis on March 18, 1814.

The newly formed town was called Perryopolis in honor of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, who a few months before, had secured a major naval victory over the British at the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812.

Perryopolis, despite its town charter, was not incorporated and so remained a part of Perry Township for more than a century, through the coal and coke boom and subsequent depression in southwestern Pennsylvania. The town finally became its own separate entity thanks to the efforts of another historic figure – philanthropist Mary Fuller Frazier, who upon her death in 1948, left her hometown \$1.5 million for “public, charitable, literary and educational purposes.” On hearing of the bequest, attorney Thomas J. Kalman called for a meeting of all local civic organizations. The meeting led to the formation of a community planning association, which spearheaded Perryopolis’s incorporation as a borough on Feb. 2, 1853.

Frazier School District is named in Mary Fuller Frazier’s honor, and the mascot – a commodore – is another nod to Commodore Perry.

Perryopolis Mayor Charles “Bud” Petrosky is a lifelong resident of the borough. “I was born in Perryopolis in 1943,” he said. “I still live in the house I was raised in.”

Petrosky said the town is a tight-knit place full of community-minded people. It has other advantages as well.

“For one thing, we haven’t raised taxes in, if I’m not mistaken, the last 12 years,” Petrosky said, noting that had to change this year, as council passed a half-mill tax increase so that the fire department could purchase equipment.

Perryopolis is proud of its first responders.

“It’s a safe place to live,” Petrosky said. “For as small a borough as we have, we have a good police force.”

Petrosky said Perryopolis’s history is well known – Washington’s Grist Mill still brings in tourists – but the town needs to look to its future as well. Part of that includes collaborating with nearby Layton.

The two communities are separated only by the Layton Bridge, a short, one-lane tunnel bridge. Layton gained fame when parts of the 1991 film “Silence of the Lambs” were filmed in a home there, and Petrosky said, “They used the tunnel on this side for a movie (2021’s “Sweet Girl,” starring Jason Momoa).”

The Great Allegheny Passage also is nearby, and Petrosky said a connection to it could benefit Perryopolis.

“We’ve got to keep trying to incorporate with (Layton) on the trail,” he said.

The Great Allegheny Passage – also known as the GAP trail – is a 150-mile rail trail connecting Pittsburgh, Penn. to Cumberland, Md. Running right through the heart of many Fayette County communities, the trail attracts thousands of cyclists, hikers and other tourists each year.

Perryopolis is not just rooted in history. Recreational opportunities are also on the rise.

The Perryopolis Parks & Recreation Authority (PPRA) works to promote and help maintain the town’s historical and recreational facilities. For more information, visit their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/mainppra.

To learn more about Perryopolis, visit www.perryopolisborough.org or follow their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/perryopolisborough.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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