

# Former blacksmith shop bought for offices

*Obs-Tribune*

By PHIL GARBER  
Managing Editor

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WASHINGTON TWP. — A boarded up, Civil War era building in the center of Long Valley once frequented as a blacksmith, general store and pool parlor may soon be renovated back to its original beauty, thanks to a Denville developer.

The developer, Peter Platt, bought the two-story stone building at 2 East Mill Road for \$85,000 last April from Peter Brooks of Chester, according to municipal records.

Platt said he intends to invest "hundreds of thousand of dollars" to renovate the structure, which lies on the banks of the South Branch of the Raritan River. He recently contracted with a stone mason specializing in historic structures to shore up the masonry. The interior will be gutted and converted into offices.

The building was erected in 1865 and was last used as a real estate office in the 1960s. It has since remained vacant, as the windows have been boarded up and the property has fallen into disrepair.

Eileen Stokes, a past president of the Washington Township Historical Society, said the building was alternatively known as the "River" building, the "Forge" building and the "Kice" building.

## Old Time Smithie

The first floor was once a wood-working shop, the second floor was a paint shop for wagons and the basement was used by a blacksmith, Ludwig Pfeifer. The blacksmith operation closed in the mid-1950s after it was no longer needed by farmer Stan Andrews and what would be the last set of working horses in Long Valley, Stokes said.

A steep ramp once led to the second floor, where six or seven men would push the wagons up to

be repainted.

For a period, the building was referred to as the "Kice" building, after its one-time owner, Lyman Kice. Kice ran the dry goods/general store after the 1880s and up to the turn of the century. His son-in-law, George McLean, then continued the business.

Records show that among items for sale in the dry goods store were ice cream, candy, horse collars and buggy whips.

An addition to the rear included a pool parlor while the top floor was used for meetings of local lodges, including the Patriotic Sons of America. When it wasn't the scene of fraternal meetings, the second floor was used as an auditorium for town functions or even to show silent movies.

The building even acted as schoolhouse in 1916 during renovations to the township school, now the municipal building. The ground floor changed hands seven

times, from wheelwright, to buggy shop, blacksmith and Mr. Down's Plumbing Business. Down sold the business to Frank Cleveland, who now lives at the Heath Village retirement center, Stokes said.

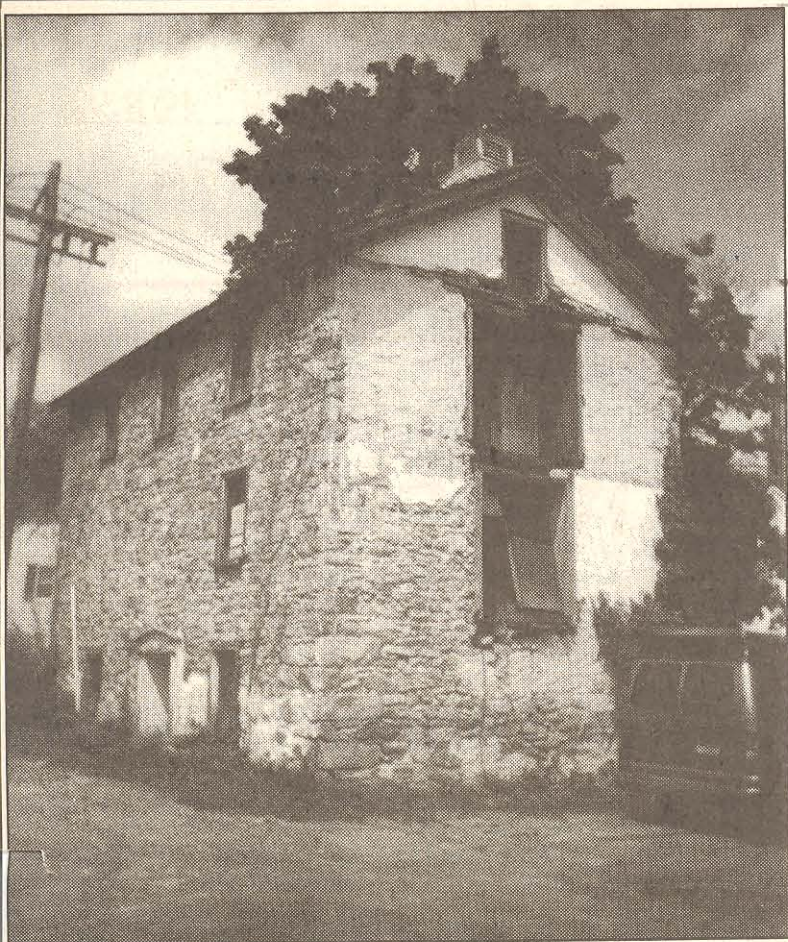
Stokes said several potential buyers have inquired in past years but have decided against buying the building.

Several years ago, the most recent owner wanted to open an antique shop but the property was not served by sewers at the time. The former owner, Brooks, however, could not receive state approval to install a package septic system and renovations plans were put on hold, Stokes said.

But a sewer line was installed last year, eliminating at least one hurdle to renovations.

Platt said the building is structurally sound and that he is hopeful the original roof can be salvaged. The windows, now

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(Photo by Rachel Ricucci)

## Back To Life

Peter Platt, a Denville developer, bought the dilapidated, Civil War era stone home at 2 E. Mill Road in Long Valley. Platt plans to convert the old building into offices.

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cemented shut, will have to be replaced and the interior is beyond redemption and will have to be rebuilt, from floors to ceiling.

History has long been a part of Platt's life. He said he was raised in an old stone house built in 1740 in Westfield. He now lives in a Civil War-era farmhouse in Denville and had planned on converting the Long Valley building into his personal residence.

But he has since bought an old grist mill off Hacklebarney Road in Chester Township to convert into his new home. Instead, he said he will turn the Long Valley building into offices.

Platt has been involved in past ventures to preserving and restoring historical buildings in Morris County. He also recently purchased 10 acres in Denville which he plans to preserve after selling the development rights to the county.