

The Federal Barn at Duportail House is a familiar landmark to Chesterbrook residents, yet very few of them have ever set foot inside. The day is getting closer when the barn could be open for tours on a limited basis, thanks to a recent restoration project spearheaded by Luigi DiFilippo, president of the Duportail House board of directors. Luigi and his wife Judy, former chair of the Tredyffrin Township Board of Supervisors, were early residents of Chesterbrook, and have long been supporters of the historic Duportail property. The oldest portion of the main house served as quarters for General Louis Lebegue Duportail during the Continental Army's encampment at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-1778. The barn itself was not present at the time of Duportail's stay, being erected in 1792. As related in a 2004 issue of the *Quarterly*, Richard Webster, from the History Department of what was then West Chester State College, states:

"Inscribed on the interior plaster of the west gable end in large script is 'The Federal Barn 1792' and nearby are the longhand inscriptions 'Jonathan Moor his work', 'John H. Moor 1792'.... In addition to these there is a date stone in the western gable 'WMD 1792'.... The initials stand for William and Mary Davis, occupants of the farm in 1792, and John Havard, owner of the farm and Mary Davis' father." <sup>1</sup>

Having focused on the preservation of Duportail House itself for a number of years, Luigi turned his attention to the barn when it became evident that leaks in the aging roof were accelerating damage to the interior structure. A structural engineer was hired to assess the condition of the barn and recommend steps to preserve it that would be in keeping with its standing on the National Register of Historic Places. It was determined that before any work could be done on the roof, the north wall of the foundation would need to be shored up. That wall has borne the pressure from the bank on the upper side of the barn for over two hundred years, and the original stonework was no longer capable of sustaining that pressure on its own. Highline Construction of Lancaster County was chosen to reinforce the wall with a new concrete foundation. Experts in the maintenance of old barns, the Highline crew also replaced some of the older wooden beams—some of which still had the original bark on them—with similar beams from other old barns that had been torn down elsewhere in the state.

Once the foundation work was completed, Highline was able to erect scaffolding on the main barn floor to support the roof while the old cedar shakes were removed and replaced. The new shingles are especially thick and should last up to 50 years. Many of the boards on the front fascia were replaced as well, and Luigi personally treated the entire fascia with weatherproofing preservative to protect the wood against the elements.

Most of the barn doors were in poor shape, and many were not original to the structure. Highline replaced the doors using old barn wood and hardware, and was amazingly able to find some old hinges dating to 1792! Finishing touches include new louvered window frames, plus interior screening of all windows and ventilation

openings in order to discourage birds from taking up residence in the barn. All work was completed before the end of March 2012.

The main Duportail House is open to visitors on most Sunday afternoons, from 1-3. Plans are under way to allow access to the lower level of the Federal Barn during the next house tour sponsored by the Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust. In the meantime, the following photographs provide a glimpse of the work in progress and as completed.



Above left: The north elevation of the Federal Barn with the new roof in place. The wooden shingles will soon weather to a darker brown. Above right, forms are used to support new concrete reinforcements that shore up the north foundation wall. The concrete was poured in staggered sections and allowed to cure before adjacent sections were constructed.

Below left: Scaffolding on the main floor of the barn, now supported by the new foundation, is used to support the roof as the old shingles are replaced. Note how much daylight is visible through the old front fascia boards. On the right, workmen secured by harnesses are visible through the exposed roof frame.



*Photo credits: Opposite page and upper left on this page are by the author. The rest are courtesy of Luigi DiFilippo.*





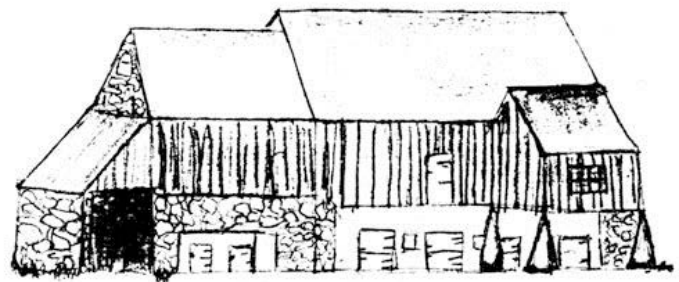
Above: With the roof complete, work is under way to replace boards that have deteriorated beyond repair. The barn doors on this side, not original to the building, are also being replaced with old wood and hinges, restoring their appearance to more closely align with 18th century architecture, as shown below.



*Both photos this page courtesy of Luigi DiFilippo.*



Above: Detail of one of the “new” pieces of hardware that the contractors obtained from another old barn. Below left, the west end of the Federal Barn, showing the more authentic doors and window made from recycled barn wood. The upper door used to lead into a wing of the barn that no longer exists, shown in the old *Quarterly* sketch at right as a small shed-like structure at the left side of the barn.<sup>2</sup> The right half of the barn was lost to fire in 1985. That section had been built in the 19th century and was in very poor shape when it burned. Below right, the door on the “bank” or north side of the barn, which allowed access to the upper level for storage of hay and grain. The ground level was used for storing heavy equipment as well as providing stalls for horses.



Top photo: Tim Lander. Bottom: Luigi DiFilippo.





Above: This ground level “Dutch” door located in the forebay provides access to the stable area. The door, hinges, and nearby window are all new to the Federal Barn. One of the stables, although unrestored, remains in fairly good shape.  
Below: A window well on the north side of the barn, with the new concrete foundation just below it.



*Both photos courtesy of Luigi DiFilippo.*



Above left and right: The Duportail Caretaker's Cottage was also re-roofed, as was part of Duportail House itself. Donations from the Friends of Duportail, many of whom live in Chesterbrook, helped defray the cost of the renovations.

At left, the foundation of the Jones Log Barn remains without a roof altogether. The foundation is on the site of the 19th century addition to the Federal Barn, awaiting funding by the Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust so the old logs can be erected. The Trust and Duportail House are working together to make the Duportail complex a venue for living history, with tours and lectures illustrating 18th century life in Tredyffrin.

Top photos: Luigi DiFilippo. Bottom: Tim Lander.

## REFERENCES

1. Nancy Pusey, "Three Pre-Revolutionary War Houses with a Family Connection. The Tenure of the Havard Family in Tredyffrin Valley," *Quarterly* Volume 41, No. 3, Summer 2004, p. 97.
2. Ann Snider, "Dating Old Barns," *Quarterly* Volume 18, No. 3, July 1980, pp. 85-95.

Additional information on the Federal Barn can be found in these other issues of the *Quarterly*:

- "Old Barn Gets Reprieve," Notes and Comments, Volume 17, No. 3, July 1979, p. 84.
- "Duportail Barn Demolition Stay Extended," Notes and Comments, Volume 17, No. 4, October 1979, p. 114.
- "Tour Tredyffrin," Notes and Comments, Volume 20, No. 3, April 1982, p. 101.
- "Chesterbrook Saga," Volume 40, No. 3, July 2003, pp. 89 & 95.

An excellent story on the recent renovation was written by Ryan Richards in the March 14, 2012 issue of *Main Line Suburban Life*, "Amish manpower restores rare DuPortail House barn in Chesterbrook."

The author serves on the Duportail House board of directors.