



LancasterHistory

For Immediate Release

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Gravestones of Lydia Hamilton Smith and Sons Restored

Dedication Ceremony For New Historical Marker To Be Held June 28

LANCASTER, Pa. – LancasterHistory, the African American Historical Society of South Central PA (AAHSSCPA), Charles F. Snyder Funeral Homes, and Heritage Monuments, in collaboration with community members and sponsors, recently completed the restoration of the gravestones **Lydia Hamilton Smith** and her two sons at Saint Mary's Cemetery, a 10.3-acre active religious cemetery in Lancaster, PA. The project aimed to preserve the legacy of the Smith family and provide a deeper understanding of their role in Lancaster County's history.

As part of the restoration efforts, a new historical marker was installed to offer valuable context to the gravesite. To commemorate the legacy of Lydia Hamilton Smith and her sons, the sponsoring parties ***will hold a dedication ceremony for the new historical marker on Wednesday, June 28, at 9 a.m.***

Randy Harris, project manager for the restoration, and staff member at LancasterHistory, first noticed the gravestones were leaning severely in the fall of 2022. Harris expressed concern for the markers to **Nelson Polite, Jr.**, President of the African American Historical Society of South Central PA, as well as friends at the Charles F. Snyder Funeral Homes, and all began to work together to restore the gravestones. Andre Dominguez, a local historian and LancasterHistory volunteer, created a conservation report for the gravestones and assisted Robert Mosko of

Mosko Cemetery Monument Services from Hanover, PA, with the extensive work of resetting and stabilizing the gravestones. Harris and Dominguez installed the commemorative marker with surrounding plant ground coverings installed by Paul Hubbs, groundskeeper at LancasterHistory.

“The restoration of the Smith family gravestones is an important part of LancasterHistory’s ongoing efforts to celebrate and preserve the diverse history of Lancaster County,” CEO and President of LancasterHistory, **Dr. Thomas Ryan**, said. “One’s gravestone serves as an enduring physical reminder of one’s life and helps sustain our communal memory. By restoring these gravestones and adding the historical marker, we honor Mrs. Smith and remember her sons as once-vital members of the Lancaster community.”

The dedication ceremony for the new historical marker is open to the public. Parking is limited at the cemetery and carpooling is recommended.

For additional information about the event, please contact Randy Harris at randy.harris@lancasterhistory.org or (717) 392-4633, ext. 131.

About Lydia Hamilton Smith

Lydia Hamilton Smith (1815-1884) was an extraordinary woman who played a pivotal role in the local community. Leaving her husband, she and her two sons arrived in Lancaster in the mid-1840s, seeking the position of house manager for Thaddeus Stevens, a prominent attorney who had relocated to the city two years prior. Mrs. Smith was hired for the position and remained in her role for 24 years, diligently managing Stevens’ household and affairs in Lancaster and Washington D.C., even during his tenure in the U.S. Congress. She provided essential healthcare to Stevens in the declining years of his life enabling him to finish his Congressional work and the passage of the 13th and 14th Amendments to the US Constitution.

About William and Isaac Smith

William Smith (1835-1860) and Isaac Smith (1837-1884), Lydia’s sons, were born in Harrisburg. In 1852, William, Isaac, and their friends established the Shiffler Fire Company, a brigade of neighborhood volunteer firefighters. Thaddeus Stevens gave the brigade access to a building on his property where they gathered and stored their equipment. Tragically, William died at the age of 25 from a self-inflicted gunshot wound that occurred at Stevens’ home. While different newspapers presented varying accounts, some referring to the incident as an accident and others claiming it was a case of suicide, the community mourned the loss of this young man.

Isaac, also known as “Little Ike,” followed in his father’s footsteps and became a barber and talented banjo player. Isaac later served as a private in the Union Army, Sixth Regiment, Company D, United States Colored Troops, from July 10, 1863, until December 15, 1864. After the war, he operated a barber shop in what had been Congressman Stevens’ law office at 47 South Queen Street. Notably, Lydia acquired the property in 1871, purchasing it from Stevens’ estate.

Unfortunately, Isaac’s life was cut short, passing away in early April 1884, only two months after his mother’s death. The inscriptions on Lydia and Isaac’s gravestones have led to some discrepancies regarding their birth years. Lydia’s gravestone states that she was born on the feast day of Saint Valentine in 1813, while her death certificate and multiple obituaries suggest her birth year as 1815. Similarly, Isaac’s gravestone claims that he died “in his 37th year,” yet obituaries from Lancaster newspapers report his age at 48.

About LancasterHistory

LancasterHistory is a community-based, not-for-profit organization established to educate the public on the history of Lancaster County and its place in the history of Pennsylvania and the United States, to advance the missions of regional historical organizations, and to promote the acquisition, preservation, and interpretation of resources representing the history of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania within the broader context of state and national history, including the life and legacy of Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, his house manager, Lydia Hamilton Smith, and America’s 15th President, James Buchanan.

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Before Photograph of Gravestones (October 2022)

Photo courtesy of Randy Harris.

After Photograph of Gravestones (June 2023)

Photo courtesy of Andre Dominguez.
