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Kimberton Waldorf School Kicks Off Historic Atrium Restoration Project through its “ Let The Sun Shine In” Campaign

KIMBERTON, PA, June 24, 2009 -- Kimberton Waldorf School announces the start of a fundraising campaign to restore the historical and architecturally-significant glass-paned roof in its middle school, formerly owned by the Myrins and part of the Myrin-Pew estate.

Added on to the original stone house structure in the 1920's, the curved, hip-style glass roof was made and installed by the Lord & Burnham Company, the premier designer and builder of greenhouses and conservatories in the United States and Canada for over 25 years. Frederick A. Lord, who began erecting greenhouses in Buffalo, NY, in 1849 was a favorite carpenter to many Hudson River estate owners. In the early years, the conservatory at Kimberton Waldorf School housed palm trees and monkeys. The glass-domed roof was also featured in the early 1960's as part of the Chester County Day Tour, which featured an exhibit of students' work.

The campaign will seek to raise \$150,000 to repair the leaking roof, which is an integral part of the eighteenth-century building's structure, and a historic bridge linking past and future. Combining historic charm with the warmth of the surrounding farm, the roof allows the children to be nurtured by the sun's warm rays and maintains a connection to the weather and seasons. The building currently houses the middle-school library and leaks pose a threat to the many books housed there.

Rich Diesl of Glass Garden Builders from Old Lyme, CT, has been selected as the contractor. Diesl worked for Lord & Burnham and has spent over 20 years restoring their greenhouses around the country. He will use historic glass panes that are original to the construction. The reconstruction process is estimated to take four months and will be completed by the fall 2009. Carnevale Eustis of Phoenixville will provide architectural consultation, with building research conducted by Wise Preservation Associates of Chester Springs. The Kimberton Waldorf School project will entail removal of all caps, cleaning out old caulk, re-glazing existing glass, replacing broken, cracked and missing glass, resealing and reinstalling caps with new stainless steel screws and painting. Downspouts and flashing will be replaced as needed. A venting motor will be added.

The mansion was the main part of the Kimberton Farms Day and Boarding School for Boys and Girls, established by Alarik Myrin in 1941. Its spacious fields and pastures were home to a group of early pioneers in organic farming. The school was originally designed with housing to accept 20 children fleeing war-ravaged England during World War II. After England disallowed sea travel for safety reasons, those children never came. The Myrins then provided quality private education to its first class of local children in the same year. Now over 60 years old, the school has 308 students from pre-school through high school.

Kimberton Waldorf School is the second oldest Waldorf school in the country. There are now over 1,000 Waldorf schools worldwide. Alarik Myrin embraced the Waldorf method of educating children after studying the teachings of German philosopher Rudolf Steiner.

The Waldorf curriculum is based on a profound understanding of human development that addresses the needs of the growing child. Waldorf teachers strive to transform education into an art that educates through an arts-rich curriculum, incorporating such subjects as music, dance, and theater, writing, literature, and the study of legends and myths.

As a non-profit organization, Kimberton Waldorf School relies on alumni and community support to meet its goal of restoring the historic roof. Naming opportunities are available for gifts of \$250 or more. Contact Mary Hirsch at 610-933-3635.

Background:

Perhaps the most famous Lord and Burnham roof was at Lyndhurst, the estate of Jay Gould in Tarrytown, where the firm constructed what has been said to be the country's first steel and iron frame, fire resistant greenhouse. (The previous, wood frame, conservatory at Lyndhurst burned in 1880.) Lyndhurst is America's finest Gothic Revival mansion and a remarkable example of the Hudson River's grand and historic estates.

Lord had his shop on the banks of the Hudson River in Irvington, NY for 126 years. At its height, Lord & Burnham operated production facilities in Irvington, NY, Des Moines, IA, and St. Catharine's, Ontario. The company's first major commission came in the 1876 when it was hired to create the Golden Gate Park Conservatory of Flowers. Its other notable conservatories include the New York Botanical Garden and the United States Botanical Garden in Washington, D.C.

The company successfully re-invented themselves many times with new ideas and innovations. Lord & Burnham pioneered the use of ground glass in greenhouse windows. Because the industrial revolution brought on advances in the production of materials such as iron, glass and heating methods, panes of glass could be made larger to fit a bigger surface than had previously been allowed. These fundamental changes in material allowed more light to reach the growing plants. The company was the first to introduce small sash bars with supporting iron frames rather than wooden rafters. It experimented with the use of aluminum as a suitable material for greenhouse construction and was one of the first to employ composite construction of aluminum and steel.

After the Civil War, plants and flowers became increasingly popular for social occasions such as funerals, weddings and parties and Victorian interiors called for houseplants such as palms and ferns. Private greenhouses became a common accessory to many estates, providing readily available fresh fruits and flowers as well as a place for entertaining for the social, financial and political elite. Soon, municipalities added to the demand for greenhouse and conservatory structures. Public parks and gardens sought to build greenhouses for public and educational use.

During both world wars, the firm converted most of its facilities to the production of critical military equipment. Production included pontoon bridges, hand grenades and assault boats.

The firm maintained a program of continuous research and development of product in for their heating and greenhouse products for both home and industry. It developed a cast iron boiler that provided dependable, adjustable and evenly distributed heat. The boiler opened up a new avenue of marketing for the firm in residential heating. Burnham Corporation, a maker of industrial boilers, discontinued Lord & Burnham - then its greenhouse division -- in 1982, one year after its 125th anniversary. Parts for Lord and Burnham roofs are still manufactured.

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