

THE I. C. WOODWARD HOUSE: EMINENT DOMAIN VS. HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The Right of Eminent Domain.

That phrase from high school Civics class should strike fear in the heart of any citizen who has dedicated years of his life to the improvement of his home and property. The “right of eminent domain” is the power of a government entity, such as a school district, to take a citizen’s private property from him to be converted to public use, provided that “just compensation” is paid to the owner by the government.

Consent of the property owner is not required. If the government casts its eye upon your home or your land and decides that it wants to take your property for public use, stopping that from happening is almost impossible. In a nation where a man’s home is his castle, to have one’s home targeted for acquisition by the government can leave a family devastated and feeling helpless. The power of eminent domain should be exercised against a citizen only as a last resort, and great care should be taken to minimize the disruption of the affected citizen’s life.

In this series of articles, I will tell you the story of a disturbing use of this formidable power forty years ago. The tale I will tell is of a family that fought tooth-and-nail to save its century-old home from being taken by a local school district that wanted to construct a new school on the family’s property.

There is no question that the school district’s taking of private property to acquire a site upon which to build a school is legal. What you may find unsettling about this story is the family’s contention that the school district could have built the new school anywhere on the seventy-eight-acre farm and easily avoided destroying the historic house that stood near the edge of the property.

Why did the board of school directors change its mind twice about whether to take the house, and then refuse to alter its plan when its decision to destroy the house triggered a public outcry? After you have read this story, you too may have questions about the manner in which

the school board exercised the right of eminent domain.

The victims of the board's decision, Ann Frondorf and Jo Hess, are sisters who now live in two historic homes on Brownsville's Front Street. Descendants of nineteenth century Luzerne Township business and civic leader Isaac C. Woodward, they were the owners of the Woodward homestead in 1963 when the Luzerne Township school board informed them that it had decided to build an elementary school on their property.

It has been forty years since that decision was announced. Ann Frondorf and Jo Hess still remember every detail of what happened next.

The story of the Woodward homestead begins in the early nineteenth century with the birth of a child named Isaac. Isaac C. Woodward was born into a Quaker family at Chadd's Ford, Chester County, Pennsylvania, on May 20, 1813. He was a descendant of William Woodward, who traveled from England to America with William Penn.

In the winter of 1819, Levi and Mary Woodward, Isaac's parents, came to Brownsville to visit Mary's relative, Chads Chalfant, and they brought their young son Isaac with them. The visit turned tragic when shortly after the Woodwards arrived, thirty-year-old Levi died.

What would become of the stunned widow and her young son? At this point, the story takes a puzzling turn.

Ann Frondorf is the great-granddaughter of Isaac C. Woodward, the little five-year-old boy who was left fatherless. Ann explained to me that Levi's widow, Mary, went back east, but for an unknown reason she left Isaac in Brownsville with the Chalfants. He remained with the Chalfants for a few months, then was placed in the custody of a Luzerne Township Quaker named David Cattell, who for the rest of Isaac's youth trained him to be a carpenter.

Isaac was not enamored with carpentry. The object of his affection lay to the east, coursing through the valley that formed Luzerne Township's eastern boundary. At twenty-one, Isaac sought out his true love, the green waters of the Monongahela River. Lured by the prospect of a life on the river, Isaac launched a career which eventually saw him become a prominent riverboat captain.

The years Isaac spent piloting riverboats along inland waterways did not preclude his having a family. He married Maria Brashear, who bore him two daughters, Anna Maria and Mary.

"After Isaac married the Brashear girl," Ann Frondorf explained, "they lived on Church Street in a house on a corner lot near the First

Methodist Church.”

Then in 1853, at the age of thirty-four, Maria died, leaving forty-year-old Isaac a widower with daughters who were only three and six years old. In the anguish of the tragedy, his mind drifted back to the trauma of his own childhood, when as a five-year-old he had experienced the sudden loss of both of his parents. He resolved not to allow family history to repeat itself.

“After his wife died, he raised those two girls until they went off to college,” Ann told me. “One of the two girls, Anna Maria, became my grandmother. The other girl, Mary, became the grandmother of Loise White.” Loise White is another Front Street resident who has a family connection to Captain Woodward.

I wondered aloud how a riverboat captain could raise two young children alone.

“He had family help,” Ann explained, “because some Woodwards who were farmers from the Brandywine area came here to live.”

I said to Ann, “You and your sister inherited the brick home that Isaac Woodward built in Luzerne Township when his daughters were teenagers. You apparently inherited it from one of those daughters. Could you spell out for me exactly how you are descended from Captain Woodward?”

“Isaac C. Woodward’s two daughters each married,” Ann said. “His younger daughter, Mary, married Dr. Cyrus Reichard. One of their five children was Dr. Lewis N. Reichard, who was Loise White’s father.

“Isaac’s other daughter, Anna Maria, married J. Jewett Parks. One of their three children was my mother, Josephine, who married Boyd Axton Wells of West Brownsville. They had two children – my sister, Jo Wells Hess, who now lives with her husband, Robert, in the Philander C. Knox house on Front Street, and me.”

“How did you and your sister come to be the owners of the Woodward farm by 1963, when the Luzerne Township school board started legal proceedings to take some of that property?”

“When Isaac Woodward died in 1898,” Ann answered, “he left his 370-acre Luzerne Township farm to his two daughters, Mary and Anna Maria. Mary’s portion of the property was eventually sold, much of it to her sister, Anna Maria. Brownsville Area High School occupies some of that property. Eventually my sister Jo and I inherited the remaining seventy-eight acres of our grandmother’s [Anna Maria’s] share of the farm, including what we had always called the ‘manor house.’”

It was the fate of the historic Woodward manor house that became the central issue in the struggle between the Luzerne Township School District and sisters Ann Frondorf and Jo Hess. The house definitely had

a venerable pedigree. An article in the *Brownsville Telegraph* explained that the construction of Woodward's brick home was completed in 1863.

"All of the material in the construction," stated the *Telegraph*, "was produced from the products on the site except the marble mantels, which were imported. Stone slabs were quarried locally."

When the home was completed, Isaac Woodward, fifty, retired from his career as an active riverboat captain and turned to farming, an occupation that ran in the blood of his Chester County kin. Isaac became involved

in Luzerne Township civic and economic life and was soon regarded as a leading citizen of the area. In 1863, the year his house was finished, he served as a Luzerne Township school director. What would Isaac have thought had he known that almost exactly one century later, the home of which he was so proud would be demolished at the direction of the Luzerne Township School Board?

Woodward's business acumen also made him an attractive candidate to serve on the boards of directors of local banks. When the First National Bank of Brownsville was organized by J. T. Rogers in 1863, Isaac was a member of the bank's first board of directors. That bank later evolved into the Second National Bank, headquartered in a building that is still standing on Market Street opposite the Flatiron Building.

By 1881, Woodward was no longer on that bank's board. Instead he was a director of the Monongahela National Bank, whose headquarters were then located in the present-day Rose home near the end of the Lane-Bane Bridge.

Yet it is no surprise that despite having the farm to run and these other duties to perform, Isaac Woodward could not turn his back on the river. In addition to the income produced by his successful farm, he held a major stock interest in the Pittsburgh, Brownsville and Geneva Packet



This image from the *Brownsville Telegraph* shows the I. C. Woodward home, built in 1863 and seized in 1965 via eminent domain by the Luzerne Township school board.

Company, whose river steamers (“packets”) delivered passengers, freight, and mail to towns along the Monongahela River. The company’s president, a former riverboat captain named Adam Jacobs, owned a boatyard and residence in East Riverside, Luzerne Township. When Jacobs died in 1883, Woodward ascended to the presidency of the steamboat line.

Isaac C. Woodward lived a long and productive life. In 1898, he died at the age of eighty-five, a highly respected citizen who had served his community and his family well. He bequeathed his Luzerne Township homestead to his two daughters, Mrs. Mary Woodward Reichard and Mrs. Anna Woodward Parks.

Next we will follow the sequence of events that led to a battle royale between Isaac Woodward’s heirs and the Luzerne Township School District.

***MOST OF LUZERNE TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY
WAS ONCE THE WOODWARD FARM***

The 1965 taking of the Isaac C. Woodward house by the Luzerne Township School District brought a controversial end to that century-old historic home. In today’s article, as we learn more about the background to that story, we will trace the dispersal of the Woodward farm property following Isaac’s death. Created from that property were several residential areas, one of which is now known as the Woodward Plan.

Following Captain Woodward’s death in 1898, his will directed that his property be divided between his two married daughters, Mrs. Mary Woodward Reichard and Mrs. Anna Maria Woodward Parks.

“Mary Reichard’s portion of the property was eventually sold,” explained Ann Frondorf of Brownsville, who is Isaac C. Woodward’s great-granddaughter. “Mary sold some of it to her sister, who was my grandmother Anna Parks, but much of Mary’s part of the farm was apportioned into lots and sold to individuals who built homes on them.”

David Gratz of Brownsville lent me two maps that show the layout of the streets and lots in “Woodward Place” and “Woodward Place - Second Addition,” two plans of lots that were created at different times from some of Mary Reichard’s property. Mary’s inherited portion of the Woodward farm extended about 850 feet inside Brownsville Borough, all the way to Broad Street (the street next to the A Plus Mini Mart).

The first group of lots that Mary created was called Woodward Place. Woodward Place was bordered on the west by High Street, on the

north by Broad Street, on the east by a row of lots along the east side of York Street, and on the south by an uneven line that ran west along Reichard Avenue until it reached Greene Street, went one block north to Woodward Street, then west again to High Street. The north-south running streets in the plan were Woodward Street, named for Mary's father Isaac, and Reichard Avenue, named for Dr. Cyrus Reichard, Mary Woodward Reichard's husband.

In November 1922, a second development of lots was created from Mary Reichard's inherited portion of the Isaac C. Woodward farm. It was called "Woodward Place - Second Addition." This new plan abutted the southern edge of the first Woodward Place and extended further southward to Fayette Avenue in Luzerne Township. Brashear Avenue, the street at the end of which Brownsville Area High School is located, is included within Woodward Place - Second Addition. That street's namesake is uncertain, either being derived from Maria C. Brashear, Isaac Woodward's wife who died at age thirty-four, or from a later member of the same extended family, astronomer John A. Brashear.

The other half of Isaac C. Woodward's farm was inherited by Mary's sister, Anna Maria Woodward. She had married a Blairsville teacher named J. Jewett Parks several decades before Isaac's 1898 death. When Mr. Parks found his teaching income to be inadequate for him to properly raise his growing family, the couple had moved west, where Parks worked for the railroad in Oklahoma and Texas. In 1902, four years after Isaac died, they returned to Luzerne Township and moved into the Woodward house. The couple's three children were Ann, Isaac, and Josephine. Josephine Parks was Ann Frondorf's mother.

In 1915, J. Jewett Parks died, leaving his widow and their unmarried daughter, Ann Parks, as the only occupants of the Woodward house. Their other daughter, Josephine, had married a West Brownsville man named Boyd Axton Wells. After the U. S. entered World War I, Boyd Wells, who was nearly thirty, joined the army and went to France, and his pregnant wife Josephine moved into the Woodward house to live with her mother and sister. While Boyd was still overseas recovering from a war-related lung infection, the couple's daughter, Ann Wells, was born.

"My father did not see me until I was two years old," Ann Wells Frondorf told me. "We lived with my grandmother and my aunt in that house until Dad came back from the war. Then we continued to live there until I was about five, because it took my dad a while to get established. He had been in an army hospital with that terrible lung infection and with complications from it."

It turned out that the complications were caused by an undetected

piece of broken rubber tubing that had accidentally been left inside Boyd Wells during wartime surgery. When it was finally discovered and removed after several years of recurring illnesses, he recovered fully and moved the family to Ohio, where he became a successful businessman.

“Ann,” I said, “when did you, your father and mother move out of that house?”

“We moved out of Pinecroft when I was about six,” Ann replied. “In 1923, the house’s owner, my grandmother Anna Maria, died, and we moved out after that. My unmarried Aunt Ann, who had cared for my grandmother in her later years, did not wish to live there alone, so she moved in with relatives. When she died in 1937, that left my mother, Josephine Parks Wells, as the sole surviving owner of the house and property. My father died at age fifty-eight in 1947, and when mother died in 1958, my sister Jo Hess and I inherited the Woodward estate from her.”

“So that is how you and Jo Hess came to be the owners of the place at the time the school district came calling in 1963,” I said. “I noticed you called the place ‘Pinecroft’ when you were describing it just now.”

“Yes,” Ann said, “that is what the homestead was called when my mother and father were married there early in the twentieth century. We called the house the ‘manor house,’ and the entire homestead was called Pinecroft.”

“Do you think Isaac C. Woodward gave it that name?”

“That I do not know.”

After the 1923 death of Anna Maria Parks and the exodus from the house by the remaining family members who had lived there, the Woodward homestead had no Woodward family member living in it until the late 1950s. Over the next few decades, the property was rented to various tenants, some of whom farmed the property or raised dairy cows.

Shortly after an 1882 drawing of the Isaac C. Woodward homestead appeared in the *Herald-Standard* next to my November 24, 2002 column, I received a letter from Marianne Stuart Schuhle of Chesterfield, Virginia. She was one of the tenants who lived at the Woodward homestead.

“The picture of the Woodward Farm brought back some fond memories for me,” wrote Marianne. “I was born in that house, as were several of my cousins. My grandparents rented it from the Parks family and lived there for at least ten years during the Great Depression. With jobs so scarce, my parents and all my aunts and uncles lived there too. It was wonderful for me being surrounded with so many doting relatives. We moved when I was five years old, and I was devastated. My

Grandmother and I never got over it.”

What does Marianne remember about the house?

“It was brick, and all the rooms were huge with high ceilings and a beautiful central staircase,” Marianne recalled. “I remember the big barn with the stone foundation, and there was a small two-story house behind the main house, where an aunt and uncle lived. The driveway leading to the front of the house formed a huge heart, and my grandmother always planted petunias in there.”

Former area resident Bill Johnson, now of Olean, New York, remembers the homestead in the forties.

“When I was in third grade at the old Hiller grade school,” Bill wrote to me, “I became a friend of Donnie McGrady and remained his friend until he passed away in 1990. Donnie’s parents, Henry and Grace McGrady, lived on the old Woodward farm for around twenty years and farmed it. I used to help them with the farm work during the 1940s.”

As time passed, the farm’s appearance changed. By 1963, when the struggle with the school district began, the large barn that Marianne Schuhle remembered was no longer there.

“It burned down a number of years before the house was taken by the school district,” confirmed David Gratz, who lives on Lewis Street across from the spot where the Woodward house once stood. There had also been two small houses behind the main house, but by 1963, there was only one.

“One of them was used by the hired hand,” remembers Ann Frondorf, “and the other could be used by the fellow who helped with the farming. By the mid-1960s, only one of the small houses remained, because the other had fallen down.”

The 1882 drawing of the Woodward farm shows a lane to the right of the house, leading back toward the large barn. As a boy, Harry Hackney, now of Tampa, Florida, lived near the Woodward farm, and after studying the 1882 picture of the farm, Harry concluded that the lane that once led to the barn has become Hiller Avenue, the road leading up to the former Hiller Elementary School.

In the late 1950s, the house experienced a rebirth. Ann Frondorf devoted a tremendous amount of time and expense to restoring and refurnishing the venerable house, taking it back to its nineteenth century appearance. For seven years Ann trekked north from her Florida home, returning to the house where she was born to spend each summer at the restored Woodward homestead.

Next we will explore what the house’s interior was like after Ann’s careful work to return it to its former grandeur. Yet even as she enjoyed the fruits of her labors, trouble was on the horizon. The coming storm

would bring a clash of legal notices and attorneys, letters to the governor and letters to the editor, community protests and curious decisions, all played out against the threatening backdrop of the Power of Eminent Domain.

RESTORED WOODWARD HOUSE TARGETED FOR CONDEMNATION

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Ann Frondorf traveled from Florida each year to spend her summers living at her ancestral home, the Isaac C. Woodward house in Luzerne Township. By 1963, when trouble loomed in the form of a property-seeking Luzerne Township school board, Ann had done an outstanding job of restoring the nineteenth century home to its former appearance.

The western side of the red brick homestead had a centered front porch that faced the direction of High Street Extension, while a back porch ran the full width of the eight-room house. Inside the house, a large center hall ran from the double front doors to a single back door. On one side of the hall were a kitchen and a dining room separated by a kitchen pantry from which back stairs led to the second floor. On the other side of the central hall were a living room and a parlor that were separated by French doors.

The four rooms on the first floor featured fourteen-foot-high ceilings. In the kitchen was a large antique open fireplace, and the other rooms each had a marble fireplace.

From the center hallway near the front double doors, a majestic staircase ascended to a large second floor hall, which had two bedrooms on each side and a bathroom at the front of the house. The bedrooms, which all had floors of stained wood and plaster walls that were in very good condition, were interconnected by another smaller hallway on each side of the house near the outside walls.

In 1965, during the legal wrangling between the school district and the Woodward heirs, real estate professional Wylie Rittenhouse appraised the house. In testament to Ann Frondorf's restorative touch, Rittenhouse wrote, "In my opinion, this dwelling has an actual age of approximately 100 years old, but due to superior construction and maintenance, it has an effective economic age of approximately 35 years."

During the early twentieth century, there were two smaller red brick houses behind the house, originally intended to accommodate farm workers or other staff. Each had two rooms upstairs and two downstairs.

There had also been a large wooden barn further back on the property to the right of the house.

By 1963, one of the two small houses no longer existed, and the large barn had burned down. Yet though the passing years had seen many alterations in the homestead's appearance, there may have been one constant witness to a century of changes.

"The place had a ghost!" former tenant Marianne Stuart Schuhle of Chesterfield, Virginia, assured me. "I think it was Captain Woodward, but I am not sure. He made the rounds once in a while and scared Grandma, but most of us just ignored him and told him to go back to his boat!"

After receiving that information from Marianne, I mentioned it to Ann Frondorf.

"Yes," she said, "the house had a ghost. In the mid-fifties, I was staying there alone for a while, cleaning it up a bit between tenants. While I was there I encountered the ghost, and I have never been so scared in my life."

"You saw him?" I asked.

"I felt him," Ann said. "I was halfway up the staircase when I felt this icy blast of wind rush past me on the stairs, causing my clothes to blow violently. There were no doors or windows open to cause it, no natural explanation for it, and it was a very frightening experience. Needless to say, I called a relative and said, 'I'm coming to spend the night!'"

Despite Ann's other-worldly encounter, she spent seven summers in the late 1950s and early 1960s living in her great-grandfather's home, basking in its reborn beauty.

"I remember some wonderful picnics and gatherings over there," said neighbor Dave Gratz, who lived across the street. "Ann and her friends and family had a great time during those summers."

And then the idyll was shattered.

In 1963, the Luzerne Township School District decided to build a new elementary school to replace the old brick building in Hiller. The site the school board coveted was an unspecified portion of the seventy-eight-acre Woodward farm. When Ann Frondorf and her husband William became aware of the school district's plan, they engaged attorney Robert L. Webster to deal with the school district.

On December 11, 1963, Webster received a letter from A. J. Kuzdenyi, solicitor for the Luzerne Township School District. The letter contained a puzzling comment about the Woodward house. It read, "Pursuant to our recent conversation relative to the matter of the proposed school site, our board would be desirous of acquiring ten to

fifteen acres of land directly behind the brick dwelling, and would not expect to acquire the dwelling unless it was given assurance that the dwelling would not be used for private purposes. A suggestion has been made that the building be given to the Brownsville Historical Society for museum and/or historic purposes.

“I trust that you will communicate with your clients with respect to the above proposal at your earliest convenience. The board is very desirous of moving ahead with their school building plans as rapidly as is humanly possible.”

It appears from this letter that as of late 1963, the school board was willing to build the new school on acreage that lay behind the Woodward house, leaving the historic homestead untouched – on the condition that Ann Frondorf and Jo Hess agreed that no one could ever again use the house as a residence, which Ann had been doing for the past seven summers.

On December 13, 1963, Webster wrote to Ann Frondorf at her home in Jacksonville, Florida. Webster wrote, “I have suggested to Mr. Kuzdenyi that you and your sister might be willing to donate acreage to the School District if the District were to forego its expressed intentions to appropriate the homestead property. Mr. Kuzdenyi has discussed this matter with the School Board, and I have received a written reply, a copy of which I enclose herewith.

“You will note that the School Board is somewhat concerned about the future use of the homestead property, fearing that it might become a potential eye sore, and to guard against this, the School Board suggested that the homestead property be transferred to the Brownsville Historical Society for perpetual historical use.”

Four months later, the school board reaffirmed that it did not wish to take the Woodward house. On March 18, 1964, Webster wrote to Ann Frondorf, “The School District of the Township of Luzerne has contacted me through their attorney regarding their plans to condemn ten (10) acres of land in the Park Plan for the construction of an elementary school. However, after several conferences with various members of the School Board, it has been resolved that the homestead property should not be included in the area to be condemned.”

“Under the circumstances,” Webster continued, “this would appear to be the best alternative that we could follow if we expect to save the homestead property from condemnation action.”

At this point, it appeared that the Woodward house would be safe from condemnation by the school board. Yet eleven months later, documents indicate that the situation had taken an ugly turn. While architectural planning for the new school building had continued during

the board's negotiations with Ann Frondorf and Jo Hess to acquire a portion of the Woodward property, the negotiations had gone sour.

On February 3, 1965, Ann Frondorf received another letter from Solicitor Kuzdenyi. It contained the chilling news that the school board had had a change of heart.

"The Board of Directors of the Luzerne Township School District," Kuzdenyi's letter stated, "is contemplating the taking by Eminent Domain, for school purposes, of a tract of land containing 15.0006 Acres, which will include the farm house and other improvements, as shown by sketch which is herewith enclosed, since it is our understanding that you do not wish to negotiate further for the acquisition by the Board of this site. Should you desire to resume negotiations for the sale of the entire tract, as indicated, please so advise."

The school board, which had previously sought only ten acres and was not planning to take the house, had become displeased with the lack of progress in the property negotiations. Now the board was threatening to take fifteen acres of the seventy-eight-acre farm and the century-old farm house too. Faced with the explicit statement that the power of eminent domain might be used to seize the property, Bill Frondorf sent instructions to Robert Webster.

"You may tell Mr. Kuzdenyi," Frondorf directed Webster, "that we are very willing to negotiate – to date we have had no offers of any kind. What we are asking now is \$10,000 for ten (10) acres that the Board wanted last August, or \$30,000 for the house and fifteen (15) acres. Also we would like to have a road to give access to the balance of the land. As I stated before, we would be glad to meet with the Board to discuss this."

Bill Frondorf's proposal of \$30,000 as an asking price for fifteen acres plus the house seemed to imply that the Frondorfs had conceded it was inevitable that they would lose the house. Nothing could have been further from the truth. As summer approached, an all-out effort was launched to prevent the school district from condemning the farm house. Next as our series concludes, matters reach a climax when the community rallies to convince the school board that the century-old Woodward house should be preserved.

***DESPITE COMMUNITY PLEAS, THE HISTORIC
WOODWARD HOUSE WAS DESTROYED***

This article concludes our series about the 1965 condemnation of the century-old Isaac C. Woodward house by the Luzerne Township school board. In December 1963, the school board stated that it planned to build an elementary school on the seventy-eight-acre Woodward farm but would spare the historic brick home built on the property by riverboat captain and civic leader Isaac C. Woodward.

In February 1965, school district solicitor A. J. Kuzdenyi notified Ann Frondorf, one of the two owners of the property, that the board had changed its mind about sparing the house and was “contemplating the taking by Eminent Domain, for school purposes, of a tract of land containing 15.0006 Acres, which will include the farm house and other improvements . . .”

Robert Webster, an attorney retained by the Frondorfs, began negotiating the amount of compensation that Ann Frondorf and her sister, Jo Hess, should receive. Webster had two appraisals done. Appraiser Frank J. Coppolino estimated the value of the property and house at \$28,600, while appraiser Wylie S. Rittenhouse’s estimate was \$24,600.

The school district also had two appraisals done. Webster reported to Ann Frondorf that “the highest value placed on the property by the school district’s appraisers was \$19,000. After extended negotiation with Mr. Kuzdenyi, the Board has authorized the settlement for the sum of \$22,000.”

Webster recommended that the board’s offer be accepted, reasoning that a Board of View would probably split the difference between the Board’s highest appraisal (\$19,000) and the Frondorfs’ lowest appraisal (\$24,600). Bargaining over the amount continued for months, but the issue was no longer whether the Board would take some of the Woodward farm. The issue now was whether the school board could be persuaded to spare the house.

The Frondorfs sought help from state education officials, but in a June 15, 1965 letter to Ann Frondorf, Harold O. Speidel, Acting Deputy Superintendent in the Department of Education, offered little hope of state intervention.

“It does not appear the board has exceeded its legal rights in the matter,” Speidel wrote. “It may be possible to save the old house by locating the school building at another point on the site, if there is a greater acreage, as you indicate in your letter.”

On July 9, 1965, Ann's husband Bill wrote to Governor William Scranton.

"This is our second appeal for help to prevent a miscarriage of justice," Bill Frondorf wrote, "by the needless destruction of our home. The home is over 100 years old, in good condition, and has been in the family since construction."

Frondorf mentioned the Board's original December 11, 1963 letter in which the Board had expressed its concern that the house might become an "eyesore."

"As far as the 'eyesore' bit," Frondorf noted, "naturally the architecture of the house does not blend with the adjacent small homes, but is this our fault? The house is completely furnished and has a year-round caretaker. The house is used during the summer for vacations and reunions. A strange thing about the 'eyesore' bit is that two of the nearby homes are owned by the School Board Chairman's brother [Roger Garofalo, administrator of Luzerne Township schools] and the other by the School Board's attorney, Mr. Kuzdenyi.

"If anything can be done, it would be deeply appreciated. Time is running out fast."

Matters were coming to a head. On July 20, the *Brownsville Telegraph* published a full page story about the impending condemnation of the Woodward house, featuring many photographs of the home's restored interior.

"It is a shame," commented the *Telegraph*, "that those in authority have seen fit to condemn this fine old home in such a fine state of preservation. We would hope that the local Historical society might get behind this old structure and see that it remains intact."

What was the position of the Brownsville Historical Society on this matter? Loise White, secretary of the historical society, wrote a letter of explanation to the *Telegraph*.

"Let me assure you that an attempt was made at the last general meeting of the society to do something about preserving the old home," White wrote. "However, due to the fact that the president of the Luzerne Township board of education and the president of the Brownsville Historical Society are one and the same [Dr. Ralph F. Garofalo], nothing was accomplished.

"The following motion was introduced by one of the members and properly seconded:

"Because the Brownsville Historical Society was founded to create an interest in and for the protection of locally historical buildings, landmarks and artifacts, I would like to move that the Historical Society petition the Luzerne school board to reconsider the razing of the Park

Farm residence; to review the possibility of its use as a museum and for a historical library and meeting place for school-affiliated units and groups.’

“At the conclusion of the discussion which followed, the president said that he could not entertain the motion as he was also president of the Luzerne township school board. Since he did not, as he should have done, according to parliamentary procedure, step down from the chair and turn it over to the vice president so that the motion could be brought to a vote, it died right there. This is why the Brownsville Historical Society has not made its voice heard for the preservation of the home.”

On July 23, 1965, Robert Webster informed Ann Frondorf that the Board, anxious to complete the condemnation proceedings, had offered a settlement of \$25,000. Webster, realizing the Board could not be stopped from condemning the property and house, recommended acceptance.

That week, numerous letters to the editor appeared in the *Telegraph*, their authors expressing concern and puzzlement at the school district’s determination to destroy the historic house instead of building the school on a different part of the property.

“Were this home in the city of Philadelphia or the State of Virginia, public officials would make every effort to see that it would be preserved,” one writer observed. “It does not appear that any logical process was followed in determining that the home should be razed. I wonder why the action was taken.”

Another letter writer asked, “Why was the land on which the house stands chosen in the first place, when there were 73 acres available and only 16 acres are required? Why are the taxpayers of Luzerne condoning the senseless destruction of a property that brings them approximately \$220 per year in taxes? Why are these same taxpayers willing to pay the \$20,000 value of the house? Isn’t \$20,000 a rather high price to pay just to destroy something?”

On July 29, William G. Murphy, Secretary to Governor William Scranton, replied to Bill Frondorf’s appeal for help by merely reaffirming that the Luzerne Township school board’s action were within the Board’s legal rights.

Six days later, Kuzdenyi sent Webster a school district check for \$25,000 as payment for the condemned 15.0006 acres and the buildings on the property. In an accompanying letter, Kuzdenyi made it clear that the Board expected “vacation of premises on or before September 3, 1965.”

Time was running out. Still hoping to save the house from destruction, Bill Frondorf air-mailed another plea to William Murphy,

secretary to the governor.

“Regarding your reply of July 29,” Frondorf wrote, “I am again asking that someone investigate the subject condemnation to prevent a gross injustice.”

Still angry that the school district had stated as late as March 1964 that the house would be spared, but only if it were used for “proper purposes,” Frondorf asked Murphy, “Is not a home a proper purpose? How about the other houses which are far closer than ours [to the proposed building site] – are they to be condemned unless their owners give assurance they will be used for ‘proper purposes?’”

Finally on August 10, Frondorf wrote directly to Governor Scranton.

“This is our final appeal,” he wrote, “to try and save the Woodward Homestead in Brownsville, Pa. from needless destruction. The Luzerne township school board is now the official owner by condemnation, despite our long, expensive and losing fight.

“The only chance now is for the Board to donate the homestead to the Brownsville Historical Society, which by the way they wanted us to do in 1963. The Brownsville Historical Society would be glad to have the building. You could contact the Secretary, Mrs. Loise R. White, for further details.”

Knowing that demolition of the house could begin within weeks, Bill Frondorf emphasized that any help the governor could offer was urgently needed. The days of August ebbed, but there was no last minute reprieve from the governor.

The battle to save the Isaac C. Woodward homestead was over.

On August 28, in a sad postscript to a hopeless cause, a letter from Ann Frondorf appeared in the *Telegraph*. After penning a final plea that her family’s ancestral home not be destroyed, Ann addressed her remarks to the residents of the town.

“Oh, Brownsville, look to your heritage,” she wrote. “There are many lovely old houses in your midst that should be retained. The setting of your town is of picture book quality. Approaching it at sundown the town comes alive with lights flickering on its hillsides that should welcome travelers today, as it did in days of yore.

“New towns can be built with ease and a sameness today, but you have something that has taken centuries to acquire. Let not these years be wasted. Remember the part your town has played in the development of America. Keep faith in your old town and capitalize on its potential.”

Today, near the spot where the Isaac C. Woodward house stood for one hundred and two years, stands the former Hiller Elementary School. The sprawling brick building now houses only the administrative offices

of the Brownsville Area School District, into which the Luzerne Township School District was merged not long after the building was constructed in 1966.

Luzerne Township School District no longer exists.

Hiller Elementary School is no longer a school.

And the historic Isaac C. Woodward homestead, which would have celebrated its 140th anniversary this year, is gone forever.