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Stevens home gets 1860s look

City celebrates exterior renovation

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The brass plaque on the outside wall of 47 S. Queen St. had been there for 78 years, telling whoever bothered to read it that the building was the home of Thaddeus Stevens.

Yet, "the Great Commoner" himself may not have recognized the building when that plaque was placed there.

In the 1920s, part of the building had been turned into an auto repair business. A garage door was cut into the wall and Stevens' law office was gutted.

A white brick facade and a third floor had been added and the rooms broken into apartments. The area that may have been Stevens' personal library had been a bathroom for tenants for decades.

The plaque came down early this year. It recently was returned, and on Sunday it was rededicated on the front of a building that Stevens would know.

Gone is the white brick exterior, the garage door and the third floor. Returned is the hidden red brick of the building and roof dormers. The building again looks as it did when Stevens called it home, from 1842 until his death in 1868.

The official return of the plaque marked a milestone for the Histor-



Marty Heisey / Staff

A crowd gathers on South Queen Street in downtown Lancaster to celebrate the restoration of the outside of the home and office where Thaddeus Stevens lived and worked during the 19th century.

ic Preservation Trust of Lancaster, which is working to create a museum dedicated to Stevens and his housekeeper and confidante, Lydia Hamilton Smith, at the corner of South Queen and East Vine streets.

On Sunday, about 50 members of the trust, city officials and sup-

porters celebrated the completion of the first phase of the project: the \$8.5 million exterior renovation of Stevens' home and law office, Smith's nearby home, the Kleiss saloon building on the corner and

Please see **STEVENS**, page A4

Stevens: Queen Street house gets 1860s look

Continued from A1

the creation of a subterranean exhibit area below the lobby of the attached Lancaster County Convention Center.

The exhibit area centers on a preserved cistern where archeologists believe Stevens, Smith or others hid runaway slaves as part of the clandestine Underground Railroad.

Sunday also marked the unofficial start of the project's second phase, said Historic Preservation Trust Executive Director Timothy Smedick. The architectural preservation group is shifting its attention to raising between \$6 million and \$7 million to renovate the interior of the buildings and create the museum displays.

Smedick said that fund-raising is expected to take about two years and the construction about a year. The museum is expected to open in late 2012 or early 2013, he said.

Smedick also announced the trust has scaled back its plans for the site.

The trust board voted during the summer to abandon plans to build an educational center across from the museum on the south side of East Vine Street. Preliminary estimates forecast a cost of \$8 million to construct that building behind the vacant Swan hotel. The latest estimates put the cost at \$25 million.



Marty Heisey / Staff

Lydia Hamilton Smith (portrayed by Darlene Colon) and Thaddeus Stevens (portrayed by Steve Anderson) chat with a guest during a reception Sunday afternoon at the Lancaster County Convention Center.

"At this point in time, we don't think it is viable," Smedick said of the educational center.

Instead, the museum will be developed in about 5,000 square feet in the Stevens home and law office and in

the underground areas. The three-floor Kleiss building will be renovated for use as a restaurant or office space, said Nancy Bell, trust board president.

With the exterior renovations done, fund-raising for

the interior work should be easier, Smedick said.

"Now we have something to show the public and we're going to use that as a springboard to move forward," he said.

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