

The President Engine and Engine House Recognized by the Gorsedh Kernow



The President Engine House, located in the village of Friedensville in Upper Saucon Township, Lehigh County, is a massive stone walled ruin sitting beside a beautiful water-filled mine quarry. The property is unimproved and, therefore, access to the ruins and surrounding property is restricted. Prior to 1900, the engine house held what was the largest and most powerful, single cylinder, rotative steam engine ever constructed. Its purpose was to lower the water level in the mine so that rich zinc ore could be extracted. The President Engine, as it was called, was said to be named after U. S. Grant, the sitting President at the time of the engine's inauguration in 1872. The mines in Friedensville during that period were owned by Philadelphian investors, but the mine management and technical specialists were largely emigres from the county of Cornwall in the United Kingdom. Although a small region in physical size, Cornwall played a very large role in the development of the steam technologies that transformed the 19th century. Further, the Cornish were world renowned for their knowledge of hard rock mining. Because of this, in the 19th century, Cornish miners and their families were recruited to the far-flung regions of the world where minerals were being discovered and mines were being developed. Sizable communities representing the Cornish diaspora can be found in Australia, South America, South Africa, Spain, Mexico, Canada, and the United States.

The President Engine House in Friedensville is the only surviving example of a Cornish style pumping engine house in the United States. In Cornwall, where a few hundred of these structures survive and dot the landscape, they are the iconic symbols of Cornwall and West Devon's UNESCO World Heritage Mining Landscape. Since about 2014, a small team of dedicated individuals have worked to draw awareness to The President Engine and the importance of preserving the Friedensville location as a surviving example of Cornwall's influential role in both mining and steam technology. In recent years, two of these individuals have been recognized as Cornish Bards by the Gorsedh Kernow specifically for their role in furthering Cornish identity in the United States by bringing attention to The President and its engine house ruins, which had previously been largely forgotten.

Every year, the Gorsedh Kernow holds the Esedhvos Festival of Cornish Culture in early September. This year it was held in the town of Hayle in Cornwall. The festival includes an impressive ceremony during which new bards robed in blue are hooded and named before all the bards of Cornwall. The Cornish Gorsedh (pronounced "gorseth") was established in 1928 to give expression to the national spirit of Cornwall and to preserve the language, history, and culture of its people; a role first played in ancient Celtic countries by the storytellers or Bards. Bards are elected in secret by the Gorsedh Council and awarded to people who, in their view, have given exceptional service to Cornwall. For their role in promoting the preservation of The President Engine and its Engine House, Dr. Damian Nance of Stratford, CT was recognized as a Bard (bardic name Karrek meaning "rock" in Cornish) in 2018 and, this year, Mark Connar of Bethlehem, PA was recognized as a Bard (bardic name Jynn meaning "engine" in Cornish). There are approximately 500 living Bards with about 10-20 new Bards inducted each year.

On the day following the Gorsedh ceremony, Mark Connar was interviewed by BBC Cornwall radio. In his remarks, Mark highlighted the foundational role that Cornish-born mine leadership and engineers played in the birth of the American zinc industry and in the creation of this landmark steam engine, the essential machine required to support continued mining in the Friedensville area. Mark also discussed the encouragement, interest, and support the project has received from the Cornish-American community which is now located throughout the United States. This year represents the 150th anniversary of the start-up of The President Engine and several preservation initiatives are underway. Despite the engine being reduced to scrap in 1900, we do know a lot about its design. A scale model of the engine, created by Anthony Mount of Devon, England, is the centerpiece of a display on The President Engine at the National Museum of Industrial History in

Bethlehem, PA. Last year, Guy Janssen of Schelle, Belgium, made an animated movie concerning the Friedensville mines highlighting The President Engine. This movie can be viewed on youtube.com and on the Friedensville mines website (below). The only surviving metal component of The President Engine system, a 30-foot-long steam boiler, is planned to be rescued from a former furniture factory in Allentown scheduled to be razed soon. The Friedensville property is owned by Lehigh University, and they have provided leadership and funding for planning efforts associated with preservation of the engine house ruins. Lehigh University has received matching fund assistance from the National Trust's Louis J. Appell, Jr., Preservation Fund for Central Pennsylvania and the Keystone Historic Preservation Grant program sponsored by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Lehigh University continues to seek opportunities to improve the property so that the engine house ruins can be made publicly accessible. More information about The President Engine and the Friedensville zinc mines is available on www.friedensvilleminesheritage.org including how to contribute to the preservation of this unique location as part of the vibrant story of Pennsylvania's industrial heritage.