1807 gem is a home once more

It’s been 10 years since an American Federal-style house at 548 Manatawny Street, built in 1807 by farmer Jacob Levengood, was first threatened with demolition.

For more than 160 years, seven generations of the same family lived in the house, once part of a 177-acre farm, until 1991, when it became vacant.

The house and a surrounding acre of land were subdivided from a much larger parcel in 2001 which was developed into Manatawny Village, a senior housing community.

Twice, in 2009 and 2012, new owners sought permission from Pottstown Council to demolish the house. Both times they were denied by 4-3 votes.

Boyertown businessman Ricky Watt bought the house in 2012 and began some restoration work, but put the house up for sale again after he decided to buy and occupy an Oley Township farmhouse.

In May 2018, the home was purchased for $100,000 — the same price Watt paid for it — by a New Jersey couple who are restoring the home and now live there.

Matt Schley, a retired New York City public school teacher, and his wife, Barbara Henry, a letterpress artist, learned of the Manatawny Street house from a fellow Jersey City resident who moved into a house he bought in 2015 on Walnut Street.

Schley and Henry were assisted by Wesley Sessa of 18th Century Restorations in Coventryville, who helped convince Pottstown Council in 2009 and 2012 that the 1807 building was structurally sound.

Schley, who restored buildings for 15 years in New Jersey before becoming a teacher, took great care to preserve all the building’s unique features — doors, floors, fireplace mantels, woodwork, staircase — even the original paint.

But the mechanicals are state-of-the-art, including a geo-thermal heating and cooling system.