

## Mural to spotlight Mount Holly history

By CAROL COMEGNO • *Courier-Post Staff* •  
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**MOUNT HOLLY** — Commuters once traveled between Mount Holly and their jobs at Smithville industrial village in neighboring Eastampton on a bicycle railway that was started as an experiment in the late 1800s.

The monorail started in 1892 at a monthly fare of \$2, but it was short-lived and fell into disrepair by 1898 with the automobile on the horizon.

Now the bike railway will be immortalized in a downtown mural being commissioned by Main Street Mount Holly, a nonprofit group that promotes business revitalization and tourism in historic Mount Holly.

A group of student artists from the Lumberton campus of the Burlington County Special Services School District will descend on the NAPA Auto Body Shop downtown this month to undertake the painting project. The students are, or were, behaviorally challenged.

Alicia McShulkis, a volunteer coordinator of the arts project for Main Street Mount Holly, said the students and their instructor will paint a bike railway scene on one side of the one-story auto shop building at Madison Avenue and Washington Street.

"It's a great way to further improve that corner as a gateway into downtown at a very low cost and involve a business as well," McShulkis said.

The location is also near former Pennsylvania Railroad tracks and a rail station, now a restaurant.

She said the school group is hoping to start in mid-April or as soon as the weather improves and to complete it by June.

Theresa Turkot, studio arts teacher at the school in Lumberton, said about 20 students will be working on the mural with paint donated by the MAB paint store on Route 38. The art project is expected to take several months, she said, because of the size of the mural -- 60 feet long by 15 feet high.

"I was looking for a mural project for my students because I had read that it teaches skills, promotes cooperation, enhances self-esteem and encourages involvement and pride in the community," she said.

The students will paint from a more than 100-year-old photograph showing commuters dressed in suits and hats while riding the railway.

McShulkis said the new project is being undertaken because an existing mural landmark across Washington Street could soon disappear. The reason: The building it embellishes is due to be demolished by the township, which owns it and which is in the midst of an environmental study of the property.

That mural, painted by local artist Jim Lemyre, realistically depicts various businesses on High Street, such as the tailor shop, a street cafe scene and the former movie theater. The painting decorates the front facade and has been up for about six years on the site of a former auto repair business.

County historian Joseph Laufer was pleasantly surprised to hear about the mural plan.

"I would wish it was closer to the Mount Holly terminus of the line at the Relief Fire Company on Pine Street, but anywhere they can paint a mural that recognizes its history and its association with Mount Holly is wonderful," he said.

Laufer said the railway was quite popular but because there was only one track, bike rail riders sometimes had to get off and let others going in the opposite direction pass them.

"There were plans for a second rail, but the timing was terrible because the automobile was coming on the scene and it was never built," the historian said.

The Main Street group also has plans for another mural that will be located at one of three possible sites on High Street, but McShulkis said that project is still being developed. The nonprofit has been awarded a \$1,629 National Endowment for the Arts grant via the Burlington County freeholders for that mural and will be seeking proposals from artists in the near future.

When both new murals are completed, McShulkis there will be at least five permanent outdoor murals scattered throughout downtown that preserve township history. Some of the others are on sides of buildings along High or Washington streets and feature a public garden that was once on Levis Drive, the original Mount Holly fairgrounds with its horse racetrack and the life of John Woolman, an early Quaker settler, tailor and anti-slavery organizer.

"This outdoor mural program makes Mount Holly unique and in the future we are hoping to do a mural art tour," she said.

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