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**May 1, 2012: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **New Lease on Life for Historic Ewing Sanctuary**

Preservation New Jersey is pleased to announce “a new partnership and a new beginning” for the historic 1867 Sanctuary in Ewing Township, formerly used by the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of Ewing, now to be known as “The 1867 Sanctuary at Ewing.”

A fifty-year lease agreement, effective May 1, was recently signed by Preservation New Jersey (PNJ) as Tenant, and the Presbytery of New Brunswick as Landlord, granting the state-wide historic preservation advocacy organization full responsibility for the landmark, including the necessary repair, rehabilitation and reuse of the building, once slated for demolition.

A celebration of the lease signing will be held on Saturday, May 5 at 1 pm in the Ewing Senior and Community Center on Lower Ferry Road, to which the public is invited.

Once the 1867 Sanctuary at Ewing is safely restored, the expectation is that it will be available for a variety of uses, including weddings, funerals, concerts, meetings, lectures and the like.

“We are very happy to have the opportunity to partner with many other individuals and entities to work toward preserving this historically significant building for future use,” said David Knights, President of Preservation New Jersey. “We very much look forward to a successful outcome for The 1867 Sanctuary at Ewing.”

Several years ago, PNJ watched with interest the problem of the 145-yr-old Romanesque Revival sanctuary. The building had a history of structural concerns related to its roof trusses and stone walls. After a noise and debris fall in 2007 prompted the township to prohibit use of the building, the congregation was given an estimate of more than \$2.5 million for repairs. Unable to afford the work, the difficult decision to demolish was made by the church governing board in 2008.

Concurrently however, church and community members seeking alternative options and financial support for the building contacted PNJ for assistance. PNJ helped to find insurance

for the building, and named the structure to New Jersey's "Ten Most Endangered Historic Sites" list in 2009. An advocacy coalition soon raised well over \$200,000 in cash and other support from not only church members, but from people and organizations throughout Ewing, the region, and even across the nation. The PNJ blog received an unprecedented amount of discussion and support of the effort.

"Our board had for some time been interested in finding a 'bricks and mortar' preservation project, beyond our more traditional education, advocacy and technical assistance," said John Hatch, AIA, president of the organization at the time. "The nearby Ewing Sanctuary seemed to be a perfect opportunity to attempt such a venture. There was strong community interest, an effective grass-roots organization, significant start-up funds, and a much-beloved structure at risk. It was and is an ideal test-case to discover practical ways to more actively and effectively guide other local preservation projects."

PNJ then made an offer to take long-term responsibility for the building, including the significant challenge of raising the funds necessary to make the required rehabilitation. The Presbytery of New Brunswick eventually accepted PNJ's offer in 2010, having previously taken jurisdiction over the building.

With the lease in hand, PNJ's attention now will be focused on working with architects, engineers, preservationists and others to rehabilitate, reopen and reutilize the building. Additionally, fund raising will be required to supplement the funds remaining from three years ago, which have been used in the interim for costs associated with the building. The total amount needed for restoration, remediation and necessary upgrades is estimated at roughly one million dollars.

Helping PNJ in the fund-raising effort will be former members of PRES (Partners to Restore Ewing Sanctuary), the advocacy coalition which originally sought alternatives to demolition and raised funds to preserve the building.

"We are extremely fortunate to have the support of PNJ, and such a community restoration effort for the 1867 Sanctuary," said Helen Kull, former chairperson of PRES, and board member of Preservation New Jersey since 2011. "PNJ's unexpected commitment made all the difference. We are so grateful to PNJ for its assistance, vision, commitment and guidance, and hope that many will return that gratitude by helping this effort to succeed, and supporting this and other restoration and preservation efforts statewide through their support of PNJ."

Fully tax-deductible contributions to PNJ and the 1867 Sanctuary effort can be made at PNJ's website, [www.preservationnj.org](http://www.preservationnj.org).

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## **FACT SHEET:**

### **About Preservation New Jersey**

Headquartered in Trenton and established in 1978, Preservation New Jersey (PNJ) is the only statewide membership-supported historic preservation organization in New Jersey. A 501c3 non-profit organization, PNJ advocates for and promotes historic preservation as a sustainable strategy. PNJ helps New Jerseyans to manage change in their communities by preserving and protecting the places that matter to them. PNJ is New Jersey's statewide partner for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

PNJ intends to eventually form a subsidiary non-profit group to oversee all aspects of the repair, adaptive re-use, fund-raising for, and future management of the building.

### **About the Lease:**

The "Landlord" is The Presbytery of New Brunswick, the regional governing body of 41 Presbyterian congregations in central New Jersey, which has a trust interest in the property of its member congregations. The "Tenant" is Preservation New Jersey, which will pay a nominal \$1/yr rent to the Presbytery for the building. PNJ will then have the authority to rehabilitate and reuse the building.

The lease does restrict the sanctuary from being used for a purpose contrary to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA; by a competing religious organization; or on Sunday mornings, Christmas Eve, Christmas and Easter by any entity other than the First Presbyterian Church of Ewing. PNJ will have no involvement with or responsibility for the historic cemetery which surrounds the structure.

### **About the Restoration Project:**

An engineering study done in 2010 by FMG Architects, LLC estimated the repairs to the building to be in the range of \$600,000, and additional remediation, upgrades and improvements to bring the total cost to roughly \$1 million. The structure has been awarded a NJ Historic Trust Site Management grant of \$50,000, which will be used to help develop plans and specifications for the building's restoration, and to partially fund an adaptive re-use study for the building, to determine the best use of the space while maintaining as much of its historical integrity as possible.

### **About the 1867 Sanctuary:**

The building is the fourth house of worship on the site, constructed to accommodate a growing congregation in the optimism following the Civil War. The Romanesque Revival-style building was designed by J.C. Sidney, architect, and built by Smith E. Hughes of Philadelphia of local brownstone from the quarries that once operated along the Delaware and Raritan Canal. The much-taller original steeple was toppled in a storm in the 1890s, and replaced with the current one. Although some modifications have been made in the past 145 years, the building is largely unchanged from the original.

### **More information:**

Websites: [www.preservationnj.org](http://www.preservationnj.org) and [www.1867sanctuary.org](http://www.1867sanctuary.org)

Photos: [www.1867sanctuary.org/media/photos](http://www.1867sanctuary.org/media/photos)