

Will Delco Preserve MLK's Divinity School, or Leave It To Be Developed?

If you turn off Upland Ave. onto Seminary Rd., you'll see Crozer-Chester Medical Center on your left. Soon enough, you'll see an off-white, F-shaped building on your right, behind a parking lot. This 3 Seminary Avenue was Martin Luther King Jr.'s home from September 1948 to May 1951, where he took classes as a divinity student. If you drive by it slowly and look at the second-floor window (two feet away from the left-central pillar) you'd be looking at the same window as King's dorm room.

King's dorm room is now an old, unkept storage space.

Still affectionately called "Old Main," this building was once the central campus spot of Crozer Theological Seminary. Crozer relocated and merged with Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in 1970, but the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in June 1973. In 1992, a commemorative state marker was placed in front of the building thanks largely to Chester resident Steven Evans.

After reading *The Seminarian: Martin Luther King Jr. Comes of Age*, which documents Dr. King's time inside Old Main, lifelong Delaware County resident Janet Lloyd Murphy started researching the building and assembled a group of interested Delaware County residents. For Ms. Murphy, the Delaware county residents, and *Seminarian* author Patrick Parr, their purpose was clear: Preserve MLK's old dorm and study building and transform it into a vibrant community center.

There's just one problem.

Old Main, and the surrounding buildings across from Crozer-Chester Medical Center, have been owned by Prospect Medical Holdings, Inc. since 2016. The building is being used by Prospect to store medical supplies. The financial difficulties Prospect has experienced, negatively affecting its Delaware County hospital system, have been well documented over the past few years.

What concerns us is the future of this historic building -- which also carries Civil War history. In the center cupola, there are signatures of both Union and Confederate soldiers -- many of whom used the rooms (King's included) after being wounded in the Battle of Gettysburg.

During Dr. King's time in the building, he took classes and attended chapel services on the first floor and resided on the second floor. The third floor was for married seminarians. In the basement was the cafeteria and a place to play pool and table tennis.

Rather than being used for storage, Old Main could perhaps be used for educational programs, library services, civic meetings, residential facilities for visiting scholars, and a museum section devoted to Dr. King's time in Delaware County.

The building rests on Upland Borough soil close to the Chester City border. We are calling on the residents and elected officials of Delaware County to take back control of this historic building and turn it into a community center that would help bring the community together. Binding the people with the goal of working towards a common good was always paramount to Dr. King's philosophy of the "beloved community." If we continue to neglect Old Main, we may very well see its local history and vast potential vanish to the highest bidder. Let's honor his birthday month, and next month's Black History Month, with a plan to move forward.

To help, contact us at the email below.

Sincerely,

The Friends of Old Main and MLK Committee

Janet Lloyd Murphy, convener of The Friends of Old Main and MLK Committee (janmurphy312@gmail.com)

Patrick Parr, author of *The Seminarian: Martin Luther King Jr. Comes of Age*

Bill Dennon, mayor, Upland Borough

Stefan Roots, mayor, Chester City

Dr. Sam Lemon, retired professor and local historian

Robert C. Keller, Esq., Delaware County attorney

Paul Steinke, executive director, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

Hanna Stark, director of policy and communications, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

Mark Wallace, James Hormel Chair of Social Justice, Swarthmore College