

Fulton St. apartment project is underway

Progressive Investments president W. Edwin Miller, left, looks over the company's plans for the old Farmers Supply warehouse, along with builder E.G. Stoltzfus and Eric Hinderliter, the city's director of housing and community development.

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Work has begun on turning a business landmark into a residential showplace.

Progressive Investment Companies is converting the Farmers Supply Co. building at 215 E. Fulton St. into a 42-unit apartment building, with a completion date targeted for next July. Farmers Supply opened a new store at 515 N. Franklin Street last month.

Demolition work began late last week on the former hardware store's out-buildings, which are being removed to make room for extra parking.

"This is a win-win situation for the city of Lancaster," said Eric Hinderliter, the city's director of housing and development, who noted that Farmers Supply kept its business in the city while its former quarters will provide new downtown housing.

Progressive's plans call for 17 studio apartments, 10 one-bedroom apartments and 15 two-bedroom units. Rents will range from \$375 to \$525. E.G. Stoltzfus is the contractor for the project.

Built around 1883, the building has seen its share of history, as it encom-

passed three of Lancaster's most important 19th and early 20th-century industries.

Originally, the structure housed the Conestoga Cork Works, but this business did not last long. By 1891, it was the home of the Rose Umbrella Factory.

According to information from the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania once led the nation in the manufacture of umbrellas, with Lancaster alone housing six factories. By the 1920's, Lancaster was turning out more umbrellas a year than any other city in the country.

The Rose Umbrella factory itself moved to different quarters in 1912, and the building, with its heavy floors and massive beams, was used as a tobacco warehouse, reflecting another well-known area industry that fueled Lancaster's turn-of-the-century economy. Farmers Supply occupied the site from 1934 until this year.

Because of the structure's association with the area's manufacturing history,

Progressive is taking plans to preserve the building's character.

"This will be an historical renovation" noted Progressive president W. Edwin Miller. While certain exterior additions, such as balcony areas, are planned, Miller stressed that such details as the structure's original cargo openings and maple hardwood flooring will be preserved.

Other details long hidden – including rough-hewn 12-by-14 wooden beams and support columns presently covered over – will be uncovered, restored, and incorporated into the residences.

The apartment building will share a parking lot with its neighbor, the Lancaster Cleft Palate Clinic, as sanctioned by city zoning officials in September.

Progressive Investments, founded by Miller in 1986, has brought new life to other downtown landmarks, including the former King Theater, which the company renovated into apartments in a partnership with the Housing Development Corp.