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## Refurbished signs remaking their mark in Birdsboro

### Restoration of state Keystone Markers begins

By **Stephanie Weaver**  
*Reading Eagle*

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Birdsboro may be only a small part of Berks County, but it's a mecca for historical markers.

The borough is working with the Keystone Marker Trust to restore three old-fashioned, cast-iron road markers, known as Keystone Markers because of their distinctive shape.

Birdsboro also will be the first municipality in Pennsylvania to receive one of the state's newly refurbished stream markers.

"They're actually cast iron and hand-painted and look like a keystone," council President Ken Templin said of the Keystone Markers.

Most Keystone Markers were made just after World War I by the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's predecessor, as part of the "good roads" movement.

The signs symbolized Pennsylvania pride and helped reinforce its reputation as the Keystone State, said Nathaniel Guest, president of Keystone Marker Trust.

The signs most often were blue with yellow writing, but Guest said the colors and font could vary.

Although hundreds were made, many have deteriorated and disappeared from Pennsylvania roadsides.

"One of the issues identified by Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is that as we've allowed our communities to grow, we've done very little to demarcate their boundaries," Guest said. "How do you know when you arrive somewhere and how do you know when you leave?"

"These markers are very important in establishing place," he said. "You won't find anything like this in any other state in the country."

Guest and the Keystone Marker Trust are working to make these markers available again after more than 70 years.

He initially approached Birdsboro Borough Council about getting support for a grant to help the trust begin the process. The borough agreed to be the first recipient of a new version of the stream marker.

While working on that project, Guest found out there were several other Keystone Markers "floating around" the borough, some of which council Vice President Neil McCauley worked to restore on his own about 15 years ago.

"The condition of all these things is lacking since they haven't been maintained for many years," Guest said. "Some of the markers are in pretty bad shape."

One of the Birdsboro markers was cracked in half and stored in the borough maintenance shed.

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Courtesy of Birdsboro Borough  
**This old Keystone Marker split in two some years ago, and Birdsboro stored it in its borough maintenance shed. It is being restored, along with two other signs.**

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Birdsboro council recently decided to spend about \$2,000 to restore the markers through the Keystone Marker Trust. Guest said one of the markers is being restored with money from a single donor, while the borough is covering the rest.

The markers were picked up March 26 to begin the restoration. Organizers hope to reinstall them in coming years after bridge projects are completed on Main Street and along Route 345 over the Schuylkill River.

The new stream marker will be installed at the Main Street bridge over Hay Creek near borough hall.

"It goes back to the old town and the old style of markers," Templin said. "It goes along with what we want to do with our revitalization plan for the downtown."

Guest hopes to restore other Keystone Markers throughout the state, adding that the project could easily be taken on by people in each community.

"The costs to restore are minimal," he said, "with the benefit that you know you're in a place where people care about their town."

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