

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

The Englishman, Joseph Priestley, world-famous as the discoverer of oxygen, built his last home at Northumberland on the Susquehanna River in 1794--a world-famous home indeed, which is now open to visitors on the Pennsylvania Trail of History. In his day Priestley was a dissenter and this was his final refuge from harassment and persecution. Early in life Priestley chose the ministry for his life's work. He became a champion of reform in British government, an exponent also of both the American and French Revolutions. He was also a teacher, and a forerunner of such now-recently adopted outdoor trips of observation in teaching science. When he was about 40 he began to devote his full energies to several projects. His experiments with carbon dioxide, in establishment of a simple method for its extraction was the foundation of the soda-pop industry. Whoever thinks of the great Priestley as such? In the course of his experimentation with air, he isolated oxygen, the discovery of which is the basis of his lasting fame. While carrying on these experiments, outside his ministerial work, he became well acquainted with Pennsylvania's Ben Franklin, then living in London. So enthusiastic was he about the American Revolution that his house was destroyed by an angry mob. Over 50, he decided to emigrate to America, hoping public opinion of his views would be more tolerant. After east coast hardships, mostly financial, he decided to come inland to Northumberland, where a colony of English refugees lived. The trip was hard, the English colony did not materialize but he decided to stay. He dried lumber on the site, built his own home.

Joseph Priestley lived the remainder of his life in Northumberland, making occasional trips to Philadelphia to preach or to address Franklin's American Philosophical Society. He was instrumental in his friend Thomas Jefferson's run for the presidency. After Priestley's death, his home passed through numerous hands. In 1874 chemists journeyed to the Priestley house to commemorate the centennial of his discovery of oxygen. This meeting to honor Priestley led to the founding of the American Chemical Society. In 1960 the Pennsylvania Museum Commission assumed administration of this Priestley house. Today it stands to remind us of the spirit of an unusual man; minister, scientist, lecturer, revolutionary--a man who stood honestly on his convictions, willing to go to a new land to live with them. A man who came to Pennsylvania and found peace, happiness, friendship and contentment along the Susquehanna at Northumberland. His home, beautifully preserved, contains mementos of his life's work---Joseph Priestley, of Pennsylvania, who discovered oxygen, without which, miracles like moon-walking could not be possible.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.