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January 2022 Update on the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH)

January 2022

Tony Indovina, SHHS Board Member and FONLH President



Tony Indovina's 2020 photo of the Neill Log House was featured on the cover of the current *Squirrel Hill Magazine*. The photo shows the urgent need to repair and restore the house to prevent further deterioration. Some of the logs at the bottom of the house are pulling away from the foundation, causing water damage and damage from animals getting into the house.

In the December SHHS newsletter, the **Friends of the Neill Log House (FONLH)** announced the kickoff for what we called a "Quiet Phase Campaign of Fundraising." This means that we are "quietly" inviting individuals like you—those interested in history and historic preservation—to join in our efforts by making personal contributions that will provide the foundation for our newly formed organization to move forward, toward the larger goal of securing all the funds ultimately needed for the restoration and usage of the Neill Log House. Even before major grants are secured, we incur day-to-day expenses of insurance and other administrative costs, like any nonprofit. This appeal to help sustain our beginning efforts is being made to members of both SHHS and SHUC who are able to help us in this way. A special account has been set up by the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition on behalf of FONLH. All contributions made into it are tax-deductible. Until FONLH receives its own 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charity status (which has been filed for), contributions made for FONLH through SHUC receive its tax-exemption.

Donations can be made online by going to shuc.org, clicking on the "Projects" link at the top of its Home Page, then clicking on "Friends of Neill Log House." Once there, the "Donate with PayPal" button lets you pay by PayPal or your credit or debit card. Donations by mail are also accepted. Make your check out to SHUC-FONLH and put FONLH in the memo line. Mail it with a note saying the donation is for the Neill Log House restoration effort to:

Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition, 5604 Solway Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15217

These instructions can also be found on the SHHS website by clicking on "The Neill Log House" in the main menu.

What's happening right now: We reported previously on the FONLH committee work that has begun. A Building/Design group is actively meeting to discuss the complexities of projecting cost estimates and operating expenses. Complimentary efforts are also being made by our fundraising committee, which is making contacts with major funding sources and beginning to assess the information required to meet requirements and deadlines of potential grant donors.

While these major efforts are underway, it is still necessary to pay attention to small details associated with our larger efforts. One of these is planning for the anticipated removal and care of the artifacts inside the log house, acquired years ago during the last major restoration completed by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation (PHLF) in 1970. These items and furnishings were donated to PHLF, mostly by the Junior League of Pittsburgh (*see the list on the next page*), that were meant to show the log house as it would have looked to those entering it in the late 1700s. Such items include rope beds, fireplace irons, cooking utensils, spinning wheel and other implements, and the Pennsylvania longrifle standing by the hearth (*see the sidebar on the next page*). Though none of these items are original to the Neill Log House, all but a few are authentic to the period.

There was a brief period of time after the 1970 restoration that these items could be viewed and discussed in the house by a docent from PHLF. Not many years later, when responsibility for the Neill Log House fell solely on the City of Pittsburgh as owner, these furnishings remained in place but unseen, without a plan in place to use the structure and show it as it was when a colonial family lived in it. Now the task at hand is to create a plan to move these furnishings and artifacts out of the log house before restoration begins. Moving everything now would assure that these contents don't deteriorate more as time passes. It is believed that all the items that were catalogued and inventoried from when they were first acquired in 1970 have remained locked inside the house when it was closed later that decade, except the replica of the Pennsylvania Longrifle that was housed all these years with the City Parks Department and, more recently, with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. We can all agree that it was a good idea not to leave a working replica of an 18th-century flintlock rifle in an unmaintained building on the Bob O'Connor Golf Course, so it is currently safely secured in another location.

One of the first efforts by those of us who first met a year ago to discuss helping the city restore the log home involved researching the cost of storage available for historic items through the Senator Heinz History Center. Even the most

reasonable monthly storage rates that could be offered by that organization were considered beyond the operating expenses of a small nonprofit start-up like ours. The City Department of Public Works, with responsibility for our Neill Log House, since it is owned by Pittsburgh, understandably does not have a facility readily available to store historic items but has been exploring all options. Our board will continue to discuss with the city a way that these contents can be safely stored outside the log house until after restoration.

We Need Your Help! Solicitation to Members—Donated Space Sought for Contents of the Neill Log House

In the meantime, the FONLH Executive Committee is seeking a person or organization who would be willing to donate storage space for the Neill Log House contents for a year or two while the house is being restored. The space should ideally be climate-controlled, absolutely dry, secure, and easily accessible for us to have access to it as needed. The combined square footage of the Neill Log House, upstairs and downstairs, is just over 1,000 sq. feet, but because the furnishings don't take up much of that space, we could possibly make do with a space of 500-600 sq. feet. The utility costs associated with any space donated might be tax deductible. (We recommend consulting with your tax advisor.) We encourage any member with an offer or ideas about a place to store the Neill Log House contents to send an email to SHHS with "Neill Log House contents" in the subject line.



Shown to the left is a fine example of the American Longrifle. This working replica was donated about 1970 by an unknown source for display in the Neill Log House. Called a Pennsylvania or Kentucky Longrifle, it was a great improvement over earlier large bore muzzleloaders. It was lighter and much more accurate over longer distances, resulting from the "rifled" or spiral grooving inside the bore of its long barrel. Sometimes called the Lancaster Longrifle because they were first introduced by German gunsmiths in Southeastern Pennsylvania beginning in the early 1700s, these were made and used extensively from the Virginia to the Ohio Frontiers. It is likely that one of these stood at the ready by Robert Neill's hearth, to shoot game or protect his family.

From a metal stamp on this particular rifle, it is known to have been made by the Smiling Fox forge in Ohio that used to make such replicas. All of these longrifles are marked by a graceful wooden stock with ornate metal work, housing a well-made patch box built into the stock. It is interesting to note that the design of metal work on the stock of each rifle is distinctive to the county in which each was made. Would any of our readers care to research this particular design to help us learn more about our particular rifle?

A Partial List of the Contents of the Neill Log House

For anyone considering offering temporary storage space for the contents of the Neill Log House, here is an inventory of the items in the house to give you an idea of what needs to be stored. The inventory was done in 1971 by the Junior League of Pittsburgh, which donated the items to the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation for display in the house. The full inventory document lists the items, their dealer or donator, and their purchase price or estimated value. Most of the items are authentic period pieces. They are old and fragile, so the storage space must be secure. An agreement specifying details of the storage arrangement and an inventory of the items and their estimated value will be drawn up and signed to protect all parties to the agreement.

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| Walnut chest of drawers | Brown glaze redware jug | Tongs, wrought iron with ball finial |
| Pine box with wrought iron handles and hinges | Large redware jug with spout at base | Peel, wrought iron with ram's horn finial |
| Low post bed with ball finials on posts | Large horn dipper | Trammel, wrought iron, hanging from lug pole in fireplace |
| Five slat ladder-back rocking chairs | Hay rake, Slate puncher, Stogie maker | Teapot, wrought iron with goose neck spout and pouring handle |
| Gate-leg table, maple top and drawer, New England, early 18th century | Reproduction flintlock rifle | Posnet, cast iron on tripod base |
| Four simple ladder-back side chairs | Two wood individual eating bowls | Steamer or double boiler, iron |
| Painted cherry corner cupboard, raised panels on doors, Pennsylvania, late 18th century | Two round wood slab plates | Two fireplace brooms |
| Wrought iron tripod-based candleholder | Pair of slip-decorated redware plates | Utensils, wrought iron, hanging over central fireplace:skimmer, ladle, dipper, spatula |
| Spinning wheel or flax wheel, Saxony or Brunswick type wheel | Redware bowl, Redware pitcher | Grill pan, Muffin pan, Horn dipper |
| Quilting rack, Sheepskin rug, firkin | Low post bed and Four-slat ladder-back chair | T-shaped cord bed tightener |
| Three assorted baskets and basket for baby | Pair of wrought iron knife andirons, penny feet and brass urn finials | |
| Candle box for candle stubs, with original painted decoration | Pair of wrought iron goose-necked andirons, hex ball finials | |
| | Dutch oven, cast iron with lid and handle, tripod base | |