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April Update on the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH)

April 2022

Tony Indovina, SHHS Board Member and FONLH President

Mission Statement for the Friends of the Neill Log House (FONLH Inc.)

Adopted February 2022

We secure funds to restore and maintain the Neill Log House, foster knowledge of its historic significance, and work with interested parties to ensure the continued educational use of the structure and its site for future generations.

The Friends of the Neill Log House (FONLH, Inc.) Project is moving quickly in every area of planning. To be clear, actual restoration is more than a year off, with much work underway to realize that timeline. As mentioned previously, our two active committees at this time are Building/Design and Funding.

The Chair of our Funding Committee is Mardi Isler, a member of SHHS and President of SHUC. Mardi submitted two major grant applications at the beginning of March, a Keystone Construction Grant and one to the Colcom Foundation. In the meantime, individual donations continue coming in (see note below on how to give). Our board alone recently made donations totaling over two thousand dollars, with all members accounted for in the giving. And during this past month, Mardi received one family foundation grant of twenty thousand dollars. All of our funds on hand go toward administrative expenses and matching any grants when approved.

The Funding Committee has a meeting scheduled in early April at the Henry Koerner House on Negley Avenue, whose owner has graciously offered to allow us to plan for a Neill Log House fundraiser at the house, to be attended by a select group of givers from the local art community. One of our SHHS board members, artist Stanley Klein, who is also on the FONLH board, will be instrumental in helping to plan this event. There will be more information about it in a future newsletter, but be sure to read about the Koerner House on the House History page on our SHHS website. The house is currently in the process of being designated a national historic site.

Complementary efforts are being made by our Building/Design Committee, staffed by extremely able architects and restoration specialists. This group has identified a well-defined scope of work specifying all necessary restoration. Prior to the FONLH acquiring sufficient funds to bid work, they are attempting to use means available to them professionally to cost-out all work required for final planning. The committee recently participated in a required Pre-Application meeting with the City of Pittsburgh to identify all necessary local public approvals that lie ahead for us.

Several other key activities are being conducted by FONLH board members. One is an agreement with the city being negotiated by our board member Ray Baum that allows FONLH to operate and manage all work and maintenance on the log house. Another effort that will be very necessary to all the above work is to have a professionally mapped-out survey of the whole site. The city has agreed to do this, and our DPW representative Claire Mastrobaradino will be managing this project.

An exciting project recently approved by our board just took place on the very day I was writing this report. Our Senator John Heinz Center representative, Dave Scofield, Director of Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village, had contracted for a dendrochronology test to hopefully date the Neill Log House accurately through wood-core sampling. The test was conducted by the chief field technician of the renowned "Tree Ring Lab" at the College of Wooster in Ohio. We are awaiting exciting revelations, which will be shared in a future newsletter. This will include more on the amazing science of dendrochronology.

Left: FONLH Board member Dave Scofield prepares to take a core sample from a log at the Neill house.

Middle: Nick Wiesenberg, Lab Technician, takes a core sample from a floor board.

Right: Wiesenberg examines a core sample before labeling it.



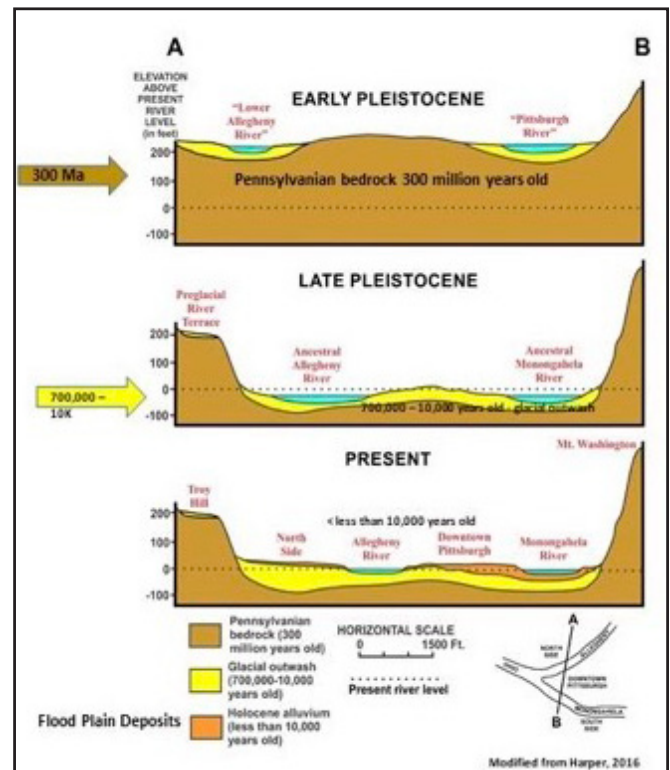
Finally, our board realized a major boost in working toward the third arm of our committee work— Usage—which is the ultimate goal of all our efforts. The boost occurred after a successful meeting with the President and two faculty chairs from Chatham University. The immediate outcome is the planning now underway to begin a student internship with the FONLH this spring, supervised on-site by SHUC. This internship will be through the History Department of Chatham and will be used to organize and expand all facets of information about the Neill Log House for future lesson plan development. It is hoped that this is just the beginning of other collaborations between the higher education community in Pittsburgh and the FONLH.

Individual support for the FONLH restoration effort will always be needed. Details about how to make individual contributions to FONLH by check can be found on the SHHS website by clicking on “Neill Log House” and then clicking on the (Quiet Giving Campaign) link. To make online donations by credit card or PayPal, go to the SHUC website, shuc.org, and click on the “Projects” link in the black menu bar at the top of the page. A pull-down menu will appear. Select “Friends of the Neill Log House.”

The Geology of Fern Hollow

This article is excerpted from “TO CROSS A BRIDGE”: FERN HOLLOW BRIDGE IN PITTSBURGH, A GEOLOGY STORY,” a Carnegie Museum of Natural History blog by **Albert D. Kollar** and **Wendy T. Noe**. Kollar is a Geologist and Paleontologist in the Section of Invertebrate Paleontology at the museum. Kollar and Noe serve on the Board of Directors of the Pittsburgh Geological Society. Reproduced with permission. To read the whole blog article, go to <https://carnegiemnh.org/to-cross-a-bridge-fern-hollow-bridge-in-pittsburgh-a-geology-story/>

The now infamous Fern Hollow Bridge, which carried Forbes Avenue’s vehicle and pedestrian traffic between Squirrel Hill and Regent Square, crossed Fern Hollow at the 900-foot contour level from anchor points at the base of the sedimentary rock unit known as the Morgantown Sandstone. Understanding the origins of the landscape features in Pittsburgh that make hundreds of bridges a necessity requires background knowledge of two long and widely spaced periods of Earth’s geologic history. Geologic events during the first period help explain why rock layers are exposed in roadcuts, railroad cuts, and as natural eroded landscape features such as valleys, hollows, and ravines. During the Pennsylvanian Period (319 million to 299 million years ago), what is now Pittsburgh was centered near the equator, when tropical seas deposited lime mud to form limestones. Along the seashore, coastal swamps developed vast tropical forests that grew so dense their dead vegetal remains were later transformed into vast coal deposits. Large rivers that flowed from the eroding ancestral Appalachian Highlands, hundreds of miles east of Pittsburgh, carried sand, silt, and mud to the coastal plain, forming sandstone, siltstone, and shale. The sediments that had turned to stone became the bedrock or strata of the Pittsburgh region.



Geologic forces contributed to a changing landscape since the formation of the Appalachian Mountains by plate tectonics, approximately 260 million to 250 million years ago. As the majestic Appalachians Mountains were eroded over the last 250 million years a broad plateau developed shaped by rivers and creeks that meandered across a gently rolling plain, creating wide, shallow valleys, the signature landscape of western Pennsylvania.

As global climate cooled after the end of the Pliocene Epoch (5.3 to 2.6 million years ago), glaciers started to form in Arctic Canada. In pre-Ice Age western Pennsylvania, the drainage patterns of the ancestral rivers flowed north and northwest, converging with the Erigan River in what is present-day Lake Erie. The Erigan River, thought by geologists to have been ancestral to the St. Lawrence River, flowed to the Atlantic Ocean. The ancestral Pittsburgh River, now known as the Monongahela River, carried clay, silt, cobbles, and boulders along its path from its headwaters in Morgantown, West Virginia, to form a relatively flat bottomland, a base for the major traffic arteries of the city’s East End. It was during the Ice Age, or Pleistocene Epoch (2.6 million to 11,700 years ago), that the erosional actions of water