

May Update on the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH):

Program Efforts of Neill Log House Stewardship

Tony Indovina, SHHS Board Member and FONLH President

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

Adopted February 2022



Friends of
NEILL LOG HOUSE

"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."

Individual support for the FONLH restoration effort will always be needed. 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." Alternatively, checks can be sent to SHUC (put FONLH in the memo line) at the following address: SHUC, 5604 Solway Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15217.



Parallel activities continuing: While waiting for the next steps of Reconstruction/Restoration on the Neill Log House to unfold, FONLH is actively anticipating those activities that should be articulated after work is completed this summer and into 2024, what we had previously called the "Usage" phase. To briefly recap what is happening now, several activities previously planned are now playing out. In last month's newsletter, I wrote that the formal agreement for us to officially manage affairs of the Neill Log House had been signed by City officials and takes effect in June. We are also currently working with the contractor vetted by the City to do work on our log house this summer. And while all of this is happening, we continue finalizing required permits and approvals.

Formal beginning of our third committee: Another historic benchmark occurred for FONLH in April, when we had the first report from Bette Landish, our new board member representing Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation (PHLF) who replaced Bob Jucha. Bob served us well since our board's inception and worked with his President and CEO to allow another individual from PHLF to assume his role. Bette is a PHLF docent with an extensive background in history and education. With her background and enthusiasm for our project, Bette agreed to assume responsibility to oversee the third committee of FONLH that she is requesting be known as the **Program Development** committee. After being introduced to and placed on our Board in March, Bette made her first formal report of what is now the third actively functioning committee of our Board—Program Development, along with Funding and Building/Design.

Identifying possible starting points: It was commonly assumed that much of our initial effort to again show the house would be similar to what was done in the '70s and '80s. Although there are few records of actual openings, we are fortunate to have received from the PHLF all the docent notes and training manuals utilized during those years. These are historic artifacts in themselves, and though they have much potential value, they need to be evaluated and in some cases updated with newer interpretations before being utilized for future programs. A lot of information that was presented during those years was done within the context of the many items and furnishings then on display. These items, many in a deteriorated state, are in a donated Guardian Storage space, awaiting decisions on what is of potential value to justify being restored, and what wooden items can practically be returned to a structure that will never be climate controlled. We have long agreed that, as a starting point, we would serve the needs of school age children, as well as adult visitors. Many of the grant narratives written by our Funding Chairperson, Mardi Isler, reference an expectation written into the State Keystone Grant, that the house be open 100 days a year. Mardi is seeking funds to develop programs and materials for children which conform to Commonwealth standards.

Envisioning all possibilities: Bette believes our program should evolve from a sense of stewardship for the Neill Log House. As stewards, we have a responsibility to both protect and preserve the house and to help current and future citizens understand its importance and what it teaches us about local and national history. The best historical site interpretation involves multiple disciplines—science, geography, history, economics, archaeology and architecture. Technology is all important going forward. We will be dealing with adults and even young school children who are already immersed in Artificial Intelligence. So, we must embrace and learn to be comfortable with engaging the public and sharing our stories through multiple, often immersive media (think Virtual Reality).

Opportunities for involvement: The Program Development committee's efforts will be ongoing, with work to expand and evolve beyond the initiation of programs that begin in 2024. There are multiple ways for members to become involved, such as helping to develop program ideas to staffing information booths throughout the summer at Farmer's Markets, Night Markets, and other community events. Or, if you are interested in antiques from the 18th or early 19th century, we could use your help in making decisions about ours now in storage. Use the Contact Us button on our website, and enter "Program interest" in the subject box.