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September Update on the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH): "Fits and Starts"

Tony Indovina, SHHS Board Member and FONLH Presiden

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.



At the time of this writing (August 30), Village Restorations Inc. of Hollidaysburg has been granted access to the Neill Log House site and has commenced activities to begin preparation for our historic reconstruction. Although the contract start date was August 14, anything before the start of September is welcome news for us, all things considered. The contractor had requested starting a week before that, but the approval process got in the way. Our leadership has come to expect occasional pitfalls, or hurdles, with the process. The phrase that comes to mind about how our work seems to proceed is "by fits and starts." This pairing of two idioms from the 15th and 16th Centuries, describing how things proceed spasmodically with bursts of activity, has come to be expected for Friends of Neill Log House overseeing this project in cooperation with the City as owner: "Thou hast these things only by fits and starts," wrote Robert Sanderson in one of his sermons (1620).

Our Building/Design Committee, with active and retired architects and restoration specialists, had done a remarkable job throughout our planning process in plotting out the approval requirements and anticipating how to submit what is required and to which office well in advance of when required. We were on pace to be issued the required building permit well before it was required, when we were told we had to submit new drawings of the structure in addition to the historic drawings first submitted. We then had to contract with a licensed engineer to produce certified drawings essentially the same as those first submitted, as nothing about the dimensions has changed since the first reconstruction of the Neill Log House. This request by the City department overseeing this was the "fit." The "start" was the good news that the permit needed was issued just one day after the contract start date, but not without another hitch. We were informed that there was one last contractor requirement to be satisfied before work could actually begin. Without going into details, the next week saw dozens of hours of communications among at least a dozen individuals, from the City and the Friends of Neill Log House board to their friends and our contractor. The very positive outcome of this is that our contractor was finally able to satisfy the one remaining requirement about two weeks after our contract start date. As was said above, not bad, all things considered. A special note of thanks is due to our contractor, the owner and workers of Village Restorations, for their patience and understanding.

So, mark August 29 as the historic start of the second reconstruction. Although actual work on the log house won't begin just yet, the staging activities have begun. This occurred with the balance of the eight-plus logs needed being delivered to the site and gaff-hooked onto the pile of three first delivered before the hewing event that took place the beginning of August. The hewing event could not have been a more welcome celebration for the forthcoming beginning of work. Over 80 individuals, old and new Friends, participated on a nearly perfect day to observe and learn about our master hewer's skills and partake in lemonade and lager and ice cream to the accompaniment of our fiddler in period garb from the Oliver Miller Homestead.

The preparation for the beginning of work that took place yesterday, with the aforementioned delivery of logs, fittingly included work to remove the tattered tarp placed over the log house this past winter to cover its tattered shingles. This was both symbolic and necessary for the work to follow. Our contractor's scope of work was first outlined in our July newsletter update, and details will follow in coming newsletter updates for everything which occurs during the course of work, upwards of 12 weeks.

Perhaps a good omen that we may be spared as many fits and starts in the future was what happened after being told by the worker delivering the logs that the dumpster planned for delivery to the site could not clear the giant mulberry tree limb inside the main gate. Because of the close working relationship between the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition and the City Forestry Department, one call resulted in a very large tree being removed the next day, clearing the way for the next visit by Village Restorations. A very special thanks is in order for this City department and its workers for a timely response and very thorough work.

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August 5th Log Hewing Event a Great Success!

Attendees who came to the Neill Log House on the afternoon of August 5 watched a log being hewn the way it was done to build log houses in the late 1700s. Roland Cadle and his assistant from Village Restorations and Consulting, Inc., both in period costume, shaped a white oak log with axes to square it off for use in the Neill Log House restoration. As Roland worked, he explained the methods he was using to hew the log and why it had to be done in a specific way.

The day was enjoyable, with a lively fiddler from Oliver Miller Homestead adding background music, and lemonade, ice cream, and beer offered as refreshments. Lager for the loggers, Hurrah!



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Here are photographs by Tony Indovina showing the arrival of the hewn white oak logs on August 29 that will be used for the reconstruction of the Neill Log House by Village Restorations, Inc.

