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March Update on the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH): Lighting and Much Other Work Underway

Tony Indovina, FONLH President and SHHS Board Member

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."

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.



Nearing the end of winter, there is much more going on regarding final work on our Neill Log House project than is apparent to anyone visiting our site. On a recent visit to help some members of our team mark the location of lighting to be installed inside, I was amused to find that a baby squirrel had found its way inside through some other means than the door or floor. I opened the door to gently direct it out, but I believe it's the nature of a log house to share itself with occasional visitors. Hopefully, regular use will discourage any small mammals from staying long. (See page 12 for a story about Schenley Park's squirrels.)



My February update mentioned everything that is underway to realize the final site plan by this summer, when formal activities will be planned to herald the historic reopening of the Neill Log House to the public in July. More information will be shared about coming events in the next several months. And during those months, work will proceed on tree removal and replanting, site grading, and the installation of the new fence approved and under contract on the expanded site recently re-surveyed. The boundaries of our leased site will be revised to extend on either side of the steps and down to the road. At the same time, the steps and railings, that technically lie on a "park trail," will be replaced by city crews. This work is all currently going through a formal legal approval process agreed to by all parties.

In addition to physical work remaining, much is going on in preparation for programming and docent work planned for the summer, after a formal opening takes place. It is truly remarkable to realize the collective work that all of this planning by our remarkable team represents!

One small example of the work entailed by each of these undertakings is the electrical work scheduled to begin soon. The most visible outcome of this will be the installation of sconce lighting to suggest candle lighting on the walls, which would have existed in Robert Neill's home. The style shown in the attached photo is a model recommended by our friends from Village Restoration, our contractor who recently completed work on the house. They also recommended the locations of the sconces that the Neill family and others would have lived with. The sconces have been ordered and will be installed by the electrical contractor scheduled to do the work agreed on, and very soon. Without going into detail, there is much behind-the-scenes work being undertaken by our board architect to find the most appropriate way for our electricians to physically install these with modern wiring in a log house in the least obtrusive way.



As was suggested by all of these activities, there is much, much more going on behind the scenes on many fronts by our entire team and others. Stay tuned!



The Neill Log House at the Carnegie Science Center Miniature Railroad

When Tony and I went to find the Neill Log House at the Carnegie Science Center's Miniature Railroad & Village, we located it just to the left of the control booth. When we told the train controller why we were looking for it, she told us it was one of the oldest model buildings on display. Then she lifted it up to show us the label inside with the name of the maker, Michael J. Orban. For many years, Mike was the creative force behind the Miniature Railroad & Village at the Carnegie Science Center. He passed away in 2023. – *Helen Wilson*