

# Click here to return to Neill Log House Update

April 2024

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

### Update on the House Site and Narrative

*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.*



#### Neill Log House Site Improvements

Many things are happening simultaneously to keep FONLH on course to realize the major goals we have set. The physical improvements to the Neill Log House are on course to be completed with the acquisition of lighting sconces for the electrical work that has been permitted that will reflect the period in which Robert Neill lived. This will be followed by a touch-up to the interior chinking after the house is newly wired. The site improvements that have been previewed in previous updates have already begun. All but a few selected trees have been removed from the site. Removal took place on one day in mid March through a massive effort by the City Forestry Division. And by the time this article is published, grading on the site will have taken place to remove the earthen trenching that was done around the structure to accommodate foundation repair and to prepare the site for landscaping. Other work will follow over the coming months, including new tree plantings, repair of the steps scheduled by the city, and finally, fencing around a new, expanded site.



Photos by Tony Indovina



#### Programming Efforts and Preparation of Docent Scripts

At the same time the site improvements are going on, our leadership continues to work on the larger vision of what will take place after the log house is again open to the public, which hopefully will happen in late summer. Central to the opening is the programming effort and the preparation of docent scripts. To assist in the preparation, the SHHS has undertaken an extensive revision of the narrative posted on the Neill Log House link on our website. The revision is being done under the supervision of our vice-president and chief historian, Helen Wilson. The information that will soon be seen on the Neill Log House link will be a completely reorganized narrative about the history of the house, enhanced by new interpretations of details that come to our attention with new research finds. We will alert everyone as to when the new narrative is posted by tagging it on the link with a note that it has been updated, so watch for it soon.

#### New Section of the Neill Log House Narrative on the SHHS Website: "1990s—Preservation Pittsburgh Efforts"

On the next page is a completely new section of the narrative, written after Helen found an August 27, 1994, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article, "Handyman Special," which provided heretofore missing details of when the log house was reopened to the public after the involvement of Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation (PHLF) ended in the late 1970s. We had some prior knowledge that Preservation Pittsburgh was involved in a maintenance effort involving the Neill Log House after PHLF's exit, but we were not sure what had been done or when it was done.

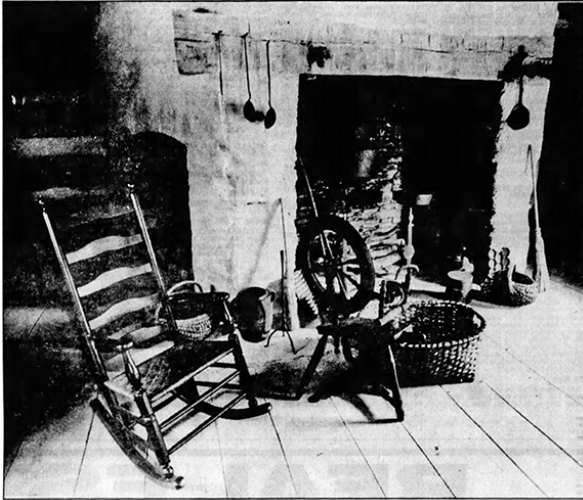
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Preservation Pittsburgh's current leadership had been looking through the organization's records to find specific information, but they, and we, needed the information that came from the article Helen found to fill in the details of this much deserved part of our narrative about Preservation Pittsburgh's important role in the history of the efforts to restore the Neill Log House.

## Here is the new narrative about Preservation Pittsburgh's involvement:

*It is not known exactly when care of the Neill Log House was transferred from PHLF back to the city, but by the early 1990s, much of the restoration work done during 1968-69 had fallen into disrepair. In 1990, the city replaced the split-rail fencing with cyclone fencing to discourage vandalism. Of the native planting and trees first installed by PHLF around a small enclosure there, only a few small fruit trees remained. And though the city assumed total responsibility for the log house and site, the person who was then Director of the Public Works Division for Schenley Park is quoted as saying that everything was only "casually maintained."*



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*And so it was that, during the spring of 1993, Preservation Pittsburgh received permission from the city to step in and reopen the log house to the public. To do so, it enlisted volunteer help from a Department of Parks and Recreation program and assumed responsibility to clean up the inside of the log house, while the city was to care for the exterior. This effort that began as a special project of Preservation Pittsburgh during Preservation Week of 1993 continued as a volunteer effort without any dedicated funding to sustain it until at least up through the time the Post-Gazette article about it was written in August 1994. The legacy of Preservation Pittsburgh's efforts is shown in a charming interior photo of the Neill Log House that appeared in the article (left), the last visual record of the interior until the house was later found to be in total disrepair in 2020.*

*Whatever Preservation Pittsburgh was able to do for a relatively brief period of time in the mid '90s is a tribute to its leadership back then, who demonstrated both a passion for the history of the Neill Log House and the desire to do whatever they could as a total volunteer effort.*

## Frick Park Receives Historic Designation from City Council

Helen Wilson

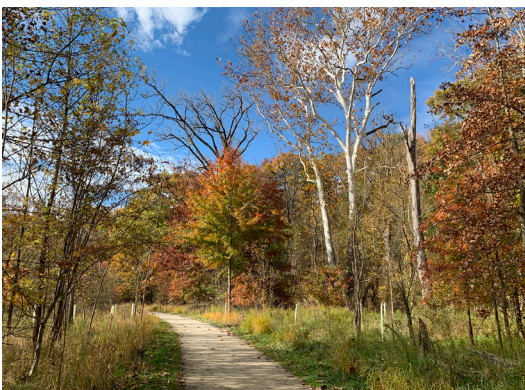


Photo by Helen Wilson

On March 5, 2024, City Council unanimously approved Frick Park's City Historic Designation. The 644-acre park has been listed on the National Register since February 20, 2019, after being nominated by Preservation Pittsburgh, but it didn't have Pittsburgh Historic status, so Preservation Pittsburgh, along with Frick Park Friends, nominated the park for that designation, and City Council approved it. A March 8 article in the *Jewish Chronicle* by Adam Reinherz says, "Receiving historic designation doesn't mean altering a space is impossible; rather, the label ensures 'physical changes to the exterior are subject to a City review process,' according to Pittsburgh's Department of City Planning....The designation also provides access to potential funding, so that our architectural fabric and social fabric are preserved in perpetuity."

The SHHS submitted a letter to City Council in support of the nomination. Here is the letter, dated Feb. 19, 2024:

This is a letter of support from the Squirrel Hill Historical Society (SHHS) for Preservation Pittsburgh and Frick Park Friends' nomination for City Historic Status for Frick Park. The SHHS has done extensive research on the history of Frick Park, and we have found that the park is amazingly comprehensive in what it holds from the entire history of Pittsburgh. We feel it is a unique City treasure.

It is well known that the land that is now Frick Park was owned by Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919), who bequeathed 151 acres to the city for a park, which opened in 1927. The SHHS would like to add some historical information that might not be as well known.