

Click here to return to Neill Log House Update **Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH), Inc.**

November 2021

Tony Indovina, Board President of FONLH

October 21 was a very notable date for a very historic undertaking. This day marked the inaugural meeting of the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH) and the official formation of FONLH as a registered nonprofit organization, with a board and governing officers. This new entity will have a defined mission to restore and maintain the Neill Log House. It's been more than a year since the Squirrel Hill Historical Society was invited to nominate the Neill Log House for inclusion on the Lewis and Clark National Trail Experience website, lewisandclark.travel, because of research suggesting that Meriwether Lewis stopped to water his horses at the Neill house when he traveled to Pittsburgh on the Nemaquin Trail to launch his keelboat and begin his historic journey. This connection became the impetus for SHHS to look more closely at the log house and



begin working with those responsible from the City to discuss the need for stabilization and restoration. Subsequently, the SHHS aligned itself with the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition (SHUC) and began the bold undertaking of forming an organization that could work with the City to directly undertake this project and take on responsibility for the log house. After many months of diligent work by Ray Baum, Esq., secretary and past-president of SHUC, all of the legal paperwork Ray prepared was submitted and approved. The Articles of Incorporation were filed and were accepted, allowing for adoption of by-laws, election of officers, and approval of a fiduciary agreement with SHUC, which is now authorized to maintain a separate financial account for FONLH. Estimates were also shared for specific kinds of insurance policies that must be in place for a nonprofit like ours to begin functioning on a project like this.



Currently there are 11 board members who have been appointed of a total of 15 allowed by the new by-laws. The SHHS has been allocated two positions by our by-laws. One is occupied by the new President of the Board, Tony Indovina, and the other by Helen Wilson, our vice-president, who graciously agreed to occupy the other position as a “placeholder” until the SHHS board approves a SHHS member who is willing to volunteer for that position. It is worth noting that several core FONLH members were equally qualified to be considered for the president’s position, and the decision was mutually made to accommodate everyone’s situation. The two positions allocated for SHUC are filled by its president, Mardi Isler, our new FONLH vice-president, who has provided invaluable direction throughout our planning process, and Ray Baum. The last member of our new executive committee is

SHHS member Charlie Stewart, fourth great-grandson of Robert Neill, who has been elected to the combined position of secretary-treasurer. His board position is authorized by our by-laws for “a descendent of Robert Neill.” The last designated position authorized by the by-laws is for one of two board seats to be filled by the City of Pittsburgh, owner of the Neill Log House. Claire Mastroberardino, senior project manager for the log house, who has worked with our planning group from the beginning, will sit on the board for her supervisor in the Department of Public Works.

The remainder of the 11 board positions are occupied by representatives of the four major historical and preservation organizations in the City, as well as a distinguished architect with prior professional involvement with the Neill Log House. This very impressive group, in alphabetical order, includes:

- Bob Jucha, PhD, long-time docent for Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation and Faculty at CMU and Pitt;
- Catherine Quereshi, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy;
- Dave Scofield, director of the Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village, Senator John Heinz History Center;
- Ellis Schmidlapp, retired architect and restoration specialist;
- Melanie Como Harris, director, Preservation Pittsburgh and professional architect.

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So, what will happen next? Over the summer, the city advertised for and received Requests for Qualifications (RFQs) to assess potential contractors, but has not yet acted on these. The recent decision of the FONLH planning group was to allow the City to structurally stabilize the log house before the winter, possibly issue additional RFQs and then invite bids so actual restoration work can occur in the spring of 2022. Our retired architect met on-site with representatives from DPW and a few of our planning group members to outline the proper way for city crews to conduct stabilization work. Look for props like those now on the front of the log house to be installed on the other three sides. The two major undertakings of the new board for now will be the following:

- **Fundraising**—to seek donations and grants to sustain our short-term and long-term efforts (a generous financial donation was made by one of our members to allow us to operate in the interim).
- **Design/build committee**—to oversee work with contractors once we are permitted to do so on our own after a city lease, or alternative to this, has been granted (a survey of the exact boundaries of the building and lot, for which we will have responsibility, are now being prepared by the City).

Educational and historic use of the log house is the ultimate goal, and this will be a major activity to be planned once restoration is underway.

Get Involved in the Neill Log House Restoration Effort!

There are ample opportunities for any of our members to be involved in FONLH, besides actually serving on our board. Anyone who embraces our mission and cherishes this historic treasure in our community is welcome to become involved by joining a committee. At this time, two committees have been established. The first, the design/build committee, is amply staffed by active and retired architects and a director of historic restoration. The second committee will be involved in fund raising. The need for a third committee for educational and historic usage was discussed and, while it was agreed that planning for this will be essential in the future, it was felt that we can begin this effort after restoration work begins.

Fund raising is a major need right now. Restoring the Neill house will be an expensive undertaking, so funding is essential. We encourage any of our members with fundraising ideas and/or experience to volunteer to work with our board to help raise money. Contact us through the SHHS website, or send an email to sqhillhist@shhsoc.org with "Help FONLH" in the subject line.

Additional SHHS Projects

- The **2022 SHUC/SHHS Calendar** is in the final stages of preparation and will be ready for sale in November. If you loved 2021 calendar, wait until you see this one, with more vintage photos of Squirrel Hill. It will make a great gift! Go to the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition's website, shuc.org, for information about where and how to purchase the calendar.
- A new display, "**What's Been Happening**," is up on the **SHHS Museum Board** at the Squirrel Hill Carnegie Library. It features a review of the projects, programs, and events the SHHS has undertaken during the pandemic and looks to the future of the organization with our lineup of programs and projects for the first months of 2022.
- The link to the **Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Experience**, lewisandclark.travel website, which highlights places to visit, eat, shop and stay along the route, can be found on both the SHUC's and SHHS's websites, shuc.org and squirrelhillhistory.org. In addition, the Lewis and Clark website has a link to the SHHS website, where people can click on the link to the **Squirrel Hill Driving Tour** to explore Squirrel Hill's historic areas.
- The **Squirrel Hill Driving Tour**, which can be accessed directly on the SHHS website, undergoes changes as new information is added. If you would like to add a place to the tour or have more information about a place we list, please contact us through our website.
- The **SHHS House History Project** is still ongoing. The Neill log house has been put on the link, and in October, a story was added about well-known artist Henry Koerner's Negley Avenue house. The Koerner house has received a Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation plaque.

