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October 2024

Finishing the Steps and Opening the Neill Log House

Tony Indovina, FONLH President and SHHS Board Member

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.



The October update on our Neill Log House project will be a relatively brief one, to report on the status of everything as it stands right now, particularly with regard to our much-anticipated opening. I'm afraid the "applause" I received when I made the very short announcement at the September SHHS program that we were finally able to announce an opening this October was premature. Until recently, we had decided to generally announce that we planned to be open by summer, and then late summer. This followed the completion of our log house restoration work and the anticipation of completion of most site work, including fencing and landscaping. Now we're aiming for November 9. What has caused an extension of that timeline is the site improvement offered to us by the City, with the replacement of the steps from Circuit Drive to our front door—the park trail for which the City has always had jurisdiction. Its decision to replace the old, uneven, and unsafe stone steps with a totally new concrete base for steps and patio, clad in new stonework, was not on our radar a year ago but has absolutely turned into a masterfully designed and installed project that will make whatever delay in our opening the site more than worth the wait. The stairway promises to be an artistic and historic enhancement of our total site plan that will then be followed by completion of our other site work.

If you haven't had the opportunity to drive or walk by to see the progress of the work described, please do, and be as impressed as we are with the work of the City's stonemason crew that has been diligently working on this project these past few months. Their work is very near completion, and we all have to accept that the stairway cannot be open to the public until the iron railings that have been ordered are received and installed by another City crew. From what we have observed from the commitment of these crews to complete their work as expeditiously as possible, we are optimistically updating our anticipated opening to November 9. Once the date can be finally agreed to, we intend to post all details about a ribbon-cutting and opening celebration on our website as well as through email to our members and extended mailing list.

And here's an amazing bit of news just received by our VP Mardi Isler, to further enhance our total site plan! Friends of Neill Log House was very recently awarded a \$19,000 grant to complete tree planting on the Neill Log House site. This was from the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission, which works in unison with the City Forestry Department. The Commission is a quasi-governmental entity created by the City of Pittsburgh to expend funds from their Tree Trust Fund to advance urban forestry initiatives.

Any delay in our opening does not prevent us from updating and fine-tuning all the other ingredients that will go into opening the house to the public. We plan to follow the opening with some 'trial' presentations to student groups, for which appropriate grade-level curricula is in place. Complimenting that will be age-appropriate docent scripts that have been and are being completed. And finally, we are presenting our members with an advance copy of the Visitors Guide that was recently completed by our team and that will be distributed to those attending our opening. It appears on the next two pages of this newsletter. The Visitors Guide, like our Docent Scripts, has been updated to be consistent with the Comprehensive History of the Neill Log House on the SHHS's website, squirrelhillhistory.org.

