

February Update on the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH): Looking Backward and Forward to 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.



It seems fitting this month to include an article from the newsletter archives of our predecessor organization that did the 1969 Neill Log House reconstruction—the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation (PHLF). The photographs and texts below and on the next page are from October 1972, concerning PHLF's July 9 dedication event for its then newly reconstructed Neill Log House. The documents describe many of the same activities as we had for our ribbon-cutting ceremony from this past November, including music for the celebration. One very striking activity occurring in 1972 that parallels what happened with our own dedication is shown in the photo below of the stone steps being installed by the Department of Public Works prior to the dedication ceremony. And it's fitting that the article about the PHLF dedication (*see next page*) ends with a preview of the schedule of when the house would be open that summer. Our schedule, to commence this April, will be published soon and will somewhat parallel theirs, with daylight hours during a few weekdays and a weekend day.

There is much more to share from the wealth of archived newsletter records available to us from PHLF. Our board rep from PHLF, Bette Landish, first sent us this information more than a year ago. We'll give more details on the historic garden project that PHLF installed on the site in the near future when we publicize our upcoming garden plans. All of the newsletter articles written during PHLF's tenure with the Neill Log House can be accessed on its website. It is interesting to note that the first one that appears chronologically in their archives, from February 1968, is entitled "Neal Log House To Be Restored (Neill Log House)." It seems that PHLF had by this time settled on what to name the log house, which had previously been known by a variation of the name Neill (see "History of the Neill Log House" on our website).

We remind our members that from time to time the narrative about the history of the Neill Log House and its people on the SHHS website is revised to reflect new information we receive. For example, the year we believe our log house was built has been updated from what PHLF believed, based on dendrochronology testing performed a few years ago. And the Neill Log House's place among other 18th century structures remaining in the City of Pittsburgh, and how many such structures there are, can now be updated from what was reported in a PHLF article from three to at least five. This revision will shortly be added to our narrative of the history of the Neill Log House on our website:

"The oldest of the five structures remaining in Pittsburgh from the 18th century is the Fort Pitt Blockhouse (c. 1765). The Neill Log House, c. 1795, is considered to be the oldest log residential structure. Two stone houses are older—the John Woods House in Hazelwood. c. 1792 (now the Woods House Historic Pub), and the John Frew House, c. 1790, a private residence in the Westwood neighborhood of Pittsburgh whose original structure is stone. The only other non-residential building remaining in the city besides the Blockhouse is the Old Stone Tavern, c. 1750-1782, in Pittsburgh's West End, the oldest known commercially built structure."

Reference: <http://www.kathrynbashaar.com/2020/06/eleven-18th-century-buildings-in-allegeny-county/>

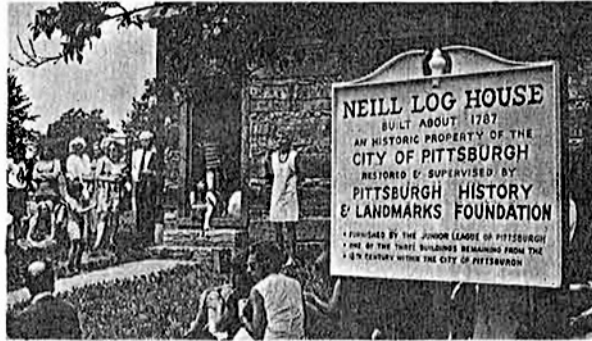


This photograph shows the construction of the stone walkway up to the Neill Log House. We recently awarded a landscaping contract for over \$11,000 worth of work at the Neill House to implement the designs of Griswold, Winters & Swain. Members are invited to inspect the work which is now moving well along

DPW installed these stone steps prior to PHLF's 1972 dedication, as they did recently for FONLH. (PHLF photograph, 1972.)

News For Members of PITTSBURGH HISTORY & LANDMARKS FOUNDATION

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Neill Log House Dedicated

Shown above is architect Charles M. Stotz addressing a crowd of 200 members that attended the dedication of the Neill Log House on July 9. An old-fashioned box lunch was followed by a concert of Pittsburgh folk songs by the Robert Schmertz group. The Junior League arranged the furnishings in the house and decorated it very appropriately for opening day and our Urban Corps students served as guides. The Department of Parks & Recreation provided a beautiful green lawn and tables and chairs; the mayor, who had planned to come, telephoned to say he had been suddenly called out of town but sent his congratulations. We are very proud of our work at the Neill Log House which was done under a grant of \$50,000 from the Richard King Mellon Foundation because this preserves one of the last of three extant buildings from the eighteenth century within the city limits of Pittsburgh. The house will be open during summer months on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday afternoons from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. Free admission.

Neill Log House Landscaping Now Being Completed

The members will recall that we restored the Neill Log House, one of the last three eighteenth century buildings remaining within the City limits and the only 18th century log house. Under a grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation the restoration was completed last June and the Junior League furnished the house very appropriately and donated funds and prepared a text about the house for a special brochure.

During the course of the past year we have been raising funds for the landscape work including many indigenous plants, and we are very grateful for the individuals, families, foundations and garden clubs that have donated to the landscaping.

We have only a few weeks remaining in our fund raising for the planting and if you are interested in assisting with a small gift, merely send it to the office together with your name; if the plant is to be in memory of someone, please include that person's name as well. We still have the following items for donation:

- 11 Indian Summer red raspberry...@\$2.50 each
- 12 Cumberland Blackberry.....@\$2.50 each
- 14 Bitter Sweet vines.....@\$5.25 each
- 49 Virginia Creepers.....@\$4.50 each
- 59 Martha Washington Asparagus...@\$2.00 each
- 29 Victoria Rhubarb plants.....@\$1.75 each

A permanent plaque will be erected on the site thanking those donors who have contributed. Following is the text of the plaque as it stands to date:

Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation is grateful to these donors for funds to defray costs of indigenous plants for the Neill Log House

These documents are from Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation News for Members. No. 37, October 1972, and have been reproduced here with permission from the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation.

Neill Log House News

The Neill Log House (built c. 1780) in Schenley Park is still in our custody, and we are endlessly grateful to Max Armbruster of the Botanical Society of Western PA for continuing to care for the grounds. With the first good breezes of spring, Mr. Armbruster placed egg cases of wasps and praying mantises (both harmless to man) on the grounds to feed on aphids and other insects that destroyed much of the plant material last year. He also cut down the dead stocks of last year's growth and has continued to plant the wild grape, green headed king flower, choke cherry, bitter night shade, wild aster, hollyhocks, spice bushes, and all of the other native plants on the grounds and attend to them.

Mr. Armbruster has reached the ripe age of 79 and needs assistance in this summer work. If you can help him, please feel free to call him direct at 441-1119.

