



# CONNELLSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY FALL 2023 NEWSLETTER

## WHAT HISTORY THIS HOUSE HAS SEEN!!

*By Karen Hechler*

Our historic home, the **GIBSON HOUSE**, has seen plenty of this community and nation's history. When our country was only 42 years old in 1818, this very fine Georgian style home was built for the iron master's family, the Gibson family. This well constructed house on the hill overlooking the Youghiogheny River has been home to numerous families until 2001 when a devastating fire did great damage to the home then owned and lived in by the Enderle family. In that same year, the Connellsville Area Historical Family purchased the damaged house and began the extensive work of restoring this house and turning it into the History Center to preserve the tremendously important history of the Connellsville Area.

We thought that we had lots of space in which to create the History Center of Connellsville but first the house needed a new roof and new chimneys. The interior had to be cleaned out after two fires, and the walls needed to be plastered. The front door had to be restored to its former glory.

A handicapped bathroom was installed so all visitors were accommodated; and a small kitchenette was added. The stairway and the woodwork had to be replaced. The carpenter work was basically done by Art Graham, a master craftsman. He wrote me a letter thanking me for allowing him to replace the woodwork in the building, I had to write back and tell him that we were honored to have him do our woodwork because he was one of the best carpenters.

The attic had to be made useful, windows replaced, air conditioning and heat added, etc. The small bedroom was turned into storage for our archival

collections. Some rooms have been earmarked for special use, like the Harry Porter Military Room and the Nelda Kern Graham Display Room. We have filled up much of the space in the Gibson House.

The basement, which includes a fireplace, has not been renovated to make it a truly useful storage



area. There is much work needed to make this sizable area serve our purposes. We have had contractors come to evaluate how the basement can be improved and

to give us estimates on the cost to do the job. Ethan Keedy, our Treasurer, has completed a grant form for the 2023 Laurel Highlands Hotel Tax Grant requesting financial help to make the use of the basement a reality. We are also going to launch a city-wide appeal to the public to help us preserve and protect this amazing building, the Gibson House, which has been involved in most of the history of Connellsville Area.

If you have ideas on how we can launch a fund-raising campaign to be able to afford the many improvements that need to be done at the Gibson House location, please contact the Connellsville Historical Society at 217 West Patterson Avenue or call **724-628-5344**. We need work done outside like a new wall along Patterson Avenue and good night lighting. The attic needs to be made into a useful spot for storage. There is always something that needs done just like the maintaining of your own home. It is never finally done. You can contact me also at [khhistory@zoominternet.net](mailto:khhistory@zoominternet.net).

## HONOR ROLL PROJECT

*By Judy Keller*

The Connellsville Area Veterans Memorial Honor Roll project is slowly progressing. Three of the four granite tablets have been installed with the third having been put in place at the end of September. More concrete will be installed including walkways and the area will be handicap accessible. Low profile LED lights will illuminate the names on the granite and lighting will also accent the new bronze flame on top of the current war memorial.



Please watch for future announcements about a dedication, both at the Honor Roll site and also an indoor dedication, location to be announced later. Descendants of the deceased have expressed an interest in attending all ceremonies, The public is invited to attend all ceremonies.

## LIVING HISTORIAN GROUP NOW BEING ORGANIZED

*By Ben Hoffman*

A new living historian group is forming in the Connellsville area. The Living Historian group is being spearheaded by Ben Hoffman with help from experienced advisors Chris & Chuck Haines. None of these plans would be possible without the Support from members of the Connellsville Area Historical Society. We are grateful for everything they do for us.

### **What is Living History?**

The term 'living history' describes the act of bringing history to life for the general public in a somewhat less formal manner than re-enacting. The players are less confined in their actions, but often have to stay at a certain place or building. Historical presentation includes a continuum from well-researched attempts to recreate a known historical event for educational purposes (re-enacting),

through representations with theatrical elements and competitive events for purposes of entertainment (think Renaissance Fair) to the use of historical tools, activities and dress in an interactive presentation that seeks to give observers and participants a sense of stepping back in time, or really living history.

Is living in the past (for a while) your idea of cool? Always wanted to have a relatively authentic 18th century outfit to wear? Always wanted to cook over an open fire? Like the idea of (safely) setting off cannons and handling a musket? We welcome new members on an exploratory basis who have a desire to join in our mission with a heart of service. We are looking for interested Historians aged 12 and over (yes, adults are welcomed, too). Having an attitude of respect toward fellow team members and those we serve is a necessity. We have volunteers who serve through historical roles and those who support us through the use of research and time.

### **Training?**

We do a good deal of our beginner training for most volunteer activities "hands on" during meetings in both historic and modern service roles, allowing novices to gain experience under the direction and guidance of our veteran leaders. For certain, or more advanced learning, we may have subject specific meetings. Our group will be presenting aspects of life in Connellsville around the time of Braddock's Crossing to be presented during the historical society's annual festival.

Options for impression—military, militia, workman, farm folk, etc. Clothing for each. Herbal medicine, games, food preparation and preservation, some spinning and weaving, military drill, eventually artillery firing and gun safety with proper permissions for those under age.

Focus will be on the 18th Century (1700 - 1799) which in this area, meant French and Indian War and Revolutionary War, so there was plenty of excitement. We want our team to represent a diverse array of historic roles as history was made by men, women and children of all ages and all places in life!

**See you in the 18th Century!**

## **Hello from the Connellsville Area Historical Society Archive and Me**

*Sarah Reedy, Archivist*

“I’m so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers.” - *Anne of Green Gables*.

Since our last newsletter, we have had some changes at the Archive. The Gibson House is now open on Saturdays from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, only. Wednesdays are available upon request. If you have questions about the collection or have research questions, please feel free to email me at [CAHSarchive@gmail.com](mailto:CAHSarchive@gmail.com).

2023 has brought several amazing collections into the CAHS Archive. Collections added to the archive include:

- Photographs from the Windsor Studio and the Photography by Gloria Studio
- Memorabilia from the Connellsville High School (1931-1977)
- Framed photographs of the Connellsville Free Canteen
- Beverly Murray Domer’s genealogical research
- Photographs of the 150<sup>th</sup> Celebration of Connellsville
- A stoneware jug
- “Soldiers and Sailor Homecoming Celebration” metal from 1919
- A drinking glass from Connellsville Plant 15
- Photographs of Robinson Falls
- Class A Uniforms from the 1950s
- Copy of a Connellsville Township map dated 1921

These collections help flesh out the story of Connellsville and the people who call it home. Here are a few of the stories that I would like to share.

The photographs from Windsor Studio and Photography by Gloria Studio are a beautiful story of community and family. Windsor Studio was established by Florentine M. Pistilli (1891-1974). After Pistilli’s retirement, the photography studio was taken over by his daughter, Gloria Pistilli Rock (1923-2019). Gloria Rock would continue her father’s business but will change the name to

Photography by Gloria. A picture is worth a thousand words and this collection does not fail to tell a beautiful story.

Beverly Murray Domer’s genealogical research will be a great boon to individuals wishing to learn more about their family history. This collection contains over one thousand folders of genealogical information. It is my hope to catalog the collection to make it searchable for those hoping to find a piece of their family. As someone who has recently started their journey into their family history the importance of archived materials such as this is very exciting.

Collections of those who attended Connellsville’s schools are always a treat. The collections I have received so far this year help bring humanity back into history. So often then we think of the past it is filled with names of individuals who seem to have sprouted fully formed on to the page. Yearbooks and ephemera from school years past help show the hills and valleys of one’s life. Those haircuts then did not suit our faces. The friends that became more like family. The dreams won and lost.

All of these stories and more can be found in the Connellsville Area Historical Society Archive.

### **PASTOR RALPH PRINKEY NOW DOING OUR NEWSLETTER**

The Connellsville Historical Society is pleased to announce that Pastor Ralph Prinkey volunteered to lay-out our first professionally printed newsletter this past spring. I know Ralph from the time that he came to the South Connellsville Playground when he was a youth growing up in South Connellsville. Some of you will know him, at least his voice, as one of the announcers on WCVI.

Pastor Ralph is now serving the Connellsville Presbyterian Church, my church, among other churches. We had the opportunity to update our friendship, and he offered to do this important task for our Society. Ralph learned to do this job in the many ventures that life has directed him over the years.

**Thank you so much, Ralph.**

## COLONIAL DAYS AT CRAWFORD'S CABIN

*By Karen Hechler*

There are many advantages to owning one of the most historic sites in Connellsville. When the Connellsville Historical Society acquired the deed to the land where the original Crawford Cabin was built, Bill Balsley, our founder, had ideas in mind for what was to be done with that specific site.

First Bill wanted to reconstruct a replica of the Crawford log cabin where you could see the Youghiogheny out of a side window. This was accomplished to honor the Bicentennial of our nation in 1976.



His next dream was for the recreating the **1755 Braddock's Crossing of the Yough** which occurred early in the French and Indian War. The first Crossing did happen in 2005 as part of the **Age of Empire** celebration. This was Connellsville's contribution to our nation's celebration of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Seven Years War also known in America as the French and Indian War.

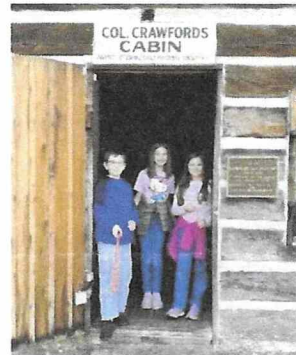
A Springhouse was constructed of Belgium stone, originally used as curb stone in Connellsville. This out building contains our small kitchen and rest room which are vital for maximum use of the property. A pavilion was added but found inadequate for our needs and was replaced by the more substantial William Balsley Pavilion.

What can the Crawford Cabin site be used for to benefit the community and the Historical Society? For the last 20 years, we have had the Annual Braddock's Crossing of the Yough celebration in late June. The pavilion is rented out for birthday celebrations, family reunions, church picnics, Boy

Scout event, community events, Historical Society events, etc.

One of the best uses of the site is when Conn Area Catholic School students come to the site for an experience of reliving what life was like in the Colonial Period of American History. Debby Hechler Mullaney has brought students to Crawford Cabin for over 25 years. Students, teachers and parents come to experience some of the activities that people in the 1750's and 1760's did when living on the frontier.

The agenda for the day included: dying eggs with onion skins, dipping candles made out of hot wax, playing colonial games, visiting the site of Braddock's Crossing, and walking the Trail to see the posters copied from past **Pride in Connellsville Poster Contest** entries.



What a way to enjoy a beautiful fall day surrounded by the colors of the leaves on the trees. The children also learn about Colonel William Crawford, our local hero.



Here you have some of the uses for the Crawford site. Or you may just come down to the Balsley Pavilion, bring a snack, sit in the pavilion and enjoy the beauty of the Youghiogheny River. Welcome to all including the Bikers!

## DO YOU HAVE IDEAS FOR FUTURE HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROGRAMS?

By Karen Hechler

It is a difficult job to find meaningful programs for a number of monthly meetings of the Connellsville Historical Society. Some Historical Societies have meetings about taxes and other subjects that are not necessarily history related.

This year we began our open to the public meetings in April. Eddie DeMuth offered a program on Pottery Crocks which he has collected for years. He had a crock with the name Connellsville on it which made it very rare. Eddie even was consulted by a local person to be of help evaluating that person's family crock collection.

In May, we went outside to celebrate Spring with a program by Matt Gault, who is on the staff of Fort Ligonier. Matt has visited us before. He was not in a fancy woolen uniform but was dressed as local militiamen dressed in the 1750's and 1760's. Matt always presents a lively program about local involvement around the time of the French and Indian War.

The June meeting was our Flag Day Covered Dish Picnic. This year we returned to having a true covered dish. We also began a new tradition in 2019 of having a Dinner/Lecture on the Friday evening prior to "**Braddock's Crossing**" and our speaker for this year was Richard Robbins of the Herald Standard. Richard spoke to us about his latest book, **Troubled Times, The Struggle For Wages, Recognition, And Power In The Age Of Coal And Coke**. Richard also talked about the famous Connellsville Canteen. Dinner was held at the current Canteen and was well attended.

Also in June, we also celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of **Braddock's Crossing Of The Yough**. The refreshments were under the direction of Debby Mullaney and Bill Sechler and they did an outstanding job of providing good food at a reasonable price. The idea of a "**Living Historian**" group was born at this event. And after many years,

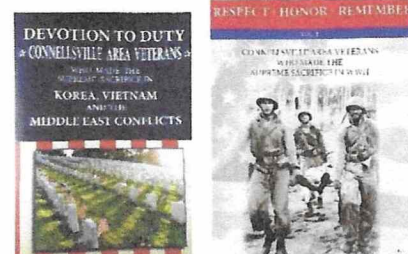
we finally had a River Crossing on Sunday thanks to the fact that the river wasn't too high and swift and COVID 19 was not an issue. We thank New Haven Hose Company and Scottdale Fire Company for making this crossing happen.

July, we had no program, but the President, the Vice President and a Board Member spent an afternoon at Ed and Jeannine DeMuth's home where the Millsboro Railroad Museum is located. We had an amazing afternoon. If you are interested in railroads, please call Eddie at 724-366-4963 to make arrangements to visit his expansive tribute dedicated to the history of railroading in this area.

August always includes the wonderful Corn Roast at Crawford's Cabin. Thanks to Geno Gallo who cooked the corn, and to Debby and Karen who lucked out and purchased really good corn that was delicious. The rest of the menu was good too.

September was a special treat with Dauna Prinkey, who grew up in downtown Connellsville. She took us on a nostalgic tour of Connellsville's downtown in the 1950's and 1960's. What fun we had reminiscing about the stores and restaurants which once found lucrative homes in the shopping district of Connellsville. Dauna had popcorn, many kinds, and candy such as what you would have found in the movie houses of Connellsville. Why not, she grew up over the Orpheum Theater.

Our October meeting was on Wednesday, October 11. Judy Keller shared research about Connellsville Patriots who gave their lives in Korea, Vietnam and the Middle East Conflict fighting for our liberty. Judy presented a very informative and well researched power point program. She had her latest



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books with her, **Dedication To Duty**, and her first book, **Respect, Honor, Remember**. They are on sale at the Gibson House, and she has donated 25% of the purchase price to the Historical Society. We thank you, Judy, for this gift. *(I am sorry about the date confusion. Those who missed the program, missed an outstanding presentation.)*

### UPCOMING EVENTS

November's meeting, Wednesday 15, 2023, will be the Annual Veterans' Day and the presentation of the winners of the "**Pride in Connellsville Area Poetry and Poster Contest**". Each child has the opportunity to come forward and explain his or her project which will be projected on a screen for all to see. It is a wonderful opportunity for the student to shine before their parents, grandparents, other relatives and friends.

After the presentations, the students will receive their monetary prizes and Treat Bags. The event is held in the Connellsville Presbyterian Church at 701 South Pittsburgh Street. And will begin at 6:00 pm. Please come and support the children and remember our Veterans. Thanks to Downtown Connellsville for providing the gifts for the students.

On December 2, we will have Open House at the Gibson House during the "**It's a Connellsville Christmas**" celebration, with tours of the decorated house, musical presentations, historical items; such as ornaments, books, t-shirts for sale, and light refreshments. Think of an item from Connellsville history for a friend who has moved from here but still has ties back home. We will be open from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

If someone would like to take on the responsibility of planning a Christmas party, contact Karen, The Board would like to see the membership more involved with Historical Society activities.

Now that you know what kind of programs we present, will you help us find historical programs for our future meetings? What can you share with us? What can you teach us? What can you teach us about local history that you might know about that others do not know? Let me know, Karen Hechler at 724-628-5344 or [khistory@zoominternet.net](mailto:khistory@zoominternet.net).

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WE NEED VOLUNTEERS TO HELP WITH NECESSARY JOBS TO SUCCESSFULLY  
MAINTAIN THE CONNELLSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Any successful organization needs the efforts and talents of its membership to maintain a high excellence in the community that it serves. Most of the work cannot fall on the shoulders of just a few members, or they soon get weary of the many jobs. There is much talent in the membership of the Connellsville Area Historical Society. Perhaps no one has ever asked you to participate, and you feel that your skills are not appreciated. Perhaps, you are engaged fully into an organization that you value very much, and your time is limited. We all set our priorities, But, if you see anything in the following list that appeals to you, please contact me at 724-628-5344 or [khhistory@zoominternet.net](mailto:khhistory@zoominternet.net). Here goes, if I have missed your interest also let me know.

1. Cleaning is always a need. The Gibson House gets dusty and dirty just like your own home. The next cleaning has been scheduled for Sat., November 18 at 10:00 am. Dusting, sweeping, mopping, bathroom, counter tops, windows (inside), etc. We need to get ready for open house on Dec. 2 to participate in It's a Connellsville Christmas.
2. Writing articles for the newsletter. It comes out 2 times a year, spring and fall. The articles should have something to do with the Society or the history of Connellsville. You may have pictures of an insight into some special aspect of Connellsville history that should be shared with our readers.
3. Helping find informative history related programs for March, April, May, July, September, and October. June is our Covered Dish Picnic, August is our Corn Roast, November is the Pride in Connellsville Area reception.
4. Selling items that we have to the public on Saturday which is the day that we are open to the public. We have no place to set up a display of our items in town. We need the revenue that they will provide.
5. Cleaning the inside of our display cases and changing displays for the public to see our collections.
6. Providing refreshments for our meetings. We also need cookies for our Christmas Open House during It's a Connellsville Christmas.
7. There is lawn work to do. Planting in the spring, pulling weeds, maintaining plants, Taking care of removing leaves, keeping the back area free of snow so that people can enter.
8. Or if you are unable to do any of the above, perhaps you will help with the expense of keeping our treasures, the Gibson House and the Col. Crawford Site, available to the public and maintaining these structures. It is very costly to pay all the expenses of maintaining and insuring what the Connellsville Historical Society owns. We don't want people to say like they have in the past. "Why did you allow the B&O Station to be torn down?" Like we could have stopped that! But we do own the Gibson House and the Crawford site, and we are responsible to maintain this prime Connellsville history. This option is open to all.

Thank you for your consideration and help,  
Karen Hechler, President