President’s Letter

It has been a busy year once again with a major long term goal achieved - the complete restoration of the 1769 Craven-Vansant Burying Ground. We continued our educational programs on early farm life in Bucks County with Centennial 4th grade students along with our newer program on the importance of steam in our modern society for generating electricity and ship transportation. The program is designed to encourage Centennial Middle School students to consider STEM careers and the program gives them an opportunity to design, build and race model steam boats.

In support of the Warminster Historical Society, Inc., we participated in History Month with display at Warminster Library and also participated in Warminster Day events at Warminster Community Park including a demonstration of our model of John Fitch’s 1790 steamboat on the park pond.

We received a major legacy gift from Harding Lindult, Fitch Museum Vice-president that along with a grant from Visit Bucks and other donor contributions will enable us to make a major addition to the John Fitch Steamboat Museum.

Our Board member, Jen Rogers made major contributions during the year arranging a partnership with Moss Mill Brewing of Southampton that resulted in the brewing of a “Craven Porter” that was enjoyed at our November Open House and at the brewery with proceeds benefiting Craven Hall. Jen authored a paper for Visit Bucks entitled “Pairing History with Pints: Craven Hall and the Moss Mill Brewing Company” that sparked the program.

Jen also worked on a new exhibit Mary Opdyke – Grand lady of Warminster that is still in progress.

Another Board member, Otto Blavier was also busy restoring a 1920’s era Wine/Apple Press and building enclosures to permit outdoor exhibit of the press and an 18th Century water pump from the former Yerkes farmstead.

In conclusion, we wish to thank our member supporters and businesses that make it possible for us to keep “History Alive” in our community. Please consider taking out a membership in the Society or, renewing your membership and /or making a contribution – A membership is only $10 and your donations are tax deductible as we are a 501-c-3 nonprofit corporation.

Erik Fleischer
Expansion of the John Fitch Museum Underway!

Thanks to a major legacy gift from our museum Vice-President, Harding Lindhult; and a grant from Visit Bucks, Inc. and other smaller donations, we have begun an expansion of the existing museum that will double its’ size, adding 435 square feet of additional space. The building extension will connect with the existing museum building and it will expand eastward and will have a connecting door to the museum. A separate entrance to the addition is also planned.

The new construction to be known as John Fitch Hall, will provide for a meeting/presentation room equipped with state-of-the-art audio/visual equipment and a magnetic “blackboard”. The new room will be climate controlled via a HVAC system that will also provide heat and air conditioning to the original museum room. The new museum room will resolve the problem of conducting museum tours while also presenting the John Fitch story via video and will also give us space for additional displays.

As stated above, John Fitch Hall will have a separate entrance and will be made available to other local groups and organizations that support the rich heritage of our area. We are deeply appreciative of the legacy gift from Harding Lindhult that has made this museum expansion possible.
Craven-Vansant Burying Ground Restoration Completed!

The project to restore this historic burying ground begun over 30 years ago is finally complete!!

The Craven- Vansant Burial Ground is the final resting place for over 60 local residents with the first burial in 1769 and the last in 1890. It contains the graves of 11 Revolutionary War veterans and a Civil War veteran. It is located on Newtown Road, just south of Craven Hall but is not visible from the road. It is accessible from the Fox Run Apartments or the new Tall Oaks housing development.

The final restoration efforts involved clearing the brush from roughly 20% of the area; rebuilding a portion of the South Wall and the complete rebuilding of the North Wall so that the burial ground is once again enclosed in a stone wall. It was decided that it would not be necessary to rebuild the East Wall as access to the burial ground at that location is essentially inaccessible, due to large trees and the deep sloping terrain directly behind the wall’s foundation.

A stone platform and canopy was also erected to display the genealogical record of those interred along with additional information on several key local individuals. These include:

* Dr. William Batchlor – a surgeon at the Battle of Saratoga – considered the turning point of the Revolutionary War as it brought about an alliance with the French.
* Jacobus (Cobe) Scout – close friend of John Fitch, steamboat inventor. He lent Fitch his shop so that Fitch could build his first steamboat models.
* Abraham Supthin – Involved in the local Battle of Crooked Billet – May 1, 1778 and brother –in law of Jacobus (Cobe) Scout.
Also posted on this platform are copies of 1906 photos of the burial ground taken by the Arnold Brothers for use in a postcard series. With the help of the Washington Crossing Postcard Club, we were able to locate the original negatives at the Spruance Library of the Bucks County Historical Society.

It is noteworthy that our discovery of the Arnold negatives revealed a photo of the original gravestone of the first burial; a Harmon Vansant who was only 35 years of age when he died in 1769 and his wife who died in 1814 at the age of 84. *The Arnold Postcard from 1906 incorrectly lists Harmon Vansant’s age as that of his wife.*
Warminster Time Capsule – “Freedom 2061” Restored

On June 14, 1987, officials of the Warminster Kiwanis Club and the Craven Hall Historical Society Inc. installed a time capsule – “Freedom 2061” on the grounds of the Craven-Vansant Burying Ground. The time capsule celebrates the 275th Anniversary of Warminster Township and the 200th Anniversary of the United States Constitution and will be unearthed in 2061 on the 350th Anniversary of the Township.

Unfortunately, the original commemorative plaque was removed by vandals some years ago but thanks to Warminster Township officials, a replacement plaque has been installed.

In 2018, Warminster’s Memorial Day celebrations began with an honor guard salute to our veterans interred in the Craven- Vansant Burying Ground. We hope that this ceremony will become an annual event and a reminder that Warminster’s Time Capsule – “Freedom 2061” reminds us of the liberties that we enjoy as a free nation.
As we begin our 41st year as a Society, it is interesting to look back and see what has been accomplished by a host of volunteers, some still with us and many others who have moved on.

- Founded in 1978 to save an elegant 19th Century Mansion House from destruction – Lead by Ella Rhoads – retired teacher.
- Restoration conducted over a 26 year period, mostly by volunteers, to return the house to its former elegance.
- In 1996, began a “hands-on “program on Farm Life in the 18th/19th Century for local elementary school students. Over 8,000 students have participated in the program since its inception
- Organized and conducted three reenactments of the Battle of Crooked Billet with over 400 reenactors participating in each event.
- In 2007, began conversion of garage/carriage house building into a museum to honor steamboat inventor-John Fitch
- In 2011, dedicated the John Fitch Steamboat Museum that includes an operating model of Fitch’s 1790 steamboat.
- In 2016, introduced a program for Centennial Middle School students using steam to encourage STEM careers. Students construct model boats propelled by steam and race them in a capped rain gutter.
- In 2018, completed the 30+ year project to restore the vandalized 1769 Craven-Vansant Burying Ground owned by the Society. The project included ground restoration, replacement of 12 veterans grave stones – 11 Revolutionary War – 1 Civil War; Completion of the surrounding stone wall and construction of a display stand featuring a genealogy diagram of the interred and enlarged photos of the burial ground and a photo of the first gravestone – both taken in September 1906
- We continue to offer monthly house and museum tours and group tours on request in additions to other special events
Our Colonial Anvil – A History Lesson

Some years ago, The John Fitch Steamboat Museum was gifted a small anvil by Dr. Laurie Duvall whose family owned the old Yerkes farmstead off Street and Jacksonville Roads. Curious to know the age of the anvil and how it was made,

I consulted with Ian Rapp; a local expert on old iron tools. It turns out that we have a Colonial Anvil that most likely dates to 1780 or earlier.

Despite its simple shape, a skilled blacksmith could use the various surfaces to do many kinds of work – drawing out or upsetting on the flat surface- the edges of the face were used for bending and the curved sides were used for shaping. Our anvil is also equipped with a “hardy hole” and “hardy” used for holding swaging and other anvil tools like the “cut-off” tool seen in the photo.

Anvil making was a labor intensive process that required highly skilled labor. It was dangerous work as the workers built up the anvils by “welding” chunks of white hot metal (2500-2700 degrees F) together and the shaping them. After one final heat – the anvil face was hardened and tempered.

A colonial anvil forged as described above will “ring” nicely when stuck with a hammer. If the face is tight (welded without gaps) the hammer will “dance” back up from the face time and time again. Such an exercise is used to evaluate a forged anvil.
John Fitch’s model steamboat trials on a pond in Southampton convinced him that it was possible to propel a vessel with steam power but he needed money to make his dream come true.

How would he be able to raise enough funds to build a full size boat? He didn’t have the connections to the few wealthy residents of Philadelphia and he had only a few fellow craftsmen who would support his venture.

Fitch conceived an idea that he could sell maps he had made while surveying vast areas of what was then known as the Northwest Territory. Prior to his idea of a steamboat, Fitch had made three trips from Warminster to the area, surveying 250,000 acres or 390 square miles of territory, (now Ohio), walking with a simple transit and measuring chain and recording the measurements in a notebook. To better understand size of the area Fitch surveyed, 390 square miles is more than twice the size of greater Philadelphia (143 square miles).

Fitch had the enclosed handbill produced to sell his maps pledging to use one half of the money to build a steamboat. (An “f” in colonial script is an “s”). As with his other efforts – this failed to raise enough money for his venture.

Fitch was unsuccessful in raising the funds with his map venture even though he had support from Patrick Henry, Governor of Virginia, and the Virginia legislature.

Ultimately, Fitch was able to raise enough funds from fellow craftsman and merchants to build his successful steamboat that plied the Delaware River in 1790.
Hidden History of Bucks County – book publication by Board member Jennifer Rogers

Our board member Jennifer Rogers has authored a new book on Bucks County entitled “Hidden History of Bucks County”. Jen has a degree in American Studies from Penn State and is pursuing a Master of Science Degree in History in Archaeology from Edinburgh University in Edinburgh, Scotland. (It is amazing what you can do on-line to get a degree!)

Jen’s book is now available from Arcadia Publishing and History Press for $21.99. – (888) 313-2665. Jen will do some book signings in March that probably will preceed the publication of this newsletter.

CONGRATULATIONS JEN- WE ARE PROUD TO HAVE A PUBLISHED AUTHOR ON OUR BOARD!
Board member Otto Blavier has completed a total restoration of a 1920’s wine press made by Baccellieri Brothers of Philadelphia. The exhibit is housed in a viewable enclosure on the back porch of Craven Hall. We plan to use it in the future to as an apple press.
Have you ever wondered how colonials pumped water from a well in the 18th century? A new exhibit enclosed in a protected and viewable enclosure has been placed just off the back porch of Craven Hall.

The preserved pump and housing was saved by the Duval family when the old Yerkes property on Jacksonville and Street roads was sold and property cleared for new development.

Early wells were hand dug and relied on a simple lift principle – often the pipes were made from hollowed out logs.

We wish to thank Board member, Otto Blavier for constructing the enclosures for both our colonial era water pump and the wine/apple press.
APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

MEMBERSHIP

( ) Individual or Family $10.00 Annually
( ) Small business $25.00 Annually
( ) Corporate $100.00 Annually

( ) Donation assistance for the Fitch Museum expansion

VOLUNTEERS:
I am interested in working with the following at Craven Hall:
( ) Restoration/Repairs
( ) Fund Raising
( ) Historic Research/Library
( ) Centralizing Records
( ) Other

( ) Docent (Tour Guide)
( ) Membership/Public Relations
( ) Special Events
( ) Gravestone Restoration
( ) Volunteer

If you are interested in volunteering, please also check that off. We really need you. Thanks.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE FITCH MUSEUM

( ) Amount: $__________ Thank you.

DVD of CRAVEN HALL

( ) Amount: By check: $17.50 check to address below.
( ) Amount: Pick up: $15.00 at Craven Hall. Please leave a message

Contributions to aid in the restoration and operation of Craven Hall are always welcome. Please make your check payable to the Craven Hall Historical Society, Inc. The Society is a non-profit corporation registered in Pennsylvania; your contribution is tax deductible. Return to Craven Hall, P.O. Box 2042, Warminster, PA 18974

Craven Hall 1900's

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