

Window on Woodville



The Newsletter of the

Neville House Associates

Volume IX, Number 3

November 2009

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



AS I finish my second term as President, I reflect on the many topics that I have covered in the newsletter for four years, ranging from eulogies to fundraising. None has been as

uniquely important as what I am about to discuss - *chickens*.

Before I begin, I would like to apologize to the NHA and its members. Not for having the chickens (they have consistently been one of the most popular programs at Woodville in the past two years), but for not adequately informing all of our members on the details of their care and maintenance.

Prior to the arrival of the chickens at Woodville, every volunteer, board member and member was given a very detailed history of the birds (see the November 2008 issue). Unfortunately, the historical facts alone did not prepare everyone for the numerous questions that many of our visitors have expressed about the more mundane aspects of raising poultry. Here are

some facts that pertain to their care and should answer most questions:

- The chickens are fed, watered and checked on every day by a volunteer staff of four different people. They are generally given new food and water each afternoon between 3 pm and 6 pm. (The guidelines from the PA Department of Agriculture (PDA) and Penn State University (PSU) Agricultural Cooperative Extension recommend 1" of trough space per bird. We provide 3" per bird.)



Henry, Woodville's resident rooster.

- There are two watering containers: a modern, galvanized, self-filling device that is removed when the area is open to the public and an 18th century reproduction of a "piggin" or feeding bucket. These devices are filled every day and within minutes the birds usually have scratched food and straw into them. This does not indicate that the water is unclean, simply that the spray from the scratching has gotten into the container.

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

• The location of the “pen” is in a historically accurate location. It is designed to replicate a “fattening pen” which would be located adjacent to the kitchen and would be convenient for the cooks to empty food scraps into. This area measures 220 sq/ft and provides each bird with 27 sq/ft of living space when enclosed. (PDA and PSU recommend 1.5 sq/feet per bird for “small scale egg producers.”) In addition to the house containing the nesting boxes, the NHA approved the building of a roosting house in March of 2009. This building will add an additional 50 sq/ft of space to the existing enclosure and should be completed this year.

• The chickens are given a bucket of ground fortified commercial meal each day. As volunteer time permits, on many days they are permitted to forage within the fenced “yard” area (4,000 square feet) for insects and plants. They are not permitted to free range every day due to the proximity of hawks in the area. (In early 2009 a chicken was killed by a hawk, the only fatality since their arrival in August of 2008.)

• Prior to the arrival of the chickens at Woodville, over a year of research was conducted regarding the historical aspects of the breed, their enclosure and its location within the grounds. Additionally, former board member Richard Smith and myself, traveled to Colonial Williamsburg in February 2007 (at our own expense), to work with Elaine Shirley, Rare Breeds Manager, who educated us about care, cleaning and feeding of the birds. We have implemented a cleaning and care schedule that is modeled after the program currently in use at Williamsburg.

• The pen is raked, shoveled and cleaned once a month. At this time the nesting house is scrubbed with bleach and treated with a pest control. Straw in the nesting boxes and the pen is replaced 2-3 times per month. Unfortunately, when it rains the pen does become muddy. Chickens inherently scratch the ground, so during inclement weather both the birds and the pen become very messy. The new roosting house should provide additional cover in wet weather.

• Chicken pens generally do not smell good. In many cases, the unpleasant smell is intensified by the odor of the food, which when damp occasionally smells worse than the droppings. With the completion of the roosting house, this situation hopefully will be remedied. The farm smells should be looked at as another way to understand 18th century farm life.

• Throughout each year chickens will molt (in the spring and fall). During this time, the feathers on each chicken will be missing and they will look bald. This is a natural process that chickens go through. Additionally, chickens can lose their feathers for other reasons, including aggression by a rooster, “hen pecking” and feather mites. We inspect our animals each month and treat them for pests. These feathers grow back and the birds return to their normal appearance.

I hope that this clarifies our care and concern for the maintenance of the Woodville flock. It is important that many of our suburban visitors, most of who have never been to a farm, understand that these animals are not pets, rather livestock, whose living conditions will differ from those animals that they keep in their homes. We will post the above guidelines on our visitor information sign at the site in an effort to better educate our visitors and answer their questions about the site. If anyone has concerns, please feel free to contact us directly. Don't be a “chicken” (pun intended).

Rob Windhorst
President
Neville House Associates



Historic Woodville Plantation Invites You To Attend



HOLIDAYS AT THE HOUSE



Sunday, November 22, 2009 - noon to 8pm



STEP back in time at Woodville Plantation as this living history museum celebrates the holiday season in an 18th century fashion. On Sunday, November 22, 2009, the public can experience the holidays in a "different light" with candlelit tours of Woodville Plantation. Admission is five dollars per adult and ten dollars per family. The site will be open from noon until 8pm.

Visitors will learn how 18th century holiday customs differ from modern celebrations. Highlighted will be traditions such as Twelfth Night, Boxing Day and the firing of the Christmas guns. Guests will be treated to expanded historical demonstrations, musical recitals and the most accurate recreation of the 18th century holiday season in Western Pennsylvania.

For more info, please contact Woodville Plantation at 412.221.0348 or www.WoodvillePlantation.org.

The Neville House Associates also needs volunteers to help with Holidays at the House. If you are interested in volunteering, please call Woodville Plantation at 412.221.0348. The phone is answered on Sundays, from 1 to 4pm. Messages may be left during the week. Thank you!

2009 PROGRAMS at WOODVILLE

Step back in time at Woodville Plantation, the home of John and Presley Neville, and visit Western Pennsylvania's principal link to the late 18th century. See how Pittsburgh's wealthiest citizens lived during the period of 1780 - 1820, The Era of the New Republic. Admission to the site is \$5.00 for adults and \$10.00 for families. The grounds are open year round for self-guided tours on Wednesday through Saturday, from 10 am - 6 pm. The house is open year round for guided tours on Sunday, from 1 pm - 4 pm. Special tours can be arranged for groups of fifteen or more by contacting the site. For additional information please visit www.WoodvillePlantation.org.



Join the interpreters at Woodville Plantation throughout 2009 as they present *Necessary Domestic Duties: a Thousand Little Occurrences Never Foreseen.* Each month, our interpreters will present the common everyday activities necessary to maintain and operate an 18th century plantation. Learn how these activities compare to our modern chores such as laundry, cooking, gardening and sewing. In addition, visitors will learn about some very different jobs such as raising chickens and cutting and hauling wood. In some cases, guests may participate in these interactive programs.

November 22 - Holidays at the House

Come celebrate the holidays in "a different light" with candlelit tours of Woodville Plantation. Learn about holiday customs that differ from today's celebrations such as Twelfth Night, Boxing Day and the firing of Christmas guns.

December 6 - Necessary Duties: Spinning and Knitting

Join the wool spinstress to learn how wool was spun into thread and then knitted into the many items needed for warmth in the cold winter months at Woodville Plantation.

December 13 - Above the Stairs: Behind the Scenes Tour

Visitors will experience a rarely seen side of Woodville, above the stairs in the main house. Tour the private rooms of the Neville and Cowan families and see the original painted checkerboard floor (circa 1790). Don't miss this rare opportunity for a look at the private lives of Woodville's residents.

*Woodville Plantation will be closed from December 14, 2009,
through January 2, 2010.*

Woodville will re-open for tours on January 3, 2010.



THE WORD from WOODVILLE

Goodbye... to Dick Smith, who retired from the NHA Board of Directors in July. A longtime member of the NHA, Dick was President of the Woodville Advisory Committee from 2000 - 2007 and was an important advisor to the Decorative Arts Committee throughout the past several years. Dick's insight into 18th century life and Irish decorative arts was a valuable resource during the restoration of the Cowan areas of the house. Thank you for all of your efforts. We will miss you.

Also, Goodbye... to Eleanor Fatigati, who is retiring from the NHA Board of Directors at the end of 2009. Eleanor is the last of the original founders of the NHA to still actively serve at the site. She first became involved with Woodville in 1975 when the organization began working with PHLF to save the site. Throughout the past 35 years, she has served in almost every administrative position, most recently as the Corresponding Secretary. Her knowledge of the history of the organization was not only interesting, but an invaluable resource. Thank you for your many years of service, we will miss you.

Thank You... to Paul Day, Rob Windhorst, Mike Koral, Doug Haag and Julianna Haag, for planting 22 evergreens and 2 oak trees at Woodville. When mature, these trees will create a visual barrier between the parking lot and the house and yard, helping to hide the 21st century sights that surround Woodville.

Congratulations... to Mike Athey, who has been elected to the NHA Board of Directors starting in 2010. Mike is a military historian who has worked for the past two years with the Wayne's Fourth Sub-Legion, based at Woodville, and he interprets military life in the 1790s. Mike will represent the Legion at the NHA Board meetings.



L - R: Paul Day, Rob Windhorst, Mike Koral & Doug Haag. Not pictured: Julianna Haag.



The Apex students at Woodville.

Congratulations... to Bob Rodriguez and the Chartiers Valley High School Apex Program on its 17th year of visiting Woodville. We look forward to many more years together.

Thank You... to Mardi Jackley for her efforts at coordinating the volunteers, interpreters and students during the APEX Programs on October 22 - 27. Also, thank you to all of the volunteers that helped during the event. (Also, thank you for the great lunches!)

The Still House Gets a New Look... with the initial renovation of the still house meeting room. The stairwell has been closed off, and the room has been carpeted and painted. Future improvements will include renovation of the kitchen and bathroom. Additionally, the exterior will undergo improvements to give it a more historically-accurate appearance. Special thanks to *Fim Galbraith, Paul Day and Rob Windhorst* who volunteered over fifty hours to complete the job, saving the NHA over \$2,500 in labor.

Thank You... to Mike and Erin Athey, for their generous contribution of a washer and dryer for the still house. The appliances will be used to clean and maintain the historic clothing used by the interpreters at the site.

The New Visitor Reception Area... is now in use and should be complete by early spring. Stop by at Holidays at the House to see the progress.



The new visitor reception area.

THE PASSAGE at WOODVILLE:

In the 21st century, successful historical museums are constantly changing. It is essential that well-run sites update their interpretations and continually develop their programs, presentations and decorative arts as more information is discovered about the site. Over the past several years, Woodville has been the epitome of this particular ideal. Since 2007, every room in the main house and still house has undergone transformations. Some changes were significant and some were less obvious.

The passage, the formal entry to the main house at Woodville, is a room that has undergone many of these subtle yet significant changes. This area gives visitors a glimpse into history reflecting the first period of the building - the period of Presley Neville's initial occupation of the site from 1782 to 1794. It is also the only

area that has remained relatively unchanged structurally throughout the 235 year history of the building. It retains approximately 85% of the architectural "fabric" from the earliest period of the house.

When you stand in the passage, you are immersed in the world that was seen by both John and Presley Neville. It is a vestibule to the past.



The passage, before restoration.

During this period, most houses in Western Pennsylvania were crude clapboard or log structures that did not have a passage. For the gentry (the top of the social class structure in 18th century America) and the well-to-do middling citizens, the passage served several important functions with regards to the maintenance and management of household activities. These functions varied significantly from rural to urban locations. In cities, this room would serve as a visitor reception area. Among the gentry class, the actions of controlling, evaluating and filtering visitors to the house would be performed not only by the servants and slaves, but occasionally by the master and mistress of the house as well. Decorum, hospitality and etiquette dictated that all members



The passage, after restoration.

of society be welcomed into the passage. It was the most public of residential spaces. This protocol becomes even more significant at Woodville, a home that was the only house of "substance" on the road from Washington to Pittsburgh. To weary travelers of all social classes, the outbuildings, kitchen and privy would be a welcome site.

Everyone was welcomed into the passage. The lower classes would be cordially sent to the kitchen and on their way or they would be welcome to spend the night in an outbuilding on the property. Members of the gentry and those traveling with letters of introduction would be welcomed into the more private of the public spaces, the parlor and dining room. Only the closest friends and relatives would be invited above the stairs to the private family spaces.

Additionally, the passage in a rural mansion house would serve the important role of being a mud room. Most rural roads were less than idyllic. Roads were exceptionally dusty in the best conditions and an ankle-deep quagmire during inclement weather. The Black Horse Trail (the principle road to Woodville) was owned, maintained and improved by John Neville and his neighbors. It followed present-day Route 50 from Canonsburg to Pittsburgh. The trail was considered to be one of the best roads in the area.

Most other roads, including those leading to Bower Hill, would have been little more than widened deer trails. Travelers, on foot and on horseback, would inevitably be covered in some type of filth, either mud or other organic matter. The passage allowed wet clothing, muddy

VESTIBULE to the PAST



footwear and travel implements to be left in an area that could be more easily cleaned than the carpeted adjacent rooms. Additionally, this room would often take on a very masculine feeling because of its use as a storage area for the gentlemen's sporting equipment such as guns, trophy skulls, riding boots and maps.

This room, like most 18th century rooms, would have been routinely reconfigured to accommodate alternate functions. These functions would include small meetings with overseers, educational activities for the numerous children that resided at Woodville, and occasionally dining. During the warmer months, this room is one of the coolest areas of the building, drawing a breeze through the open doors at either end of the room. For a small family dinner, this would have been an ideal space. Additionally, it could be the location in which the children would dine when the families were entertaining guests in the more formal dining space.



A view of the passage showing the removal of the door and plaster restoration.

The passage, as it appears today, is the result of several years of intensive research, educated interpretation and lively debate. During the restoration of the adjacent Cowan bedroom in the summer of 2008, a door that originally permitted access from the western end of the room into the bedroom was removed. This door was installed in the 1930s to permit entry into a newly installed

bathroom. The removal of the door allowed Woodville historians to view the inside of the passage walls for the first time, revealing significant new information about the architecture of the

house. The double rows of small forged nails along the wall studs indicated that not only the passage, but also the room on the southern side of the wall, was originally plastered. This plaster was removed when the room was divided into the two existing southern rooms by Christopher Cowan around 1820.

Additionally, several small pieces of plaster were removed from beneath the doorframe on the passage side of the wall. These fragments were painted a curious salmon color. Analysis by Vicki Burton, historic paint and wallpaper expert at Belmont College in Ohio, determined that the paint was originally a barn red milk-based paint that dated to the end of the 18th century. This paint was applied over what appears to be an existing whitewash (the color that was chosen for restoration), presumably sometime during the end of Presley Neville's occupation of the house. The current salmon color was a result of the red iron oxide-based pigment separating from the milk residue, which had turned yellow through oxidation and aging.

A previous paint analysis, completed by Edward Haller of the Mellon Institute in 1979, was used to restore the cream-colored door frames to their original finish of painted wood grain with several coats of shellac. This subtle restoration enhances the appearance of the already large doors, giving them an illusion of an increased door size and space in the area, creating a very dramatic effect.

Some of the most important architectural details of the house are found in the passage. The small windows above the transom, on the east door of the room, would have been essential for illuminating the room in the morning hours. Without the porch, which was added during the second quarter of the 19th century, these windows would have allowed enough light into the room to permit it to be used during the morning hours. In the afternoon, a well thought out architectural design permits light from the dormer on the landing above the stairs to brighten the eastern portion of the passage.

The box locks on all of the passage doors, which were made in Philadelphia and date to 1780, are

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THE PASSAGE at WOODVILLE: VESTIBULE to the PAST



identical to the original ones found on the rooms above the stairs. Hinges are another significant detail that often goes unnoticed. The massive strap hinges that support the solid cherry doors in the fore and aft of the room are excellent examples of early Pennsylvania craftsmanship. The hinges were possibly created by Neville's slaves in a blacksmith shop located on the farm.

The most significant architectural detail in the passage is the pair of foliated cross garnet hinges on the closet beneath the stairs. These T-shaped (cross garnet) hinges have a leaf-like design (foliated) on the frame portion of the hinge. Dr. Edward Chappell, Director of Architectural Research at Colonial Williamsburg, believes that these are the oldest example of this type of hinge in existence in the United States. They were most likely constructed at the same time of the house in 1774.



A close-up view of the foliated cross garnet hinges.

Furnishing the passage has also been a painstaking process. Using the 1794 inventory of Bower Hill as a guide, most of the furnishings that are currently in the passage were mentioned specifically in the listing of items lost when John Neville's home was burned. An interesting item is the new Howell's map, which hangs on the southern wall of the passage. This item replaced an original map by Reading Howell, dated to 1811, that hung in the passage until early 2009.

The new Howell's map is a 1792 version, most likely the same version that was listed by Neville in his inventory. It is mounted on linen so that it can be rolled up or used as a wall hanging, a process common in the 18th century. Also hanging in the passage are original prints of General

Washington (a personal friend of the Neville family), a print of Congress and depictions of 18th century sporting life.



The new Howell's map.

The Philadelphia style, comb back Windsor Chairs are reproductions that recreate the one and a half dozen chairs found at Bower Hill. They have been meticulously painted with a pigment-based milk paint and finished with linseed oil, in order to create a historically accurate appearance. These chairs have been funded by the generous donations of our members. We hope to fully outfit the passage with twelve chairs during the next several years.

The 19th century-styled gas light, which hung overhead in the passage for over 25 years, was replaced with a period-correct tin and glass lantern. We have had the lantern electrified for the convenience of our visitors during dark afternoons.

Also, over the next few years as funding and budget permits, visitors can expect to see the addition of sporting and hunting equipment such as the "blunderbuss pistols with bayonets" and the several "elegant fusees" which Neville referred to in his inventory.

While it appears that Woodville is rapidly changing, these changes are the result of intensified research, decades of scholarly examination and the labors of a dedicated staff of volunteers. The 2007 change in ownership of the site has permitted the Neville House Associates to finally implement many of the restoration objectives that it has been working on for years. Although it is the major transformations (such as the Cowan bedroom and the soon-to-be completed visitor reception room), that are most obvious to our members and visitors; it is the subtle and detailed changes (many of which go unnoticed), that keep Woodville moving in the direction of its definitive goal. The goal of being a completely accurate and authentic view of a Western Pennsylvania farm during the Federal Period.

ORDER FORM for COMB BACK WINDSOR CHAIRS

Thank you for your contribution to the Windsor Chair Reproduction Program at Woodville Plantation, the home of John and Presley Neville. The comb back Windsor Chair, or "stick chair," that will be built for Woodville by local artisan Dave Burke is a style that was commonly found throughout America from 1790 to 1820. Fittingly named because of the resemblance of the back to a rooster's comb, these functional chairs would have been used for both formal occasions inside, as well as for more casual affairs on the verandah and in the garden.

Our reproductions are made using woods, such as oak, maple and pine, that would have been found near the site during the turn of the 19th century. The seats are formed from a single piece of white pine that will be contoured by hand. Spindles, legs and turnings will be created from hand-shaved maple or oak. The finished chair will be painted in an authentic verdant green color using a historic paint receipt. Mixed by hand, the paint looks just as it would have in 1790. Each chair will take an individual craftsman approximately one month to complete. Finally, each hand-assembled chair will be affixed with an engraved brass plate recording an inscription of the donors choice.

The Windsor Chair will be used exclusively at the site for events, general seating and re-enactments. Woodville Plantation and the Neville House Association Board of Directors thank you for your donation and for supporting our living history programs. We look forward to seeing you enjoy a respite on the verandah of the Woodville estate, on an authentic reproduction that you sponsored.



*An example of the finished
comb back Windsor Chair.*

COMB BACK WINDSOR CHAIRS

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Amount Enclosed (Chairs are \$450.00 each =): \$ _____

Inscription to Read:

Make checks payable to: Neville House Associates
Woodville Plantation Windsor Chair Program
1375 Washington Pike
Bridgeville, PA 15017



VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED

AT

Woodville Plantation



We are looking for a few good men... and women. Woodville Plantation is in need of energetic, enthusiastic and historically-minded people who would like to volunteer as docents and historical interpreters.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, we ask that you volunteer a minimum of six to ten Sundays throughout the year. Duties include opening the site at 12:30 pm, leading tours of the house from 1-4 pm and closing the site at around 4:30 pm. If you would like to do more, occasionally we have special events that require multiple docents.

If you are not sure about "dressing" in period clothing, do not worry. volunteers are divided into two groups - interpreters who dress in period clothes and demonstrate a particular 18th century skill and docents who wear 21st century clothing. In either case, we will provide the attire for you to wear.



Woodville Plantation, the John and Presley Neville house, is Southwestern Pennsylvania's link to the late 18th century. Located on Route 50 in Collier Township, this living history museum interprets the time period of 1780 to 1820.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION,
CALL 412-221-0348
OR VISIT US AT
WWW.WOODVILLEPLANTATION.ORG**

NEVILLE HOUSE ASSOCIATES MEMBERSHIP



Please take time to renew your NHA membership. Renewing will help the Neville House Associates staff with programming and activities, as well as with newsletter and postage costs. Woodville is one of only 2,500 National Historic Landmarks in the United States. Your gift will help to support the continuing preservation, restoration and interpretation of this historic site.



DONATION LEVELS

Student/Senior.....	\$20.00	Wrenshall.....	\$100.00
Basic.....	\$35.00	Christopher Cowan	\$250.00
Mary Fauset.....	\$75.00	Presley Neville.....	\$500.00
John Neville.....	\$1,000.00 (Lifetime Member)		

All memberships include free family admission to Woodville Plantation for the regular hours of operation, gift shop discounts, invitation to “members only” events and a NHA newsletter. Your gift is tax deductible.

Many companies also match their employee’s donations to organizations such as Woodville Plantation. If your employer provides matching donations, please let them know about your contribution. This is an easy way to double your donation. *Thank you for your support!*



NHA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Make checks payable to: Neville House Associates, Inc.

1375 Washington Pike

Bridgeville, PA 15017

Attn: *Julianna Haag, Membership*

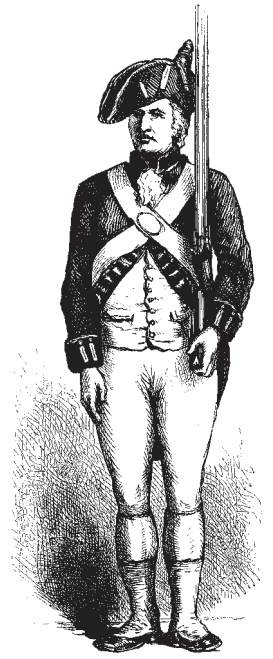


NEEDED, a FEW ABLE MEN

The soldiers of Wayne's Fourth Sub-Legion have returned to Woodville Plantation and they are looking for recruits. The unit will recreate the twelve soldiers who bravely defended Neville's Bower Hill mansion in 1794. Exhibition camps will be set up in 2010. The men will march and demonstrate the military drills of 1794 (based on Von Steuben's "Blue Book" from 1777), along with recreating various activities of camp life.

Requirements are that you be at least sixteen years of age (fourteen if you are interested in becoming a fifer or drummer), able to attend at least one drill session per month at the Woodville site, able to attend the soldier programs at the site and are interested and committed to historical accuracy.

Woodville will provide you with a loaned uniform and all accoutrements, instruction and training on drill and history of the unit, and occasionally meals prepared by the Woodville cooks during our major events. 18th century civilian dress will be provided during the training period and a custom outfitted uniform will be provided following the successful completion of training. Soldiers will also have the opportunity to muster with other units of Wayne's Legion in the local area for off-site activities.



Window on Woodville

Neville House Associates
1375 Washington Pike
Bridgeville, PA 15017

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED