



Blue Rock Heritage Center

Washington Boro | Pennsylvania

2023 Spring Newsletter

A Message From the President

Dear Members and Friends of the **Blue Rock Heritage Center**,

Looking back at 2022, we had a very successful year with many programs and activities. The annual Heritage Day was very well attended and one of our best in terms of fundraising. One of the highlights has been the work which occurred to restore and preserve the Wittmer barn. The exterior siding project was completed and now work is focusing on the foundation and basement area. You will notice photos in the newsletter showcasing the work activities at the barn.

Our network partners have also had a successful year and we urge you to visit their website for information and activities proposed for 2023. Our new partner, Chapter 28 of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology did several test pits, seeking evidence of artifacts from the Native American occupation of this area. This small sampling with more testing to occur in 2023 was very successful, yielding stone tools and pottery sherds. We were successful in finding the foundation of the large stone farmhouse which was present at this site, but demolished 70 years ago.

A generous donation allowed for our pathway from the parking lot to be paved, creating a much safer and defined entrance. This project has been on our wish list for several years.

A coverlet belonging to Jacob Witmer, the builder of the 1832 grist mill, home of the Heritage Center, was acquired at a local antique show and helps us to connect with those from the past. A wooden floor board with the name W.M. Lewis and dated 1807 was found in the barn several years ago. We have been able to identify this name and affiliation with the property. Catherine Witmer, daughter of Jacob Witmer married William M. Lewis. Most likely this board was salvaged from another building and reused when the barn was constructed in 1856.

We want to thank everyone for their financial support as well as physical labor, talents and skills which is helping us to preserve our heritage for another generation. Please join us this year by attending the events listed in the newsletter and renewing your membership.

Sincerely, Charlie Douts, President

Get Involved

We are in need of some volunteers to get things spruced up and ready for the public. We are scheduling a workday for Saturday

April 8 from 9am to noon.

A few hours from each family in the spring goes a long way to making this facet of our community a better place. Some basic outside cleanup is needed as well as tidying up inside the building. If you plan to help with outdoor cleanup, please bring gloves and weather appropriate clothing. Rakes, trimmers, pruning shears are needed for this task. Interior cleaning will include windows, floors, and exhibit space.



2023 Meeting Dates

April 17

May 15

June 19

September 18

October 23

Our meetings are held at the **Blue Rock Heritage Center** @ 7:00 pm
All meetings are open to the public.

Please use the **Blue Rock Heritage Center** Parking lot which is accessed from Blue Rock Road

2023 Important Dates

Annual Open House

June 4th 1pm – 4pm

The **Blue Rock Heritage Center** will also be open the following dates:

May 14

June 4

July 9

August 13

Sept 13

Oct 15

1pm-4pm

Admission is free

Donation appreciated



Blue Rock Heritage Center is a registered non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and as such, we rely entirely on donations and fees from our members. **Blue Rock Heritage Center** is run by volunteers.

Please know that every dollar of your membership fee goes toward the upkeep of our grounds and buildings. If you know of anybody else that would like to become a member, visit our webpage and click the button at the bottom labeled "BECOME A MEMBER". Donations are always appreciated.

We need help with creating and maintaining displays and exhibits, volunteering to help with the annual Heritage Day, general maintenance and cleaning and miscellaneous other activities.

We desire to have the Center open on a regular schedule and docents are needed to serve.

Please visit our website, or contact Debbie Saylor, Curator Debbie.saylor1@verizon.net or Paul Hoffer 717-951-0089 or Charlie Douts 717-719-3008.

Jacob Witmer Coverlet

In 1832, Jacob Witmer built and operated the grist mill which is now the home of the Blue Rock Heritage Center. At an antique show held in December at the Columbia Market House, Charlie Douts found a special artifact. A coverlet which was made on a loom was displayed for sale and purchased. The coverlet is dated 1838, Manor Township, Lancaster County and notes it was made by J. Witmer. The atlases of this time period for Manor Township shows only one J Witmer as a landowner which is the site of the grist mill. This is the only known personal item which we are aware which belonged to Jacob Witmer.

Coverlets of this type were common during this period in early America. They typically were woven in the home on a small loom and proudly displayed as family heirlooms. This dealer who sold this coverlet said it was found in an estate cleanout of a home in Columbia. The quilt will be on display at the Heritage Center.



Blue Rock Heritage Center Open House June 4th 1pm to 4pm

The annual open house will be held on Sunday June 4 and will feature a special presentation by Dr. Ed Wilson. Ed grew up in the Wrightsville/Hellam area of York County with advanced degrees in anthropology and social systems and a lifelong fascination with the interactions of people and their natural environments. He is currently involved the Horn Farm in Hellam Township and serves as a director on the board. He has been a leader promoting sound land use and farmland preservation in the township.

Ed will be presenting a session entitled the Indigenous Peoples and Their Land. He will highlight the environment of the area and how it influenced the prehistoric people and their occupation of the land. He will utilize the archaeological records to present how the prehistoric people adapted to the environmental conditions, concluding with the traumatic consequences of their contact with Europeans. The presentation will start at 2 pm and is estimated to last approximately one hour which includes a time for questions and discussion.

The Jacob Witmer coverlet will be on display and the C.L. Wittmer barn will be open for people to view the restoration process. It is anticipated the our network partners, Chapter 28 of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology, Circle Legacy and Raven Ridge will be present. This is a free event open to all including children and families.

New Paved Walking Path

Thanks to a generous donation by brothers Todd and Jeff Lehman and their spouses, a paved path connecting the parking lot to the BRHC was constructed this fall. Jeff and Todd grew up in the area and lived near Turkey Hill Dairy which was founded by their grandfather Armor Frey. Both are successful businessmen and have carried on with businesses founded by their mother and father. The path is dedicated to their parents' memory. The pathway is now free from the washout of rainstorms and provides a safe, smooth walkway. Please remember to park in the parking area at the Blue Rock River access and walk to the center. Parking is not provided immediately adjacent to the building and please only use the river access parking.



Annual Heritage Day

The annual Heritage Day is scheduled for Saturday, October 21, at the Washington Boro Community Park. The event is free and includes activities, presentations and food for all ages. Activities include educational booths highlighting our network partners. Barrel train and hayrides, blue grass music by Barry Lee, and local church sponsored activities. Craft and flea market vendors are present as well as farm tractors and classic cars. The event begins at 9 am and ends at 3 pm. Please contact Charlie Douts at 717-719-3008 or Doug Kramer at 717-808-4413 to reserve a booth or for information concerning the event. The local Penn Manor Chapter of the FFA hold a tractor pull on the property adjoining the Park on the same date.



Archaeology Center: Excavation at Blue Rock Heritage Center

By Debbie Saylor, Curator

A citizen-scientist archaeology program has been initiated on the property of Blue Rock Heritage investigating the Witmer Family home and privy. Lower Susquehanna Archaeological Society, Chapter 28, SPA has partnered with Blue Rock Heritage Center to uncover the many artifacts both historic and prehistoric on the property. Charlie Douts is the lead investigator with the opening of several test pits and has located the foundation of the Wittmer home. The home is no longer standing dating back to approx. 1832.



Debbie Saylor, President of Chapter 28 will lead the educational components involving various learning modules, workshops, and field experience in order to qualify in joining the archaeological excavation. The team will learn how to identify and date artifacts, proper excavation techniques, cataloging, plus a summation of the cultural & physical impacts on the footprint of the land.

The team has already uncovered prehistoric Susquehanna & Shenk’s Ferry pottery shards, projectile points, stone scappers, & fire pits with associated charcoal. Historic artifacts consisted of redware & transfer pottery fragments, glass, and metals.

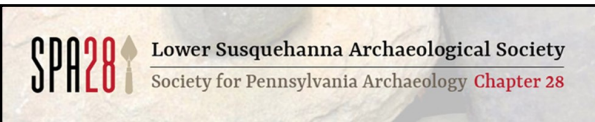
If you are interested in joining the 2023 team, please contact Judith Englert: 717.515.7907

email: judithenglert@earthlink.net or visit www.spa28.org

email: info@spa28.org

April 16th 1:00-2:00 Lecture open to the public.

April 16th 2:00 - 3:00 Workshop for team members only.



Champion Sycamore Tree



A large sycamore located along Witmer Run at the Blue Rock Heritage Center was recently nominated to the Pennsylvania Champion Tree Program which is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Forestry Association. This winter, Kelly Ford, Environmental Education Specialist for the Susquehanna Riverlands, Susquehannock and Sam Lewis State Parks, measured the tree using a designated method for determining the age of the tree.

The tree’s circumference measured at chest height is twenty feet and seven inches. The tree calculator estimated the tree to be 328 years old. This places the tree as seedling starting its life in 1695 and ranks as the 5th oldest sycamore tree in Lancaster County.

The tree would not have been present during the Susquehannock occupation of the last known village in the area which was abandoned about 1665, but it would have been present during the occupation of other villages along the Susquehanna River valley. Nearby Conestoga Town was occupied from 1690 to 1763. Another nearby site includes Conoy Town at the Haldeman Mansion in Bainbridge which was occupied from 1718 to 1743.

On your next visit to the Blue Rock Heritage Center, feel free to admire this magnificent tree and reflect on the many things it has witnessed during its life. It is located along the north side of the stream approximately 250 ft. east of the paved path and near the stone culvert which carries the River road traffic.



Witmer Barn Update

The Christian Wittmer barn built in 1856 has been undergoing restoration by volunteers from the Blue Rock Heritage Center. In 2022, the east side of the barn had its siding replaced which completes the siding replacement of the entire exterior. This culminates a five year effort to replace the exterior siding and windows. Electric lights and receptacles have been installed allowing us to create a usable area to host events and display antique farm equipment.

Windows and masonry work were completed along the south side of the basement area of the barn. This effort was to restore the barn to its original appearance. Work proposed for 2023 includes additional work in the basement to create a space to host seasonal activities associated with the heritage center. Please stay tuned for time and dates when additional work is scheduled. Big thanks to LASA for purchasing the materials and for the skill and labor of the many volunteers who provided of their time.



The Witmer Name

Did you notice that the last name of Witmer has different variations?

The Grist Mill was built by Jacob Witmer in 1832. Notice one T.

The barn was built by Christian Wittmer in 1856. Notice the 2 T.

Network Partners

The Blue Rock Heritage Center (BRHC) is pleased to partner with local entities who share common interests. Circle Legacy is a local group who promote the heritage and traditions of Native Americans who once occupied this land. Raven Ridge Wildlife Center is a local wildlife rehabilitator of injured wildlife. Chapter 28 is a local group of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology which emphasizes responsible archaeology and how it helps us to understand our past. We urge you to visit the website of these organizations for a full listing or their events, programs and activities for the year. Circle Legacy website, circlelegacycenter.com / Raven Ridge Wildlife Center website, ravenridgewildlifecenter.org / Chapter 28, Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology, website, spa28.org,