

Notes & Comments

Discovery at Duffy's Cut

The February 2007 meeting of the Society featured Immaculata University professors Dr. William Watson and Mr. John H. Ahtes. They spoke about 57 Irish immigrants who died in 1832, while working to construct the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad near Malvern. As reported by the Associated Press on March 24, 2009:

Human bones discovered last week near the suburban Philadelphia university may at last reveal their final resting place — and possibly allow researchers to identify the remains and repatriate them.

"We feel a kinship with these men," said Immaculata history professor William Watson. "Righting an injustice has led us to this point."

The woodsy site where the bones were found is known as Duffy's Cut. It is named after Philip Duffy, who hired the immigrants from Donegal, Tyrone and Derry to help build the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad.

Years of combing the several acres of rough terrain in Duffy's Cut had so far yielded about 2,000 artifacts, including pipes, buttons and forks. Then on Friday, researchers using ground-penetrating radar unearthed pieces of two skulls along with dozens of other bone fragments and teeth. The findings were announced Tuesday.

Research led Watson to conclude many of the Irish workers died of cholera, an acute intestinal infection caused by contaminated food or water that typically had a mortality rate of 40 percent to 60 percent.

Watson believes some of the workers may have been murdered because of their illness or ethnicity. There was general prejudice against Irish Catholics, tension between residents and the transient workers, and a great fear of cholera — especially among the affluent classes, Watson said. Anyone with cholera "was deemed to be almost subhuman," Watson said. "God forbid it would spread to the respectable segments of society."

Researchers including University of Pennsylvania geosciences professor Tim Bechtel expect to find bullets buried with the bones.

For additional information, see www.duffyscutproject.com.

A Loss to the Preservation Community

Berwyn resident Neil McAloon passed away unexpectedly in January. Active in both historic preservation and land conservation, Neil was a founding member of the Tredyffrin Historic Preservation Trust and a board member of the Open Land Conservancy. As a leader in the Veteran's Association of Easttown and Tredyffrin, Neil helped organize the Salem Church cemetery cleanup, as reported in the Summer 2008 issue of the *Quarterly*. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he achieved the rank of Captain in the Marine Corps, and served his country in Vietnam. Neil and his wife Mia lived in an historic home once owned by early Tredyffrin resident Samuel Jones, and which served as the headquarters of British commander-in-chief Sir William Howe in 1777. Neil was instrumental in rescuing the neighboring Jones Log Barn from demolition. He will be missed by many.

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Historic Homes Threatened by Turnpike Expansion—or Not

In January, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission announced that plans to widen the road to six lanes between Rt. 29 and the Valley Forge interchange would require the condemnation of nine Tredyffrin homes, of which several were over 200 years old. The condemned properties were to be used for stormwater retention basins. After a significant public outcry, the PTC reversed course on March 24, stating that “The decision to suspend project development was made in reaction to a major cost increase required to meet the demands for alternative stormwater-control methods . . .” It remains to be seen whether this is the final word on this project.

ARC Groundbreaking and Moratorium

The American Revolution Center will break ground for its proposed trailhead building in May, although that does not imply that construction on the building will begin at that time. The Center has also announced a 15-year moratorium on plans to build the controversial conference center/hotel on the property. On the financial front, the ARC announced a commitment of \$8 million in funding from the state, and an additional \$5 million from philanthropist and ARC chair Gerry Lenfest. In the meantime, a federal lawsuit by the National Parks Conservation Association received a hearing in late March in U.S. District Court, and was subsequently dismissed. The NPCA views the ARC museum complex as a competitor to Valley Forge National Historical Park. Next steps by the NPCA and other ARC opponents are unknown at this time.



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