THE SPELLING OF ROBERT NEILL
WHO BUILT THE NEILL LOG HOUSE
IN SCHENLEY PARK

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The Robert Neill Log House is now being expertly and painstakingly restored under a grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation and under the auspices of the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation which will operate the project when it is completed. The structure is one of only three known eighteenth century buildings left in the City of Pittsburgh. The distinguished architects Charles M. Stotz and Ralph Griswold are in charge of the physical restoration which will include an eighteenth century complex consisting of herb and kitchen gardens, a hen house and privy, and out-buildings of the period as well as restoration of the old spring house.

Although in the past the name given to the cabin has frequently been the "NEAL Log House" that spelling of the name would appear to be incorrect and the correct spelling of the name would appear to be "NEILL." Careful examination of the deeds and papers in Allegheny County reveals the following:

1. HISTORY OF THE LAND BEFORE NEILL

One Ambrose Newton lived in the "upper town" of Fort Pitt in July of 1761. He was a member of an artillery company at the Fort. Being promoted to the position of conductor of the Kings Store, and in common with other soldiers he secured a tract of land. He bought 262 acres on the waters of the north branch of Four Mile Run on which the cabin now stands.

The sale of lands in this section of Pennsylvania was begun April 8, 1769, following the Treaty of Fort Stanwix at which the Indians' title to this part of Pennsylvania was extinguished. Newton shortly after the Treaty put in an application and was granted an order of survey No. 3018. He died July 7, 1773, and in 1774 his executor, James Wilson of Lancaster, offered the land at public sale in Hannastown, the seat of Westmoreland County. Robert Hanna, the founder

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of the village, bought the tract for 63 pounds 9 shillings. Two days later Hanna conveyed it to Wilson for the same price — evidently in accordance with some pre-arrangement between them. Prior to 1779 by various conveyances the land became vested in Robert Neill.1

2. 

DECEMBER 10, 1787

The tract of land called “Highland” was in Pitt Township, County of Westmoreland and is believed to be the land on which the log house now being restored was constructed. The Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania had patented the land on December 10, 1787, to Robert NEILL (Patent Book 11, page 448). Neill paid 34 pounds 8 shillings for the tract. The land, being in Pitt Township, bordered the land of the “Widow Girty,” perhaps the mother of the notorious Simon. The recital in the patent states that the tract had been surveyed in pursuance of an application No. 3018 entered April 11, 1769, by one Ambrose Newton whose right by virtue of “divers conveyances” became vested in Robert NEILL.2

Neill sold the land “Highland” to Reed (see footnote 3) for 365 pounds 5 shillings in 1795, thus realizing a gain of 330 pounds over what he had paid in 1787 for the patent. This increase, together with architectural evidence as to the date of the cabin, would lead to the supposition that between the dates 1787 when Neill acquired it by patent and 1795 when he sold it, Neill had improved the property by the construction of the cabin.

3. 

AUGUST 21, 1795

One of the extant signatures (other than that on the Will itself which we discuss later) is “Robert NEIL” and his wife “Elizabeth

1 Pittsburgh Leader, February 1, 1903, 27. See also the patent described of December 10, 1787 (supra).

2 Simon Girty, Sr., father of Simon Girty, married Mary Newton, an English girl, in 1737 (Howe’s Historical Collections, Volume 2, 191). Simon, Jr. was born in 1741. In 1751 in a drunken frolic in Dauphin County an Indian named “the Fish” killed Simon, Sr. John Turner, who lived with Girty, killed “The Fish” in revenge. In 1753 Turner married the Widow Girty. In 1756 Turner was killed by the Indians at Kittanning. Simon, Jr. was captured by the Indians but his mother the Widow Girty, now Turner, escaped and went to live in Pittsburgh. In 1759 the Indians released Girty to his mother at Pittsburgh. While Girty is said to have lived at one time on Squirrel Hill (Warner, History of Allegheny County, 1859, 1, 468), Butterfield who wrote the History of the Girtys denies it. Simon Girty died in Ontario in 1818.
NEIL" (signing by mark) which occurs on a deed from “Robert NEAL and Elizabeth, his wife,” of Pittsburgh conveying “Highland,” the property of 262 acres to John Reed of Pitt Township, County of Westmoreland. The price was 365 pounds 5 shillings. The deed was made August 21, 1795, and was recorded February 9, 1796, in Deed Book Volume 4, page 472. The deed recites that “in witness whereof Robert NEILL and Elizabeth his wife” have set their hands and seals to the deed. The acknowledgment says that Robert NEILL and Elizabeth came before the notary to take the oath.

John Reed was the grandson of Hugh Reed who was a pack horse driver at Fort Pitt in 1760. After selling “Highland” to Reed, Neill located in Pittsburgh, probably on either Lot 349 or Lot 384 of Colonel Wood’s general plan of Pittsburgh as described below. Neill died in 1804.3

4. May 6, 1785

On May 6, 1785, John Penn and John Penn, Jr., made a deed to Lot 349 in Colonel Wood's Plan of the City of Pittsburgh to Robert NEAL, Yeoman, of the Town of Pittsburgh in the County of Westmoreland, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The lot was bounded by Diamond Alley, by Lot 350 in Colonel Wood’s Plan, by Fourth Street and by the “Public Square.” The deed was drafted in Philadelphia, being acknowledged before Samuel Shippen, Esq., President of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia. The Penns signed the deed in the presence of David Landreth, Peter Miller and Jean Louis Patry. Receipt for the consideration being 12 pounds 10 shillings lawful silver money of Pennsylvania was acknowledged by Tench Francis, attorney for the Penns.

Although the deed was made in Philadelphia on May 6, 1785, it was not recorded in Allegheny County until June 5, 1803. Late recordation in the frontier times of deeds was common, the owners of property apparently believing it was better to keep their deeds with them than to give them up to the recorder even though they would get them back after they were transcribed. This deed is recorded in Allegheny County in Deed Book Volume 11 at page 245.

3 The land on which the cabin was located was sold to James O'Hara whose granddaughter became Mrs. Schenley and the land eventually became part of Schenley Park. These transactions together with an account of the Burchfield tenants in the cabins are set forth in the Pittsburgh Leader of February 1, 1903, page 27.
5.
May 26, 1785

On May 26, 1785, a deed recites that Robert NEAL of Pitt Township, County of Westmoreland conveys one-half of Lot 349 of Colonel Wood's Plan to Ann Cranmere of the Town of Pittsburgh, County of Westmoreland, spinster. The consideration was 6 pounds 5 shillings lawful silver money of Pennsylvania. This deed is signed Robert NEEL. The deed was recorded in Deed Book Volume 1, page 98.

6.
July 2, 1795

In Deed Book E-5 at page 68 John Fisher (Innkeeper) and Catherine Fisher, his wife, of Washington County conveyed Lot No. 384 in Colonel Wood's general plan of Pittsburgh to Robert NEILL of Pittsburgh, Yeoman. This lot was bounded by Fifth Street and Diamond Alley and by lots 383 and 385. The consideration was 65 pounds and the date of the deed was July 2, 1795. Neill owned part of this lot 384 at his death and part was sold by his daughter out of his estate in 1825 (as the will below recites) for $1,500.00.

7.
December 10, 1801

When Robert NEILL came to sign his Last Will on December 10, 1801 (being perhaps too ill to write), he signed it by mark, thus: "X" [Robert NEILL His Mark].

The preamble recites "In the name of God Amen. I Robert Neill of the Borough of Pittsburgh, etc." The will was probated May 31, 1804, by the Register of Wills as the "will of Robert NEILL" and the original document will be seen in the Neill Log House when the cabin is restored.

8.
February 22, 1825

After Robert Neill's death there was a deed again from the Robert NEILL estate to the Farmers and Mechanics Bank for certain property owned by the "Robert NEILL Estate," being an eighth part of lot 384 in Colonel Wood's Plan. The deed is found in Deed Book Volume 32, page 58 and is dated February 22, 1825.

It is interesting to note that Robert Neill's daughter Martha,
wife of Matthew Stewart, signed her name to the deed from the estate in 1825. Thus, Martha could sign her name although her mother could not, as revealed in the deed cited above.

Thus it would seem that the only designation which is improper and unrecognized by Neill himself is *Neal*. Neill himself in the only two signatures available by his own hand, signed his name once *Neil* and once *Neel*. His Last Will and Testament indicated that he himself considered his name to be correctly spelled "*Neill*" and his daughter did also in the deed of 1825 from the Estate of Robert *Neill* to the Farmers and Mechanics Bank of Pittsburgh.