

Readers Reply

The article on the Big Band Era in the fall issue of *Western Pennsylvania History* was fascinating to me! I am the niece of Charles Craft (Baron Elliott), whom you mentioned frequently. He was my mother's brother.

I have been working on my own article about my Uncle Charles, describing his military service during World War II, which I learned about almost by accident. He was reticent about this, and I only persuaded him to discuss what he did in the war not long before he died in February 2003.

Having been drafted into the U.S. Army in 1943, Uncle Charles became part of the 35th Special Services Company, taking some of his band members from Pittsburgh with him. The 35th was an entertainment company, staffed specifically to present live "Big Band" variety shows and movies.

Following basic infantry training at Fort Meade, Maryland, the 35th was sent overseas to the British Isles to entertain the troops during the build-up for D-Day. They toured with James Cagney. The 35th landed on the Coast of Normandy (at Omaha Beach, in fact) in July 1944 and thereafter followed the U.S. Army through France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, and finally into Germany. They were caught in the Battle of the Bulge, where they briefly had to resort to rifles instead of musical instruments. Uncle Charles was awarded a Bronze Star for bravery due to his leadership within the 35th.

Best regards,
Lynn Morris Mendelsohn



- The Depreciation Lands Museum (DLM) is a living history village in the North Hills of Pittsburgh. It is in the heart of the Depreciation Lands, designated by the Pennsylvania legislature in 1783, with 720,000 acres purchased from the Iroquois nation in 1784, to compensate soldiers who had fought in the Revolutionary War. The name is because troops had been receiving seriously depreciated currency as their pay. The state issued Depreciation Certificates, which had a value in gold currency, and could be used to purchase the newly surveyed land north of the Ohio and Allegheny Rivers.
- The all-volunteer DLM has carried out its mission for 40 years to preserve and interpret the lives of early settlers. Every Sunday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., May through October, visitors walk into another world teeming with fully costumed interpreters of all ages going about their daily lives circa 1792. These interpreters cook and sew, blacksmith and teach, run the mercantile, tend the garden, play colonial games, and spin and weave both linen and wool.
- The DLM hosts special activities for the public throughout the year, including a Tavern Night dinner, Children's Heritage Day, a Fleece-to-Shawl demonstration, Hydref fall festival, Pioneer Living day camp, and Colonial Teas for both children and adults. For schools and groups, interactive programs such as Living in History and Cabin Days can be scheduled at any time. For adults, the weekly Gunn Klass, sponsored by the DLM and supported by Hampton Township and the Hampton Township School District, offers classes in building the Pennsylvania longrifle and other early firearms, along with other types of colonial arts and crafts. The Klass also participates in and conducts historical events in conjunction with the museum.

Weeding flax.
Depreciation Lands Museum.



A volunteer fires a musket.
Jeff Semke.



Spinning flax.
Depreciation Lands Museum.

- This spring, the site will jump into the Civil War era to celebrate Hampton Township's 1861 founding. To assist with this celebration, the DLM will host the Heinz History Center's traveling Civil War exhibit, *The Civil War in Pennsylvania*, from April 12 to May 6, 2014. Many special activities and programs are scheduled during the run of this exhibit, including a Civil War concert presented by the Pittsburgh Historical Music Society.
- For information, visit www.DepreciationLandsMuseum.org or contact the museum at DepreciationLands@gmail.com or (412) 486-0563. The museum is off William Flinn Highway/PA 8 at 4743 South Pioneer Road, Allison Park, Pa., 15101.

The History Center Affiliates Program, HCAP, is a membership-based network that allows local and regional historical societies and museums access to museum professionals and best practice standards through the Senator John Heinz History Center.

To learn more about HCAP or to apply for membership for your organization, please contact Robert O. Stakeley, Educator, at rostakeley@heinzhistorycenter.org or (412) 454-6359.