

MARCH 2021

THE CRAVEN HALL NEWSLETTER

CRAVEN HALL HISTORICAL SOCIETY, THE JOHN FITCH
STEAMBOAT MUSEUM & THE CRAVEN-VANSANT BURYING GROUND



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Erik Fleischer - President
Laura Martin - VP, Treasurer
Bernice Graeter-Reardon - VP, Secretary
Jennifer Burns - VP, Public Relations, Editor
Kent Sloan - Photographer

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Welcome to 2021 and goodbye to 2020 – we won't miss you!

While the pandemic has changed our lives significantly during the past year, the Society was able to function reasonably well with the hosting of 2/3rds of our Elementary Program for 4th graders before being shut down. Unfortunately, our steam/model steamboat program with Centennial Middle Schools was cancelled. We were able to conduct many of our monthly House and Museum tours with special protocols – face masks and social distancing.

Looking to the future, our Board authorized the establishment of three Vice-President positions; namely, Vice-President/Treasurer, Laura Martin; Vice-President/Secretary, Bernice Graeter-Reardon, and Vice-President/ Public Relations – Jennifer Burns. The persons selected to these positions were members of a management task force established in 2019 to chart our path forward. One of the prime tasks of the management team was to establish a vision for the future and the initial result was the establishment of a new branding – namely, The CRAVEN HALL HISTORIC SITE to reflect not only Craven Hall, the building, but also the The John Fitch Steamboat Museum and the Craven/Vansant Burying Ground. To highlight our rebranding, the team developed a new logo to reflect the change and our members and supporting businesses will receive a decal (with adhesive backing) and a refrigerator magnet as shown below.

In conclusion, we want to again thank our member supporters and businesses that make it possible for us to keep “History Alive” in our community. Please consider taking out or renewing your membership in our Society. We've raised the membership fee to \$15 to be able to offer you an adhesive decal and refrigerator magnet. Donations are also deeply appreciated and your contributions are tax deductible as we are a registered 501-c-3 non-profit corporation.



As we move forward into 2021 and beyond, we hope to be able to reactivate our school programs in 2021 and once again present a program series on history topics with guest presenters, another craft brew session with Moss Mill Brewing of Southampton, PA, and a character presentation of “residents” of the Craven/Vansant Burying Ground. In the meantime, stay safe and well – hopefully we are on the path to a more normal lifestyle.

-Erik Fleischer, President

Craven Hall & The John Fitch Steamboat Museum Gifted Internet Access Through Historic Partnership

Thanks to Ray Cline of Libertas Consulting of Ivyland, PA and Low Voltage Nation, a consortium of internet providers across the nation, Craven Hall and the John Fitch Steamboat Museum now have access to high-speed internet. The equipment and installation, valued at over \$30,000, was almost completely donated by Libertas Consulting and members of Low Voltage Nation, along with financial contributions from local supporters.

Craven Hall also received a grant from Visit Bucks for \$1,500 to use for the project. The project came about through a local Chamber of Commerce scholarship meeting held at Craven Hall where Ray Cline, owner of Libertas Consulting, learned about the educational programs on local history conducted annually for local school students since 1996 and saw a need and opportunity to help advance the efforts of Craven Hall and the John Fitch Steamboat Museum. Craven Hall and the John Fitch Steamboat Museum can now offer free internet access to visitors and guest presenters and provide a 30-person meeting hall with internet access for other groups. In addition, this new service will provide the capability to enhance our museum exhibits and other offerings.

Words alone make it difficult to express our deep appreciation for all the vendors who donated equipment and the numerous installers who had to find appropriate places to install the equipment while protecting the historic fabric of an 1845 mansion house. It was a monumental effort completed over a single weekend without a hitch. To all who participated and/or made a contribution, a huge THANK YOU!!



The Craven Hall Historical Society Has Authors

Craven Hall Historical Society is proud to announce it has two published authors on its board! Abraham Lincoln historian and author, Fred Antil, and local historian and author, Jennifer Burns (Rogers), have published books on topics they are both very passionate about — Fred, *A Lincoln Treasure Trove*, and Jennifer, *Hidden History of Bucks County*.

For Lincoln enthusiasts and experts alike, *A Lincoln Treasure Trove* is fun, informative, and engaging, and offers some of the most interesting, unknown stories and lesser-known facts about our nation's 16th president. *Hidden History of Bucks County* dives into the rich history beautiful Bucks County has to offer, from stories of our county's founders and famous and influential families, to historic, Revolutionary War-era taverns and inns, cemeteries, and more.

Purchase your copy of *A Lincoln Treasure Trove* or *Hidden History of Bucks County* online at Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, and local book stores near you.

CRAVEN HALL LAUNCHES REBRANDED, MOBILE-FRIENDLY WEBSITE

In Fall 2020, we announced the launch of our new mobile-friendly website, built by our VP of Public Relations, Jennifer Burns, and her brother, Brian Rogers, a senior web developer from a local digital advertising agency. We also recently partnered with Blu Echo Design, based out of Langhorne, Bucks County, for a logo redesign and rebranding. We chose to rebrand our organization as The Craven Hall Historic Site to encompass Craven Hall, the John Fitch Steamboat Museum, and our historic burying ground which dates back to the pre-Revolutionary War era.

Our previous website, built before the age of mobile browsing, showcased our years of work dedicated to the preservation of local history through stories, articles, and photographs. Everything was successfully transferred to our new website and additional features were added including a contact form, donation form, and more. Later this year, we are planning on launching our eLibrary, providing access to over one hundred books and documents. We will continue to add to our eLibrary database as we acquire more historic documents and books for our archives. A huge thank you to Brian for his help on this project!

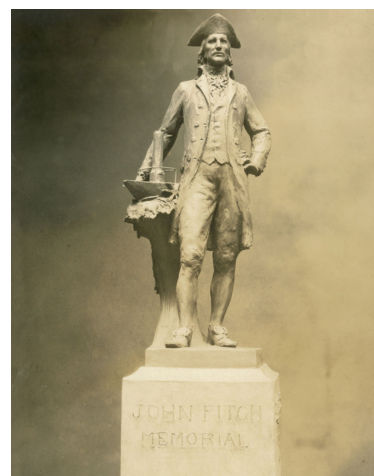


Visit our rebranded website at:
www.craven-hall.org

JOHN FITCH - STEAMBOAT INVENTOR - HE GETS NO RESPECT!

For those readers who have visited the John Fitch Steamboat Museum here in Warminster, PA, you may have heard one of our docents reference John Fitch as the Rodney Dangerfield of his day. The lack of respect for John Fitch is wide spread – a marker for his birthplace was placed on an adjacent property because the lot owners didn't want it on their property!

We are indebted to Kathy Hernard of Slidell, LA for yet another example of the lack of respect for the steamboat inventor. Ms. Hernard is the granddaughter of renowned Chicago sculptor, Frederick C Hibbard. He is best known for his statues of Mark Twain and Tom Sawyer/Huck Finn in Hannibal, MO, along with a number of Civil War statues. Mr. Hibbard attempted to memorialize John Fitch with a number of model sculptures as seen here but apparently could not gain any sponsors to support his proposed sculptures. Just another example of how little respect John Fitch has received even though his invention paved the way for modern transportation.



PANDEMIC ACTIVITIES AT CRAVEN HALL

Our maintenance “crew” of Kent Sloan, Otto Blavier, and writer, Erik, have undertaken the opportunity during our current shutdown to do a major “refreshment” of Craven Hall along with some needed yard work.

Kent and Erik “refreshed” the Library and Museum rooms and upstairs hallway in Craven Hall – scraping, plastering and repainting walls and woodwork. In addition, 15 sets of 2nd floor shutters were repaired, repainted, and rehung.

Our “refreshment” activities were supported by additional volunteers, Bernice Graeter-Reardon, Mary Ann Casele, Laura Martin and Jen Burns and her parents, Cindy and Ray Rogers.

Additional cleaning/repainting projects are planned for 2021.



Museum Room



Shutter Repair and Repainting

Otto Blavier cut down our large log pile in preparation for splitting and removed two storm damaged apple trees in preparation for our Christmas Tree sales this fall/winter. Otto can and will do almost anything but draws the line when it comes to painting! We have excused him from painting projects as his other skills are invaluable!

We hope the current shutdown will soon be lifted but in the interim we will continue our efforts to accomplish needed work on the property.



Apple Tree Removal

18TH CENTURY CLOCK INSTALLED IN VANSANT PARLOR

Craven Hall has a new addition to our collection thanks to the clock repair and restoration skills of Orland Bergere. The 30-hour clock is of English origin and dates circa 1780. The wood case is walnut and the dial is hand painted. There is no chime or bell but the clock workings originally had an alarm bell. The writer bought the clock at an auction in Virginia because of the handsome walnut case and beautiful dial without realizing the “workings” were in very poor condition. We are most appreciative of Orland Bergere’s many volunteer hours of repair and restoration that has brought this fine wall clock back to working order.



EDUCATION PROGRAMS ON LOCAL HISTORY IMPACTED BY PANDEMIC

The year 2020 is one we probably all want to forget as it caused the cancellation of many programs. Fortunately, we were able to complete two thirds of our program for 4th graders on local history. All twelve classes for McDonald Elementary and Davis Elementary were completed before schools closed due to the pandemic. Unfortunately, we didn't get a chance to host any classes from Willow Dale Elementary.

The program on the importance of steam and the model steamboat competition by students of Klinger Middle School and Log College were also cancelled by the pandemic. Since these classes are held in May, we still have hope that we may be able to conduct them in May 2021. We normally schedule our Elementary Programs beginning in December and we hold out hope that this program can restart in December 2021.

We are considering the possibility to video tape some portions of the Elementary Program in that event that student visits to Craven Hall are delayed until December 2022.



TALES FROM THE 1769 VANSANT/CRAVEN BURYING GROUND

Part 1 - James (Jacobus) "Cobe" Scout

The historic 1769 Craven/Vansant Burying Ground contains over 60 graves and several of the "residents" have interesting stories to tell. Probably the most interesting "resident" is James (Jacobus) Scout, or "Cobe" Scout as he was known by his friends and associates. His gravestone had the unusual inscription, "he shot an English soldier at 900 yards and killed him," and "he was an intimate friend of Thomas Paine." The original gravestone has long been gone but a 1912 postcard of the graveyard confirms the inscriptions. While not recorded on his gravestone, "Cobe" was also a close friend of John Fitch and he allowed Fitch to use his shop to build his first steamboat models. The story of shooting an English soldier is recorded in WWH Davis's *History of Bucks County*. "Cobe" apparently was "mocked" with a gesture by an English or Hessian soldier on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River as "Cobe" and his companions stood on the Pennsylvania shoreline. "Cobe" raised his rifle (he was a rifle-maker), fired a shot and the soldier dropped – thus the story.

"Cobe" was also involved in the Revolutionary War incident known as the Paoli Massacre where colonial troops were set upon at night by British soldiers with disastrous results for the colonials. "Cobe" was making his escape when he heard a horseman bearing down on him and thought he was a "goner." At that moment, a shot rang out and the rider fell from his horse. "Cobe" managed to grab on to the horse and escape. He found two pistols and a pair of horseshoes in the saddlebags on the horse. He sold the pistols but kept the horseshoes. His neighbors in Warminster always thought him a little strange which may explain his friendship with another "strange" fellow – John Fitch.

Part 2 - Abraham Sutphin

Abraham Sutphin is one of 11 Revolutionary War veterans who "reside" in the Craven-Vansant Burying Ground. Our "Troubles" with Mother England that erupted in the spring of 1775 prompted Abraham in 1777 to join Captain Bingley's unit of the Pennsylvania Militia. That unit was part of Captain Issac Longstreth's brigade and assigned to General Lacey's Corp.

On the night of April 30, 1778, he was assigned sentry duty at the south end of Crooked Billet (Hatborough) and observed an enemy force advancing on the town. He claims to have quickly fired a warning shot to alert Gen. Lacey and his forces and as such he claimed to have saved Gen. Lacey and others from being captured or killed. The battle, known as the Battle of Crooked Billet, was a rout of the militia forces with many militia captured or killed. Abraham was fortunate to escape capture. Abraham's brother-in-law was none other than James (Jacobus) Scout.

The Craven/Vansant Burying Ground is accessible from the back parking lot of the Fox Run Apartments on Newtown Road.



Gravestone of Jacobus Scout



Gravestone of Abraham Sutphin

THE BATTLE OF CROOKED BILLET: MAY 1, 1778

On May 1, 1778, the Battle of Crooked Billet took place near the Crooked Billet Tavern in present-day Hatboro, Montgomery County. A skirmish in the Philadelphia Campaign of the American Revolutionary War, British forces, led by General William Howe and under the command of Major John Graves Simcoe, attacked Brigadier General John Lacey and three Pennsylvania militia regiments. John Lacey, of Buckingham, became a military officer when he was appointed brigadier general in January 1778 at the age of 23. General George Washington, quartered at Valley Forge, fearing the British would raid Bucks County and surrounding areas for food and supplies, sent Lacey two objectives to meet by spring 1778: guard the roads leading to Philadelphia, and protect the Patriots throughout the countryside.

General Lacey's forces continued to shrink despite the promise of one thousand men at all times. Lacey's camp shrunk to just six hundred men, and then to about 400 at the time of battle. In April, Simcoe gained permission to launch a surprise attack on Lacey, and on April 30, a joint force of Hessians and British troops marched from Philadelphia to Second Street Pike, up through Horsham, cornering Lacey at his encampment in Hatboro. Lacey, caught off guard because a Lieutenant ordered to keep watch fell asleep at his post, had to quickly retreat and pull his troops to a nearby wooded area. Abraham Sutphin (our burying ground "resident") claims to have fired a warning shot to alert General Lacey, possibly saving Lacey and others from being captured or killed.

The British wreaked havoc, stealing supplies, burning crops, and committing atrocious crimes against the Americans. According to the Royal Pennsylvania Gazette, between 80-100 Americans were killed, at least 50 more captured, forcing Lacey and his troops to retreat into Warminster.

If you are interested in learning more about the battle, please be sure to visit our Battle of Crooked Billet display during your next visit to Craven Hall.



Painting of the Battle of Crooked Billet. See this at your next visit to Craven Hall.

We Thank You for Your Continued Support!

To stay up to date on Craven Hall, and to learn more about Colonial America and local history, visit Facebook.com/CravenHallHistoricalSociety Instagram.com/HistoricCravenHall, and Medium.com/@cravenhall



MEMBERSHIPS & DONATIONS

NAME: _____ STREET: _____
CITY/STATE/ZIP: _____ TELEPHONE: _____
EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Membership:

- ☐ Individual or Family: \$15 (Includes decal and refrigerator magnet)
☐ Donation assistance for additional displays - John Fitch Hall - \$_____ *Thank You.*

Volunteers:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restoration/Repairs: | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership/Public Relations: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising: | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Events: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic Research/Library: | <input type="checkbox"/> Gravestone Restoration: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Centralizing Records: | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Docent (Tour Guide): | |

If you are interested in volunteering, please check a box. We need you. Thank you.

- ☐ **Contribution to the John Fitch Museum** Amount: _____ *Thank you.*

- DVD of Craven Hall** ☐ Amount by check: \$17.50 (to address below)
☐ Amount by pick-up: \$15.00 (Please call to arrange: 215-675-4698)

Contributions to aid in the restoration and operation of Craven Hall are always welcome. Please make your check payable to: **Craven Hall Society, Inc. P.O. Box 2042, Warminster, PA 18974.**

The Society is a non-profit corporation registered in Pennsylvania. Your contribution is tax deductible.



Craven Hall 1900's

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