

Interpretive Program Overview

Our Mission at C.I.

The mission of the Conococheague Institute is to develop and foster awareness, understanding, and stewardship of the cultural and natural history of the Appalachian frontier of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia.

Our primary way of **realizing this mission** is through costumed **historical interpretation** that gives visitors a snapshot of life in the lower Cumberland Valley in the 18th century and in some cases the early 19th century. While it is not possible for our programs to portray this period with 100 percent accuracy, our goal is to provide visitors with an experience that educates them by **using the latest research and the most accurate sources.**

C.I. Interpretive Themes

The Conococheague Institute currently covers a broad range of topics in our interpretation as our site's history spans from neolithic peoples to the mid 20th century. Our primary focus, however, is the 18th century and in this time there is still a broad array of stories that can be interpreted. The 1730s, when euro-Americans first settled the area, are vastly different from the 1790s. For this reason our **general interpretation** tends to settle on **the inter-war period** between the French and Indian (1763) and the American War for Independence (1776). Further, the "frontier period," the period that is our mission to interpret, ends in the Cumberland Valley around 1770 when most lands are settled. Though we focus on this inter-war period, other periods can of course be interpreted, but usually only during special events or themed weekends. Unless there is a special event or timeline **these periods should never be interpreted at the same time.**

- **Possible Periods for Costumed Interpretation**
 - Early European Settlement 1730-1745
 - The French and Indian War 1755-1763
 - Inter-War Period 1763-1776
 - American War for Independence 1776-1781
 - Early Republic 1788-1809
 - Federal Period 1810-1820

In that time range, CI's history includes a **range of interpretations.** Classes represented include middling wealth landowners, laborers, craftsmen, travelers, enslaved people and indentured servants. Women's roles, often underrepresented at many sites, play a pivotal role in our site interpretation of Daily Family Life. The PA frontier in the mid 18th Century contains a **blend of cultures** including Welsh, English, Scotch-Irish, German, African and Indigenous people.

Special America250 Focus

As part of the nation's anniversary, CI's strategic plan involves incorporating a focus on the 1770's time period. This will involve presenters having a greater knowledge of local and national events during this time frame for context, but CI's personal interpretation will focus on the daily life of an indentured servant in rural Pennsylvania. Common lifeskills will still be key, but weaving the larger story into it. What did Independence and Liberty mean to the disenfranchised? Why were people in this region supporting the Revolution. More specific plans are pending

Interpretive Standards

Like many other historic sites, CI has standards to ensure that our programming and interpretation is as **accurate as possible**. As interpreters we have a responsibility to make sure that our dress, activities, and programs are as accurate as possible. Otherwise, our **credibility** will suffer.

If an **interpreter** is **representing** a person or peoples of another time and is telling visitors “this is how they would have dressed, this is what they would have eaten, this is how they would have done this, etc etc...” they should be accurately representing and delivering the historical information. If not concerned with authenticity, the interpreter will be dishonest to visitors and hinder CI’s mission. For many visitors their only exposure to living history might be at C.I. so the product that we present to them needs to be top notch.

Good interpretation starts with good research. Many people will get into living history and interpretation because they think the period is cool, they like the aesthetics, the fashion interests them and so on. This is fine, but nice clothing doesn’t mean someone is knowledgeable and a keen knowledge of the period doesn’t mean that someone can just wear or do whatever they want. By doing the research an interpreter can know what clothing is accurate for the period they wish to interpret and what facet of life they wish to interpret to the public. CI staff are more than willing to point people in the right direction and work with them in honing this knowledge. **CI also has an incredible research library with a specific focus on 18th century life and material culture. As a requirement to be a volunteer a volunteer must also be a member. Members have free access to our library.**

It's important for us, as an interpretive site, to focus on **one period at a time** so as to give that period the time and nuanced programming it deserves while also **maintaining standards of interpretation**. However, presenting additional time periods allows visitors to ponder the evolution of history and grasp cause and effect as well as change over time. Much can be learned about various time periods by demonstrating how technology, trades, farming, fashion, politics, government, foreign policy, racial issues etc. are altered by time. **CI will occasionally offer special programs designed to offer visitors a glimpse into future eras beyond mid 18th century frontier life. Interpreters will have to be very clear with visitors concerning the goal of these events and ensure the general public has an excellent understanding of the timeline being discussed.**

The interpretation needs to make sense for our mission. As our main area that we tend to interpret is the end of the frontier period in the Conococheague settlement, interpreters need to make sure that their interpretation makes sense contextually for that era. As a hyperbolic example an interpreter should not be dressed as a member of the British nobility while sitting in our Ordinary. Our objective in interpretation is to show the lives of the **plain, everyday, and common**.

If the Conococheague Institute is an interpreter’s main location for doing historical programs we want to thank them for their support. We’re humbled that they picked us, especially if they are new to historical interpretation. C.I. does not want to turn people away if their interpretation doesn’t meet our standards, but rather wants to work with these individuals to bring them up to or start them at the standard. **Ask what you can do to meet our standard.** CI staff and trusted volunteers would be happy to help those who may already have their own interpretation or are brand new to 18th century historical interpretation.

Historical Interpretation can be expensive and **we're more than willing to give advice about where to acquire accurate materials and in some cases how to make your own!** Check with us first before you shop or create. The best way to become a great interpreter is to read as much as possible and then think about how you can clearly and concisely impart your interesting research information to visitors of different ages and interest levels. It's understandable that interpreters are very concerned with their dress and appearance, but developing knowledge and public speaking skills should be a high priority for those wishing to engage visitors.

Interpretive Areas

C.I. has a main interpretive area which is referred to as "**The Historic Area.**" The H.A. refers to **the Log Home, the garden, the Ordinary, and the Green.** This is where the majority of our historic programs and events take place. Each quadrant of the HA has its own interpretive goals and themes that interpreters should adhere to when in these spaces.

It's important to remember that at CI our interpretation is not a portrayal of the specific history of Rock Hill Farm, but rather a general interpretation of life in the Conococheague Settlement in the 18th Century. **The Historic Area is a stage that uses its buildings as props to tell the regional history.** It is still important, however, to know the history of CI's structures along with how we use them today.

The Log Home (aka the Negley Cabin)

- The **main style of homes** being built in and around the Conococheague Settlement from the 1730s-1830s were **log homes.** Their quick method of construction, by cutting notches on the end of logs that fit together, and the abundance of building material that was readily available (i.e. tree for timbers, red clay, stone, and limestone for chinking.) meant that a family, with little more than their worldly possessions and some tools, could venture into the wilderness and build a solid home. The log home style was adopted by new settlers to Pennsylvania based off of the homes that were being constructed by Swedes along the Delaware River in the 17th century.
- Originally built shortly after **Eliab Negley purchased the property in 1806,** the Negley Log Home was built in a popular style for many log homes in that area of PA. Sadly, the **original structure burnt down in 2016.** While **today's log home** sits on the original foundations and shares similar dimensions to the original, it **is a fabrication** that is not a one to one recreation of the original. Log homes of this style and dimensions were seen from the 1750s-1830s and therefore it serves our purpose as an **interpretive tool** to tell a general history of the region.
- **Log Home Interpretive Programs**
The Log House is home to many of our most popular programs at CI. Being that it is a fully furnished house it lends itself well to telling the stories of the day to day lives of the simple farmers and other early inhabitants of the Conococheague Settlement.
 - **Foodways:** With our **very large cooking hearth** we are able to do some great foodways programs in our log home. All of our foodways programs are based on **period sources** like cookbooks and journals. Our foodways programs also have to accurately follow the **seasons.** For example, if it's December and the ground is frozen we can't use fresh produce that would normally be available in say June. Also, we encourage anyone doing a food ways program to **use produce from our garden first** before they buy their own or

bring produce from off site. Just **contact site staff** before the program day to determine what is available in the garden.

- **Laundry:** CI has everything needed, minus the stale urine, to do laundry historically. Laundry is one of those household chores that would have been done multiple times throughout the week. It is a fun and easy program to learn and is very hands on and interactive for visitors.
- **Baking:** Next to the cabin is the bake oven. Baking is another fun program that can really involve visitors. Make some dough in advance and bake it in the oven or make dough on site and get visitors involved in kneading the dough. They'll think they are doing a fun historic activity, but in reality they are just doing the hard work...**NOTE** the oven needs to be fired hours in advance to bring it up to temperature so either **plan to arrive early to heat the oven** if one expects to have bread on the table by noon **or contact site staff ahead of the programming day** so the fire can be built the morning of.
- **Misc Tasks:** There are always various tasks that can just be done around the log home and the site. Various tasks could include: **Sewing, small crafts, household chores, writing, brewing, apothecary, splitting wood, drawing water, visitor dress up, and so much more.**

The Garden

- In the 18th century most households, even if it was just a small plot of land, would grow something on their property. Self sufficiency varied depending on location and accessibility to local markets and goods. **CI's historic garden represents a subsistence garden that a rural family would have used to feed and take care of themselves.** If there was anything left over it may find its way to market to make some extra money for the family. **Kitchen gardens were largely managed by women and young children, both free and enslaved.** Gardens were used for both **produce and medicine.**
- Our current garden is a **four square garden** which was a popular style due to it being easily managed. Each corner of the square can have varied soils to suit varied types of garden produce. The borders of the garden also serve a purpose. The border closest to the log home is for **kitchen herbs.** The two sides are for **medicinal herbs.** The back side is for **miscellaneous.** The middle bed is **ornamental.**
- **Garden Programs**

In the Spring and Summer the garden always has work that needs doing and lends itself well to being a very interactive space with visitors. Encourage visitors to explore and get their hands dirty.

 - **What's Growing? Produce:** Encourage visitors to explore what's growing in the main garden beds. If there is anything that is ripe, wash it off and encourage visitors to try it with their consent. Give the historical context for the items that are growing and how they may have been used in the period.
 - **Weeding:** Yes, weeding can be made into a program. Garden weeds have been a problem since the first gardeners laid seed to earth. Learn the weeds that grow in the garden and educate visitors about them. Some weeds are edible and medicinal and may have been used by the 18th century gardener.

- **What's Growing? Medicinal:** Same as the produce program, however, **do not encourage visitors to explore medicinal herbs without appropriate supervision.** Several medicinal herbs growing in the garden can cause illness, vomiting, diarrhea, and even death if consumed in large quantities. A good knowledge of CI's medicinal herbs should be achieved before handling them.

The Tavern (aka the Piper Cabin aka the Ordinary)

- **Taverns** in the 18th century were so **much more than a simple place to have a drink** and a bite to eat. Taverns served a **vital role in 18th century society** especially in burgeoning communities. By law towns had to have places to put up travelers as the average person will only travel roughly 10 miles by foot. Prospective tavern owners would apply for a license from the colony, later state, and if granted would be allowed to charge travelers for letting out a room. To make some more money on the side, taverns would serve food and drink while guests waited for their rooms. There was no standard for this food and drink and the fare was often ordinary hence the name "ordinary." Oftentimes most early towns had only **two public buildings**, a church and the tavern. Taverns were essential for governmental business in early America. Rooms would serve as meeting places for superior and lower **court sessions**, as well as **public meetings**. In addition, the tavern was the place where **business would be conducted between farmers, artisans, and town merchants**. They served as centers for people to receive their mail, catch up on news, and debate politics.
- The building itself, the **Piper Cabin**, was originally located in the **Amberson Valley** in Franklin county. It was likely built in the last quarter of the 18th Century and served several purposes throughout its lifetime. It was relocated to **CI in 2011** for preservation. Today, like the other buildings in the Historic Area, we use it as a prop to interpret the general history of the region.
- **Possible Tavern Programs and talking points**
 - **Community Hub:** Taverns often served as hubs of their community. Dispel the myth to visitors that taverns were seedy venues only to be used for drinking and gambling. Give context to visitors about the role that taverns played in early America.
 - **Fun and Games:** Though taverns served many purposes in their communities, they were still taverns. Gaming, singing, and dancing were as popular in the 18th century as they are today and taverns were a good host to these activities. Lead visitors in some singing, play a game of draughts, and if you feel the rhythm, have visitors join in the fun of a jig and reel.
 - **Visiting Trades and Crafts:** As people passed through regions they often brought their trades with them. Interpretative stories that don't work in a small rural home (surveyors, traders, recruiting parties) are perfect for the tavern. Aim to focus on educating the visitor on the context for the trade/role, and how it fits in the broader 18th century community.
 - **Politics and Debate:** Throughout many parts of 18th century history, taverns served as meeting places where discourse could be held on the day's politics. Making sure to keep modern politics out of the discussion, talk revolutionary politics with visitors. What are their opinions on the Stamp Act? How do they feel about the Proclamation Line of 1763? Prime visitors and get them debating!

The Green at C.I.

Village greens to this day still serve as a common outdoor space that can be used for all kinds of purposes. Greens are common grazing areas, places to hold festivals and fairs, and with a few sticks, a ball, and a cricket bat, they quickly become an arena! Historically, the green at Rock Hill Farm would have been just an area for grazing.

- **Possible Programs**

- **Games:** As a large outdoor space the green works really well for large team games like cricket. There are several other games like battledor, graces, or even lacrosse that can be played on the green.
- **Larger Trades or Craft Demonstrations:** There are several areas just off the walking path on the green that are level and lend themselves well to demonstrations. Simply set up a fly or contact site staff ahead of the programming day to set up CI's fly. The buildings in the historic area can quickly get filled with both participants and visitors alike so if the weather is nice spread out and use the green for programs.
- **Militia Mustering:** Many towns and communities in the 18th century had "mustering places." These were predetermined locations that served as training grounds for the local militia when they were required to meet. For special events demonstrating drill and teaching drill are both great uses for the Green at CI.

For the Visitor

It is important to remember that when volunteers are interpreting at C.I., whether for a special event or for a normal interpretive day, that they are **representing the site**. Many volunteers come from all different backgrounds and varied groups, but upon becoming a trusted volunteer, they are part of **the team**. Visitors won't necessarily be able to differentiate between staff, volunteers, or groups. They will see all as **representing the site**. For this reason we want volunteers to be aware of their language, actions, and interpretation when interacting with visitors. C.I. has a **zero tolerance** policy when it comes to inappropriate or offensive behavior especially around visitors. C.I. staff have final say in programs, events, and interpretation. **If a volunteer wishes to try something new, change a program, or invite individuals to the site for programming they must consult with site staff well ahead of the programming day.**

The main reason that we have our onboarding process for volunteers is **accountability**. This is why we strongly discourage walk-ons for our programs, events and interpretive days. We want to know who people are before they are in a program with visitors or our other volunteers. Our onboarding protects the site, our volunteers, and our visitors.

- **Walk-ons:** We usually don't have many issues with walk-ons, but they do happen. C.I. can't necessarily turn away a visitor just because they showed up wearing historic clothing, but walk-ons should be treated like other visitors and **not like other participants**. It's the equivalent of if someone showed up to a fast food restaurant in that restaurant's uniform. It's weird, but it's allowed as long as they don't start talking to visitors and claiming that they work there...

In the future, C.I. plans to implement a **signifier** that will **differentiate volunteers from visitors**.

Finally, **volunteers and staff are here for the visitor**. Without visitors there is no reason to have interpretive programs. While gathering at C.I. and seeing each other is fun, volunteers and staff have to

remember that they are on site to interact with and educate the visitors. Our volunteers are not just window dressing. They are a crucial part of our programming and without them our 18th century community would lack it's community. Leave egos in the parking lot, ask what you can do for CI, and remember we are **here for the visitor.**