

Conococheague Pioneer Times

The Newsletter of the Conococheague Institute for the Study of Cultural Heritage

Volume 31 Issue 4



4th Quarter 2025

Good Day to you...From the Executive Director



It's so good to be reflecting on this year and all we've accomplished together. I never would have dreamed a few years ago that we'd be serving 6,000 students in education bookings, hosting weekly **Revolutionary Homestead** programs, and being so involved and supported by the community.

As you'll remember, we launched a **\$50,000 Matching Campaign** this fall, so turn to the next page to see how close we are to completion thanks to people like you.

In early December, I was honoured to be a presenter at the **Americana Corner 'Preserving America'** conference again, this time in Franklin, Tennessee. Showcasing and sharing tips about our own success is a real privilege, a AC founder **Tom Hand** has been such an inspirational supporter of our mission and growth.



As expected, our fall education bookings were busy, fun, and entertaining for all! We saw new students from religious academies, homeschool groups, and public schools. We welcomed back the entire 6th and 7th grade of **Greencastle Antrim Middle**, and the whole of 3rd grade of the **Tuscarora School District**. We're able to host such large bookings thanks to our professional staff, dedicated volunteers, and educational sponsorships from **Patriot Federal Credit Union**, & **M&T Bank Charitable Trust**.



Animal lovers will be happy to note that we're giving our goats and sheep extra special treatment this winter. We've chosen to blur the lines of history and installed heat lamps, warm water buckets and wind screens in their house, so they are earning a well earned break after an outstanding year.

They've been on live **ABC TV**, and Hawthorne is a regular at all our outreach programs now. We believe Carmella the goat and one of the sheep are pregnant, so fingers crossed for new lambs and kids in March!

Please contact me if you ever have any questions or suggestions for the Conococheague Institute. We are here because of the generosity of our community, and I love to serve you. mwedd@cimlg.org - 717-328-2800

*Cheers! Matthew Wedd
Executive Director*



2025 Fall Contributions

With the last newsletter we publicly announced a \$50,000 Matching Campaign supported by our founder Dr. John C. Stauffer. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed between September 23rd and December 6th, and to those who continue to support our 2025 programs, operations, educational visits, and preservation work. Every gift truly makes a lasting impact.

Proud CI Contributors

Mac and Madeline Cepeda of Liberty Auto & Tire, Claudia C. Mooij, Ron Chamberlin, Mike and MaryEllen South, Hope Bigler of Undone Kombucha, Lynda Thomason, Matt Rockwell of Rockwell Construction Company, Richard Johnson, Lee Davis, Mayor Michael Pedersen of Brownstone Chiropractic, Vince Newell, Dennis Kubicki, Anthony Distefano, Susan Etter, Melodie Anderson Smith, MaryRuth and Richard Reis, Janet Rogers, Carol Parsons, Drusilla and Vern Hart, John C. Stauffer, Karen and Robert Yudnich, Denise Smith, Peter Wang, Joanne Klase, Tomi Kotowich of the Mercersburg Inn, Dana and John Rogers, Kay Boward, Dick Ebersole, Oliver Goetz, Donna Catling, Jenifer Depaolo, Ted Mills, Eric Fischer, Shiela and Tyrone Snider, Catherine Carbaugh, Patricia Novack, Mary Hoffman, Thomas G. & Nancy H. Burkey Fund, Frank Walizer, Barbara and Tony Onorato of Shady Spring Farm, Scott Lemon, Chris and Susan White, Joyce Horst, the Estate of Joan M. McKean, Wendy Mahan, Richard Sturtz, John Rudmin, Lois Steichen, Rebecca Gettel, Bethany Bell, Sam Cool, Ron Jones, Jack & Deborah Ebersole, Jean Guritz, Ralph and Dotty Young, Mikaela, Mummert, James Wetzler, Kevin Fox, James Rogers Sr, Jennifer Martin, David Ditto, Joanne Klase, and Rob Adler.

...Thank you for your support! Every contribution is stewarded to ensure our organization is a success!



In-Kind Donations

In preparation for a trial Longbow Lottery we had donations of generous prizes from **Blackjacket Munitions** (a Percussion Cap French Model Pistol) and **3Rivers Archery** (drinks thermos, baseball cap, and other merchandise).

Barbara Onorato of **Shady Spring Farm** donated a beautiful bottle of Madeira and gift cards, **Gina Vitale** contributed handmade jewellery, and even our staff gave some fun items.

Ace Distributing generously supplied \$500 of beers and adult beverages for our fundraiser events, and **America250 PA** also gave us ample items.



Experiences



Education



Heritage



Dr. John C. Stauffer \$50,000 Matching Campaign Progress \$43,314.11, just \$6,685.89 to go!

DONATE



We're almost there with your support! Help us reach the \$50k goal by December 31st 2025!

For 31 years, since its founding by **Dr. John C. Stauffer**, the Conococheague Institute has been fulfilling *its mission to to develop and foster awareness, understanding, and stewardship of the cultural and natural history of the Appalachian frontier of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia.*

In recent years of growth, that has been enabled by matching campaigns where the Stauffers pledge to match your contributions and support. Last year you beat the \$50,000 goal, resulting in \$100,000 towards our annual budget. Let's continue the trend and make this year a winner!

Maintaining our grounds and trails year-round, offering free weekend programming, and supporting the professional staff who plan and run our educational programs - all of this wouldn't be possible without contributions from people like you. Every donation is appreciated and wisely stewarded to ensure that the Conococheague Institute can continue its mission.

Scan this link to make a tax deductible contribution and have it matched directly through Square!

Endowment contribution will be matched too! You can give by donating stocks & securities directly. Just use this information: DTCC Number: 0141 Conococheague Institute Acct#6672-9564

In Memory of Robert M. Kurtz Jr.

Robert Meyers "Bob" Kurtz Jr., of State College and formerly of Clearfield, passed away on Tuesday, Nov. 25, 2025 at Foxdale Village, State College.

He was a lifelong resident of Clearfield and the fifth generation of his family to live in Clearfield until he and his wife Marilyn moved to State College.

Bob was born in Clearfield on Feb. 26, 1933. He married Marilyn Mears Swails Kurtz on July 20, 1991.

Bob attended Clearfield schools with his high school graduation from the Mercersburg Academy in 1952. He later served as President of the Mercersburg Alumni Council and three terms on the Academy Board of Regents. He was awarded the 2017 Mercersburg Academy Alumni Council Medal for Distinguished Service. In 1956 he graduated from the University of Redlands, Redlands, Calif. He had also attended Penn State for several years.

Bob was past President and Chairman of **Kurtz Bros.** the school supply and printing firm of Clearfield which was founded by his grandfather, Chas T. Kurtz. Rob Kurtz led the company for over 25 years making it an employee owned company before he retired. That achievement over the years has kept many hundreds of jobs in the Clearfield area. Bob established the Clearfield County Charitable Foundation in 1984. He was proud of this permanent legacy bestowed on Clearfield for which he had the greatest admiration.

An author, historian and photographer Bob published three photographic books as well as several family historic books. He participated in many local and area photographic exhibits. He and his wife Marilyn made numerous travels and published many photographs from those trips.

Joint services are planned for Marilyn and Bob next spring.



In Memory of Bob Kurtz Jr.
1933-2025

The R. Kurtz Endowment for Early American History

Through his connections with **Mercersburg Academy**, Bob and Marilyn visited the Conococheague Institute in the early 2000's and became annual supporters. In 2022, we approached Bob about sponsoring a new program '*Can you Live 18th Century*', where Mercersburg Academy students would spend 2 weeks immersed in frontier history. We requested \$10,000 to outfit the students, and Bob was so impressed he gave double! Continuing to share the journey with us, Bob gave several additional generous contributions, spurring further programs, community collaborations, and growth.

In 2023, our **Executive Director Matthew Wedd** was on vacation and sent Bob a postcard from Scotland. A small gesture of thanks, but upon his return to CI, a letter was waiting from Bob that he'd be interested in setting up a \$100,000 endowment if CI could show how it'd be used. With the description of supporting student programs, **Bob was so pleased with the summary he called Matthew to say he had enclosed a check not for \$100,000 but \$1,000,000** to be split between CI & Mercersburg Academy! In a single envelope with only 1 stamp!!! This incredible gift became the foundation of our **R. Kurtz Endowment for Early American History**

DTCC Number: 2116

Conococheague Institute Acct#301500000

Consider making a donation or giving stocks or securities today in memory of Bob. Contact us for more options.



The Conococheague Institute
... Where History Comes to Life

Strategic Plan

December 2025 to 2029 and beyond



It's thanks to the foresight & generosity of people like Bob Kurtz that we are able to plan for the future. Our leadership just updated our **Strategic Plan**, contact us for a copy. The last plan set in 2023 started the ideas of animals at CI, and we met all the goals. Let's take the next step together!

Fall Activities: A Snapshot

1775: Harvest on the Homestead

A heartfelt **Thank You** for everyone who joined us at 1775: Harvest on the Homestead on October 18th! This was an incredible event that captured the sights, sounds, and spirit of our 18th century harvest traditions. From grape stomping, cider making, hearth cooking, beer brewing, blacksmithing, dancing, Algonkian harvests, animals, and the community gathering by the bonfire, thank you to everyone who helped bring history to life! This event was supported by **Americana Corner's** Preserving America Partners program, **F&M Trust**, **Liberty Auto and Tire**, **Ace Distributing**, and **Renewal by Anderson**, and generous community partners.



A Caring Community: Student and Business Volunteers

With school back in session we cherished the weekly student volunteers from **Mercersburg Academy**. Projects this fall included painting the animal pasture, bringing in the apple harvest, planting our new native gardens, and much more. We also welcomed back **James Buchanan Middle** students and a large group of **Greencastle Antrim Middle** schoolers for volunteer sessions. Students in this area have a true respect for giving back to their community, and at CI they have a great time while doing it! In November **Patriot Federal Credit Union** and **Middletown Valley Bank** took part in the **United Way Day of Caring** at CI, and planted and mulched over 100 native trees provided by the **Chesapeake Bay Foundation!**



Arrowheads and Archery: Drew Shuptar Rayvis and a Longbow Lottery

In addition to celebrating Native American Heritage Month, this amazing program on November 22nd also served as a trial run for future fundraisers through our Longbow Lottery. **We welcomed 130 participants and raised \$6,448 throughout the day, thank you to everyone who contributed!** We'll be reinvesting some of the proceeds into new bows and arrows as well, to keep growing this program. Drew Shuptar-Rayvis was as charismatic and eloquent as ever, teaching and demonstrating numerous stone-working techniques.

The archery sessions were incredible, with experienced archers and naturally gifted newcomers (including some enthusiastic toddlers!) taking turns to let arrows fly. The land that CI occupies was once the traditional territory of the Massawomeck tribe, part of the Iroquois Nation. Over the centuries, the Susquehannock, Tuscarora, Shawnee, and Lenni-Lenape peoples have also called this place home. The self "D" bows we used reflect centuries of Native American hunting traditions, as well as the strong archery heritage of our 18th-century Welsh settlers.



BUILDING UP THE NEXT GENERATION



SUPPORTING PAID
INTERNSHIPS IN MUSEUMS
& CONSERVATION



Scan this link to make a tax deductible contribution to our intern fund directly through Square! We offer paid internships year round starting at \$15 per hour.

Conococheague Wetlands Pond: Improvement & Monitoring Project

Visitors often come to the Conococheague Institute for its historic cabins, winding trails, and quiet pastoral charm. Yet just beyond the interpreted 18th-century homestead lies one of the site's most valuable assets: **our wetlands**, a living system that quietly filters water, shelters wildlife, and sustains the ecological story of this landscape. Over the past few years, we've made a commitment to elevate our natural resources to the same standard as our historical ones. Today, with the help of students, volunteers, and supporters across the region, that commitment is flourishing in ways that are already visible on the ground and ripe for replication at your home!

Reviving an Overworked Wetland

Like many wetlands across the mid-Atlantic, ours has been stressed by sediment and nutrient runoff from surrounding agricultural land. The symptoms such as seasonal algae blooms, murky water, and reduced biodiversity, are clear signs of a system trying to keep up with more than it can handle.

In response, our upcoming **Wetlands Pond Improvement & Monitoring Project** is designed to restore both beauty and balance. **Work begins in Spring 2026 with the installation of a solar-powered RPS F200 aerator fountain at the pond's center.** While its gentle spray adds visual movement to the landscape, its true value is ecological: increased oxygen near the surface deters algae spread, improves water clarity, and helps native aquatic plants thrive.

At the pond's inflow point, we're adding another essential tool: **sediment and nutrient filter socks**. Acting as the wetland's "first line of defense," they capture sediment, fertilizers, and other runoff before they reach the open water. We'll be combining these tools with **annual stocking of native fish species**, so the pond becomes its own self-maintaining system: fish feeding naturally on algae and algae-promoting invertebrates while boosting wetland biodiversity from the bottom of the food chain upward.

This project, generously funded by the **Thomas G. & Nancy H. Burkey Fund of the Franklin County Community Foundation**, was researched by our **Iowa State University** summer intern, **Ellen Hake**. It will be installed and monitored with the help of students from **Mercersburg Academy**, who will conduct ongoing water testing and equipment checks as part of their hands-on conservation training.

Every element of this wetland restoration involves student volunteers. Under guidance from CI staff, students gain experience in water quality testing, data tracking, habitat maintenance, and the practical science behind ecological restoration. Their involvement ensures more than just continuity for the project, it invests the next generation with the tools to care for the landscapes they will someday inherit.



Lucas Lapole Memorial Intern Fund: Goal = \$32,000
The equipment for this project is fully funded by the **Thomas G. & Nancy H. Burkey Fund**, but donations to our intern fund ensure students like Ellen have the opportunity to make real career progress, while benefiting our site and mission goals. **Just note 'Intern' on any donation to become a supporter!**



Native Habitat Restoration Around the Wetlands

Our commitment to ecological revitalization extends beyond the pond itself. With the support of a **South Mountain Partnership Mini-Grant**, CI recently transformed two key areas of our property into vibrant native plant habitats: a birding garden around the wetlands and a native welcome garden at our Visitor Center. With student volunteers leading the project, we planted *300 native plants* from trusted nurseries including *The Native Niche and Schott's*.

But this wasn't just beautification. It was an ecological strategy.

Native plants support pollinators, host beneficial insects, stabilize soil, and provide the food and cover needed by local bird species. For new or casual birders, the wetlands area can feel dense and overwhelming, so by increasing plant biodiversity (and therefore insect activity), birds become easier to observe along the edges. A new interpretive panel lists common and seasonal birds spotted on site, helping visitors make sense of the avian flurry around them.

Thank you to the **South Mountain Partnership** and the amazing student volunteers of **Mercersburg Academy** for making this project a reality!

What You Can Do at Home

Our work at CI reflects the growing awareness that conservation is not limited to large landscapes or professional land managers. The principles we're applying can be brought to backyards, balconies, and school grounds across our region:

- **Plant native.** Even a few native plants can support pollinators, birds, and soil health.
- **Create small wetland helpers.** Rain gardens, mini-ponds, and runoff filter plantings reduce sediment and nutrient flow into local waterways.
- **Support biodiversity.** Avoid pesticides when possible, leave some leaf litter, and provide habitat layers: ground cover, shrubs, and canopy.
- **Get young people involved.** Children who plant a tree or test a water sample develop a personal stake in conservation that lasts a lifetime.

A Living Landscape, Shared by All

At the Conococheague Institute, history and nature are not separate chapters, they're a continuous story told through stewardship. By restoring our wetlands, expanding native habitats, and involving our community at every step, we're ensuring that this land remains vibrant, resilient, and educational for generations to come.

To learn more, request our native planting lists and guides, or support our efforts, visit www.cimlg.org, contact info@cimlg.org or call 717-328-2800



The Welsh Barrens Visitor Center: Open every Saturday 10am to 5pm

Whenever you begin your visit, we encourage you to stop by the Visitor Center first. Greet our team, learn about the history of Rock Hill Farm, explore the exhibits, and make a purchase in the gift shop (or become a member to support our mission). We're always updating the exhibits, and there really is something for everyone.

Throughout the week, our staff are always on-site working, so give us a call or knock when you visit.

Conococheague Book Club: 3rd Thursday at 1pm

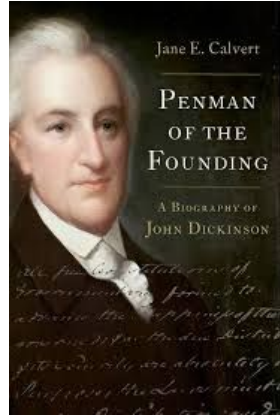
December 18, 2025: Show & tell – Bring a non-fiction history book to share

No meeting in January

February 19, 2026: Penman of the Founding: A Biography of John Dickinson (2024) by Jane E. Calvert

All are welcome, join us for invigorating conversation on key historic topics.

Check out a range of books in our gift shop, including the new book by Tom Hand: America Victorious!



1775: A Colonial Christmas

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 10AM TO 4PM

Journey back in time at 1775: A Colonial Christmas! Experience the sights, sounds, and flavors of an 18th-century holiday season on a 30 acre historical farmstead.



No RSVP required!
Free Event

Watch a colonial feast being prepared, try your hand at baking traditional gingerbread, and join in the festive spirit with Wassailing and old-fashioned games.

Explore a selection of local food and craft vendors, and don't forget to find the perfect stocking stuffer in our charming store. Bring the whole family for a hands-on, historic holiday celebration!



Tasty food and drink vendors make this a full day experience, this event is sponsored by the Americana Corner's Preserving America Partners program, Liberty Auto and Tire, Renewal by Andersen, and generous community partners.

The Conococheague Institute
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12 MONTH MEMBERSHIP


PRESERVING OUR CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES


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Staff and Team

Matthew Wedd, *Executive Director*, mwedd@cimlg.org
 Kori Taber, *Programs and Farmstead Manager*, visit@cimlg.org
 Mikaela Mummert *Visitor Experience Team Member*, team@cimlg.org

Contact us

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Did you Know?

While our memberships are valid for 12 months from the time of purchase, over 80% of our members renew during November, December, and January. Our membership remains strong, with 200 families from across the country (and a few overseas). Without your dedication, we wouldn't be able to do the important work we do. Thank you for your support!



Be a part of our history: Your Membership support allows us to continue in our mission! CI Membership runs on a 'Valid through 12 month cycle', so whenever you renew you will receive a full year of benefits

Annual Membership/Donation Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone No: _____ Email: _____

Newsletter Format Preference, Email or Printed: _____

- Student: \$10
- Individual: \$25
- Family: \$35
- Patron: \$125
- Corporate: \$200
- Sustaining: \$300
- Life: \$1000

Membership Level: _____
 Additional Donation: _____

Make Checks Payable to The Conococheague Institute, 12995 Bain Road,
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 Thank you!

I support the Conococheague Institute because: _____

I would like a copy of the new Strategic Plan mailed

I would like more information about Funded Projects and Sponsorships

I would like more information about legacy giving and bequests

I have included CI in my Estate Plans