

Conococheague Pioneer Times

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

Volume 32 Issue 3



3rd Quarter 2026

Good Day to you...From the Executive Director



I'm writing this as summer draws to an end, but we just had another 90 degree day! Let's all look forward to fall and the harvest season together!

I think we can safely say that 2026 has been one of the busiest years in CI's history. Between the 250th anniversary, thousands of students and visitors, our expanded weekend Revolutionary Homestead programs, summer camps, new animals, gardens, exhibits, and everything else happening behind the scenes, there have been more than a few days when I've wondered what happened to the calendar!

But I wouldn't trade it for anything. Thanks to increased need, and contributions, we've also welcomed a record number of interns this summer. Turn to page 6 to see all they've accomplished, but I'm grateful for the fantastic camaraderie and energy that **Allister, Trey, Ellie, Jacob, Seren, and Shane** have brought to our team this summer. This year's students have tackled everything from conservation and wetlands work to visitor programs and the daily chores that keep a working historic farmstead running. I'm especially excited to see how many of our interns continue into museum, education, and environmental careers after their time here.



Our seasonal interns are incredible, but of course I'm grateful for our year round staff who mentor them. The ever reliable **Kori Taber** (officially 'Programs and Farmstead Manager' but involved in all our community happenings), **Mikaela Mummert** (Historic Educator and Forestry Queen), and **Tom McQuaid** (Maintenance Chief and Keeper of the Vehicles).

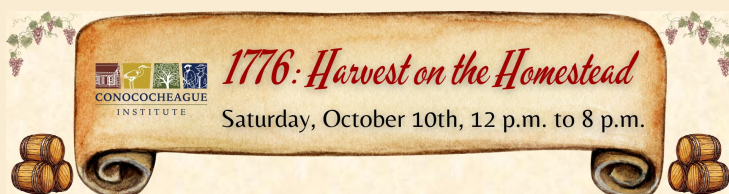
We're a small tight knit team, but we're working hard together to continue to grow the Conococheague Institute, preserve our history, conserve our natural areas, and educate as many new visitors as possible.

Behind the scenes, we're also looking toward CI's future. Our **strategic plan lays out some ambitious goals for the next several years**, from improving our historic buildings and visitor experiences to expanding educational programs, growing our working farmette, and reaching more people throughout the region. We've had guests from across the states this summer, international TV documentaries, and even ads in local cinemas!



Growth is exciting, but it also comes with responsibility. Everything we do has to begin with preserving the remarkable history and natural resources entrusted to us here at Rock Hill Farm. **That means your memberships, donations, volunteer hours, and even your visits make a real difference.**

And speaking of visits, we hope you're ready for **1776: Harvest on the Homestead** on October 10th! This year our busiest event coincides with our **Annual Members Meeting**, and a special authors talk from **Tom Hand**, and you're invited!



We'll be celebrating the harvest with living history, music, foodways, demonstrations, animals, and all sorts of frontier activities from noon until 8 p.m. It's going to be a wonderful way to celebrate the season and bring our 250th anniversary programming to a close. **I hope you'll join us, and bring a friend!**

As the days cool, leaves change, and we enter another busy education booking season (*1,850 students booked between now and November*), I'm reminded **once again how fortunate I am to work at a place where every season brings something new.**

Thank you for being part of it.

Cheers! Matthew Wedd

Executive Director

mwedd@cimlg.org 717-328-2800

2026 Summer Contributions

Our annual budget is \$320,000 and we are deeply grateful to everyone who contributes, who continue to support our programs, educational visits, and preservation work. Every gift truly makes a lasting impact.

Proud CI Contributors

Elizabeth Lillard, David Emerick, Bill Nitterhouse, the estate of Catherine Stickell, William Lee Davis, Richard Johnson, Susan Peterson, Patricia Hornbaker, Scott Henry, Jessica Hohenwarter, Lady Moon Farms, Elizabeth Wilson, Robert Miller, Nince Newell, Ryan Rau, Mike Reed, Jennifer Martin, Kathy Hawbaker, Andrew Chesnut, Summer Cline, Tania Kirkman, Denise Smith, David Meek, Carolyn Ketchel, Jamar Galbreath, Virginia Young, Lynda Thomason, Anonymous, Sandra Turman, Scott Lemon, Christina Jarvis, Mercedes Getto, Steven Hatleberg, Robert Stranksy, Richard Anderson, Scott Longstreth, Claudia Mooij, Chris Connolly, Pam Anderson, James Schwartz, Dorothy Harbrige, Carol Zehosky, Hannah Ford, Sue Gemeny, William Lear, Jennifer Constable, Sulakkhana De Saram, Lynne Wigfield, the Mummert Family, Barb Danowski, Fast Ink of Mercersburg, Mary Ruth & Richard Reis, and Tiffany Fair

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

In-Kind Donations

Our exhibits, programs, and collections are always enriched by valued item or service in-kind donations from our members. This summer, **Jean Frey** donated a beautiful framed watercolor of the Negley Cabin for an upcoming fundraiser auction, **Dana Rogers** jumpstarted our Aquatic Conococheague funded project with a 50 gallon aquarium, **Adam Mumma** hand crafted a wampum belt depicting the Treaty of Shackamaxon, **Robert Miller** added to our Native American story with arrowheads and lithics found along the West Branch of the Conococheague Creek. The farms in that area would undoubtedly have been served by Fort Maxwell, an important part of frontier defenses. **Carroll Walter** of Chambersburg donated a collection of family antique carpentry tools, scythe, and family portraits. **Nancy Linn** and **Anna Lee Kopp** donated numerous antique pieces in memory of their brother and **former CI President Terry Musselman**, including a huge copper kettle (we we've been using to boil water to scour our wool), and **Lee Davis**, whose items we use the most in our programs has contributed many useful assets, the most exciting being a Old Conestoga Wagon Hammer Hitch, one of the frontier travellers best multitools!

If you have an antique, reproduction item, even vehicles that you think would aid our mission, contact us about making an in-kind contribution.



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2026 End of Year Giving: Honoring a Legacy

This winter, Conococheague Institute founder **Dr. John C. Stauffer** will celebrate his **100th birthday!** One hundred years old, and still visiting the site he founded more than three decades ago!

For 32 years, the Conococheague Institute has carried forward Dr. Stauffer's vision: *to develop and foster awareness, understanding, and stewardship of the cultural and natural history of the Appalachian frontier of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia.* What began with his passion for preserving this special place has grown into a thriving museum and educational organization serving thousands of students, families, and visitors each year.

To celebrate this remarkable milestone, the Stauffer family is once again offering a \$50,000 matching challenge for our End of Year Giving Campaign. Every contribution you make will be matched, dollar for dollar, until we reach the \$50,000 goal, turning your support into \$100,000 for CI's future.

Your generosity helps make everything we do possible: maintaining our historic buildings, grounds, and nature trails; keeping the site open to the public for free each weekend; providing hands-on educational programs for thousands of students; caring for our animals; and supporting the staff who bring CI's history to life.

A gift to this campaign is more than a donation. It is an investment in the future of the place Dr. Stauffer believed was worth preserving, and in the generations of visitors and students who will continue to discover its history.

Help us reach \$50,000 by December 31, 2026, and double your impact. Thank you for being part of our frontier family.



Siblings of Rock Hill Farm,
Martha and John Stauffer,
September 2026

IRA, Estates, and Endowment Contributions have a Lasting Impact

You can give by donating cash, stocks & securities directly, or set us as a beneficiary of your IRA or Estate. Just use this information with your accountant:

DTC Number: 2116

F/F/C Account Name: Farmers and Merchants Trust Company of Chambersburg

FBO: Conococheague Institute Acct # 30150000

EIN: 25-1763245

Contact us for more details and notify us of your planned gift. And thank you for giving for future generations.

Summer Activities: A Snapshot

Revolutionary Homestead: Free Weekend Programs Bring History to Life

From Memorial Day to Labor Day, our Revolutionary Homestead weekend programs included Saturdays AND Sundays thanks to support from **Americana Corner’s Preserving America Partners** program. With our amazing interns and volunteers being able to showcase 18th century frontier life for visitors weekly is incredible for visitors looking to step into the past. This summers **highlights included the scouring and carding of our wool** (that had been shorn in our May event). We have 4 fleeces of clean black wool now, and **if you’d like some to try for personal spinning projects swing by, we’re happy to share**. Other highlights included hearth cooking, gardening, dance, and an ever increasing amount of skill building. Lots of leather working took place, with everyone making leather journals. We even **taught the team to fire the swivel gun for a 4th of July celebration!**



Making a Cider Press, 18th century style: Volunteer Spotlight Mark Niemeyer

Behind the scenes of our summer programming, a fascinating historic craft project has been underway, and now it’s complete! Volunteer **Mark Niemeyer** kindly offered to reproduce an antique cider press from our collection. With the grating of saws, the striking of chisels, some good, hard wood, and a whole lot of craftsmanship, the press has come to life!

The screw was purchased from **Evans Wooden Screw Co.**, but everything else was created by hand, including an ingenious method for making the bands that hold the press staves together. Mark has given countless hours to this project, working through the heat and rustic frontier conditions, and we are incredibly grateful for his time, skill, and dedication. Not only will we be pressing apple cider during our upcoming **October 10th, 1776: Harvest on the Homestead** event, but we also have numerous bookings this fall that have requested this program. A huge thank you to Mark for bringing this piece of our collection back to life in such a hands-on and thoughtful way. We can’t wait to put it to work!



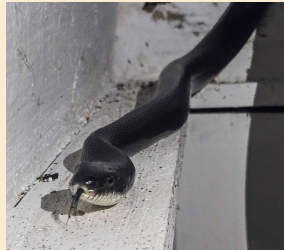
The Conococheague Institute on the Road - Outreach Adventures

With such a competent team, we’ve been able to handle a stream of outreach request for educational lectures and events, while still maintaining the homestead and our own weekly programs and camps. We’ve lectured on Tavern’s and Music at **Gettysburg Public Library**, shared organizational stories with the **Kiwanis Club of Chambersburg**, took the animals to **St John’s** (Clear Spring) summer camp, **Matthew and Nova** attended **Shady Grove Ruritan’s 4th of July** festival, spoke at the **Rocky Springs Church** for the 250th, Kori presented on 18th century clothing at the **Smithsburg Library**, and then a week later at the **Alexander Hamilton Memorial Free Library**, we taught butter making and goat history at the **Country Creek Produce Farm**, and lectured on Laws and Crime at the **Middleburg/Mason Dixon Historical Society**, as well as our team being involved in regional meetings, mixers and conferences. All the outreach means more people in the community learning about and caring about our mission here at the Conococheague Institute!



Just a page of the larger story....

And that is just a small smattering of the fun activities and adventures we’ve been having this summer. **Snakes appearing in the historic buildings**, exhibit design, invasive removal, summer camps, hearth cooked meals, and more!



A Summer of Discovery at CI!

This summer, the Conococheague Institute was buzzing with curiosity, creativity, and plenty of outdoor adventure!

In June, we welcomed two weeks of **Chambersburg YMCA** camp groups for hands-on exploration of life in the 18th century. Campers stepped back in time as they learned about colonial trades, gardens, and family life, discovering what daily life was like for families in the Conococheague Valley.

Then, in July, we hosted our own **week-long CI Summer Camp**, packed with activities that brought history and the natural world to life. Campers explored the CI grounds, studied streams and wildlife, learned about animal husbandry, and created nature-inspired crafts.

Throughout the week, campers also enjoyed wild creature encounters, conservation and restoration projects, outdoor art, 18th-century living history, hearth cooking, musket and militia drills, garden activities, and traditional games. The week wrapped up with water play, scavenger hunts, pizza making, and archery!

A big thank-you to all of our campers, families, counselors, and community partners who helped make this summer such a success. We can't wait to see what adventures next summer brings!



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Grant News Worth Celebrating!

The opportunity to apply for grants for projects that would be outside our usual budget is very important to us. Had we not received our **2023 ARPA Outdoor Improvements** grant, which funded our tractor (and picnic areas and playground), would we have accomplished all we've done in recent years?

In that spirit we're excited to share two recent awards we just received notice of that will be taking place very soon. First we're looking forward to some much needed Fall repairs on **Rock Hill Farm's** foundations, funded in part by the **National Trust Preservation Fund of the National Trust for Historic Preservation**. A \$22,000 project, this stabilization will be undertaken by **Lynwood Petre of Poor Boys' Enterprizes** in the next few months.

We're also ecstatic to squeeze in some last minute news. Our HVAC system in the Visitor Center is aged and has broken down several times in recent years (it was out for 2 days of summer camp and it was HOT), but our technicians at **Premier HVAC** give us excellent service. They even quoted us last year for a full system upgrade, but it wasn't in the budget unfortunately.

So what a surprise when **Premier HVAC's Tim Stenger** shared with us that we've been awarded their community **Feel the Love** award, part of manufacturers **Lennox** initiative to provide free HVAC's for deserving recipients. This is a treasured blessing, as we'll be improving our visitors (and staffs) comfort, saving money on electric bills with a more efficient system, and saving a potential \$30,000 investment from future budgets!

Funded Projects

During the \$50,000 Matching Campaign, all contributions will be matched, whether donations, memberships, sponsorships or our special funded projects. This year we’ve asked our team for some suggestions!

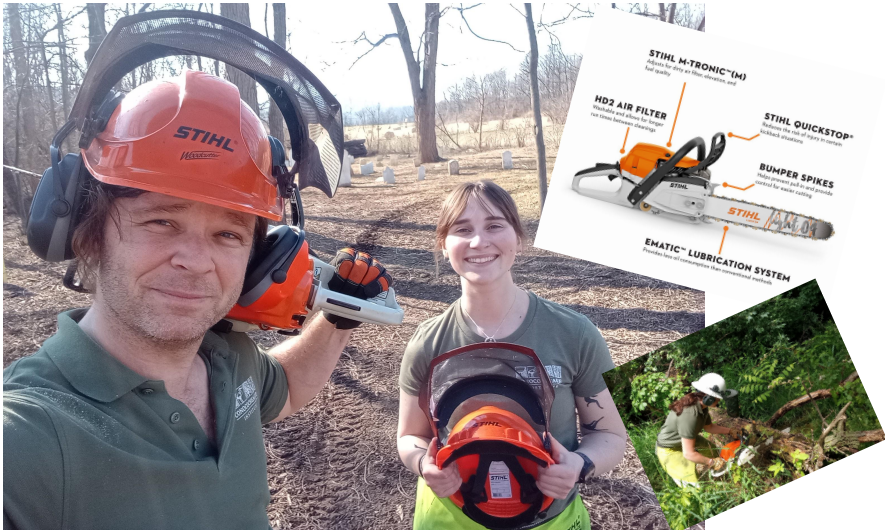


Kori - Historic Chocolate Making: Goal = \$500

This summer Kori took a 18th century chocolate making workshop in Dearborn Michigan, and would love to bring this experience to our families at the Conococheague. Supplies would include chocolate pots, cacao beans, metate, mano, and molcajete to produce handmade 18th century chocolate. As well as being a popular drink for men and ‘chocolate’ and coffee houses, ladies like Martha Washington enjoyed drinking the cacao shells brewed into a healthy tea.

Mikaela - Professional Forestry Tools: Goal = \$1,000 - \$2,500

As a Penn State Mont Alto forestry student (and competition winning woodsman athlete), Mikaela has led Trey and our interns this summer in removing invasive trees from across the site. Our CI chainsaw is 10 years old, fairly old, is very heavy, and puts increased strain on the user...which in chainsawing can definitely increase risk! Her funded project is a professional grade new chainsaw(s) and equipment that would be lightweight, faster, and safer for everyone involved!



Interns - Conococheague Aquarium Habitat: Goal = \$854.15

Allister Caretti, our Environmental Intern worked on researching and designing a prototype native waters aquarium for our visitor center. Not only would it allow for views into the streams that support our land, increase understanding of the importance of aquatic habitats, but also provide another educational experience indoors during field trips with inclement weather. We have the fish tank, so with your contribution we can build the artificial biosphere and stuck it with native crayfish and fish.

Board - Beer Brewing Exhibit: Goal = \$2,750

In an effort to recreate craft skills from history, match our programs to our inhabitants inventories, and create a new exhibit space, we’ve drawn up plans to utilize our ‘Summer Kitchen’ as a year round brew house. We have beer brewing equipment in early Davis inventories, and the Negley family, so reproduction copper kettles, mash tun components, fermentation vessels, and specialized tools such as mash rakes, ladles, and sieves would be purchased to create a new asset for tours. And we already grow our own hops, so that at least would be a sustainable on site resource for interpretation!



Matthew - Endowment and Legacy Estates: Goal = \$10,000 to \$10,000,000

Those are some big numbers, but after six years at the helm of CI and raising our endowment from \$40,000 to \$1 million, Matthew has seen firsthand the benefit of large gifts and estate bequests. It was through the **generosity of Bob Kurtz** that amazing new programs were established, while **Joan McKean’s legacy gift** allowed for new infrastructure and staffing. As we look to the next five years, and as individual donations continue to dwindle in a changing economy, **establishing a stronger endowment now will create future prosperity, programs, preservation, and educational opportunities for decades to come**, help us keep pace with our growth, and on track with our strategic plan.



2026 Internships: A Summer of Learning and Doing

After welcoming our 2026 interns this spring, we're delighted to look back at all they accomplished over the summer. From conservation and forestry to living history, education, and exhibit work, this year's interns gained practical experience while becoming an important part of the CI team.

Trey McCarty, of **Frostburg State University**, spent the summer with our Environmental and Conservation team, working on native gardens, trails, wetlands, construction projects, and invasive plant removal. He also created a virtual program on mullein, exploring its historic uses while explaining its role as an invasive plant.

Allister Caretti, heading to **Loyola University Maryland**, developed hands-on skills in forestry, native garden management, and invasive species removal. She also proved a natural fit for living history, helping with our 250th 4th of July programs and painting a new sign for the tavern. Beyond her practical skills, Allister brought tremendous energy, kindness, and teamwork to the CI crew.

Ellie Stine, entering her senior year at **Mercersburg Academy**, embraced living history, historic handcrafts, and public engagement while continually challenging herself to try new things. Inspired by our 18th-century medicine programs, Ellie developed a project exploring childbirth and midwifery in early America, bringing greater attention to an often-overlooked aspect of women's history.

Jacob Shaffer, a longtime CI volunteer from **Scotland, PA**, joined us after graduating high school. He quickly grew into a confident program leader, particularly excelling in presentations on the rifle and shooting. He also explored archery, woodworking, and other aspects of 18th-century martial and practical life.

Seren Gibbs, of **Mercersburg Academy**, completed our special one-week micro-internship, working alongside our summer camp team while expanding her museum experience. Seren participated in exhibit design, project management, animal and garden care, and living history programs, building on her previous experience as a CI volunteer and **Frontier Culture Museum Youth Ambassador**.

We're incredibly proud of this year's interns and grateful for everything they brought to the homestead. We wish them all the best as they continue their education and careers!

As college semesters start up, give a warm CI welcome to our latest **Shippensburg University intern, Shane Billings!** Joining us in an applied history paid internship, Shane is a graduate student, **Marine Corps veteran**, family man, and avid reader. In his first weeks, he has already meshed well with the team, pitching in on some fall construction projects and preparing for a busy fall living history schedule.



Allister



Trey



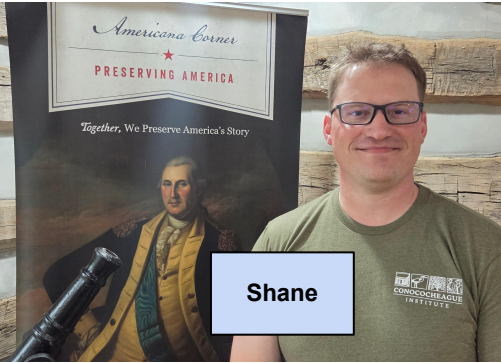
Jacob



Ellie



Seren



Shane



Pennsylvania
Historical & Museum
Commission



Interns Make an Impact!

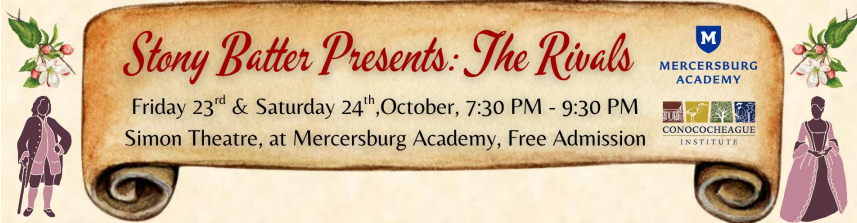
State Representative Chad Reichard called us this week, and several of our members have also shared the news with us. The 2026–27 **Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) Cultural and Historical Support Grant** has awarded the Conococheague Institute **\$15,000 for paid internships in 2027, up from \$6,200 this year** and the largest award in Franklin County!

We're incredibly grateful for the continued support that makes opportunities like these possible for young people like **Jacob, Ellie, Allister, Seren, Trey, and Shane**. Thank you to **PHMC** and to the members of our community who help make this program possible through their generous support!

Lucas Lapole Memorial Intern Fund: Goal = \$32,000

Since 2022, CI internships have been fully paid thanks to the support of the **PHMC Cultural and Historical Support Grant, Lee Davis, the Stauffer family**, and our dedicated community. These contributions make it possible to provide meaningful, career-building opportunities for young people while strengthening our programs across the site. We're always accepting rolling applications too! Donations to our intern fund ensure students 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!**





A Special Invitation to the Stage!

On October 23rd and 24th, the **Stony Batter Players** will bring Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s hilarious 18th-century comedy **The Rivals** to the stage at the Simon Theatre at **Mercersburg Academy**. The **Conococheague Institute** has been delighted to consult with the cast and production team throughout the season, providing cultural expertise on the clothing, customs, etiquette, and everyday life of Sheridan’s 1775 Bath, so come enjoy a little Georgian-era drama, romance, and comedy! CI staff will be there to welcome you both nights, and share more context and stories for the historical and theatrical process we’ve been honored to be part of!

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Kori Taber, *Programs & Farmstead Manager*, visit@cimlg.org
Mikaela Mummert, *Visitor Experience Team Member*
Tom McQuaid, *Historic Site Grounds & Maintenance Technician*
Alli Caretti, **Trey McCarty**, **Jacob Shaffer**, **Ellie Stine**, **Seren Gibbs** *Summer Interns*,
Shane Billings *Fall Intern*

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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 / \$50k Matching 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 \$50k Matching Campaign Donation: _____

Make Checks Payable to The Conococheague Institute, 12995 Bain Road, Mercersburg, PA, 17236

Thank you!

I support the Conococheague Institute because: _____

Vote for Board Nominees (Yay/Nay): Suellen Burkey _____ Travis Russell _____

I would like to RSVP for the October 10th Author Talk (1PM) and Members Meeting (2PM) ☐

I would like to schedule a meeting about legacy giving and bequests ☐

I have like to RSVP for the performance of the Rivals at Mercersburg Academy ☐