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Pennsylvania

MAGAZINE

Frontier Sites

Visit the Daniel Boone Homestead, Conrad Weiser Estate, and Morgan Log Home

Spring Events

WWII Eldred Bomb Factory

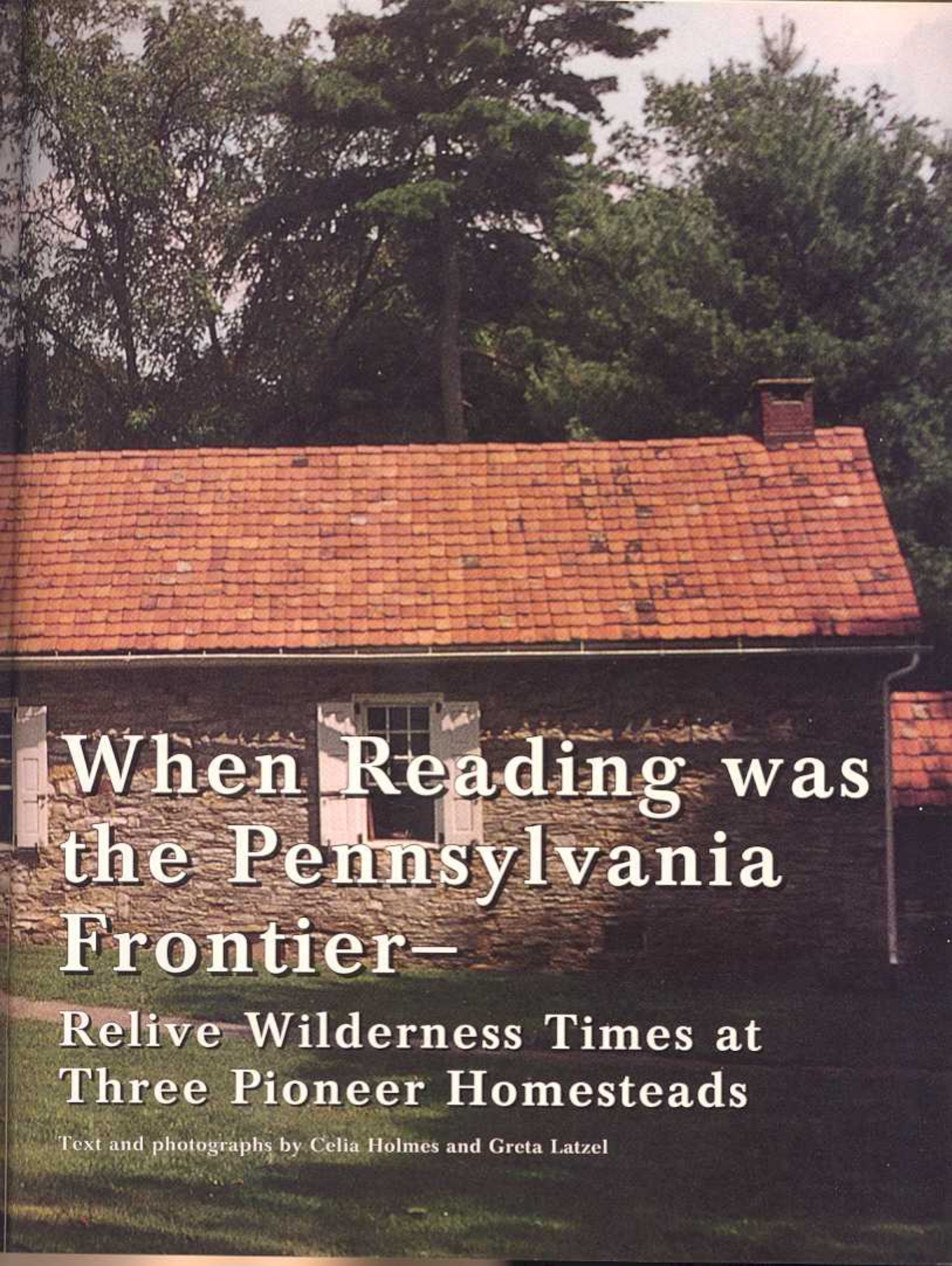
Photo Essay—
Town and
Country Views

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Visitors and reenactors mingle during one of the historical events held at the Conrad Weiser Homestead near Womelsdorf in Berks County. Weiser's home was originally a one-room cabin on the edge of the frontier. The building (second from left) was enlarged to two rooms in the 1750s.



When Reading was the Pennsylvania Frontier—

Relive Wilderness Times at
Three Pioneer Homesteads

Text and photographs by Celia Holmes and Greta Latzel



Once, America's western frontier ran through Pennsylvania, its boundaries moving gradually away from Philadelphia to the three rivers of Pittsburgh and beyond by the mid-18th century. One of the most celebrated woodsmen of the era, Daniel Boone, was born into that wilderness, near what is now the city of Reading in Berks County.

Today, three sites in or near that county reflect the history of Boone's time, from the log houses of his parents and grandparents to the home of his contemporary, Conrad Weiser, a peacemaker and Indian agent.

The Daniel Boone Homestead

In 1720, a Montgomery County Quaker named Sarah Morgan wed Squire Boone, an English Quaker, and in the early 1730s, they and their young children moved to the Oley Valley in Berks County where Squire's father and other Boones had settled. Here, in this peaceful vale, Sarah and Squire raised 11 children, including a son, Daniel, who became famous as civilization pushed the frontier even farther west.

The Daniel Boone Homestead, where Daniel Boone was born on November 2, 1734, is located near Baumstown, Berks County, approximately 30 miles northwest of Sarah Morgan's maiden home,

A craftswoman demonstrates spinning during an Evening on the Green, one of the special events held on the Daniel Boone Homestead grounds from March to November. Other events include a celebration of Independence Day in July, Daniel Boone's birthday in November, and flintlock shoots throughout the year.

the Morgan Log House. The site's extensive grounds contain more than just the birthplace of Daniel Boone. There are seven 18th century structures, a lake, several trails, and 579 acres of land for you to explore. Before purchasing your tickets for the tour of the main house, take a few minutes to study the dioramas in the visitor's center and to become acquainted with the various residents of the homestead, from the Boones to the DeTurk family, who owned the property until the late 19th century.

The house that stands today bears little resemblance to the one-room, one-story log cabin that the Boones built over a spring still flowing today. Only the original stone foundation and the spring house underneath remain; the house that was home to the family until 1750 was torn down in 1779. The grassy view from the front porch would also seem unfamiliar to the Boones. In the wilderness of that time, only a small percentage of the land was

cleared for use. Daniel's father was a weaver and a blacksmith who did little farming on their 250-acre piece of land.

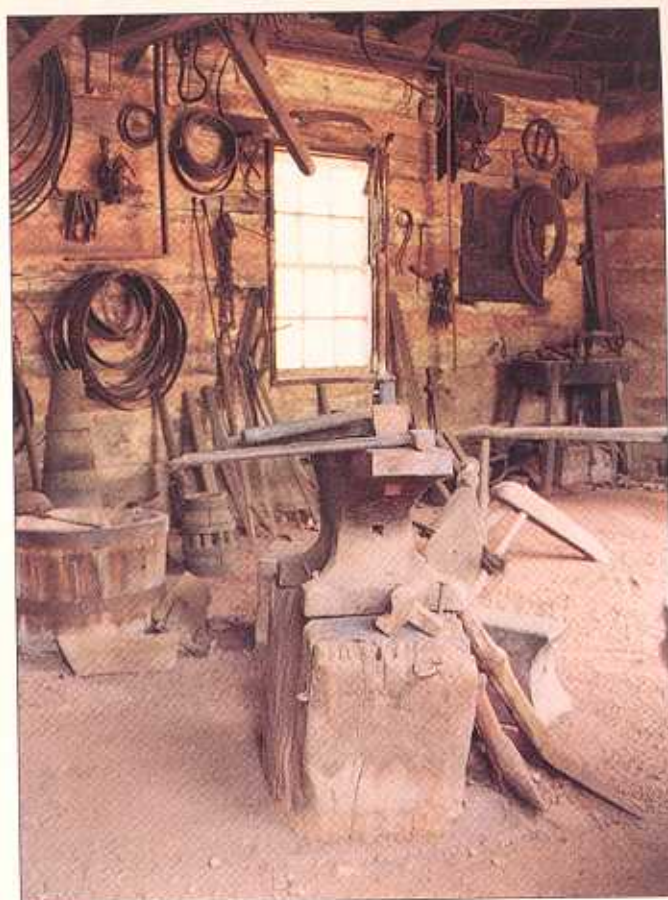
When the Boones left for North Carolina in 1750, the property was purchased by William Maugridge, an English settler and a distant relative of the Boones, who sold it 20 years later to John DeTurk. The land finally prospered as a working farm under his and his descendants' ownership. In 1937, 10 years after the farm was last inhabited, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission acquired the site to preserve it as the birthplace of one of Berks County's most famous natives.

The Daniel Boone Homestead vividly contrasts the different lifestyles of its colonial English and German owners. The half of the house that Maugridge completed in the 1750s is furnished in the simple style favored by early English settlers. The heart of the stone house is its kitchen, with a large walk-in fireplace and cooking implements hanging from every nook and cranny. In this spacious room, it's easy to imagine aproned women in colonial garb baking bread in an iron Dutch oven, turning the wheel of a juice press to make apple cider, and collecting honey from a woven bee skep.

To the right of the kitchen is the parlor, which functioned as a dining room as well as a family room when the Maugridges were in residence. In typical English fashion, all of the austere, undecorated furniture is pushed against the whitewashed walls, to be brought forward when needed. A steep flight of stairs climbs upwards from the kitchen to the bedrooms above. As a sign of status, the Maugridges slept in the chilly master bedroom located above the parlor, with only a bed warmer to heat their goosedown quilts during the cold winters.

When you step across the threshold of the kitchen into the building that was erected on the foundation of the Boone's log cabin, you literally step into a different culture. Constructed by John DeTurk, the second owner, this half of the residence represents a typical German household of the late 1700s. In contrast to the English parlor, brightly decorated furniture is pulled into the center of the German *stube*, or living room, ready to use at a moment's notice.

A large canopied bed fills the adjoining master bedroom and a second narrow flight of stairs leads from this room to the next floor. In homage to Squire Boone, an upper chamber displays various weaving implements, including flax, wool cards, a large spinning wheel dated 1768, and a wooden yarn counter called a "weasel." After 40 winds of the counter, the device makes a popping



The blacksmith shop is one of seven 18th century structures on the enlarged 579-acre site of the Daniel Boone Homestead near Baumstown in Berks County. Daniel's father was a blacksmith and a weaver by trade who did little farming on the original 250-acre plot before the family moved westward.

sound—hence the nursery rhyme expression, “pop goes the weasel.”

Wandering through the blacksmith shop, two-story barn, and sawmill outbuildings on the spacious grounds of the Daniel Boone Homestead, you are treated to a glimpse of colonial life that is heightened during the special events held on the grounds from March to early November. On the top of a hill behind the sawmill, John DeTurk and his brother, Samuel, are buried in a small cemetery. A gravel-strewn circuitous path, marked by a weathered split-rail fence and resting benches, takes you to the 1737 Bertolet House before returning to the homestead via the barn and blacksmith shop.

The original Bertolets were French Huguenots who fled from persecution to Germany, and then immigrated to the German-speaking Oley Valley in the early 1700s. Their house was relocated to this site in 1968, when the quarry that owned the Bertolet site decided to expand. A typical

German structure, the Bertolet House shares many similarities with log homes of Welsh origins like that of Daniel Boone's maternal grandparents.

The Morgan Log House

Daniel's mother, Sarah Morgan Boone grew up in a two-story log house in Montgomery County, about 30 miles east of the Boone Homestead. Built by her father, Edward Morgan, it stood in the wilds of the Welsh Barony west of Philadelphia. Edward was a Quaker from Wales, and was deeded the land circa 1708, but he may have begun building as early as 1695. After Morgan's son, John, sold the house in 1741, it passed through many owners until becoming a tenant farm and falling into disrepair in the early 20th century.

Condemned by a developer in the 1960s, the Towamencin Township property near Lansdale was saved by a lucky chance. "A historical architect just happened to be driving by one day and saw logs peeking out from under the house," explains Joan Hauger, curator of the Morgan Log House. The thought of locating such a large and previously unknown log structure prompted him to stop and satisfy his curiosity. His find sparked the interest of township officials, who purchased 1.7 acres to save the dwelling from the wrecking ball. After intense research, historic preservationists discovered a pre-

viously unsuspected connection of the property to Daniel Boone.

Now restored as closely as possible to its former appearance, the Morgan Log House stands incongruously, but contentedly, amidst the suburban sprawl near Lansdale. Managed by the Welsh Valley Preservation Society, the site has a small visitor's center that exhibits the details of how the log house was rediscovered and renovated on its way to earning a spot in the National Register of Historic Places. Although researchers are unsure of Morgan's occupation, he once owned more than 800 acres, and the substantial home that he built over a spring is definitely *not* a one-room cabin. Preservationists sought to save as much of this solid structure as possible.

Directly inside the main door lies a huge open fireplace, providing not only a cooking area, but also heat and light for the entire building. A bifold door, which opens halfway to keep heat in during the winter, covers the descent to the spring room, where butter, milk, cheese, and ice are kept cool in the house's main source of water.

The master bedroom lies just around the corner from the toasty hearth, with an uncomfortable-looking rope bed as its centerpiece. As the ropes stretched, tired occupants would gradually roll to the middle until the cords were tightened, which explains why people in Morgan's time preferred to

Visitor Information

Daniel Boone Homestead—located east of Reading, just off Rt. 422 near Baumstown in Berks County. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday from noon to 5 p.m., and closed Mondays and some holidays.

Admission is charged to tour the house: adults, \$4; children age 6-12, \$2; and families, \$10. Tours are given at the start of each hour. Handicapped accessible in main areas, but not the house. Three picnic areas are on the site. Special events occur from March to November; flintlock shoots are held throughout the year. Call 610-582-4900 or write to R.D. #2, Box 162, Birdsboro 19508.

Morgan Log House—located near Lansdale, off Exit 31 of the Northeast Extension, Pennsylvania Turnpike, in Montgomery County. Open April through December on weekends from noon to 5 p.m. Tours Monday through Friday are by appointment only.

Admission fee is adults, \$4; students with I.D., \$2; children under age 5, free. Tours are given as visitors arrive. Steep stairs and narrow halls negate

handicapped accessible. Special events occur in June, July, October, and during the December holidays. Call 215-368-2480 or write P.O. Box 261, Kulpsville 19443.



Conrad Weiser Homestead—located west of Reading, just past Robesonia on Rt. 422 in Berks County. Open daily April through October, Wednesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. Closed Monday and Tuesday, and some holidays; hours vary November through March.

Admission fee is adults, \$2.50; children age 6-12, \$1.50 and under six, free. The first Wednesday of every month is free admission day. Tours are given at the start of each hour. A large picnic area is on the site. Main areas are handicapped accessible, but house has narrow stairs. Special events occur from March through August. Call 610-589-2934 or write to R.R. #2, Box 28, Womelsdorf 19567. ☺

In the small, enclosed yard surrounding the Morgan Log House, plants and herbs typically grown in the 18th century flourish. This two-story, log house in Montgomery County, about 30 miles east of the Boone Homestead, was Sarah Morgan Boone's childhood home, built by her father and Daniel's grandfather, Edward.

"sleep tight." The adjacent room has been furnished in the style of a mid-to-late 18th century parlor, with tea caddies to secure the expensive brew of colonial times and foot warmers full of coals to ward off a chill.

The little ones slept upstairs, possibly warmed by the fireplace below or the close proximity of the 10 Morgan children in one bed. A demonstration of the long, arduous process of turning flax into cloth is also displayed on the upper floor. Try your hand at carding some wool to remove the tangles or combing the flax into fibers suitable for spinning into thread. After a few minutes of effort, you'll appreciate the labor and expense involved in producing cloth in those times and understand why the house lacks closets. Before leaving this peaceful site, stroll along the path through the small, enclosed yard surrounding the house. Plants and herbs typically grown in the 18th century flourish in the small gardens edging the property.

The Morgan Log House hosts several special events throughout the year, including a Midsummer's Eve celebration in June when dancers in period dress dip and twirl in the summer twilight. In December, the house is decorated for the holidays in traditional Welsh fashion and candlelight tours are offered.

The Conrad Weiser Homestead

The Boones headed west in 1750, with fifteen-and-a-half-year-old Daniel in the lead. The Oley Valley had remained peaceful throughout much of their stay, for the Quakers continued William Penn's policies of trade and negotiation with their Native American neighbors. Before leaving the county, the Boones' wagons most likely traveled past the one-room log cabin of the man largely responsible for maintaining these friendly relations, a diplomat named Conrad Weiser.

Although he is little-known today, Weiser was



one of the most influential Pennsylvanians of the early 18th century, respected and admired by settlers and natives alike. Born in Germany in 1696, he emigrated to New York in 1710, where he lived among the Mohawks for a time, learning their culture and language. This knowledge served him well after 1729, when he and his family moved to present-day Womelsdorf, just west of Reading.

At the time, relations were tense between New World settlers pushing west and Native Americans who lived and hunted in certain areas. Due to their Quaker religious tenets, Pennsylvania's governmental officials resisted establishing a military force, relying instead on negotiations to effect peace. Because of his skill in Native American languages, Conrad Weiser, along with the Iroquois chief Shikellamy, soon became a major figure in these talks. In 1736, he helped establish a new accord that recognized the rights of the powerful



Actors James Newell (seated at left) and George Irvin (standing) portray Governor Penn and peacemaker Conrad Weiser during a reenactment of the Treaty of 1742 on the grounds of the Conrad Weiser Homestead. Weiser was a key mediator between settlers and Native Americans in settling land disputes as the frontier expanded westward.

custodial guide supervisor of the homestead. As a result of these misfortunes, much of the original interior was lost, leaving the stone walls, foundation, and two full basements from Weiser's time remaining. A springhouse with a red tiled roof sits next to the Weiser cabin and just beyond, the stone farmhouse of the Sheetz family, later owners of the property, can be seen.

The historic area forms only a small part of the 26-acre site, so linger and walk the gentle banks of the pond behind the Sheetz house to the bridges that span its waters, or picnic near the gazebo on the grassy slope across the drive. On your way, follow the path between the Weiser Homestead and the Sheetz farmhouse to pause at the small graveyard, where you'll note the tombstones of Conrad and his wife, Anna Eve. A short distance away, a statue of Shikellamy raises a hand in friendship as he holds vigilance over the home and final resting place of his colleague, a man whose death was mourned by the people of two cultures.

The property's normally quiet environment transforms into one of bustling activity during the special events hosted by the homestead. Past summer activities have included encampments and reenacted peace treaty signings with Native Americans in full dress mingling with colonial-garbed settlers, a sight that was common to Weiser, who often hosted visiting tribes on his property.

During Weiser's lifetime, the frontier drifted across Pennsylvania in a remarkably peaceful manner until the French and Indian War. Today, the mundane and extraordinary struggles of living in the wilderness are mostly forgotten until you step across the thresholds of the colonial homes of the Boone and Morgan families, and of Conrad Weiser. Their homesteads remain standing, a testament to the courage of those settlers who lived on the edge of the frontier and carried civilization westward through Pennsylvania and beyond. ▼

Celia Holmes and Greta Latzel are a photo/journalist team living in Bucks County.

Iroquois Confederacy in New York to oversee the Indians in Pennsylvania in exchange for their promise to help maintain order. Weiser continued to mediate such disputes even throughout the French and Indian War, and his efforts were instrumental in producing the 1758 treaty at Easton, which ended the war in Pennsylvania.

For much of this time, Weiser lived in a one-room, log cabin that today forms the centerpiece of the Conrad Weiser Homestead located about 30 miles west of the Daniel Boone Homestead just off Route 422. Tours of the grounds and Weiser's restored home begin at the visitor's center where displays show items from his life and period of history.

The white-shuttered house was first opened to the public by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in the late 1920s. It was rebuilt in the colonial revival style popular at the time rather than restored to its original appearance, which was damaged by a tornado in 1904 and a fire three years later, according to Kerry Mohn,