

Manor Township’s Conguegos and its grounds restored to 18th-century origins

A handsome Germanic stone house dominates the historic 21-acre property now known as Conguegos. Located on Highville Road at the western edge of the Conestoga Indians’ land in Manor Township, Conguegos is a 21st-century model of preservation and conservation.

“I want this property to represent a time when people were still connected to the land,” says Pamela R. Lyons-Neville. She purchased the old home and surrounding land two years ago and began the arduous process of returning both to the way they appeared in the 18th century.

Lyons-Neville has restored the exterior and interior of the house, retaining its older elements and replacing some newer features with old materials drawn from other structures. She and a small army of landscape experts are methodically eradicating invasive plants and replacing them with native trees, shrubs and flowers.

She is doing this not only because she respects the property, but also because she is descended from the Musser family of physicians that built the home on the edge of the Conestogas’ land.

Beyond its significance as one of the few remaining structures that stood in that area when the last of the Conestogas were slaughtered by the Paxton Rangers in 1763, the building has been recognized by the Lancaster City and County Medical Society as the oldest privately operated hospital in Lancaster County.

It is unclear when the stone house, built by the Musser family about 1750, began keeping sick patients overnight, but the building was functioning as a “hospital” by the first decade of the 19th century.

The Scribbler was apprised of the use of the Musser house as a hospital by Dr. Nikitas Zervanos. He is writing a three-volume his-



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tory of general practice and family medicine in America. Book 2 includes a chapter on the Musser family, based largely on research by Dr. Henry Wentz.

John Musser crossed from Switzerland in 1727. He built a house, served an apprenticeship with a Lancaster physician and practiced medicine in the Mussertown section of what is now Lancaster city. He also farmed land at what is now Conguegos in Manor Township.

One of John Musser’s sons, Jacob, inherited his father’s Manor Township property and settled there, within a half mile or so of Indian Hill, the most prominent physical feature in the area. He built the original part of the house, learned medicine from his father and practiced there.

Jacob’s son, Benjamin, fathered 18 children with two wives. To accommodate all of these people, he doubled the size of the house. He also learned medicine from his father and, as time passed, created an apothecary shop and set aside rooms for his sickest patients. He died in 1820.

The Musser family continued producing doctors for generations. The house passed out of Musser family ownership in the mid-19th century.

Lyons-Neville’s grandmother’s family of Mussers grew up in the house on Highville Road, and she believes she was destined to own it.

“This has been my dream, ever since I was 8 years old, owning this house,” she remarks as she digs thistles from among the flowers in her front yard. “I was meant to own this property.”

She has restored the

oldest parts of the house — including a large closet that reportedly held Benjamin Musser’s medicines — and is turning the land into a vast garden and woodland of native plants.

“I have an empathy for any native people and their relationship to the land,” she says, explaining she named the property Conguegos for a female leader of the Conestogas who died in 1714. “I feel that this land has been given to me to preserve.”

● Jack Brubaker, retired from the LNP staff, writes “The Scribbler” column every Wednesday. He welcomes comments and contributions at scribblerlnp@gmail.com.



BLAINE SHAHAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Pamela Lyons-Neville works in a garden at her 18th-century home May 1 on the Manor Township property known as Conguegos.

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