

# BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

Vol. XVIII - Number 4 March, 2003



### Gladys Phillips Memorial Plaque

*We had a small group (40 or so) attend the dedication ceremony. Several people insisted the remarks offered should be the focus of our next newsletter. So, ---*

Good Afternoon. I am Dick Herchenroether, current President of Ben Avon Area Historical Association, or BAAHA, as we often refer to it. For the record, today is Sunday, December 22, 2002. We are gathered to honor Gladys Phillips for her role in founding our organization and saving this log house for the appreciation of this and future generations.

Gladys died in 1997. In 1998 a few people with ties to BAAHA met and resolved to an effort to prevent the organization she created from withering away. Since then we have, I believe, restored the organization to be an active, if not quite vibrant, role in our Avonworth community.

We do this through the publication of our newsletter and books, by hosting community lectures and exhibits. We care for the log house. This spring we hope to rejuvenate our influence within the Avonworth school system by working with the 8th grade social studies teacher, who plans to add local history at the end of the year's curriculum on civics. Local, to us, is much narrower than western Pennsylvania, and we will help him with the resources he needs.

This would sit well, I think, with Gladys who saw cooperative collaboration within the school system as a key purpose of BAAHA. She and Tracy Ferguson worked from the very beginning on a 5th grade program that included a teaching guide, slide show, in class program and a field trip to the log house -- and locks and dam.

In recognizing Gladys we also acknowledge the importance of numerous others who worked to save the log house and create BAAHA. Original board members included Bill Trimble (then historian at W. Pa Historical Society and now a professor at Auburn), Martha Mitchell, Mary Ann Graf, Tom Phillips and Lou Seifarth. Other early participants were Gail Steinmetz, Leo Stember, George Barnhardt, Trudy File, Tracy Ferguson, Jim Hefley, Ellen McKain, Ed Swarmer, Joyce Kelly and, no doubt, many spouses as well. Naturally my poor memory, as well as my ignorance of the early detail mean some, I hope only a few, key people are overlooked. *For example, after the ceremony I met Warren Cooper -- who worked on the house windows, doors and stairs.*

We also must acknowledge the cooperation of Allan Randolph who owned the property, including the log house portion, in 1984 and Brad Mooney the contractor with the expertise to breakdown and reassemble the house, moving it some 60 or 70 feet to its present location.

Other than Mooney, none of these people were paid. In fact some loaned or donated significant sums in the process. And all contributed much more time than they initially expected to when approached by Gladys for help. Tracy Ferguson, for example, introduced Gladys at the 1987 dedication of the log house as "the person responsible for consuming all my free time."

Many of these people continue to contribute. Current board members are Tracy Ferguson, Trudy File, Jean Henderson, Ken Jaros, Bob Kiser, Darlene Phillips (no relation), and B.J. Robertson.

Jean is another person who can attest to the power of a "request" by Gladys. She and her husband, Dave, chaired the Ben Avon Centennial committee which created a full year's schedule of activities in 1992. The committee worked most of 1991, as well as throughout 1992 on the effort. Gladys' centennial contribution was the updated and expanded (at 72 pages) version of the history of Ben Avon.

The reconstructed log house was dedicated -- perhaps rededicated -- on May 24, 1987. The ceremony took about 30 minutes although there were frequent delays for trains passing. And brief interruptions from the locking traffic whistles. In a way this was appropriate because the house was placed here, by the river, in order to be close to the transportation routes. The main routes are now elsewhere, of course, but in the 1700s and 1800s, the focus of transportation was the river (first) and the river banks (second). In addition the old Indian path which was the initial guide for Brighton Road ran nearby. Because Gladys and Bill Trimble believed authenticity of time and place to be an essential part of the story, the house was reconstructed here, rather than moved to a "more accessible," but obviously more

antiseptic, park location. If one is to learn from history it is important to understand the artifacts in context. It still takes imagination to fit the pieces together, but if this house were moved to, say Avon Park, it would be more relevant to a modern hunting camp than a typical residence of a frontier expanding settler who valued his flat ground and access to river transportation.

I would like to briefly review with you what happened in 1984. By fall BAAHA had been formed and a \$15,000 fund raising effort begun. Agreement between BAAHA and Allan Randolph had been reached to transfer ownership on this small triangle of land and allow time to plan and move the log house portion of the building Randolph was razing in order build the existing business property. The community was involved to the extent that the theme for Avon Club's fall festival that year was "Little House by the River."

BAAHA itself was incorporated in September. Prior to that were ad hoc committee meetings which began early in the year. And then more formal community meetings in August with initial public fund raising.

But how was Gladys involved? As she told the story at the 1987 dedication, it started with Joe, the plumber. In February, 1984 he was working in the Phillips' house. In talking with him Gladys learned his next task was to help his friend, Allan, pull down an old house. Where, asked Gladys? When she heard the location she recalled it included the log house, although it was not visible owing to modifications over the years. But the key was Gladys' reaction to the news. In short, it was "oh no, you're not."

The rest, as we might say, is history!

So Gladys took on the task of saving this house. She was smart enough to spread the work and responsibility by enlisting the aid of many others. That formed BAAHA. The house is worth saving alone, but as a focal point to remind the community of where we were a short 200 years ago, and to ponder what has happened since then (and why) it has more meaning.

As we recall these events, we should appreciate that we have yet another example of one person making a difference. [Cliches arise from repetitive experiences.] The story also shows the power of an idea. Gladys was able to show the importance and relevance of this house to others in the community. Others gave much and these accomplishments depend on them. Yet it was Gladys' with the original inspiration who took the first step and rallied the others.

We are thankful that she chose this mission and hope others are inspired to make a difference in their own way.

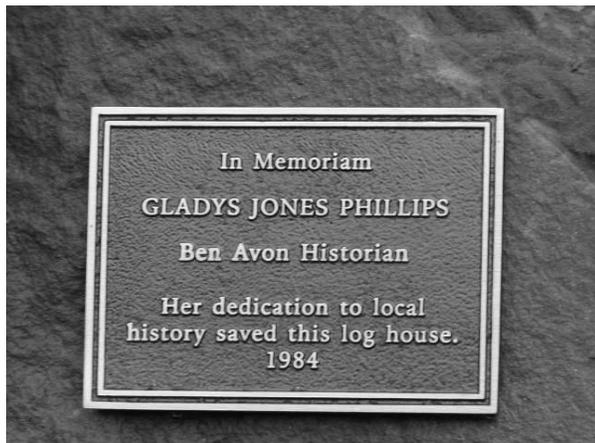


photo by A. J. Ewing

The plaque is attached to a boulder in the yard south of the house. We are gradually installing plant material according to a plan of Ed Werley which utilizes species indigenous to the area in the late 1700s. This

serviceberry tree to the south was planted last month. The dogwood on the north side of the house was planted at the 1987 dedication.

Thank you for attending and you are invited to a brief reception at Jean Henderson's home (157 Dickson Ave). Those of you who know the way, please guide those who do not. Before you leave you might pick up a brochure about the log house which tells the story of saving the house and its historical significance. We also have copies of Volume 1, No. 1 of our newsletter. While we always stress the importance of dating and naming things, note that we failed to date this first issue.

**Spring Meeting**  
**7:30 p.m., Tuesday, May 13, 2003**  
**Emsworth U.P. Church**  
**Hilands Avenue**

We want to revisit our "show and tell" and "hazard a guess" program format which worked so well last year. The theme this year will be stories of life during World War II. We're thinking here of a swap meet of oral history. Visual aids to emphasize points and add interest are encouraged, but not required.

We have lined up a couple of people to give us a starting point. We hope to draw out your stories as well. And not only the front line service. We want to hear memories from womens service, stateside service, the home front and the viewpoint of those who were youngsters in the 1940s.

### **Call for House Photos**

We are often asked if we have pictures which show a home's exterior in original condition. If you have photos of homes or street scenes, please share them (or copies) with us.

Ben Avon Area Historical Association  
 c/o 136 Dickson Avenue  
 Ben Avon  
 Pittsburgh, PA 15202



Renewed since October, 2002

Barb Meehan	Ben Avon
Maggie Mosier	Ohio Township
The McLuckies	Emsworth
Jim & Judy Little	McCandless Twp, PA
Alice Brown	Cranberry Twp, PA
Marilyn Simon	Kilbuck
Augusta Molnar	Ben Avon
Elizabeth Kern	Ben Avon
Harvey & Barbara Hinch	Moon Twp, PA
John & Jane Angelini	Ben Avon
George Prentice	Englewood, FL
Irene McClintock	Ben Avon
Patricia Cramer	Ben Avon
Carol Spencer	Bethesda, MD
John & Lou Seifarth	Ben Avon
Charles & Sally Davies	Ben Avon
Robert & Marjorie Seelhorst	Indiana, PA
William & Marion Shaw	Ben Avon Heights
The Forrests	Ben Avon
Elsa Dickson	Emsworth
Gene & Laurie McBride	Ben Avon

**Please Join Us!**

<b>Ben Avon Historical Association</b> c/o 136 Dickson Avenue, Ben Avon PA 15202			
Name:			
Address:			
Boro/Township			
Phone:			
Membership:	Family \$10	Indiv. \$5	Other
I would be interested in helping with:			
Articles for Newsletter			
Short Projects or Jobs			
Log House Maintenance			
Publicity			

Thank you for supporting BAAHA with your donations of money and artifacts.