

der Wetterhahn

Volume 7 Number 2

The Newsletter of Renfrew Museum

Fall 1994

Museum Forms Center for Ceramic Studies

It took seven months to create. Work started last January with the Bell Interpretive committee and its review of the museum's pottery collection. The first test of support came when the committee, chaired by board member Marie Lanser Beck, recommended to the museum in March that the museum create a new organization, dedicated to the study and preservation of the pottery tradition of this region. The mission of such an organization would be to serve as, "a regional academic institution in affiliation with Renfrew Museum and Park for the purpose of preserving, collecting, exhibiting and interpreting the pottery of John Bell and other potters of the Cumberland/Shenandoah Valley pottery tradition." Such an institution would be organized as a separate, nonprofit entity, funded entirely by its own resources. Support was there; the museum board accepted the committee's proposal, and voted in April to form a center for ceramic studies.

In May, month five now, after countless discussions and revisions, it was given a name, The Nicodemus Center for Ceramic Studies of the Cumberland/Shenandoah Valley Pottery Tradition. So named, the center honors Renfrew's benefactor, Emma Geiser Nicodemus, for her early appreciation of the pottery of the Bell family and her foresight in building a collection of their works that continues to merit our appreciation.

Within the same month, the museum board requested the Waynesboro Borough Council act on the formation of the Nicodemus Center by approving its bylaws. After an ongoing series of discussions, negotiations and delays, Borough Council approved, with modifications, the center's bylaws on July 6. The museum board, at its next regular meeting on July 25, agreed to the modifications imposed by Council, thus formally creating the Nicodemus Center.

Like many a newborn, the center began life with a parent (Renfrew), a name and not much else – no money, no Board of Directors, no committees, no staff. There

were some other assets: a reason for being (statement of purpose), a set of well-hashed bylaws and a corps of volunteers, dedicated beyond what many would consider the frontier of common sense.

By July's end, the center had begun excavations of the John Bell pottery site; received notification of a \$23,000 legislative grant to underwrite a portion of the excavation costs (thanks to State Senator Terry Punt and to Kenton and Audrey Broyles), initiated the acquisition of its first piece of pottery (John W. Bell crock shown below) and raised more than \$3,200 for research and collection development.

At the afore mentioned July meeting, the museum board appointed the center's first Board of Directors.



John W. Bell crock, dated April 22, 1858, will be part of the museum's next exhibit, opening October 15. The crock is on loan to the museum from Edward A. Miller.

Nicodemus Center (cont.)

Those directors are: Marie Lanser Beck (representative of the Renfrew board), Willard F. Rahn (representative and president of Renfrew board), Richard Bell, Kenton Broyles, John W. Keller and Jack Middour. To date, one seat on the board remains unfilled. The first meeting of the center's board is scheduled for September 12.

Bell Pottery Site Excavations

As one of its primary functions, the Nicodemus Center in association with Renfrew Museum began a joint project of archaeological research at the John Bell pottery site. With the cooperation of property owners Ed Harbaugh and Harry and Jill Morningstar, the excavations started on July 26 and are expected to last for two years.

The initial phase of the project is aimed at uncovering a known kiln base adjacent to the former St. Paul's church. In 1988 workmen exposed a section of the kiln when an addition was being built onto the church (sparks from a welder's torch caused a fire in the church's roof structure, destroying its interior shortly after the kiln base was uncovered).

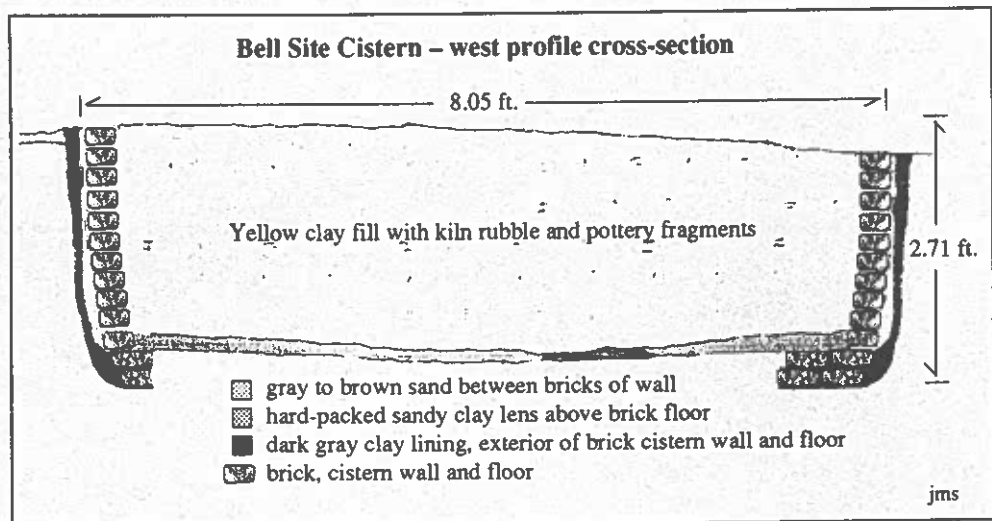
An early discovery from the excavations involved a feature within the basement of the former church. Ed Harbaugh, present owner and developer of the property, during preliminary construction work, uncovered a heavy deposit of pottery kiln material within a circular brick structure. Harbaugh halted the construction, went to the museum that same day (it was a Saturday) with a five gallon bucket

loaded with artifacts. He knew, in his own mind, that his back hoe had just ripped through one of John Bell's kilns. Later that day, after the museum was closed, I went out to the site, expecting to see disaster – another piece of cultural history torn apart, this time littering the floor of the church basement. I pulled up the plastic tarp and took a coroner's look underneath; the back hoe's work was everywhere. Bricks, pottery fragments, kiln waste lay scattered over the ground. The back hoe ripped through something all right, but, dear Ed, that something wasn't a pottery kiln.

The feature, built of bricks laid-up with sand and clay in a circle eight ft. across, contained a sandy-clay fill, heavily packed with concentrations of kiln bricks and kiln furniture.

That following Monday and Tuesday, archaeologist Will Sheppard and I, with the help of volunteer Brenda Krepps, salvaged as much material and information as possible from the cistern. Harbaugh, at a cost to himself, delayed his work schedule for those two days. This gave us time to excavate a section of the fill, keep a photographic record of the work and make detailed plan and profile drawings. The interior of the cistern yielded more than six, 5 gallon buckets worth of material – normally archaeologist quantify artifacts by the count and weight, not by the gallon – of which we have just begun lab analysis.

Turns out, the cistern was built by Bell and used to supply water for his pottery shop. After the property was sold to the congregation of St. Paul's, it was filled with debris from the period when Bell's shop was in operation. In effect, the church took kiln waste from the site and dumped it into the cistern. By 1901 the feature ceased to



be a cistern and, for a very brief time, became one large brick-lined trash pit.

Artifacts, photographs and drawings from the initial excavations of the Bell Pottery site will be on exhibit in the changing gallery of Renfrew museum from October 15 to 30. In addition to the archaeological material, the John W. Bell crock (page 1) and pieces from other local potters, including Daniel Baker, Jacob Heart and Anthony Baecher will also be on display. The exhibit will be open for visitation during regular museum hours and by special arrangements.

James M. Smith

Ed Miller, Park Superintendent, Announces Retirement

It's hard to think about Renfrew without the face of Ed Miller coming to mind.

And even though Miller, 70, is retiring Dec. 31 as superintendent of the museum and park's buildings and grounds, he will still be involved at Renfrew. "It will always be a part of me," said Miller, with that ever-present smile gracing his face. Because Miller was given life estate on the property by Renfrew benefactor Emma (Geiser) Nicodemus, he will continue living in the home adjacent to the property.

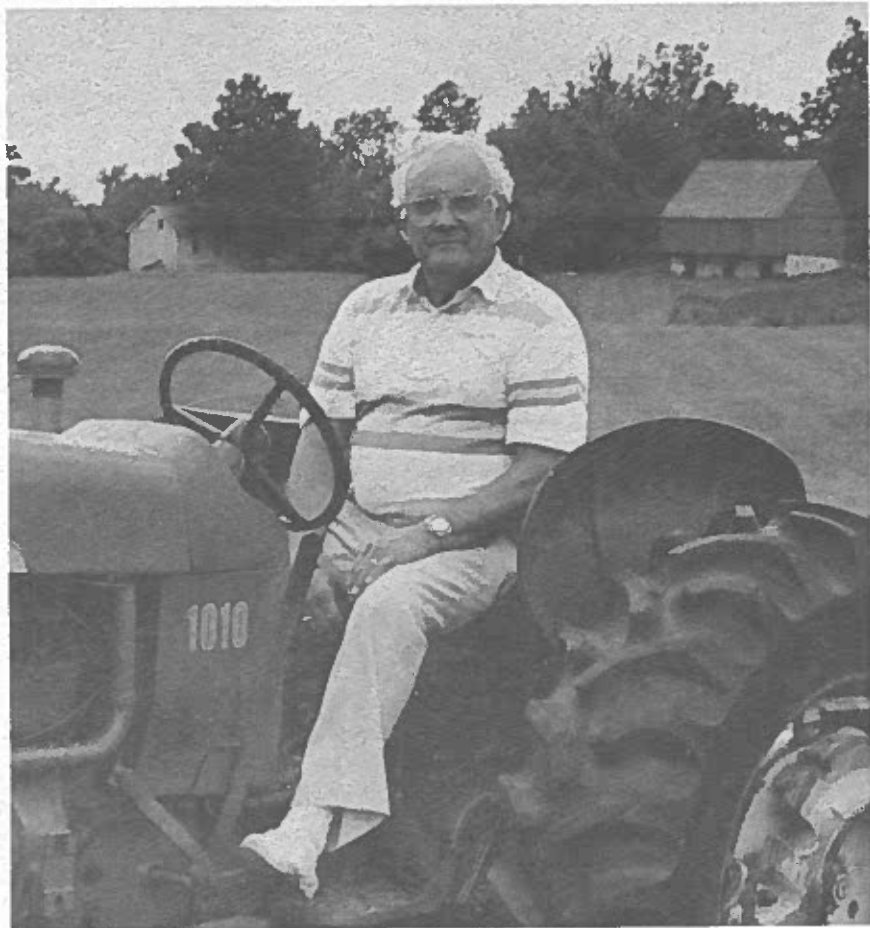
Miller reflected on his life and Renfrew's beginnings from his office in the visitors center, where he has been overseeing daily operations for the past 20 years. Portraits of the Nicodemus family, as well as family momentos, hang on the walls near his desk.

His lifelong association with the Nicodemus family began more than 50 years ago, when as a 15-year-old high school student, he worked as a laborer in their orchards. Miller's father, Merrill, worked for the family from 1918 to 1967 as engineer of the Nicodemus' cold storage on Wharf Road outside Waynesboro. After graduating, Miller started working full time at the orchard. During this time, Edgar Nicodemus and Emma married and in 1942 purchased the property where Renfrew is now located. Miller worked at both the orchard and museum property from 1942 until 1947, when he left to operate the Texaco station on North Grant Street.

In 1952, Miller resumed working for Mr. and Mrs.

Nicodemus. He and his wife Mary Jane, who died in 1988, and daughters Liane and Kathy, moved into the home where he still lives. It is with the fondest of memories that Miller recalls his relationship with the couple. "They felt free to call on me at any time. They were so good to me...treated me better than a son...how could I have been anything else to them?"

Miller described the determined way in which the couple set out to restore their home, built in 1812, which is now the museum. "The house was in a terrible state, it was falling down. They were instrumental in restoring it to what it is today. The home had seven fireplaces, only one was working, and they put them all back in



At the end of 1994, Ed Miller will be retiring as Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds for Renfrew Museum and Park. Miller, since 1974, has served as Renfrew's first and only superintendent. With his retirement, an era at Renfrew will come to a close.

Photo by Nancy B. Mace

Miller (cont.)

service. They saved all the old floors with the exception of two rooms and they used yellow pine boards (found in the attic of the brick portion of the Fahnestock House) for those."

It wasn't until 1969, about four years after her husband's death, that Mrs. Nicodemus began talking to Miller about her ideas for the home. "She wanted to leave it to Waynesboro, as a museum. She swore me to secrecy. And she didn't do it for the glory, as some people think, because it was kept a secret until after her death. If she did, why would she want it named Renfrew, in memory of sisters Sarah and Jane Renfrew, reportedly massacred on the property."

Miller's eyes sparkle when he describes Mrs. Nicodemus, whom he said lived a very modern life but had a great deal of respect for the past. "She spent a lot of time reminiscing about her visits to Renfrew. She came out with her father, who went fishing all the time. I think she was inspired by this place at a very early age. She remembered swimming with her sister Hazel in the Antietam and she was fascinated by this old house. And even though she was a very modern woman, who drove a Cadillac and wore suits tailor-made in New York, she loved doing things the old-fashioned way."

Her dreams for the property came to fruition after Hazel agreed to also donate a large part of her estate to the endowment which would support the museum. "She didn't want the museum to be a liability for the taxpayers."

The museum was accepted by the borough and opened briefly in 1974, before being closed for a year for renovations. Major changes made in the home included reverting the very modern kitchen, complete with double ovens, back to its original state, including a fireplace that had been removed. The two parlors on the first floor had been made into one big room for entertaining by the Nicodemuses, according to Miller, and was changed. The children's bedroom of the museum on the second floor was a full bath, which had to be taken out.

Today the home is open for tours from April to the end of October. The largest public collection of John Bell pottery is on display in the visitors center and the formation of a pottery center has just been completed.

The original smokehouse, milkhouse and barn on the property have been restored. Renfrew Institute, which offers educational programs to thousands of children each year, is celebrating its fifth anniversary. Now the Fahnestock house on the property is about to be restored.

Each year visitors flock to Renfrew for various cultural, musical and educational events, all evidence that Mrs. Nicodemus' dream has more than been fulfilled. Miller believes it is because of her vision that Renfrew has become what it is today. "She was so different, so unique. She lived in a very unusual world of her own."

Miller has no regrets about his decision to retire. He describes his position with the Nicodemus family to working at Renfrew, as "the best job anybody could have had. It was a pleasure to come to work in the morning. It still is." Miller's duties include touring the museum and visitors center each day, making sure employees have their responsibilities for the day, planning the work schedule (according to the weather) and going to the borough office with bills, etc. "I'm a working superintendent, so I mow grass, pull weeds, trim trees...anything and everything that needs to be done." He also is treasurer of both the Renfrew Museum and Renfrew Institute board of directors and helps prepare the agenda for the monthly board meetings.

"Even though it involves doing things routinely, every day is different and challenging. When I open the gates and the restrooms at 6:00 in the morning and close them again at night it gives me peace of mind and satisfaction to know that the place is secure. I will really miss that." Miller plans to keep busy by writing a book about the Nicodemus family and traveling. He will continue to perform with the Trinity Players, a theater group at Trinity United Church of Christ, where he is a member, and the Potomac Playmakers, Hagerstown. Miller is involved in many local civic organizations, including the Waynesboro Welfare Association, Waynesboro Lions Club, Waynesboro Historical Society and Franklin County Heritage.

"I can feel good in retiring knowing that Renfrew has become what Mrs. Nicodemus would want it to be. That's the bottom line."

Nancy B. Mace

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Springfest

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Yuletide Open House

Ann Brown (co-chair)
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 members
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 Virginia Hair
 Louise Kyser
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 Pauline Maxwell
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 Mary Shoemaker

**And all others who, unamed,
 have given.**

Calendar of Events for Late Summer & Fall

Star of Heart Applique Workshop

Saturday, September 17, 9 a.m. - noon

Led by Virginia Rahn in Renfrew Museum Visitors Center. Fee will be charged to cover cost. To register call (717) 762-4723.

Egg-Scratching (Pysanky) Workshop

Saturday, October 1, 9:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Nancy Rickard will lead a workshop on the *Pysanky* (Ukrainian) art of egg-scratching. Enrollment is limited to 15 and pre-registration is required. Cost of the workshop is \$5 for members and \$7.50 for non-members. To register call (717)762-4723.

Pumpkin Festival

Saturday, October 15, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

(Rain date - Sunday, October 16)

Renfrew Museum and Renfrew Institute are co-sponsoring the first annual event as a fun- and fund-raiser for both organizations. Admission of \$5 for adults, \$3 for kids, ages 4 to 12, and free to kids under 3, provides food (soups, breads and drinks), hayrides, live music by the Blue Ridge String Band, baby farm animals for petting by the Blue Ridge Chapter of the FFA and alumni, games, tours of scarey old houses (museum and Fahnestock) and a great place to buy Halloween pumpkins. Genuine Renfrew pumpkins, grown on park property, will be sold by size: giants - \$5; big - \$3.50; regular - \$2.50; assorted gourds - \$1. A team of artists will be on hand to carve or help others to carve the pumpkins at no charge. For information call (717)762-4723 or 762-0373.

John Bell Pottery Site Exhibit

Saturday, October 15 - Sunday, October 30

A joint exhibit mounted by the museum and the Nicodemus Center for Ceramic Studies will feature material recovered from the recent excavations of the John Bell Pottery site. Also on display will be examples of other local potters who worked during the same period as Bell. One of the centerpieces of the exhibit will be the dated John W. Bell stoneware crock. Other material will include the Bell pottery stamps. The exhibit will be open during regular museum hours (Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 1 to 4) and by special arrangements.

Theorem Painting Workshop

Saturday, October 29, 9:00 a.m. - noon

Lonnie Brechbill will lead the workshop in the Visitors Center at Renfrew. Theorem painting is an art form dating to the early 1800's, involving oil paint on cloth. Those attending should bring paper and pencil for notes, 5"x 5" squares of wool flannel cloth and a No.1 or 2 fine point oil brush. Registration is limited, and a fee of \$17.50 will be charged to cover additional materials and cost. For more information call (717) 762-4723.

Fraktur Workshop

Saturday, November 5, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Workshop instructor, Kelvin Mack, will discuss and demonstrate the history and folk art of frakturs and teach participants to make their own frakturs. Registration is limited and a fee of \$10 for museum members and \$12.50 for non-members will be charged to cover materials and expenses. Those attending are asked to bring a brown-bag lunch.

Open Hearth Thanksgiving

Saturday, Nov. 19, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Shirley Baker, director of visitor services for the museum, will demonstrate the preparation of a PA German Thanksgiving meal in the museum kitchen. Registration is required and a fee will be charged. For more information call (717) 762-4723.

Annual Yuletide Celebration

Saturday & Sunday, Dec. 10 & 11

Renfrew Museum welcomes the holiday season with its annual celebration. The museum will be open to the public from 2 to 5 p.m., Saturday, and 5 to 8:30 p.m., Sunday. The celebration will include musical entertainment, refreshments and tours of the museum house with decorations by the Antietam, Blue Ridge and Toll Gate Garden clubs. Admission is free.

Museum programs - Shirley M. Baker

Renfrew Museum and Park

1010 East Main Street Waynesboro, PA 17268 (717) 762-4723

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Donor \$25 _____

Individual \$10 _____

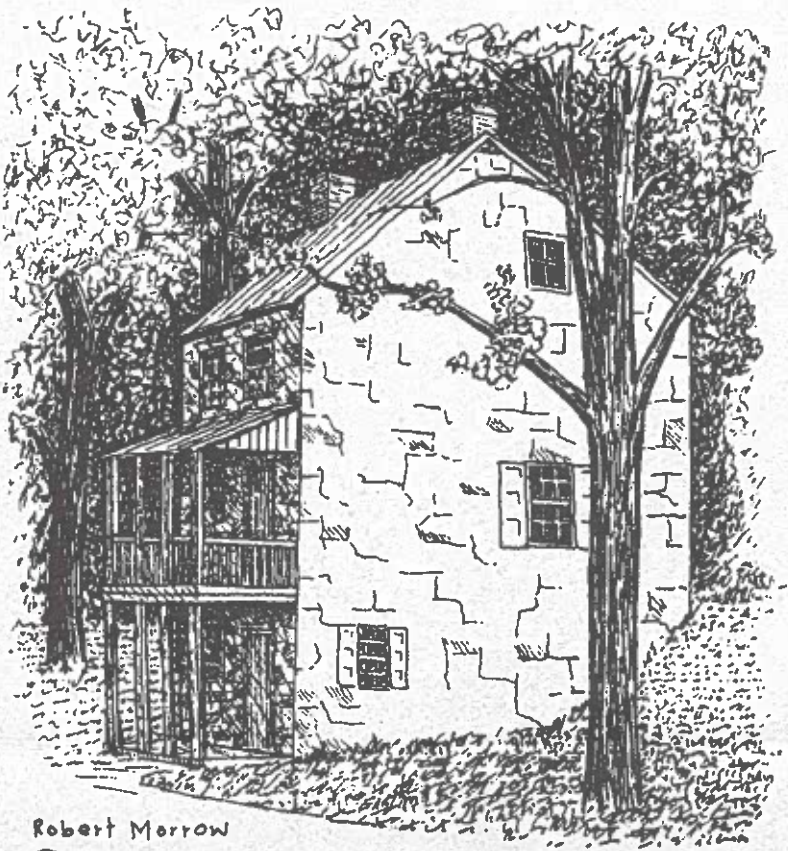
Please make checks payable to Renfrew Museum

Fahnestock House

Renfrew Museum was recently awarded a Keystone Preservation grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museums Commission. The grant, in the amount of \$28,415, will allow the museum to restore the Fahnestock house, much sooner than originally planned, to its original 1806 appearance. It will provide 50% of the restoration cost; the other half will be provided by the museum from funds already raised.

Because the funding will not be made available before late winter of 1995, work to restore the house is on hold for the remainder of this year. Once the funds are released, the restoration should be completed within 18 months. This means, come October of 1996, the Fahnestock house will take on a look similar to the one sketched by Robert Morrow at right.

In addition to the house, the adjacent landscape will also undergo limited restoration. One of the first of these restoration projects involves plant ecologist Doris Goldman, who will be working with the museum to establish a PA German 4-square (kitchen) garden within the next year.



Robert Morrow
© 1994

Fahnestock House
Pen and ink sketch by Robert Morrow, 1994.

der Wetterhahn

Renfrew Museum 1010 East Main St. Waynesboro, PA 17268

Non-profit org.
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Waynesboro, PA 17268
Permit No. 233

Renfrew Museum and Renfrew Institute are having a

Pumpkin Festival

where: **Renfrew Park**

when: **Saturday, October 15**

(Raindate Sunday, October 16)



from: **10:00 to 4:00**

why: **to have fun and raise \$\$\$ for the Museum and the Institute.**

Admission of **\$5 for Adults, \$3 for Kids, ages 4 to 12, and Free to Kids under 3** provides you food (soups & breads & drinks), hayrides, live music, baby farm animals (to pet), games, tours of old scarey houses (museum and Fahnestock) and a great place to buy your Halloween pumpkins (gourds too).

Giant Pumpkins \$5; Big Pumpkins \$3.50; Regular Pumpkins \$2.50; Assorted Gourds \$1.

When you buy Renfrew pumpkins, we'll help you carve them for free! (Adult supervision and safe carving tools provided.) Advance tickets available at Renfrew, 1010 East Main Street, Waynesboro, PA 17268 (717)762-4723 or 762-0373.

