

# The Clifton



# House News

The Historical Society of Fort Washington Newsletter

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WEBSITE [www.FortWashingtonHistory.org](http://www.FortWashingtonHistory.org)

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PLEASE STAY SAFE AND  
STAY WELL!

**HAPPY 2021**

**CLIFTON HOUSE  
IS STILL CLOSED**

**CLIFTON THE SNOWMAN**  
PHOTO BY ANDY KEENAN



*From the desk of*

**Myles Pettengill, President**  
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Greetings and good health wishes to all our members! Like so many organizations such as ours, we remain closed for all public entry as the Covid-19 Coronavirus public health threat circles in our midst. This history making event continues to impact the entire country as a whole -taking precious lives of ordinarily healthy people, some from our immediate community. As various vaccines are now being distributed, many of us are wishing this will soon let us return to normalcy, and in our case open our doors once again, and begin inviting everyone back to Clifton House. March will be one year that we have been closed. When we do re- open, we will carry on with long postponed events. While closed, two of our Trustees -Renee Webb, and Marianne Matt were instrumental in giving our Caretakers apartment a fresh makeover, just in time to welcome our new tenant Caretaker Andy Keenan. Thank you to both! And a special thanks to Renee's husband Roland who did so much work also. While we will remain closed until the coast is clear, we will continue to make needed improvements to protect the building from water damage as occurred earlier during storms. Also-we are close to finalizing plans to add a handicap accessible bathroom on the first floor. In a special appeal I would like to ask for your financial assistance to help us through these trying times. Any contribution would be greatly appreciated. Hope to see you soon... ❖

## New Caretaker for Clifton House

### Andy Keenan

Andy grew up in Langhorne, PA and calls the Philadelphia area home. He spent several years living in Nashville TN and a short stint in Key West, FL. He is a professional musician who has toured

nationally and internationally with a variety of artists. Andy enjoys organic music, cooking, history, genealogy, and learning new things.

His day job is a FedEx delivery driver, and he is deciding if he should go back to school this summer. Instruments in Andy's repertoire are the guitar, pedal steel, dobro, and banjo. He has played on countless albums as a session musician for local and national artists. He performed on numerous iconic television programs such as the *Tonight Show* with Jay Leno/Jimmy Fallon, the *Late Show* with David Letterman, Conan, Ellen, and many more. Artists with whom he has worked - Amos Lee, Jennifer Nettles, Calexico, *The John Byrne band*, Hezekiah Jones.

Hopefully when this pandemic is over you can meet him? ❖



## Membership Dues

**Robin Costa**

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Membership renewal form is on page 4. If you are able, consider an additional donation towards some building capital improvements i.e. First Floor Bathroom, Clifton House maintenance, etc. Thank you for your continued support of the *Historical Society of Fort Washington*. The *Historical Society* is a 501(c) (3) and your membership and/or any donations to the Society are tax deductible. ❖

## Clifton House

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You are familiar with *Clifton House* as the headquarters of the *Historical Society of Fort Washington* but can you picture it as the summer resort it once was? One way to get a flavor of it is to read some of the *Ambler Gazette*s from the late 1800's and early 1900's. **George Herman** and his wife bought *Clifton House* and the 37 acres around it in 1886. They owned it for 34 years. The property included a large annex built in the 1870's which included a large hall for dining and festivities, a stone barn and other out buildings.

*Gazette* articles in the summer of 1895 indicate that 65 persons were regularly staying at the *Clifton House*



and on some holidays and Sundays there were as many as 70-75 people there. There are descriptions of a musicale on a Saturday evening including performances by piano, violin, and singing, and an entertainment in the hall given by children under twelve. Euchre card parties (This **party** is structured so that each **party** guest gets to be a partner once with every person who attends) were also a regular feature. In late August of that year an excursion of 16 people was described traveling by four-horse coach along the Wissahickon drive up to the *Seven Stars Hotel* near

Norristown for a private supper followed by dancing.

In 1897 a beanbag throwing contest was described in the *Gazette* in which "some of the ladies displayed much ability in that line, to the surprise and chagrin of the gentlemen friends who were their partners." It also reported that dancing is "indulged in nearly every night, but on Friday night a very nice hop was held by the guests." Another event described in the August 26, 1897 *Gazette* described a "cake walk." In this event a large cake was arranged in the center of the hall and the 28 contestants marched in, each gentleman having a lady on his arm, and marched around the room several times and the judges picked the winning couple. They then shared the cake with others.

This festive hall was torn down in October of 1932 by the Fairmount Park Commission. The Commission had acquired this land before turning it over to the State of Pennsylvania, the current owner of *Clifton House*. ❖

## Inauguration Day History and Facts

The Old Farmer's Almanac 01/11/21



The word "inauguration" means "beginning" and comes from the ancient practice of augury, which means predicting the future.

The day marks the start of a president's term in office.

**Inauguration Day** falls on January 20 in the year following a presidential election. In 2021, Inauguration Day took place Wednesday, January 20. It will mark the 59<sup>th</sup> Presidential Inauguration in American history, a tradition begun on April 30, 1789, by George Washington, our first U.S. president.

The *Constitution* originally fixed March 4 (the anniversary of the effective date of the *Constitution* in 1789) as *Inauguration Day*. That is about four months after Election Day (which occurs on *the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November*).

*Inauguration Day* was moved to January 20, with the *Oath of Office* to be administered at noon, when *Congress* ratified the 20<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment in 1933. Reasons cited included the improved roads and transportation, the unpredictability of March weather, and the desire to reduce the time that the previous president remains in office as a "lame duck."

In years when *Inauguration Day* falls on a Sunday, the new president is sworn in at a private ceremony on January 20, and the public ceremony is postponed to January 21. The first president to be inaugurated on January 20 was Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1937, when he took office for the second of his four terms.

**Inauguration Trivia To Be Continued Next Edition....**

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The Historical Society of Fort Washington is a non-profit educational institution. Clifton House, headquarters for the Society, leased from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Premises, situated within Montgomery County's Fort Washington State Park, which is under the auspices of the Bureau of State Parks. ❖



# THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF FORT WASHINGTON

THE CLIFTON HOUSE ★ 473 Bethlehem Pike, Fort Washington, Pa. 19034

[www.FortWashingtonHistory.org](http://www.FortWashingtonHistory.org)



"Fort Washington Historical Society"

## Membership Form

Your dues help the Society with the maintenance and the upkeep of Clifton House, its museum rooms and library; provide interesting entertaining programs. Two annual events are *exclusive* for members and their guests – the Society’s June Picnic and December Wassail Celebration. Members receive monthly newsletters which include historic anecdotes and news of our efforts in the community.

Membership dues also provide funds to preserve, pursue, protect, and research local history. The time you give to an organization gives back to you immeasurably with a sense of community, friendship, and camaraderie. Please consider volunteering at our events and to attend our monthly meetings.

**Help preserve the past for the future! Join Today!**



Click button for Membership, Donations, and/or Events  
*The Historical Society* is a 501(c) (3) and your membership and/or any donations to the Society are tax deductible.

**By Check:** return form and check payable to: ***The Historical Society of Fort Washington*** to  
**473 South Bethlehem Pike, Fort Washington, PA 19034; Attn.: Treasurer.**

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