

Music Returns to the Neilltown Church Building



In 2006, the Oil Region Alliance launched the "Music Returns to the Neilltown Church Building" series.

Live musical programs are held at the historic

building on Sunday afternoons in the summer. The concerts are open to the public. Donations received are used to preserve this historic building.

2019 Concert Schedule

Sunday, June 23
Mostly Brass

Community band that has been going strong for over 30 years!

Sunday, June 30
Musicians from the Oil City Area and Titusville Area School Districts

Experience the region's young musical talents!

Sunday, July 21
Fieldstone

Trio inspired by Celtic and Appalachian musical traditions!

Concerts are FREE and begin at 2 p.m.

Seating available, but feel free to bring a seat cushion or folding chair



The concerts are supported in part by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Historic Properties Series

Neilltown Church



2638 Neilltown Road
Pleasantville, PA 16341

41°36'32"N, 79°30'27"W

2019 Concert Schedule on Back!



www.oilregion.org

History of Neilltown Church

Early pioneers settled the area surrounding Neilltown, PA during the 1790s. As the area's population grew, itinerant circuit riders, including Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian ministers, visited the communities, holding religious services. In 1822, local Scotch-Irish Presbyterians organized the Concord Presbyterian Church, and in 1826, constructed a log church at Tyrell Farm (today east of Pleasantville, PA along Route 36).

The Concord Presbyterian Church adhered to the doctrine of Original Sin and held extremely plain worship services devoid of frivolous diversions like music and heat. Forbidden to work on Sunday, followers attended services the entire day. When, in 1837, the



Neilltown Church congregation, c. 1915

Presbyterian Church split into the Old and New Schools, the thriving congregation at Tyrell Farm remained staunchly committed to the Old School. This decision along with the simultaneous growth of neighboring communities like Pleasantville and Neillsburg (present Neilltown) led to a steady decline in membership until the church at Tyrell Farm was finally abandoned.

During the early-1840s, the William Neill family (original settlers of the area) donated land for a new Concord Presbyterian Church in Neillsburg. Built during the summer of 1842, today's Neilltown Church hosted its first sermon on September 14, 1842. Though strict in doctrine, the church flourished until the 1860s and 1870s when the region's oil boom drew people to the

thriving towns of Pleasantville and Tidioute. Never a large congregation, the church's membership dipped during the early 1880s, numbering fewer than 30 people.

Increased oil activity in the Neilltown area breathed new life into this Presbyterian church during the final years of the nineteenth century. In 1892, membership reached a record high 64 people, and the Neilltown Cemetery Association was created in 1897. Neilltown Church's style of worship changed dramatically during this period with the installation of a harmonium (pump organ) and two wood-burning stoves. The church and cemetery continued to thrive through the first two decades of the twentieth century. However, during the 1920s, Neilltown Church entered another period of decline, hosting only occasional services.

From 1929 to 1945, Neilltown Church saw regular use as the home of the American Sunday School Union. The Cemetery Association also held annual picnics during this period. In preparation for the church's 1942 Centennial Celebration, the congregation replaced the roof, redecorated the interior, and constructed a shed to house an electric generating plant. On September 20, 1942, 290 people attended the two worship services marking the occasion. Yet, despite the excitement created by the church's Centennial anniversary, Sunday School activities and regular worship services ceased in 1945, and Neilltown Church fell into disuse.

By 1969, Neilltown Church's deteriorated condition prompted the creation of a Restoration Committee. As its first order of business, this group replaced the church's floor framing and decking. Beginning in 1973, the church hosted a Spring Memorial Service and an Autumn Praise and Communion Service annually. The Neilltown Cemetery Association acquired the church building from the Lake Erie Presbytery on June 4, 1983, and in September 1992, Neilltown Church marked its 150th Anniversary. The annual services at Neilltown Church were discontinued in 2003, and the Oil Region Alliance purchased the building for historic preservation in 2004.

Preserving Neilltown Church

The Neilltown Church, built in 1842, is a single-story wooden post & beam structure located in Forest County, Pennsylvania.

This Greek Revival style church contains two rooms, a narthex (39'5" wide by 8'10" deep) & a sanctuary (39'5" wide by 36'1" deep). It can seat approximately 110 people. In 2004, the Oil Heritage Region, Inc. (predecessor to the Oil Region Alliance) purchased the 1,880 square foot building for \$1. The Neilltown Cemetery Association retains ownership of the parcel of land upon which the building sits.

The Oil Region Alliance undertook the church's exterior rehabilitation in 2010. To start, a local contractor



In 2010, workers installed the church's new cedar-shingled roof.

While working on the exterior restoration project, workers discovered two severely rotted timber sections along the top of the church's framework. After inspecting the deterioration, the structural engineer declared the building unstable. Securing an emergency loan from Preservation PA, Inc., the Oil Region Alliance initiated rapid response repairs. Gustafson General Contracting sistered custom-made wooden bracing to the problem timbers, installed interior support poles, and added cement pads beneath each upright timber on the church's perimeter, stabilizing the structure.

The Oil Region Alliance today operates the Neilltown Church as a special events venue. Memorial services, educational programs, and cultural events may be held at the building. Call the Oil Region Alliance for rental rates and information. The church is also open for tours by appointment by contacting the Oil Region Alliance.



In 2006, Preservation PA, Inc. added the Neilltown Church building (pictured here that same year) to its list of Pennsylvania's Most Endangered Historic Properties.

replaced the building's asphalt-shingled roof with a new, more historically accurate cedar-shingled roof and added a gutter system. A new ADA entrance was added at the rear of the building, with a new steel door, concrete pad, sloped approach and an aggregate walkway from a designated ADA parking space.

In accordance with the recommendation of the project architect, the building's north wall was reinforced and the rotted timber sill was replaced. To complete the project, electricity was restored to the building, a security system was installed, and the church's original front doors were repaired and refinished with the addition of new reproduction period door latches.



A structural engineer inspects timber deterioration inside the church, 2010.

Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism

The Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Oil City, Pennsylvania. This membership-based organization serves all of Venango County as well as the City of Titusville, Borough of Hydettown, and Oil Creek Township in eastern Crawford County. The Alliance is an active economic development agency, the official Tourist Promotion Agency for Venango County, as well as the administrator of the Pennsylvania Oil Heritage Region and the federally designated Oil Region National Heritage Area.

Mission Statement

The Mission of the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism is to manage the Oil Region National Heritage Area and to increase the prosperity of the Oil Region by enticing people to live, work, learn and play in "the valley that changed the world" through the preservation, promotion, development and support of historical, educational, natural, recreational, residential, commercial and industrial destinations.



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Become a member today!

Explore More Area Heritage Sites

Neilltown Church is located just outside the boundaries of the Oil Region National Heritage Area (ORNHA). Known as "The Valley That Changed The World," the ORNHA was designated by Congress in 2004 to preserve, interpret, enhance and promote the area's distinctive legacy as the birthplace of the modern petroleum industry.



Drake Well Museum

202 Museum Lane; Titusville, PA 16354
(814) 827-2797 www.drakewell.org

Oil Creek State Park

305 State Park Road; Oil City, PA 16301
(814) 676-5915 www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks

Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad

409 South Perry Street; Titusville, PA 16354
(814) 676-3733 www.octr.org

Pithole

14118 Pithole Road; Pleasantville, PA 16341
(814) 827-2797 www.drakewell.org

Tarbell House (Open by Appointment)

324 East Main Street; Titusville, PA 16354
(814) 677-3152 www.oilregion.org