

BY WILLIAM RICE

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Lifelong Frankford resident Elaine Peden never seems to be caught standing still. Peden not has spent her life working for various memorial events and actions for her historical hero William Penn, but she also plays in the Munier Mandolin and Guitar Orchestra and works full-time at the Betsy Ross House in center city.

Peden's philosophy on life is simple.

"You have to be positive," she said. "You have to wake up every day and ask yourself 'OK, what am I going to do today?'"

Peden is best known around the area for her dedication to and involvement in various

William Penn-related activities, such as pushing for the United States to recognize William Penn as an honorary citizen or helping get the statue of William Penn atop City Hall renovated. And today she, and the Friends of The Solitude, are engaged in another campaign—the renovation of The Solitude, the home of William Penn's grandson John Penn, which now sits on the grounds of the Philadelphia Zoo.

The most prominent renovation project on the Friends of The Solitude's list is that of the tunnel which runs from the basement of the historic house to the vaults which were once of the basements of the estate's kitchen dependency (which was torn down in the 1860s to make way for the zoo).

"This is an ongoing project," Peden said.

Peden's time is not all spent studying and promoting William Penn. Her time with the mandolin orchestra is also very important to her.

"I love playing for them," she said. "I've played for them for 40 years."

Peden and the rest of the orchestra will be playing at St. Mark Church next Sunday, September 23.

"They love us there," she said. "They let us play right up at the altar."

Peden's fascination with Penn and American history started 30 years ago.

"When I was in school I hated history," she said. "Then in the 1970's I took a trip to England started to get interested."

Eventually Peden began reading and learning about William Penn, a historical figure



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Elaine Peden has her walls full of William Penn artifacts in her Frankford home. Peden was directly responsible for the founder of Philadelphia being named as an honorary American Citizen.

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she found very interesting.

"If I hear anything about anybody doing a project on William Penn and having trouble, I do what I can to help," she added.

One room in Peden's home is decorated with all things William Penn; including paintings from a 1970s city art program.

"I'm not a historian," she said. "I'm just someone with a high school education and a lot of common sense and street smarts."

Peden may not be a historian but her knowledge of history is not lacking. The Frankford woman once called up the people at the ABC television game show Jeopardy to correct them

on one of their questions.

"I was watching Jeopardy one day and the question was 'Pennsylvania is named for this man,' and a woman buzzed in and said William Penn, and they said she was right," Peden said. "I called up and told them that there were many William Penn's. The correct answer would be William Penn's father—Sir Admiral William Penn."

For Peden, the persona of William Penn holds special appeal as someone who chose the nobler yet harder path over an easy life of mediocrity.

"He could have lived an entire different lifestyle," Peden said. "His father wanted him to

follow in his footsteps and live out at sea. To me he is a true hero because he could've taken the easy road and live an entirely different lifestyle but he didn't."

Penn was eventually banished by his father, Sir Admiral William Penn, not only for his refusal to become a man of the sea, but because of his conversion and support of the, at the time, radical religious sect of Quakerism.

"We throw the word 'hero' around very lightly these days," Peden said. "But Penn was truly a hero, to face those kinds of challenges and take the right path. It wasn't easy for him but he did it."