Pennypacker Mills Presents: This is the Way We Wash the Clothes!

Schwenksville, PA (July 20, 2012) – One hundred years ago, well-to-do individuals could hire a laundress to wash and iron their clothes and linens. Most people could not afford this luxury so women and children were up at dawn, hauling water from wells, heating it over an open fire outdoors, and using a variety of devices to loosen dirt and effectively clean their clothes. Not such a bad thing in the summer, but come winter, it was a brutal chore that meant standing outdoors and getting their hands wet. What could be done to improve the lot of these women?

Welcome to the era of high-tech laundry, circa 1900! Washboards and wringers were the old standbys, but new devices were on the horizon that did the job and kept hands out of the hot and caustic water too! Visitors to Pennypacker Mills can try some of these techniques as this county historic site offers an ongoing “hands-on” Laundry Experience. On Saturday, July 21, 2012 from 1:00pm to 3:00pm visit Pennypacker Mills and see firsthand how the arduous task of laundry changed dramatically for most Americans as technological advancements made the all-day chore easier, quicker, and less back-breaking.

Visitors may also take a guided tour of the Pennypacker mansion. A guide will take guests through the fully-furnished mansion filled with family antiques, memorabilia, and artifacts that highlight the long history of the famous family who owned the property. All tours include the new exhibit entitled, “Call to Arms! Emergency Militia in Pennsylvania during the Gettysburg Campaign,” in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War.

The laundry demonstration and the guided tour of the mansion are both FREE. Handicapped restrooms and parking facilities are available. The mansion is handicapped accessible only on the first floor.

Pennypacker Mills Historic Site, operated by the Montgomery County Department of Assets & Infrastructure, Division of Parks & Heritage Services, is located at 5 Haldeman Road, Schwenksville,
PA. Pennypacker Mills offers guided tours, changing exhibits, seasonal events, and educational programs. For information call 610-287-9349 or check out the website at www.historicsites.montcopa.org/pennypackermills

For more information, contact Linda Callegari, Assistant Administrator, at 610-287-9349 or email her at lcallega@montcopa.org.

All photographs, courtesy of Pennypacker Mills:

Children helped their mothers do laundry on Mondays in most households. Turning the wringer seems like fun, but after a full day of this task, arms would be sore!
New-fangled gadgets such as this early hand-cranked washing machine became available and eased the burden of hand laundering using a washboard.

After washing all the clothes, table and bed linens, and towels, it was time to hang them up on a clothesline with clothespins. Many children today don’t know what a clothespin is used for!