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# **Civil War play scheduled for the Heritage Discovery Center**

***Play based on historic letters from western Pennsylvania***

The Johnstown Area Heritage Association will present three performances of *Soldier, Come Home*, a play by Frank Wicks based on family Civil War letters, from September 12-14, 2003, at the Heritage Discovery Center.

Frank Wicks, a founding member of the Long Wharf Theater and a theatre professional since 1958, transformed the letters of his great-grandparents, Philip and Mary Pringle, into a dramatic stage presentation. Mary Pringle wrote to her husband from Armagh, Pennsylvania, as well as Summerhill, while he responded from several major Civil War battle sites, including The Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, the siege of Petersburg, and Appomattox. The letters, which were written from 1859-1865, also mention such nearby place names as Johnstown, Ebensburg, Pringle Hill, Wilmore, South Fork and Loretto.

In 1950, the long-forgotten letters were discovered in the attic of the home of Wicks' grandparents, John S. Wicks and Sadie Pringle Wicks, in South Fork. Wicks' father, Frank Wicks, Sr., began to transcribe the letters. After his father's death, Wicks continued the project and began work on *Soldier, Come Home*.

"I was struck from the beginning by the emotional content of the letters," Wicks said. "They were filled with conflicts, complicated relationships, humor, enormous difficulties and struggles for survival. I felt that the energy of the letters, plus their historical importance, would make for a dramatic presentation."

Frank Wicks has numerous family connections to Johnstown and the western Pennsylvania area. A beautiful pipe organ that belonged to his grandfather, John S. Wicks, can be seen on the third floor of the Johnstown Flood Museum. Former Girl Scouts CEO

Frances Hesselbein, a native of Johnstown, is Wicks' first cousin. Several family members still live nearby, and the small town of Pringle Hill was named for the Pringle family, who first settled there in the 18th century.

"I'm thrilled to be bringing the show to western Pennsylvania, because this is where these dramatic events actually occurred. The Civil War had an enormous impact on the individuals in these communities." Wicks said. "In a way, I'm bringing the play back home to where it belongs."

*Soldier, Come Home* has been playing to sold-out houses since its premiere performance in Brunswick, Maine in May 2002. The play also had a successful Off-Broadway presentation in New York City. For the opening performance, critics said, "*Soldier, Come Home* played to enraptured audiences. The script, plus the acting, staging, lighting and music produced an amazing, intimate view of history. This is a theater experience not to be missed."

The cast members include Rock Bergeron, Jack Mahoney, Jessica Peck, Christopher Price, and Hamish Strong.

The performances of *Soldier, Come Home* will be held on Friday and Saturday, September 12-13, at 8:00 p.m., and on Sunday, September 14 at 2:00 p.m., on the third floor of the Heritage Discovery Center, 7th & Broad Street in Johnstown. All tickets are \$8.00. For reservations, call JAHA at (814) 539-1889.

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