During his time as director of the Bradford House, Kilgore helped to launch the Rebel Fair in 2008 to bring attention to the Whiskey Rebellion. The event attracted a few hundred people. In 2010, as part of events to celebrate the City of Washington’s Bicentennial, the fair was transformed into a larger festival and today, the Whiskey Rebellion Festival is held every year in July and attracts thousands of visitors.

**Drawn to the Past**

Growing up in West Finley, Kilgore says he was always interested in history but did not realize that preserving and promoting Washington County’s history would be his life’s calling until one summer break during his college years when he interned as a blacksmith at the Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village. Interestingly enough, and possibly history repeating itself, Kilgore noted that he is a ninth-generation metal worker. “I loved it. When I returned to school that Fall I had a new direction for my course work and my future.”

Upon graduation from Penn State Behrend, Kilgore was hired by the Washington County Historical Society as its curator, a position he held for a number of years. Later, Kilgore served as the director of the Bradford House Museum before returning to the historical society in 2012 as its executive director.

“The mission of the Washington County Historical Society is to preserve our region’s history, artifacts and historic sites, while increasing awareness of Washington’s important place in our nation’s history,” shared Kilgore.

The artifacts maintained at the society include nearly 75,000 documents in the LeMoyne archives alone, including private letters, business ledgers, military documents and other public records of the time. According to Kilgore, sites like Ancestry.com have helped to increase interest in researching family genealogy and in turn, the number of people that visit the archives to research their family history.

Among the letters in the LeMoyne archives are private letters from Ulysses S. Grant to William Wrenshall Smith, who lived in Washington, PA. Grant was a frequent visitor to this area to visit Smith, who was a cousin of Grant’s wife. He was also Grant’s aide-de-camp during the Civil War. Smith was with Grant at Appomattox, VA in April 1865 when Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered. On one of Grant’s visits to Washington in September 1869, he laid the cornerstone of the Washington Town Hall that still stands today.

Bringing history to life and piquing someone’s interest in Washington’s past is certainly Kilgore’s passion. “I love telling people about the history of this region. We provide a variety of education programs, including approximately 65