



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

2015 was a momentous year in which our nine year effort to acquire and preserve Happy Retreat finally bore fruit.

At the end of 2014, the City of Charles Town, under the leadership of Mayor Peggy Smith, stepped forward with an agreement to purchase 10 acres of the 12.3 acre Happy Retreat property. This reduced the amount of money Friends of Happy Retreat needed to buy the house and remaining 2.3 acres.

Dr. Wallace Boston, President of American Public University, immediately led off our fundraising campaign with a combined gift and challenge pledge of \$150,000 for the acquisition, restoration and operation of the historic property.

Then in May, Dr. Taylor Fithian and his wife Margie Fithian made an incredible donation that enabled us to purchase Happy Retreat outright. Their gift was made to honor Dr. Fithian's family, including his parents Taylor and Avis Fithian and his grandfather, R. J. Funkhouser. Our gratitude to the Fithians for their generosity can never be adequately expressed.

We also remain deeply grateful to the Gavin family for their willingness to work with us for so many years to make the purchase possible.

We look back with great fondness to the many hours we spent with Bill and Mary Gavin imagining Happy Retreat's future.

Thanks to the generosity of many other donors, we have matched American Public University's challenge gift for restoration and operation. This has allowed us to move forward with initial restoration work and planning, as reported elsewhere in this newsletter.

We have much still to do. Our initial goal is to have Happy Retreat sufficiently restored to begin holding events in the early summer of 2016. The complete restoration of the house and historic outbuildings will take more time. We still must raise over \$1 million to do all that we want to accomplish.

With your continued support, we will. We will keep you informed of our progress through regular newsletters like this one and through our newly redesigned website: www.happyretreat.org. We welcome your ideas and suggestions for the future of Happy Retreat.

Thank all of you who have helped support Friends of Happy Retreat over the past nine years!

Walter Washington
President

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RESTORATION

Our restoration work is moving forward under the very capable management of Wayne Bishop, Project Manager for MidAtlantic Contracting, Inc., and his wife, Elayne Edel. We also have the incredible good fortune of having architect Kevin Lee Sarring as an adviser. Kevin, an architect with extensive experience in historic preservation, is volunteering his time to advise our Restoration Committee. The Committee meets regularly to review progress and plan the next restoration goals.

LANDSCAPE CLEAN-UP

Shortly after the property was acquired, a clean-up of the grounds around the house began. First, all of the existing trees and bushes were identified and evaluated. An inventory plan was drawn to record their location. Shrubbery planted close to the house in the 1950s was removed. This had been recommended by every expert in historic preservation who had visited the house because the bushes were preventing air circulation which was causing mold to develop and paint to peel on the outside walls.

A silver maple tree which was in danger of falling on the house was taken down, along with several dead or dying trees in the yard. Other trees were trimmed and dead limbs removed. None of the trees on the property are original to the time of Charles Washington's ownership. Most probably date to sometime in the 20th Century.

Working with the City's Parks and Recreation Board, an arborist was brought in to develop an annual maintenance plan to preserve several ash trees which are showing early signs of infestation by the emerald ash borer.

SCREEN PORCH

A prominent modern addition to the house was a 20th Century screen porch built along the west side of the west wing. It was an easy restoration target. Following procedures to protect the structural integrity of the house from damage, the porch was removed in early November. As the brick and concrete base of the porch was demolished, a set of stone steps was uncovered leading from the west door of the wing. Documentary and photographic evidence establish that the steps were added during renovations to the house made in the 1940s. They have been left in place for now pending further archaeological study.

EXTERIOR FAÇADE

Treatment of the exterior façade will be a major undertaking. The original brick used was probably locally made using local clay. Local kilns were not hot enough to produce hard fired surfaces so the bricks tended to be soft. We have not yet determined what the original treatment was on the outside walls, such as whitewash. Unfortunately, beginning in the mid-20th Century the walls were painted with standard exterior paints. This has caused moisture to be trapped against the brick surfaces causing the bricks to crumble and the paint to peel. Remediation and restoration will require careful analysis.

For cosmetic purposes, peeling paint on the front of the house was carefully removed, using a plastic scraper so as to not damage the underlying brick. Exposed spots on the exterior wooden trim around windows and doors were scraped, primed and painted. An inventory of all 44 windows on the house is underway. The condition of each window will be assessed and documented and necessary repairs made.

Many of the exterior shutters have been removed and put in storage in the basement. Quite a few are in need of serious repair. Each will be evaluated and a restoration plan put in place.



The fan window, known as a lunette.

FAN WINDOW

For many years, the fan window on the third floor of the front of the house had been obscured by a window screen made with a crude plywood frame. As part of the exterior clean up, the screen was removed, revealing the geometric grandeur of the window. For those of us on site when the screen came off, it was a magical moment to see such a beautiful feature of the house revealed. A new screen will be made that can be put in place when the window is open. Otherwise, the window will preside, un-obscured, as a focal point of the Greek Revival façade.



GARAGE

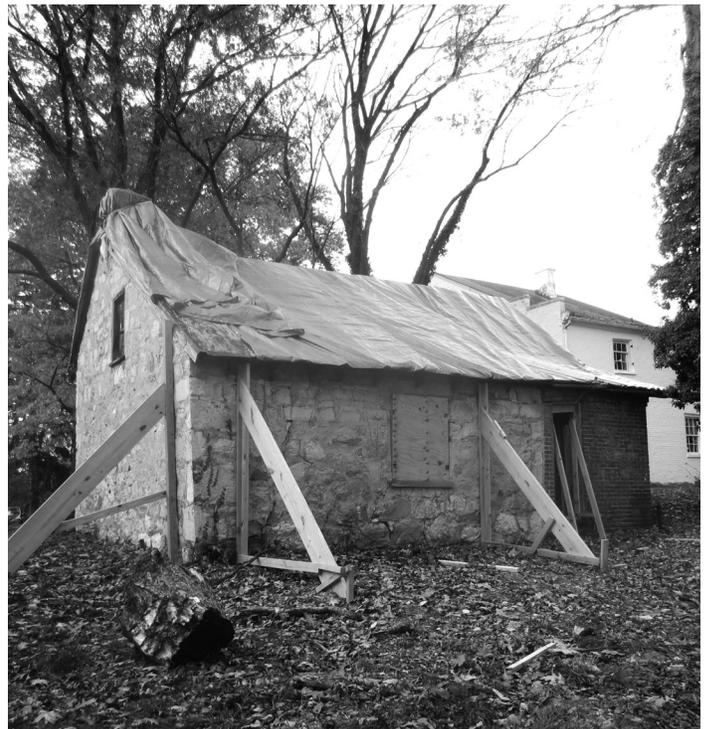
A 20th Century brick garage stands behind the house to the right. Its design mimics the architectural style of the wings of the house. A cornerstone bears the name “Conklyn,” which dates the garage to the ownership of Happy Retreat by C. Magnus Conklyn and his brother, J. P. Conklyn, who bought the property in 1920 and sold it in 1945. Both were men of many talents and abilities. They ran a furniture making business from Happy Retreat. “Conklyn Brothers” furniture remains a collector’s item in Jefferson County. We plan to turn the garage, which is in excellent structural condition, into an orientation center for visitors. In preparation, the original standing seam tin roof has been carefully repaired and painted. Missing window panes have been replaced and the window frames re-glazed and painted. When the window frames were removed for repair, we discovered that they had all been re-cycled from some other building, as evidenced by grooves for pulley weight ropes no longer in place.

WEST WING

The first floor of the west wing of the house contains two rooms. They date to the ownership of Charles Washington. The front room, used in modern times as a dining room, retains much of its original 18th Century detail. The rear room was converted into a modern kitchen in the 20th Century. What appears to be the location of a fireplace was bricked-in to house electric ovens. Cabinets, countertops and modern appliances were installed. As the first phase of restoration of that room, the cabinets, countertops and appliances have been removed. Further work awaits a careful forensic analysis and detailed restoration plan.

STONE KITCHEN & SMOKEHOUSE

The stone kitchen and adjoining brick smokehouse are considered the oldest structures on the property. The restoration of these two buildings will require a careful evaluation by experts in historic preservation. A recent visitor from the National Trust for Historic Preservation commented that the buildings are so remarkable they could be the subject of a doctoral dissertation. For the time being, they have been stabilized.



Wooden supports shore up the stone kitchen. The roof and chimney are protected by a tarp.



Members of the Charles Washington Symphony Orchestra perform at the Fall Gala at Claymont.

NEXT STEPS

With cold weather approaching, we are turning our attention to the inside of the house. The house is currently heated by a hot water radiator system with an oil burning furnace, which was recently replaced. There is no central air conditioning. Frank Weis, a structural engineer and vice president of the Heffron Company, nearby in Maryland, has been engaged to inspect the system and make recommendations for improvements. The electrical wiring system and plumbing systems are also being evaluated. The roof of the house has been inspected by three roofing contractors. Proposals to either repair or replace the roof are under consideration so that a decision can be made to move forward with the work in the spring.

FALL GALA

We held our third annual fall gala at Claymont on September, 13. A catered dinner was served by The Mediterranean Café, a restaurant on Washington Street in Charles Town. Musical entertainment was provided by members of the Charles Washington Symphony Orchestra. What made the event special this year was having Dr. Taylor Fithian and Margie Fithian among the guests along with Dr. Wallace Boston of American Public University System (APUS). We had the opportunity to express our gratitude to the Fithian's whose generosity made the purchase of Happy Retreat possible and to Dr. Boston whose support through a lead gift from APUS has allowed us to move forward with restoration.

CATERER'S KITCHEN

A primary means of generating revenue to support Happy Retreat will be to make the house and grounds available for rental for weddings, receptions and other events. To that end, it will be necessary to install a kitchen caterers can use to serve meals. The east wing of the house was built over a shallow crawl space. Reportedly, this led to extensive termite damage which required the interior of the wing to be completely gutted and rebuilt in the 1940s. It was further remodeled extensively in the 1950s. Consequently, none of the interior fabric of the east wing is original. We have decided to put the kitchen in the back room of the east wing. This location will facilitate serving events held indoors or outdoors without compromising the historic parts of the house. Marcia Flanagan, a local chef, caterer and owner of thebestcookie.com bakery has helped us with the kitchen design. Another local caterer, Margarita Edmondson, has also helped with her advice.



Members of the Jefferson High School Chamber Choir sing at ArtOber

ARTOBER

The Jefferson County Arts Council staged its first annual ArtOber event at Happy Retreat from October 1 through October 17. Artists of all kind, including painters, sculptors, wood workers, musicians, poets, photographers, writers and comedians, displayed their talents in rooms throughout the house. ArtOber, which was free to the public, was Happy Retreat's introduction to the community. Over 150 people attended the opening night. The artists and those who attended were thrilled with how beautifully the space at Happy Retreat displayed their work. Musicians praised the acoustics of the main parlors where they performed. There is talk that many of the musicians want to come back to record a CD to be called "The Happy Retreat Sessions" because of the superior acoustics.

NEW WEBSITE

Board member Bill Jackson has worked untiringly over the last several months to help develop a new website for Friends of Happy Retreat. In September we hired web designer Paul Maxey of Frostburg, Maryland, to design and launch a new site which is viewable on all devices. Be sure to check it out at www.happyretreat.org and also join our Facebook page. We look forward to keeping the content of the site current to allow you to follow our progress. As part of the makeover, we have designed new logos, one of which is based on the magnificent fan window at Happy Retreat. Please let us know what you think.

MEET OUR RESTORATION COMMITTEE

The Restoration Committee includes board members Walter Washington (Committee chair), Randy Hilton, Bill Jackson, Bill Senseney, Robin Huyett Thomas; Wayne Bishop, Elayne Edel and Matt Viveiros of MidAtlantic Contracting, Inc.; architect Kevin Lee Sarring; and architectural historian John C. Allen, Jr. We are also fortunate to have as a resource Matt Webster, Director of Architectural Preservation at Colonial Williamsburg, who has visited Happy Retreat several times over the years and has been generous with guidance and advice. Matt grew up in Shepherdstown and loves to boast about Jefferson County's incredible historic resources, including Happy Retreat.

PRESERVATION OFFICERS VISIT HAPPY RETREAT

In early November, the National Association of State Historic Preservation Officers held its fall meeting at nearby Shepherdstown. The Association's itinerary included a tour of Happy Retreat on November 3rd. Led by Randall Reid Smith, Commissioner of West Virginia's Division of Culture and History and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Susan Pierce, preservation officers from states as far away as Texas, South Dakota and Washington state toured the house and grounds on a beautiful fall afternoon.

FINANCE COMMITTEE FORMED

The Board is proud to announce the membership of our Finance Committee. Led by our Treasurer Richard Seckinger as Committee chair, the committee members include David Darnell, a CPA and president of Darnell & Company, a local accounting firm; Steve Shaeffer, Cash Management Officer and Assistant Vice President of the Bank of Charles Town; and Ann Paonessa, member of the Charles Town City Council and small business manager. Our Treasurer's careful attention to detail and aversion to spending money will be complimented by this strong financial management team.

PRESERVATION AWARD

In September, the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia (PAWV) awarded Friends of Happy Retreat the 2015 Most Significant Save of an Endangered Site Award. In 2010, PAWV placed Happy Retreat on its list of the ten most endangered historic properties in the state that year. At PAWV's 2015 awards banquet held in Grafton, West Virginia, on September 17, Board President Walter Washington accepted the award on behalf of FOHR. PAWV has and will continue to be an important resource and supporter of our efforts. In 2010, Lynn Stasick, PAWV's field representative, prepared a careful evaluation of the condition of Happy Retreat which has helped guide our restoration efforts.

MUSIC AT HAPPY RETREAT

The Charles Washington Symphony Orchestra was formed in Charles Town several years ago as a community orchestra, open to musicians of all ages and abilities. Members of the orchestra performed at our 2015 gala at Claymont and during the ArtOber celebration at Happy Retreat. Plans are underway for the formation of the Charles Washington Chamber Music Society which will perform works of chamber music written by American composers from the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. We look forward to hosting those performances at Happy Retreat in 2016. We know that George Washington was an enthusiastic concert goer and we plan to recreate some of the same chamber music performances he heard and enjoyed. We are working with the Orchestra to develop other exciting opportunities for music that will make Happy Retreat a lively musical center.



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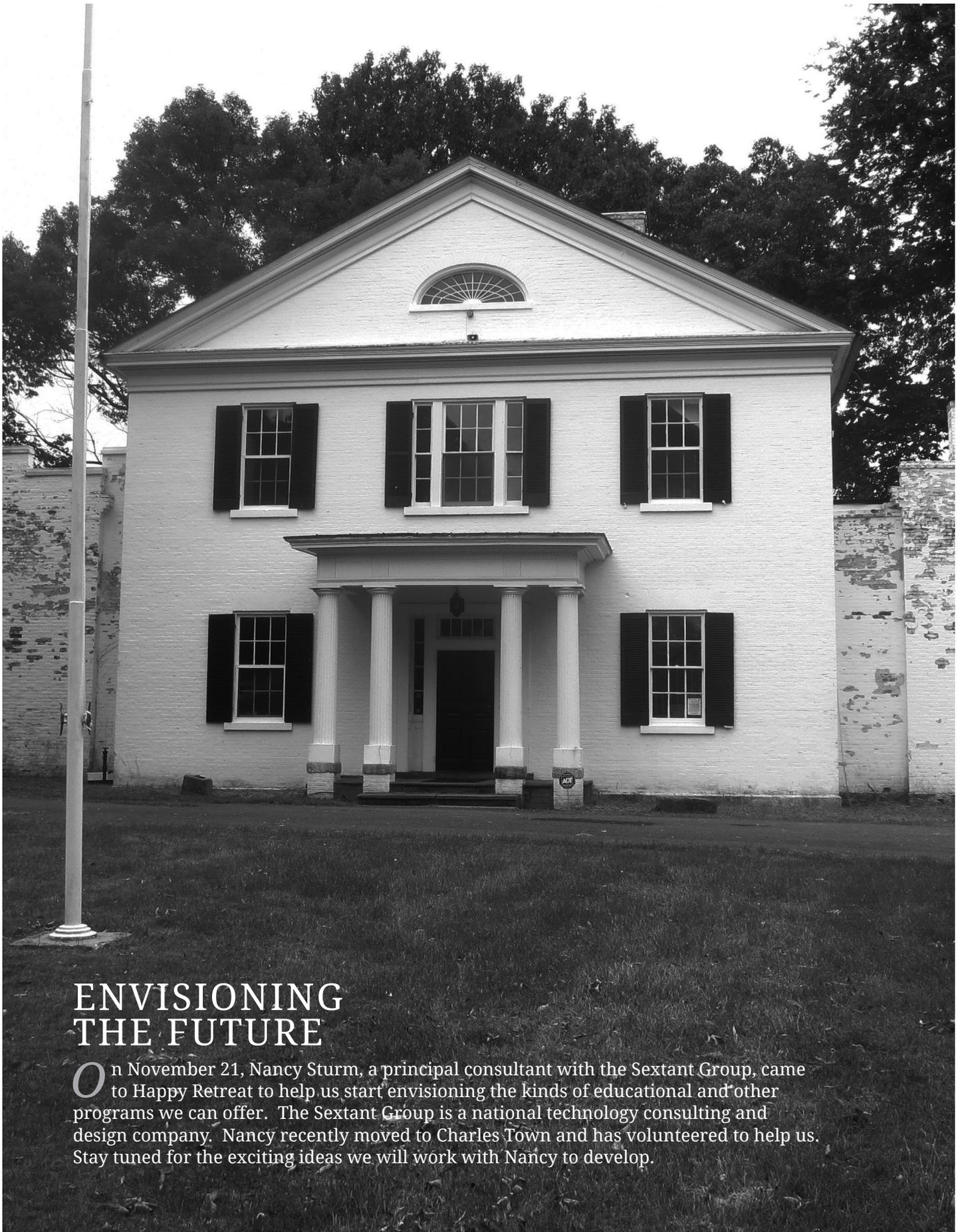
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The name "**Rising Sun**" is taken from the Rising Sun Tavern in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The tavern is located in the house built by Charles Washington in 1760 and where he lived before he moved to Happy Retreat. The house became a tavern in 1792. It is now owned and operated by the Washington History Museums.



ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

On November 21, Nancy Sturm, a principal consultant with the Sextant Group, came to Happy Retreat to help us start envisioning the kinds of educational and other programs we can offer. The Sextant Group is a national technology consulting and design company. Nancy recently moved to Charles Town and has volunteered to help us. Stay tuned for the exciting ideas we will work with Nancy to develop.



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