Two momentous events marked the year that draws to a close. First, in June the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Happy Retreat a National Treasure. We cannot begin to express our gratitude to the National Trust for this immense and humbling honor. The National Treasure designation is not simply a plaque to hang on the wall. It is a commitment between the Trust and our Board to work together to bring to life our plans for Happy Retreat. This work began even before the National Treasure designation was announced as we worked with experts from the Trust to develop a strategic plan. Our work continues monthly to build on that plan.

Then, on September 10, we held the first annual Happy Retreat Craft Beer and Music Festival. It was a huge success. The festival brought people to the grounds of Happy Retreat not only from the Eastern Panhandle but from nearby Maryland and Virginia as well. It was an example of how Happy Retreat can become a center for our community, both by bringing people to Happy Retreat to enjoy an event and by involving the community in the event --- over 100 enthusiastic volunteers stepped forward to make the day a success. We look forward to making the Craft Beer and Music Festival an annual event and building on it to create other happenings that will draw diverse audiences.

Cheers and Happy Holidays!

Walter Washington  President
HAPPY RETREAT NAMED A NATIONAL TREASURE

On June 18, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Happy Retreat to its list of National Treasures. The National Treasures “program demonstrates the value of preservation by taking direct action to protect cherished places and promote their history and significance.” Fewer than 75 places in this nation have been selected as National Treasures. Other National Treasures include Nashville’s Music Row, Theodore Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch, the Houston Astrodome, the Grand Canyon, the historic Woodlawn estate adjacent to Mount Vernon, and The National Cathedral in Washington, DC. We are the first National Treasure named in West Virginia.

The announcement was made on the front lawn of Happy Retreat in a ceremony led by Charles Town Mayor Peggy Smith, West Virginia Commissioner of Tourism Amy Goodwin, National Trust representative Monica Miller and FOHR president Walter Washington.

The National Treasure designation means that for the next year, a team of experts from the Trust will work with Friends of Happy Retreat to realize our vision for the property. Our team is led by Nancy Tinker, Senior Field Officer in the Trust’s Charleston, South Carolina, Field Office. Under Nancy’s experienced leadership, we are working with the Trust on these five defined tasks:

1. Identify the best approach for the future uses of Happy Retreat for historical, community, arts, cultural, educational, recreational, rental and other shared uses, using best practices and strategies from similar historic houses across the nation;
2. Help enhance better local community engagement with Happy Retreat;
3. Build a national network of support for the restoration of Happy Retreat;
4. Help Friends of Happy Retreat determine the best approach for hiring an Executive Director; and
5. Support a robust fundraising campaign.

Through the National Treasure program, we have access not only to the Trust’s in-house expertise, but also to the network of other historic properties the Trust owns across the country. One of these, Belle Grove, in nearby Middletown, Virginia, has already served as a model for us in many ways. Rather than trying to re-invent the wheel, we have the opportunity to examine what works and doesn’t work at the Trust’s other sites as well.

JUNE BBQ

Our celebration of the National Treasures festivities on June 18 was capped off by a “BBQ & Boots” evening at Cedar Lawn, hosted by the Fithian family. Guests dined on a delicious spread of BBQ favorites and desserts. We were entertained by a remarkable mother/daughter singing duo who performed numbers from the Patsy Cline songbook and other country hits.

Yard games included bocce and a corn-hole toss. We are indebted to local caterers Marcia Flannigan, Margarita Edmonson and Ann Smith for their contributions to the evening’s success. Thank you Margie and Taylor Fithian for your never-ending generosity in support of Happy Retreat!
We held the first annual Happy Retreat Craft Beer and Music festival on Saturday, September 10. It was a huge success. Over 1,500 people braved the 94 degree heat to enjoy the day’s events. Josh Vance, owner of Charles Town’s own Front Porch Brewing Company, brought together a first rate line-up of 20 craft breweries who offered 50 different beers to sample. Josh also signed four top-notch bands to provide great music throughout the day – The Woodshedders, The Hillbilly Gypsies, The WOO-Yeas and Dale and the Z-Dubbs.

We had a variety of food vendors: Ortega’s Taco Shop, a local favorite; Pizza Llama, selling wood-fired pizzas; Rolling Smoke BBQ, also local; C & J Jerk Chicken, selling authentic grilled Jamaican jerk chicken; TheBestCookie selling their cookies (which are the best!), and Mountaineer Popcorn from Charles Town, a new local vendor.

Over 100 volunteers came out to help pour beer, take tickets, park cars, set up and take down tables and chairs, clean up trash and otherwise help. They were the backbone of the festival and we could not have done it without them. Thank you all!

Thanks, also, to the many businesses who donated time and resources to the festival.

American Public University and the Board of Education allowed us to use their parking lots for guests and volunteers. River Riders Family Adventure Resort provided two busses to shuttle guests from those parking lots to Happy Retreat. Mid Atlantic Contracting, Inc., the company overseeing the restoration of Happy Retreat, handled the logistics for the festival, including the perimeter fencing, electrical service and overall set up. American Electric Services kept an electrician on call to trouble shoot problems during the day. Walmart donated 1000 pounds of ice. The Bank of Charles Town facilitated the use of remote credit card readers on site.

Many thanks to the City of Charles Town for its cooperation and assistance, particularly Todd Wilt and Chief Kutcher and the police department. Also, thank you to Sheriff Pete Dougherty and the Sheriff’s Reserve officers who helped with security and to Independent Fire Company for providing and EMT on site.

But mostly, thanks to the over 1,500 people who came out to make the day so memorable for Happy Retreat. We have already scheduled next year’s Craft Beer and Music Festival for Saturday, September 9, 2017.
FUNDRAISING

The Friends of Happy Retreat have taken steps to bring our fundraising efforts to new, more professional levels in order to achieve our ambitious goals. We have collaborated with the National Trust to establish a Fundraising Strategy and confirm key priorities, including the most important restoration projects and the plan or ensuring sustainable operations with a full time paid Director.

RESTORATION

We are moving forward with restoration of the house on all fronts. We are fortunate to be guided by so many knowledgeable people.

East Wing. During the 1940s, The East Wing was completely gutted due to termite damage and then remodeled, leaving no original interior fabric. We took up the floor in the rear room of this wing in preparation for putting in an events kitchen. When the floor was removed, a stone foundation was exposed running under the center wall.

Protruding from under the base of the foundation is a 7' x 3' rectangle of stones laid flat in the ground. Was this a hearth? The foundation of a chimney? An entrance step? Dr. Charles Hulse, professor of anthropology at Shepherd University, spent a day in September excavating the site with his son, Jonathan. They recovered over a hundred artifacts. His report will help us interpret the significance of the find.

This diagram by architect Kevin Lee Sarring shows the detail of the foundation uncovered when the floor in the rear room of the east wing was removed. Architectural drawings made in the 1950’s label this room the “Winter Kitchen.”
West Wing. It was evident from a seam in the outside west wall of the west wing that this part of the house was built in two phases. The front room was built first; the back room was added later. The rear room was converted into a kitchen in the 20th Century, while the front room was used as a dining room. We have removed all of the modern wall board and plaster covering the walls in the rear room. Exposing the interior of the brick walls confirms the sequence of construction of the two rooms. It is clear that the front room was built separately first and the rear room was added later. The north wall of the rear room was originally the exterior south wall of the front room.

Evidence of this comes from a technique known as penciling. Bricks used in the construction of Happy Retreat were fired locally. They were uneven in size and color. This was common to construction in those days.

Once the house was built, in order to make the bricks look uniform in color and size, the outside walls were coated with a reddish-pink paint to simulate the color of brick and the mortar joints were then “penciled” in with a line of white paint.

When the plaster was removed from the rear room, it revealed pristine penciling of the north wall. This proves that this was originally the exterior south wall of the front room.

Another startling revelation from the restoration work in the rear room is that it had no fireplace. We are puzzled to explain why a room would have been added, presumably in the late 18th century, without a source of heat.

HVAC SYSTEM

Currently, Happy Retreat is heated by hot water radiators. There is no air conditioning. Earlier in the year, we hired Roger Catlett, president of the mechanical engineering firm of Comfort Design, Inc., of Winchester, Virginia, to develop a proposal for a new HVAC system. He has proposed installing a water source heat pump system. This system would use the pipes of the existing radiator system to circulate hot water to heat the house and cold water to cool it. The advantage to this system is that it would not require installing ducts or vents in the house. The pipes are already in place. We are pricing the system based on this design using either the existing oil burner or a geothermal pump.
HISTORY OF THE OWNERSHIP OF HAPPY RETREAT

Charles Washington, 1752 – 1799. The land where Happy Retreat now stands was part of one of three contiguous land grants from Lord Fairfax to Lawrence Washington, older half-brother of Charles, dated October 17, 1750. The three grants totaled 2,255 acres. Charles inherited all or part of these tracts upon Lawrence’s death in 1752.

By 1796, after selling off the platted lots of Charles Town and other conveyances, Charles’s holdings had been reduced to some 800 acres. In declining health and fortune, Charles conveyed a one-half interest in these remaining 800 acres, including the house, to his son Samuel in August, 1796, and leased the remaining half-interest to him as well. Samuel was also building a house of his own on this acreage at the time of the conveyance. In July, 1799, just six months before his death, Charles conveyed the remaining one-half interest in the property to Samuel.


Heirs of Thomas Hammond, 1820 – 1837. Thomas and Ann Hammond’s son, George Washington Hammond, consolidated ownership of the house and 179 acres from his widowed mother and three surviving siblings in 1834. In 1837, he sold the property to Isaac R. Douglass, Circuit Judge of Jefferson County.

Hon. Isaac R. Douglass, 1837 -1852. Judge Douglass built the central portion of the house and added the second stories to the two wings, creating the Happy Retreat house we know today. He renamed it Mordington after the Douglass ancestral home in Scotland. Douglass died from injuries sustained in a horseback riding accident in 1850. He was survived by his wife Margaret. She sold her dower interest in the house and surrounding 4 acres to Francis W. Drew in 1751. Drew acquired the remaining ownership in the house and 133 acres from Judge Douglass’s estate in 1852.

Frances W. Drew, 1852 – 1874. Drew’s ownership of Happy Retreat was terminated in 1874 following lengthy litigation apparently to satisfy debts he owed.

Charles T. Mitchell, 1874 – 1887. Charles T. Mitchell bought the house and 101 acres from the Special Commissioners appointed by the Circuit Court to discharge Drew’s debts.

Judith Francis Carter Mitchell, 1887 - 1920. Charles T. Mitchell deeded title to Happy Retreat to his wife, Judith, in 1887. She died in 1907. Her heirs sold the property, then consisting of 87 acres, to C. Magnus Conklyn and J. P. Conklyn in 1920.

C. Magnus Conklyn and J. P. Conklyn, 1920 – 1945. The Conklyn brothers set up their well-regarded furniture business at Happy Retreat. They built the brick garage to the rear of the house, copying the Greek Revival style of Judge Douglass’s addition. After subdividing the 87 acres into five lots, they sold the house and surrounding 12 acres to the Blakeley Corporation in 1945.

The Blakeley Corporation, 1945 – 1951. The Blakeley Corporation was owned by industrialist R. J. Funkhouser, who also bought and restored three other Washington family homes – Blakeley, Claymont and Cedar Lawn, saving them from an unknown fate. Under his ownership, Happy Retreat, which had fallen into disrepair, was extensively restored.
Funkhouser Industries, 1951-1952; The R. J. Funkhouser Foundation, 1952-1954. Ownership of Happy Retreat was transferred among these entities belonging to R. J. Funkhouser as the restoration work continued.


We want to thank the local businesses that continue to contribute their time, material and labor to help restore Happy Retreat. Again, Mark Kable, owner of Kable Excavating Company, sent men and machinery to grade the west elevation and do other clean up in the yard. Jay Ware, owner of Green Horizons Turf Farm, donated sod to turn the graded yard into a lush lawn. Wayne Bishop and Elayne Edel of MidAtlantic Contracting, Inc., continue to go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that every detail of work done at Happy Retreat is perfect.

Thank You!

Walter Washington
President

Richard Seckinger
Treasurer

Nancy Bateman
Margie Fithian
William Jackson
William Senseney
Robin Huyett Thomas
Michael Tolbert
Matt Ward
Scott Rogers

J. Randolph Hilton
Vice- President

Marjorie Gaestel
Secretary

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.
Please visit our new website
WWW.HAPPYRETREAT.ORG

PLEASE HELP SUPPORT the RESTORATION of HAPPY RETREAT

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Here is My Donation: □ $100 □ $50 □ $25 □ Other________________________________________

□ Yes, I would like to volunteer to help Friends of Happy Retreat

Mail Check Payable to: Friends of Happy Retreat, P.O. Box 1427, Charles Town, WV 25414

(Friends of Happy Retreat is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation.)