"If only these walls could talk,” is something we often hear people say at Happy Retreat, as I’m sure they do at most historic homes. It turns out that, in a way, walls can talk, as we learned from the paint analysis done as part of the first phase of the Historic Structures Report summarized in this newsletter. In one room, that analysis gave us a complete chronology of the colors of paint used back to the day Charles Washington first walked through the door. By comparing that sequence of paint colors to samples taken elsewhere in the same room and in other parts of the house, we now know when certain doors and windows were added and other alterations were made.

We now know that the trim in the front room of the west wing was originally painted with an expensive and fashionable verdigris-based green paint, suggesting that this was a room of some importance. It is the same bright green color you see today on the walls of the dining room at Mt. Vernon.

We now know that the mantel in that room does not reveal the same paint sequence, which means it was moved there from some other location. Seams also indicate the mantel was cut down to a shorter size from its original height.

The paint analysis and other observations in the Historic Structures report, have given us a new understanding of the history of the construction and use of Happy Retreat. So we have learned that walls can indeed tell us a great deal about the history of a house, if you know how to listen. We look forward to continuing our conversations with the walls at Happy Retreat for many years to come.

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We are looking forward our first Wine and Jazz Festival, which will take place on the grounds of Happy Retreat on Saturday, June 10, from 11am to 6pm.

We hope to build on the success of last fall’s Craft Beer and Music Festival to make Happy Retreat a place where people come to enjoy more than just history.

Walter Washington President
We are excited to welcome Rachel Niswander, an AmeriCorps member, to Happy Retreat. AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service which places members with local non-profits, schools, public agencies, etc., around the country. Rachel, who is from Illinois, is a 2016 graduate of Marquette University. She comes to us after working at Blackberry Farms, a living history museum that interprets 19th century pioneer life in Aurora, Illinois. She will help us organize events at Happy Retreat like the Wine and Jazz Festival and the Craft Beer and Music Festival; build and coordinate our volunteer database; do research; help organize our archives and assist with many other tasks. We have set up an office for FOHR in the front room of the east wing at Happy Retreat where Rachel will work. Up until now, FOHR has relied entirely on the volunteer time and effort of our board of directors, past and present, and scores of other volunteers. This is our first step in creating a sustainable organization to carry out our work.

Phase I of the Historic Structures Report (HSR) has been completed. The 81 page report was prepared by Maral S. Kalbian and Dennis J. Pogue. A copy can be downloaded from our webpage. The report established this chronology of Happy Retreat's construction:

- The front room of the west wing is the earliest part of the house, dating to ca.1780.
- Both the rear room of the west wing and the east wing were built around 1785.
- The name “Happy Retreat” first appears on a letter Charles Washington wrote to his son, George Augustine Washington, dated November 23, 1785.
- The central portion of the house and the second stories of both wings were completed by Judge Isaac Douglass in 1842.
The most striking conclusion in the report is about the original use of what is now the west wing. The front room was built first as a freestanding, single room structure. It had a fireplace, with a cupboard (which remains today) on the right side of the fireplace and either a matching cupboard or shelving on the left side. It had chair rails on all four walls, a remnant of which remains today to the right of the fireplace. The west wall originally had no doors or windows.

There was a full basement. Just above ground level on the east side, a six-foot long “soldier course” of bricks indicate a possible bulkhead entry to the basement, i.e., a wide entrance with a double door accessed by descending stairs dug into the ground.

Then, a few years after this room was built, a single adjoining room was added on the south end. A door was punched through to the left of the fireplace in the front room. What is unusual about this added room is that it had no apparent source of heat. There is no evidence of a fireplace.

The HSR concludes that the west wing – the two adjoining rooms, one unheated, over a full basement with a large exterior basement door -- was built originally as a store. The front room was where business was transacted. The unheated back room was where goods were stored. This is consistent with similarly configured buildings at other 18th Century Virginia plantations, such as Belle Grove, below Winchester.

This interpretation only deepens the mystery of Happy Retreat’s original plan. Where did Charles, Mildred and their four children live when they moved to Happy Retreat from Fredericksburg in 1780?

This phase of the HSR focused particular attention on the first floor of the west wing because it is the oldest part of the house with the most original features. The HSR will be ongoing. Next phases will cover the smokehouse/kitchen/privy outbuilding, the 1842 section of the house and the octagonal outbuilding. Understanding the history of Happy Retreat will be a never-ending exploration.
A major challenge to understanding the history of the construction of the west wing was the lack of original building material remaining. Preliminary analysis revealed that all of the floors and floor joists for both the first and second story had been replaced during the renovations of the mid-20th Century. There was no original wood left that would give an indication of age or that might be dated through a process called dendrochronology, which analyzes growth rings in lumber to determine its age. The wall plaster is also modern.

In an attempt to find some evidence of the age of construction, Dr. Susan Buck of Williamsburg, Va., a leading expert in the dating of paint, was brought in to conduct a paint analysis. Using a technique known as cross-section microscopy. For this analysis, small paint samples are taken from strategic points and examined microscopically to determine the number of paint layers and the colors of each. The results were stunning. Samples taken from the trim around the windows and door on the north and east sides of the front room revealed 24 layers of paint, establishing that these are original to the time of Charles Washington. The paint analysis helped date the door and window on the west wall to a later time, indicating they were not there originally but were added later. The analysis also disclosed fascinating details about the mantel and other elements of the room.

Above. Paint analysis and other evidence indicate this mantel was moved to this room from another location.

Left. Paint samples taken from the woodwork in the first floor rooms of both wings established their sequence of construction. The rooms were numbered for the paint analysis. Room 105 was built first, ca. 1780. Rooms 106, 107 and 109 were built ca. 1785. The central portion of the house and the second floor of the two wings were completed in 1842. HSR, p. 43.
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER’S REPORT

As part of the HSR, Timothy Painter, a structural engineer with Painter-Lewis, P.L.C., of Winchester, Virginia, conducted a Preliminary Structural Assessment Report of the brick smoke house, stone kitchen and privy outbuilding. The three were built separately: the brick smoke house in the 18th Century, the stone kitchen in the 19th Century and the brick privy in the 20th Century. Although they are attached to each other, they are not connected structurally. This has led to separation and movement of the walls. The smokehouse is in good structural condition, but the kitchen and privy are not. The structural report recommends repointing the smokehouse and replacing damaged bricks; rebuilding portions of the brick privy walls and the stone kitchen walls; and designing a system to tie the sections together. We also know from an environmental study done in 2010 by Winchester Environmental Consulting, Inc., that the roofing shingles on this building contain asbestos and will have to be replaced.

The rear of the kitchen/smokehouse/privy outbuilding showing cracks. The brick privy enclosure, built in the 1940s, is on the right. The wooden reinforcements were put up in 2015 to stabilize the structure.

The first step in restoring the smoke house, stone kitchen and privy is to evaluate the foundation of each. In early April, Dr. Charles Hulse of Shepherd University directed an archaeological excavation along the south west corner of the kitchen to inspect the foundation. Further excavations around the other portions of the building will follow.

Left. Dr. Charles Hulse (r) supervises excavation of the kitchen foundation.

Above. Dirt from the excavation was sifted to find artifacts which will be washed, identified and cataloged. 5,000 artifacts were found, including many nails, pottery shards and animal bones.
We are pleased to announce that the Jefferson County Historical Society will locate its office at Happy Retreat. It will be the first time the Society has had a physical office space in over 40 years. We are looking forward to working with the Society to develop programs that will benefit both it and FOHR and which will foster interest in history and broaden participation in both our organizations. The Society’s full time presence at Happy Retreat is an important step in making Happy Retreat a vibrant center for history and learning. The Society, together with the Charles Town Library Civil War Roundtable, will hold its first event -- the 7th Annual Jefferson County Civil War Roundtable -- at Happy Retreat on Tuesday, June 20, 2017, from 9 to 4:15.

Please see our website for further details. Seating is limited. For further questions, please contact the Historical Society at 304-725-2608, or by email at Needwood201@gmail.com.

Historical Society board member Doug Perks in the Society's new office at Happy Retreat.

HAPPY RETREAT BOOK CLUB

We are excited to announce the formation of The Happy Retreat Book Club. The Club will choose several books a year to read and discuss.

The first book will be The Grand Idea, George Washington's Potomac and the Race to the West, by Joel Achenbach. This book tells the story of George Washington's trek across the Appalachians to what was then the western frontier -- the Ohio River Valley -- in September, 1784. The two-fold purpose of the trip was to visit his far-flung land holdings and to investigate transforming the Potomac River into a route of commerce between the western frontier and the East Coast. He spent his first night after crossing the Blue Ridge at Happy Retreat where he met with Gen. Daniel Morgan and other local leaders to discuss his Grand Idea.

The Four Seasons Book Store in Shepherdstown has offered to make the book available at a 15% discount to Club members.

The idea for the book club came from Dr. Michael Spensley, of Charles Town, who has agreed to facilitate the Club’s first meeting. It will be held at Happy Retreat on Flag Day, Wednesday, June 14, at 7 pm. If you are interested in joining the Club, please call us at (304) 724-7956 to sign up. Membership is free. We look forward to seeing you on June 14!
UPCOMING EVENTS

Wine and Jazz Festival – June 10

We will be hosting our first Wine and Jazz Festival at Happy Retreat on Saturday, June 10, from 11 am until 6 pm. There will be over 50 fine wines to sample. We will have a full day of jazz provided by three great groups -- The Brooks Tegler Quartet, The Krispy Kat Quartet and The Apollo Jazz Septet. There will be a variety of food vendors: the Mediterranean Café, a local Charles Town favorite; Pizza Llama, with his portable wood-fired pizza oven; and caterer Marcia Flanigan, with salads and specially created offerings. On the sweet side, TheBestCookie.com will be back and Sugar Whipped Bakery will be creating miniature wine flavored cupcakes, such as Merlot chocolate, strawberry Chardonnay, and raspberry Rose. Chocolates from Appalachian Chocolates will also be available.

An innovative feature of the festival will be three “virtual” wine tasting classes for VIP ticket holders. The interactive classes will be taught by Simone FM Spinner, MH, CSW, CWE, adjunct professor of wine studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado. The three classes offered will be Hot Trends In Wine, Wine & Music, and Taste Like A Professional. The classes will be held in the Happy Retreat mansion on the day of the festival. Each class is limited to 20 participants, first come, first served, so sign up early. Details of each class and how to enroll can be found on our website www.happyretreat.org.

These classes are a glimpse of the vision we have for Happy Retreat’s interactive future. Professor Spinner will conduct the classes remotely from Boulder online. Nancy Sturm, a principal consultant with the Sextant Group, a nationally known IT consulting and design firm, envisioned this idea and has set it up. Nancy, who lives in Charles Town, first approached us a year ago with creative ideas for making Happy Retreat into an interactive hub for learning and creativity. We are excited to be working with her and the Sextant Group towards a high tech future for Happy Retreat.

Happy Retreat Book Club – June 14

Jefferson County Historical Society's 7th Annual Civil War Seminar – June 20 (see details above)

Craft Beer and Music Festival – September 9

The Craft Beer and Music Festival will be back by popular demand on Saturday, September 9, from 11 am until 6 pm. We are looking forward to building on last year’s success. So please save the date!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We need volunteers to help with both the Wine and Jazz Festival and the Craft Beer and Music Festival. Please contact FOHR at (304) 724-7956. All volunteers receive a free ticket to the event.

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

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☑️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.)