President’s Letter

As you read through this issue of The Rising Sun, you will get a sense of how many things are going on at Happy Retreat at different levels. We continue to make steady progress on the restoration of the house and outbuildings. We have established two signature annual events – the Wine & Jazz Festival and June and the Craft Beer and Music Festival in September – which will continue to anchor our calendar of activities. The Book Club has introduced many in our community to two excellent books and provided a stimulating setting to discuss them. Our AmeriCorps member, Rachel Niswander, has set up a program to archive the growing amount of material — books, letters, papers, even furniture — in our collection. This December we will host our first Christmas Open House. In 2018, we will inaugurate the Charles Washington Chamber Orchestra concert series.

Our challenge is to develop a sustainable “shared use” plan for Happy Retreat that will accommodate all of these activities and more. To that end, we will be launching a Grand Idea Task Force in early 2018.

The name is taken from Joel Achenbach’s book about George Washington’s “grand idea” to develop the Potomac river as a route of commerce between the Western frontier and mid-Atlantic ports. The Task force will bring together a broad spectrum of local historical, cultural and educational groups, along with representatives of tourism and hospitality agencies. The goal will be to produce a blueprint for the use of Happy Retreat that will accommodate as many kinds of activities as we can — festivals, concerts, event rentals, classes — in a way that will help make our organization financially sustainable. We are fortunate that the National Trust for Historic Preservation will be advising us, lending their expertise to our effort.

Please come to our holiday open house — Happy Christmas at Happy Retreat — on Sunday, December 10, from 2 to 4 pm. You will see the house decorated as it might have been in earlier times. There will be cider, cookies and seasonal music.

Walter Washington President
CRAFT BEER & MUSIC FESTIVAL

Our second annual Craft Beer & Music Festival was another great success. The weather was perfect – a bright, sunny day with temperatures in the 70s (20 degrees cooler than last year). Close to 2,000 people came out to enjoy the day. Hundreds of people toured the house non-stop throughout the day. We are grateful to the over 100 volunteers who turned out to make the day work!

RESTORATION UPDATE

Roof. Restoration of the roof on the central portion of the house is complete. The standing seam metal roof was scraped, repaired where necessary, then primed and painted. The soffit molding along the eaves on both sides of the house was badly rotted in a number of places and had to be completely replaced. When the old soffit molding was removed, several squirrel nests of undetermined age were uncovered. The new molding was milled at Hicksville Lumber Company to match the profile of the original. Carpenter Dave Kardok from Harpers Ferry did a masterful job of installing the new soffit molding. He created a series of small vents under the edge of the roof, screened to keep out insects, to allow better air circulation in the attic. With the new molding in place and painted, new gutters and downspouts were installed. The new gutters and downspouts are larger in diameter than the ones replaced and do a better job of handling rainfall and melting snow. Completing this work is a major step in preserving and protecting Happy Retreat for the future.

We are now turning our attention to the roofs on the two wings. These present special challenges due to renovations made to the house over the years. In the 1920s, a bathroom was added to the second floor of the hyphen between the house and the west wing which we plan to remove.
RESTORATION UPDATE CONT’D

However, the diverted water flow is greater than the gutters can handle, resulting in overflows which at times have run into the basement. We are working with architect Kevin Lee Sarring to develop plans to address both of these and other issues. We are grateful to the donors to our successful “Raise the Roof” campaign who made this important restoration work possible.

Smokehouse/Stone Kitchen. In September, Matt Webster, Director of Architectural Renovation at Colonial Williamsburg, architectural historian John Allen and architect Kevin Lee Sarring spent an afternoon inspecting the smokehouse/stone kitchen and detailing plans for restoring both buildings. A final restoration plan will be completed soon and we hope to move forward with restoration work in the spring.

ON THE MAP

Happy Retreat is becoming a stopping point for prestigious tours. The day following the Wine & Jazz Festival in June, a group from the Center for Palladian Studies in America arrived from Charlottesville, Virginia, by bus to tour the house. The Center promotes the understanding of Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio and his influence on architecture in the United States.

The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, sent two tours over the summer. In June, students from its Summer Institute visited. In September, members of the Museum’s Frank L. Horton Society included Happy Retreat on a four-day study tour that included the Winterthur Museum in Wilmington, Delaware, and historic sites in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Finally, at the end of September, 40 members of the “guest facing staff” from Mt. Vernon came to visit. These are the people who give tours and provide historic interpretations and demonstrations at Mt. Vernon. AmeriCorps member Rachel Niswander coordinated the visit and led the tour of Happy Retreat. In addition to Happy Retreat, the group toured Harewood, the home of Samuel Washington, and the Jefferson County Museum.

These tours bring people with expertise in period history and historic preservation who often provide important insight into the work we are doing. We receive many appreciative notes from the visitors on these tours thanking us for the opportunity to see Happy Retreat.

TRAILS PLAN

At our October board meeting, Tanner Haid, a member of the Charles Town Planning Commission, presented a concept plan to develop a trail system for the 10 acres of the Happy Retreat property owned by City of Charles Town. Board members Randy Hilton and Bill Jackson were appointed to a joint planning committee to work with the City to develop these plans. One objective is to build a foot bridge across Evitt’s Run that will connect Happy Retreat to the graves of Charles and Mildred Washington. We will report more about the trails at Happy Retreat in our spring issue.

Samples of the old soffit molding removed from the center portion of the house.

Heating & Air Conditioning. Our “Turn Up the Heat at Happy Retreat” fundraising effort is underway to raise $200,000 for a geothermal HVAC system which we hope to install in 2018.
MUSARCH INVENTORY PROJECT

AmeriCorps member Rachel Niswander provides this report on the important job of setting up a program to archive material in our collection.

I have been working on archiving the collection of the letters and blueprints we have documenting the alterations made to Happy Retreat by Robert and Elizabeth McCabe, who owned the house from 1954 until 1968. To do this, I am using a software called Musarch to catalog the letters, blueprints, and other documents. Musarch is an archiving software that offers a place to organize and provide more details about documents, pictures, and other similar items that an organization might have accumulated. Musarch can archive books, letters, furniture, blueprints, photos, and any other historical items.

The majority of what I have cataloged so far is related to the McCabes. So far, I have archived letters and correspondence between the McCabes and their landscape architect and architect and blueprints for alterations to Happy Retreat. These letters and blueprints have been incredibly interesting to archive, and I have learned more about the restoration work that was done to Happy Retreat during the 1950s. I have also cataloged several pieces of furniture that were gifted to us, purchased, or are on loan. Happy Retreat has recently received a large donation of books from Curt Mason, and I plan to put those books into Musarch as well.

VISIT TO SULGRAVE

*This is the second installment of the account by Board member Marjorie Gaestel of her trip to visit Sulgrave, the Washington family ancestral home, in England.*

While visiting the Washington Ancestral home of Sulgrave Manor last spring, I had a wonderful side trip into the village of Sulgrave where I was able to visit the Washington's church, Saint James The Less. This beautiful church was built between 1327 and 1377 during the reign of Edward the III and is still very well attended. It's very likely Lawrence Washington (1500-1583) had the front entry of the church built in memory of his wife Amee. Her death date 1564 is on the stone above the entry. Also above the entry are the initials ER commemorating the visit of Queen Elizabeth I who visited Northhampton in that same year. Lawrence Washington, his wife Amee and son Robert are buried inside the church in front of the Washington pew.

Inside the church the Washington pew sets directly in front of the beautiful Washington stained glass window. The four panes of glass in the Washington window are particularly interesting as they date from the reign of Elizabeth I and show the coat of arms of three generations of Washingtons. The lower right-hand side are the arms of Lawrence Washington and his wife Amee Pargiter. It has been suggested more than once that these arms inspired the use of the stars and stripes in our American flag.
GEORGE WASHINGTON’S REPLY TO MILDRED THORNTON WASHINGTON

In the last issue of The Rising Sun, we published a remarkable letter from Charles Washington’s wife, Mildred Thornton Washington, to her brother-in-law Gen. George Washington. The letter painted a bleak picture of life at Happy Retreat and asked General Washington for financial help. Below is his reply. In our next issue, we will publish the letter Samuel Washington, the son of Charles and Mildred, wrote to his uncle at Mt. Vernon adding further detail to the family’s plight.

To Mildred Thornton Washington
Mount Vernon 18th Octr 1798.
Dear Madam,

Your favour of the 13th instt [sic] came duly to hand. The contents gave me great pain, on two accounts; first, to find the situation of my brothers [sic] affairs in so deplorable a State; and next, that it is so little in my power to afford you effectual relief.

My situation, is very little understood by most people. Whatever may be my property, the income of it, is inadequate to my expences [sic]: not from any wish or desire I have to live extravagantly, but from unavoidable necessity proceeding from the public walks of life in which I have been, and the acquaintances made thereby, which fill my house continually with company. Were it not for frequent and large sales of Lands which I have made, it would not have been in my power to have supported the expence without running deeply in debt. I mention these things with no other view than to shew you that, it is not in my power to do for you as much as you might expect. I will, however, provide a thousand dollars in the Bank of Alexandria, to be applied to the removal of the immediate distress with which you expect to be assailed; but the mode of applying it, to render it effectual, must be attended with circumspection and caution otherwise it would be useless to you, and the money absolutely thrown away by me. The most eligible [sic] one, as far as my view of circumstances, from your Statement of my brother’s situation extends, is, to suffer an Execution to be levied upon such slaves, and other property, as are absolutely necessary to supply your present wants; and be sold for ready money.

These slaves & other things to be bought in on my account, and to remain with you, as my Property.

The same things after a fair and open transaction of this kind, will not be liable to future executions; whereas, to apply the money in discharge of Execution, the latter may be levied thereon again & again as long as there is a debt owing from the Estate; and no relief, unless I could be continually advancing money (which I am not able to do) to redeem them.

I will be answerable for purchases made in this manner, to the amount of a thousand dollars, but am unable to advance more, and this indeed will be drawn from the use to which it was actually appropriated.

You will observe, I have mentioned the sale to be for ready money: the reason is, you will get more property by that means than if sold on credit; with respect to myself, it can make no difference, as I have no advantage in view, & cannot go beyond the Sum I have mentioned. If Mr. Hammond 1 will purchase for you to the above amount, and see that the articles are properly secured against future executions, I will pay the draughts by a check on the Bank of Alexandria upon that evidence of it, being produced to me.

With respect to the conduct of your Son Samuel I shall say nothing, because I know little concerning it. But if he applied the thousand dollars he had from me, or any part of it, towards the building of a house instead of paying his father’s debts, it was not only imprudent, but a breach of his engagement to me, for it was for the latter purpose only, and expressly that I lent him the money.

I am very sorry to hear of the losses you have sustained in your Negros and Crops, and more so for your own bad health, and the unhappy situation of my brother. At all times, and under all circumstances, it would give me sincere pleasure to render you all the Services & kindesses in the power of Dear Madam Your Most Affecte [sic]

Go: Washington

P.S. As I write in haste you must excuse this scrawl.

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1 Thomas Hammond (1770 - 1820 ) was the husband of Mildred Gregory Washington (1772 - 1804), daughter of Charles and Mildred Washington. Hammond purchased Happy Retreat in 1800.
CURT MASON AND SUZETTE KIMBALL GIFTS

We are indebted to Curt Mason and Suzette Kimball for their donation of a period Empire sofa, several other pieces of fine furniture and a collection of over 300 books. The books cover a wide range of historical topics, with an emphasis on local history. They will form the core of our library. Curt was the founding president of Friends of Happy Retreat in 2006 and we wish him and Suzette all the best in their new home in North Carolina.

HAPPY RETREAT BOOK CLUB

Dr. Scott Casper, author of *Sarah Johnson's Mt. Vernon*, led the discussion of his book at the meeting of the Happy Retreat book club on October 3. Dr. Casper gave a fascinating account of the research behind the history of Mt. Vernon seen through the eyes of the African Americans who worked there, first as enslaved people and after Emancipation. Keep an eye out on our website for the announcement of our next featured book and Book Club meeting in 2018.

COTILLION BENEFIT

On Saturday, September 22, the Eastern Panhandle Cotillion Club held a benefit dance for Friends of Happy Retreat, featuring the music of the Fabulous Bel Airs. It was a great evening of music and dancing. Many thanks to the members of the Cotillion for all the planning and work that went into making the night a success.

NEW BOARD MEMBER

We are pleased to welcome John Swift as a new member of our board of directors. John is retired from the U.S. Army after a career spanning thirty years in intelligence and special operations forces. He later served at Albright College in Reading, Pennsylvania, as executive assistant to the president and director of strategic planning. He then served as a senior executive in the U.S. Department of Energy followed by service as a senior counterintelligence executive, Directorate of National Intelligence. John took undergraduate and law degrees from Georgetown University and studied as a national security fellow at Harvard’s JFK School of Government. John is an avid traveler and lifelong reader and explorer of history.
Christmas Open House

We will be hosting a Christmas Open House at Happy Retreat on Sunday, December 10 from 2 until 4 p.m. The public is invited to see the house decorated in period Christmas finery, enjoy cider and cookies and listen to holiday music. The Wright Denny Intermediate School Children’s Choir will perform a medley of favorite holiday songs.

Charles Washington Chamber Music Society Concert

The Charles Washington Chamber Music Society will hold its first chamber music concert at Happy Retreat on Sunday, February 25. The program details will be announced on our website. Seating will be limited.

2018 Wine & Jazz Festival

The second annual Happy Retreat Wine & Jazz Festival will be held on Saturday, June 9 2018. Mark your calendars! We will have more fine wines, great music and delicious food to enjoy. Keep an eye out on our website for updates on plans for the day.

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 join us for the
Christmas Open House
Sunday, December 10, from 2 to 4 p.m.

Please visit our new website
WWW.HAPPYRETREAT.ORG

PLEASE HELP SUPPORT the RESTORATION of HAPPY RETREAT

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