



Photo: Brian Christopher.



Photo: Brian Christopher.



Photo: Brian Christopher.

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER



**I**t has been a very good year for Happy Retreat. A lot has happened this year to move us toward our goal of completing the restoration of Happy Retreat and its grounds, as is further detailed in this newsletter.

First, we have developed a master plan for both the house and the grounds. Second, this year's federal budget contained \$500,000 in Congressionally Directed Spending for Happy Retreat, thanks to U.S. Senator Joe Manchin. Third, we dedicated the smoke house and stone kitchen after a lengthy restoration made possible by the generosity of Tia and Bob McMillan of Shepherdstown. Fourth, the City of Charles Town gave us a grant to fund a topographical study and develop the engineering plans for the parking lot and other hardscape infrastructure called for in our master plan. Fifth, the Bee Line Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution donated a kitchen herb garden. Sixth, we broke ground for the relocation and restoration of the octagon building, again made possible by the generosity of Tia and Bob McMillan. Seventh, we received a grant from the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office to help fund the restoration of the columns on the front portico. Eighth, the West Virginia Humanities Council awarded us a grant to continue our research into the history of the enslaved community at Happy Retreat.

To top this all off, we hosted a successful fifth annual Craft Beer & Music Festival after a two-year hiatus

caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. And the Appalachian Chamber Music Festival capped off a highly popular second season with its concert finale on the back lawn at Happy Retreat.

Yet, one of my favorite memories of the year was on senior prom night in May. We had received an inquiry from a student at Washington High School if he and a few of his friends could come to Happy Retreat to take their senior prom pictures. They wanted to come at 5 p.m. on prom night. When I arrived at Happy Retreat at quarter till five that evening, there were at least 15 cars already parked on the grounds. Word had gotten out and prom couples from both Washington and Jefferson High Schools had come to Happy Retreat, dressed in the most fashionable prom styles, corsages in hand. And with them had come admiring parents, younger siblings, grandparents, neighbors and friends. It was a beautiful late spring evening. The dogwood trees were in bloom. And soon pictures of beaming couples posing all around Happy Retreat were popping up on social media.

We want Happy Retreat to be a place for the entire community. The fact that our local high school students sought out Happy Retreat as a place to take one of the most memorable pictures of their young lives gave me hope we are achieving that goal. Thank you to everyone who has helped to make this possible!

**Walter Washington** *President*

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# DEDICATION OF SMOKEHOUSE/STONE KITCHEN AND OCTAGON GROUNDBREAKING



*Tia and Rob McMillan, their family, and guests cut the ribbon at the dedication of the smoke house and stone kitchen. Photo: Brian Christopher*



*The McMillan family breaks ground for the new location of the octagon building seen in the background. Photo: Brian Christopher*

On June 18, we honored Tia and Bob McMillan at the dedication of the smokehouse and stone kitchen. Their generosity made the restoration of both buildings possible. We were honored to have in attendance Emma Bryan, representing the office of U.S. Senator Joe Manchin; Jay Clemens, President of the Board of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Randall Reid-Smith, the West Virginia Commissioner of Arts, Culture and History; Charles Town Mayor Robert Trainor; and Jamila Fleet representing the Charles Town Chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., all of whom expressed their gratitude to the McMillans for their contribution to the restoration of Happy Retreat. Former board member Michael Tolbert gave a

brief but fascinating talk about the importance of historical context.

As part of the dedication ceremony, the McMillans broke ground for the relocation and restoration of the octagon building. Again, the McMillan's generosity will make this project possible. We have photographs showing the octagon building in two prior locations before it was moved to its current site in the 1950s. We will move it from where it currently sits – mostly hidden by a boxwood hedge – to a place where it will be visible from the house and become a focal point of the landscape.



*Commissioner Randall Reid-Smith greets Tia and Bob McMillan. Photo: Brian Christopher.*

## CONGRESS DIRECTS \$500,000 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE GRANT TO HAPPY RETREAT

As noted in the President's Letter, when Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 in March, included in it was \$500,000 in Congressionally Designated Spending for Happy Retreat. This was made

possible by the dedicated work of U.S. Senator Joe Manchin. We are grateful to Senator Manchin and to Seth Gainer, Senior Policy Advisor to the Senator and to fellow staff members in the Senator's office Keith McIntosh, Mara Boggs and Ryan Thorn for their work on making this funding a reality. This is a matching grant, meaning that in order to receive the \$500,000 we must raise a matching amount of \$500,000, which will give us a total of \$1 million. We believe this will allow us to complete the restoration of the mansion.

## KITCHEN HERB GARDEN

Over the summer, the Bee Line Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution donated an 18th century kitchen herb garden which was planted next to the stone kitchen. The garden contains three separate herb beds. One contains herbs used in cooking, such as mint, sage and rosemary; the second contains medicinal herbs, such as bee balm, borage and chamomile; and the third contains household herbs, such as lavender, rue and artemisia. We are indebted to Chapter officers Heidi Ware and Darla Treat Courtney for researching, designing and installing the garden. We are also indebted to the Fithian family who donated the picket fence and to former sheriff Bobby Shirley who installed it, with help from board member (and former sheriff) Bill Senseney. We will be working with the Bee Line Chapter to develop educational signs and brochures identifying the herbs and describing their use in an 18th Century household.

This is the second major contribution the Bee Line Chapter has made to Happy Retreat. In 2020 it awarded us a \$10,000 grant which enabled us to restore the Show Room in the mansion. We look forward to further collaborations in the future.



*The kitchen herb garden donated by the Bee Line Chapter National Society Daughters of the American Revolution.*

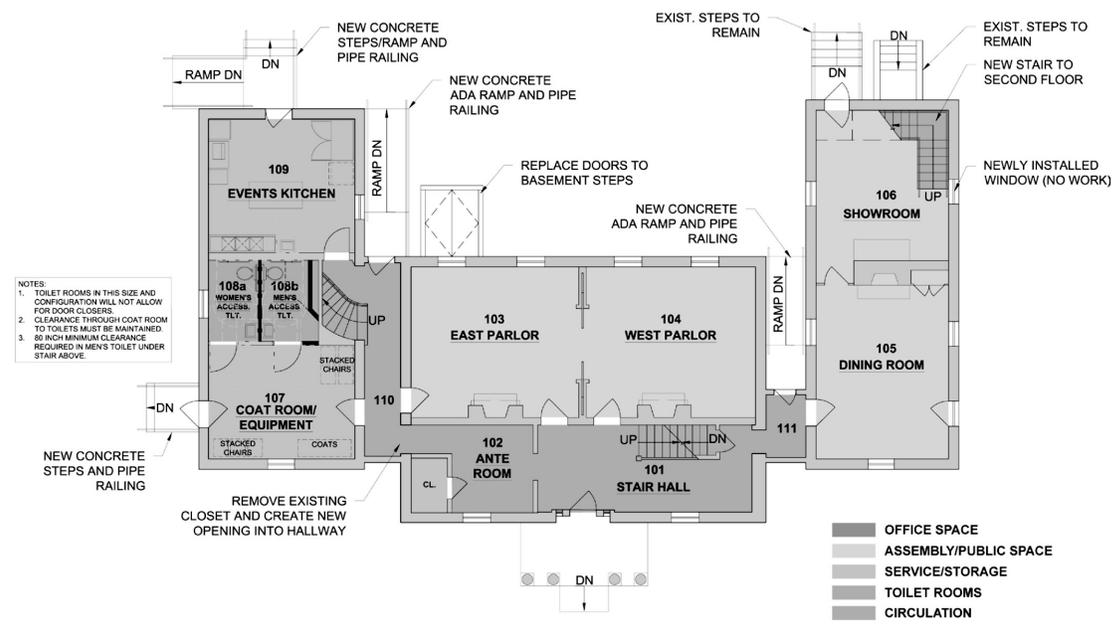
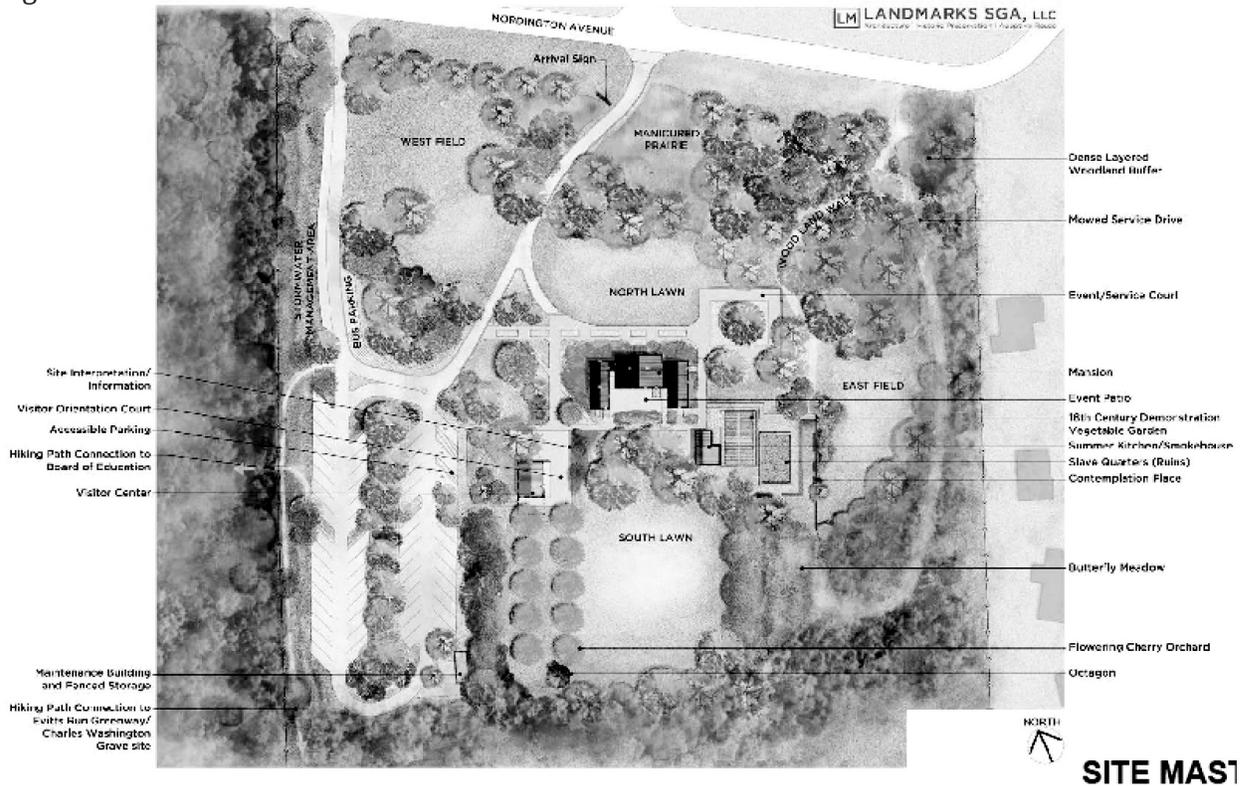
## STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE GRANT

The West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has awarded Friends of Happy Retreat a grant to restore the columns on the front portico. In the late 20th Century, the bases of the four fluted wooden columns succumbed to various injuries (including a lightning strike)

and general deterioration. To stop further deterioration and provide structural support, the base of each column was encased in a block of poured concrete. Using money from the grant and matching donated funds, we will remove the concrete and restore the damaged wood.

# HAPPY RETREAT MASTER PLAN

Last year, we engaged the firm Landmarks SGA to develop a master plan for both the Happy Retreat house and grounds (Landmarks SGA also managed the beautiful restoration of Charles Washington Hall in downtown Charles Town). The concept plan which Landmarks produced includes a parking lot, driveways for ingress and egress, pathways and a comprehensive landscape plan as well as several minor modifications to the mansion to provide for handicap accessible bathrooms on the first floor of the east wing. This plan, shown below, provides us with the blueprint for the completion of the restoration of the house and grounds.



# HISTORY AT IT'S BEST

## “The Charles Washington Family”

*By Marjorie Gaestel, Happy Retreat Historian*

A big part of being the Historian of Happy Retreat is knowing about the Washington family who lived here. The person I am featuring in this issue of the newsletter is Samuel Washington, the son of Charles and Mildred. He was the youngest of their four children, having been born in 1774. He passed away while living in Kanawha County, Virginia (now West Virginia), in 1831.

Samuel had a lot on his shoulders during his father Charles' later years. He took over running the family's estate plus was responsible for his father's debts.



*The gold headed cane Benjamin Franklin gave to George Washington.*

In my research about Samuel, I came across two fascinating details that connect him with his famous uncle George. The first is a gold headed cane that Benjamin Franklin gave to General Washington and which the General gave to his brother Charles. Samuel inherited this cane from his father. The second is a battle sword which the General left to Samuel in his will. This green handled Baily silver and ivory hilted cuttoe (a battle sword with a green stained ivory grip) can be seen at George Washington's side in the famous painting by Emanuel Lutze “Washington Crossing the Delaware.”

Both items were eventually inherited by Samuel's son Samuel T. Washington. He donated them both to the United States Congress and they are now at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. It's fun to realize both of these items were once at Happy Retreat.

I recently became acquainted with Kenneth Washington, another Washington descendant of Charles and Mildred through their son Samuel. He was also interested in this great find at the

Smithsonian. He sent me a photo of him and his wife at the Smithsonian with both items.

Sadly, we lost Ken Washington who was a great friend and generous supporter of Happy Retreat. Ken passed away in early February of 2022 with his family by his side. Ken was eighty-three and an avid Washington history researcher. You can learn more about Charles' son Samuel and this interesting story when you visit Happy Retreat.



*The battle sword George Washington left to Charles's son Samuel in his will.*



*Detail from "Washington Crossing the Delaware" by Emmanuel Lutze showing the battle sword.*

*The Friends of Happy Retreat would like to thank the American History Museum/Smithsonian and also give thanks to Erik Goldstein, Stuart C. Mowbray and Brian Hendelson for their great book “The Swords of George Washington” which is now part of The Kevin Sarring Research Library at Happy Retreat.*

## WEST VIRGINIA HUMANITIES COUNCIL GRANT

The West Virginia Humanities Council awarded Friends of Happy Retreat a grant which will allow us to continue our research of the enslaved community at Happy Retreat during the Washington and Hammond ownership from 1779 until 1837. We will again hire professional

researcher and genealogist Jane Ailes to continue her work on this project. We will hold a public presentation of her findings in the summer of 2023. We hired Ms. Ailes in 2020 to begin this research and she provided us a preliminary draft of her initial research in 2021 which was summarized in previous issues of this newsletter. This grant will allow her to finish her research for this period of Happy Retreat's history. This is also a matching grant and the matching funds have already been donated.

## CITY OF CHARLES TOWN GRANT

The first step in implementing the new master plan is to do a topographical survey and produce engineering plans for the infrastructure. The City of Charles Town awarded us \$195,000 in funds the City received through the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to complete this work. This will give us "shovel-ready" plans for the construction of the parking lot, entrance and exit driveways and a handicap ramp from the parking lot to the mansion grounds. We are grateful to Charles Town Mayor Robert Trainor



Charles Town Mayor Robert Trainor presents a check for \$195,000 to Walter Washington.

Photo: Brian Christopher.

and the Charles Town City Council for making this next important step possible.

## CRAFT BEER & MUSIC FESTIVAL

We celebrated our 5th annual (except for the COVID years) Craft Beer & Music Festival on September 10. Over 800 people came out on a beautiful fall day to enjoy the fun. Thirty five craft breweries, including local favorites Abolitionist Ale Works and Rippon Brewing Company, offered tastes of more than 100 craft beers. The band line-up included DJ Charlie Brown Superstar, the Crush Funk Brass Band, from Washington, D.C., and John "Papa" Gros, who drove with his band direct from New Orleans to perform. Our food vendors were Ortega's Taco Shop, Pizza City, Mountaineer Popcorn, Scoop Dawg and Deez Donuts. We are indebted to our sponsors for their support of the Festival: Printz Mortgage Team, Bank of Charles Town, Summit Bank, Kable Construction and Gaestel Family Farm. Most importantly, thank you to the nearly 100 volunteers who turned out to help make the Festival a success.



The Crush Funk Band performs at the Craft Beer & Music Festival. Photo: Brian Christopher.



John "Papa" Gros and his band at the Craft Beer & Music Festival. Photo: Brian Christopher.

# APPALACHIAN CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The Appalachian Chamber Music Festival again chose Happy Retreat as the venue for its finale concert on August 28. An audience of over 150 music lovers gathered under the trees on the back lawn. The title of the concert was the *Celtic Heritage of the Appalachian Region*. The music began with the Furnace Mountain Band from Harpers Ferry playing traditional Appalachian songs. Then Dr. Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt, Director of Shepherd University's Center for Appalachian Studies and Communities, spoke on the Celtic heritage of Appalachian culture. This was followed by the Festival musicians' performances of works by classical composers Claude Debussy and Felix Mendelssohn and contemporary composers Mark

O'Connor, Judith Ring and Rebecca Gikyson. Videos of many of the Festival's concerts can be viewed on its YouTube channel (search YouTube for Appalachian Chamber Music Festival). We look forward to continued collaboration with the Festival in 2023.



The musicians at the Appalachian Chamber Music Festival take a bow at the concert finale at Happy Retreat. Photo: Brian Christopher.

## Christmas OPEN HOUSE

We will resume our tradition (suspended during Covid) of a Christmas Open House on Sunday, December 4, from 2 pm until 4 pm. Please come to see the house decorated for the season and enjoy seasonal music and refreshments! We will also repeat the Festival of Lights this year, with local businesses decorating the trees in front of the house with Christmas lighting.

## Volunteers Needed!

We are in constant need of volunteers both to help at our events and to serve as docents in the house. If you are interested, please return the form on the back page indicating your interest, or call us at (304) 724-7956, or email us at [volunteer@happyretreat.org](mailto:volunteer@happyretreat.org). Volunteers are crucial to the success of everything we do at Happy Retreat. Please consider becoming part of our volunteer team. Thank you!

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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.



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**WWW.HAPPYRETREAT.ORG**



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