

CASTLE CHRONICLES

NEWSLETTER OF THE BUCKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



SPRING/SUMMER 2019



MERCER
MUSEUM
& FONTHILL
CASTLE



Smithsonian Affiliate

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MERCER
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CASTLE



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GENERAL INFORMATION

MERCER MUSEUM & MUSEUM SHOP
84 South Pine Street, Doylestown, PA 18901
215-345-0210

Hours:
Monday – Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, noon – 5:00 p.m.

Research Library Hours:
Tuesday – Thursday, 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Friday & Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Sunday & Monday, Closed

FONTHILL CASTLE
525 East Court Street, Doylestown, PA
215-348-9461

Hours:
Monday – Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, noon – 5:00 p.m.
One-hour, daily guided tours

Our members receive unlimited admission
to the Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle.

ON THE COVER

Springtime at Fonthill Castle by Kevin
Crawford Imagery LLC.

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OUR MISSION...

To educate and engage our many audiences in appreciating the
past and to help people find stories and meanings relevant to
their lives – both today and in the future.



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Here is something that is unique, an educational institution that no other town possesses and if our citizens are not proud of it today, their children and their grandchildren will be. Here is a rare and remarkable tree in good condition just planted: watch over it, guard it, save it, prune it, and water it until it spreads its noble shade not only over this little town and this state...but over this whole nation.

– Henry Chapman Mercer, 1916

These words from Henry Mercer appeared in several of his writings, and were spoken at the opening of the Mercer Museum in 1916. As the season changes and we celebrate spring, renewal and rejuvenation, I find it a perfect time to reconnect with Mercer's vision, his accomplishments and his legacy to the community. This is why I have adopted the essence of Mercer's words and made it the cornerstone of my vision for the future of these remarkable national landmarks.

Nurturing the community, caring for the castles, and preserving Mercer's gifts influence the tasks we undertake and the initiatives we achieve. Across the Mercer Mile, exciting projects have been completed and others are underway.

We have converted the Fonthill Castle carriage house into a welcome center. Guests will be able to congregate in a picturesque setting while waiting to begin their tour. By moving the welcome desk out of Fonthill Castle, guests will be able to see the beautiful tiles previously obscured by furniture, and experience the WOW factor upon entering the main floor of Mercer's home. The tours will begin with an overview of the grounds and the unique architecture, combining history and nature – just as Mercer would have preferred.

At the Mercer Museum, we have begun a multi-year project to help guests transition from the new wing to the core of the museum. The Gateway Project will feature an introduction to Henry Mercer and his buildings, using his own words for interpretation. We will conserve the concrete mixer used to build the museum, and it will be displayed prominently and permanently in this new gateway exhibition. I hope this project will add a deeper appreciation for the feat Mercer accomplished when building the Mercer Museum.

Sharing these treasures with inquisitive explorers is important. We are fortunate that the Dart Bus committee has decided to add a bus stop for the Mercer Museum, Library, and Michener Art Museum. The bus stop will be located on Pine Street by the arches between the Mercer Museum and the Michener Art Museum. Previously, the Dart bus would go to the Doylestown Cultural District on a call-as-needed basis.

Looking towards the future, we have completed the new strategic plan for 2019-2021 and its executive summary can be found on our website. The Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle are alive and well, and moving forward in robust fashion. I am privileged to be part of these exciting times, and I think Mercer would be excited, too. I believe we all should focus on supporting a dynamic community.

Kyle McKoy
President & Executive Director



Sketches of the Fonthill Castle Welcome Center by William R. Schutt (2018)



A NEW CATERING PARTNER FOR THE CASTLES



We are pleased to announce our exclusive catering partnership with Jeffrey A. Miller Catering. For decades, this company has been known for providing extraordinary cuisine in incomparable settings – venues rich with cultural and historical value.

JAM Catering's success and expertise in working with exceptional settings were key factors that led a board-directed task force to select the company for this coveted opportunity. Inspired by Henry Mercer's creativity, imagination, and originality, Miller and his vast team of chefs and event planners look forward to planning unmatched and flawless occasions for those seeking a one-of-kind place for their special celebration.

Begin planning your special day by contacting Kim Bates at kimb@jamcater.com or 267-334-4127.



RECENT GRANTS BENEFIT PROJECTS ACROSS THE MERCER MILE

Diversified funding streams are vital to the Bucks County Historical Society. Annual efforts like Cocktails at the Castle, Fonthill Castle's Beer Fest and the Annual Fund are some of the key ways the organization raises the funds needed to sustain its mission, programs and services.

Grants from foundations and government entities are also very important sources of support. Within the last year, the Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle benefited from the generosity of a number of granting sources.

- The Summer 2019 exhibition, *Making Astronauts: Bucks County to the Moon*, is sponsored by three granting entities – Bucks County Foundation, Cascade Foundation and Visit Bucks County.
- A number of education programs and projects, including the recent Bucks Mont Regional National History Day Contest, benefit from a grant provided by the Berger Family Foundation.
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) provides general operating support for both the Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle.
- Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA) provides support for arts-related programs at the Mercer Museum, including the annual "Stories Under the Trees" series.



2018 Bucks Mont Regional National History Day Contest
2nd Place Senior Group

If you have a family foundation, or know of any funding entities that support cultural programs and services, we'd love to hear from you. Please call our development department at 215-345-0210 ext. 129 to speak with Laura Biersmith, V.P. of Development.

WELCOME OUR NEW STAFF

Libby Clark, Manager of Community Services – Clark joins us from Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, and has a background in Public History and Museum Studies.

Tom Dougherty, Museum Guide and Educator – Dougherty comes with a background in computer sales. He lives in Doylestown and volunteers at local historical sites.

Annie Halliday, Assistant Collections Manager, Library and Archives – Halliday lives in Germantown and recently received her Master's degree in Library and Information Science from Drexel University. Previously, she worked at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania as an archivist.

Mark Lempp, Head Facilities Custodian – Lempp has many work experiences, ranging from co-hosting a television show to gracing the cover of a magazine. He is now happy to be a part of the Bucks County Historical Society.



L to R: Tom Dougherty, Libby Clark, Mark Lempp, Annie Halliday

PLUS ULTRA SOCIETY YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

Being a Central Bucks County native, I have many fond memories of visits to the Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle. Whether with a school group or Girl Scout troop, the beautiful tile work and castle atmosphere made a lasting impression.

As a parent and school chaperone, the story of the castles was passed on to our children. The castles were always here to visit and enjoy, and I appreciated the shared exploration with those closest to me.

When retirement gave me some free time, I chose to volunteer in the shop at the Mercer Museum. Over the years, the museum has grown and the shop has changed location and merchandise. Other opportunities to become further involved with the organization presented themselves, including serving as a board member for six years, and joining the planning committee for the annual Cocktails at the Castle major fundraiser.

Meeting and working with so many dedicated and caring volunteers and staff has been truly amazing. I've witnessed, first hand, the valuable programs and services the organization presents for the public's enrichment.

Through my planned gift, I know my future support will continue to benefit the castles. I also enjoy being a member of the *Plus Ultra Society*, which recognizes individuals who have included the Bucks County Historical Society in their estate plans. We all gather annually for special experiences and opportunities offered only for our special group.

Make your plans today and join me – you'll be glad you did!

Kathleen "Taffy" Schea



Taffy in the Mercer Museum's Old Library, one of several locations depicting Henry Mercer's artistic tiles.

To learn more about joining the *Plus Ultra Society*, and/or to notify us if your estate plans include the BCHS, please call Laura Biersmith at 215-345-0210 ext. 129.



SUMMER 2019 EXHIBIT PREVIEW: *FROM HERE TO THERE*

A new traveling exhibit entitled *From Here to There* will be on view at the Mercer Museum from May 31 – September 8, 2019. The new exhibit is a hands-on, family experience that explores the science of how things move from place to place.

From Here to There is a 1,500 square foot exhibit that is color-coded and divided into three main categories: transportation by land, sea and air. Twelve different educational interactive stations provide an engaging opportunity for guests to learn about gravity, friction and the laws of motion and physics.

Guests can ride a hovercraft to experience how air pressure works, turn up the heat to launch a hot air balloon, and experiment with pneumatics, pulleys, hydraulics and levers to see what kind of mechanical advantage works best in each environment.

The Rochester Museum & Science Center of Rochester, NY and the Sciencenter of Ithaca, NY developed *From Here to There* as part of the **Traveling Exhibits At Museums of Science (TEAMS)** collaborative. Funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation, *From Here to There* is sponsored locally by Marv and Dee Ann Woodall.

Entrance to the exhibit is included with general museum admission. For pricing and additional information, please visit mercermuseum.org.



FROM HERE TO THERE: INTERACTIVE SPOTLIGHT

A sailing lesson inside the Mercer Museum?

At the Mercer Museum's new exhibit *From Here to There*, you can learn first-hand how boats sail into the wind and control the wind by aiming air-blowing tubes around a miniature lake. Then, adjust the sails and rudder to harness the elements and steer the boat to safety...or mayhem!

By experimenting in "Set Sail," guests will discover why the shape of a sailboat is important and how a sailboat's parts all work together, along with the forces of air pressure and water resistance, to generate movement and control direction.

The interactive stations inside the exhibit invite guests to learn about the science behind familiar modes of transportation, and introduce guests to new travel possibilities.



SUMMER 2019 EXHIBIT PREVIEW:

MAKING ASTRONAUTS: BUCKS COUNTY TO THE MOON

Just in time for the 50th anniversary of the historic Apollo 11 moon landing, the Mercer Museum will be showcasing a major summer exhibit, *Making Astronauts: Bucks County to the Moon*, from May 31 – September 8, 2019.



This original exhibit, created in collaboration with the Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum, highlights the extraordinary role of the Warminster-based Naval Air Development Center (NADC) Johnsville in America's early space program. From Mercury to Apollo, the NADC helped train the astronauts who ultimately achieved putting a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s.



R. Flanagan Gray with the "Iron Maiden" (1959)

"This is an exhibit that may surprise our community, as many may be unaware that in order to get to the moon our earliest astronauts first had to come through Bucks County," says Mercer Museum Vice President of Collections and Interpretation Cory Amsler. "As the 50th anniversary of America's first moon landing approaches on July 20, *Making Astronauts: Bucks County to the Moon* is a relevant and timely exhibit to showcase at the Mercer Museum."

Training at the NADC centered on the Aviation Medical Acceleration Laboratory and its human centrifuge – then the world's largest – in which scientists, engineers and astronauts learned how to prepare for and manage the rigors of space flight. No astronaut journeyed into space, or stepped onto the moon, without first riding the Johnsville centrifuge.

The exhibit will showcase many historic artifacts, images and multimedia components, many on view for the first time, including period film clips, a replica spacecraft, Navy flight clothing and interactive opportunities.

"The Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum is excited to partner with the Mercer Museum on this original exhibit to showcase the science and technology from our own community that changed history and catapulted the U.S. space program," added Mark Calhoun, Vice President of the Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum.

The Mercer Museum will host a wide array of community programs throughout the summer related to the *Making Astronauts: Bucks County to the Moon* exhibit, including special behind-the-scenes tours, space-themed kids crafting days, and an exciting family celebration on the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing on Saturday, July 20, 2019.

Entrance to the exhibit is included with general museum admission. *Making Astronauts: Bucks County to the Moon* is sponsored by Visit Bucks County, Bucks County Foundation, Susan Kane, Cascade Foundation, Lisa Kristin Soren, Brian and Louise McLeod, and Dr. Christine McGinn of Papillon Center. For more information, please visit mercermuseum.org.

Mercury Astronaut Wally Schirra
at Johnsville Centrifuge (1959)



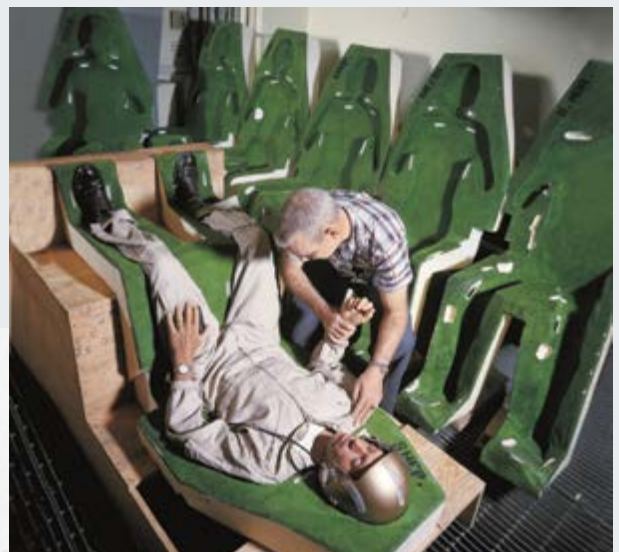
MAKING ASTRONAUTS: BUCKS COUNTY TO THE MOON – ARTIFACT SPOTLIGHT

Among the historical artifacts included in the *Making Astronauts: Bucks County to the Moon* exhibit is a section of a so-called “contour couch.” In the 1950s, extensive research on the most comfortable position for astronauts inside a space capsule led to the invention of these form-fitting seats. Much of that research was conducted in the human centrifuge at the Naval Air Development Center (NADC) in Johnsville, Bucks County. Cradled in a molded shell, astronauts lay on their backs, with knees elevated in what was referred to as the “bent paper clip” position. Based on testing, and much trial and error, scientists and engineers learned that this position enabled pilots to better withstand the gravitational stresses of launch and acceleration.



Contour Couch Section of Gilbert North, attributed to Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, c. 1960. Collection of the Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum.

The first couches were composed of a less durable foam material. Later, they were constructed of fiberglass. Fabricators custom-molded each couch to fit the body of a particular astronaut. This one – in fiberglass – was made circa 1960 for Gilbert North (1922-2015), a test pilot and engineer involved in early space flight training. Following his service as a combat engineer and fighter pilot during World War II, North worked for the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation (later McDonnell-Douglas). The company produced all of the capsules for the Project Mercury space program. The couch – of which only the upper section survives – cradled North’s body when he made runs in the centrifuge at NADC.



Mercury Astronaut Alan Shepard in Contour Couch, c. 1959. Courtesy of the Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum. Shepard reclines in one of the earlier versions of the couch, prior to development of the fiberglass models. A couch for pilot Gilbert North is visible at the far right of the photo.



Naval Air Development Center Sign
Johnsville, Warminster Township,
Bucks County, c. 1960

COMMUNITY PARTNER – JOHNSVILLE CENTRIFUGE AND SCIENCE MUSEUM



The Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum was founded in 2009 with a goal of creating a science museum and STEM education center highlighting the innovations generated by the laboratories at the Naval Air Development Center (NADC), Johnsville, once located in Warminster, PA.

NADC Johnsville was the Navy's premier military research facility from the late 1940s through its closing in 1996. Averaging 50 patents a year, the scientists and engineers working in over 30 laboratories at NADC helped win the Cold War and played a pivotal role in placing Americans on the Moon first. The Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum uses the pioneering work done at NADC as a springboard to inspire students to explore STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) careers, and to better communicate the rich history of Bucks County.

The organization has an agreement with Northampton Township granting it access to a five-acre plot of land at the intersection of Hatboro and Bristol Roads where construction of a museum and STEM learning center is planned. In the meantime, while the organization continues to fundraise towards this goal, its volunteers have taken their show on the road with interactive presentations given to numerous classrooms and scout groups, history presentations given to local social organizations, and appearances at community events.

The Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum has a collection of artifacts, some of which will be exhibited this summer at the Mercer Museum. Included in this summer's exhibit will be a flight jacket once owned by famed aviatrix Betty Skelton, who underwent the same training as the Mercury Astronauts at Johnsville, and the "Iron Maiden" which was designed by Bucks County native R. Flanagan Gray. The "Iron Maiden" is a one-of-a-kind, experimental full-body sized water tank used to set the unbeaten record for a load of 31.25 Gs for nearly five seconds. Also in the collection is the original Johnsville Centrifuge gondola (aka the "Mercury 7 Gondola") which remains on display along Bristol Road in Warminster while awaiting restoration.



Dating back to Brewster Aircraft, the base at NADC Johnsville became the largest employer in Bucks County. The Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum invites anyone who may have any artifacts from that era, including photos and documents, to contact them in order to honor the legacy of the men and women who played a large role in some of the technology we enjoy today.

The Johnsville Centrifuge and Science Museum is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. More information on the museum can be found at www.nadcmuseum.org.

The "Iron Maiden"
R. Flanagan Gray (inventor), c. 1958



Decorated G-1 Navy Flight Jacket of Betty Skelton

L.W. Foster Sportswear Company,
Philadelphia, c. 1950s

“WITNESSING HISTORY” – JURY CHAIRS ADDED TO MUSEUM COLLECTION

How many of us stop to ponder the swath of human history that objects in a museum’s collection may have witnessed? Silent and unassuming, everyday artifacts often stood in close proximity to the people and events that shaped our community, our state, or our nation. They may even have figured directly or prominently in some historical drama. The closest we can ever get to actually visiting the past may be standing in the presence of these enduring “material witnesses.”

As we know from countless television procedurals and Hollywood films, the courtroom is one place where dramatic events sometimes unfold. While many – perhaps most – court cases may be perfunctory, or even tedious, some can be dramatic and consequential, not only for those directly involved but for the broader public as well. Since the Bucks County Seat moved to Doylestown in 1812, our courthouses have witnessed hundreds of significant decisions, powerful incidents, and seminal events.



Interior of the Main Courtroom, Bucks County Courthouse, c. 1910. Mercer Museum Library Collection. The jury chairs are arrayed at right in this image, directly in front of the prisoner’s dock.



(Left) **Windsor-style Juror’s Chair from 1812 Bucks County Courthouse,** c. 1815. Gift of Hon. Hiram Keller, 1944.

In the first courthouse built in Doylestown, for example, the fugitive slave Basil Dorsey won his freedom in 1838, and then was dramatically spirited away to a new life in New England with help from prominent abolitionist Robert Purvis. Just a few years earlier, the scheming pretender and con artist Lino Espos y Mina was convicted of murdering Dr. William Chapman of Andalusia, a trial that was captured in the tabloid journalism of the era. His was the last public hanging in Pennsylvania, witnessed by thousands of spectators. These and numerous other trials and cases were witnessed by a simple Windsor armchair in the museum’s collection – later embellished with a painted inscription noting its function as seating for the jury.



Jurors’ Chairs from the 1877 Bucks County Courthouse, c. 1880. Gift of the Estate of Edwin William White, 2019.

Doylestown’s second courthouse, built in 1877, also was the scene of noteworthy events. In addition to important legal proceedings, the main courtroom served as a gallery for Henry Mercer’s unveiling of his “Tools of the Nation Maker” collection in 1897. One silent onlooker to Mercer’s seminal exhibit was the courtroom’s stout “prisoner’s dock,” ringed by iron spikes – and later added to the museum’s collection. Now, this artifact of the old courthouse has been joined by two additional witnesses to Mercer’s exhibit – jury chairs that likely were part of the courtroom’s original furnishings.

In February 2019, members of the White family of Telford contacted the museum, noting that family lore recalled that the upholstered chairs had come from the courthouse. However, no documentation accompanied the chairs to prove their origins. Fortunately, postcard images of the main courtroom from the first decade of the 20th century clearly picture the seating furniture. In the photos, arrayed in two neat rows near the prisoner’s dock, are twelve identical chairs intended for the jurors.

PRESERVING BUCKS COUNTY HISTORY – ONE DEED BOOK AT A TIME

A dusty warehouse in Doylestown is an unlikely location as a holding place for Bucks County history and records dating back to William Penn. It was here that Bucks County Recorder of Deeds Robin Robinson, who came into office in January 2018, first came upon old deed books from the county's holdings, and began a passionate effort to restore these crumbling books.

In August 2018, Robin met with Joe Degnan of Kofile Technologies, one of the nation's oldest and most experienced firms specializing in the preservation of legal and historical public records, to discuss the project. Kofile Technologies, located in Essex, Vermont, has an experienced staff trained in conservation methods developed especially for books and documents used by government offices. Together with the County, they began the restoration process on the first batch of 75 books.



To fund this project, Robin Robinson has utilized a portion of the Record Improvement Fund, which are funds collected through transactions within the Recorder of Deeds office. However, the fund alone is not enough to cover the estimated cost of just under \$2 million to restore the entire collection of 700 books.

"We have a very, very small window to get these books fixed," says Robin. "They contain our history and are a treasure of our county. We don't want them to disappear forever."

The Bucks County Recorder of Deeds office is searching for grants to help them cover the remaining cost of this restoration project. This led to the creation of the Bucks County "Adopt-A-Book" Program, which asks residents of Bucks County to make individual donations to support the restoration efforts of the deed books.

Once the books are back in the possession of the Recorder of Deeds' office, they will be stored in a new, climate-controlled storage space in the administration building to prevent further damage. This will also make the books more accessible to the community.

On June 27, 2019, the Bucks County Historical Society and the County of Bucks will host an evening community program at the Mercer Museum showcasing the Deed Project and discussing the importance of these documents for future research and preservation.

To donate to the "Adopt-A-Book" Program, please visit the County of Bucks website at buckscounty.org.

"WITNESSING HISTORY" *Continued from page 10*

Armed with this visual documentation, the museum was delighted to accept the chairs from the Estate of Mr. Edwin William White for the collection. The citizens who once gave testimony in the 1877 courthouse, and the attorneys who argued cases, are mostly gone. But the jury chairs remain, evocative witnesses to the history that unfolded in that courtroom.

In addition to the jury chairs, the Historical Society also added these materials to the museum's collection: a collection of World War II-era Brewster Aeronautical Corporation and Fleetwings Corporation memorabilia (gift of Clinton Flack), a desk set with inkwell and other items from the original Levittown Administration Building (gift of Simeon-David Marable), a coverlet woven by Samuel B. Musselman (gift of Dianne A. Snook), two sets of racing sulky driver's gear worn by Dr. Malcolm J. Borthwick of Solebury Township (gift of Dr. M.J. Borthwick), and group of items related to local businesses, and other Bucks County memorabilia (gift of David B. Long).

COLLECTION CONNECTIONS

LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT

The Mercer Museum and Bucks County Historical Society Library collection consists of over 15,000 books, tens of thousands of visual images, postcards, prints and drawings, and an extensive ephemera collection that includes broadsides, trade-cards, social invitations, brochures, and more.

With so many resources at their disposal, patrons of the library can research their family, home or property, or gather information for upcoming publications such as books, newspapers or scholarly papers.

Recent publications by scholars and journalists who have used the Mercer Museum Library collections include:

- Carl LaVO, "Story behind Bucks County's Almshouse Road," for *The Intelligencer/Courier Times*. LaVO's article includes images of the Almshouse, c. 1880, from the library's collection (Article published on March 4, 2019).
- Dr. Peter Lubrecht (Berkeley College), *Carl Schurz: German-American Patriot – My Country Right or Wrong*. Dr. Lubrecht's book features research and images of Fanny Chapman, aunt to Henry Chapman Mercer (Print date TBD).
- Lorette Treese, "Pleistocene Preserved: The Lost Bone Cave of Port Kennedy," for the publication *Pennsylvania Heritage* (Spring 2019). This article features images from the library's collection of Henry Chapman Mercer during his 1894-96 excavation of the Port Kennedy Bone Cave in Montgomery County, PA.
- *Historic Artists' Homes & Studios Guidebook* (written and produced by the Historic Artists' Homes & Studios Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Stockbridge, MA). The guidebook will feature Fonthill Castle, and include images of Henry Chapman Mercer and various views of the castle. It is being published by Princeton Architectural Press.



MUSEUM SPOTLIGHT

Scholars of early American crafts and trades regularly visit and utilize the museum's collection for research. On March 6, 2019, a delegation of tinsmiths from Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia visited the Mercer Museum and Library. Steve Delisle, Joel Anderson, and Jenny Lynn centered their visit around the museum's considerable tinsmithing tool and lighting device collection. While here, they examined a variety of tinsmithing tools and products – including a collection of templates and patterns – with the hope of recreating these objects in their Williamsburg workshop.

Colonial Williamsburg Tinsmiths Steve Delisle and Joel Anderson study lanterns from the Mercer Museum collection in early winter 2019.

THE A. OSCAR MARTIN BRIDGE ARCHITECTURAL PLANS

Kate Gulick-Tuers, Project Archivist

When you think of bridges in Bucks County, you probably think of the spans heading to New Jersey from Washington Crossing, New Hope, and Morrisville, or the various covered bridges that still remain. Many of these bridges are represented in stunning architectural drawings created by architect A. Oscar Martin, and which reside in the Mercer Museum Library collection. Thanks to a partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, this unique collection will soon be fully digitized and available online.

A. Oscar Martin (1873-1942) was a Doylestown architect who designed homes, office buildings, churches, and bridges. Though he spent some of his career working in Philadelphia, Lansdale, and Buffalo, he eventually returned to Bucks County and opened his own practice. He also worked as the county architect alongside the Bucks County Commissioners in order to update, redesign, or capture the architectural layout of the bridges located in Bucks County. This relationship lasted from around 1900 to 1923.

Martin documented and designed concrete, stone, arch, canal, and interstate bridges throughout Bucks County. Many still stand, while others exist only in the architectural drawings, making this collection even more valuable. The collection was donated to the Mercer Museum Library by Martin's son Fred after his father's passing.

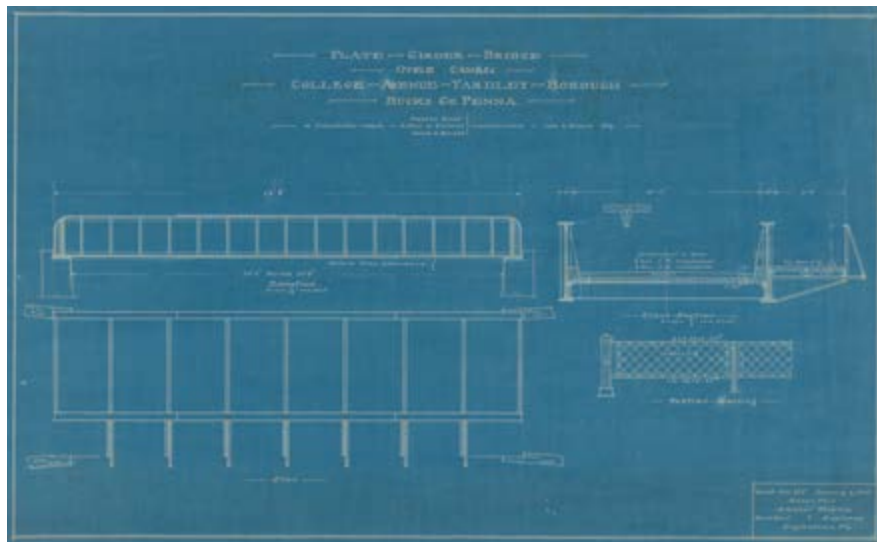
The bridges provide a glimpse of the architectural styles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Bucks County, as well as a hint of the challenges facing public works agencies at the time. Examining the bridge drawings by date, a pattern emerges: stone arch bridges are either fortified with concrete or replaced entirely over time. Covered bridges were completely phased out, and repairs to existing covered bridges included higher roofs, indicating a transition to taller vehicles. Studying the plans also shows an overall transition in focus from aesthetics to safety.

The bridge drawings only encompass a fraction of the material the Mercer Museum Library has from Martin, but they will serve as a template for eventually processing the entire collection. It is a first step in making all of Martin's architectural plans accessible for both bridge enthusiasts and design professionals. Over the past few months, the drawings have been organized by location and include specific information about the bridges and locations. The museum worked with Digital Reprographics in Doylestown to create high-resolution scans of each of the fragile drawings, which will help to preserve their content for the future. A thumbnail of each drawing is available on the museum's online database, RolloPAC. To access the collection on the database, just type in "A. Oscar Martin Architectural Plan Collection" and search 'match all words.' The database is also searchable by bridge name.

Finally, as part of the museum's partnership with PennDOT, the agency will provide in-depth technical analyses of the drawings, which will also be made available on the museum's database. PennDOT will also receive high-resolution scans of each drawing to use when planning new bridge repair or expansion projects.

The Mercer Museum and Library would like to thank PennDOT and Digital Reprographics for making this exciting project possible.

**Drawing for Plate Girder Bridge Over Canal,
College Avenue, Yardley, Bucks County,
by architect A. Oscar Martin (1913)**



CELEBRATING 50+ YEARS

THE FRIENDS OF THE BUCKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Friends of the Bucks County Historical Society (BCHS) is a remarkable group of community members sharing an interest in history, culture, and the arts. Formerly known as the Women's Committee, the group was founded on May 11, 1967, as a volunteer auxiliary group with a commitment and dedication to support the mission of the Mercer Museum and Library & Fonthill Castle. The group officially changed its name to the Friends of the Bucks County Historical Society to better reflect its growing membership.



The Friends of BCHS provide educational programs four times a year at no charge to the public. Presentations have focused on topics of local and national interest, as well as many visits from first-person interpreters. On May 20, the Friends of BCHS welcome Carol Simon Levin to present "*A W.A.S.P. Takes Wing: The Women Airforce Service Pilots of WWII.*" All are welcome to attend and enjoy the 50+ Anniversary Celebration, starting at 12:30 p.m. at the Mercer Museum.

Beyond programs, the Friends of BCHS have sponsored a variety of fundraising events over the years, including masquerade balls, card parties, tavern nights, musical performances and one of their most popular events – Kite Day at Fonthill Castle, which will take place this year on Sunday, May 19, 2019.

If travel and discovery are more your style, the group's "On the Road with the Friends" features inspiring bus trips to explore history and art within a day's drive. Trips have included NYC's Lower East Side, FDR's Hudson River Valley, the Pennsylvania State Capitol, Baltimore's museums, and Bucks County's historic taverns. The group next travels to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on Saturday, June 8, 2019.

Christine Harrison, president of the Friends of BCHS, finds her experience with the group to be very rewarding. "Our programs attract a diverse group of people who enjoy coming together to explore history. We are a community united by our desire to enrich ourselves, while connecting with the amazing legacy that Henry Mercer left to all of us."

The revenue generated from the annual initiatives of the Friends of BCHS directly benefits projects at the Mercer Museum and Library & Fonthill Castle. In 2019, the group approved funds to support the purchase of curatorial housekeeping equipment for Fonthill Castle, monitor environmental conditions in museum exhibits, provide archival storage for the unbound Perkasio News-Herald collection, and afford cataloging assistance to make 19th century bound manuscripts accessible to researchers. In addition, the Friends of BCHS continue their support of community programs including National History Day, Fonthill Castle's Old-Fashioned Fourth of July Celebration, and Holiday Open Houses across the Mercer Mile.

Annual membership dues, which are additional to Bucks County Historical Society membership fees, help support the group's activities.

For information on upcoming events and bus trips, or to join the Friends of BCHS, please visit mercermuseum.org or call Eileen Shapiro at 215-345-0210, ext. 132.



MERCER MUSEUM & FONTHILL CASTLE 2019 ANNUAL FUNDRAISERS

FONTHILL CASTLE BEER FEST

Saturday, August 24, 2019

Fonthill Castle (525 East Court Street, Doylestown)

Fonthill Castle will host its 6th Annual end-of summer Beer Fest featuring high quality drafts from local and regional breweries in the beautiful outdoor setting of Fonthill Castle. Guests will enjoy music, light fare, and a commemorative beer-tasting glass.



COCKTAILS AT THE CASTLE

Friday, October 11, 2019

Mercer Museum (84 South Pine Street, Doylestown)

This legendary evening of culinary delights in a one-of-a-kind castle setting features crafted cocktails and scrumptious offerings from the area's most renowned restaurants, caterers, and bakeries, all in support of the Mercer Museum's year-round exhibitions, youth education programs and community initiatives.

For sponsorship opportunities and information, please call Laura Biersmith at 215-345-0210 ext. 129.



Photograph by Bruce Rutherford

MUSEUM SHOP CORNER



Photograph by Mark Welch

A visit to the Mercer Museum or Fonthill Castle isn't complete without experiencing the many treasures in our museum shops. Over the past months, we have added wonderful new offerings for guests who want to share their love of our castles with the world!

Members of the Bucks County Historical Society always receive a 10% discount on Museum Shop purchases, and there is never an admission fee to enter the shops.

You can always reach us at shop@mercermuseum.org or call 215-345-0210, ext. 130.



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One of a kind celebrations.**



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