



MERCER
MUSEUM
& FONTHILL
CASTLE



Smithsonian
Affiliate

Bucks County Historical Society

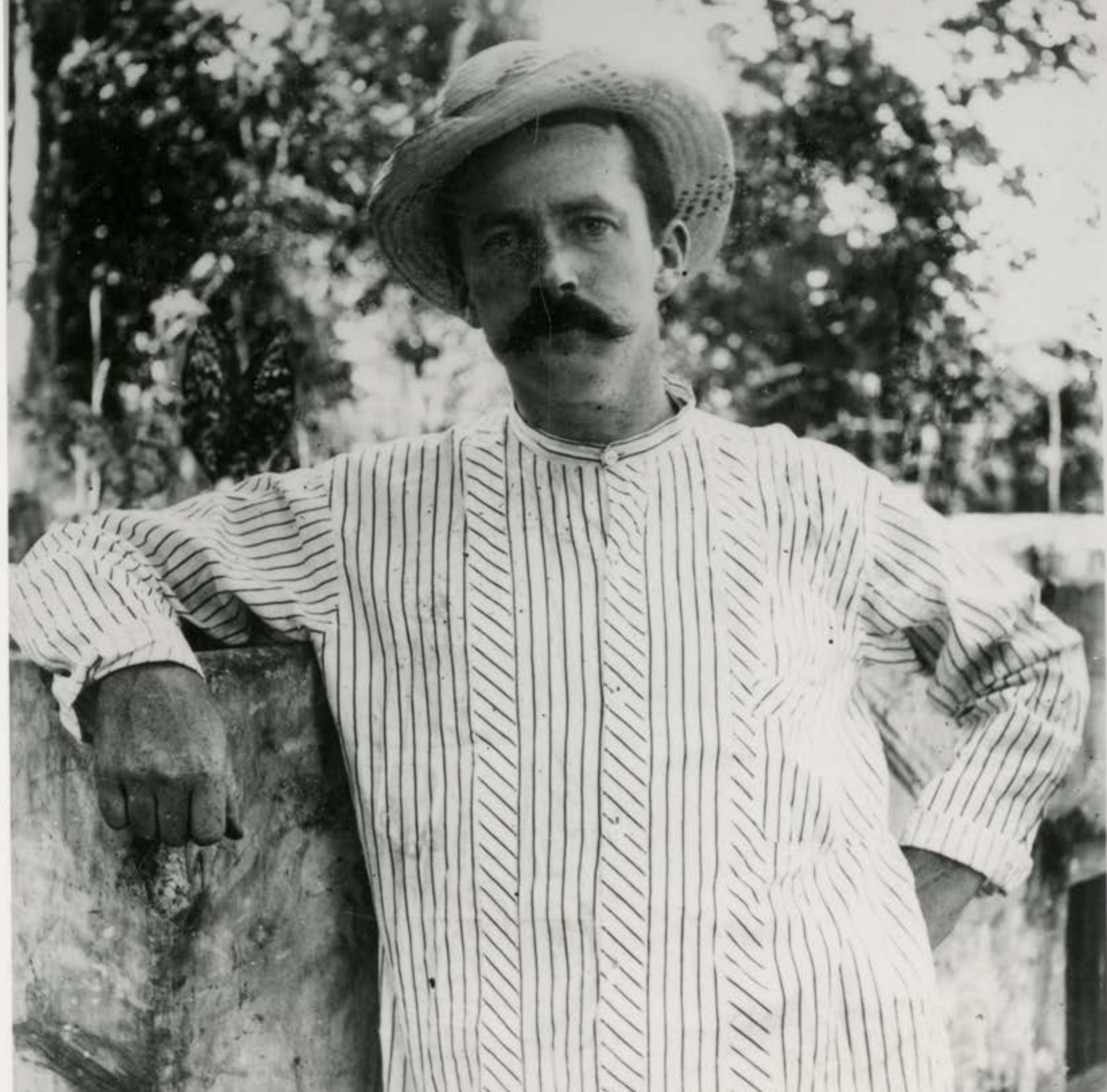
STRATEGIC PLAN

2022 - 2024



"Here is something 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 it's noble shade not only over this little town and this state...but over this whole nation."

- Henry Chapman Mercer





About the Bucks County Historical Society

Founded in 1880, the Bucks County Historical Society (BCHS) is dedicated to preserving Bucks County history and promoting the importance the past plays in contemporary life. As one of the oldest and largest county historical organizations in Pennsylvania, BCHS's duties as a fledgling organization had its roots in marking historical sites, presenting papers, and accumulating memorabilia. By 1897, BCHS member, historian, and archaeologist, Henry Chapman Mercer (1856-1930) recognized the need to collect and preserve the non-mechanized material and tools of daily life in America before it was all swept away by the Industrial Revolution. To understand the mission and history of BCHS, one needs to understand Henry Chapman Mercer.

Mercer was born and raised in Doylestown, PA and was a renaissance man in the truest sense. He was a world traveler, archaeologist, ceramicist, historian, builder, dog lover, author, artist, naturalist, and collector. Between 1908 and 1916 he designed and built three unique concrete structures: Fonthill Castle, his home in which he lived among his showcased tiles, and entertained guests; the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works, where he designed and created his distinctive hand-crafted products; and the Mercer Museum, where he displayed his vast collection of early Americana. Part of his legacy to his community is the three buildings he left in the public trust.

When Mercer died in 1930, his will designated ownership of the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works to his assistant, Frank Swain. After several changes of ownership over the decades following Swain's death in 1954, the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works was eventually shifted to the care of the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation. Mercer bequeathed Fonthill Castle to the Trustees of the Mercer-Fonthill Museum as a museum for the study of tiles, prints, and decorative arts. This bequest included the 69 acre Fonthill grounds as a park, bird sanctuary, and arboretum for the community to enjoy, while educating themselves on native species of trees, plants, and wildlife. He left the Mercer Museum in trust to the Trustees of BCHS with the intent his collection be used for the education of the public on the tools that built the nation. Today, the Bucks County Historical Society owns both Fonthill Castle and the Mercer Museum, and the County of Bucks owns the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works Museum building.

OUR MISSION

It is the mission of the Bucks County Historical Society to educate and engage its many audiences in appreciating the past and to help people find stories and meanings relevant to thier lives - both today and in the future.

OUR VISION

By connecting people to our shared history and environment, we promote interdisciplinary education and committment to serving the community. In order to uphold our mission it is BCHS's responsibility to the surrounding communities to ensure creative educational, inclusive, and supportive community spaces.



Values are guiding principles that never change. Values are deeply held convictions, priorities, and underlying assumptions that influence our attitudes and behaviors. Our core values and mission statement are part of our strategic foundation – the beliefs and purpose to which we are truly committed.

Our Values

INTEGRITY

BCHS demonstrates professionalism with intellectual honesty and ethical conduct through transparent and careful stewardship of resources, including collections, staff, facilities, and investments.

COMMUNITY AND MEMORY

BCHS is a community gathering space, resource, and catalyst for public engagement that is rooted in Bucks County history. We champion our mission to collect, preserve, and share the community's material culture, memories, and heritage; and we foster meaningful relationships with many individuals and partners who inform our direct work.

CURIOSITY AND INNOVATION

BCHS invites curiosity and creates space for innovation through inspired and imaginative collaborations between staff and community voices.

RESPECT

At BCHS we respect people, communities, and cultures and appreciate the richness offered by inherent differences. This deeply held value is established in our I.D.E.A. Committee and daily operations and fostered through interactions with guests and community, on-going staff education, and inclusive exhibit content and programming.



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2022 - 2024

BCHS Strategic Planning Process

Steven Wray, trustee and Principal at Econsult Solutions, Inc., in Philadelphia, led the planning process, employing strategic foresight through routine and wild card scenario sessions, and asking the question: *What did we learn from the 2020 pandemic?* These monthly meetings included trustees, staff, and community members. The following is a summary of the topics that were discussed:

March 2021

What Have We Learned About BCHS During the Pandemic? This was a roundtable session with staff on what we learned about our operations, customers, audience, and what new processes/strategies we will adopt post-pandemic. Panel discussion included staff presentations with a focus on finances, operations, and exhibits.

April 2021

What Is the Future of Meetings, Parties, and Celebrations? This roundtable discussion featured our partners at Jeffrey A. Miller Catering and the BCHS Development/Event staff to learn more about the outlook for events at the castles, strategies to build and grow business at our new facilities, and the future of fundraising events for BCHS post-COVID.

May 2021

Attracting Visitors to the County, Doylestown, and the Castles. Visit Bucks County, James A. Michener Museum, Peddler's Village, and Discover Doylestown joined this roundtable session to discuss visitor outlook, strategies for visitor attraction and retention, and ways that attractions have worked together and can partner in the future to make Doylestown and Bucks County premiere visitor destinations.



June 2021

Previous Strategic Plan Update. BCHS Leadership presented a comprehensive update to the Board of Trustees on the status and progress towards the goals and objectives of the previous strategic plan: What has been accomplished? What changed? What is left to be done?

July 2021

Scenario Planning Workshop. Steven Wray led a scenario planning workshop, where staff and board identified key drivers of the future for the BCHS, alternative futures that must be considered during the strategic planning process, and key factors for success.

September 2021

Strategic Planning Session #1: SWOT Analysis and preliminary staff recommendations. A SWOT Analysis developed by ESI, in consultation with BCHS staff, was reviewed and a preliminary staff wish list for plan elements was formed with a focus on goals and objectives as well as highest priority activities.

October 2021

Working Session to Refine Plan Elements

November 2021

Reviewed Draft Plan and Previewed Plan Dashboard

December 2021

Approved Final Strategic Plan

STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

To move towards our vision while addressing our key challenges, the Bucks County Historical Society will pursue five organizational goals that staff will aspire to achieve through targeted action items

GOAL #1: SUPPORT PEOPLE

Human resources are the organization's most important asset, whether they are employees, trustees, supporters, donors, advisors, volunteers, visitors, or guests. People attain the outcomes, they are not THE outcomes. BCHS will strengthen support to foster a healthy environment of respect and open communication that encourages innovation and achievement.

- *Streamline Human Resources policies and procedures*
- *Provide better health benefits to our staff*
- *Evaluate IT requirements and implement solutions as needed*
- *Improve emergency planning and preparedness across the Mile*
- *Offer I.D.E.A. training to all staff and incorporate into BCHS onboarding process*
- *Create and maintain legacy standard operating procedures by department*



GOAL #2: ACHIEVE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

A healthy financial base equates to the sustainability of BCHS and ensures that BCHS is the best possible steward for the collections and properties, is a predominant local provider of public programs, and is a trusted and valued community partner.

- *Reduce dependency on the endowment*
- *Increase Rental events at Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle, in partnership with Jeffrey A. Miller Catering*
- *Streamline museum shop procurement across both sites, and highlight locally-crafted items and items raising brand-awareness*
- *Create new menu of sponsorship opportunities for programs and special events and develop solicitation materials*
- *Increase portfolio of individual and corporate supporters and prospective donors*
- *Evaluate, design, and implement BCHS's major fundraising campaign(s)*
- *Increase grant funding*
- *Increase unrestricted charitable giving*
- *Increase special events income and enhance donor experience*
- *Increase membership income*
- *Actively promote the Planned Giving Program*



GOAL #3: CARE FOR COLLECTIONS AND PROPERTIES

BCHS has been entrusted to practice responsible custodianship of the collections, which includes objects, buildings, and properties. Their care includes conservation, preservation, and determination of the highest and best use.

- *Address critical interior and exterior building preservation and restoration needs at Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle*
- *Improve efficiency of the regular maintenance program at all BCHS sites*
- *Define and prioritize phased program of site/grounds improvements at Fonthill Castle*
- *Ensure safe and appropriate environmental conditions for BCHS collections in storage*
- *Improve conditions in which BCHS collections are presented and exhibited*
- *Improve security and surveillance systems at BCHS sites*
- *Address critical collections cataloging, documentation, and processing deficiencies in Museums and Library, and expand digital data*
- *Offer community programs that highlight our varied collections and the stories they tell, and foster a public appreciation for their care in the future*
- *Review select BCHS publications and create a timeline for reproduction, with the goal to sell in museum shops across the Mercer Mile*





GOAL #4: PROVIDE RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

It is crucial to BCHS to make direct and engaging local, national, and international stories – as inspired by our collections – accessible for communities to enjoy and experience.

- *Develop and present one major exhibit each year in our primary changing gallery*
- *Activate the Mercer Museum's original historic core to enhance visitor engagement*
- *Build on existing community partnerships and create new connections for exhibits, community programs, and special projects*
- *Introduce BCHS digital offerings in local and regional elementary schools*
- *Strengthen media relations and brand awareness via print, radio, TV, and digital channels*
- *Create community programs highlighting the outdoors and our grounds, including the Fonthill Woodlands*

GOAL #5: INCORPORATE I.D.E.A. THROUGH ALL LEVELS OF PLANNING

Inclusion – The BCHS will work to break down any barriers to creating inclusivity and equality. We strive to better use our resources and spaces to support underrepresented cultures and stories.

Diversity – We believe different voices and perspectives enhance all aspects of BCHS and will commit to diversification throughout the organization.

Equity – The BCHS is committed to identifying what inequities currently exist in our spaces and policies and will allocate resources to eliminate them, while supporting active equity building.

Accessibility – The BCHS believes our organization should be accessible to everyone. Our goal is to provide access to our programming, collection items, and exhibit spaces to all who wish to experience them.

- *Establish a community diversity council to provide regular input, advice, and feedback on a range of BCHS concerns*
- *Increase our sensitivity to, and improve our interpretation of, those artifacts, spaces, and stories in our museums that may trigger or induce some form of trauma in our guests*
- *Address barriers to accessibility at the Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle*
- *Offer ongoing accessibility/diversity/awareness training to all public-facing staff members, in addition to HR onboarding training*
- *Review interpretation materials for Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle guides and diversify the stories we share*
- *Broaden our offerings by continuing to work with our partners in the accessibility space*