



MERCER  
MUSEUM  
& FONTHILL  
CASTLE



Smithsonian  
*Affiliate*

# Strategic Plan

## 2026 - 2028

*Approved October 20, 2025*

This document was approved at a regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Bucks County Historical Society on October 20, 2025. Members of the Board of Trustees at the time of approval include:

Linda B. Hodgdon, Chair  
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**Special thanks to the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, which included:**

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## Section 1: Mission, Vision, Values

### **Mission Statement:**

*Inspiring people through the legacy of Henry Chapman Mercer.*

### **Vision Statement:**

*We envision a future where history is recognized and respected as a powerful tool to deepen understanding, promote critical thinking, strengthen community ties, and shape a more thoughtful civic life.*

### **Values:**

**Integrity.** *We demonstrate accountability and transparency in how we work, how we lead, and how we serve others.*

**Curiosity.** *We approach challenges and people with open minds and a genuine interest in learning from every encounter.*

**Innovation.** *We improve by testing ideas, adapting thoughtfully, and working across roles to solve problems creatively.*

**Respect.** *We uphold dignity by listening well, recognizing contributions, and addressing conflict with care and clarity.*

**Community.** *We build belonging by investing in shared purpose, shared spaces, and shared success.*

## Section 2: Introduction to the 2026–2028 Strategic Plan

### **A brief history of Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle**

The Bucks County Historical Society (BCHS) was founded in 1880 by General William Watts Hart Davis and several friends to preserve the rich history and culture of Bucks County and the Delaware Valley region. Among the founders was 23-year-old Henry Chapman Mercer.

Merger, born and raised in Doylestown, PA, was a Renaissance man in the truest sense. He was a world traveler, archaeologist, ceramicist, historian, builder, dog lover, author, artist, naturalist, and collector. By 1897, he recognized the urgency of preserving the non-mechanized tools and materials of daily life in America before they were swept away by the Industrial Revolution. Between 1908 and 1916, Mercer designed and built three iconic concrete structures: Fonthill Castle, his home, which also showcased his tiles and hosted guests; the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works, where he created his distinctive handcrafted designs; and the Mercer Museum, which housed his vast collection of early Americana. His enduring legacy includes placing all three buildings in the public trust for future generations.

When Mercer died in 1930, his will designated the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works to his assistant, Frank Swain. After several changes of ownership following Swain's death in 1954, the site eventually came under the stewardship of the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation. Mercer bequeathed Fonthill Castle to the Trustees of the Mercer-Fonthill Museum as a center for the study of tiles, prints, and decorative arts. This gift also included the 69-acre Fonthill grounds, intended for public enjoyment and environmental education. The Mercer Museum was left in trust to the Trustees of BCHS with the intent that its collection educate the public about the tools that built the nation. Today, BCHS owns and operates both Fonthill Castle and the Mercer Museum.

Henry Mercer's legacy embraces history, architecture, art, science, nature, and technological innovation and manifests in the collections, programs, exhibitions, and events at the Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle.

## Section 3: The Strategic Planning Process

Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle's 2026–2028 Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative process that engaged staff and trustees in shaping the organization's direction. The planning effort was led by the Strategic Planning Steering Committee.

### **Phase I: Strategic Visioning Workshop**

On June 9, Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle hosted a full-day Strategic Visioning Workshop attended by Steering Committee members and senior staff. Consultant Darren Macfee opened with an educational session on the board's role in strategic planning and how long-term aspirations translate into annual goals and day-to-day execution.

Participants engaged in a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), reflected on organizational achievements since 2015, and explored emerging challenges and opportunities in the decade ahead. The group envisioned what MMFH could become by 2035, and together drafted an initial set of Strategic Institutional Priorities to guide the next three years.

### **Phase II: Initial Review and Feedback**

Consultant synthesized the workshop outcomes and survey insights into a preliminary draft of the strategic plan, with a focus on the Vision for 2035 and a proposed set of strategic priorities. The Steering Committee reviewed this draft and offered detailed feedback, which was incorporated into subsequent revisions.

### **Phase III: Review by professional staff**

A revised draft was shared with the MMFH Leadership Team, who contributed additional insights based on operational realities and departmental perspectives. This feedback helped refine the plan's clarity, as well as alignment with MMFH core capabilities.

### **Phase IV: Development of Performance Measures and Resource Requirements**

With foundational elements in place, Consultant developed a final section outlining suggested performance measures, anticipated staffing needs, a phased

implementation timeline, and projected budget implications. These additions were designed to support future evaluation and accountability while remaining flexible to changing conditions.

### **Phase V: Final Review**

The Steering Committee completed its final review of the Strategic Plan through online document collaboration, ensuring every member had the opportunity to review without convening a formal meeting.

### **Phase VI: Presentation to Trustees**

The final draft strategic plan was presented to the Board of Trustees on **October 20, 2025**. This presentation marked the culmination of months of collaborative planning and established a shared framework to guide Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle's efforts from 2025 through 2028 and beyond. *The plan was approved by a vote of the Trustees.*

## Section 4 : Strategic Institutional Priorities: 2026-2028

Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle will focus on the following Institutional Strategic Priorities for the coming three years.

### **Strategic Priority I: Deepen Community Relevance and Public Engagement.**

Continue to build the organization’s reputation as the cultural anchor of the area through programming, partnerships, and consistent messaging of our impact on the area.

### **Strategic Priority II: Strengthen Interpretation and Visitor Experience – Onsite and Online.**

Enhance both physical and digital interpretation to make visits more engaging, educational, and accessible.

### **Strategic Priority III: Advance Financial Sustainability and Philanthropic Growth.**

Diversify revenue and expand donor engagement to ensure long-term resilience and impact.

### **Strategic Priority IV: Invest in People and Organizational Capacity.**

Support staff, volunteers, and board members to ensure alignment, professionalism, and long-term resilience.

### **Strategic Priority V: Enhance Physical Infrastructure and Steward Historic Assets.**

Preserve and activate the organization’s historic campus with capital improvements, collections stewardship and resilient maintenance planning.