

CASTLE CHRONICLES

NEWSLETTER OF THE BUCKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*Holidays
at
Fonthill
Castle*



WINTER 2025



MERCER
MUSEUM
& FONTHILL
CASTLE



Smithsonian
Affiliate

VOL. 38 NUMBER 1



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GENERAL INFORMATION

MERCER MUSEUM
 84 South Pine Street, Doylestown, PA 18901
 (215) 345-0210
 Tuesdays – Sundays, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
 Closed Mondays

MERCER MUSEUM RESEARCH LIBRARY
 Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
 Thursdays – Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
 Closed Sundays & Mondays

FONTHILL CASTLE
 525 East Court Street, Doylestown, PA 18901
 (215) 348-9461
 Tuesdays – Sundays, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
 Closed Mondays

Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle are operated by the Bucks County Historical Society. Schedule and programs are subject to change. Visit mercermuseum.org for the latest information.

ON THE COVER

Images from *Holidays at Fonthill Castle*

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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 PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

As our nation approaches the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, the Bucks County Historical Society is proud to reflect on the enduring importance of history in shaping our present and guiding our future. In a moment when the lessons of the past are more vital than ever, our mission to preserve and interpret the treasures of American history takes on renewed significance.

Henry Mercer, our founder, was a man deeply captivated by the story of America. He believed that the tools of everyday life – objects and stories – were essential to understanding our past. Today, we honor his vision by continuing to connect people of all ages with the narratives that define our shared heritage.

Our current exhibition at the Mercer Museum, *The Doan Gang: Outlaws of the Revolution*, is one such example. The Doans – intertwined with the struggles and upheaval of the Revolutionary War – offer visitors an opportunity to grapple with the complexities of our nation’s founding era. Through this exhibition, students, families, and lifelong learners alike can explore how the Revolution shaped not only the destiny of a nation, but also the lives of ordinary people in Bucks County.

As we look ahead to the 250th anniversary in 2026, we invite you to join us in celebrating our nation’s past, engaging with its stories, and ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to learn from them. Together, we can honor Henry Mercer’s vision and strengthen our shared commitment to the history of our region.

With gratitude,

Kyle McKoy
 President & CEO



BUCKS MONT NATIONAL HISTORY DAY COMPETITION – PAST AND FUTURE

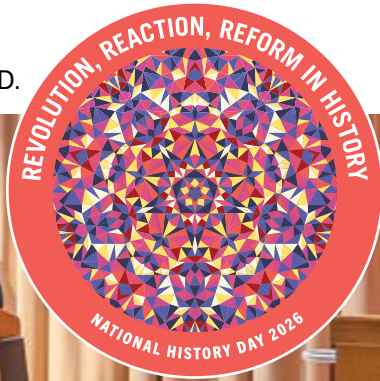
The Bucks County Historical Society was proud to host the 2025 Bucks Mont Regional National History Day Competition at Delaware Valley University in March of 2025.

National History Day (NHD) is an annual academic enrichment program for students in grades 6-12 that encourages thoughtful historical research and project-based learning. The national theme for 2025 was “Rights & Responsibilities” and students participated as individuals or groups in one of five categories: papers, websites, documentaries, performances, and exhibits.

The BCHS education team has coordinated the Bucks Mont NHD regional contest since 1996, encouraging Bucks and Montgomery County high school and middle school students to take their love of history beyond the classroom. In 2025, 310 students submitted 191 projects to the competition, and over eighty volunteer judges reviewed the student projects both via Zoom and in person, providing crucial feedback to students and supporting museum staff for this annual event.

The NHD theme for 2026 is *Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History*, and the Bucks Mont Regional National History Day Competition is slated to take place at Delaware Valley University on March 28, 2026.

2026 information and registration deadlines are available now at mercermuseum.org/NHD.



GRANTS SUPPORT WORK AT OUR CASTLES

In 2024 museum staff noticed that the concrete columns supporting Henry Mercer’s springhouse at Fonthill had deteriorated significantly. Built about 1913 to replace an earlier stone and frame shed covering the spring, the structure may have been inspired by Italian Renaissance architecture Mercer had visited in Europe. Following closer examination by a conservator and structural engineer, the building was temporarily shored to prevent further losses, or any potential collapse.

With repairs estimated to cost in excess of \$100,000, the museum determined the first step should involve the production of detailed construction and engineering drawings to guide the eventual restoration. A timely grant in the amount of \$10,170 from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s Keystone Grant Program, a program funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, will support this work. A matching sum, provided by private funds, will bring the entire cost of the project to \$10,340. The production of the drawings will take place later this year, and then we will turn our attention to raising the funds necessary for restoration.

Another grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission is providing funds to fully catalog and digitize three volumes of early Bucks County colonial records, making them more widely available for research and study. The grant, in the amount of \$4,995, is from the Commonwealth’s Historic Archives and Records Care program. Library and Archives Director Annie Halliday is supervising the project. The funding is enabling the hiring of a contract archivist to perform the work, and to offset the cost of some archival supplies. When completed, extensive information about these early volumes – which include the 1684 “Book of Arrivals,” the 1684-1693 cattle “Earmarks Book,” and the 1780-1830 “Register of Slaves” – will be accessible via the Library’s online catalog.

Finally, a \$406,000 “Local Share” grant provided through the Department of Community and Economic Development of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is enabling the Mercer Museum to modernize its main passenger elevator. Because such Local Share grants are provided only to local municipalities, the Borough of Doylestown is serving as a collaborator to help secure the funds and administer the grant. It is anticipated that the long overdue work to replace the elevator’s operating system and hydraulics, as well as its cab and interior, will take place during winter 2026.

A Page from the “Earmarks Book,” begun by Phineas Pemberton, William Penn’s chief administrator and Bucks County recorder. In an era when cattle were allowed to roam freely, the book provides a record of the unique marks, or cuts, made in the ears of livestock to identify owners. A grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission will make information about this, and other colonial volumes, accessible for research.



Fonthill’s ca. 1913 Springhouse, the subject of a grant from the Keystone Grant Program of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT! INTERNS AT MERCER MUSEUM & FONTHILL CASTLE

Every summer, the *BLBB Charitable Internship Program* at the Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle allows a dynamic group of students with varied interests, strengths, and goals to immerse themselves in an outstanding educational and professional environment.

Interns learn and work directly with museum professionals in a team-based, collaborative environment that offers experiential learning, mentoring benefits, and leadership-building skills. Our 2025 interns were with us from June 2 – August 8, 2025, and their work supported our exhibition, archives, education, and community services initiatives at both castles.

Our Community Services & Education interns worked on projects relating to the development of an artifact cart station to be used by museum educators, future possible Fonthill Castle Woodlands outdoor programming, future Family Days programming at the Mercer Museum, and guided tours for families and youth. These interns also had leadership roles at the Mercer Museum’s Wizing Academy Summer Camp and contributed to a variety of summer community programs.

Our Archives intern spearheaded the processing of two manuscript collections that are part of the Mercer Museum’s Research Library’s recent acquisitions, which included arranging the collection, creating a database record, labeling and storing the collection.

Finally, our Exhibits intern developed new interpretation and curation of one of the exhibitions in the Mercer Museum Core. This process included guest surveys, conducting research, selecting objects and writing object labels.

The Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle’s internship program is generously sponsored by BLBB Charitable. BLBB Charitable supports initiatives that help people discover their true and full potential through educational and leadership opportunities.

Want to join us in 2026? Information on our internship opportunities is available at mercermuseum.org/internships.



(L to R): 2025 interns Laura Waters, Dakota Borneman Murtha, Fiona Orrok, Arianna Halle, Eliza Hendrick, and Ivy D’Agostino

HISTORIC CORE ENHANCEMENTS AT MERCER MUSEUM

Beginning in late 2024 and continuing into 2025, Mercer Museum curatorial staff members have implemented a number of projects to upgrade exhibits in the museum’s original 1913-1916 core. These include developing completely new installations, as well as rearranging existing exhibits and introducing new labels and graphics. This work has been enabled by the long run of our current changing exhibition, *The Doan Gang: Outlaws of the Revolution*, which opened in 2024 is continuing through 2026.

In the fall of 2024, a 5th-floor room formerly displaying musical instruments and other artifacts was re-opened with an exhibit featuring international tiles drawn from Henry Mercer’s collections at Fonthill. In addition to the global tiles on exhibit – some of which date to the 12th or 13th centuries – a tile rubbing activity and a mosaic puzzle interactive are proving very popular with guests.

Shortly after the installation of the tiles, an exhibit of toys, games and sporting artifacts was installed on the museum’s 6th floor. Much of the museum’s collection of toys was once displayed in a room on the 5th level (a space now occupied by the “Animals on the Loose” family exhibit), however, this collection had been in storage for a number of years. The new exhibit gives visitors the opportunity to enjoy this collection anew. A nearby room also has been revamped to feature the museum’s collection of early bicycles, as well as a portion of its collection of dolls, dollhouses, and dollhouse furnishings.

Currently undergoing renovation is the museum’s “schoolroom” exhibit on the 7th floor. One of a few rooms in the Mercer core that have long lacked descriptive or identifying labels, the new “Schools and Schooling” exhibit will feature a variety of educational tools and objects, as well as visual images and label text. The space will also now be “walk-in,” enabling visitors to get closer to some of the artifacts on view. The new exhibit will be completed by the end of 2025.

Finally, the “Animal Husbandry” room on the 3rd floor now has identifying labels, the result of another summer intern project. The permanent versions of these labels have just recently been installed in this exhibit space.

Top: A Young Visitor enjoys the new mosaic puzzle activity on the Mercer Museum’s 5th floor.

Middle: Exhibit Specialist and Preparator Clint Flack works to install one of the Mercer Museum’s early bicycles in “Room 67” on the 6th floor.

Bottom: 2025 Curatorial Summer Intern Ivy D’Agostino surveys artifacts in the “Schoolroom” on the 7th floor as part of her project to redesign and produce labels for an updated version of the exhibit.



NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The Mercer Museum Research Library has recently completed some exciting projects. Thanks to a PHMC Historical & Archival Records Care grant, the Gene Asro collection is now fully processed. This collection contains over 20,000 negatives and photographs related to the Levittown area in the late twentieth century. The inventory and rehousing of the A. Oscar Martin collection, consisting over 3,000 hand drawn architectural plans for local private and public buildings, is also now complete.

Thanks to volunteer assistance, the SAN/MER book collection has been cataloged. These books were added to the Library as a companion to the Museum's collection of pre-industrial tools. Some volumes were donated by Joseph Sandford, others were removed from Henry Mercer's personal book collection at Fonthill.

Finally, over 650 negatives created by the Charles and Newtown Arnold (the Arnold brothers) from 1896 to 1910 are now digitized and listed in our archival database. This collection includes postcards and unpublished photographs of Bucks County businesses, homes, and landscapes.

Additionally, Library staff presented lectures both at the Museum and offsite. We were hosted by the Pine Run Retirement Community, Doylestown Free Library, Free Library of Northampton Township, Chester County Historical Association, and the Friends of Graeme Park. Presentation topics included true crime in Bucks County, Henry Mercer's trip in a French river boat, historic Valentines, Burpee seeds, and the Doan Gang of Bucks County.

The Library was also pleased to host several behind the scenes tours of the archives. Guests included the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, Bucks County Free Library, Doylestown Nature Club, Longwood Gardens, and Temple's Special Collections Research Center.

Materials from the Museum's object collection and the Research Library archives have been featured in many ways. Here are just a few of the requests the collections have been able to assist with recently:

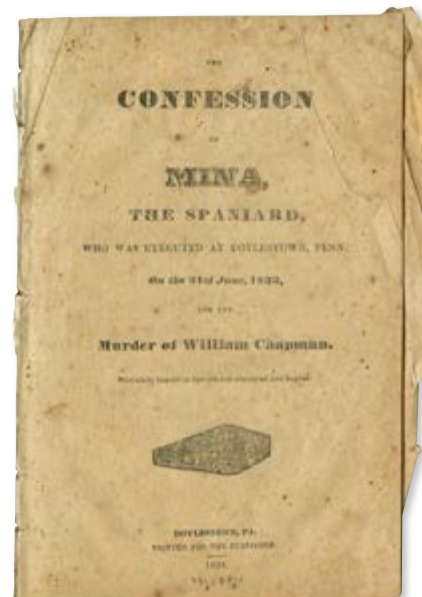
- Samplers by Fallsington Boarding School students for Historic Fallsington's organizational newsletter
- Images of Edward Hicks' paintings Peaceable Kingdom and Penn's Treaty were featured in the Michener Art Museum's exhibition catalog for *Never broken : visualizing Lenape histories*
- A daguerreotype of BCHS founder W.W.H. Davis was featured in a PBS New Mexico documentary
- Several archival documents and museum objects will be center stage for the upcoming season of the Dhody Research Institute's YouTube series *What's That For?*



Charles R. Arnold posing in the Arnold Brothers Print Shop in Rushland, Wrightstown Township, July 31, 1906 (SC-29-05, 65-03)



SAN/MER books in our secure, climate-controlled vault, with improved labeling



Cover of The confession of Mina, the infamous 1831 Bucks County murder case discussed in the newest season of the Dhody Research Institute's *What That For?* series (SC-14, 172)

COLLECTIONS ON THE ROAD

Even artifacts need vacations! The Bucks County Historical Society's unique collections are in demand, and thanks to an active loan program, our objects are on temporary display at several local and national museums.

Our largest loan includes over thirty tools and accessories from our African collection. These objects, acquired in Angola by Amandus Johnson in the 1920s, have been on display at the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation in Virginia since 2006. They help to interpret the history of slavery at Jamestown, including the African roots of some objects and works of art owned by enslaved people.

Other collections on the road include a fruit dryer and corn husk broom on display at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.; a "Delaware" hand pump fire vehicle from c. 1810 at the Delaware Valley Fire Museum; and a stone mile marker and butter worker salesman's sample at the Newtown Historic Association as part of an exhibit celebrating Newtown's Semiquincentennial.

Thank you to all of our loan partners for introducing our collections to new audiences!



Ceramic Vessel
c. 1900-1920
Angola, West Africa
Mercer Museum Collection
On loan to the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, Virginia
Accession #20084



Tools and Ornaments
Angola, West Africa
c. 1900-1923
Mercer Museum Collection
On display at the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, Virginia



Butter Worker Salesman's Sample of Lettie Smith
c. 1853
Newtown, Bucks County
Mercer Museum Collection
On loan to the Newtown Historic Association
Accession #25499

"Delaware" Hand-Pumped Fire Engine
c. 1810
Perkins & Jones, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Mercer Museum Collection
On loan to the Delaware Valley Fire Museum
Accession #18983





Holidays at Fonthill Castle

Now - December 31, 2025



There is no better place to celebrate the holiday season than at Fonthill Castle!

Our annual holiday programs at Fonthill Castle are open now through December 31, 2025 and will be sure to delight the entire family.

Located in the heart of Bucks County, Fonthill Castle, the home of Henry Chapman Mercer (1856-1930), is a National Historic Landmark operated by the Bucks County Historical Society. Every year, the interior of the castle is transformed into a winter wonderland with fifteen beautifully decorated Christmas trees throughout the castle and Welcome Center.

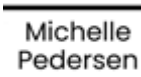


Holidays at Fonthill Castle is generously supported by Fulton Bank, The Haverford Trust Company, Raphael Architects, Michelle Pedersen, Penn Medicine Doylestown Health, and The Tustin Group.

Schedule and tickets are at mercermuseum.org/holidays. Advanced tickets are highly recommended for all of these holiday programs.

Fonthill Castle is closed on the following holiday days:
 Thursday, November 27, 2025 (Thanksgiving Day);
 Thursday, December 25, 2025 (Christmas Day) and
 Thursday, January 1, 2026 (New Year's Day).

Fulton Bank



This year, there are three magical ways to visit Fonthill Castle during the holiday season:

Fonthill Castle Holiday Daily Tours

Weekdays and November weekends beginning November 15 through December 23, 2025

\$20 Adult/\$17 Senior (65+)/\$15 Student/\$10 Youth (6-17)/Child (5 and under) – Free/BCHS Member Adult – Free

On all weekdays as well as weekends in November, daily one-hour guided tours of historic Fonthill Castle showcase Henry Mercer's home decorated for the holidays, and share the history of Mercer and the construction of this unique property. Tours are 60 minutes and guided.

Fonthill Castle's interior features Mercer's renowned, handcrafted ceramic tiles designed at the height of the Arts and Crafts movement, and the castle serves as an early example of reinforced concrete architecture with forty-four rooms, two hundred windows, and eighteen fireplaces.

Holiday Evening Tours at Fonthill Castle

Friday, November 21 & Saturday, November 22, 2025
 Friday, November 28, 2025
 Thursday, December 4, 2025
 Wednesday, December 10 & Thursday, December 11, 2025
 Wednesday, December 17 & Thursday, December 18, 2025
 First tour begins at 5 P.M.

\$25 Adults/\$20 Member Adults/\$10 Youth (6-17)/\$5 Child (5 and under)

Nothing is as magical as discovering Fonthill Castle decked out for the holidays on one of our guided Evening Tours! Discover Mercer's renowned ceramic tiles and holiday trees glowing in the candlelight during these intimate 45-minute historic tours.

Holiday Lights Meander Days

Saturdays & Sundays:

Saturday, December 6 & Sunday, December 7, 2025
 Saturday, December 13 & Sunday, December 14, 2025
 Saturday, December 20 & Sunday, December 21, 2025
 Saturday, December 27 & Sunday, December 28, 2025

Time slots begin every 10 minutes (each slot is 45-minutes long)

Special Dates & Times:

Wednesday, December 24, 2025 (Christmas Eve) – Special hours: 10 A.M. – 1 P.M.
 Friday, December 26, 2025
 Tuesday, December 30, 2025
 Wednesday, December 31, 2025 (New Year's Eve) – Special hours: 10 A.M. – 1 P.M.

\$25 Adult/\$20 BCHS Member Adult/\$10 Youth (6-17)/\$5 Child (5 and under)

Offered on all weekends in December, as well special holiday days, Holiday Lights Meander Days allow guests to explore the rooms and trees on the 2025 Holiday Lights Meander tour route inside Fonthill Castle at their own pace.

Knowledgeable tour guides are available along the holiday route to inspire and engage and make this a seasonal experience to remember for the whole family!



FONTHILL QUESTERS GIFT SUPPORTS SCREEN REPRODUCTION

The Library at Fonthill Castle has an eye-popping new addition thanks to a generous gift from the Fonthill Questers. In March 2025, the Bucks County Historical Society unveiled a new reproduction folding screen in the room, once a showpiece gallery in the former home of Henry Mercer and now a highlight on public tours of the castle.

Henry Mercer owned a variety of textiles when he lived at Fonthill Castle. These included three tapestry-covered free-standing trifold screens, likely located in the Library, Saloon, and Morning Room. Like all of Henry Mercer's original textiles, the fabric on the screens became badly damaged by light and environmental conditions in the castle over the past century, and the original screens were moved to storage by the 1990s.

Thankfully, however, an unfaded sample of the fabric used to cover one of the screens was discovered in a chest in the Garret. Using this sample, BCHS staff worked with former Fonthill docent Kathy Appel – now at Hearth & Hedgerow Interior Design in Quakertown – to find a similar pattern still in production that could be used to recreate the original screen. The closest pattern, called "Mission Forest," was purchased from the fabric house Kravet.

After woodworker Sal Losapio created the poplar frame for the screen, Hearth & Hedgerow staff customized and attached the reproduction fabric and trim using tacks similar to the ones used on Mercer's original.

The reproduction fabric is more durable and lightfast than Mercer's originals, ensuring that the screen will add to the interpretation of Fonthill Castle for years to come. The vibrant colors bring back some of the pizzazz that made the room an expression of Henry Mercer's vision.

The Bucks County Historical Society continues to be grateful to the Fonthill Questers for supporting this project and many other restoration projects at Fonthill over the years.



Top: Henry Mercer's original tapestry-covered folding screen, now in storage. It had become badly faded over time.

Above: An unfaded sample of the fabric used to make Henry Mercer's original folding screen, found in the Garret. The reproduction was based on this pattern.



Above: Reproduction tapestry pattern, "Mission Forest," used to make the reproduction folding screen.



Left: Fonthill Questers members Pam Lahr and Judy Volpe are pictured with the new screen in March 2025.

PLUS ULTRA SOCIETY: CARRYING HENRY MERCER'S DREAM FORWARD

When asked why he was a member of the BCHS *Plus Ultra* Society at their annual gathering, longtime supporter and BCHS Board of Trustees Vice Chair shared the heartfelt remarks below on why the Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle hold such special meaning to him. As the owner of Bucks Country Gardens, Tom Hebel is no stranger to community and to making a difference in the lives of others:



Maybe some of you heard the rumor that Pink, Taylor Swift and Bradley Cooper were joining us tonight, and that explains our large group. And to think, you get to hear me instead!

My reference to celebrities is not just my attempt to interject a little humor, but also to remind us how special this place we call "home" truly is. When people get a chance to experience Doylestown and Bucks County, it's no wonder they want to live here too. You know all the reasons we love this place and think it's so special. And there's nothing more special than the concrete castle where we're standing right now. Fonthill Castle and the Mercer Museum are the most notable and most important assets that define our town and our region. How lucky are we!

I think there's a common bond amongst us here today beyond our appreciation of the place we call home. I bet every one of us supports lots of worthwhile organizations with our time, our talent and our treasure. Maybe it's your church, your school, a hospital, medical research, social services, the arts, land preservation, environmental stewardship. Many in our community support all of these and more. My wife Barb and I have been blessed as I suggest you have been too. We are privileged to help support many organizations that make a difference in our community and beyond.

So why is Bucks County Historical Society so high on our list? We think this organization is uniquely positioned to make the biggest positive impact on our community with almost unlimited potential. I knew I could make a difference and contribute to the future of BCHS and ensure our children and grandchildren will have the same opportunity one day.

And today, each of you has that opportunity.

When you join us by including BCHS in your estate plan or contribute to the Fonthill Capital Campaign, your generous support will help ensure the Henry Mercer vision of 100 years ago will be carried forward for generations to come.

Henry Mercer was a dreamer. He dreamed really big dreams and they came true when he created these magical places. Today we are called to be dreamers too. To carry Henry's vision forward. To make this place even more special.

I can't sing like Pink or Taylor. I can't act like Bradley. But I can make a really big difference by supporting BCHS, the Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle.



To learn more about joining the BCHS *Plus Ultra* Society, or to notify us if you have already included the Bucks County Historical Society in your plans, please contact us at 215-345-0210 or email development@mercermuseum.org

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Thanks to Henry Mercer’s broad definition of the concept of a “tool” – encompassing everything from chisels to folk art – the Mercer Museum collection is one of the most diverse museum collections in the United States. Our new acquisitions this past year continue that eclectic tradition.

One new object we’re especially excited about is also one of most beautiful objects to enter our collection in recent years – a document box that was likely decorated by schoolmaster and fraktur artist David Kulp (1777-1834) of Bedminster Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The box decoration is rare evidence of a fraktur artist working in other media, including oil paints.

The box was made for Esther Kolb, likely before her marriage; the “-in” after the name “Kolb” painted on the top of the box is a feminine suffix sometimes used in the German language, and may also denote an unmarried woman. The exact identity of this Esther Kolb is not yet known.

Another recent acquisition is certainly in the spirit of America 250! The small ceramic candle holder, called an “illumination lamp” at the time of its production, was one of thousands of identical holders sold in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in advance of a much-anticipated visit to the city in 1824 by the Marquis de Lafayette, a French ally of George Washington during the American Revolution.

In September 1824, Lafayette returned to the United States, passing through Morrisville and Bristol in Bucks County before arriving in the Philadelphia. Philadelphians placed these lighted candles in their windows on the evening of September 28, 1824, to welcome Lafayette to the city.

The National Gazette and Literary Register in Philadelphia reported on September 29, 1824, that “the illumination formed a tribute which he must have contemplated with singular complacency...The lights were withdrawn from the windows and all was silence and rest about eleven o’clock.”

Our final highlight is a fascinating piece of local history – a fire helmet that belonged to Gustav A. Rathke (1859-1929), a firefighter with Bristol Fire Company No. 1 as well as a longtime Borough Council member in Bristol, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Rathke was born in Königsberg, Germany. He emigrated to the United States in 1883 at the urging of Otto Haas, one of the founders of the Bristol chemical company Rohm and Haas. Mr. Haas helped Rathke to find a position at the Thomas L. Leedom carpet company in Bristol. Rathke was deeply involved in many organizations in Bristol, including the fire company, and we’re proud to preserve part of his legacy.

Thank you again to the generous donors of these objects and to all of the donors who contributed to our collections in 2024 and 2025!



Decorated Box of Esther Kolb
c. 1810
David Kulp (1777-1834), Deep Run,
Bedminster Township, Bucks County,
Pennsylvania
Gift of David B. Long, 2024
MM2024.12.002



Decorated Box of Esther Kolb – Detail
c. 1810
David Kulp (1777-1834), Deep Run,
Bedminster Township, Bucks County,
Pennsylvania
Gift of David B. Long, 2024
MM2024.12.002



Fire Helmet of Gustav A. Rathke
Bristol Fire Company No. 1
c. 1883-1920
Gift of Carl Doan in Honor of
Charlotte R. Doan, 2025
MM2025.07.001

DIGGING UP THE DOANS: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE DOAN GANG

The Doan Gang: Outlaws of the Revolution is the major exhibition on display at the Mercer Museum, and active research about the Gang continues to this day. Recent investigations at a local cave and excavations at the former Bucks County Treasury in Newtown have added to our knowledge of the Gang’s history.

Buckingham’s “Doan Cave” and Expedition Unknown

For over a century, local legend held that the Doans stashed their stolen treasure in caves, including a cave in Buckingham known as the “Doan Cave.” There is no direct evidence to support this claim, but recent discoveries raise interesting questions.

The Buckingham cave’s story begins in January 1859, when local schoolteacher Joseph Fell wrote to the Bucks County Intelligencer to announce that his son and several friends had found the inscription “1775 M. DOAN” carved into one of the walls of the cave. Fell speculated that the inscription was carved by Moses Doan.

Exhibit co-curator Clint Flack, along with property owner Frank Lamitina, re-discovered and excavated Buckingham Cave beginning in 2019. The excavations were featured on the Discovery Channel program Expedition Unknown in July 2024. After filming was complete, Flack, Lamitina, and Rayna Polsky uncovered the “1775 M” stone as well as a colonial bottle that dates to the Gang’s time.

The stone with the inscription and the bottle are now on display at the Mercer Museum. Did Moses Doan actually carve this mysterious inscription? Visitors can decide for themselves.

Scene of the Crime: Rediscovering the Bucks County Treasury in Newtown

Doan archaeology also continues aboveground. This past spring, the foundation of the Bucks County Treasury in Newtown, robbed in 1781 by the Doan Gang, was rediscovered by archaeologists in a project sponsored by the Bucks County Historical Society.

Phase I archaeological testing was conducted on the site of the former Treasury on May 10-11, 2025, under the direction of Matt Bielecki of Stony Hill Archaeological Research. The group excavated four test pits on the site of the former Treasury.

Many members of the public witnessed the excavations and even had a chance to learn archaeological methods from Bielecki and his staff. The archaeologists found parts of the original foundation as well as eighteenth-century artifacts, including an English pistol gunflint.

The original Treasury building, which was once part of a complex that also included a prison and courthouse, was demolished in 1873. For decades it was unclear whether anything remained of the original structure. The recent archaeological testing put that mystery to rest.

BCHS and Bielecki hope to conduct further testing on the site in spring 2026, where more of the original foundation and other artifacts from the Doan Gang’s time may be discovered.



Exhibit co-curator Clint Flack with Expedition Unknown’s Josh Gates in 2023.

Stone with the inscription “1775 M,” found in the Buckingham “Doan Cave” in 2024 and now on display.



Archaeologist Matt Bielecki (right) supervises excavations in a test pit at the site. Photograph by Mike Cypher.

“WHAT’S THAT FOR?” FILM SERIES COLLABORATION

A collaborative project between the Dhody Research Institute (DRI) and the Mercer Museum has led to the release of a series of entertaining and informative videos featuring medical instruments and devices from the Mercer collections. Led by Anna Dhody, the former Curator of Philadelphia’s Mütter Museum, the DRI pursues projects that connect medical history to current and future challenges in health care, and that help foster curiosity in science education, forensics, and medical research. The videos certainly fall into the latter category.

The DRI selected the Mercer Museum as the site to feature for its second season of “WTF?” (or “What’s That For?”). A total of eight episodes, each featuring a particular artifact or group of artifacts from the Mercer collections, will be aired on the DRI’s YouTube channel. The episodes, which pair host Anna Dhody with a Mercer curatorial or library staff member, provide viewers with the opportunity to learn a little about each object and guess its purpose, before revealing its true function and history. Along the way, some playful, tongue-in-cheek humor keeps each episode lively and fun.

As each episode in the series is released, the Mercer Museum will display the featured object in an exhibit case on the museum’s 4th floor. Inside the case will be a QR code, enabling guests to access the related video on their phone or other device. The Mercer Museum will also post links to the videos on its own digital platforms.

The Mercer is excited to participate in the second season of *WTF?*, which offers yet another opportunity to feature the incredible depth and enduring educational value of our collections.



Mercer Museum Director of Collections, Exhibitions, Historical Properties Cory Amsler discusses a group of artifacts with DRI Executive Director Anna Dhody just prior to taping a segment for the *WTF?* series. (Anne Hoskins photograph.)

STEPPING UP TO SUPPORT THE CASTLES

If you spend time outdoors in Doylestown Borough, you have probably run into Chris Grebey. This self-professed “student of history” logs more steps in a day than most, and can often be spotted walking at a brisk pace with a wide smile throughout the grounds of Fonthill Castle and the neighboring streets she calls home.

We caught up with Chris Grebey on a beautiful fall morning and learned not only of her career as a business person, but as a professional archaeologist. Her interests are deep and varied, and she shares quite a few with Henry Mercer, making her a wonderful spokesperson for Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle. A true advocate of community involvement, Grebey believes that in good times, as well as turbulent ones, we can both lean on and offer support to friends, family and the greater community.

Chris Grebey likes to focus her energies where she can have an impact, and supporting the Bucks County Historical Society is important to her. She reminds us that we cannot assume that history and these landmarks of beauty are automatically taken care of by someone else. “So many people enjoy Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle every day, and financially supporting them, as well as the act of sharing experiences with others, is vitally important.” As she joyfully shares, “This is part of my daily routine and I am so lucky to have this in my life!”

What are some ways that you can help? Chris has a few ideas:

- Encourage friends and neighbors to visit the castles and explore with you
- Donate (maybe for the first time!) if you enjoy these grounds and historic landmarks
- Renew your annual membership
- Support the many year-round programs and special events
- Visit Fonthill Castle during the holidays (and remember to look for the pickles hidden on every tree. It’s her new family tradition!)

As we close in on the holiday season, Chris has “stepped up” in the community and encourages you to do the same!

Chris Grebey on the steps of Fonthill Castle



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: THOMAS SCHMITZ, MANAGER OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

How did you come to join the team at Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle?

I grew up in Montgomeryville, Pennsylvania just about 20 minutes from Doylestown. Growing up, I visited the Mercer Museum and would remember driving by Mercer's concrete castle as I was coming and going through town for sporting events, shopping, and family fun on the weekends.

After majoring in History at Penn State University and then interning at the Pennsylvania Military Museum as a Curatorial Assistant in 2019, I knew I wanted to work in museums. My experience at the military museum was largely in cataloging the collections, and there were ample opportunities for me to be involved in public-facing programs.

Two years later, as museums were still bouncing back (and the Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle was bouncing forward!) from COVID-19, I joined Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle's Guest Services team part-time. I was promoted to my role of Manager of Community Services in January 2023.

What do you enjoy most about your position?

My role allows me to engage with the public in so many different ways! I work with our part-time Guest Services, Gallery Guide, and Tour Guide teams and oversee daily operations and historical interpretation for guests visiting the Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle.

One thing I've grown to love is the different touch points a museum can have with the community. Those touch points can be taking a guided tour, learning something new from one of the museum's exhibitions, watching a movie outside the Mercer Museum with family and friends, or simply walking the grounds of Fonthill Castle on a quiet day and getting away from it all.

All of those touch points are about being a community place for people to have great experiences.

One of the things I'm most proud is the opportunity to foster a team that focuses on the guest first and wants to provide meaningful experiences. Every time I receive a positive review from guests, whether it's online, from a phone call, or in person, I am very proud of our team.

What is your favorite artifact in the collection and why?

Henry Mercer's collection of pre-industrial tools preserved at the Mercer Museum is well-known. One of my favorite artifacts is actually in Henry Mercer's home, Fonthill Castle. It is a print of the French Emperor Napoleon containing a "parody of his assumed titles." The print is right on Fonthill's main tour route, but can be missed among the many artifacts, books, and tiles. It hangs on the wall in Fonthill's Map Room, directly across from some of Mercer's military history, including volumes on the history of the French Revolution and Napoleonic eras.

In college, I studied this period of history, so every time I pass by the print, I imagine Mercer reading a book on the French Revolution 117 years after the deposing of the French king. I am reminded that when we speak with museum guests today about Fonthill Castle's construction in 1908, we are also talking about history that is now 117 years old!



ANNUAL FUND: YOUR DONATIONS MAKES A DIFFERENCE!



The Bucks County Historical Society operates two National Historic Landmarks celebrating the legacy of Henry Chapman Mercer in the heart of Bucks County, PA.

Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle are treasured historic sites that offer wonderful guest experiences and community programs, thought-provoking exhibitions, and access to rich archives and collections.

Did you know that admission and program fees cover only a portion of our annual operating expenses?

We depend on gifts from individuals like you, as well as corporations and foundations, to fund over half of our budget each year. Your donations do more than maintain the buildings, collections, and grounds. They support our thriving and devoted community. Our guests spend time in our local restaurants, shop in our local shops, and stay with our local lodging partners.

In 2023, Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle welcomed 94,000 people through admissions and program attendance alone. In 2024 we welcomed 127,000 people, and 2025 looks like another record-breaking year. Even more guests appreciate the free public access to the Fonthill Castle Woodlands and trails, or the sledding hill at the Mercer Museum.

Today, please consider supporting our mission of inspiring people through the legacy of Henry Mercer. When you support our museums, you champion two irreplaceable community pillars in the heart of Bucks County.



SAVE THE DATE: 2026 MERCER WIZARDING ACADEMY SUMMER CAMP REGISTRATION OPENING SOON!

Already thinking about summer camp plans for the kids? You're in luck!

The Education Team at the Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle are planning away and creating the most magical experiences for next summer's Mercer Wizing Academy.

Our week-long, half-day summer camps are filled with wonder and excitement. Our campers get "sorted" into their wizarding houses, prepare their special wands, and take captivating classes in *Potions*, *Care of Magical Creatures*, *Herbology*, and so much more.

This indoor/outdoor summer camp experience connects history, science, literature, and magic in a one-of-a-kind setting inside of the Mercer Museum and throughout its grounds.

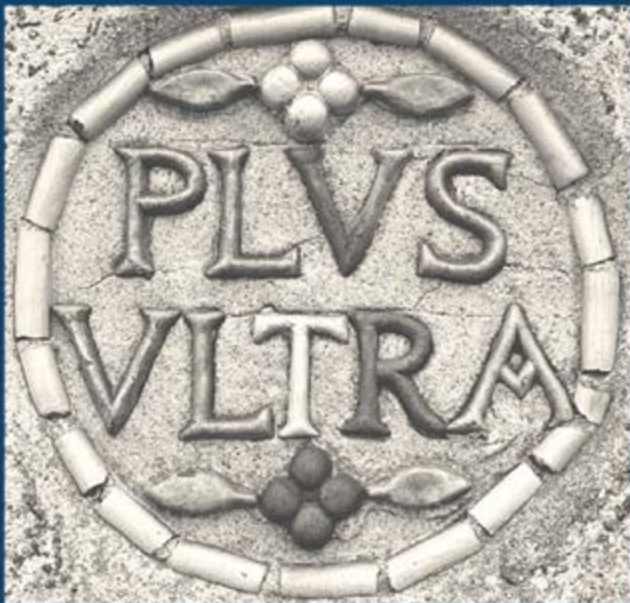
The Mercer Wizing Academy experience is suited for campers ages 7-12. Wizing dress is encouraged and fun will be had by all!

Camp registration opens in January 2026 at mercermuseum.org/wizardingcamp.





84 South Pine Street, Doylestown, PA 18901



PLUS ULTRA ... MORE BEYOND

Inspired by Henry Mercer's legacy of the Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle, members of the *Plus Ultra* Society create their own legacy by making a planned gift to the Bucks County Historical Society.

With a planned gift, you support our mission and leave a lasting statement for future generations.

Learn more at mercermuseum.org/plusultra