

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc.

2025 has been a year of growth and experimentation for Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc. (CFHS) with new and unique endeavors and successful renditions of fan-favorite events. With the official establishment of the Catoctin Furnace Friends Group (CFFG) in January, we've been able to attract even more public attention to our amazing site and build a Catoctin Furnace community around the globe.

VISITORSHIP

Catoctin Furnace saw over 51,691 visitors in 2025, including 119 "Stay Back in Time" overnight rentals at the Forgemaster's House!

EVENTS AND HIGHLIGHTS

Acquisition of the African American Cemetery

Following seven years of fundraising, CFHS was able to acquire the 1.921 acre cemetery in April. Descendants of Hanson Summers, an enslaved ironworker at Catoctin whose sister or niece was buried in the cemetery, attended. On December 30, 2025, CFHS donated the cemetery to the State of Maryland as a gift to the citizens of Maryland from the historical society. A public transfer ceremony is planned for Saturday, February 28, 2026.

Restoration of the Hoke House

Painstaking restoration of the historic 1820 Hoke House has brought this log structure back to its original form (albeit with a lovely rear shed roof service wing containing a modern kitchen, laundry, and bath). The long process of restoration began with archaeological mitigation and was informed by review of historic photos, oral histories, completion of historic structures report, paint and plaster analyses, dendrochronology, and exploratory demolition of modern additions.

Stabilization of the Ironmaster's Mansion

An NPS semi quincentennial grant is funding stabilization of the Ironmaster's Mansion in time for the 2026 commemoration. Removal of fencing and opening the site to visitors, a long term goal, now within sight!

Restoration of the F.W. Fraley General Merchandise Store

During November 2025, Frederick County's Board of Zoning Appeals gave the green light to CFHS for restoration of the interior of the store with rewiring, HVAC, etc. planned for 2026.

Pole Banners

As part of ongoing traffic calming initiatives, CFHS designed and installed banners on utility poles throughout the village utilizing generous funding from the Delaplaine Foundation.

Black History Month Celebration at Mountain Elks Lodge, February 20th

Rhonda Tessier's program about African American labor at Catoctin Furnace attracted a large turnout with many younger attendees, thanks to engagement with local high schools. Rhonda serves as the liaison between CFHS and AARCH.

Maryland Iron Festival, May 17th and 18th

Many visitors and vendors reported that this Maryland Iron Festival was the best thus far! Parking for volunteers/musicians/vendors at the Victory Tabernacle was a success and Chris & Laura did a wonderful job in the general store selling 79 T shirts and many other items. Preston & Billy were perfect hosts in the busy beer & wine area. The iron pour was fantastic, and the crowd enjoyed Dominic's narration. Dominic & Makala did a great job planning the festival and making sure that everything was on schedule and in order! We also had great weather! The arrival of a fleet of Model T automobiles was a hit. Congratulations and thanks to all our wonderful volunteers and supporters! See you on May 16 & 17, 2026!

AARCH Luncheon at Museum of the Ironworker, May 21st

Rhonda Tessier arranged a luncheon and continues to do a fantastic job coordinating AARCH and CFHS. One outcome of this meeting: CFHS now hosts an AARCH information and merchandise table in the F.W. Fraley Store.

Inaugural Music at the Museum, June 13th

The first of its kind, *Music at the Museum* featured the **Hot Furnace Band** and a selection of food trucks. Great music, food, company, and weather meant it was a memorable evening in the village.

International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC)

One of 10 museums within the United States, CFHS and the Museum of the Ironworker completed a three-year project entitled **Addressing the Silences: Museums Reflect, Correct, and Transform to Foster Social Cohesion**. Partnering with the Catoctin Furnace Friends Group of descendants, CFHS accomplished board parity and facilitated acquisition of the cemetery and transfer to DNR to be co-managed by the descendants.

Juneteenth Commemoration, June 19th

Commemoration began with a program at Catoctin Mountain Park led by National Park Service interpretive staff and NPS/CFHS Pohanka Intern Anne Bolenbaugh. Weather forced the program indoors, but guests were able to enjoy the visitor center exhibits. In the village, a procession to the African American Cemetery Interpretive Trail overlook was followed by a reading of the 271 names of Catoctin's skilled enslaved ironworkers, bell ringing, and placement of a wreath at the "Return of Names" panel by Dean Evangelista and Tyrone Van Echo, scouts from Scouting America Thurmont Troop 270. The scouts also placed wreaths at the two forensic facial reconstructions in the Museum of the Ironworker. The day continued with remarks by AARCH President Will Graham and unveiling of the VR reconstruction of the slave quarters at Catoctin Furnace, funded in part by a HCWHA mini grant. Julie El-Taher of the Thurmont Lions Club

provided refreshments. A vespers service in historic Harriet Chapel brought the commemoration to a close.

Play Music on the Porch Day, August 30th

This is a worldwide event and 2025 was the second year CFHS and the **Hot Furnace Band** participated. Here is a link to the event page: <https://playmusicontheporchday.com/> Thank you to Ken Brink and the Hot Furnace Band for presenting wonderful bluegrass music and bringing music back to the F.W. Fraley store. This will continue to be an annual event in Catoctin Furnace.

Inaugural Catoctin Furnace Living History Festival, September 11th – 14th

The production of *Iron Will* was an immense success, bringing more than 252 attendees to the performances. Based on sales data, the audience included visitors from all over the United States: Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, D.C., Pennsylvania, New York, and Texas! Audience enthusiasm prompted CFHS to plan a reprise, and the Living History Festival will become part of the Maryland Iron Festival with more performances of *Iron Will* on May 14-17, 2026.

HCWHA GeoTour Kick-off, September 19th

The Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area selected Catoctin Furnace as a site in the 3-county wide “250 GeoTour.” According to the Geocaching website, 260 participants have found our geocache already! Have you?

Fallfest 2025, October 10th and 11th

A very successful Fallfest resulted in excellent apple butter. This annual event included blacksmithing demonstrations, tours of the site, and artisanal wares for sale by talented vendors.

Spirits of the Furnace, October 18th

This year’s production marked 25 years of *Spirits of the Furnace*! We had a great turnout for both visitors and volunteers. Once again, the sold out event allowed 75 guests to experience village history by lantern light.

Traditional Village Christmas, December 6th

Once again, CFHS celebrated the holidays with our signature wreath decorating. This year, more than 300 event attendees enjoyed caroling by the Catoctin High School Tri-M Honors Society as well as colonial tea tastings, artisan vendors, hot mulled wine, blue grass music by the *Hot Furnace Band*, a bake sale, blacksmithing, signature German food, site tours, and a visit from Belsnickel!

Museums by Candlelight, December 13th

More than 60 visitors braved the weather and came to Catoctin Furnace during this annual county-wide event. Children and adults enjoyed creating and decorating punched tin ornaments.

SELECTED SPECIAL TOURS/VISITORS

- Small Museum Association bus tour, including a visit to the site, museum, and wine tasting; 22 guests
- Lucy School, Middletown, Maryland Tour for 7th & 8th social studies class students; 18 guests
- JHU genetics graduate student tour and seminar; 22 guests
- UK travel agents group tour; 12 guests
- Fourth grade social studies class from Friends Meeting School, Ijamsville; 14 guests
- Destination Gettysburg/Visit Frederick FAM; 3 guests
- Northeast Campground Owners Association Tour; 37 guests
- Buckingham's Choice Bus Tour; 18 guests
- Dickinson College First Year Seminar; 12 students plus staff
- University of Maryland School of Law; 8 guests
- Hood College Center for Coastal and Watershed Studies tour; 12 guests
- New Midway/Woodsboro Elementary School history club; 6 guests
- Buckingham's Choice; 6 guests
- Journalist tour: 2 guests (keep an eye out for the forthcoming write-up March 2026)

GRANT SUCCESSES

African American Heritage Preservation Program (AAHPP) – to acquire the African American Cemetery and expand the African American Cemetery Interpretive Trail

NEH – Expanded and Enhanced Juneteenth Commemoration at historic Catoctin Furnace (Note: Notice of termination received 4 3 2025) – Losing this grant was a huge disappointment. We will continue to pursue funding for an enhanced Juneteenth Commemoration in 2026.

TRIPP Advertising – July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 - Continuing and Strengthening Momentum

TRIPP Development – Updating and reprinting the immensely popular Iron Road brochure in time for the Semi quincennial

HCWHA Mini Grant – Virtual Reconstruction of the Slave Quarters at Catoctin Furnace

Maryland State Arts Council - Presenting and Touring grant – Music at the Maryland Iron Festival

FY 2024 Delaplaine Foundation grant – Proceeding with Caution: Implementation of Traffic Calming Recommendations for Signage in historic Catoctin Furnace

Maryland Humanities SHINE grant - Strengthening the Humanities Investment in Nonprofits for Equity

Thurmont Lions Club

NEH – Museum Programming Support

MHAA - Cemetery Interpretation: Honoring the Ancestors

Visit Frederick - Maryland Iron Festival sponsorship

Delaplaine Foundation - Year Three - The Successful Completion of Proceeding with Caution - 21st Century Safety on an 18th Century Roadway

PRESS

We were incredibly lucky to be featured in multiple publications, such as the MD250 Maryland Mosaic booklet, *Frederick Magazine*, *The Frederick News-Post*, and the Delaplaine Foundation's *The Greater Good*.

Catoctin Furnace was also nominated for **Best Museum** in *The Frederick News-Post*'s annual "Best of the Best" competition. After multiple rounds of voting, CFHS and the Museum of the Ironworker were chosen as the #2 best museum (#1 is the amazing Civil War Medicine Museum)! Thank you to everyone who took the time to vote for CFHS!

CF was featured in an online article as part of a new "Upper Potomac/Western MD" UGRR content by **Visit Maryland**

Living History Festival featured in **72 Hours** feature article by Erin Jones

Gateway article – huge thank you to Vickie Grinder for including Catoctin Furnace in the autumn issue

MISCELLANEOUS HIGHLIGHTS

Staffing Updates

While we said goodbye to Dominic Curcio and Makala Harrison earlier this summer, we have since welcomed new additions to our staff: Hanah Romsburg, Julia Aldred, Sierra Dicks, and Nicholas Braxton. Hanah, a former intern at CFHS, returned to Catoctin Furnace after working in cultural resource management on the West Coast. Julia, Sierra, and Nick are members of the Maryland Corps/Service Year Option Class 3.

PROGRAMS

Rob Wanner - Artifacts from the Carty-Miller House

At the Carty-Miller house, the EAC/A team excavated four 5x5' units within the dwelling. The house was built in 1820 and occupied until very recently. Rob noted that there was much less disturbance from plastic and other 20th century materials compared to findings at the Forgerman's House. Over 30,000 artifacts were found and many suggest that at least one of the families that lived in the house was of a high socioeconomic status. The artifacts are currently being washed and catalogued.

African American Cemetery acquisition complete

It took 7 years, but we did it! The deed was recorded on 6/5/2025 / Book 17373, pp. 1-6. The CFFG will sign an affiliated foundation agreement with DNR and we will celebrate this land transfer to DNR with a public event on February 28, 2026.

Catoctin Furnace Friends Group (CFFG): Membership is now open, with individual and family memberships available. Anyone who is interested in becoming a member can contact

Crystal Emory at prescffriends@gmail.com. The Friends group is writing several grants for preservation and conservation of the cemetery.

Juvenile Service Education Program (JSEP) and DNR – Victor Cullen students worked with Billy Claggett throughout the spring and summer, learning new skills and making plans for their future once they are released. Here is an example – Billy gave them a day long hands on lesson on how to conduct a home inspection so they could learn about plumbing, heating, electricity, etc. We are thrilled to have this Heritage at Work program at Catoctin Furnace.

Oral history update – In June, Pat Weddle sat down with Anne Comer in June and recorded an amazing interview recounting her memories of the F.W. Fraley Store. It is a fascinating account of the past! It is the 13th oral history uploaded to our website...check it out!

Rediscovery of the 18th Century Quarters for the Enslaved at Catoctin Furnace: A 21st Century Technology Reveal - Elizabeth Comer presented the latest research about the slave quarters at Catoctin Furnace, including a Phase IA archaeological reconnaissance, surface survey, and ground penetrating survey (GPR). The presentation drew an audience of 24 to the Thurmont Regional Library! The results of this investigation informed the virtual reconstruction of the quarters, as well as recommendations for future treatment of the site.

NPS Catoctin Mountain Park Cultural Landscape Documentation - Iron Industry Resources.

CFHS is helping the UPenn team on this important project that will build upon our 2014 Lidar survey of collier hearths.

Establishment of the Catoctin Furnace Theatre Program

We are thrilled to share the news that Reiner Prochaska has agreed to serve as the Artistic Director for the new Catoctin Furnace Theatre program. During 2026, three major theatre productions will be staged – *Iron Will*, *Spirits of the Furnace*, and *A Revolutionary Christmas*. The idea of an outdoor theatre at Catoctin Furnace was part of the 1970 Master Plan for the site and we are thrilled that, 50 years on, it is becoming a reality!

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026...

Gettysburg College Civil War Institute Pohanka Internship Interviews, February 12-13 and February 16-19

Cemetery Transfer Ceremony – Saturday, February 28 (TBD)

Small Museum Association Conference, February 16-18

America 250! History Fair, Sunday, April 26

Maryland Iron Festival and Outdoor Theatre Performance of *Iron Will*, May 14, 15, 16 & 17

Descendant Reunion, May 15, 16, & 17

Maryland House and Garden Pilgrimage – National Road- Saturday, June 13

Civil War Institute co-led tour with NPS and CFHS “From Iron Furnace to Underground Railroad: Catoctin Mountain, Catoctin Furnace, and the Liminality of Freedom in Borderland Maryland,” Tuesday, June 16, 1-5 pm

Juneteenth Commemoration, Friday, June 19

Fourth at the Furnace, July 3 & 4

Fallfest, Friday, October 9 and Saturday, October 10

Spirits of the Furnace, Saturday, October 17

Traditional Village Christmas, Saturday, December 5

A Revolutionary Christmas, in coordination with Landmarks Foundation, Friday, December 4 at 7 pm, Saturday, December 5 at 2 pm and 7 pm, & Sunday, December 6 at 2 pm, 2026

Museums by Candlelight: Holidays and Historic Sites, Saturday, December 12