

HEART OF THE

CIVIL WAR

HERITAGE AREA

YEAR-IN-REVIEW

July 2025 - June 2026

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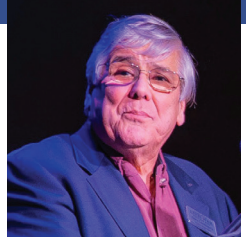
OLIVIA PETERSON, Heritage Area Assistant

ELIZABETH PAUL, Newcomer House Manager



Elizabeth Scott Shatto, Executive Director



Gary Candelaria, President

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD

Remember what it was like to be 20 years old, on the brink of turning 21 with all that the unfolding of a new age promises? We're there! Much like the nation, now that the milestone of the 250th birthday has been reached, we look forward to working with partners to realize our vision–to be a place where "a vast and diverse audience engages meaningfully with the past and present...carrying their experiences here into the future."

Importantly, on the eve of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area's (HCWHA) 20th anniversary (July 13, 2026), a new cap on Maryland Heritage Areas Authority funding was signed into law, making it possible for state heritage area grants to come closer to meeting the need expressed by grant applicants from the state's 13 certified heritage areas. In the HCWHA, we are grateful to all who voiced support for the new statute, the many bipartisan sponsors, and especially Senator Paul Corderman, who introduced the bill in the Senate. The Washington County Community Lobbying Coalition, with encouragement from the Hagerstown-Washington County CVB, was an essential partner in this achievement.

This sets the stage for a range of heritage area possibilities. With you–our friends and partners–we look forward to new ways of sharing stories that help our visitors from near and far see themselves in history. Together, we will invite people to experience history as detective work that deepens our understanding of the past. And we will build relationships that strengthen our communities and the nation, now and in the future.

Thank you for helping us reach this milestone, and for sharing our vision for the future.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Scott Shatto
Executive Director

Gary Candelaria
President of the Board

P.S. *The new cap on MHAA funding allows, but doesn't promise, more grant dollars for heritage area projects. Soon, we'll let you know ways to encourage activation of the new funding cap.*

MARYLAND HERITAGE AREAS AUTHORITY (MHAA) **PROJECT GRANTS**

The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) Grant Program is a source of funding designed to assist and encourage the **preservation of historical**, **archeological**, **natural**, and **cultural resources** and support **economic development** through heritage tourism within heritage areas certified by MHAA.

A total of $597,588 was awarded in July 2025, supporting HCWHA and projects undertaken by the following:

- Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc.
- City of Frederick
- National Museum of Civil War Medicine, Inc.
- The African American Resources-Cultural and Heritage Society, Inc.
- The Mayor and Common Council of the City of Westminster
- The Washington County Historical Society, Inc.
- Town of Keedysville



The National Museum of Civil War Medicine received an FY26 MHAA Project Grant to support exhibit upgrades.

HCWHA **MINI-GRANTS**

The HCWHA administers an annual mini-grant round, **supporting non-capital heritage tourism-based projects in the region**.

A total of $25,000 was awarded to the following partners in January 2026:

- C&O Canal Trust on behalf of Canal Towns Partnership
- Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, Inc.
- Douglas G. Bast Museum of History and Preservation, Inc. DBA Boonsborough Museum of History
- Sgt. Lawrence Everhart Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution
- The Union Mills Homestead
- Thurmont Historical Society
- Town of New Windsor
- Washington County Historical Society
- Washington County Historical Trust, Inc.



An FY26 mini-grant funded this interpretive panel at the Union Mills Homestead.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE GRANT AWARDS, VISIT HEARTOFTHECIVILWAR.ORG/STAKEHOLDERS/GRANTS-OTHER-BENEFITS/

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The mission of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area is to–with our partners–preserve and promote the historic sites, towns, cultural landscapes, and diverse stories in Carroll, Frederick, and Washington County, Maryland.

Working with our partners and assisting them in the accomplishment of their own missions is a key component of what heritage area staff do every day. We meet organizations where they are: remarkable collections in need of cataloguing, historic facades in need of restoration, century-old roofs in need of replacement, stories in need of interpretation. We help partners find solutions by making introductions to experts, connecting projects with funding sources, and talking organizations large and small through their next steps.

This past year Executive Director Elizabeth Shatto assisted Mt. Zion AME Church in Knoxville with their application for an African American Heritage Preservation Program Grant. When Rose Hill Manor Park & Museum needed a conservator for a hearse, she already had the experience to provide guidance. And when the AARCH Society needed someone to sit in on interviews for a new Heritage Center Manager, they knew they could call on Liz.

Heritage tourism depends on strong partnerships. This assistance doesn't always get the headlines project grant awards draw, though it often results in funding, and the work is no less important.



Andrew Chamberlain, an expert in historic interiors, discusses the Durbin House renovation project with Abby Gruber, Director of Recreation and Parks for the City of Westminster.

TESTIMONIALS

"As the Director of Recreation and Parks for the City of Westminster, I have firsthand experience with the immense dedication, expertise, and guidance the Heart of the Civil War team brings to community preservation... From the earliest planning stages of the Durbin House renovation, HCWHA provided the strategic insight and technical assistance necessary to navigate a complex historical restoration. Their staff did not just offer resources; they offered a collaborative partnership, helping us honor the rich history of Westminster while creating a functional, beautiful space for our community to enjoy today."

ABBY GRUBER
Director of Recreation and Parks for the City of Westminster

"HCWHA connected us to the Frederick County US Semiquincentennial Commission and to Maryland Humanities, which selected Frederick Book Arts Center to host the traveling exhibition, 'Revolutionary Maryland.' Introductions to other partners, like the AARCH Society, are paving the way for innovative cultural heritage collaborations. The HCWHA connection introduces new audiences to our exhibitions, talks and hands-on opportunities related to the 'art of the book,' both historic and contemporary."

CASEY SMITH, PHD
Executive Director, Frederick Book Arts Center

"They understand that preserving history requires more than historians. It requires different perspectives, experiences, relationships and voices to help ensure the stories we preserve and share reflect the full richness of our communities and the people who shaped them."

TEREANCE MOORE
Tereance Moore Consulting



GeoTour launch event at Exploration Commons at 50 East in Westminster.

PROJECTS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Partners, supporters, and elected officials celebrate the GeoTour earning a Maryland Preservation Award.

HCWHA US 250 GEOTOUR LAUNCHED TO ACCOLADES

On Sept. 19, 2025 the HCWHA US 250 GeoTour was launched to a packed audience of geocachers. Well over 100 attendees from across the country crowded into Westminster Library's Exploration Commons for the event.

The GeoTour has had the desired impact: resulting in more than 5,600 visits to our historic sites, towns, cities, and museums, driving heritage tourism to preserve and promote these special places and their diverse stories.

In 2026, HCWHA's work on the GeoTour was recognized by the Maryland Historical Trust's 51st Annual Maryland Preservation Awards with the Excellence in Public Programming and Exhibits award. HCWHA and our partners celebrated the award on May 20, 2026 at the Frederick Visitor Center.

HCWHA US 250 GEOTOUR BY THE NUMBERS (as of July 2026)

20 GEOCACHE LOCATIONS **5677** TOTAL LOGGED VISITS
686 GEOCACHING ACCOUNTS **31** STATES **6** COUNTRIES

MAIN STREET CONFERENCE

At the October 2025 Maryland Main Streets Conference in Easton, HCWHA Executive Director Elizabeth Scott Shatto and Advisory Council member Becky Axilbund, who is the Middletown Main Street Manager, joined with Ariane Hofstedt, Director of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program to offer "The Maryland Heritage Areas Program and Main Streets Working Together!"



HERITAGE AREA STAFF PRESENT AT SMALL MUSEUM ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Heritage area staff led two separate sessions at the Small Museum Association Conference in York, Pennsylvania in February, 2026. Elizabeth Shatto presented with her son, Scott Shatto, "Climate and Changing Approaches to Museum Programming." Emily Huebner presented on geocaching and the GeoTour to a packed audience and fielded follow up conversations with attendees in the weeks following the session.



Elizabeth Shatto and Scott Shatto at the SMA Conference.



Emily Huebner presents at the SMA Conference.

HCWHA VISITOR CENTER AT THE NEWCOMER HOUSE

Now in its **16th year**, the historic Newcomer House on Antietam National Battlefield continues to serve as the heritage area's Visitor and Exhibit Center, often the first stop for battlefield visitors from across the country. At the end of last season, longtime manager Rachel Nichols retired after years of diligently providing engaging programs and recruiting volunteers for the House. New manager Elizabeth Paul, a retired teacher with many ties to local history, has continued that work.

This restored home is the only private dwelling on the battlefield regularly open to visitors. A robust volunteer corps greets visitors and orients them to the history of the house, battlefield, and the many remarkable sites within the three-county heritage area.

The House hosts well over 300 visitors a month when open six days a week (June through September), and half that when only open on weekends (April, May, October, November). Over 400 volunteer hours have been documented in the first four months of the 2026 season, ensuring the House is open to the public.

The Newcomer House Facebook page now has nearly 1,000 followers and is used regularly to promote not only its own programs but other events at the battlefield and throughout the heritage area.



On May 30, 2026, the 3rd US Regular Infantry presented military living history near the Newcomer House, including a skirmish demonstration. The program was part of an interpreted hike of the Middle Bridge area of the battlefield.

HCWHA BROCHURE UPDATE

This past spring, the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area unveiled an updated brochure, which underscores that the heritage area has something to offer every type of visitor in every season. Distributed strategically, the new brochure is part of the travel packet we provide to people who want to know more about planning a visit to the heritage area. Since implementing the spring advertisement campaign through Google, PMax, and Meta, it has generated nearly 1,000 requests for travel packets a month.

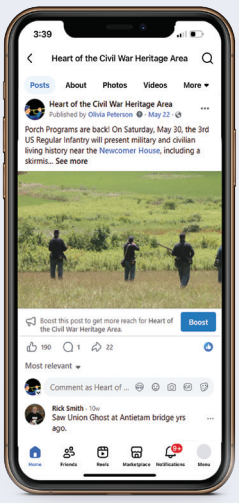


TOP PERFORMING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

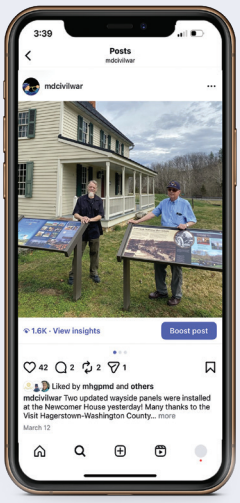
CURRENT FOLLOWER COUNT

FACEBOOK
3,682 followers

INSTAGRAM
2,347 followers



May Porch Program announcement featuring a skirmish demonstration.



New wayside installation at the historic Newcomer House.



Casa Loma, atop Braddock Mountain, was a tour highlight. The home, with its Spanish Revival details, looms large. An early asylum for the sick and later home to one of Frederick's most prominent families, today's owners gave visitors a glimpse of the process underway to restore the grandeur of the property.

MARYLAND HOUSE & GARDEN PILGRIMAGE

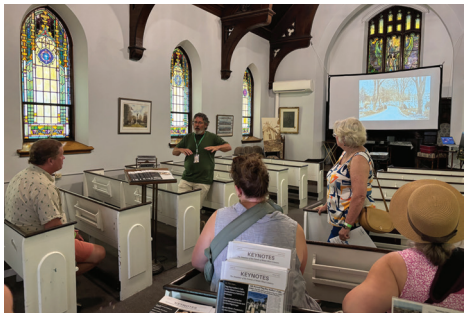
Eight spectacular Frederick County historic stops, loosely aligned along the historic **National Road, a National Scenic Byway,** opened to the public on June 13 for the Maryland House & Garden Pilgrimage (MHGP).

Tour co-chairs Becky Axilbund and Beth Gura curated a suite of homes and gardens as a contribution to local programs for the nation's 250th anniversary, and to raise awareness and a generous donation from MHGP for the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area. In addition to exclusive access to private properties, visitors experienced scenic farmland, mountain landscapes, and lively Main Street communities, as well as lesser known aspects of the Monocacy National Historic Landmark and the rediscovery of landscape architect Stuart Haller, one of Maryland's most prominent landscape designers who made his home and the focus of much of his work in Frederick County.

We are grateful to all the property owners and 100+ volunteers, including Master Gardeners, who helped make the tour a success.



Hood College President Debbie Ricker and guest in the East Cottage garden.



Mt. Olivet Cemetery's Chris Haugh spoke about the Garden Cemetery movement.



Stunning arrangements and guide books for the seven Maryland tours greeted pilgrims.



Donning an MHGP America 250th anniversary scarf, a visitor chats with home owner Leigh Anne Thompson at Casa Loma.



The President's residence, East Cottage at Hood College, graced with an expansive and inviting wrap-around porch.



Middletown Welcome Center, a past MHGP special project and MHAA grantee, was the first stop for guests in 2026.

STRATEGIC PLAN **PROGRESS**

HCWHA is four years into a six year strategic plan. We have exceeded our goals the four areas identified by the plan: Product Development, Building Partnerships, Regional Identity, and Organizational Development.

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:



Geocachers gather to redeem their GeoTour passports for a Geocoin at the Frederick Visitor Center.

GOAL: Ensure that experiences in the heritage area are appealing and welcoming to diverse audiences that reflect future visitation trends

MD 250 Fellow, Kitri Post, undertook original research into the diverse history of each GeoTour stop to write each entry's geocache page. Crossroads of War and Freedom website hosts robust 19th century history resources.



Newcomer House volunteer training ahead of the 2026 season.

GOAL: Facilitate/support platforms and methods to connect and weave assets of heritage area together into cohesive experiences and products

Contributed an essay to a Maryland Humanities History Day resource for educators and students. Launched the three-county US 250 GeoTour.



HCWHA Board and Advisory Council try a hands-on printing press at the Frederick Book Arts Center with Casey Smith, FBAC Executive Director.

GOAL: Align the human resources of the heritage area with its future needs

After the retirement of longtime Newcomer House Manager Rachel Nichols, hired Elizabeth Paul in partnership with Visit Hagerstown. Hosted two remote Goucher College interns over January term.



HCWHA staff, Board, and family set up and clean up a portion of the 23,000 luminaries for the Antietam Memorial Illumination.

GOAL: Develop and implement a plan for sustainability for the heritage area

Continued annual Legacy Leaders Circle event; Legacy Leaders include HCWHA in their estate planning. Participated in the Combined Federal Campaign. Successfully advocated in Annapolis to lift the cap on heritage area funding.



Sponsored by David Guiney, an HCWHA map was installed at the Myersville McDonald's as a strategic travel hub.



Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area: Strategic Plan Update 2022-2028

Funded by the RMC Rural Maryland Council

SCAN TO VIEW AND DOWNLOAD OUR STRATEGIC PLAN.

GOAL: Support capacity building through technical assistance for heritage and cultural tourism organizations in the heritage area

HCWHA hosted in-person and virtual grant workshops for mini-grants and project grants. Introduced partners to resources to preserve and develop heritage tourism products.



Refreshed waysides installed at the Newcomer House with Bruce Kaiser and David Guiney.

GOAL: Examine how digital technologies can help the heritage area address the future needs of audiences in sustainable and relevant ways

Strategically deployed online marketing, resulting in an exponential increase in interest in HCWHA travel packets. New heritage area website recently launched and frequently updated to introduce visitors to all the region has to offer.



HCWHA Annual Meeting 2025 featured a Stump the Audience activity highlighting objects from the Carroll Farm Museum.

GOAL: Provide support for vulnerable collections and sites

Heritage area staff consults one on one with historic sites and museums regarding their collections challenges, providing access to free and low cost tools. Active in local discussions about future proofing collections storage among local repositories.



MHT Preservation Award presentation for the US 250 GeoTour.

GOAL: Support and coordinate the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the United States across the heritage area

Hosted a MD 250 Fellow to assist in coordinating heritage area 250th gathering. Held regular 250th Convenings for partners to meet, plan, and share resources.



New HCWHA brochure.

GOAL: Engage local residents in knowing, preserving, and promoting the Heritage Area themselves

Partnered with local distillery Pathfinder to offer talks in Boonsboro that highlight the region's history and to help locals get to know the heritage area. Presented with partners at similar live events throughout the state.

WHAT DOES HCWHA DO BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE?

A year ago, we posed the question above to supporters. The following response was characteristic of the answers that came our way:

BUILDING BRIDGES

"The HCWHA acts as a fantastic collaborative hub, partnering with local governments, historical societies, museums, and tourism boards. This means they don't just promote themselves; they amplify the work of everyone in the heritage community, **making the entire region's historical offerings stronger and more accessible**."

Your support makes our bridge-building possible. Without it, $597,588 in direct FY26 grant dollars from MHAA may have eluded local nonprofits and government entities. That's because eligibility for these grants requires a viable certified heritage area. Thank you for ensuring we continue to activate strong, resilient communities.

However, to sustain our work in FY27, your annual fund contributions are needed more than ever. Revenue sources we enjoyed in the past, such as the Combined Federal Campaign, no longer exist. Yet, an increasing number of groups turn to our program for technical assistance, grant services, and more.

WAYS TO GIVE

Outright donations made online or by check **are always welcome**! We can facilitate other approaches, too. In all instances, we recommend consultation with your tax advisor, but you may also consider:

- Does your employer offer a matching gift program? That's a great way to double the impact of your contribution.
- Donors over age 70 ½ may make a tax-free Qualified Charitable Distribution from their IRA, directly to HCWHA (this may also satisfy Required Minimum Distributions).
- We also welcome contributions to our Agency Fund at the Community Foundation of Washington County, a fund building for long term sustainability of HCWHA.



Sunday Morning at Savannah's in New Windsor was the setting for our Historic Preservation Month and Legacy Leaders Circle celebration in May. Pictured are Elizabeth Scott Shatto, Mayor Kevin Cornick, host Savannah Mitchell, Al Martin, Amy Yingling, Gary Candelaria, Carroll County Commissioner Tom Gordon III, and Mallory Huard.

Our Legacy Leaders Circle is widening and you are invited!

No matter where you are on life's path, this emerging community welcomes you to consider ways you may help provide for HCWHA's future. Let's talk about options to include HCWHA in your estate planning.

GIVE TO HCWHA TODAY!

heartofthecivilwar.org/support/donate/

JOIN OUR LEGACY TODAY!

heartofthecivilwar.org/support/legacy-giving-info/

Thank you to all who contributed to our success in the last fiscal year, July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026.

LEADERSHIP GIFTS OF $500 AND MORE

Diane Boettcher
Matching gift from Microsoft via Benevity
Gary and Brianna Candelaria
Brian and Renée Huard
Mallory Huard
Al Martin
Kristen McMasters
George Messner
Tom Riford
Elizabeth Scott Shatto
Dan Spedden
Mike and Marlene Young
Dave Ziedelis

GIFTS OF $499-$100

Richard and Joanne Baum
Donald and Susan Campbell
In honor of Mallory Huard
Captain Bender's Tavern
Jim and Linda Clement
John and Katie Fieseler
Dennis Frye
Kathryn Hauser and Shaun Donnelly
Dennis Kubicki
Robert A. McCune
Pathfinder Farm Distillery Tasting Room and Cocktail Bar
Alyssa Poulin
Barry Salisbury
James Shriver
Richard Turner

GIFTS UP TO $99

Anonymous
Andrew Chamberlain
Emily Huebner
Lisa Macurak
Winona Peterson
Christina Martinkosky
Kitri Post
Martha (Babs) and Robert Savitt
Peter Sumner
In honor of Robyn Sumner
Barbara Ware
Caylee Winpigler

DONATIONS MADE IN HONOR OF RACHEL NICHOLS

Carla Bussard
Gary and Brianna Candelaria
Jim and Linda Clement
Timothy and Vernell Doyle
Jane Edwards
Carroll Keyfauver
Skip Miller
Kathy Rhoades
Tom Riford
Saida Russell
Londa Starliper
James Stribling
Nancy Troup
Rob and Kelley Villers

SPECIAL THANK YOU

to all of the donors that made contributions totaling more than $1,200 to support the continued maintenance of the HCWHA US 250th GeoTour that launched in FY26!

UNRESTRICTED GRANTS AND MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Carroll County Economic Development and Carroll County Tourism
City of Frederick
City of Hagerstown
City of Westminster
US Semiquincentennial Commission of Frederick County, Maryland
Hagerstown-Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau
Maryland House and Garden Pilgrimage
Tourism Council of Frederick County

RESTRICTED GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Maryland Heritage Areas Authority
Kristen McMasters
Robyn Sumner

As fiscal sponsor, the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area administered grants from Frederick County, Tourism Council of Frederick County, and the Maryland Two Fifty Once in a Generation grant.

MAJOR IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

Antietam Institute
Antietam National Battlefield
Braddock Heights Community
Don Branch
Carroll County Beekeepers
Google Grants
David Guiney
Hagerstown-Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau
Jacob Rohrbach Inn, Chris and Amy Vincent
John and Christine Milleker
Mark Neuberger
McDonald's (Myersville, MD)
Middletown Valley Volunteer Fire Department
Newcomer House Volunteers
Wakefield Valley Park Event Center, City of Westminster

LEGACY LEADERS CIRCLE

Bob and Diane Boettcher
Shuan and Cindy Butcher
Gary and Brianna Candelaria
Sylvia and Dennis Frye, *Founding Members*
Alfred E. Martin
Kristen McMasters, *Founding Member*
Robyn and Jonathan Sumner

FREDERICK COUNTY TOUR, MARYLAND HOUSE & GARDEN PILGRIMAGE

In addition to 100 volunteers who welcomed visitors on the day of the tour, the following made significant contributions to planning the tour and/or opening their homes for the day:

Becky Axilbund, Tour Chair
Beth Gura, Tour Chair
A Mother's Rest, Terrace Guest House
Khalid and Ruqaiya Asad
Beausoleil Farm
Will and Vanessa Djinis
Ami Gregor
Chris Haugh
Hood College
Linda Moran
Mt. Olivet Cemetery
Debbie Ricker, Ph.D.
Andrea Faris Roberts
Leigh Anne Thompson
Audrey Vargason







US 250 LIBERTY TREES PLANTED

HCWHA worked with local 250th groups to participate in the Maryland Liberty Tree project, a statewide initiative that planted Liberty Trees in every Maryland county and the City of Baltimore.

Many partners co-sponsored the project, including Preservation Maryland, the Maryland Center for History and Culture, the Department of Natural Resources - Maryland Forest Service, the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area (SMNHA), the Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition (MHAC), and the Maryland 250 Commission. Each tree is accompanied by a plaque that explains its significance.

The tulip poplars planted in 2026 are exact DNA descendants of the original Maryland Liberty Tree which lived on St. John's College campus in Annapolis from before the American Revolution until 1999, making it the oldest surviving Liberty Tree.

TOP: Washington County Liberty Tree dedication at City Park in Hagerstown.

MIDDLE: Frederick County Liberty Tree dedication at Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Frederick.

BOTTOM: Carroll County Liberty Tree dedication at the Strawbridge Shrine, near New Windsor.

This publication has been financed in part with State funds from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority but does not necessarily reflect its views or policies. The Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area is a 501 (c) 3 charitable organization. Gifts are tax-deductible in accordance with applicable law. A copy of the current financial statement is available on request. Documents and information under the Maryland Charitable Solicitations Act are available for the cost of postage and copies from the Maryland Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401 (240) 974-5534.

COVER ILLUSTRATION: South Mountain State Battlefield at Gathland State Park, intersected by the Appalachian Trail, is a popular dog-friendly hiking destination. Photo courtesy of Visit Frederick.

GET TO KNOW THE HEART OF THE CIVIL WAR HERITAGE AREA

The Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, Inc. (HCWHA), is an independent non-profit organization, certified by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA). As such, HCWHA's services include eligibility to compete for MHAA project grants extended to nonprofits and government agencies within our Carroll, Frederick, and Washington county boundaries.

MISSION – the heritage area's reason for existing.

The Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area–with its partners–preserves and promotes the historic sites, towns, cultural landscapes, and diverse stories in Carroll, Frederick, and Washington County, Maryland.

VISION – a future in which the Mission has been accomplished.

A vast and diverse audience engages meaningfully with the past and present in the HCWHA, carrying their experiences here into the future.

VALUES – standards we will not compromise in pursuing our Mission.

- **INTEGRITY:** of ourselves, of our organization, and of the resources.
- **WELCOMING:** of visitors, of residents, of diversity, and of varied viewpoints.
- **COMMITTED:** to responsive public service, to making a lasting difference, to the value and relevance of Civil War history.
- **INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE:** in all aspects from our governance to our staffing, from programming to partnerships.
- **CONNECTING:** partners, resources, information, assistance, visitors, residents, stories, experiences, and ideas.

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info@heartofthecivilwar.org

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