



Historic Shepherdstown & Museum

Letter From the President

Dear Friends of Historic Shepherdstown,

As we look forward to the arrival of spring, I am delighted to share several exciting updates from Historic Shepherdstown.

First and foremost, we are pleased to announce that our museum will reopen for the season on April 18th. We look forward to welcoming visitors back through our doors to explore the rich history that makes Shepherdstown and Jefferson County so special.

This season, we are especially proud to unveil new exhibits that highlight pivotal moments in our nation's story. Among them is the beautifully restored West Virginia 35-Star Flag, a powerful symbol of our statehood during the Civil War era. We are also featuring a compelling collection of Battle of Shepherdstown relics, offering visitors a closer look at the artifacts and personal stories connected to one of the region's most significant engagements.

We are equally thrilled to celebrate two outstanding members of our community. Historic Shepherdstown board member Donna Bertazzoni and long-time Rotary Club member, the late Peter Smith, have been named West Virginia History Heroes because of their work on the Bee Line March commemoration. Their dedication to preserving and promoting West Virginia's heritage exemplifies the very spirit of this recognition. We are deeply grateful for their contributions to our shared mission.

Looking ahead, we are also very excited to take part in activities commemorating the 250th anniversary of our nation. The upcoming celebrations of United States Semiquincentennial provide a meaningful opportunity to reflect on our country's founding ideals while highlighting the unique role Shepherdstown has played in the American story. We look forward to sharing more details about special programs and events in the months ahead.

Thank you for your continued support of Historic Shepherdstown. Your enthusiasm and generosity make it possible for us to preserve our past and share it with future generations. We hope to see you when we reopen on April 18th!

With warm regards,
Stephanie Unger

President, Historic Shepherdstown

2026 Speaker Series Lineup Underway

To open the Historic Shepherdstown Speaker Series, Dr. Ben Bankhurst, Associate Professor of History at Shepherd University, will be presenting a talk called "The Historical Memory of Frontier War in Twentieth-Century Shenandoah Family Histories" on Wednesday, April 15, at 7 p.m. in the auditorium of the Byrd Center for Congressional History and Education. The talk will address the privileged place that the era of white settlement on the eighteenth-century frontier has in the family lore of the Shenandoah Valley and central Appalachia. For the descendants of white colonizers, the arrival of their pioneer ancestors and the conquest and settlement of the region serve as a heroic origin story, rooting them to the land while simultaneously connecting them to the grand narrative of the nation's founding. Throughout the twentieth century, family historians with a connection to the region, whether resident or not, published hundreds of family histories celebrating their families' colonial lineage. Dr. Bankhurst will examine how white families, in the Valley and Central West Virginia, utilized genealogies anchored in the colonial or revolutionary periods to tie them to the land and, through the positive depiction of pioneer ancestors, counter demeaning narratives of the region and its people. Central to this process was the construction of often demeaning Native American stereotypes.

Because May is Historic Preservation month, I wanted to secure a preservation-related speaker. This topic is especially appropriate given historic preservation's essential role in shaping Shepherdstown in general and the Entler in particular. Erin Barnes, president and CEO of Main Street America, will be our speaker on May 13. The talk will be co-sponsored by the Potomac Valley Audubon Society. —Keith Alexander

All the presentations are scheduled to take place in the auditorium of the Byrd Center for Congressional History and Education.

2026 Historic Shepherdstown Membership Appeal



The appeal to current and lapsed members to renew their memberships is underway. Letters have been mailed with a return envelope to assist renewals – or you can go to the website to renew with a credit card – www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/historic-shepherdstowns-memberships.

Our goal is to complete the renewal process in time for all members to attend a special members reception on Friday, April 17 to mark the reopening of the museum and to celebrate the unveiling of a rare 35-star United States flag denoting when West Virginia became a state.

Historic Shepherdstown is also introducing a Business Sponsor program in 2026 for town and regional businesses to demonstrate their alignment with our mission and work. Businesses may contact Administrator Suprena Mills (304-876-0910 or hsc1786@gmail.com) for more information about sponsorship opportunities.

Thank You Business Sponsor



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Calendar Of Events

The Spring Opening Reception for Historic Shepherdstown Museum will be Friday, April 17, from 5 to 7 p.m. Weather permitting, the event will be held in the garden of the Entler Hotel.

The reception will mark the 43rd year of Historic Shepherdstown Museum. It first opened its doors in October 1983. This year's reception will be catered by Gypsy Soul. Historic Shepherdstown members will receive emailed invitations in March.

At the reception, members will be invited into the museum to get a first view of the redesigned first-floor foyer and additional new information about the Battle of Shepherdstown in the Civil War room on the third floor. The Museum purchased a 35-star flag in 2024, representing West Virginia's admittance to the Union. The Benedum Foundation has generously provided funds to have the flag conserved and displayed in the foyer. Our goal is to complete the installation before April 17. In addition, we have updated the "History of Shepherdstown" timeline panels that hang in the foyer and worked to make the space more inviting to visitors.

On Saturday, April 18, the museum will open to the public at 11 a.m. We are planning a ceremony to unveil the flag and other new exhibits, and a reception for townspeople.

Again this year, Historic Shepherdstown will be participating in both Earth Fest and the Back Alley Garden Tour and Tea. Both events are rain or shine.

Earth Fest, which is free to the public, will be held Saturday, May 2, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Morgan's Grove Park. We will have an information booth and items from our traveling trunk. There will be music throughout the day as well as Earth Day-related activities for children. Earth Fest is also pairing with Blue Ridge Arts and Crafts, so there will be dozens of vendors with handmade crafts for sale.

The Entler's garden will again be on the Back Alley Garden Tour. The event is scheduled for Saturday, May 16, and Sunday, May 17, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sponsored by the Community Club, the self-guided walking tour is a chance to visit some of the most beautiful gardens in Shepherdstown. Tickets are currently available online at https://www.shepherdstowncommunityclub.org/back-alley-garden-tour-tea/?utm_source=Tourism&utm_medium=Link&utm_campaign=Tourism.

Worth Saving: Jefferson County's Finest Early Center-Hall Town House Preserved on East German Street

A series of nine Historic Shepherdstown columns was featured in the *Shepherdstown Chronicle* throughout 2025. The column highlighted a Shepherdstown historic home's history and the current residents who are preserving its history. Unfortunately, the *Chronicle* ended publication after 34 years in December. What follows is the column that appeared in the final issue; it was written by Board Member Greg Coble, with the editorial and research assistance of Marelle Aherne and Terry Fulton.

The current owners of seven of the nine historic homes featured in this column arrived in Shepherdstown with Washington, DC backgrounds. This influx of talents, interests and motivations have served Shepherdstown's evolving personality and the preservation of the town's historic homes. Such is true of the early 1790s home at 204 East German Street and its owners Sue Kemnitzer, with a distinguished federal career, and late husband and noted DC preservation architect David.

In John Allen's *Uncommon Vernacular*, he describes what is known historically as both Wynkoop's Tavern and the Selby-Hamtramck House as the largest and most refined of Jefferson County's early center-hall town houses. Allen notes the paired chimneys on either gable as distinctive architectural features and the unusually generous lot size that enabled the house to be nearly fifty feet wide – creating an imposing presence.

The Kemnitzers were seeking a rural retreat when Washington neighbors John Shank and Joe Matthews, later proprietors of a fine antiques shop and home on West German Street, invited them to their nearby Maryland farm.

"Weekend visits with John and Joe lead us to the purchase of a small house in 1975 near Dam Number Four on the Maryland side of the Potomac, where we could enjoy the river, fish and hike. David learned it had been the home of a C&O canal engineer," Sue Kemnitzer shared.

In 1995, they moved to Shepherdstown into a 1910 wood frame home at 206 West High Street, featured in this column in October. Seeking a large brick home five years later, they purchased and began the restoration of the early 1790s home on lower German Street. Illustrating their meticulous approach, they hired nationally recognized historic paint consultant Matthew Mosca who identified paint layers and colors, confirming that the house had been painted only twice before. Mosca attributed this to when the house was built, the practice was to allow plaster to dry five years before being painted. Sue Kemnitzer said that it took four months to restore the plaster in the house. Wallpapers were also used, including noted 19th century designer Candace Wheeler's signature honey-bee design in the dining room.

The Kemnitzers restored the kitchen to preserve its historic look, inserting into the hearth a British-made AGA cast iron stove which uses a constant propane gas heat source. The kitchen was built as a separate brick structure to the rear of a log structure in the 1760s. It was not until around 1900 that the kitchen was connected structurally to the house. Of interest are a handsome still-existing brick six-seat outhouse (the women's side has four seats, including two for children) and an indestructible 1918 toilet in the second floor primary bathroom.

Cornelius Wynkoop had operated a tavern in the log structure from 1781, but there is evidence it had operated since the late 1760s. Wynkoop purchased the adjoining lot in 1792, at which time he demolished the log structure and constructed the present brick structure on the combined lots. Six generations of one family – all through the women of the Selby family and with different surnames – owned the house from 1810 until 1986.

Perhaps the most prominent resident was Colonel John Francis Hamtramck who commanded a regiment in the Mexican American War, was Indian agent to the Osage Nation, and married three times, his second to Eliza Clagett Selby of Shepherdstown in 1825, who died a few years later. He then married her younger sister Sarah Ellen Selby and served as mayor for four years beginning in 1850. When Hamtramck's father died at an early age and though his mother was alive, William Henry Harrison became his guardian. It is believed that the future President visited Hamtramck several times at the home.

Sue Kemnitzer had a distinguished federal government career, including 40 years at the National Science Foundation. In the 1970s, she was one of only two female budget examiners at OMB – the other being Ina Garten who created a culinary empire as the Barefoot Contessa. Kemnitzer focused on interior policy matters, playing a leading role in placing 140 million acres in Alaska into park and wildlife refuges, settling native claims and allowing the state to own public lands. She currently serves as chair of the Shepherdstown Water Board.

David Kemnitzer, who passed away in 2019, served as an architect on the construction of the Washington, DC Metro and worked with the State Department on design projects for foreign embassies. The firm he created – Kemnitzer, Reid and Haffler – specialized in historic preservation, including projects for the US Capitol, White House, Eisenhower Executive Office Building, and the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials. He began collecting architectural paper models as a child, amassing an important collection of 4,600 models of historic structures that he donated to the National Building Museum.

It is fair to say that the Kemnitzers have added to Shepherdstown's personality and preserved one of Shepherdstown's most imposing historic homes.



Sue Kemnitzer on the front porch of her historic home at 204 East German Street.