



2026 Grant Recipients of the Miller History Fund Announced

BALTIMORE, Md. (May 26, 2026) – The Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC) is honored to present the four winners of this year’s Thomas V. “Mike” Miller Jr. History Fund, re-granting \$200,000 in funding statewide to historical collections stewards in Maryland.

The Miller History Fund is made possible by an annually recurring allocation from the state’s Preservation of Cultural Arts Fund, proposed by late Senate President Emeritus Thomas V. “Mike” Miller Jr., for which the fund was renamed in 2021. Currently in its seventh year, this grant program has now invested over \$1,300,000 to 68 historical organizations throughout Maryland.

The program’s core objective is to build the capacity of organizations to care for historical collections and make them accessible and relevant to the public. This year’s cohort includes organizations from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, each bringing historical storytelling, interpretation, and preservation to the forefront in their respective communities and around the state.

In this Semiquincentennial year, the 2026 Miller History Fund honors the spirit of Maryland’s commemoration. While past awards ranged from \$10,000 to \$20,000, the 2026 Miller History Fund is awarding four (4) awards of \$50,000 each to support transformative projects. Among the award’s standard criteria of heritage value, clarity, relevancy, impact, expertise, and sustainability, this year’s applicants were also scored by their project’s connection to Maryland’s Semiquincentennial commemoration.

“By selecting a more focused group of awardees and increasing the size of each grant, we can achieve a deeper and more meaningful capacity-building impact,” explained MCHC President and CEO Katie Caljean. “This group of Miller History Fund awardees exemplify how these projects advance the goals of inclusive history and storytelling, an important tenant of Governor Moore’s Maryland 250 Executive Order.”

In a 2023 Executive Order, Governor Moore authorized the Maryland 250 Commission to develop an inclusive commemoration of Maryland’s many contributions to America’s 250 years—a statewide observance that recognizes all Marylanders’ journeys toward life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

A total of 34 applications were submitted for the 2026 Miller History Fund cycle, from 14 counties and Baltimore City. This was the second-largest number of applications received during the history of the program, only surpassed by those submitted in its

inaugural year in 2020, as the Maryland Pathways Grant Program. Proposals are evaluated competitively by third-party grant review panels made up of history and museum experts from Maryland and neighboring states.

“With so many applicants, it was a difficult yet rewarding process,” said Brian D. Lyles, Director of Annual Giving and Membership at MCHC and program administrator of the Miller History Fund. “All of the projects submitted demonstrate the wide range of history and history programs we have throughout Maryland. Each one represents a specific pathway into our collective past, present, and future.”

Funds granted this year will support archaeology at a Revolutionary-era furnace in Western Maryland, interpreting the lives of Indigenous and enslaved populations on the Eastern Shore, expanding an oral history project to collect historically underrepresented voices in Baltimore City, and a project to create a Maryland Oral History Center to provide training for digital archiving and data management of oral history programs for years to come.

With over 400 history museums sharing Maryland’s irreplaceable heritage, MCHC is honored to continue to uplift this passionate work in every corner of the state. Awarded projects for 2026 are:

Baltimore City:

The Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture

The Peale will expand and sustain its signature digital storytelling initiative *Life in Baltimore*, which documents contemporary Baltimore through oral histories, video portraits, and community-driven narratives. Funding will support the continued collection of new *Life in Baltimore* interviews, the organization and preservation of existing digital recordings, and the development of robust access tools that make these materials discoverable and usable by the public.

“We are deeply honored that The Peale’s *Life in Baltimore* initiative has been recognized through the 2026 Miller History Fund,” said John Suau, The Peale’s Executive Director. “This support affirms the importance of preserving Baltimore’s contemporary stories and lived experiences as part of Maryland’s historical record. Through oral histories, digital storytelling, and community partnerships, we are building sustainable systems that ensure these voices remain accessible to future generations.”

At present, The Peale stewards hundreds of digital assets—including oral histories, video interviews, digital stories, photographs, and transcripts—that document Baltimore’s neighborhoods, cultural movements, and community life. Without dedicated project management and expanded systems for organization and access, these materials risk remaining fragmented, inconsistently described, or difficult for the public to discover and use. This project will stabilize, organize, and activate these digital collections as a coherent and accessible historical resource for Maryland.

**Dorchester County:
Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance (NHPA)**

Interpreting Enslavement at Handsell in Maryland's Founding Era will create a public-facing interpretive initiative at Handsell, an architecturally significant 18th-century brick structure in Vienna, Maryland. The project will activate NHPA's database documenting 262 enslaved individuals who lived and labored in the Nanticoke River watershed between approximately 1729 and 1861. The plan is to interpret the founding era through three voices—Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans and African Americans, and colonial settlers—to examine how slavery, land, and labor shaped early Maryland communities and how those legacies persist today.

"The Miller History Fund award will support the Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance in interpreting the long, rich and often difficult history of three cultures who have occupied the Chicone Village and Handsell land grant," said Midge Ingersoll, NHPA Trustee. "Specifically, the under-told story of the enslaved communities, inspired by extensive research, can be explored in depth and shared with the public. A planned conference led by the Slave Dwelling Project for historical groups all over the state will guide us in how to best interpret this difficult history."

NHPA is a trustee-led organization without paid staff. Grant funds will pair trustee training with professional interpretive support from the Slave Dwelling Project to ensure responsible, sustainable interpretation of emerging historical records. Activities will culminate in a three-day public program in October 2026 featuring descendant-centered storytelling, facilitated dialogue, and hands-on interpretation that frames Maryland 250 as an opportunity for truth-telling, rather than celebration.

**Frederick County:
Catoctin Furnace Historical Society**

Be an Archaeologist for a Day will focus on archaeological capacity building at the historic Catoctin Furnace site, an historic 18th-century iron forge located between Frederick and Thurmont in Western Maryland. The hands-on program will train scouts, students, and other young people in the rediscovery process and their role in the heritage field. Participants will literally rewrite the labor history of the village, commemorate the lives of the workers who actually forged Revolutionary-era industry in Maryland, and create a future for themselves in the heritage field.

"You can't see yourself in a field you can't see," explained Elizabeth Comer, President of the Catoctin Furnace Historical Society. "This grant will allow young people to 'be an archaeologist for a day' and will introduce them to archaeology and heritage interpretation. We hope this valuable experience inspires a new generation to appreciate our nation's history and consider careers in heritage fields."

This year, both Catoctin Furnace and the United States turn 250 years old. The story of Catoctin Furnace and its role in the Revolution as a producer of cannon and

cannonballs is well documented in historical record. However, while much is known about the wealthy owners of the complex, the story of the laborers will only be told through the process of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting artifacts they left behind.

**Statewide:
Maryland Museum Association (MMA)**

The “Maryland Oral History Center” is a pilot project to create a transformative resource to support community historians, museums, and other public history institutions in their oral history work. The private nonprofit Maryland Museum Association will work in partnership with the Maryland State Archives and Digital Maryland, a collaborative, statewide digital preservation program of the Enoch Pratt Free Library/Maryland State Library Resource Center, to design and advance the project. Cohorts of practitioners will participate in an oral history certificate program, with each member creating their own oral history projects with equipment provided. Members will also train in digital archiving and data management.

The timing of this project is significant because of the Semiquincentennial, as many Maryland organizations are looking towards Governor Moore's edict to create the most inclusive public history anniversary possible and considering and creating oral history programs to capture diverse, personal narratives and stories.

A recently completed first phase of MMA's project, funded by the Maryland 250 Commission in 2025, produced a snapshot of existing oral history resources in the state, created a Maryland Oral History Toolkit, and identified the need for more training, especially concerning long-term planning for archiving and access.

“Listening for many years to the trends and needs of the Maryland museum community, oral history training—as well as what comes next; editing, providing access, and digital archiving—was bubbling up regularly,” said Meagan Baco, Maryland Museum Association Executive Director. “We're excited and grateful that MCHC is empowering MMA with a Miller History Fund grant for us to collaboratively create a centralized and accessible Maryland oral history framework.”

The eighth cycle of Miller History Fund grants, for fiscal year 2027, is scheduled to open this fall with notification of guidelines and informative workshops. For more information as it becomes available, visit mdhistory.org/miller-history-fund.

###

ABOUT THE MARYLAND CENTER FOR HISTORY AND CULTURE

The Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC) collects, preserves, and interprets the history, art, and culture of Maryland. Originally founded as the Maryland Historical Society in 1844, MCHC inspires critical thinking, creativity, and community through its Museum, Library, and education programs. The Museum is open Wednesday-Saturday, 10 am–5 pm. The H. Furlong Baldwin Library is open Wednesday–Friday and the second Saturday of each month. Learn more at mdhistory.org.

MEDIA CONTACT

Jamie Preto Hepworth, Director of Strategic Communications & Initiatives
jpretohepworth@mdhistory.org
410.685.3750 ext. 330