



Photo courtesy Albert Mach



# ROBERT HIGGINS HOUSE

Interpretive Master Plan Report  
Moorefield, WV  
August 2020 (edited 2021)

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## INTENT: ACCESSIBILITY & INTERPRETATION



*Museums are powerful social institutions and while the Robert Higgins House Museum is a small space, it will be telling a larger story. Our Master Plan provides an outline for the telling of that story.*

Thirty years ago, a movement overtook the museum world in which museum practices and ideologies were challenged and issues of accessibility, interpretation and representation came to center stage in exhibition content and design. The Robert Higgins House Museum is intent on addressing these issues in its architectural, interpretation, display and educational program design and execution.

Utilizing the *Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design*, the Robert Higgins House will create a museum experience universally designed to assure that it is accessible to all. Included will be legible labels and directional signage, audio recordings and large print texts, captioning for videos, and display cases designed and placed with consideration for users of wheelchairs. The entirety of the first floor will be accessible to people with disabilities, however, the second floor will not be accessible for those who cannot climb the House's 19<sup>th</sup> century staircase.

In addition to these considerations, the interpretive panels and displays will be available on the first floor in books and videos. Initially the videos will be available on the museum's monitor and on a stationary iPad but as the educational programs are advanced, all visitors will be able to interact with the museum's content through technology.

These are commonsense considerations for any facility wishing to educate, to reach the broadest possible audience. But issues of physical accessibility are not the only concerns that need to be addressed within any institution presenting historical facts and artifacts, interpreting them for public consumption.

The museum will start with the story of the Higgins House (the primary artifact of the museum). Fortunately, despite the amount of renovation that occurred, the log interior of the House remains basically intact. Built, possibly rebuilt, renovated, subsumed, revealed, and restored, the House holds clues from all these stages of its existence and reveals a complex picture of what the 18th century structure looked like and what architectural decisions were made throughout its life to accommodate the needs and desires of its owners.

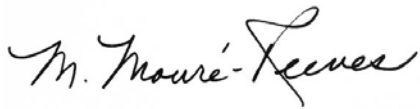


Architectural and dendroarchaeology reports developed from research in Phase 1, coupled with historical research, provided the basic information for the development of this Master Plan and the museum's content outline. But the House is only one part of the narrative.

The other part of the story will investigate the life of Robert Higgins and how the founding and evolution of our nation is embodied in the life of this man, a farmer, a husband and father, an officer in the American Revolution and a prisoner for three years during that conflict, the builder of a log house, possibly a merchant, and the founder of a town in the newly opened frontier, the Northwest Territory. It is also the story of the rural western Virginia lands in which he lived, the indigenous population challenged and displaced, and the enslavement of others.

It must be clear, however, that a critical look at history is not a criticism of that history. The mores and traditions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century can be examined through our 21<sup>st</sup> century lens but that history cannot be revisioned without considering that we are looking back with the benefit of knowing what has come about because of decisions made then. Nor will our interpretation of this history be a linear compilation of 'great' events, works or people.

The Higgins House stands as an "ultimate example of material culture" and the legacy of Robert Higgins' as a participant in our nation's early days and its revolutionary rise. His everyday life and public/private relationships, his House standing as an artifact of that time, can now be seen as part of historical fact, and objects, texts, and events will be "read" with new relevance or meaning.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Moure-Reeves". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail on the 's'.

Michele Moure-Reeves  
Executive Director

## ***Stories from an 18<sup>th</sup> Century House***

### **Concept Approach**

#### **Overview**

The following interpretive master plan for the Robert Higgins House in Moorefield, WV provides a road map for presenting stories about the house and about the events of the times in which it was built.

The themes presented on the first floor will focus on the architecture of log houses, the clues left in the House to interpret its many changes, and the science used to learn more about the history the Higgins House. On the second floor the focus will be on the American Revolution era and the cultural history of the times. But most importantly it will tell the story of Robert Higgins, a story that links rural Hardy County WV with the nation's evolution.

The stories will be told via a combination of interpretive graphic panels, one or two low-tech interactive engagements and artifacts or replicas of the period. Visitors will also have an opportunity to do a deeper dive into the history of the house, the times, and the man using print literature and videos and, later, an augmented reality tablet app.

#### **The Architecture of Log Houses (Early Settlers Cabins)**

- Log houses, log cabins and 18<sup>th</sup> century architecture as influenced by Native Americans and immigrants
  - o Photos/drawings of local log houses/cabins and brief descriptions; examples of different styles of architecture and types of log construction; and how these assists in tracking early immigration and settlement in the mountains
  - o Maps of pre-revolutionary westward migration



South Branch River Log House (Photo courtesy Gerald Milnes)

- If there is no hardware store, how do you build a house?
  - o Display of tools, sketches of construction process; description of processes



Timbers hand-notched for log cabin construction

### The Robert Higgins House

- Specifics about the construction of Higgins House (using Milnes report & photos)
- From Robert Higgins to the Town of Moorefield, the story of ownership
  - o Deeds; tax records; expansion by Parran Parsons; photos from the community and family; demolition; Town records



Higgins House is seen on far right of larger addition

## A Conversation Between Science and History: Dendroarchaeology

- The study of human culture meets the science of tree-ring dating
  - o What is Dendroarchaeology? How historians use the science and visa- versa
  - o Photos of tree rings and archaeological studies
  - o Samples of Higgins House cores; logs revealed on west side and in doorway
  - o Display Case with core samples and a reader rail with a flip book
- The Higgins House dating mystery interpreted
  - o Excerpts from reports, photos of specific findings within the house (1787 vs 1790 and 1827)



Charred log near ceiling of Higgins House

- o Sketches of what the Robert Higgins House would have looked like as single pen with loft; then as 2 story structure; possibility of addition of one-story building on east side
- o Identify obvious (and not so obvious) 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century alterations



Cores of timbers reveal tree-ring patterns making it possible to date historic structures. Image: Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory  
Columbia University Earth Institute



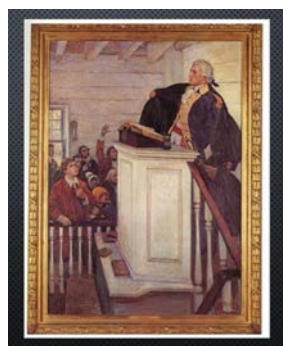
Crosscut of tree showing rings (K. deGrauw)

## Robert Higgins' History, the Revolutionary War

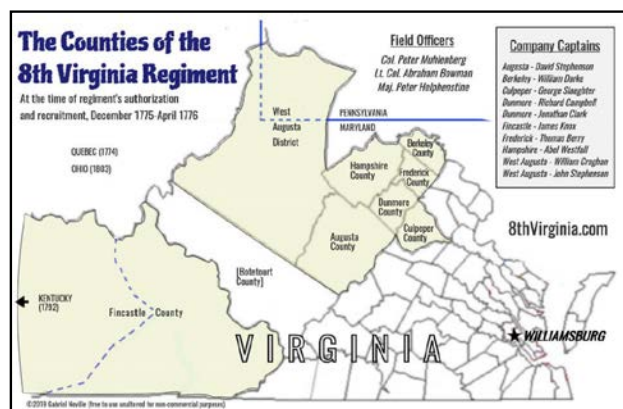
- Pre-revolutionary era westward migration; displacement of indigenous people
- Robert Higgins life in western VA
  - o Birth (PA), family life in Hardy Co, 1st marriage; a western Virginia farmer and slave owner
  - o Relationship to other Hampshire/Hardy County families
- Revolutionary War and the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment
  - o Reasons for War: French & Indian War in Hardy County then debt from war equaled heavy taxation of colonists; Stamp Act
  - o All politics are local; revolt in colonies
  - o Virginia Declaration of Rights and Declaration of Independence
  - o An 8-year war



- o 8<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment (uniform, armament, field gear, food, health) in Revolutionary War. Process of raising regiments
- o Higgins as prisoner of war
- o Higgins returning to western VA; buys lot in 1787; builds house
- o Evidence that he was a merchant in Moorefield



Building the 8th Regiment



Map courtesy Gabe Neville





John Trumbull's Battle of Bunker Hill



Battle where Higgins was captured



Prisoner of War (detail from John Trumbull painting)

AN  
ADDRESS  
TO THE  
NEGROES

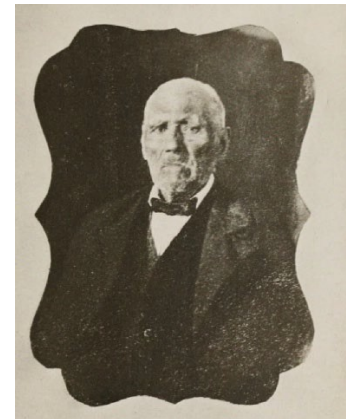
In the STATE of NEW-YORK,  
By JUPITER HAMMON,  
Seruant of JAMES LIVER, Jun, Esq; of the Manor of  
Queen's Village, Long-Island.

"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of  
persons:  
"But in every Nation, he that feareth him and  
"worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."  
Act x. 34. 35.

NEW-YORK:  
Printed by CARROLL and PATTERSON  
No. 37, Milk-Street.



- Story of John Cuppy (only known photo of an 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment soldier who fought in Revolutionary War – from farm near Romney)
- Ratification of Constitution
- Westward migration - Robert Higgins After Moorefield
  - o British Gov would not allow settlement west of mountains calling back those already there, but after the War a period of western migration began



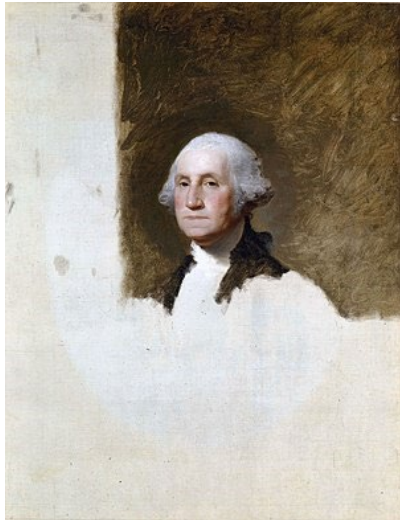
Opening of the western territories saw significant migration after the Revolutionary War

- Explanation of Bounty-land Warrants
- What did territory look like
- Higgins move to Kentucky then Ohio; 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage
- Founding of Higginsport, Ohio; Jesse Grant connection-will; grave marker



### After the War: A brief overview (minimal space available for this section)

- World Leadership:
  - Revolutionary war allies: France, the Netherlands, and Spain
  - Expansion, revolt, long reigns - George III, Catherine the Great, Zand Dynasty Iran), Qianlong Dynasty (China), Louis XVI (France)
- Geographic shifting of populations after the War:
  - European American, Native Americans, and African/Black Americans
  - End of Proclamation of 1763 opening westward migration
  - Spanish objection to westward migration of Americans
- National Politics:
  - Ratification of the Constitution (no judiciary, vague, no mechanism for collecting taxes)
  - Bill of Rights (Freedoms that remain the backbone of our Nation but lacked of support for emancipation, women's rights, and Native American right/lands/treaties)
  - Political in-fighting and outspoken opposition to government policies
  - Greater participation in local and state governance (i.e., freedom of speech, assembly, and right to vote)
- Economic status:
  - End of British manufacturing and shipping restrictions; new embargos
  - Need for local manufacturing, food production, and interstate commerce
  - Slavery as an economic issue
  - No national currency
  - Huge war debt
- Emerging 'American' Culture:
  - Writers, visual artists, musicians (well-known and obscure - Pope, Butler, Livingston, Phillis Wheatley; Scripio Moorehead (portrait of PW); Charles Peale, John Turnbull, Ralph Earl, Gilbert Stuart, Joshua Johnson)
  - Religion: Church of England, Quakers, rural ministries, secular optimism
  - Inventions: Ben Franklin; John Harrison (Sea Clock), bicycle, parachute, gas turbine, thresher, improved steam engine



George Washington Athenaeum  
Portrait by Gilbert Stuart  
(Used for dollar bill engraving)



King George III



The French Revolution began in 1789



Phillis Wheatley (writer)  
Frontispiece by Scripio Moorhead



Family Group, c.1800, Joshua Johnson

# HIGGINS HOUSE

## CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

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- C1.1 GENERAL NOTES
- C1.2 SPECIFICATIONS
- A2.0 FOOTINGS
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- A2.2 1st FLOOR FRAMING
- A2.3 1st WALL FRAMING
- A2.4 ROOF FRAMING
- A3.0 ELEVATIONS
- A5.0 SECTIONS 1
- A5.1 SECTIONS 2

#### PROJECT INFO

##### CLIENT

HIGGINS HOUSE  
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 35°32'55.7"N 85°18'20.8"W

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