

Captain Michael Cresap House

Celebrates 250th Anniversary of Cresap's Rifles

FIRST COMPANY OF MARYLAND RIFLEMEN
IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Written by: **Karen Cresap**

Among the rolling hills of Allegany County, Maryland, and not far from the C&O Canal in Oldtown, sits an old stone house on a hill. It has witnessed nearly three centuries of life in these Western Maryland mountains. The Shawnee Tribe first named this land King Opossa's Oldtown, found near a ford on the Potomac River. The Shawnee left the area about 1720. Col. Thomas Cresap and his wife, Hannah Johnson Cresap, settled at the farthest point west in the early colonial times of the 1740s. They had five children who survived to adulthood. Their youngest son, Michael, was raised to learn survival in the wilderness while also receiving an education in Baltimore. Michael married Mary Whitehead of Philadelphia in 1764 and brought her to Oldtown to begin life as a frontier family. Michael built their two-leveled stone house which included a full attic, basement, and a fireplace in every room. The house was built on a hill over a natural, fresh-water spring that flowed continuously, thus providing a source of water—the most important commodity for a pioneer family.

Michael Cresap continued the pursuit of land throughout the Ohio River Valley, south into what is now Kentucky. In 1774, Dunmore's War broke out in the region—bringing an erroneous accusation by Thomas Jefferson—who wrongly claimed that Michael perpetrated an attack on the Native American family of Chief Logan.

In the spring of 1775, Michael became ill with a relentless fever, possibly from malaria or Yellow Fever. Even with his wife, Mary, waiting for him in Oldtown with four young children—three daughters and a son, with a baby due in the fall—Michael continued working along the Ohio River until finally deciding to return home to Oldtown for rest and recovery. On his journey home, however, he was met by his close friend, John J. Jacob, who was bringing him some very important news.



**Main room of the Cresap House
with time period memorabilia of an
18th Century frontiersman.**

PHOTO BY LANCE BELL



Top photo: Today the historic Michael Cresap Museum, Inc. is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and open for tours by appointment (248-644-3163) and for special programs. *PHOTO BY LANCE BELL*

Inset photo: Circa 1900s photo of Michael Cresap House in Oldtown, MD.

On June 14, 1775, the Continental Congress ordered ten rifle companies to assemble and report to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to support General George Washington in the early days of the American Revolutionary War. Michael Cresap was selected to be the Captain of the First Company of Maryland Riflemen. He received the news along with hearing that if he didn't accept serving as Captain, even with a serious illness, his elderly father, Col. Thomas Cresap, would serve. Michael accepted the great challenge for the betterment of what would be a new country. He began assembling a rifle company of men, collecting and compiling all the equipment and supplies that would be needed.

Many backwoodsmen who had served in Dunmore's War in 1774 would travel from as far away as the Ohio River Valley to support their new Captain's mission. During the worst heat of the summer, early in the week of July 27, 1775, these men joined others who were waiting for them in Fredericktown and surrounding areas in Maryland. They would grow in number until about 140 men worked towards their goal of reaching New England by way of traveling through Eastern Pennsylvania and Northern New Jersey. The riflemen were greeted by townspeople along the great journey and they were supplied with food and encouragement. Cresap's Rifles marched onward through New York State and Connecticut to finally reach Cambridge, Massachusetts, and ultimately the battleground in nearby Roxbury, MA, on August 25, 1775. After their month-long journey, they were a welcome sight upon arrival as they

would serve a critical role of holding back the British forces. The Riflemen from the countryside stunned the British forces with their unexpected sharpshooting skill and they took a special interest in intimidating the British officers.

Captain Michael Cresap would never return home to Oldtown again. After succeeding in leading Cresap's Rifles on their Beeline March to Cambridge and fighting the British officers, Captain Mike's illness grew worse. He was sent home to recover but never made it and died of a fever in New York City on October 18th, 1775. He was buried in Trinity Churchyard on Wall Street after an elaborate funeral procession in New York City.

Michael's wife, Mary, had delivered her fifth child in the frontier stone house Michael longed for, just eleven days before Michael died, having named the baby Michael, Jr. Mary later remarried to Col. David Rogers who was killed in battle a year later. Mary remarried a third time, to long-time Cresap family friend, John. J. Jacob, who in about 1781 built the brick addition that is connected to the east side of Michael's stone house.

Rev. Irvin Allen of Oldtown purchased the house, which was in poor condition, in 1961. Recognizing the historical importance of the house when others didn't, Rev. Allen created a Non-Profit 501(c)(3) Corporation registered in Maryland, and donated the house to the Michael Cresap Museum, Inc. for protection and for preservation in the

future. The Michael Cresap Museum, Inc. Board of Directors celebrate fifty years in 2025 in memory of Rev. Irvin Allen. The Allen family worked for many years on the preservation of the historic structure, saving it from destruction and sharing the Cresap family story and Oldtown history with the public. The entire Allen family is for-ever part of the Michael Cresap House and its story, as are all the Oldtown families who have occupied and resided in the house on the hill for two hundred and sixty-one years.

The Captain's old stone house continues to watch over Oldtown, MD, in testament to the determination of Michael Cresap and his riflemen. July 2025 marked 250 years since Cresap's Rifles assembled at Captain Michael Cresap's house. 250 years have passed since a group of fathers, sons, farmers and frontiersmen set out on over a 500-mile trek to support a vision and a hope of freedom in a new country. These fellow patriots knew they had a lot to lose but they believed in a cause greater than themselves.

On the 250th Anniversary of Cresap's Rifles, after having been closed for many years, the Michael Cresap Museum, Inc.'s Board of Directors recently celebrated a Grand Re-Opening of the house for tours by the public. The house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a national treasure and an outstanding place-based learning experience both in frontier family life and the early days of the American Revolution. The 18th Century home is open for tours by appointment and for special programs and exhibits. Follow the Michael Cresap Museum on Facebook and Instagram and visit their new website for more information.

www.michaelcresapmuseum.com

*A book written through the eyes of Captain Michael Cresap and other riflemen about their journey, **Cresap's Rifles**, is available at the Michael Cresap Museum or on Amazon.*

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