

# Miller House Museum in Hagerstown, Maryland Celebrates the 200th Anniversary of the Price Miller House

Written by: **Mary Reisinger**

THE HOUSE IS OFTEN CALLED THE PRICE MILLER HOUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE ITS BUILDER, WILLIAM PRICE, AS WELL AS THE MILLER FAMILY WHO DONATED IT TO THE WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.



PHOTO COURTESY MILLER HOUSE MUSEUM

The handsome red-brick Price Miller House in Hagerstown was built 200 years ago on one of the original lots laid out and sold by Jonathan Hager. Since 1966 it has been the headquarters of the Washington County Historic Society. This is fitting since the site and the house have been part of the development of Hagerstown and Washington County from the area's early colonial days.





Jonathan Hager, a German immigrant and very early non-Native American arrival, made significant contributions to Washington County, especially Hagerstown. In 1739-1740 he bought land and built Hager's Fancy, a sturdy stone house that stands today in Hagerstown's City Park, to serve as a combination home, fort, and trading post.

By the 1760s, Hager had acquired thousands of acres of land to establish a town, which he called Elizabethtowne, in honor of his late wife, but which later was officially named Hagerstown. The lots he laid out were large, about 80 x 240 feet, because they were expected to accommodate housing, wells, outbuildings, animals, gardens, and possibly businesses. A plat of these lots is displayed in the Miller House Museum.

In 1775, Hager died when he was crushed by a log that slipped and fell on him as he was helping to build a church. This was just a year before Washington County separated from Frederick County, becoming the first county in the United States to be named for George Washington.

**Some of the beautiful features of the Price Miller House include the famous "floating" staircase, this and several other original fireplaces, and a portrait of William Price, who had the house built in 1825.**

*PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER*

Also in 1775, Peter Bell, Jr., was born. Hagerstown had developed a thriving trade in earthenware production, and Bell learned pottery making from his youth. In 1802, Bell purchased half of lot 91, one of Hager's original lots, and its buildings. Bell's family lived on the second floor of their

two-story house, and he operated his pottery business from the ground level. By 1823, Bell's half of lot 91 was sold at auction to settle a debt. He moved to the Shenandoah Valley, where he and his four sons were all noted potters. At the site of his earlier home in Hagerstown, the Miller House Museum displays a large collection of the distinctive pieces made by Bell and his sons.

William Price won the bid for the half lot and replaced the potter's home and workshop with an impressive neoclassical building to serve as his family's home and his law office.

What came to be known as the Price Miller House featured 11-foot ceilings, a cantilevered staircase, a fireplace made of local stone, and beautiful furnishings. It was completed in 1825; this year the museum is celebrating its 200th anniversary.

William Price and his wife Sarah had seven children before her death in 1839. Price married Marion Bruce in 1842 and they had four children. Price performed many public services, including laying out a major road and promoting the building of a canal. In 1844, Price sold his Hagerstown home and moved to Cumberland and then to Baltimore, where he continued his legal work and his involvement in political matters. He was appointed U.S. District Attorney for Maryland by President Lincoln in 1862. One of Price's daughters married William Beverly Clarke, who became Price's law partner. Two of Price's sons fought on opposite sides of the Civil War, another died on a naval mission to Japan, and his youngest son, Bruce, became a famous architect. Bruce Price's daughter was etiquette expert Emily Price Post.



**Salt Dispenser**  
From the camp chest owned and used by General George Washington during the Revolution

After the Price family's departure, another lawyer, Alexander Neill II, bought the Hagerstown house in 1844. He, his son Alexander III, and his grandson Alexander IV all lived and practiced law there. The Neill family redecorated to the tastes of the day and added such amenities as gas chandeliers, a telephone, and radiant heat. The Neills were active in the community. Alexander III was president of Hagerstown Bank, and Alexander IV helped to start the Washington County Historical Society.

During these years, Hagerstown came to be known as the Hub City because several train lines coming into the city resembled spokes on a wheel. Hagerstown had always been at the center of trade and transportation, beginning with its location at the intersection of north/south and east/west trails. In the 1860s, Hagerstown found itself in the center of the Civil War. The Battle of Hagerstown was fought between Confederates retreating from Gettysburg and Union forces that wanted to capture their supply wagons. The fighting, which took place on city streets, was mostly conducted on horseback by cavalry soldiers. One Union soldier used his bugle to fend off a Confederate swordsman. A civilian art teacher, on a rooftop to sketch the battle, was killed, probably by a stray bullet. In the end, Union forces withdrew to



**The Miller House Museum owns three artifacts from George Washington, including a tiny traveling salt dispenser. The lovely bronze gown was worn by Sarah Ann Resh at her wedding in 1863. Local lore identifies this chest as the strongbox used to deliver the ransom to the Confederate soldiers, but there is no way to prove it!**

PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER

support Union soldiers doing battle in Chambersburg, leaving behind hundreds of dead and wounded soldiers and horses in the streets of Hagerstown.

Near the end of the war, Confederate soldiers demanded a ransom from Hagerstown to prevent the city from being burned. The demand was for \$20,000 and 1500 suits of men's clothes. The Board of Directors of Hagerstown Bank and prominent citizens, including Alexander Neill II, hastily convened to decide how to meet the demand





within four hours. They raised the required sum from three banks, and wealthy residents signed notes to cover the banks' losses. Though people donated clothing, they were not able to gather 1500 suits of men's attire. The Confederates accepted what was offered and left to levy ransoms on other cities. Chambersburg did not fare as well as Hagerstown and was set ablaze. An interesting exhibit currently at the Miller House Museum includes details and artifacts of the ransom and of the Civil War era generally.

Alexander Neill IV, born after the Civil War in 1875 and resident of the Price Miller House, was interested in studying and preserving the history of the region and became one of the early directors of the Washington County Historical Society, helping in the society's formation in 1911. It was a shock to the other members when he died later that year at age 35 of a brain tumor.

After Neill's death, the house was sold to Dr. Victor Davis Miller, Jr., a local doctor looking for a home to accommodate his family (wife Nellie Baechtell Loose Miller and children Helen and Victor Davis III) and his medical practice. A third child, Henry Loose Miller, was born in 1912. By 1915, Dr. Miller finished the basement and constructed a three-story annex that connected the existing house to the house next door. This additional space provided offices for Dr. Miller and four other doctors. Gradually

**The Miller House Museum often uses its back garden for outdoor events. The potters in the Bell family were renowned for the unusual designs and innovative glazes they used to enhance utilitarian earthenware.**

*PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER*

the family both restored the house to its federal style and modernized it with plumbing and electricity. The family lived in the house for decades.

Victor Davis Miller III participated in the Washington County Historical Society and in 1966 became its fifth director. Following his father's death in 1955 and his mother's death in 1965, Victor and his brother Henry decided to provide the historical society with a permanent home by donating their shares of the Price Miller Home. The WCHS then purchased the remaining share. Victor Davis Miller III died soon afterward in 1968, but Helen lived until 1994 and Henry until 2012. The property, which remains the headquarters of the Washington County Historical Society, is generally known as the Miller House Museum.

The house contains period furniture, a large collection of 18th and 19th century longcase clocks by local clockmakers, and many other exhibits and artifacts related to the history of the house's residents and the community. Regularly scheduled tours are offered on Fridays and Saturdays except for the winter months. There are activities for children,

lectures paired with appropriate cocktails for adults, and other events held both inside the house and outside in the garden. A special party to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the house is planned for June 2025.

The Miller House Museum also houses the Kinship Family Heritage Research Center, which maintains and makes available to the public a large collection of materials for exploration of family history. The Kinship Center is currently conducting an extensive genealogical research project on the family of Daniel P. Spedden, President of the Hagerstown/Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau, which is a member of the WCHS and frequently sponsors society events and exhibits. The results of the Kinship Center's research on Mr. Spedden's family roots will be revealed at a fundraising event on

Friday, November 7, 2025, at the Price Miller House.

The Miller House Museum combines a significant and beautifully preserved example of federal architecture with the historical interpretation of the Washington County Historical Society and the resources of the Kinship Family Heritage Research Center. It is well worth a visit, especially in this 200th anniversary year.

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**For More Information:**

**Miller House Museum,**  
open April-December with tours on  
Fridays and Saturdays  
135 W. Washington St., Hagerstown,  
MD 21740; 301-797-8782;  
[washcohistory.org/](http://washcohistory.org/)  
Curator/Program Manager Abigail  
Koontz, [curator@washcohistory.org](mailto:curator@washcohistory.org)

**Washington County Historical  
Society Kinship Center:**  
open year-round;  
[washcohistory.org/kinship/](http://washcohistory.org/kinship/)

**Hagerstown/Washington  
County Convention and Visitors  
Bureau**

16 Public Square, Hagerstown, MD  
21740, [visithagerstown.com](http://visithagerstown.com)



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