

The National Iron & Steel Heritage Museum: lifelong learning through digital curriculums and exhibits for all ages.

### **Our Mission:**

The Graystone Society is a not-for-profit educational institution focused on broadening the public's understanding of the iron & steel history of Coatesville, Southeastern Pennsylvania and of the nation at large. Our mission is to reach diverse audiences by presenting programs of interest to all ages and to conduct personal tours that give visitors a sense of being part of a working steel community and rolling mill. In addition, our expanded online presence, our community forums and public lectures are similarly focused on the story of iron & steel as told through its people, places, processes, and products.

### **Regions Served:**

The immediate community that is served by our museum is the City of Coatesville (pop.13,299 in 2021) and the surrounding townships of Valley, Caln, East Fallowfield, and West Bradford. However, many of our visitors come from throughout Chester County and the state. Our use of advertising venues such as “Discover Lancaster County” also helps to bring visitors from out of state.

Our on-site visitors are anywhere from 3,000 to 4000 people each year.

In the last two years, we averaged more than 100k pageviews on our web site (a record for us) , and an average of about 72,700 “likes” on Facebook. Our mailing list to museum members averages 1,514 addresses and 750 “VIP”contacts.

### **Nonprofit’s history, goals, key achievements & distinctiveness**

The Graystone Society was incorporated in 1984, but its educational mission was greatly expanded when the National Iron & Steel Heritage Museum (NISHM) was established. The museum is open to the public six days a week, and its school programs, historic house tours, special exhibits, and displays of steel products help to preserve and interpret what has been described as one of the nation’s and Pennsylvania’s greatest stories of enterprise and innovation. Our educational impact has been widely recognized including our involvement with a county-wide initiative called the CIron & Steel Heritage Partnership.

Our educational projects typically align closely to the published criteria established by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) such as lifelong learning, community engagement and collections stewardship and access. Our exhibits and online content are based on the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Standards for Education and closely address core lessons in the STEM and STEAM fields. Promoting our state’s steel industry through our educational website’s STEM content is especially designed to encourage young students and perhaps spark their interest in future employment that will continue Coatesville’s legacy in steelmaking. To that end, we have an active relationship with Cleveland-Cliffs Steel Co., which co-hosts events such as “Manufacturing Day” on our museum grounds.

With our work-in-progress educational web site, we hope to motivate middle and high school students to engage in academic learning in a fun away by taking part in tours of our museum

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and/or learning about the steel industry through engaging online content such as Lukens photos and industrial videos.

Community engagement with area residents is met by our Annual Holiday Open House (free admission for kids) and The Rebecca Lukens Award (RLA) event, first held in 2007 by the Graystone Society to recognize individuals who have dedicated their time, talents, and expertise to their community and who exhibit the compassionate qualities of Rebecca Lukens, the Victorian ironworks owner known as the nation's first female industrialist.

**Funding request:** We are seeking funds to convert a former two-car garage so that we can highlight Lukens involvement in manufacturing the steel tridents for the Twin Towers of the former World Trade Center. Our museum has the largest collection of 9/11 related artifacts outside of New York City including the tridents left standing after the terrorist attacks (ten of the tridents, or 500 tons of steel, were returned to Coatesville in 2010 but only one trident is currently on display).

The second initiative is a first-of-its-kind digital educational program that will serve as a free resource for the teachers in the Coatesville Area School District (CASD). We hope to eventually expand the outreach to other school districts in the county. At this point, though, we are seeking funds to complete the web site so that the content can go "live."

**Description of key initiatives:** By separating the 9/11 material the exhibits in our Visitor Center, we hope to create a more cohesive visitor experience. Visitors will be able to take their time viewing videos or examining our smaller displays such as the model of "Plant #4" that illustrates the rolled and flame-cut process used to manufacture the tridents. We see this important exhibit area as one way to mobilize community pride in our shared industrial past in the City of Coatesville.

We think that our plans for a digital curriculum is an ideal way to develop lifelong skill sets based on the "building blocks" of education. In addition to state educational standards, our project aligns closely to the "Museums for America" criteria established by the Institute for Museum and Library Services such as lifelong learning, community engagement, and collections stewardship & access.

Most of all, we can envision a future connection between our longtime supporters and museum members with residents of the Coatesville community who might have been intimidated by our "academic" presence. The ease of access to future exhibits such as the 9/11 space, as well as the interactive – and free – access to our digital curriculum, will no doubt help promote an environment of equality and diversity.

**Specific needs & issues to be addressed:** To date, we are still seeking estimates for the garage renovations, which will likely include a large display window in one garage door and an extra man-door in the second garage door. (We were unable to get estimates at this date since we had unexpected repairs. A recent storm felled many of our specimen trees and destroyed a greenhouse where we grow plants for our period Victorian gardens. )

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During the 2020-2021 COVID shutdown, we were forced to move our core exhibits from the historic Lukens Executive Office Building (LEOB) and into the former Lukens firehouse. The new site has fifty-percent less square footage but we needed to increase our office rentals in LEOB and we were uncertain if we would ever return to the hundreds of visitors who came to the museum in pre-COVID days. We are now focused not merely on expanding our exhibit space but our online presence as well. It should be noted that before the COVID shutdown, the museum often featured a themed exhibit every six months in addition to our permanent displays.

As you can see from the attached operational budget, we have had sponsors help to cover the costs of some exhibits and related expenses, but that does not include the upkeep of permanent displays or the costs of interpreting and installing the many donations we receive of Lukens-related artifacts and steel products. This coming year, we will receive small capacity-building grants from the Cleveland-Cliffs Foundation and from the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) but neither was earmarked for any renovations or exhibit expansions.

As for the timeline and costs of our proposed digital project, our educational committee is currently completing downloadable lesson plans and science projects. The prototype was developed last year by our consultant, Miller Designworks based in Phoenixville, PA. As you can see from the itemized Profit & Loss report under “web design,” we had to cover more than \$6,000 in additional costs because of the new educational web site.

**Why it is important to fund this now:** We are committed to developing a new interpretive plan for the museum that is in keeping with today’s emphasis on hands-on and interactive learning. Moving the 9/11 content into the new space, will free up space in the Visitor Center, where we recently installed industrial models that include an open hearth furnace, a blast furnace, a coke oven facility, a strand-caster, degasser, and Basic Oxygen Furnace.

With the help of Miller Designworks, we hope that our digital curriculum will draw on our current museum content such as industrial photos, and Lukens company records. To give one example, we define the ever-changing STEM fields to include social sciences and economics. Several of the online lessons plans (with suggested classroom activities and questions) are connected to the social and cultural aspects of the Coatesville steel community. These lessons are very timely and include “Women in Steel: Rebecca Lukens to Rosie the Riveter and beyond” and “Company Housing: Carver’s Court,” a Coatesville housing complex built in 1944 for Black Lukens workers, now on the National Historic Register.

**How impact & results will be demonstrated:** The success of our free digital curriculum will be measured through the number of teachers who use it and find success with the website content. Since the online material draws from our museum’s collections, we will no doubt inspire visitors to our museum. The impact on Coatesville will be seen in the weekly visitor lists we compile to track such data as the age range of visitors and their hometowns, as well as their areas of interest.