

# Blair County Historical Society – Baker Mansion History Museum



Front exterior of Baker Mansion, made of limestone and cast iron.

All photos Blair County Historical Society.



Restored 1850s Double Parlor exhibit showcasing original furnishings.



Making apple pie at Baker Mansion.



- The Blair County Historical Society (BCHS) was chartered on July 23, 1906, as a nonprofit association open to all persons interested in preserving the history of Blair County, Pennsylvania. Since its inception, the society has taken an active role in preserving and interpreting the region's heritage through marking historical sites, publishing books and pamphlets, and collecting and preserving artifacts relevant to the heritage of the area's people.
- Since 1922, the society headquarters have been located at Baker Mansion in Altoona. After leasing the building for two decades, the society purchased it from the Baker heirs in 1941. Here the society operates its museum, where visitors may see period rooms depicting the Baker family's lifestyle.
- Baker Mansion was originally home to ironmaster Elias Baker and his family. Baker purchased the nearby Allegheny Furnace in 1836. Elias brought his wife, Hetty, and their two sons, David Woods and Sylvester, from Lancaster County to what was described as a "tolerable good mansion house" near the furnace. The luxurious Greek Revival mansion was completed in 1849 and cost an exorbitant \$15,000. The family

resided there until 1914. From 2014-2018, Hollidaysburg artist Michael Allison undertook extensive renovation work in Baker Mansion's many rooms. Restoring the spaces to correct Victorian color schemes and designs, he resurrected the 19th-century vibrancy that formerly graced the halls.

- The society also owns the Springfield Furnace Mansion (more popularly known as Royer Mansion) outside of Williamsburg, Pa. Samuel and Sarah Royer moved into the home in 1821. Samuel was an area iron master who owned Springfield Furnace. Extensive renovations to the mansion have been undertaken in recent years, and the site now serves as a community hub.
- The society distributes Penn State Altoona's Heritage Passport, which conveys the tales of 17 unique sites in the Blair County area. Inspired in part by the successful National Parks Passport, this booklet connects travelers to the stories that have shaped local and national history.
- Funding comes from memberships, museum fees, donations, grants, and events. The organization is completely dependent upon the time, talent, financial resources, and passion of volunteers and benefactors. The society is a member of the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations, the Alliance of Pennsylvania County Historical

Societies, the American Association for State and Local History, Explore Altoona, and the Blair County Chamber of Commerce.

- The Blair County Historical Society will host the Heinz History Center exhibit, *We Can Do It! WWII* from May 25 to July 16, 2019. The displays and artifacts will be located at the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum, a partnering organization. The society has teamed up with a dozen community organizations and museums to coordinate numerous WWII commemorative events during the exhibit's run.
- Two new and exciting exhibits for 2019 are *A Family at Work: The Wolf Furniture Story* and *A County at War: Blair County during WW2*. The society also plans a tasteful restoration of the Baker Mansion kitchen area to its 19th-century appearance.
- BCHS proudly boasts a wide array of accomplishments in the community. Offering diverse levels of educational programs, lectures, tours, reenactments, publications, and services, the society intends to build upon a rich tradition as a regional cultural pillar.
- The address for Baker Mansion History Museum is 3419 Oak Lane, Altoona, Pa., 16602. Learn more at [blairhistory.org](http://blairhistory.org) or by calling (814) 942-3916.

The History Center Affiliates Program, HCAP, is a membership-based network that allows local and regional historical societies and museums access to museum professionals and best practice standards through the Senator John Heinz History Center.

To find out more about HCAP or to apply for membership for your organization, please contact Robert O. Stakeley, History Center Affiliates Program (HCAP) Coordinator, at [rostakeley@heinzhistorycenter.org](mailto:rostakeley@heinzhistorycenter.org) or (412) 454-6359.



Smithsonian Connection

## Bronze bust of George Westinghouse, 1925.

*Pittsburgh: A Tradition of Innovation*

American sculptor Daniel Chester French is best known for his monumental rendering of Abraham Lincoln for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., but he also created more intimate pieces. Westinghouse, a captain of industry and one of America's leading innovators, proved a worthy subject. The Engineers' Club in New York City first displayed this bust, which was completed posthumously in 1914. French was later chosen as the sculptor for the Westinghouse Memorial in Schenley Park. Having one of America's premier sculptors render him in bronze solidified Westinghouse's legacy as a leader in science and industry.

Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, L2007.33.1. Photo by Nicole Lauletta.

