Caroline Furnace
Camp & Retreat

CAROLINE FURNACE MEMORIAL PROJECT

Artist Information and Submission Packet

Welcome Letter to Participating Artists

Dear Artist,

Thank you for your interest in the Caroline Furnace Memorial Project.

Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp & Retreat Center, located in Fort Valley, Virginia, is a historic site that has evolved from its origins as a 19th-century iron furnace into a place of gathering, reflection, and community. Today, the camp serves individuals and groups through programs centered on connection, growth, and shared experience.

As part of our ongoing commitment to honoring the full history of this land, we are undertaking a memorial project dedicated to recognizing the enslaved individuals whose labor built and sustained the original furnace. This initiative represents an important step toward acknowledgment, remembrance, and continued learning.

We are grateful for your willingness to engage in this work. Your time, creativity, and perspective are essential to shaping a memorial that carries both historical truth and lasting meaning.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to a project rooted in reflection, respect, and community impact.

Warm regards,
Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp & Retreat Center
Fort Valley, Virginia

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp & Retreat Center invites artists to participate in a memorial design initiative honoring the enslaved individuals whose labor built and sustained the historic Caroline Furnace in Fort Valley, Virginia.

This project seeks to create a permanent, site-specific memorial installation that acknowledges the past while fostering reflection, education, and community connection for future generations.

Selected artists will have the opportunity to contribute to a meaningful historical narrative through creative expression and public art.

2. PURPOSE AND VISION

The goal of this memorial is to:

- Honor and acknowledge the enslaved laborers who constructed the Caroline Furnace
- Create a space of remembrance and reflection on the camp's grounds
- Promote historical awareness and education
- Encourage community healing and dialogue through art

The selected design should thoughtfully balance historical truth, artistic interpretation, and emotional resonance.

3. BACKGROUND: CAROLINE FURNACE

Caroline Furnace is a historic iron furnace site located in Fort Valley, Virginia, dating back to the early 19th century. The furnace was part of Virginia's iron industry and relied heavily on enslaved labor for its construction and operation.

Today, Caroline Furnace operates as a Lutheran camp and retreat center, serving youth, families, and organizations through programs centered on community, faith, and personal growth.

According to our mission and values, Caroline Furnace is committed to:

- Providing a welcoming and inclusive environment
- Fostering personal growth, reflection, and community connection
- Creating spaces where individuals can learn, gather, and build meaningful relationships

This memorial initiative reflects a continued commitment to truth-telling, reconciliation, and honoring the full history of the land.

4. THE MEMORIAL OPPORTUNITY

Artists are invited to submit:

Phase 1: Initial Submission (Deadline: 31 December 2026)

- A portfolio (3–5 examples of prior work)
- A written concept (250–500 words) describing the proposed memorial

Phase 2: Finalist Design Round (Deadline: 4 April 2027)

- Two finalists will be selected in January 2027
- Each finalist will receive a cash award
- Finalists will develop a visual design proposal (renderings, proposed materials, placement concepts)

Final Selection

- One design will be selected in April 2027 for creation and installation
- The selected artist will receive a final award and begin fabrication
- Miniature to be unveiled during Caroline Furnace's 70th anniversary Celebration on 2 October 2027
- Final unveiling and dedication in May 2028

5. SELECTION AND REVIEW PROCESS

All submissions will be reviewed collaboratively by an advisory team, composed principally of Caroline Furnace Camp Staff, Caroline Furnace Board Members, Representatives from the local NAACP chapter, and Virginia Synod (ELCA) Representatives.

Evaluation will consider:

- Artistic quality and originality
- Historical sensitivity and relevance
- Feasibility of installation
- Alignment with the project's purpose and values

6. PROJECT THEME AND CONSIDERATIONS

Design proposals should reflect:

- The lives, labor, and legacy of enslaved individuals
- Themes of resilience, dignity, and remembrance
- Opportunities for visitor engagement and reflection
- Respect for the historical and natural environment

Artists are encouraged to consider materials, symbolism, and spatial experience when developing their concept.

7. GENERAL LANDSCAPE AND SITE CONTEXT

The Caroline Furnace campus is located in the Shenandoah Valley, surrounded by natural beauty including:

- Rolling hills and wooded areas
- Open gathering spaces used for camp activities
- Historic structures, including the original iron furnace stack

The memorial will be situated within an environment that balances:

- Historic preservation
- Natural landscape integration
- Active community use (camp programs, retreats, gatherings)

Designs should:

- Integrate naturally with the surrounding environment
- Be durable and appropriate for outdoor installation
- Consider accessibility and visitor flow

8. ELIGIBILITY AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION

This opportunity is open to:

- Student artists from Virginia HBCUs
- Members of the Shenandoah County NAACP chapter
- NAACP-sponsored artists
- Community creatives

9. SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Submit materials via the link at https://carolinefurnace.org/racial-healing-memorial
Deadline: 31 December 2026, 11:59 PM EST

Submissions should include:

- Name and contact information
- Portfolio (PDF or link)
- Written concept (250–500 words)

10. CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions or additional details:

carolinefurnace.org/contact-us
540-449-0012

MEMORIAL SITE LOCATION

The images on this page provide a general visual reference of areas within the Caroline Furnace campus where the memorial may be installed. While a final location has not yet been determined, these examples are intended to help artists understand the natural landscape, historical surroundings, and spatial context of the site.

Artists are encouraged to use these visuals as a guide when developing their concepts, while remaining open to creative interpretation and flexibility in placement.

Final memorial siting will be determined in collaboration with the selected artist, taking into consideration design intent, historical significance, accessibility, and environmental integration.







HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FORT VALLEY, CAROLINE FURNACE AND THE CAMP

FORT VALLEY, VIRGINIA

Fort Valley is a historic rural community located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, nestled between the ridges of Massanutten Mountain. Often referred to as "The Valley within the Valley," this area has long been shaped by agriculture, natural resources, and early American industry.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the Shenandoah Valley played a significant role in Virginia's economic development, particularly through farming and iron production. Like much of the region, this growth was deeply tied to the labor of enslaved African Americans, whose contributions were essential yet historically underrecognized.

For additional context on the region and its history:

- Shenandoah Valley overview (Virginia Humanities): https://encyclopediavirginia.org/regions/shenandoah-valley/
- Fort Valley / Massanutten region overview: https://www.nps.gov/places/massanutten-mountain.htm

CAROLINE FURNACE: INDUSTRIAL HISTORY

The Caroline Furnace was constructed in the early 1800s as part of Virginia's expanding iron industry. Iron furnaces like Caroline were critical to producing materials used for tools, infrastructure, and regional development.

The construction and operation of the furnace relied heavily on enslaved labor. Enslaved individuals were responsible for physically demanding and highly skilled work, including:

- Quarrying and transporting raw materials
- Operating and maintaining furnace systems
- Supporting the broader industrial infrastructure

Their labor was foundational to the success of the furnace, yet their stories have often remained absent from the historical narrative.

For additional context on iron furnaces and industry in Virginia:

- Virginia iron industry history: https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/iron-industry/
- Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) – Iron furnaces: https://www.loc.gov/collections/historic-american-buildings-landscapes-and-engineering-records/

This memorial project seeks to help correct that omission by centering their contributions and humanity.

TRANSITION TO CAROLINE FURNACE CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER

In the 20th century, the property transitioned from an industrial site into what is now known as the Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp & Retreat Center.

Today, the camp serves as a place for:

- Youth camps and outdoor education
- Retreats and community gatherings
- Spiritual reflection and personal growth

While the site has evolved in purpose, the physical presence of the original furnace remains a powerful historical landmark.

To learn more about the camp, its mission, and its history:

- Caroline Furnace Mission & Values: https://www.carolinefurnace.org/mission-and-values
- Caroline Furnace About Page: https://www.carolinefurnace.org/about

WHY THIS MEMORIAL MATTERS

COMMITMENT TO TRUTH AND REFLECTION

Caroline Furnace Camp & Retreat Center commits to:

- Acknowledging the full history of the land, including its connection to slavery
- Creating spaces for learning, reflection, and dialogue
- Building a more inclusive and honest narrative for future generations
- Partnering with value-aligned organizations, such as ReconcilingWorks and the NAACP, to progress in honoring all people and walks of life

JUSTICE FOCUSED

The land on which Caroline Furnace stands carries both historical significance and moral responsibility.

This memorial represents an intentional step toward:

- Honoring those whose labor made the site possible
- Creating visibility for historically marginalized voices
- Providing a space for education, remembrance, and reconciliation
- Restorative acknowledgment: This memorial serves as a tangible act of recognition, honoring the enslaved individuals whose labor was historically uncredited and helping to correct the narrative by placing their contributions at the center of the site's story.
- Public truth-telling and visibility: By creating a permanent, visible tribute, this project challenges historical erasure and ensures that the realities of slavery connected to Caroline Furnace are acknowledged, remembered, and engaged with by future generations.

Artists participating in this project are not only designing a structure, they are helping to shape how history is acknowledged, interpreted, and experienced.