

Sole of Kent - 1631

"To Discover, Identify, Restore and Preserve the Heritage of Kent Island"

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC. ■ SPRING 2003

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President's Message

Nancy M. Cook

After so much hard work by so many of our members, it was such a disappointment to have to cancel Kent Island Day. And with it went our planned dedication of the reopening of Cray House, which opens following its lengthy and extensive renovations. See story on page 2.

The Society is on the threshold of yet another grand opening celebrating completion of the restoration of Kirwan House to the grandeur it enjoyed at the turn of the last century.

The Kirwan House and surrounding property were left to The Heritage Society in 1996 by Catherine Kirwan with the stipulation that the attached store be preserved as a museum. A new roof, new paint, and an updated furnace were mandatory improvements. Now a concentrated effort is being made to stock the store with items that were in storage for the last six years and with donated period inventory.

This is where our membership can be of great assistance. We need old cereal boxes, egg cartons (metal), old spice cans, old kitchen utensils, etc. We will not accept on-loan items, but will be glad to issue a 501(c)(3) certificate for a donation.

The first event planned for the house and the store is a reception for owners of historic (at least 100 years

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Kent Island Day 2003 Rained Out

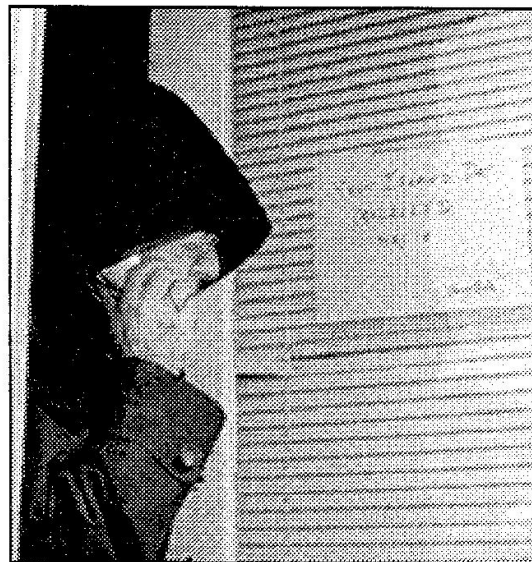


PHOTO BY JEAN LEATHERY

President Nancy Cook peers forlornly from The Society's headquarters at the Old Stevensville Post Office. Her plaintive sign announces: "Kent Island Day Cancelled."

Mark Your Calendar

Kent Island Heritage Society QUARTERLY MEETING

Tuesday, June 10

Kent Island Branch Library

7:00 Refreshments

7:30 Program

Cray House Reopens to Public

Kent Island Day was planned to open with a ceremony celebrating the long-awaited reopening of historic Cray House, which had been closed since 1996 because of extensive structural problems that made it unsafe.

The almost 200-year-old Cray House was severely distressed by the ravages of time. A deteriorated foundation allowed the unique post-and-plank structure to sag extensively. Water damage was readily apparent. Both chimneys were badly deteriorated.

A Bond Bill introduced by then-Del. Wheeler Baker and approved by the 2001 Maryland Legislature, a grant from the Maryland Historic Trust, and matching funds from The Kent Island Heritage Society paid for the extensive renovation.

Steel beams inserted beneath the

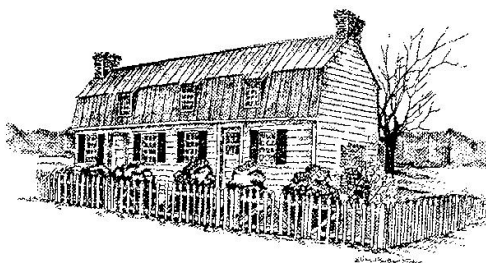
house gently lifted it into the air and supported it while the crumbling foundation was repaired. In addition, climate controls were added to protect the furnishings and interior fabric of the house.

A concurrent archaeological dig conducted by Dr. John Seidel of Washington College concluded that the house had likely been constructed where it now sits, rather than having been

moved there as some thought.

The herb garden and oyster-shell walkway has also been restored by members of The Kent Island Garden Club. It contains medicinal, dye and cooking herbs characteristic of early 1800s gardens.

The architect for the project was Torchio Architects and the builder was Trionfo Builders, Inc. of Phoenix, Maryland.



An Invitation to Owners of Historic Kent Island Homes

AN OPEN HOUSE AND
RECEPTION WILL BE HELD
ON SATURDAY, JUNE 28
FROM 2:00 UNTIL 5:00
P.M. AT THE KIRWAN
HOUSE FOR ALL OWNERS
OF HISTORIC (100 OR MORE
YEARS OLD) KENT ISLAND
HOMES. THE SOCIETY HAS
IDENTIFIED MANY OF THOSE
OWNERS, BUT WE MAY HAVE
MISSED YOUR NAME. WE
WOULD LIKE TO ADD YOUR
NAME AND ADDRESS TO OUR
MAILING LIST TO ASSURE
THAT YOU RECEIVE AN
INVITATION. PLEASE CALL
PRESIDENT NANCY COOK AT
410-758-2502.

Know Your Board

C. Willard Thomas was born in Baltimore, but his parents were native Kent Islanders. They moved back to Kent Island when he was three. Thus, Willard concedes, he may be called a "chicken necker" by some.

He attended Salisbury State College (now Salisbury University) and the University of Maryland. He was a purser on the Matapeake ferry for six years, assistant chief auditor of the state Income Tax Division for 25 years, and a real estate agent, part-time or full-time, since 1950. He was a Navy PT boater in World War II and made it back to Kent Island after the Normandy invasion.

Willard helped organize and is a charter member of the Kent Island Fire Co. and the Kent Island Lion's Club. He was a scout master for six years

and is active in his church.

He was a vice president of KIHS and chaired its Ways and Means Committee for the celebration of Kent Island's 350th anniversary. He can be counted on to help when needed.

Brent Lewis was born and raised on the Eastern Shore. His dad's family are longtime Chester residents; his mom's side can be traced back to Henry De Coursey of My Lord's Gift Farm in Queenstown. He grew up around his grandparents' store in Grasonville in the 1960s. His family moved to a property at the head of Warehouse Creek on Route 8, where, back in the 1940s, his grandparents ran a store and gas station that catered to travelers riding the ferries.

After graduating high school in 1980, he joined the Navy and served about the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Nimitz*. He saw some of the world, he says, and

"found out Kent Island did not have a monopoly on colorful characters."

He then sold real estate and tended bar in such landmark local restaurants as Kentmorr, Kent Manor Inn, the now-extinct Shamrock Inn and Fisherman's Crab Deck.

His daughter, Nicole, is a member of the class of 2003, lives in Montana, and is excited about her upcoming college years.

His wife of more than 10 years, Peg, is also from a long line of Eastern Shore folk and works for Queenstown Bank.

Brent has been a residential real estate appraiser since 1989, which gives him an opportunity to check out some amazing local homes, both historic and modern. "I'll find myself standing on some property wondering what a Kent Islander who lived there a century or so ago would think about his hometown now," he explains.

GREETINGS FROM KIRWAN HOUSE

Greg Nizza, Caretaker

Activity is really picking up here at the Kirwan Farm as we prepare for the June 28 reception.

The Kent Island Garden Club tree plantings are doing nicely with all the recent rains. The lawns are looking green and lush.

I have begun the spring cleanup in the yard. The old original walkways that were uncovered last year have emerged nicely this year following the power edging that was done last fall. The walkways allow a nice flow through the yard, which was the site of extensive gardens and plantings in its heyday.

In cooperation with the Kent Island Garden Club, we are planting annuals to add a dash of color.

A local Boy Scout will be helping out with an Eagle Scout project to renovate and beautify the garden pond.

Out front, we are working on new fencing to allow safe access to the original Kirwan storefront. I will be doing outdoor touch up painting in June. A new parking plan has been developed and should be in place for the June 28 reception.

Inside the Kirwan House, the furniture has been unpacked and sorted into the appropriate rooms. Knick-knacks and glassware still are being unpacked and placed.

The Kirwan Store is under construction with an original surround being installed to hide the oil furnace. Touch up painting will be done inside the store, as well as inside the rest of the house in June.

Some excellent historical items of Kirwan family history have been unpacked, such as original portraits of James E. Kirwan and Mary Catherine Kirwan, as well as some very interesting Kent Island history.

Our events on June 28 and July 12 should be fun and exciting as we work hard to restore the history and heritage of the Kirwan House and the Kirwan Store. Please come on out and see all that is happening. I look forward to greeting you and visiting with you then.

KENT ISLAND GARDEN CLUB REPORT

By Diana Bonner
Director, District I

✿ Be sure to take a look at the restored herb garden and oyster shell walkway at the Cray House. Research for this 1800s herb garden was done by Kent Island Garden Club member Sally Boden.

✿ A riparian buffer of 500 trees and shrubs was planted last month along Kirwan Creek behind Kirwan House. An additional 70 trees will be planted this fall. This buffer will filter runoff and help restore water quality in Chesapeake Bay.

Queen Anne's County Soil Conservation District and Adkins Arboretum recommended the list of native trees and shrubs. The Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage Organization provided planting expertise and manpower to place the trees. Michael Hill of Chesapeake Landscape donated labor and equipment to dig the holes.

Garden Club members—along with more than 40 volunteers from the Naval Academy, Boy and Girl Scouts, 4-H members, school groups, master gardeners, and Dan Hopkins from KHS—participated in the planting effort.

This project was funded by a grant of \$10,400 from the Chesapeake Bay Trust.

✿ Phase 2 of the garden restoration was delayed by spring rains. The heavy trucks needed to trim the trees would have rutted the water-saturated lawn. And heavy falling branches would put the pool area at risk. That work has now been done, and Boy Scout John Hamilton's Eagle Scout project to restore the pool and adjacent walkways and planter wall can get underway.



FUN in the SUN Kent Island Style

By Brent Lewis

Kent Island has always been a fun place to live. Especially in the spring and summer. Even back when the King of England was running the place, there were always warm weather celebrations. Horse races and circuses were all the rage during the Revolutionary War era.

Public tastes change some over the years, but our playfulness endures.

Love Point Hotel — There was no swankier resort than the Love Point Hotel. From the turn of the century until the late thirties, this elegant, sprawling landmark was a beloved vacation spot. Steamboats from Baltimore brought city dwellers here by the thousands. The sandy beach and expansive lawn must have seemed a world away from where our guests lived and worked.

In the early days of the hotel, there were bull wrestlers and shooting championships. Annie Oakley herself came to town in 1908. As part of her exhibition she would throw light bulbs into the air and pick them off with a shot. She never missed.

The Kent Island Business Men's Association sponsored a ten-day celebration at Love Point in 1936. The party started on June 25 and culminated with fireworks on Independence Day. Events included a professional boxing match between brothers Bob and Kid Cosden, a baseball game between the Queenstown Terps and the Washington Red Sox, and a beauty contest. First prize was a free trip to Atlantic City.

Carnivals — The Kent Island Volunteer Fire Department was formed in 1947. Having been advised as to the best ways to raise funds, the original members voted to put on a carnival as soon as they could. It's been 56 years now, and the KIVFD carnival is still known to be the biggest event of its kind on the Eastern Shore.

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Thank you! We are indebted to the following sponsors whose generous support makes Kent Island Day possible.

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		Western Auto

KENT ISLAND BLUES

Out of the great white ice
Down through dozens of thousands of years
Past sun-stricken flats of mud and pools
Where mastodon and mammoth wade
Past wandering man with axe and flint
Past inlet marsh and dune,
The stream slithers south to meet the sea
Which begins to warm and rise
Flood fill and push into creek and bight.
Islets rise and lift up stem and stalk
To wait for time
Dawn
Noon
Dusk
Night.
(Here is a four beat pause or rest.)

Kent Island
Called Monoponsan then
Sheltering native Matapeakes and Wicomess
Growing corn bean pumpkin squash
in peace.
The gull that glides past Romancoke
Saw William Claiborne come
To trade his button-beads for fur
And go.

And then the long light on the land
Of quiet generations
New farms
Old estates
Unchanging

Watched by whitetail canvasback and loon
Rail lines and steam ships
The ferry wharves grow old
Skipjacks at the narrows
Bring in oyster crab and rock.
Then came the bridge
Always the bridge
The great gray mother floats
Carrying her own bags forth and back
From Sandy Point to Kent
Imprinting her form not on the water but the land.

Now it's tear down
Old estates and farms goodbye
Reach the beach
And "you want fries with that?"
Condo, townhouse, chain motel.
Any available land
Property rights, defense leagues
Hold on, hold tight,
old heritage
Now in your ears
The echo of an old lament,
You cannot go home again.

Alex Johnson's poem, "Kent Island Blues," won a third place (tie) award in the Seniors category in the Eighth Annual Regional Poetry Contest, sponsored by the Caroline, Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot County Arts Councils.

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We gratefully thank the following patrons for their financial support of the twenty-eighth annual Kent Island Day. We also extend our gratitude to any patron whose contribution was received too late to be included in this printing.

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President's Message

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old) Kent Island homes scheduled on Saturday, June 28. An open house will be held for the general public on Saturday, July 12.

As we strive to carry out our purpose of discovering, identifying and preserving the heritage of Kent Island, we find that we are always in need of donations of volunteer time and financial aid. Please feel free to offer one or, better yet, both of these much needed means of support.

Isle of Kent

John Bonner, Editor

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FUN in the SUN

Continued from page 3

Parades. Rides. Raffles. Fireworks. Games. Food. Socializing. Generation after generation, the carnival is a highlight of the summer.

In the early days there were usually two parades: the official Firemen's Parade with companies from all over the area competing and the Clown's Parade. In the humor parade, various organizations and prominent individuals would dress up in outlandish costumes and march down Main Street to the delight of the crowds.

There used to be a talent show and the crowning of Miss Queen Anne's County. Governor Preston Lane showed up once in a long black limousine that got stuck in a ditch. In 1948, the renowned radio entertainer Happy Johnny was scheduled to appear even though there was some concern among organizers when he was rumored to have died. The amusement company responsible for the show sent assurances that Happy Johnny would make the appearance. And he would be alive.

Thousands of raffle tickets have been sold over the years for everything from a carton of cigarettes to a hog to a 1963 Valiant automobile.

In 1950, the entire food bill for the week was \$60.14. This grand total included fifteen pounds of crabmeat, forty-two pounds of ground beef, forty-five pounds of onions and six pounds of lard.

Boat Races — In the early fifties a few local men became interested in boat racing. They held unsanctioned

wildcat races in the Wye River, and the more serious among them competed on national courses at St. Michaels, Chestertown and Cambridge. The Kent Island Yacht Club was formed in 1955. The club leased an old farmhouse on Cox Creek for a dollar a year. The first official Queen Anne's County boat races were held there the next spring.

The gleaming new clubhouse at Kent Narrows hosted the third annual races. Some hometown racers caused a stir by switching from the "cracker box" P.O.D. class to the sleeker, faster hydroplanes.

Local legends included members of the Ruth and Thompson families, but nobody was as victorious as Alton Pierson. Driving the inboard "Bo-Bo Two" with the classic logo of One-Eyed Bo, the National Beer pitchman, Mr. Pierson set world speed records. He was the American Boat Racing Association's 1958 Driver of the Year and is a member of the State of Maryland Athletic Hall of Fame.

Kent Island Days — Ever since the 1977 Governor's Proclamation that designated the third weekend in May as Kent Island Days, the Kent Island Heritage Society has celebrated the history that helps make this island such a special place. From tours of private homes and public buildings to blacksmith demonstrations to petting zoos, Kent Island Days has always had something for everyone. This year's event is sure to prove that streak continues. Join us on May 17 and see how much fun you can have.

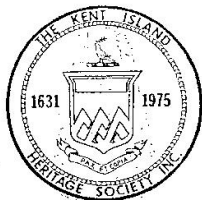
Brent Lewis has always liked to have fun.

The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc.

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