

# Isle of Kent - 1631

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC. ■ WINTER 2002

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## President's Message

Nancy M. Cook

Once again another year begins, and with it an agenda that is a full one. But before we move on we must take time for remembrances and resolutions.

### Remembrances . . .

■ The 400 school children and other tour groups who have visited the Train Depot, the Cray House and the Old Stevensville Post Office through the year.  
■ The 2001 Kent Island Days, which began with one of the best parades in several years.

■ The first October weekend "Pathways to Our Past" event, where all the historic sites in Queen Anne's County were open to the public.

■ The oral histories that were recorded by Dan Hopkins, Jane Sparks and Fran Taylor.

■ The Bond Bill awarded to the Society for the restoration of the Cray House.

■ A successful first day of Kent Island Days (the rains came on Sunday, the second day).

■ Awarding of the first Kent Island Heritage Society Scholarship.

■ Adoption of amended and restated Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws.

### Resolutions . . .

■ To complete the restoration of the Cray House in 2002.

*Continued on page 6*

## Old Graveyard Gets A New Life

Margot Mohsberg

Broad Creek Cemetery in Stevensville has stood quietly down a road just off Route 8 since 1652.

On Feb. 18, the oldest public graveyard in Maryland will come to life for the first time in 99 years for the funeral of a man whose dying wish was to be buried there.

Erika Roof of Stevensville will grant the wish of her late husband, James Roof, a member of Christ Church on Kent Island who died in 1998, by burying his ashes in the same graveyard that the church's founders were buried in.

In the next several months, the ashes of two more parishioners who died several years ago will join his.

All three made the requests, having faith that the 400-member congregation could eventually complete a long-awaited restoration of the graveyard.

"It's a historical site that is part of our legacy to the community," said the Rev. James Shand, pastor of the church, now farther down Route 8 at 830 Romancoke

*Continued on page 2*

*Margot Mohsberg is staff writer for The Capital, which has given permission to reprint this article from its Feb. 2 edition*

### Mark Your Calendar

## Kent Island Heritage Society QUARTERLY MEETING

Tuesday, March 12

Kent Island Branch Library

7:00 Refreshments

7:30 Guest Speaker Eric Mills

"Chesapeake Bay and the Civil War"

## Old Graveyard

*Continued from page 1*

Road.

The restoration not only protects the graves of the church's founding members, but it also gives all parishioners the opportunity to bury their loved ones in the tranquil setting, protected by a white wooden fence and sheltered by large oak trees.

"We wanted to mend the past with the future," said DeeDee McCracken, a Bloody Point resident who took over the project last year. The congregation has paved the dirt road that leads to the graveyard—and put up a formal sign announcing the historic graveyard's existence.

"Now we are getting visitors who had heard about the graveyard but didn't know where to find it," Mrs. McCracken said.

The members, with the help of Boy Scout Troop 1631 of Stevensville, have collected \$9,000 in donations from the congregation and set up a memorial garden where a majority of the graves are.

They have also begun plotting the remainder of the unused land at the 4-acre cemetery.

"It's neat to be able to offer the congregation a nice quiet place that is historically significant," said Joe Thompson, who has been watching over the graveyard for more than two decades. He decided in 1985 to protect the remaining headstones from further damage by vandals by storing them in his garage.

But church members aren't even close to being done with their work. They are still trying to find out who is buried there.

With county officials and state archaeologist Richard Irvine backing them, the parishioners have asked for a \$50,000 grant from the Maryland Historical Trust and a \$6,000 grant from St. Margarets Church in St. Margarets to search the property with radar and eventually do an archaeological dig.

"Our main goal is to preserve any artifacts we find," Mrs. McCracken said.

In the meantime, parishioners are seeking any records that mention the church, such as old newspaper clippings or family Bibles. A church fire in

## Do You Believe in Ghosts?

An Oct. 28, 1995 article in *The Capital* reports the claim of Kent Manor Inn employee Aviva Baker to have seen the ghost of Alexander Thompson in this stately house, much of which he built before his death on Christmas Day of 1917 at age 82.

"He was in a guest room, sitting on the edge of the bed and smoking a pipe," proclaims Ms Baker. "His hair and beard were snow white. He was dressed all in brown."

Other employees confirm that this ghost is a prankster who turns on radios, switches off telephones, yanks hair, unlocks doors, relights candles—but none have ever actually seen him do these things. They claim he likes women and once pinched a maid's butt.

But Queenstown resident Catherine Carter, who lived in the house from 1922 to 1940 expresses doubt. "This all came up *after* it became the Kent Manor Inn," she points out.

This "may be good Halloween publicity," rejoins Jean Lee Eareckson, wife of Alexander Thompson descendant Capt. Leif Eareckson, but "he died on December 30, 1874 at age 58." This would make him much too young to be the pipe-smoking greybeard whom Ms. Baker purportedly saw.

Undaunted, *The Capital* printed a follow-up story on June 3, 2001, this one, coincidentally, written by Margot Mohsberg who contributed our page one story about Broad

Creek Cemetery. In it, Innkeeper Dennis Shakan—who claims not to believe in ghosts—nevertheless hastens to clarify that this ghost is "something of a lady's man," more like Casper than the malevolent Steven King variety.

Shakan attributes only playful events—lights that won't stay off, a TV that won't stay on, doors that won't stay closed, banging noises, disembodied footsteps, the pungent aroma of pipe tobacco—to the ghost of Alexander Thompson, who, in his more corporal times, married three times but never had any children.

This "would come as a surprise to his eight children," again rejoins the indefatigable Jean Lee Eareckson. "Surely the success of the Inn does not need grossly inaccurate stories upon which to base its reputation and to attract guests."

The Earecksons were so pleased with the Inn's restoration, which had fallen into a state of disrepair, that they donated copies of family documentation and research they had compiled over the past 30 years to the new owners. They also contributed their only photo of Alexander Williamson Thompson, for whom Thompson Creek is named, which now hangs in the lobby of the Inn.

But they are distressed that the memory of their revered ancestor is tarnished for what they believe is crass commercialism.

the mid-1800s destroyed many of its records of early Kent Island settlers.

Based on records that survived the fire and the few remaining headstones, the congregation knows of only 14 people who are definitely buried there. They include several infants and Robert Wilson, who died in 1746 at age 47—making his the oldest known grave.

Christ Church, originally called Christ Episcopal Church, was built on the first settlement established on Kent Island by William Claiborne in 1631. It is the oldest continuous Christian congregation in the state.

In 1652, the church moved to Broad

Creek. The creek provided the only harbor on the bay side of the island and as a result a community grew there.

The church was built on a small knoll, and oak trees were planted around it. As the years passed, a cemetery was established nearby.

In 1880, a new church was built in Stevensville using some parts of the old, dilapidated church on Broad Creek. The old gravestones eventually became the only indication that the church had been there.

"It's exciting to work with things from the 1650s," said Mr. Thompson. "It's neat to know that there was a church that stood right there."

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## GREETINGS FROM KIRWAN HOUSE

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**Greg Nizza**

Kirwan House Caretaker

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Things are proceeding nicely here at historic Kirwan House in Chester. I just finished packing away the decorations from the Christmas season, which saw fresh new decorations brightening up the Kirwan House both inside and out.

Evergreen bunting was hung outside on the fence. Candlelight decorations accented with red bows were in the windows. Greens were hung over pictures and doorways in the Victorian tradition. A theme of angels and cherubs decorated the rooms.

I wasn't able to follow Catherine Kirwan's tradition of placing a stuffed Santa on the front porch swing, but we'll work on that for next year.

The Christmas decorations were a nice way to celebrate a very productive year of restoration work at Kirwan House. The year 2001 saw many significant projects completed.

Major projects include replacement

of roofs on the main house and the workshop. A complete tear off of all old asphalt and cedar shake shingles was done down to the original rafters. All new plywood was laid and flashing replaced. The new roof is a 30-year architectural shingle in a weathered wood look. Kudos to Billy Denny for coordinating with the roofers on this huge project.

Another major projected completed was removal of the old, outdated oil

burner and installation of a new high-efficiency furnace.

Also, as you may have read in the summer issue, The Kent Island Garden Club, with help from Eagle Scout Steve Rafter, completed a significant overhaul of part of the gardens. New landscaping beds now complement a new brick pathway to a large new white arbor, which many of you may have noticed out back.

*Continued on page 4*



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*Caretaker Gregory Nizza, who also is a KIHS director, will provide a regular update of progress on this ambitious project.*



Certificates of Appreciation in recognition of their contributions to the Society during 2001 were presented at the Annual Meeting on December 8 to: (left to right) Myrtle Bruscup, William Denny III, Janet

Denny, Florence Dunn, Fran Taylor, Willard Thomas, Diana Bonner, John Bonner, Eva Thompson, Ellen Klages, Caryn Trinkley, Gil Dunn and Audrey Hawkins.

## Kirwan House Update

*Continued from page 3*

Interior work in 2001 included the continuing cleaning and restoration of several main downstairs rooms. The dining room has now been restored and painted in a soft Victorian pink. The downstairs bathroom was repainted. The front living room, part of the original 1870s house, was finished in 2001 and painted a pastel Victorian aloe green.

The original plaster ceiling medallion has also been accented. All trim work throughout the house is being finished in pearl white. In addition, in 2001 a new security system was installed.

Current work at Kirwan House includes stripping of old, peeling wallpaper in the two original upstairs bedrooms and the upstairs front foyer. I anticipate completing this project in March.

Once these rooms are readied, a professional refinisher specializing in historic homes will refinish all the old pine floors in the original part of the house, including the staircase. I'm looking forward to completion of this step, which will really brighten up the house and make it glow with the warmth of its original charm.

When the floors are finished and have cured, plans are in place to return the original furnishings, currently in a warehouse in Delaware, to the house. At this point the true feeling and character of the old Kirwan family will really begin to emerge.

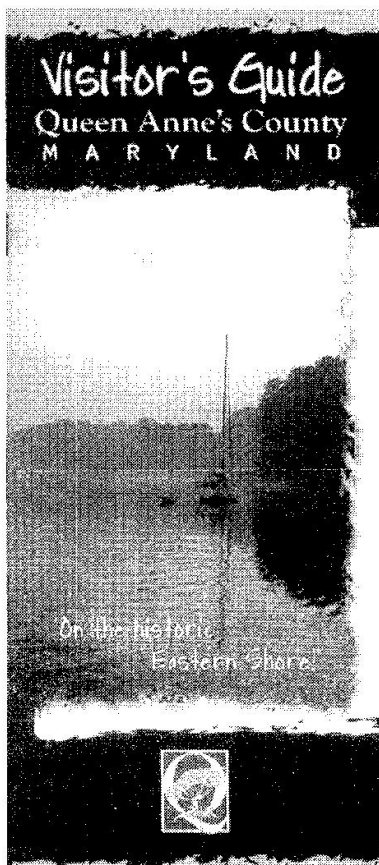
Once the furniture is back, our attention in late spring and summer will turn to restoration of the historic Kirwan store to its original condition. Much cleaning and sorting has been done, but much more remains.

The washer and dryer will be relocated. A partition will be constructed to conceal the new furnace. When restoration and repainting is completed, the original furnishings restocked with the original merchandise will transform the store's ambiance to the way it was when it was a bustling center of commerce in the early 1900s.

The sense of the past continues to delight me. Just the other day I came

across Catherine Kirwan's 1937 Washington College yearbook, *The Pagasus*. Here's an excerpt:

**Mary Catherine Kirwan, Chester, Md.** *"Caki" is that gay, cheerful person who has had the necessary "stick-to-itiveness" to get her degree after several spells of severe illness. She is also one of those delightful hostesses, who help uphold the Eastern Shore hospitality tradition. With her carefree, agreeable, sympathetic nature it is a pleasure to chat with her. Possessing a beautiful voice, she has for several years been a great help to both the women's chorus and the now extinct chapel choir. Always she has pursued a college education—we think she has gotten it.*



## 2002 Meeting Schedule

### General Meetings

Kent Island Branch Library  
Refreshments 7:00 p.m.  
Program 7:30 p.m.  
Tuesday, March 12  
Tuesday, June 11  
Tuesday, September 10

### Annual Meeting

Kent Island Yacht Club  
Christmas Dinner 6:00 p.m.  
Saturday, December 14

## New Pamphlets

■ The new Queen Anne's County Visitor's Guide for 2002 is a 52-page, 4-color comprehensive guide to attractions, recreation, dining and accommodations in the county. It has been made even more helpful by the addition of an 8-page tear-out Calendar of Events and Festivals. It also has a handy map with points of interest clearly marked.

Our Heritage Society's historical sites are prominently featured, along with a photo of the Old Stevensville Post Office. The Calendar section promotes Kent Island Day.

Anyone who has had to entertain house guests for a period of time will appreciate what a valuable resource this booklet can be.

You can pick up a copy at the Chesapeake Exploration Center at Kent Narrows, Kent Island Branch Library, Kent Island Federation of Art, Kent Manor Inn, Hemingway's Restaurant and Narrows hotels. Or you can request a copy by telephone (410-604-2100), by fax (410-604-2101) or by e-mail ([tourism@qac.org](mailto:tourism@qac.org)).

■ The new pamphlet enclosed with this issue is designed to promote interest in the Society's activities and the rich history of Kent Island. It will be available to visitors at the Chesapeake Exploration Center.

■ In preparation is an 11x17-inch tri-fold pamphlet with a readable-size map to promote a walking tour of Historic Stevensville. Twenty-four structures of historic significance are described. It will be published in time for Kent Island Day.

### Kent Island Days Becomes Kent Island Day

Members should take note that Kent Island Days will become a one-day event, beginning this year. It is scheduled for Saturday, May 18, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. In the event of rain, it will be held the following day. Mark your calendars now so you don't forget.

As always, this popular community-oriented event will feature a variety of entertainment, children's activities and food. Artisans, crafters and other vendors will demonstrate their skills and display their wares for sale. A vendor application is enclosed. Please pass it along to someone whom you think might be interested.

A new activity added to this year's celebration is a tour of 24 sites of interest in Historic Old Stevensville. Originally planned as a walking tour, President Nancy Cook is working on a docent-guided mobile alternative.

## Know Your Board

**Wayne Morris** is a native of Maryland. He grew up in Carroll County, but, while he was studying chemical engineering, family ties increasingly lured him to Kent Island to relax, crab and spend time with family.

His career took him away from Maryland to Illinois, West Virginia and New York, earning an MBA along the way.

Despite the distances, he, his wife, Pat, and children, Sean, Ian and Jaclyn, visited Kent Island regularly.

They bought property on Crab Alley Creek adjacent to the Kirwan Farm. They now live in a house they built only a few miles from the house his great grandfather built almost 100 years ago.

**Francis K. "Butch" Collier** grew up in Grasonville and graduated from Stevensville High School. He was a rural carrier for the U.S. Postal Service, retiring after 35 years.

He is a trustee of the Kent Island United Methodist Church. He and his wife, Linda, are very active in the Stevensville High School Alumni Association.

Butch's hobby is restoring/customizing old cars. He says he "always had an interesting vehicle in some stage of completion."

He has one child, two step-children and three grandchildren. He enjoys traveling, boating and entertaining friends.

"I accepted a position on the board," he explains, "because I am interested in preserving the character of Kent Island."

**Paul W. Wilderson III** joined KIHS when he moved to Kent Island in 1986. He served on its board 10 years ago, organized the parade for Kent Island Days for two years, and oversaw the society's archaeological survey of Kent Island.

His wife, Marilyn, who passed away in 2000, served as

## TREASURERS REPORT, 2001

Audrey B. Hawkins, Treasurer

**Balance on Jan. 1** **\$51,079.76**

### RECEIPTS

Kirwan farm lease	\$15,000.00
Stock dividends	8,191.20
Kent Island Days	
Sponsors	\$4,445.00
Vendors' fees	1,770.00
Patrons' ads	1,350.00
Dues	7,565.00
Annual meeting	5,024.00
Dinner	2,033.00
Auction	1,352.00
Sales	3,385.00
Sales tax collected	1,099.57
Bank interest	52.48
Donations	631.24
Cray House	505.00
Scholarship	280.00
Miscellaneous	1,803.92
<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>\$43,537.41</b>

### DISBURSEMENTS

Merchandise for resale	920.04
Printing/office sup.	1,577.78
Mailing	979.40
Kent Island Days	4,503.04
Annual meeting	2,290.16
CPA accounting services	1,500.00
Miscellaneous	3,630.70
Old Post Office maint.	4,000.17
Cray House expenses	12,994.01
Cray Hse/Depot maint.	1,761.11
Kirwan House	
Maintenance	33,616.95
Furn. storage	2,856.70
<b>Total Disbursements</b>	<b>\$68,262.06</b>

**Balance on Dec. 31** **\$26,355.11**

Cray House funds	\$19,440.29
CDs	17,727.94

recording secretary for a number of years.

Paul is an historian, holding a Ph.D. in early American history from the University of New Hampshire. He is executive editor at the Naval Institute Press, a book publisher in Annapolis.

He is author of a biography of John Wentworth, the last royal governor of New Hampshire and co-author of a history of movie actors who served in the U.S. Army and Air Force.

Before coming to Maryland, he and his wife lived in Colorado, New Hampshire and Nebraska.



## President's Message

Continued from page 1

■ To continue to record audio-visual histories of persons involved with Kent Island's history.

■ To continue to restore the Kirwan House with the original store opened as a mini-museum.

■ To continue the annual Kent Island Day on May 18 (rain date May 19).

■ To involve more persons in the Society's events and activities (a membership brochure and a walking tour of Old Stevensville brochure will be available at month's end to aid in this resolution).

■ To establish a docent program.

■ To continue to discover, identify, restore and preserve the heritage of Kent Island.

As always, the Society is in need of volunteers for our various projects. Won't you please call me at 410-758-2802 and volunteer to help?

## In Memoriam

Roger W. Eisinger  
Mary A. Larrimore  
Mrs. Thomas O. Hoxter

## Genealogy Records

### Myrtle Bruscup

Five volumes of marriages and obituaries covering 1881 through 1892, and four volumes of obits only from 1926 through 1933, are recent additions to our growing collection of genealogy records that we maintain at the Kent Island Branch Library.

These valuable resources provide names, dates of birth and death, places of burial, names of spouses, children and sometimes parents and siblings.

I met with Mr. and Mrs. Benson, who are researching the Shep family. Our reading room books provided quite a bit of information for them. Mr. Benson's ancestors came over with Claiborne and were quite prominent on the Island.

I also met with Mr. Carter McKaig, who resides in Cove Creek. He brought a large volume (no.2 of 4) that provided a history of the Pearsalls branch of his family. This ancestor came with Claiborne but never settled here. Evidently he was a trader of tobacco, etc. and went back and forth between England and the colonies. There were various mentions of Kent Island throughout this volume.

Mary White and I spent time at the library photo copying material she had accumulated that will be useful in our files.

Our files always need some going over. Your help would be greatly appreciated. Just call me at 410-643-5596.

## Welcome to New Members

David Bonnar  
Stevensville

Fred & Patricia F. Chew  
Stevensville

James Greg  
Chester

Dr. & Mrs. William Kirwan  
Chester

Jo Anne Willox  
Stevensville

### New Life Member

Gene M. Ransom III  
Grasonville

### Honorary/Life Member

Mrs. Alfred White  
Stevensville

[Accidentally omitted from list published last issue.]

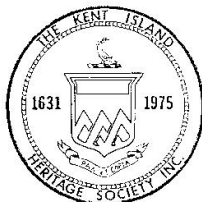
### Isle of Kent

John Bonner, Editor

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