

Isle of Kent - 1631

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC. ■ FALL 2008

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President's Message

WHAT A YEAR THIS HAS BEEN for the Kent Island Heritage Society. My first year as president has been both challenging and rewarding, highlighted by great places and great events, made possible by great people.

Our Fall Heritage Picnic in October was every bit as successful as we had hoped. It's becoming a new and special tradition in celebrating the best of our unique Island heritage. Thanks and congratulations to Carole Frederick and her team for all their hard work. Thanks also to the Kent Island Garden Club, the Corsica Antique Tractor Club, Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, and "The Little Creek Boys" music group — all for helping make the day a success.

Congratulations to Julia Glenn for her winning Kent Island flag design. The flag was unfurled and flown for the first time at the picnic. All of the flag design entries will be displayed in the Kent Island Library.

When I reflect back on the year I am impressed with and grateful for the wealth of talented and dedicated folks in our Society. The best analogy I can think of is that of a coach of an all-star team. Here are just a few of our highlights to be applauded:

■ **Audrey Hawkins** and her coordination of our enthusiastic and knowledgeable docents.

Continued on page 2

Nominating Committee's Recommended Slate for 2009

An election of officers and directors to lead The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc., in 2009 will be held at the Annual Meeting on December 13 (see details in box below). The nominating committee, consisting of Dan Hopkins and Butch Collier, recommended the following slate at the Nov. 12 board meeting:

President
Vice President
Recording Secretary
Corresponding Secretary
Treasurer

Jack Broderick
Dan Hopkins
Peggy Walbert
Carole Frederick
Audrey Hawkins
Wayne Morris
Joel Berger
Bill Denny
Jean Leathery
Lynne Riley-Coleman
Gary Walters
Joyce Woodford
Nancy Sadler

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Kent Island Heritage Society Annual Meeting

Saturday, December 13
Kent Island Yacht Club
\$40 per person

5:30 Reception
Wine, cheese and appetizers
6:00 Annual Meeting
Installation of Officers
Presentation by Brent Lewis on new Kent Island book project
Special awards
7:00 Dinner and music
Choices: Chicken Marsala or London Broil

Please RSVP with dinner of choice by Dec. 5
Return card on p. 8 or call Toni Gibson at 410-643-6483

COMMITTEES

Docents

Audrey Hawkins
Joanne Anderson
Myrtle Bruscup
Francis & Linda Collier
Nancy Cook
Dick & Eileen Dadds
William & Janet Denny
Gil & Florence Dunn
Carole Frederick
Jay & Toni Gibson
Chris Kilian, Lora Lake
David & Jean Leathery
Geo. & Barbara Marmion
Fran Peters, Louise
Price, Flora Sossi
Joan Stoer, Fran Taylor

Kent Island Day

Flora Sossi
Toni Gibson
Gary Walters
Joyce Woodward

Kirwan Property

Joel Berger
Bill Denny

Dan Hopkins
Wayne Morris

Kirwan Interior

Midge Kirwan
Myrtle Bruscup
Linda Collier

Lora Lake

Jane Sparks

Emma Thomas

Cray House

Bill Denny

Barbara Marmion

Old Stevensville P.O.

Francis Collier

Train Depot

Florence Dunn

Gil Dunn

Caboose Restoration

Nancy Cook

Richard Dadds

"T" & Wayne Humphries

Oral Histories

Brent Lewis

Membership

Mae Hutchison

Library Files

Myrtle Bruscup

Mary White

Audit

Lynn Riley-Coleman

Scholarship

Jane Sparks

Social

Janet Denny

Cemetery Identification & Preservation

Lora Lake

Farmers Market

Laura Keene

Public Relations

John Bonner

President's Message

Continued from page 1

■ **Wayne Morris** and his constant effort to keep our money straight.

■ **Linda Collier** and Lora Lake and their outstanding work in reopening the Kirwan House and Museum, and for winning a grant to support that effort.

■ **Flora Sossi** and her crack team responsible for Kent Island Day.

■ **Laura Keene** and her creative effort to organize the Kent Island Farmers Market.

■ **Toni Gibson** and her idea and organization of the Kent Island Flag Design Contest, and Julia Glenn for her winning Flag design.

■ **Jay Gibson** and his timely oversight of extensive Kirwan House repairs.

■ **Carole Frederick** and her team for the great Fall Picnic.

■ **Dan Hopkins** and his persistent efforts to complete the Kirwan Farm Conservation Projects.

■ **John Bonner** and his skillful work as our newsletter publisher.

■ **Nancy Cook**, our past president, and her helpful mentoring and invaluable behind the scenes work to help keep us on track.

It's been a great year and a great Board. We look forward to the future.

I also want to share some thoughts on the loss of two more of our friends in recent months, Walter Denny and Melvin Clark, both long time Society members and active supporters. Walter was a past president of the Society in the early 1980s. His mother, Emily Roe Denny, was a co-founder of the Society, and he was proud of his Island heritage. Melvin was . . . well, he was Melvin . . . philosophical advisor, net-maker, folk historian, star of parade and pen. He was one of the infamous "Three Old Kent Islanders" of Nick Hoxter's book. We will miss you guys. God bless you. Brent Lewis has a fitting tribute to both Walter and Melvin — and also to Laura Lake's father, Harold Claiborn (yes, a direct descendant of *that* Claiborne) in this newsletter.

On a happier note, we marked two special birthdays this year. Past Presidents Gil Dunn and Audrey Hawkins both turned **90!** Gil was president from 1987 to 89 and Audrey was president from 1990 to 92 and still serves as treasurer. We all admire your passion and zest. Happy Birthday! And, thank you for sharing so much of yourselves with the Kent Island Heritage Society.

We hope you will join us on December 13 at the Yacht Club for our annual dinner meeting and holiday reception. We will hold the election (if additional nominations are received) and installation of officers and

Board members for 2009. We will also say so long and thank you to two great folks who are going off the Board, Flora Sossi and Brent Lewis. We will hear about Brent's new book-writing venture on the history of Kent Island and also present some special awards.

Hope to see you then.

Jack Broderick

New Slate for 2009

Continued from page 1

Officers are elected for one-year terms; directors serve three-year terms. New recommendations for positions on the board are Peggy Walbert for recording secretary and Nancy Sadler for director.

Additional nominations may be submitted to current recording secretary Flora Sossi, together with the nominees' consent to run, at 335 Five Farms Drive, Stevensville, MD 21666, as soon as possible.

Welcome New Members

Jack C. Dadds
Stevensville, Md.

The Glenn Family
Stevensville, Md.

The Gomez Family
Stevensville, Md.

Robert Lowe
Winter Haven, Fla.

Nancy Sadler
Stevensville, Md.

The Tracey Stone Family
Stevensville, Md.

Donald & Margaret (Peggy) Walbert
Queenstown, Md.

The Kent Island Heritage Society has lost three more friends.

MELVIN CLARK

We lost Melvin Clark this past summer. Born in Stevensville on May 15, 1922 to the late Thomas B. and E. Amelia Clark, Mr. Clark was a waterman, craftsman and historian. He cared deeply about our Kent Island and carried a wealth of information about our heritage that was unrivaled.

He married Alma Catherine Schepers in 1943, the same year he went off to serve in the Army during World War II. Melvin worked in commercial and industrial construction but was perhaps best known for operating his own business in Stevensville building tongs, live boxes, and crab nets for local watermen. He was a member of the Kent Island Heritage Society, American Legion Post 278, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7464, National World War II Memorial, Attack Boats Association, Camp Gordon Johnston Association, and was an honorary lifetime member of the Kent Island Volunteer Fire Department.

He loved Kent Island deeply and had nostalgic feelings about the place he grew up. In a 2004 interview he said, "People were happier back then, friendlier. Hardly a night went by you didn't have company or go visiting. There was no rat race. I think people are happier when they have less money."

Melvin Clark is survived by two sons, William and Paul; one sister, Mary Leona Smith; three grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

WALTER T. DENNY

Walter T. Denny, a member of a family that has been faithfully connected to Kent Island since the earliest days, died in September. Mr. Denny's father, T. Walter Denny, was on our society's first board of directors, and his mother, Emily Roe Denny, was one of the five ladies who originally founded our society. Mrs. Denny was a popular and fondly-remembered school teacher who also wrote several books and pamphlets about various aspects of Kent Island history.

Walter T. Denny was born on his family's Scillin Farm in 1939, and it was there he developed a lifelong love of farm life. He was a 1957 graduate of Stevensville High School and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture from the University of Maryland. He worked as an entomologist for the Department of Agriculture for more than four decades.

After retirement, Mr. Denny spent many hours researching his genealogy. He scoured historical archives, explored old cemeteries, and traveled the country making contacts. Walter T. Denny devoted his time studying the past so it would be preserved for his family's future. A fan of country music pioneer Hank Williams, Mr. Denny had a passion for country music that extended to the icon's progeny Hank Williams Jr. and Hank Williams III.

Mr. Denny's son Richard Carvel Denny says, "Kent Island was close to dad's heart. He loved being part of that heritage, his family connection to the island. He saw the Island change, and though he understood growth, he loved the way things used to be. He loved to be outside — hunting, trapping, working on the farm. His joy was to be here." Along with his son Richard, Mr. Denny is survived by a daughter Amanda, a sister Joan, and five grandchildren.

HAROLD CLAIBORN

October saw the passing of Harold Claiborn. Mr. Claiborn was a direct descendent of Kent Island's founder William Claiborne. He is survived by his daughter Lora Claiborne Lake, her husband, Kerry, two grandchildren, and a "host of relatives and beloved friends."

Ironically, Mr. Claiborn was unaware of his connection to our island until his daughter started researching the family's genealogy. Lora discovered that a 19th century ancestor who lost his arm fighting for the Union in the Civil War received a government check that had dropped the 'E.' so in the interest of getting paid, the veteran did the same. Variances in the spelling of surnames are not historically uncommon, but the practice can put up roadblocks in the research process. Fortunately, Lora has been able to verify her family's descendancy from Kent Island's primary forefather by two different sources.

His family remembers Harold as a man dedicated to them, his friends and community, country and church. He had a gentle and kind charm, with a keen sense of humor. Harold collected jokes and funny stories, he even had a little black book filled with punch lines to help call up the appropriate zinger. Lora says, "We'd just look at each other and laugh."

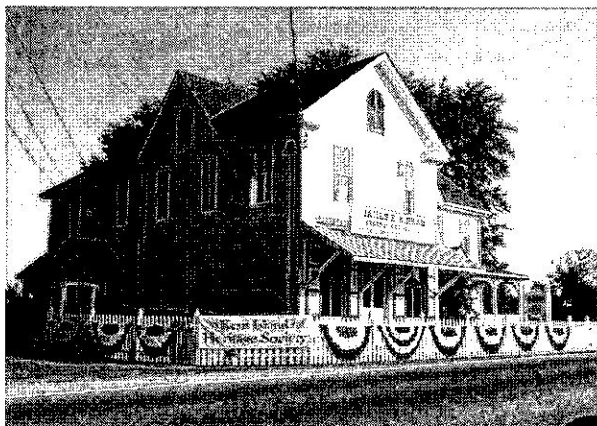
Lora has been one of the driving forces behind both the original opening of the Kirwan Museum and the restoration process required after the heartbreaking water damage that occurred earlier this year. Kerry is on the board of The Kent Island Heritage Society.

The Kent Island Heritage Society regrets the passing of these friends and extends our heartfelt sympathy to their families.

— Brent Lewis

FALL HERITAGE PICNIC at KIRWAN FARM

Photos by Doug Bish
The Bay Times



➡ FACING PAGE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
RIGHT:

Kent Island Flag
Design Contest
category winners:

ADULT

John Dadds

HIGH SCHOOL

Julia Glenn*

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Jessica Stone

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Jordan Gomez

CONTEST CHAIRMAN

Toni Gibson

KIHS PRESIDENT

Jack Broderick

* Julia Glenn's winning
entry flies above the
group.

■ Kirwan House

Co-curator Linda
Collier serves home
made ice cream to
John Dadds.

■ Guests enjoyed hay

ride tours of Kirwan
Farm.

■ Gospel music

provided by Harold
"Coon Dog" Smith,
Guinea Legg and
Chuck Van Meter on
guitar.

■ Buffet tables

overflowing with fried
chicken and a wide
variety of homemade
delights were followed
by this table of cakes,
historically authentic
pear pie and other
treats, including old
fashioned vanilla ice
cream made in
Kirwan's kitchen by
Linda Collier.

KENT ISLAND DAY PATRONS

*Without the financial support of our patrons, Kent Island Day
would not occur. Below are names of those who generously
contributed to this activity.*

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William and Joyce Woodford
Charles and Bonel Zakarian



... Once Told Me ...

By Brent Lewis

The Chesapeake Bay offers much in the way of bounty, but I consider the oyster, the blue crab, and the rockfish the trinity of Chesapeake Bay seafood. It's oyster season, and that got me thinking ...

MELVIN CLARK once told me, "Back in the old days you were either a waterman or a farmer, there was an abundance of oysters but no money. We'd sell to the shucking houses, and sometimes you'd sell two bushels for a quarter just to get rid of them. Jim Cockey built boats and made tong shafts in Stevensville. I worked with him and learned my trade. Mr. Harper was the blacksmith. He made the heads.

"Contractors across the bridge liked to hire Eastern Shoremen because they knew they would work hard. Only problem was they knew they'd lose them in September come oyster season. Oystering got into your blood. You were independent. You could go out when you wanted and come in when you wanted. Nobody could tell you to do anything."

WELDON (GUINEA) LEGG once told me, "If I had to do it all over again I'd rather oyster with hand tongs than anything.

"Most fellows who make tongs today make them like real tongs but don't build them to suit what a pair of tongs is really supposed to be. Some of them are beautiful. Carry them out there, and they couldn't scratch my butt. It's not about how they look. You have to know what to look for. Have to make sure the bottom of your tongs is made from the butt of the tree. You don't want them upside down. Have to know your grains. Some of that wood is like a sponge as soon as they hit the water. You could work the tops and the bottoms wouldn't really move. Heads last a lifetime. Dan Crouch was an Island blacksmith and was supposed to have made good heads. I have a pair Bobby Aaron made me and they're just as good as any I ever had.

"Electronics changed the business.

With depth finders, GPS, watermen don't have to learn everything. I tell my grandchildren, you can't be an oysterman until you learn the water out there like the palm of your hand. You've got to know where you are in daylight; you've got to know in the dark. You've got to know."

BILLY HARRIS once told me, "When I was a boy, oysters were 25 cents a bushel. Three men in a boat could catch 75 to 100 bushels a day. November 1 was the start of dredging season. There'd be 100 dredge boats off Love Point catching 300 to 500 bushels a day. Back in my grandfather's time, in the 1800s, they said if you caught four bushels that was a good day's work. There were 15 oyster houses at Kent Narrows. When I started, a gallon of oysters was \$2.50. My father had sold that gallon for 59 cents."

GORDON CROUCH once told me, "The packing house (at Little Creek) was in our family from 1929 until I retired and sold it around 1990. My grandfather ran the packing house; my father had a store and bar down there. We mainly catered to watermen, sold beer, lunchmeat and some groceries. I started working there when I was about 12 years old. Daddy used to have a truck that would come up from St. Michael's with oysters. We'd be up before school shoveling those oysters. Back then, you could run the whole operation on \$200 or \$300 per week. Everything — buying oysters, paying shuckers, and we had a houseful of shuckers. After I got out of the service I went to work for the state. I was working part-time for my father but that arrangement didn't last long. He couldn't get help. He just handed me the keys. My state job lasted nine months. I ran the packing house for about 29 years.

"Back then a lot of oystermen didn't do anything all summer. They'd hang their tongs up and be done until fall. In the old days I heard of men who quit oystering with \$25 and lived on it all summer. Of course, back then

everybody had hogs, chicken and eggs, a garden. About all you'd need would be a barrel of flour.

"At one time the oyster business used to be big on Kent Island. Right here in Little Creek there were six packing houses. There were two or three more up the creek. Started dropping off in the 1970s after Hurricane Agnes or one of those big storms. We were the last ones to close. It was the end of an era."

That's what those guys once told me.

Author/Member Seeks Old Kent Island Photos

Kent Island! Stevensville! Chester! Love Point! Kent Point! Bloody Point! Matapeake! Kent Narrows! Little Creek! Buzzardville! Ticktown! Historic Homes and Businesses! Watermen! Farmers! Notable Citizens! Fishing! Hunting! Recreation! Bay Bridge! Fire Department! Chessie! Memorable Events! The Good Old Days!

Brent Lewis is seeking iconic vintage photographs of Kent Island for a couple different projects he's working on. He hopes to find pictures that have not yet been seen by the general public, but is interested in all.

He's also looking for color photos and paintings that could be used as a cover art for a book about the history of Kent Island. Thanks to available technology it won't be necessary to borrow the pictures, but the plan would be to scan them at a location of your choosing. Members who would like to contribute photos won't have to worry about loss or damage.

Brent can be reached at 410-310-8216 or brentlewis46@gmail.com and would appreciate any and all assistance offered in this endeavor.

Been to the Old Stevensville Post Office Lately?

By Fran Peters

Saturday, October 4, was a beautiful autumn day. Lots of sunshine. A gentle breeze moved the "OPEN" flag back and forth at the corner of the Old Stevensville Post Office. Traffic moved briskly past its front door.

This little yellow building has been on maps of Stevensville since 1877. That's 131 years ago. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. But some mail still gets picked up at a post office in much the same way. Or it is delivered to your house.

As a docent in this quaint little building, I get to tell visitors about the history of this place as though it were a first-hand personal account. And it almost is because it is so much like the little post office I went to when I was a child in Texas. Going to town to pick up our mail was a big event, and getting back home by way of the railroad tracks without losing anything was a big responsibility. That was big time summer fun. I wonder if anyone who lives on Kent Island today remembers walking to the post office in Stevensville.

Once there was a post office at the grocery store at Mattapax that served the south end of the island. It was closed and its mail handled by the Stevensville Post Office. Back then, a ferry brought our mail to Love Point, where a train

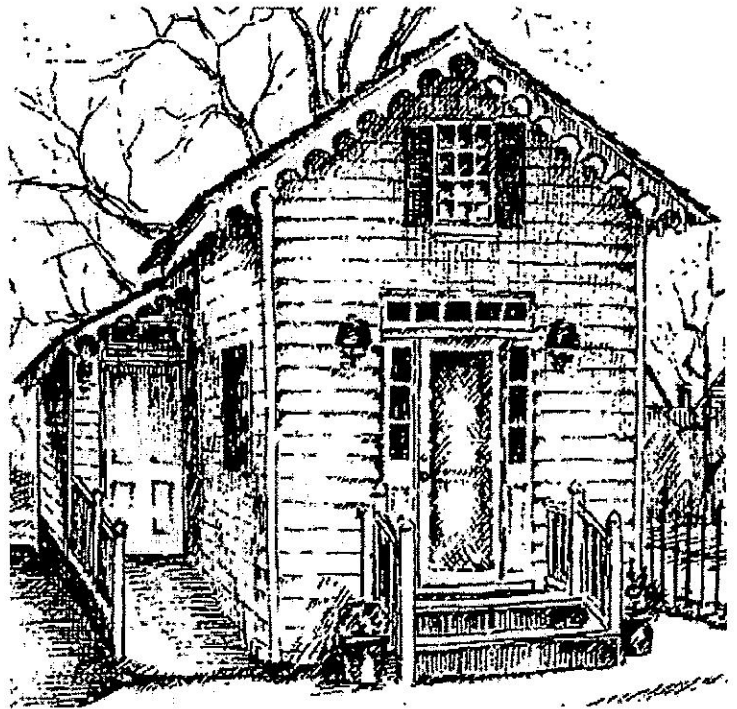
picked up and brought it to this little yellow building for sorting. We still have one of those original sorting tables. Visitors can see the way it was from 1877 until 1951 when postal operations moved to a larger site.

While I wait for visitors I like to pretend I can hear the train chugging its way from Love Point. I tell people how we placed our outgoing mail sack on a pole so it could be snagged as the train roared through town at 35 mph. Our incoming mail sack was just thrown on the ground for someone to pick up and bring to the post office for sorting.

I think it would have been fun to sort the mail and see who was writing to whom. Some letters would go into the pigeon holes to be picked up. Other mail went into the lock boxes where the folks with keys could get it whenever the post office was open. If the shade on the front door was up the post office was open for business. If the shade was closed, the post office was closed.

Picking up the mail was an important social event. Neighbors did some visiting when they came into town. The children could take their coins over to the grocery store for candy or ice cream.

This year the historical sites in Stevensville were open on the first Saturday of the month from 12 noon to 4 p.m. We had about 50 people from many different places stopping by. They all seemed to think it was



wonderful that our Heritage Society keeps these aged buildings in such good shape. And they tell me about how it was in their hometown.

Home delivery of mail didn't become a regular event until about 1929 when Mr. Tolson was hired. However, news accounts that predate the railroad tell that when the mail was picked up at the ferry boat by horse and wagon that the driver would drop packages off at farms on his way back to the post office.

Oh, excuse me. I have some visitors. I'll tell them I have some mail for them and give them an envelope with an original stamp. They're always surprised.

This Saturday was a good one. We had 12 people sign the guest book, and they seemed to enjoy their visit. I know I was glad to have them.

At four o'clock, I will pull down the shade on the door, bring in the "OPEN" flag, turn out the lights and lock up.

Isle of Kent

John Bonner, Editor

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RESERVATION FOR ANNUAL MEETING

Name(s) _____

Dinner Choices:

- ☐ Chicken Marsala
☐ London Broil

Telephone No. _____

Names of others sharing your table (maximum of 8 per table)

Reservations must be received by December 5. Tickets are \$40 per person.
Please return this card to Toni Gibson at 1814 Churchill Lane, Chester, MD 21619
with check payable to: The Kent Island Heritage Society.
Or call her at 410-643-6483 with this information.