

Kent Island - 1631

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC. ■ SPRING 2007

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President's Message

THE STATE PROCLAMATION issued in 1977 by Acting Governor Blair Lee declaring the third weekend in May as Kent Island Days seemed most appropriate as the Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc. commemorated the 376th anniversary of the founding of Kent Island. This proclamation was read at the opening ceremony of this year's Kent Island Day on May 19. Here are excerpts:

WHEREAS, Kent Island, Queen Anne's County, is the site of the first English speaking settlement in the State of Maryland and the third such settlement on the North American Continent, preceded only by Jamestown, Virginia, and Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts;

WHEREAS, Kent Island is the site of the first permanent Anglican Church in Maryland, and the Church remains a functioning church today;

WHEREAS, The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc., has designated the third weekend in May to appropriately observe the heritage and history of Kent Island and celebrate the occasion of this State's first settlement by William Claiborne in 1631;

WHEREAS, Kent Island and Kent Islanders have made major contributions to the welfare and economy of Queen Anne's County for over two hundred and seventy years . . .

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Historic Preservation In Queen Anne's County

By Nancy Cook

As president of The Kent Island Heritage Society, I have often been contacted by newcomers to the island inquiring about historic preservation regulations of Queen Anne's County. My answer has always seemed to be such a surprise to them: "There are none."

Because there has not been an historic preservation ordinance or commission established in the county, The Society became proactive in calling attention to this fact in orange postcards that were sent out two years ago urging "the Queen Anne's County Commissioners to create an Historic Preservation Commission and adopt an historic preservation ordinance for Queen Anne's County. The historic houses and buildings warrant the creation of such a commission so that the history of the county may be protected and preserved for the future."

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Mark Your Calendar

Kent Island Heritage Society GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, June 13

Kent Island Free Library

7:00 p.m. Refreshments

7:30 p.m. Program

"Archivists Make It Last Longer"

Kristin Bombard, Public Service

Librarian, Queen Anne's County Free
Public Library

*Attendees are asked to bring family Bibles
or family-tree charts to be photocopied
that evening for addition to The Society's
genealogical archives.*

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Cemetery Identification & Preservation

Lora Lake

Editor

John Bonner

President's Message

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The Society, whose purpose is to discover, identify, restore, and preserve the heritage of Kent Island, constantly strives to make the community aware of the wonderful and unique history of the area in which they reside or visit. The Cray House (1809), the Stevensville Depot (1902), the Old Stevensville Bank (1909), the Old Stevensville Post Office (1877) are historic sites for which guided tours are provided and are wonderful visual records of Kent Island's history in Historic Stevensville Town Center.

The Society has an enormous responsibility to the public to publicize and perpetuate the wonderful history of this area, which holds such a unique place in the history of our nation and state.

Nancy M. Cook

In Memoriam

ELSIE E. REAMY PORTER

[102 YEARS OF AGE]

MRS. JOHN T. (EVELYN)

PRICE

The society is very thankful for and will miss the interest and support shown our organization by these members. Continuing our shared mission honors their memory.

Welcome New Member

Laura Ringgold
 Stevensville, Md.

Historic Preservation

Continued from page 1

There is, however, a historic structural review under the auspices of the Dept. of Planning and Zoning that requires photographs and documentation before an historic structure can be demolished. This documentation is performed by Amanda Apple, executive coordinator of the Historic Sites Consortium, and has sometimes been referred to as "an historic demolition policy."

Just recently, Planning and Zoning recommended changing the definition of "historic" to "a structure or building that is 100 years or older." This would be in conflict with the Secretary of Interior's and the National Historic Register's definition of historic as "50 years or older." On Commissioner Carol Fordonski's amendment, however, the County Commission disapproved this recommendation. KIHS Vice President Jack Broderick and I spoke at all the hearings held on this matter.

In June 2006, Broderick and I, along with Scott MacGlashan of the Queen Anne's County Historical Society and Mr. Stephen Kehoe lawyer for the town of Centreville (his participation meets county Ethics Committee standards) met to discuss historic preservation for the county. In April 2007 another meeting was held that also included Elizabeth Watson, executive director of ESHI/Stories of the Chesapeake Bay, and Juanita Kohn, executive director of Queen Anne's Historical Society.

The process to establish such a commission will involve many persons from those in government to those from the private sector. Hopefully, many misconceptions will be allayed through much discussions and knowledge of what historic preservation is.

Establishing an historic ordinance will deem the county eligible for federal and state monies to establish a commission and take advantage of the many tax exemptions and grants that are available. Oral histories, archaeological surveys, projects that increase awareness of our place in history, and identification of historic sites are other benefits of such a commission.

A grant-funded survey is in the process of being conducted — Queen Anne's County Historic Sites Inventory Project, 2007-2008 — updating and expanding the list of historic sites within the county, particularly those built between 1865 and 1955. If you wish to know more about this project, contact History Matters (202-223-8845) or email info@historymatters.net.

KIRWAN HOUSE DISASTER

By Nancy Cook

THE ISLAND IDLERS

By Gil Dunn

Our wonderful Kirwan House Store Museum suffered a most unfortunate incident when a second-floor water pipe above the museum froze and burst on February 8, sending water dripping through the floorboards and cascading down the stairway to the kitchen. Many store artifacts representing the years 1890 through 1930 were saved by quick action of museum staff Society members Linda and Butch Collier, Lora and Kerry Lake, and Vice President Jack Broderick. With the assistance of many others, the museum is well on its way to being restored.

We are especially thankful for Amanda Apple, Queen Anne's County heritage coordinator, for her quick action in obtaining an emergency grant from The Maryland Historical Trust for hiring conservators to assess the collection and provide much information for the restoration of the items and the store. Mr. Peter Leshner, collections curator for the St. Michaels Maritime Museum, also provided invaluable advice on saving and restoring various items. Our thanks, too, go to Marie Malero, president of the Queen Anne's Historical Society, and to Ann and Dan Shortall of the Eastern Shore Life Museum in Centreville, who assisted in providing names of restoration resources.

Structural damage to walls and floors has been repaired and repainted. The store ceiling has been repainted its original green. All artifacts will have to be cleaned and cleared of any mold-inducing agents, and the arduous task of accessioning (photographing and documenting each item and placing an accession number on each object) will have to be completed. During the summer the heating and air conditioning system will be installed as previously planned, as well as updating of the electrical system. We are targeting September as a reopening date.

This has truly been a learning experience for all who were involved. We are fortunate to have such truly dedicated volunteers working with the museum.

During the period following the opening of the Bay Bridge, there was a sharp increase in the number of retired men living on Kent Island. One of them, Bill Kerber, had the idea to form a Men's Club. They would meet on a certain day each month in the home of one of the retirees. This would assure them of a place to visit each month.

The idea took hold, and a good number of retired men showed up for the first meeting. They named their new club The Island Idlers. They would start each meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance. Then they would sing their "alma mater," written by club member Ollie Kirwin and sung to the melody of "God Bless America":

God bless the Double I
Those who would do or die
For the land they love
On the golden Isle of Kent.
Many happy hours are spent
In peaceful retirement
Thanks to God above.

When the number of members increased, a larger meeting place was needed. Available halls on Kent Island were scarce back then. Half of a 100-foot former Chicken House in Stevensville had been renovated as a playroom for kids and a meeting place for adult gatherings. Arrangements were

made for the Idlers to meet in the Chicken House each month.

Membership increased significantly. They played cards, they played pool (the pool table was in the playroom for kids), they drank beer (they brought their own), and they sang songs.

Member Pete Von Roon, the self-appointed musician of the club, led the singing. His old-country accented English made Jingle Bells come out Yingle Bells.

Twenty-five feet of additional space was renovated for the club to make room for their annual oyster and crab feast. The need for kitchen facilities resulted in their move to a larger place at St. Christopher in Harbor View. Several years later they moved again to an even larger facility at the Elks Club on Rte. 8.

As the years passed, the older men who started the club began to die off. New members did not replace them. Attendance at meetings declined. The Island Idlers closed up shop in 2004. There is no longer an Island Idlers Club.

But their original meeting place — the Chicken House — still remains. No longer used for activities, it is filled with many items in storage. I know these things because the Chicken House is in my backyard.

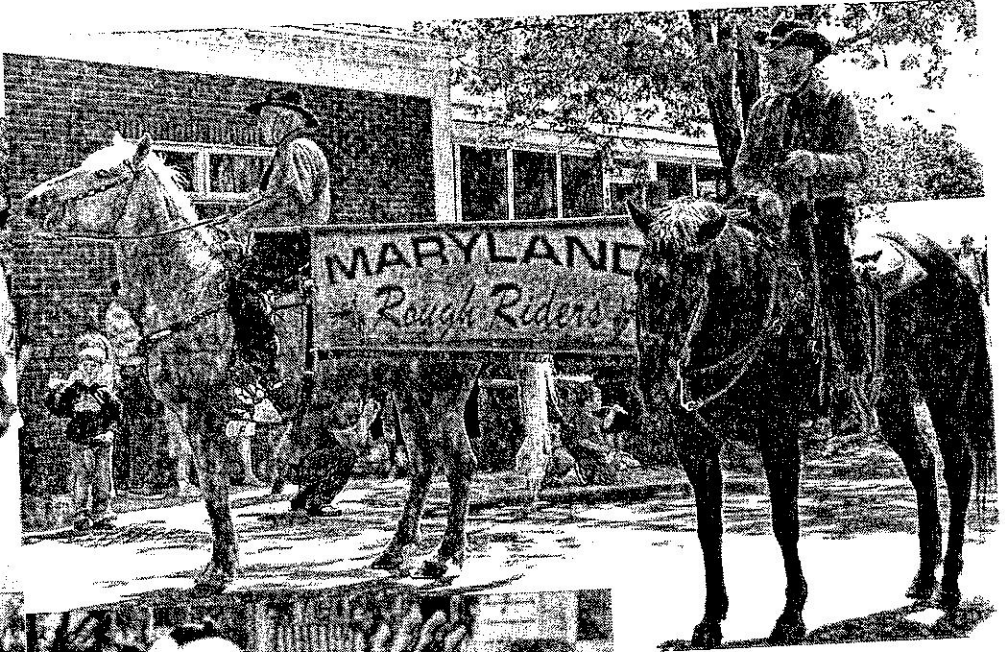
Isle of Kent

John Bonner, Editor

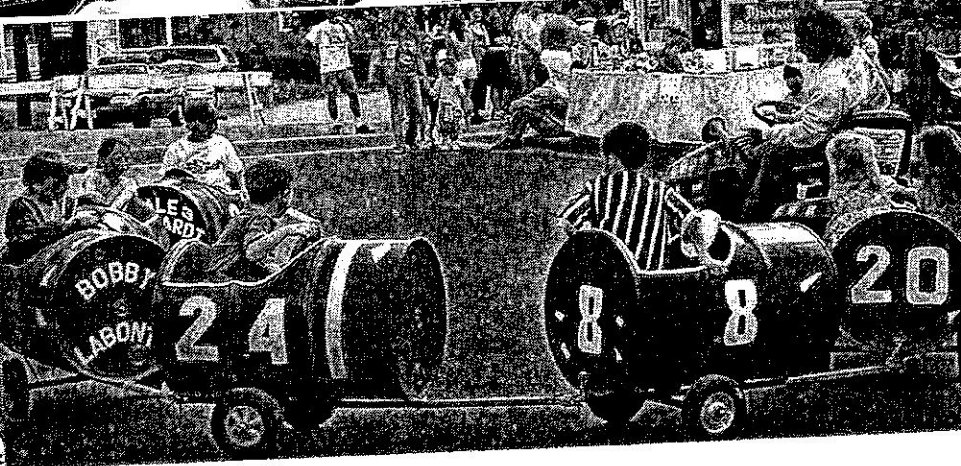
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nd Day 2007



Photos by
Jean Leathery
& John Bonner



Docents Tea

The Kent Island Heritage Society honored its docents for their invaluable services to our community with a tea at the Kent Island Free Library on March 28. Our dedicated docents — in authentic costume and role — enhance the awareness and appreciation of our common heritage for citizen and student alike.

Honored docents are Joann Anderson, Alex Bernadyn, Myrtle Bruscup, Linda and Butch Collier, Lora Lake, Richard and Eileen Dadds, Gil and Florence Dunn, Janet and William Denny, Carole Frederick, Audrey Hawkins, Jean Leathery, Barbara and Georgia Marmion, Fran Peters, Flora Sossi, Fran Taylor and Hanna Wall.



Photo by Bryan McBournie, The Bay Times

Other photos by Jean Leathery

Kent Island & World History

By Brent Lewis

Everybody here knows 1631. That's the year William Claiborne established Kent Island as an English settlement. Twenty-four years after Jamestown, our country's first permanent colony, and eleven years after the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock.

In 1631, most of Europe was entangled in the religious and political pandemonium of the Thirty Years War. The Dutch were in the midst of their economically ruinous tulip frenzy. In India, the Taj

Mahal was under construction. Rembrandt began to establish himself as an artist of considerable reputation, while Galileo wrote science that would be called heresy. A mathematician first used "X" as the symbol for multiplication. Baltimore, in County Cork, Ireland, was attacked by pirates. Witch-hunting was all the rage.

Looking at the past through a global lens helps tell the story of our island.

Three years after Claiborne came ashore here, Lord Baltimore claimed Kent Island for his new Maryland colony. Claiborne resisted, resulting in our country's first naval battle and first charges of

piracy. Claims and counterclaims for the fate of the island went on for a couple decades until Claiborne left forever in 1658.

In 1658, Britain's love-him-or-hate-him political and military leader, Oliver Cromwell, died. So did Edward Sexby, a Cromwell enemy who had conspired to assassinate the so-called Lord Protector of England. Molière debuted on stage in Paris. Red blood cells were identified for the first time. The first bank note was issued.

Kent Island probably never had a huge native population. Claiborne reported a small tribe of about a hundred Matapeakes living on the southeastern shore, near Kent Point. There is some evidence an even smaller group, the Monoponsons, also called the island home. As the years passed, their numbers decreased to a handful. According to a letter written by a Mr.

James Bryan, it was around 1770 when the last Kent Island Indians "turned their faces westward" and became part of history.

The Boston Massacre occurred in March 1770. In May, a fourteen-year-old Marie Antoinette married the future King Louis XVI of

France. Ludwig Van Beethoven was born in December. The Industrial Revolution had begun.

In 1850, two farms were combined to create the town of Stevensville.

Also in 1850: California became a state. Henry Clay introduced his slavery compromise to the senate. Harriet Tubman, a Marylander, was a conductor on the Underground Railroad. "The Scarlet Letter," "The Arabian Nights," and "David Copperfield" were published.

Trains came to Kent Island in 1902 when the Queen Anne's County Railway Company extended its Lewes, Delaware, line from Queenstown to Love Point.

Charles Lindbergh, John Steinbeck, Son House, Ray Kroc, Leni Riefenstahl, Carlo Gambino, Strom Thurmond, and Larry from the Three Stooges were all born in 1902.

In 1952 the Chesapeake Bay Bridge was completed, connecting the island directly to the Baltimore-Washington Metropolitan Area. After centuries of limited exposure to the outside world, life on the Eastern Shore changed forever.

Dwight Eisenhower was

elected president that year. The same Queen Elizabeth that visited the United States in 2007 succeeded her father on England's throne. The National Security Agency was founded. Doctors performed the first open heart surgery. Multiple UFO sightings were reported over the course of the year, including several over our nation's capital and at least one in Queen Anne's County. Cheez Whiz came out. Curly from the Three Stooges died.

When future historians look back at our time, how will 2007 be framed? How will they look at terrorism, the Iraq War, and the debate over climate change? Not to mention American Idol, Spiderman, and all those badly behaved, marginally talented at best, pseudo-celebrities everyone seems obsessed with but nobody really cares about?

And what will they see when they look at Kent Island? What will the outstanding events be? Who will be the people that make history?

Only one thing is certain, and the French writer Lamartine said it best. "History teaches everything including the future."

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