

Islc of Kent - 1631

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

NEWSLETTER OF THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC.

SUMMER 2023

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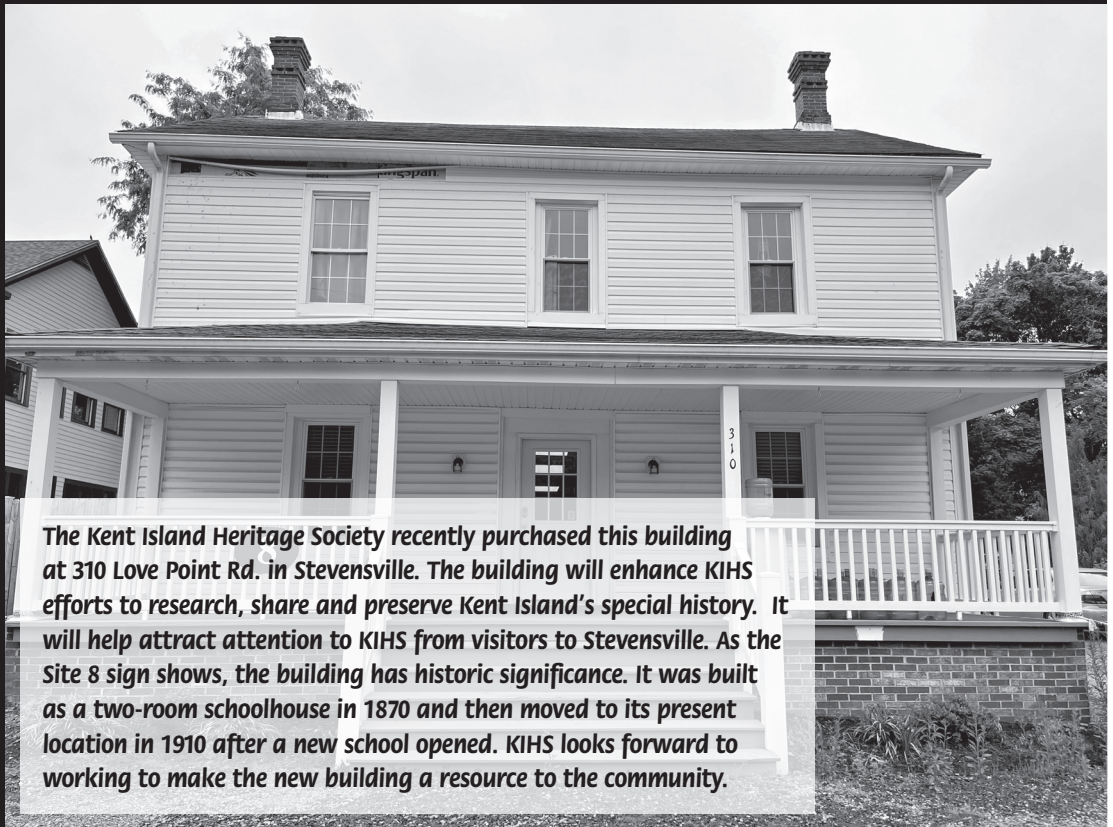
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The Kent Island Heritage Society recently purchased this building at 310 Love Point Rd. in Stevensville. The building will enhance KIHS efforts to research, share and preserve Kent Island's special history. It will help attract attention to KIHS from visitors to Stevensville. As the Site 8 sign shows, the building has historic significance. It was built as a two-room schoolhouse in 1870 and then moved to its present location in 1910 after a new school opened. KIHS looks forward to working to make the new building a resource to the community.



President's Message

Fate has been good to us this spring, with two major events. We celebrated our iconic Kent Island Day – bigger and better than ever, and we purchased a historic property in downtown Stevensville!

On Saturday, May 20, we gathered in Stevensville for the annual Kent Island Day celebration, founded in 1977 by Governor Proclamation. We hosted over 100 vendors and exhibitors and a crowd approaching about 2,000! After the opening ceremony and reading of the Proclamation by Commissioner Chris Corchiarino, the colorful parade followed through town to the delight of the large crowd of visitors and their families. The weather cleared and could not have been better as we enjoyed the exhibits, displays, and entertainment, and celebrated our unique heritage with the food, fun, and friendship of Kent Island Day. Enjoy the pictures here in this Newsletter.

(Continued on page 2)

The teamwork of our Board and volunteers was impressive in planning and hosting our special event. New this year was the hiring of a talented Event Planner, Stacy Bernstein of Chester. We extend our gratitude to Stacy, who brought our Kent Island Day team to a whole new level! Thank you, Stacy.

In late April we celebrated a major landmark event, the purchase of a key historic property in Historic Stevensville. The property at 310 Love Point Road, directly next to Peace of Cake Bakery, is over 150 years old. The building was the first public school in Stevensville, known as Schoolhouse # 4-2 (the second school in QA County District 4). It was originally built in the 1870's at a different site about ¼ mile south on Love Point Road, at the location of the still-standing Old School House building. It was sold in 1910 and moved up the hill (can you believe that!) to its present location to make way for a new school. It has served since as a residence and a business location. The building is in excellent condition. We anticipate that the building could become our new headquarters, museum, records storage and research center. We have appointed a committee (spearheaded by KIHS VP Bob Lowe) of select Board Members with diverse skills to explore and recommend plans for the road ahead. It's an exciting prospect to house and showcase our rich Kent Island heritage.

This purchase was made possible by the generosity of our long-serving former Treasurer, Lynne Riley-Coleman. As you may recall in a prior Newsletter, Lynne died in the fall of 2021. We learned afterwards that she bequeathed a large financial gift to the Heritage Society to be used for: the purchase of the Historic Stevensville Bank, or other historic Kent Island property, or other unexpected expenses. As it happened, the Bank was sold about the time of Lynne's passing and was no longer available. We considered several properties in the immediate Historic Stevensville area before deciding on 310 Love Point Rd, also known as Schoolhouse #2. Stay tuned for future information as we move forward to extend our capabilities and expand our historic footprint in downtown Stevensville.

At our general meeting on June 27, we plan to host a very special presentation by Dr. John Seidel, Professor Emeritus from Washington College. His presentation will focus on shaping the Chesapeake Landscape – Archaeology – People – and the Environment. Dr. Seidel will share his insights on how humans have been shaped and changed by their environment and in turn how the environment has been changed by humans, particularly around the Chesapeake and on Kent Island. Check out the article here and our website for details. We invite you to join us on Tuesday, June 27 at 7:00, at Historic Christ Church in Stevensville.

On July 1, in addition to our Historic Sites being open, we will welcome to the Cray House Green the 2023 A&E Pet Parade sponsored by the Stevensville A&E District. Starting at 10:00 a.m., the event will feature pet-oriented vendors and groomers, the parade, and prizes. Check out the A&E website for details (stevensvilleartsandentertainment.org). Also in July we plan to join our A&E partners for a "Thursdays in the Park" concert sponsored by the Queen Anne's County Center for the Arts. The concert will be held on Thursday, July 27, at 7:00 on the Cray House Green behind the Train Station and will feature music by the popular local rock / R&B band, Wheelhouse.

In September we plan to host our annual Fall Heritage Picnic at the Kirwan House, showcasing the Kirwan Place itself along with Kent Island's changing autumn landscape. In December, we will host our annual Holiday general meeting and elections at Cascia Vineyards. We also plan to participate again in the annual Queen Anne's County Festival of Trains in December, highlighting the railroading heritage of Kent Island.

We are planning an online fundraising event, unique to our heritage efforts. In reaching out to local businesses for possible KI Day sponsorship support, PRS Guitars, Inc. responded with the offer of a beautiful PRS Guitar from their collection. We obtained the guitar too close to KI Day to set up a fitting onsite event, so we've decided to hold an online auction this summer. We plan to develop a musical ad for our website and expanded social media. Check our website and local press for timing and details (kentislandheritagesociety.org).

With our historic sites open on each First Saturday (May through November), we want to emphasize the important work of our docents, our welcoming guides, at each site. Our docents are our ambassadors, dressed in authentic historic period outfits, who meet and greet our visitors and tell our stories. It bears repeating that being a docent can be stimulating, fun, and educational in its own right. If you appreciate our Kent Island History and enjoy meeting people, consider becoming a docent.

We want to share some other positive news. In late May, we were honored to present our 2023 Kent Island Heritage Society Scholarship to Lucas Hetzel, an accomplished graduating senior from Kent Island High School. We extend our congratulations to Lucas. Check out his winning essay and picture.

We thank you for your continuing support as we look forward to an active year of activities and events in support of our mission to discover, identify, restore, and preserve the heritage of Kent Island.

Stay cool. Enjoy some crabs! Enjoy your summer!

Jack Broderick



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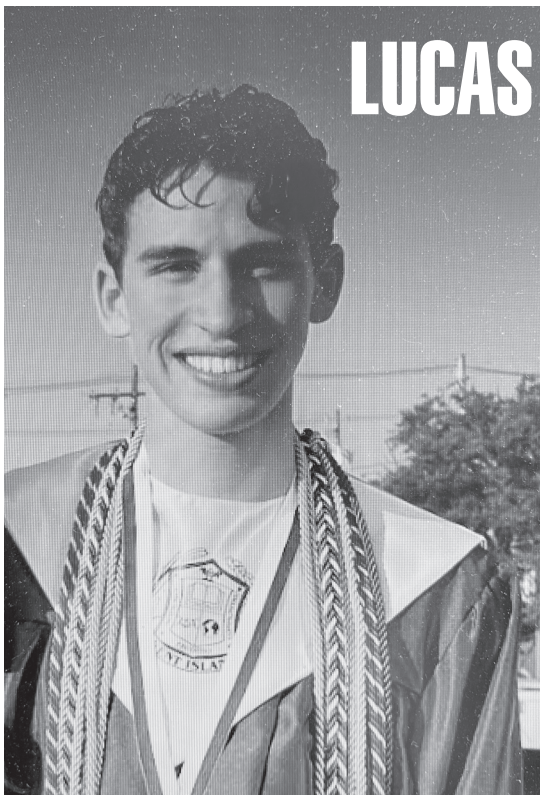


Thank You **KENT ISLAND
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LUCAS HETZEL WINS SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

Lucas Hetzel is the winner of the Kent Island Heritage Society \$1,000 Scholarship awarded each year to a graduating senior from Kent Island High School. Hetzel had a strong record of academic achievement and community service. He was ranked second in his graduating class and among his community service was founding an organization called New Life for Books which has resulted in thousands of books being donated to Queen Anne's County residents. He was a member of several academic honor societies and he also played on the KIHS soccer team. He will attend the University of Maryland in the fall.

One of the criteria for the scholarship is to write an essay on the importance of preserving the history of Kent Island. Here are portions of Mr. Hetzel's essay:

I feel that the importance of preserving the heritage of Kent Island is very important not only for the current generation but for future generations. As a native of Kent Island, I have had the opportunity to explore and study the history and culture of our area. Knowing that Kent Island was the 1st European Settlement in today's Maryland is amazing. We own this special place in history, and I feel we need to cherish the history around it. I appreciate the names we have used in Kent Island to forever remember our area's past such as the Matapeake. I have visited and toured the historic Stevensville Main Street area and have been able to explore each building. I really appreciate that we have been able to keep these buildings in good condition and allowed the public to enter them. From the Train Station to the bank with the very cool vault to Christ Church, they are all amazing in many ways.

I feel that the first thing we need to do is to continue to preserve Kent Island in various ways so that future generations can continue to learn and realize how life was before them. I feel as we look back in time, we can learn and take a few notes on how simplistic things were back then. We can be a bit spoiled in today's days and I think by preserving our past, we can teach everyone something about

life. I have dedicated many of my volunteer hours to giving back to our environment and sharing what I know with others. If we don't keep this island clean this will affect the culture of who we are. If we contaminate our areas or waters, it will trickle down to our heritage and represent us. . . If we protect our lands and waters, we protect our heritage. . .

Our heritage is our identity here on Kent Island. We have so much history that many do not know about even today. We need to share our culture with others in the best way possible. Broad Creek, the train tracks, the lands all represent what happened here many years ago and represent those who began their lives here. Kent Island started by exchanging goods for other goods we had here and growing from there. We need to continue educating our community on our heritage so that others will continue with teaching future generations.

The Kent Island Heritage Society would like to thank past-president Nancy Cook for all the work she has done to make the KIHS Scholarship Award program a success, as well as the teachers and staff at Kent Island High School who provided support to those entering the contest this year. Our judges were impressed with the quality of the submissions this year.

The Last Picture Show

By Linda Collier

In the year 1917, the congregation of the Stevensville Methodist Episcopal Church, commonly known as the first church or the brick church, had outgrown its building and needed more space for their Sunday School classes. This church was standing in 1816 on a piece of land sold in 1784 to the trustees of the Methodist Church by William Osbourne for the expressed purpose of building a house of worship for the existing Methodists of the island. It was to the right of the old school house (still standing today) on the main road to Matapeake and all points south. Mr. Charles Downes saw the need for a bigger building and donated the property on the corner of what is now Church Street and Love Point Road to build a new larger church with Sunday School rooms and it was called Downes Methodist Episcopal Church.

Just a block away was the Trinity Methodist Protestant Church, so when the Methodist conference decided to combine three branches of the church in 1939 and call it simply the Methodist Church, Trinity moved in with Downes and became Trinity Downes Methodist Church and the old Methodist Protestant Church became the church hall. It is today the antique shop owned by the Denny family.

At some point between 1917 and 1930, Senator James E. Kirwan bought the old M.E. Church. Being the Renaissance Man that he was, he set about turning it into a motion picture parlor called the Stevensville Opera House.



M. E. CHURCH, STEVENSVILLE, MD.

*Yes folks,
Kent
Island had
a movie
theatre!*

According to Calvert Jones' recollection in the 1977 *Bay Times* article about the Opera House, it was there he saw his first "talkie" which attracted the entire population of the island. This is possibly an exaggeration or poetic license because in 1930 the entire population of Kent Island was about 2200

people, but I'm sure it was packed. Talkies were gradually evolving, by small steps, until a full talking movie was created by 1930.

For such a small island however, there was plenty of entertainment and activities available. There was a bowling alley, two or three town halls, weekend dances and exhibitions at Love Point Hotel and Matapeake. The James Adams floating Theatre came for two weeks each summer, and there were log canoe races, horse races on Parson's Island, and Ice Carnivals at Steam Mill Bridge in winter. In the early 50s, there was even a roller rink! At some point even Grasonville, Queenstown and Centreville had movie theatres.

Brent Lewis relates a tale in his book, *Remembering Kent Island*, that Frank and Jim Cockey once showed movies upstairs of Legg Hall. The price of admission was ten cents, but they let a Mr. Moore in for free because he was a real good laughter. The time period for this can't be verified.

Fast forward to 2023. The population is well over 20,000 and we have none of this. Rec and Parks, school sports and social media are how most young people find their entertainment these days.

Back to Senator Kirwan opening the Opera House in 1931. In the beginning, two showings were offered at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The first movie shown was entitled *Young Sinners*. That sounds a little racy for 1931, but I am certain it would have been rated "G" by today's standards. His son-in-law, Whitefield Coleman, managed the theatre and my uncle, Monk Severa, ran the projector. There were other locals employed there, I am sure.

This enterprise ran beautifully for many years. Senator Kirwan died in 1938, but his son Lemuel carried on the business showing all the latest and most popular films. That is until Saturday, March 28, 1942 when fire disaster struck.

Kent Island did not have a fire department at the time so had to rely on neighboring companies. The Opera House was located to the right of the elementary school, about where Duty's garage and Caliber Collision are now. Jane Sparks was in second grade in Miss Bright's room. Miss Bright taught second and

(Continued on page 8)

Fire Destroys

Stevensville Opera House

In the most disastrous fire Stevensville has had in many years, the Stevensville Opera House was completely destroyed, last Saturday afternoon.

The fire was discovered shortly after 12 o'clock noon. Fire companies from Queenstown and Centerville battled the blaze, and succeeded in confining it to the theatre.

The building which formerly was the Methodist Church, was purchased and remodeled some years ago by Senator Kirwan, but for some time had been the property of Lemuel Kirwan, who also owned the movie equipment, which was also destroyed by fire.

The theatre had been operated for several years as the Stevensville Opera House, the completely equipped building being rented from Mr. Kirwan by F. P. Klein. According to Mr. Klein, there was also in the building at the time of the fire some \$2,500 worth of equipment which was his property. Everything but this latter equipment is said to have been covered by insurance.

third grade in the same room and was busy with her third graders when Jane raised her hand to tell her that she smelled smoke. Miss Bright told her to be quiet and it was about then a fireman knocked on the door. They evacuated all the children to a big ditch along the opposite side of the building from the Opera House, where they stayed until parents or the bus came and got them.

KIHS member Don Crouch remembers

that he was in Miss Margaret Tolson's 5th grade classroom with windows facing the Opera House and they had a bird's eye view for a while. Poor Ted Breeding had ridden his new bike to school that day and left it leaned up against the Opera House where it went up in flames with everything else.

Someone questioned why the children were in school on a Saturday? For a brief time, the schools were in session for an extra day a week so kids could get out early in the year to help farmers with the planting. Boys and girls alike had to help on farms as a lot of young men were serving their country in WW2. Jane remembers she had to plant tomato plants on her uncle's farm with some other kids. He paid everybody 50 cents, except for Jane. He gave her a quarter, because, after all, she was a relative.

The Opera House was a total loss and there has never been another on the island. Playing the weekend of March 26th, 27th and 28th was *Roxie Hart* starring Ginger Rogers.

There would be no shows on the 27th or 28th as the 9 P.M. show on the 26th was truly THE LAST PICTURE SHOW on Kent island!

"ROXIE HART" PLAYS AT STEVENSVILLE



Playing at the Stevensville Opera House Thursday, Friday and Saturday, March 26-27-28 is "Roxie Hart" starring Ginger Rogers.



The Broad Creek Cemetery at 370 Romancoke Rd. was established in the mid-1600s and is still a beautiful and peaceful spot to visit. There were three churches built at Broad Creek in 1653, 1712, and 1840. As the population moved toward Stevensville, a new church, today's Historic Christ Church on Main Street, opened in 1880. Members of Christ Church Parish continue to care for the Broad Creek Cemetery where burial sites are still available outside the foundations of the original church. For more information, visit ccpri.org/bcc.

A Brief History of Stevensville School #2-4

By Louis S. Crouch Jr.

The announcement in this issue of the purchase of the historic Stevensville School #2-4 located at 310 Love Point Road by the Kent Island Heritage Society is a significant milestone in our own history. A booklet entitled *History of the Schools of Kent Island Queen Anne's County Maryland* first published in 1978 by the KIHS has much information on the school when it fulfilled its originally intended purpose, some of which is presented in the paragraph below.

There were 11 original Kent Island public schools serving no higher than grade 7 and these dated as far back as approximately 1850. The schools were designated according to race and a numbering system: Negro School #(1-3)-4 and White School #(1-8)-4, in accordance to the Queen Anne's County school numbering system of the late 1800s. The second number denoted the Kent Island school district. It is unclear at this time if the authors of the KIHS booklet added the designation of location. The original School #2-4 building, located on the western edge of the confines of Stevensville at the time, was used from 1870-1909. A new School #2-4 building constructed in front of the original one was opened in 1909 which also housed the original Stevensville High School along with grades 1-7. This second building remains at the site (201 Love Point Road) having been repurposed ever since after closing as a grades 1-6 school in 1956.

The fate of the original School #2-4 building now owned by the KIHS is recounted in the Maryland Historical Trust Document QA-463 dated 1986: *"Two-story 3-bay frame 1 house, originally constructed as two-room school in 1870, moved to present location and expanded to present form 1909-1910 by Dr. John R. Benton; first occupied by Samuel Skinner, rural mail carrier"*. Seven of the original 11 schools were still standing according to the 1978 KIHS booklet at issue, some of which were replacement buildings such as the second School #2-4. All were repurposed as residences including at least one that served as a business for a period, the Coxes Neck School #5-4 (1850-1923). This former school building was until very recently the oldest of the 11 original school buildings extant but owing to falling into disrepair it was recently demolished. The KIHS School #2-4 building, with the demise of the Coxes Neck School #5-4, is now the oldest of the 11 original public school buildings on Kent Island. However, the School #2-4 building is not the oldest building now standing on Kent Island that housed a school (public or private), or even in Stevensville. That honor belongs to the Historic Christ Church Rectory as stated in QA-463 noted above: *"Christ Church Rectory. 2 1/2 story 3 bay frame side passage house constructed c. 1840-1855; lower ell at rear. Now clad in round-butt shingles. Operated as Chesapeake Female Institution, boarding and day school, in 1860s"*.

The School #4-2 building in its present location served first as a residence and later housed a succession of businesses until KIHS acquisition. The history of the building since moving, which accounts for 113 of its 153 years to date, has yet to be compiled. The KIHS hopes to add to what is in hand with further research and capture a more complete story of this venerable building from the beginning to our acquisition.

The KIHS would like to hear from our members and their relatives and associates what they know about the original Stevensville School #2-4 before and after moving. Copies of documents and photographs are, as always, greatly appreciated and at this time KIHS is unsure if any photographs of the original School #4-2 in its original location exist. We offer a sincere and profuse thank you in advance for our members input on our new site.

The booklet *History of the Schools of Kent Island QAC Maryland* is available from KIHS. It includes many interesting items about the schools from the late 1800s and early 1900s. Here is an item from the booklet about the two 15-minute recess periods at the School #2 District 4 once housed in the new KIHS building.

"The games children played were prisoner's base, ante-over, baseball with a small homemade ball and bat, dodge ball with a small rubber ball, crack the whip, marbles, mumbly peg with a pen knife, leap frog, hide and seek and run sheep run."

Alas, "The disobedient children were punished by standing on the platform with their back toward the other children, stood them in the corner, heads down on their desks, losing recesses, staying in after school, there was a ruler to use when needed."

History of The Schools of Kent Island Queen Anne's County Maryland



Published by
THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC.

SCHOOL VISIT

KIHS docents enjoyed hosting over 100 fourth graders, their teachers, and several parents from Bayside Elementary School for a tour of the historic sites in Stevensville on May 2. The students asked many great questions, and all were encouraged to return for more visits with their families. Thanks to teacher Juliet Sonneveldt for coordinating the visit. KIHS hopes to host more student visits and to again present Kent Island history to Kent Island High School classes as it did prior to COVID.



KIHS TOOK PART IN KI KIDS CONNECTION SPONSORED BY SHORE UPDATE AT KENT ISLAND HIGH SCHOOL ON APRIL 29.

Jack Broderick and John Conley represented KIHS and were pleased with the solid turnout of local residents interested in learning more about Kent Island history. Some visitors said they would join the Heritage Society and looked forward to attending Kent Island Day. The annual event features displays from local companies and non-profits.



Dr. Hugo Gemignani

Dr. Hugo Gemignani, past president of the Kent Island Heritage Society, passed away on January 14 in New Bern, North Carolina, where he had made his home for the past 10 years. Prior to his retirement, he had spent a good deal of his life on Kent Island and other places on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Dr. G. (as he liked to be called) had a forty year teaching career at Anne Arundel Community College where he was chairman of the Science Department. He got his PHD in biology and his first love was always teaching.

During his tenure he convinced the board of the college to purchase a vessel so students could actually go out on the water for hands on education. No online degree with Dr. G.! It was through this adventure that he met many locals and gained a true appreciation for the hunters and the hard working watermen of the island.

As he developed friendships, he gathered enough information to author a book titled *The Forgotten Seven, The Decoy Carvers of Kent Island*. Before he left the area, he donated his personal collection of decoys to the Kent Island Heritage Society. They are now located at the Tourism Center at Kent Narrows, for everyone's viewing pleasure and his book is still on sale through our website kentislandheritagesociety.org.

Hugo was vice president of the society in 1994 and president from 1995-1998. He was chairman of the Cray House Restoration Committee and was president when we inherited the Kirwan estate, which was no small job. He donated his remains to Duke Medical Center as a means of paying back science for the wonderful life he had lived.

His favorite charity was St. Jude's if anyone wishes to make a donation in his memory.

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You Are Invited

SHAPING THE CHESAPEAKE LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY – PEOPLE – AND THE ENVIRONMENT



Tuesday, June 27 at
7:00, at Historic
Christ Church in
Stevensville

Dr. Seidel will share his insights on how humans have been shaped and changed by their environment and in turn how the environment has been changed by humans, particularly around the Chesapeake and on Kent Island.

Sponsored by the Kent Island Heritage Society
www.kentislandheritagesociety.org

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POSTCARD from Kent Island: Early 1900s Church and High School *Submitted by John L. Conley*



This early 1910 era postcard has two images tied to articles in this issue of *Isle of Kent 1631*. The first Stevensville High School, which was completed in 1909, stood in front of the first Stevensville School #2-4 which opened in the 1870s as an elementary school. The new high school, also denoted as Stevensville School #2-4, had four rooms and included students from the elementary school which was closed. A second story was added in 1913 and the 1909 Stevensville School #2-4 was closed as an elementary school in 1956. The building then housed Old Schoolhouse Antiques for years and in recent years was a school again, the Sweet Bay Magnolia Academy.



The original two-story elementary school was purchased by Dr. John Benton and moved to its present location in Stevensville when it became a private residence. That is the building that was recently purchased by the Kent Island Heritage Society and will again be used to educate the public on Kent Island history. Read *A Brief History of Stevensville School #2-4* in this issue for further details.

The Methodist church on the card was located near the old schoolhouse. The congregation merged with another church and the building was eventually purchased by Senator James Kirwan and turned into a motion picture theatre. Read *The Last Picture Show* in this issue to learn about where the first movies were shown in Stevensville and the end of the building that traced its roots to 1816.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU!!!! Please contact KIHs if you have comments on items in *Isle of Kent 1631* or if you have questions about Kent Island history that we can try to answer. We welcome topics you would find of interest and especially information you can provide for future issues. Contact: John Conley: jconcomm@gmail.com | cell: 703-216-0449