

Isl of Kent - 1631

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

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

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Kirwan Property

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Cray House

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Bruscup, Mary White

Social - Jackie Kopec,

Scholarship

Jane Sparks

President's Message

Another year of my tenure as president of The Kent Island Heritage Society has quickly passed, and as always, this is a time for remembrances, resolutions and reflection is in order so that The Society may plan for the future.

Remembrances

* Our General Meeting programs have been excellent: William Baxter, speaking on Kent Island history in March; Mr. Sewell Fitzhugh, representing The Nause-Waiwash Band of Indians in June; and Mr. Michael Dixon, speaking on "If This Place Could Talk, Researching the History of an Old House" in September.

* The cancellation of Kent Island Day on May 17 and the May 18 rain date because of the torrential rains that made both days unfit for crafters and entertainers and the planned dedication of the Cray House.

* The reception held on June 28 at the Kirwan House in Chester for owners of historic Kent Island homes.

* The open house held on July 12 for the on-going restoration of the Kirwan House and Store Museum.

* The completion of the long awaited restoration of the Cray House.

* The planting of trees as a conservation effort by The Kent Island Garden Club with the aid of a grant.

* The wonderful Cray House herb garden planted by The Kent Island

Recommended Slate of Officers and Directors

An election of officers and directors to lead The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc., in 2004 will be held at the Annual Meeting on December 13, 2003. [See box, below.] The Nominating Committee recommends the following slate:

President

Nancy M. Cook

Vice President

Daniel T. Hopkins

Recording Secretary

Florence M. Dunn

Corresponding Secretary

Carole P. Frederick

Treasurer

Audrey B. Hawkins

Director

Jack Broderick

Director

Myrtle A. Bruscup

Director

Forrest P. Chisman

Director

Francis K. Collier

Director

Janet C. Denny

Director

Fran L. Peters

Director

Flora S. Sossi

Officers are elected for a one-year term; directors serve three-year terms.

Additional nominations may be made 21 days prior to the annual meeting. A declaration of intent must be presented to Recording Secretary Florence Dunn (409 Main St., Stevensville) and must be signed by the candidate and two supporting members of The Society.

Mark Your Calendar

Kent Island Heritage Society ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, December 13

Kent Island Yacht Club

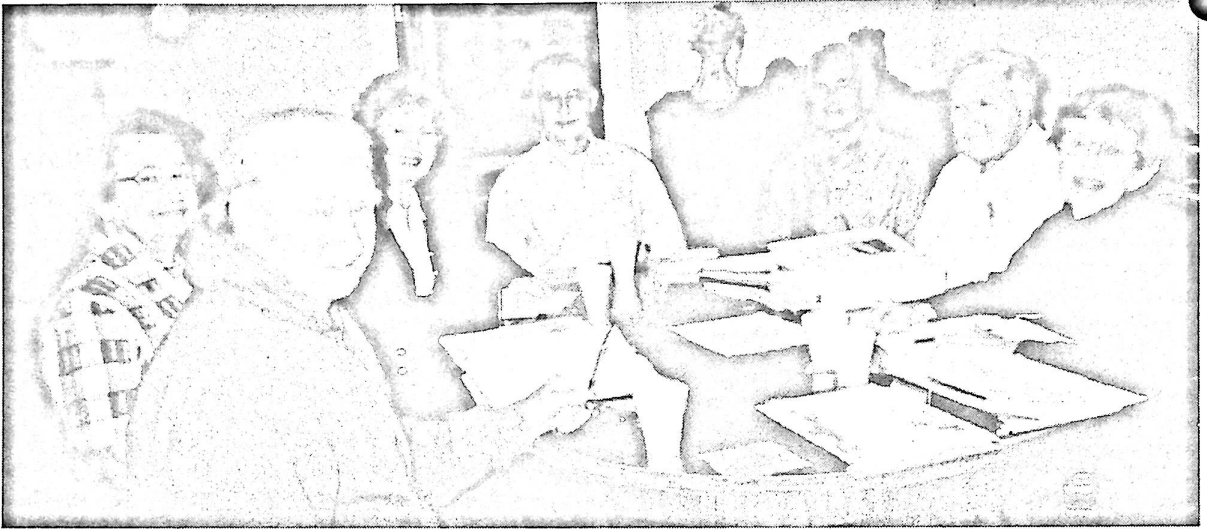
6 p.m. Cash bar

7 p.m. Dinner

Dance to the music of
The Kent Island Jazz Band

Continued on page 2

Our Board



Participants in October's Board of Director's meeting, clockwise from foreground: Cil Dunn, Audrey Hawkins, Jane Sparks, Paul Wilderson, Butch Collier, Bill Denny, Florence Dunn. Photographer: Nancy Cook.

President's Message

Continued from page 1

Garden Club by a committee chaired by Sally Boden.

- * The cadre of docents who give much volunteer service as we open our historic sites.
- * The reprinting of our *Walking Tour of Historic Stevensville* brochure made possible by a donation from American Legion Post #278.

Resolutions

- * To continue to restore the Kirwan House with the original store and to open on a regular basis.
- * To continue the annual Kent Island Day, scheduled in 2004 for Saturday, May 15 with a rain date of May 16.
- * To continue developing the Docent program and, to that end, provide period costumes for our volunteers.
- * To continue restoration of the Old Stevensville Post Office with period furnishings.
- * To continue recording audio-visual histories of persons involved

with Kent Island's history.

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

Reflection

- * Our organization must recruit new members. We cannot perpetuate the wonderful heritage of Kent Island unless there are those who will perform that task.

Thank You

- * Butch and Linda Collier for donation of a typewriter.
- * Fran Taylor for donation of a typewriter.
- * Kitty Duncan for two old bugles belonging to "Greenie" Grimes.
- * Daena Feldman for her generous donation of photos she took and made into slides for a scripted presentation on the history of Kent Island.

Wish List

- * For the Old Stevensville Post Office
 - Old cloth window shades
- * For the Kirwan Store

- A potbelly stove, about 3½' tall
- Old washboards
- Old bottles/boxes with brand name labels intact
- Old lanterns
- Ladies' shoes, circa 1860-1890
- * For the Stevensville Train Depot
 - A train caboose (delivered onsite)
- * And a slide projector for showing Daena Feldman's slides.

Nancy Cook

Know Your Board

Joel D. Berger is 42 years old. His wife's name is Madeline; they have a daughter named Aliya.

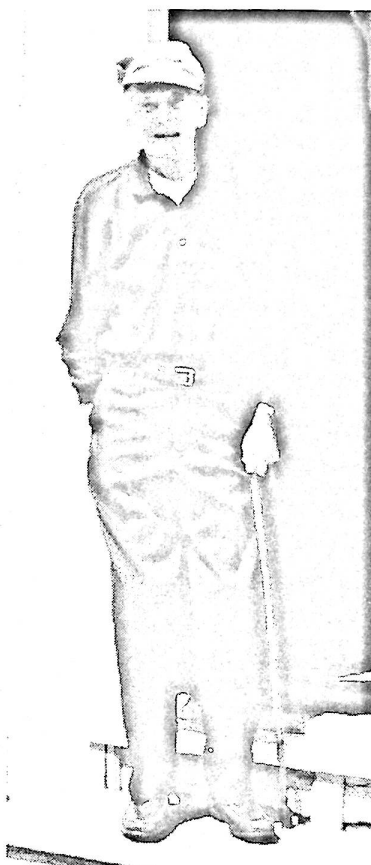
Joel is a self-employed real estate attorney. He has an undergraduate degree from Boston University and a graduate degree from the Chicago-Kent College of Law.

His interests are ornamental blacksmithing and metalworking, sailing/boating, hunting and dog training, oyster and clam growing.

Our Docents



Hanna Wall



Roland Bruscup



Mrytle Bruscup

Other docents to be featured in future issues of *Isle of Kent* are: Audrey Hawkins, docent coordinator; Fran Peters; Florence Dunn; Gil Dunn; Nancy Cook; Joe Thompson; Lynne Riley Coleman; Delores Parker; Elizabeth Bukowsky; Edna Ryon; Butch Collier; Eileen Dadds; Richard Dadds; and Carole Frederick.

GREETINGS FROM KIRWAN HOUSE

Greg Nizza, Caretaker

Fall arrived quickly at Kirwan House, and yard cleanup is underway. I have begun work on uncovering more of the extensive concrete pathways that wind through the back yard. These pathways were installed probably by Lemuel Kirwan, who was an avid gardener. He cultivated extensive flowers, shrubbery and formal gardens on the Kirwan property. He also installed the

concrete pond, the planter wall and other original garden features.

When I first arrived at Kirwan House none of the paths were visible, having been overgrown by grass over the years. Slowly, I have been edging the walkways, clearing grass and dirt and pulling weeds to uncover the paths. These paths trace a history lesson of the Kirwan property, and combined with old photos, will hopefully lead us to being able to restore the Kirwan gardens to their original glory.

Inside Kirwan House, work is progressing on adding to the items in the

Kirwan Store and stocking the shelves with more original items. A relative of the Kirwan family stopped by for a visit recently and recounted stories of days when the store was still in operation in the 1940s. I am also working on restoring and painting trim in the upstairs bedrooms.

And finally, after a wet year and with fall now here, some touch up painting needs to be done on the exterior of the house. We will be finishing up that work soon to prepare for what we hope is a not so cold winter on Kent Island.

Uncovering the History of a House

By Michael Dixon

The questions one can ask about the history of a house or structure seem endless. Thus, this research model is designed to help you find answers by directing you to the most likely sources. It may be helpful to organize your thoughts about the past before looking for answers. Here are some typical questions about these buildings, their owners and their history.

Research Questions

1. *About the building.* When was it constructed and for whom? Was it built in stages or all at the same time? What is its architectural style and what period of construction might the style suggest? Who was the architect or contractor? What changes have occurred to the building since it was first constructed? What other buildings have stood there?
2. *About its owners.* Who has owned it since it was built? What was interesting or significant about the occupation's life and career?
3. *About its history.* What happened here? What led up to each event? What were its consequences? How does the history of this property relate to larger events or historical trends?

Thinking About the Past

You may not be able to answer all these questions, but data sources exist to help you answer many of them. This handout describes the basic, general sources that usually help provide these answers.

As you begin your research, think broadly, not narrowly. Your property has been part of a neighborhood or community for a long time. Some things about its surroundings have changed (neighbors, nearby buildings), while others have remained constant (rivers and creeks, land forms, area land-marks). You will learn much more about your building and its many owners and occupations if you keep the bigger picture in mind and gather information about the surrounding areas as well.

Historical Research - A Model

1. *What has been Done.* Before plunging into archival records and manuscripts, identify the data that already exists on a particular property. Sometimes local historical agencies and preservation groups will have a file on a building or information on it may be found in a published work. Local agencies typically have hundreds of photographs of streets and buildings, as well.
2. *Begin at Home.* After determining what has already been done, start by studying the surrounding neighborhood. Are there any other houses that are similar to the one being investigated? Or does the home appear to be different, unlike any that surround it? Exploring the home's surroundings can help provide answers to questions that arise later.
3. *Documentary Data*

A. Each time that a property was sold, a record was made of that transaction. By searching these records (called deeds) back in time, you can obtain a list containing each owner of a property and the date of purchase. The deeds are bound in

large volumes and are usually located in the Clerk of Court's office at the county court house. The name of the person the land was bought from is also indicated on the deed. By looking at several deeds, you can establish the chain of title, the official record for the land over the decades.

B. Estate records document the value of property and how it is transferred to heirs and beneficiaries after the owner's death. This is valuable information to historians, because frequently these records contain details about a person's land, house, and belongings, as well as a relationships with family and community.

C. Assessment and census records can also tell you more. Assessment records are the records of the taxable holdings of property owners, on which their local taxes were based. It is useful to link the assessment information with other facts. Census records are federal documents that record information on the population. The person researching a house's history may find information on the property owner, the head of the household, the occupants of the house and their ages, occupations of the residents, race of occupants and country of origin. If the house was part of a farm, census data for farms was collected in the 19th century. The same holds true for manufacturers.

D. Maps are an excellent source for research because they provide much useful information at a glance. Some maps are drawn to scale to show individual buildings and are especially useful when they show owner's names and features in the surrounding community.

E. Newspapers, especially in the 19th and first half of the 20th century often carried information about buildings and their owners.

4. *Oral History.* Information available through oral evidence should be collected too. Long-time residents of the community frequently possess information about a house and its inhabitants that predates their own lives, especially in small towns where social history is handed down orally.

5. *Physical Evidence.* When an exhaustive examination of public and historical records are completed, researchers should assess the physical evidence presented by the building. A study of the style of construction of an old house can reveal facts about its history, as long as one remembers that styles are revived and copied, buildings are altered and construction techniques may be outdated. Each succeeding owner leaves evidence of his stay whether it is through building an addition, remodeling, landscaping or simply changing the color scheme. As you look at the house, try to determine its original appearance and the chronology of change.

6. *Conclusions.* After all the data has been completed, from the documentary sources to an examination of the structure, use the data to come to conclusions.

This article was developed from a handout provided by Michael Dixon at his presentation at KHS's quarterly meeting on Sept. 16.

PHILPOT'S FRONT PORCH

By Skeeter Philpot

"I seen Chessie once." It's a conversation stopper.

Burle went on. "I did. We were working out at Flag Pole, and I seen him come up about a hundred yards off our bow. Split-second. Saw his head first, then a scaly coil, a tail slap and he was gone. Happened so fast I hardly believed my eyes. Slim Chance seen it too, but since it's Slim I won't officially claim him as witness."

"Wise of you," I agreed.

We were headed to Tilghman Island in my pickup to buy some crab pots. A boy down there was getting out of the business and was virtually giving them to me. I did him a favor once, and when it came time for him to follow some girl down to Georgia he gave me first crack. I appreciated it, and if I didn't buy them some other waterman would, but somehow I knew the kid would be back up here before the end of next summer with a broken heart and zero crab pots. He's got that look in his eyes. But you can't tell anybody anything. Everybody's got to learn life on their own.

"Seen a ghost once too. It was eighth grade, right around Thanksgiving. I was walking down Route 8 with Wayne Tyde. You remember that?"

"Last time you walked anyplace wasn't it, big boy?"

"Yep. Mrs. K. kicked us off the late bus for some reason or the other. We walked down to the fishing pier, and by the time we headed to his house it was

almost dark. There wasn't nearly the traffic down there is now. We watched the last of that orange sun sink into the bay over Craney Creek, and it was like somebody turned the lights out. Not a light, not a star. Black as Bruce Lee's belt. We were teasing each other about the ghosts that were supposed to roam around down there, so of course we didn't get a hundred yards and started hearing hoof-beats coming up behind us from across that field. Sounded like 20, 30 horses. Louder than could have been real. Me and Wayne started jogging a little bit, trying not to act scared, but when it sounded like they were getting closer, man, we took off. I was running so hard I was afraid to look back even when Wayne started lagging. One part of me was praying for him, another was thinking of him as monster bait. About that time a car came out of Kentmorr and I jumped right into the headlights. The guy almost ran off the road. I opened the back door and piled in, Wayne right behind me. We were so freaked out the old man turned around and took us all the way to Wayne's front door. And I swear, Skeeter, when I got enough nerve to look out that back window as we headed south, off in that field I saw a man in a white shirt on a horse. And neither one of them had a head."

"Anything else you want to share?"

"You ever hear your old man talk about the witch that lived in Chester?"

Locals avoided her, but big town cars with New York license plates would roll up to her place, spend an hour or so, then roll out. They used to say she put curses on people."

"Pop said she used to always give him biscuits and jam."

"Mm-hmm. Lucky he didn't get turned into a snapping turtle or something." Burle shifted in his seat, stared out the window a few moments. "Jack-o'-lanterns or will-o'-the-wisps were devil lights that could rise out of the marsh and lead you to your death. I've heard about haunted houses at Love Point, in Stevensville, Castle Marina and Grasonville. In high school, didn't we hear about a coven of witches? When I was a real little kid, there supposedly was some guy parking with his girlfriend in Buzzardsville. He gets out for some reason and disappears. She's afraid to move and hears scratching on the roof all night long. She's hysterical by the time the cops find her. When she gets out she sees her murdered boyfriend hanging from a tree limb over the car, his fingernails

scratching the roof. I heard they had to put her in an institution."

"Urban legend."

"Rural. And you yourself claim to have seen a UFO fly out of the Chester River."

I couldn't say he was wrong about that, so I said, "What's your point?"

"My point is this. As scary as all that stuff was when we were kids, it's got nothing on what kids today have to be afraid of. All my boy has to do is turn on the first five minutes of any newscast and he's got more scary stuff to deal with then we could have ever imagined."

"Sandy will be all right. He's a tough kid. Smart."

"If there's market for ornery he'll be Bill Gates." Burle snickered and turned to the view outside his passenger side window. He took a deep breath. "It's just a different world, man. It's just a different world."

I couldn't say he was wrong about that, so I said, "We're really getting a deal on these crab pots."

The only thing Skeeter Philpot really fears is his wife. And, of course, running out of ten ounces.



President Nancy Cook presents 2003 KIHS scholarship to Carla Chance at June meeting.

Welcome New Members

Jason, JoAnne Baker
Centreville, Md.

Joe and Lee Thompson
Stevensville, Md.

THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC. P.O. Box 321 • Stevensville, Maryland 21666-0321

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I wish to become a member of the Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc.
Enclosed is my check to cover dues of membership indicated below:
Life Membership ... \$250.00 Single Membership ... \$15.00
Organization Membership ... \$25.00 Family Membership ... \$25.00

Name _____

Street _____

Town/State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

*Dues and contributions are deductible on income tax returns.
Membership period January 1 - December 31*

The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc.
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Stevensville, Maryland 21666

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Isle of Kent

John Bonner, Editor

Isle of Kent is published quarterly by The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc., a nonprofit corporation chartered by the State of Maryland, P.O. Box 321, Stevensville, MD 21666. Every effort is made to assure the accuracy of published information, but no responsibility is assumed by The Kent Island Heritage Society Inc. or the editor in the event of claim of loss or damage from any article. Statements attributed to individuals do not necessarily reflect official policy of the KIHS. Send correspondence regarding newsletter to Editor, 324 Columbia Lane, Stevensville, MD 21666.

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