

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 2004

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Programs - Dan Hopkins

Kirwan Property - Greg

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Cray House

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Denny

Train Depot

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Publicity - Greg Nizza

Oral Histories

Jane Sparks, Dan

Hopkins, Fran Taylor.

Brent Lewis

Membership

Mae Hutchison

Library Files - Myrtle

Bruscup, Mary White

Scholarship

Jane Sparks

President's Message

Serving as President of The Society for the last six years has truly been a learning experience and has been filled with a myriad of tasks and projects to be completed.

Without the fine officers and directors of the past few years very little would have been accomplished. As another year concludes it is a time for remembrances, resolutions and reflection.

Remembrances

□ Our excellent General Meeting programs:

* in March Mr. Richard Ervin, archaeologist for the State Highway. Administration spoke on "Archaeology and the Cemeteries of Kent Island"

* in June Dr. Julie Bernstein spoke on "Evolution of Pleasure Gardens of PG County and the Chesapeake Bay Area from Colonial Period to the Present"

* and Mr. Michael K. Day from The Maryland Historical Trust spoke on "Tax Incentives for Rehabilitation of Historic Structures or Homes within Historic Areas";

□ The Cray House Dedication held as part of the Opening Ceremonies for the 2004 Kent Island Day festivities on May 15;

□ The opening of the Cray House on the first and third Saturdays of the months of April through October and the wonderful programs that have been presented there (Janet Denny is the chair of the Cray House Committee and is responsible for

Continued on page 2

Recommended Slate of Officers and Directors

An election of officers and directors to lead The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc. in 2005 will be held at the Annual Meeting on December 11, 2004. The Nominating Committee of Dan Hopkins, Butch Collier and John Broderick recommend the following slate:

President

Vice President

Recording Secretary

Corresponding Secy

Treasurers

Director

Director

Director

Director

Director

Director

Nancy M. Cook

Forrest P. Chisman

Flora S. Sossi

Carole P. Frederick

Audrey B. Hawkins

John Wayne Morris

Florence M. Dunn

Daniel T. Hopkins

Gregory J. Nizza

Paul W. Wilderson III

John E. Gerber

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

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 Street, 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 11

Kent Island Yacht Club

6:00 p.m. Cash Bar

7:00 p.m. Dinner

Please return the accompanying reservation form by December 5

Greetings from Kirwan House

By Greg Nizza, Caretaker

The Kirwan House and Museum hosted approximately 30 visitors over the last three Queen Anne's County Historic Sites Open House Saturdays. Some quality tours took place, with distant Kirwan family relatives passing through the house and store. Some very informative tours took place with local Kent Island residents who visited the Kirwan Museum to tell stories and memories of their times in the Kirwan Store as small children.

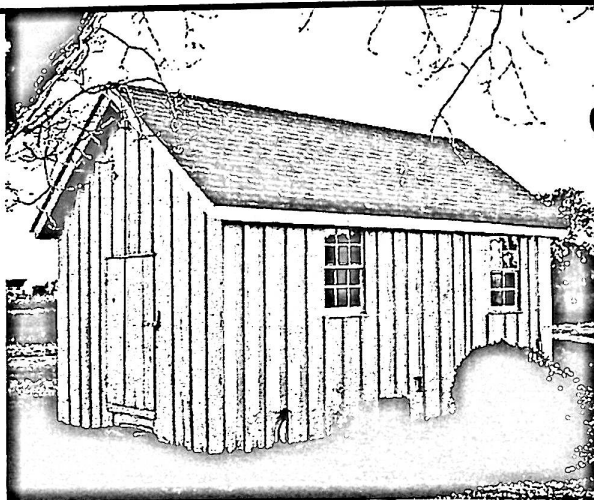
The Kirwan Store was closed for business sometime in the 1950s. Bill Baxter of Chester remembers how he and many of the youth in the Dominion area picked vegetables in the fields for Sen. Kirwan and recalls how they were paid in tokens redeemable at the Kirwan Store. That's how free enterprise worked back then.

Many local residents mentioned the large selection of candies, including licorice, that were available in the store, as well as every other item one could imagine, including nails, clothing, eggs, coal, tools, lumber and vegetables.

The Kirwan Farm used to have a full stable of horses, a blacksmith shop, a lumber mill, as well as a barn for cows and milking. Now with the open houses finished for the colder months, our focus is turning to the exterior of the property and the accessory structures.

One of the original outbuildings that still stands at the Kirwan Farm is the old workshop. I cleared out several truckloads of trash and dirt and have uncovered some interesting artifacts and tools from the past. Old farm implements, historic farming tools, grinders, and some grain processors are still in place in the old workshop.

We will be working on the workshop outbuilding over the winter and plan on adding it to the Kirwan Farm tour next spring to start interpreting the outside history of the Kirwan Farm. Agriculture was one of the most important aspects of



the Kirwan Farm, and we will be featuring this as part of the tour next year. Also, the adjacent field to the Kirwan House has been taken out of farming and mowed and will be used for a much improved parking area and ingress/egress next year.

Other recent exterior work includes the painting of the white picket fence and some work I have done to secure the old barn on the other side of the property. Carpentry work is underway for repairs being made to the run-in shed behind the house, as well as building a new handicapped ramp. Steps will be built this winter to lead off the back porch to the area installed by the Kent Island Garden Club. Bushhogging work has also been done in the back of the yard to recover some of the areas that used to lead to the Kirwan Creek landing. With the tree plantings on the property flourishing this year, everything on the exterior is shaping up nicely.

I hope everyone has a happy Thanksgiving!

President's Message

Continued from page 1

events held there);

☐ Our participation in the conservation program of the Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage involving the Kirwan properties on Route 552 in Chester (this project was initiated by Dan Hopkins);

☐ John Hamilton working on his Eagle Scout badge as he restored the fountain in the goldfish pond at the Kirwan property;

☐ The reprinting of the Mildred Schoch's "Of History and Houses—A Kent Island Heritage" and Hugo G. Gemignani's book, "The Forgotten Seven: The Decoy Carvers of Kent Island" made possible by a donation from American Legion Post #278 in

Stevensville;

☐ Our wonderful cadre of docents who give much volunteer service as we open our four historic sites;

☐ Our excellent genealogical and archival files housed at the Kent Island Branch of the Queen Anne's County Free Library (kudos to Myrtle Bruscup and Mary White for their consistent diligence in maintaining those files and reference books);

☐ Our Isle of Kent newsletter editor who always seems to "make a silk purse out of a sow's ear" with his fine skills; and

☐ A successful, rain-free 2004 Kent Island Day.

Resolutions

☐ To continue to restore the Kirwan House and Store Museum;

- ☐ To increase our membership;
- ☐ To recruit more docents for our four historic sites; and
- ☐ To be proactive in discovering, identifying, restoring and preserving the heritage of Kent Island.

Reflection

☐ The Kent Island Heritage Society is, at this point in time, a healthy organization with an ever-increasing number of projects and challenges on our plate. We do need to continually provide activities and events that will attract new members and serve visitors to our area with the importance of Kent Island's history and the impact that history has made in our lives.

Nancy Cook

Kent Island Garden Club

The community of interest between The Kent Island Heritage Society and The Kent Island Garden Club has resulted in an especially beneficial symbiotic relationship: Each organization contributes its own unique skills to achieve an outcome greater than either organization could accomplish by itself.

While KI Heritage Society labored long and hard to rehabilitate Cray House, KI Garden Club member Sally Boden was doing extensive research to determine the shape and content of its original herb garden, circa 1800. She determined what herbs were most likely planted for culinary and medicinal uses in that time period. She incorporated herbs used to dye wool and cotton. The circular garden is intersected by oyster shell paths. Garden Club members worked in teams to dig, plant, weed and water the seedlings throughout the summer. This magnificent effort received an award from the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland.

While KI Heritage Society focused its attention on the rehabilitation of Kirwan House, the KI Garden Club surveyed the long-neglected-but-once-magnificent gardens. Working step-by-step with foundations and local Boy Scout troops, KI Garden Club President Denise Swayne oversaw the replacement of broken walkways, restoring the long-defunct pond and fountain, building a gazebo, and planting of a veritable forest of trees in the outback toward Kirwan Creek. These accomplishments have been recognized by a number of state and national Garden Club awards.

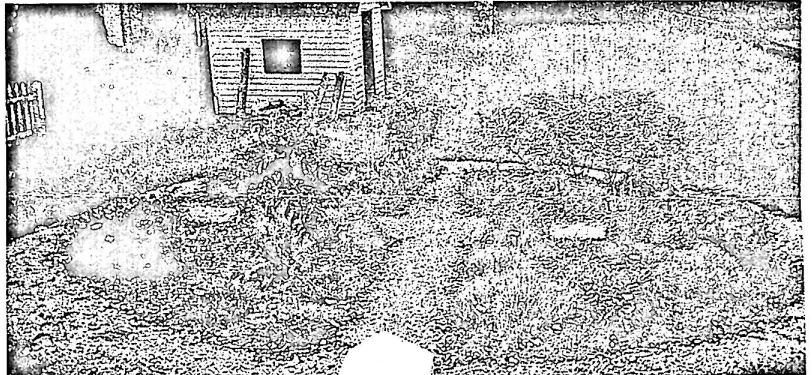
NEW MEMBERS

Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
Easton, Md.

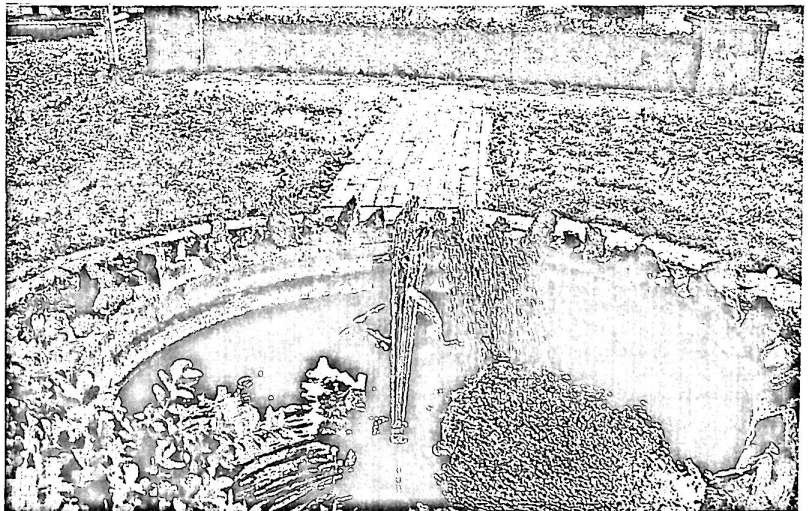
Harold B. & Rebecca P. Ringgold
Stevensville, Md.



Sally Boden stands by flourishing herbs during a summer weeding session at Cray House.



Cray House circular herb garden as it appeared in the 1800s.



Kirwan House fishpond restored by John Hamilton as Eagle Scout project.

What Does 'Going to the Post Office' Mean to You?

BY FRAN PETERS

Nowadays, "going to the post office" means a place to go if you need stamps or to send something that won't fit into the mailbox in front of your house. If it is a business matter it may need special attention or maybe it is just an excuse to get away from the office.

But back in 1790 — when Kent Island was *really* an island on the distant shore — a law was passed to speed up conveyance of public letters. The sheriff of each county was required by law to deliver "public letters and packets" to the sheriff of the intended county. Anne Arundel County's sheriff delivered public letters to Queen Anne's County for the Eastern Shore.

I wonder if the people who lived around the time when the Cray House was built in 1809 had to go to Broad Creek for their mail when the Broad Creek ferry came in or wait for the sheriff to come by their house.

In Stevensville, as indicated on the 1877 map, there was a post office. It is, in fact, the very one that is now the headquarters of The Kent Island Heritage Society.

When folks back in those days went to town, they would go for groceries and the mail in the same building. From what I have read people, products and mail was brought by steamships from Baltimore. Not much is written about going to the post office or how long it took a letter

or invitation to get to the intended person, but I'll bet there are some interesting tales about the trip.

I have asked a few people who have lived in Stevensville a long time what they remember about going to the post office. Irene Grollman remembers being barefooted and handed some coins so she could go next door for an ice cream cone while her in-laws went in the post office to get the mail.

One lady said, "Oh, I never went to the post office. That was my husband's job. It was for business, you know." Another lady said she went to get stamps and gossip. The fourth lady I asked remembered as a kid trying to reach the

combination on the lockbox when she went with her dad to the post office.

As you know we are trying to collect objects and equipment like what was used during 1904 through 1951 in the Stevensville Post Office. At present we have the U.S. Postal Cabinet with lockbox and pigeon holes, a tall writing desk, a mail pouch and a postmark stamp and a few pictures.

If you have or know where can find other postal related objects, please contact Fran Peters at 410-827-5250 or Butch Collier at 410-643-2731.

Fran Peters is a director and a member of the oral histories committee.

IN MEMORIAM

JOHN FOUNTAIN DAVIDSON
MRS. MARY ESTHER DYES
CONSTANCE K. HURLEY
MRS. ROXANNE POWELL
C. WILLARD THOMAS

The society is very thankful for the interest and support shown over the years by these members of our organization and our community. We honor their memories by continuing our effort to discover, identify, restore and preserve the heritage of Kent Island.

The Kent Island Heritage Society Reservation for Annual Meeting

Name[s] _____

Telephone No. _____

Reservations must be received by December 5.

Tickets are \$30 per person.

Please enclose check payable to

The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc.

Mail to Nancy Cook, 124 Bryce Road, Queenstown, MD 21658

Names of others sharing your table [8 persons per table]

Kent Island's Eastern Shore

By Brent Lewis

Kent Island has two zip codes.

21666 is the code for Stevensville. 21666 borders the Chesapeake Bay and includes all that land from the tippy-top of the fabled Love Point down to the legendary Bloody Point. The Bay Bridge begins there but ends somewhere else. The schools are in 21666, and so are the parks. 21666 has a neat little town center, a historic district that has been on the National Register for going on twenty years. Presidents, celebrities and royalty have passed through. 21666 gets a lot of attention.

21619 — not so much.

Chester's zip code is 21619. Chester is the eastern section of Kent Island with west-east boundaries from Cox's Creek to Kent Narrows. The Chester River has rounded off any northern point that may have existed, but Cox Neck Road runs all the way down to Turkey Point and Eastern Bay. Bodkin Island, Hog Island and Parson's Island, among others, are also in 21619.

Parson's Island is the largest of the three and the only one inhabited. Land records going back over

350 years indicate Parson's Island was once Parson's Point. Erosion brought on by decades of tide and storms split the property from the mainland by 1865. McCormick & Company bought the island in 1944 for use as an experimental spice farm. For many years now, Parson's Island has primarily been utilized for corporate gatherings.

Historically, Chester itself was two separate sections. The Cox Neck Road area was known as Phillip's Corner. John Phillips was a schoolteacher and magistrate. Jim and Mollie Benton owned a store at the southwestern corner of the main road and what is now known as Dominion Road, so that area was known as Benton's Corner.

Other neighborhoods popped up over the years. They were known by colorful names that would give modern day civic boosters nightmares — names like Buzzardsville, Ticktown and Devil's Dominion. The moniker-shortened 'Dominion' area exists to this day and is located east of Crab Alley Creek, off Little Creek Road.

In a 1986 issue of this

newsletter, my great aunts, Myrtle and Lydia Coleman, reminisced about growing up in Chester.

Myrtle and Lydia were two of Joseph and Agusta Timms Coleman's eleven children. They were born around the turn of the last century. The sisters worked and lived in Baltimore for many years, but Chester was their true home.

In the 1986 article, my aunts mention growing up near Senator Kirwan's property, a mile south of Benton's Corner. Owning a parcel of land that combined three farms, the Kirwan's operated not only a general store there, but also a coal yard, brickyard, and sawmill.

Myrtle and Lydia name farmers and teachers — there were three schools located in Chester in the early 1900s. Surnames of carpenters, sailors and lawyers are remembered and still recognized as local today. Current road names and neighborhoods offer numerous reminders of old Kent Island family names. Golt Road, Gardner's Purchase Lane and Benton's Pleasure are all examples. Goodhand's Creek and Norman's Point a

are also named after longtime island families.

Like everywhere in America, things have changed in Chester. General stores have been replaced with carry-out fast food and specialty retail. Farms have been developed into waterfront residential subdivisions. Coal is almost impossible to find.

There are, however, some real 21619 bright spots. The Kirwan House and Store was donated to The Kent Island Heritage Society and is now the recipient of an impressive makeover. The Kent Island Yacht Club will be celebrating its fiftieth year in 2005. The Chesapeake Exploration and Visitors Center, located at Kent Narrows, is a valuable resource. And the new Kent Island Volunteer Fire Department firehouse is going to be on the Chester side of the line.

Yeah, Stevensville might be the Hollywood of Kent Island, but Chester is its Eastern Shore. I mean, come on. Buzzardsville?

Brent Lewis' family has lived in Chester for at least 200 years, but he loves 21666 and 21619 equally.

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.

Email: JLBonner@myshorelink.com

**Cray House
WINTERFEST 2004
Open House
1 - 6 p.m.
Saturday, December 4**

What's In Those Extra Boxcars???

By Gil Dunn

On a recent visit to the Kent Island Library the librarian and I were casually paging through a book on Queen Anne's County history. We came upon a photo of a train with an extraordinarily long line of boxcars. The caption simply read: "July 1942, Queen Anne's Railroad train pulling a line of boxcars from Chester Station to Love Point." After its brief stop in Stevensville, the train was headed north to Love Point.

But what, we wondered,

was in all those additional boxcars? Neither the librarian nor I had an answer.

During the spring of 1942 the Delmarva Peninsula was pink with color from the many, many peach trees in spectacular bloom. My good friend Harry Rhodes of Queenstown will attest to the large number of peach orchards on the Delmarva Peninsula at that time. One large peach orchard near Millington in Queen Anne's County had 165,000 peach trees, which

gives some idea of the size of the peach crop for the entire peninsula. There were many more peaches around than there were peach eaters. The extra boxcars were likely loaded with baskets and baskets of Delmarva Peninsula peaches.

Many changes have occurred on the Eastern Shore since those days during World War II. A dominant cause of those changes was construction and opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in

1952, which allowed huge trucks with their "reefers" — refrigerated trailers — easy access to the bounty of the Delmarva Peninsula.

But even though peach orchards have diminished, the Eastern Shore is still a peachy place to live.

Director Gil Dunn's peachy perseverance was largely responsible for saving the old Stevensville Train Depot from destruction and having it moved to its present location next to Cray House.

The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc.
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