

# Isle of Kent - 1631

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC. ■ SPRING 2004

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## President's Message

The Society continues to be active as we attempt to discover, identify, restore, and preserve the heritage of Kent Island. Here is an update on various activities that have occurred since our last newsletter.

□ Our Board retreat on March 20 focused on formulating plans for implementing recommendations of the various committees of The Society. Our guest speaker was A. Elizabeth Watson, executive director of stories, of the Chesapeake

*Continued on page 8*

## Cray House Dedicated ... Finally

The extensively, expensively restored Cray House has at long last been dedicated at a ribbon-cutting ceremony that was the opening event for Kent Island Day 2004. Cray House is now officially open for public viewing, though it has unofficially been open since dedication ceremonies planned for last year's Kent Island Day were rained out.

President Nancy Cook told the assembled dignitaries, members and guests the importance of this unique historic structure to the history of our community and of the difficulties and challenges of historically-authentic restoration.

An authentic restored "meat house" has been added to the back yard, relocated from another site. About the size of a contemporary yard shed, it will

*Continued on page 8*



Left to right: Commissioner Gene Ransom, Wheeler Baker, Denise Swayne, Eva Thompson, Mary White, Commission President Ben Cassell, Gill Dunn, Hugo Gemignani, Audrey Hawkins, Michael Denny, Janet Denny, Myrtle Bruscup, Architect Gregory Torchio, Nancy Cook.

**Mark Your Calendar: Kent Island Heritage Society Quarterly Meeting**  
**Tuesday, June 8 • Kent Island Library • 7 p.m. Refreshments • 7:30 Program**  
**Dr. Julie Bernstein Speaking on the Evolution of Pleasure Gardens of PG**  
**County and Chesapeake Bay Area from Colonial Period to Present.**

# Kirwan Farm Becomes Model Conservation Project

This spring The Kent Island Heritage Society partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, Inc. to convert a 40-acre tract of our 240-acre Kirwan farm to forest and meadow. We decided what better way to satisfy our mission to preserve the culture and heritage of the area than to show future generations the island's natural beauty and abundance that was prevalent not that long ago.

By enrolling in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) The Society was able to increase the farm's income as well as to improve water quality and increase wildlife habitat in the watershed. CREP will make ten annual payments for taking this land out of production.

"I'm told that this is one of the largest woodland restoration projects in recent years on Kent Island," says KIHs Vice President Dan Hopkins. "It shows that modern farming and wildlife habitat can coexist. We're

looking forward to seeing wildlife colonize these newly established meadows and forest."

Located between Kirwan and Crab Alley Creeks on Kent Island, the farm has over one-and-a-quarter miles of waterfront which, until this year, had been intensely tilled. It left only a fringe of marshland to support wildlife and remind visitors of what was once lush forest.

Fortunately the farm practically borders Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage's 520-acre Barnstable Farm dedicated to wildlife habitat restoration and environmentally-wise farming practices. Ecologist Ned Gerber was instrumental in guiding us in selecting 20 varieties of trees and shrubs and a mix of cool and warm season grasses to match our soil types.

In the end, 17,420 trees were planted. Tree tubes were put on with the help of local scout troop 165 and students from Wye River Upper

School at Wye Mills, who learned a little about the techniques involved in restoring habitat and gained greater appreciation for the area.

By the end of this year there will be a walking trail between the forest and the meadow that completely borders the farm. This will provide access to school groups, scouts and others interested in the history and ecology of the Eastern Shore and specifically that of Kent Island.

"So much of Kent Island has already been lost to development, and a lot more is poised to be lost shortly," explains Hopkins. "We want to show future generations the natural abundance their ancestors had and that it's possible to regain some of what has been lost. It's amazing to see this transformation back to nature. We want to share it. Come visit the farm and our general store/museum, look out over these fields and watch our progress."

## GREETINGS FROM KIRWAN HOUSE

Greg Nizza, Caretaker

Spring has sprung at the Kirwan Estate and we are getting ready for an exciting year which will see the Kirwan Store & Museum officially become part of the QAC Historic Sites Consortium. Following on last year's two open houses the Kirwan Store will now be open on the first Saturday of each month during the summer season, along with all the other historic sites in the County.

This is a big step forward as the Kirwan Store is now very presentable after years of hard work, and the Kirwan House interior is coming along nicely. The cosmetic work done on the inside is now showing nicely with the original Kirwan furniture in place, and the house is taking on more of a historic feel every day.

Projects have included the continuing work to clean up and beautify the Kirwan yard, including recent work by Julie Smasal and me to stabilize and paint the old storage shed in the Kirwan yard which was such an eyesore in the past.

I am also continuing work to clear and edge the old maze of pathways which wind through the Kirwan yard; recent spring rains have made me understand why these walkways were installed in the past. The Kirwan land is very low-lying, and is a virtual swamp after a heavy rain. This spring I found myself using the cleared pathways to traverse around the saturated grass yard. No doubt Mr. Lemuel Kirwan, who was such an avid gardener and who probably installed the paths, traversed these paths often as he tended his many plantings.

The Eagle Scout has now completed the brick path project which took the place of the original

concrete path near the fountain. The yard will now receive some flower treatments from our friends at The Kent Island Garden Club to make it very presentable for the big opening on June 5. Work is also being done in the yard by KIGC to remove some uneven walkway and replacing it with a shrub bed. Many thanks to KIGC for its continued efforts.

Other work over the past several months included clearing of growth from around the barn on the Kirwan property, as well as the hauling away of trash that seems to constantly accumulate on a 200 acre farm.

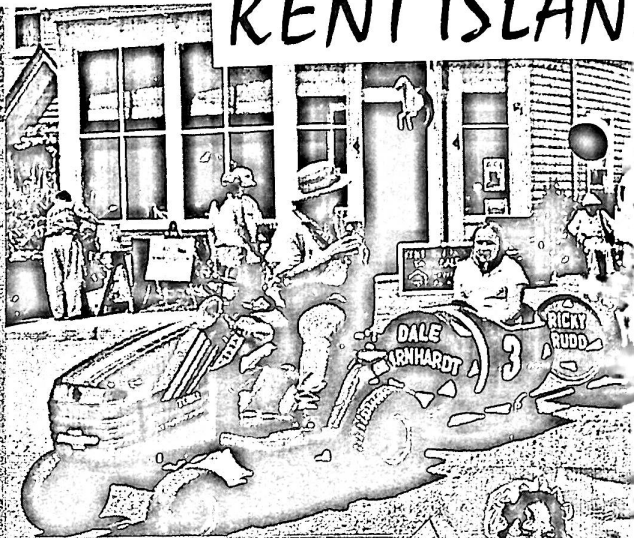
The buffer plantings along Kirwan Creek and Cox Neck Creek have been beautifully handled by the Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, and many projects are falling into place, with more to be done this summer. Come on out to visit us on one of the open house Saturdays this summer. I think you will find your tour to be a very pleasant experience.

## Cray House Dedication





# KENT ISLAND





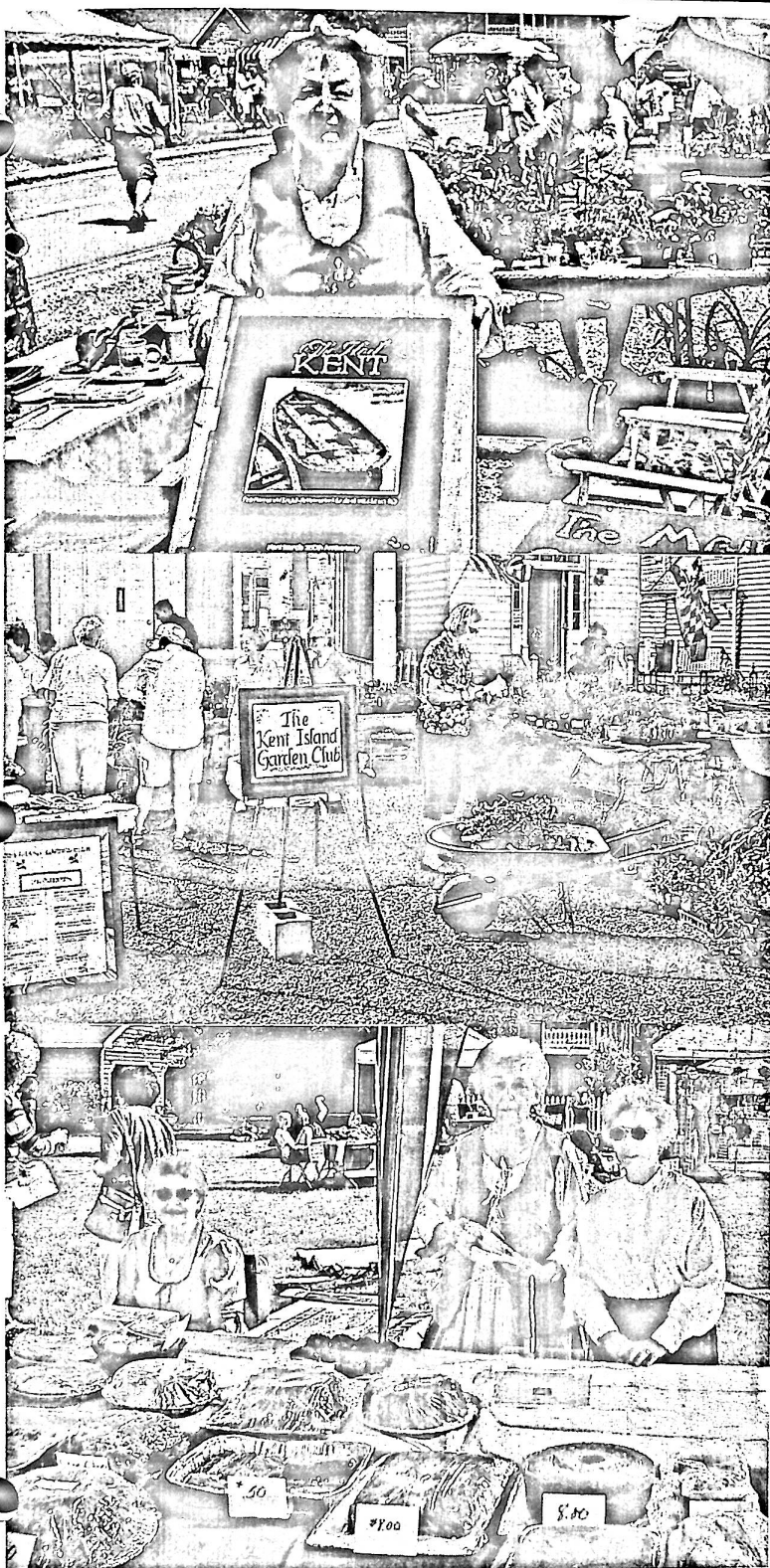
# DAY -2004



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*We gratefully acknowledge and thank the following patrons for their financial support of the 28th annual Kent Island Day. We also extend our gratitude to any patron whose contribution was received too late to be included in the printed listing. Our appreciation is also extended to Lynne Riley-Coleman and her committee consisting of Jane Grafton, Terry Babb, Florence Dunn and Flora Sossi, who spent much time and energy contacting the patrons.*

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\* Life Membership

\*\* Organization Membership

## IN MEMORIAM

ANTHONY O'BRIEN  
EDNA RYON  
FEBRUARY 2004

*The society is very thankful for the interest and support shown over the years by these members of our organization and our community. We will continue to honor their memories by discovering, identifying, restoring and preserving the heritage of Kent Island.*



## President's Message

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Heritage Area (under the aegis of Eastern Shore Heritage, Inc., located at The Custom House in Chestertown). Her organization assists historic sites in Kent, Caroline, Talbot and Queen Anne's counties with grants in order to preserve or restore needed projects surrounding the sites. We plan to request grants for a proposed blacksmith shop and restored lumber storage facility on the Kirwan property.

□ The Cray House has taken a new lease on life with Chairperson Janet Denny providing enthusiastic, knowledgeable leadership.

□ The Train Depot has received a new coat of paint, just in time for the Kent Island Day celebration. Thus far, four busloads of students from area elementary schools have been scheduled in May to visit the restored original 1902 Stevensville Depot

□ Plans for the Old Stevensville Post Office are being made by Fran Peters and Butch Collier to install push-button switches and cloth shades that were original to the 1877 structure.

□ The Society signed an agreement with the county allowing 13 parking spaces to be constructed on our land abutting Cockey's Lane in return for delineated parking spaces with creosote timbers and the construction of a picket fence matching the existing fencing surrounding the Cray House. The badly needed parking area will make historic Stevensville more accessible to those who visit our sites and the area merchants.

□ Our thanks to Mr. Thomas Nelson of Centreville, who repaired and refinished several of the Kirwan House Museum pieces of furniture as The Society prepares for the opening on the first Saturday in June.

□ As you will note on page 7 we are pleased to welcome a large number of new members to The Society. Their involvement will help make our organization a more viable force for our community.

□ And finally, note the article on page 2 telling of Vice President Dan Hopkin's initiative establishing a 40-acre tract at Kirwan farm as a model conservation project.

*Nancy Cook*

## Cray House Dedicated

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become a gift shop.

The adjacent historic train depot had also just received a facelift with fresh paint and glazing.

More than 250 people toured Cray House during this year's Kent Island Day celebration.

*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.

e-mail: jlbanner@myshorelink.com

## Know Your Board

### JANET DENNY

I was born in an old New England French-speaking mill town in 1939. I attended a French-speaking Catholic school. Growing up I learned a lot from both my grandmothers: making soap, knitting, sewing, cooking, gardening, canning, herbs, old-time laundry techniques and so many other things I can't begin to list.

In adult life I pursued my love for history by working at Meadow Farm Museum (a living-history farm) in Richmond, Va. I learned hearth-cooking and hand-spinning, sheep-shearing and candle-making. When I moved to Maryland in 1989 I started a Spinners Guild in Annapolis and served as President for three years.

For the next few years I found myself doing 18<sup>th</sup> Century reenactments and demonstrations at such historical sites as Mount Vernon, London Town Public House, Belvedere Plantation, Charles Carroll House, Paca House, Montpelier Mansion, Fort Frederick and others.

I wrote booklets on hand spinning and hearth cooking. I wrote a book—*The Acadian Odyssey*—on the history of my ancestors and their flight from Arcadia, Canada.

Other interests are painting, flower arranging, reading, writing poetry, beachcombing, antiques, interior decorating and traveling.

After meeting Bill, the love of my life, I decided to spend the remainder of my life with him here on Kent Island. Come and see us at Ye Olde Church House, where I get to engage in all my passions.

### The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc.

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