

# Isle of Kent - 1631

Newsletter of The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc.

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

## Kent Island Days

The twenty-fifth Kent Island Days will be held on Saturday, May 20 and Sunday, May 21 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Stevensville Town Center. An opening ceremony at 10:00 a.m. on the entertainment stage will signal the beginning of our celebration of the founding of Kent Island in 1631 by William Claiborne. A parade then follows at 11:00 a.m. from State Street through Stevensville to the original home of the Christ Episcopal Church on Route 18. The two-day event will feature an 18<sup>th</sup> century encampment consisting of a blacksmith, a leather-worker, and ladies with demonstrations of soapmaking, cheesemaking, candlemaking, and spinning. A military encampment will also be on the grounds and will perform a brief military drill. There will be story telling and music throughout the day for the children. A special "Playtime - The Colonial Way" will be held on Sunday, May 21 at Bayside Elementary Schools at 1:00 p.m.

A Photography Contest is being held which involves the Stevensville Middle School, the Kent Island High School and home schooled children. The photographs must portray subjects related to Kent Island in some way, historical sites, a Kent Island view, a Kent Island celebration (family or community), workers of Kent Island, etc. Winners will receive a camera and have their work displayed during the Kent Island Days.

Bayside students will be part of a "Let's Learn about Kent Island" quiz and entries will be displayed during the Kent Island Day festivities.

Entertainment will occur hourly at the Band Stand and will consist of the Stevensville Middle School Band, Dashielle School of Dance, Bay Country Gentlemen, Meg Yoast Dance Connection, the Kent Island Community Band, the Heavenbound Quartet, the Kent Island Community Jazz Band, Eileen Royal (harpist), Margarite Batzer (organist), Phil Whitby (magician),

*See KI Days, page 5*

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**Tuesday, June 20**  
**General Meeting**  
**Kent Island Library**  
**7:00 Refreshments**  
**7:30 Program**

**You Can Get There From Here:**  
**Women's Work & Community on**  
**Smith Island**

**Oral History by**  
**Janice Marshall and Elaine Eff**

Isle of Kent is published quarterly by The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc., a non-profit corporation, PO Box 321, Stevensville, MD 21666. Every effort is made to publish accurate information, but no responsibility can be assumed by The Kent Island Heritage Society, Inc., or the editor in the event of claim of loss or damage from any contribution. Statements attributed to individuals do not necessarily reflect official policy of the KIHS. Send Isle of Kent correspondence to Claudia Jewell, Editor, 1816 St. Mary's Rd, Chester, MD 21619

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Barbara Nash	1998, 1999, 2000
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## President's Message

Being a part of the Kent Island Heritage Society is being part of a fast growing industry, that of tourism, a \$6 billion dollar-a-year industry, in the state of Maryland. Visiting historical sites or museums is among the top three visitor activities state-wide in every region within Maryland...Historic preservation visitors stay longest than other visitors when they come to Maryland...Heritage tourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry nationally." These findings were part of a study by Donovan D. Rypkema and produced by Preservation Maryland and depicts the impact that historic preservation has on jobs, property values, economic development, smart growth and film production. There are more than 200 heritage museums throughout every segment of the states (operating budgets totaling \$19 million, serving over 275,000 school children) and over 300 historic sites which have been identified by the Maryland Historic Trust.

What effect does this have on our Society? During the last several months your president ahs presented three talks, ranging from fifteen to thirty-five minutes in length to tour groups who have come to Queen Anne's County for the purpose of visiting our historic sites. As of now three more such tours, co-ordinated by the Historic Consortium division of the Department of Tourism, are scheduled for the spring and there are sure to be more. We are most grateful to those who serve as docents for the Train Depot and the old Stevensville Post Office (and we always need more volunteers).

One of our immediate KIHS goals is to continue to raise matching grant funds for the restoration of the Cray House, one of only two post and plank construction houses in Maryland. Visits to the Old Stevensville Train Depot elicit much positive response from our visitors and thus it is with much urgency that we begin and finish restoration of the Cray House.

The potential for developing other historic sites on Kent Island is enormous. The Kent Island Heritage Society will have much on their historic preservation agenda in the future. We need our member's aid in fulfilling that potential! Won't you volunteer?

Nancy Cook

## The Mattapex Post Office

By Forrest P. Chisman and Renee S. Woodworth

Most present day Maryland road maps contain a dot on Kent Island that is labeled "Mattapex". The dot is located on the east side of Route 8 about six miles south of the Bay Bridge. It seems to indicate the location of a village, but today only two small frame houses stand on the location. In fact, there was never a village. The dot indicated the location of a short-lived fourth class post office.

In 1877 (and doubtless for some years before) there was a country store located on the east side of Kent Point Road (Route 8) about 150 feet south of the present day Plantation Road. The store sat on a portion of the 235-acre Shipping Creek Farm that fronted the road. Both the store and the farm were owned by Samuel L. Carter. Immediately north of Shipping Creek Farm was Mattapax Farm (often spelled "Mattapex") owned by John P. Norman.

In 1877, Samuel Carter abandoned his interest in the country store. He sold one acre and one-half interest in the store "...now attached to the dwelling of John T. Goodman..." to Mary Gardner, and he sold one acre and the other half interest to Norman. There is no record of a sale of the "dwelling" or any of the land surrounding the store to Goodman at any time. The relevant documents may have been lost. There is however, a record that Goodman purchased fifty acres across the road from the store from Norman in 1877.

The likely explanation is that Goodman occupied the "dwelling" as payment in kind for serving as a part-time storekeeper while he farmed his small parcel across the road. At the time Goodman was 46 years old and had farmed a number of properties on Kent Island. Keeping store was a respectable way for a middle aged man to insure some income while he struggled with the problems of agriculture. *Mattapex, from page 1*

Moreover, both owning and managing the store was probably good business for all concerned. The 1877 map of Kent Island shows no country store south of the one kept by Goodman. The nearest store to the north, owned by the Price family, was about half a mile away - on the west side of Kent Point Road about where the clubhouse of the Blue

Heron Golf Course now stands. There were other stores along the road in the area of Batts Neck. But the Goodman-managed store was the first stop for shoppers coming from the southern tip of the Island.

The 1880 census identifies Goodman as a "farmer" living with his niece, Mary, and employing a servant and one farm laborer. No doubt everyone in the Goodman household did double duty on the farm and in the store.

In 1879 Mary Gardner married Gustavus Stratt. It appears that they decided to settle near the store in which Mary held an interest. In 1881, Goodman sold the 50-acre tract he had purchased from Norman to the Stratts, and in 1883, Samuel Carter sold them two more acres near the store. But for some reason, the

*See Mattapex, page 4*

### WANTED

#### Bakers for Kent Island Days

Kent Island Days this year is two days, May 20 and 21 and we will need many more bakers and many more goodies for the bake table. Anything you can contribute will be greatly appreciated...cup cakes, cookies, brownies, cakes, rolls, breads and pies.

Any wonderful confection you choose to cook-up. Many of you have been contacted and we look forward to your tempting delights. If you did not receive a call, we will welcome your contribution.

**Please...**all that are reading this notice, if you have not received a call, pick up your phone and let me know what you will bring.

**Remember...**if you have been contacted, don't forget to bring your 'goodies' on Saturday or Sunday.

**Also...** if you can volunteer some time at the bake table, this will also be greatly appreciated. It is a great way to see old friends and help out the Heritage Society at the same time.

**HELP - HELP - HELP**

Myrtle Bruscup

410-643-5596

Stratts decided to abandon their project. A few months after they bought the 50-acre tract, they sold it back to Norman. They also sold their three acres and ½ interest in the store to John H. Porter.

Porter served as storekeeper from that time on. In fact, he was almost certainly in charge before he purchased his interest in the store, because in February 1883, he applied to the Postmaster General for permission to establish a fourth class post office in the store. The name he proposed for his post office was "Mattapex." The name was probably selected out of deference to his partner, Norman. Although the store and post office were not located on the land that was ever part of Mattapex Farm, Norman owned half interest in both, and they were located only one half mile south of the road leading to his home.

At the time he filed his application, John H. Porter was 64 years old. He was the scion of a large Porter clan that lived on Kent Island and elsewhere in Queen Anne's County. In 1877, he was farming a parcel along Kent Point Road, just north of Craney Neck. He and his wife, Mary E. Porter (b.1828) had two children: Joseph B. V. Porter (b. February 14, 1861) and Mary E. S. A. Porter (b. October 7, 1869). Porter's union was a late-life marriage and he had late-life children. It appears that he turned to storekeeping as a way to support his family in his declining years.

Although the income from postal operations was small, opening a post office was a common way for storekeepers to boost their incomes in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. Fourth class postmasters (those with revenues below \$1000 per year) were paid a percentage of the postage they sold, and one authority estimates that few made more than \$50 per year. But having a post office increased the traffic in the store. Before Rural Free Delivery (RFD) service began to spread across the country in 1896, people had to go to the post office to collect their mail. That meant that virtually everyone in his service area would visit Porter's store, and everyone would be tempted to buy his wares.

His service area was very large indeed. As Porter explained in his application, the only other post office on Kent Island was located in Stevensville, more than six miles north, (A few years later another fourth class post office opened in Chester.) That meant that the Porter store would become the emporium of choice for the whole southern part of the island, outshining the

Price store and others to the north.

Permission to establish the Mattapex post office was granted on March 16, 1883. A photograph of it survives in the archives of the Kent Island Heritage Society. It was a narrow, rectangular frame building, about thirty feet long and one and ½ storied high, with a sharply pitched roof. Shuttered windows on both stories flanked a wide central door with two panels that opened from the center. Above the door a sign proclaimed:

Mattapex Post Office

J. H. Porter Post Master

Dealer in Dry Goods, Notions, Groceries, &c.

A chimney on top of the building indicates that the proverbial pot bellied stove of the American country store blazed within.

Porter's success was brief, however. The postal authorities discontinued his service on April 11, 1904. No reason is given. One possibility is political. Post masterhips were political appointments. If a postmaster got on the wrong side of the patronage machine, his license could be yanked. Another possibility is that the postal authorities did not buy his argument that there was a need for a post office in the southern part of the Island. The Post Office's file on Mattapex contains a letter and numerous forms filled out by Porter explaining where his office was and why it served the public convenience.

Eventually, his persistence paid off. The Mattapex Post Office was re-established on January 4, 1887. A few months later, John P. Norman sold his half interest in the store to Porter. At the age of 68, John H. Porter was set up on his own.

Sadly, fate intervened. John H. Porter died on August 5, 1887. Surprisingly for a man of his age, he died intestate, and his estate became the property of a large collection of heirs. It took three years to sort matters out, but in 1890, the Porter heirs sold to "Mary E. Porter" identified as "the wife of John H. Porter recently deceased", was appointed postmaster on August 16, 1888. Lady postmasters were not uncommon in rural America at the time, nor was it uncommon for patronage appointments to be given to widows and orphans of appointees.

Although just shy of her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday when she took the job, Mary served as Mattapex postmaster without break until 1904. In 1896, she married James W. Marvel but continued to hold her job.

## Plan to Attend

these upcoming events...

General Meetings  
Kent Island Public library

Refreshments 7:00 p.m.

Program 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 20  
Tuesday September 19

Annual Meeting  
Christmas Dinner  
December 14, 2000 6:00 p.m.  
Kent Island Yacht Club

### THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC.

P.O. Box 321 Stevensville, MD 21666-0321

#### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I wish to become a member of the Kent Island Society, Inc. Enclosed is my check to cover dues of membership indicated below:

Life Membership - \$250.00 Single Membership - \$10.00

Organization Membership - \$15.00

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

Town/State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

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

The Kent Island Heritage Society  
P.O. Box 321  
Stevensville, MD 21666

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