

THE MUSEUM NEWS

CELEBRATING THE HISTORY AND COMMUNITY OF CAPE CHARLES

CAPE CHARLES HISTORICAL SOCIETY

814 Randolph Ave. P.O. Box 11 Cape Charles VA 23310

Email: capecharleshistory@gmail.com

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OUR OFFICERS

John Griffith, President
Dora Sullivan, Vice Pres.
Brittany Cannon, Secretary
Marion Naar, Treasurer

2022 Season Museum Opening & New Exhibit

A fortunate donation inspired the new exhibit for 2022. It will inform visitors of a little-known part of the history of Cape Charles: the Cape Charles Air Force Station, a radar facility which operated from 1950 to 1981. The last Commanding Officer of the base was Major William U. Gillespie, Commander of the 771st Radar Squadron. Last summer, Major Gillespie's son, Mark Gillespie, contacted us to offer some memorabilia from his father's time at the base. The primary item was the 771st Radar Squadron's guidon (flag), plus an article from the Eastern Shore Post about the closing of the base. We put the guidon on display in the museum and were impressed by the visitor interest in it. Our archives and personal items will supply memorabilia for display. John Griffith is working with members of the American Legion Post 56 in Cheriton and members of the 771st Facebook group for additional items. With the help of some of the people stationed there, we will have pictorial history for all to see. If you have artifacts or documents about the base and might be willing to lend them for the exhibit, please let us know.

The military history of the station actually began in 1941 when the United States Army established Fort Winslow as a coastal defense artillery installation to complement Fort Story in Virginia Beach in protecting the vast entrance to the Chesapeake Bay. During World War II the site functioned as Fort John Custis with an impressive battery of artillery. In 1981 it became Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Board Member Projects

In 2021 board members continued to provide hands-on work running the organization and the museum. Thus Pres. John Griffith, in addition to standard presidential duties and many hours as a museum docent, manages the museum building from security system to museum shop. Sec. Brittany Cannon and VP Dora Sullivan are mainstays of fundraising. Treas. Marion Naar continues visitor statistics and newsletters. Laura Smith maintains the web and Facebook pages, works on accessions and archives, and joined Jan and Bill Neville in providing historical information to the Main Street organization's Smartphone walking tour. Laura also provided improved images for the reprint of Cape Charles: A Railroad Town. Jennifer Ash works on memberships and this year will be managing docents; Mike Ash is spearheading the railroad renovation projects including the partnership with the Rotary Club on cabooses restoration. Barbara O'Hare manages the reprinting of the book, Cape Charles: A Railroad Town, including long hours editing the text. Melinda McPeck is working on a

second Rotary partnership project: the Cape Charles Black History tour. Lenora Mitchell continues to faithfully format the newsletters. Jan Neville is the authority on intricacies of our buildings and how to repair them when needed; brother Bill is resident local historian, including information not found in any known public records. The new board members all took on special projects in 2021: Jim and Carol Carnegie served as volunteer docents throughout 2021 and will continue in 2022. Dawn Kern collected deposits and organized museum sales and donations for the treasurer. Damion Geist worked on finding homes for outdoor railroad equipment and procured a piece of rail stamped 1921 from the track being removed by Canonie Atlantic, which he will clean up and donate to the museum. Andy Dunton a great addition to fundraising projects. We welcome Damion and Andy as well for their (relative) youth and physical strength!

2021 Museum Visitors

Visitors to the museum are requested to sign the visitor register, answering a few questions about where they are from, why they are stopping, how they heard about it, and leave comments. Statistics compiled from the visitor register reflect a few new trends but are generally consistent with past years. In 2021 we had 3,960 recorded visitors compared to about 4,200 in both 2018 and 2019. In addition several hundred people attended the three fundraisers. As usual, nearly half of all visitors came from Virginia with about 13% from Maryland, Delaware and DC. Over 50% cited the museum as their primary interest, with 44% citing the combination of the museum and welcome center. As always, about 45% of people heard about the museum by passing by and seeing the sign. Family and friends, previous visit, or live/lived here drew about 20%. As to be expected, information on the internet and Facebook, including our web site, now attract about 25% of visitors. The Volkmarsh Club, an international organization, continues to use the museum as its local headquarters for walkers and had 24 walkers here in 2021.

The comments left in the visitor register say it all: Beautiful museum! Great museum, love the exhibits, not too much. Great little museum, love the trains! Thank you! Nice railroad exhibit. Thank you for turning on the generator for us! The working generator was sooo cool! Wonderful historical information. Learned a great deal, thanks! Thank you for maintaining our history!! I keep coming back!

Railroad Projects

Renovation of our railroad stock is a major goal for CCHS, both the “new” cars and the long resident baggage car and caboose. Periodically, during the late summer and fall, members of the Cape Charles Rotary Club worked on the restoration of the caboose. So far, they have cleaned up the roof and applied primer and a black top coat. Next when the weather warms up, they will work on the sides once the exact shade of red color has been decided. We received a \$1,000 grant from the Eastern Shore Tourism Commission from our application to fund restoration of the Pilot House. That amount was insufficient to begin significant work on the pilot house, but we were able to use the funds for the installation of seven interpretive signs for the railroad cars. The signs themselves were donated by The Sign Company of Waterford, NJ; installation required backing boards and support posts. In September, we applied to the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore for a grant to restore the Pilot House, and were awarded \$40,000. That amount will put us well on the way to restoring the building for useful working and exhibit storage space for the museum. The initial steps will be to sandblast and paint the exterior of the building. We have had all the junk that came with the building removed, and salvaged some railroad lanterns and operations documents for later display inside the caboose. Also, Bill Neville spent a productive day sweeping out the interior ready for the restoration work. We are open to recommendations for contractors willing to help us with the restoration work on the pilot house, as well as on the other railroad cars. Volunteers too are always welcome.

Storage and Cleanup

2021 also saw an upgrade to our storage facilities and significant cleanup of items accumulated over the years. For many years we have used the baggage car and a small shed behind the museum to store tools, tables, chairs, upcoming yard sale items, and some large archival pieces. Clearly a replacement was needed. Success: John Griffith located a 20 ft standard used roll-off trailer, wind and water tight, from Mobile Mod for \$4,453. Originally a shipping container, its brick red colors are actually close to traditional PRR colors. It will be painted with a banner caption citing the Cape Charles Branch and PRR Railroad, kindness of Damion Geist. Inspection of baggage car contents resulted in some discards and yard sale items while valuable items were moved to the new trailer. Together with significant outdoors cleanup, the museum campus, both inside and out, looks and works a great deal better.

Fall Fundraisers

For the second year in a row, we were faced with loss of revenue from having to cancel our longtime popular Oyster Roast given the concerns of putting our 200-250 people and yields approximately \$7,000 profit. However, our fundraising committee worked to provide some mindful outdoor opportunities and will continue to evaluate fundraising opportunities in light of the pandemic-influenced new normal.

supporters at risk. This annual fundraiser usually draws 200-250 people and yields about \$7,000 profit. However, our fundraising committee worked to provide some mindful outdoor opportunities and continues to evaluate fundraising opportunities in light of the pandemic-influenced new normal.

In November, CCHS energetically brought back the community yard sale! CCHS started this fun fundraiser in the spring of 2021 on the Museum lawn, and it was such a hit we decided to bring it back in the early fall. We solicited donations, used leftover items from the spring yard sale and clean-out items including a host of Christmas ornaments. Much like the spring yard sale, people were offered vendor set-ups at \$10 with CCHS providing tables. There were 32 town vendors, more than twice the 14 we had in April.

Oh what fun! In mid-December the fundraising committee leveraged the incoming traffic drawn by the beautifully decorated Main Street Festive Friday attractions. This fundraiser provided a unique opportunity for the public to purchase locally grown clams and oysters – a perfect gift or addition to holiday tables! Pre-order sales were encouraged through social media outlets, and supporters could walk or drive-up to the museum grounds to collect their fresh seafood selections. In efforts to keep the spirit of the Oyster Roast alive, quarts of our traditional CCHS clam chowder were also on sale. As you may recall, CCHS clam chowder was always a big hit at the oyster roasts and remains a CCHS tradition! The museum doors were also open with some yard sale items, plus tins of peanut brittle, for people to browse and purchase as they picked up their bags of clams and oysters. The great success of this event was due to the partnership of a local business member and New Inlet Inc., a local seafood supplier, who generously sponsored the event and donated a portion of the seafood sales to CCHS. More so, we have to give thanks to the many enthusiastic buyers who also provided generous monetary donations.

In sum, the selfless volunteers that serve CCHS fiercely continued to persevere through 2021 by carrying out three successful outdoor fundraisers raising close to \$5,900! Please keep a lookout for a 2022 spring event. Bring items for donation and/or volunteer to help with the sale! Call Dora Sullivan at 757-695-0966 or email dorasullivan8@gmail.com for more specifics.

The book – *Cape Charles: A Railroad Town*

We are pleased to announce that the reprint of *Cape Charles: A Railroad Town* by Jim Lewis will be available by the beginning of March. The book is a wonderful comprehensive history of Cape Charles from its inception in the 1880s, its Glory Days of the 1920s and 1930s, on through the latter part of the 20th century with Jim's personal memories of growing up in Cape Charles. The original book went out of print in 2004. The reprint, true to the original but with enhanced graphics, will be available for sale at the Cape Charles Museum, local bookstores, and online at our website capecharlesmuseum.org.