

THE MUSEUM NEWS
CELEBRATING THE HISTORY AND COMMUNITY OF CAPE CHARLES
CAPE CHARLES HISTORICAL SOCIETY 814 RANDOLPH AVE. P.O. Box 11
Email: capecharleshistory@gmail.com
JUNE 2022 VOL. 17, ISSUE 2

OUR OFFICERS:

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

Cape Charles: A Railroad Town

We consider *Cape Charles: A Railroad Town* to be the most comprehensive history of the town ever written. Jim Lewis, a 1960 graduate of Cape Charles High School, took on the daunting task of tracing this transportation driven boomtown from its beginnings in the nineteenth century to modern times. Its research and writing took Jim ten years to complete. Last published in 2004, existing copies of the book were bought up not long after. Continuing interest in town history led CCHS to the desire to republish the book. Thanks to tireless work by board member Barbara O'Hare, the grant of publishing rights by Jim Lewis's sons, hands on work by several other CCHS directors, and publication by Xenophon Press, the project reached a successful conclusion early this year. In text, graphics, and format it is identical with the original edition. Fortunately in the process we were able to enhance many of the images. Now on sale at the museum, some local outlets, and our website in both hard and soft cover editions, the book is selling well.

As described in the book, the rapid growth of rail and steamer transportation in mid 19th century set the stage for the 1884 efforts of William L. Scott and Alexander Cassatt who envisioned and implemented the railroad running down the spine of the Eastern Shore and across the 32-mile mouth of the Chesapeake Bay by ships, ferries and tugs to shorten the North-South transportation route. Early chapters describe the building of Cape Charles and its harbor on partial marshland, and its emergence from the early "rough and tumble" days to a peak in the 1920s as a thriving commercial center, when it was not unusual to have thousands of passengers passing through Cape Charles on a single day. The month of May 1924 set a freight record with a total of 19,557 loaded freight cars transported by tug and barge in both directions across the bay. Subsequent chapters describe the evolution of the town's economy over the ensuing decades, the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel in 1964 which put an end to passenger ferry crossings, and the demise of rail transportation: the last passenger train in 1958 and the last freight car and barge crossing in 2018. Additional chapters describe churches, schools, utilities, and services, personal recollections and a chapter entitled 'Lest We Forget.' Four appendices provide maps, plans, timetables and schedules, names of superintendents and railroad workers, and technical details of rail

cars, steamers, ferries, tugs and barges.

Cape Charles: A Railroad Town is a valuable and lasting tribute to the life and transportation history that the town of Cape Charles illustrates.

Memberships and Finances

Response to the February request for memberships has been excellent. As of this writing we have more than 140 memberships at all levels, a good start but still a ways from our goal of 200 which of course we like to exceed! So if you can be a new member or haven't yet renewed please take this opportunity to do so. Mail a check to P.O. Box 11 or use a credit card through the website capecharlesmuseum.org.

We were very pleased to learn that we are to receive \$3,000 from the Cape Charles Charitable Fund, which was established in 2021 by Kathryn & David Gammino, owners of the Hotel Cape Charles. Unlike most other local funding it is not directed at the economics of tourism, but intended to "enhance our grantees ability to serve Cape Charles and other Eastern Shore Communities." The funding is unrestricted.

In April we again applied to the town for funding. Since we have received no money for the past two years we are not hopeful for this year; gone are the days when we received \$5,000 unrestricted annually. On a brighter note we are due to get \$1,842 from a Rebuild Virginia grant about 18 months after applying for it – they ran out of funds back in 2020 but received more this year and so reactivated old unfunded applications like ours. Should you wish to view CCHS finances in detail you can find our f990 federal tax return on our web site or at irs.gov.

The \$40,000 grant we received in 2021 from the Eastern Shore of Virginia Community Foundation for work on the restoration of the Pilot House exterior is now in action: the Pilot House was sandblasted in mid May and now receiving a coat of long lasting paint. The baggage car will also receive much needed attention.

Technical Upgrades

We are fortunate to have Netwavz, an expert local business, keeping our computer systems and databases secure and up to date. Our databases and digital images are backed up both onsite and offsite. Our Windows operating system has been upgraded to Win 10 from Win 7. Win 7 remains operational to run some of our older but still functional software. Also through Netwavz we signed up for

Spectrum internet service, which will allow archivist Laura Smith to work remotely on accessions and also enable upgrade of museum videos. The museum continues as an internet hotspot, courtesy of Eastern Shore of Virginia Broadband Authority (ESVBA) so visitors can procure information on local amenities and utilize our smartphone outdoor museum campus walking tour. We have added Square which enables credit card transactions through our website and at the museum via a card reader, automatically adding sales tax where needed. Finally, we will be replacing the Johnson Controls security system with a more cost effective system better targeted to our needs.

A Tribute to Capt. Bill Parks 1929 to 2021 Provided by Jim Garrison

In June of 1947, an event happened that would change young Bill Parks life. He asked Capt. Ernest Ewell for a job with the Virginia Ferry Corporation. He was rewarded with the job of Ordinary Seaman and began his employment a few days later. As a deck hand he became interested in the job of wheelsman and within 3 years he was a wheelsman with his 1st Class Pilot's License and he moved to the position of 2nd mate. By 1951 he passed the captains exam and received his Captains license at age 22! He didn't use his license until 1958 becoming a captain aboard the Virginia Ferry District ferries. The ferry system shut down in April of 1964 and Capt. Parks was on board the Pocahontas on her last trip across the Chesapeake Bay.

Capt. Parks transitioned with the ferry boats to the Delaware River & Bay Authority's Cape May-Lewes ferries when they began operation shortly after the Virginia ferry system shut down. He stayed with them for just a few months before taking a job with the Army Corps of Engineers on the Delaware Bay and river on a survey boat. He left the job with the Army Corps to work with the Gulf Coast Transport company on sea going tug boats going between Tampa and New Orleans starting as mate and moving to Captain. He came back to Virginia to work as a captain for Curtis Bay Towing in Norfolk for 17 years before retiring to Onancock.

While Captain Parks was following his career, he got married to his wife Betty and raised two children, Linda and William Parks III. I (Jim) had the good fortune to meet Captain Parks in the spring of 2015 to interview him about his experiences while working for the Virginia Ferry Corporation for a series of videos I created for the Cape Charles Museum. Also joining us was Captain Richard Belote and William "Butch" Baxter. From the interview I was able to create a video telling his story. With Captain Parks and Captain Belote together, Butch Baxter and I interviewed the two captains and I was able

to create a two-part episode about both their adventures together working for the Virginia Ferry Corporation. The two built a great friendship over the years. In his retirement Captain Parks enjoyed growing tomatoes in his garden and cooking seafood. Captain Parks was one of those people who was always ready to help anyone and cared about his family and friends. For all of those who knew Captain Parks, we will sorely miss him.

New Season and Exhibit

Our new season has begun. Thanks to recruiting and scheduling efforts by board member Jennifer Ash and volunteer time donated by twenty people the museum is open every day 10 to 4 staffed by two docents in most sessions. Visitors have been steady, with good donations and sales at the museum shop. Thanks to efforts by a committee of board members a number of new items are now stocked at the museum shop.

As described in the February newsletter, our main exhibit this year is the Cape Charles Air Force Station. Yes, at one time there was an Air Force presence in Northampton County. It was located where the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge is now at the end of our beloved peninsula. We have put together a montage of pictures of the radar site. Come visit us in the newly remodeled museum.

April 30th Low Country Shrimp Boil

For many years the Low Country Shrimp Boil has been an annual low key fundraiser bringing in money to keep the museum open – pay for utilities (ANEC, town fees and security) in our two buildings, insurance, accession work, ongoing maintenance and computer/internet work. Due to COVID concerns the event was not held in 2020 or 2021, but spurred on by a dedicated core of Boil enthusiasts, we decided to hold it again this year. Fortunately most of the event is outdoors and we missed the May surge of new COVID infections. The 170 or so people who joined us for the April 30th event enjoyed large steamed shrimp, potatoes, peppers and sausage cooked in the traditional low country recipe along with local craft ice cold brew. Many locals and out of town guests showed their support by digging in and peeling some shrimp, enjoying fellowship by the fire pit, and swaying to the sounds of a live band. Luck was with us in the weather, which was perfect and probably contributed to a number of last minute ticket sales at the door.

To the fifteen volunteers who served food and drink at the event and others who supported us by donating to and bidding at the silent auction, we thank you for helping make this gem of a fundraiser possible. Thanks to \$8,300 in ticket revenue, several very generous sponsors, and good results in the silent auction, we were able to realize a profit of about \$7,800. It will be put to good use!