



Fall 2020

NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 102  
Laurel, DE 19956

[laureldehistoricalsociety.org](http://laureldehistoricalsociety.org)



# SPECIAL EXPANDED EDITION

**Historic Warrington House Destroyed  
by Fire, Remembered by Family**



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of Paula M. Shannon**



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**IN THIS ISSUE:** Schollenberger Watch Returns to Laurel, From Ross Point to Zambia, Depression-era Laurel, the Nan Fooks Campbell Document Collection, and more!

THIS ISSUE OF OUR NEWSLETTER reflects Laurel amidst a global pandemic in that the usual coverage of past and upcoming activities is missing. However, our team of contributors has created a delightful variety of articles and features which I believe you will find both educational and enjoyable.

Many thanks to those of you who continue to send in Annual Appeal campaign contributions, and membership renewals! We'll soon be launching our next campaign. Maintaining the rich history of Laurel in appropriate facilities for future generations is expensive, and even during a time of canceled events and social distancing, most of our operating expenses remain the same. So, please, continue to be generous when you receive the society's Annual Appeal contribution request.

Like all of you, I am looking forward to resuming normal activities with the Laurel Historical Society, hopefully in the near future. In the meantime, stay safe! ■



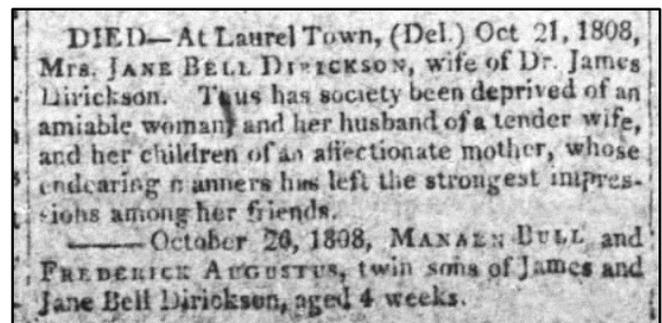
Photo courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.



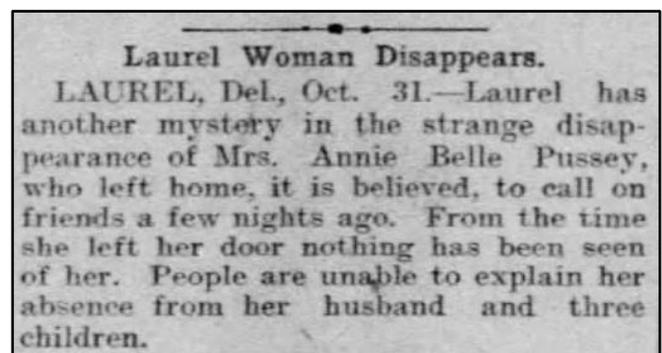
Emily Abbott has served as our docent coordinator for several years and recently decided to retire. This position required many hours each month contacting potential docents to welcome guests at the Cook House and the Laurel Heritage Museum. Many thanks to Emily for her dedication to the society! ■

## Old News

From the *Aurora General Advertiser*  
(Philadelphia), November 12, 1808:



From the *Morning News* (Wilmington),  
November 1, 1904:



## Historic Warrington House Destroyed by Fire

by Chris Slavens

IT LOOMED OVER THE FIELDS AND FORESTS near Pepperbox for generations, witnessing the Civil War, the abolition of slavery, the development of electricity and automobiles, World War I, World War II, the moon landing, 9/11, and the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 before burning to the ground in a sudden midnight blaze.

On the night of May 11, 2020, local firefighters rushed to Pepperbox Road, where the historic Warrington farmhouse was already fully engulfed in flames. They worked until the early hours of May 12th. Despite their efforts, little remained of the grand old house when the last flame was extinguished, save for a blackened chimney and fragmented foundation.

The property is part of Trap Pond State Park, and the house was in the state's residential curator program, which allows members of the public to occupy and restore historic homes under certain conditions. At the time of its destruction, Delaware State Parks had taken steps to preserve the house in preparation for a potential curatorship.



*Courtesy of the Laurel Fire Department.*

According to brief documentation (mostly photos) compiled by the Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation in 1986, the house dates back to 1856. The source of this date is unclear, but it is quite clear that the house appears on the Beers Atlas of 1868, labeled "E. H. Warrington." Warrington also owned a second house a short distance south of the Pepperbox intersection where a schoolhouse and general store stood at that time.

Elijah H. Warrington was born in 1813. At age 29, he married Hetty Ann Cannon, who was 20. Between 1843 and 1864, the couple had nine children. Elijah's occupation was farming, according to census records.



*Photo by Chris Slavens, 2015.*

During Elijah's lifetime, the house and outbuildings were surrounded by open fields, some of which are now forested. A public road ran northwestward through the farm towards and over the old Cannon mill dam; this road survives as a state-maintained footpath for hunters, hikers, and horseback riders. One of the few man-made features along the path is a small, secluded family cemetery, where Elijah is buried alongside his wife, three children, and a son-in-law.

The Laurel Historical Society is grateful to have received many artifacts from the Warrington farm, and regrets the loss of this historic home which was a landmark in the community for so many years. ■



*Courtesy of Trudy Parker.*

*"This is why we do what we do!"*

SOMETIMES ALL IT TAKES is one piece of information to break through a brick wall in family genealogy research. Sometimes that information comes through a moment of serendipity. For several years, a large, Victorian portrait of Elijah Henry Warrington has quietly hung over the mantle at Cook House, a gift from the heirs of Laurel native, the late Donald Warrington. Of course we knew he was the grandfather of Ford and Joe Warrington, and great-grandfather to society members Marlene Warrington Hamilton, her sister Beverly Warrington Smith, and their cousin, Shirley Warrington O'Neal. But through a random comment in a newsletter article, two more family lines were also able to discover what their great- great-grandfather actually looked like.

Through the electronic magic of Ancestry.com, Kate Skovron, of Pikesville, MD, and Heather Conaway of Delmar discovered they were each descended from two of Elijah Henry Warrington's children and began to share information. Heather remembered reading about a portrait in a Chris Slavens article on social media and mentioned it to Kate who promptly contacted us through our website and made arrangements to come visit. When she turned around in the dining room and saw the portrait she was visibly moved, having thought it would be just a faded old snapshot or 8x10. To see it in its place of prominence in its original, ornately carved frame was a little overwhelming for her. Her first words were, "I can see my grandmother in his face."



Those were the same words that were uttered by Kathy Warrington Willink when she saw the portrait a few weeks later. She and her mother, Louise Warrington, accompanied Heather Conaway, Louise's granddaughter, when they also came to see the portrait. Again, the excitement and emotions were high as neither woman had any idea what Elijah looked like or even that the picture existed. Old Elijah had nine children. Now thanks to a donation made to the society years ago, the descendants of three of those children have been able to re-connect with their common ancestor. This is why we do what we do! ■



*Painting by H. J. Brumbley.*

## Behind the Camera: Meet Paula M. Shannon

SHE MOVES QUIETLY around the edges of the Laurel Historical Society's events, camera in hand, capturing candid shots of attendees, or occasionally prompting them to smile or lean in. A small selection of her photographs illustrates the society's newsletters, while many more are shared via social media. Documenting the activities of a historical society is, in and of itself, a feat of historic preservation, but one that is often overlooked—and all too often, people don't get to see the person behind the camera.

Paula Shannon is an award-winning photographer from Seaford, Delaware. She has been an avid photographer for more than twenty years; her love and passion for capturing images extends back to her childhood, a time when she didn't own a camera. As a young child, she battled severe scoliosis and spent years at a time in the Old Shriners Hospital in Philadelphia. It was from a viewing porch at the hospital where she learned to study and memorize images of the sky and sunsets to get her through the isolation of her treatments.

Paula purchased her first professional camera for a trip to France in 1985. It was there that she realized her love for photography, as she captured the iconic Sacré-Cœur in Paris, and the Pont du Gard in Nimes. Her fondest memories are of times shared with her mother, who encouraged her to capture their favorite places. Paula's favorite photograph, of a tree near the Woodland Ferry, was taken on one of their cherished explorations, and was also one of her mother's favorites.



Today, Paula still has a love for nature, wildlife, and sunsets, but she also enjoys capturing people. Because of the adversity she has faced, her camera became a social tool, allowing her to communicate through her art. She developed a keen depth of awareness that allows her to connect with her subject to capture authentic moments. She is active in her community and has established a niche in photographing civic and community events. Paula is proud to have won a Friends of Prime Hook award, Photography Club awards, Best of the State Fair, Ward Museum Arts in Nature Photography Contest with first place in her category, and was featured on the prestigious Ward Museum Spring 2015 magazine cover. ■



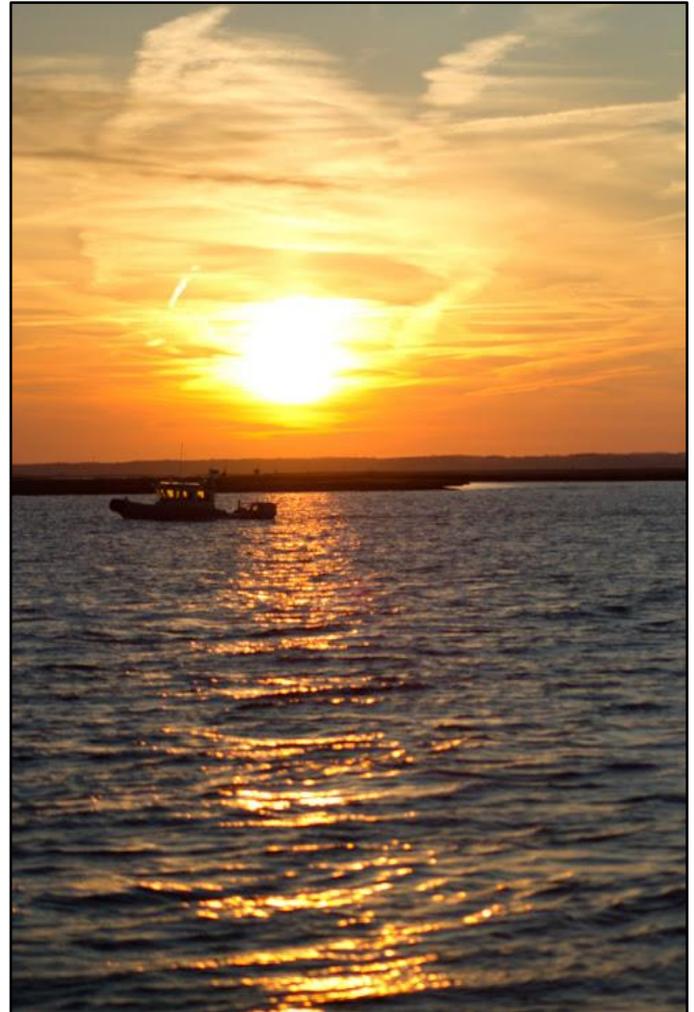


Ward Museum  
Arts in Nature  
Photography  
Contest

Best in Category  
Amateur  
Landscape/Scenery

*Day is Done*

Paula M. Shannon  
Seaford, Del.



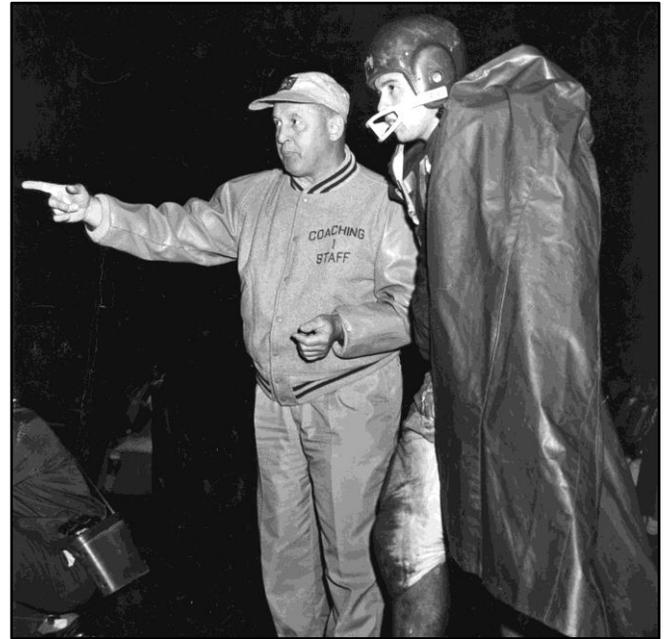
*Photos courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.*

WE WERE STILL IN THE DEPRESSION. People took any job that they could get. At that time, no one in Laurel ordered mixed drinks. There were three choices: a beer, a shot, or a shot and a beer. So a bartender's job was to pour and keep the pretzels and chips coming, and collect the money. Later on, it got a little more complicated when the more sophisticated started ordering mixed drinks.

Edgar Bennett, the general manager of The Red Star Bus Company, headquartered in Salisbury, came in and asked if we would be interested in selling tickets. They ran three busses each way daily between Salisbury and Philadelphia with stops all along the way. They would stop in Laurel and other places only if they had a passenger or package to discharge or if a signal was displayed to indicate that there was a passenger or package to pick up. They paid a commission on the tickets and gave us all the passes we wanted. The business increased to the point that we no longer had to put out the flag. The drivers stopped all the time and frequently came in for a cup of coffee or just to say "Hi." There were two other bus companies that came through, Greyhound and The Short Line. We became their agents also, but still had to put out the flag for them.

The bus business was good, but it brought a problem: what to do with the growing number of colored people using it? Of course, they had to sit at the back of the bus. This was 'way before Rosa Parks. But our problem was where to sell the tickets and where to have them wait for the bus. This may seem strange to you, but if Negroes had been allowed in the restaurant, we would have lost all of our other customers. Fortunately, there was a small piece of ground adjoining the restaurant. Mother had a room built there with a sliding window door into the restaurant through which our colored patrons could be served tickets and food. The outside door had a sign, "Colored Entrance." For the time, that was very progressive.

Each year the Laurel Rotary Club had a Father and Son dinner meeting; and each year members who had been friends of my father's took me. There were other men in town who were very kind. One was Paul Gordy. Paul worked in the office of The Valliant Fertilizer Company. Each day, he left work early to make a deposit at the bank, after which he stopped by the hotel for a few beers before going home.



*Coach Schollenberger with Nelson Beach.*

George Schollenberger, the boys' gym teacher, football, basketball, and baseball coach, took me to football games at his Alma Mater, Temple, where the legendary Pop Warner had named him to his all-time All-American Football Team. After the games, Coach often had a few beers with some of his friends. One of the reasons that he took me was that he knew he could trust me not to spread the word about his beer drinking, which was never excessive, but would not have been well received in the school. The reason that he knew he could trust me was that the Sussex County Coaches Association met monthly at a big table in a darkened corner of our dining room and consumed a few pitchers of beer. I was sworn to secrecy. This is the first time that I have told. Coach also took me to gym meets at The Naval Academy.

I wasn't much of an athlete. I was too skinny to play with the big boys. With those nearer my size, I was pretty good and enjoyed football more than any other sport. Catching and intercepting passes were my specialties. And I was a pretty good runner after I got the ball, due, no doubt, to my fear of being tackled. One year, I did go out for the team.

*\* Collection of the Laurel Historical Society. Gift of Daniel Risdon Twilley, son of the author and great-grandson and only living descendant of Emanuel Twilley, the original owner of today's Hitchens Homestead.*

The only use that Coach made of my skills was to have me demonstrate to some of the big goons how to take a stance and other fine points of the game. I was sort of an unofficial assistant coach. That kept me from being killed. With basketball, I was just slightly better. I did make the squad, but got to play only when the outcome of the game was already determined. My other athletic endeavor was in track. I was a high jumper until a dislocated knee put an end to that.

There were a lot of things to help out with at the hotel. I already mentioned washing glasses Saturday nights. Also, I washed windows. We had a lot of windows. Bon Ami was what I used. To this day, I cringe when I see a can of Bon Ami. Paul and Fuzz had summer jobs at the Block and I wanted to work there too.



*Lining up at the Block.*

The Block was an open shed where the farmers' produce was sold at auction. They drove through in either their trucks or horse drawn wagons loaded with produce. An auctioneer described what was for sale, and a group of buyers put in their bids to the auctioneer's chant. Whoever won the bid directed the farmer to a loading area nearby, where the produce was transferred to a large truck or railroad car for shipment to the city, usually Philadelphia, but sometimes New York or Boston. Early in the season, strawberries were the main crop. Then came cucumbers, watermelons, cantaloupes, and some corn and raspberries. Later on a few sweet and white potatoes and cabbages were brought in. Paul worked in a nearby shed nailing together crates for the berries and cantaloupes. That was piece work, a hard way to make a living. But since he expected to own the company later, it was a good place to start. Fuzz worked in the

loading area. His father was one of the buyers. So that was an appropriate place for him. I managed to get a job with the tightest buyer; he paid me \$4.00 for a five day week. I had to be there all day, but worked only a few hours because he didn't buy very much. I told you he was tight.

There was a man by the name of Hartley, who was the manager of the Phillips Packing Company tomato canning factory. He lived at the hotel during the canning season. One summer, I persuaded him to give me a job. That was a bad move. My job was on the second floor, feeding gallon cans into a chute. The odor and heat from the cooking tomatoes came at me all day long. Do you wonder why, to this day, I can't enjoy stewed tomatoes. The money was a little better. Thankfully, though, the job didn't last long.

The best summer job that I had was Japanese Beetle Inspector. I got that job through a State Senator who was a friend of the family. It paid \$100.00 per month. That was a really big salary then. There were no Japanese Beetles in Sussex County. I had never even seen one. All I had was an instruction booklet with a picture of a beetle on the cover. Actually, my job wasn't to look for beetles. My job was to make sure that trucks and railroad cars that would be passing through a contaminated area into a non-contaminated area had the produce completely sealed off from the outside. There were permits to fill out. And I had wires with lead seals for the doors and tarpaulins. During that summer, there probably was an average of two or three trucks or cars a day. It was my first introduction to government work.

Another job that I had on a part time basis I shared with Fuzz. We folded fliers of coming attractions at the local movie house; and on Saturday mornings we walked all over town tacking up posters of the coming attractions on the telephone poles. There was no pay for that. The benefit was that we could go to the movies free. If the movie was a really good one, they ran it for two days, most of them for only one, and sometimes there were double features. Once in awhile we were pressed into service as ushers for which we were paid twenty-five cents an hour.

Occasionally on Saturdays we polished brass at St. Philip's Episcopal Church for which Father Barber paid us. We donated our pay to the church. St. Philip's was a small church with a small congregation. Father Barber didn't cater much to the people who were best able to support the

church. His main concerns were with the youth, and with those in the country who had no way to get to the services. He recruited others to help him; and before each service he and his apostles drove into the country and came into church with their cars loaded down with Episcopalians and about-to-be Episcopalians. He lost some of the well-to-do parishioners, but his work didn't go unnoticed or un-rewarded. Two very wealthy women, Nan Fooks Campbell and Mary Carpenter, supported him financially. Father Barber recruited another person—the year after having Fuzz and me confirmed, Mother was confirmed, too. ■



*The altar at St. Philip's.*

## Schollenberger Tribute Returns to Laurel

WHEN AN OBJECT OR PERSON has not been seen for a long time, it generally elicits joy at its return. Such was the case when a simple wristwatch found its way back to Laurel recently. It seems that members of the 1953 LHS football team pooled their resources that year, and purchased an Elgin Delux Sportsmaster watch as a tribute to their coach, legendary George Schollenberger. On the back was engraved "Football Team 1953 6-1." Information from the 1954 Milestone yearbook announced that the season had six wins and only one loss, and it was NOT to Seaford! That year Laurel was named by the sportswriters throughout the state as the number one team in southern Delaware.

So how did the watch come back to Laurel? After Coach passed away in 1982, the watch went to his son, Butch Schollenberger. Years later Butch decided the watch should go back to the team. The team, which had been dispersed all over the county by 2020, decided the watch should be sent to Alan Whaley who still lived in Laurel. After some back and forth emails among the players, it was decided to donate it to the historical society where it will add to the growing collection of Schollenberger sports memorabilia. We are delighted to add this to our collections and thank all those who participated in returning it home. The senior



players that year included Linwood Miller, Alan Whaley, Frank Waller, Jim Cordrey, Jack Ellis, Gardner Gootee, Bob Hickman, Jim Lewis, Jim Thawley, Clark Abbott, and Bob Miller. Go Dawgs! We also thank Sug Whaley for her help in bringing the watch home. ■

Are you interested in contributing to the Laurel Historical Society's newsletter?

*Please submit articles, photos, suggestions, and questions to  
Chris Slavens, newsletter editor, at [chrislavens@gmail.com](mailto:chrislavens@gmail.com).*

## Generosity in a Pandemic Year

This season of Covid 19 has affected us all in some way, even in our collections at Cook House. Donations in 2020 started out well in January and February, but by March and April things came to a screeching halt. By May folks had cleaned out enough closets to start donating again, and by June we were back on track. Here is a summary of our 2020 acquisitions as of 9/14/2020, and the kind people who remembered us. Any omissions are purely operator error.

**Jerry Lynch:** c.1940 Centenary Church telephone index and shopping directory; **Pat Shannon:** 19th century tableware and cutlery; **Kim Littleton:** historical society calendars, DuPont Plant paperweight; **Jane Ellen Hiller:** antique picture frames, shoe mold, flat iron, Bethel bridge photo, 2 copies of “The Bulldog;” **Clark Benson:** photo of Cook Wholesale Grocery office; **Kendal Jones:** 19th century red and green counterpane, Deputy-Lowe family archives, 200+ color photographs of Laurel over the last 50 years, Centenary Church membership directory; **Lib Fisher:** photographs, documents, and other publications pertaining to Laurel history; **Woody Disharoon:** Sussex Trust bank and ashtray and bass fishing brochure; **Frank Calio:** Calio’s Cabins postcard, Calio Shoe repair shoe horns and key ring; **Eastern Shore of Virginia Historical Society:** Seven books pertaining to Delaware history; **Trudy Parker:** WWII era telegraph from Laurel resident Percy Pusey; **Linda Justice:** calendar of School Activities for LHS 1935-1936, 12 copies of the LHS calendars, one copy of Bacon Switch DVD, one set of Studley House blueprints, Xeroxed copies of the Laurel School Mirror newspaper, posters, drapes, and school history papers, Jack Lewis’ book *A Brush with Fate*; **Doug Marvil:** Town and Country Supply paint stir, C.C. Oliphant letter case, copy of Laurel Special School District stationary, copy of the Constitution and minutes of the Laurel Academy; **Janet Walker:** 1947 calendar from Christ Methodist Church with the members’ birthdays pre-printed in each month; **Ned Fowler:** book, *My business was to fight the devil*, newspaper clippings about Rosemont; **Larry Allen:** lighter and cufflinks from Dolly Madison Ice Cream Co.; **Jan James:** Collection of photographs, newspaper clippings, sports letter emblems, and other assorted Laurel memorabilia; **Elizabeth Oldfield Hall:** reference book, *Delaware a History of the First State*, biographical volume; **Alan and Sug Whaley:** George Schollenberger watch; **Ann Gootee Henderson:** Roller skates from Centenary Church roller rink, original blueprints for the 1921 Waller Theater, two Waller Theater movie posters, Laurel School books used by Frances Penuel (Hastings); **Yancy Graves Hillegas:** LHS Bulldog cheers booklet c. 1959. ■

## All in This Together on Facebook

Thanks to member Debbie Mitchell, LHS has maintained a presence on Facebook during the pandemic. In March, she began posting a series of 31 photos mainly from our Kendal T. Jones 20th century collection taken around town of people and places we all know and remember fondly. As of September 20, these pictures have been seen by 59,530 people – an average of 1,920 per shot! The most popular view was of the dolphin swimming up Broad Creek to the mill dam, followed by snow scenes of the Big Hill and the Central Avenue bridge. In the coming weeks and months, former LHS intern, recent Mary Washington University graduate, and Laurelite Emily Whaley will take on this popular project in sharing photos and items from our collections for everyone to enjoy. What a great way to celebrate Laurel since “we’re all in this together.” Check it out. ■

### CONNECT WITH US ONLINE



[laureldehistoricalsociety.org](http://laureldehistoricalsociety.org)

## The Laurel Historical Society By the Numbers

KEEPING TRACK OF SOCIETY COLLECTIONS is an immense undertaking, and we thankfully have a software system to help us in this endeavor. The process has evolved over the past 12 years to the point where we have records approaching nine thousand in number. After having first been vetted as to relevance to Laurel, when items come into our possession via donation or (very, very rarely) by purchase, they are thoroughly documented. A collections number is first assigned and affixed to them. Next, they are cleaned when necessary, photographed and measured, and then researched, identified, and described. A storage or display location is found and then, along with the above, is listed by location (Cook House, Heritage Museum, or Hitchens Homestead), building, room, wall, or shelf. Finally, in order to complete the legal transfer of ownership to the society, a Deed of Gift form is sent to the donor for signature and return.

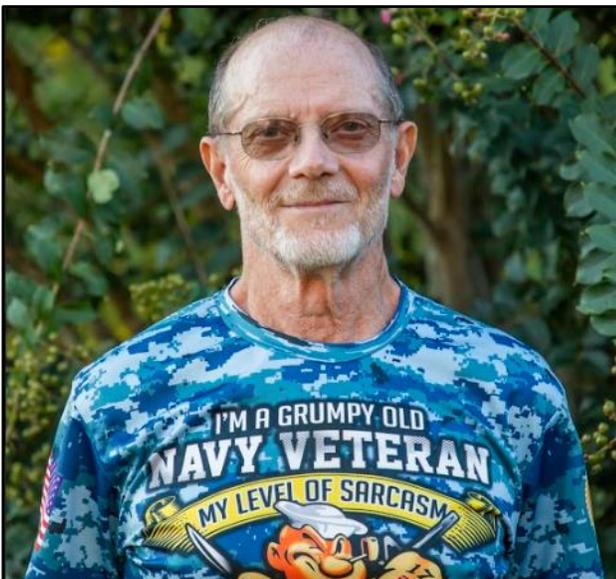
Our number of accession records is actually an understatement, for an accession can encompass just one item or an entire collection. For example, one record might be listed for a shoebox of 400 postcards or, say, for 7 boxes full of Matt and Dona Blaine's Laurel-made Broad Creek pottery. For the most part, however, we do try to break down these collections and describe and label them one by one so as to retain as much of their provenance as

Archival	1,518
Objects	1,998
Photographs	5,047
Research Library	189
<b>Total Accession Records</b>	<b>8,752</b>

possible. All this will come in handy one day when all of us are gone and another generation wants to learn about Laurel.

In summary, it's probably safe to say that we've got over ten thousand things among our collections which, when woven together, tell Laurel's proud story. . . and that's not including the as-yet-to-be-counted thousands of Waller Studio negatives, the tables of things in the Cook House work room awaiting accession, and the stuff we're rounding up next week from 3 more homes in the Laurel area. None of this would be possible without you and your generosity. As Bob Hope would say, "thanks for the memories." That's what we're all about. ■

## Volunteer of the Year: Woody Disharoon



While many of us enjoyed the summer of 2020 in the pleasure of air-conditioned homes and offices, Woody Disharoon spent hours and hours volunteering his time cutting grass at the Hitchens Homestead and the Cook House. The society saved thousands of dollars this summer due to his generous contribution of time and labor.

In recognition of Woody's service, it is President George Denney's pleasure to award him with the VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR award.

Many thanks to Woody for his selfless dedication to the Laurel Historical Society! ■

## Collection Spotlight: The Nan Fooks Campbell Document Collection

By Norma Jean Fowler

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT COLLECTIONS we have is the Nan Fooks Campbell Document Collection which consists of over 300 deeds, plats, surveys, inventories, letters, field survey booklets, certificates, and a whole host of other 18th and 19th century archival writings. The dates of the documents run from the mid-to-late 1700s through the first quarter of the 20th century. Information contained in these original slips of paper is immeasurable for the researcher of early Laurel families and history. The collection was originally cataloged as a single record, outlining a very brief overview of what was contained. To be of any real value however, each document needed to be cataloged separately, so that the names of places and people recorded inside could be located by a keyword search. In the early days of our cataloging, there just wasn't time to do that, and so the collection was available but not searchable. The Covid silver lining was that during the shutdown, all 305 items have been abstracted! All it took was about 56 hours of typing!

Deep in these hard-to-read documents are nuggets of history that may have come to light for the first time. Many of the records were created by Cyrus C. Windsor and Jacob Wootten, early Sussex County surveyors. In miniscule handwriting, the metes and bounds were recorded in a field survey book, to be later used in creation of the legal document showing land ownership. Many of these surveys and plats were re-surveys of much earlier tracts of land, some dating from the late 1600s. These were granted by the Lord Proprietors, Calvert and Penn. This is excellent information in tracing land provenance. A particularly important deed concerns the creation of an African American church at Old Forge. Tradition has for many years stated that Mt. Pisgah AME Church in Laurel had its origin at Old Forge, the area just southwest of today's Legion home. A deed from John Polk to several free blacks in that area proves this tradition as it quotes "for the erection of meeting house."

Many documents detail the first laying out of roads in this colonial time period. For example, one deed mentions the survey for the new road from Tresham's Mill to Laurel, which today is most likely Trussum Pond Road. Old landmarks, no longer extant, are noted such as a wharf at Cod Creek

where it empties into the Nanticoke River. Crossing over the "ditch" known as Cod Creek today on old Sharptown Rd., one would never guess that there had been a busy loading dock in that area. A few of the documents identify and name free black property owners, information not readily available to African American researchers today. Family relationships can be discovered in some, as references to my wife, my brother, my niece etc. are included. Often female names are hard to trace and this collection has much information that connects husbands and wives, fathers and daughters. Inventories of property outlined in probate proceedings can give researchers a better idea of the quality of life ancestors had. Inventories here reflect both ends of the social scale, both wealthy and impoverished. The receipt that Emma Hearn got for paying \$3.50 to J. B. Frost, principal of the Laurel Academy in 1860, for her daughter's half term tuition in Algebra and Common English opens discussion for not only the Academy but female education in the Civil War era.

The early settlers here in Laurel were very interconnected and had rich active lives. So much went on here that we don't know about. The Nan Fook Campbell Collection brings this to life in a new and exciting way. It is second only to the Waller Photographic Collection in its breadth and depth of information. Where the Waller Collection represents life at the turn of the 20th century and beyond, the Campbell collection reveals life in Laurel as it was over 200 years ago. ■

The logo for 99.1 FM Radiorehoboth.com features the frequency "99.1 FM" in a large, bold, white sans-serif font against a dark blue rectangular background. Below this, the website address "RADIOREHOBOTH.COM" is written in a smaller, white, all-caps sans-serif font.

Chris Slavens joined Jeff Balk on the Daybreak Morning Show on Radio Rehoboth, 99.1 FM, on October 1st, and briefly discussed the Laurel Historical Society and the early history of Laurel. The interview is temporarily available online at [radiorehoboth.com](http://radiorehoboth.com).

ONE WOULD ASSUME that having spent so much time away from home, I would have forgotten by now what makes my hometown of Laurel the great treasure it is. I've been fortunate to travel throughout a great deal of the world, on a journey of exploration from Africa, Europe, the Middle East, South America and Central America. And despite the brilliant wonders I've marveled, the lasting memories of a humble home and the people in it remain. Memories of foggy summer mornings and the sweet smell of corn stretching in every direction still bring a nostalgic smile to my face, even as I wince at memories of the pungent odor of manure hanging over the Delaware sunset. My story is one of many successes, but also of many failures that have helped shape the path I've traveled through this peculiar world. And in the midst of these challenging times in which we now live, amidst a pandemic and sociopolitical turmoil, I find myself uniquely positioned to practice steadfastness and courage in ways that I never imagined, deep within the African bush.

As I write this looking at the horizon over the sun-scorched Zambian land, I can recall with ease the many people that gently and unknowingly guided me to this very spot in the southern hemisphere. It would take pages to name them all. My earliest memories begin as a young boy spending much of my time at Mommom's house. Nancy Truitt was a Laurel native and wife of Vernon Truitt, my adoptive Grandfather and namesake. Married for 50 years, together they led a rich heritage in Delaware black history, becoming one of few successful large-scale black, farming families from the 1950's through the 1970's. My earliest memories began at their house situated just across a small field from my parent's home, which my father built with his own hands. In fact, my father's construction business, Caldwell and Sons Construction, laid the foundation of many new family homes throughout the state of Delaware. Mommom had been a faithful member of St. John A.M.E. Zion Church, which many know as "Ross Point." It was in this historical landmark built in 1884 that I recall spending every Sunday alongside my mother Shirley Caldwell, the assistant pastor there at the time and my father Paul Caldwell. Thinking back, I chuckle at the many Christmas plays and singing performances I was gently encouraged (forced) to do in front of a smiling



*VERNON CALDWELL grew up in Laurel, graduating from Laurel High School in 1999 as Class President and Class Salutatorian. He is a sociologist, professor, researcher and professional in education, global health and international development. He previously taught at the City University of New York. He is now Senior Lecturer and Director of Hope College of Education in Zambia, Africa ([hopeedu.org](http://hopeedu.org)), which he founded. He holds a B.S. in Biology and Latin-American/Spanish studies from Haverford College, and an M.S.Ed. in International Educational Development from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and is a Doctoral candidate at City University of New York.*

congregation of mostly grayed and graying congregants.

The youngest of five siblings, two brothers and two sisters, our house was one filled with laughter, youthful antics, and, of course, great cooking. My mother poured out her love in the form of delicious southern-style dinners that none of us could resist. Thanksgiving was, and still is, my favorite holiday for obvious reasons. With my family spread throughout the country from Los Angeles to Georgia now, Thanksgiving gives us the rare opportunity to reunite and reminisce about all of the crazy things we used to do (and got away with). And then there was Laurel High School, the

innumerable wrestling tournaments I competed in, the Laurel High School Chorus and the unparalleled Mrs. Denney, pep rallies, proms, and Friday night football games. There were some dull, even sad, moments at times, but our family loved sitting around recalling the times we spent growing up, laughing till our bellies ached.

While still in school, I was honored to act as Class President for our senior class of 1999 and look back fondly on the camaraderie the student government worked together to build. Most of us had spent our entire lives together through primary, middle, high school, and even a few early college classes at University of Delaware, so it was bitter sweet to see it all come to an end leading up to college. I was at the Laurel High School Baccalaureate ceremony when I first found out that I had received a \$144,000 scholarship to my first college choice, Haverford College, in Pennsylvania. I remember the speaker announcing it and thinking to myself that he must've misspoken, but he didn't backtrack. So in a state of utter shock I approached the stage behind a calm façade, shook his hand and only after sitting did it sink in how much my life had just changed.

I had visited Haverford during my senior year and fallen in love. The school was situated on "the mainline," a long thoroughfare stretching from the city of Philadelphia through many of its suburbs known predominantly for their wealth. Sprawling, opulent homes with ostentatious landscaping were a common sight. I wasn't aware of it yet, but leaving home for college would usher in awakenings for which I was completely unprepared, some less serious than others. I remember, for example, reluctantly trying soy milk for the first time and, to my surprise, finding it to be a shockingly palatable, alternative to the vitamin D full-fat milk I had grown up on. That I'd no longer need to endure the unsavory grit of a Lactaid pill at meals to properly function came as a pleasant surprise to me during my first year. More seriously, though, college life surrounded me by friends and professors with starkly different values, norms, ideals, and aspirations; and I felt very much like a foreigner in a strange land. Life on the mainline was worlds apart from my familiar hometown in Delaware. It was the first of many experiences that would open my eyes to the immense and fascinating diversity of the human experience. Though my worldview would be stretched and expanded, my love of science was one thing that would endure the

novelty of life away from home.

Attending a liberal arts college, we were encouraged to expand our intellectual grounding and capacities in all kinds of areas of study. By the time I graduated from Haverford with a Bachelor's degree in Biology, I had explored such an expanse of learning, from sociology to education, psychology, linguistics and philosophy; it became difficult for me to narrow down my ambitions and interests. During my senior year at Haverford I spent a year abroad in Mexico at the University of Veracruz studying Spanish and Latin American history. Although I had traveled extensively through the US, this was my first time living abroad within a different culture. I explored the ancient ruins of the Mayans and Toltecs, climbed the famous Pyramid of the Sun, Teotihuacán, and learned to speak fluently in Spanish. The wanderlust travel bug would infect me from there. I needed to see what else the world had to offer, so I made every effort to marry my career interests and love of learning and language with global travel. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my decision to take a gap year after college and before applying to medical school would take me on a life-changing trajectory.

My gap year turned into several years teaching science in the Philadelphia area, during which time I devised lofty plans to start my own school abroad. After a few years learning Portuguese and consuming as much literature, music and media I could on Brazilian culture, I took the first leap to Brazil in South America. I was young, driven and maybe a bit overly confident in my ability to traverse the red-tape involved in starting a business abroad. Brazil is known for both her beauty and crime, filled with gorgeous cities lining breathtaking beaches and surrounded by beautiful natural landscapes nestled between rolling hills and dull skyscrapers. Juxtaposed with the city's wealthiest residents are the majority of the city's poor living within shantytowns, called *Favelas*, built precariously on the city slopes.

Although I entered Brazil with intentions of teaching English first and then starting a school for Brazil's most privileged, I would ultimately end up working alongside the nation's poorest and most vulnerable residents. It all began when I started offering English lessons to adults at a place called Casa Refugio, or Refuge House, an orphanage for children living with HIV/AIDS. Later, teens residing at the house begged for lessons, until

lessons with them became lessons for even younger children. Most of the kids there had extremely difficult pasts, having been abused, or abandoned because their HIV treatment couldn't be afforded or their parents couldn't face the "humiliation" of having a child with AIDS. In addition to these children, I was also able to accumulate a large number of other adult clients while in Brazil, but I was never able to fully carry out my lofty dreams of starting a school there. Yet, it was an unlikely and necessary stepping-stone in my journey.

Once I returned to Philadelphia, I began a Masters program at University of Pennsylvania in International Education and Development. In my mind, it seemed like a reasonable step; I had a reasonably good amount of teaching experience and hadn't yet abandoned my hopes of starting a school abroad. Within that same year, as time would have it, I'd be landing in Africa for the first time, on an academic internship at the Botswana Ministry of Health. While there I completed a large study on the impacts of health on education, learned my first African language, Setswana—the language of Botswana—and then hopped on a plane headed for Zambia, just two hours away. My best friend back in Philadelphia had told me about a small-scale project his parents started there. So, I planned to take a trip down to check it out once my work in Botswana was finished. I did and what I witnessed there was extraordinary: a village family filled with the cries and laughter of about 100 children brought there to start new lives where they could go to school, be fed, sing and play with brothers and sisters without the fear of abandonment and hunger they had combatted with for so long before. It was after multiple visits to this very village that I was eventually asked to consider leaving the states to help here.

After many years working at the City University of New York while I pursued my Ph.D. in Sociology, I had to make a very difficult decision. I'd have to choose to leave behind my cushy NYC life, as well as my dearest friends I'd made while there, and enter into one of the most extreme life transitions possible. Moving from a city buzzing with the energy of 9 million people to the Zambian Bush amongst those whose culture, language and lives I hardly understood was seemingly unheard of. I never thought I'd find myself returning, in a sense, full circle back to my rural Delaware roots, but it seemed right, so I said my goodbyes, packed up my home, putting most of my life in storage and took



the next step into what would become my home away from home and my purpose during this pandemic.

There are typically two stereotypical views of Africa that we Americans hold. The first, constructed from commercials with soiled, pitiful children with distended bellies, flies on their faces and desperation in their eyes, largely misses the target. And in the other, the spellbinding voice of Attenborough narrating another dramatic melee between predator and prey conjures caricatured images of Africa. Those privileged enough to travel here, however, would find the reality of Africa on the ground shockingly different. Africa is a continent running over with thousands of languages and cultures, rich people and poor people, those with dark skin and those with light. And sorry to disappoint, but unless you're on a game reserve, you'll probably never see any of the wildlife we're so used to seeing on TV. Likewise, social media photos of Africa fail to capture the contrasts that exist on the continent. The most unexpected of which may be that parts of Africa get cold. Deep in the southern hemisphere, the narrowest stump of the continent experiences cold nights with snow usually falling in the high mountain regions. Arid winds pick up speed during the winter months of June and July (yes, the seasons are switched in the southern hemisphere). Across the region, most lock themselves away under the warm refuge of double-layered fleece blankets, the only barrier between them and the morning chill. The cold here is nothing like the blizzards, iced-over windows and blue fingertips endured in the American north, but for the native Southern African, it might as well be.

Having grown up a product of Western society, I've been conditioned to believe that competition and one's individual success is what drives the world. One should always be on time, keep moving,

stay busy, and each year aspire to something slightly more ambitious. This way of understanding the world all came tumbling down upon starting my life in Africa. Adaptability, flexibility and community are all primary characteristics of African cultural life. Time is relative, no one rushes, punctuality leads to stress and, ultimately, progress and success are measured in terms of relationships, not in any one individual's excellence. It took a bit of time to find comfort in what I first viewed as antithetically opposed to how one should operate in life. Many of Africa's idiosyncrasies require that expatriated Americans turn off their Westernized expectations, and the frustrations and anger that accompany their entitlements being unmet.

There is some true justification for the widespread, somber view of Africa. The HIV/AIDS epidemic, for example, has impacted this continent more than anywhere else in the world. Southern Africa, home to about two percent of the world's population, accounts for over thirty percent of all the people in the world who are living with HIV/AIDS. This should come as no surprise, though. HIV flourishes where the conditions of underdevelopment, gender inequality, and poor public health services undermine efforts to prevent its spread, making societies more susceptible to HIV infection. Making things worse is the resulting orphan crisis. Since the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, more than 13 million children have lost their mother or both parents to AIDS. Orphans, especially double orphans, are more likely than other children to be working for pay, heading a household and less likely to receive schooling.

Zambia is one of the poorest countries in the world, and 10% of children are orphans. The country is land-locked, having no shoreline, and has struggled to effectively develop and implement solutions for issues surrounding infrastructure, healthcare, local job creation and education for a people that depend on just one hydroelectric dam on Lake Kariba, a man-made reservoir, for their electricity. In response, innumerable projects, NGOs and government-run initiatives have been created with the intentions of improving the lives and futures of the most vulnerable here.

After a 23-flight from NYC, I arrived at one of these located on a 230-acre farm, located 45 miles north of the Zambian capital city, Lusaka. I have lived and worked here now for the past 3 years. This small-scale project, called Village of Hope, was founded by Benedict and Kathleen Schwartz, a

couple from Maryland. Their intention for the organization personally impressed me because it was an attempt to confront all the previously mentioned social and economic issues while avoiding the notorious veneer of western humanitarianism in African development, an approach that has focused predominantly on governments pouring in cash, but has ultimately done more harm than good on the continent.

Village of Hope was designed to tackle the challenges that Zambia faces by focusing on Zambians themselves, specifically giving communities financial autonomy and economic independence. The guiding purpose of the organization revolves around creating new economic and educational models to positively impact rural Zambian communities. Three principles are key to the project: serve and stimulate the local markets, establish joint ventures with responsible Zambians and use diversification as a means to weather economic changes in the local economies and to foster long-term sustainable growth.

On a typical day here I wake early at the start of the day like most Zambians, who rise with the sun, sometimes as early as 4:00 a.m. Unlike most Zambians, however, I find it hard at this time of the day to brush off the fact that the electricity is gone and I'll be unable to have my requisite morning caffeine injection. I blame my mother for my addiction to coffee. Everyone in my family knows how much she loves her morning Dunkin Donuts coffee and I am certainly a chip off the block. "Load-shedding," as it's called, means that electricity is being reserved, so I'll have no access to most luxuries—Wi-Fi, fans, microwaves, hot water, refrigeration, and my cell phone and computer once they've lost their charge. Lake Kariba, the largest man-made lake in the world, runs dangerously low during the dry season and fails to produce enough hydropower for the nation. Although this happens almost daily, life carries on as usual for most Zambians.

My role in this effort focuses primarily on educational development and directing a college of education here called Hope College of Education. When I arrived, the college didn't exist, so I was tasked with building it from the ground up, a job fraught with a great many administrative tasks from hiring instructors, training instructors, writing curriculum, marketing and advertising, building partnerships with local universities and finally admitting students. As one might presume,

it was no simple task, but the pieces came together quickly in less than one year.

Lecturing in a foreign college where no one speaks English as a native tongue comes with many challenges. It was a rude awakening to find that my previous teaching experience of 13 years wouldn't work to make teaching here a breeze. My American accent made lectures almost unintelligible to students. And what, back home, my students would consider slow, relaxed, understandable speech felt to most of my Zambian students like a racing speech with unfamiliar vocabulary and strange cultural references. I had to relearn pretty much everything, especially how to hit the pause button in order to rethink wording (Zambians use British vocabulary and grammar) and give them a moment to interpret the foreign twang through which I spoke those words. I felt very much like a new professor again. It's all been worth it, though. Many years later now, I've fairly mastered the Zambian language Nyanja, and am much more familiar with important Zambian cultural references, which make teaching a great deal easier.



It would be impossible for most of the students at the college to attend large colleges and universities in Zambia because they are very expensive. It's for this reason that Hope College was designed to meet the needs of under-privileged rural Zambians. The fees are a fraction of what one would spend at University of Zambia, the nation's most expensive and prestigious school. Yet, we pride ourselves on providing our students with the highest quality teacher training and believe the college is on its way to becoming a hub of teacher education in Zambia. I'm happy to see a large number of students well on their way to becoming Zambia's future educators.



Reaching this point at the college is important because, ultimately, education is at the core of a country's development. It is the invisible glue of the relationship holding business, economy and political life together in the nation. So, it is an ongoing hope at the college that newly trained Zambian teachers will lead to children that are skilled, responsible workers and consumers capable of thriving both within the local economy as well as within the global economy. By raising up the region's future educators, Hope College of Education is endeavoring to address some of the challenges of providing quality education and equal opportunity to all, a task greatly complicated by Zambia's extreme cultural and linguistic diversity. Quality basic education better equips youth with the knowledge and skill sets necessary to assume healthy lifestyles, make better life decisions and take an active role in social, educational and economic decision-making as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. Ultimately, the college and the Village of Hope as a whole are looking to the future; the future of young Zambian children and their families, the growth of the nation and its impact on an ever-changing world with so many challenges of its own.

On one of my adventures traveling to other countries on the continent, I recall standing at the base of the Great Pyramid of Giza thinking about the hundreds of thousands of hands it took to erect such large structures almost 5000 years ago. When you're standing next to them, the heat of the Egyptian sun and sand beating away at the two million, 80-ton blocks that make them up, you can't help but be in awe. That many believe aliens built them comes as no surprise. Yet, from what we can tell, at some point in ancient history, a people banded together in the 10s of thousands to create a wonder of the world. They did it precisely by

looking to the future. It took extraordinary planning, unity, cooperation, strategic coordination, lots of time and effort for groups of workers to meet the demands of an authoritarian, pharaonic ruler. Visions of the afterlife, and probably a bit of fear on the part of the workers, drove them to achieve a marvel like none other existing today. Humanity has relied on superstitious ideology and been compelled by the rod of oppressive leaders since the beginning of civilization.

Fortunately, now we live in a world where it is clear to see that there is no one Earthly individual for whom we should be compelled to move. We should be driven to unite, cooperate, coordinate over time to meet the demands of the most vulnerable living right next to us. And in this increasingly globalized world, everyone is our neighbor. Although I've seen much pain and desperation here in Zambia, the idea that it is "those" people elsewhere the world that experience real hopelessness leads us to ignore the suffering of those living just across the tracks from us. So, how does this all help us think through the complexities of 2020, a year that what will most certainly be looked back on as one of the most turbulent of years?

Our belief systems frame our worldview and we adopt them because it makes us happy and seems protective. But really, no one has a perfect worldview. When we choose news programs and friends because they validate our way of seeing the world, we tend to experience the world working just as we predicted. As a result, our biases are confirmed over and over until we're surer than ever that our way of seeing the world must be true. And, of course, the news programs love that because we've then become reliable, loyal viewers; they sell us advertising and make a ton of money.

With this in mind, we should challenge ourselves to be ever vigilant of the ways we inadvertently, or in some cases openly exclude, ignore, and prejudice the unfamiliar. It is our duty and responsibility as *citizens of the world* to educate ourselves, be willing to learn from others and be open to seeing the world and its inhabitants in new ways, expanding and transforming our worldview, even if we are never so lucky to be able to trot around the globe. Many of the ills that plague our world today, from racism to nationalism, classism, fascism, colorism, sexism, and the list goes on, thrive like bacteria in uneducated, misinformed,

culturally-stifled and ideologically dogmatic environments. The virus we're all being forced to confront now doesn't discriminate. It has impacted everyone on the globe and forced us to work in concert to beat it, all while waiting patiently on a cure. On the contrary, the vaccine for most of the world's societal issues is, and has always been, in plain sight: Rethinking how we see each other and how we treat each other. Having been guilty of all of the above in some form or another, the true remedy for my ignorance came in the form of asking good questions and listening well.



If I've learned just one thing through this great journey I've traveled, it's that I must continually discard the "us and them" mentality that we all so easily fall victim to and instead look actively for the good in our fellow humans. Every step I've taken from Africa to Europe, South America and back to the small Broad Creek town of Laurel has been a confirmation of that for me. I'm hopeful that, as a nation and a global community, we will emerge on the other end of this challenging time of change and uncertainty with a new story of hope and purpose, prayerfully without the masks or needing to be 6 feet apart. ■

*To learn more about Hope College of Education in Zambia, or to make a donation, visit [hopeedu.org](http://hopeedu.org).*