



# Winter 2021

## NEWSLETTER & ANNUAL REPORTS

P. O. Box 102  
Laurel, DE 19956

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



*Courtesy of Howard L. West.*

### President's Corner

by George Denney

BEST WISHES for a great 2021! This year, as a result of the COVID-19 virus, our annual report will be presented via the winter newsletter. Officers and board members will report on activities and finances. If you should have any questions regarding any of our business, please feel free to contact us.

Although our activities have been limited by the pandemic, a number of members got their hands dirty during a clean-up day at Rosemont on October 24th, and helped out at the auction on December 12th. We appreciate the help of those members, as well as the Laurel High School Boys Basketball team and coaches David King and Patrick Vanderslice.

The first two months of our annual appeal have been very gratifying. Thank you to all who have already made their contribution, and those who plan to in 2021.

Stay safe! I'm going to take my vaccine! ■

### Society Receives \$5,700 Grant for Millhand House

RECENTLY THE SOCIETY RECEIVED a \$5,700 grant from the Sussex County Council to paint the exterior of the structure known as the Millhand House at the Hitchens Homestead. ■



*The Millhand House in 1978. Bureau of Archaeology & Historic Preservation.*

**IN THIS ISSUE:** News, board member reports, Rosemont clean-up & auction, Ross Point's Howard West, reprinting a historic book, Collections Corner, & more!

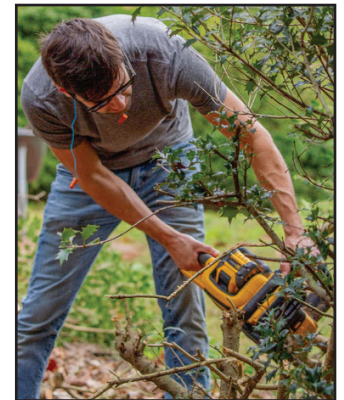


# A Little T.L.C. for Laurel's Most Historic Residence

On the morning of Saturday, October 24th, about three dozen volunteers representing the Laurel Historical Society, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, the Laurel High School Boys Basketball team, and the community at large gathered at historic Rosemont to give the yard some much-needed T.L.C. Weeds were pulled, leaves were raked, shrubbery was trimmed or removed, the front walkway was cleaned off, and two dumpsters were filled to the brim. The result was a greatly improved view of the house from the street, and a general sense of tidiness after years of neglect.

During a break, Ned Fowler gave the volunteers an eloquent summary of the house's incredible history, which is believed to stretch back into the colonial era.

The Laurel Historical Society thanks the following individuals who rolled up their sleeves and helped out: Bob & Beckett Wheatley, Jeff & Wendy Dolby, Jeff Mathias, Doug Marvil, George Denney, Ned Fowler, Marcus Gillespie, Trina Giles, Mike Wilkins, Gareth Deitzel, Brian & Pat Shannon, Paula Shannon, Brian & Dianne Callaway and daughters Alida, Kathryn, and Evelyn with friend Savannah, Chris Slavens, Barry Mitchell, Pam Betts, George & Carla Hankins, and Jamin Pugh. Also, a big thank-you to coaches David King and Chris Horsey, and Laurel basketball players Kyle Wilson, Tyronn Kane, Nifere Griffin, Dontarious Jones, Quinton Wilckens, Kannan King, and Terez Dickerson! ■



Photos courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.



# **SOLD! to the Highest Bidder**

by George Denney

After months of cleaning and organizing, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and the Laurel Historical Society held a public auction to sell some of Rosemont's contents which were deemed historically unimportant or dispensable. Additional items were generously donated by Susan Henry-Jone, Bob Bethards, and Cathy Bethards Taylor.

The day of the auction, December 12th, was unseasonably beautiful and warm. Volunteers arrived early to transfer the items to be sold from the house and garage to the lawn. Although the crowd of buyers was smaller than expected, that did not dampen the enthusiasm. Pots and pans, pamphlets and postcards, dishes and glasses, chairs and tables all added up for a grand total of nearly \$1,000.00! Amazing, given that none of the items cost the society a cent. A portion of the proceeds from the auction will go to restore the four antique chairs which were recently found hanging in the shed (see Ned Fowler's article "A Front Row Seat to History" in the Spring 2020 issue). After two hundred years, the chairs are basically falling apart. The remainder of the proceeds will be used to restore Laurel legend "Miss Clara" Marvil's beaten biscuit block, as well as the tall case clock from Spring Garden.

We would like to thank the following individuals who volunteered on the day of the auction:

Woody Disharoon, Doug Marvil, Jeff Methias, Chris Calio, Danny LeCates, Richard & Cathy Parker, Randy Hill, Ned Fowler, Chris Slavens, and George & Penny Denney. We would also like to thank coaches David King and Patrick Vanderslice, and Kyle Wilson, Tyronn Kane, Quinton Wilckens, and Cade Vanderslice of the Laurel High School Boys Basketball team. ■



*Photos courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.*



# Delaware State Parks Loses Two Friends of Local History

Jim Hall, a long-time champion of cultural resources management and historic preservation at Delaware State Parks, left Delaware in December for a new position as director of the Erie Maritime Museum in Erie, Pennsylvania.

During his fifteen years with the Division of Parks & Recreation, Jim managed interpretive programs at Delaware Seashore State Park in 2005-2010; served as the state-wide Chief of Cultural Resources in 2010-2020; and most recently did a stint as superintendent of First State Heritage Park in Dover. Locally, he was instrumental in the beautiful restoration of Bethesda Church at Trap Pond State Park. Jim lived at Trap Pond for a period of time, and was deeply interested in the area's history. In June of 2019, he toured the Hitchens Homestead during the society's Hoedown.

Jim's new charge, located on the shore of Lake Erie, is home to the U.S. Brig *Niagara*, a reconstruction of the vessel involved in the pivotal Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. Those who enjoyed the privilege of working with him in Delaware know that Pennsylvania has gained a great friend of history.



*Jim Hall takes a leap of faith off the wreck pole. Photo courtesy of the Indian River Life-Saving Station Museum.*



*John McCarthy examines artifacts unearthed at Trap Pond State Park in 2019. Photo by Chris Slavens.*

Also in December, archaeologist and architectural historian John P. McCarthy announced his retirement from the Delaware Division of Parks & Recreation after six years.

The Kentucky native's four-decade career in cultural resources management included positions in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Georgia, and Indiana prior to his arrival in Delaware in 2014.

John oversaw the Time Travelers program for Delaware State Parks, offering expert instruction in archaeological theory and field methods to volunteers, and leading field exercises at a number of locations, including Trap Pond State Park, where volunteers unearthed prehistoric ceramics in 2019. The program was temporarily put on hold in 2020 due to the pandemic.

In addition to his work for the state, John is an active member of the Archaeological Society of Delaware, and continues to serve as the organization's treasurer. During his retirement, he plans to stay involved in cultural resources management as an independent consultant for "discerning clients." ■

In recent months, the society's initiative to share photos of our collections via Facebook has resulted in nearly **60,000** views!

Thank you to those who have assisted with the project, and to everyone who has liked, commented on, or shared the photos.

Check it out at: [facebook.com/LaurelDEHistoricalSociety](https://facebook.com/LaurelDEHistoricalSociety)

# Collections Corner

by Norma Jean Fowler

Ten years ago this January, a team of graduate students from the University of Delaware started a massive project of photographing, inventorying, cataloging, cleaning, and rehousing our clothing collection. These items had been accumulating since the society's beginnings in 1977. The interns got about 100 items processed but were not able to finish the remaining items. In the ensuing years, the unaccessioned items were put in clean, archival storage boxes but nothing else was done for them. No photographs, no descriptions, no records. It was just too big an undertaking. This meant that if a particular item was needed for an exhibit, etc., etc., we had to look thorough all the boxes until that item was found. There was no key word or number searching.

This fall, with the help of Pat Ellis Downes, we have processed around 214 clothing items, resulting in much better access to the collection. Pat took each of the 17 boxes and laboriously photographed and wrote up descriptions for items in that particular box. Each box was then given a number, and a catalog record featuring detailed description, photograph, individual object number and box location was entered into the computer for better key word item retrieval. This was a massive job that will make future collection and exhibit work so much easier. "Bulldog" Pat even processed some boxes in the Cook House attic, when the boxes were too big to get down the stairs without "man" power! From Victorian wedding dresses to disco era golf pants, we can now see photographs of the items without having to disturb the boxes unnecessarily. As with any old item, the less it's handled the better its preservation. Along the way we discovered some real treasures.

Make an appointment with me if you would like to explore this or any other collection we have at the Cook House. You'll be surprised! ■

## Ph. D., Poultryman, & Loyal Volunteer: Meet Doug Marvil

Few individuals have served the Laurel Historical Society as faithfully as Doug Marvil. Over the years, he has served as president and membership chair, among other positions. Currently, he serves as treasurer. But it's been his work behind the scenes that has moved the society forward. Doug helps with fundraising, building maintenance, grant writing, and computer troubleshooting, to name just a few of his many contributions.

Doug grew up in Laurel. In 1965, he married his childhood sweetheart, Edna Whaley, while attending the University of Delaware and majoring in animal science and agricultural biochemistry.

After receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in 1967, Doug continued his studies at North Carolina University, and received a Ph. D. in nutrition and biochemistry in 1974. The family moved to Zurich, Switzerland, where Doug began a post-doctoral research fellowship at the Microbiology Institute of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology. The Marvils returned to the U.S. in 1977, and Doug began a second post-doctoral research fellowship at New York University while Edna worked as a secretary in the psychiatry department.

After a couple of years at NYU, the couple began to think about the next step in their careers. Doug recalls, "I had decided that I didn't want to continue down the academic path. . . We both really wanted to come back to the Delmarva Peninsula."

In 1979, Doug started working in the poultry industry. He worked for Showell Farms until 1995, and then for



*Courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.*

Perdue Farms until 2008. Some of Doug's responsibilities during this period included planning and monitoring vaccination programs, formulating feed rations, and setting up quality control programs for feed ingredients.

Doug credits his success to Edna's "constant support." Since retiring, they have enjoyed traveling, gardening, and being involved with Centenary United Methodist Church. Doug also enjoys fishing, hunting, and golfing.

From society chaplain to moving man with a truck, Doug will graciously do whatever is asked of him, and we thank him for his years of service and dedication. He is truly one of the powers behind the throne. ■



# Reviving a Civil War-era Delaware Book

by Chris Slavens

“Wow, COOL! You wrote this?”

“No, I transcribed it. It’s a reprint.”

“Oh. . . ?”

This has become a familiar conversation during the last couple of months as I’ve tried to explain to friends and family members why I published a book I didn’t write. People are familiar with self-publishing—writing a book, and then publishing it yourself—but re-publishing somebody else’s book is somewhat less common. What’s the point? And is that even legal?

It started with a book I did write and self-publish, *The Roofed Graves of Delmarva*. Although I was a newbie when it came to book formatting and design, I didn’t want the book to look amateurish; I wanted it to look as “real” as possible. After much thought and googling, I chose the name Bald Cypress Books and created a little tree icon to go with it. At some point during this process, I realized that if I was going to create my own publishing imprint to release one book, then I might want to use it to publish other books in the future—and they wouldn’t necessarily have to be *my* books. I could publish new books by other authors, yes (and I hope to do so in the future), but I could also reprint old books, little-known books, rare books, historical books—the kinds of books I’d like to buy.

I made a list of potential projects, and, after discarding a couple of candidates for various reasons, settled on an old text cumbersomely entitled *Report of the Committee of the General Assembly of the State of Delaware, Together With the Journal of the Committee, and the Testimony Taken Before Them, in Regard to the Interference by United States Troops With the General Election Held in the State on the Fourth Day of November, 1862*. The book was published in 1863 by the General Assembly, and although excerpts had been reprinted since then—for example, in *The History of Nineteenth Century Laurel*—the complete book had never been reprinted, and surviving copies of the first edition are rare and expensive. That is unfortunate, because the text, which includes the sworn testimonies of nearly 130 Delawareans about dramatic events in nearly every town in the state, is historically important and fascinating.

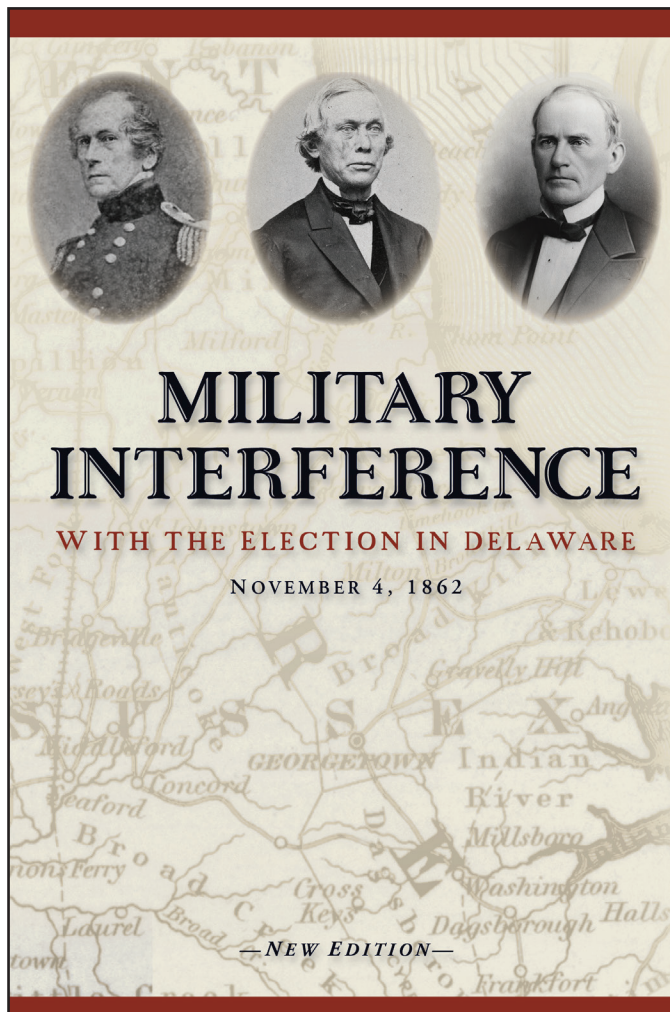
I resolved to publish a new edition of the book, if for no other reason than to be able to place a hardcover copy on my own bookshelf.

The first step was to determine whether this would be legal. Copyright law can be confusing, and it’s not always clear whether a work is in the public domain or not. Some works published in the early 20th century linger in a legal gray area, a publishing purgatory; nobody is really sure whether they’re still protected by copyright. Fortunately, the

book in question was published decades before this tricky period, and is indisputably in the public domain.

Next I needed to shorten that title. The lone copy of the original edition I was able to find featured an alternative title: *Military Interference With the Election in Delaware, November 4, 1862*. Still a little awkward, but much better. It would fit on the spine.

I spent several months transcribing the text, a PDF scan of the original on the left side of my screen, a Word file on



the right. Despite the interesting subject matter, this wasn’t a fun process. I found that I was only able to type about ten pages before I started to get distracted and make mistakes. With nearly five hundred pages to type, the task was a marathon, not a sprint.

When I didn’t feel like transcribing, I worked on a cover design, selecting fonts, colors, and images which would reflect the topic and the time period. After all, people *do* judge books by their covers. Two of the photos I wanted to use, of Governor William Cannon and State Senator Gove Saulsbury, required written permission from the Delaware

Public Archives, which I requested and received. Colton's 1855 map of the peninsula provided a muted background which was historically appropriate without overwhelming the text and photos.

Much of the work that goes into a book is unexciting, and taken for granted by casual readers. Setting page margins, picking fonts, adjusting line spacing and hyphenation, proofreading (and proofreading again, and again, and finding more errors every time), and even choosing the color and thickness of the paper (cream or white? 50 lb. or 70 lb.?) are the nuts-and-bolts tasks which determine what the final product will look and feel like. Even the cover files must be adjusted to fit the slightly different sizes of hardcovers and paperbacks.

One task that I put off until the last minute was the writing of an introduction, one of the privileges of an editor or publisher of such a project. Should it be a deep dive into the history of the period, providing context for the investigation and testimonies? Some of the allegations in the book are controversial to this day—should I weigh in? (After spending so much time reading and transcribing the text, I certainly had formed opinions about it.) I decided to

err on the side of minimalism and neutrality, leaving it to readers to make up their own minds about what happened during Delaware's election of 1862, and why, and whether it was justified or not.

It was purely a matter of ironic coincidence that I completed the project just before the recent election, which provoked controversies of its own in Delaware and across the nation. Facebook even flagged some of my posts about the book! Although the timing was unintended, it may have been fortuitous, since disputed election results have become a hot topic.

With the publication of a new edition of *Military Interference With the Election in Delaware, November 4, 1862*, I'm thrilled to have revived one of the most important, yet least known, titles in Delaware, and it is my hope that this long-neglected book will finally take its rightful place on the bookshelves of libraries, schools, and history buffs up and down the state.

Paperbacks and hardcovers are available locally via [baldcypressbooks.com](http://baldcypressbooks.com), or from major online retailers like Bookshop.org and Barnes & Noble. Discounted copies are available to bookstores and nonprofit groups. ■

## A Ross Point Community Product

by Howard L. West

THE LITTLE COMMUNITY OF ROSS POINT, located approximately three miles northeast from Laurel, has a rich and important African-American history.

As the grandson of Henry West, I took the African Ancestry, Inc., paternal DNA test. The results noted a connection to the African nation of Angola and the Mbunda people. Written documents revealed that the first nineteen slaves brought to Jamestown, Virginia, by Portuguese traders in 1619, were Angolans.

The history of Ross Point, Delaware, was diligently researched and written by Mildred West, daughter of the late William G. and Annie E. West. Many, many years ago, the parents of Henry Waters, known as Henry West, lived in Blackwater, near Millville, Delaware. Minos West's parents lived around Laurel, Delaware, and the parents of Samuel and Handy West, brothers, resided around Glass Hill in the vicinity of Parsonsburg, Maryland. Three of these men (Henry, Minos, and Handy), none of whom were related, moved with their families to Ross Point. Henry and Minos moved to Ross Point before Handy. They helped to build the Saint John AME Zion Church in 1884. This, of course, is not the present building. The three families attended and were quite active in the Ross Point church and school. They were religious and industrious, working as teachers, preachers, famers, or in the sawmills. The women were kept busy doing the usual chores that accompany living on a farm. A

few did domestic work.

Early in the 1840s, Henry West was a slave on a plantation near Ross Point. His wife, Nancy Caroline, was known as a bonded woman. As the slaves were freed, they were given forty acres and a mule, and were free to earn their own living. Henry, a farmer, progressive thinker, and money manager, acquired many more acres of land. Henry was the father of nine children and my mother, Daisy, was one of the nine. Raymond, the son of Handy West, married Daisy, and from that union came, in order: Granville H. West, Roscoe R. West, and I, Howard L. West, the youngest.



Rosa Parks and Howard L. West, freedom fighter and civil rights activist.



At the age of thirty my mother became extremely ill and, unfortunately, homecare with the application of home remedies was not effective. She realized that hospital care was her only hope for survival. She reached out to Vernon and Nancy Truitt and asked them to care for me while she was hospitalized. She also had another request, which was to rear me as their child if she did not return. Regrettably, she never regained health, and died in the hospital of pneumonia.

The Truitts' home was a blessing for this twenty-two-month-old toddler. It provided unconditional love, understanding, respect, patience, security, and a stimulating environment that encouraged learning. They became my mom and dad.

My new mom and dad were strong promoters of education and constantly pushed for academic excellence. I was not the only person to benefit from the Truitts' advice, guidance, love, and shelter; so did several others, namely: the late Rev. Roscoe R. West, assistant pastor of Saint John AME Church and entrepreneur; Rev. Dr. Wilford Oney, pastor of Liberating Power AME Zion Church and academic counselor at Delaware Technical Community College; Rev. Shirley Caldwell, pastor of Ross Point AME Zion Church; and Vernon Caldwell, professor, senior lecturer, and director of Hope College of Education in Zambia, Africa, which he founded.

The Truitts were a unique couple who enjoyed sharing their wisdom and positive advice; in fact, the people who stayed with them became college graduates. Despite their second- and third-grade education, to me they possessed a Ph.D.'s sacred foundational wisdom. The Truitts loved children. Their home became a summertime free live-in recreation center for many children to have fun and enjoy delicious home-cooked meals. The Truitts lived by their motto daily, "Make sure you Weigh before you Say."

My first introduction to a formal education began at the age of six in a one-room school, containing grades one through eight and one teacher, Mrs. Cora Norwood-Selby. She was an inspiring, resourceful, motivating, and creative teacher. She modeled her skills after the late Mary McCleod Bethune and Charlotte Hawkins Brown of the Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedolia, North Carolina.

Most of the children who attended 215c walked miles to school to be taught. 215c was a segregated school, but the children received a first-class instruction from the teacher with brand new books annually. Her students did not receive used books like the other African American students attending Delaware's segregated schools. 215c was the lighthouse of one-room segregated schools in Delaware. Mrs. Selby taught her students to be maximally effective.

Mrs. Selby was everything for the Ross Point Community; she became the counselor, wrote all the obituaries, did



*Ross Point Colored School, 1922.*

income taxes, wrote important correspondences, helped with the church fundraising, spoke at special events, and eagerly shared her immense wisdom. Mrs. Selby taught all five of her children; all graduated from college, four from Delaware State University.

My first four years of formal education were at Ross Point, 215c, and grades five through nine were at Paul Lawrence Dunbar in Laurel, Delaware. The curriculum was challenging, but, with the excellent foundation I received at Ross Point, I was able to adjust to the new school without difficulty. The instructions and confidence-building I received at 215c provided a smooth transition. The teachers at Dunbar were excellent and well-learned. Many of them had advanced degrees received after attending out-of-state summer schools. Dunbar's teachers took pride in teaching, and exposed their students to the latest teaching techniques.

I attended William C. Jason Comprehensive High School in Georgetown, Delaware. Jason High School was the only school in Sussex County that offered a 12th Grade diploma for African American students. Prior to that, African American students had to go to the Delaware State College for grade 12, or to Howard High School in Wilmington, Delaware.

Jason High School met the challenges in teaching the whole student in the preparation for college, entrepreneurship, and adult survival skills. The curriculum consisted of college prep, home economics, commercial building trades, auto mechanics, science, art, and agriculture. The school was staffed with skilled master teachers. They were iconic teachers in Delaware; their instruction inspired students to emulate them. I never saw a male teacher in the hallway without his tie or jacket.

After high school, I joined the Army and became a senior paratrooper with 48 jumps with the 188 Airborne Division. I was sent to Germany. I was promoted to sergeant, and became a squad leader in charge of a 157mm gun squad. I graduated with honors from several Army NCO leadership



academies. I spent three years in the military, from June 1954 – July 1957.

In 1957, I enrolled in Delaware State College—now Delaware State University—and upon completion, received my Bachelor of Science degree in Education in 1961. I began my career as a teacher at Bangs Avenue Elementary School in Asbury Park, New Jersey. I was appointed director of the Head Start program from 1965 to 1970, summer session, and taught English as a Second Language in the Asbury Park Adult School. This was the beginning of ESL classes at the time, in the area. In 1966, I was appointed vice principal of the Bangs Avenue Elementary School. In 1970, I earned a Master of Science degree in Administration/Supervision from Kean University in Union, New Jersey. I was then appointed to the position of principal of the Bangs Avenue School, a position I held until my retirement in 1992.



#### PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS

I married my College Sweetheart, the late Wilhelmina Johnson-West of Orlando, Florida. She was a beloved retired Business Education Teacher for the Long Branch, New Jersey Board of Education. I am the father of Howard West II and Glenn Blake.

There are three events that are special in my life: **A.** Serving as the keynote speaker at Mrs. Cora Norwood-Selby's banquet given in her honor by the Ross Point Community Improvement Club. **B.** I was also the keynote speaker at Mrs. Ruth Webb's Principal of the Paul Lawrence Dunbar School Banquet Dinner sponsored by the Concord Improvement Club. **C.** Finally, I spoke at State Representative Timothy Dukes' conveyance of the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Elementary School to the town of Laurel, Delaware, for use as the new home of the Laurel Police Department. ■



*Photograph from page 1: Henry West poses with students at the old Ross Point Colored School, located at the intersection of today's East Trap Pond Road and Ross Point Road. The original schoolhouse, built c. 1884, was replaced in 1925 on land donated by West. Photo provided by Howard L. West and Artez West.*

## It's that time of the year again!

It's time to renew your membership in the Laurel Historical Society.

Please submit the enclosed renewal form with your dues by mail, or renew online at [laureldehistoricalsociety.org](http://laureldehistoricalsociety.org).

\*Does not apply to Lifetime Members.





## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2021

### OFFICERS

<i>PRESIDENT</i>	George R. Denney III
<i>VICE PRESIDENT</i>	Artez West
<i>TREASURER</i>	Doug Marvil
<i>SECRETARY</i>	Dee Cross
<i>CORRESPONDING SECRETARY</i>	Emily Whaley
<i>PAST PRESIDENT</i>	Ned Fowler

### MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

<b>Woody Disharoon</b> <i>Buildings &amp; Grounds</i>	<b>Maggie Proctor</b> <i>Publicity</i>
<b>Norma Jean Fowler</b> <i>Collections</i>	<b>Brian Shannon</b> <i>LRC &amp; Rosemont Liaison</i>
<b>Trina Giles</b> <i>Laurel School District Liaison</i>	<b>Chris Slavens</b> <i>Newsletter Editor</i>
<b>Matt Parker</b> <i>Civic Groups Liaison</i>	<b>Brad Spicer</b> <i>Special Events</i>
<b>Don Phillips</b> <i>Fundraising Chair</i>	<b>Patrick Vanderslice</b> <i>Finance Committee</i>





## ANNUAL REPORTS

2021

### GEORGE R. DENNEY III

#### PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

Due to the lingering pandemic, we made the disappointing yet unavoidable decision to cancel our annual in-person membership meeting, usually held in January, and distribute board members' annual reports to members with the winter issue of the newsletter.

Thank you for your support of the Laurel Historical Society during a difficult year. We are hoping for the best in 2021, and look forward to seeing you soon!

Don't forget to renew your membership—whether by mail (see the enclosed membership form) or online—and please consider contributing to the society's Annual Appeal campaign.

### ARTEZ WEST

#### VICE PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

In February 2020, the Laurel Historical Society embarked on a tour to Dorchester County, Maryland, to discover and retreat on the life of my favorite Eastern-shoreman and abolitionist, Araminta Ross, however, you know her as Harriet Tubman. We boarded a bus at Laurel Elementary School and departed south west on our journey. With approximately 60 participants between the bus and trailing cars, the board hosted society members, friends of the society, and community members. We also had local travelers from as far as Dover, DE, and Lewes, DE, to join. Along the route, we navigated to certain points of interest between Laurel, DE, and Cambridge, MD, including the marker that denotes the Mason-Dixon Line, located just outside of Delmar. After a brief stop at the Dorchester County Welcome Center, we disembarked at the following: The Harriet Tubman Museum (downtown), The Stanley Institute Museum (a one room schoolhouse), Bucktown General Store (the place where Mrs. Tubman was struck in the head), and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park. We also stopped briefly at the Broadus Plantation to see the area where her plantation once stood and finished the evening with dinner at Old Salty's. We plan to continue with Black History tours once travel is safe.



## **DOUG MARVIL**

### TREASURER'S ANNUAL REPORT

*Please see pages 19 and 20 for a list of society assets and 2020-2021 Annual Appeal donors, respectively.*

## **DEE CROSS**

### SECRETARY'S ANNUAL REPORT

Minutes for the LHS General Membership Meeting  
January 26, 2020  
2:00 p.m.  
Abbott's on Broad Creek

Board Members Present: George Denney, Artez West, Chris Slavens, Doug Marvil, Don Phillips, Patrick Vanderslice, Woody Disharoon, Ned Fowler, Norma Jean Fowler, Brian Shannon, Dee Cross, Emily Whaley, Maggie Proctor, Brad Spicer.

Absent: Trina Giles, Matt Parker.

General Membership Sign-in Sheet [on file].

President George Denney called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. followed by the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### Business Meeting

Secretary's Minutes from 2019

Brad Spicer made a motion to waive the reading of the minutes which Patrick Vanderslice seconded and members approved.

Finance Report: Doug Marvil presented the financial reports. Patrick Vanderslice, Finance Committee Chairman, thanked Doug for breaking down the expenses for each area.

President George Denney recognized Scott Phillips, outgoing board member, for his service to the LHS. He was the webmaster of the first website, did online sales, the DVD project, plus he and his wife gave a

substantial donation to our annual appeal. Scott accepted the certificate of appreciation and spoke about his almost ten years of service to the LHS.

### Committee Reports

Emily Abbott manages the monthly Open Houses at the Cook House and Train Station and needs volunteers on the first Sunday of each month from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Woody Disharoon is in charge of the Buildings and Grounds and Brad Spicer wanted to recognize him for all that he does for the LHS.

Maggie Proctor handles PR for all the events and has worked with five radio stations, four TV stations, and eleven newspapers in promoting events such as the Dunbar Open House, Delmarva Life segments, and the Hoedown.

Chris Slavens does the LHS Newsletter, currently twelve pages and with 250 copies being sent out by mail. He thanked those volunteers who helped with the mailings and for writing articles.

Brian Shannon, the LRC liaison, asked everyone to come to Hitchens Homestead on February 1, 2020, at 1 p.m., for the HGTV Home Town video.

Vice President Artez West asked people to come out to New Zion on January 28, 2020, to represent the LHS and to sign up for the Harriet Tubman bus trip on February 23, 2020.

Emily Whaley is the Corresponding Secretary and writes thank you notes for the LHS plus has done so much previous work on our computer program.

Norma Jean Fowler, Fowler Research Center, told about our several thousand dollar grants for summer interns to work on the Dunn Art Project. On March 17, 2020, St. Patrick's Day, from 4-5:30 p.m., she will coordinate the presentation of the Children's Art Project with pictures from the 1930s and 1940s reflecting life around Laurel. She hopes to get approval for another intern for finishing our clothing collection. She invited everyone to come to see what we have at the Cook House.

Ned Fowler, along with his committee of Brad Spicer, Danny LeCates, Debbie Mitchell, Doug Marvil, Don Phillips and Dawn Collins, hosted five public events with about 100 to 150 people each time in attendance at Hitchens Homestead from the yard sale to the Hoedown to the Big Reveal and the Grand Illumination. Scott, Debbie and Maggie increased our presence on social media, the press and television. He thanked volunteers for the thousands of hours of work with Woody and Doug being at the top of the list. We documented and photographed items given to the LHS. Thank you Paula Shannon for the photography. We did the historic paint analysis to know the original colors which cost \$6200. Doug got us a grant of \$4000 to paint the trim to protect it until painted. We opened the fireplace and took out the HVAC. Overall, the house needs a lot more work, but Ned invited us all to come and stand on the hill!

*Artez made a motion to accept the slate of candidates as presented which Emily Abbott seconded which included the current officers and Emily Whaley as Corresponding Secretary. At large board seats included: Chris Slavens, Matt Parker, Don Phillips, Brian Shannon, Trina Giles, Norma Jean Fowler, Brad Spicer, Patrick Vanderslice and Maggie Proctor. Members approved the motion.*

Brian and George reminded everyone to turn out for the HGTV taping at Hitchens Homestead on February 1, 2020.

*Artez made a motion to adjourn which Emily Abbott seconded. George adjourned the meeting at 1:50 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Dee Cross, LHS Secretary



## **EMILY WHALEY**

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY

*Emily's duties include writing and mailing thank-you notes and other society correspondence.*

## **NED FOWLER**

2020: The Year that Was, or Was It?

HITCHENS HOMESTEAD ANNUAL REPORT

Following on the success of our very first Grand Illumination at the Hitchens Homestead, 2020 started off with a bang and great promise. We were energized to look further for the elusive piazza and cut through the entry room ceiling in its quest. Aside from a visit to the Seaford Museum to compare notes with the “competition,” our plans pretty much fizzled out, as group activities had to stop.

What did occur, though, were significant additions to the Homestead’s collections and more research into its story. A breakthrough came from our friend Jim Bowden, Seaford native and current president of the Georgetown Historical Society, who brought to our attention an aerial view of Laurel in the collections of the Hagley Museum in Wilmington. Go to [https://digital.hagley.org/1970200\\_00946](https://digital.hagley.org/1970200_00946) and see what got us so excited. At top left, the Hitchens property as it was in the 1920s. Zooming in, we saw the original barn for the very first time. But there was something unexpected. At the top of the hill on our circular driveway, there’s a building that has puzzled us. We couldn’t figure out what it might have been used for, why it might have been plastered inside, nor why it featured an exhaust pipe opening through the ceiling. It appeared old, yet had much later underpinnings. Bummer, we thought, when it wasn’t on the aerial view where it is today. Lo and behold, it surfaced in another spot: attached to the millhand house as what appears to be a summer kitchen.

Just recently, we’ve been fortunate enough to secure a grant from the Sussex County Council to paint the millhand house and further secure its exterior with repairs to the siding, windows, and doors. Basking in holiday floodlights, with wreaths on the doors and windows, and flickering candles aglow, we forge ahead with hope for the new year.

## **LHS and Rosemont**

Maybe it was fortuitous, but having things at the Hitchens Homestead slow down to a snail’s pace gave us the opportunity to come to the rescue of our sister organization (and significant donor to our annual appeal), the Laurel Redevelopment Corp. It was thus that the LHS entered into a consulting relationship with LRC with respect to Rosemont, Laurel’s oldest and most important house. We found and identified the four Windsor chairs, organized a community-wide grounds clean-up, cleaned out the house contents, and then had an auction to dispose of surplus items with the proceeds going into a fund to restore the chairs. In the process, we were able to add to society collections with things we could either use now or save for future display. LHS was also instrumental in beginning the process to get Rosemont listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Along the way, we’ve made some important discoveries, on which we’ll report in a later issue.

## **WOODY DISHAROON**

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS

*Woody continued to handle various maintenance matters at society properties during the pandemic, including mowing the lawns at the Cook House and the Hitchens Homestead.*

## **NORMA JEAN FOWLER**

COLLECTIONS ANNUAL REPORT

Even with the impact of Covid 19 and the closing of all LHS activities, the collection work continued in 2020.

- Approx. 45 individuals made donations to the collections.
- A total of 50 accessions were added. This represents almost 200 individual items.
- Approx. 40 persons contacted LHS by phone or email, asking for help with historical research or family genealogy. We were able to help most of them in some small ways.
- Approx. three hundred 18th and 19th century documents in the Nan Fooks Campbell Collection were finally individually cataloged. See LHS fall newsletter for more on this collection.
- 214 items of clothing were photographed, cataloged, and rehoused, thus completing a project started by the UD interns in 2011! Pat Ellis Downes was a huge help with this!
- Much time was spent on developing and publicizing the Talking Crayons program scheduled for March at the Laurel Library, which was cancelled due to the virus. This slide show of over 300 pieces of art work done by Laurel students in the 1930-1940s will hopefully be uploaded to our website in 2021.
- Assisted the Town of Laurel with information for the historical section of their spring and fall newsletters.
- Assisted with collection item transfers from Cook House / Hitchens Homestead to and from Rosemont. This involved changing the locations of items in their individual catalog records.
- Increased much needed collection storage space at Cook House on the second floor. This involved rearranging room usage and installing more shelving.
- Researched the background history of collection items both new and old. How an item is connected to Laurel is what makes it special. Information uploaded into the computer will be the only information available when the present generations are gone. The “who, what, where, why, and when” associated with each photo or object needs to be discovered and entered into the catalog record or its story will be lost. An item is just “stuff” until the Laurel story associated with it is revealed.

## **TRINA GILES**

LAUREL SCHOOL DISTRICT LIAISON

*Members of the Laurel High School boys basketball team volunteered to assist with the clean-up day and the auction at Rosemont.*



## **MATT PARKER**

CIVICS GROUPS LIAISON

Civic clubs have been a casualty of Covid, so there is not much to report. Meetings have been canceled in most cases, and those that are held are done online and poorly attended. The LRC and LHS are working closely on Rosemont which has been a nice collaboration, however, that is about it as far as working with other civic clubs. We hope to resume in mid-2021.

*Matt appeared on Delmarva Life on January 16, 2020, to promote the Harriet Tubman bus trip.*

## **DON PHILLIPS**

FUNDRAISING CHAIR (HITCHENS)

*Applications for grants were submitted to the Sussex County Council and Preservation Delaware.*

## **MAGGIE PROCTOR**

PUBLIC RELATIONS ANNUAL REPORT

Timeline:

Annual Meeting, January 26, 2020

Harriet Tubman bus trip, February 23, 2020\*

Book Signing, author/LHS Board member Chris Slavens, Saturday, March 28, 2020\*\*

Talking Crayons, a panel discussion showcasing original artwork by Laurel schoolchildren, co-sponsored by the LHS, the Delaware Humanities Forum, and the Laurel Public Library, Tuesday, March 17, 2020\*\*

Article for the LHS Newsletter, "The Harriett Tubman Marathon," by Vern and Maggie Proctor, published online in May, 2020

Clean-up day at Rosemont, Saturday, October 24, 2020

Auction at Rosemont, Saturday, December 12, 2020

Summary of Media Outlets

We publicized the above events in an abbreviated list of media outlets in order to get maximum impact for our efforts: 3 television stations, 1 radio station, 2 newspapers (Laurel Star and Cape Gazette).

New this year: We publicized our events by sending press releases and information to neighboring historical societies: Delmar, Seaford, and Bethel.

For "Crayons", our marketing department (Debbie Mitchell) sent an email blast, generated a postcard to send to area organizations, and set up a Facebook event page.

For the book signing, Chris Slavens publicized in the Laurel Star and set up a Facebook event page.

Lynn Parks wrote an article which detailed the October clean-up day at Rosemont and also chronicled the history of Rosemont and its importance to Laurel.

Paula Shannon supplied professional photography services for several of this year's events, including this front-page photo of the volunteer corps at the Rosemont clean-up:



Television:

Board member Matt Parker appeared on Delmarva Life/WBOC on January 16, 2020, summarizing the life and work of Harriet Tubman and telling people how to get tickets for the trip.

Chris Slavens, in preparation for the book signing scheduled for Saturday, March 28, 2020, also appeared on Delmarva Life/WBOC. He discussed his book, *The Roofed Graves of Delmarva*, and gave some hints of other works in progress.

\* This event, the Harriet Tubman bus trip, was listed in last year's report because most of the publicity was finished at the time of the Annual Meeting, although the event itself had not yet occurred. We did know about COVID-19 at the time of this event, but the pandemic had not yet come to Laurel in a significant way, and there were no government restrictions at the time.

\*\* These two events were scheduled and ready to launch but did not occur due to increasing restrictions in mid-March.

## **BRIAN SHANNON**

### LRC LIAISON'S ANNUAL REPORT

- The Laurel Redevelopment Corp and Laurel Historical Society continue to combine efforts to learn more about Rosemont.
- Ned Fowler has been invaluable by introducing several “experts” to the property in an effort to consider and develop the best steps forward for the property.
- George Denney, Ned Fowler, Doug Marvil, Woody Disharoon and many others have gone above and beyond in helping with the clean out, grounds clean up, the yard sale, and much, much more.

Rosemont has been transformed due to these efforts, and the LRC is extremely grateful to the Laurel Historical Society. We look forward to continuing this mutually beneficial relationship for years to come.



## **CHRIS SLAVENS**

### NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

One of the adjustments the society made in response to the pandemic was the production of online-only issues of our newsletter. Usually, a group of a dozen or so volunteers assembles each issue, folding printed copies, stuffing envelopes, affixing address labels and stamps, etc. Since it is impossible to social-distance during this process, we decided to distribute each newsletter via email and our website. My role in the production of each issue did not change, but, instead of submitting the final draft to a printer, I forwarded the files to Debbie Mitchell, who created the emails sent to members and uploaded the files to the website. Every visitor to the website since last spring has been greeted by a message inviting them to download the most recent newsletter.

This alternative process has its pros and cons. The most obvious silver lining is that we saved approximately \$2,000 which would usually go to printing, envelopes, stamps, etc. Another is the increased flexibility in terms of content and page count. However, I suspect that fewer members read the online editions, and even fewer members printed copies to save. Some members might have missed out on the newsletters entirely. Hopefully we will be able to resume production of print newsletters in 2021.

On the technical side, I've started experimenting with new ways to improve the newsletter. All of the issues produced in 2019 and 2020 were created with good ol' Microsoft Word (yes, I can sense the cringes coming from anyone with the slightest knowledge of graphic design—but it was easy, and it worked). This issue, although it looks similar, was created from scratch with Adobe InDesign, a vastly more advanced program. I hope to continue to improve the design and contents of the newsletter with the help of InDesign's powerful features.

When it comes to content, I can only repeat my previous calls for submissions. Please feel free to reach out to me with ideas or questions. Remember, writing ability is less important than the actual information presented in an article. Your memories of Laurel are uniquely yours, yet you can share them with readers who may enjoy reading about them more than you might expect. In the future, each issue of our newsletter will be a valuable source of information about life in Laurel during the 20th and 21st centuries.

The three issues are published in May, September, and January, so content should be submitted in or (ideally) prior to the preceding month—i.e., April, August, and December, respectively. Please submit news items, articles, photographs, ideas, or questions to me at [chrisslavens@gmail.com](mailto:chrisslavens@gmail.com).

Finally, I would like to thank the following individuals who contributed to (or otherwise assisted with) one or more issues in 2020: George Denney, Ned Fowler, Norma Jean Fowler, Brad Spicer, Frank Calio, Doug Marvil, Vern Proctor, Maggie Proctor, Vernon Caldwell, Artez West, Paula M. Shannon, and Debbie Mitchell.

## **BRAD SPICER**

### SPECIAL EVENTS REPORT

The Hoedown at Hitchens Homestead remains on hold until it is deemed safe due to the Covid pandemic. When appropriate, a date will be set and planning will commence.

## **PATRICK VANDERSLICE**

### FINANCE COMMITTEE

*Please see pages 19 - 20.*

## Laurel Historical Society

Month End	Bank of Delmarva General Checking	Edward Jones Federated US Treasury Obgls	Bank of Delmarva Hilda L. Fowler Mem CD *	Total
<b>Maturity</b>			04/25/21	
12/31/19	40,020.59	40,130.16	8,418.61	88,569.36
01/31/20	37,100.61	40,180.41	8,465.93	85,746.95
02/29/20	42,386.68	40,229.65	8,465.93	91,082.26
03/31/20	41,319.78	40,275.90	8,465.93	90,061.61
04/30/20	40,804.16	40,301.32	8,513.00	89,618.48
05/31/20	45,430.58	40,307.51	8,513.00	94,251.09
06/30/20	45,115.09	40,310.95	8,513.00	93,939.04
07/31/20	44,290.75	40,313.75	8,535.77	93,140.27
08/31/20	43,930.36	40,316.50	8,535.77	92,782.63
09/30/20	42,827.17	40,318.29	8,535.77	91,681.23
10/31/20	51,617.66	40,318.78	8,559.44	100,495.88
11/30/20	68,054.36	40,318.78	8,559.44	116,932.58
12/31/20	78,659.49	40,318.81	8,559.44	127,537.74



# ANNUAL APPEAL DONORS

Oct. 2020 - Jan. 2021

Larry & Nancy Allen	Jerry & Marsha Murphy
Charlotte Baker	Gwen North
F. Matthew & Dona Blaine	Louis & Shirley O'Neal
James & Nancy Brock	Ruth O'Neal
Elizabeth Brogan	Dr. Gary & Loretta Owens
Frank & Becky Calio	Matt & Ashlee Parker
Brian & Diane Calloway	Richard & Cathy Parker
Hunter & Carol Calloway	Joyce Pepper
William & Carlene Campbell	Don Phillips
Bobby & Grace Carey	Ann Plummer
Marlene Collins	Vernon & Margaret Proctor
Mark & Dawn Collins	Ben & Ellen Sirman
Dee Cross	Chris & Crystal Slavens
Denise Crowe	Brad & Joy Spicer
Brian Dayton	Fred & Donna Sponseller
Shirley Diefenderfer	Michael Stutz
Woody & Sharon Disharoon	Lauretta Thompson
Jeff & Wendy Dolby	David & Janice Tranberg
Paul & Pat Downes	James Vreekand
Jerry Eller & Faye Ellis Jones-Eller	Jane Ward
Mark & Darlene Figgs	John Watkins
Edward & Norma Jean Fowler	Amy Lowe & Blair Whaley
Rick Givens	Cindy Whaley
Donald Haines	Eva & Matt Whaley
Beverly Smith & Marlene Hamilton	Vincent & Sharon Whaley
Yancey & David Hillegas	Billie Jane Wheatley
Linda Hitchens	Robert & Beckett Wheatley
Paulette Hyland	Gary White
Mary L. Jones	Reid Williamson
Nelson & Linda Justice	James & Janet Windsor
Daniel & Mary LeCates	Thomas & Mona Wright
Penny Lewis	
John & Carol Lynch	Bald Cypress Books
Doug & Edna Marvil	Dave Smith's Exterminating, Inc.
Sharon McDonald	Laurel Medical Group
Edna & Gerald Millman	Laurel Redevelopment Corp.
Bruce Moore	The Real Estate Market

Total: **\$41,956.00**

## LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2021 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

By becoming a member of the Laurel Historical Society you are part of a living, vital organization that is giving back to its community. As a member, you show you care about greater Laurel and publicly support the goal of protecting and preserving our heritage for generations to come.

**Learn about Laurel's past, have fun in the present, and prepare for the future!**

### WHAT WE ARE WORKING ON FOR YOU

- Website updates
- Creating new exhibits
- Hitchens Homestead preservation and restoration
- Continued cataloging of our collection items
- Creating new and interesting programs and experiences
- Documenting day to day life in Laurel for future generations
- Building community relationships
- Assisting at Rosemont
- Print and emailed newsletters

### MEMBERSHIP TYPES AND RATES JANUARY - DECEMBER

Individual (\$30.00) \_\_\_\_\_ Family (\$50.00) \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Membership: New \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

### WE APPRECIATE VOLUNTEERS!

What special skills can you offer the society?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer skills         | <input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance and repair         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> House cleaning          | <input type="checkbox"/> Baking/ Food preparation       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter              | <input type="checkbox"/> Research                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yard maintenance        | <input type="checkbox"/> Carpentry/plumbing/electricity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity               | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum Hosting                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Officer or Board member | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Planning               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephoning             | <input type="checkbox"/> Cataloging and Accessioning    |

Other: \_\_\_\_\_



*Cook House*



*Heritage Museum*



*Hitchens Homestead*

Complete this form and  
mail with check payable to:

Laurel Historical Society

P O Box 102

Laurel, DE 19956

or pay online at:

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

