



Winter 2019

NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 102
Laurel, DE 19956

laureldehistoricalsociety.org

Bulldogs Volunteer at Hitchens Homestead



*The Laurel football team helped out at the Hitchens Homestead on Nov. 3, 2018.
A lunch of pizza and fried chicken was donated by Pizza King and Shore Stop.*

A Note from the President

by George Denney

As a result of the response to our Annual Appeal I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our many members and friends who have made a tax-deductible contribution to the society. Each dollar is spent to preserve the rich history of Laurel for future generations. We are still in need of additional contributions which will enable the society to meet the mission and goals to preserve the rich history and culture of Laurel. With our ever-growing collections and properties we need even more funding this year which will enhance the extent to which we will be able to

complete and maintain these projects.

I am continually gratified by the number of individuals who have designated the Historical Society as a recipient of retirement funds, charitable trusts, and beneficiary of wills. Please consider any of these types of giving when planning your support for the Historical Society.

We've had a busy and exhausting host of activities this fall which will be highlighted in the newsletter by society members Emily Abbott, Don Phillips, Frank B. Calio, Ned

IN THIS ISSUE: Celebrating Dunbar, Hoedown Recap, Collections Corner, New Quilt Exhibit, Lilies of Laurel, Parramore's Plantation, "Old News," & more!

Fowler, and Norma Jean Fowler, with photos by Paula M. Shannon. As with any voluntary organization a tremendous amount of work was put into the planning and execution of these events. Your support of these events was important to the continued success of the society.

I am pleased to announce that our new editor for the Laurel Historical Society newsletter is Chris Slavens. I'm certain you'll enjoy reading his professionally researched and presented article in this edition of the newsletter.

Please plan to volunteer for the Laurel Historical Society this year, or join us for one of our many upcoming events such as our Annual Meeting on January 27th, Nostalgia Night at Dunbar School on February 17th, and a dinner and book signing on March 16th. ■

ANNUAL MEETING & ELECTION

The nominating committee is pleased to announce the following slate of candidates for election at the Laurel Historical Society's annual meeting at 2:00 pm on January 27, 2019, at Abbott's on Broad Creek:

President.....George Denney

Vice President.....Artez West

Treasurer.....Roy Jones

Secretary.....Dee Cross

The following members have been nominated to serve on the board of directors.

At large: Chris Slavens

Gregg McCullough

Brad Spicer

Nostalgia Night at Dunbar School

by Norma Jean Fowler

With the completion of the new Laurel Elementary School, the oldest primary school in Laurel has been decommissioned by the State. Paul Laurence Dunbar School closed its doors last June and will, in the near future, be repurposed as the new home of the Laurel Police Department. The building will be remodeled for greater efficiency and improved technology.



Paul Laurence Dunbar School served the African-American community for grades 1-11 from around 1921 until the school integration

days opened it up for all children in pre-K, kindergarten, and first grade. For the past fifty years, generations of children, black and white alike, have passed through its doors, learning to read and write while making not only lifelong friends but meaningful memories.

However, before this change is made, the Town of Laurel and the Laurel Historical Society invite all Dunbar alumni (and anyone else) to ***Nostalgia Night at Dunbar School on Sunday, February 17, 2019, from 3:00 – 5:00 pm.*** Informal tours of the building and a few remarks from the community are being planned. While the complete agenda is still in the beginning stages, save the date now as this will be the only newsletter announcement before the event. Although we may send out an email reminder later, mark your calendars now just in case.

Please come, share your memories of this historic building, and help the society accomplish its mission of preserving Laurel's story. ■

Welcome Home Celebration at Spring Garden

by Emily Abbott

Neither rain nor a surprise guest could deter 45 historical society members and guests from enjoying the Welcome Home Celebration of Kendall Lewis's grandfather's clock. Kendall's great-great-granddaughter Rosalind Williams presented the clock, four Windsor chairs and the Lewis family Bible to the historical society. In her presentation, Professor Williams told of her family's history and love for Laurel. Rosalind also told the party about her lifelong study of history, teaching and publishing. (See the Fall 2018 newsletter for the history of the clock, family, and Spring Garden.)

Present owner Gwen North graciously opened Spring Garden for this memorable occasion. Guests toured the home and heard the history of this unique Laurel gem. Umbrellas added color to the gathering on the grounds as a gentle rain fell. We all had a bit of a laugh at Kendal Jones's expense. As Rosalind was speaking, a young squirrel appeared and decided that Kendal was the perfect person to climb. Scampering around and up Kendal's leg and chest, the squirrel was oblivious to the group's surprise, and Kendal's shock, then

ran away after Ned Fowler's gallant effort to assist Kendal. We all shared a laugh at the unusual encounter.



L to R: Craig and Connie Truitt, Gwen North, and Rosalind Williams.

It is with greatest appreciation that the society thanks Rosalind and her family for these new acquisitions and to Gwen for the opportunity to see inside Spring Garden. ■

Hitchens Homestead Yard Sale a Success

by Don Phillips

It's true, what they say. One man's trash is another man's treasure. You had to go no further than the Laurel Historical Society's recent 'yard sale/freeze off' to see this truism play out!

Days of organizing and collecting castoff attic, garage, and storage items....antiques, tools, sports equipment, furniture, mirrors, books, building material, you name it...everything came together. You had to see it: A young father ducking into a full size playhouse, lifting it from the inside, and walking it down the hill, as if the 5-foot tall children's cottage had tiny feet. Another fellow strapping

building materials four feet up on his car roof. It was so cold that the LHS workers had the hoods of their barn coats up all day long, yet the collectors and scavengers and bargain-hunters came up the little hill of the Hitchens Homestead, to the tune of more than \$1,100 filling the restoration coffers that cold Saturday.

But the best part of the day was the fun and camaraderie we workers shared during the day. Cleaning out the out-buildings of the Hitchens house and taking a full step toward the goals we in the Laurel Historical Society have set for ourselves: PRICELESS! ■

'Hoedown' Entertains and Educates

by Frank B. Calio

Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat nor gloom of night could have kept 75 loyal members of the Laurel Historical Society from enjoying a grand evening at a festive hoedown.

Chairman Brad Spicer picked the perfect location, a 90-year-old barn (with gracious hosts, Lem and Jessie Hudson), which set the scene for an outstanding evening mixed with entertainment, excellent food, an educational session, and most importantly, good fellowship.

I called Jessie for the age of the barn, but ended the conversation with a book filled with information about the barn's history.

Lem's grandfather, Charles, had an agreement with the federal government to retrieve fallen cypress trees from nearby Trap Pond and sell the trees to a shipbuilder in nearby Milton, DE. Cypress trees survive in water; the more they absorb the longer the trees survive, unlike most trees. The trees were hauled from the water by mules, then taken to the saw mill.



Lem and Jessie Hudson's barn. Courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.

When Charles wanted to build his barn, he turned to the shipbuilder. His trees were cut into boards at his saw mill located near the pond. The result: the barn is designed as a ship's hull, upside down. The roof would be the bottom of the ship, and the first floor would be the top of the ship. And the

barn was built with, you guessed it, cypress boards from downed trees. That's why this interesting barn is so different from others we see in the area.



About 75 members attended the event. Courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.

After the first floor was built, the trusses for the roof were assembled on the second floor, and pulled to the top by mules. Jessie said for years they had trouble keeping the barn painted. One day an elderly gentleman stopped by who, by luck, was the site manager who oversaw the construction of the barn. When Jessie complained about the paint, he chuckled and said, "The barn was built from cypress wood; cypress doesn't hold paint, you have to stain the wood." The Hudsons stained the barn. This year it will receive another coating, and problem solved. The gentleman was also the first to take the trip to the top with the first roof truss.

The barn was used to store mules and horses for farming on the first floor, and the upstairs was stocked with hay. Jessie said the barn has had many uses including when Lem and Jessie's children were in school, the upper part of the barn was used for basketball practice and tournaments. Kids from Laurel, Georgetown, and Seaford used to play basketball after school and weekends. Jessie said she had a light switch in her house which controlled the lights inside the barn. When she felt it was time for the teens to leave, she flipped the switch off and on;

players had five minutes to leave the grounds before the lights went out for the evening.

The band featured Whaley's Crossroads bluegrass; food was provided by Southern Grill, Seaford; the best bar maids were Penny Denney and Debbie Mitchell; Norma Jean Fowler and Ruth O'Neal were our hostesses; Pam McCumbers assisted the board in serving our delicious meal, with further help from Cathy Parker and Emily Abbott.



Good ol' Sussex County bluegrass. Courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.

After dinner, guest speaker Ned Fowler did what he does best, to perfection, an interesting presentation, "Made in Laurel . . . or Pret' Near," a slide presentation of furniture, textiles, and decorative arts made in Laurel and surrounding areas. As usual, his presentation was well documented and professionally presented.

Because of the rain, the bonfire scheduled for after the event was postponed.

Brad said the event profited by \$1,750.

The Laurel Historical Society would like to express its appreciation to Brad (and wife Jill) for giving us a wonderful, memorable evening, and to the Hudsons, Lem and Jessie, for their hospitality. The Hudsons had previously hosted the LHS during a bus tour of little-known historical sites in the area. And thanks to the board, members, and friends who participated in this event. ■

Time Traveling in Delaware State Parks



Time Travelers are volunteer members of the public who give their time to assist the archaeologists and historians working in state parks with research projects to protect and study our cultural heritage.

Time Travelers have recovered c. 2500-year-old Wolf Neck prehistoric pottery from a site near Laurel and historic artifacts used by 18th-century millworker families in Yorklyn. Sound exciting? It is!

No experience is necessary. However, classroom training sessions are held that provide the basic background necessary to work with state parks staff and to take part in research programs in our parks and other DNREC properties. The classroom training sessions involve illustrated lecture and hands-on training in basic archaeological field skills. Classes last about three hours. Each newly-qualified Time Traveler will receive an embroidered Time Traveler patch. The program is open to anyone over the age of 14, but minors under 16 need to be accompanied by an adult. Younger students may be admitted on a case-by-case basis.

For more information, visit destateparks.com/programs/timetravelers or contact John McCarthy at John.McCarthy@state.de.us or (302) 739-9188.

Old News

From the *Middletown Transcript*, Feb. 22, 1868:

Sad Accident at Laurel.—A young man by the name of Wiley, residing at Laurel, Del. being taken with a chill, a week or two since, his sister suggested he should take some spirits, a little bottle of what she supposed to be liquor of some kind, she observed in a closet. He took some, remarking it had a queer taste. She then tasted it herself, and inquired of a servant if it was liquor. Upon being told it was some thing to destroy bed-bugs, she immediately set out after her brother, who had left the house for his home, telling him of her unfortunate mistake. A physician was called in, but the young man, after lingering a day or two, died. The sister, as may be imagined, is deeply distressed.

Retrieved from Newspapers.com by Norma Jean Fowler.

Christmas at the Laurel Heritage Museum

The Laurel Historical Society welcomed members to the Laurel Heritage Museum on Sunday, December 2nd, for its annual Christmas party. Photos courtesy of Paula M. Shannon.



New Exhibit Opens at Train Station

by Ned Fowler

For the very first time, our entire collection of locally-made quilts is being displayed at the Laurel Heritage Museum in the old train station on Mechanic Street. Accompanying the quilts are vintage photographs of Laurel scenes from the earliest days of the twentieth century. These treasures from our collections can be seen on our regularly scheduled first Sunday of each month from 1-4 p.m., as well as by special appointment.

Over the years we have collected local quilts mostly by donation, and, in special cases, by purchase. For most of that time, they have been either stored away at the Cook House or, when on exhibit, have been folded because of space issues. Now that the Laurel Chamber of Commerce has joined with the Western Sussex Chamber, and moved its offices out of the train station, we have much needed extra space. This allows for all eleven quilts to be hung completely open on the walls, fully displaying their beauty and artistry.

The exhibit title, "Reflections of Laurel," was inspired by the centerpiece quilt of the same name. Crafted by society member Linda Justice, it features early Laurel photographs transferred to the quilt square fabric, truly making it one of a kind. The show also features a signed and dated Laurel crazy quilt, a Centenary Church signature quilt, and vintage crib quilts, in addition to large c.1880 bed quilts. Additional photos chronicle life in Laurel as seen through the camera lens during the 1890-1950 time period. Make it a point to visit this exhibit if you truly want to time-travel back to the days when our grandparents and great-grandparents were youngsters growing up in our little town. ■

As a native of Laurel, who has spent his entire life enjoying the small-town experience of our unique little town, I have been afforded the opportunity of watching Laurel change in so many directions. Whether it was the identification of the largest historic district in the state of Delaware, the urban transfiguration of our downtown by the newly-formed Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, or the formation of the Laurel Historical Society, each has impacted the physical appearance of Laurel in positive ways.

However, today, we find that many of our historic town residences have fallen into disrepair for any number of reasons and consequently some of their unique architectural features have been lost. One of those features is the “fleur de lis” bracket trim work that was prominent on so many of Laurel’s porches in the past. This unique porch trim was utilized on many of the homes built during the 1890-1930 time period and is believed to have been manufactured and sold in Laurel. This particular trim is unique to Laurel in that it is rarely found adorning the homes in any other towns on the Eastern Shore. It is, architecturally, a prized Laurel ornamentation. There used to be so many visible throughout the town, but, unfortunately, many have disappeared due to neglect, remodeling, and the enclosure of front and side porches.



Recently, I conducted a survey of all of the homes in the town limits of Laurel, looking for homes that still proudly display these fleur de lis brackets. I slowly drove down each street in my quest to document every home preserving these “Lilies of



Laurel.” To my surprise I only found nineteen (19) homes retaining this architectural element as part of the porch decoration. An iconic symbol of Laurel is being lost (It is also the symbol that our organization uses in our branding; check the cover of this newsletter and the signs on all of our properties). I found these results shocking and unacceptable. Below you will find the list of Laurel properties that currently feature the “fleur de lis” bracket porch trim. Please take the time to drive throughout Laurel to find and appreciate these gems:

216 E. 8th Street, 206 E. 7th Street, 207 E. 7th Street, 222 E. 7th Street, 228 E 7.th Street, 608 West Street, 109 West Street, 304 E. 4th Street, 503 Willow Street, 511 Willow Street, 508 Pine Street, 307 E. 6th Street, 310 E. 6th Street, 31876 Gordy Road, 528 Cooper Street, 517 E. 4th Street, 518 E. 4th Street, 515 E. 4th Street, and 112 Brooklyn Avenue.

One of the prime directives in the society’s mission is to educate. Currently, we are undertaking a plan to fully research this decorative element and to develop a handout that explains its historic importance, so that we can provide it to the current homeowners in hope that these prized iconic pieces of Laurel architecture can be preserved for future generations.

If you have any of these brackets that are not attached to a porch, the society would greatly appreciate them being donated for preservation purposes. Also, if you know of any homes in the surrounding countryside that also have fleur de lis brackets, please contact the society. ■

As we start a new year, let's take a look back at all the wonderful folks who donated collection items to the society in 2018. From our records, we can figure out that about 50 individuals donated approximately 756 items to our research center. Before you say "whaaat?" remember that one item could be as small as a matchbook cover from the Rigbie Hotel, or as large as a 200-year-old tall case clock. And when Kendal Jones donates more than 225 snapshots from his collection, the numbers can easily escalate. However, the size of the donation is immaterial; it's the story that comes with it that is important. So whether large or small, every donation contributes to preserving another chapter in Laurel's history, and we wish to thank each individual listed below. ■

Lora Brittingham	Kendal Jones	Al & Barbara Erskine
Emily Abbott	Trudy Allen Maddox	Rick Givens
Gene Wootten	Beverly Smith	Insley Fowler
Ann Brumbley	Jackie Erdman Crumrine	Jane Ellen Hiller
Woody Disharoon	John Downes	Don Phillips
Anonymous	Clark Benson	Tom & Mona Wright
Laurel Public Library	Billie Jane Wheatley	Sue Warrington Doud
Marcus Gillespie	Ned & Norma Jean Fowler	Cathy Stump
Suzanne Carmean	Rudy Wilson	Matt & Dona Blaine
Eleanor R. Henry	Frank Calio	Jesse Still
Rosalind Williams	Wendy Dolby	John Fillmore
Emily Whaley	Jim Duffy	Jay Windsor
Shirley Skinner	Gainor Urian	Lewes Historical Society
Dean Allen	Larry Allen	Bryan & Monica Whaley
Stanley Records	Don Ward	Jean Brittingham Layton
Ruth O'Neal	Ellis Hammond	Jean Smith
Talbot Co. Historical Society	Dan Twilley	Brian Shannon

Thank you!

Parramore's Plantation at Whaley's Crossroads

by Chris Slavens

It was a warm, sunny afternoon in June of 1769. Defiant Virginians, 37-year-old George Washington among them, had recently taken the bold step of insisting that Great Britain had no right to lay taxes in their colony; on the western frontier, a seasoned hunter named Daniel Boone made his way into the rich, forbidden lands the Shawnee Indians called Can-tuck-ee; in the distant Pacific, Captain James Cook sailed amongst the scattered isles of the South Seas; and near the Tub Mill Branch in Broad Creek Forest on the Eastern Shore, Matthew Parramore winced and slapped a mosquito on his exposed neck as he stood and surveyed his new plantation.

He knew the land well, having grown up nearby; he had hunted here as a young man, when it was untouched forest, before James Bouger acquired fifty acres along the old road to Indian River. Like many who tried to build a life in Wimbesocom Neck, Bouger neither succeeded nor stayed, and most of his land was included in a larger resurvey for John Saunders in 1760. But Saunders inherited his father's land on the east side of the branch, and in less than a decade, sold his own patent land in two parcels. Now Parramore owned one hundred acres of the tract known as Friendship, in addition to his holdings about a mile to the west, near Joseph Collins' mills on Wimbesocom Creek.

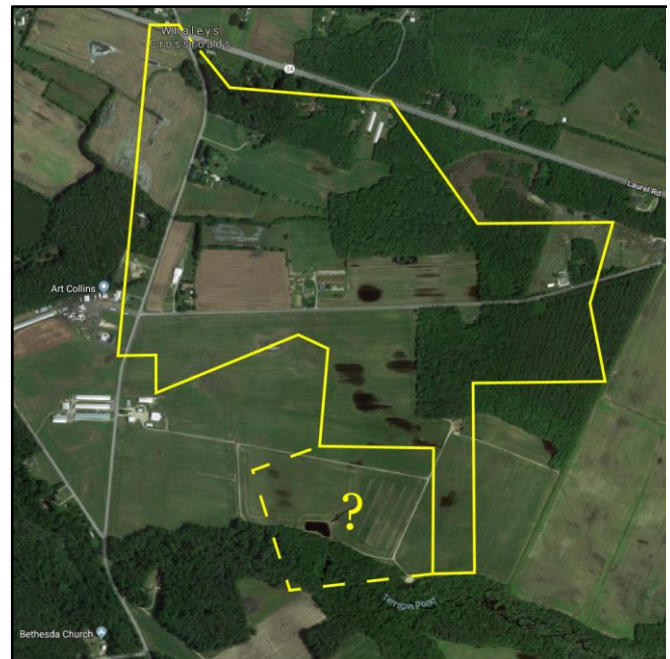
Friendship was not the best land on the peninsula, but it was far from the worst. The ground that had already been cleared was level, and stayed dry most of the time. The wooded northern section was swampy, except during dry spells, but Parramore knew from experience that a strategically located ditch could drain such land well enough for it to be farmed. The first crop he would harvest would be oak, pine, cedar, and bald cypress, as he continued to clear the land and enlarge the existing fields.

He paid little attention to the dwelling house, a small, simple structure with one brick chimney, a roof of cypress shingles, and clapboard siding; and less attention to the cluster of outbuildings behind it. Lumber was plentiful, and new buildings went up quickly with enough help.

The aging planter slapped another mosquito, wiped away the beads of sweat forming on his brow, and turned back towards his horse. There was work to be done.

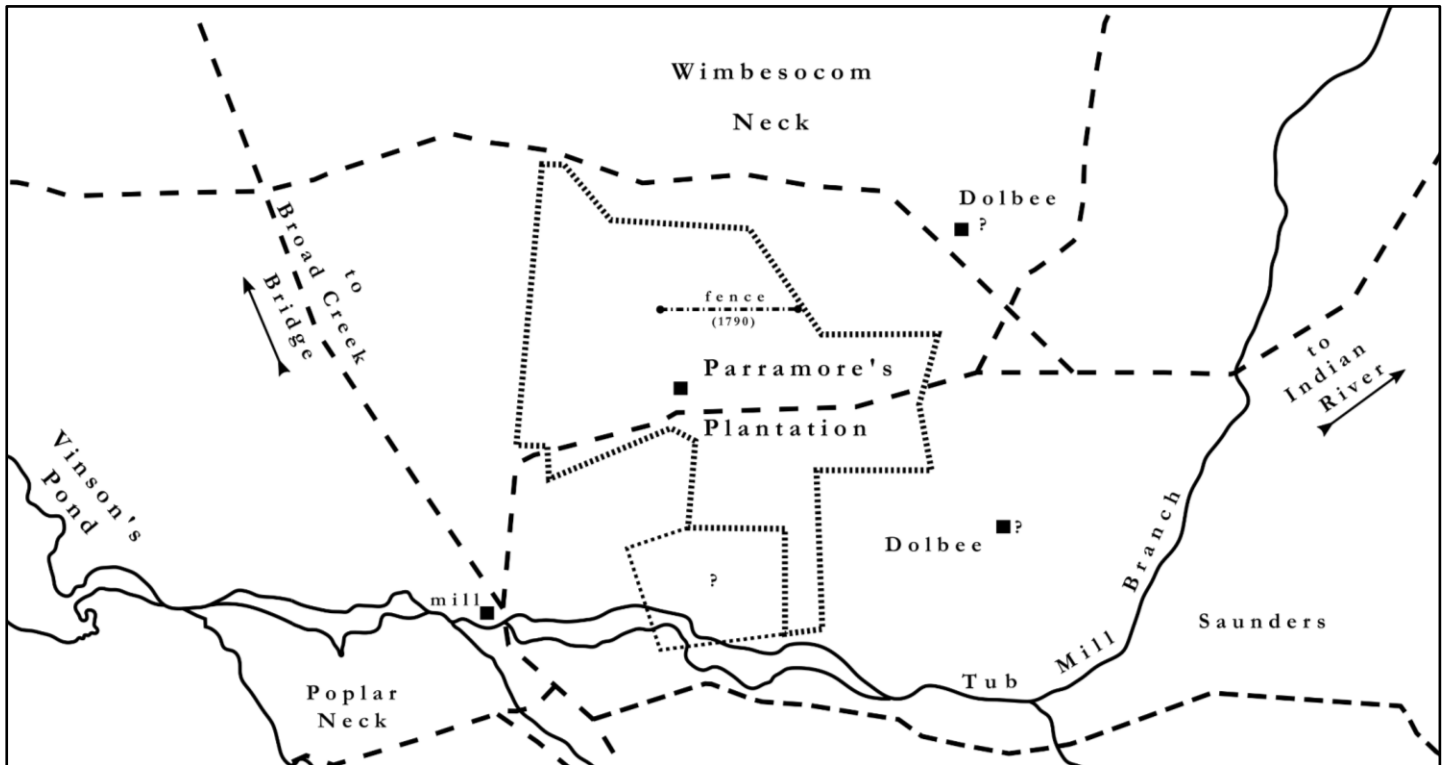
This scene is fueled by imagination, but based on facts. The Parramore family, which had roots in Virginia, settled in Wimbesocom Neck, north of today's Trap Pond, in the early 1700s. In 1743, just one year after a Nanticoke-led plot to massacre the local English settlers was thwarted, fifty acres near today's Whaley's Crossroads was surveyed for James Bouger, who was probably the son of another James Bouger who lived near Broad Creek as early as 1720. Evidently the younger Bouger "omitted paying Caution for the Land," and in 1760 most of the tract was included in a 140-acre resurvey for John N. Saunders. The boundaries of the new tract, called "Friendship," were described as "beginning at a marked red oak tree standing on a level piece of ground back in the woods from Bowgers Mill..."

If the mill is the same one mentioned in a 1740 survey of a tract named "Mill Lot" for Peter Callaway, it was located at Terrapin Pond, and was one of the oldest mills along Broad Creek. It is also possible that there was another mill site elsewhere on the branch.



Approximate boundaries of the plantation, circa 1776 - 1790.

The adjoining portion of today's Samuel Hill Road seems to have been one of the oldest roads in the neighborhood. As early as 1730, the first bounder of a nearby tract named "Wright's Choice," located alongside the branch, was said to be located "about half a mile below the olde road..." This road



Parramore's Plantation, near today's Whaley's Crossroads between Laurel and Lowe's Crossroads, circa 1776 – 1790.

was probably one of the primary roads leading northeastward to the head of Indian River (today's Millsboro) during the 18th century.

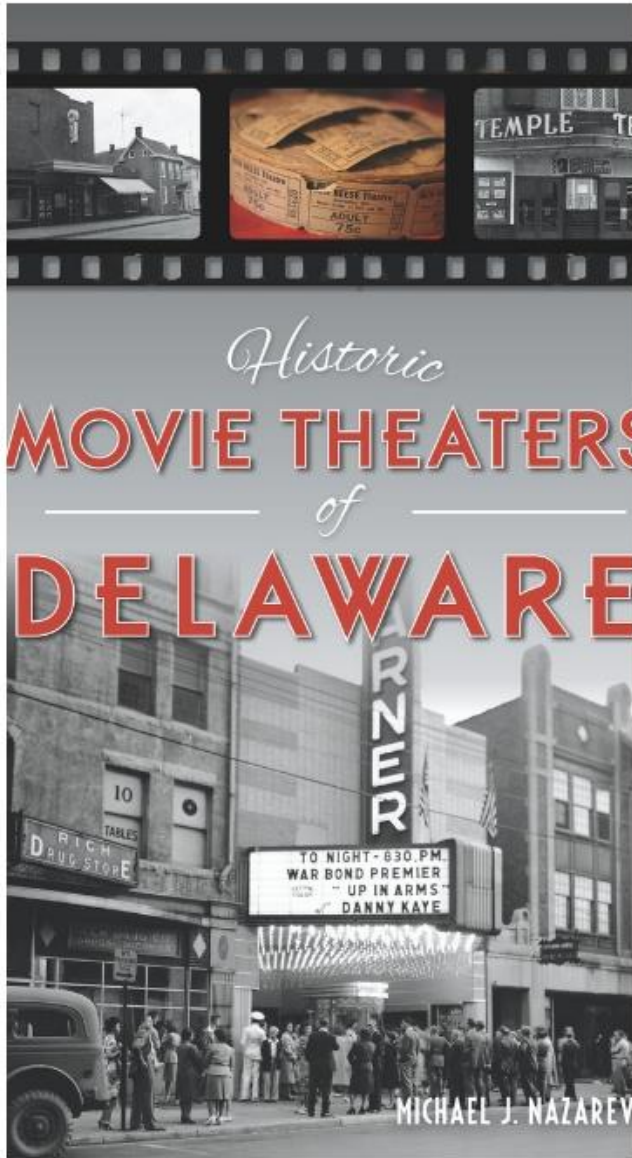
In 1769, Saunders sold "Friendship" in two parcels: Forty acres to his brother, Andrew Saunders, and one hundred acres to Matthew Parramore. Parramore was not a young man at the time; he was probably in his fifties, if not older. His father, also named Matthew, had died in 1739, aged about 61. He may have expanded his land holdings for the sake of his family's future rather than his own. In 1776, he had the land resurveyed, resulting in the addition of even more adjoining vacant land.

Parramore's will, written in 1783, and the inventory of his estate, compiled in 1784, offer a glimpse into his life during his relatively short time on his new plantation. The will makes it clear that he used it as his dwelling plantation—his home—though he still owned his older lands to the west, where his sons Thomas and Patrick lived. The dwelling plantation would go to a younger son, Ezekiel, when he came of age; in the meantime, Thomas would manage it. The inventory paints a picture of a typical farmer, not wealthy, but secure: No slaves; a few pigs, sheep, and cattle; typical household items like a couple of beds, a spinning wheel, and cookware; and practical tools including a drawing knife, a "shewmakers Hammer," old plows and harrows, and three guns.

The location of Matthew Parramore's grave is unknown. If there was a family burying-ground on the property, which is likely, it has been lost.

For reasons that are unclear, Ezekiel sold the plantation to Thomas on May 23, 1791, for one hundred pounds, with neighbors Peter Dolbee and Jesse Saunders serving as witnesses. Just three weeks later, Thomas sold twenty-two acres to Dolbee; and in November of that year, he conveyed one hundred acres to Jonathan Betts, Sr. It seems likely that neither of these two parcels included the heart of the plantation; i.e., the dwelling house, outbuildings, gardens, etc. However, a little over a year later, in December 1792, he sold an additional seventy-nine acres to Betts, which probably included the oldest and most important part of the plantation, straddling part of today's Samuel Hill Road on the south side of Route 24. The northern boundary of this parcel followed an east-west fence line. In 1793, another fourteen acres, down towards Terrapin Pond, went to Jesse Saunders.

During the 19th century, the old plantation was owned primarily by members of the Betts and Matthews families; notably Henry Clay Matthews, who died in 1917. Subsequently the land was divided into increasingly smaller parcels which changed hands many times. Today members of the Mitchell, Whaley, Hitchens, Slavens, Ellis, Perez, and Hudson families own pieces of the land that Matthew Parramore once called home. ■



"Historic Movie Theaters of Delaware"

by Michael J Nazarewycz

March 16, 2019, at 6:00 pm

St. Philips Church

600 S. Central Ave-Laurel De.

Dinner, Presentation,

& Book Signing

\$40.00 per person

Books are available for \$20 cash per copy.

Michael Nazarewycz had been writing about movies for most of this decade when one day he realized all the movie theaters he went to as a kid were gone. He started looking into the history of those theaters, which evolved into a history of all Delaware theaters.

The book looks at Delaware theater history, beginning in 1868. This predates film, but it begins with theaters that would go on to show movies. It delves into the histories of 150 theaters through 2017, as well as the history and evolution of moviegoing in the state.

Michael's presentation will touch on various aspects of the book, as well as his research process and anecdotes from the research and writing journey.



SPACE IS LIMITED!

NAME _____ NO. OF GUESTS _____

PHONE: _____ AMOUNT ENCLOSED: _____

EMAIL: _____

MAIL \$40.00 PER PERSON BY MARCH 08, 2019

PAYABLE TO LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 P O BOX 102, LAUREL, DE 19956
 OR ONLINE @ WWW.LAURELDEHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

UPCOMING EVENTS

Save the date!

Annual Meeting · January 27, 2019 · 2:00 pm · Abbott's on Broad Creek

Nostalgia Night at Dunbar · February 17, 2019 · 3:00 pm · Dunbar School

Dinner & Book Signing · March 16, 2019 · 5:30 pm · St. Philip's (*see page 11*)

Annual Donor Reception · May 11, 2019 · 6:00 pm · *more details TBA*

Gala Fundraiser · June 8, 2019 · 5:30 pm · *more details TBA*

Annual 4th of July Picnic · July 4, 2019 · 5:00 pm · Janosik Park

Gala Fundraiser · October 12, 2019 · 5:30 pm · *more details TBA*

Annual Christmas Party · December 1, 2019 · 1:00 pm · Laurel Heritage Museum

I WANT YOU FOR LHS NEWSLETTER



What's *your* Laurel story?

Please share your memories, old photos, historical articles, story ideas, and questions. All are welcome to contribute! Submit material for the Spring 2019 issue to Chris Slavens, newsletter editor, at chrisslavens@gmail.com by April 1st.

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If you have provided us with your email address, keep an eye out for occasional updates from the Laurel Historical Society!

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