

P.O. BOX 102, LAUREL, DE 19956



LAURELDEHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

# Spring 2025

## NEWSLETTER

### President's Note | George Denney

The first phase of exterior restoration at the Hitchens Homestead and Rosemont is coming to an end. Please stop by to view the work that has been completed over the last two years. I'm certain you will agree that the restoration is fabulous. Our thanks to Joseph Builders for an outstanding job. And, of course, many thanks to our project chairman, Ned Fowler, who has unselfishly given hundreds of hours to both projects. Thanks, Ned!

The society was treated to an outstanding program at our March dinner meeting. Member Don Ward spoke about his new autobiography, *My Journey*. Don generously donated all of the proceeds to the society, a gift of \$300. He also shared part of his impressive collection of tools and other antiques. Thanks, Don!

Saturday, April 19th, was an exciting day at the Hitchens Homestead as about fifty children participated in our first-ever Easter Egg Hunt. The children had a great time searching for eggs. I would like to thank Crystal and Chris Slavens for organizing the hunt. They are still recovering from snapping together more than one thousand eggs. In addition, I want to acknowledge the

generous sponsorship of the event by Randy and Cathy Hill of the Real Estate Market.

We are very fortunate to have a small group of volunteers who help make the society successful. Without their continued support we would not be able to open our doors. I'd like to recognize the following volunteers who go above and beyond the call. They are: Ned & Norma Jean Fowler, Woody & Sharon Disharoon, Dee Cross, Jared Allen, Crystal & Chris Slavens, Doug & Edna Marvil, Mary Jones, Snicky Davis & Brian Seeba, Jessica Redmond, Debbie Mitchell, Tris Holland, Emily Whaley Spicer, Matt Parker, Paula Shannon, and many others. Thanks!

We're looking forward to this year's Donor Reception at the new home of society Vice President Artez West. I hear the home is a masterpiece of fine furniture and decorative arts. Thanks, Artez! Members who responded to our Annual Appeal with a donation will be invited to the reception. It's never too late to give.

Please see page 11 for more information about upcoming events. Enjoy your newsletter! 

**IN THIS ISSUE:** News, Old News, Photos, Upcoming Events, Accessibility, the History of Phillips' Men's Shop, Acquisitions, Spring Dinner, and more! →

## Cool New Stuff! | Norma Jean Fowler

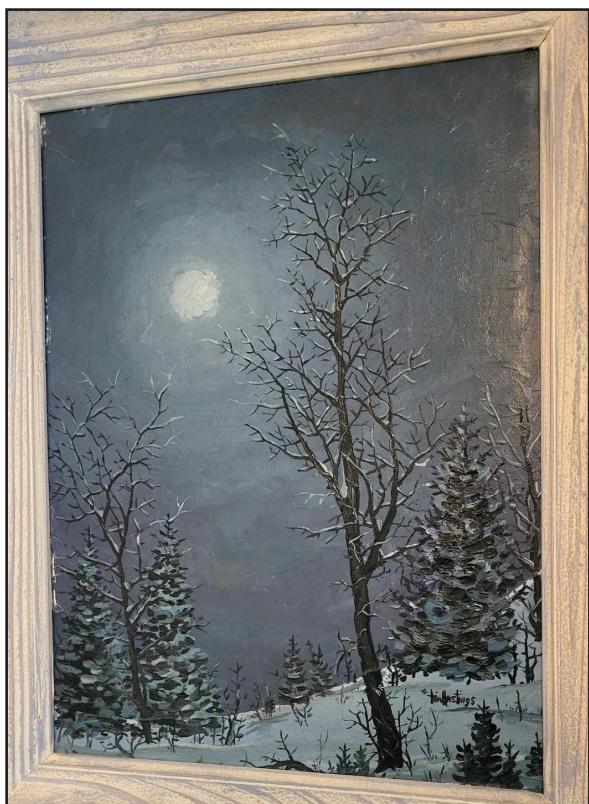
Since the beginning of 2025 we have received new donations that tell a wide range of Laurel stories. In January the society purchased a counter from an old-fashioned country store which now has a new life at Rosemont as a buffet or drinks server. The society received its first-ever oil portrait also in January, from Robert Valliant Jones of Chestertown, Maryland. Robert's grandfather, William E. Valliant, was an early 20th-century business and civic entrepreneur who also served as Laurel's mayor. An extremely extensive genealogy of the Valliant family will delight anyone with any connection to the Valliant name. It's a whopper of information.

A beautiful oil painting showing a winter scene created by Laurel artist Timmy Hastings was donated by member Reid Williamson. It formerly belonged to Reid's mother, teacher Eleanor Williamson, who encouraged Timmy's talent. It joins works done by Tim's mother, Hazel Brumbley, whose renditions of Bethesda Church and the Warrington farmhouse at Pepperbox are already in our collection.

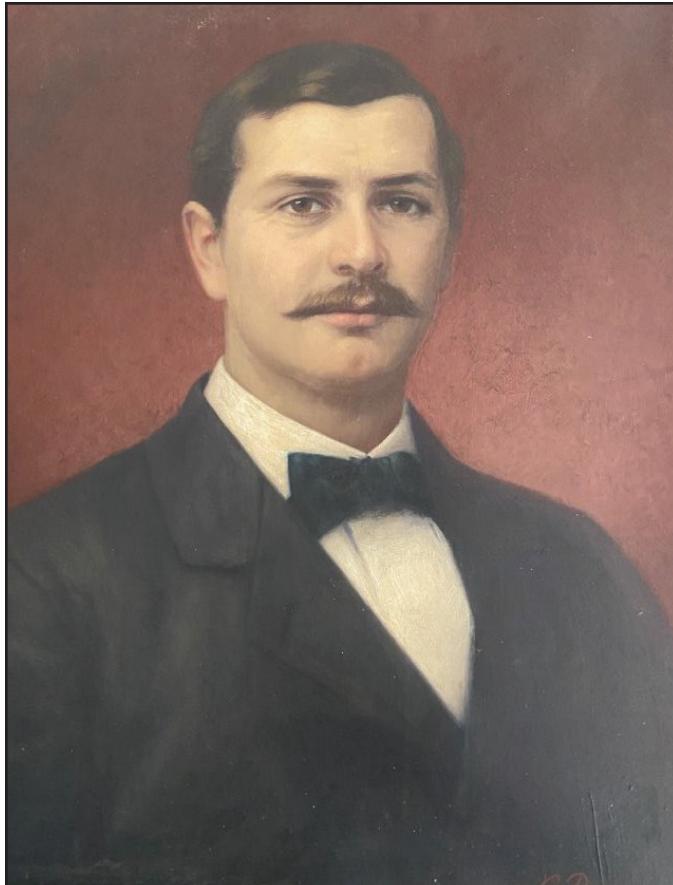
A 1922 Laurel High School banner has returned home after 102 years, and three generations of the Walter Brittingham family. It is notable for the fact that the class of 1922 was the first class to graduate from the "1921 Building." Alan Ralph has donated more of Laurel's Marvil Package baskets! We have a whole wall of produce and field baskets in the pantry store room at Hitchens Homestead. It makes quite a statement as to how important these simple items were to the farming industry.

Speaking of Valliant Fertilizer, the original building on North Poplar Street was demolished a few weeks ago, but before it was lost, the society was invited to sort through the defunct offices to see if we could use anything. We are in the process of wading through a mountain of items affiliated with Gov. Elbert N. Carvel, whose career with Valliant Fertilizer spanned decades.

Finally, our March dinner speaker Don Ward donated a wooden and porcelain commode. If you don't know what a commode is, ask the oldest person you know! \*



Left: Winter scene by Tim Hastings; Top right: Bethesda Church by Hazel Brumbley; Bottom right: Warrington Farmhouse by Hazel Brumbley.



Former Laurel mayor and entrepreneur William E. Valliant.



An old country store counter will be a useful addition at Rosemont.

## Volunteer Your Time and Energy

*Doug Marvil*

The Laurel Historical Society continues to benefit tremendously from the volunteer efforts of our members. Volunteering offers a unique opportunity to connect with our community's heritage. By preserving artifacts, sharing stories, and supporting educational programs, you help keep local history alive for future generations. It's also a chance to develop new skills, meet people with similar interests, and gain a deeper appreciation for the events and individuals that shaped western Sussex County. Whether you're cataloging items, leading tours, assisting with events, or helping to improve the physical appearance of our historic sites, you are contributing greatly to our cultural preservation and civic pride. **And—We Always Have Fun** getting together with our cohorts to work toward our common goal of historic preservation! We look forward to working with each of you who will be sharing your talents, time and energy in supporting the Laurel Historical Society. Thank You! 

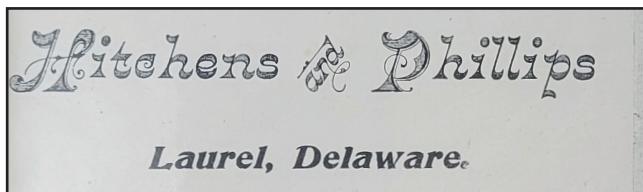
**Thank You**



Many thanks to the Real Estate Market for sponsoring the society's Easter Egg Hunt held on April 19th. It was a wonderful success! Stay tuned for photos of the event in our next newsletter. 

# Phillips' Men's Shop: 108 Years in Downtown Laurel | *Don Phillips*

Phillips' Men's Shop was a Downtown Laurel business anchor throughout the entire 20th century. It was founded in 1901 by Albert Phillips, a 21-year-old entrepreneur, as a partnership named **Hitchens & Phillips**, and was a thriving enterprise during the bustling first half of the 1900s. After World War II, he was joined by Harold Phillips, his nephew, and the business became **A. H. Phillips Co.**, growing to serve an expanded regional customer base in Delaware and Maryland.



*Hitchens & Phillips logo from first known advertisement, c. 1904.*

In the 1970s, Harold's two sons Don and David became the third generation of Phillips family leadership. Throughout the period 1965–2008, known now as **Phillips' Men's Shop**, it became the largest menswear operation on the Delmarva Peninsula, with branch stores in Salisbury, Easton, and Dover. It specialized in upper-end men's tailored clothing and sportswear, and was the preeminent specialist in fitting men of all Big & Tall sizes. Women's fashions were added during the 1960s, and eventually grew to 30% of its merchandise mix.

Laurel's Downtown was especially vibrant and active throughout the first two thirds of the 20th century with



*"New" A. H. Phillips Co., Inc., store on Market Street in downtown Laurel, 1965.*



*Albert H. Phillips, founder, c. 1910.*

a constant churn of retailing—menswear, womenswear, furniture, hardware, restaurants, drugstores, jewelry, giftware, and variety—as well as the center for lodging, banking, insurance, groceries, and entertainment. During the 30s and 40s, retailers were open until midnight on weekends just to catch the movies crowd after the double feature let out. On Wednesdays, every store closed at noon to allow staff time off for fishing and family. At Halloween, hundreds of kids paraded in homemade costumes, and judging stands centered parades throughout the years. At Christmas time, seasonal strings of colorful lights crisscrossed Market Street. At its peak in the 70s, the local chamber of commerce numbered more than one hundred local businesses, and the Downtown had a vibe, a personality, and was the social center of the community. It was the core of everyday activity, and embodied the success of its people.

At Phillips', innovations over the years—expanded size ranges, custom-made tailored clothing, private label

# Phillips' Men's Shop

"Displaying The Feelings Of Man"



Harold D. Phillips, second-generation owner, c. 1950.

**FREE**

## Dress for Success Seminar

This Free 1-Session 2-hour Seminar will be presented Evenings from 7:00-9:00 PM on the following dates: November 10th (Salisbury), Nov. 11th (Easton), Nov. 12th (Laurel), Nov. 17th (Laurel), Nov. 18th (Dover) and Nov. 19th (Salisbury).

Advertisement in the Morning News (Wilmington), October 28, 1987.



"Final Closing" illustration featuring four generations of the Phillips family by artist Abby Phillips.

"Peninsula Collection" sportswear, skilled tailoring, gift wrapping, monogramming and fashion shows—fueled its growth with a personal customer base of more than 5,000 families across Delmarva in 2000.

Yet the personalities and individualized service of its staff were always the key components of Phillips' success. Many—Eschol Jones, Mel Cordery, Ralph Baker, and tailor Rosie Mutchler to name only a few—spent their entire thirty to forty-year work careers with the company, and were local personalities in their own right.

The Phillips family has always been active and contributing toward the community, and especially its progress, economic development, and growth.

The business was an anchor in the active chamber of commerce and the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation.

Phillips' Men's Shop closed in 2008 upon the retirements of its third-generation Phillips family members, Don, David, and Nancy. They were joined by more than 250 employees over the 108-year history of Phillips' Men's Shop, clothing and serving the area and community. As they related in their final advertisement, what could be more valued than "covering up naked people for 100+ years!" \*

Send **your** Laurel story or photos to Chris Slavens, newsletter editor, [chrisslavens@gmail.com](mailto:chrisslavens@gmail.com) or P.O. Box 102, Laurel, DE, 19956.

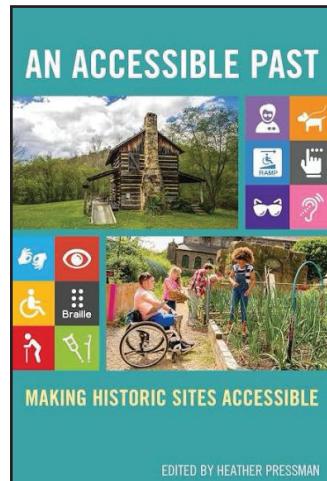
# The Importance of Accessibility and Inclusivity | Brad Spicer

I am writing this article through new lenses for me; through the eyes of a handicapped person. Ensuring handicap accessibility in historic homes is vital for inclusivity, allowing everyone to experience and appreciate history, while balancing preservation with accessibility through creative solutions and adherence to ADA guidelines.

Perhaps, a more detailed explanation of the importance of accessibility to handicapped people is warranted. So, why is it important in today's world? The answer is inclusivity and equal access. Historic sites should be accessible to all, regardless of ability, ensuring that everyone can participate in the experience of learning about the past. Also, access to public spaces, including historic properties, is a civil right, as established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The challenge lies in finding ways to make historic properties accessible while preserving their unique character and historical significance. When full compliance with accessibility standards would threaten the historical significance of a property, alternative solutions may be allowed, such as providing accessible routes and entrances, alternative methods of access, and accessible restrooms. Ramps and lifts can be designed to blend in with the historic architecture. Tactile maps, audio descriptions, and printed materials can enhance the experience for people with visual or auditory impairments. Special hours or programs can be offered for those with autism or other sensitivities. Service and emotional support animals should be welcomed.

House museums and significant spaces within historic buildings may not be adaptable for physical access. In such cases, visual access and/or program access to such spaces may be adequate alternatives. Methods include



Recommended reading:

*An Accessible Past: Making Historic Sites Accessible*  
Edited by Heather Pressman  
(Rowman & Littlefield, 2023)

visual presentations, models, and providing exhibits in accessible spaces. For accessibility to programs, relocation of these functions to accessible areas is allowed and avoids major adverse renovations. Exterior accessibility can be accommodated by providing a wheelchair accessible path from safe and accessible parking to a significant entry to the building, historic landscapes, or informational exhibits.

As an historical society which is currently restoring one property (the Hitchens Homestead) and will take on the restoration of a new headquarters building (the Phillips House) in the future, I hope that in these restorations we will be sensitive to the needs and rights of the disabled as we move forward, while preserving the historical architectural features and intentions of the buildings. I believe that once accessibility is achieved and advertised we will open inclusivity and access to new previous unserved visitors. This can be a win for the society and the public that we serve. ☮



# Old News

## Burglars Leisurely Invaded a Store at Laurel, But Did Not Get Great Deal of Booty.

### Special Correspondence of Every Evening

Laurel, Oct. 15.—The clothing store of Hitchens & Phillips was broken into, Friday night, the thieves gaining entrance by cutting a hole in the screen at the back door, unhooking it and then cutting out a panel of the other door and unlocking it.

The door of the fireproof safe had been closed, but not locked, and the thieves, not knowing this, had tried unsuccessfully to work the combination and thereby locked it. Mr. Hitchens' desk was broken open and the drawers rifled. The thieves found the stamp box and took the stamps and money out of it; also, they robbed the cash registers.

Fortunately, the owners keep very little money in the store over night, and the thieves did not get more than \$5 in cash. Messrs. Hitchens and Phillips do not know whether any clothing was taken or not, but think there was.

After the robbers had ransacked the store, they calmly walked out the front door, leaving it wide open.

*Every Evening,*  
Wilmington, Del.  
October 15, 1917

GOLDSBOROUGH JONES, aged 25, and Annie Simpers, aged 80, have been married in Laurel, Delaware. A boy's will is the wind's will.

*The Philadelphia Times,*  
Philadelphia  
December 31, 1889

Until You Try A  
JAYMAR® SANSABELT II®



S  
SANSABELT II®  
A JAYMAR BLACK



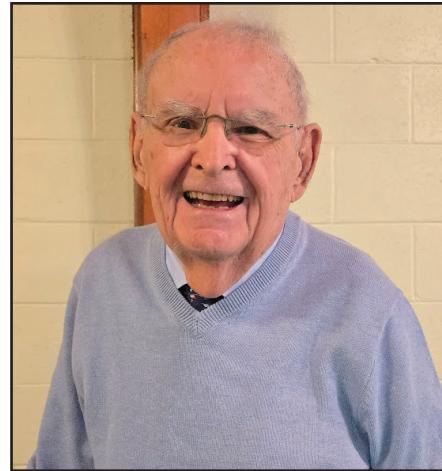
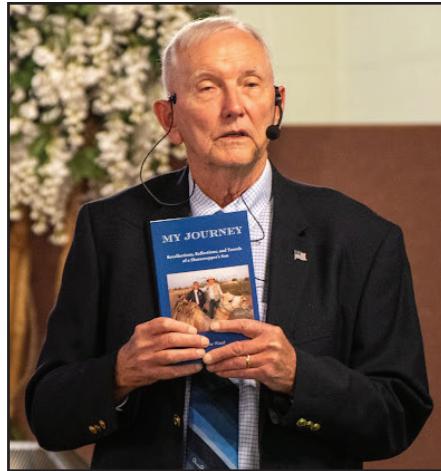
You'll never know how  
comfortable going without  
a belt can be?

**Phillips' Men's  
Shop**

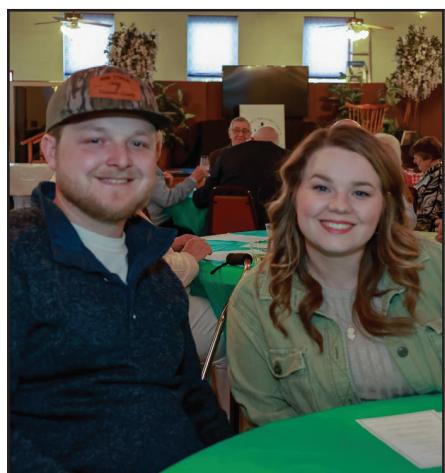
Laurel, Delaware

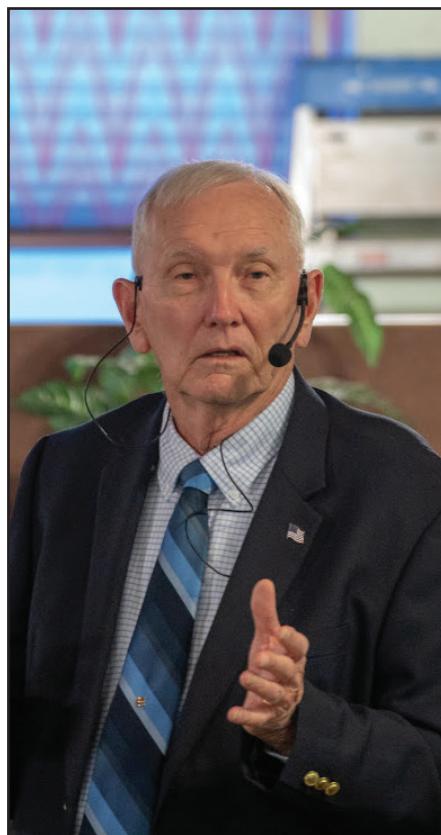
115 W. Mkt. St. 875-7554

*The Delmarva News,*  
Selbyville, Del.  
August 29, 1974



Don Ward (above) spoke about his new book, *My Journey*, and gave an interesting and educational presentation about a variety of antiques at the society's spring dinner on March 22nd. Don generously donated all of the proceeds from the evening's book sales, a total of \$300, to the society. Thank you to all who attended the dinner, and to the volunteers who helped make the night a success. Special thanks to Rosemont Wealth Management for providing the complimentary wine bar, and to Paula Shannon for taking photographs. 🌸





## St. Philip's Church's 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Strawberry Festival

600 S. Central Ave. Laurel, DE 19956



Saturday May 17, 2025

8 am to 2 pm

Breakfast - Scrapple Sandwiches

Strawberry Desserts & Ice Cream

Lunch – Hot Dogs or Hot Dog Meal

Fresh Strawberries Sold

Vendors and Crafters

Attic Treasures Table    Bake Table

Entertainment & Community Participants

Come join us for a fun filled day of food & Entertainment



Wanted  
Local Merchants &  
Vendors

Contact:  
Julie Howard @  
302-344-5841

Or  
Lee Collins @  
302-236-0344  
Laurelfam@hotmail.com

No Admission Fee  
& Free Parking



### WHEN

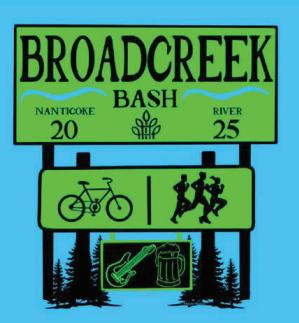
June 14<sup>th</sup> 8am-5pm  
Opening Ceremonies to begin  
at 9am

### WHERE

Laurel Farmers Auction Market

FEATURING •Local FFA BBQ Chicken •Antique Tractors •  
Petting Zoo • Vendors • Baked goods • Entertainment, and  
much more,

Support your local  
businesses  
BUY LOCAL



SCAN ME

SCAN QR CODE to REGISTER

### Features:

- All routes begin and end in Laurel and feature designated rest stops with restrooms, snacks and beverages.
- Rides include historic attractions, beautiful waterways, The Woodland Ferry, Trap Pond State Park and More
- Finish Party at Tidewater Park on Broad Creek featuring Dogfish Head beers, live music, food trucks and vendors.
- Interactive map with historical stops plus photo app locations throughout the ride
- Charitable giving benefits local non-profit groups
- Event is Rain or Shine. Extreme weather could force cancellation

## Broad Creek BASH

Formerly known as Broad Creek Bike and Brew

Saturday, August 16, 2025

7 a.m to 9:00 a.m onsite registration begins  
After Party begins at 10:00 am at Janosik Park

Laurel Elementary School

815 S. Central Ave, Laurel DE, 19956

### For more information:

Contact the Western Sussex Chamber of Commerce

Email: [admin@westernsussexcoc.com](mailto:admin@westernsussexcoc.com)

(302) 629-9690

[www.westernsussexcoc.com/broad-creek-bike-brew](http://www.westernsussexcoc.com/broad-creek-bike-brew)



Southern Delaware  
Beaches are just the beginning.

## • UPCOMING EVENTS •

May 4	•	Museums Open <i>Free</i>	•	Old Christ Church, Rosemont, Hitchens Homestead, Cook House, Train Station, Bethel	•	1 – 4 p.m.
May 10	•	Paint Laurel Plein Air	•	Janosik Park	•	a.m.
May 16	•	Vernacular Architecture Forum		Visiting Bus Tour	•	—
May 17	•	Strawberry Festival	•	St. Philip's	•	8 a.m. – 2 p.m.
June 1	•	Museums Open	•	All Six Museums	•	1 – 4 p.m.
June 6	•	Donor Reception	•	West House	•	<i>By Invitation</i>
June 14	•	Laurel Farmers' Auction Market 85th Anniversary Event	•	"The Block" 10667 Georgetown Rd	•	8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
July 4	•	Independence Day	•	Parade, Festival, & Fireworks	•	—
July 6	•	Museums Open	•	All Six Museums	•	1 – 4 p.m.
August 3	•	Museums Open	•	All Six Museums	•	a.m.
August 16	•	Broad Creek Bash (formerly Bike n' Brew)	•	Old Christ Church (society station)	•	a.m.
September 7	•	Museums Open	•	All Six Museums	•	1 – 4 p.m.
October 5	•	Museums Open	•	All Six Museums	•	1 – 4 p.m.
October 18	•	Dinner & Lecture <i>Speaker: Brian Shannon</i>	•	Abbott's on Broad Creek	•	6:00 p.m.
December	•	The Grand Illumination	•	Hitchens Homestead	•	<i>To Be Announced</i>

*Save the date!*



P. O. Box 102  
Laurel, DE 19956

**Museums Open! First Sundays, May - Oct., 1 - 4 p.m.**



*Old Christ Church  
Christ Church Rd*



*The Cook House  
502 E 4th St*



*Rosemont  
121 Delaware Ave*



*Laurel Heritage Museum  
215 Mechanic St*



*Bethel Maritime Museum  
312 First St (Bethel)*



*Hitchens Homestead  
205 Willow St*