



# Winter 2025

## NEWSLETTER

### President's Note | *George Denney*

The Laurel Historical Society has been busy with multiple restorations at the same time this past year. At the Hitchens Homestead you can see extraordinary transformations to the exteriors of buildings. We are fortunate to have Ned Fowler guiding the restorations. Since this is not his first restoration, we've had the luxury of tapping into his vast knowledge and expertise to supervise the restoration at the Hitchens Homestead and Rosemont. Also, the recently placed corn crib and outhouse are major additions at Hitchens.

Have you noticed the addition of the front balcony and shutters at Rosemont? And how about the chimneys and new roof? We are fortunate to have a positive and close relationship with the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation (LRC). Our missions are different in many ways, yet they overlap to celebrate the rich history of the past and preserve it for future generations. We are blessed to have visionaries like LRC's Brian Shannon and LHS's Ned Fowler who are dedicated to the revitalization of Laurel.

None of this work would have been possible without Sen. Bryant Richardson and Rep. Tim Dukes and their

commitment to these projects. In addition, your generous support of the society makes a tremendous difference to the success of the society. Please remember, if you would like to contribute to the annual appeal, please feel free to donate any time during the year. A contribution form is provided on page 9.

We are now receiving membership dues for 2025. Please complete the form on page 11 or pay online to renew your membership. We also accept memberships any time during the year.

Finally, please plan to attend our annual meeting on **Sunday, January 19, 2025, at 2:00 p.m.** Lunch or dinner will be served from the menu at **Abbott's on Broad Creek**. Brad Spicer, chair of the calendar committee, will be reporting on exciting events for the 2025 calendar year, and Ned Fowler will be reporting on the ongoing restoration projects at the Hitchens Homestead, Rosemont, and the recently acquired George Phillips House! We will also be conducting our yearly business meeting with election of officers for two years. We hope to see you then.

Happy New Year! Enjoy your newsletter. 🌸

**IN THIS ISSUE:** News, Old News, Membership Renewal, Annual Appeal, Progress at Hitchens Homestead and Rosemont, "Mitchelltown," & more! ➔





*Emanuel Twilley House before exterior renovations and painting, Feb. 14, 2023 (left). and after historically correct painting, Aug. 4, 2024 (right). All photos by Ned Fowler.*

## Restoration at Hitchens Homestead | Maggie Proctor

Laurel townspeople passing by Hitchens Homestead on Willow Street have noticed ongoing restoration of the Emanuel Twilley house, the mill hand house, the log corn crib, and other outbuildings. Under the sponsorship of the Laurel Historical Society, and with the skills of Al and Otts Joseph, and Klay West, the repairs are proceeding from exterior to interior, with priority placed on painting and sealing the exterior of each building, in order to prevent further loss of the buildings, some of which are almost 150-years-old.

The crown jewel of Hitchens Homestead is the Emanuel Twilley House, ca. 1878, which has undergone an historic paint analysis, and has been repainted with colors believed to be the same as those with which it was painted in 1878. The mill hand house, fragile due to lack of maintenance over the years, has been thoroughly scraped, has received two coats of primer, and has been painted with one of the common exterior colors for outbuildings of the day, “Spanish brown.” Concrete block piers were placed for the log corn crib next to the summer kitchen. The log corn crib now stands in a row with the summer kitchen and a two-seat outhouse.

All of this transformation comes at a price. With the assistance of Representative Tim Dukes and Senator Bryant Richardson, the Historical Society was able to obtain grants from the Delaware Community Reinvestment Fund. Additional sources of capital are Preservation Delaware and the Sussex County Council. Finally,

the importance of donations to the Annual Appeal of the Laurel Historical Society cannot be overstated: this source of support allows the Historical Society to continue its work in the community, including at its other properties in Laurel, while finishing the restoration work at Hitchens.



*Mill hand house after exterior renovations, “Spanish Brown” paint, Oct. 26, 2024.*





Row of outbuildings: Log Corn Crib, Summer Kitchen, & Outhouse, Nov. 19, 2024.

Step by step, the Laurel Historical Society is “peeling back the layers” to arrive at the original plan for the property on Willow Street. First, a site plan, showing the locations and orientations of the main house and all of the outbuildings, was attached to the original insurance policy for the Hitchens Homestead property. Then an estate inventory, dating from the 1916 death of Emanuel Twilley, was discovered. More recently, gifts of original Twilley furniture and household objects were received from the widow of Daniel Twilley, Emanuel Twilley’s great-grandson.

With the ongoing support of the Laurel community and government friends, the Laurel Historical Society hopes to peel back the last layer, and be able to present the fully restored Hitchens Homestead. 🌿



The Laurel Historical Society extends its thanks to Activ Pest Solutions for performing a free termite evaluation and preventative treatment at the Mill Hand House on October 8, 2024. The treatment was valued at \$395.00.



# FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK

[FACEBOOK.COM/LAURELDEHISTORICALSOCIETY](https://www.facebook.com/LAURELDEHISTORICALSOCIETY)

## Mitchelltown: Early Laurel's Forgotten Twin . . . or Rival? | Chris Slavens

I probably ought to begin by explaining that there is not, and never has been, a local town with the name of Mitchelltown. That is merely my private nickname for what one early land record describes as “*sundry Lotts forming a small town on the North side of Broad Creek.*” An accurate description, but not particularly memorable. And so, as I pored over handwritten deeds and plotted boundary lines, I began to think of the little town that was emerging as Mitchelltown. It’s as appropriate a nickname as any, for the town owed its existence to at least three men named Mitchell, and a fourth, who came a bit later, remains its most famous resident to this day.

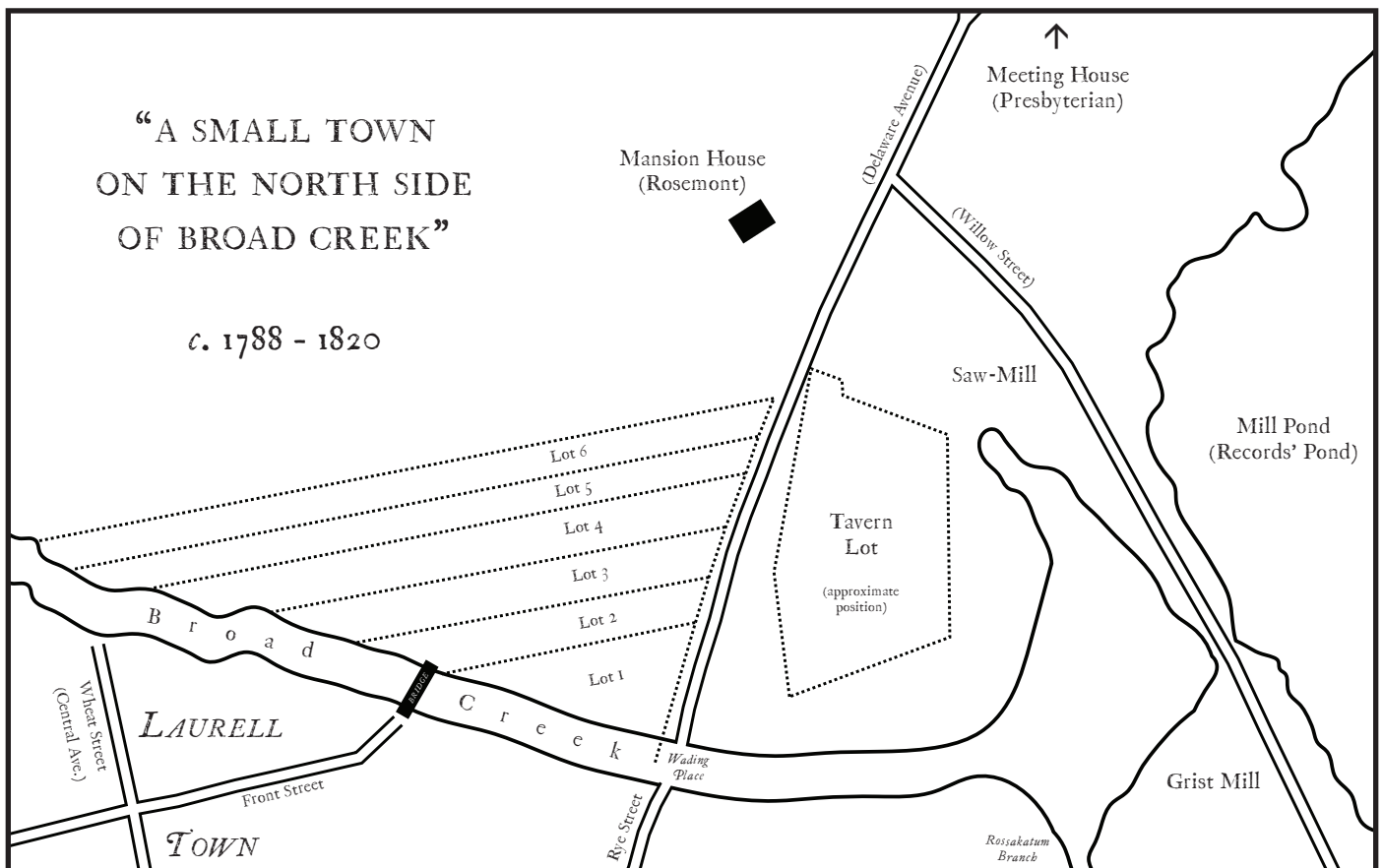
But I’m getting ahead of myself.

The story begins with John Mitchell who purchased 2,236 acres of the Nanticoke Indians’ reservation on Broad Creek in November of 1768. It is possible that he was present at Broad Creek even earlier; long-overlooked documents in the Maryland archives reveal that a number of Englishmen leased parcels from Nanticoke leaders as early as 1740, and built structures including a tobacco warehouse and mills. This exciting revelation significantly alters our understanding of Laurel’s history, for it means

that when Mitchell bought his large tract and Laureltown founder Barkley Townsend bought the 500-acre tract on the south side of the creek, there was already an English community there to some extent. It is to be hoped that we will be able to learn more about this poorly documented period.

The available records shed little light on John Mitchell’s intentions for his sprawling plantation. His business interests included a grist mill, a saw-mill, and a store. He certainly owned an unknown number of tenant houses, but no plat has yet been found which would show their locations. And, of course, his mansion house must have been complemented by the usual cluster of outbuildings. He might not have intended to lay out a true town, like Barkley Townsend, but he practically owned one already.

Mitchell dictated his will from his deathbed on December 20, 1787, and died on that very day. Unfortunately, the executors of his estate—John Mitchell, Jr., Cyrus Mitchell, and James Bratten—had no choice but to sell most of it to pay his debts. It seems that the idea to lay out several lots along what is now Delaware Avenue developed at that time.





By the spring of 1791, they had laid out six lots on the west side of the street, beginning with Lot 1 (including the site of today's Abbott's) next to the Wading Place and continuing north and a bit east through Lot 6 (which probably includes today's "Pink House" or LRC office). However, each lot slanted away from the road at an angle of S 79° W until it reached the edge of the creek, resulting in long, rectangular lots, quite unlike the squarish lots being sold or leased across the creek in Laureltown.

Additionally, there was a "Tavern Lott" on the east side of the street. One document indicates that a "Capt. Smith" already lived there when the lots were drawn; a couple of later records identify him as Alexander Smith. Presumably John Mitchell owned the tavern during his lifetime. This large and valuable lot included much of today's Villas on Broad Creek. Yet another lot, farther up the street, was sold to the trustees of the Broad Creek Presbyterian congregation. The 1791 record of the sale states that their meeting house was already located on the lot.

The division and sale of the Mitchell estate turned out to be a messy and lengthy process. For reasons that are not entirely clear, most of the results of the first public sale, in which James Bratten bought most of the lots and Barkley Townsend made off with the grist mill, didn't "stick." A second public sale was held in October of 1792, with very different results:

Lot/Parcel	Buyer	Price
No. 1	George Mitchell	£21.10.0
No. 2	Isaac Moore	51.10.0
No. 3	Robert Ewart	37.10.0
No. 4	George Mitchell	57.10.0
No. 5	Jonathan Cathell	24.10.0
No. 6	John Bacon	12.0.0
Tavern lot	Alexander Smith	200.0.0
Meeting House lot	Robert Houston (trustee)	1.10.0
Mansion House, Mills	George Mitchell	2,600.0.0

Oddly, both Robert Ewart and Jonathan Cathell immediately sold their lots back to John Mitchell, Jr., and Cyrus Mitchell, for the same price. John's will, dated 1815, mentions "Lotts near Laurel."

Lot 2 had a somewhat interesting fate: Barkley Townsend acquired it in 1795. It was the next to most valuable of the six numbered lots, but why? An 1802 plat of "Laurell town" suggests an explanation. At the



Front Street and an early bridge over Broad Creek on Joseph Copes' "Plan of Laurell Town," 1802.

time, Front Street ran to a bridge located behind the present Pump House building. This early bridge, built in 1798 as a result of a petition, appears to have connected Front Street to Lot 2.<sup>†</sup> From there, a lane or street must have crossed what is now the Abbott's parking lot and joined Delaware Avenue. Therefore, the bridge was an extremely important link between Laureltown and all points to the north, allowing travelers to bypass the old Wading Place. Is that why Barkley Townsend acquired a single lot in what was arguably a competing business venture? That very well might be the best explanation for why Laureltown's first bridge was built where it was. A bridge at the Wading Place came later.

During this period, the most important individual on the north side of the creek was George Mitchell. He was also one of the most prominent politicians in the Delaware State. A reliably documented connection between him and John Mitchell, Sr., has yet to be discovered, despite their shared surname. George owned both mills, the mansion house, lots 1 and 4, and hundreds of acres of land. However, he only lived there for a few years. When he made his will in 1798, he was living in Kent County. Eventually his property on Broad Creek passed to his brother, Nathaniel.

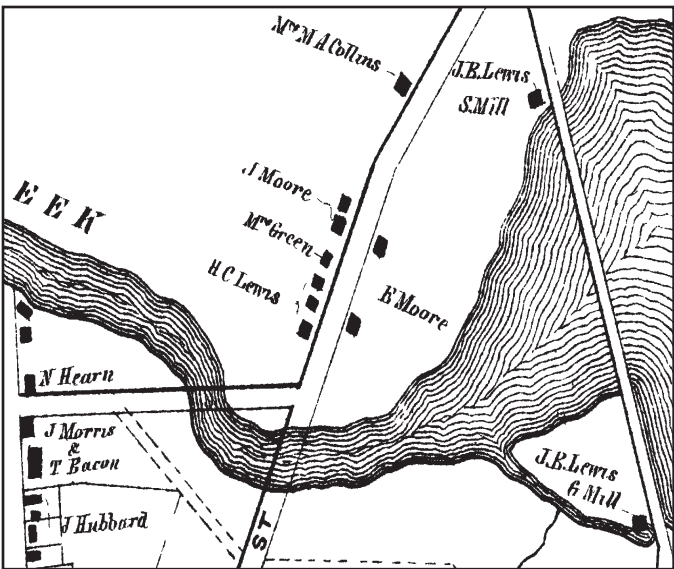
When Nathaniel Mitchell acquired the property, including the mansion house known today as Rosemont, in 1808, he had recently completed a term as Delaware's governor, but remained active in politics, serving in the

<sup>†</sup> Alternatively, the bridge may have crossed Broad Creek into Lot 1. Later dredging of the creek makes the exact positions of the lots uncertain.

state house in 1809 and in the state senate in 1810–1812. He died the following year at about age 60, continuing the family tradition of leaving behind a complicated estate. One can read all about it in the whopping 158-page probate file! These documents are vital when it comes to researching the history of Rosemont—the house is depicted on two plats, along with many other features of the neighborhood—but they also indicate that Nathaniel Mitchell owned lot 3.

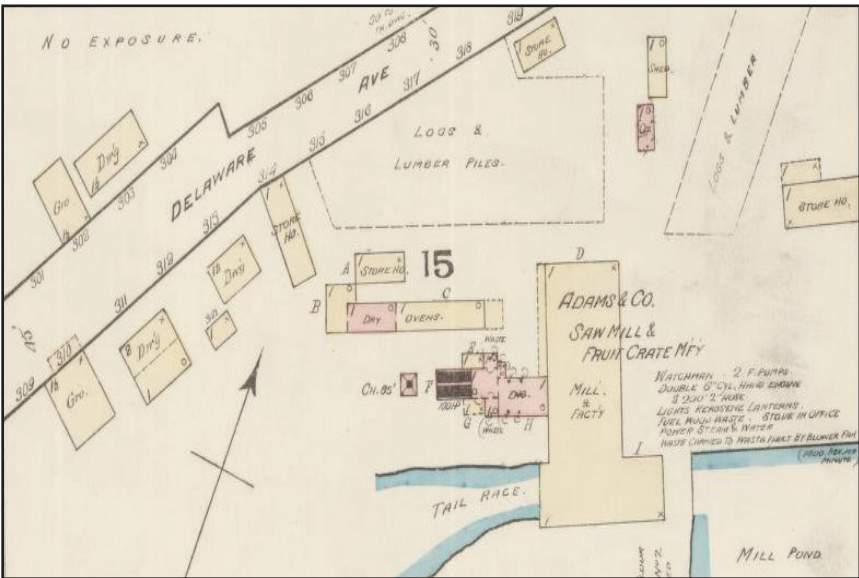
By this point in time, there is little doubt that everybody involved thought of the cluster of lots and buildings on the north side of Broad Creek as part of Laurel rather than some competing twin town. We know almost nothing about how the numbered lots were used during the early years, and the fate of the tavern next to the Wading Place, valued so highly in 1792, is unclear. The building itself *might* appear on the Beers Atlas of 1868, labeled “E. Moore.” Seven other structures are depicted along the stretch of Delaware Avenue between the bridge and Rosemont, three of them owned by Henry Clay Lewis. Some of these houses might have been occupied by tenants who worked at the mills. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of the 1880s–1890s depict two grocery stores and a few modest dwellings, but there is no way to know which, if any, of those structures dated back to the 18th century.

Again, to be clear, “Mitchelltown” is a tongue-in-cheek nickname with no historical basis, but it is interesting to ponder whether the Mitchells of the late 18th and early 19th centuries had a name in mind for their “small town” across the creek from Laureltown. If asked, they certainly would not have identified Rosemont, the mills,



*Pomeroy & Beers Atlas, 1868.*

the tavern, the Presbyterian meeting house, and the cluster of dwellings and outbuildings north of the creek as being part of Barkley Townsend’s venture. It was not only the creek that separated the two towns; Laureltown was established in Little Creek Hundred, but the Mitchells’ holdings were largely in Broad Creek Hundred at a time when the hundreds had much greater legal and political significance than they do today. (Consider the twin towns of Seaford and Blades, which also developed in different hundreds on opposite sides of the Nanticoke River.) Perhaps it was the lack of a name—or one that stuck, anyway—which resulted in the gradual swallowing of the little community by Laureltown. Today the neighborhood is sometimes called Brooklyn, or, more often, North Laurel. 🌿



*Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1885.  
Library of Congress.*



## Don Ward to speak at society's spring dinner, March 22<sup>nd</sup>

The Laurel Historical Society's upcoming spring dinner, scheduled for **Saturday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>**, will feature a book signing and presentation by author and society member Don Ward.

Don grew up in Sussex County on a small farm near Carey's Church and Camp about five miles west of Millsboro. He is the son, grandson, and great-grandson of sharecropping farmers, all of whom lived within a few miles of his homeplace. After graduating from Millsboro High School and East Carolina College, Don taught physics and chemistry at Millsboro High School. In 1968, he became the last principal of that school. In 1991, he retired as Supervisor of Instruction from the Indian River School District. Upon the retirement of his wife, Anne, in 2000, they embarked on numerous world travel experiences lasting almost a quarter of a century and visiting more than one hundred countries and every continent. In 2019, Don published a history of Carey's Church and Camp entitled *Hope and History*.

Don's most recent publication is his autobiography, entitled *My Journey*, drawn from material collected over the last seven decades. Copies will be available for a \$20 donation to the Laurel Historical Society. Don will share memories of times spent with his grandfather, visits to local country stores, attending school in Millsboro, and traveling around the world. In addition, he will share several antique items of interest from the area, and some of his favorite photos. 🌿



**Saturday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>  
6:00 p.m.**

**St. Philip's Church Hall  
600 S. Central Avenue  
Laurel, Del.**



Please mail this form with \$45 per attendee to the Laurel Historical Society, P. O. Box 102, Laurel, DE, 19956. Questions? Contact George Denney at 302-745-1963.



Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_



# Old News

## A Lively Old Lady.

LAUREL, Del., Feb. 16.—Mrs. Jennie Carmine celebrated her 110th birthday. She is quite hearty and does her housework.

## Captured a Seal.

LAUREL, Del., Feb. 16.—A large seal was captured on the beach at Ocean City by one of the crew of the life saving station.

*The Buffalo Evening News,*  
Buffalo, New York  
February 16, 1893

## QUEER DISEASE AT LAUREL.

### Grip Also Has Been Epidemic for Two Weeks.

Special Despatch "The Morning News."

LAUREL, Del., Dec. 14.—La Grippe has been epidemic here for the past two weeks. Although it was in an unusually severe form no deaths have as yet resulted. Whole families have been affected at a time.

There are also many victims of an unknown disease. It makes its appearance in the throat, similar to diphtheria, but other symptoms are very much like scarlet fever, though not so severe.

## Queer Disease Among Chickens.

Special to "The Morning News."

LAUREL, Del., Dec. 14.—A strange disease is killing chickens by the scores in this section.

## Big Hogs About Laurel.

Special to "The Morning News."

LAUREL, Del., Dec. 14.—More hogs have been killed in this community this month than for years. They are unusually large, too. A hog weighing under 400 pounds dressed is considered small.

*The Morning News,* Wilmington, Del.  
December 15, 1897

## HARDWARE EMPORIUM.

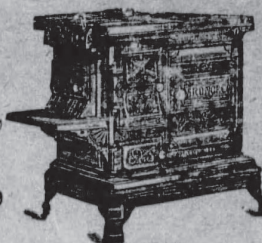
## WOOTTEN \* BROS. STOVES,

HEATERS  
and RANGES,

Tin Roofing,

SPOUTING.

## Tin and Sheet Iron Work



Of all kinds done at shortest notice, in the most workmanlike manner and at most reasonable prices. Satisfaction guaranteed.

—At the old stand—

DELAWARE AVE. and MARKET ST. LAUREL

## Plain Facts For The People.

Jas. W. Melvin, Laurel, Del.

In presenting our advertisement to the people, we desire to impress upon all that after two years of legitimate business we come now to the front, more than ever determined to please our customers and guaranteeing full value for every cent you spend in our store. It is our aim to maintain our established reputation:

THE LEADING BUTCHER! THE LEADING GROCER!

Our line of fresh meats is always up to the high standard that has made them popular in the past, while the price is in keeping with the hard times. Our grocery department offers special advantages to close cash buyers, for we fully realize that freshness, quality and low price are essential to business success.

LOOK OUT SOON FOR A CHANGE IN OUR ADVERTISEMENT

And keep your eyes open on our store for the year 1896 will show you some big surprises. We are always glad to see you and will give prompt and careful attention to your wants. JAMES W. MELVIN, Central Avenue.

Opposite the Laurel House, Laurel, Delaware.

## HEALTH BETTER THAN RICHES!

At this season of the year more than at any other the human system should be carefully guarded against disease. Build up now and be ready to withstand the rigors of hot weather and long days of toil.

Pure Medicines, Low Prices.

We have made a big cut in the prices of many standard drugs. Here are a few of the prices:—Johnston's Sarsaparilla, quart bottles, for \$1.00; Genuine Liquid Malt Extract, 25 cents per bottle; Emulsion Cod Liver Oil, same size as Scott's \$1.00 bottle, only 75 cents; 2 grain Quinine Pills, 25 cents per 100, \$2.00 per 1000; Bronchial Troches, 15 cents; worm syrup, 10 cents; worm lozengers, 10 cents; Bromo Celery, 3 for 20 cents; Compound Syrup Hypophosphites, 75 cents; Kenney's Headache Tablets, 8c. box. Other drugs proportionately cheap.

Johns' Celebrated Paints.

These are very superior ready mixed paints and we sell them at \$1.60 per gallon. Can you beat it? Try our Gilt Edge shoe polish, 20 cents a package.

LAMPS, TOILET ARTICLES, ETC.—we have a very complete line of these goods at prices that are popular, and in fact, anything usually found in a first class drugstore. Details are tedious, call and examine the goods.

## L. KENNEY,

LAUREL, DELAWARE.

*The Sussex Countian and Laurel Gazette,*  
Laurel, Del.  
October 24, 1896



# Our 2024-2025 Donors

as of  
12/31/24

## RECORDS' POND — \$10,000+

Paul & Pat Downes  
Sharon McDonald

## TRAP POND — \$5,000 - \$9,999

Austin F. Okie

## PORTSVILLE POND — \$250 - \$499

Marlene Collins  
Mary D. Cross  
Randy & Kathy Hill  
Doug & Edna Marvil  
Joyce Walmsley Pepper  
Chris & Crystal Slavens  
Billie Jane Wheatley

Thank  
you!

## CHIPMAN'S POND — \$1,000 - \$4,999

Ned & Norma Jean Fowler  
Karl & Triss Holland  
Randy & Ann Lee  
Gary Leslie  
O'Neal's Antiques  
Matt & Ashlee Parker  
Don Phillips  
Vern & Maggie Proctor  
Beverly Smith  
Donald & Anna Ward

## TRUSSUM POND — \$500 - \$999

Activ Pest Solutions  
Kendal T. Jones  
Danny & Mary LeCates  
Wash 'N Vac  
Blair Whaley & Amy Lowe

## HORSEY'S POND: \$100 - \$249

American Legion Post 19  
Charlotte Baker  
Robert & Deborah Bethards  
Denise Crowe  
Woody & Sharon Disharoon  
Wendy Dolby  
Jerry Eller & Fay Ellis Jones-Eller  
Blanche Hitchens  
Randy & Kathy Hitchens  
Mary Jones  
Linda Justice  
Lynn Lyburn  
Gregg & Elizabeth Milo  
Marsha Murphy  
Dr. Gary & Loretta Owens  
Wilfred & Monica Ponton  
Brian Seeba & Ann Davis  
Tom & Joy Slavens  
Dave Smith Exterminating

## HORSEY'S POND, *continued*

Cindy Whaley  
Matthew & Eva Whaley  
Gary White  
Janet Windsor  
Thomas & Mona Wright  
Jim Yori

## TUSOCK POND: \$25 - \$99

William Acker  
James & Nancy Brock  
William & Carlene Campbell  
Edwin Connor  
Virginia Coxé  
Nancy Smith  
Sierra Spicer-Zimmerman  
Bob & Lauretta Thompson  
Penny Ward

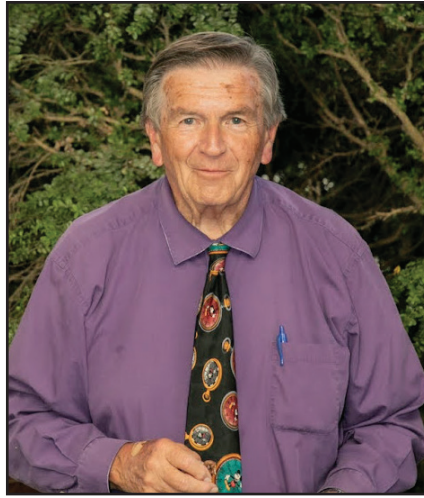


P. O. Box 102  
Laurel, DE 19956

Annual Appeal

CATEGORY	LEVEL	SELECT YOUR LEVEL OF SUPPORT
Records' Pond	\$10,000+	_____
Trap Pond	\$5,000 - \$9,999	_____
Chipman's Pond	\$1,000 - \$4,999	_____
Trussum Pond	\$500 - \$999	_____
Portsville Pond	\$250 - \$499	_____
Horsey's Pond	\$100 - \$249	_____
Tussock Pond	\$25 - \$99	_____

It's never too late to give! Please mail your 2024-2025 donation to the address shown above, or you can make a donation by visiting our website at [laureldehistoricalsociety.org](http://laureldehistoricalsociety.org) and clicking on the Donate button.



## Phillips House Preview

Local officials, society members, and interested members of the community got a chance to tour the society's new project, the George Phillips House on Central Avenue, on Friday, September 13th. Mayor John Shwed and State Representative Tim Dukes were among those in attendance. Complimentary wine and a spread of charcuterie and cheeses were served. *Photos courtesy of Paula Shannon.* 🌿



**Welcome our  
new members!**

Sandra S. Williams  
Jeanne Dennis  
Stacey Stump  
Robert Williams  
Amanda Lowe-Whaley





*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)



## LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2025 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: \_\_\_\_\_





P. O. Box 102  
Laurel, DE 19956

*Please join us at our annual meeting on Sunday, January 19th, 2 o'clock, at Abbott's on Broad Creek.*

# **It's time to renew your membership!**

Please complete and mail in the enclosed membership renewal form,  
or bring it to our annual meeting at Abbott's on January 19th.\*

Forms are also available online at **[laureldehistoricalsociety.org](http://laureldehistoricalsociety.org)**.

\*Excluding lifetime members.