



Fall 2021

NEWSLETTER

P. O. Box 102  
Laurel, DE 19956

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

## Work Continues at the Hitchens Homestead



VOLUNTEERS GOT THEIR HANDS—and the rest of their bodies—dirty at the Hitchens Homestead during the course of two productive work days at the property.

On July 17th, a group of nine people gathered at the house and tackled the south porch and bathroom. Both ceilings were removed, allowing further exploration of this portion of the house and the elusive piazza.

On August 3rd, ten volunteers strategically removed drywall and insulation under the guidance of Ned Fowler. Shawn Larrimore and Patrick Vanderslice (top right) literally brought the house down—or at least part of it—with crowbars and sledgehammers. After three hours, the workers were able to confirm the location of the piazza roof line against the east exterior wall of the meal room.



The society plans to continue to investigate, and eventually restore, the 143-year-old house. Many hands make light work, and all are welcome to participate. Future work days will be announced as they are scheduled.

2022 will see the return of the Hoedown at Hitchens Homestead, first held in 2019 and postponed during the pandemic. 🌸

**IN THIS ISSUE:** News, Yuletide at Rosemont, local murals, new members, upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, Centenary phone books, & more!

# President's Corner

by George Denney

WITH THE HOLIDAY SEASON rapidly approaching, your board has been busy preparing for Yuletide at Rosemont! Read all about it on pages 3-5. This event promises to be one of the highlights of the year, so don't miss it. The story of how the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and the Laurel Historical Society have cooperated to make the restoration of Rosemont possible is a tribute to the commitment both organizations share in this important venture. I would like to acknowledge the work of both Ned Fowler and Brian Shannon, who have spearheaded this project.

There are a variety of tasks which need to be addressed in preparation for the Yuletide event. We have selected **November 20th** as the date for a volunteer work day at Rosemont. Tasks will include yard work such as raking, pulling weeds, and general housework. We'll also have a team of carpenters complete a major installation inside the house. Please join us at 8:00 a.m. as we begin celebrating our first holiday season in the oldest home in Laurel. It will be open on three Sundays in December, so the public will enjoy, for the first time ever, the splendor and history that



*George Denney and Shawn Larrimore take a well-deserved break during a work day at the Hitchens Homestead. Courtesy of Paula Shannon.*

is Rosemont. In addition, work continues at the Hitchens Homestead, the Cook House, and with other projects. Stay tuned for additional opportunities to volunteer.

We are already looking forward to 2022 and planning a series of events, beginning with our annual meeting in January. One or more bus trips may be organized, and the popular Hoedown at Hitchens Homestead will return next fall. More details will be announced in our winter newsletter.

Once again, it is time to begin sending our annual appeal request. Please remember, your gift is what enables the historical society to reach our goals and achieve our mission to preserve the rich history and culture of Laurel. 🌸

## Central Ave Bridgetender's House Comes Home



*Back in Laurel after many years in eastern Sussex.*

WITH THE CONSTRUCTION of the new Central Avenue drawbridge in 1923, each of Laurel's four bridges could be opened to allow for ships sailing into or out of port. Some brought lumber from the Carolinas to Marvil Package or the raw materials Valliants used to manufacture fertilizer. Others carried local timber, output from our fruit and vegetable canneries, and Marvil baskets to northern markets. But these bridges had to be opened each and every time and someone had to initiate the process. Consequently, bridgetender's houses were built to wait out the arrival or departure of ships in all kinds of weather.

Thanks to the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, the original Central Avenue bridgetender's house has recently been moved back to Laurel after having spent many years doing duty on the Mispillion River in eastern Sussex County. It will be restored and eventually be on display aside the Poplar Street bridge, where a similar structure once stood. 🌸 — Ned Fowler

# Locally Sourced: Laurel Native to Prepare Yuletide Feast at Rosemont

*Join Chef Matthew Whaley on Saturday, December 4, for a holiday culinary experience as we celebrate the revitalization of Laurel and restoration of Rosemont.*

IT STARTED WITH the 2-2-2 special at Britt's Dutch Inn, but over the last two decades, Matthew Whaley has built a career as a professional chef spanning the Eastern Shore's ocean resorts, the James Beard House in New York City and high-end restaurants in major metropolitan areas.

Matthew Whaley, son of Cindy and Terry Whaley, grew up in Laurel. Before graduating from Laurel High School in 2001, his culinary career began at the intersection of Central Avenue and Oak Lane Drive when he was hired as a bus boy his freshman year. Like many Laurel teens, his first job entailed cleaning tables and the salad bar, surrounded by Bulldogs memorabilia—including that of his grandfather, Laurel's Thomas Whaley. By the time he turned 16, he started working in the kitchen under the supervision of Ms. Brenda, gaining his first experience in how to "work on a line" and cook efficiently in a restaurant setting.

During college, Matt spent summers cooking at the beach, eventually becoming lead expeditor at J/R's, "the place for ribs" in Ocean City, Md. From there, he went on to his first management position at the West Ocean City Green Turtle, where he would work for several years until he was hired as a grill cook at Nebula, his first fine dining restaurant (and what would become Liquid Assets' dining room, one of Ocean City's top culinary destinations). At Nebula, in his early twenties, his passion for cooking progressed; he gained experience contributing to the restaurant's prix fixe menu and worked his way to sous chef—until the restaurant's executive chef offered an opportunity to join him in revamping a restaurant in Lancaster, Pa.

As one of the oldest, continuously operating steak restaurants in the U.S., Lancaster's Stockyard Inn was once owned by President James Buchanan. Working within the historic kitchen—with original hardwood floors—Matt perfected how to hand cut and trim steaks and chops. After successfully redesigning the Stockyard's menu, Matt was approached to help open a new upscale, casual restaurant in downtown Lancaster called Fenz. There, Matt would be involved with every aspect of building a kitchen from scratch, starting from the initial construction. Later, it was



at Fenz that Matt would receive a call from the owner of Nebula, asking him to return to Ocean City as head chef at the newly renovated Liquid Assets, which was being overhauled to include a wine bar and bistro restaurant.

For the next five years, Matt worked as Liquid Assets' executive chef, overseeing all food preparation and client presentations, and managing and training a kitchen staff of 18. Most notably, he developed many of the menu items that remain a feature today, including the "secret recipe" house made doughnuts. In 2013, with support from Liquid Assets' owner, Matt decided it was time for a career leap. He moved to New York City and would soon spend time "staging" (the culinary equivalent of interning) at restaurants across lower Manhattan.

In New York, Matt would go on to work in the West Village as chef de cuisine at Louro, a modern American restaurant from Chef David Santos, known for his Portuguese-inflected take on contemporary American cooking, as well as chef de partie at L'Artusi, a Michelin-rated Italian restaurant where he was accountable for daily pasta making.



In 2015, after reconnecting with his Laurel High School classmate and now wife, Eva Fowler Whaley, Matt moved to Washington, DC, where he worked across a variety of settings. This included catering dinners for the embassies of Belgium, Estonia and Spain, hosting a private event attended by members of the Obama family, and developing and leading the on-site prepared foods menu for the Organic Butcher of McLean, a full-service butcher shop.

As executive sous chef at Centrolina in CityCenter DC, Matt supervised 15+ line cooks and kitchen staff at the seasonal Italian restaurant and market, which was nominated as upscale casual restaurant of the year by the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington and named the top Italian restaurant by Washingtonian magazine. Matt also worked closely with Centrolina's chef owner to open a fast-casual sister restaurant, Piccolina, featuring a wood-fire kitchen.

After working in restaurants for more than 20 years, in 2019, Matt decided to pursue a new craft within the

industry by taking a position at Waypoint Food Brokers. Since then, he's learned the ins and outs of the broker business by serving as the sales force connection to major food manufacturers, providing recipe and menu solutions to drive increased revenue and working with chefs to source ingredients, stock products with broadline distributors, and provide sustainable products that benefit farmers and restaurants alike. In addition to helping clients navigate new realities, throughout the pandemic he has virtually managed and brokered large volume accounts, including with Chef José Andrés' World Central Kitchen.

Today, Matt lives in Rockville, Md., with his wife Eva and four-month old daughter Everleigh. As a member of the Laurel Historical Society, he is excited to provide a curated tasting menu for "Yuletide at Rosemont" on December 4, 2021.

Tickets are available to the public and may be purchased at [laureldehistoricalsociety.org](http://laureldehistoricalsociety.org). Please contact George Denney for additional information at 302-745-1963. 🍁



*Courtesy of Crystal Slavens.*

Recently the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation installed a beautiful sign on the front lawn at Rosemont, Laurel's oldest residence and the former home of Governor Nathaniel Mitchell. The design is consistent with the Laurel Historical Society's branding, and, along with a similar sign at the nearby Hitchens Homestead, serves to inform passersby that exciting things are happening along Broad Creek.

Although it is not known exactly when Rosemont was built, the approximate date of circa 1769 acknowledges local traditions which say the house was built in the 1760s, as well as the fact that John Mitchell purchased the land (then vacant) in November of 1768. In its heyday, Rosemont was the mansion house of a 2,500-acre plantation on the outskirts of a young and growing Laurel.



The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation  
and The Laurel Historical Society  
Present

## *Yuletide at Rosemont*

121 Delaware Ave. Laurel, Delaware  
December 4, 2021  
Join Us Between  
5:00 and 9:00 p.m.

**Laurel native Chef Matthew Whaley  
will provide a locally-sourced Mid-Atlantic tasting menu,  
creating a holiday culinary experience like no other.**

Fine Wine & Live Music  
\$100.00 per person  
Tickets Limited

With a distinguished record in the catering and food distribution industry, Chef Matt's background has taken him full circle from his tenure as executive chef at Ocean City, MD's top restaurant, Liquid Assets, to New York City, where he cooked at Michelin star restaurants and the James Beard House, as well as, Washington, DC's premier restaurant destinations. Join us for an evening of food and festivities as we celebrate the revitalization of Laurel and restoration of Rosemont.

**Please contact George Denney for tickets or additional information  
at (302) 745-1963. Tickets may be paid for by check written to the  
Laurel Historical Society at P.O. Box 102, Laurel, DE 19956  
or pay online at [www.laureldehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.laureldehistoricalsociety.org)**

**Reserve tickets by November 5, 2021**

# Early Depictions of Rosemont

by Chris Slavens

AS LAUREL'S OLDEST and most important home, Rosemont has made a number of appearances on surveyors' plats over the centuries. In the early years it was common for a surveyor to draw an icon of a house in its approximate location on his handdrawn map of a property; not a literal depiction, and not to scale (typically the house is enlarged in relation to the rest of the map). Yet it was also common for the artist to customize the icon to some degree, particularly if the house was a large one. Comparing and contrasting these simple illustrations of various houses from around the area—many of which predate the invention of photography—can be interesting and instructive. (That might be a topic for a future article.)

It can be equally interesting and instructive to examine different depictions of the same house, especially when that house still stands today. Rosemont offers such an opportunity, appearing on plats in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The earliest known example dates to 1799. It is simple and crude, because it is one of many details on a map depicting nearby roads. The house is labeled "Mitchell's House," and appears to have an overabundance of stylized chimneys. Technically, the house belonged to the Mitchell family at this time, as George Mitchell had just died and his brother, Nathaniel, would not buy his siblings' shares of the property until 1808.

The house made another appearance in 1823, a decade after Nathaniel's death. The most obvious discrepancy between the illustration and the actual house is the absence of the front porch and its grand columns. Whether the

surveyor omitted them for the sake of simplicity, or they were constructed later, is an open question. Some windows are missing, but the layout is otherwise correct, and the door frame is intriguing. Another house on the same map is shown with a simple rectangular door, suggesting that the artist captured a unique detail in this case.

The property was surveyed and plotted yet again in 1835. The door and windows are even more simplified, yet it is clear that we are looking at the same house. Once again there are no columns.

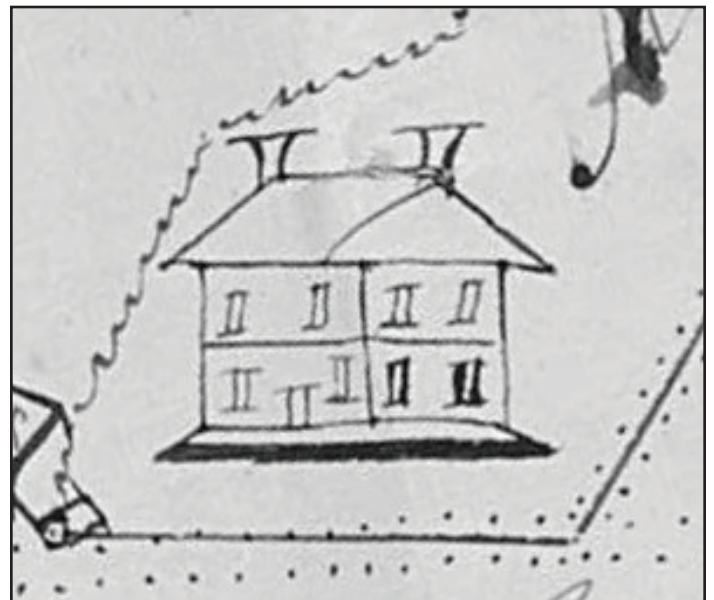
In addition to their basic representations of Rosemont, these historic maps shed light on other interesting details such as the locations of nearby fields, treelines, and roads, helping us to visualize the once-rural property before the development of north Laurel. We have only begun to scratch the surface of the long and fascinating history of this incredible 18th-century mansion, and it is going to be an exciting journey as we dig deeper and learn more. ✨



"Mitchell's House" in 1799.



The late Nathaniel Mitchell's mansion house in 1823. Orphans Court records.



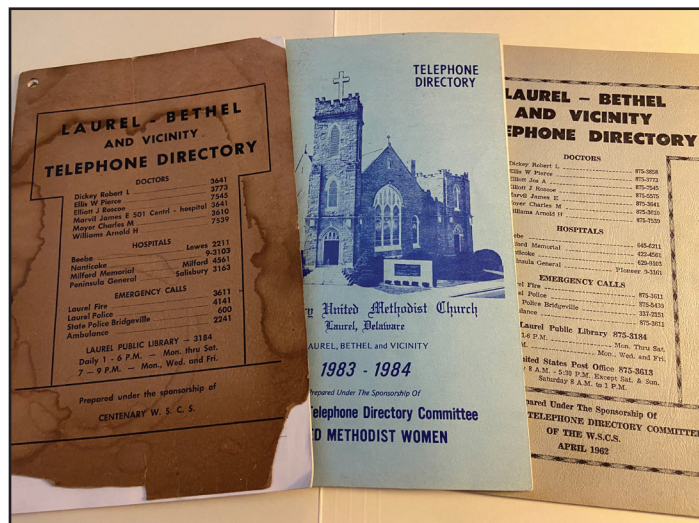
A similar depiction in 1835. Orphans Court records.

# Collections Corner

by Norma Jean Fowler

SOMETIMES THE MOST ORDINARY items can reveal the most interesting history. Such is the case with the humble Centenary Church telephone directory. No longer published, these little books were distributed to households from the 1950s to at least 2015. We have about 10 of them, covering a variety of years. Now that so many folks use cell phones, how can these old books be of use to an historian? Well, let me tell you a story.

We had a man visit the society from California a few years ago. He had come east for a Washington, DC, conference and took a side trip to Laurel in search of the gravesite of the father he had never known. His parents had divorced when he was a child and he had grown up not knowing too much other than his father was buried here. He was just searching for any information that would tell him more about the man his father was. There was not much in our records that could help him. After exhausting our records with no success, we looked into our collection of old phone books (c. 1950) and there was a listing for his father, with both phone number and address. We were then able to show him where his father had lived at that time.



Based on that location, we realized he had been a neighbor Mrs. Zora Riggin, mother of the late LHS member, Lee Riggin. A brief phone call to Lee assured us that he remembered the young man's father and would be happy to share some memories with his son! This California boy spent an evening talking by phone to Lee and went back home with new insight into the father he had lost. All because of a little Centenary Church phone book. Why are we telling this story? To show you that even outdated information can still be helpful. If you come across any of those phonebooks, please donate them to us. In fact, before you throw out things, give us the chance to see if they might just have some more stories left in them! 🌸

## Upcoming Events at Trap Pond State Park

### Bethesda Church & Cemetery Tour

October 7th—4:00 p.m.

*Long before Trap Pond became a park, people lived around the pond in homes, churches and communities. Learn about some of these past lives as we tour the church grounds and cemetery.*

### Fall Wagon Rides

Oct. 2nd, 9th, & 16th; Nov. 13th & 20th—4:00 p.m.

*Meet at the camp store for a 40-minute wagon ride through the fields and forest around Trap Pond. Wagon rides begin at the camp store.*



### Youth Fishing Tournament

October 10th—8:00 - 11:00 a.m.

*Ages 15 and under. Meet at the boathouse for free fishing instruction and other activities. Equipment will be provided, or bring your own.*

Call the nature center at 302-875-5163 for more details, or visit [destateparks.com](http://destateparks.com).

# Mural, Mural on the Wall...

by Norma Jean Fowler

WHO'S THE FAIREST of them all? It just might be the new "Unity Mural" that is currently being painted on the gymnasium of the former Paul Laurence Dunbar School. Spearheaded by the grassroots group known as "One Laurel," the mural will encourage a greater sense of community among Laurel's diverse residents. A call went out to the students in Laurel schools for ideas, and one image was selected to represent our town. Lily Hearn, age 15, is the artist behind the design. Presently, it is in the beginning stages, but will be lovely when finished.

While the unity mural is a new effort, there have been other murals in Laurel over the years. One that easily comes to mind is the "Scenes of Laurel" mural painted on the side of the old Galco building by noted Delaware artist Jack Lewis. Financed by local donations, the effort was spearheaded by the Laurel Historical Society in 1993. High school art students also helped with this painting. Unfortunately the Galco building was purchased by the Laurel Senior Center and, despite local efforts, was demolished in 1998 for much needed parking space.

Fortunately, two other historic murals still exist today, both with connections to the Laurel Historical Society. Sometime in the 1990s Norval "Shoddy" Johnson, buildings and grounds director for the school district, called then-LHS president Ned Fowler to see if the historical society would be interested in an old mural that, for years, had been stored backstage at Dunbar School. It would turn out to be a Sussex County rural scene, painted by a former art teacher in the district. Marie Wheeler, fresh out of college, was the elementary art teacher for the 1954-55 and 1955-56 school years. Due to its size, the society offered the mural to the Town of Laurel for the newly renovated council chambers, where it still can be seen today on the north wall. Little else is known about Miss Wheeler, but

her slice of 1950s life can still be enjoyed today. Can you share have any memories of Miss Wheeler or her mural?

Another long lost treasure was found, not too long ago, when the society was offered the opportunity to retrieve some excess furnishings from the decommissioned middle school. High on the wall of the biology lab, and hidden beneath several layers of decorative paper, a student mural of the human digestive system, c.1963-64, was discovered.



*The new unity mural, designed by 15-year-old local artist Lily Hearn.*



*Rural scene painted by former elementary art teacher Marie Wheeler, now in the possession of the Town of Laurel.*



The signature revealed the artist to be none other than our own society member and benefactor, Beverly Warrington Smith. How many generations of students had seen it before it went “undercover?” Do you remember it?

So, as they say, beauty *is* in the eye of the beholder. Which of these murals do YOU think is the fairest of them all? Let us know if these murals jog any new memories of life in Laurel! 🌸



*1960s student mural discovered in the old middle school.*



*"Scenes of Laurel" on the old Galco building, demolished in 1998.*

## **Welcome our new members:**

Charles & Susan Salkin  
Dover

Charles Ellis  
South Orleans, MA

D. Blair Ellis  
Yorktown, VA

Cynthia Cain  
Mackville, KY

Membership / renewal forms  
are available online at  
**[laureldehistoricalsociety.org](http://laureldehistoricalsociety.org)**.

The Laurel Historical Society's newsletter is published triannually in May, September, and January. Please submit articles, photographs, suggestions, or questions to Chris Slavens, newsletter editor, at [chrisslavens@gmail.com](mailto:chrisslavens@gmail.com).

# Three More Reasons to Give

by Don Phillips

IT'S THAT TIME OF THE YEAR when we all decide what organizations, charities, and community projects are worthy of our financial support in this 2021 calendar year. This has been a challenging year for your Laurel Historical Society and our community, and I'd like to take a few moments to reinforce the need for all of our members to continue to strongly financially support our beloved organization.

There are three important new reasons I would like to ask you to recommit your LHS financial support, and, if your circumstances permit, to even consider increasing your level of giving.

- COVID has dealt even strong organizations like our society unforeseen blows. Our normal repeating expenses like utilities, insurance, and maintenance continue, while our income-producing events and giving opportunities were hard hit by our inability to meet in person and the economic uncertainty of this past "lost year." We have fixed costs that must be covered to protect and service our valuable properties and collections.

- We are working with the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation to preserve and restore two of Laurel's most iconic historic and architectural sites: The Hitchens Homestead with its Gothic Revival house built in 1878, and Rosemont, Laurel's oldest home, built circa 1769, once owned by Governor Nathaniel Mitchell and now owned by the LRC. Our two well-established non-profits are partnering to unite the skills and strengths of both organizations in this bold undertaking: The LHS brings its 44-year historic, architectural, educational, staging, and educational background to the table; the LRC likewise adds its successful 26-year record of funding, business and property management, grant requests, and partnerships with both private and government organizations, to the partnership. Together, we will continue to revitalize Laurel while celebrating and preserving the town's rich history.

- Obviously, projects of this size and scope will demand generous new funding. We will be working continuously to obtain grants, gifts, and financial support to make these two community restoration projects successful in the years to come. When we, both the LHS and the LRC, make our requests for supportive funding from foundations, charities, government, and private organizations, **we must always be able to preface our requests for assistance and sponsorship with this statement:** "We the local residents, citizens, organizations, and businesses of Laurel have already provided broad support of our own—our financial gifts, our time, and our talents—to these projects celebrating our 250 years

of history, heritage, and investment in our community and its people. Now, we ask for your assistance."

By making our annual commitments to the Laurel Historical Society—our donations, our time and hard work, and our leadership—we tell all of our potential partners that we care for our community, and we back this up not only with words, but by pledging broad, strong, and continuing support to ensure these projects succeed. Please be generous in your support. 🌸

## Free Money Available!

A little-known and nearly effortless way to support the Laurel Historical Society is to shop on Amazon—something most of us already do all the time. Through its easy-to-use AmazonSmile program, the online retailer donates a small percentage of eligible purchases to the nonprofit organization of the shopper's choice. You can ensure that your future purchases benefit the society by completing three steps:

1. Go to **smile.amazon.com** and log into your existing Amazon account.
2. Go to Your Account and, under Settings, click on "Your AmazonSmile."
3. Add a charity. Search for the Laurel Historical Society and select "Laurel Historical Society Inc, Laurel, DE" from the list of options. Amazon will save your choice.

*Note: You must shop at smile.amazon.com to participate in the program. Purchases made on Amazon's main site will not result in a contribution.*

**amazon**smile  
You shop. Amazon gives.

# Old News

From the *Morning News* (Wilmington),  
October 29, 1917:

**Laurel Elects Committeemen.**  
LAUREL, Oct. 28.—At the Democratic primaries here yesterday the following county committeemen were elected: Charles E. Wooten, first of the fifth; William E. Valliant, third of the fifth, and B. Guy Wheatley, of the fourth representative district.

**Evergreens and Holly Plentiful**  
LAUREL, Oct. 28.—Evergreens and holly are reported to be more plentiful in the woods around Laurel than for several years. Although the holly is of excellent color the red berries are not so plentiful.

**Laurel Boy Scouts Active.**  
LAUREL, Oct. 28.—About \$50,000 worth of Liberty Loan Bonds were taken here last week, of which amount the Laurel Boy Scouts sold \$12,400 worth.

Retrieved from newspapers.com.

From the *Journal-Every Evening* (Wilmington),  
November 16, 1949:

## Laurel Inn Accessories Called Best in Nation

LAUREL, Del., Nov. 16—(Special).—At a recent convention of representatives of the American Lace Paper Company held in Washington, D. C., the Dutch Shoppe, on Route 13 at the southern entrance to Laurel, was honored, by having its new paper doilies selected as the best in the United States in use by restaurants and hotels.

These are in daily use at the Dutch Shoppe, and they are so outstanding that the American Lace Paper Company is using it in connection with its national advertising. The Dutch Shoppe is owned and operated by two brothers, Ed and George Northam.

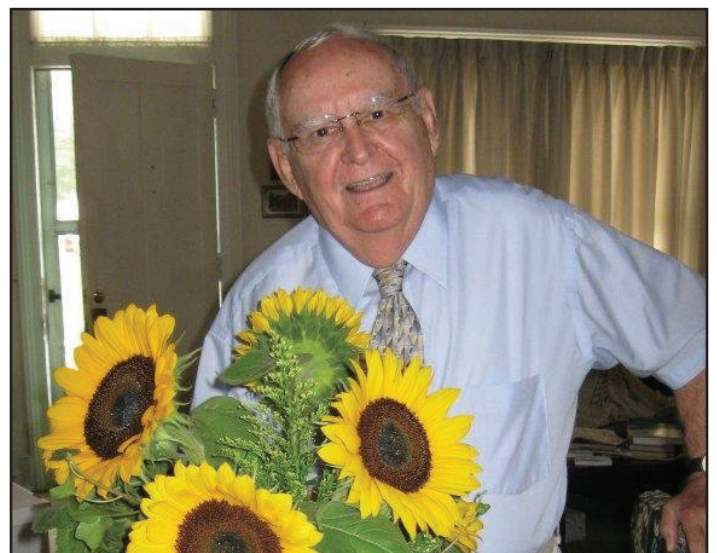
## All Clean, No Green at the Cook House

The Laurel Historical Society thanks Jared Allen, owner of JA Pressure Washing, for giving the porch and chairs at the Cook House a much-needed cleaning, free of charge.



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## Birthday Boy



Happy belated birthday to Kendal Jones, who turned 95 on September 1st!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

November 20th	•	Work Day at Rosemont	•	121 Delaware Ave	•	8:00 a.m.
December 4th	•	Yuletide at Rosemont	•	121 Delaware Ave	•	5:00 - 9:00 p.m.
December 5th	•	Open House at Rosemont	•	121 Delaware Ave	•	1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
December 12th	•	Open House at Rosemont	•	121 Delaware Ave	•	1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
December 19th	•	Open House at Rosemont	•	121 Delaware Ave	•	1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
January	•	Annual Meeting	•	<i>To Be Announced</i>		

*More events in 2022 to be announced.*



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