



Spring 2021

NEWSLETTER

P. O. Box 102
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laureldehistoricalsociety.org



Society Members Rescue Historic Treasures from 18th-Century House Days Before Demolition

IN A RACE AGAINST TIME, a group of members of the Laurel Historical Society and other members of the community spent a week in mid-March salvaging materials from a previously undocumented 18th-century house slated for demolition.

After an initial investigation by a very excited Ned Fowler, a group of about twenty volunteers gathered at the house formerly located at the intersection of Laurel Road and Adams Road, approximately five miles east of Laurel, and literally tore into the old home, removing everything from doors to paneling to trim to cedar shingles.

We've devoted an unprecedented six pages of this issue to the historic treasures found in the house, including hand-painted artwork, as well as the quest to identify the earliest owners. Read all about it on pages 4 - 9. 🌿



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President's Corner

by George Denney

SPRING IS THE TIME OF REBIRTH and renewal, and so it is with the society. Now that most of the members of the board have been vaccinated for Covid-19, we have begun to hold our board meetings in person at the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation office, as well as virtually thanks to the technical prowess of Brian Shannon. We have discussed many exciting events and programs for the coming year (depending on Covid-19 restrictions) and look forward to your participation. However, since our winter newsletter, many behind-the-scenes events and activities have occurred with a smaller nucleus of society members which you will

read about in this important issue.

I have been blessed with such a thoughtful and talented board over the past several years. It has indeed been a pleasure to work with such an outstanding group of individuals. I didn't know, for example, how proficient Patrick Vanderslice, Doug Marvil, Matt Parker, and Chris Slavens were with crowbars and sledgehammers—just to mention a few. I would also like to recognize Paula Shannon for spending many hours at the house on Adams Road back in March and photo-documenting the structure's final days, from the salvage efforts through demolition.

Once again, I want to thank our members and friends who have generously given to our annual campaign. Your contributions are appropriately allocated to fixed costs such as the Cook House electric, heating, security systems, etc., and our special projects. All contributions are systematically tracked on an Excel spread sheet and reviewed monthly by the board. The accounting system was developed by Doug Marvil, who spends hours each month making certain we stay within the budget developed by the finance committee. So please remember it's never too late to make a contribution to the Laurel Historical Society.

Enjoy your newsletter! 🌿

Emily Whaley joins State Historic Preservation Office

RECENTLY the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs' State Historic Preservation Office welcomed historian/architectural historian Emily Whaley. She joins the division after work as a records clerk for the government of Sussex County, Del. where she was involved in, among other responsibilities, conducting historic-preservation research. A resident of Laurel, she graduated from Sussex Technical High School and earned a bachelor's degree in historic preservation in 2019 from the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Va. During her student days, she worked as an intern in collections management at the Laurel Historical Society, and now serves as a board member and corresponding secretary.

Whaley's responsibilities at the division include reviewing and conducting architectural surveys; reviewing nominations and project proposals for the National Register of Historic Places, historic-preservation tax credits and Certified Local Government programs; consulting with federal, state and local agencies and applicants on proposed construction projects; assisting in monitoring preservation covenants and easements; and other preservation planning work. She is based at the division's main office located at 21 The Green in Dover. 🌿



Bea Money Redeemed

by Ned Fowler

JUNE 27, 1953: 116 years of Elliott family ownership at Laurel's Rosemont had come to an end. From the time that family patriarch Meshack Elliott bought the place in 1837 to that public auction in 1953, four generations of his family had called the house on the Delaware Avenue hill home. It had dwindled in size from a 500-acre pond-and creek-front plantation to just a little over an acre, with the streets and neighboring homes of North Laurel scattered about the original acreage. Elizabeth Stevenson Collins, widow of Meshack Elliott's grandson, John Meshack Collins, was faced with moving to smaller, more affordable quarters with her daughter, Mary Catherine. She down-sized and bought the home standing today on the western edge of the Centenary Church parking lot on West Market Street.

Nell, as she was called by her family, had grown up at Chanceford, on Federal Street in Snow Hill, Maryland. It was (and still is) the town's most prestigious residence. She had come to Laurel in 1904 upon her marriage to John Collins and moved into Rosemont and the top of Laurel society. In later years, daughter Mary Catherine, when asked about what her father did, responded that "he was a gentleman." We would probably interpret that by saying he never worked a day in his life. Family fortunes, sadly enough, were to take reverses over time and the family was forced to sell off, little by little, what we know today as everything from the pond to North Central Avenue, to Five Points, to the railroad tracks, and beyond. As well as parting with family heirlooms at public vendue, Mrs. Collins peddled things to the State, the Smithsonian, the duPonts, and just about anybody else who would lend her an ear. Things got so desperate that she even sold Rosemont's ancient boxwood right out of the yard. As much as she treasured her family's heritage and home, Collins did everything within her power, meager as it was, to provide for Mary Catherine after she was gone.

The buyers of the property that day were Milton and Beatrice Yerkes. The house brought \$6,250. Yerkes owned a feed and seed store on the site of what some of us remember as Taylor Hardware, on the southeast corner of Market and Poplar Streets. He was president of the Laurel School Board, owned farmland and rental properties, and was a director of the Peoples National Bank. Mrs. Yerkes was a clubwoman, with a reputation for doing things "right." In 1957, three years after her husband's sudden death, when she was president of the Delaware Federation of Women's Clubs, Bea re-married and became Mrs. William R. Money. Her grandson Milton Nagel tells of when he

turned sixteen and got to cruise around in her mile-long, shark-finned green Cadillac, with the vanity tag MONEY on the back. Bea Money also was "big" in the Daughters of the American Revolution and enjoyed the prestige of living in Governor Mitchell's house. It was at Rosemont, in 1972, when she was State Regent, that the Gov. Nathaniel Mitchell Chapter of the DAR held its initial meeting.

So wouldn't you think, now that you know the story, that she would have either restored Rosemont or at least left it as it was? Heck, no. Like the 137 years of Elliotts and Collinses before her, she set about to thoroughly remodel the place like she wanted it and, in the process, nearly destroyed any original building fabric left. The rear kitchen wing was torn down and replaced by a breezeway and a two-car garage. A jalousie-windowed sunroom that looked like it should have been on Toddy's Drive-In or the Tastee-Freeze was added off the back, old doors and windows were removed or re-positioned, and new floors were installed on top of the old. Sure, in order to survive and be useful, any building has to adjust to modern times. But really? The final blow was that all seven original fireplaces, replete with fully panelled walls, were torn out and trashed. . . or so I thought.

Much to our delight, when we were cleaning up in the Rosemont garage after this past December's auction, it finally gave us a chance to climb up in the rafters. Amid garden hoses, vinyl siding, storm doors, screens, PVC piping, and kerosene heaters, there they were. . . after over something like 60 years in the garage. . . Rosemont's totally intact original 18th-century raised panel chimney breasts. Why, how, and when we may never know, but thank you Bea Money for saving some of the most important early woodwork in Southern Delaware! 🌿



Courtesy of Ned Fowler.

This Can't Be! Not in Laurel!

by Ned Fowler

MANY YEARS AGO, I went to a country auction out on Wootten Road past Trussum's Pond. Nothing exciting here, I thought. Some years later, though, I was in the market for some old doors and remembered the house, reduced by then to a shadow of its former self—with wild dogs lounging in the dirt below and the wind blowing through open doors and windows. The abandoned ruin actually shook in the breeze. Especially memorable was a rusty, old iron bed with legs going through the rotten second story floorboards to the room below. A real charmer, as today's realtors might put it. I approached the owner, who lived down the road, and eventually purchased not only four doors, but everything in-between the dirt floor and the underside of the attic roof.

In removing the doors, I detected something strange around the door frame. What anyone could see was a wall sheathed in cheap trailer paneling, but below that was a layer or three of wallpaper. Peeling back each layer got more tedious than the last until I discovered a plaster wall. Not wall board, but real plaster laid atop hand-hewn plaster laths secured with ancient nails. Yet beneath that was something yellow. What I had unearthed turned out to be a late-18th or early-19th century house fully fitted out with floor-to-ceiling vertically beaded paneling with its original paint intact. Recognizing the importance of this find, I contacted the University of Delaware's Center for Historic Architecture and Design (CHAD), which thankfully documented everything prior to historic woodwork removal and before the Hosea house was torched by an arsonist.

Over the next 40-odd years, I was fortunate enough, in bits and pieces, to have had this same experience some four or five times right here in the Laurel area: to learn first-hand how craftsmen plied their trade with unbelievably limited resources and to appreciate the beauty of the end-product created by their hands. I have been pained to witness the disregard for these once-noble structures and mourn their loss. You see, there aren't any more of them left. Go out into the countryside and look for yourselves. They're all long gone. By now, you would think that I would watch my words in making claims of something being the oldest, the only, or the last. As it has now happened once again, I was only setting myself up for eating my own words.

The phone rang on Wednesday evening, March 17. It was Kendal Jones' friend Don Ward, who was looking for some advice. He had purchased a farm out on Rt. 24 just past the turn-off for Trap Pond and had plans to raze an



Courtesy of Paula Shannon.

old house on the property. Knowing the place, like most of you, and having ridden by it zillions of times, I knew it had to be at least elderly just from the roof lines. We agreed to meet the next morning for me to check it out.

What transpired over the next few days is a complete blur. It all happened so fast. Folks in the neighborhood must have wondered what in the dickens was going on and why there was an armada of vehicles pulling in and out of the driveway. And the debris! There was so much timber cast outside that it looked like spaghetti straws pouring out of the windows. Within two days, your Laurel Historical Society members assembled like an emergency squad and put together a band of volunteers like never before. It was a motley crew of merry old (and not-so-old) men, plus a few brave ladies. There were the Sussex County preservation officer, a State architectural historian, a deed researcher from SU's Nabb Center, a Winterthur grad from UD's CHAD, and from our Laurel group a PhD, a pesticide applicator, several realtors, retired school teachers, a surveyor, and the list goes on. All told, we had about 20 volunteers from all walks of life going at the same time. President Denney called out and said you've got to see this to believe it, and they all came running. It's the first time we have ever come together so quickly for such hard work and for such a pressing matter. I hope to be proven

wrong once more, but I'll go out on a limb and say it will never happen again.

So why all the fuss? When I first walked into the house, it was probably the most horrid sight I'd ever encountered. The trash, the filth. How people (and school-age children, mind you) could have lived in this squalor only a few days before was inconceivable. The corners of rooms were littered with piles of rotting take-out food from Royal Farms, half-empty soda cans, and smelly clothes.

Whatever else they had, furniture, tvs, and all, was tossed into heaps over waist-high. I nonetheless held my nose and charged ahead, soon to forget it all for what my eyes next beheld.

It was the most magnificent, drop-dead gorgeous, 10-panel 18th-century door I had ever seen anywhere around here. What have I stumbled across, I pondered? Lo and behold, it was an 18th-century house long obscured from sight, yet hiding in plain view right on Rt. 24 at Adams Road. Like the Hosea House, so many years back, it was disguised with modern-day additions, porches, and siding. And there were more doors to follow, this time six-panel ones, plus a few battened ones. And original floor

boards, and original ceiling rafters. I'm hyperventilating by now. We could use all this at Rosemont, I thought.

Mr. Ward gave me permission to do whatever necessary to carry out my investigation so, following my experience at the Hosea House in the 1980s, we started with an inside wall partition. And, dang, right off, we struck gold. It was a fully paneled wall: this time, something only found locally on the second floor at Rosemont. Thoroughly hidden under several layers was a treasure-trove of beveled 18th-century woodwork, just perfect to re-install a long-lost interior partition in Rosemont's front entry hall. Ward began the discovery process with his crow bar, to be followed by Dan Parsons, our county historic preservation guy. By then everybody was going crazy, only to find that the entire two-story house was fully paneled from floor to ceiling. Our workers took everything they could pry loose and then some more. They even salvaged some cedar shakes from the exterior for use on the soon-to-be-restored, original Central Avenue bridgetender's house. It's recently come back to Laurel from the Milton area and will eventually be put on public display along Broad Creek next to the Poplar Street bridge.



Courtesy of Ned Fowler.



L to R: Ned Fowler, Don Ward, and Ann Ward. Courtesy of Paula Shannon.



Courtesy of Paula Shannon.



L to R: Matt Parker and Patrick Vanderslice. Courtesy of Paula Shannon.



Courtesy of Paula Shannon.



Bob Wheatley carefully removes original paneling. Courtesy of Paula Shannon.

But wait! It gets even better. Just when we thought things were winding down, we happened across (here I go again in making claims) one of the most important building “finds” anywhere around in recent years. It’s the kind of stuff at Williamsburg, Winterthur, or MESDA—certainly not in Laurel. The room we considered to have the least merit proved to actually have the most. The western wall fireplace and mantel were gone, but the northern and southern walls yielded quite a surprise. Like the rest of the house, each wall was paneled from floor to ceiling with beaded vertical boards (some up to 18” wide), but this time with its original coat of yellow ochre paint still intact. However, the real treat is a floral design painted on top of that. It’s a large rectangular area with eight floral sprays and trailing vines connected by borders of painted bell-flowers (like inlay on a piece of Federal-period furniture). The vivid colors are white, pink, blue, yellow, and green, and they’re in fabulous condition. No wonder, for they’ve probably been covered up for over 150 years. Needless to say, we worked overtime and pulled out every single piece

of it for future re-installation at one of our properties.

The painting we unsurfaced was done by an unknown classically-trained artist, perhaps a local or more likely by someone passing through. We have little doubt that it was by the same hand as the painted chimney breast originally installed in the Newbold Vinson house, which stood on the road between Trap (formerly Vinson’s) and Trussum Ponds. The woodwork from the Vinson house was apparently sold off, pulled out of its original location years ago, and moved to a Chicago-area estate, last owned by the president of Sara Lee Foods. In that case, the central panel of the chimney breast was painted with a huge bouquet of flowers, the name “Newbol Vinson,” and the date 1791. (See page 7.)

Who would have ever “thunk” it? That house on the Millsboro Road we’ve ridden by a thousand times? Circa 1791? Another Laurel treasure has fallen to dust, but at least we got to save the best of it. Thanks again to everybody whose sweat labor made it possible. 🌿

Laurel's Unknown 18th-Century Artist

by Brad Spicer

RECENTLY, THE SOCIETY WAS AFFORDED the opportunity to rescue several sections of painted panels from the now-demolished Adams House, found just off Route 24.

To identify these panels as “painted” is an understatement. When these panels were beginning to be exposed by the workers, excitement took over their efforts. They had uncovered a remarkable find . . . decorative painted embellishments of flowering dogwood framed by sprigs of dogwood and bellflowers. The pristine condition of these decorations is remarkable.

It is suggested that the artist of these decorations had exhibited some degree of formal artistic training, given the thoughtful composition of the work. The shading and highlighting mastery further supports this suggestion. The brushstrokes are controlled and help to form the structure of the blooms and leaves. Therefore, conjecture postulates that the artist was possibly an itinerant artist serving the design needs of local land owners.

Another late 18th century home in Sussex County also contained panels featuring decorative paintings. That was the home of Newbold Vinson. While the Vinson panels feature a floral feature, there are similarities to the panels found in the Adams house. The shading and highlights

of both homes show very similar accomplishments. The brushwork used in both are very similar in their execution. Also, the use of the bellflower motif in each of the artist's efforts may suggest a shared source. Finally, both homes are from the same time period and have relative physical proximity to one another. For all of these reasons, one could suggest that there is the possibility that the same artist decorated both homes with decorative features. 🌿



One of the two sets of decorated panels. Courtesy of Paula Shannon.



Close-up of artwork from the Adams house. Courtesy of Paula Shannon.



Similar artwork from Newbold Vinson's house at Trap Pond, c. 1791.

Dating the Adams Road House

by Chris Slavens

THE SHOCKING DISCOVERY of 18th-century features in a long-neglected local house just before its demolition raised many questions about the structure's history. Like, why was it never documented in any of the cultural resource surveys carried out in the neighborhood? The house was visibly old, and local historians knew it appeared on the Beers Atlas of 1868, but how had everybody forgotten or failed to recognize that it was *so* old? When was it built, and by who? What sort of people called it home?

There are a number of ways to date an old house. Some are high-tech and precise, like dendrochronology, the dating of tree ring sequences in samples of original lumber. The dating of architectural features can also be surprisingly precise; for example, the hand-wrought iron nails recovered from the oldest portions of the Adams Road house indicate that it was almost certainly built before 1800. But how much earlier?

The purpose of this article is to examine the history of the land on which the house was located in an attempt to zero in on its approximate age and learn more about its earliest residents. That history begins with the first survey of the land in 1710.

Alexander Adams and Eastwood: 1710 - 1762

For reasons that are unclear, a man named Alexander Adams had a 234-acre tract of land, located far upstream on Broad Creek, surveyed in 1710. The tract, named Eastwood, was vaguely described as being “on ye east side of one of ye branches of Broad Creek.” There is evidence that Eastwood was the English name for this forested neck, as well as the name of the tract itself. Adams' selection of this remote site in what would seem to be the proverbial middle of nowhere is a bit mysterious. So is his identity; initially he was assumed to be the Reverend Alexander Adams, who lived on the Wicomico River during this period, but subsequent records indicate that he was not. Eastwood was patented to Adams in 1723. Subsequently he acquired several other tracts which were not directly associated with Eastwood.

Oddly, Alexander Adams is missing from the Somerset County tax lists of the 1720s and 1730s. This is one of the reasons that he was incorrectly assumed to be Reverend Alexander Adams, who consistently appears on the tax lists for Wicomico Hundred. If Adams lived at Eastwood, or on one of his other tracts in the area, he should appear on the tax lists for Nanticoke Hundred. His unexplained absence is puzzling, and raises as-of-yet unanswered questions about

the use of Eastwood during this period.

Beginning in 1730 several other tracts were surveyed in the neck, which was called Wimbesocom Neck, a name of Indian origin. The intersection of today's Laurel Road (24) and Adams Road probably developed during this early period, with two crude paths going into the neck; one to the northeast (Adams Road and Phillips Hill Road) and the other to the southeast (parts of Laurel Road and Little Hill Road). This intersection could have been a convenient location for a dwelling house as early as the 1730s.

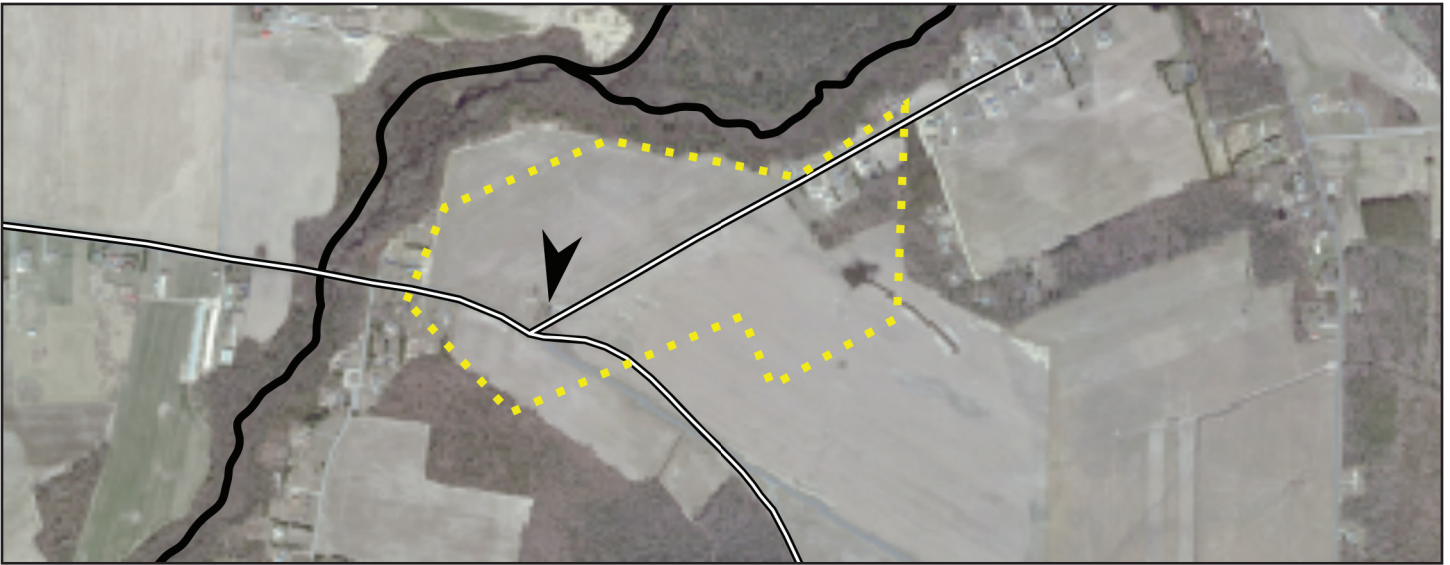
Samuel Adams: 1762 – 1772

Alexander Adams sold Eastwood to a son, Samuel Adams, on November 2, 1762. Samuel is the reason we know that Alexander was not the minister with the same name; the Reverend Alexander Adams's will does not mention a son named Samuel. Additionally, Alexander was identified as a clerk in 1762. Father and son were residents of Somerset County, indicating that neither lived at Eastwood at the time (it had been in Worcester since 1742).

As with his father, little is known about Samuel Adams or his use of the tract. He was identified as a planter in 1762, and willed the tract to his sons, Samuel and John Wittingham Adams, in 1772. The will does not mention any other tracts of land by name, and, interestingly, it states that the elder Samuel lived in Worcester County, indicating that he had moved after purchasing the land in 1762. It is tempting to conclude that he must have lived on the only tract mentioned in his will, but positive evidence is lacking.



Photo by the author.



Puah Pusey's 1792 purchase in yellow with the roads of the period and modern aerial imagery. The house site, indicated by the arrow, would have been an ideal location for a dwelling.

Samuel Adams and John W. Adams: 1772 – 1787

The younger Samuel Adams died sometime before 1787, when his brother, John Wittingham Adams, sold a 30-acre parcel to Joseph Cannon, Senior. This parcel did not include the site of the house. In 1789, Adams sold the remainder of the tract to John Timmons “the younger.”

Yet again, there is little information about the grandsons of Alexander Adams or their use of Eastwood prior to the sales in 1787 and 1789. John Wittingham Adams does not appear on the assessment list for Broad Creek Hundred in 1785, as he should have if he was living at Eastwood.

John Timmons: 1789 – 1792

John Timmons sold a 95-acre parcel of Eastwood, including the site of the house, to Puah Pusey in 1792.

Puah Pusey: 1792 – 1820s

Puah Pusey’s 1792 deed does not mention a house, but that does not mean there could not have been one. However, when Pusey purchased another parcel from Timmons in 1800, its first bounder was described as being located “on the west side of the county road leading from said Puseys house to the tub mill Bridge.” This county road was undoubtedly the Laurel Road / Little Hill Road route to the southeast, because it is known that the Tub Mill Bridge was located at Terrapin Pond. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Pusey’s house in 1800 was located at the intersection—and, indeed, was the very same house which provoked so much excitement in March of 2021.

Puah Pusey bought and sold a number of parcels of land during the following years, and was an early lot owner in nearby Laurel Town, founded circa 1789. In 1820 he owned six slaves. He appears to have died circa 1821.

Conclusions and Further Research

A conservative interpretation of the available land records suggests that Puah Pusey either bought an existing house in 1792, or built it shortly thereafter. A date of c. 1792 is wonderfully consistent with the fact that the house’s decorated paneling resembles local artwork with a firm date of 1791.

However, the land records do not rule out the possibility that the house could have been built by one of the earlier landowners. The relocation of the elder Samuel Adams from Somerset County to Worcester County between 1762 and 1772 is interesting, because Worcester included the house site during that period. Samuel *could* have lived at Eastwood during the final years of his life. Alternatively, one of the subsequent landowners—his sons, Samuel and John Adams, or John Timmons—*could* have built the house. (Of course, it would make little difference whether Timmons built the house c. 1789, or Pusey c. 1792—but it would be quite another matter if it turned out to be colonial.)

Further research may shed more light on these possibilities. Short of sending samples of the rough-hewn joists and beams off to a lab for dating (which could be done), it is possible that additional documentation will turn up.

In addition to dating the house (and, therefore, the materials which the society salvaged from it), it would be desirable to learn more about the early owners and their use of the property. The house was considerably larger than the typical local house of the period; its first owner must have been a wealthy man. What stories unfolded within its walls during more than two and a half centuries? What did this structure mean to the many people who lived in it?

We may never know for sure, but it's fun to imagine. 🌿

Keeping “Cool” in Laurel in 1910

by Norma Jean Fowler

WHILE WE ARE ENJOYING this spring weather, we all know that the dog days of summer are on their way, and that means we will be cranking up the AC and drinking plenty of cold beverages. But how did Laurel folks keep their drinks cold before refrigerators? As the Eugene O’Neill play explained, “The Ice Man Cometh!” A recent inquiry about the Crystal Ice Company came into the society last week, and started a fun adventure to track down more information on this early Laurel business.

We have long had a Waller photograph of the Crystal Ice Company and knew that it had been located on the north side Spruce St. between 5th and 6th Streets. The people identified in the photo included Richard Thawley, Harley Hickman, and Asbury Short. In the 1910 census Short is listed as a laborer in an ice plant. But that was about all. Using the Sanborn Maps and newspapers.com for reference we were able to find out a little bit more.

The first mention found on newspapers.com was from 1905 when an ice plant is mentioned as being in Laurel. Three years later, in 1908, the Acme Ice Co. of Laurel was purchased on January 25 by a company trading as the Laurel Ice Co. The manager was Thomas Riffin, Jr. The 1905 company mentioned was most likely this Acme Ice.

From the c. 1910 Waller photograph and the 1910 census we see the name painted on the wagon as Laurel Crystal Ice Co. The next notice was from July 1911 when a fire started in the smoke stack of the ice plant and burned out an 8 block area of the downtown before it was extinguished. The houses of Thomas Briner and C.W. Riffin as well as Riffin’s barn were also consumed.

The Sanborn map of 1912 shows the site as the Laurel Crystal Ice Co., which ran day and night and used coal and shavings as fuel. Equipped with electric lights, it had a 12 ton ice machine. A potato storage house was now located on the property, fronting on the Spruce St. sidewalk. Today’s old timers will remember it as a red four unit apartment house. Charles A. Hastings, Jr., was elected the manager to “succeed E. E. Riffin who has resigned.”

Sometime in early 1915 the plant shut down for repairs or updates. When manager C.A. Hastings, Jr., and engineer William Hollowell, Jr., went to re-open, they found that thieves had stolen all the brass fittings. Some things never change, and re-opening was delayed.

Two year later, in 1917, the plant was purchased by manager Charles A. Hastings, Jr., for \$2200. Shortly thereafter a notice of a price increase was published. Then just a month later, a notice in the Wilmington paper stated



Laurel Crystal Ice Co., c. 1910. Waller collection, Laurel Historical Society.

that a new charter had been filed for the Laurel Crystal Ice Co. in Wilmington DE with a capital of \$25,000. The incorporators were listed as F. D. Buck; M. L. Horthy; and K. E. Longfield, all of Wilmington.

In a 1920 notice, mention was made of “the old ice plant being put out of commission.” We are assuming this would have been the Crystal Ice Company. A company called Pure Ice Co, was chartered in Laurel on August 8, 1921 with a capital of \$100,000. In 1922 the Sanborn map shows the Crystal Ice Co. as vacant and dilapidated. The connection between these two companies is not known at this writing.

The 1931 Sanborn map shows two warehouses on the site and no trace of the ice plant building. Finally in 1938 we find the Seaford Ice and Cold Storage company purchasing the Pure Ice Co. which was “recently burned out” for \$2200. By 1945 there were two more buildings on the site, all marked as dwellings. Where the plant stood was vacant and one assumes constituted the back yards of these dwellings. Today, two new homes have replaced two of these older homes.

One final note: While researching the Hitchens Homestead and the original Twilley family, we found several references to harvesting ice from Records’ Pond. The details call for another story, but suffice it to say, it’s hard to imagine it being cold enough to cut and store ice from today’s pond! This story is just the research of a history bug, so we welcome any additions or corrections to it. 302-875-1344 or laurelhistoricalsociety@hotmail.com. 🌿

CHoWing Down With Reid

by Ned Fowler

TO CHOW OR NOT TO CHOW? That is the question posed by former Laurelite, LHS Class of 1966 grad, and society member Reid Williamson, who now lives in Richmond, Virginia.

By definition, chow is: 1) a Chinese dog; 2) when said twice quickly, something akin to pickle relish; or 3) vittles you eat at the mess hall. But leave it to Reid. (Can't you hear his mother, the late esteemed LHS English teacher Eleanor Williamson, gasping right now?) Although pronounced the same, he fashions it as CHoW, an acronym for Colonial Houses of Worship.

For those of you who don't already know, Reid is obsessively, compulsively, and certifiably. . . something. They just haven't invented the term for it yet. He's a very serious collector—not of things like presidential signatures, milk bottles, butterflies, or beanie babies, but of things a little more off-the-wall to most of us. Things ranging from sightings (and photos) of Delaware's 100 lowest license tags, visits to every county in our fifty American states (that's all 3,142 of them, including those in Hawaii and Alaska), checking out the highest point in each state (as well as its capital building), tramping about to photo-capture

rare birds flying in to wherever, documenting how many times he's crossed the Atlantic, mapping nearly every road on which he's driven (i.e., kazillions of miles), and the dear Lord only knows what else. At one time, he held the Guinness Book of World Records title for having traveled to the most countries in a twenty-four hour period (but they wouldn't make acknowledgement, since it might have started a dangerous precedent for others trying to better his time). Oh and, by the way, did I mention that he was a champion on Jeopardy?

Williamson's latest thing, however, is colonial houses of worship, an interest he's had for years. Perhaps it began at Laurel's Old Christ Church or maybe at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg when attending the College of William and Mary. Always seeking perfection, Reid is well known to drive hundreds of miles in pursuit of a new discovery or the perfect camera shot. If I have it right, he's now seen something like 370 of America's some 390 CHoWs. If you've got some time and want to go on a pandemic road trip from your laptop, check him out at historic-churches.com.

Well done, Reid! 🌿

Daughters of the American Revolution meet at Rosemont

The Daughters of the American Revolution are shown here on the steps of Laurel's "Rosemont," the home of Nathaniel Mitchell, a soldier under Gen. George Washington at Valley Forge, and their chapter's namesake. The Major Nathaniel Mitchell chapter of the DAR held their spring meeting here for the first time, where they pledged their support in the restoration of this historic building.

For information about the DAR call 302-875-2820.



A Tribute to Dr. Cora Norwood Selby

by Howard West, Sr.

GRADUATING FROM DELAWARE STATE COLLEGE, now, Delaware State University with honors before her twentieth birthday, seeking employment in her pursued field—education—came a time in her life to make a serious choice. A decision had to be made whether to stay close to home and teach in the Bell Town/Lewes areas, or to become totally independent in a completely new environment. Maybe Dr. Selby felt the way Jesus did when he chose to go to Samaria. There was a need for total commitment to teach. Dr. Cora Norwood Selby was William Shakespeare's contribution to literature, Albert Nobel's contribution to science, Booker T. Washington's contribution to education, Oliver Wendell Holmes' contribution to law, and Frederick Douglass' contribution to the struggle for freedom. The words if they exist, fall short of the meaning they seek to convey. However, though my words may be inadequate, my sentiments about Dr. Cora Norwood Selby are unmistakable, for she was great. She was eloquent and elegant. She was the epitome of her art and the master of her craft. She was the affirmation that talent matures, beauty ripens, and age was a state of mind. To paraphrase E. E. Cummings, even when her magnificent instructional voice is quiet, the silence of herself radiated academic achievement. Though she exemplified everything that was free and open, in her presence we all became her captives. As a willing prisoner to her talent, her knowledge, her beauty, her charm, her commitment, her friendship, her soul, I joyfully accept the sentence. In recognizing Dr. Cora Norwood Selby, all her students from 215c, North Laurel Elementary, the migrant workers, the adult education community honor all that is noble, all that is strong, and all that is beautiful in the hearts and mind of our people. There is a special joy and pride that she brought into our lives. How do you measure how much this great lady has meant to us? Perhaps we can turn back to when she became our teacher—committed to community service. She was our link to new horizons, a promise to our future, an antidote to the pain and the brutality of non-achievement. And then, there was her presence in the church, the pinning of many historical documents now left in archives, the St. John AME Zion Church bears her authorship. Whatever Dr. Selby did was done with pride, with taste, with total irrefutable dignity; and being Dr. Cora Norwood Selby that she was, proud, intelligent, uncompromising, but humble. She helped us all to walk a bit taller and smile a little brighter. Within Sussex county the integration movement took a new direction in the 1960s. There she was at the side of the



teachers, giving freely of herself and her gifts, so that the promise inherent in the words “Lift Every Voice And Sing” became a living reality. Yes, she was there, she was with you and me in the times of testing in the ovens of adversity. How fortunate we are that as a people, we can point to an unbroken succession of beautiful Black women who have illuminated our days and eased the pain of our passage from darkness into the light: Phillis Wheatly, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Mary Mcleod Bethune, Patricia Harris, Daisy Bates, Rosa Parks, Mary Church Terrell, Rosa Dixon Bowser, Sarah J.S. Garnett and countless others. The road for Dr. Cora Norwood Selby has not been an easy one. We will never know the pain she has felt time and time again, as the words of her speeches came from her lips and gently caressed the ears of the audience that was ever ready to applaud the talent but unwilling to share the same room at conventions.

How many times must that inexhaustible pride that she always manifested been hurt in the slights and the snubs she endured. But, through it all, she kept her head high, her face remained undaunted, and she persevered! Her story is a study in courage, an inspiration to all of us

to live life unafraid, willing to share to walk tall and never forget from “whence we came” or the dues we owe.

Dr. Selby inspired and encouraged all her students to believe in themselves and strive for excellence. Her efforts are revealed in the list of college graduates from their little one room, grades 1-8 Ross Point 215C school. After high school graduation we all attended and graduated with a degree from her alma mater Delaware State College now Delaware State University.

1. Her first student was **Robert K. West**, industrial arts teacher, musician, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity.
2. **Howard L. West Sr.**, teacher, principal, civil rights activist, NAACP President for 30 years, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.
3. **Mildred Vickers**, middle school/ high school teacher, teacher mentor, veteran coordinator, entrepreneur.
4. **Bernice H. West**, teacher, poet,
5. **James R. West**, fourth grade teacher, teacher mentor, photographer, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc
6. **Shirley M. West Dillard**, teacher, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority.
7. **Paul Selby**, her son, Counselor, Dean of Students services, Delaware Technical and Community College,
8. **Clarence Paige Selby**, her son, staff training technical officer, Delaware State Department of Corrections.
9. **Clyde Selby**, her son, school bus contractor, entrepreneur.
10. **Adrian Selby LeBlanc**, her daughter, navigator, Math Lead (grades 1-4): supports administrators, teachers and students with professional development, Instructional Delivery and Data analysis.

Dr. Selby was the mother of five children, the four older children attended 215C and were taught by her. Terrance the youngest child did not attend 215C because all of the 93 schools built in 1923/24 by Pierre S. DuPont for the colored African American children were closed by the state of Delaware adhering to the law separate and unequal. Upon reaching school age Terrance attended North Laurel Elementary school. He graduated from Delaware Technical College and became a dairy farm counselor.

Dr. Selby was one of the first African American teachers to graduate from the University of Delaware’s graduate program. She applied for enrollment on campus with dormitory privileges and was accepted. She graduated with honors from the University of Delaware and was awarded Gold Guard Pin in 2009.

An opening on the Delaware State College trustee board became available and Dr. Luna S. Mishoe was aware of Cora Norwood Selby’s skills, talents and reputation. He presented her impressive credentials to the Governor Pierre S. DuPont, and Gov. DuPont appointed her to Delaware’s State College Trustee Board in 1980. During her tenure on the Board of Trustees, Dr. Selby became the board secretary. She was a faithful, dependable, salient, exceptional and an outstanding trustee for 20 years.

In many circles they call Dr. Cora Norwood Selby a living Legend. To her students she was our standard setter and idol. She was our inspiration, our perpetual ray of hope, our teacher, role model, mentor, friend, and sister. 🌿

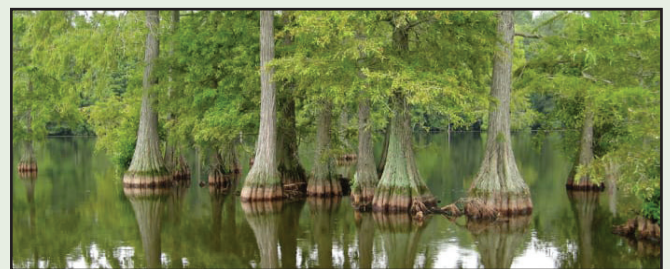
Upcoming Events at Trap Pond State Park

Bethesda Cemetery Tour

May 27th, June 17th, July 15th, August 19th—5 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.

Shingle Making

June 24th, July 22nd, August 26th—5:00 p.m.
Trap Pond was created in the 1700s to harvest Baldcypress and cedar from the local swamps. Much of this lumber was used for shingles. Try your hand at splitting shingles, just like they did it back then.



Three Square Meals

June 10th, July 8th, August 12th—5:00 p.m.
Tour some original Civilian Conservation Corps structures at Trap Pond State Park. Learn how these young men impacted the state and the nation.

Call the nature center at 302-875-5163 to make your reservation. For more details, visit destateparks.com.

Collections Corner

by Norma Jean Fowler

Early 20th-century Laurel history discovered

MOST OF LAUREL'S HISTORY has been gleaned from documents, photographs, books, and oral stories. While much has been recorded, there is still more to discover. "We don't know what we don't know" could be our mantra. Such was the case when we received an email from a researcher in Dover who had discovered Laurel information that seems to have never been previously discussed. Charles A. Salkin, upon the recommendation of Madeline Dunn, contacted us when he discovered, from census records, a large number of Jewish merchants appearing in Laurel during the 1890-1930 time frame. The retired Director of Delaware State Parks, Salkin was researching Jewish residents of Kent and Sussex Counties who arrived in the U.S. during the 19th century. While investigating these

early Jews, he found only a handful to be in Laurel before 1900. However, by the first two decades of the 20th century, there were enough Jews in Laurel to bring a rabbi from Baltimore here to lead them in religious services for the High Holy Days and other important Jewish rites. Graciously sharing his information with us, Mr. Salkin has identified approximately twenty Jewish families that at one time called Laurel home and the businesses they provided. When older residents were questioned, very few had any knowledge of a Jewish population here. This was "new" history. We have archived this information in our research files in hopes that it will help someone at some future date. If you are interested, contact us at 302-875-1344 or laurelhistoricalsociety@hotmail.com. 🌿

A Laurel family comes home . . .

FORMER LHS PRESIDENT DOUG BREEN once told me that the most prevalent local surname he found in his cemetery work was Elliott. That may be, but there sure are a lot of Hearn/Hearne families as well. In March of 2020, the society was visited by Jay Hearn from upstate New York. His Hearn ancestors lived in the Delmar and Bacon Switch area. As he is getting older, Mr. Hearn wanted to make sure that his information on our local families would be available for the next generation. After visiting the Cook House, he decided our research center was the place for his collection, which included a significant amount of photographs and information on not only the Hearn line, but on the many, many, other families that married into the Hearn.

Included in the donation are approximately 300 copies of a Hearn family tree poster, each measuring 36" x 24." Since Jay and his ancestors are related to just about everybody on Delmarva, other names on the tree include Collins, Moore, Friedel, Rawlins, Wilson, Burton, Lecates, Phillips, Culver, and Ellis, to name just a few. Additional items include lots of photographs of ancestors from the

19th and early 20th centuries. Booklets detailing the Gray family, a Confederate soldier's memoir, the Freeney family cemetery in Delmar, and even an 18th century business ledger, make up other parts of the donation. While the printed books etc. will remain in the research center, the **copies of the updated family tree are being given away to anyone with an interest in family history!**

This family tree is an update to an earlier 1907 tree, and contains the names and dates of persons born after the original publication. To say that there are hundreds of Laurel/Delmar names on this tree would not be an exaggeration. When Ned and I were looking at it for the first time, not only did he recognize many Laurel folks living today, but I found my own living Delmar relatives as well. And I have NO Hearn relatives at all! If you have seen the 1907 copy framed in the Cook House parlor, you will understand how many names are on this chart.

These posters are offered to anyone who is interested in having one (or two or three!). Please leave a message at 875-1344 or email laurelhistoricalsociety@hotmail.com and someone will get back to you. 🌿

Old News

Today's News Today

The Evening Journal

FIFTEEN
Largest Paid Circulation

LAUREL TOWN COUNCIL BANS NUDE BATHING IN LAKE

NEW CASTLE BEACHES DRAW BATHERS, CRABBERS

Town Council Will Order Purchase of Motorcycle to Help Police to Handle Heloless Drunks.

men employed by J. E. O'Connell and Sons, contractors, have nearly completed the excavation of Washington avenue, preparatory to beginning actual construction of the new concrete roadway. The fills are being made to East Sixth street. The same contractor has completed the resurfacing of West Seventh street with asphalt. This work, under the operating agreement of the

ROAD MARKET FARM ADJUNCT

Pass Experimental Stage, Bring Big Results to Growers

WANT PROTECTION

LAUREL BANS NUDE BATHING

Barn With 80 Bushels Corn and 40 Bushels Rye Burned

TOWN ORDERS

SHORE CROPS ARE IMPROVED

More Moisture, However, Is Needed In Parts of Delaware and Maryland

TRUCK GARDENS

PRODUCE MARKET OPENING PRICES

Quotations Today for Provisions, Grain and Poultry In Philadelphia

Following are the quotations to-day for the market

STEALS MONEY OF BENEFACTOR

Youth Agrees to Leave State When Charge Is Withdrawn

ARRESTED ON TRAIN

16 DELAWARE MEN QUALIFY

Floyd W. Hubert, Newark, Second Scorer With Automatic Rifle

3 MAKE GRADE OF

Town Council Puts Nude Bathing in Nearby Lake Under Ban.

FIRE DESTROYS BARN

(Special to Every Evening.)

Laurel, July 11.—The Laurel Fire Department won a \$25 prize at the fifth annual firemen's convention last Wednesday at Smyrna for having the best band in the line of parade. Ten bands were in line and the parade was more than a mile in length.

Within a short time every street in Laurel will be identified with a sign showing the name of the street. These special signs and posts have been ordered by the Town Council. The signs will be blue and white and owing to the fact that each one must be made from a separate steel die, it will be several weeks before they are completed and ready to be erected.

There will be a Sunday school picnic at Mt. Pleasant Church on Thursday, July 16. If stormy it will be held July 17. There will also be a church picnic at Kings July 18. The second quarterly conference for the charge will be held July 18 at the parsonage.

Two vacancies exist at the present time in Laurel Fire Department due to the fact that two of the members have moved out of town. Applications for membership to the organization must be written.

The Mayor and Town Council passed a resolution this week to the effect that no nude bathing will be permitted in Laurel Lake. They also passed a resolu-

PLUCKY WOMAN ATTACKS BURGLAR

LAUREL, Del., Dec. 11.—Mrs. John M. Collins, one of Laurel's most prominent residents, though of slight build, attacked a burglar she surprised in her home, just before midnight Tuesday, and struggled with him several minutes before he broke away and escaped from an upper porch. Hearing a noise at a bedroom window, Mrs. Collins rushed to the balcony and grappled with the intruder, a white man. After the man had regained his cap which the plucky little woman had snatched from his head and broke away, Mrs. Collins struck him several times with a broom as he descended by a porch post.

The Collins mansion is the most historic place in this section, having been the home of two former Delaware governors, ancestors of Mrs. Collins, and is filled with rare relics and antiques.

Welcome our new members:

Penny Creamer
Laurel

Carol T. Mitchell
Laurel

Kate Skovron
Pikesville, MD

Tom & Joy Slavens
Laurel

Tammera D. Ward
Laurel

Howard L. West, Sr.
Neptune, NJ

Have you renewed your membership?

Membership / renewal forms
are available online at
laureldehistoricalsociety.org.



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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.