

Hutzell: Banner Book Club explores Revolutionary mystery in 'Chesapeake Bound'

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Tom Guay, an Annapolis musician and writer, is working on follow-ups to his 2025 historical fiction, "Chesapeake Bound." (Rick Hutzell/The Banner)

The first thing to know about Tom Guay is that he doesn't see the hero of his novel, Irish indentured servant Michael Shea, as an alter ego.

"Michael's a far better musician than I am," he said. "He's a real cookie, like a Dylan or a Mozart kind of guy."

Michael is at the center of "Chesapeake Bound: An Annapolis Novel," Guay's historical fiction about music, murder and American beginnings. It's the first book in his planned trilogy, "Sailing to Revolution."

Like all good stories set in the past, the book mixes actual events with made-up characters and plot, balancing what actually occurred with what might have happened had these

characters existed.

“I think the key is this is not a history book. It’s the motivation behind the characters,” Guay said. “I don’t try to put that in the story. The real story is a love story and an adventure story. That’s really what’s going on.”

Guay is working this summer to finish what he kicked off in 2025. He’s writing the second and third books simultaneously, with hopes of turning them over this fall to his publisher, McBooks Press.

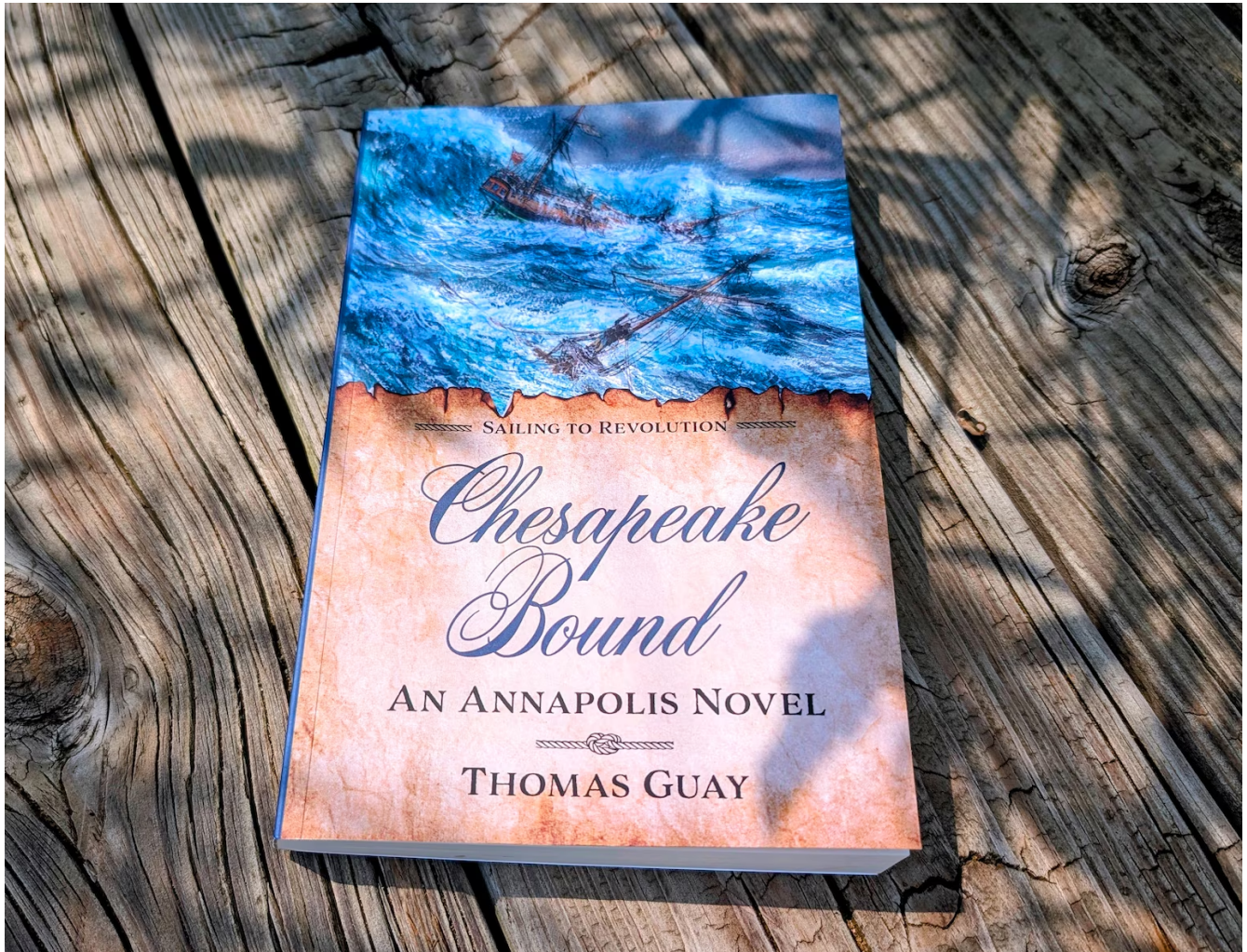
I’ll talk with Guay Wednesday night at [The Banner Book Club](#) about the characters, the research that went into his novel and the story’s hidden Easter eggs. It’s a fun, free way to explore Maryland’s literary heritage.

The book is divided into three parts. You meet Michael in 1765 London, a struggling physician’s assistant in a time when medicine involved bleeding patients to balance their humors.

He’s also a talented violinist who performs in a tavern with his friend, Danny O’Mara, and the owner’s older daughter, the vivacious Emma Baker. Michael treats a young Charles Carroll, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, for smallpox. Historically, Carroll contracted it while studying law.

When Carroll’s friend, a planter’s son in pursuit of cheating London business partners, is murdered outside the tavern, it’s clear that Michael and Danny need to leave England. With no better alternative, they sign up as indentured servants in the colonies, hoping Carroll will become a benefactor once they reach Annapolis.

Most of the story unfolds at sea during a harrowing crossing. That’s why McBooks Press took this on; it’s a major publisher of maritime fiction. The first book ends with Michael, Danny and Emma’s teenage sister, Moira, arriving at the Annapolis harbor.



The Banner Book Club will talk with Tom Guay about his book, “Chesapeake Bound.” It’s the first in a planned series set in the lead-up to the American Revolution. (Rick Hutzell/The Banner)

Along the way, Guay mixes a murder mystery, the roots of the American Revolution, the plight of the Irish, sailing, music and medicine. It’s a complicated mix, but one that matches what Guay brings as an author.

“The whole idea of Michael’s character is he’s in search of a sense of belonging,” he said. “He’s been orphaned twice. He doesn’t know where he fits in. He’s a Catholic in England. He’s Irish in England. It’s not a good fit.”

He calls Michael “auto-aspirational,” living a life Guay wishes he could — an outsider who becomes an indentured servant in a strange land, a sailor, musician, and evolving healer who is driven to find love and home.

Guay is best known as a member of the [Eastport Oyster Boys](#), an Annapolis-based Chesapeake Bay folk group. Whether Michael jumps on a tavern table to play a reel or raises shipboard spirits following a devastating Atlantic storm, the book comes alive through Guay’s love of music.

The author is also a sailor who knows Annapolis-area waters. He worked for a decade on Severn River restoration efforts before launching his own environmental education program. For the last two years, he's monitored [falling osprey numbers](#), possibly caused by overfishing in Virginia.

If Guay was never an 18th-century physician, he is a fan of Patrick O'Brien's 20-book British naval series set in the Napoleonic wars. There's more than a little of O'Brien's university-trained ship's physician, Irishman Stephen Maturin, in Michael.

Like his character, Guay's family has roots in Ireland. Michael studied in France; the writer's father was French Canadian.

By connecting the story to Carroll, Guay taps into his personal story again. Shortly after moving to Annapolis, he worked as a docent at the historic home of Carroll and his father, Charles Carroll of Annapolis.

That led Guay to a job as a Watermark Journey tour docent, where he's spent a decade as the character Squire Tomás, walking people through stories of historic Annapolis.

It's through Carroll that Guay plans to explore America's path toward revolution. It's also where he will have to tread carefully.



Guay sidelines as a tour guide in Annapolis. His character, Tomás, is one inspiration for the main character in his historical fiction. (Courtesy of Tom Guay)

History is a cottage industry in Annapolis, and there are plenty of arguments over who retells it and how. In the final pages of “Chesapeake Bound,” Guay introduces some of Carroll’s enslaved men and women, including a fictional house servant named Dominic.

In his next books, Guay will have to explore a fraught subject: Annapolis was both a slave port and center of revolutionary spirit built on the idea of liberty and rights.

“Michael, being an Irish guy, he’s from Ireland and then France. He’s living a European life. He’s never seen slaves. He’s never seen Black people. It’s all brand new to him,” Guay said.

“So I thought this would be interesting when he gets to Annapolis. It’s like first contact.”

“Chesapeake Bound” sold out its initial run, proof of interest in what happens next. Like most first-time authors, though, Guay has to finish the next books to his publisher’s satisfaction before readers get the rest of the story.

He plans to bring back Carroll, Dominic and Revolutionary Annapolis, along with other historical figures and events. Danny and Moira will be there, as will the mystery surrounding

the murder of Carroll's planter friend.

If the Atlantic provided the venue for the sea story driving "Chesapeake Bound," the bay will play that role in the second book. The story will explore how royal taxes sparked the Revolution and the smuggling that sprang up around Annapolis in response.

And Michael, sum of Guay's many parts, will gain a new dimension to his multifaceted personality.

"Guess who's going to be the detective?"

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