

# Cape Charles Museum Getting Back on Track After COVID-19 Disruptions

Story and Photo by Jim Ritch

What a year to become the new president of the Cape Charles Historical Society.

Shortly after John Griffith took over the controls from longtime president Marion Naar in January, the state of Virginia closed the society's museum during the COVID-19 shutdowns. The society's big spring fundraiser, its shrimp boil, had to be canceled. Donations dried up. The society's executive director left.

Now, Cape Charles' museum and welcome center are getting back on track.

Griffith, a Cape Charles native whose family operated Griff's restaurant on Mason Avenue, reopened the museum in July and staffs it himself on Saturdays.

Wednesday at 10 a.m., the society will hold its first formal board meeting in months.

With donations coming in through the museum, plus grants and membership gifts, the society is covering its stripped-down expenses.

With no director and no paid moni-

tor to open the museum, the largest expense is now utilities, he said.

However, the museum is open only on Saturdays, and a big fall fundraiser, an oyster roast, is still running under a yellow cautionary light. In the past, the society has sold 250 tickets at \$40 to \$50 per ticket, but current state regulations would allow only up to 50 people to attend at one time.

A bit of good financial news is that several major renovation projects were completed in recent years, so the museum building is sound.

Last year, more than \$40,000 was spent to repaint bricks and repair the museum's exterior walls.

"We're hoping all the big stuff is done for now," said Griffith.

Among those major projects was a series of rail car donations following the closing of the Bay Coast railroad yard almost two years ago.

Several railcars and a locomotive were donated to the museum, but the museum had to pay to have the cars moved into place.

"They were cutting track out as fast



**John Griffith, president of the Cape Charles Historical Society, stands with a caboose, one of six railcars and a locomotive held on a siding behind the Cape Charles Museum. Received and painted in 2001, the car is one of several that need to be "re-refurbished," Griffith said.**

as we could get them out," he said.

The society moved a locomotive to its siding, but had to repair deteriorated switches and even replace some connecting tracks that had been removed.

The repairs, plus rental of a large backhoe that pushed the inoperable locomotive into place, came to about \$20,000.

The cars currently lined up behind the museum include a boxcar; tank,

## Town of Accomac, Virginia

**PROPOSED EXPENDITURES  
FOR PERIOD -  
Ending August 31, 2021**

**PROPOSED REVENUES  
FOR PERIOD -  
Ending August 31, 2021**

When Called: 8-15-2020 6:45 AM 6-22-2020

railway express, hopper, and flatbed cars; and a caboose.

With finances on a tenuous but level path, Griffith hopes the society can turn to projects such as developing a new exhibit.

The museum's central floor space was occupied for the last two years by four storyboards and several loaned exhibition pieces about the former and then-segregated Cape Charles Elementary School that served African American children.

A history of the ferry boats that

sailed from Cape Charles had planned to open this summer. The ships, which underwent such major renovations as being cut in half and expanded in length, had unusual histories.

The ferry Northampton began its existence during the Second World War as a landing ship tank (LST) that was designed for use in amphibious landings. A second LST, also purchased from military surplus after the war, became the fuel barge Kiptopeke, he said.

To volunteer or donate to the museum, visit [www.capecharlesmuseum.org](http://www.capecharlesmuseum.org)

