

THE MUSEUM NEWS

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CELEBRATING THE HISTORY AND COMMUNITY OF CAPE CHARLES

CAPE CHARLES HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Memberships & Volunteers

The new year 2021 has begun and with vaccinations underway, our hopes are for a return to a more robust museum season. With this comes our need for 2021 memberships. As always the value of memberships to the museum cannot be over stated, especially now when we cannot rely on our traditional large fundraisers. Memberships contribute the largest share of our operating funds, which keep the museum running and our archives documented and safe. Many thanks go to the 227 members who provided \$20,000 of our 2020 operating revenue. So, if you have been a member before please renew now and if you have not been a member, take this opportunity to join for 2021. Receiving memberships early in the year enables us to plan with confidence and avoid reminders. Operating funds cover utilities, insurance and some museum work. Hopefully, they can also fund some new railroad work.

A cut-off Membership Form can be found at the bottom of the president's letter with a return envelope. You can also renew on the website capecharlesmuseum.org. Options for additional contributions to special funds are on the form. For a total donation of \$250 or more you may request a plate in honor or memory of a person of your choosing to be added to our museum wall plaques. Eight plates were added in 2020.

Another critical need is new volunteers. Several core volunteers are nearing and even beyond 80. So new hands are most welcome and in fact essential if the museum is going to continue into the future. There are always opportunities. Last year just when our longstanding gardener Irene Munz moved to Florida, a new resident of Bay Creek thankfully stepped forward to manage the museum gardens. Don't know what you might contribute? Give a call or attend a meeting, which are held most months. Send an email to ccmuseum@hughes.net and we will forward notices to you. If you would consider being a docent, John Griffiths is ready to help you get started. Give him a call at 757-287-1983.

Fundraisers: Past, Future and Ongoing

Last fall we were faced with loss of revenue from our longtime popular Oyster Roast which typically realizes over \$7,000 profit. Our fundraising committee, who have fiercely persevered through 2020, led the charge by organizing and hosting two smaller but successful fundraisers by which we raised over \$3,700. First was an outdoor masked and socially distanced yard sale on October 10.

We solicited donations, used silent auction leftovers and added some duplicate or irrelevant items from our collections. People were offered vendor set ups at \$10 a table. Originally planned by the town to be a community wide event, in the end ours was the only game in town and we had 22 other vendors. The predicted rain held off until 1 p.m. and both vendors and customers were well pleased. We are planning a 2021 spring event. If you have items to donate or would like to volunteer at the sale, do let us know. .

In mid December, our fundraising committee again leveraged the outdoor space of the museum to host a unique cost effective local seafood sale while maintaining COVID-19 safety guidelines. The sale featured locally grown and harvested clams and oysters - a perfect addition to holiday tables - and was advertised through social media outlets as an opportunity to support the museum. Sales were encouraged by pre-order, and supporters could walk-up or drive-up to the museum grounds to collect their seafood selections. Many enthusiastic buyers generously provided donations in addition to their actual purchases. The great success of this event was due to the partnership of a local member and New Inlet Inc., a local seafood supplier who generously sponsored the event and donated a portion of the seafood sales to the museum.

The museum was also open several November and December Friday evenings in support of the town merchants Friday holiday openings. Unique raffles were offered for a tee shirt and Watson Hardware engraved oyster knife. The Museum rang in the new year with a renewed sense of optimism, hope for the future, and gratitude to our supporting members and local community. Thank You!

As an on-going effort, thanks to board member Laura Smith we have undertaken online selling through eBay and Paypal. A donated Victorian sofa and chair recently brought in \$488. The Facebook page and our website continue to draw donations and interesting questions. A historian in her own right, Laura's work can be viewed at www.sundayhistorical.com.

Virtual Outdoor Tour

Want to walk around the museum campus from your phone, iPad or computer? Visit <https://www.theclio.com/entry/106100>. Created by board member Melinda McPeck with help of funding from part of a Virginia Tourism grant, this very professional tour offers video and audio on the history of the museum building, Bloxom station, Jetty house, Pilot house and all the railroad cars. Try it!

Passings: Virginia Savage & Joanne Warren

We are very sad to note the death of Virginia Savage on November 25th at the age of 91. Virginia's important contributions to CCHS began at the society's founding in 1986 and continued to within a few weeks of her death. She was key to the existence and growth of the museum over the years. A founding member, Virginia organized a symposium on town history at the 1986 town centennial which included notable Virginia historians and was funded by a grant she got from the Virginia Humanities Foundation. She vigorously championed keeping the second diesel engine and generator at a 1994 board meeting during intense debate about whether to sell it for scrap (as was the other unit), arguing that it was key to the history of the museum building and would become increasingly 'historic' with time. She was absolutely correct - it continues to be the most popular exhibit. Virginia was a keen judge of people and attracted those who, like herself, had vision and were doers. With her well known love and knowledge of gardening she established the museum gardens and tree plantings, but typically turned them over when a capable enthusiastic person appeared. She also had an eye for exhibit arrangements and what would be of interest and importance to visitors. Her family's donations of several significant steamers and sailing vessels are valuable additions to the museum displays. Virginia's family continues to be loyal to the museum; we thank them for having Virginia with us. Many members and friends of Virginia's have contributed generously in her memory. We will be mounting a memorial to her in the spring.

Joanne Warren who died on December 14th was also a CCHS founding member and handled the memberships for many years. We remember her best as an enthusiastic, reliable and knowledgeable Sunday docent from the museum opening in 1996 until her husband Randy's illness prevented it. Joanne's knowledge of 20th century Cape Charles was invaluable. Her father Allison Mills, a Cape Charles banker, was interviewed for our oral history collection in 1990. Always a warm, enthusiastic presence, Joanne also served as a volunteer in numerous other town organizations as well.

Iconic Book: Cape Charles: A Railroad Town

Author Jim Lewis grew up in Cape Charles, a lifelong friend of Bill Neville. Jim loved to write and had a keen interest in the town in all its dimensions - the railroad, ships, barges, commerce, town life and the people who made it all happen from the town's beginnings into the 1990's. Drawing on decades of his own research and collections, Jim organized it all into this large book which was published in 2004 by Hickory House Press, owned by Frances Bibbins Latimer, a local author and historian. The book is loaded with photo and document images from our collection and other sources. It provides

invaluable information and is an interesting read. Over the years we sold hundreds of copies to museum visitors, but with the death of Frances Latimer a few years ago the book went out of print and no more copies were to be had.

Early last year board members Barbara O'Hare and Bill Neville decided to find a way to get the book republished. Given the complicated rules of publishing this was no easy task, made additionally difficult because no digital image of the contents could be found. But after many months of work we are pleased to report that we are on the way. Permission for publishing rights has been granted to CCHS by Jim Lewis' heirs, and we are now working with Xenophon Press of the Eastern Shore to reprint it. Xenophon Press is experienced at publishing out-of-print books when no digital image is available. The book will be sold through CCHS and other local book retailers. Proceeds, above printing costs, will benefit the museum. If you care to contribute to the publishing costs, please so indicate on your check.

Museum Visitors

Our visitor register requests information for statistics but also has a space for comments. These are always interesting and truly gratifying. People love Cape Charles history and thank us heartily for preserving and displaying it for their education and enjoyment.

Total visitors were of course fewer than usual due to COVID and our limited openings. There were 680 visitors compared to 4,200 in 2019. The statistics on visitor's home region, reason to visit, and 'how did you hear about the museum' were mostly similar to earlier years. 65% of visitors were from Virginia, with a consistent 14% from Hampton Roads, nearly 42% from other mainland Virginia, and the rest from VA Eastern Shore. About 20% came from MD, DE and DC, with half as many as usual from other states (understandable given COVID rules) and no international visitors. For their primary interest, 62% of visitors cited the museum, 5% the visitor information and 34% both. Somewhat more primary interest in the museum than previously, but again shows the value of pairing museum and welcome center functions. 'How did you hear about the museum' is consistently topped at about 45% by 'passed by and saw the sign', which shows the value of drawing people into town with tourism initiatives and of course having a good sign. But local connections - family and friends, previous visits, live/d here and local accommodations continue to be very important. Online presence: internet, web sites (including Facebook, Instagram and the museum web site) are responsible for over 20%.

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