Comings and Goings on Church Alley

By Anne Burris, President of the Historical Society

The State of the Society is good. Ongoing activities and an energetic membership keep it viable.

The well-attended Christmas Wassail party was very festive with many tempting delights and decoration befitting the season. Charlie and Gene in red and green were kept busy with the potable recipe. Guests were treated to the new lighting system in the Irish breakfront which illuminates the collection of Chinese export teapots. This was made possible by a donation from the Sophie Kerr Questers.

Children ranging in age also cross the Geddes Piper threshold. The older set did an outstanding job performing as hostesses during the Christmas tour for the Lester Center. And on February 19, Patsy Hornaday presented for the second year her puppet show, “The President and Patsy,” a story about George and Martha Washington. The puppets were made by Patsy Hornaday and attracted the young and young-at-heart.

Also in February, under the auspices of Chestertown’s Beautification Committee, two presentations were given at the Geddes Piper House: “The Colonial Kitchen and Herb Garden,” by Paul Boertlein, and “Maryland Flowers and Shrubs for Town and Country” by the Maryland Native Plant Historical Society’s Charmayne Truesdell.

The fourth annual winter lecture series of the Historical Society is still well attended with the topics and speakers being very interesting. If you have suggestions for a topic for the 1996 winter lecture series, please contact Jack Stenger.

Activities during the spring will include the annual dinner meeting on Wednesday, April 19, to be held at the Parish hall of Emmanuel Church preceded by a cocktail party at the Geddes Piper House.

Mark your calendars for a June 17 gala cocktail reception at the home of life members, Mr. and Mrs. Fenimore Johnson. Invitations for the exciting event will be coming out in April and reservations are limited. This event is a fund-raiser for the restoration of the Society’s reverse paintings of Martha and George Washington, which had almost reached the point of being beyond repair. We are grateful to the Johnsons for donating their property for this event and also to John and Marcy Parker and Mackey Dutton for coordinating the reception.

Plans for the 26th Candlelight Walking Tour are underway, so mark your calendar for September 16.

As Spring arrives, bulbs that have been donated by the America the Beautiful Fund, with the assistance of the Chestertown Beautification Committee, will bloom along the brick path leading to the Geddes-Piper front door. And remember, you are always welcome at the Geddes-Piper.
In March of 1791, Washington was attempting to return home to Virginia from Philadelphia. Upon learning of the poor travel conditions, he determined to cross the [Chesapeake] Bay by the way of Rock Hall. On Wednesday, March 23 he dined and lodged at the House of one Worrells in Chester; from whence I sent an Express to Rock-hall to have Boats ready for me by 9 o’clock tomorrow morning — after doing which Capt. Nicholson obligingly set out for that place to see that every thing should [be] prepared against my arrival.

The following day’s entry contained a rather descriptive and somewhat humorous accounting of his trip across the bay.

"Left Chester town about 6 Oclock. Before nine I arrived at Rock-hall where we breakfasted and immediately: after which we began to embark - The doing of which employed us (for want of contrivance) until near 3 Oclock and then one of my Servants (Paris) & two horses were left, notwithstanding two boats in aid of The two Ferry Boats were procured. Unluckily, embarking on board of a borrowed Boat because She was the largest, I was in imminent danger, from the unskilfulness of the hands, and the dulness of her sailing, added to the darkness and storminess of the night. For two hours after we hoisted the Sail the Wind was light and a head. The next hour was a stark calm after which the wind sprung up at So. Et. and encreased until it blew a gale...we soon grounded again where...finding all efforts in vain, & not knowing where we were we remained, not knowing what might happen, till morning."

Not only the next morning was the boat able to make it into Annapolis harbor but Washington recovered from his adventure, met with the Governor.

Numerous other references appear in Washington’s diaries from 1782-1789 relating to his involvement with Washington College.

However, the most revealing passage of Washington’s impressions of Kent County is a letter sent to James Lloyd in September 1793. In the letter, Washington is discussing a series of resolutions passed by the County’s inhabitants in favor of the government. Washington writes:

“The spirit which breathes throughout the resolutions of the inhabitants of Kent County in the State of Maryland, lately convened at Chestertown, does honor to their character as Citizens...The expressions of confidence and attachment towards myself contained in the same resolutions, impress me with sensations analogous to their fervour and earnestness, and to the true esteem and regard which I always feel for the respectable Citizens from whom they come.”

NOTE: Washington’s diaries contain abbreviations and misspellings which have been retained in the article above.

African-American Exhibit

The Maryland Historical Society has announced that they will exhibit a collection of 18th and 19th century African-American-made arts and crafts beginning in September, 1995. Many items will come from the collection of Derrick Joshua Beard. In preparation for the exhibit, the Maryland Historical Society is researching and attempting to locate additional examples of Maryland-made objects. If you have any items to display or information which may be helpful to the Society’s research, contact Barbara K. Weeks at 1-(410) 685-3750, ext. 331.