



THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
of
KENT COUNTY

UNLOCKING OUR PAST

2021 Fall Newsletter

We open this newsletter with sad news. Our longtime Treasurer and Board member, Roger Brown, died on September 10. Roger has been our North Star for some 30+ years, always steering us toward the future, helping us dodge many financial challenges, and standing ready to help. His steadfastness and leadership will be missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Phyllis, and their family.



Despite Covid, we are moving along...

Legacy Day

Legacy Day 2020 (so named because it was originally planned for last year) was kicked off this year with our special preview of the Legacy Day exhibition at the Bordley History Center on August 5. About 40 of our members, our Board, co-sponsor Sumner Hall's Board, and the Legacy Day Committee attended over a four-hour open house. Society volunteers Cynthia Saunders and Susan Percival poured wine to the preview attendees.

Historian Bill Leary, with the assistance of designer Francoise Sullivan, created an exhibition that filled both museum windows, all three interior display cases, and both interior museum walls. Society volunteers Stephanie Gosman and

Kurt Smith assisted in installing the exhibition. The exhibition will be available at the Bordley History Center through September.

This year's Legacy Day theme was "Outstanding African American Athletes of Kent County," and featured 44 men and women athletes and four coaches, from 1931 to 2017. A 48-page commemorative book and a smaller brochure, both designed by Barbara Slocum, were also produced. Copies of the book are available from Sumner Hall (we have a few copies if you contact our office), and the brochures are available at the Bordley. Both can also be downloaded from our website at <https://kentcountyhistory.org/>.

Legacy Day included an opening night ceremony at Janes Church on Friday, August 20, with each honoree receiving an Olympic-style medal. It was a standing-room-only crowd and had the feel of a glorious high school reunion. Cannon Street next to the church was closed for an open-air party with a wine bar before and after the ceremony. The Bordley History Center stayed open until 10 p.m., so honorees could visit after the ceremony. (Thank you, Erik Gulbrandsen, for the extended hours.) All in all, it was a fine night for honorees.

On Saturday, August 21, Legacy Day moved to Wilmer Park for a day and evening filled with entertainment. The day started with a genealogy workshop, followed by a panel discussion by honorees about how athletics influence their lives, followed by an evening of music and dancing. Congratulations to our Board member, Nivek Johnson, who chaired the Legacy Day Committee, and to our Board member, Gordon Wallace, who was an honoree.

International Underground Railroad Month

Behind the scenes, there has been work on three new projects related to Maryland's International Underground Railroad Month, the month of September. Part of a National Park Service initiative, IUGRR Month, has been official in Maryland since 2019. (The Society has three UGRR brochures available at the Bordley Center, including a driving tour of Kent County's UGRR sites.)

The first of these new projects is the updating and expansion of the African

American Walking and Driving Tour brochure. An ad hoc committee of LaMonte Cooke, Sheila Austrian, Jane Nevins, Darius Johnson, and Barbara Jorgenson have been working together, led primarily by Jane who is an avid and skilled researcher and writer. The plan is to have the brochure re-designed by Barbara Slocum and ready for release by the end of September. A very special thanks to Bayly Jansen LaPalme for sharing her original research files on African American businesses in downtown Chestertown.

Another project, spearheaded by Sheila Austrian, is the reworking an academic-style paper on free Blacks brought to our attention by Board member Robert Bryan. Robert's friend Paul Thien of Galena wrote the paper based on historic records of the Wickes family ca. 1783-1835 found in an attic, providing new evidence that during this time, free Blacks worked as skilled craftsmen, earning good wages and enjoying a middle-class life style. We hope to publish this work as a stand-alone essay/book and make it available on our website and in our museum shop.

The third project revolves around our native son, Henry Highland Garnet, who was born enslaved in Chesterville and who became a leading African American abolitionist known for his fiery oratory. Van Gosse, professor at Franklin & Marshall College, has written a 700-page book about the origins of Black politics. Gosse will talk about how Henry Highland Garnet was at the center of a cohort of young men in New York, New England, and Ohio who re-energized Black politics before the Civil War. Gosse will trace Garnet's activism as a leader in the Liberty Party, and his conditional support for Lincoln's Republican Party, amid other ventures inside and outside the U.S. Although originally planned for late September as an in-person event, the local Covid surge has forced a change to have Gosse present in an interview format, to be live-streamed and recorded for later distribution. Look for details in a future newsletter. Society volunteers Jane Nevins, Kurt Smith, and Gibson Anthony are working on this project.

Three other projects have been on the Society's front burner, so to speak.

Executive Director Search

At its August 17 meeting, the Board of Directors authorized a search for a new

Executive Director for the Society. We have been without an Executive Director since mid-2019. A new director was hired in late 2019 and was scheduled to start in early 2020. Then Covid hit and the Society was forced to close as a non-essential business. During the closure, our new director changed his mind and withdrew. Sadly, he subsequently died. An Executive Director Search Committee has written a new job description for this fulltime position, which can be viewed [HERE](#). The Search Committee is headed by Society President Barbara Jorgenson and comprised of Society Secretary Erik Gulbrandsen and Board members Joan Horsey and Darius Johnson. The Committee hopes to bring its recommendation for a new Executive Director to the Board for approval at its November meeting.

Joint Digitization Grant

Due to the leadership of Board member Jennifer Moore, the Society and the Queen Anne's County Historical Society have jointly received a \$10,000 grant to be used toward digitizing our respective collections. Jennifer and Barbara Jorgenson are researching strategies for doing so, beginning with meetings with the Talbot County Historical Society which is in the midst of digitizing its collection. Meanwhile, the library has already started reviewing and culling our archives under the steady hand of longtime library volunteer Carol Schroeder, ably assisted by our librarian Joan Andersen, volunteer Stephanie Gosman, and Board member Joan Horsey.

Maryland Humanities Grant Application

Thanks to a timely tip from Stephanie Gosman, we are applying to a \$10,000 operating grant from Maryland Humanities. This grant would be used to bring our staff back to their pre-Covid hours, to pay the new Executive Director, and to pay other overhead expenses such as utilities. Keep your fingers crossed!

Saving the Happiest for Last!

Our treasurer, Bridget Mahoney, and her husband,

Wil Campbell, welcomed their son, Wilson Rooney Campbell, on August 15. This photo of Rooney, as he is called, was taken right after the August 30 doctor's visit at which he weighed in at 8 lbs. 14 oz., and measured 22 1/2 inches. All are doing well, including older brother, August. Congratulations to Bridget, Wil, and August, and welcome to our newest and youngest member.



We count on your generosity to fund our museum, library and programs. Any gift you are able to make is greatly appreciated!

Donate Securely Online via PayPal

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please send an email to
director@kentcountyhistory.org**