

# BULLETIN

OF  
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CECIL COUNTY

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No. 10                      Bohemia Manor, Maryland                      October 20, 1958.

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## JUNE 1958 PICNIC

On Monday evening, June 2, approximately 75 members of the Society traveled to Aikin to attend a picnic as guests of Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher P. Williams in the Arcadian environment of their estate "Flower Dale" in Gotham Bush. The members brought box suppers which were consumed at tables on the greensward while a peripatetic minstrel provided accordion melodies and led in vocalizing some favorite numbers.

Mr. E. Wilmer Jackson, the senior resident of Gotham Bush, displayed a plat of the property prepared in 1806 by Robert Walmsley, County surveyor, and a program of the Commencement at West Nottingham Academy in June 1886, at which Mr. Jackson delivered a declamation entitled "The Price of a Drink".

As dusk closed in on the landscape the picnickers repaired to the Williams residence for a period of friendly sociality. We again express to our former President and his wife many thanks for arranging this enjoyable affair.

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## AGGRESSION ON THE SASSAFRAS

Fredericktown on the Sassafras River was originally called "Happy Harbor", but after it was laid out in December 1736 by William Rumsey, the settlement was named for Frederick, Prince of Wales, the father of King George III of England. The town on the Kent side of the river was named Georgetown in honor of Frederick's younger brother, George. By way of returning the compliment, the British burned both places on May 6, 1813, during the War of 1812.

The order to apply the torch to the two villages was given by Admiral Sir George Cockburn, whose fleet sailed up the Chesapeake Bay and harassed the inhabitants on both shores by pillaging and burning their towns. On May 6th a flotilla of 18 barges manned by sailors from the fleet ascended the Sassafras River. On board were 150 marines under command of Lieutenant Westphal of H.M.S. *MARLBOROUGH*. Admiral Cockburn was with them. When the barges appeared the embattled farmers discharged a round of musket shots and hastily fled, and the British then proceeded to fire the houses in both villages.

The action at Georgetown produced a local heroine in the person of Miss Catherine (Kitty) Knight, who defied the invaders with caustic words and scalding water and saved two houses from destruction by putting out the fire with a broom. This courageous woman was born on Knight's Island in the Sassafras River midway between the Cecil and Kent shores. She was the daughter of John Leach Knight and his wife, Catherine Mathews. Mrs. Knight's

father was William Mathews, who once owned Worsell Manor, which is now the property of Major Alfred N. Phillips, Jr., and her twin brother, Dr. William Mathews, was one of the County's first physicians.

Kitty Knight's grave is close by the south wall of St. Francis Xavier Church and is covered by a marble slab which records that she died on November 22, 1857, at the age of 79.

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#### RECENT GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

Grateful acknowledgment is made to donors of the following gifts recently received by the Society: Two antique dolls with original clothing, from Mrs. Henry S. Young, of Elkton; a woven pocketbook of 1769, from Mrs. Ethyl Howard Rowe, of Elkton; and the source material for Miss Alice Miller's History of Cecil County, from her sisters, the Misses Mary E. and Emma Miller, of Port Deposit.

A copy of "History of the Wells and Allied Families of the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Delaware" has been presented by the author, Dr. G. Harlan Wells, of Philadelphia, Pa., and a copy of "James Logan and the Culture of Provincial America" has been given by Col. Theo W. O'Brien, of Havertown, Pa.

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#### QUIZ PROGRAM

How much do you know about your county and its history? Here are ten questions to test your knowledge:

- 1) When will Cecil County observe its tercentenary?
- 2) In how many places has the county seat been established?
- 3) What was the name of Augustine Herman's white horse?
- 4) Where was Thompson's schoolhouse?
- 5) Which river did the Indians call the Oppoquermine?
- 6) What was the Chesapeake Chesapeake?
- 7) Who fixes the boundaries of election districts?
- 8) Where was Jacob Askew's tanyard?
- 9) Why was Pivot on the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal so called?
- 10) How many postoffices are there in the County?

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#### KILROY WAS HERE

The subjoined letter, evidently intended for the late George Johnston, recently came across the desk of the County Librarian:

Mr. Johnson,  
Dear Sir,

October 4

*I made a trip to your library for the first time and enjoy it gratefully. I didnt know you had so mutch junk or I would of been up there before. I would love to own the big six shooter. No body ever told me you wrote a book about the County. I think I would rather study history than have so mutch art and other crap.*

Sincerely,  
Mickey Kilroy, 4th grade

The Board of Education will please note.

#### CECIL COUNTY'S INVENTOR

The progenitor of the Rumsey family, whose members filled many important offices in Cecil County in the 18th century, was Charles Rumsey, who emigrated from Wales to America about 1665. He landed at Charleston, South Carolina, and some time prior to 1678 settled at the head of Bohemia River in this county where he married and became the father of eight children. His youngest son, Edward, was the grandfather of James Rumsey, inventor of the steamboat, who was born on a farm at the Head of Bohemia in March, 1743.

James Rumsey was by trade a millwright. He was also a student of the mechanical arts and published one of the earliest works on the application of steam to naval propulsion. He served in the Continental army during the Revolution and in some manner attracted the attention of George Washington, for after the war Washington appointed him superintendent of the Potomac River Navigation Company. This position enabled Rumsey to turn his talents to steam navigation and while thus employed he developed his first steamboat in the secrecy of a log workshop in Washington County, Maryland.

Through Washington's efforts the state of Virginia granted Rumsey a ten-year patent on his invention, which embodied two novel principles, viz: the use of steam to propel a boat, and a hydrojet system by which steam-driven pistons drew water into the keel of his boat and pumped it out at the stern at high speed, thus producing forward motion.

Benjamin Franklin was so impressed with Rumsey's work that he formed and became president of the Rumseyian Society. This group raised money and sent Mr. Rumsey to England in order that he might interest English capital and secure the services of the most skilled mechanics. Although Rumsey was an American and had borne arms against England, the British Government granted him patent rights. Similar grants for his invention were received from France and Holland.

For more than four years he labored abroad to perfect his second steamboat, which he christened the *COLUMBIA MAID*, although he suffered many reverses due to lack of funds. By the end of 1792, however, the completion of his steamboat was in sight, but on December 23, 1792, while delivering a lecture to a large audience in London to raise money for a final trial of the *COLUMBIA MAID*, then lying in the Thames River, he was stricken with apoplexy and died within a few hours. He was buried in St. Margaret's churchyard, near Westminster, in a grave that is unmarked.

In 1939 the James Rumsey Memorial Bridge was dedicated at Shepherds-town, West Virginia, where this Cecil County genius on December 3, 1787, demonstrated that his steamboat with six passengers aboard could move against the strong current of the Potomac River. This successful experiment occurred 20 years before Robert Fulton operated his side-wheeler on the Hudson River and established Rumsey's right to be recognized as the inventor of the steamboat, an honor which is not always accorded this distinguished man.

## CECIL COUNTY ALMANAC

The chronicle of unusual events that befell in Cecil County during the month of October becomes the sixth consecutive installment of the County Almanac.

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### OCTOBER

### 10TH MONTH

1. Rev. Hugh Jones appointed rector of St. Stephen's Parish, 1731
2. Seventh Day Adventist Church at Blythedale dedicated, 1920
3. Local Preachers Camp Meeting Association incorporated, 1895
4. James B. Groome, Governor 1874-1876, died in Elkton, 1893
5. Squirrel hunting season opened in Cecil County, 1958
6. Joseph Hinchcliffe opened his news-stand in Elkton, 1865
7. Gen. Lafayette boarded steamboat at Frenchtown 2 a.m., 1824
8. Cornerstone of new Methodist Church in North East laid, 1911
9. Crimson flag assigned Cecil County by Gov. Nicholson, 1694
10. Presbyterian Church at Perryville incorporated, 1888
11. Susquehanna Post #135, American Legion, organized, 1937
12. County's first agricultural fair held in Elkton, 1880
13. Hart B. Holton, U. S. Congressman, born in Elkton, 1835
14. Dr. John E. Owens, Civil War surgeon, born Seneca Point, 1836
15. Rev. Jos. Houston installed first pastor Elk-river Church, 1724
16. James McKinsey appointed postmaster at Elkton, 1861
17. "Parson" Weems, colporteur, visited Rev. Wm. Duke in Elkton, 1795
18. St. Andrew's P. E. Church at Andora dedicated, 1900
19. Cecil County troops engaged in battle at Cedar Creek, Va., 1864
20. Last legal execution in County occurred, 9:53 a. m., 1905
21. Queen Elizabeth II traversed County by B&O RR, 1957
22. Col. Tench Tilghman rode across Cecil countryside, 1781
23. Rock Presbyterian Church observed 235th anniversary, 1955
24. William Penn from ship *WELCOME* landed at New Castle, Del., 1682
25. Cecil County Library dedicated by Gov. T. R. McKeldin, 1955
26. 150th anniversary of Methodism in North East celebrated, 1931
27. First ship passed through Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, 1829
28. U. S. Postoffice and Federal Building in Elkton dedicated, 1939
29. Community Hall in Cecilton dedicated, 1921
30. Tome Memorial Methodist Church at Port Deposit dedicated, 1872
31. Christopher Rousby fatally stabbed by George Talbot, 1684

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### INFORMATION NEEDED

Dues for the year 1959 will be paid for the first member of the Society who submits a notable event in Cecil County history occurring on any one of the following dates:

November 25 - 27

December 22 - 28

January 3 - 29

This offer expires December 31, 1958