

BULLETIN

OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CECIL COUNTY

No. 12

Vinegar Hill, Maryland

May 11, 1959

JANUARY 1959 MEETING

The cafeteria at Cecil Manor Elementary School near Miller's Corner was comfortably filled when the Society's regular winter meeting was called to order by President Wm. T. Mahoney on Monday evening, January 19, 1959. The invocation was given by the chaplain, Rev. James A. Junker, and a fine dinner was served by the PTA of Cecil Manor.

During the business session which followed, Peyton B. Patterson reported that through the good offices of Fletcher P. Williams, who was unable to be present, the State Roads Commission has agreed to reconstruct the old covered bridge at Gilpin's Rocks, to erect suitable markers, and to create and maintain a State Park at the site of the former picnic area. This announcement was vigorously applauded and a rising vote of thanks was extended to Mr. Williams for his success in saving the only covered bridge remaining in the County.

The publisher of the Bulletin returns thanks for the vote of appreciation given him for this journalistic effort and hopes that this apparent interest in the publication will induce some member to contribute an article or news item for its columns. In another burst of enthusiasm the Treasurer, Henry S. Young, and the Curator, Morton F. Taylor, were warmly commended for their constructive work in promoting the interests of the Society.

The President introduced as the guest speaker, Mr. James A. Flood, managing editor of the *CECIL WHIG*, who talked in an entertaining manner of the early days of that newspaper. Mr. Flood traced the origin of the Whig name, the rise and fall of the Whig party in American politics, the futile attempts to launch other County papers, and the circumstances leading up to the founding of the *CECIL WHIG* in August, 1841. He described Palmer C. Ricketts, who was named the first editor at the age of 23, as a dynamic personality and a forcible writer. Excerpts were read from trenchant editorials written by Mr. Ricketts who thereby became embroiled in a bitter feud with Amor T. Forwood, Esq., editor of the Cecil Democrat, which culminated in a personal encounter and the fatal shooting of Forwood on August 30, 1843.

This episode was dramatically re-enacted when Ed H. Seneff, present editor of the Cecil Democrat, assumed the role of his ill-fated predecessor and feigned an assault with a heavy cane on Mr. Flood, who drew a toy pistol and demonstrated how the youthful Ricketts defended himself against his assailant.

Mr. Ricketts continued to edit his paper from a jailcell until he was brought to trial on a charge of manslaughter on October 26, 1843. He was defended by Col. John C. Groome and John Henry Jamar, who won a verdict of acquittal for their client.

The bound volume of the first issues of the *WHIG* was displayed and examined by a number of members who noted the excellent typography and the durable quality of paper used 115 years ago.

VINEGAR HILL

This name was originally given to that section of Wallace road west of Colora which rises sharply for a half mile to the top of one of the high spots in Cecil County. From this elevation of approximately 400 feet one may look west across the Susquehanna River valley to the Harford County hills and north to York and Lancaster counties in Pennsylvania.

How the hill got its name is not certain, as several traditions have come down through the past 150 years. The story of a vinegar barrel which fell from a wagon and rolled down the hill spilling its contents along the way has been passed down through several generations with some variations. According to one version, it was stolen vinegar that was spilled in the getaway. Another is that a load of moving contained a barrel of this home-brew with an open bung, so that in going up the steep hill the contents were spread along the road and an empty barrel was all that remained when the summit was reached.

In 1840 Mount Pleasant Church was erected on this hill top which since that time has borne the name of the church. Before the church was built the cross-roads village there consisted of a blacksmith shop, a sorghum mill, a store, a cobbler's shop, and at least two dwellings which still stand. Nearby were farmhouses antedating the church, the Ewing home to the south being one of these. From their farm the lot for the church was purchased on July 10, 1840.

Vinegar Hill has always been a favorite sledding place, as it is straight and long. Small sleds can easily make the half-mile journey from the top, over the little brook at the bottom and the next rise, and on to the cross-roads in Colora village. (B.B.)

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CURATOR'S REPORT

The Society is greatly indebted to Mr. John H. Ware, 3d, publisher of the *CECIL DEMOCRAT*, for an almost complete file of back issues of that newspaper. Dating from 1840, when the *DEMOCRAT* was founded, this file is without doubt the most historically important gift the Society has received, as it will be an invaluable aid for those doing research in County history. Old newspapers, like wine, improve by age.

Other accessions have been: From Miss Eliza Sempers, a pin cushion bought by her grandfather at the Whitsuntide Fair at Charlestown more than 100 years ago, and three nails made at Elk Forge by Whitaker, Garrett & Company; from Miss Gertrude Brinkle, two parchment deeds to Rumsey property near Warwick; from Mrs. Wm. T. Mahoney, satin glass slipper from the Columbian Exposition of 1893, handpainted fan, and an ornamental pin and comb; from Mrs. James B. Fassitt, tunic of a Union officer's Civil War uniform; from Mrs. Albert F. Graham, print of a sketch of the British defeat by General Jackson's forces at Chalmette Plain, New Orleans, January 8, 1815; from Mrs. Henry S. Young, school-master's desk from Elk Landing; and from Miss Mary L. Howard, a pair of ancient spectacles. *Belonged to Col. Henry Hollingsworth*

Grateful acknowledgment is made for these gifts, and also to Miss Lenore Taylor for the loan of an unusual hatpin collection and to Mrs. Ronald Haines for restoring two antique dolls given previously by Mrs. Young.

MISCELLANY

The Executive Committee has elected Mr. Howard A. Medholdt, of North East, a Trustee of the Society in place of Mrs. Kingsley Montgomery, resigned.

Since the first of 1959 the following nominees have been inducted as members:

Dr. & Mrs. S. Ralph Andrews	Mr. & Mrs. John H. Lux
Mr. & Mrs. T. Wholley Brown	Mrs. Newton H. Mahoney
Mr. & Mrs. Warren B. Eib	Mrs. Willard W. McKinney
Mrs. G. William England	Miss Virginia Richards
Mr. J. Frank Holt	Mr. & Mrs. Arthur F. Stanley
Mrs. Ernest Janney	Mr. & Mrs. John P. Stanley

The seventh in the series of round table seminars on various phases of County history was held in the Assembly Room of the Library in Elkton on Monday evening, April 13. Mrs. Henry S. Young served as moderator for an interesting discussion of the individual services of those patriotic Cecil countians who took a valiant part in the struggle for American independence between 1776 and 1781. Other matters studied were the major engagements in which these men participated and the frequent movement of troops and supplies in and around Head of Elk.

Can any reader locate any of the places in Cecil County formerly known by these names: Ewingville, New Kansas, New Mexico, Mechanics Dale, Mullin's Delight, Prospect Hill, Still Valley, Peddler's Lane?

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WHAT PRICE FREEDOM?

On November 9, 1861, the following notice appeared in the *CECIL DEMOCRAT*:

PUBLIC SALE OF A NEGRO MAN

Notice is hereby given that by virtue of an order of the Circuit Court for Cecil County, passed October term 1861, the undersigned will sell at a public sale on

Friday, the 15th of November, 1861

at the Court House door in the town of Elkton,

ELLIS PENNINGTON

Free Negro, as a slave for 12 years from the day of sale. The above negro is to be sold out of the State. Terms cash. Sale to commence at 11 o'clock a.m.

Sheriff's Office

James E. Oldham, Sheriff

Although he was a free negro, Ellis Pennington had fallen into the clutches of the law by aiding a colored servant to abscond from her master, and in consequence the Court had sentenced him to slavery for 12 years. The County realized \$79 from his sale, which Patrick Henry might have considered was selling liberty at a low price.

MARYLAND'S CONSTITUTION IS ADOPTED

(Special to the BULLETIN)

Annapolis, Md., November 8, 1776. The convention which assembled in this city on August 14th last, with a mandate to frame a State constitution, completed its work today when the instrument which had been under consideration for nearly two months was finally agreed to. Maryland as a proprietary colony has now ceased to exist and Maryland the independent State is prepared to take her place in the galaxy of new republics comprising the confederation of American states.

The four delegates from Cecil County, Messrs. Joseph Gilpin, David Smith, Patrick Ewing, and Benjamin Brevard, who have been in constant attendance at the deliberations of the convention, were in their customary places today and upon the final roll-call were recorded as voting in favor of the proposed constitution.

The new form of government will be composed of three separate branches, the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary. The legislative authority is vested in a Senate and House of Delegates, whose several powers are specifically defined. The House of Delegates will consist of four delegates from each county and two each from the cities of Baltimore and Annapolis. They are to be elected immediately by the people, viva voce, at elections held by the sheriffs of the counties in their respective court houses. The Senate will consist of fifteen members—nine from the western and six from the eastern shore—who are to be chosen by a college of electors composed of two delegates elected by the people in each county.

The executive authority is placed in the hands of a Governor who is to be elected annually by joint ballot of the two houses of the legislature. He must own an estate of not less than 5,000 pounds and cannot hold office more than three years. The judicial system of the State includes the general courts, the court of chancery, and the court of appeals. The sheriffs of the counties are to be elected by the people, and the clerks of the courts will be appointed by the judges. The register of wills is to receive his commission from the Governor.

Under the new constitution, every voter is required to be above the age of 21 years, to possess a freehold of 50 acres of land in the county in which he resides or property within the State of the value of 30 pounds current money. An aspirant to the House of Delegates must possess property of the value of 500 pounds and Senators are required to own property of 1,000 pounds in value. Delegates will be elected for one year, Senators for five years.

The constitution provides that an election shall be held on the 25th of this month for Senatorial electors who are ordered to meet in Annapolis on December 9th to select the first Senate of Maryland. On December 18th an election is to be held in the several counties for members of the House of Delegates, and at the same time and place for sheriffs of the counties.

The convention is now about to adjourn. It was made up of the ablest and most distinguished patriots in Maryland who have performed their arduous duties under the inspiration of the spirit of freedom. How well they have wrought, time alone will tell. Before the nascent republic may lie a future whose greatness cannot now be foreseen.