

BULLETIN
OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CECIL COUNTY

No. 7

West Nottingham, Maryland October 21, 1957

OUR HOME ADDRESS

A comment has been made that use of different date lines on this publication may be confusing to those who are not familiar with the Society's activities and that a permanent address should be shown for their benefit. In deference to this suggestion, it can be stated that the only address of this Society is 135 East Main Street, Elkton, Maryland. The different date lines used are names of places in which meetings are held and at which the corresponding number of the BULLETIN is distributed. Original names of meeting places are used when available. It is proposed to continue this practice so far as practicable.

MAY 1957 MEETING

The sparkling surface of the North East River provided a perfect backdrop as the stage was set for a record-breaking attendance of 164 members and guests which taxed the facilities of the North East River Yacht Club at the Society's spring meeting on Monday evening, May 13. At the conclusion of the dinner, President W. T. Mahoney presided at a business session during which Argus F. Robinson, Barclay Moore, and Mrs. Eugene England were named as a committee to pre-nominate a slate of officers to serve for the bi-ennium beginning October 21, 1957.

Upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, a contribution of \$100 to the restoration fund of Old Bohemia Church was authorized. Frank W. Krastel, President of the Old Bohemia Society, expressed appreciation for this support of the restoration project.

Wallace Williams, Sr., the Society's poet laureate, read a new poem entitled "Heritage" as a prelude to presenting the guest speaker, the Hon. George L. Radcliffe, former U. S. Senator and President of the Maryland Historical Society since 1938. The Senator made an interesting talk on Maryland history, commenting that the important role played by the Old Line State in the nation's development is not emphasized as it should be in modern education and that the State has been remiss in not giving more attention to heroic deeds performed by Marylanders of bygone days. Among these he cited the death of Captain Edward Veazey, of Cecil County, at the battle of Long Island on August 27, 1776, when the Maryland Line stemmed the advance of British forces which otherwise would have annihilated the entire American army.

Senator Radcliffe warmly congratulated the Society upon the interest shown by its members in their County's historical inheritance and described the meeting as the largest of its kind which he had attended in the State.

* * *

ANOTHER ROUND TABLE

The fourth in the series of informal round table discussions of various facets of County history will be conducted in the Assembly Room of the Library in Elkton on Monday, November 18, 1957, at 7:30 p.m. The subject to be discussed will be "The Old Public Schools of Cecil County". This will be an open meeting and members and others who have recollections of a favorite school are invited to attend and contribute their information for purposes of record.

* * *

AMONG OUR CONTEMPORARIES

By Act of the General Assembly of Maryland the fee for a marriage license issued in Garrett County has been increased from \$2 to \$4, and the increase of \$2 is divided equally between the Enslow Public Library in Oakland and the Garrett County Historical Society. This produces an annual income of approximately \$500 for each beneficiary. The Garrett County Society reported 228 paid memberships at June 30.

The entire membership of the Prince George's County Society, numbering 265 persons, has accepted a package deal whereby each member has become an affiliate member of the Maryland Historical Society and is entitled to receive the Maryland Historical Magazine.

The Commissioners of Carroll County have completed the erection of a new office building in Westminster and have set aside a spacious room on the first floor for use of the Historical Society of that county. In addition, the Commissioners have equipped the room with necessary furniture, display cases, files, etc. We congratulate the Carroll Society and its 554 members upon having the official support of Commissioners of such broad vision.

The Washington County Society is already at work on plans for an appropriate celebration in 1962 of the centennial of the Battle of Antietam, which was fought September 17, 1862. The co-operation of the National Park Service has been enlisted in formulating these plans.

Exploratory conversations are in progress looking toward the formation of a historical society in Howard County.

If these efforts should be concluded successfully, it will mean that the 17th Maryland county will have been organized on a local level, leaving only six counties in the State without societies.

THE BULLETIN
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the Historical Society of
Cecil County, Incorporated
135 E. Main St., Elkton, Md.
Ernest A. Howard, Editor

A RENUNCIATION

The first woman in Maryland history to become successful in business affairs was Mrs. Margaret Brent, a relative of Governor Leonard Calvert, who named her as the executrix of his estate. She was thought very presumptuous when she asked for a "voice and vote" in the General Assembly and her demand was refused because the Assembly believed that no woman should help to enact the laws.

It is interesting to know, however, that from the earliest days of the colony women possessed and exercised many rights in much the same way they do at present. They executed deeds and bills of sale, gave power of attorney, made wills, and even divorced their husbands. This privilege is illustrated by the case of one Mary Wheeler, who in 1674 filed a paper entitled "A Renunciation". It is recorded in Cecil County Archives Liber M 1, folio 71, and reads as follows:

"Know all men by these presents that I, Mary Wheeler, lately counted wife of John Wheeler, Senior, planter of Cecil County, do disown him as my husband in all respects till death do part, and that I and my heirs have nothing to demand upon or any interest or account whatsoever from the said John Wheeler, Sr., or his heirs.

For witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 23rd day of June, 1674.

Sworn and signed and delivered in the presence of us

John Gilbert
His
Sam'l (X) Wheeler
Mark

The (X) Mark of
Mary Wheeler"

Mrs. Wheeler gave no reason for publicly disowning her spouse, but evidently it was considered a lawful procedure, for in 1676 the said John Wheeler, Sr., planter, for "divers good reasons" conveyed by deed, in which his former wife did not join, his dwelling and plantation called Wheeler's Point, on the east side of Chesapeake Bay on the north side of Sassafras River.

* * *

COLLEGE GREEN

College Green, now Greenhurst, was the home of Dr. John Beard, who erected there a building which he proposed to give to the College of New Jersey. Dr. Beard was a graduate of Oxford University and came to America in 1752. He served as minister at West Nottingham Presbyterian Church (1762-1771) and was also a surgeon in the American Army during the Revolution. His son, Hugh Beard, who was county surveyor for many years, was the great-grandfather of a member of this Society.

A PIONEER SCHOOLMASTER

At the first road intersection west of Rising Sun on Route 1 a highway marker announces:

WEST NOTTINGHAM ACADEMY
FOUNDED 1744 BY REV. SAMUEL FINLEY, A
PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER AND A NATIVE OF
ARMAGH COUNTY, IRELAND. HE REMAINED IN
CHARGE OF THE ACADEMY UNTIL JULY, 1761,
WHEN HE WAS CHOSEN PRESIDENT OF THE COL-
LEGE OF NEW JERSEY NOW CALLED PRINCETON.

Samuel Finley, a Scotch-Irish immigrant, arrived in Philadelphia on September 28, 1734, at the age of 19. He studied for the ministry and in June 1744 became pastor of the Presbyterian church at Nottingham, Maryland. In conjunction with his pastoral work he established an academy which acquired a great reputation in educating young men for the ministry and for other professions. Dr. Finley's school in the backwoods was the forerunner of at least 1600 such institutions affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America. After an existence of more than 200 years it is today the last remaining one under jurisdiction of that church.

Education on the colonial frontier in those early days was a secondary matter. Usually there were more immediate concerns: clearing off the lower twenty, re-roofing the cabin, getting in the corn, hauling grain to the mill. Although this educational hiatus was most evident in the sparsely settled outposts, it was apparent as well among the children of wealthy planters in the colonies. Frequently several planters pooled their resources to bring a teacher from Europe to instruct their large families, erecting for him a house and granting him the use of a certain number of acres for the purpose of raising crops.

Such efforts, more often than not, proved a waste of time and money. The indentured servants who called themselves "teachers" were often almost illiterate or worse—mere opportunists who seized the chance offered to secure passage and a stake in the new world.

The clergy were the only group remaining who could properly claim to be educated. Many of them set about the business of saving minds as well as souls. They established schools in their homes, in crude log cabins back of their churches. To these schools came the most promising young men of the colonies to learn how to cipher and spell and, what was more important, how to build a nation.

One of the most renowned of these clergy schools in the middle colonies was West Nottingham Academy, which stands today as a monument to the character of its founder.

MEMBERSHIP ROLL OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CECIL COUNTY

December 31, 1957

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Baker, W. Herbert	Bratton, Mr. & Mrs. Wm. Wilson
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 England, Mr. & Mrs. Harold
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 Phillips, Mr. & Mrs. John P.
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