

The HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HARFORD COUNTY, Inc.

Preserving Our Past For Your Future



143 N. Main Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Society News

January / February 2013

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The Historical Society of Harford County, Inc., headquarters.

IN THIS ISSUE

President's Message	1
New Members	1
Edwin Booth Birthday Celebration	2
Historic Society Volunteer Honored	3
Did You Know?	3
Volunteer Today!	3
On Doing History	4
A Visit to the Historical Society – A Virtual Time Capsule	6
2013 Calendar of Events	7
Fall Events Review	8
Building Restoration Campaign Update	9
Archer Fellow Award	11
Membership Application	11

NEW MEMBERS

Dorothy Ward - Karen Bands - JoAnne and David Bogusko - Christina Class - Spencer I. M. Elmore and Bettie S. Foell - Carlo Gilotte - Bill Harlan - George F. Harrison - Barbara Hinder - Francis and Susan Kelly - Thomas and Josephine Murtaugh - A. A. Roberty - Judy Savage - John and Cyrile Sincock - Janice A. Spellman - Janet Thomas - John Thompson - Anne Welsh

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Last year we celebrated in a grand way the 75th Anniversary of the construction of our headquarters building. We kicked off the largest fundraising effort in the Society's history as we began our Building Restoration Campaign. This is a multi-year effort as we attempt to raise \$500,000 to strengthen our headquarters in the landmark Old Post Office building.

We were encouraged by the award of a grant in the amount of \$50,000 from the Community Development Block Grant program and by individual contributions as people have begun to help us put the "puzzle" together. We are currently awaiting word on another grant that has been submitted and several others are being written as this newsletter goes to press.

This project will not be an easy one however, it is vital to the future of the Society that this building be restored. This is not simply because we need a mailing address. Rather it is vital to our collections, which represent Harford's history. Leaks, peeling paint, defunct heating and cooling units and their ductwork, rotting windows and cracked mortar all threaten the contents of this building.

While I realize that we are in difficult financial times, I am confident that we will be successful. We are planning events that we hope will be "funraisers" as much as they are fundraisers. You will be hearing more about our efforts as the year progresses. I hope you will support us in the campaign.

Wishing you a very healthy and prosperous year,

Henry C. Peden, Jr., President

179th EDWIN BOOTH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

By Tom Fink

It was a beautiful, crisp, clear night November 13, 2012 in New York City. A perfect night to celebrate Edwin Booth's 179th birthday at the private club Edwin founded on the last night of 1888—The Players. The Players was his longtime dream; it created a first-class sanctuary where actors and eminent men in other professions in business and the arts could informally meet and rub shoulders, and still is today. For many it was and is a home away from home. It was also the last place Edwin chose to make his home.

The Players continues to honor Edwin's life and the ground breaking theatrical contributions he made to the American theatre which are alive today. The birthday celebration they held in his honor that night achieved just that. It commenced with carefully selected readings by Players members, moderated by the Master of Ceremonies David Staller: *Edwin Booth's Youth* by his sister Asia Booth Clarke and William Winter, *A Booth Saves a Lincoln* by Adam Badeau, *Edwin Booth's Letter to the People of the United States*, *The Curse of Rome* by Laurence Hutton and an *Excerpt from Joseph Jefferson's Inaugural Speech as Second President of The Players*. Then they presented a touching, beautiful slideshow of Edwin through his life produced by Elizabeth Jackson.

Cathy Rowan, a Junius B. Booth Society member who resides in The Bronx, and I, the President of the JBBS and volunteer at the Historical Society of Harford County, were honored to be invited to the celebration and were warmly introduced to the members in attendance. We all made a candlelight excursion across the street into Gramercy Park and a laurel wreath was placed on Edwin Booth's statue. There David Copeland read *On*

Edwin Booth's 104th Birthday—November 13, 1937, written by Player Edgar Lee Masters. An impromptu rendition of *Happy Birthday* to Edwin was sung by all. We then made our way back to The Players for champagne and hors d'oeuvres in The Grill Room.

Elizabeth Jackson, who produced the celebration invited Cathy and me to join her and her guests at her table. We had a great time getting to know each other and talking about Edwin and his legacy. I met many wonderful Players members and answered a lot of questions about The Junius B. Booth Society. It really was a wonderful, unique experience, made even more special in Edwin's beloved *The Players*.

Later Cathy and I were delighted to tour the club and visit Edwin's bedroom, preserved just as it was when he died in 1893. I would like to thank Elizabeth Jackson and John Martello, Director of The Players, for their hospitality and making us feel at home. It was a night to remember. Well done *The Players*!

HISTORIC SOCIETY VOLUNTEER HONORED

Doris Barben, a Society volunteer since 1982 and the person most responsible for the creation of the Family Files section of the Library Collection, was honored at the 26th Annual *Harford's Most Beautiful People Celebration* on October 25th. The write-up in the program referred to Doris as possessing all "the characteristics of a superlative volunteer" and being the "classic behind-the-scenes source of energy. Congratulations to our Dear Doris.

BOOTH GATE SOLD AT AUCTION

Many years ago several items were sold at auction to close the estate of the deceased owner of Tudor Manor, originally the Booth family home. One of these items was an iron gate that once protected the graves of the Booth children buried on the site before they were reinterred at Greenmount Cemetery in Baltimore. The Booth Society is trying to locate the gate and possibly return it to its original home. If you have any information about the gate, who purchased it or where it is currently, please contact Maryanna Skowronski at the Historical Society, 410-838-7691.



Booth gate from Stephen Archer collection.

DID YOU KNOW?

Before refrigeration, ice was a precious commodity. Each year workers would gather along the Susquehanna River, sawing ice into huge blocks, hauling the blocks out to store in straw on hillsides and carting it off for storage. They used ice tongs and pick axes to push and pull in submerged blocks of ice while horses wearing ice shoes with saw blades, tugged on the ice until it popped up far enough to pull over and out.

(Excerpt from Images of America: Havre de Grace)

VOLUNTEER TODAY!

JOIN THE FUN!

JOIN THE TEAM!

MAKE HISTORY HAPPEN

ADMINISTRATIVE & TYPING ASSISTANCE –

Provide visitor services and reception, managing donor and member databases

DATA ENTRY – Enter information into museum databases, must be detail oriented

GRANT WRITING ASSISTANT – Assist with identification of grant resources and help prepare grant applications

EVENT COORDINATOR – Help manage and plan Society events

COLLECTIONS AIDE – Assist with small hand sewing. Interest in antiques and military history a plus.

GARDENING – Help with care and maintenance of Society and Hays House Museum grounds

To volunteer, stop by the Historical Society Headquarters or go online to www.HarfordHistory.org to complete a volunteer application.

ON DOING HISTORY

By Jim Chrismer

Historians hate gaps. It's not that they are victims of an unusual phobia or are otherwise psychologically challenged—it's their desire to have answers to all relevant questions so as to provide a complete and full account of a given topic. Indeed at times they will drive themselves to distraction seeking to resolve historical mysteries, realizing all the while that they are limited by a series of factors, most especially the availability of proper source materials.

I offer these observations to point to an instance that recently occurred in my quest for "historical truth" in local history.

Eighteen years ago I wrote an article for the *Harford Historical Bulletin* detailing the wartime experience of William R. Bissell, a 53-year old captain from Bel Air in the Confederate Army at the Battle of Gettysburg. Severely injured on July 3, 1863, during "Pickett's Charge," Bissell died after a two-week struggle for life at Gettysburg in a field hospital. His wife Margaret, 46, learning of his injuries, had hastily travelled the 75 miles to the overwhelmed village in south central Pennsylvania with a party of people from Harford County. This included her oldest daughter, 28-year old Lizzie. Subsequently both wife and daughter were at Captain Bissell's side when he died.

Upon her return to Bel Air, Margaret Bissell penned a multi-page memoir detailing her experiences in Gettysburg. In it she recounted how she learned of her husband's injuries, explained the process by which the group made its way to Pennsylvania, described how they located William, and generally conveyed details regarding the aftermath of the battle. Particularly poignant was her description of

Bissell's worsening condition, his ultimate death, and the burial her party arranged for the fallen Confederate. She stated that they buried William in "the Presbyterian Church yard" and provided a "board at his head marked with his name." Given the haste and awkwardness of the circumstances (burying a Confederate officer in a Union town), Captain Bissell's internment, like thousands of others, was intended to be temporary in nature.

In preparing the memoir for publication, a major challenge was to provide the annotations that would make Margaret's reminiscences intelligible to readers 140 years removed from local affairs during the Civil War era. This required providing relevant background on all the principals, explaining the political situation in Harford County, generally describing the conditions that prevailed in the United States of 1863, and relating briefly Bissell family history following the war. One relatively minor issue, so I thought, was to answer the question "whatever happened to William R. Bissell's remains?"

The answer to the question appeared to be easy to answer. In the cemetery of Churchville Presbyterian Church, to which the family belonged, there existed a marker bearing Bissell's name and referring to the circumstances of his death. But there was certain vagueness to the inscription that intrigued me. Nowhere was there a phrase such "here lies the body" or "mortal remains." There was no reference to a reburial or re-internment. Rather, the first words on the stone read simply "In Memory of Our Beloved Father." Was this a gravestone or only a commemorative marker? Had William R. Bissell really returned to Harford County? Was this really a tombstone? Or had the

eight children (possibly following the 1906 death of their mother) simply decided to erect a memorial to ensure that their deceased father would not be forgotten? What, in fact, was the real story? The quest for “the truth” began.

The obvious first step was to examine the archives in Churchville. The pastor gave me free access to a large cabinet of historical records, but nothing he had yielded any information on burials of that era. Descendants with whom I was acquainted likewise had no knowledge beyond the mere existence of the marker. So off to Gettysburg I went. Officials at the Gettysburg Presbyterian Church allowed me to examine their holdings from the 1860s. Nothing referred to Bissell, but I did discover that the cemetery had been disestablished soon after the war and the bodies removed when the church sold the property for commercial development. Most of the bodies were thought to have been moved to a lot in the borough’s Evergreen Cemetery. Was the body of William R. Bissell among those moved? Evergreen had no Bissell listed.

Printed secondary sources were inconclusive. Some indicated that Bissell’s body was among those CSA remains moved in 1872 from Gettysburg to a special plot for Confederate soldiers at Richmond’s Hollywood Cemetery. Another blithely listed him as being interred at the non-existent Gettysburg Presbyterian burial ground. Yet another suggested he lay among the 600 men buried on Confederate Hill in Loudon Park Cemetery in Baltimore. No source cited Churchville Presbyterian. Needless to say, the question as to the location of Captain Bissell’s remains was not such a “relatively minor issue.”

So what could I write for the *Harford Historical Bulletin*? I wrote what I had to write: “No written record as yet has been discovered to confirm when, or even if, Bissell’s body was

reinterred at Churchville.” That was in the spring of 1994.

And that’s where the matter stood for eighteen years.

This past summer, quite by accident, as is often the case in lingering historical research, my pursuit for “historical truth” took a huge leap forward. Noted genealogist and society president Henry Peden was working with the congregation at Bethel Presbyterian Church in Madonna to make copies of many of their records for the Society’s Church History Collection. Among the various items was the Diary of the Reverend Thomas S. C. Smith, pastor at Bethel from 1857 until 1864 and then at Bel Air Presbyterian Church from 1864 to May 1869.

Remembering what I had written about Bissell years earlier, Henry’s attention focused on the entries for July 19 and July 21, 1866. On July 19th, Smith wrote: “*went to Churchville to inter the remains of Capt. W. R. Bissell but they did not come owing to breakdown on the N.C. RR.*” [North Central Railroad that ran through the very eastern portion of Baltimore County]. A very tantalizing entry, to say the least.

Finally, two entries later, there it was: “Saturday 21st, Buried the remains of Capt. Wm. R. Bissell.”

At length, after nearly two decades of research, at least *part* of the mystery had been resolved. Three years after his death at Gettysburg, Bissell’s remains had returned to Harford County and had been buried at the family cemetery. The marker was both a memorial and a gravestone.

But where had the body been? How had the Bissell family come to arrange its return? The pursuit continues.

A VISIT TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY – A VIRTUAL TIME CAPSULE

By Carol L. Deibel

Time – There never seems to be enough to do all the things we want to do. Many society members find this true, wishing to be more involved in Society activities or just to explore the many treasures housed in the Society's headquarters. Therefore, in this issue I have attempted to provide a virtual tour of the headquarters building for those of you who have not had an opportunity to explore on your own.

As you enter the Society Headquarters, the old Post Office lobby, you are greeted by a unique book and gift shop featuring books by local authors and a wide variety of antiques, costume jewelry and collectibles. To the right is an exhibit area which changes regularly. Exhibits tell the County's story, ranging from the history of the canning industry in Harford County to the development of local postal service to the current exhibit – Harford's Role in the War of 1812.

The main floor of the building includes a library, local genealogical resources, court records, archival materials, an outstanding collection of historic photographs, postcards, scrapbooks, maps and a microfilm newspaper collection dating back to the 1700s.

Volunteers are generally available to help researchers locate information on their family history, historic properties, and historic events

unique to Harford County. (It is best to call for appointments to assure volunteer availability) All families have interesting stories, finding these can be an adventure to share with your entire family, something to pass down from generation to generation. Similarly, researching your house or business may lead to a new appreciation and possibly a new restoration project. Many local properties are documented in the Society's archives, providing information on who built the house/building, its original style, and the cultural forces at work when it was built and throughout its history. This immersion in a building's history allows you to experience its uniqueness and its personality, making its history come alive.

The library contains treasures not generally found elsewhere, including community histories, yearbooks, unpublished manuscripts and more. The society's basement yields even more discoveries, holding artifacts donated by generations of Harford Countians. In the near future, a new Artifact Conservation Studio is planned, further enhancing the Society's ability to process, store and maintain the County's historic resources.

When you have a chance, we encourage you to come to the Society Headquarters to experience its wonders for yourself. We also encourage you to become a part of the effort to repair and restore the building.

IN MEMORIAM

We are sorry to report the passing of long time Society volunteer and Archer Fellow recipient, Thirza Brandt. Please keep her family in your thoughts and prayers as you remember one of the most elegant volunteers the Society has ever had- *the lady in the hat*.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HARFORD COUNTY INC. 2013 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 9	Spring lecture and tea (speaker TBA), Lecture free, Tea and lecture \$8
June 10	Bus Trip (Destination TBA)
June 22	Yard Sale
July 4	Independence Day Open House at the Hays House (free)
July 20	Summer Lecture and tea (speaker TBA), Lecture free, Tea and lecture \$8.
August 16	Movie Night at the Historical Society
September 9	Bus trip (Destination TBA)
September 19	Annual Meeting and Dinner Call 410-838-7691 for reservations (\$)
October 26	Annual George Archer Lecture, Lecture free, Tea and lecture \$8
November 16 thru December 15	Model Train and Aluminum Christmas Tree Show Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Adults-\$4, children \$2, Under four, free.
December 1	Hays House Christmas Open House (Free) December 8- Candlelight Christmas Concert and Tea at Emmanuel Episcopal Church Call for reservations 410-838-7691
December 8	Candlelight Christmas Concert and Tea at Emmanuel Episcopal Church Call for reservations 410-838-7691
December 15	Greens Sale at Society Headquarters

*The Hays House will only be open 2 Sundays a month. Special event program information is not yet available.
Visitors should call 410-838-7691 for hours.*

Unless otherwise noted, all events will be held at the Historical Society headquarters, 143 N. Main Street, Bel Air, MD 21014. For additional information call 410-838-7691, watch for information in the Newsletter, check Facebook.com/HarfordCountyHistoricalSociety, or check our website at www.HarfordHistory.org for updated information throughout the year.

In addition to Society and Hays House Museum Events, we try to bring you updates on events sponsored by our sister organizations the Archeological Society of the Northern Chesapeake and the Harford County Genealogical Society. You are cordially invited to attend the following events sponsored by these groups.

Jan 9, 2013 – 6:30 pm “A Birdwatchers Experience at Machu Picchu, Peru”

Amanda Koss, Harford Glen Staff, Havre de Grace City Hall

Feb 13 – 6:30 pm “Results of the 2012 ASM Field Session.” Jim Gibb, ASNC Member

Historical Society of Harford County. Bel Air, Maryland

FALL EVENT REVIEW



Hays House concert



Christmas Festivities at the Hays House Museum



This year's Model Train show sponsored by the Harford Model Railroad Group delighted many visitors to the Society.



Some of the recipients of the newly announced "J. Alexis Shriver Award". The award will be presented annually to Society members to recognize their outstanding service.



Christmas at the Society Gift shop



Annual Society Greens Sale

HSHC BUILDING RESTORATION CAMPAIGN UPDATE

The Society recently celebrated the 75th Anniversary of its Headquarters. Originally the home of the Bel Air Post Office, the building was turned over to the Historical Society in 1994 when a new Post Office was constructed on Blum Court. Like many of the buildings documented in the Society's files, it is in need of restoration and repairs. Over the next two years, we hope to raise \$500,000 to restore, repair and renovate the building. The following Options for Giving form outlines the numerous ways you can help in this effort.

This is an invaluable facility offering a unique service to the community. The Society is a private nonprofit organization, not part of County government, dependent on your generosity to continue its mission of "Preserving Our Past for Your Future". Please consider helping with this effort.



**HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HARFORD COUNTY INC.
BUILDING RESTORATION CAMPAIGN**

OPTIONS FOR GIVING

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

Help us Repair, Restore and Refinish the following:

WAINSCOT PATRON \$ 5,000 (5)

WINDOW TO THE PAST \$ 3,000 (30)

CAPSTONES - \$ 1,000 (115)

LIMITED NAMING OPPORTUNITIES

ARTIFACT CONSERVATION STUDIO \$20,000 (Newly developed studio for processing, storing & maintaining County artifacts)

CONFERENCE ROOM, CATACOMBS, VAULT, PHOTO COLLECTION, FLAG COURT, PARKING LOT (Each available on a first come basis for a minimum donation of \$10,000)

PUZZLE PIECES

With a minimum donation of \$ 100, you can buy a piece of the puzzle and add your name to the framed puzzle located at the Society. The puzzle is still at the foundation, but is growing daily. This is a special way that you can be part of this restoration project.

Gifts of \$1,000 or more receive recognition on a plaque in the Society's lobby and a year's membership including free admission to all Society sponsored events/activities during the upcoming year. All gifts are tax deductible and gifts of any size are deeply appreciated. Gifts may also be done as a pledge over time. For more information call Maryanna Skowronski, the Society's Director at 410-838-7691. Thank you for your generosity.

Please send your tax-deductible donations to:

The Historical Society of Harford County, Inc.,

143 N. Main Street, Bel Air, MD 21014

or make your donations online at www.HarfordHistory.org

DONOR RECOGNITION

The Historical Society wishes to thank the following individuals for their generous contributions to the building campaign.

Veronica A. Peden

Katherine E. Anderson

Lawrence J. Carmichael

Dorothy Stambaugh

Lois and William Kelly

Bonnie D. Watts-Cook

Donald C. Hildenbrand

Mary L. Silling

Robert and Mary Cardwell

Charles L. Robbins

Ann C. Robbins

Susan K. Robbins

Charles L. Robbins, Jr.

Lisa B. Robbins

Charles L. Robbins, III

Henry A. Robbins

Susan U. Burdette

David L. Heckman

*Joan L. Ludlow, In Memory of Edna
and Edward Maisenholder*

Harry and Carole DeRan

Dana and John Ward

Judy Laylon

Carol Deibel



Society President Henry Peden, Jr., presents volunteer Doug Washburn with the 2012 *Archer Fellow Award* in recognition of his service to the Society

JUST A REMINDER: YEARLY MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE NOW DUE. TO OUR NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS - THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION – Please share with a friend.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TOWN, STATE, ZIP: _____

HOME PHONE: _____ WORK PHONE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

MEMBERSHIP (PLEASE CHECK)

INDIVIDUAL: \$30 ____ FAMILY: \$35 ____ STUDENT: \$10 ____ CONTRIBUTING: \$50 ____

MEMBERSHIP WITH SPECIAL BENEFITS (PLEASE CALL)

BENEFACTOR: \$100 ____ SUSTAINING: \$250 ____ BUSINESS PARTNER: \$250 ____

CORPORATE: \$500 ____ CORPORATE GOLD: \$1000 ____

To become a member, please complete this form and submit it along with your check based on the appropriate membership category to HSHC, 143 N. Main St., Bel Air, MD 21014. Any questions call 410-838-7691 or email to HARCHIS@MSN.COM.

The Historical Society
of Harford County, Inc.
143 North Main Street
Bel Air, MD 21014



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The NEWSLETTER of The Historical Society of Harford County, Inc. is published bi-monthly

OFFICERS 2012-2013

<i>President</i> <i>Henry Peden</i>	<i>1st Vice President</i> <i>Richard Sherrill</i>	<i>2nd Vice President</i> <i>Richard Herbig</i>	<i>Recording Secretary</i> <i>Elizabeth Lehmann</i>
<i>Corresponding Secretary</i> <i>Millicent Jordan</i>	<i>Treasurer</i> <i>Brianne B. Norris</i>		<i>Past President</i> <i>Philipp Brundrett</i>

DIRECTORS 2013-2014

<i>Wendell Fritz</i> <i>A. A. Roberty</i>	<i>George Harrison</i>	<i>Walter Holloway</i> <i>John Spielberger</i>
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DIRECTORS 2012-2013

<i>Carol Deibel</i> <i>James Wollon</i>	<i>Larry Carmichael</i> <i>Adrienne DeRan</i>	<i>Mary Cardwell</i> <i>Robert Preston</i>
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DIRECTOR

Maryanna Skowronski

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Carol Deibel

HISTORICAL SOCIETY and GIFT SHOP HOURS

Tuesday
COURT RECORDS
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Wednesday
ARCHIVES
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Thursday
RESEARCH LIBRARY
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Fourth Saturday
ARCHIVES and
RESEARCH LIBRARY
10:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.