

The HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HARFORD COUNTY, Inc.

Preserving Our Past For Your Future



143 N. Main Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Society News

May / June 2018

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

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ON DOING HISTORY

by Jim Chrismer

The Computer and Internet. Who could have realized the multitude and vastly different ways in which these developments would revolutionize life? Writing term papers and conducting local and historical and genealogical research included.

Research in the not-so-distant past meant a great deal of movement: traveling to often-daunting libraries, searching through scores of catalog drawers, determining the floor and location of the appropriate collections, and roaming mazes of stacks arrayed in a manner, you believed, only a clairvoyant would be able to decipher. Locating the usually-non-circulating source material meant trips to mysterious photocopiers.

Indeed, all of this could at times be a form of adventure and perhaps even fun, but it was also time-consuming, costly, often frustrating, and frequently less productive than one would have hoped.

Developments in technology have greatly transformed access to information about the past, making historical investigation far more efficient, raising standards of personal expectation, and enabling motivated researchers to produce better quality work. Great varieties of databases; vast numbers of scanned books and newspapers; catalogs of holdings from depositories near and far; and digitized images are very often but a click away from the enthusiastic researcher -- be they undergraduates, scholars, local historians, genealogists, or even advanced high schoolers.

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Efficiency and productivity aside, there is a downside to these technical improvements. Lost, sadly, in this new methodology is a sense of the tangible, an appreciation for the characteristics of the actual records and the people involved in their creation. Only occasionally do researchers, especially students, visit private libraries, museums, rare book rooms, archives, and historical societies. Rarely do they hold, see, touch, smell the objects that provide them entrée and insight into the past.

Historical records on a computer monitor, including the rarest of documents, are but two dimensional. Even in "living color" they're generally sterile, impersonal, and detached, often precluding a true sense of engagement with earlier times and persons. One cannot touch a digitized book, artifact, or manuscript; sense its heft, feel its texture, breathe in its aroma, value its patina, appreciate the nuances in its production, or wonder at its condition. Lost also is the very real prospect of being stirred into a sense of the human context or its societal impact.

Admittedly, not all researchers seek such experiences. Many lack the time, disposition, or interest, legitimately concerned more in gathering information and being on their way. But for persons with an inclination to immerse themselves in the life of earlier periods, visits to brick and mortar archives provide the perfect venue for personal encounters with the past.

There is no shortage of such sites in the United States. *Wikipedia's* imperfect list refers to 61 "state" historical societies (e.g., Texas claims four and Virginia two). "County and local" societies number over 500, with Indiana leading the way with 200; and Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, and Arkansas report none. Delaware cites 4, New Jersey 20, New York 21, Pennsylvania 21, and Virginia 4 (five if you count *Colonial Williamsburg*® -- talk about time travel!). Specialty venues—for railroads, planes, religions, automobiles, presidents and other prominent individuals, etc.-- provide additional opportunities to experience "up close and personal" engagements with the past.

Maryland claims fifteen county and local historical societies. The most comprehensive nearby venues are the Historical Society of Harford County (at 1885, the second oldest historical society in the state) and the Historical Society of Cecil County in Elkton. Other neighboring groups that maintain libraries of immediate local materials include The Aberdeen Room Museum and The Havre de Grace Museum at the Lockhouse. To the north, historical societies libraries in Adams, Chester, Lancaster, and York County, Pennsylvania, support serious historical investigation and maintain stimulating gallery displays (as do the Decoy Museum and the Maritime Museum in Havre de Grace).

The Historical Society of Harford County offers a first-rate example of an organization whose collections engross their users. The Society's mission is to "collect, preserve, promote, and interpret the rich and diverse history" of the area and its people. Its divisions include the Family and Local History Library, Historical Archives, Court Records, and Artifacts. Sub collections include Prints and

Photographic Images, Maps, Textiles, and Paintings and other forms of art. Of these the Library/Family History section, with its extensive selection of secondary and duplicated or published original materials, is the most popular and draws visitors from around the country.

Here patrons discover copies of county marriage licenses, church and parish histories of every denomination, vertical files for every public and private school (past and present), cemetery records, obituaries, census and tax compilations; also listings of local members of the armed services since the War for Independence, records of local properties in the Inventory of Historic Places, over 50 linear feet of family histories, and a vast array of additional publications and files, including nearly 10,000 family files.

The most fascinating and historically evocative materials, observers are likely to agree, are found in the Historical Archives. Consisting of items dating from the 17th century to the present, the Archives Collection is strongest in items dating from the Civil War to the first three decades of the 20th century.

Among its thousands of treasures are

- The original Bush Declaration of 1775
- Photo albums of families whose members trace their county origins to the mid-19th century
- A warrant for the arrest of a young John Wilkes Booth for assault on a worker at Tudor Hall
- Original manumission papers between 1775 and 1865 for nearly 600 persons held as slaves by county residents
- Handwritten memoirs, letters, diaries (some with pressed flowers and locks of hair), soldier accounts, school assignments
- Journals and Account Books of mills, canneries, country stores, doctors, etc.
- Canning items, especially photos, labels, and tokens used to “pay” local and immigrant workers.

One particularly telling example of the author’s many encounters with the past at the HSHC occurred in the 1990s. Ms. Mary Wright Barnes, then in her late 80s, the daughter of C. Milton Wright, asked this “young pair of eyes” to draw near her table and help identify the year of the unusual looking document she was examining. Looking through the society’s electrified, 8-inch magnifying instrument, she asked me to help identify the number, either a three or an eight that preceded a four, to which she was pointing. “A three or an eight,” I exclaimed, “Mary, the first two numbers are a one and a six.” Our Archives Chair was calmly holding a 1684 official document from the Colony of Maryland founded but fifty years earlier. Talk about an experience with an earlier era!

Your local museums and historical societies await your visit to the past.

COMING EVENTS

Headquarters, 143 North Main Street, Bel Air, MD, unless otherwise noted.

Brown Bag Lunch Series: 300 Years of Facebook - Not That Much Has Changed

- **May 8th** - Speaker: Meg Algren; Free. (12:30 P.M.)

Genealogy Workshop: Joining A Lineage Society & What Is Required

- **May 9th** - Speaker: Chris Smithson; Fee \$10. (7:00 - 9:00 P.M.)

Charles George's play, *Final Performance or The Curtain Falls* at the Bel Air Armory, 37 N. Main St.

- **May 18th** - A story about Edwin Booth after the Lincoln assassination; Fee \$12 (7:00 P.M.)

Harford County Heritage and Music Festival; Highlands School, 2409 Cresswell Road, 21015

- **June 9th** - Join us for a day of food, live music (3 bands), fun and celebration including exhibits, demonstrations, and a celebration of Harford's heritage; Fee \$10, 12 years and under are free. (12:00 - 6:00 P.M.)

Annual Rummage Sale

- **June 30th** - come shop our "stuff". (9:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.)

Hays House, 324 Kenmore Avenue Bel Air, MD

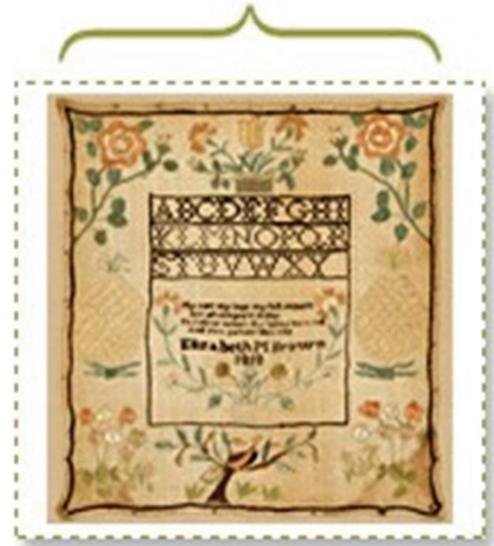
- **Starting May 4:** Hays House has several brand-new events coming up. For the first time, the museum will participate in **Bel Air's First Fridays'** celebrations. On the first Fridays of the month from May through August, Hays House will be open for free tours from 5 to 7 pm. Costumed guides will escort visitors through the house and offer complimentary lemonade and cookies. Bring the whole family for a bit of history and light refreshments.

- **June 10: Learning Bee Series** continues when needlework expert Kathleen Franetovich will be at Hays House to talk about schoolgirl samplers and decorative needlework created by young girls in Early America.

Needlework was long-considered an indispensable subject in a young girl's education. Girls as young as six labored over their samplers as a means of learning the rudiments of reading and writing as well as sewing. Young girls painstakingly worked their name and age into their samplers, often with rhymes and mottos, or with religious and moral themes. Their homes, families and pets were frequent subjects. Sometimes they stitched the whole alphabet, row after row.

On display at Hays House Museum is an original Harford County sampler worked by Blanch Hall Lee in 1830 when she was eight years old. Below is a picture of another sampler stitched in Harford County.

Do you have a family-heirloom needle work? Bring it along for “show and tell”. Admission to this event, which includes a tour of the 1788 Hays House Museum, is \$5 for adults and \$3 for students and seniors. Children under 4 are free. Parking is free.



Elizabeth M. Brown
Mrs. Cloud's Female Academy
Bel Air, Harford County, 1818

- **June 26:** On Tuesday from 1-3 pm, after the school year ends and before summer activities are in full swing, Hays House will offer a rare opportunity for children and parents. Collector and volunteer Sandy Matthai will talk about *Dollhouses for the Child in All of Us*. After a short history of dollhouses and miniatures, everyone will have a chance to create her own miniature painting to take home and perhaps use to decorate her own dollhouse. Supplies will be provided. Tours of the house and a chance to view several dollhouses, dollhouse furnishings, and miniatures will follow. Children may spend some time playing with a variety of dollhouses and furnishings in the Children's Hand-on Room.

This event is for children ages eight and up who must be accompanied by an adult. Space is limited, and advance reservations are required. Reserve space now for this unusual and exciting event. Cost is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children and seniors. Paid reservations must be received by June 15. Questions? Call Betsy Lehmann at 410-592-8693.

KAREN JOY FOWLER TO WRITE NOVEL ABOUT THE BOOTH FAMILY

Author Karen Joy Fowler, recipient of the 2014 Pen/Faulkner Award for American fiction, visited the Society during the last week in March. Ms. Fowler, a resident of Santa Cruz, CA, was in Maryland to do research on her current project, a novel about the Junius Booth family of Churchville.

Accompanied by Terry Alford, author of *Fortune's Fool: The Life of John Wilkes Booth*, Ms. Fowler met with Junius B. Booth Society Director Tom Fink at Tudor Hall before arriving at the HSHC. While at the Society Headquarters Fowler began investigating the Stephen M. Archer Papers. Professor Archer of the University of Missouri amassed his Booth Collection during nine years of research on Junius Brutus Booth: Theatrical Prometheus. The late Elwin Penski of "The Spirits of Tudor Hall," arranged for Dr. Archer to donate his papers to the Society's Booth Research Center.

The Booths, arguably the country's most historically prominent and fascinating theatrical family, have been the subject of virtually no serious works of fiction. Even the notorious youngest son, John Wilkes, has had few serious works of fiction dedicated to his misspent life. A notable exception is *Fates and Traitors: A Novel of John Wilkes Booth* (2016) by Jennifer Chiaverini.

Ms. Fowler, a graduate of UC Berkley and UC Davis, is the author of six novels (two dubbed Notable Books by the New York Times) and four collections of short stories. She is perhaps best known for *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2004) that served as the basis of the 2007 film of the same title.

In 2011 Fowler published *What I Didn't See*, a collection of twelve short stories that included two stories about Abraham Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth. Of that collection *Publisher's Weekly* wrote that the author "displayed a keen sense of the historical world," while the *San Francisco Chronicle* averred that Ms. Fowler exhibited "an astonishing narrative voice, at once lyric and ironic, satiric and nostalgic...Fowler can tell stories that engage and enchant."

While in Maryland, Ms. Fowler also visited the National Archives at College Park before returning a second day to the Society. Jim Chrismer will act as the point of contact for Fowler with the Society, as he did for Professor Alford.



Jim Chrismer with authors Joy Fowler and Terry Alford

NEW MEMBERS

Michael Adams
 Charles and Gail Connolly
 Denise Berry Graham
 Juanita Larson
 Pam MacLean

Lauren Mayes
 Cathy Price
 Patti Sauers
 Valerie T. Stump
 Erica Suess

RESERVATION FORM

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Fee</u>	<u># Tickets</u>	<u>Amount</u>
May 9	Genealogy Workshop	\$10.00	_____	_____
May 18	Charles George's Play: <i>Final Performance</i> <i>or The Curtain Falls</i> at the Bel Air Armory	\$12.00	_____	_____
Jun 9	Harford County Heritage and Music Festival at Highland¶ School, 2409 Creswell Rd, 21015	\$10.00 under 12 free.	_____	_____
Jun 10	Learning Bee Series - Schoolgirl Samplers at the Hays House, 324 N. Kenmore Ave.	\$5- / \$3- Adult/Student-Senior	_____	_____
Jun 26	Dollhouses for the Child in All of Us at the Hays House, 324 N. Kenmore Ave.	\$5- / \$3- Adult/Student-Senior	_____	_____

Please Note: this event has a minimum age of 8 and reservation is due by June 15!

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$_____

Name: _____ Ph. or E-Mail: _____

Brown Bag Lunch Series is free.

Tickets for events with fees can also be purchased via *PayPal* on the Society's web page.

For more information, check the Society's website at www.HarfordHistory.org, www.Facebook.com/HarfordCountyHistoricalSociety or call 410-838-7691. Return your Reservation form to the Historical Society, 143 N. Main Street, Bel Air, MD. 21014.

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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.