# 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 2023

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

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# WINTER AT ROCK RUN HOLLOW

One of the great pleasures of volunteering at the Historical Society is access to the Society's amazing library. Here you will find historical treasures not available anywhere else, everything from family histories to books that are long out of print, histories by and about Harford County's everyday people, including some famous and a few infamous characters.

In this edition of the newsletter, we are featuring a story included in a book found in this library. The story comes from the 1967 edition of *Rock Run Hollow: Four Seasons from a Farm Window* by former Harford County resident, Baltimore Sun Reporter, and area farm owner, Isaac B. Rehert. Mr. Rehert's book is a charming tale of a year at his farm at Rock Run in Harford County in the mid-sixties when Harford County was still a rural enclave and the challenges of farm life mixed with the pleasures of a quiet country existence.

#### The Night the Pipes Froze

Living in an old farmhouse, like farming itself, is an art based on science. And the science that seeps into the bones and brains of the old-timers, while sometimes faulty, is always worth listening to and frequently worth respecting and following.

Winter is not the time of the year for learning the old-timers' science or art of crops and soils. But when a stiff, frigid wind rolls out of the Arctic and blasts against the windward side of the house, forcing its way in through every crack or opening, the old-timers can and do teach their lessons of how to survive and stay comfortable.

It was an old-timer plumber who put in our water system here at Rock Run some years ago. He had a reputation for sweating a joint cont'd page 2



The Historical Society of Harford County newsletter is funded in part through a gift from Harford Mutual Insurance Company.

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that would never leak, even though there might be a blotchy excess of solder that he never deigned to wipe his greasy rag over to remove.

I remember I questioned his running the long copper pipes from the cellar through the corner of the living room on their way to the room above that we had decided would be our bath. We weren't anxious to be fancy, but it did seem to us that the pipes like the electric wires, could be hidden away inside the wall. Modern-minded people, I now remind myself, don't like to be made aware of the more earthy facts of life like bathroom noises. And at that time, I didn't see why whenever someone bathed or used the toilet, I had to hear the hum of water running in and out of the bathroom as I sat in my cozy living room with the newspaper.

"Old houses like this," he said after a trip to the kitchen to spit tobacco juice, "you want to keep your pipes where you can watch 'em."

I was a bit exasperated. "Watch 'em? Who wants to watch pipes? Pipes should be concealed."

He ignored my exclamations and continued his work.

"Old house like this," he said after a trip to the kitchen sink [to pick] up a gas torch. "Get a good blow and it'll go right through shingles, clapboard, and all. People c'n put on coats and keep warm, but pipes'll freeze! Got to be able to get at'm. Keep'em here in the living room and they may not even freeze at all.

I was unconvinced but I quit arguing. I gave in the way I give in to my wife when I drive at the speed limit and she insists I go 10 miles slower. I'm sure nothing will happen, but I could never face the "I told you so's" if anything did.

Finally, the old-timer gathered together his torch and his fluxes, his fittings, and his scraps: and as he pocketed the check I gave him, we both looked at the tarnished copper pipes he could see they were not very elegant.

"You can box 'em in," he said. "No trouble to get a box off if you want to repair 'em."

Those pipes never did get boxed in. Spring came, and with it spring plowing. After I had sat on a hard steel tractor seat all day and then spent a couple of hours each evening in the barn looking at the business end of a cow, the esthetics of copper pipes running through the living room didn't bother me very much. Those pipes stayed there for years. And they never froze. We had pipes freeze in the basement, where the icy winds sneaked in around the doors and through the mortar of that old stone foundation. We had pipes freeze between the first-story ceiling and the second-story floor, where they ran between the sink and the bath, but they never froze in the living room which we kept heated all through the winter with a big old coal stove that sat almost in the middle of the room and that we could put our backs right up to when we first came in from the outdoors.

As the years passed and the economic squeeze on farmers caused us to sell our dairy cattle and find other means to make the mortgage payments, we decided we ought to modernize the old house and get some of the conveniences of modern American life, like the Joneses we were working with.

So, we called the contractor who used to sell us tin for our leaky barn roof and we spoke to the local bank president about a loan and pretty soon carpenters and plumbers arrived to install a new furnace and

redecorate the kitchen. The contractor, who had been building lots of nice little ranchers around the country, was nonplussed when he saw those old copper pipes running through the living room.

Whoever put those there?" he wanted to know, a patronizing smile on his face.

I told him the old-timer plumber and his ideas about keeping pipes where you can get at them. The contractor snorted and laughed and then told his foreman to get the pipes out of the living room and hidden in the wall.

"You'll never have to worry about freezing your pipes again," he said. "With this furnace, we're putting in, you'll never even know it's cold outdoors."

I watched with some regret as the pipes were cut out and the plumbers maneuvered in absurd contortions bending the old copper tubing around logs and joists to fit it inside the partition between the kitchen and living room on its way upstairs to the bath. There was some dismay, even, in my attitude, since I was paying these men by the hour, and the job dragged on for that pipes-whose presence there had become a comfort-hidden from view. But, finally, they were gone, and the water now ran in the bathroom without a sound downstairs in the living room.

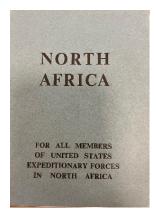
We were really living like city folks.

(Of course, the story goes on to describe the first real winter weather after the remodel. After three days of harsh wind and freezing temps, the pipes froze. A plumber was called and his recommendation was to put the pipes in the living room. Of course, he also recommended boxing them in if we didn't like the way they looked.)

## **NEW MEMBERS**

Melva Balducci Leah Tracy Joy Temple Ray James Foard Carolee Foard Alvin Banthem Libby Banthem

# RESEARCHER'S QUEST



The Historical Society receives requests for information from all over the world on many far-ranging topics. Last month, a Ph.D. student from Oxford University in England contacted the Society about a piece of history she needed for her doctoral project on the role of American troops in Morocco during the Second World War. Doctoral student, Catherine Phipps found a listing for the Pamphlet on the Society's website, the Past Perfect archival listings. Mary Schweers, the Society's Administrative Assistant contacted volunteer George Niewenhous, head of the Military Archives department, to see if he could locate this document. Within a short time, this rare document was located and the digitized version was forwarded to the student with wishes for best of luck with her studies and her project.

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### President's Message

The coming year promises to be a very exciting one for the Historical Society and for all Harford County residents as we begin the celebration of the county's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We will open the year with the long-awaited introduction of the Society's book, *In Their Own Words: Harford County in the Twentieth Century – Stories.* This memoir includes more than one hundred stories written by your friends and neighbors sharing their memories of life in Harford County over the last century. Copies of the book are available at the Society's headquarters.

In February, seven local breweries will release a special Harford 250 brew as part of a countywide FeBREWary celebration. The brew will launch on Thursday, February 9th at Double Groove Brewery in Forest Hill. March will usher in the Harford Showcase event at the APGFCU Arena at Harford Community College. This two-day event, on March 31 and April 1, 2023, will be the major kickoff for our year-long celebration. The following month, the Historical Society will celebrate the grand opening of the new Harford County Museum at the Historical Society. These events and so much more are planned for the coming year. Be sure to follow us on Facebook and the Society's website for up-to-the-minute information about the many planned events throughout the county.

Meanwhile, restoration projects continue at both the Society Headquarters and the Hays House Museum. This long process is nearing closure and will be well worth the wait. Volunteers are working diligently on organizing archives, artifacts, and library resources to be ready for the Grand Opening of the Society and the new museum.

Finally, please watch for this year's Annual Giving notice and as a reminder, Membership renewals are due In January. You may visit the website for a quick, easy way to renew or to donate towards the Annual Giving program. Any help you can give is much appreciated. As you can see, we have a very ambitious program ahead for the coming year and your participation and assistance helps to make these exciting programs come to fruition.

Happy New Year!

-Bill Walden, President

### GENEALOGY WORKSHOP SERIES RETURNS

On January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 7 pm, the 2023 Genealogy Workshop series will return with an in-person program hosted by the genealogist, Chris Smithson at the Historical Society Headquarters, 143 N. Main St. in Bel Air. Mr. Smithson will present a class on "Finding your Ancestors on the Tax Rolls". The cost is \$15 per person and registration at <a href="https://www.harfordhistory.org">www.harfordhistory.org</a> is recommended.

There are many vehicles to help locate those hard-to-find ancestors, but they are often perplexing, especially when they involve government documents. Mr. Smithson will help unlock some of those mysteries in your search.

### CELEBRATING 250 YEARS: A COUNTY IS BORN

In 1773, the Maryland General Assembly officially approved the formation of Harford County as a separate entity. The following excerpt describes the Assembly's action.

#### Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly, October 1773 to April 1774 - Volume 64, page 198

Liber R. G. An Act for the Division of Baltimore County and for erecting a new one by the Name of Harford – 1773, p. 239

No. 6 Whereas a Considerable Body of the Inhabitants of Baltimore County by their Petition to this [Preamble.] General Assembly have prayed That an Act may be passed for a Division of the said County and for erecting a new one out of Part thereof And whereas it Appears to this General Assembly that the erecting of a new County out of such part of Baltimore County will conduce greatly to the Ease and Convenience of the People thereof —

[The Be it therefore enacted by the Right Honourable the Lord Proprietary by and with the Advice Bounds of and Consent of his Governor and the Upper and Lower Houses of Assembly and the Authority of the same that after the second Day of March next all that Part of Baltimore County which is included within the Bounds following to wit Beginning at the Mouth of the little Falls of Gunpowder River and running with the said Falls to the Fountain Head and from thence North to the Temporary Line of this Province and thence with the Temporary Line to Susquehannah River thence with Susquehannah to Chesapeak Bay and thence with the said Bay including Spesutia and Pools Islands to the Mouth of Gunpowder River and thence up the said River to the Beginning aforesaid shall be and is hereby erected into a new County by the Name of Harford County —

And be it enacted That the Inhabitants of Harford County afore-said shall have hold and enjoy all such Rights and Privileges as are held and enjoyed by the Inhabitants of any County in the Province

tants to en*joy the same* Privileges as those of other Counties.] [Commissioners appointed to purchase Land in or adjoining to Bush-Town, for building a Court-House and

Prison, &c.]

[Inhabi-

And be it enacted That M.\* John Paca, M.\* Aquila Hall, M.\* John Mathews; M.\* John Hall of Cranbury, M.\* Amos Garret, M.\* Richard Dallam, and M.\* Benedict Edward Hall, shall be and are hereby appointed Commissioners for Harford County aforesaid and they or the Major Part of them shall and they are hereby authorized and required to buy and purchase in Fee a Quantity of Land not exceeding four Acres of Land in or adjoining to Bush Town on the Head of Bush River for the Purpose of building thereon a Court House and Prison for the said County and shall cause the said Land to be laid out by the Surveyor of Baltimore County with good and sufficient Boundaries and a Certificate thereof to be returned and recorded in the Records of the said County and the said Commissioners or the Major Part of them shall draw their Order on the Sheriff of Harford County to pay such Sum as shall be agreed upon for the said Land and the Sheriff is hereby directed and required to pay the said Order out of the Money here after mentioned to be collected by him for that Purpose and such Payment for the Land aforesaid shall invest the Justices of Harford County and their Successors with an Estate in fee simple therein for

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## THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY INITIATES ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

During the coming year as we celebrate the county's sestercentennial, the Historical Society invites you to follow Harford 250 news on Facebook.com/harford250celebration. There you will find Monday Minutia, featuring weekly trivia questions/Wednesday Community Engagement /Photo Fridays, and much more. We also encourage you to visit our website: <a href="https://www.harford.250">www.harford.250</a>. org for information on upcoming events and Harford 250 news.

There will be programs, events, and projects throughout the county. The Society's initial offering is a collection of stories written by residents describing their memories, experiences, and accomplishments during the twentieth and early twenty-first century in Harford.

## HARFORD COUNTY MEMOIR HAS ARRIVED!

For many, this Anthology will be a walk down memory lane, but for younger generations and possibly for future generations it will provide a glimpse of a world they never knew - one that predates computers, cell phones, and the hectic pace of life in the twenty-first century. Copies of the book are available at the Historical Society headquarters, 143 N. Main Street in Bel Air and will be available at planned events throughout the coming year.

The Society is working with local government agencies, museums, individuals, and groups to bring events to you each month throughout the coming year. We encourage you to be a part of the celebration.



One of these collaborative events is the planned Susquehanna Symphony

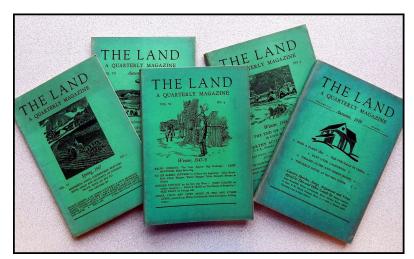
Orchestra's program scheduled for Saturday, March 18, 2023, at the Bel Air High School. Tickets will be available at the door or <a href="www.ssorchestra.org">www.ssorchestra.org</a>. The concert will feature a musical tribute to Harford County as the orchestra transports the audience from the Revolutionary War years through many of the County's historic moments up to present-day Harford. For now, the Symphony is seeking photos of country lanes in Harford County. These will be on display as part of the program, highlighting the uniqueness and beauty of Harford. Visit the Harford250celebration Facebook page for more information.

## **2023 SPEAKERS SERIES**

The Society is excited to announce the 2023 Historical Society Speakers Series. The series will replace the Society's Brown Bag Lunch Series. Some of the offerings will be virtual, and other programs are planned as in-person events. At least one Speaker program is planned for each month in the coming year. The January and February programs are described below. Visit the Society's website at <a href="https://www.harfordhistory.org">www.harfordhistory.org</a> to register for each of these events and to peruse our YouTube offerings which include the numerous speaker's programs recorded over the last two years.

All virtual events are free of charge although donations are encouraged to help offset production costs. In-person events have a nominal charge of \$15.

#### Forever the Land



On Tuesday, January 10, 2023, at 12:30 pm, Trustee, Jacquelyn Seneschal will present a virtual program describing the lives and accomplishments of County residents, Russell and Kate Lord, both a major force in the national environmental movement and the local culture and art scenes.

In the years following World War II, Russell and Kate Lord moved to Bel Air. Their work in D.C. during the War exposed them to the devastation of

agriculture and the environment and led to a passion to protect the land. Together they published one of the first environmental magazines in the nation, *Forever the Land*, impacting the environmental movement now and then. Learn about this dynamic couple and their long-term influence on the environmental movement.

To register or for more information visit <u>www.harfordhistory.org</u> or call the Historical Society at 410-838-7691

#### • History of Havre de Grace Colored High School

On Tuesday, February 14, 2023, at 12:30 pm the Executive Director of the Havre de Grace Colored High



School, Patricia Cole will present a virtual program sharing the story of Harford's first public high school for African American students. This is the story of not just a building, but also of the people whose lives and legacies are so important to county history. To register or for more information visit <a href="https://www.harfordhistory.org">www.harfordhistory.org</a> or call the Society at 410-838-7691.

#### SPECIAL PRESENTATION: The Story of the Ma & Pa Railroad

Everyone is invited to an in-person presentation regaling all on the mysteries and legends of the Ma & Pa Railroad by railroad aficionado, Walt Holloway, on February 18, 2023, at 2 pm at the Historical Society's Headquarters, 143 N. Main Street in Bel Air.

Area residents have long been enamored by the unique rail line that snaked its way through Harford County's farms and fields delivering products between Pennsylvania and Baltimore. Walt Holloway is the Historical Society's resident expert on the railroad and will share his numerous photos and stories of this legendary part of County history.

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The cost is \$15 and registration is recommended as space is limited. To register or for more information visit <a href="www.harfordhistory.org">www.harfordhistory.org</a> or call the Society at 410-838-7691.



Ma & Pa Excursion in Harford County, MD

## POLLITT SIGNS CELEBRATES 75 YEARS IN HARFORD

Pollitt Signs, Inc., located at 718 Girard Street in Havre de Grace, was founded in 1947 by James and Bertiste Pollitt. James (Jim) was in charge of the art department at Bainbridge Naval Training Center. Soon after leaving the Naval Center, he opened Pollitt Signs; a sign company in Port Deposit, Maryland. Later, he and Bertiste decided to move to Havre de Grace, Maryland to improve accessibility to Havre de Grace customers and those in Bel Air. They produced lettering on trucks and boats along with electric signs. At the time, electric signs were considered to be state-of-the-art. They were just beginning to come into fashion. James and Bertiste retired in 1974 and the business was soon taken over and managed by their sons Eric and Tim Pollitt, as well as Tim's Wife, Barbara. With the coming of the computer age in the sign industry, vinyl lettering became popular and something that was in high demand. The need and demand for hand-painted signs declined.

As time progressed, electric signage changed as well. Neon was phased out due to environmental and health concerns. Fluorescent lamps were a much more affordable option and provided many additional options for colors. These became very popular for Pollitt Signs.

In 2018, Tim passed away and his brother Eric soon retired. The shop is currently managed by Tim's son, Mike. Tim's wife, Barbara also helps around the shop as needed along with several other family members. Our current world has been taken over by the age of LED lighting which has now replaced fluorescent lamps. The sign industry is completely integrated with the digital world, from high-quality digital prints to full-scale illuminated signs that you can control from your phone. The sign industry continues to adapt and reach higher than anyone ever thought possible for this industry. Pollitt Signs will always take pride in doing quality signs at a fair price and looks forward to seeing what the future of the sign industry will hold.

The Historical Society congratulates Pollitt Signs on its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and wishes them continued success in this ever-changing industry.

## ALFRED B. HILTON MEDAL OF HONOR MONUMENT DEDICATED

Friday, November 4, 2022, was a momentous day for the Historical Society of Harford County, the City of Havre de Grace, and citizens of the county generally. In a preview of the Veterans Day celebration, the Alfred B. Hilton Memorial Foundation and the City of Havre de Grace dedicated a monument at David Craig Park to Harford County's sole native-born recipient of the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military award.



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The lead-up to November 4<sup>th</sup> occurred over twenty years, beginning with the Historical Society's publication in 2000 of author Jim Chrismer's study of Hilton and his career during the Civil War. Sgt. Hilton, the national color sergeant of the 4<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops, died in October of 1864 as a result of leading a charge on September 29, 1864, against entrenched Confederates at the Battle of New Market Heights outside Richmond, Virginia.

Efforts to educate the public about the significance of Sergeant Hilton and other local men in the United States Colored Troops proceeded surely but slowly. Harford County Schools revised its Social Studies Curriculum to put more emphasis on local matters of the Civil War. The Historical Society published a series of *Bulletins* that chronicled the county's involvement with the war and provided speakers to a variety of groups and organizations.

Public awareness of Sgt. Hilton's significance increased enormously starting in 2018. In that year, Bel Air Post 55 American Legion changed its name to the Sgt. Alfred B. Hilton Memorial Post No. 55. The following year Harford County Government produced a video for Black History Month depicting Hilton's life and career. And in 2021, the Town of Bel Air and Legion Post 55 collaborated to create a near-life-sized mural on the exterior wall of its Bond Street building.

The Historical Society was well represented at the ceremonies on the 4th. Among the most notable persons were new Society Trustees, Evelyn Byrd, and Roxann Redd-Wallace. Ms. Byrd is a lateral descendant of the unmarried Sgt. Hilton and Ms. Redd-Wallace serve as a member of the Foundation's Location & Design Sub-Committee. Society member and Vice-Chairman of the Foundation, James Thornton, served as emcee for the festivities.

Others in attendance were current and past Directors, Christine Potts and Maryanna Skowronski; former Board president, Jacquelyn Seneschal, Co-Chair of the Harford 250 Steering Committee; and Research Aide and Publications Chairman, Jim Chrismer, who also serves as the Historical Consultant for the Hilton Committee. Mrs. Barbara Hersl, the wife of the late Jerome Hersl, founder of Campaign 42's *African American History of Harford County* and an early advocate for a Hilton memorial, was a featured guest.

The monument itself is impressive in its setting, design, and scale. With the waters of the Susquehanna River as a scenic backdrop, the monument features two black granite panels, sourced from India, weighing 4,300 pounds each, and etched with scenes depicting Sgt. Hilton's valor. A bronze, oversized representation of the Medal of Honor mounted on a gray granite slab from Georgia sits between the two black panels. The story of Hilton's service appears on the reverse of the two wings.

Fabrication and installation of the memorial involved firms in three states. The overall contractor was Bailey Granite and Memorials of Kentucky.

The costs of the monument and its installation were met by donations from private individuals and foundations, as well as grants from state and local, governments.

Copies of Chrismer's study, *Harford Historical Bulletin* Number 86, are available through the Society: <a href="https://www.harfordhistory.org/product-category/bulletins/">https://www.harfordhistory.org/product-category/bulletins/</a>

## WHAT'S NEWS AT THE HAYS HOUSE MUSEUM?

Susan K. Wooden, Acting Chair

Here's an update on Hays House repairs: The cedar shake roof replacement has begun and is expected to be completed soon!

As I've discovered while sorting miscellaneous Hays House files, documents that solve a history mystery can also create additional riddles. This is the case with the portrait of Thomas Archer Hays, Sr., that hangs prominently in the parlor over the mantel. I learned during my training as a docent in 2002 or so that the portrait is a copy of an original in the Harford County Courthouse (Hays was a Judge of the Orphans Court). I was told that the original was "not painted from life" and its source was unknown. I often wondered how the original portrait came to be. I'm still wondering, even after finding three news articles about the copy in the files.

"Hays House receives a picture of its namesake" in The Aegis on May 31, 2000, reports that Jim Lambdin, President, and CEO of Lambdin Development Company, commissioned two copies of the "only portrait of Thomas Archer Hays in existence." The copies were made with photography and digital printing by Berry and Homer. The opulent framing was done by Skevington Gallery to closely match the original. Lambdin generously donated one copy to the Hays House and placed the second copy in his office suite, the Thomas Hays Building in Bel Air.

"Hays House to get a reproduction of infamous Archer photograph" in The Weekender on June 9, 2000, has the same content as The Aegis article referenced above except for the tantalizing, inaccurate title. We will never know why the person who re-rewrote the title called Hays "infamous," used Hays's middle name in place of his surname, and called a portrait a photograph.

"Thomas A. Hays comes home again, Portrait of the historic figure featured as Hays House is reopened for tours," in The Aegis in 1991, reports that the Harford County Courthouse loaned the original portrait of Hays to the Historical Society in honor of the grand re-opening of the Hays House after an extensive renovation. One part of one sentence addresses the portrait's mystery: "painted by an unknown artist but assumed authentic..."

Is the portrait a composite, a descendant's idea of what he looked like, an enlargement of another portrait, or possibly an inherited portrait that a Hays descendant kindly donated? My researcher's brain isn't finished with this conundrum yet.

You can contact me at <a href="mailto:susan.wooden@outlook.com">susan.wooden@outlook.com</a> to talk about the Hays House I'm gathering about Mr. Hays's portrait.

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



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#### **HISTORICAL SOCIETY and GIFT SHOP HOURS**

Third Wednesday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Fourth Saturday **ARCHIVES & HENRY COURT RECORDS** ARCHIVES HENRY C. PEDEN Jr. ARCHIVES & HENRY C. PEDEN Jr. LIBRARY 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. RESEARCH LIBRARY C. PEDEN Jr. LIBRARY 5:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M. 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. 10:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.