

The HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HARFORD COUNTY, Inc.

Preserving Our Past For Your Future



143 N. Main Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Society News

March / April 2023

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

IN THIS ISSUE

DAR Recognition	1
President's Message	3
From the Director's Desk	4
Hays House Museum	4
New Members	5
2023 Speaker Series	6
J. Alex Shriver and MD's Roadside Markers	6
Harford County Memoir	9
Genealogy Workshop	9
Historic Preservation Awards Program	10
Historical Society Volunteers at Work	11

DAR RECOGNIZES OUTSTANDING SOCIETY VOLUNTEERS

• James E. Chrismer Receives NSDAR History Medal

The Governor William Paca Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution recognized long-time Historical Society volunteer, Jim Chrismer with the prestigious DAR History Medal. The presentation was made at the Historical Society's Annual Meeting in September.

Jim will also be honored at the chapter's award celebration in April. This upcoming award is granted by the national organization and is presented in recognition of the recipient's ongoing contributions to the body of knowledge of the history of a region. Very few of these awards are granted each year, and the medal is only awarded after a careful review by the Historian National of the candidate's body of work.

In nominating Jim for this award, the Governor William Paca Chapter noted that he is a widely-recognized authority on multiple historical topics in Harford County and the region. He has focused much of his study and writing on the American Civil War, concentrating on the experiences of African Americans, enslaved and free. The chapter also highlighted Jim's accomplishments as a teacher at John Carroll High School, a volunteer at the Historical Society, and a prolific writer and presenter about the history of the county.

The chapter noted that Jim has served as a Research Aide for the Historical Society of Harford County for almost 40 years, assisting patrons who come to the Research Library in pursuit of specific information to find the resources they are seeking. In addition, the nomination noted his service to the Historical Society as a former

cont'd page 2



HARFORD MUTUAL
INSURANCE GROUP

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

Continued from page 1

member of the Board of Directors and since 1991, as their Publications Chair. His service to Harford County as chair of the Harford County Committee on the Constitutional Bicentennial and service on the Harford County Historic Preservation Commission for twenty years, including seven years as its chair, was also highlighted.

Multiple examples of Jim's articles and publications were also submitted in support of his nomination. His histories of historic Catholic churches in the area and contributions to many publications devoted to African American History were presented as evidence of the breadth of his interests and work.

The nomination noted that, for one project, Jim compiled a list of the 200+ Harford County men who served in the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War. It also acknowledged his work in documenting the life of Alfred B. Hilton, a local free African American who joined the 4th United States Colored Troops during the Civil War.

Furthermore, it was noted that Jim is also considered the resident expert on the life and career of Captain John Adams Webster, a hero of the War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War. He is currently working on a publication about this under-appreciated hero.

The Governor William Paca Chapter appreciates that Jim is also a very popular presenter and is called upon frequently to share insights unearthed in his research. Jim never says "no" and is known throughout the area for his informative and entertaining presentations. He always finds the little-known fact that brings his subject to life. The Governor William Paca Chapter DAR is very pleased that this deserving candidate has been recognized with this prestigious award.

- **Walter Holloway Nominated for Historic Preservation Recognition Award**

Additionally, the Governor William Paca Chapter, DAR, of Bel Air has nominated Walter Holloway for its DAR Historic Preservation Recognition Award. This award is given to volunteers who have done remarkable community service in preserving history, such as genealogical records, local histories, archival materials, photographic collections, and serving as docents.

Walter, a native of Bel Air, has exhibited an encyclopedic knowledge of Bel Air and Harford County and their histories. He routinely provides detailed information on the buildings in Bel Air and their histories, including what buildings used to be at those sites. His knowledge of the family histories of Harford County is legendary.

He is a long-time volunteer in the Historical Society's Archives Department and has an intimate knowledge of its contents. As chairman of the archival photograph collection, he has been responsible for digitizing over 50,000 photos detailing life in Harford County since the mid-19th century.

He is a railroad enthusiast and has an extensive collection of memorabilia about the extinct Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad, which he has donated to the Society.

In 1990, he published a history of the Bel Air Volunteer Fire Department on the occasion of its 100th anniversary. The Historical Society library also contains several of his compilations of Harford County residents who served in the various military branches during World War I.

Walter was recognized in November of 2016 for his exceptional service to the Historical Society when he received the annual Archer Fellow Award.

Walter will be honored and recognized at the DAR's annual awards reception in April.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Spring is almost here and with it comes the Grand Opening of the Harford 250 Anniversary Celebration at the APGFCU Arena at Harford Community College on March 31 and April 1, 2023. Everyone is invited!

If you haven't visited the Harford 250 website or Facebook page yet, I encourage you to take a peek. There you will find information about the numerous events planned for the coming year along with before and after photos, trivia questions, and much more. Visit frequently as the events and stories continue to evolve.

You will also be able to order tickets for the March 31st *Harford Showcase: Commemorating 250 Years of Community*. This gala event will feature Honorary Chair and celebrated jazz musician, Kim Waters, the C. Milton Wright Jazz Band, and WJZ's Kristy Breslin as emcee. For those who don't know, Kim Waters grew up in Harford County and attended C. Milton Wright High School prior to launching his successful recording career.

Guest speakers for the evening will also include County Executive Bob Cassilly and several community leaders. There will follow an evening of fine entertainment and catered hors d'oeuvres, wine and beer.

The APGFCU Arena at Harford Community College will provide a unique setting to "Come See About Harford". More than 50 organizations, museums, and tourist venues will highlight countywide attractions. The evening (6 pm – 9 pm) will also include a major art exhibit by area professional and amateur artists featuring renderings of the people, places, and events that make Harford unique. Tickets are on sale now at www.harford250.org, the cost is \$75.

On Saturday, April 1, 2023, the event will become a little less formal but equally entertaining. Outdoor displays will include fire and emergency equipment, including an antique 1890s fire truck along with some surprise displays, music, dance, and other unique performances on two stages throughout the day (10 am – 4 pm). There will be an opportunity to vote for your favorite artist or art piece and a chance to record your personal story at an oral history booth along with the opportunity to learn about countywide attractions and what Harford has to offer. Tickets are \$5 per household. Come learn about Harford's history and future. See what's in store for the coming anniversary year and be a part of this great adventure.

This is just the beginning. Organizations throughout the county are partnering with the Historical Society to make this a year to remember. Each month will feature new and exciting opportunities to meet and celebrate our county. We look forward to seeing you at these events.

-Bill Walden, President

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

As a young person, my interest in history tended to the large scale -- to famous, faraway places and legendary, larger than life figures who had impacted the world in big, bold and dramatic ways. Nowadays, the most compelling historical destinations I am discovering are local, and the figures holding my fascination most are the near and the dear.

As many of you may have learned by now, Harford County is turning 250 years old this year, and the Historical Society is launching a year-long calendar of events to celebrate. If you have never had the opportunity to learn much about the history of the County, now would be a great time to start. With virtual talks and in-person lectures, galas, and a myriad of events planned, the breadth and depth of our shared County past will be on full display.

Did you know that Lafayette marched through Harford on his way to Yorktown? That our earliest roads were built on hunting trails forged by Native Americans? That the serpentine rock called "green marble" mined in Slate Ridge beautifies the Empire State Building? Or that an entire community was flooded and submerged with the building of Conowingo Dam?

These and many other stories from all parts of the County contribute to a composite tale of historical expansion and evolution waiting to be discovered. So, join us! With completion of our Headquarters renovations, we plan on gradually reopening our doors as a full research library and brand new county museum. We are welcoming in a host of new volunteers to help with caring for collections, conducting new research, serving as museum docents, and boosting events.

The Harford 250 celebration is itself an historic event. So, if you want to step into the moment, learn about our past, and help us make history for future generations—as a visitor, a volunteer, a member or a sponsor--the time is ripe. And we can't wait to welcome you on board!

-Christine Potts, Executive Director

WHAT'S NEWS AT THE HAYS HOUSE MUSEUM?

Anyone who has visited the Hays House over the past 20 years likely knows how proud we are of our re-created rustic log kitchen. It's my favorite part of the Hays House, and it's where I recently completed a rigorous "experiential archeology" project. First, here's the kitchen's part of the story.

When Thomas Hays purchased the gambrel-roofed frame house in 1811, the house was 23 years old and likely needed some repairs. Its original configuration comprised a hallway and stairs, the main living area where the cooking was done (the current parlor), and two upstairs bed chambers. Thomas and Betsy Hays had four children by then. Mr. Hays expanded the house by adding a dining room, a bed chamber, and a log kitchen. Although it was a workroom intended for servants and enslaved persons and was more cheaply built than the other rooms, the kitchen effectively upscaled the first floor by relocating food preparation from the main room to the opposite end of the home. Mr. Hays later tore off the log kitchen and added a large stone ell, which was demolished when the house was moved to its current location in 1960.

In 2001 the log kitchen was re-created as the final part of an extensive renovation begun in 1997. Prominent architectural preservationist and past president of The Historical Society of Harford County,

James T. Wollon, Jr. (1939-2022), designed the kitchen not only for historical accuracy but also for safe use by hearth cooks. Since then, we have included hearth cooking demonstrations in our programming. In fact, visitors could look down at their feet and see remnants of past meals ground into the unsealed pine wood floor. Going over the dirty floor boards with a damp mop every now and then made us volunteers feel good but didn't clean the crud.

Here's the experiential archeology part of the story: I intended to clean the filthy floor the 18th- century way. Exciting!

"Lay some gall on the spots overnight, and the next day with strong hot lie, made of wood-ashes scour the boards on your knees with a little brush and clean cloth..." ("The Servants Directory Improved; or, The House-Keepers Companion," by H. Glass [Hannah Glasse]. Fourth Edition published in 1762, page 16.

Gall? Lie (lye)? Wood ashes? Yikes! Fortunately, Mrs. Glass also describes a sand scour that seemed less risky and more doable. Armed with natural bristle scrub brushes, a bucket of all-purpose sand, rags, and a knee pad, I literally got down to work. Alas, dry sand on dry wood created a cloud of dust but cleaned nothing. Wiping with a damp rag before sanding wasn't any better. After uttering words that would have made my grandfather take notice (a carpenter with a reputation for creative cussing), I resorted to a 21st-century degreasing solution that I sprayed lightly on small sections, then wiped off



immediately. Some sections required two or more applications. I then sprinkled sand on the boards and scoured them along the grain as Mrs. Glass instructed. My knees and arms got a workout, I became winded and sweaty from the vigorous scrubbing, and I readily admit *I'm never scouring this floor again*. If anyone says "You missed a spot," I'm unlikely to take it well.

But, oh, the floor looks almost like new, and there's a faint aroma of pine. Exciting!

You can contact me at susan.wooden@outlook.com for more details about experiential archeology or anything else related to the Hays House Museum. Be sure to also check our [Facebook](#) page for more pictures.

-Susan K. Wooden, Acting Chair

NEW MEMBERS

Shaun Anderson
Dan Carroll
Michelle Karczeski

Chrissy Davis
Jamie Healey
Donald Davis
Robert Rinaca

Peter Schlehr
Chris Deaver
Tom Hunt

2023 SPEAKERS SERIES

• 250 Years of Harford's History

On Tuesday, March 14, 2023, at 12:30 pm Trustees Jacquelyn Seneschal and Carol Deibel will share Harford's story from its earliest days as a colonial outpost to the current suburban hub that it has become. In this virtual talk, the speakers will provide a glimpse of the events and people that played significant roles in this long history. The talk will set the stage for the Harford 250 celebration planned to officially commence on March 31st at the APGFCU Arena.

To register for this virtual lecture, visit www.harfordhistory.org or call the Historical Society at 410-838-7691 for more information.



• Aberdeen Proving Ground's Historical Role in Computer Development

On Tuesday, April 11, 2023 at 12:30 pm Charles Nietubicz, a retired experimental and computational research scientist from the Army Research Laboratory at Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) and current President of the Discovery Center at Waters Edge, will take us on a journey from the beginning of the computing age to the supercomputers of today. He will also briefly describe the new Discovery Center at Waters Edge where visitors will experience STEM activities, see tomorrow's technology today, and learn about the heritage of APG's role in technology development that has had significant long-term impacts on our daily lives.

To register for this virtual event, visit www.harfordhistory.org or call the Historical Society at 410-838-7691 for more information.

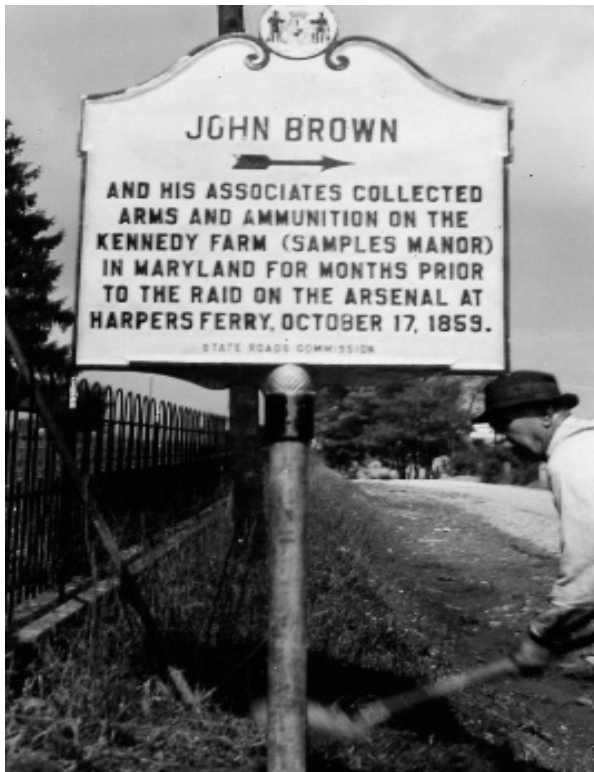


J. ALEXIS SHRIVER AND MARYLAND'S ROADSIDE MARKER PROGRAM©

Jim Chrismer

"Washington Stayed Here." This statement, often associated with older historical signs, brings to mind Harford's J. Alexis Shriver and Maryland's Roadside Marker program. The current Celebration of Harford 250 makes such a reminder all the more appropriate.

Drivers today take such markers for granted. But in the late 1920s and into the 1930s, when automobile production, road construction, and the travel industry were in a developmental stage, highway markers were uncommon or non-existent. Churches, local governments, parks, commissions, and private



Shriver installing the John Brown Marker in 1938 in Washington County

organizations, notably historical societies and heritage groups such as chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), began to place markers to educate the citizenry.

In 1930, the Maryland State Roads Commission (MSRC) sought to establish a program to expand the amount of available public information. According to the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), credit for the actual beginnings of the State's Official Marker program goes to Harford Countian J. Alexis Shriver, in cooperation with the Maryland Historical Society.

J. Alexis Shriver was a man of many interests and enormous energy. Born in Baltimore in 1872 to a prominent and wealthy Maryland family, he moved to Harford in the 1890s, following his graduation from Cornell. He established himself and raised his family at his late father's summer home, "Olney," off Old Joppa Road in the community of Wilna. The property remains today in the hands of the family of his wife, Harriet Van Bibber Shriver.

Shriver was an entrepreneur. In the late 19th and early 20th century, while employed as a "special agent" for the Commerce Department, he invested a great deal of his personal time and money in a variety of ventures involving local utilities. Among these were the Bel Air Telephone Co., the Bel Air Electric Company, and the Baltimore & Bel Air Railroad Company.

For decades until the 1950s, J. Alexis Shriver almost single handedly was the Historical Society of Harford County (HSHC). After its early and robust start in 1885, membership in the HSHC dwindled greatly, it failed to secure a permanent headquarters, and meetings ceased. Problems worsened with the coming of the Depression. From his home, his offices, and at the Maryland Historical Society, Shriver amassed thousands upon thousands of manuscripts, archival documents, books, pamphlets, corporate papers, and correspondence.

Rather than simply allowing the collections to remain filed away, he sought to use the materials to help educate individuals about their heritage. He wrote books, pamphlets, and articles; he lectured; he sponsored tours; he produced public celebrations, galas, commemorations, and festivals. And, most enduringly, he promoted the creation of a program of highway markers. Shriver biographer, Dr. David Hodge, refers to him as a "big project man."

As the HSHC's representative to the Maryland State Roads Commission (MSRC), Shriver moved to initiate the state's official Roadside Marker Project. Similar to a number of signs erected by the DAR, the singularly attractive MSRC signs were of cast iron and featured the Great Seal of Maryland in full color atop a silver shield. The inscription on the shield appeared in bold, raised black letters. This distinctive design has remained the norm for over nine decades and hundreds of markers across the state.

Confusion exists as to which signs in Harford County the MSRC and Shriver mounted first. One reason for this is agency's ironic failure to maintain clear records; another is its use of a variety of names to identify the group designated as the sign's sponsor; and its lack of a definition of what constituted an official marker. An examination of the MHT's list of 51 markers in the county indicates that the following were the first signs sponsored by the MSRC:

1. Harford Town / Bush – 1937 – Rt. 7 at Bush Road
2. Churchville / Lower Cross Roads – 1934 – Rt. 22 at Rt. 136
3. Olney – 1937 – Old Joppa Road near Rt. 152
4. Site of Old Baltimore – 1938 – Head of Bush River on APG

The Commission likely placed a marker in the 1930's at Jerusalem Mills on Jerusalem Road near the Baltimore County Line but failed to note a date in its records.

Harford's newest official state marker rests in Berkely Crossroads, a community near Darlington that included Free People of Color, founded before the Civil War. Sponsored in 2014 by the MHT and the Maryland State Highway Administration (the new name for the MSRA), the sign on Castleton Road near the Hosanna School Museum, represents an effort by the state to diversify its program.

Although this brief article concerns itself with J. Alexis Shriver and the MSRC, it should note those markers placed before the MSRC became involved. Beginning in the late 1920's, Bel Air's William Paca Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erected markers in the county's tidewater region, signifying the importance of today's Maryland Rt. 7, the Old Post Road; Cokesbury Church and College in Abingdon, Governor William Paca's birthplace at Chilbury Farm (now on APG), and Spesutia Church in Perryman.

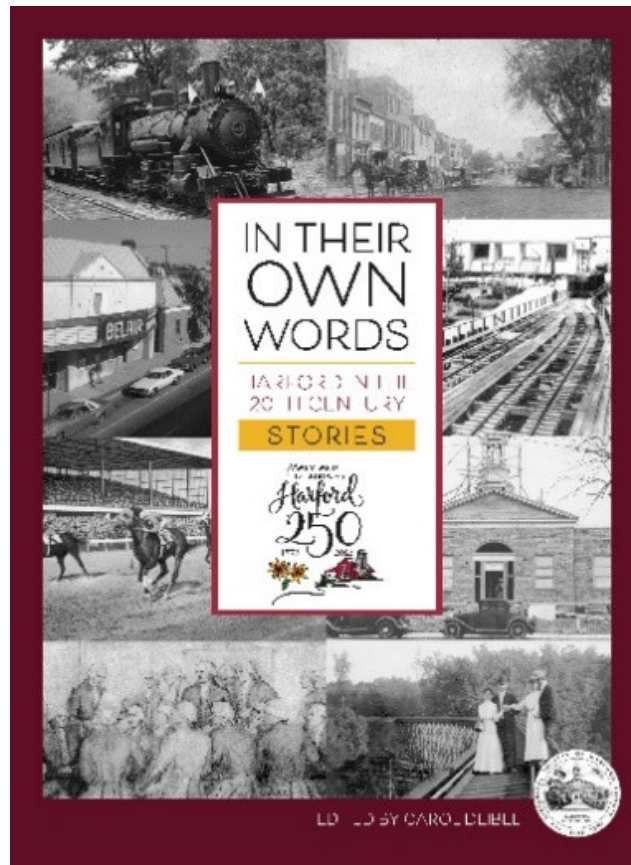
Likewise, the Historical Society of Harford County in the early 1930's placed signs on Route 40 in Abingdon citing John Smith's voyage up the Susquehanna and near Darlington citing Lafayette's Encampment at Colonel Rigbie's Estate. The MHT, the state's oversight agency, includes both the DAR and the Historical Society's markers in the list it maintains.

A more complete story of the county's 50-some markers remains to be told. The existing publication by former HSHC president, Joe Swisher of Aberdeen, remains valuable but has grown outdated since the 1990s. The most helpful source is the regularly updated page on the website of the MHT that includes markers throughout the state installed through the State of Maryland's roadside marker program. Not included are signs, plaques, and markers erected solely by other entities such as the National Park Service, cities, counties, and private individuals. See the following website: <https://mht.maryland.gov/historicalmarkers/Introduction.aspx>

As with any source of history, readers need to take care in accepting without question the narrative on the markers, especially for the very early signs that required little documentation.

HARFORD COUNTY MEMOIR

For many, this Anthology will be a walk down memory lane, but for younger 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.



GENEALOGY WORKSHOP



On March 15, 2023 at 7 pm, the Historical Society's bi-monthly genealogy series will continue with a presentation by Genealogist Mary Schweers entitled *Occupations and Crafts of our Ancestors*. So much of our lives are dictated by the professions we choose or are chosen for us. One way to gain a better understanding of our ancestors' lives is to look at their occupations, the crafts they produced, and their contributions to the community. Ms. Schweers will help unlock the doors to this past. This is an in-person event held at the Historical Society's headquarters, 143 N. Main St. in Bel Air.

The cost is \$15 per person and registration at www.harfordhistory.org is recommended. For more information, call the Society at 410-838-7691.

*HELP HARFORD CELEBRATE BY NOMINATING A PRESERVATIONIST OR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROJECT FOR THE BI-ANNUAL
HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS PROGRAM*

Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly, the Harford County Historic Preservation Commission and Department of Planning and Zoning are pleased to call for nominations for the 2023 Harford Historic Preservation Awards. The Historic Preservation Awards continue a tradition started in 1995 to honor excellence in historic preservation within Harford County. The awards will be presented at a ceremony in May for National Historic Preservation Month.



MAY
is
HISTORIC
PRESERVATION
MONTH

“The annual Harford County Historic Preservation Awards are a great way to recognize those individuals and projects that help to preserve Harford County’s rich heritage for future generations”, County Executive Cassilly said.

Nominations may be made in the following four categories:

- *Preservation Project Awards* - Recognizes various preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse projects in Harford County. These nominations may include projects of an archeological nature.
- *Special Preservation Awards* – Recognizes publications, exhibits, demonstrations, workshops, unique presentations, and stewardship and advocacy efforts that focus on the County’s historic architecture, archaeology, or cultural heritage.
- *Local Government Preservation Awards* – Recognizes projects and individuals at the local government level for efforts in Historic Preservation.
- *Preservationist Honor Award* – Recognizes individuals, museums, organizations, or businesses that have advanced the cause of historic preservation in Harford County over a long period of time.

Nominated projects, publications, workshops, etc. must have been completed, published, or have occurred between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2022. Nominations will be accepted until February 26, 2023.

Visit <https://www.harfordcountymd.gov/2420/Historic-Preservation-Awards> for more information and nomination packets. Paper copies are available upon request.

For questions or to submit a nomination, please contact Jacob Bensen, Historic Preservation Planner, at jmbensen@harfordcountymd.gov or (410) 638-3103 ext. 1385.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY VOLUNTEERS AT WORK



(above) Paul Koerner assembles a bookshelf for the gift shop.

(below) Susan Loyd (left) and Kathy Shupe (right) prepare table for the MA and PA lecture.



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of Harford County, Inc.
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Tuesday
COURT RECORDS
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

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

Third Wednesday
ARCHIVES & HENRY
C. PEDEN Jr. LIBRARY
5:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.

Thursday
HENRY C. PEDEN Jr.
RESEARCH LIBRARY
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Fourth Saturday
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