

(The View from Here, con't)

The Museum can uniquely help every newcomer find their place in the history of this community. The Museum can help us discover the stories of those who came to Oxford before us and then help us add our own chapter to the narrative. The Museum can help us keep making history here *together*, guaranteeing that Oxford will remain a place we can all call "home."

Museum Annual Membership Meeting May 8

The Museum will host its annual membership meeting on Friday, May 8, from 5:30 to 7:00 at the Holy Trinity parish house. After a short business meeting, members will vote on the election of officers and new board members.

The highlight of the evening is the announcement of this year's recipient/s of the Douglas Hanks Jr. Oxford Preservation Award. Appetizers and beverages will be served. All members and their guests are invited to attend.

Please RSVP by contacting Ellen Anderson at the Oxford Museum: phone 410-226-0191 or email: Oxford_Museum@verizon.net.

Dickson Preston's History of Oxford Reprint Now Available

The Museum plans a reprinting of Dickson Preston's history of Oxford, *Oxford: The First Three Centuries*. The reprinting will offer the same quality copy as the original, which was first published in 1984. Advance orders are being taken and the reprint order will be placed when twenty-five advance copies have been purchased. The price for those ordering in advance is \$40; thereafter the price will be \$50. To advance order and receive your copy, please send a check payable to the Oxford Museum.

We're thrilled to make Preston's book available again so that everyone who has the privilege of living here can learn about the history of this unique town and surrounding area. Our gratitude to our friends at the Talbot Historical Society who have graciously given us permission to reprint.

Membership Renewal

Current memberships expire June 30. Watch for renewal forms in your mail in late May. We are very grateful for our many members and the support each one of you provides to the Oxford Museum. Thank you for making us one of the premier small museums in the state. And remember, you can pay your dues online on our secure website page at www.oxfordmuseum.org.

Museum Hours

Opening on Oxford Day, Saturday, April 25, 2015. Hours are Monday and Saturday 10-4, Friday 10-1, and Sunday 1-4. Beginning June 1, we will also be open Wednesdays 10-1.

THE OXFORD MUSEUM, INC. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The Oxford Historian

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The Oxford Museum, Inc.

*A special place.
A special heritage.*

100 South Morris Street
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The Oxford Historian

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Bonfield Manor House Tour to Benefit Museum on May 9

For the first time Bonfield Manor, both house and grounds, will be on tour as a benefit for the Oxford Museum on Saturday, May 9.

Bonfield was built in 1771 by Samuel Chamberlaine, Jr. The Chamberlaines were among Talbot county's wealthiest families. In the March issue of the *Tidewater Times*, Gary Crawford details the history of this family whose dynasty began with the immigration of two brothers, John and Samuel (Sr) from Liverpool in 1714.

Like his father, Samuel Jr. served as a deputy Naval officer for the Port of Oxford. His plantation, Bonfield Manor, was inherited by his son James Lloyd Chamberlaine who had to put a fence across the Oxford road to keep his cows from wandering into town.

The original manor house was destroyed by fire in 1927 and the current colonial revival house constructed in 1929 over the same foundation. It retains several original features in the basement level: the kitchen, servants dining room, storage room and vault. Outside are original outbuildings, including remnants of a slave cabin, and the contours of landscaping designed to elevate the house and provide a vista. Both mound and vista remain intact.



Rear of the original manor house.
Photo, courtesy of Talbot Historical Society



Current manor house built in 1929

More recent owners include John Lee Carroll Downes who built the present structure. Mr. Downes was an officer of the Philadelphia National Bank, President of General Motors, and at one time an officer and director of more than 60 large corporations. In the 1930s it was owned by poet and writer, Hervey Allen, author of several novels including *Anthony's Adverse*, which was made into a

major motion picture in 1936 starring Fredric March and Olivia de Havilland. Mr. Allen operated Bonfield as a self-sustaining farm with its own electricity plant and gas station.

Mr. Spring, a local business man. bought the still substantial property in the mid forties. His widow, Mrs, Royce R. Spring, operated Bonfield Manor in the late seventies and eighties as a training and recreation center for employees of the Equitable Trust Company of Baltimore. Mrs. Spring sold the manor and 13 acres

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to Mr. and Mrs. Sellers in 1986. The present owners, Marianne Haug and her husband Andres Rigo, acquired the house in 1996. After much repair and restoration it is now a weekend and summer retreat for family and friends. We are very grateful to them both for hosting this tour to benefit the Museum and hope everyone will take advantage of this unique opportunity to see one of Oxford's oldest historic properties.

Two tours are scheduled:

- ◆ Morning tour: 10:30 to 12 noon. Tickets \$30; \$40 on May 9.
- ◆ Afternoon tour and cocktail reception: 3:30 to 5:30. Tickets \$50. **Must be purchased in advance.**

For ticket purchase, reservations, or other information contact the Oxford Museum: 410-226-0191 or email Oxford_Museum@verizon.net.

Oxford at War: New Exhibit Space Showcases Original Declaration of Independence and Other Rare Documents

When it opens this year, the Museum will have a space dedicated to special exhibits. "Oxford at War" is the first new exhibit to be shown. Highlighting area citizens who played a prominent role in the Revolutionary War, the exhibit also includes information on how the Revolutionary War had a significant impact on the town of Oxford. Part of the exhibit includes rare documents and publications from the Steve Goldman collection:

- ◆ **An Original 1776 Declaration of Independence.** (Probably the first to be publicly displayed in Talbot County for 240 years since the original Declaration of Independence was first received here in 1776.)
- ◆ **An original 1775 news poster with a first report of the beginning of the Revolutionary War.** (The only existing one of these with a first report of the Battles of Lexington and Concord.)

Although no battles were fought in the immediate Oxford area during the War of 1812, activity in the Chesapeake Bay area and the British attack on St. Michaels brought it very close to 'home'. This portion of the exhibit features the following publications:

- ◆ **An original 1814 illustrated news poster showing the Capture of Washington, DC by the British in the War of 1812.** (The only one of these in existence.)
- ◆ **An original 1814 newspaper with one of the first printings of the words to the "Star Spangled Banner"** as written by Francis Scott Key during the Battle of Ft McHenry in Baltimore in the War of 1812.



Francis Scott Key aboard a British warship views Fort McHenry following the Battle of Baltimore, War of 1812.

Museum Exhibits Rare Hanks Collection Documents Oxford Day Weekend

Those who were fortunate enough to know Douglas Hanks, Jr. knew how much he loved this town and as a descendant of one of its founders, William Stevens Jr., he also had a deep and abiding reverence for its history. We were reminded of just how much with a recent gift from his widow, Xan, of documents which relate to Oxford's founding as a town.

The Hanks collection consists of seven rare and very early documents (ranging from 1666 to 1881) that relate to a land dispute in the Choptank, Tredhaven, and Bullenbrooke (Bolinbroke Creek) area involving possible overlapping boundary claims related to properties called Enfield, Sutton Grange, Bullen, and Hier Dier Lloyd (patented in 1659).

The land on which Oxford was developed was part of Hier Dier Lloyd owned by Edward Lloyd. In 1667 he traded some acreage with William Stephens, Sr. a Quaker from Virginia, in exchange for Wye Island. Stephens later conveyed part of the land received in this trade to his son, William Stephens Jr. who set aside thirty acres and deeded it "by free gift and donations to the Right Honourable the Lord Proprietary for the settling and building of a Towne in Tredaven Creeke in Great Choptank where the said Land Lyeth." (Dickson Preston: *Oxford, The First Three Hundred Years*). But here the records become murky and no copy of this deed of gift has been found.

Maryland land law gave precedent to the earliest land grant, called a patent, that could be established on the ground at the time of any boundary disputes. The original land grants prior to the American Revolution were from Lord Baltimore but after the Revolution they were granted by the State of Maryland. Because all title to land in Maryland was to be traceable back to a valid land grant, the owners in these documents ran up against an earlier claim by Edward Lloyd in the area.

According to Dr. Edward Papenfuse, retired Maryland State Archivist and Commissioner of Land Patents, the Hanks collection of documents tell us much about the ownership of land in the 18th and early 19th century, especially as it relates to disputes over property boundaries; but they also contain personal information about people who gave testimony (notarized depositions) about their memories of boundaries, disputes over land ownership, etc. Dr. Papenfuse writes "I was particularly taken by one of the documents in which one witness remembered as a six or seven year old being out fishing with both his parents and overhearing some vital piece of information about a boundary. The idea that in Maryland information gleaned from neighborhood testimony was vital to solving legal disputes over land and lineage (i.e. inheritance and slave parentage) was central to Maryland law, but rejected in Federal courts when such disputes related to slave parentage."

We invite you to see these unique artifacts of early Oxford and Maryland history. Due to their rarity and the need for protection from excessive light exposure, they will be on exhibit on Oxford Day weekend only. They will remain in the Museum's collection, available to scholars and researchers and may be seen after Oxford Day by special request.

Museum members are invited to a special "preview" reception on Thursday, April 23rd from 5 to 7



The View from Here

by Stuart Parnes

We asked Oxford resident Stuart Parnes to share his thoughts about the value of small town museums like ours. Stuart has over 30 years management experience at maritime museums including the Connecticut River Museum and Mystic Seaport. He is a past President of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum and most recently Executive Director of the Connecticut Humanities Council.

Having just paid off the mortgage and celebrated our 50th anniversary, it seems an opportune time to think about where we go from here. What should the Museum be—do—provide—for the next fifty years to remain relevant. As members and supporters we'd love to hear your thoughts. Email us at Oxford_Museum@verizon.net.

I have to admit that I still feel like a "come-here." After living in New England for nearly 60 years, I first arrived in Oxford in 2006. Now, in retirement, my wife and I have chosen to make this our new home. We don't want this to be our *home away from home* or our *second home*. We're trying to put down roots deep enough to really become part of this place. But it's not easy.

We are among the millions of Americans who are on the move in and out of towns and cities from Maine to Florida to Alaska sun. Wherever we land, we face the inevitable difficulties of reestablishing our lives. As newcomers, we know we should dive right in - reaching out to neighbors, learning the new language and customs, exploring the bi-ways and waterways. But it's difficult to break with the past. Instead, we find comfort by surrounding ourselves with the trappings of our *past* homes and learn to be *in* the town long before we feel *of* the town. That slow adjustment might be just fine with some natives who monitor the trickle of new arrivals with trepidation, worried that the place they have called home for generations might be slipping away. This situation is certainly not unique to Oxford, though as a tiny village of just over 600 souls, even small changes seem awfully big. Some folks will always worry that time and change can only weaken their community, not strengthen it. They want *their* town to remain just the way it is, or just the way they think it used to be.

Fortunately for those who come to Oxford, any pockets of Eastern Shore reserve are far outweighed by the work done by the town's civic and religious organizations to welcome and integrate new residents into the community. But from my point of view, none of these groups can do as much as the Oxford Museum can to help us learn about our new home and find our place in it.

If I climbed to the roof of my home on Tilghman Street and turned to the east, I could look out over landmarks stretching back four centuries. From the red shingle cupola of the Odd Fellows Hall across to Downs Curtis's former sail loft, then down to the Cutts and Case boatyard-cum-museum, I could see artists James Turrell and Kyung Lim Lee's retreat, over to Preservation Green's living roof, to Schooner's and the Scottish Highland Creamery. Out across Town Creek I could see the monuments of the Oxford Cemetery, the restored remains of Plimhimmon plantation and finally, on the far horizon, the newest fortress of stone and brick ballasting Morgan's Point. Each of these sites reveals a piece of Oxford's history, but together they remind me that I am just the latest in a very long line of come-heres. Alone on my roof, I could try to make sense of the centuries-old patchwork that has become the Oxford of today, but I could certainly do a better job of it with a little help.

The little Oxford Museum is charming, but I know that Oxford's history can never be fully collected, preserved and contained in the tiny storefront on Morris Street. The richness that makes Oxford's history so extraordinary extends far beyond the limited collection of artifacts and artwork that document long-passed events and deeds. The story of Oxford is not frozen somewhere in the past; it is the living record of this place, written as much on the landscape as it is in the archives.

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