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*Elected On October 17, 1981

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George C. Dyson, President

The RECORD

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Charles G. LaHood, Jr., Editor

Dent's Palace

PART 2*

By Olga S. Hamer

DENT GENEALOGY

It is relevant to this report that I trace genealogically, my relation to the Dent family. My great, great, great, great, great-grandfather, Captain John Dent, 16__ - 1712, settled permanently in Maryland in 1676. There is no fact, but a permanent belief is that he was a direct descendant of Peter Dent of Gibsborough of England.

John Dent became one of the leading planters in Maryland and held many offices of trust under the Lord Proprietor. He purchased or inherited landed estate of 3,000 acres. On November 24, 1698, the Vestry of All Faiths Parish, ordered the parish to purchase for 25£ from Captain John Dent, 50 acres of land near a fountain of healing waters, these being the first mineral springs found in Maryland. The land is now the site of the present Charlotte Hall Military Academy, Charlotte Hall, Maryland. His son, John Dent, II, 1674 - 1733, was born in Chaptico, St. Mary's County, Maryland.

His son, Hatch Dent was born at Dent's Inheritance. An undocumented source (D.A.R. papers) state that he married Susannah Edwards. No proof of this has been found, but his widow was Elizabeth. During the Revolutionary War he served as a private in Captain Clarkson's Company of Charles County Militia. His daughter, my great, great-grandmother was Susan Julian Dent, born November 9, 1800. She was married to Henderson Freeman. My great-grandmother was Ann Amelia Freeman born September 27, 1834, died February 18, 1910. She was married to Samuel Thomas Swann, born November 20, 1820, died April 6, 1892. Their eldest son, my grandfather was Philip Briscoe Swann, born March 23, 1854, died April 6, 1890. He was married to Chloe Hatten Herbert. My father Thomas Edward Swann, born June 28, 1886 and died October 8, 1967, married Grace Aliene Dyson, who was born December 11, 1885 and died on October 26, 1968.

The Dent family must be numbered as one of the first families of Southern Maryland, as records show that in St. Mary's County, Thomas Dent was one of the original owners of a plot of land in St. Mary's City. His acre was known as "Lawyers Lodgings", whose dwelling had been built there in 1673. His wife was the former Rebecca Wilkinson. She became a widow in 1677 and remarried a Colonel John Addison of the Addison family of England.

Records show that several members of the Dent family, born at Dent's Palace, were officers in the American Revolution. The family graveyard, situated about a hundred yards

from the home, has grave stones whose inscriptions are prior to the revolution. Captain Hezekiah Dent, born August 2, 1747, lived and died at Dent's Palace. He was the son of Hatch and Ann Dent. On October 22, 1777, he was commissioned a First Lieutenant of Captain Isaac McPherson's Company of the Lower Battalion of Charles County Militia. On May 28, 1779, he was promoted to Captain and assigned to the 12th Battalion in Charles County. He died in 1792. His brother, Hatch Dent, II, was also commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the American Revolution, on July 9, 1776 of the Flying Camp Smallwood Battalion. He later was commissioned a Captain. After the revolution, he was first pastor of the Episcopal Church, Trinity Parish. He later became the first principal of Charlotte Hall Military Academy, Charlotte Hall, Maryland; the school of which my father is an alumnus. Dents also played an important part during the Civil War.

My great, great-uncle, Doctor Stoughton Warren Dent, was a well known physician in Charles County during the 19th Century. His old frame house is still standing between Dentville and Newport, where he was domiciled at the 1850 census. He was well known also, for his activities as a spy for the Rebel Forces during the Civil War. The Dents and my father's family have always been staunch Episcopalians and very active in the affairs of Trinity Episcopal Church. While the Palace was owned by my grandmother, Chloe Hatten Swann, she allowed the Trinity Episcopal Church to have its annual picnic and jousting tournament on the grounds of the home.

Life at Dent's Palace

In 1907, my father, Thomas Edward Swann, at the age of 21, returned to claim his family estate. He had been raised in a farming situation, been educated at Charlotte Hall Military Academy in the traditional manner, and with the residue from his share of his father's estate, bought out the brothers' and sisters' share of the property. After this purchase, he married Grace Dyson Swann, a local teacher, in 1908. They established a home at Dent's Palace.

I was the third of four daughters, born May 25, 1916, as the War clouds of World War I were gathering over the horizon of the United States.

We lived on a totally self sustaining farm, tobacco being the largest economic factor. In those years and until World War II, our life was completely rural in all aspects: education, social and economic.

Although my father came to own and operate Dent's Palace as a successful farmer, his place in the community of farmers was pre-civil war in its function. Many times I have seen him acting as banker in a paternalistic setting for other farmers in the area, loaning money to meet mortgages, loaning men and machinery to help harvest the neighbors' crops. He owned the most up-to-date machinery for successful farming at

*Continued from **The RECORD**, September, 1981, No. 23.

that time. He was, in short, in the first half of the 20th Century, the motivating father figure of the community.

There were many happy times in the big old home, the time before the telephone, when company came at any time. Sundays were fun and full of surprises as far as guests were concerned. Folks visited in carefree informality and were always welcome for meals. There was always an abundance of food to eat and plenty prepared for the welcomed guests.

The Dent house was the scene of many gala events, as I grew to womanhood. The parties and dancing in the double parlors and center hall will never be forgotten. The old house must echo the many happy times from the hoop skirts of the early Dent Ladies to the 20th Century.

The cellar was the storage place for many varieties of food. Hundreds of jars of home canned foods were stored there: vegetables and fruits — peas, beets, corn, tomatoes, large bins of potatoes, pears, apples, blackberries, a barrel of black molasses (from which the taffy-pulls in the kitchen resulted), and the barrel of salted herring, used as a part of the daily diet for the farm workers who had to be fed three meals daily.

The outside meat house, which is one of the original out buildings, still stands. It is unique for its four sided roof. Many hams, shoulders, and sausage were stored. My father had his own recipe for curing hams. His sugar curing and the smoke from the hickory logs gave them a succulent flavor. Hog killing time or butchering time on the farm was a busy time and pork was an important part of the economy. Pork meat was a staple for the daily menu. The lard was needed for making breads and other cooking needs. Other meats were raised to supplement the menu such as chickens, turkeys, and beef. For the three hot meals a day, pork in some form was the usual fare, so hog killing time was important.

I would awaken to the whine of the grind stone as the butchering knives were being sharpened. Big kettles of water were boiled over open fires so that the hogs could be scalded and scraped. Long wooden racks would be put up so that the hot carcasses could hang and cool. The kitchen was a busy place where the fat could be boiled down or dried and the grease or lard strained into five and ten gallon earthen-ware jars. Here the meat was ground into sausage.

When I was very young, I remember the soap making time. We used lye bought from the store, and our own grease saved from butchering time was used. These were combined in a kettle over an open fire, outside. The end result was a clear soap used for heavy laundry done by some of the tenant's wives on the back porch of the home.

One of the big events on the farm that I so vividly remember as a child was wheat threshing time. Wheat and corn were the two supplementary money crops. Wheat threshing was a community project. Many acres on the farm were planted in wheat and this was a large undertaking. The farmers came from the surrounding farms and brought their tenants and laborers. The farmers in turn worked with each other on a friendly communal basis until the wheat crops were harvested. This was busy time in the kitchen, as many as forty men had to be fed two and three meals a day. Many pies, chickens, hams and vegetables were prepared. Many pans of home made hot biscuits, baked in long flat iron pans, were eaten. Each pan would hold about forty biscuits.

This was a time before loose leaf markets and local tobacco auctions. All tobacco had to be prized into hogsheads and shipped to Baltimore. The tobacco was first handpacked into hogsheads, then placed horizontally against a screw prize where the contents of two handpacked hogsheads were forced

into one. These were then shipped by train and later by truck to Baltimore.

There were many outbuildings on the farm, necessary for sustaining the many needs of a large farm production. The granary that held wheat and corn; the stable with the horses; the lofts above in which hay was stored; and where it was fun to find a hen's nest buried down in the hay; barns in which the tobacco was stored, and the cowpens where the cows came to rest after a leisurely day in the fields.

My elementary schooling took place in a one room school house on the front of our farm facing Routes 6 and 232. On June 8, 1891, my grandmother Chloe Hatten Swann, had deeded to the School Commissioners of Charles County (Liber J St. 2 No. 4 Folio 159) one acre of land, more or less, for the erection of this one room school. The building stood until 1917, when it was removed and another erected on the same site. It was in this building that I attended school until the 7th grade. In 1928, La Plata High School was erected. My father was given the privilege of buying back the school building for \$150.00, which he did in 1928. He converted this building into a tenant house.

The story of our life at Dent's Palace would be incomplete without describing the contributions of my mother. She was a former teacher, with a deep love of literature. At an early age we were taught poetry and at many times were expected to recite for guests. Wide range reading was available for all members of the family. She provided, motivated and set the standards for our cultural background. She was strong, creative, and had a fine sense of humor. With my father, she created a wonderful image of marriage and parenting that is not frequently found today.

As we girls grew older and left the homeplace to go to school and marry, many changes were taking place on the farm. My father had no sons. At the approach of World War II, it became more difficult to obtain dependable and worthwhile tenants. Tenants and farm hands were leaving farms to take employment in local war industries and it became a struggle to operate the farm effectively during the war years. Some relief was obtained during the years that the German prisoners of war were available. They helped harvest the corn and tobacco crops. In 1947, after 40 years of living a wholesome and happy life at Dent's Palace, my parents retired and sold the farm to Moultrie Hitt.

Although we no longer have Dent's Palace in actual fact, the major portion of my life was formed and lived in the gracious and historically steeped environment of the Palace. Nothing can erase the significance of this experience from my memory and it has been a pleasure to record my experiences and knowledge of this Maryland Land Mark.

A Legend of Dent's Palace Miss Olivia Floyd

"Love is Eternal" quote the Romanticists and perhaps they are correct. One of the loviest legends of Dent's Palace centers around this theme.

Miss Olivia Floyd, Southern Maryland's comeliest spy during the Civil War, lived at Rose Hill. Her home was, and still is, one of the most picturesque and historic of Charles County.

As a young girl, my mother, and a number of her friends, would spend Sunday afternoons at Rose Hill, listening to the exciting stories of romance and adventure which Miss Floyd would tell of the Civil War Days. Often she would end the day

by telling the fortunes of the young girls. Her beauty, apparent even with age, and the fact that she never married, were perhaps the prominent factors which caused her involvement in legends of romance.

Reportedly, a Captain John Dent, her lover, was killed in action against the Federal Troops and buried in the graveyard of Dent's Palace. As a result, the beautiful Olivia Floyd, embittered by her loss, used every means at her command to defeat the "Yankie" cause.

This great love for Captain John Dent, continues to manifest itself even after her death, for as legend has it: on the main road of Dent's Palace, leading to the grave of Captain John Dent, when the light of day turns to twilight, Miss Olivia Floyd can be seen carrying a bouquet of flowers, sweet in fragrance and profuse in color, to the tomb of her lover.

Book Review

Donald G. Shomette, **Flotilla: Battle for the Patuxent**, Solomons, Maryland, Calvert Marine Museum Press, 1981,

The War of 1812 is most frequently remembered for two events: the burning of the public buildings in the Nation's Capital, and for the defense of Fort McHenry in Baltimore which inspired Francis Scott Key to write a poem that became "*The Star Spangled Banner*." Those interested in the history of Southern Maryland counties, however, know of other events of that War which occurred within those counties. One of the more interesting of these was the defense of the Patuxent River by forces under the command of Commodore Joshua Barney during the summer of 1814. This is the subject of a book recently published by the Calvert Marine Museum Press.

Since the War of 1812 was largely a naval war, it was logical that the Chesapeake Bay would receive the attention of the British Navy. Not only was the Bay successfully blockaded, but the British raided the Tidewater with impunity, with little effective opposition. One American who attempted to offset these situations was Joshua Barney of Baltimore, a veteran of naval action during the American Revolution, but a private citizen when war was declared in 1812. By 1813, he was sufficiently incensed to propose to the Secretary of the Navy a plan to defend the Bay area. His plan was for the building of a fleet of shallow-draft barges that could be armed and manned and harass the enemy in the shoal waters of the Bay and its tributaries. By late summer of 1813 his plan was accepted, and Barney was given a special appointment by the President to command a flotilla in the upper part of the Chesapeake.

Commodore Barney and his flotilla did not engage the Royal Navy until spring of 1814. For several months, the flotilla was involved in a series of actions in the Patuxent River, some of which were surprisingly successful despite the superiority of British arms and manpower. Although most of the naval actions took place in the waters of Calvert County, the activities at Benedict in Charles County are described in considerable detail. In the end, however, Commodore Barney and his force were ordered to burn their remaining barges near the upper tidal limits of the River. Since the British by this time had begun their march on Washington, Barney and his men were ordered to Bladensburg to assist the capital's defense—a short campaign in which Barney was wounded and which was not successful in deterring the British despite a gallant effort.

Flotilla recounts in considerable detail the story of this interesting American naval action in Southern Maryland waters, a story not too well documented. The author, Don Shomette, is a staff member of the Library of Congress and has come by

his interest in Barney as part of a larger effort to locate some of the barges themselves. The Nautical Archaeological Associates, Inc., with which he is associated, succeeded in 1979 in locating one of the barges in upper Patuxent. A group of artifacts from this wreck was recovered, treated, cataloged, and was exhibited this past summer at the Calvert Marine Museum.

Flotilla contains an excellent bibliography and has full citations to the sources used. It has several illustrations and excellent maps. It is available in hardback only — 257 pages, from the Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, Maryland 20688. \$12.50 plus \$1.00 for tax and handling. A catalog of the artifacts has been published and can be obtained from the Museum for \$2.00 plus 50¢ for tax and handling.

Paul L. Berry
Battle Creek
Calvert County

A History of Grant

From the

Maryland Committee for the Humanities

The Charles County Community College, under the auspices of the Historical Society, has been awarded a grant to record oral history in the county. This is the first time the Maryland Committee has ever presented a grant to Charles County, and the approved topic is "Charles County: A Study of the Cultural Life and Economy, from 1934 to 1968, as Influenced by Slot Machines."

If you have any suggestions, or would like to help, please call Mrs. Susan Shaffer at 934-2251, Ext. 331, in the Southern Maryland Room. We are interested in speaking to people who remember the slot machines, and photographs of the county as it appeared in those days, especially along the 301 corridor, Marshall Hall, and other amusement places.

Note from the Research Committee

The Committee is attempting to locate Col. William Joseph DeVanne Neale, a descendant of the Neale family of Wollaston Manor. Anyone having information should contact the Research Committee, Charles County Historical Society, Box 261, Port Tobacco, Maryland 20677 or telephone the Southern Maryland Room, Charles County Community College, 934-2251.

Editor's Note

Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are needed for future issues of **The Record**. Please send articles and other communications to: Editor, **The Record**, P.O. Box 273, La Plata, Maryland 20646.