

OFFICERS, BOARD OF DIRECTORS
AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

OFFICERS:	
President	Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr.
Vice-President	Mrs. Sarah L. Barley
Secretary	Mrs. Vivian Malczyk
Treasurer	Mr. Charles G. LaHood, Jr.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS:	
Mrs. Rebecca L. Benton	Mr. Gilbert Milstead
Dr. Lloyd S. Bowling	Mrs. John Hanson Mitchell
Mrs. Colleen Carter	Mr. J. Richard Rivoire
Mr. Philip L. Griffith	Mr. Joseph Y. Rowe
Miss Eleanor Higdon	Mrs. Anita L. Wood
Mrs. Margaret Langley	
PAST PRESIDENTS:	
* Mr. Bennett Crain, 62-63	*Mr. Watson M. Perrygo, 70-78
Mr. Eugene A. Jenkins, Jr., 63-64	Mr. George C. Dyson, 78-82
Mr. H. Maxwell Mitchell, Jr., 64-66	Mr. William E. Garvey, Jr., 82-85
Mr. W. Preston Williams, 66-68	**Mr. Richard E. Heise, III, 85-86
*Mr. John H. Mitchell, 68-70	
*deceased	
**acting president	
COMMITTEES:	
Membership:	
Miss Eleanor Hidgon, <i>Chairperson</i> (district 5)	
Mr. George C. Dyson (2)	Mrs. Mary Mauck (7)
Mrs. Vivian Malczyk (3)	Mrs. Emma Middleton (8)
Mrs. Routh Chandler (4)	Mrs. Olga S. Hamer (9)
Mrs. Sandra Mitchell (6)	Mrs. Aurelia Perry (10)
Friendship House:	
Educational Programs:	
Mrs. Rebecca Benton	Mrs. Ruth Wegner
Mrs. Judith Huber	
Facilities:	
Mr. George C. Dyson, <i>Chairperson</i>	
Furnishings:	
Mr. Warren E. Barley, <i>Chairperson</i>	Mrs. John Hanson Mitchell
Ms. Shirley A. Hunsberger	Mrs. Watson Perrygo
Museum:	
Ms. Janet Andrews, <i>Chairperson</i>	
Tours:	
Mrs. Anita L. Wood, <i>Chairperson</i>	Miss Eleanor Higdon
Mrs. Madeline Griffith	Mrs. Sue LaHood
Preservation Advisory:	
Mr. J. Richard Rivoire, <i>Chairperson</i>	
Ways and Means:	
Mrs. John Hanson Mitchell	Mrs. H. Maxwell Mitchell

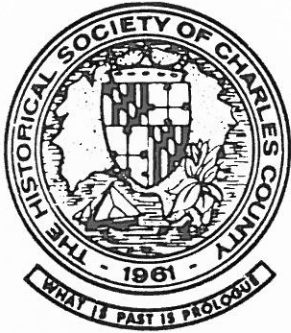
Programs:	
Mrs. Sarah L. Barley, <i>Chairperson</i>	Mrs. Mary K. Albrightain
Mr. Joseph Y. Rowe	Mrs. Carol Donahue
Arrangements:	
Mrs. Ann Liebrecht, <i>Chairperson</i>	
Mrs. Sandra Diachenko	Mrs. Sandra Mitchell
Mrs. Anna Garvey	Mrs. Jacqueline Pender
Audit:	
Mrs. Robert Petri	
Budget:	
Mr. Charles G. LaHood, Jr.	Mrs. Robert Petri
Editor:	
Mr. Elwood M. Leviner	
Memorial Fund:	
Mr. Richard E. Heise, III	
Publicity:	
Mrs. Colleen Carter	

SOUTHERN MARYLAND STUDIES CENTER

Liaison:	
Mr. Charles G. LaHood, Jr.	Mrs. Leo F. Middleton
Mr. Elwood M. Leviner	Mrs. Elaine Walker
Cemetery:	
Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr., <i>Chairperson</i>	
Mr. Walter B. Huber, Jr.	Mr. W. Preston Williams
Mrs. Margaret B. Langley	Mrs. Dorothy Wilson
Mr. Gilbert Milstead	Mrs. Anita L. Wood
Mr. Spencer Milstead	
Genealogy and Research:	
Mrs. Ruby Dyson, <i>Chairperson</i>	Mrs. Margaret B. Langley
Historic Sites:	
Mrs. Edward C. Turner, <i>Chairperson</i>	Mrs. Jane H. Chapman
	Mrs. Ira Dell Newcomb
Oral History:	
vacant	
Projects:	
Miss Eleanor Higdon, <i>Chairperson</i>	

EDITOR'S NOTE

Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are requested for possible publication in future issues of **The Record**. Please send your typewritten manuscripts and other communications to: Editor, **The Record**, Box 583, La Plata, Maryland 20646.



The RECORD

Publication of The Historical Society of Charles County, Inc.

NO. 43 May 1988

Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr., *President*

Elwood M. Leviner, *Editor*

The Forgotten Cavalier: Joseph Lancaster Brent

by Garth Bowling, Jr.

Brave, but not reckless; forceful, but gentle; noble, but humble; pugnacious, but compassionate - these are some of the adjectives that describe one of Chales County's most colorful and interesting native sons. Some might go so far as to label him a swashbuckler, adventurer or cavalier. Whatever the description, however, there are few people in this nation whose personal histories equal that of General Joseph Lancaster Brent.

The gentle rolling hills bordering the lower Potomac River have witnessed the births of many great American warriors, such as George Washington, Robert E. Lee, and Raphael Semmes. Joseph Lancaster Brent was also born near the ancient banks of the Potomac. Unfortunately, unlike these famous men, whose exploits and accomplishments have become legendary, public knowledge of Joseph Brent is almost nonexistent.

Brent is an old tidewater Maryland and Virginia name. From the county of Somerset, England, Giles Brent was the first to come to the new world. He settled in St. Mary's County, Maryland, in 1637, and the following year was joined by his brother, Fulke, and his two sisters, Margaret and Mary. Giles Brent was a member of the Maryland Assembly in 1639 and in 1643 was appointed commander of Maryland's military forces. His sister, Margaret, will forever be remembered for her wisdom and courage. She was the first woman to own land in the Maryland colony and was this country's first frmale suffragist. The Brent's, however, were not destined to stay long in Maryland. With the rise of Cromwell in England and the take over of Maryland by the Protestants, Giles and his sisters felt it wise to move across the Potomac to Virginia, since they were devout Catholics. Fulke Brent had returned to England many years earlier. In the 1660's, their nephew, George Brent II, came from England and joined them in Virginia. He was the direct ancestor of Joseph Lancaster Brent. George Brent II's grandson Robert moved to Charles County, Maryland from Stafford County, Virginia around 1730 and married Mary Wharton of Charles County. They built a home known as Brentfield, where many generations of Brents were born, including Joseph's father, William Leigh Brent, who married Maria Fenwick of Charles County.

William Leigh Brent studied law and opened his first practice in Maryland. He obtained a job with the federal

government and was sent to the Louisiana territory on government business around 1809. While there, he grew fond of the area, and established a residence at St. Martinsville. Not long after arriving in Louisiana, William Brent was appointed deputy attorney general for the Western District of the Territory of Orleans. He became the first representative to Washington from the Louisiana Territory, and after Louisiana became a state in 1812, he later served as a Whig in the United States Congress from March 4, 1823 to March 3, 1829. After his career as a legislator, he went back to practicing law in Louisiana and Washington, D.C. He died on July 7, 1848, in St. Martinsville, Louisiana, and is buried in St. Martin's Catholic Cemetery.

On November 30, 1826, while his father was in Congress, Joseph Lancaster Brent was born at his mother's family's home in Charles County, known as Pomonkey. Although his father's official residence was in Louisiana, his occupation required that he spend most of his time in Washington, D.C. As a result, young Joseph grew up in Charles County and the Washington area. He spent much time at Pomonkey with his grandparents and relatives on the Fenwick side of the family and also at Brentfield, which his father's older brother owned. When he was six years old, his older brother, William Leigh Brent, Jr., died. His remains rest in the old Fenwick cemetery in the northwest corner of Charles County.

Joseph Brent was educated at Georgetown College, class of 1840, where he studied law. He first practiced his new profession in the Attapakas section of Louisiana, evidently a result of his father's connection to that area, but this was only for a short while. The discovery of gold in California beckoned many young men from the East, and Joseph Brent proved to be no exception. His interest, however, was not in mining for gold, but in establishing a law practice in a land where many men would be in need of an attorney. In 1850, he booked passage on a steam ship in New Orleans for the long trip to California. He landed at Panama, crossed the Isthmus, and sailed to San Francisco, arriving in July. He became a well-respected member of the community and befriended not only the English speaking Americans who has also come to this "promised land" to make their fortunes, but also the native Californians who referred to their friend as Don Jose. During his eleven years

The Historical Society of Charles County
Post Office Box 261
Port Tobacco, Maryland 20677



Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr.
Rt. 2, Box 65
Indian Head, Md. 20640

in California, he acquired a lucrative practice and a large amount of real estate. Around the mid 1850's, Joseph Brent became interested in politics, and served two terms in the California legislature. In his memoirs, Brent spoke highly of his friends in California and their adventures in a land where the gun quite often served as the law.

Many elements go into the making of one's personality, especially one as complex and interesting as Joseph Lancaster Brent's. Heritage certainly had its influence. Brent had come from a noble family with public service considered a natural duty, and honor being considered a necessary trait of any southern gentleman. His ancestors had set the stage for him. He was born into wealth and was provided the best possible education. It would have been easy to have remained in Maryland or Louisiana and have lived a comfortable and complacent existence. There was something within him, however, that demanded more out of life. California was obviously the place where life could be lived to the fullest. Although, originally settling in San Francisco, he became sick for the first and only time in his life and move to the milder climate of Los Angeles, at the suggestion of his doctor. He immediately fell in love with the beauty and charm of the place and its pleasant people. Brent wrote the following in his memoirs:

"I went down to that city (Los Angeles), intending to return as soon as I recovered my health. But I became fascinated with the life, the beautiful climate and valley and the pleasant friends I made. When wearied and enfeebled I reached the beautiful Peublo, and rode from out the dry and parched plains into the lanes and corriestas of the old San Pedro entrance to the city, the sun had just gone down, the west was all ruddy, and the earth green and scented with odors of that blooming oasis. The beauty and charm of the sky and earth entered into my heart and filled it with a love for the place that still holds now, after the lapse of near half a century."

The Spanish speaking Californians found in Brent a man of compassion and a man who would be willing to defend them in time of need. This was unique to the Californians, since most English speaking Americans looked down upon them. On several occasions, Joseph Brent risked his life to defend Californians as well as Americans. Around 1852, two California teenagers were wrongfully charged with murder and arrested. As a gang of outlaws blocked the entrance to the jail and swore to kill the boys on their way to the courthouse, Brent solicited the aid of the boys' relatives and friends, as well as a few troopers from a local United States cavalry unit, and protected them. As the hearing proceeded, the courtroom was filled with the armed outlaws and their notorious leader. Brent, acting as defense attorney, also possessed a pistol and stood by a window where someone was ready to receive his signal, thus bringing on the Californians if the outlaws tried to kill the defendants. Fortunately, the outlaws backed down and no violence occurred.

On another occasion, he was attending a local dance, when a crowd of local ruffians gathered outside and threatened to enter the building to put an end to the fun. When a shot was fired from outside, that passed through the door and scattered glass over the dancers, Brent and a friend opened the front door and returned the fire. The mob dispersed. These incidents were just two of many that shaped young Joseph Brent's character during his California years. According to his memoirs, he was constantly surrounded by mankind's worst vices, such as greed, prejudice and hate, yet, he appreciated the beauty, charm and potential this new land offered to all who wished to experience it. During this first decade of his manhood, Brent was tempered like steel into a unique individualist, whose sense of fair play, and courage to take a stand against injustice, became his most dominant attributes.

In the spring of 1861, the shadow of impending war cast itself across the North American continent as far away as California. People began making decisions that would research for this article.

Being a native Charles Countian, Brent sided with the South and made plans to return to the East to offer his services to the Confederacy. Albert Sydney Johnston, a friend of Brent, and an officer in the U.S. Army stationed in California, also supported the Confederacy. These two men held numerous conversations about the upcoming war, and when the first shots were fired in April, Johnston resigned from the Army and travelled back to the south to join the Confederate Army, where he became a greatly respected general. Because of his land holdings and law practice, Joseph Brent did not leave with Johnston, but took several months to conclude his affairs. During this time, Johnston's wife, who remained in California, gave birth to a child. Before leaving California, Brent visited Mrs. Johnston and the baby, and promised that when he got back to the South he would tell Johnston that he had seen his fine new-born child. However, Brent was never able to get the message to General Johnston, because at the moment of Johnston's one true victory, he was shot and killed.

By October, 1861, Joseph Brent had finished his business in California and was ready to leave. According to family legend, he left written instructions in the hollow of a tree, regarding how his real estate should be disposed of in the event he did not return. Allegedly, the city of Pasadena now sits on much of his land.

NOTE: The author is grateful to Mrs. W. Page Dame and Mr. Michael Rybikowsky for their assistance in the research for this article.

Editor's note: This article will be continued in the October issue of The Record.

WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS SINCE JANUARY 1988:

Mr. & Mrs. Britton Fisher, *Waldorf*
Dr. & Mrs. Thomas Salimeno, Jr., *Upper Marlboro*
Mr. & Mrs. Mark Willett, *Bryans Road*
Mr. & Mrs. John Dudley, *Welcome*
Mr. & Mrs. Melvin Racey, *Brandywine*
Ms. Clare M. Aris, *Pomfret*
Mrs. Doris B. Jones, *Callaway*
Mr. Joseph E. Obryan, *Texas*
Ms. Dorothy S. Patterson, *Waldorf*
Mr. & Mrs. Karl Schwartz, III, *Virginia Beach*
Ms. Anne M. Walter, *Waldorf*
Ms. Rose M. Foster, *Waldorf*

THE FEDERALIST SAILS TO CHARLES COUNTY

Two hundred years ago, Captain Joshua Barney, naval hero of the Revolution launched his tiny craft, the **Federalist**, in the Baltimore Harbor to begin a historic voyage. The voyage was in enthusiastic recognition of the Maryland ratification of the U.S. Constitution and followed by a month a joyous celebration in Baltimore of the same event. After sailing the ship to Annapolis, Capt. Barney then continued the voyage down the Bay and up the Potomac to Mount Vernon, where he presented the **Federalist** to George Washington, the greatest Federalist of them all.

Now in 1988 the Maryland **Federalist** will attempt to recreate the historic voyage of the original **Federalist**. The journey will begin on the afternoon of 27 May in the Baltimore Inner Harbor and conclude on the afternoon of 9 June at Mt. Vernon where the presentation to George Washington will be re-enacted.

The schedule for the trip is proposed as follows:

27 May pm Depart Baltimore Annapolis
29 May am arrive Annapolis
29 May pm on display, Annapolis
1 June am arrive Solomons Island
1 June on display, Solomons Island
3 June pm arrive St. Mary's City
4 June am, pm on display, St. Mary's City
5 June pm arrive St. Clements Island
5 June pm on display, St. Clements Island
6 June pm arrive Port Tobacco
6 June pm on display, Smallwood State Park
8 June am arrive Colonial Farm Museum
8 June pm on display, Colonial Farm Museum
9 June pm arrive Mt Vernon

"OUT OF THE PAST" HISTORICAL SOCIETY DISCUSSES BUSY PLANS

The Maryland Independent, November 14, 1962

Wayside - Sen. George L. Radcliffe, president of the Maryland Historical Society, brought greetings from the state society to a recent dinner meeting of the newly formed Historical Society of Charles County at Christ Episcopal Church, Wayside, and invited members to use the extensive files and reading rooms at the state headquarters in Baltimore.

Dr. Reginald V. Truitt of Stevensville, MD., presented a gavel carved from historic Wye Oak on Maryland's Eastern Shore to the society. Ira C. Cowie of "Betty's Delight" near La Plata, chairman of records for the Charles County society, reported that he has received many valuable and interesting information and letters, adding that the most unusual of these is a letter signed by Louis Phippe Sept. 30, 1815.

The Rev. Wade Safford, rector of Christ Church, served as master of ceremonies for the meeting and gave an historical resume of Cobb Neck.

Bennett Crain of "Mount Victoria" was elected president of the new society, which was incorporated August 28, 1961; serving with him the for forthcoming year will be Eugene Jenkins, Jr., of Bryans Road, vice president; Mrs. Edward J. Edelen of "Mulberry Grove," Port Tobacco, secretary and Mrs. Samuel C. Linton, Sr., of near Nanjemoy, treasurer.

Members of the Board of directors include Judge J. Dudley Diggs, H. Reeder Hungerford, James C. Mitchell, Adm. Frank Jack Fletcher, Mrs. John Hanson Mitchell, Robert T. Barbour (legal advisor), Francis I. Ferrall, Mrs. George H. Matthews, Miss Louise Matthews, F. DeSales Mudd and Mrs. Worthington S. Kemp.

Historian is P.D. Brown. Hungerford, membership chairman, reported that the society has 362 charter members.

Next meeting of the society will be Jan 17, 1963; scheduled meetings are in January, May and October. On October 20, a committee from the Charles County Society attended the annual meeting of the state historical society at Easton, in honor of the 300th anniversary of Talbot County.

A society seal, showing the county seal and symbols of industry superimposed on a map of the county has been designed by Mrs. Mitchell.

Plans for the immediate future include establishing a record room, drawing up plans for a permanent headquarters and creating an agricultural museum, for which a site has been donated by the owner, society officials report.