



A Message from President Ron Brown

Dear Members of the Historical Society of Charles County,

Here we are fellow members in mid-2020 and we are experiencing historic times whether we like it or not. In the 1930s and 1940s, the generation before us lived through the economically devastating Depression and the internationally destructive World War II. The nation survived the events of the 1930s and 1940s and in some ways the nation came out better, though some families paid a dear price. Now we are again thrust into another economically devastating period with the tragedy of high unemployment rates, small businesses dwindling at a staggering rate and some corporations declaring bankruptcy. Stimulating the economic decline is the Covid-19 Pandemic which has cast the nation into another kind of life and death war. The dual strains that have provided an environment that gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement motivated by a rash of African American deaths owing to the toll of the coronavirus and episodes of police brutality reports. Too many individuals, families, counties, states and nations have been experiencing loss and have been making numerous and fundamental adjustments to confront the dual economic and health threats.

In prior American historic periods, many of our forebearers recorded what was happening in their lives through diaries, journals, letters, and various illustrative media. The purpose of this letter is to invite you, the members of the Historical Society of Charles County to take pen in hand or keyboard or brush or camera to record your thoughts and personal events as you steer your lives through the constraints inflicted by the Covid-19 Pandemic and its consequences.

A convenient place for what you may be willing to record is the Southern Maryland Studies Center (SMSC) archives at the College of Southern Maryland. Maria Leighton is the Archivist with the SMSC and what follows is her invitation in an email response to my inquiry to her:

“Thank you for thinking of sharing our call for contributions with the Historical Society’s members. If it helps, here is the link to our announcement: [call for Citizen Contributors to Share Real-Time Observations of Current Events](#). Please make sure they know that we

are collecting many forms of evidence, including their thoughts and observations, letters, diaries, journals. We are not focusing only on pictures or videos. I’ll be happy to chat with them if they have any questions or ideas. If the society’s members contact you about this, feel free to share with them my cellphone number: 978-239-0870. Also, we are checking our office phone messages every work day (phone: 301-934-7606), so if they leave their contact information I can follow up with them, or they can send us an email to smc@csmd.edu.”

Ms. Leighton added, “...we received two project proposals to add to our collections that I hope to start working on soon. One is to contact high schools in the area to ask if they want to share their virtual graduations with us, and the other is our former student assistant, Shray, who is eager to begin a project of oral histories through recorded phone calls, one covering the Covid-19 pandemic in Southern Maryland, and the other covering the BLM movement in Southern Maryland.”

Additionally, she informed me that “Another piece of great news is that we were just awarded a grant by NEH, which will allow us to transcribe 40 of our oral histories while funding our Archives Assistant’s position so it is not furloughed. So, I’ve been spending a lot of time setting up the accounts and other grant management details.”

Personally, I have been contributing to the SMSC project. I have been keeping a Covid-19 journal since April and sending in entries monthly and since late March I been sending in a few dozen photographs of Covid-19 related scenes and signs. I have not taken many pictures of people that I did not know. Ms. Leighton understood my hesitation about taking photographs of persons since their approval would be needed if the photographs appeared in any publications. She added you could get their verbal consent and contact information for any follow up if needed.

So, historical society members, please do consider the above invitation to participate in the gathering of a local historical record of how Charles County and Southern Maryland weathered our current historic times.

Benedict on the Patuxent – Update

By George Howard Post

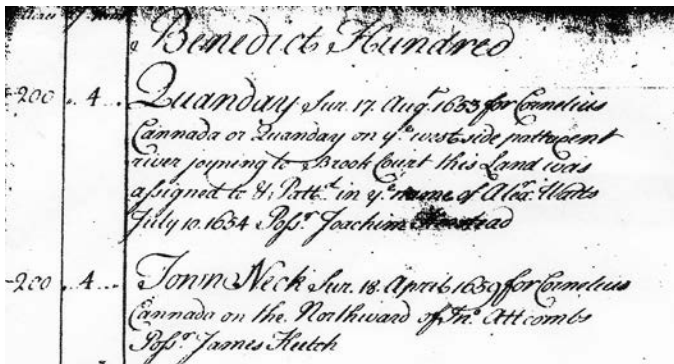


Tourists & Store in Benedict, 1908/1909.

I completed the book “Benedict on the Patuxent” in 2014, but in the years since then, I have continued to conduct research on the village and have uncovered still more items of historical note. This article gives a brief overview of some of the more interesting things that I have found.

One of the biggest discoveries goes right back to the first days of the town’s existence. As noted in the book, this was not 1683. That date, (which is on the historical marker at the town’s entrance) is merely the year in which the town was give the name “Benedict.” We knew that the town was in existence before that—the only question was: “How much before that?” When did the town actually start?

An exact date is hard to say, but the document below (which I found earlier this year) pushes the start date all the way back to the 1650s—very soon after the first settlers arrived.



“Town Neck” in “Benedict Hundred” list.

This document requires some explanation. It is a list, done in 1753, showing all the “Rent Roll” properties in the Benedict Hundred section of Charles County from the earliest days up until 1753. Properties on the list owed a yearly “Quit Rent” to the Lord Proprietor. The second property on this list is called “Town Neck.” According to the list, Town Neck was 200 acres, surveyed in 1659 for Cornelius Cannada and then leased to James Keech.

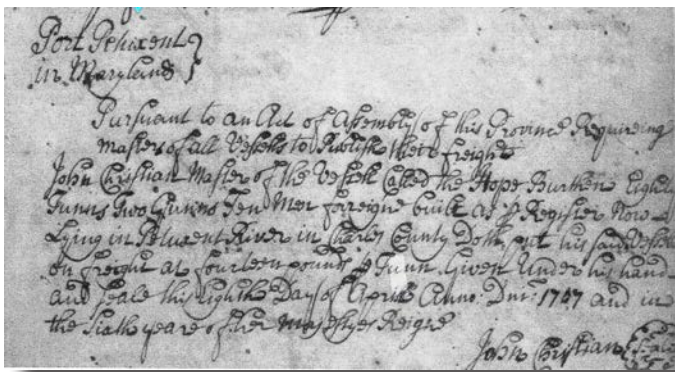
Benedict Hundred was a large tract of land that included everything between Swanson’s Creek and Indian Creek and extended west from the river for several miles. A “neck” is a relatively narrow piece of land which has water on both sides. Withing Benedict Hundred there is only one piece of land which can be described as a neck—namely, the land between the river and Mill Creek, the site of today’s village. The fact that this neck was called “Town” Neck in 1659 can only be explained one way: there must have been a town there on that neck at the time that the survey was done in 1659. There is no other logical explanation.

The first settlers came to this part of the Patuxent in 1650. Tobacco farming and trade with England started almost immediately. How soon was it that this settlement and that trade resulted in an actual town? Almost from the very start, the Rent Roll shows us the town was there all the way back in the 1650s.

This, of course, raises another question. If the town was there from the 1650s, and it was not called “Benedict” until 1683, what was it called before that date? In other words, what was the original name of the village? I believe I have found the answer to this question in another document.

The colonial assembly passed a law which said that all ship captains had to declare publicly the rates that they charged for transporting freight (such as tobacco). In compliance with this law, Captain John Christian made the following statement (which was recorded in the Charles County property records, Book Z, page 271);

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“Port Patuxent”

The handwriting may be a bit difficult for the modern reader. Here is the transcription:

Port Patuxent in Maryland

Pursuant to an act of [the] assembly of this Province requiring Master of all vessels to publish their freight [rates]. John Christian, master of the vessel called the Hope, burthen eighty tunnes, two gunnes, ten men, foreign built as per register, now lying in Patuxent River in Charles County, doth put his said vessel on freight as fourteen pounds per tunne, given under his hand and seale this eighth day of April, Anno Domini 1707, and I the sixth year of Her majestyes reign.

John Christian

Captain Christian states that his ship, the *Hope*, is “now lying in Patuxent River in Charles County.” There can be no question as to the location of his ship; there has only ever been one town in Charles County which was on the Patuxent River—the town we all know as Benedict. But Captain Christian does not refer to this town as Benedict. Instead, in the heading, he refers to it as “Port Patuxent.” “Port Patuxent in Maryland,” he says. How are we to explain this discrepancy?

The most logical explanation is that Captain Christian, in 1707, was continuing to refer to the village by its “old” name, even though it had gotten a new name some years before. This sort of thing happened all the time. Port Tobacco, for example, was officially designated “Charles Town” in 1729, but people continued to call it Port Tobacco. (And today, you will still hear people say “Andrews Air Force Base” even though it has officially been Joint Base Andrews for some years.) With Port Tobacco, the new name never did stick. With Benedict,

the new name eventually did stick—but it apparently took some time. Perhaps Captain Christian was an “old timer” who had been calling the village Port Patuxent for years, and just found it hard to break the habit.

Documents show that name changes were quite common in colonial times. Serenity Farm, just north of Benedict, can be traced in property records to a 1707 land patent and survey for Richard Smith, (Provincial Court Land Records, Archives of Maryland Online, vol. 697, pages 357-359). According to this survey, the eastern boundary of Smith’s land went from St. Nicholas Creek, south along the river to the mouth of King’s Creek. In between the two creeks there was a point called Hallowing Point. All of these three sites got name changes:

- St. Nicholas Creek became Swanson’s Creek
- King’s Creek became Mill Creek, and
- Hallowing Point became Town Point

In those days there were two Hallowing Points—one on each side of the river. (The name is thought to have been “Hollering Point,” meaning that people would stand on the opposite points and “holler” across the river, but this theory has never been proven.)

In 1668 the colonial government chose “Hallowing Point—in Patuxent River as the region’s official “port of entry”—the site through which all in-coming and out-going goods would have to pass for taxation, (Proceedings of the Council of Maryland, Archives of Maryland Online, vol. 5, page 31). The town at Hallowing Point was Port Patuxent. Port Patuxent was designated in 1668 as the port of entry for the entire region. It was, thus, from earliest times, the commercial hub and the most important location on the whole river, (a fact which had been obscured by name changes and only brought to light when all the name changes were sorted out).

In addition to the original name and the earlier-than-previously-thought prominence of the village, there is one more item from the colonial period which should be mentioned. This one is a bit different, however. It concerns something that should be in the records, but is not.

When I was writing the book, I wanted to use property records to locate all the lots from the 1732 village survey. I wanted to piece them together to make a map of the colonial village. I was not able to do this, however. Of the

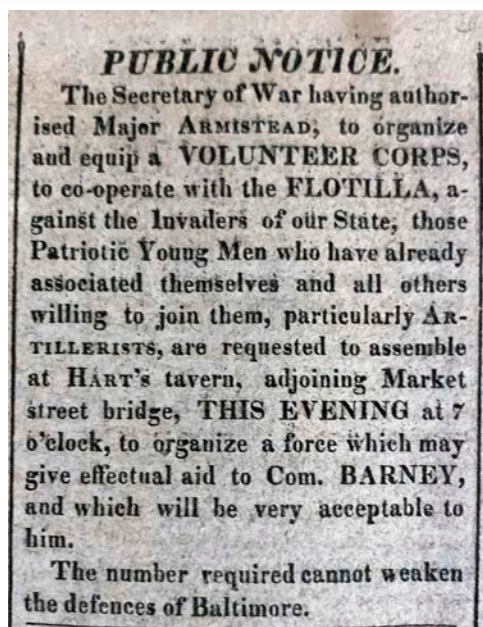
Benedict on the Patuxent – Update, continued on page 4

twenty lots that were surveyed in 1732, I could find only thirteen in the property records. Despite considerable effort, I could find no records for lots 2, 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, or 14. With a publication deadline looming, I eventually had to give up and move on—without the village map.

After the book came out, however, I decided to try again. In 2015, with no publication time-pressure, I went page-by-page through over 7,000 pages of colonial property records looking for these missing lots. What I discovered came as a complete surprise—the missing 1732 lots were simply not there. I looked on every page, but there was no evidence of these lots in the property records. I have not been able to discover a reasonable explanation for this situation. It remains a mystery.

Moving on to the War of 1812, I have recently purchased several original issues of the Baltimore Patriot & Evening Advertiser newspaper, which provide a number of details of the military maneuvers along the Patuxent and the fighting at Benedict. Although they do not change the main arc of the narrative, the details in these first-hand accounts provide a “you-are-there” quality to an already gripping story. I had not known of this newspaper previously, but I will definitely include these accounts if there is ever an updated version of my book.

Similarly, in the Civil War chapter, I would want to include a document which I found at the Southern



Maryland Studies Center (where I volunteer). There, while processing some recently donated materials, I found a document issued to Marshall Chapman by General William Birney, commander of Camp Stanton at Benedict.

Chapman owned the farm which became La Plata. Late in 1863, two of Chapman's slaves ran away, made their way to Camp Stanton, and enlisted in the army. Now, in January of 1864, Chapman had come to get them back. To his chagrin, his demand for their return was denied. Philip Turner and William Dent were no longer his “property,” he was told, but free men and privates in the U.S. Army. Instead of leaving with Turner and Dent, Chapman left with just this piece of paper, describing then and attesting to their previous condition. Chapman could, he was told, use this paper to apply for compensation.



Courtesy of the Chapman Collection, Southern Maryland Studies Center, College of Southern Maryland.

Now, let us move on to the early 1900s and two photos that I found in 2018. The first is a photo of St. Francis de Sales Catholic church and can be dated to 1918. This photo is later than the one in the book. The tree in front of the church is larger and, more importantly, this photo shows the original rectory, which had not been built when the first photo was taken.



St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church & rectory, 1918.

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Before the rectory was built, the priest lived in a house in the village which was rented from L. K. Farrall. Farrall owned and rented out eleven homes in Benedict. (Farrall's records are now at the Southern Maryland Studies Center and make for interesting reading; one month a man paid his rent with a wagon load of manure.) The records show that the last payment to Farrall was April of 1918. Presumably this was when the rectory was completed and the priest (Father Fitzgerald) moved in. In December of 1918, the church burned. This means that the photo, showing the church and the rectory together, could only have been taken between April and December of 1918—thus dating the photo. (This first rectory burned in 1943 and was replaced by the present rectory in 1944.)

The second photo is also from the early 1900s. In this photo, the photographer is standing toward the southern end of Benedict Avenue, looking north.

In the center of the photo we can see the cannery with its



twin smokestacks. The cannery was built in 1902. The large building on the left is Chappellear's Hotel (later Henderson's Hotel, Benedict Hotel, Captain's Inn, etc.), looking the same as it did circa 1900. (See page 149 of the book.) This hotel was renovated and enlarged in 1922, so the photo must have been taken some time between 1902 and 1922. Were both photos taken in 1918? It is possible, but we cannot say for sure.

It is interesting to compare this photo with the two on the front of the book. Comparing it to the top photo, we can see that by 1922 the hotel had gained a third floor and the cannery had disappeared (destroyed by fire). Comparing it to the lower photo, we can see two views

of the Benedict shoreline, looking in opposite directions. The hotel's spring house is visible in both photos. It is the low, triangular structure in the foreground in the book's photo, and is visible next to the hotel in the other photo. This helps orient the viewer.

Finally, here are two images which were given to me by a cousin. Both are from 1948. The first shows Benedict Avenue, looking north. The Gulf gasoline sign was in front of Parker's store. The second photo shows Wharf Lane, looking toward the river. At the end of the lane we can see a large pile of oyster shells, discarded by Sollers' oyster house. Oysters were much more plentiful then.

Bits of Benedicts history continue to turn up—often in unexpected and surprising ways. I enjoy the hunt, and felt a responsibility to save what I can of the town's long and interesting story.



Benedict Avenue, 1948.



Wharf Lane, 1948.

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Local Historian Publish New Books

Local educator and historian, Garth Bowling, has written two books about Charles County's role in the Civil War. His first book, *Gateway to the Confederacy, Charles County, Maryland*, was published in 2019. The second book, *On the Confederate Border, Charles County, Maryland*, will be released for sale in the fall of 2021.



In *Gateway to the Confederacy, Charles County, Maryland*, the reader is introduced to a variety of Charles County personalities who had a powerful impact on our county and nation during the Civil War. It includes numerous stories about Union and Confederate soldiers, spies and slaves. Over twenty senior citizens, who were interviewed by the author in the 1980s, share old family tales about their grandparents and great-grandparents who lived

in Charles County during the war. A self-guided tour of the county's Civil War sites serves as a wonderful resource for one to drive around the county and see buildings and places that were significant during the war. After reading this book one will be convinced that Charles County exemplified the South and that the people of the county truly were living at the Gateway to the Confederacy.

Garth's second book, *On the Confederate Border, Charles County, Maryland*, is a sequel to his first. This book delves deeply into the relationships between various segments of the county's population during those four tumultuous years of the war. Stories of cruelty and compassion are told regarding the soldiers from the North who occupied the county, the white citizens, the free black citizens, the enslaved population, and the escaped slaves who were trained at Benedict to become Union soldiers. This book closely examines the human conflict that existed in the county during the Civil War and how people began to heal in the decades following the war. A self-guided tour of Civil War sites in the county provides the reader with additional locations to visit that were not included in the first volume.



Both books are full of fascinating pictures that represent the people and places of the county during the war. They provide a unique opportunity for the reader to explore a part of local history that has not been given much attention. *Gateway to the Confederacy, Charles County, Maryland*, can be purchased at Martin's in La Plata or from the author by contacting him at talloak2@hotmail.com.



Local historian and genealogist, Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr. has written a historical fiction set in the time period of the American Revolution. *Dear Aaron, Dear Sarah*, is the correspondence between Aaron Simmons, during the American Revolution, and that of his future bride, Sarah Thompson, who is at home on her family's farm in Charles County, Maryland.



Beginning in April, 1777, a twenty-year old Aaron Simmons leaves Charles County to enlist in the American Revolution. He is accompanied by George and Willie Thompson, the brothers of his intended. Through the letters he writes to Sarah, our eyes are opened to both the excitement and horrors of war. From his enlistment and training, to the descriptive cities and battles of the American Revolution, he describes his journey and experiences as a soldier until the conclusion of the war in 1781.

Sarah, on the other hand, depicts to Aaron, the everyday life of her world. From the farming of tobacco and wheat, planting vegetables and herbs, to church festivals, quilting bees, weddings and funerals, she weaves a story of the experiences of her family and neighbors at home in Charles County. Through her eyes, we feel her anxiety of sending loved ones off to war, the despair and fright of battles, and the joys and sorrows occurring among her family and friends.

The detailed descriptions of the battles and their commanders are historically accurate. Considerable research was provided to establish the authenticity of the food, clothing, crops, towns and cities during this time period. The characters portrayed in Port Tobacco, Annapolis, Fredericksburg, Salemburg and in Charles County, actually lived in those locations.

Dear Aaron, Dear Sarah, can be purchased at Martin's in La Plata or from the author by contacting him at mjmazzeo55@gmail.com.

Friendship House Foundation

Friendship House sits proudly on the campus of the College of Southern Maryland. Please join the Historical Society of Charles County in contributing to the preservation of Friendship House for many generations to come.



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Friends of Stagg Hall Steering Committee

Mary Pat Berry

Denise deLozier Grote

Elaine Lawton

Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr.

Elsie Picyk

Carin Diggle, *Historic Port Tobacco Village Representative*

EDITOR'S NOTE

If you would like future newsletters sent to you by e-mail, please send us your e-mail address. Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are requested for publication in future issues of *The Record*. Please send your articles and photographs to: The Historical Society of Charles County, Publications, *The Record*, P.O. Box 2806, La Plata, Maryland 20646.

Friendship House Committees

Foundation

Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr., Chair
Joyce Candland
Alex Cobey
Evelyn Karlsson Merritt
John S. Morris, III

Cellar Museum & Shop

James H. Berry, Jr.
Mary Pat Berry

Ways & Means

Ruby Dyson
Sandra Mitchell

Furnishings

Louise B. Turner



Mark Your Calendar

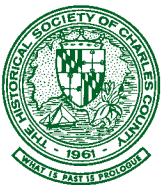


March 2021 – Spring Meeting:

Garth Bowling will present his publication:
Gateway to the Confederacy:
Charles County, Maryland

May 2021 – Field Trip:

Patrick Henry's Scotchtown
and Historic Hanover Tavern



THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CHARLES COUNTY, INC.

P.O. Box 2806 • La Plata, Maryland 20646
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