

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

LEAD STORY

## A New Kind of Newspaper

BY RICHARD FRIEND AND KEVIN LEONARD

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Voices of Laurel*, a new kind of newspaper produced by The Laurel History Boys.

The Laurel History Boys is a 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit organization. Our mission is to bring local history to you. We do so with community presentations, books, videos, our website, social media, and other history-based projects to educate the public about local history. *Voices of Laurel* is our latest project to do just that.

What makes this a new kind of newspaper is that it is an outlet for contributions from the community—people with stories, photos, and artifacts

to enhance our mission of bringing local history to you. We are careful to present these contributions as they are told by our contributors. It's important to be in their voices, not ours.

We are thrilled when stories or photos surface that we've never heard of or seen before. It happens so frequently that we are certain these pages will be filled for some time to come. And giving people an opportunity to tell their own stories will present a unique perspective.

Each of The Laurel History Boys will contribute to the paper. Kevin Leonard will continue his reporting of historical events and people, just as he has been

doing for the past 10 years in the *Laurel Leader*, with his new column, "The Laurel Chronicles." Richard Friend has a variety of features planned—ranging from nostalgic to notorious. And Pete Lewnes, the preeminent collector of Laurel memorabilia, will showcase his collection with a curated new display in each issue.

The paper, which is free, will be electronically distributed quarterly as a PDF file. A link to the paper will be on our Facebook page and web site.

*Voices of Laurel* represents a true collective, and includes writers and artists from a diverse background. What they all have in common is a connection to Laurel.

We're looking for folks who have unique stories and perspectives—whether that be through experience, age, or maybe something else entirely. By sharing such stories we get to know our community better and perhaps learn something about our town—and ourselves.

We hope to increase our roster of contributors to reflect the diversity of the area. If you or anyone you know would like to become a contributor, please contact us.

You might become a regular contributor, or perhaps you'd just like to try your hand at writing a piece for a single issue. Either way, we want to hear your voice!

THE LAUREL CHRONICLES

### The History of Laurel's Post Office



BY KEVIN LEONARD

Any institution that's been around for 184 years is bound to have its share of interesting stories. Laurel's Post Office is no exception. The Laurel Post Office had four different locations before settling into its current building at 324 Main Street. Both times, when the current post office building was originally built in 1937 and, again, when it was expanded in 1967, the

Federal Government took possession of the lot under eminent domain from the same family. And both times, after losing their house to the government, the family physically moved the house structure to a different location.

#### First Hundred Years (1837-1937)

The first post office was established in 1837 for Laurel Factory, as the town was known then. Before that, the closest post office was in Vansville, near Beltsville. Although there's no official record of it, that first post office was likely in a small shed off Main Street on a street that became known as "Postoffice Ave." (Much later it was changed to Post Office Ave.)

It's unclear exactly when it moved, but the 1894 *Laurel Illustrated Residence and Business Directory* contains a photo of the "New Postoffice" at 397 Main Street, across from the Citizen's National Bank. The building was owned by J. Spaulding Flannery, editor of the long-defunct *Laurel Journal* and the postmaster in 1894. The post office occupied the first floor, and the newspaper was produced upstairs.

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PROFILES

### Chief Chronicler



BY MELANIE DZWONCHYK

During my 22 years on the staff of the *Laurel Leader*, not a day went by that I wasn't reminded of the legacy of Gertrude Poe. From callers who spoke of the "News Leader," as the paper was titled under her tenure, to digging around in the clip files and finding tear sheets from newspapers produced under her leadership and measuring myself against her high standards, the influence of this pioneering woman impacted every decision I made while at the helm of the *Leader*.

A self-taught journalist, Gertrude was handed the editor's job in 1938, and stayed at it for a staggering four decades.

As I wrote in a *Laurel Leader* editorial after her death



Melanie Dzwonchyk with legendary *Laurel Leader* editor, Gertrude Poe. (Photo courtesy of Melanie Dzwonchyk)

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# Watch Your Step, Steward Manor

*City Councilmember helps right a wrong*



BY RICHARD FRIEND

Just before I started first grade way back in 1978, my family moved to Steward Manor apartments. The first building we lived in was 2 Woodland Court. It was there that I met my oldest and best friends, twin brothers Rodney and Ronald Pressley. The Pressley family, including mom Tina and daughter, Audrey, had already been living there for nearly three years by the time I arrived.

Some 45 years later, Tina Pressley, now in her mid-70s, *still* lives there—in that very same apartment.

She recently had knee replacement surgery, and a lengthy recovery has severely hindered her mobility. Ironically, while she's been able to get around her second-floor apartment fairly well, it's the two steps in front of the building that have become a problem for her.

Why? There's no hand rail.

Two simple concrete steps—an obstacle that most of us without mobility issues wouldn't think twice about skipping over in our haste to get to or from the building—are a real liability for Tina. With nothing to hold onto, she's at a significant risk of taking a hard fall at any given time.

Her doctor was surprised to learn about the lack of a hand rail at her building's entrance. He wrote a formal request to the rental office manager, asking that a hand rail be installed soon.

Several weeks passed without a response from the Steward Manor rental office. Finally, Tina called the manager, who *laughed* while acknowledging that he'd received the letter from her doctor. "Who do you think you are?" he asked her.

After hearing this, I wrote to Steward Manor's parent

company, Southern Management, via their website in September. I explained that the manager's actions were unacceptable, and that the missing hand rail is also an accessibility code violation. Other buildings on the very same street *do* have hand rails in place—despite their steps being shorter and less treacherous than those in front of 2 Woodland.

Not receiving a reply, I wrote again a few weeks later. Still no response from anyone.

On October 15th, I notified City Councilmember Carl DeWalt, asking if he might intervene.

He paid a visit to the Steward Manor rental office, and after leaving his business card, received a call from the manager later that same day. The manager denied having brushed off the request, and falsely claimed that he had told Tina that they *would* install the hand rail—he



just hadn't committed to doing it anytime soon. He assured Councilmember DeWalt that it would be done.

Over a month later, the hand rail still had not been installed.

I emailed DeWalt again in November to let him know that city code enforcement might be needed to convince Steward Manor to follow through.

Tina received a phone call from the rental office manager a few days later, finally committing to installing the handrail. He promised that it would be done the week after Thanksgiving, but it actually didn't arrive until January 7th. Better late than never, as she's scheduled to have another surgery in early February.

There is a lesson to be learned here. When a resident of *any* community feels that their needs are being ignored, there are people who can help. We often forget

about our local elected officials, assuming that they're too busy tending to loftier municipal duties. But this is a perfect example of what a good City Councilmember can do for a constituent. I can tell you that Carl DeWalt takes matters like this personally, as he should. He follows up, and he follows through when it counts.

I would encourage every Laurel resident to get to know their City Council representatives, and not hesitate to contact them should a situation like this ever arise where a little extra help might be needed. I think you'll be surprised at how quickly they'll (pardon the pun) step up.

==

*Richard Friend is a founding member of The Laurel History Boys, and creator of the popular "Lost Laurel" website and book.*

## VOICES OF LAUREL



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*Voices of Laurel* is published quarterly by The Laurel History Boys, Inc., a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization utilizing archival preservation, photography, oral history, and presentations to convey the historical experiences of Laurel, Maryland. *Voices of Laurel* is designed to bring together a diverse group of contributors whose common interest is Laurel—whether it be through history, current events, culture, or nostalgia. Contributors are Laurel residents past and present from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. All submissions are voluntary. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the views or opinions of The Laurel History Boys, Inc.

If you would like to be a contributor, please contact [laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com](mailto:laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com). Individual stories are welcome, as are recurring columns.

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## PROFILES



Left: Jim Murphy and Jim Clash at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. Right: Clash behind the wheel of the NASCAR Racing Experience stock car. (Photos courtesy of Jim Clash)

## Two Laurel Friends Reconnect—at 165 mph



BY JIM CLASH

As a kid growing up in Laurel, I accumulated many fond memories—and many great friends. One old friend I reconnected with not long ago on Facebook was Jim Murphy, 65, married, and living now in Greeley, Colorado. He graduated from Laurel High School in 1972, a year before me.

My most vivid memory of Jim, or “Murph” as he was affectionately called, is him pitching to me in little league baseball. He was on the green team, me the yellow. As I stood there at the plate, I watched fastball after fastball whizz by. I swung at a few helplessly, but Murph struck me out, and more than once. I didn’t even get to tip or foul the ball!

Fast-forward a few decades. I’m living in New York as an adventure writer for *Forbes* magazine. One thing I do regularly for stories is give high-speed ride-alongs to race fans, in both stock and Indy cars, with a company called the NASCAR Racing Experience (NRE). I usually post something on Facebook beforehand for anyone who might be interested in a ride at the track where I’ll be driving. Most of NRE’s customers fork out good money for such rides, but I give them to friends for free.

One recent ride-taker was none other than Murph. A few months ago, he saw my posting that I would be at Las Vegas Motor Speedway and indicated his interest in coming out. Las Vegas is a fast track. At 1.5-miles around, the oval is banked at a progressive 20 degrees in the corners. Las Vegas is also a dangerous track. Two-time Indianapolis 500 champion Dan Wheldon was killed there in 2011 in a 220-mph, multi-car pileup. Our speeds wouldn’t be 220 mph, but we would top out at

about 165 mph—still pretty quick.

Murph and I caught up in Vegas proper over dinner the night before our ride. Much of the city was closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but we found a restaurant with adequate social distancing between the tables, wore our face masks, and hand-sanitized often. We also exchanged countless tales from the old days. One time we had set the woods on fire, another we got caught climbing the 125-foot water tower near the old Laurel Sanitarium. It was great to catch up, and we had lots of laughs.

But once at the track the next morning, I could sense Murph’s nervousness. He was about to entrust his life to an old friend from high school he had barely seen in 40 years. It didn’t help that back then I was a bit crazy, too, as teens tend to be.

No matter, Murph sucked it up. Clad in a helmet and Hans device in the passenger’s side of a 600-hp stock car, he belted in snugly with a five-point harness system. It was hot—over 120 degrees in the car. We looked at each other as I gunned the engine, gave a thumbs up, then roared through the gears out of pit lane.

I wasn’t sure what Murph was thinking. A speed of 165 mph is frightening enough to anyone their first time, especially in the high-banked corners where you pull some serious Gs. As for me, I was thinking about responsibility. It’s one thing speeding around a track by yourself, but entirely different when there’s a passenger along—and especially when that passenger is your friend. His life depends on you not making a mistake.

I gave Murph the full Monty, six laps, increasing speed with each, eventually approaching 170 mph. I couldn’t see or hear him during the ride (I was concentrating,

and the engine was too loud), but I hoped that he was having a good time. When we pulled back into pit lane and parked the car, I glanced over. Murph looked a little pale but was mostly smiles, to my relief.

“It was exhilarating,” he said later over lunch, “like getting off a big rollercoaster, then wanting to get right back on because it was so much fun. At first, I felt claustrophobic,” Murph continued, “with the heat, safety equipment and tight belts. But once we took off, I felt physically comfortable. And, after the first high-speed turn, which was pretty intense, I was emotionally comfortable as well. It was obvious that my driver had been to this rodeo a few times.”

Aw, thanks Murph! We clinked glasses, and I asked if he would do it again. “In a heartbeat,” was his immediate response.

Well, Murph, you’ll have the chance. I’ll be doing more rides this winter, this time at Florida’s famed Daytona International Speedway. If you or any of your friends are interested, just let me know. The weather that time of year is good, and the track is—well—fast!

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*Jim Clash, a longtime writer for Forbes magazine, regularly immerses himself in extreme adventures. He has driven a Bugatti at 253 mph, flown in a MiG-25 to 84,000 feet at 2.6 times the speed of sound, summited the Matterhorn, and skied to the South Pole, among other things. He has a BA from the University of Maryland, an MBA from Columbia University, and graduated from Laurel High School in 1973. His books include *Forbes to the Limits* and *The Right Stuff: Interviews with Icons of the 1960s*.*



RICHARD FRIEND

# The Greatest of All Time?

*A poll questioned which business stands as Laurel's most iconic*



BY RICHARD FRIEND

An informal research poll conducted by The Laurel History Boys over the period of three months last spring—provided more as a fun exercise during the initial surge of the COVID-19 pandemic than a scientific study of hard data—asked a provocative question: *what was the single greatest business in the history of Laurel?*

Of course, it's a completely subjective topic and there's no actual criteria to gauge one business against another. But we were curious how folks would respond when asked to seriously consider which one business stands out in their minds as the all-time greatest—as the one place that most embodies everything that they love about Laurel.

The poll was conducted on Facebook across both The Laurel History Boys and Lost Laurel pages. To maintain some semblance of order, (which is often easier said than done on Facebook) we presented it in

five stages, asking readers to vote for their choices in the following categories: Bars, Restaurants, Fast Food Joints, Department Stores, and Specialty Stores. When a winner was determined in each of the five categories, they were pit against each other for the title of Greatest of All Time.

Voting for each round was done by simply posting a comment in the respective Facebook thread with the reader's choice. Taking care not to influence any in particular, we provided a few examples of businesses for each category to help clarify their eligibility, but most people had no trouble recalling what their all-time favorites were. Although there *were* some surprising entries and results, as well as some downright baffling ones—we'll get to those shortly.

We opened the poll with the **Bars** category, and the responses reflected a who's who of legendary watering holes, including: B&E Tavern, Boots n' Saddle, Bottom of

the Bay, The Brass Duck, The California Inn, Club 602, Delaney's Irish Pub, Fyffe's, The Greene Turtle, Mac's Place, Nuzback's, Oliver's, Sam & Elsie's, and the Turf Club.

Bars that were part of larger restaurants could also be counted in the **Restaurants** category. Some of those selected were: Bay n' Surf, Captain Jerry's, C.J. Ferrari's, Delaney's Irish Pub, Henkel's, Hitching Post, Mango's Grill, Ming Gardens, O'Toole's, Pal Jack's, Pappy's, Pasta Plus, Ranch House, Rustler, Showbiz Pizza, Tag's, Tastee Diner, and Tippy's Taco House.

The **Fast Food** category also had some restaurant crossover, but other entrants included: Apple's Pie, Arby's, Chaucer House, Chicken Roost, Harley's, Herb's Carry Out, Laurel Meat Market, Little Tavern, Shane's Sandwich Shop, Tastee-Freez, Villa Pizza, and Weiner King.

The **Department Stores** getting the most votes were: Block's, Light's, Hecht's, J.C. Penney, Montgomery Ward, Sears Surplus, Shirley's, Woolworth, and Zayre.

Last, but certainly not least, was the diverse category of **Specialty Stores**, which included: Bob Windsor's All-Pro Sports, Bunker Hill PX, Comic Classics, Cook's Laurel Hardware, Dougherty's Pharmacy, Gavriles', Hobby House, The Jean Jack, Keller's/Knapp's, Kemp Mill Records, Kroop's, Laurel Art Center, Polan's, Suburban Music, and Time-Out Family Amusement Center.

The finalists in each category ended up being: **Oliver's** (bar), **Bay n' Surf** (restaurant), **Tastee-Freez** (fast food), **Montgomery Ward** (department store), and **Cook's Laurel Hardware** (specialty store). These five then faced off in a final poll to determine which would be named the G.O.A.T.

Before revealing the winner, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention some of those more baffling entries and results. One of the more memorable comments came in the Restaurants poll, where someone entered their selection as "Italian place." *Which* Italian place they were referring to, I still have no idea. But apparently they felt strongly enough about this place—despite not remembering its name—to vote for it as the greatest Laurel business of all time.

A number of businesses that I thought would be front runners ended up receiving far fewer votes, including Keller's/Knapp's—the iconic Main Street news stand. I thought for sure it would've been a top pick.

And while I certainly wouldn't have expected it to be a finalist, I was surprised that not a single person mentioned the fantastic pizza place from the 1980s at the Laurel Centre Mall food court, Italian Delite. (Hey, wait ... maybe *that* was the aforementioned "Italian Place!")

The results, of course, have to be taken with a hefty grain of salt. It's fair to say that we didn't reach every potential voter, with the poll being limited to Facebook users exclusively. And the reality is that the majority of the participants are simply too young to have experienced many of Laurel's earlier businesses.

That having been said, who actually won?

When all the votes were tallied, (and *re*-tallied, what with this being a contentious election year and all) the business that our readers voted the Greatest of All Time is ... **Cook's Laurel Hardware**. Oliver's was a close second.

Lenny Wohlfarth, owner of Oliver's Old Towne Tavern, took the good natured competition in stride. "I can handle losing to Cook's or Bay n' Surf. As long we don't lose to Montgomery Ward!"

## COMMUNITY

# The Lost Art of Storytelling ... Continued



BY CHARLES H. CLYBURN

Welcome back to all who were connected with me when I was on Laurel TV some years back. Been a while, so some of you may not remember the series.

So, for those who were tuned in, this is a continuation of the same subjects you remembered. There may be some repetition, e.g., the breast cancer interviews, or the piece on “Why Black History?” But for those readers who are new to me, I’ll catch you up as I go along. This column will appear in *Voices of Laurel* online as it is published on a quarterly basis. Comments, suggestions, etc. are encouraged. I want to hear from you. Contact me at clyburn87@gmail.com.

My maiden voyage subject is to introduce you to the Laurel Arts Council (LAC) to which I was appointed to this august body by the City Council on recommendation from Mayor Craig Moe. The council’s work is supervised by the Department of Parks and Recreation, Ms. Joanne Barr, Director. For further information not found in this column, contact Ms. Barr at (301) 725-7800. The mission statement of

the LAC reads: “The mission of the council is: 1. To encourage the advancement of the arts which benefit all people living in the city of Laurel, 2. Organizing the display of art in public places throughout the city, 3. To provide diverse high quality arts programming to engage all residents, and 4. To increase advocacy and opportunities for local artists and organizations.”

The council’s vision is to create a vibrant arts community that enriches the lives of those who live in, work in, and/or visit the city. The LAC will reach out to other arts councils and organizations in neighboring cities to exchange ideas and to coordinate schedules for arts events. In addition, the council will communicate with and seek sponsorship from county and state levels, i.e., Prince George’s County, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and the state of Maryland.

The LAC’s first public artwork was a clay tile history bench installed at McCullough Field. To create tiles for the bench, community members ranging from youth to

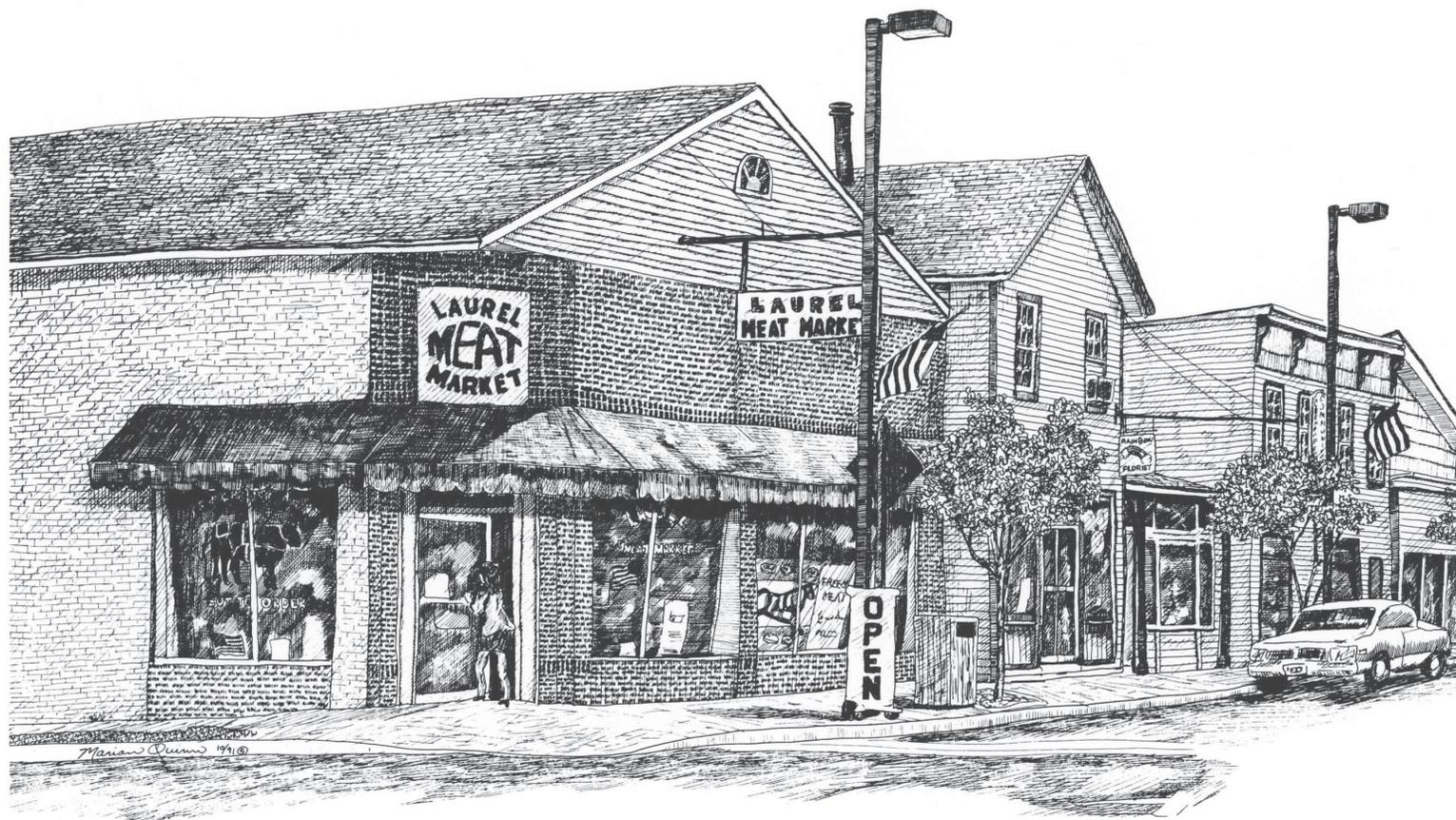
seniors came together in a series of public workshops directed by art teacher and LAC member Cheryl Dyer. The bench was dedicated in 2019.

Future projects include working with the advanced arts students at St. Vincent Pallotti High School, whose work can be seen at the outdoor entry wall of the Laurel Municipal Swimming Pool, and partnering with the Laurel High School Visual Arts Department to organize and mount a public exhibit of students’ artwork, including paintings, sculpture, and ceramics. The LAC encourages input from all city residents as it looks forward to hearing from you, the public.

Stay tuned for the next column to be published in April 2021. In the meantime, keep wearing those masks and washing those hands!

*Charles Clyburn, a resident of Laurel for 20 years, is a storyteller of African American folktales and a television and voice over actor.*

## MARIAN QUINN’S LAUREL



LAUREL MEAT MARKET, 1991

*Marian Quinn, a local artist and framer for over 50 years, has a large collection of illustrations of historic and cultural sites in Laurel. She is also the owner of Fulton Art & Framing in the Cherry Tree Center at Routes 216 and 29. She will be a regular contributor to Voices of Laurel.*



ILLUSTRATION: MONICA STURDIVANT

## Archaeology at the Laurel Museum



BY ANN BENNETT

Archaeology is the study of human culture through material remains. Broken items, trash, discarded objects, or lost items all give archaeologists clues to what happened in the past, whether it is 200 years ago, or 2,000, or 20,000. Although we can never truly understand exactly what happened in the past and what motivated people then, because we are all human beings it is possible to get very close to the actual events and ways of life.

Archaeology is much more than digging in the dirt, pulling things out of the ground, and then cleaning them up in the lab. It is more about story-telling—understanding how and why these artifacts were used in the past and why they were important to the people who used them.

### The Museum Dig

Archaeologists have investigated at the Laurel Museum for more than 30 years, and their findings help add to our knowledge of the people who lived and worked in the *circa* 1837 millworkers' building—as well as posing questions that we strive to answer. Recently, the Laurel Historical Society included the next generation in these discoveries by hosting Archaeology Summer camps in 2019 and 2020.

The archaeological site at the Laurel Museum is designated as “18PR228.” Archaeological sites in the U.S. are registered by state, county, and sequential site number; there is also typically a name given to the

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Stories from the Howard County Historical Society's Archives

## A Civil War Soldier's Letter to Home



BY PAULETTE LUTZ

We have many original hand-written letters in our Howard County Historical Society (HCHS) Archives. Many are poignant and wonderful descriptors of life in a particular era. This is the case in a letter written by Robert Goodloe “Harper” Carroll, great-grandson of Charles Carroll of Carrollton and brother to John Lee Carroll, Governor of Maryland.

R. G. Harper Carroll lived at “Homewood” (1839 to 1915), which was built on the land of Doughoregan Manor located at Homewood Road and Route 108. He attended St. Mary's College in Ilchester, Md. with his younger brother Albert.

Harper and his wife Eleanor “Ella” Thompson Carroll lived at Homewood. The family home passed on to R. G. Harper Carroll II and remained in the Carroll family until the 1960s. Homewood, sitting on 14-acres, has six bedrooms, six fireplaces, and a library, wine cellar, grand foyer, and kitchen.

Away from home as a 22-year-old young man, Harper was recorded in the Confederate muster rolls as 5'7", fair complexion, blue eyes, and dark hair. He enlisted at Leesburg, Virginia in Company K of the 1st Virginia Cavalry, Confederate Army, along with his brother Albert, who later died in battle.

Harper met Ella S. Thompson quite conveniently. Ella was the sister of Governor John Lee Carroll's second wife Mary Carter Thompson. Ella was born and raised in Staunton. Harper (24) and Ella (23) were married on June 18, 1863 in Staunton, Virginia where Ella lived.

However, six months later, on October 5, 1863, Harper Carroll was serving in Culpeper, Virginia as an Aide to General Ewell. Starting on September 12, 1863, the Army of the Potomac's 10,000-man Union Cavalry under General Alfred Pleasanton crossed the Rappahannock River to attack Major General J. E. B. Stuart's headquarters at Culpeper Court House.

Below is a transcription of an original letter in the HCHS Archives that Harper wrote to Ella describing the lack of food and supplies and the anxiety of the warfront. And even in war, marriage squabbles existed.

October 5, [18]63

My dearest girl,

Last night I received your letter in answer to a very cross note I wrote a few days before. Let me assure you Little Puss it was not in the temper that you supposed. I

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

## COMMUNITY

## Food

# Local Restaurant Top Picks



BY WAYNE CARR

For my first column, I'll give you an informal list of different types of local restaurants, and a couple I enjoy that are slightly out of the area but definitely worth the trip. This started out as a Top 5 list, but some categories are just too tough to name a clear favorite. So here are a few selections that you should try for yourself, especially when the pandemic ends and we can all safely enjoy a meal inside again.

I'll start with everybody's favorite—

**Pizza:**

- Pasta Plus—the best gourmet/neopolitan style pizza anywhere.
- Stained Glass Pub (Elkridge)—great bar style pizza.
- Ledo Pizza—another great bar style pizza.
- Trattoria E Pizzeria (Columbia)—New York style
- D' Angelo's Pizza & Subs—traditional take-out bar style/New York pizza

**Burgers:**

- Tastee Diner (Laurel Diner)—best homemade tasting burger
- Denny's—very good fresh burger
- Five Guys—make sure you get the fries
- Hooters—yes, Hooters. Great burger.
- Red Hot and Blue—one of the best burgers in Laurel
- Honorable mention: Stained Glass Pub

**Breakfast/Brunch**

- Tastee Diner—best homemade breakfast around
- Sip at C Street Flats—best bagels
- Ragamuffin—best pastries around
- More than Java—very good brunch items
- Chains: Dennys, IHoP, Bob Evans, First Watch—all decent places

**Wings**

- Red Hot and Blue—best wings
- Pizza Prime Time—jumbo wings with many great flavors
- Hooters—where else?
- Ledo's—jumbo wings
- D' Angelo's Pizza & Subs

**Chinese**

- Mandarin House—the best of the best
- Yum's Restaurant—a very good close second

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PHOTO COURTESY OF JHANNA LEVIN

## Memories of Main Street



BY JHANNA LEVIN

She'd warn you. *"Three to five bites! Savor it, let it melt on your tongue"* were the instructions given in her forever-a-teacher voice. This was a typical exchange at the front counter of L&L Gifts and Gourmet (Antiques and Fine Chocolates) located at 512 Main Street. My mom, Louise Zeigerman Eldridge, was the proprietress. She provided her customers with fine chocolates and gifts that could not be found elsewhere.

*"I make them in the basement,"* she'd say with a completely straight face and a twinkle in her eye. I never ceased to be shocked when customers just shook their heads in agreement.

I never understood how anyone could think that the exquisitely beautiful truffles laid out before them were made in our basement on Main Street. Most of these buildings don't even have basements.

Even if they didn't believe her, no one ever argued.

The original plan was just to move her existing estate jewelry and antique business from Spencerville to Laurel at the suggestion of her friend Len (of Len Geary Antiques fame; now the Laurel Mill Playhouse). "Be my neighbor," he said. At the time, there were a few successful antique stores along Main Street already. They dreamed of a Main Street lined with antique stores, "like Kensington or New Market." "A destination again, rather than a thoroughfare," she believed Main Street should be once again.

She immediately fell in love with Old Town—hard. Said it reminded her of back home in Old Town Philadelphia. The way she embodied the feeling,

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## Stage Lights Brighten the Shadow of COVID at Little Theater on Main Street



BY PATTI RESTIVO

The creative energy and laughter pouring from the little theater adjacent to Olive on Main abruptly paused when COVID-19 made its uninvited debut last March. Laurel Mill Playhouse cancelled its then-rehearsing spring production of *The Vagina Monologues*.

“Never have I lived through anything like this,” said Maureen Rogers, public liaison officer. “We went from realization to meeting virtually and in-house with masks and proper social distancing, to participating in and producing virtual fundraisers with other theaters, and to producing virtual performances independently.”

Hundreds of artists over nearly two decades have contributed to the success of the little theater. A few have sadly passed: Linda Bartash (lost to COVID in June), Tom Snyder, Bill Tchakirides, Don Neal, and Don Olsen will always be remembered there, and Maureen Rogers said there have been no greater benefactors than the late Bert Roberts and his wife, Pat.

“Without the Roberts, we would not exist; they supported us in every way possible,” she said.

In COVID’s shadow, the Playhouse carefully presented two inhouse performances of Ron Hutchinson’s *Midnight and Magnolias* in mid-March. Later that month, it participated in a digitally produced fundraiser by the Pandemic Players of Baltimore, and last July Laurel Mill Playhouse was one of 14 theaters that performed in a “Community Theatre Thrives” virtual fundraiser coordinated by the Reston Community Players.

Last month, local soloist Keenan McCarter performed in two virtual fundraisers that benefitted the Laurel Mill Playhouse. He performed at Jared’s Barn in Bowie and at the Playhouse between Christmas and New Year’s with Playhouse regular Mimi McGinnis accompanying on piano.

As news of COVID vaccines and therapeutics beckon to many more normal days ahead, the little theater on Main Street continues to claim its place in Laurel’s history—a legacy envisioned nearly 20 years ago.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

Pillars

## Bill McCormick



BY C. PHILIP NICHOLS

In every community of substance there are pillars of the community. Strong, honest, and decent men and women who make positive contributions and, as they say, leave the world a better place. Capt. Bill McCormick was one of those in our community of Laurel.

### Service to the State

Bill initially began his service to the state as the Governor’s chauffeur. He gave 47 years of service to the Department of Transportation and its predecessor organizations. At the time of his retirement in 1964 he was the supervisor of the Southern Avenue Office in Baltimore.

### Military Service

He was a founding member of the American Legion, Post 60, in Laurel, where he served for 60 years. In 1938 he gave leadership to the purchase of the current home. Bill was the only member to become a national officer of the American Legion. He was an army veteran of World War I, serving overseas in 1918. After the first war, he became head of the Prince George’s County Draft Board. He later served as Commanding Officer of the Maryland State Guard after the National Guard was called to active duty during World War II, earning the rank of Captain. The Maryland Defense Force became the successor origination to the Maryland Guard. My father served with him and held him in the highest regard.

After the war he had to ironically forgo pleasantries at the Legion home as many of its members were drafted into the army while he was the head of the draft board.

### Service to the County

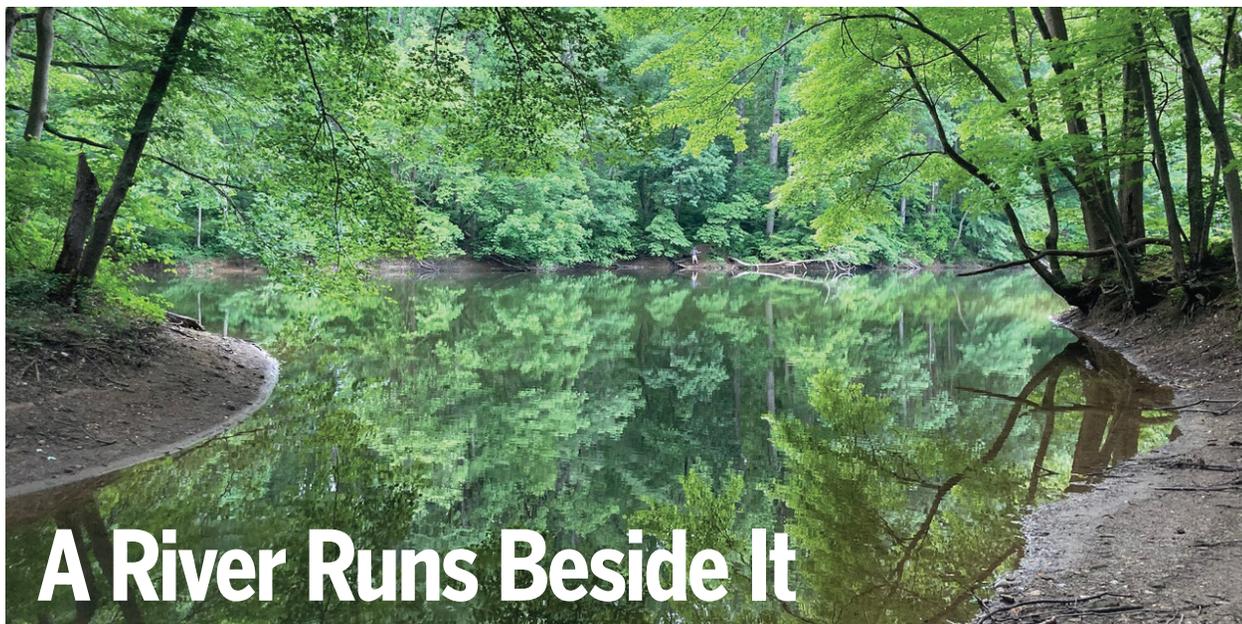
Bill served as Foreman of the Grand Jury in Prince George’s County during a particularly turbulent time. There was a note slipped under the Grand Jury Room door by the then-State’s Attorney asking to be let in. The Foreman thought otherwise, and the Grand Jury proceeded to “clean house,” indicting several county magistrates for corruption. The *Washington Star* described the actions in words to the effect of a “Runaway Grand Jury.” Dishonesty was something Bill was not prepared to overlook.

### Fire Service

Bill was a charter member and officer of the Upper Marlboro Fire Dept. and, later, an Honorary Member of both the Laurel Volunteer Fire Dept. and the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad. His knowledge of trucks, their equipment, and hydraulics made him the “go-to person” for the public safety organizations in Laurel when complicated mechanical issues arose. He was especially well liked by the younger members of both organizations. It was eye catching to see him and much

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

## COMMUNITY



## A River Runs Beside It

PHOTO COURTESY OF LAUREL FOR THE PATUXENT



BY MIKE McLAUGHLIN

The City of Laurel has had a long and complicated relationship with the Patuxent River, beginning with the area's indigenous tribes living along a river they named "Paxtuxunet" (roughly translated as "water running over loose stones") and their interaction with the English settlements that arrived in the 1600s. In Laurel's earliest days as a mill town, the river was used for transportation and its flow was diverted into mill races where the river's current would power the mills' wheels and turbines. Then, in the 1950s, the city stopped using the river as its sewer by tying into the WSSC sewer and water system. Today, the city and environmental groups like Laurel for the Patuxent, Inc. (L4P) are working to preserve, restore, and, in some cases, enhance the river and its surrounding watershed.

In planning for many years, the grassroots organization L4P had its introductory public meeting in May 2019, and was incorporated as a nonprofit in 2020. It has over 50 members in and around the City of Laurel, some of whom have participated in river area cleanups and vine cuttings to reduce the invasive vines that are choking the trees lining the river.

Laurel for the Patuxent is grassroots in its organization and activities, but is committed to collaborating with local and state governments. Its membership includes Laurel Mayor Craig Moe; City Council members Carl DeWalt, Brencis Smith, Keith Sydnor, Council President Valerie Nicholas, and Michael Leszcz, who is also the Chair of the Patuxent River Commission; and Prince George's County Council member Tom Dernoga. Additionally, Patuxent Riverkeeper, Fred Tutman, is a member who was very helpful to L4P founders and co-chairs, Brian Coyle and Mike McLaughlin, in their early planning of the organization.

L4P was invited to be a partner in the Patuxent River Watershed Flood Mitigation Partnership Project, a multi-jurisdictional and multi-agency study of 37 miles of the Patuxent River beginning in Laurel. It is working closely with the City of Laurel to help draw up a long-

range "Greenprint" to create real sustainability across the city and eventually create a City Department of the Environment with a Sustainability Coordinator.

L4P believes that it will take effort on the part of both the city government and its citizenry to improve the city's relationship with the Patuxent River, which will lead to improvements in the quality of the river's water, its surrounding watershed, and the lives of the people who live there.

As St. Mary's College of Maryland Professor, Julia A. King, said to the *Washington Post* during a 1999 archaeological study of the Patuxent River when she was chief of archaeological services for the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, "What goes on at the head of the river is connected to what happens at the mouth of the river. We're hoping people will see how these things are linked—and environmentally, politically, socially, they are linked. [The river] really was a highway in the history of this region."

Challenging though it may be in the 21st century, as we seek better stewardship of the Patuxent River and its watershed, we would be wise to follow the example of those first inhabitants of this area and their symbiotic relationship with the river and its surroundings.

In future issues of *Voices of Laurel* you can look forward to more from Laurel for the Patuxent, Inc. about the history of the river, its earliest neighbors, its health, the broad sustainability initiatives planned, and about the history of the City of Laurel as it grew with the river that runs beside it.

*Mike McLaughlin, a 50-year resident of Laurel and former Old Town columnist for the Laurel Leader, served on the city's Environmental Affairs Committee, and is a co-founder and co-chair of the nonprofit Laurel for The Patuxent, Inc.*

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# Memories of Laurel by an Almost Native



BY KEN BOYER



A young Ken Boyer (left) and his brother walk south down Fith Street in the 1950s, with Cook's Laurel Hardware in the distance along Main Street.

Why an almost native you ask? I was born in Iowa. My parents met in a small town in northwest Iowa towards the end of World War II and married a little over a year after the end of the war. They had both grown up in and near that town. After they married, they moved to Laurel because Dad was stationed at Fort Meade with the Army Ground Forces Band. That organization became the Army Field Band in 1950. Before I was born, Mom went back to live with her parents on their farm while awaiting my arrival as Dad was on tour with the band. When I was six months old, Dad came back to Iowa to get Mom and me. We arrived in Laurel in early 1948.

My earliest memories are of the small apartment we rented on the second floor of a house on Post Office Avenue. On Sundays, we would walk to Laurel Presbyterian Church for Sunday school and church services. Laurel was a small town, and when Dad was away on tour, we walked everywhere, as Mom

didn't drive. We had everything we needed in walking distance: the Safeway on C Street, the drug store at the corner of US 1 and Main Street (later Dougherty's), Light's, Block's, Phillip's, Polan's, Gavriles', the meat market, A&P, the library, Citizen's Bank on the corner of 4th and Main Streets.

My brother and I attended Laurel Elementary School on Montgomery Street, and walked those four blocks every day. LES was such fun, despite a few of the stricter teachers. The playground in back was memorable for its steel and concrete play structures surrounded by stones on the ground—no foam or plastic for us. Some days when we had a few pennies in our pocket, we would stop in the Cordelia's Bakery on Main Street. Trying to pick one of the many penny candies in the case was always fun.

There were different roads headed out of Laurel in those days. To the North, the Ninth Street Bridge, lost to Tropical Storm Agnes in 1972, and Route 1 North. To the West, Sandy

Spring Road, which is now called Old Sandy Spring Road, and Brooklyn Bridge Road. To the South, Route 1 was it. To the East, Main Street, under the B&O tracks by the depot, Bowie Road, and Route 602. Route 602? Yep, you now know it as Route 198 and it was only two lanes, not the six lane monster it has become. Gorman Avenue ended at 8th Street and Talbott Avenue ended at 9th Street. There were no houses in what is now Laurel Hills, just trees. The only thing south of Montrose was the Sanitarium. Then, in 1956, the shopping center opened. It was a big deal in our little town.

As kids, we rode bikes and played all over. It truly was small town America. The picture at left was taken by my parents. Dad was early into 35MM slides, and Mom always had her trusty Kodak.

*Ken Boyer was born in Iowa, grew up in Old Laurel enjoying small town life, and retired from Verizon.*

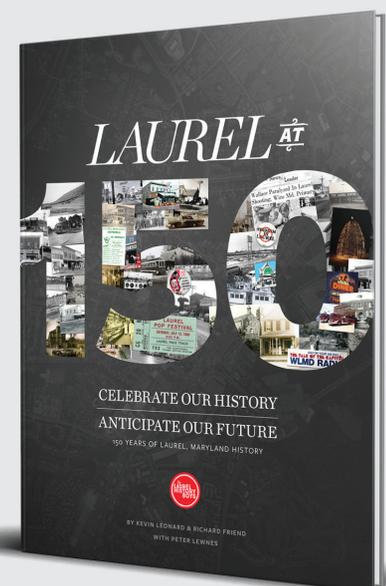
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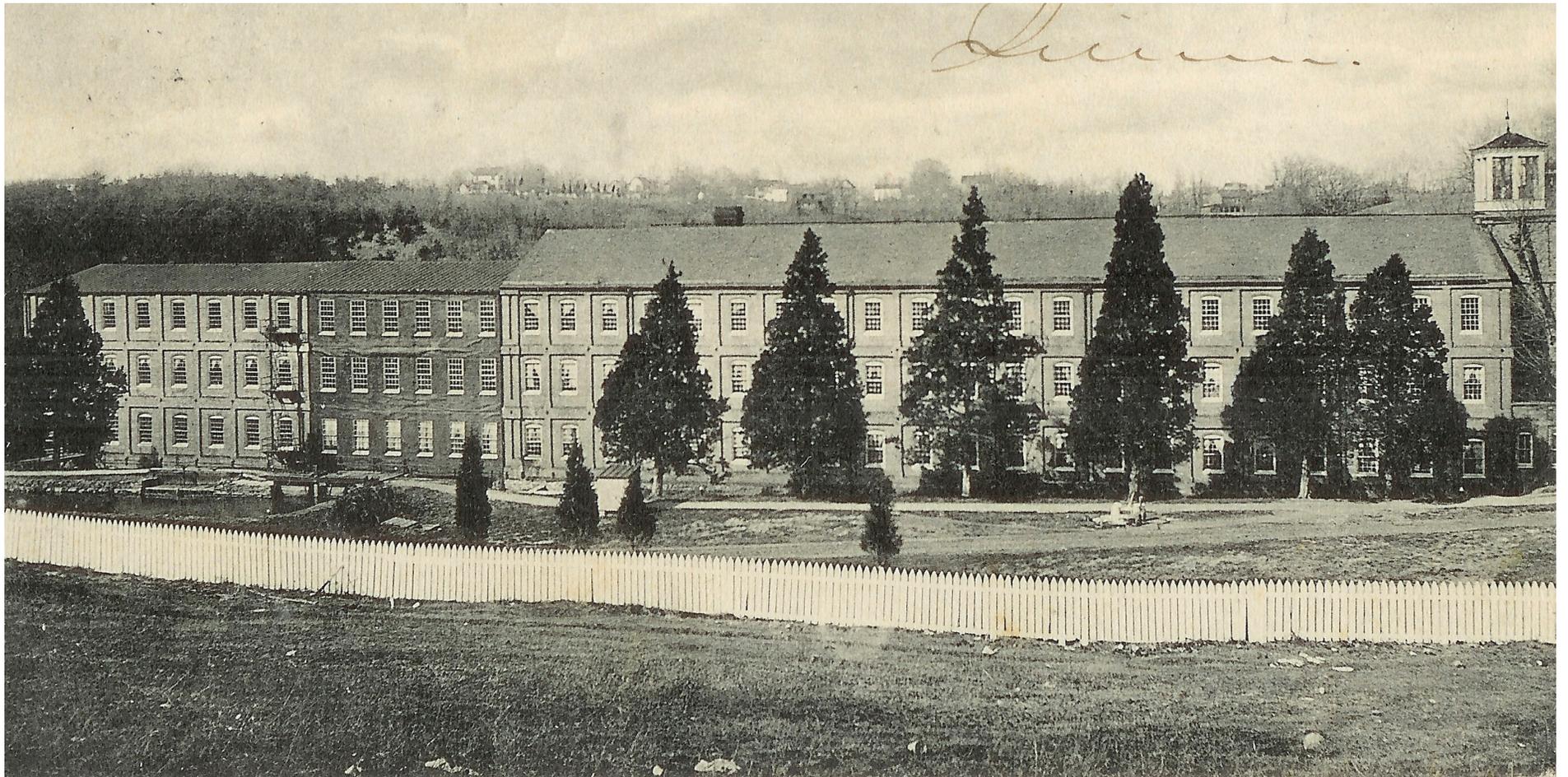
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# Often Overlooked Snippets from Laurel History



BY JACK BOWEN



*The Laurel Mill at the turn of the 20th century. (Laurel History Boys collection)*

Laurel was known as “Laurel Factory” from 1837 until 1870. It was sometimes called “Laurel Station” by Union troops during the Civil War.

In 1859, Arthur Poe Gorman, then 20 years old and a resident of Laurel, became a founding member of the original Washington Nationals baseball team. This team is recognized by some historians as the first team to be organized in the Washington area; others credited it with being the first in the United States. Gorman later became a United States senator.

The search for John Wilkes Booth for shooting President Lincoln in 1865 focused briefly on Laurel. Booth was said to have befriended a schoolteacher in the town and it was thought that he might be fleeing to her for help.

General George Meade’s son lived in Laurel after the Civil War and died there in the early 1880s.

Laurel High School opened in 1899 as the first public high school in Prince George’s County. Mayor Phelps of Laurel personally paid to complete construction of the building after funds were depleted. The school opened with 59 students and four teachers. The first graduating class in 1900 was all women.

A building on the northeast corner of Main and C Streets served as a hospital for Union troops during the Civil War. A building at this location later became Block’s Department Store.

Seabiscuit trained for his classic race with War Admiral in October 1938 at Laurel Park race course. This match is often dubbed the “Event of the Century.”

A disastrous fire that struck Main Street on June 23, 1898 destroyed 12 buildings and the Presbyterian Church. Laurel had no fire protection at this time. Four years later, the Laurel Volunteer Fire Dept was organized and a constitution and bylaws drafted. Three fire stations were created, two on Montgomery Street at 5th Street and 8th Street, and the third on Washington Boulevard south of Main Street. These were consolidated into one station in 1935, located at 9th and Montgomery Streets in the former Phelps and Shaffer building.

Francis Harrison Pierpont moved his family to Laurel during the Civil War because he deemed the community to be safe from attack. Also, it was closer to his job site in Washington. Pierpont was later elected governor of West Virginia and became known to historians as the “Father of West Virginia.”

Nicholas Snowden built what was to become known as the Laurel Mill early in the 19th century. It was on the site of a gristmill at the intersection of 9th and Main Streets in Laurel. Horace Capron, who had married into the Snowden family, became the superintendent of the mill. Capron left in 1851 to become an agricultural consultant in Japan. Then the mill suffered heavy damage in a fire in 1855. It remained closed until the end of the Civil War. Union General George Nye was the superintendent from 1877 until 1885. The mill then closed again and was sold at auction. It later reopened as The Laurel Company. Several diverse products were manufactured there, including cotton cloth and duck covers for Conestoga wagons and even window shades. It was Laurel’s largest employer throughout the 19th century. During World War One, the closed mill was used to house soldiers from Camp Meade, later known as Fort Meade.



*John (Jack) Bowen is a Laurel native and a 50-year local historian and memorabilia collector.*

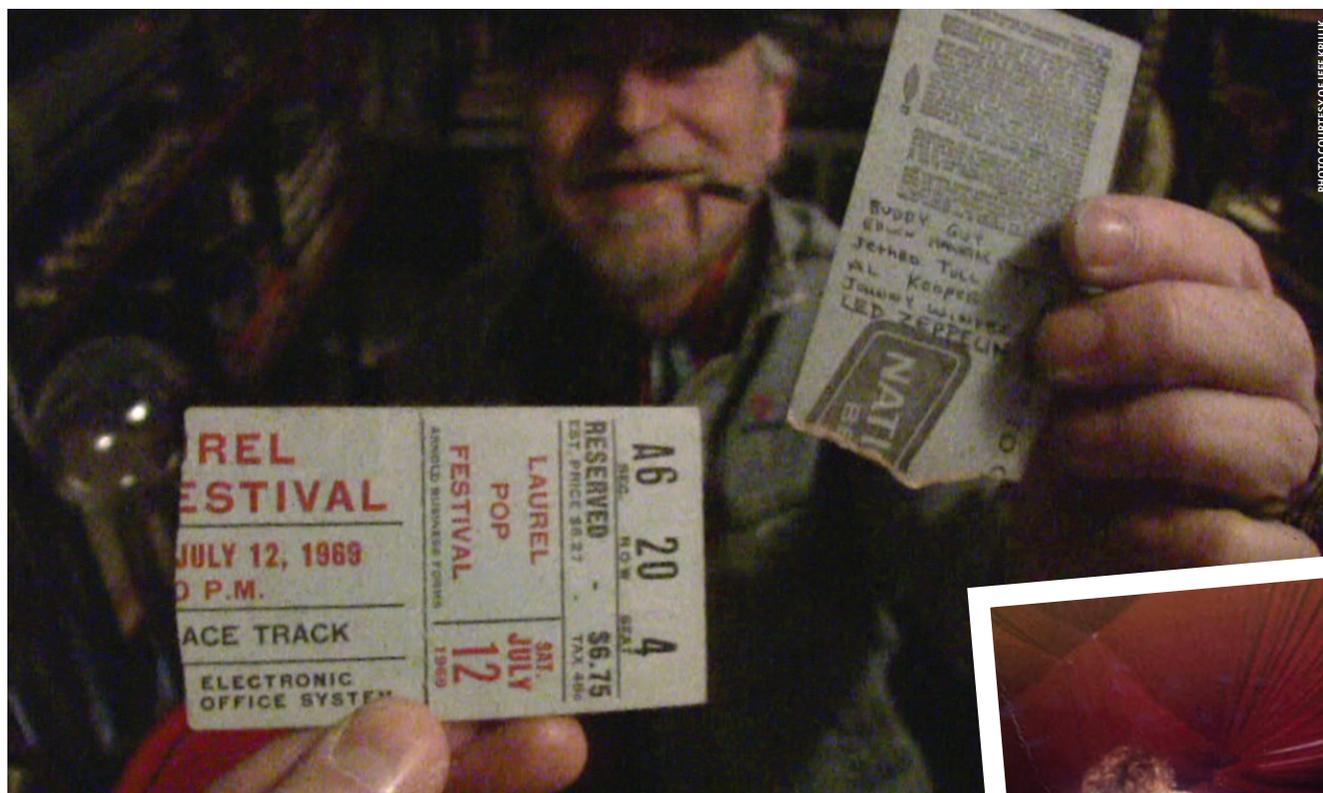


PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF KRULIK

Tom Beach (above, holding tickets to the Laurel Pop Festival) shot the photos at right of Led Zeppelin playing at Laurel Race Course just one month before Woodstock. While the Laurel Pop Festival has been largely forgotten despite an incredible lineup, the band may have played a much more obscure concert six months earlier at the Wheaton Youth Center. (Photos: Tom Beach)

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# Led Zeppelin Played Here

*Documentary About the Laurel Pop Festival Takes a Different Path*



BY JEFF KRULIK

I have been fascinated with the history of the rock concert industry for as long as I can remember. I've always been curious about the personalities and machinery behind the industry, and how the modern concert industry truly emerged out of the 1960s. I grew up in Bowie, came of age in the era of '70s arena rock (first rock concert was Bad Company at the Capital Centre in June 1977), and experienced bands in nightclubs as a young adult and college student attending the University of Maryland. But I've always been keen to know about the Washington, DC area's place in music lore and rock concert history.

In 2013, I finished *Led Zeppelin Played Here*, a documentary that explores the start of the modern rock concert industry, centered around local rock concert folklore:

*Did Led Zeppelin play a concert in their first month in the U.S. at the Wheaton Youth Center gymnasium*

*on Monday, January 20, 1969, in front of 50 confused teenagers (while Richard Nixon was celebrating his first Presidential Inauguration at the same time, and the weather was cold and snowy)?*

Trying to solve that mystery anchored this feature-length documentary (John Kelly in the *Washington Post* called it "Rock-and-Roll Rashomon"), but it's chock full of other rock and roll tales, including an incredible two-day pop festival held at the Laurel Racetrack that also featured Led Zeppelin as a headliner.

In fact, my original intent was to make a documentary I planned to call *Maryland's Woodstock* that was going to be only about the Laurel Pop Festival. I was fascinated that this stellar concert lineup took place nearby at Laurel Racetrack on July 11-12, 1969, yet seemed unheralded and forgotten (unless you were there), and eclipsed by Woodstock, which took place once month later.

Had I been of concert-going age, and not 8 years old, perhaps I could have borne witness to such acts as Jethro Tull, Ten Years After, Sly and the Family Stone, the Mothers of Invention, and Led Zeppelin—to name a few—early in their path towards rock immortality. The full two-day concert line-up was Buddy Guy, Al Kooper, Jethro Tull, Johnny Winter, Edwin Hawkins, and Led Zeppelin (on July 11); Jeff Beck, Ten Years After, Sly and the Family Stone, The Mothers of Invention, Savoy Brown, and The Guess Who (on July 12, although I've read that Savoy Brown never played).

So, I began gathering stories. My first shoot was with high school friends Tom Beach and Bruce Remer, looking through Tom's immense rock memorabilia collection for photos and ephemera from Laurel Pop. Sure enough, Tom locates his tickets, a ticket order form, and almost a dozen photos taken with his Kodak Instamatic. These were the first images I had ever seen

of anyone on stage (or backstage at the festival), and I can hear the excitement in my voice off camera when he finds these.

During another interview, I got to see an original (and highly sought after) Globe Poster advertisement, taken off the store wall by Empire Music employee Jean Aker. And during a further interview, my excitement was tenfold when collector Tim Pace reveals to me that he shot 16mm footage at the festival, of Led Zeppelin and others in performance.

All of these became key components in my film, because footage and photos of any concert or rock event from the 1960s are incredibly rare finds—cameras were not a ubiquitous part of the concert-going landscape as they are today, courtesy of the phone in everyone's back pocket.

But my documentary took a marked detour when I walked into the Wheaton Recreation Center on Georgia Avenue, which opened in December 1963 as the Wheaton Youth Center. Popular lore had Led Zeppelin playing their first area concert in the gymnasium on a wintry January night, but for most it was unconfirmed—if not downright unbelievable—as so few were in attendance and there was no available proof.

The moment I walked through those doors I was transported in time, as the building appearance had not changed in nearly 50 years. There were still talent show plaques in the lobby from the 1960s. I was floored. This building had a story to tell, and I immediately envisioned it as a character in the film.

I switched my approach to exploring (and solving) the mystery of this alleged phantom concert, and along the way connecting the dots of Led Zeppelin's early local appearances, that included a May 1969 double-bill at Merriweather Post Pavilion, opening for The Who.

My new approach crystallized at a bona-fide Wheaton Youth Center reunion held on March 7, 2009, where over 100 people showed up, many with concert stories to tell. But only one had a convincing enough story about Led Zeppelin that she made the cut. Anne Marie Pemberton claimed they performed on the floor of the gym, and even demonstrated where everyone was positioned.

Others at that reunion were there just to soak up the vibe and storytelling, including Led Zeppelin collector Brian Knapp, who has built a world-class archive, with particular interest in the several pop festivals of 1969 that featured Led Zeppelin.

Most remarkable concert-going experiences are of the “you had to be there,” variety, but I did my best to transport viewers through what limited storytelling the constraints of a documentary provide. It's nice to find other stories out there that still flesh out what it was like to attend Laurel Pop, such as the late rocker Tommy Keene's memories of attending the concert with his brother Bobby.

Much of my documentary and research work continues to chronicle the emerging cultural landscape of my home state, which, in many ways could reflect anyone's coming-of age experiences. I'm especially gratified when a regional film like *Led Zeppelin Played*

*Here* can find an audience across the country, as well as internationally even, proving my point.

The recently published *Evenings with Led Zeppelin* has compared the unconfirmed Wheaton concert to the Loch Ness Monster. We know with proof that Led Zeppelin did indeed headline one night of the Laurel Pop Festival. But here's a chance to watch the feature length *Led Zeppelin Played Here* and decide for yourself if you believe they performed at the Wheaton Youth Center on January 20, 1969—or did not.



*Jeff Krulik, a lifelong DMV resident, is an independent filmmaker since the mid-80s. He has always been fascinated with the history and evolution of rock concert promotion. Krulik is a member of the Board of Directors of The Laurel History Boys.*

*Top left: employees of Baltimore's legendary Globe Poster Company show one of their countless pieces from the 1960s—a poster advertising a performance of the Los Angeles-based rock band, Pacific Gas and Electric, at the Wheaton Youth Center. Jeff Krulik's documentary asks the question, did Led Zeppelin play here, too?*

*Top right: In a screen shot from the film, Ann Marie Pemberton—who claims to have been in attendance at the Led Zeppelin performance—animatedly demonstrates where each member of the band was positioned during the concert.*

*Bottom: The Wheaton Youth Center gymnasium, which hosted numerous concerts throughout the 1960s, both documented and undocumented. (Photos courtesy of Jeff Krulik)*





PHOTO COURTESY OF LVFD

# Holy Smokes!

*Tales from the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department*



BY CHRIS STANTON

As one of Laurel's many volunteer firefighters, hearing the dispatch radio squawk, "Prince George to Howard, Anne Arundel, Montgomery. Stand by to copy..." meant excitement. The house bells would soon clang, and the fire engine would belch that familiar smell of diesel as you rushed to report of a structure fire.

Tucked along the Patuxent, the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department, No. 1 Inc., was organized in 1902. Originally, Laurel had three departments, hence the "No. 1," but those departments disbanded early in the 20th century and "No. 1" is only part of our corporate name. The modern station number as part of the Prince George's County Fire/EMS Department is "10." The distinctive patch of the company has the leaf of the Laurel plant but is affectionately known around the station as our "pickle" patch.

Old veterans of the War Between the States saw the precursor to the modern department in the City of Laurel. In 1886, a hook and ladder truck was brought to fires by the Laurel Fireman's Association. On a fateful summer afternoon in 1898, Baltimore City Fire Department Engine Company 10 responded to aid Laurel. After arriving in Laurel and disembarking

at the B&O Railroad Station, Baltimore City Probationary Pipeman Charles Franke tripped in front of the steam engine and tragically was crushed and died in the line of duty.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1902, the founding fathers of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department (LVFD) organized and established themselves to provide for a fire service in Laurel. October 13, 1902 is recognized as the anniversary of the department, as on this date an ordinance was passed and signed by the Mayor and City Council. In those early days, the LVFD included three companies. Each had a cart with 500' of 2 1/2" hose, and Company No. 2 had a hook and ladder truck until 1909 when it was moved to the men of Company No. 1. The early years up to and through the Great War were sparse ones for the department. The only apparatus continued to be hose carts and the membership was pleased just to receive electric lighting. At the dawn of the Roaring Twenties, the City of Laurel provided coats, boots, and caps for a dozen men of the department to wear on fire calls. During



*"Old Liz" participating in the very first Main Street Festival parade in 1981. (Photo: John Floyd II)*

these years, Companies No. 2 and 3 disbanded, while Company No. 1 remained to continue their service to others.

For almost a quarter century, the LVFD had depended on hand pulled hose carts, but expanded capability in 1924 by purchasing a 1918 Model "T" Ford hose wagon from Hyattsville. Five years later, LVFD acquired what remains the pride of Laurel, a 1928 American LaFrance pumper with an ability to pump 1,000 GPM and has been affectingly named "Old Liz."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

## FIRST RESPONDERS



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICK MCGILL

# “We had a guy...”

*Tales from the Laurel Police Department*



BY RICK MCGILL

Most professionals consider themselves to be members of a unique fraternity. Doctors, lawyers, firefighters, and policemen all have something in common with their co-workers in that they often believe the general public simply cannot comprehend what it takes to do the job, whatever that job is, day after day. You haven't been there, haven't done it, seen it, felt and lived it, so you just can't understand what it is to be a doc, a firefighter, a cop.

The very thing that keeps them all seemingly isolated from society and from the very people they live to protect is also what bonds them together in such a way that when they get together in those private moments—where their clients, customers, and citizens can't see—the guard is down and they start swapping war stories. We crack open a beer and the topic of conversation soon roams from the latest sports scores or family woes to something we all can relate to: the job.

I've worked in law enforcement for well over 23 years and met fellow law enforcement officers who all exhibit the same quality. Once they know you're one of them, you're family. Personally, I'm shy among strangers, but when I'm among cops it's as if I've known them for years. I've worked in Iraq and other countries

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“Grab yourself a cup of java or crack open a beer and get comfortable. You're in a room full of cops talking shop. And the attitudes, sometimes smart-ass, sometimes despairing, that go with it. In our town, on my shift, this was policing in the last decades of the 20th century.”

---

with other retired U.S. cops and it happens over and over. The war stories eventually come out like well-worn souvenirs, sometimes following a theme of the day, like drunks or suicides or domestic disturbances, and they are usually told with a minimum of scenic details because we've all been there and done that. For example, I don't have to describe what a bad drunk smells like and acts like and why it's a pain in the ass to deal with him. It's enough to set the stage by saying

something like, “We had this bad drunk one night.”

The listener immediately fills in the setting with one of his own on-duty experiences and I can get to the punch line without a lot of flowery language.

Okay, so sometime the language does go beyond flowery. We deal with society's worst and that world is not gentle.

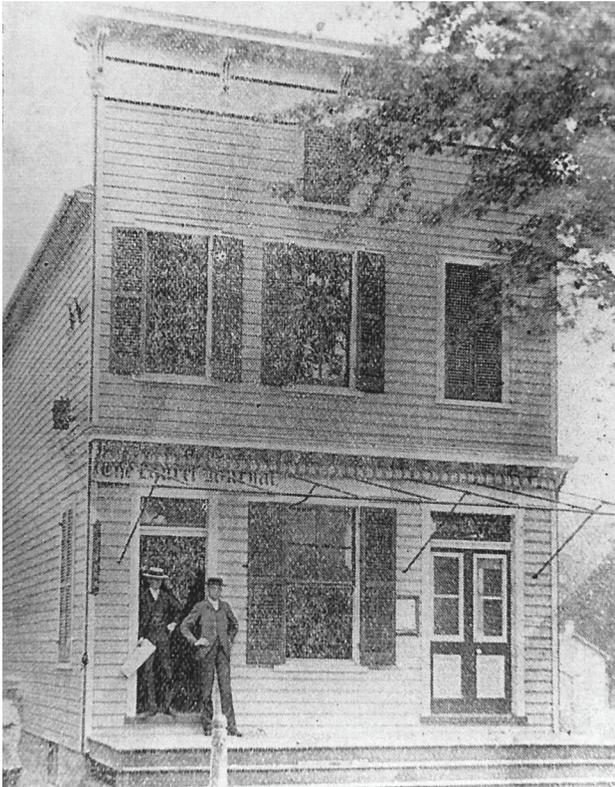
But when a cop hears the phrase, “We had a guy...” he knows it's going to be an honest-to-God, no-s\*\*t true war story, and he'd better be thinking up one of his own to follow it.

This series is an uncomplicated string of personal war stories from my time at a small municipal police department between Baltimore and Washington, DC, told without a lot of those extravagant details; just the facts, ma'am. Other cops will appreciate the bare-bones setups of my individual anecdotes. But I do try to explain some of the procedures for the general public who has little understanding of why we do some of the things we do. The media usually does a poor job of defining the nuts and bolts of criminal law and why we can't just “go lock them up” whenever we want to.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

# The History of Laurel's Post Office

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Left: The post office at 397 Main Street, as it appeared in the 1894 Laurel Illustrated Residence and Business Directory.

Center: Using a team of horses and pulling it along greased logs, the old building was moved in 1922 to a new location five blocks away at 42 A Street, where it had numerous tenants before being torn down several years later.

Right: G.B. Timanus, who resigned as mayor of Laurel in 1905 to accept an appointment as postmaster. By contemporary accounts, he was more popular in his new role. (Source: Laurel Historical Society)

In 1905, after Postmaster Charles F. Shaffer, Jr. (owner of Shaffer Lumber Company) resigned, Congressman Sydney E. Mudd appointed Mayor Gustavus B. Timanus as postmaster at Laurel. In addition to serving as mayor, Timanus had been the superintendent for years at the Laurel Cotton Mill.

He resigned as mayor to take the new position, and a special election was held to replace him. The *Leader* was not sorry to see him go, and subtly criticized Timanus' tenure as mayor by declaring "the interests of the public may be and generally are opposed by a select few, who imagine that everything should be done for their interest."

However, as postmaster, Timanus earned praise from the *Leader* when he "placed in the office a desk for the use of the public, which is a convenience to be appreciated. It is understood that the postmaster contemplates a number of changes for the efficiency of the service and convenience of the patrons." One of those changes was to move the post office into a larger building next door on Main Street in 1907, which afforded much more room for its growing operations. "Laurel is now quite a center for mail distribution, having two rural carriers and two star routes which serve portions of Howard and Montgomery counties."

In an interesting backstory, when the post office moved next door, the building was sold to the Laurel Building Association and served as its headquarters until 1922, when the entire building was moved five blocks down Main Street to 42 A Street.

In the same way the Brewster Park Hotel was moved in 1905 a half-mile to the grounds of the Laurel Sanitarium, a team of horses pulled the former post office building over greased logs down Main Street. The operation took a week. On A Street, the building then became a Maryland State Police barracks and office of the Justice of the Peace. The building was torn down many years later.

In 1909, the Laurel Post Office was burglarized, and thieves made off with between \$300 and \$400 in cash and stamps. The thieves broke in using tools stolen from a blacksmith shop on Postoffice Ave. owned by Joseph Desoi. The stolen tools were left behind in the post office by the burglars. "The front of the safe was blown off" with dynamite, creating a blast so powerful that "a piece of the iron passed through the door of the inner office and through the upper part of both front windows, smashing the glass and cutting the wire of a pendant electric light, landing on the other side of the street," according to the *Leader*. The explosion left "the side of the room near the safe a mass of wreckage." Curiously, the 2 a.m. robbery was not reported by any

neighbors, even though many heard the explosion. "None of them thought it of enough importance to make inquiry in regard to it."

The post office moved for the fourth time in 1914 when the Patuxent Bank building opened on the corner of Main Street and Route 1, where it remained until 1937.

For the next 23 years, operations at the Laurel Post Office grew along with the area's population. Mail service saw a big jump in 1917, when it began to handle mail for the newly opened Camp Meade. In 1924, the Post Office Department notified Postmaster Timanus that Laurel would soon be elevated to a "second-class office" as soon as all residents display house numbers and install mailboxes, and the city installs street signs. A second-class office meant free carrier service delivering mail to residences. Previously, residents had to pick up their mail at the post office. Laurel's first two mail carriers were Richard T. Tucker and Richard B. Beall. In 1932, the Laurel Post Office obtained its first mail truck. "It has been a great drawback to the post office using a small car, as all packages could not be taken out at once, thus delaying the delivery of packages," according to the *Leader*.

In the mid-1930s, mail operations increased to the point where a new, larger post office was required. The federal Post Office Department decided Laurel needed a dedicated, federally owned post office.

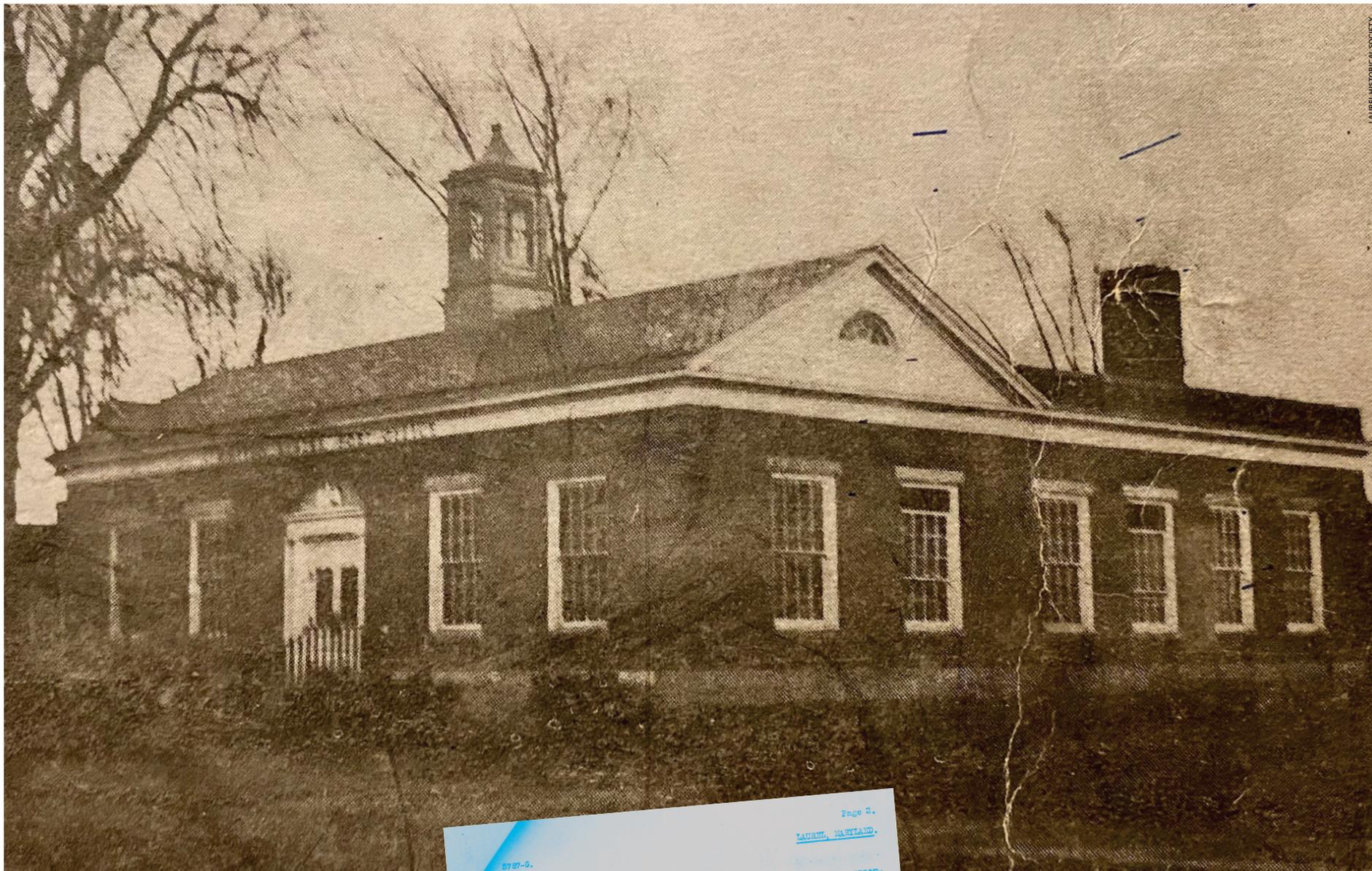


## Chapman Lot Wins

In 1936, the Post Office Department evaluated 17 different sites in Laurel that were offered for sale to the government. The owners of some of the lots were well-known Laurel families: Fetty, Stanley, Beall, Greco, Chapman, and Osbon. A Post Office Department Inspector filed a report (shown at right) describing the lots and offering his recommendations (some of the lots are listed more than once but there were 17 different lots).

The Federal Government followed the inspector's recommendation and selected the lot on Main Street owned by Benjamin and Kathryn Chapman.

The Chapmans lived on Main Street since 1924 with their daughter, Virginia. Ben Chapman was a horse breeder and trainer, and he raced horses at Laurel. In



LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Page 2.  
LAUREL, MARYLAND.

BID #.	OWNER OR AGENT.	LOCATION.	DIMENSIONS.	ASKING PRICE.
1	John F. Fetty, Agent.	Southwest corner of Washington Avenue & Prince George St.	95' X 140'	\$15,000.00
1-A	SAME Chas. H. Stanley, Agent.	SAME West side Washington Ave. between Prince George St. and Montgomery Street.	90' X 150'	\$13,500.00 8,000.00
3	Norris C. & Maude Seall and Dew. H. & Minnie Donaldson. Owners.	Northwest corner of Montgomery and 4th Streets.	100' X 167'	8,000.00
4	T. C. White, Owner.	West side Washington Avenue, between Main and Prince George Sts.	63' frontage 100' in rear X 190' (L shape)	25,000.00
5	William E. Boswell, Owner.	Southeast corner of Washington & Laurel Avenues.	200' X 102'	7,000.00
6	Clyde C. Williams, Owner	West side Washington Ave., between Gorman and Compton Avenues.	115' X 191'	3,200.00
7	Vincent Creco, Owner.	North side Main St., between B and C Streets.	100' X 150'	11,500.00
7-A	Same	Same	Same	10,000.00
8	Athey & Harrison, and Delia G. Casey. Owners.	East side C Street, between Main Street and Patuxent River.	200' X 160'	4,500.00
9	Mrs. B. E. Chapman, Owner	South side Main St., between Washington Avenue and Race St.	147' X 213'	20,000.00
9-a	Mrs. B. E. Chapman, Owner	South side Main St. between Washington Avenue and Race St.	100' X 213'	9,000.00

Page 3-A.  
LAUREL, MARYLAND.

BID #.	OWNER OR AGENT.	LOCATION.	DIMENSIONS.	ASKING PRICE.
10	Arthur L. Vickers, Owner.	Northwest corner of Washington and Carroll Avenues.	100' X 293'	\$ 7,000.00
11	John H. Fetty, Agent.	South side Main Street, between Washington Ave. and Race Street.	100' X 223'	12,000.00
2	Eugenia S. Fisher, Owner.	Northwest corner Main and Second Street.	122' X 150'	7,500.00
	Dora A. and Norval W. Frost. Owners.	Northeast corner Main and B Streets.	70'2" X 150'	20,000.00
	John J. Norton, Owner.	West side Washington Ave. between Montgomery St. and Laurel Avenue.	110' X 200'	7,500.00
	Mary S. Cobon, Owner.	North side Main St., between Washington Ave and Second St.	87'10" X 650'	22,000.00 (including improvements.)
	Same	Same	Same	27,000.00 (including lot adjoining improvements on east.)
17	Same	Same	Same as No. 15.	18,000.00 (Excluding improvements.)
17-A.	Same	Same	87'10" X 170'	12,000.00

negotiations with the government, Mrs. Chapman enlisted her friend and neighbor, Postmaster Elizabeth Boss, to propose lowering the price of the lot from \$10,000 to \$9,000 if the government would pay to have their house moved 50 feet to the back of their lot that was not part of the sale. The government refused and paid \$8,500 for the lot, invoking eminent domain.

The Chapmans loved their house, so they took the government's offer and hired contractors to move the house 50 feet onto a new foundation.

Laurel's Post Office was dedicated on Sept. 1, 1937. Construction of the facility cost \$73,000.

**“Mail Coach at Laurel” Mural**

One aspect of FDR's New Deal supported artists by commissioning murals that reflected American history for post offices. The Works Progress Administration

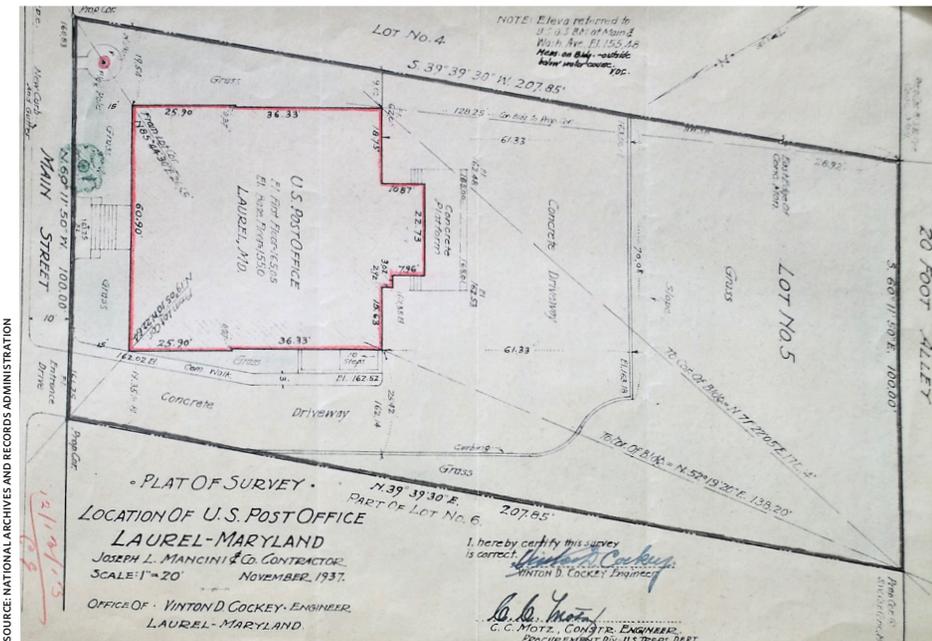
SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

# The History of Laurel's Post Office

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17



Artist Mitchell Jamieson's 1939 mural, "Mail Coach at Laurel." The rectangular cutout at the bottom center of the 14-foot wide painting was to accommodate the top of the postmaster's door. (Source: National Archives and Records Administration)



SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION



Above: James A. Farley (left), Postmaster General of the U.S. lays the cornerstone of the new Laurel Post Office in 1937, assisted by H.P. Millard, who made the marker. At far right is Laurel Mayor Gen. E.E. Hatch. (Source: Laurel Leader)



Left: The staff of the Laurel Post Office at its opening in 1937: (front, l-r) R.M. Moore, Walter Fisher, Postmaster Elizabeth Boss, M.V. Fisher, Russell Beall, Allie Brown; (back row, l-r) Lee Harrison, Lester R. Young, R.B. Beall, Elmer Mallonee, Richard T. Tucker, Ralph Ramey, Raymond Miles. (Source: Laurel Historical Society)

(WPA) was an agency created to carry out public works projects and provide employment to millions during the Great Depression. But, as described by Patricia Raynor in the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum's newsletter *EnRoute*, "Often mistaken for WPA art, post office murals were actually executed by artists working for the Section of Fine Arts. Commonly known as 'the Section,' it was established in 1934 and administered by the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department. ... the Section's main function was to select art of high quality to decorate public buildings—if the funding was available."

For Laurel's Post Office, artist Mitchell Jamieson was awarded a contract for \$730 to create a "mural depicting the delivery of mail by stage coach, when the establishment of the United States Mail was in its infancy," as described in the *Leader*. The 14-foot wide mural was installed over the postmaster's door in the lobby in March 1939.

Maryland-born Jamieson's career was just starting in the 1930s. He painted murals for other post offices and federal buildings until World War II. He was commissioned an ensign in the Naval Reserve in 1942 and spent his military career as an official combat artist, seeing action in both the European and Pacific theaters.

He taught at the University of Maryland in the 1960s until 1967, when Jamieson volunteered as a civilian artist for the U.S. Army. He went to Vietnam for about one month and the experience scarred the combat veteran for the rest of his life. "Vietnam scarred us all, but it gnawed at Jamieson and would not let him heal," according to the *Washington Post*. "He would not stop remembering and drawing the horrors he had seen and those he had dreamed."

Jamieson committed suicide in his home in Alexandria in 1976.

### Round 2 for Negotiations & Eminent Domain

Mail service reached new heights coincident with the housing boom experienced by the greater Laurel area starting in the mid-1950s. During this time period, the post office leased space at the Laurel Race Course to process Christmas mail and, starting in 1962, 25 mail carriers were working out of a post office annex in a warehouse on Main Street. Expansion of the almost 30-year-old post office was a necessity.

By the early 1950s, both Ben and Kathryn Chapman had passed away but their daughter, Virginia, and her husband, Dolph Scagliarini, lived in the relocated house

behind the post office. In a recent interview, Virginia Scagliarini described how they converted the house that had been moved in 1937 to make way for the new post office into four apartments. The Scagliarinis lived in one and rented the other three to members of the Army Field Band at Fort Meade. But by the late 1950s, their relocated house was exactly where the government wanted to expand the Laurel Post Office.

Once again, negotiations commenced for the lot but went nowhere. They dragged on for years with the memory of having her house taken from them in 1937 still fresh in Virginia's mind. In her interview, she remembered phone calls and letters from government officials as high up as Baltimore U.S. Attorney Benjamin Civiletti. In a memo regarding the lot dated 12/7/62 from the General Services Administration on file in the National Archives, it said, "Owners have been contacted on numerous occasions by regional representatives. Owners [sic] asking prices are unreasonable, being far above the appraised fair market value of the property. It is therefore necessary to condemn."

It was no use. Having been through it before, Scagliarini told the *Leader* in 2019, "Unless you've got billions and like to fight, you just don't fight." The property was condemned. Another memo in the National Archives, dated May 9, 1963, states, "From my examination of the above-mentioned documents, I find that the condemnation proceeding has been regularly conducted to date." It was signed by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

In an unusual and unfair arrangement, the Scagliarinis were allowed to buy back their renovated apartment house after receiving payment from the government for the property. They had a foundation built on a lot and, once again, had the top half of their apartment house lifted up and moved to a new location on Seventh Street.

Construction proceeded and the expanded post office—which cost \$443,300—was dedicated on October 14, 1967. The new building tripled the size of the old facility. At that point, Laurel had graduated to a First-Class post office with 60 employees.

The Scagliarinis did not attend the dedication.

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*Kevin Leonard is a founding member of The Laurel History Boys. He has written about local history for the Laurel Leader for almost 10 years.*



### A House Changes Address

Formerly the second floor of a two-story apartment in the rear of 328 Main Street, Laurel, this frame and block structure was disengaged from its resting place and took a trip through town last week to its new location at 613 Seventh Street where it will become the upper portion of a split foyer house. Its face will be veneered in brick and when all's said and done it's not likely there'll be much similarity to its original appearance. It is owned by Mr. and Mrs. D. R. Scagliarini, who will also occupy it. They moved it after selling their Main Street residence located next door to the U.S. Post Office to the federal government. The movers hauled the structure across the Laurel General Hospital parking lot to Prince George Street, over to Washington Avenue, south on Washington Ave. to Carroll Avenue and west on Carroll to 7th Street.—Photo by W. L. Armstrong.



*Left: The Scagliarini house is shown making its move to Seventh Street in this August 27, 1964 News Leader clipping.*

*Above: The Laurel High School band plays at the dedication of the post office expansion. (Source: Laurel Historical Society)*

# Archaeology at the Laurel Museum

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

site as well. So 18PR228 can be read as: 18 indicates the site is in Maryland, PR indicates the site is in Prince George's County, and the site is the 228th site registered within Prince George's County. The archaeological site name for 18PR228 is the "Laurel Factory House."

The first known work to be conducted at 18PR228 was done by a team of volunteer avocational archaeologists in the early 1980s, headed by Conrad Bladey, director of the non-profit group City of Laurel Archaeological Survey. In a 1982 article in the *Washington Post*, Bladey indicated that his group of volunteers had dug "scores of one-foot square holes around the neglected property." Unfortunately, the results of these excavations, along with an inventory of the recovered artifacts, have never been published. The artifacts are still in the possession of Bladey and no one has been able to view them for additional property research.

Bladey, a professional archaeologist and Laurel resident at the time, revealed in contemporary interviews that the group encountered intact deposits of early 19th century domestic materials, underlain by intact deposits from the Woodland period. This was a prehistoric time period dating from approximately 1,000 BC to 1500 AD, in which huge changes to society and material culture occurred, including the invention of the bow and arrow; development of pottery and horticulture; and use of small, triangular projectile points.

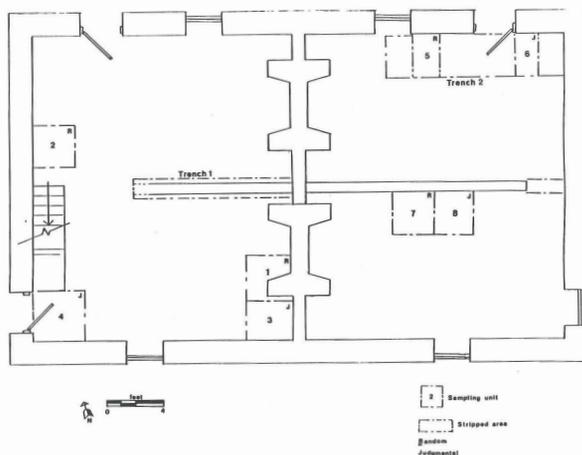
In 1988, a Phase I survey was conducted along the floodplain of the Patuxent River. A Phase I survey means that archaeologists are looking for the presence of archaeological sites. If sites are encountered, then the boundaries are delineated through surface survey and/or shovel testing. A survey was conducted at this time at the request of the City of Laurel Department of Parks and Recreation, which was planning the development of Riverfront Park, and wanted to identify the location of any cultural resources or potential archaeological sites located within the project boundaries. This Phase I fieldwork included a pedestrian survey, the excavation of shovel test pits, and an examination of the archaeological integrity of the Laurel Factory House site. The survey crew identified and recorded the approximate dimensions of the previously excavated units done in the early 1980s by the volunteer group.

After a Phase I survey, Phase II allows for more in-depth testing and boundary delineation. A Phase II investigation was conducted at the site in March 1994, when the rehabilitation of the Laurel Factory House building was ongoing, prior to its opening in 1996 as the Laurel Museum. The scope of work included replacement of the basement floor and installation of utility lines, which resulted in moderate ground disturbance.

As part of Phase II, a total of 24 shovel test pits, 11 test units, and two trenches were excavated in and around the Factory House. Test units can vary in size but are typically dug in 1x1m squares at this point in the survey. In Phase III excavations, units can be 5x5m, 10x10m, or even larger. For the Phase

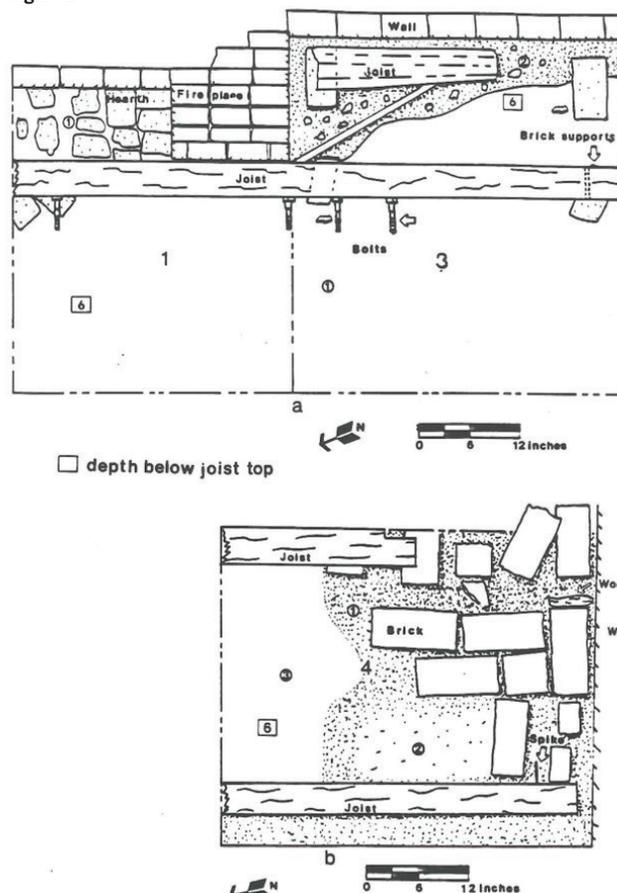
II testing at the Laurel Factory House, the test units and trenches varied in size, as they were placed to examine the basement area (Figure 1) and the south and east yards.

Figure 1



The units excavated in the basement revealed a late 19th or early 20th century wooden floor on top of remnants of a brick pavement floor (Figure 2). The soil between the floors contained 20th century artifacts, which were deposited through rodent activity, slippage through the floorboards, and the decay of the wooden floor. The presence of archaeological deposits that date to the construction of the building is possible but it is a remote possibility. Testing on the exterior of the building revealed thick layers of brick rubble and fill dirt.

Figure 2



More than 2,800 artifacts were encountered during the Phase II testing in 1994, including 1,386 architectural objects, 48 clothing items, 963 kitchen-related artifacts, 49 personal items, 201 miscellaneous historic items, and one possible prehistoric object (a quartz flake). Categorizing the artifact assemblages helps archaeologists understand the activities and occupations at different time periods at the site. Some of the wide range of artifacts recovered included marbles, a phonograph record fragment, a small iron axe, three ceramic doorknob fragments, a pink paint fragment, buttons, leather shoe parts, ceramic sherds (pearlware, porcelain, ironstone, whiteware, salt-glazed stoneware), animal bones, ceramic figurine fragments, five pennies (including an 1890 Indianhead Penny), eyeglass pieces, a Blistex tube, and a dentistry partial.

The site has been disturbed by extensive episodes of excavation and backfilling (archaeology, landscape, and utility), vandalism, and illegal dumping. The building had many uses over the years in addition to its initial function as a multi-family residence. All of these factors make it nearly impossible to determine artifact distribution for the purpose of understanding the usage of the site over the last 180 years.

## Archaeology Summer Camp

It was with great excitement and interest that archaeological investigations returned to the site in 2019, after a 25-year hiatus, in the form of a summer camp opened to fifth and sixth graders. The week-long morning camp introduced campers to the discipline of archaeology through classroom instruction, hands-on teamwork, and outdoor activities. Students learned how to analyze mystery artifacts, wash and handle artifacts, study stratigraphy, and write a site report. Campers enjoyed learning more about the site through nature walks to the dam ruins and Patuxent River. The last day of the camp was devoted to test excavations in the yard at the museum (below). Students were thrilled to find many of the same types of artifacts recovered in the 1994 Phase II investigation—marbles, whiteware ceramic sherds, glass fragments, and lots of rusty nails. And no—none of the artifacts were planted so that the students could uncover artifacts!

With the success of our first Archaeology Summer Camp, we planned a second one for July 2020. However, with the pandemic and the closure of the Laurel Museum, we transitioned our on-site camp into a virtual educational experience. Fortunately, the Laurel Historical Society was awarded a CARES Act grant through the National Endowment for the Humanities to pivot our programming to Zoom and Google Classroom. LHS Board Member Amy Dunham and consultant Ashley Poulos worked with the staff to create a fun new learning opportunity. And since we weren't limited by on-site instruction, we were able to include students from outside the Laurel area!

The virtual summer camp had its challenges, but we engaged the students with fun quizzes and games, and ended each morning session with a make-at-

home activity. The students had the most fun with the “wigwam or clay pot challenge.” Since most of the fun of an archaeology camp is the digging, we decided to offer an optional dig session at the Laurel Museum, and we invited the campers and their families to attend. Units were spaced apart, equipment was sanitized between uses, and masks were worn even outdoors. But none of this stopped the fun or the learning.

Archaeology can help us understand what happened at a particular place throughout time, but in many cases, it raises more questions than answers. We will continue to research the history of the site through archives and archaeology, and hope that we can include the artifacts and data from the 1980s dig in the future.

For more information about the summer camps and other programs at the Laurel Historical Society, visit our website at [www.laurelhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.laurelhistoricalsociety.org), email [info@laurelhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@laurelhistoricalsociety.org), or call (301) 725-7975.

*Ann Bennett is an archaeologist, educator, and living historian who loves historic sewing, hearth cooking, kayaking, and crossword puzzles. She currently serves as the Executive Director of the Laurel Historical Society and as a Director for the Laurel Board of Trade.*



*The illustration for this story was created by Monica Sturdivant, who currently serves as the Assistant Director of the Laurel Historical Society and is a visual artist.*



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## Chief Chronicler CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

on July 13, 2017 at the age of 101, Gertrude “guided her weekly broadsheet as four decades of American life was filtered through the little mill town on the Patuxent and reported on the pages of the *Leader*.”

In the last years of her life, I often visited Gertrude at her lovely home in Ashton, where we would sit in the glass-enclosed sunroom and watch the birds and other wildlife that filled her backyard.

Sometimes we would talk, mostly we just sat with one another. But her great niece Vicci Rodgers told me Gertrude knew on those days that the *Leader* editor was coming for a visit.

Not many of us leave a legacy, a name that is recognized throughout an industry where she was the first woman to be president of her press association and honored with awards and accolades; a name that for longtime city residents calls up a memory of a polished and professional newspaper woman strolling Main Street on her way to the nearby lunch counter.

Gertrude Poe described her career as being “the chief chronicler of Laurel’s saga for more than four decades.”

This was her gift to Laurel; thank you, Gertrude.

*A version of this story first appeared on [melaniedzwonchyk.com](http://melaniedzwonchyk.com).*



*Melanie Dzwonchyk, retired editor of the Laurel Leader, Columbia Flier, and Howard County Times, lives in Old Town.*

## A Civil War Soldier’s Letter to Home CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

*was fearful of its giving you too much pain. Poor Little Puss, the very idea of what that letter has caused you has given me the well-deserved punishment. To crown it all, this evening I was told by a person, a trunk was down at my tent. Someone attached here found it at Gordonsville and brought it on. I know not what to thank you most for. The guilt will be particularly agreeable as tonight is very cold. I have reserved the peaches for private hungry hours. The potatoes will be very nice as we are in want of vegetables or just out of them. The preserves put me in mind of my little darling running about the house with dress tucked up and sweet and dirty fingers. I cannot express myself to you as the idea of your doing this for pleasure, gives me more innate pleasure than the trunk itself.*

*I have received your note this evening by mail. I am much obliged to the donors. Thank them for me. Earl’s peaches shall be delivered.*

*The enemy have made some very odd movements looking rather like an attack. Do not start below until this has blown over. Today everything was packed up ready for move. Our position is magnificent. Yesterday I went on Clarks Mountain—a position completely overlooking Culpeper, Madison and Rappanannock Counties. The camps of the enemy seemed to be stretched over 30 miles square. Tis very seldom in one’s life a person can have an opportunity of such an extraordinary sight. Can you imagine two armies 150,000 men lying at your feet, their pickets within three hundred yards but perfectly quiet? Tis beyond all conception.*

*Write me on receipt of this and tell me you have forgotten my note. Do not start down the valley without some fit companion, and wait till this is over as I might be wounded. I shall return the trunk, as I am not allowed no room in wagons.*

*Your devoted husband,  
Harper*

Harper survived the battle and skirmishes with countless numbers killed and wounded. During this battle, General George Armstrong Custer seized more than 100 prisoners, as well as three artillery pieces. The Union victory opened up the Culpeper region to Federal control. On May 4, 1864, Harper Carroll was promoted to Full 1st Lieutenant. As a Commissioned Officer, he mustered out of the Army on November, 21, 1864.

Harper returned home to Homewood with his beloved Ella after the war. However, Ella died in 1872.



*Paulette Lutz is the Deputy Director of the Howard County Historical Society. Founded in 1958, the HCHS is the primary private repository of historical records and artifacts related to Howard County’s history. Learn more at [hchsmd.org](http://hchsmd.org).*

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### The Laurel Volunteer Fire Department

Located in the northern point of Prince George’s County, we service the Greater Laurel Area, including parts of Anne Arundel, Howard, and Montgomery counties.

[laurelvfd.org](http://laurelvfd.org)

## Holy Smokes! CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14



*Ladies of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary, circa 1960s. (Photo: LVFD collection)*

Old Liz served throughout the '30s, 40's, and '50s. It would pump on its last fire in August 1962 when Laurel Automotive on Main Street burned. This beautiful apparatus is on display in the current fire station at 7411 Cherry Lane.

As the Great Depression fell on Laurel, and nearly 75 years before the LVFD would provide ambulance service, the membership voted to obtain a first aid kit—and three spittoons. In the 1930s, LVFD had a much larger first due area, so much so that Howard County provided annual contributions to aid the department. In 1932, the members of LVFD and Branchville's fire department mutually agreed to identify Muirkirk Road as the boundary between their first due areas. This same year, a new Brockway fire engine was placed into service by Laurel's firemen. Twenty years later, on this chassis would be built the first rescue squad truck for the Laurel Rescue Squad. In these years before the Laurel Rescue Squad was formed, a LVFD Diamond-T pumper carried a folding stretcher able to transport patients to the hospital on top of the engine—something unimaginable in today's modern department.

As they did across the country, the bursting bombs over Pearl Harbor changed the lives of everyone in Laurel. The same day that President Roosevelt delivered his "Infamy" speech to Congress, Chief Beall discussed adding Laurel's high school boys to the department's

roster as auxiliary firemen. Preparations for civil defense, such as preparing for air raids, dominated the first year of war. Before the war—and for too long after—the LVFD membership was limited to white men. During the war, with many LVFD members overseas in the Army and Navy, a dozen women donned coveralls as Laurel's front-line firefighters. Today, the LVFD has transformed into an organization that welcomes the diversity and inclusion of members of any gender, race, and sexual orientation.

In a period bursting with advancement, from nuclear technology to TV dinners, the LVFD moved into a new fire station on Montgomery Street, installed radios in the fire engines for the first time, adopted a new numbering system for the apparatus, with Old Liz being designated Engine 101, and placed in service a 1954 American LaFrance ladder truck that had the dual capability provided by a 750 GPM pump. This author's favorite LVFD apparatus also was designed and arrived during the 1950s—known as the "rubber truck." Designated Engine 102, this American LaFrance 700 Series pumper was built on a ladder truck chassis carrying 600 gallons of water, 50 gallons of foam, and mounting several rubber hose booster reels. In those days, the engine might stop at Montgomery Road and Route 1 to pick up a few guys on the way to a call. Other stories have been told of the fire bell ringing during the day prompting younger members to slip out of an open

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## Holy Smokes! CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

window of Laurel High School to race up to the fire station.

In the decade that man first began circling the Earth in space, the LVFD enjoyed its own golden age, now settled into the fire station at 901 Montgomery Street with weekly bingo, dances, and lots of fire runs. These were the years before Howard County added new fire stations in the Scaggsville and Columbia areas, and so Laurel's volunteers rode deep into the Howard and Anne Arundel sides of greater Laurel, especially aboard Truck 10. The "twins"—two Oren pumpers designated Engines 101 and 102—arrived in 1970 and would be the work horses of the department for the next two decades. In 1973, LVFD's Chaplain Warren Litchfield initiated an annual tradition of holding a Memorial Day service to honor those who have served the department and community, with members gathering at Ivy Hill Cemetery each year until the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020.

Probationary Laurel firefighters are all trained to be especially careful of power lines, and have been told the story of two (now Life Members) nearly killed during an apartment fire on Main Street near the intersection of 9th Street in July 1977. While lowering an extension ladder, high voltage lines arched and severely injured both firemen. Quick action by their crew and the grace of God saved their lives that day. Both men went on to serve the department for many years—one as fire chief and the other as president of the department. A more lighthearted story was made the day two members took a short cut responding to a call in Howard County—by trying to cross the Patuxent River in the brush truck. Despite being a Jeep, it was still no match for the water that had risen to several feet deep. What a sight it must have been with the light on top of the Jeep, silently going around and around in the middle of the river, as red as the chief's face. As of November 2020, they continue to be teased about that mistake on a regular basis.

As M\*A\*S\*H gave way to big mustaches and big phones, the LVFD got bigger apparatus, which would ultimately lead to a bigger station. The "trash truck"—Engine 103—was a 1985 Kenworth/E-One. Still an open cab for the guys in the back, it had Snoopy painted on the side, but its short wheelbase made it look more like a pug than a beagle. One member recalled he was driving to an auto fire on the BW Parkway southbound when, "this car pulls up beside me and the guy yells, 'hey your tire is on fire.' No BS—we put the engine out first then the car."

A new engine arrived in 1988 and it was the LVFD's first fully enclosed cab for the full crew, and the final apparatus to be added to the LVFD fleet before the company moved into the current fire station on Cherry Lane at Van Dusen Road. LVFD has continued the Laurel tradition begun with three hose carts by operating the modern Engines 101, 103, and 104 and that hook and ladder first placed in service in the 1880s with Tower 10. The days are gone of riding to fires on the backstep, but fires remain. Before the current Emerson complex at Fourth Street and Cherry Lane,

three-story garden apartments occupied the corner and were a source of many calls for service. In late 2001, an unoccupied candle erupted into a blaze on the third floor, which Engine 103 and Tower 10 quickly arrived to extinguish.

Each fire station has a "first due area"—the geography within which that station is supposed to arrive first when a fire is reported. A particular surge of adrenaline rushes through a firefighter's body when beating the first due company to a fire. Although the current LVFD fire station is further south from the border with Howard County, the LVFD still remains on initial alarms to the Scaggsville and Savage areas. On a hot summer afternoon, Engine 103 was dispatched for a townhouse on fire on Pine Nut Court in Howard County. Savage Volunteer Fire Company was dispatched as the first due company, but Engine 103 raced north, arriving first and stretching hose to attack and extinguish the fire before other units from Howard County could arrive.

Laurel has frankly been very fortunate to have not had more members seriously injured. On two different fires, the same firefighter had extremely close calls. The first, a two-alarm fire occurred in the Irish Pub off Laurel-Bowie Rd near Muirkirk Road. The firefighter entered the structure, which was filled with dense black smoke, and turned left to search for the fire. The area of the pub to the right became super-heated with gas causing a flashover that ignited everything within the space creating catastrophic conditions. If the firefighter had entered and been in that area of the pub, grave injury could have been sustained. On the second occasion, the same firefighter responded to a house fire on Ashland Place in West Laurel. Again, entering the front door, she turned left to search for people possibly trapped. Soon after entering, the floor to the right of the front door partially collapsed under the weight of a piano as the fire was burning below in the basement. Fighting fire is hazardous and serious business, but firefighters are simple and flawed people like everyone else. For example, this author was once greatly surprised when attacking a fire in the Jiffy Lube on Little Montgomery. The fire was in the pit of the building where workers stand to be underneath cars. On opening the hose to extinguish the fire, the grease on the floor provided no traction and the force from the jet of water comically slide firefighter, hose, and all backwards across the floor like a skater on ice.

In December 2006, we met the community need for emergency medical services by placing our ambulance in service. Our first ambulance was purchased from Goodwill Fire Company on the Eastern Shore. The transition of the LVFD to providing ambulance service was a difficult change. For many generations—specifically 104 years—the LVFD had focused on being a "fire department," while the Laurel Rescue Squad excelled at pre-hospital emergency medical care. While the culture shift dominated those first years of the 21st century, the members of the LVFD adopted and demonstrated committed resilience to the change. The LVFD has now expanded to a fleet of two exceptional



Firefighters of the 1950s pose with a trophy they won for "Best Apparatus"—the 1956 American LaFrance custom pumper known as the "rubber truck" due to its five booster reels. (Photo, LVFD collection)



Circa 1960s. Pictured L-R are Clifford Mackey, Robert Coulson, and Robert Holmes. (Laurel Leader photo, LVFD collection)

ambulances that serve Laurel.

The world, Laurel, and the fire/EMS service all continue to change, and this change happens in ways that place ever greater demand on the men and women who volunteer to service Laurel. Through the change, Laurel's volunteers remain, because each knows their service and sacrifices matter. Each member believes that the lives of each person in the Laurel community matter. Daily, members witness acts of compassion, courage, and commitment that do offer good in a greatly troubled world during a greatly troubled time.

The global pandemic that emerged from Wuhan in China and arrived in Maryland shortly after Valentine's Day in 2020, ushered in the greatest strain to emergency services in decades. The fire and EMS personnel in Prince George's County did not just watch events unfold on television but saw them one at a time in the back of ambulances. With case numbers rising by the day, the landscape of "coming to the fire house" turned from being familiar to one of instability and uncertainty. Dealing with death is part of the firefighter's regular experience, but the pandemic has made mortality a constant reminder that all people are

assured of death. Volunteers continue to serve despite the risks, motivated to help our neighbors. These efforts show a trust that life will renew itself. A confidence that open houses, school visits, parades, meeting night, and everything else that goes on at the fire house will be restored.

Examples throughout history make clear that human good emerges brightly in the face of disaster. During the pandemic, in spite of all that the news media and politicians tried to frame as bad, Laurel's volunteers were just a small few of the many Americans who shined brightly in doing good to help others despite an omnipresent risk to self, committed to providing "Service to Others."

*Christopher Stanton joined the LVFD in June 2001 in the footsteps of his father and uncle. Both of his grandfathers were members of the LVFD and together completed Firemen's Training Course—Basic together in 1956, and other cousins and family continue to serve Laurel. This article is based on oral history, meeting minutes from the department, newspaper articles, the 100th Anniversary book, and personal experience.*



Left: Ground breaking of the new fire station at 7411 Cherry Lane, 1989.  
Below: A well-attended Open House event at the station, 2018. (Photos: LVFD collection)



Pine Nut Court fire (center) and Laurel firefighters at the Irish Pub fire, 2003 (Photos: Jim Codespote)

## “We had a guy...”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Otherwise, hopefully readers of the police genre will also understand the brevity that comes with writing police reports for a living. All the officers I know have had writers' cramp at some point, so we have learned to cut to the chase with a minimum of fanfare. We write enough to satisfy the State's Attorney who may prosecute the case and leave the fluff to the mainstream media. “It was a dark and stormy night” doesn't cut it in official police reports. (Unless you're Sgt. Walt, who always looked for a way to use that exact wording in his reports just for fun.)

The men and women I worked with are the finest you will find in any police agency anywhere. Some have since retired or moved on to other agencies, and some are still there fighting the good fight. Hopefully this bit of sucking up will make up for any inconsistencies in my memory of the events in which some of these great guys made an appearance. They will no doubt recognize their own first names and possibly the fictitious names of some of our less-than-law-abiding customers.

So grab yourself a cup of java or crack open a beer and get comfortable. You're in a room full of cops talking shop. And the attitudes, sometimes smart-ass, sometimes despairing, that go with it. In our town, on my shift, this was policing in the last decades of the 20th century.



We had a guy one night, drunk as they come, nasty, can't-see-straight: absolutely schnockered. He was a known police fighter and was always in trouble, which in itself wasn't so bad; I mean that's our business, right? It's job security in our little town and we always seem

to be dealing with the same people over and over again. But it's good to know all the players and we knew Danny always wanted to fight the police. It was some kind of pride thing; “I kicked a cop's ass last night!” Maybe he had that as a tattoo somewhere.

So, this one night we find him drunk in the parking lot of a local establishment specializing in adult beverages. It was Christmas Eve and Danny had just kicked his own dad's (also drunk) ass and left him passed out lying up against a dumpster behind the Diner motel.

It's probably 11-something at night but the street is pretty deserted because most normal people are home putting presents under the Christmas tree or watching “It's a Wonderful Life.” Some things you just have to keep believing in or the world just goes to crap. Just about my whole squad, five or six of us, were loitering in front of a hamburger shop across the street when Danny comes walking over and obviously still feeling his Wheaties starts pointing at us and counting out loud, “One, two, three, four” like he's figuring the odds of taking us all on at once. I started jumping around in our little group of uniforms, saying, “Move around! Make him lose count!”

Our sergeant, Joe (I was only a corporal at that time), calmly walks over to Danny and reminds him its Christmas Eve. Now, Danny towers over Joe so to my mind Joe had guts just walking up to him knowing he was looking for a fight.

“Aw, come on, Danny,” said Joe. “Do you really want to spend Christmas in jail? Or in the hospital?” Joe paused to let that sink in. “Cause I guarantee you, if you don't get out of here right now we're kicking the s\*\*\* outta you. And you know we'll win but, to be honest, I

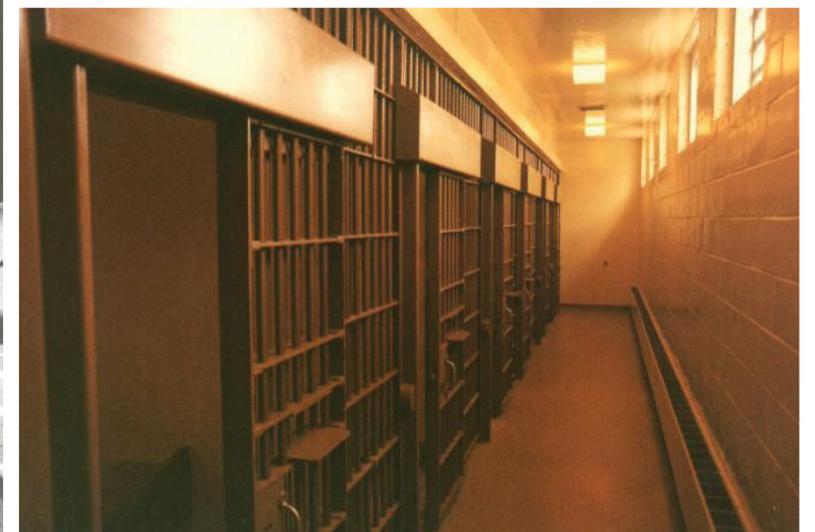
really don't want the paperwork.”

Now, normally you just can't reason with a drunk. It's one of the first things you lose when you're intoxicated: your sense of reason. Well, that and your taste in women. But Christmas is the time of miracles and Danny stands there weaving for a few seconds while his brain catches up to the conversation and finally slurs, “Off'cer Joe, you're right.” He turns and looked hard at the rest of us, “F\*\*\* all you-all, and Merry Christmas.” And with that he stumbled on down the street. Peace on earth.



I preferred midnight shift. The town is sleeping the sleep of innocence and it's my job to make sure they wake up in a world similar to the one they left. I just didn't care for the mundane calls of day shift. But midnights is where you are out there making a difference: trying to actually catch someone in the act. Nothing is more satisfying on the job than grabbing somebody up and they know you know. Conversely, nothing is more frustrating than finding out that someone “got in” on you the night before. Some burglary happened or some graffiti or theft of some kind, and you didn't find it. I took it personally and it made me want to be everywhere, so I would be checking spots and businesses and areas that maybe didn't get checked as often.

I had a guy sleeping in his pickup truck on a parking lot down near the river at the end of Main Street. It was about 3 AM and the lot was deserted but it wasn't unusual to find someone sleeping it off in their vehicle in secluded areas of town like this. I drove closer to run



*The Laurel Police Department communications office in 1977 (left) and the original cell bay in the Barkman Building on C Street. (Photos courtesy of Rick McGill)*

a quick check on the license plate. I'd make sure the guy was alive and if he woke up, I'd tell him to go back to sleep: no need to put another drunk driver on the road. As I got closer, I saw the license plate was from Michigan. *Hm. Out of state. Curious.*

I walk up to the open passenger window and shine my flashlight around the inside to assess the situation before I wake up sleeping beauty, and lo and behold, there's the butt of a pistol sticking out from under the seat. In Maryland you can't have a firearm in a vehicle where the driver can get to it. Meaning it's a chargeable offense. And it means you make a custodial arrest. *Damn. There goes breakfast.*

An arrest this time of night is going to take until dawn to finish up all the paperwork, evidence forms, and charging documents, not to mention processing the guy and inventorying all his property, impounding his truck, and inventorying all that property.

I stepped away and called for back-up. Sleeping Beauty woke up with my own pistol stuck in his ear. We got him out of the truck real slow and arrested him for the firearms violation. He didn't put up an argument or resist arrest in any way.

Open and shut, right? Sure. And the paperwork isn't really as bad as I make it out: we all help each other when we can and other officers were helping with the various reports and property forms while I'm processing the guy in the booking room. But in that initial banter that comes while you're instructing someone in the proper way to wear handcuffs, (just so you know: they're wider and hence more comfortable if you keep your palms facing out) I asked the guy what he was doing down here from Michigan.

"I'm on my way to Washington. I'm going to see the President."

*Alrighty then. There goes breakfast and probably lunch.*

I get him logged into a cell and call our 24-hour number for the U.S. Secret Service. I had a feeling they might be interested to know someone with a gun was on his way to pay his respects to the President of the United States.

Interested? Oh yes, they were interested alright.

Here it was, 4-something in the morning and within an hour two Secret Service guys show up at our station and take custody of my guy, my paperwork, my neatly packaged handgun/evidence, and whisk them all away to disappear in some black hole never to be seen again. I'm not a stat-monger so it didn't bother me to lose an arrest stat. I never even got a court summons.

But I did get breakfast. I love my government.



Domestics. Always prime fodder for cop stories. We had a guy on my squad (See? The "guy" doesn't always have to be the bad guy.); he was my corporal, and I was a sergeant by then. Mike was this big Italian guy, though he'd probably insist I say he was Sicilian since he's a huge "Sopranos" fan. He was also the biggest male chauvinist I've ever met. He'd go on a domestic call and always side with the husband or boyfriend. We go on a call and, following *Frommer's Guide to Basic Police Response to Domestic Disturbances*, we'd separate the two combatants, each get their stories, and then get together and compare notes. If there was an assault or arrestable offense things might go one way. If no one crossed that line we'd try to find a way to talk one of them into leaving for the night to let things cool down. It didn't matter to us who left as long as we didn't have to return in an hour to referee another fight call. Routine cop work that every cop does.

So Mike takes the husband aside and I take the wife. We don't really care what the original beef was between them: we're law enforcement officers. Until they break the law it usually helps just to get them to give each other some space for a while. But like I said, Mike liked to take the husband's side. This is pretty much the typical exchange in our huddle after speaking with the couple-in-distress:

"Sarge, she's pretty much a b\*\*\*\*. He was only out with the guys for the evening. And it's not even two o'clock yet. I think she's being unreasonable.

Mike, you can't always side with the guy. Go talk to her and I'll talk to him and we'll figure out who's

leaving for the evening so they can calm down."

We do our thing with the opposite partner and huddle up again. "Well?"

"Sarge, he really is an a\*\*hole. All she wants is for him to let her know where he is when he goes out 'cause she's worried he'll get busted again for DUI. He almost got fired at work last time.

See, Mike? Don't be so quick to judge the lady. So who's leaving tonight?"

Oh, he's leaving. Don't worry.

You can't decide for them. Let's ask them. Its gotta be consensual.

Right, Sarge. It'll be him. I got a feeling..."

God love him, Mike will restore peace, order, and tranquility come hell or high water. Anything short of police brutality. Usually.



Not every police report ends with the initial description of the basic events. When there's a probability of further supplementary reports to come the typical closing line of the report narrative is, "Investigation to continue." I hope these anecdotes haven't offended too many readers of this new venture from the Laurel History Boys. And hopefully there will be more to come. Thanks for your time.

Investigation to continue...



*Rick McGill grew up in Laurel and worked at the Laurel Police Department from 1977 to 2001. He authored two history books: Brass Buttons & Gun Leather, A History of the Laurel Police Department (soon to be in its 4th printing), and History of the North Tract, An Anne Arundel Time Capsule. In 2001 he retired to Montana and worked as a military security contractor for Blackwater Worldwide making 12 deployments to Iraq and Pakistan from 2004 to 2010. He is now a Reserve Deputy Sheriff in Montana.*

## Bill McCormick CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

younger men take apart, climb over, and diagnose difficult mechanical and hydraulic problems together on very large and expensive fire trucks.

### Laurel Elementary School

There came a time when the Board of Education replaced the old Laurel Elementary School. The new school was built behind the old. Eventually, the day came to tear down the old school to make way for a parking lot. Capt. McCormick and several old school alumni went to watch. The wrecking ball was about to swing when Bill went over to the operator and told him by his calculations the wall of the old school would likely fall into the wall of the new school. The crane operator was resolute and refused any suggestions and Bill stepped away to watch the old wall fall into the wall of the new school. He was nice enough not to say "I told you so" but did allow himself to go

over and shake his head as they surveyed the damages.

### St. Mary's of the Mills

Bill was a long-time member of St. Mary of the Mills Church where he was interred in the church cemetery. His faith in God, his family, and his fellow man followed him all his life.



*C. Philip Nichols, Jr., served as the 19th Chief Judge of the Seventh Judicial Circuit of Maryland and is a Laurel native.*

## Restaurant Top Picks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

### Italian

- Pasta Plus—the best local, and in my opinion, even better than Little Italy in Baltimore

### Mexican

- Toucan Taco—I recommend getting the queso, taco, and burrito dinners; and have it for lunch and dinner
- Gringada—a close second to Toucan
- Chidos—a good place for a date

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*Wayne Carr is a lifelong resident of Laurel and a 1981 Laurel High graduate. Working route sales for a number of years allowed him to visit many restaurants in the tri-state area, which prompted him to begin doing food reviews for fun nearly ten years ago. Wayne's reviews became popular on social media, and he began hosting Facebook Live videos from restaurants throughout the region. His future reviews will utilize a "grease stain" rating system:*

- 5 grease stains (the best he's had)
- 4 grease stains (very good)
- 3 grease stains (good)
- 2 grease stains (could be better)
- 1 grease stain (not very good)
- 1/2 or 0 grease stains (he'd rather eat poison)

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## Memories of Main Street

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

you'd think she'd been in Laurel forever. Nope. Just another transplant that saw potential and felt that something special (as Pat Walsh named his coffee shop two doors down).

After purchasing the building and doing some extensive remodeling, she soon realized that what Main Street in Laurel needed was an upscale gift store (and antiques alone were not going to pay the bills). Along with my dad, Larry, (the other L) who was a certified gemologist, she handled all of your chocolate, gift, and bauble needs until her passing in 2002.

My mother was convincing people to buy expensive chocolate WAY before it was cool to spend money on higher-end food. She patiently explained the cocoa content and percentages, the reason that cheap chocolate wouldn't satisfy you, the aforementioned infamous acceptable procedure for eating chocolate, and many other little gems of knowledge. She taught people how to identify fake stones, real cameos, and how to make informed decisions about your family's heirlooms. She was a teacher at heart; that never went away. She

discovered Stacy's pita chips, Route 66 potato chips, and KIND bars before the big box stores did. She was a little ahead of her time, to say the very least.

The 500 block of Main Street was a happening place in those years. It was like the predecessor to Facebook or Instagram. Between Something Special and L&L, you could usually find out the latest news, see all your neighbors, and pick up breakfast, lunch, or dessert. People often popped in just to say hello or have a chat (and grab a few pieces of chocolate, of course). Wives would come in and pick out gifts for themselves and then send their husbands back in later to buy them. We had a little something for everyone.

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*When Jhanna Levin is not at work teaching Prince George's County school children about Environmental Literacy, she spends her time walking Old Town, doing yoga, and loving all things Laurel. She volunteers her time with the Laurel Historical Society, the city, and Laurel for the Patuxent.*



*Something Special, a popular coffee shop two doors down from L&L Gifts and Gourmet, was a mainstay of the 500 block of Main Street throughout the 1990s. (Photo: Laurel Historical Society collection)*

## Stage Lights Brighten the Shadow of COVID CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

### Marvin Rogers' Vision

Once home to a dance hall called "O'Brien's" during World War I, the Laurel Mill Playhouse continues its mission to expand the cultural base of the quad-county area through theatre arts with an emphasis on education, thanks to a dedicated board of volunteers led by its long-time president, Marvin Rogers.

Looking slightly out of character whenever he's without his cowboy hat and his banjo, Rogers—who performed for years with the Savage Bluegrass Band at Sam and Elsie's bar on Washington Boulevard—sits comfortably in many saddles. Rogers simultaneously served as president and chairman of the Laurel Board of Trade and president of Laurel Mill Playhouse in recent years.

As current president of the nonprofit Burtonsville Players doing business as Laurel Mill Playhouse, Rogers has more to be proud of than his skill at changing light bulbs onstage or the prominent silver belt buckle on his worn blue jeans. He literally built the stage tucked behind the double doors at 508 Main Street, where hundreds of local artists—actors, musicians, emerging playwrights, and even magicians—have shared their talents with our town. Almost 20 years ago, Rogers became a driving force behind the vibrant Old Town theater conceived when the Burtonsville Players lost their Laurel Lakes lease. Rogers' wife, Maureen, sat on the Burtonsville Players' board of directors when then-member Marvin spotted a "For Sale" sign in a dingy Laurel storefront window while driving through the historic district.

Drawn to take a closer look at the property, he parked and peered inside the windows from the sidewalk at a roughly 26 by 60-foot space with the acoustic potential to be renovated into a functional theater facility. It needed a complete overhaul, he said, but was priced at under \$180,000. Excited by the possibility of the Burtonsville Players being one of the first community theaters in Maryland to own their stage, Rogers felt eager to share his vision with his wife.

They then met with past President Bartash and past Vice President Kathe Parke to discuss the possibilities. Marvin, who'd recently discovered a passion for renovation, had just finished his first major project in the Rogers' home.

"We met in the basement that I had built—installing the flooring and plumbing myself," he said. The ambiance spoke to the board members' imagination,

and they voted to pursue buying the property "as is" and renovating—a decision that would prove harder to fulfill than anyone imagined.

Nonprofit community theater groups typically rely on volunteers from their membership and the community for manpower, and this was a grueling undertaking. Gutting the first and second floors required a huge amount of elbow grease before construction could begin. And though he said a few folks showed up to help the first weekend, two weeks into the project, Rogers found himself working solo.

"I decided it was something I could do to benefit my community, and I am proud of that to this day," he said.

It took 16-hour workdays and 7-day workweeks battling obstacles such as water damage in a loadbearing retaining wall, sawdust insulation in walls that needed tearing down, and prolific soot left from a fire some 100 years past to kickstart the construction.

Clearing mounds of debris left from gutting the space, Rogers said, was "filthy work." Until he could stabilize the second floor in what would become the dressing room and costume storage area, no one was allowed upstairs. And what's now part of the stage and most of the backstage area was literally an icebox that had to be dismantled and hauled away.

But there were high times, too, as others stepped up to help. Patrick Ready designed and installed the wiring. Rogers' cousin Eric Guille donated extensive construction experience as an advisor. Don Olsen did all the engineering drawings, and John Decker installed the tech booth.

Once most of the mess from the major renovations cleared, less skilled enthusiasts from the arts community came in to work weekends. Under Rogers' supervision, they helped build the final and most anticipated structure, the Laurel Mill Playhouse stage.

Rogers' face wrinkles in disgust as he describes the filth he worked in for two years, but it melts into pleasure when he points out the pieces of gorgeous original wainscoting he re-used to panel the entire inside front wall and trim the edge of the stage, thus preserving some of the building's history.

Once, while tearing out a wall, Rogers found and salvaged an antique pull toy from behind the plaster. That great discovery, "at least a hundred years old, all metal with hearts in the wheels ... is still around the theater somewhere," he said.

### A Grand Opening

The Burtonsville Players opened the double-doors at Laurel Mill Playhouse in March 2003 with a ceremony attended by Laurel Mayor Craig Moe. Today, a shelf of trophies showcases awards from the city for the theater's participation in many Main Street parades and festivals. Numerous Ruby Griffith, WATCH, and Maryland One-Act Festival awards are also on display.

What came into being as a years-long feat of endurance served up performance art just as Rogers envisioned. Rarely dark, Laurel Mill Playhouse presented nonstop live theater, music, art, dance, talent shows, staged readings, fundraisers, and one-acts until last March, when Governor Hogan declared a state of emergency in response to COVID.

Most important to Marvin Rogers were the youth productions.

"The youth are my passion," Rogers said. "Watching the young people perform—that's a thrill for me."

Affordable shows at the Laurel Mill Playhouse have thrilled audiences and performers alike. Where else in Laurel could local playwrights see their work performed for the first time, or actors meet celebrities like Broadway producer John Driver, who came to town to attend rehearsals and serve as consultant on an encore production of a play he'd written thirty years earlier? Driver enjoyed an open invitation to bed and board at the Rogers' home during the production of his musical, *Ride the Winds*, in 2004.

If Marvin Rogers is the brawn behind the theater's success, he credits his wife as its "heart and soul." A versatile performer who supports every production offstage and appears regularly onstage, Maureen Rogers is the only remaining officer who served on the Burtonsville Players' 2001 Board of Directors.

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*A freelance arts and entertainment writer known for her Laurel landmark business series and theater reviews in the Laurel Leader, Patti Restivo has received several MDDC Press Association awards, most recently for a landmark business story picked up by the Washington Post.*

**VOICES**  
OF LAUREL



**Let us know what you think.**

Send comments to [laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com](mailto:laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor will appear in the next issue.

# Matchbooks From the Past



BY PETE LEWNES

Not so long ago, matches were everywhere along with the covers they came in. They could be found in any bank, business, hotel or motel, service station, restaurant, etc. and were there for the taking—a form of advertising and a light of your smoke. The matchbook covers often carried a message along with the establishment's name, address, and phone number.

Eventually, smoking became unfashionable and banned from most public places. The matchbook cover today is a thing of the past and nearly extinct.

As a kid, my dad would travel the back roads on our family vacations and liked to travel at night. It was during these trips that I experienced roadside America firsthand with keeping him company while my mom, sister, and brother slept. During stops along the way for either gas, a snack, or nature call, I would always grab a handful of matchbooks. I guess this was the beginning of my collecting various items from over the years. A different time back then, as it was okay for a kid to do so.

I am glad to have grown up in that time when things were so very different and enjoyable. Today, so much from that era that was good can only be found in private collections, in books, or on websites like the Laurel History Boys'.

Now, fast-forward to my relocating back to Laurel in 1986 and the beginning of my obsession with collecting items from my new hometown. Since then, my wife Martha and I have amassed a nice group of matchbook covers from Laurel—just a few of which are shown here. Some were obtained through eBay, trade shows, yard sales, and from local folks who happen to discover them in a junk drawer. To date, the piece that has traveled the furthest to come back home and into our collection was 8,622 miles from Auckland, New Zealand—it's a 1950s matchbook from the Vogue Dress Shop when it was on Main Street.

From time to time, I am still amazed to find a cover not already in our collection and the story it tells.

*Pete Lewnes is a founding member of The Laurel History Boys, and a prolific collector of historical Laurel memorabilia from all eras.*



## OBITUARIES

# Joseph R. Robison, Former Mayor, 87

*Laurel Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad life member; dedicated civil servant*



On Tuesday, November 10, 2020, Joseph (Joe) R. Robison, beloved husband of Joan (Donovan); loving father of Bette Anne (the late Steve) Sanders, and Mitzi (Danny) Betman, passed away at his home with his wife and daughters by his side. Joe was born in his parent's home at 222 Ninth Street, to the late Walter and Mildred Robison, and lived his entire life in the City of Laurel, something he was always proud to tell others. Joe was the youngest of five children (all deceased: Leo, Bud, Kitty, and Sonny).

Joe had an unselfish and loyal devotion to God, family, city, county, state, nation, and the fire, rescue, and emergency medical services. He was a member of St. Mary of the Mills Roman Catholic Church. Of Joe's many accomplishments, he considered his family his proudest. In addition to his wife and daughters, he is survived by six grandchildren: Christina (William) McKenney, Samantha (Nick) Johnson, Matthew Sanders, Rebecca (David) Gavin, Sarah (Edwin) Betman, and Ruth (David) Bryant; and eight great-grandchildren: Monica, Jackson, Molly, Camden, Levi, Sanders, Mia and Emma. Joe loved to travel with the *entire* family. Cruising together was one of his favorite things to do.

Joe graduated from the Laurel High School on Montgomery Street in 1952, where he was the Senior Class President. Joe was very involved in athletics in high school. When he was 16 years old, he asked another Laurel High athlete on a date, and that was the beginning of a 71-year love story!

Joe entered the United States Army after high school and served at Fort Knox during the Korean War. He was a member of both the American Legion and the Korean War Veterans. When he returned from service, he married Joan on Friday, May 13, 1955. Joe worked at the United States Postal Service for over 36 years,

beginning as a clerk at the Laurel Post Office, and retired from Postal Headquarters in 1988 as a Quality Control Specialist.

Firefighting had been in Joe's blood since he was a little boy. He had over 70 years of continuous and faithful service except for his two years in the Army. Even then he could be found at the fire department or rescue squad during his leave. He began his firefighting with the Maryland State Forestry Department at the age of 14. His application for membership in the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department (LVFD) was accepted in September 1951. He served in all operational offices of the LVFD and for 30 years served on its Board of Trustees. In 1999, Engine 103 was dedicated to him and another member, Louis Luber. He was a charter member (1952) and life member of the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad (LVRS). As Chairman of the Board of Directors, he was instrumental in obtaining the land and coordinating the construction of their first station which they still occupy. He also served as Treasurer of the Building Committee.

He had over 50 years of active involvement in the Maryland Fire Chief's Association (MFCA) and the Prince George's County Volunteer Fire & Rescue Association (PGCVF&RA). In 1961, Joe became involved with the Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA), and remained active until his death. He has served as President of all three of these Associations. Joe is a member of the Hall of Fame in both the MSFA and the PGCVF&RA and is an Honorary and Life Member of the MFCA. He also received Honorary Membership into the English Council Junior Fire Department for the establishment of a statewide committee to promote Junior Firefighters when he was President of the MSFA and for his continued support. He is an honorary Member of the Berwyn Volunteer Fire Department

and Rescue Squad and the Greenbelt Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad —companies he served for 33 years as their Fire Commissioner.

Joe was very active in his community having served as Councilman and Mayor. During his term as Mayor, recycling was begun, a sports park was established, a new community center was designed and built—the first new building for the City of Laurel in over 100 years—and the purchase and renovation of the present City Hall was completed. He chaired the City's yearlong 125th Anniversary Committee. He served as the Director of the City's Emergency Services Commission.

In 1993, he was honored by the Rotary Club with their Four Star Award.

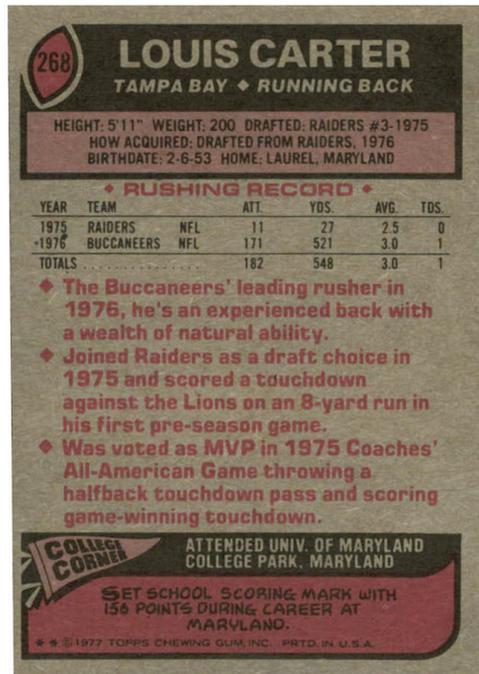
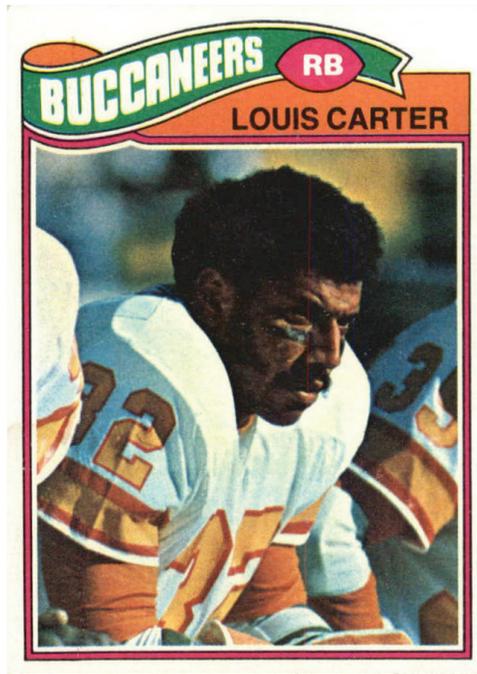
Joe's commitment to the Laurel Historical Society (LHS) was long and extensive. He was instrumental in securing and supporting the renovation of the Laurel Museum. As Mayor he also helped in the effort to obtain funding for the building's restoration. He later served many years as Chairman of the LHS Board. He was given the honor of Director Emeritus. Joe was known as Laurel's unofficial historian and conducted tours of Historic Main Street and the Patuxent River, as well as his "history lessons" at the Mayor's annual open house.

Joe was a man of integrity, action, and commitment. He took civic responsibility and community service seriously and lived these qualities. He served quietly and with a desire to succeed in whatever duties he assumed. He was a man of purpose with an extraordinary vision who worked to make a difference in the fire service, his community, and those he served alongside. He will be missed by all who knew him.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the "LVFD Joseph R. Robison Memorial Scholarship Fund."

# Louis Carter, Former NFL Star, 67

*Laurel native threw first ever touchdown pass for 1976 expansion team Tampa Bay Buccaneers*



Former NFL running back Louis Carter, who was born in Laurel and returned to his hometown after a brief career, died on October 11th at the age of 67 after battling blood cancer.

Carter grew up in Maryland City before becoming a star player at the University of Maryland. He was drafted in the third round by the Oakland Raiders in 1975 after being named MVP of the Coaches' All-American college all-star game during his senior year at Maryland. Just one year later, he was acquired via the number one pick by the expansion Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the veteran allocation draft of 1976.

Traded to Washington in 1979, he was one of several pre-season roster cuts by coach Jack Pardee on a team that was stacked at running back—including Hall of Famer John Riggins.

Carter retired from football and returned home to Laurel where he became a successful car salesman. He worked at Ballenger Buick in Laurel, among other dealerships.

Through no fault of his own, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers were an infamously dismal team during the years that Carter had the misfortune of playing there. However, while they've certainly improved over the past decades, and are a top attraction today with the addition of Tom Brady at quarterback, Louis Carter holds a distinction that's forever cemented in Buccaneers history—he threw the team's very first touchdown pass.

A 1977 Louis Carter Topps trading card. (Laurel History Boys collection)

# Pamela Bakhaus doCarmo, 78

*50-year member of Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad, one of Maryland's first EMT instructors*

Pamela Bakhaus doCarmo, 78, a groundbreaking paramedic with the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad, passed away on October 7, 2020.

Pam was a 50-year LVRS member, having joined the squad in September 1970. She became one of the first EMT instructors in Maryland (1969–70) just before joining the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad in 1970. In 1972, she taught the Squad's first class of EMTs, successfully graduating 38 members. Pam enjoyed teaching paramedics and EMTs, as well as volunteering. She was quoted as saying "Being a volunteer paramedic is part of my whole credibility of teaching." She was a trendsetter for women, in what was a male-dominated fire service. She received her own National registry EMT in 1982; she was already an ambulance driver and serving on squad calls for several years. She and a small band of women broke the barrier, and were the first women to serve overnight duty, as previously women had to leave the building at 2300 hours. She wrote two textbooks: *First Aid Principles and Practices* and one on basic skills for the EMT. She held many positions over the years and served as treasurer from 1998–2018 for the LVRS. When asked of her volunteer time at LVRS, Pam said, "I love it, it's part of my life, my life-style." She was voted a life member of LVRS in 1990, and having served a total of 3,792 calls.

It was at the LVRS where she met the love of her life, Finley doCarmo. They celebrated 47 years together in June. She and Finley lived their lives in Laurel until moving in 2003 to Gambrills, MD to a 55+ community where she served as secretary/treasurer for Waugh Chapel until the spring of 2020. Pam was an avid Detroit Tigers fan first, and then came the Baltimore Orioles. She and Finley enjoyed extensive traveling around the world.

Born in Wyandotte MI, she was the oldest daughter of Joseph and Joyce (Oetting) Bakhaus. Pam is survived by her loving husband, Finley doCarmo, sister Kaye (Walter) Gajor, plus many beloved in-laws, nieces, and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, Joseph and Joyce Bakhaus, sister Cynthia Bakhaus, and brother in law Daniel doCarmo.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting donations be made to the LVRS at 14910 Bowie Road, P.O. Box 1278, Laurel, MD 20725.

Pam doCarmo behind the wheel of a Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad ambulance in the early 1980s. (courtesy LVRS archives)



# John Floyd II, 63

*Lifelong Laurelite and dedicated archival photographer*

A longtime resident of Fifth Street, John Floyd II passed away from natural causes at his home on August 21, 2020.

John was born August 7, 1957 on a ship from Great Britain en route to America. After a brief stay in Camden, NJ, he and his newly-single mother, Phyllis Murray, relocated to Laurel in 1964—living for a time at the old Laurel Park Hotel boarding house near the race track. Phyllis soon met Harry Fyffe, owner and proprietor (along with his brother, Walter) of the legendary Fyffe's Service Center at Montgomery and Tenth Streets. "Our Harry," as they called him, welcomed Phyllis and young John into his modest home on Fifth Street. Harry and Phyllis were married, and John would end up living out his remaining years in that house.

John graduated from Laurel High School as a member of the class of 1975. While he was never the most studious of pupils, John possessed a great mind that retained vast knowledge of the things that interested him most—that included music, trains, and fire and rescue apparatus—things that would remain a permanent fixture in his adult life.

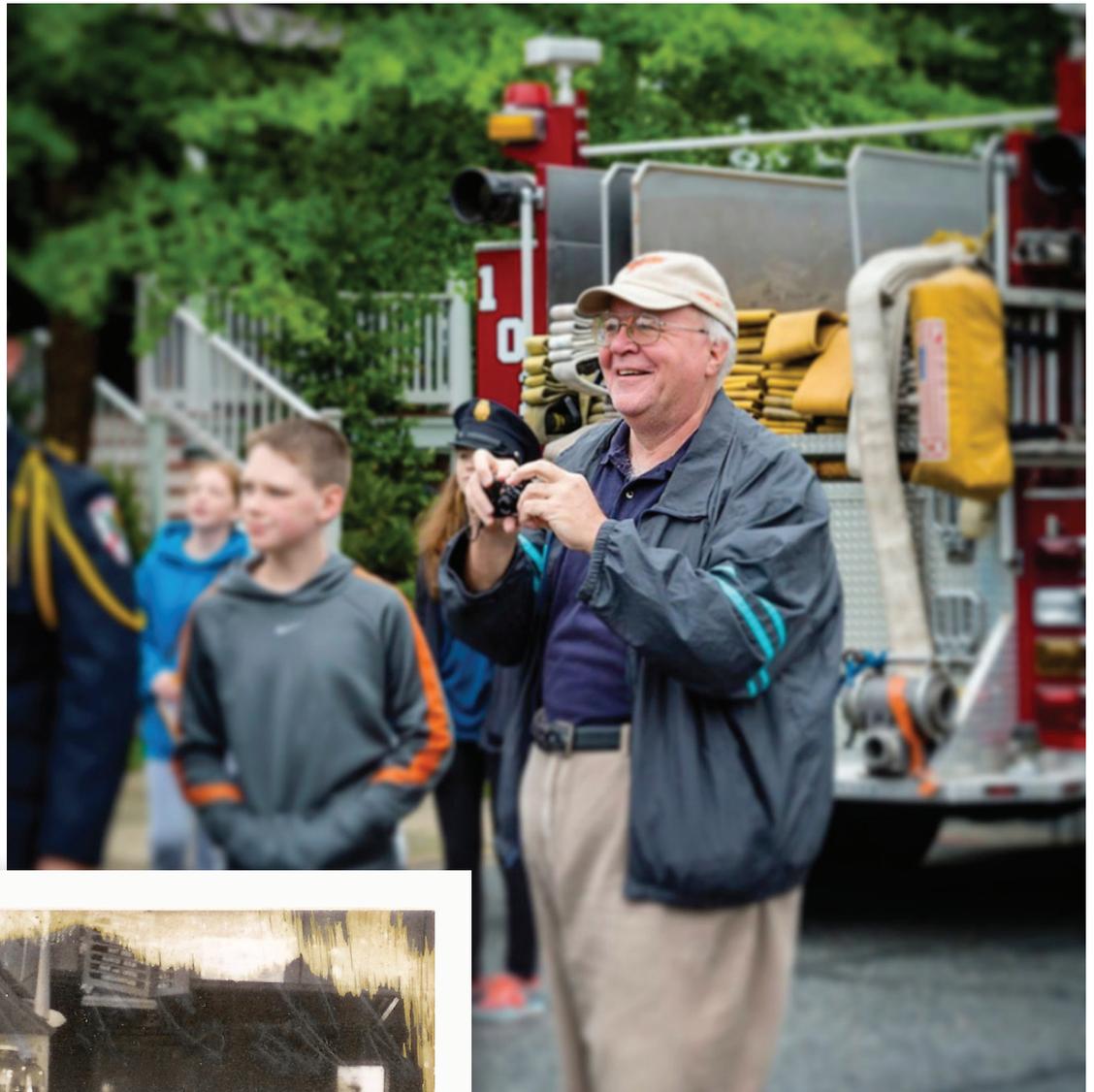
John's high school band experience evolved into a lifetime love of vintage big band music, and playing gigs with the Windsor Kessler Orchestra and other top bands was essentially the only career he ever had. He formed his very own band, the Royal Blue Orchestra, which performed regularly at Baltimore's Inner Harbor and elsewhere throughout the early-to-mid-1980s. A proficient Sousaphone player, John could be frequently spotted in local parades as part of the West Laurel Rag-Tag Band.

When he wasn't performing in parades, he loved to document them—and everything else in Laurel. John was rarely, if ever, without camera in hand.

He took an early interest in firefighting, briefly becoming a member of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department. But his real love was photographing the fires and firefighting apparatus. Many of John's photos were published in the *Laurel Leader*, and his extensive photo collection has been and will remain an invaluable asset to the Laurel History Boys.

A Celebration of Life for John was held on October 11th at Bertucci's in Columbia, organized by close friends Wayne Carr, Diane Klukosky, and others.

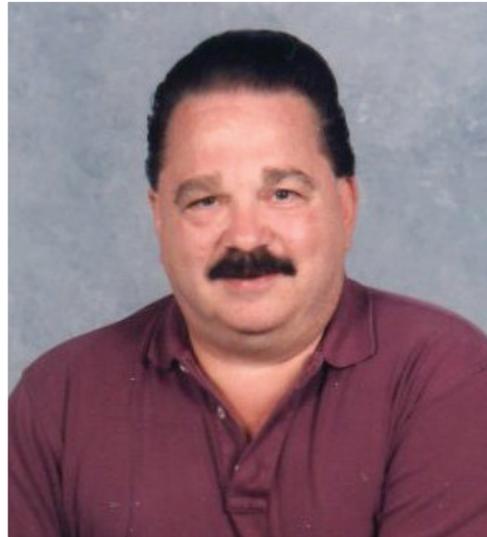
Donations in John's name to his favorite charity, Laurel Cats, are welcome.



*Above: John Floyd doing what he did best—happily photographing things around Laurel. (Edit of original photo by Jim Jpcphotography via Facebook)*



*Left: A young John poses with stepfather Harry Fyffe behind the bar at their family owned tavern, Fyffe's Service Center. Harry's brother, Walter, stands behind them. (Laurel History Boys collection)*



## Bill Miles, 78

*Owner of Laurel Meat Market since 1970*

On December 28, 2020, William “Bill” Leroy Miles, Jr. passed away at his home in Burtonsville, MD. Bill was born on January 29, 1942 in Olney, MD to his parents W. Leroy Miles, Sr. and Doris “Granny” (nee Mills) Miles.

Bill started his working life at 11 years old, cutting meat for his father at the Burtonsville Market, then at Safeway, but was best known for owning and operating the Laurel Meat Market on Main Street for nearly half a century. Bill was a fixture at his store and was always good for a quick smile and wave, or a long conversation. Bill knew his customers and their families and always took an interest in their well-being.

After operating the Meat Market for 48 years, Bill’s family made the decision to retire and close the market, prompting Mayor Craig Moe and the Laurel City Council to issue a proclamation declaring October 21, 2018 “Bill Miles Family Day” and giving Bill a Key to the City.

Bill was a veteran of the U.S. Navy and was a parishioner and member of Liberty Grove United Methodist Church and the American Legion.

Bill is survived by his loving wife Ruth Ann Miles; his caring son Brian L. Miles and wife Candi; his cherished grandchildren Brian Miles, Jr., Zack Miles, and Christopher Miles. He is also survived by his brother Jim Miles and daughter-in-law Melinda. Bill was preceded in death by his parents Leroy and Doris and his son Chris S. Miles.

Above all, Bill was a hard worker and a devoted husband who loved his family.

Memorial donations can be made in Bill’s name to the American Heart Association or the American Cancer Society.



PHOTO: JOHN FLOYD II

## Francis “Mickey” C. Hall, 86

*Carpenter and home improvement expert*

Francis C. Hall died on Sunday, February 7, 2021 at his home. He was 86. Francis, known as “Mickey” to all his family, friends, and coworkers was born in Savage, Maryland in 1934 to Florence and Clarence Hall.

He worked initially for the B&O Railroad in his late teen years before settling into a long and productive career as a highly skilled carpenter. His last positions were as a carpenter and Shop General Foreman maintaining various buildings and property associated with the D.C. Children’s Center in Laurel. He retired from the Federal Government in 1988.

During his post-retirement years, he owned a small home improvement business, which proved to be quite successful and an outlet for him to display all his trade skills to various homeowners and real estate companies. Throughout his life, Mickey enjoyed it the most when he was outside tending to his vegetable gardens,

fixing his truck, or working in his yard. He was always available to his family with anything from extensive home renovations to simple maintenance repairs, where his skill for square, plumb, and level were passed on to those around him.

His greatest joy was his family. He especially delighted in seeing his family grow and loved spending time with his grandchildren and great grandchildren. Mickey is survived by his wife of 65 years Betty Jean; children Michael, Janice (Joe), and Stephen (Patty); grandchildren Chris (Ana), Julie (Matt), John, Greg (Mackenzie), Melissa (Addison), Michael (Samantha), Billy, Ricky, and Erin; and 11 great grandchildren. He is also survived by his sister Theresa Parham.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his three siblings Jerry, Cliff, and Peggy.



# Emerson Richard Lloyd, 95

*Laurel Policeman and World War II veteran helped co-found Laurel Rescue Squad*

Emerson Richard Lloyd, 95, of Ocean Pines, MD, passed away on January 7, 2021. He was born on Hooper's Island, MD, on November 23, 1925 to the late Lafayette and Mary Lloyd. Emerson was raised on this small island in the Chesapeake Bay during the Depression. After Pearl Harbor, he joined the 1st Infantry Division and fought bravely in Germany at the age of 19. In the Ardennes counter-offensive, better known as the Battle of the Bulge, he was wounded in the arm and sent back to the States. He is a recipient of the Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars.

After the war, he joined the Maryland State Troopers which led to the meeting of his wife, Julia Adele. They married in 1948, moved to the suburbs of Laurel and raised four children. Lloyd became a Laurel policeman and helped co-found the Laurel Rescue Squad.

One of his favorite stories from his time with the Laurel Police Department is when he was with another officer patrolling the Laurel Lake area at night. He said to his partner "Hey, that car looks a lot like my car. Wait, that IS my car." He walked up to the car and shined his flashlight inside to disturb the couple "parked." It was his brother-in-law and his girlfriend! Emerson's wife let her brother borrow their car that night.

Over the years he became affectionately known as Mr. Lloyd to the neighbors, Uncle Rich to the cousins, and Pop-Pop to his grandkids, but will always be Dad to his children. He led a simple life, but a fulfilling one, and his legacy will be that of a great family man.

Lloyd was preceded in death by his parents and his wife, Julia Lloyd. He is survived by his sons Emerson Lloyd, Jr. (Karen) and John Lloyd (Brenda); daughters Mary Catherine Fontaine (Norman) and Ruthann Clark (Doug); 13 grandchildren; 23 great-grandchildren; and his sister, Ann Bradway. A memorial service will be held at a later date.



*Laurel Police officer Emerson Lloyd inspects an abandoned car on Second Street in this Laurel News Leader photo.*



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