

# Museum Newsletter Spring, 2020

## President's Message: Uncharted Waters

**A**s we each find our own ways to cope with the limitations of life in this time of pandemic, I try to remind myself of one great gift that we all share. If we have to live with shuttered businesses and social distancing, Oxford is about the best place to do that. Surrounded by water and located at the end of a long access road, we are naturally isolated.

Quiet even in the busiest of times, stillness is not something new or ominous to us. Accustomed to walking around town with our dogs or our spouses/partners, it is

reassuring to be able to do that, and to see friends and neighbors even if it is a bit further apart now.

Even though The Oxford Museum cannot be open for visitors, we can still be an active part of the community. For the next few weeks (months?) we will be installing rotating exhibits in our front windows to try to keep you amused and informed. Keep a look out as you make your way up and down Morris Street. Since the Museum is and has been the guardian of the history of our town, help us to document how this national crisis has

impacted our community. Send us a quick paragraph or two, or maybe a photograph, describing just how your life has been changed by this shut-down. Tell us how you feel about self-quarantine, how you're keeping in touch with family and friends, and how you are trying to fill the extra hours at home. We will edit and publish your "memories" on the website. So stay tuned.

Send your musings to: [theoxfordmuseum@gmail.com](mailto:theoxfordmuseum@gmail.com).

Thank you.  
 Stuart Parnes, President

## A New Twist for a Historic Exhibit

**T**his year, visitors will have a chance to learn about Oxford's history in an entirely new way. Museum Director Julie Wells, Curator Leo Nollmeyer, Board members John Pittman, Jef Kinney, Pat Jessop and others have been researching local histories, and pouring

through the collection to create a timeline that presents life in Oxford in context with historic events happening in Maryland, the nation and the world as a whole.

**"Ebb and Flow: A Timeline of Oxford History"** will highlight Oxford's fortunes from its

beginning in the 1630s to the founding of the Museum in 1964. This is a story of both boom and bust, and it will be richly illustrated with art and artifacts from the collection. Whenever the Museum opens its doors for the season, we look forward to sharing this new exhibit with members and visitors



# 2020 SPECIAL EXHIBIT: Jay Fleming “Working the Water”

Those attending the March 6 Museum Preview Party at Holy Trinity had the opportunity to meet and to hear the impressive photographer and historian, Jay Fleming. Jay not only captures artful images of the Chesapeake Bay in his photographs, he also records history. This year’s opening exhibit at the Museum, “**Working the Water,**” features 12 large Fleming photographs.

A native of Annapolis, he spent three years documenting all aspects of the Bay’s rapidly changing seafood industry. Even for those of us who have seen hundreds of photographs of the Chesapeake, these images are stunning. Jay takes us under the surface to see the Bay’s most prized residents – crabs, oysters and rockfish – in their natural habitats. But he also brings us closer to the watermen and women than we have probably ever been. Out on their boats and

in the packing houses, Jay has been granted unusual access to the grueling daily work required to eke out a living season after season. At a time when these traditional skills are disappearing, Jay is providing us with a lasting historical record of a vanishing way of life.

Jay started taking pictures at the age of 13, inheriting this affinity from his father, a former National Geographic staff photographer. In the ensuing years he developed a photographic style and identity all his own. Jay’s first published photograph, when he was just 17, appeared on the cover of *Delaware Beach Life* magazine and won grand prize in the Environmental Protection Agency’s “Wildlife of Wetlands” photography contest.

Jay is currently working on his second book, *Island Life*. After 10 years of making trips to Smith and Tangier Islands, the two only inhabited offshore islands in the

Chesapeake Bay, he developed an affinity for the environment and the island communities. *Island Life* will explore the environment and the seasonal Chesapeake harvests that provide the rhythm for community life, while documenting the tenacity and determination of the Smith and Tangier islanders who honor their traditions while facing an uncertain future. *Island Life* is expected to be released in October of 2021.

Whether it’s a dramatic sunrise over the water or a fisherman hauling gear, the passion for his craft and for visual storytelling is obvious in every photograph. Jay’s talent is undeniable, his photography is not only beautiful but purposeful.

Until the Museum’s opening day can be scheduled, we will preview some of Jay’s photographs in our Morris Street windows.



# Harrington Photography Gifted to the Museum

## The Norman W. Harrington Collection

Long-time Board member and past president, Lisa Harrington recently made a significant gift to the Oxford Museum. A large portion of her late father Norman W. Harrington's photography collection will be donated to the Museum. The collection consists of thousands of images of Oxford and Talbot County spanning post World War II through the mid-1980s.

Harrington moved to Easton in 1935 and lived in Easton and then in Oxford for the rest of his life. He was a civic leader, newspaper editor, historian, journalist, book author and had a passion for photography.



A Harrington exhibit photograph

Harrington was editor of two Eastern Shore newspapers: *The Star Democrat*, where he served as editor for 17 years, and *The Daily Banner*. Additionally, Harrington authored several books including *Shaping of Religion in America*, and *Easton Album*, a book commemorating Easton's 275<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He also served as picture editor for three Dickson Preston books: *Talbot County: A History*; *Oxford: The First Three Centuries*; and *Newspapers of the Eastern Shore*.

For four years during WWII, Harrington served as head of a U.S. Army Combat Photographic Unit in North Africa and Europe. He was awarded a Bronze Star for his work photographing nearly 30,000 German prisoners of war.

From 1979 until his death in 1987, Harrington was Managing Director of the Talbot County Historical Society and was an exceptionally involved member of the community. He was first chairman of the Easton Airport Authority, first president of the Talbot County YMCA, first chairman of the Oxford Community Center, and served on numerous other boards.

Throughout his years living in Oxford and on the Delmarva Penin-



sula, Harrington took photographs. The entire collection consists of some 40,000 images. Those pertaining to Oxford and its environs make up this gift to the Oxford Museum, which is currently being archived and catalogued.

The Museum is grateful to Lisa and her family for this generous gift that tells the pictorial story of Oxford and its surroundings and people over 40 years.

## Annual Membership Meeting: Stay Tuned...

This year's annual Membership Meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday, June 5** at 5:30 p.m. at Holy Trinity Parish House. We will keep you updated on the event. In addition to an annual update on museum business by current President, Stuart Parnes, members will also be electing new officers for a two-year term and voting on several new Board members for

a six year term.

The current Board would like to thank outgoing members Steve Goldman, Simon Arnstein, Suzanne Beyda, Suzanne Hanks-Litty and Eric Neustadt for their service. We will miss their contributions to the Museum's programs, events and exhibits and welcome them back as volunteers.

The evening will be capped off with the announcement of this year's winner(s) of the *Douglas Hanks Jr. Oxford Preservation Award*.

The food will be fabulous, as always, and it's a chance for us to commune and catch up after this unique social distancing experience. If there are any changes in date or location, we will notify members by email. Hope to see you there!



# Benson Collection Gifted to the Museum

## The Benson Gift

**B**orn in 1908, William L. Benson and his wife Sara moved to Oxford in 1938 where Captain Benson became owner and operator of the Oxford-Bellevue Ferry, the oldest ferry in continuous operation in the country. He became an Oxford icon and widely regarded as the town's "ambassador of goodwill." Over 36 years of service, Captain Bill ferried more than 40,000 people - visitors, commuters, workers in the packing houses of Bellevue and Oxford—across the Tred Avon River from sunup to sunset 7 days a week.

Over all those many years, Capt. Bill and Sara kept a amazingly detailed, daily logbooks in which they documented weather conditions, every foot traveler, bicycle,

car and truck passenger they carried, income, expenses of fuel and any other notable events. They also collected a lifetime's worth of souvenirs relating to the ferry and its operation, including paintings, photographs, models, and newspaper clippings. Together with their extensive business records, this archive is a treasure trove, offering a detailed history of not just the ferry, but of Oxford as well. A tiny portion of this material was included in last summer's exhibit on the history of the Oxford-Bellevue Ferry.

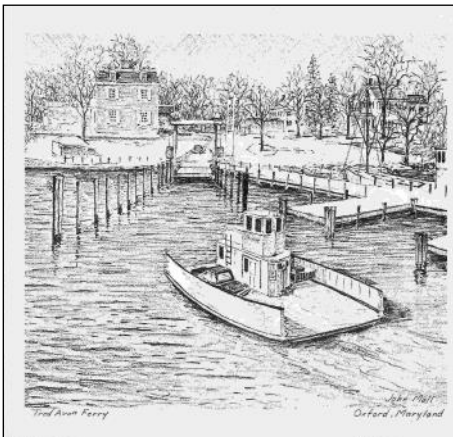
Recognizing the need to preserve this priceless collection where it will be accessible to future museum visitors and researchers, Bill's only son, William L. (Dale) Benson, Jr. has agreed to donate

these artifacts to the museum.

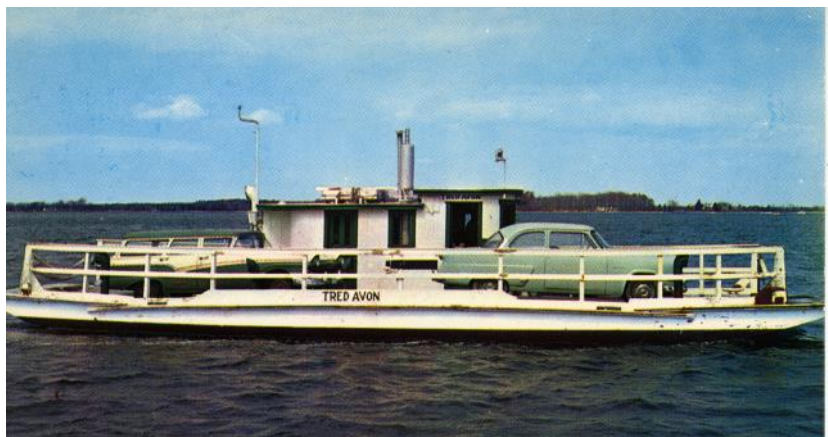
Working with Dale, Curator Leo Nollmeyer and President Stuart Parnes will begin the task of inventorying and cataloguing all of this material, photographing the art and artifacts, and gathering as much personal background information as Dale can provide.



Bill, Dale and Susan Benson



A pencil sketch by renown Oxford artist, John



## Docent Training to be Offered

**E**ven though current circumstances make it not just difficult but impossible to plan much beyond the next few weeks, we are thinking ahead to the 2020 season. While we don't yet know the Museum's opening date, we do know that the exhibits will be new and we will need our docents to be ready to welcome visitors.

Training will take up as little of your

time as possible while still providing information needed to open and close the building, manage sales from the gift shop and respond to visitor queries.

Training sessions for veteran and NEW docents will be scheduled and announced as soon as possible. Please consider sharing your experience with us by joining our crew of docents. Even if you only have a few

hours a month available, we would welcome your participation.

If interested (and of course we hope you are), please contact the Museum by email ([theoxfordmuseum@gmail.com](mailto:theoxfordmuseum@gmail.com)) and we **WILL** get back to you.

# New Board Members Nominated

.At the Museum's annual meeting (TBD), members will vote on the following candidates proposed for membership to the Museum's Board of Directors. Each of these individuals brings a unique skill set and experience to the Board and we look forward to their officially joining the team.



**Pat Jessup**

Pat is a native Marylander who left the area in 1976, returned in 1996 to settle in Oxford and sail the Bay with husband, Lawrie. Since then have been involved in several local organizations serving on the Board at OCC, former Secretary of OLA, Secretary, two-time President of the Museum, former President Oxford Garden Club, Master Gardener and Baywise certified gardener. She is the Managing Editor of this newsletter and author of most marketing pieces for the Museum. We are so happy to have her back.



**John Pittman**

John is originally from Jackson, Mississippi. He currently works in Washington with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as a Procurement Analyst, a job which has sent him abroad to places not often traveled by most of us. John is excited to bring the perspective of a weekend resident in helping to share the rich history of Oxford with museum visitors. He is interested in reaching out to the entire community to learn about the varied Oxford experiences, while also having the museum serve as an active part of today's Oxford in promoting tourism and cultural awareness. He and partner Mark Lacey spend most weekends and holidays at their home here in Oxford.



**John Tochko**

John is a retired Oceanographic Engineer. He worked for the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (JHU/APL) for 33 years before his retirement in 2012. He and his wife Chris have been active in the Oxford community since 1992, starting out as part-time residents and then moving to Oxford full-time in 2012. John has served for two terms on the Board of Trustees at the Oxford Community Center. He also has been building houses weekly for Habitat for Humanity as a member of the Thursday Crew. John is an avid watercolorist and printmaker, enjoys boating, racing radio-controlled model sailboats, and gardening. For many years, both Chris and John have been supporting the Museum behind the scenes. As the new chair for the Buildings & Grounds committee, John looks forward to using his artistic and handy-man talents to continue his support of the Museum.



**Louisa Zendt**

Louisa retired to Oxford in 2018 after a career in Education that spanned 35 years culminating as a Director of Admissions at St. Andrew's School in Middletown DE. Louisa's experience made her a natural candidate to be not just a member, but also a volunteer docent. She is someone who enjoys meeting people, hearing their stories which in turn creates a greater interest in learning more about the early inhabitants of Oxford and the events that have unfolded here over time. Louisa is heading up our volunteers and managing docent training and scheduling this year.