

DID YOU SEE THIS?

The Talbot Spy found us!

<https://talbotspy.org/chesapeake-history-oxford-museum-fills-in-the-gaps-of-black-history/>

GRATITUDE

Black Lives in Oxford (more on page 5) and the previous summer window exhibits, have benefited from the **CARES Act Emergency Relief Grant from Maryland Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities.**

According to Curator Stuart Parnes, "This grant has been a lifeline for cultural organizations all across Maryland. It has allowed the Oxford Museum to continue to maintain its facilities and collections this summer. Even though we have been unable to welcome visitors inside our building, we have been able to present new exhibits all spring and summer by changing our windows for viewers walking, biking and stopping by the outside of our building."



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
FOR THE HUMANITIES



President's Message SUMMER REFLECTIONS

I must admit, I am a fan of all things summer: sun, water, boating, sailing, picnics, cookouts, bike riding, Fourth of July, vacationing...most of which did not happen, BUT I know they will be back, better than ever, in 2021. Definitely something to look forward to. But here we are, ready to see the Autumn show and its beautiful display of colors, with fantastic sunsets and beautiful leaves, a chill in the air, a crisp apple to crunch.

So how was your summer? I think the Museum had a good one. Despite our closure, for the first time since we opened in 1964, we still managed to put on some great exhibits. Jay Fleming, photographer, never disappoints and was well received as his photographs chronicle the watermen's story and the intriguing images of the vanishing islands of Smith and Tangier. Our current exhibit, *Black Lives in Oxford*, is receiving the attention it so rightly deserves. Thousands of people have engaged in our social media pages, contacted us directly, and have sent notes of gratitude for an exhibit whose history needed to be told; the story of our fellow citizens of Oxford: our Black friends and neighbors. If you have not had a chance to stop by and see the windows, please do.

We've been diligently working on the new Walking Tour of Oxford with a compatible app for your phone. It's been fun putting this together, an education for all of us. We've had volunteers transcribing old documents, some dating to the late 17th century, as well as interviews of citizens long gone, helping those searching for their family's history. And, we've had a great team of "Museum Minders" taking turns to keep the Museum entranceway fresh for the viewers of our windows gallery!

As you enjoy this beautiful weather remember to keep the museum in your fall giving plans. **Our Annual Fund Drive started on October 1.** Please check your email and mailbox and remember it is only with your support that we can provide new and engaging exhibits and maintain a presence here in town. What would Oxford do without a museum to preserve our history? Please give as generously as you can so we can open our doors once again.

Thank you.

Julie Wells, President

PICKET FENCE AUCTION

Thanks to the Oxford Business Association for the Oxford Picket Fence Auction and \$750 raised for the Oxford Museum this year!



Eleven other non-profits also benefited from this fabulous annual event of painted picket fences. A win-win for everyone! Thank you Oxford Community Center for hosting this annual event.

WHAT'S UNDER YOUR HOUSE?

In our summer newsletter we shared an attic treasure and asked for yours, but there were no responses! Perhaps it was too hot to go into your attic. This time we share findings from the ground under a



few of our older houses. Now we wonder, what's under your house? Email photos of your findings so that we can share!



Counting On

Nope, this is not a story about the Arkansas family with the 19 kids and counting on with grandchildren. This is a different counting story that started six years ago and counting!.

As you are driving into Oxford and round the top of Town Creek, glance to your right. There, at the edge of the parking lot, just before you reach the Applegarth boatshed/Shannahan office building, stands a small white structure, with one window facing front. It's a **"Counting House"** also known by some as a "Hoist House". This one stood dilapidated and abandoned, near Doc's restaurant on Pier Street.



The ground beneath was eroding and since it was the last one "standing" of the many that used to be in town, and the museum decided it had to be saved. It needed to be repaired and repainted which the town undertook. Thanks to Scott Delude and maintenance team, the counting house has a new life. It has been in storage until this year, waiting for the right spot. Soon it will move a few feet onto a concrete pad, a hoist will be added, and it will be "home", near the water, and watermen once again.

What is a Counting House and why save it? This story is told on the signage that will be part of the building exhibit:

COUNTING HOUSE

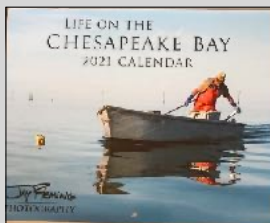
For the convenience of local watermen, several tiny buildings like this one were once placed along Oxford's wharves. No, they were not outhouses. These were known as "counting houses" where watermen would offload and sell their catch of oysters & crabs. Some were directly attached to Oxford's packing houses while others were freestanding, but all were licensed and regulated by the Maryland State Marine Police. When a crab boat came alongside in summer, the catch would have already been sorted into baskets and barrels by the crew. The attendant would hoist the containers onto the dock, weigh them and give the waterman a receipt. Cash payments would typically be made once a week. When oyster tongs or buy boats came in during the winter, their oysters were loose on deck or in the hold. The boat's crew would shovel them into metal bushel baskets, filling them level to the brim. Each basket was counted out as it swung ashore and dumped into wheelbarrows. Oystermen were often paid as soon as the offloading was complete. Today, Oxford's watermen, including those whose boats are docked here, do not need counting houses. They either unload and truck their own catch to nearby markets and restaurants or have standing arrangements with regional wholesalers to meet them at the dock every afternoon and take away their catch. This is Oxford's last surviving counting house. It was built around 1970 by Paul Cianferano, who owned the packing house at the end of Pier Street, and it was manned by Capt. Gordon Pope. The building was donated to the Oxford Museum in 2014 by Gretchen Fox and David Valliant and has been restored by the Town of Oxford.

THE MUSEUM STORE

Ready for Holiday Shopping?

Go online, it's easy to shop on the
Museum Website Store!

Some of Our Favorites Include:



Jay Fleming's
2021 Calendar

Jay Fleming's
*Working the
Water*

Dickson Preston's *Oxford, The First Three Centuries*

Douglas Hank's *Oxford Then and Now*

The Oxford Artists Museum Coloring Book (for all ages!)

The Oxford Museum Cookbook

Check out the Museum Webstore for these items and other books on the History of Oxford and Talbot County, and finish your Holiday Shopping early!

Click Here! www.oxfordmuseummd.com



Preserving The Past THE ROBERT MORRIS LEDGER STONE

According to Wikipedia, a "ledger stone or ledgerstone is an inscribed stone slab usually laid into the floor of a church to commemorate or mark the place of the burial of an important deceased person". For those who have not visited White Marsh Cemetery, the final resting place of Robert Morris Sr., his grave, located near the ruins of the standing church wall, is marked by a ledger stone on which is inscribed:

*In Memory of
Robert Morris, a Native of Liverpool
In Great Britain
Late a Merchant at Oxford
In this Province*

*Punctual Integrity influenced his Dealings
Principles of Honour governed his Actions:
With an uncommon degree of sincerity
He despised artifice and dissimulation.
His Friendship was firm, Candid and valuable.
His Charity frequent, Secret and well adapted.
His Zeal for the Publick Good Active and Useful.
His Hospitality was enhanced by his Conversation
Seasoned with cheerful wit and Sound Judgement.*

*A Salute from the Canon of a Ship
The wad fracturing his arm
Was the Signal by which he departed
Greatly lamented as he was esteemed
In the fortieth year of his age:
On the 12 day of July
MDCCL*

How many times have you driven by the ruins of the Church on Route 50 and thought about stopping to visit the grave in remembrance of this remarkable man who was so prominent a part of Oxford's history? Recently a couple of Museum board members, Pat Jessup and Julie Wells did just that.

What they saw was distressing. Mr. Morris's ledger stone was badly in need of cleaning and care. Also noted was the absence of other grave markers in the immediate area. It piqued curiosity about who else from Oxford in the 17th and 18th centuries might be buried there. Thus began the great White Marsh expedition to research maintenance of the Morris marker and find the names of others interred there. White Marsh was the only parish Church serving Oxford and the surrounding towns in the 17th and early 18th century. Unfortunately in the late 1800's a farmer while burning brush, accidentally set fire to the church building itself, so that the interior was gutted by fire, leaving only the high brick walls standing to mark the site of what was until that time the oldest church edifice on the Eastern Shore.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

With all the walking we do up and down and around Oxford, have you ever thought about the people for whom some of our streets were named?



With our *Black Lives of Oxford* exhibit, Bobby Banks has been celebrated and remembered by so many for his vibrant life in Oxford and

Banks Street

named in his honor made us start to think about many others.

Of course, we know who **Morris** and **Tilghman**

streets were named for, but what about **Stewart, Norton, Caroline, and Wilson**

streets? Each one has a story, and is an important part of Oxford's story. There are folks in town who can tell you about these families and more.



When you take a longer walk and head out to **Bachelor's Point** you can imagine what this road was named for, but apparently most of us are wrong. What do you know? Please share your stories!

Research in the archives of the Talbot County Historical Society turned up a document indicating that the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) had placed the Morris ledger stone and were responsible for its maintenance. After



several emails and phone calls, a local DAR member declared that the SAR (Sons of the American Revolution) were the responsible entity. After several more emails, contact was made with a representative of the SAR resulting in a successful outcome. Pat Jessup and Julie Wells met with Lou Raborg, Maryland Society Sons of the American Revolution, NSSAR Vice Chairman of Historic Sites and Celebrations, and Maryland Organizing Secretary, his wife Becky and B. Conway Gregory, President of the Col. Tench Tilghman Chapter, SAR, on a beautiful October morning at the cemetery. They were hard at work scrubbing the ledger stone carefully with a mild mold inhibitor, small brushes and a lot of elbow grease. It was washed with water several times to clear decades of accumulated dirt, mold and mildew. The stone came to life as Robert Morris Sr. rested below. We believe this is the first cleaning 70 years and the job was well done by this wonderful crew from the SAR. Thank you for restoring this Oxford treasure.



The search continues for the White Marsh grave records. These documents may have been transferred to St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Trappe or may have been lost in the fire which occurred after preparations had been made to resume services there in 1896. If you know anything about the burial and/or parish membership records from White Marsh we'd love to hear from you. Please leave a message at the Museum 410-226-0191.

*In photograph (L to R): **B. Conway Gregory**, President, Col. Tench Tilghman Chapter, **Lou Raborg**, Maryland Society Sons of the American Revolution, NSSAR Vice Chairman of Historic Sites and Celebrations and Maryland Organizing Secretary, **Julie Wells**, President Oxford Museum, **Pat Jessup**, Board Member and Past President.*

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Have you renewed yet?

If you are not up-to-date, reminders have been emailed. Please stay with us, we appreciate your support and always welcome member feedback!

It's easy to renew online, just click here:

[https://www.oxfordmuseummd.org/donate-membership/!](https://www.oxfordmuseummd.org/donate-membership/)



ANNUAL FUND DRIVE

THANK YOU for your generous consideration of a contribution to our annual fund drive. Our exhibits, building and grounds, utilities and new developments need your full support. We appreciate the enthusiastic and engaging spirit of the town of Oxford and its new and long-time residents.

We are a 100% volunteer organization. All monies benefit the Museum, its members and visitors.

Please give generously.

Black Lives in Oxford A STORY SHARED

"I'm one of the little Sunday School girls in the display!" said the caller who left a voicemail, shortly after the *Black Lives in Oxford* exhibit was displayed in the Museum windows. "I like the way you're honoring our Blacks in Oxford."



Oxford Museum visited Cynthia soon after receiving her voicemail and she proudly shared her story.

"The little girl was Cynthia Thomas, a lifelong resident of Oxford. She was born on September 14, 1947 and raised in Oxford on Tilghman Street. Cynthia's parents were William and Ethel Thomas. She also had a brother named William Upshur Thomas, Jr. who died at the young age of 8 months, of spinal meningitis. Cynthia's mother did factory work at a cannery in Cambridge, and her father was a Chef at the Harrison Restaurant on Tilghman Island. After her mother passed away, when she was just two years old, she was raised by her Aunt Mary Curtis. Mary worked as a maid at the Parson House in Oxford. Cynthia would play with members of that family and she was young Margarite Owens-Webster's best friend. "Mrs. Parson treated me like I was one of her own." Cynthia had many Aunts and Uncles that helped raise her. One of her uncles was the sailmaker, Downes Curtis.

"I have many fond memories of my father's people. My grandmother was Lily Gibson and my grandfather was William Thomas. My grandmother had seven grandchildren. The children were Elenice, Elisie, Hattie, Mickey and Morris, and two died in child birth." As a child she had many family gatherings with her immediate family. They attended and she is a member of Waters United Methodist Church, on Banks Street, in Oxford. Cynthia attended a lot of the church activities and socials with her family. "There was always a lot of cooking and neighborhood people that attended the church." Cynthia's whole family raised her. Her grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Curtis (Lizzie) and her grandfather Raphael Curtis had 10 children "and they all have passed away. Recently my youngest aunt, Alene Ayers died, on May 12, 2020, and another aunt died in 2015 at the age of 97, her name was Agnes Washington. My other aunts and uncles were Othella Sisci, Downes Curtis, Mary M. Curtis, James Curtis."

THE MUSEUM ONLINE

Click the links below to connect you with our many online museum resources and follow us on social media:



EMAIL . . . write to us! Share your story, your news, or your findings about Oxford.



WEBSITE . . . find Oxford Museum information, history of Oxford and our Museum Store.



FACEBOOK . . . follow our news and current events as they happen.



INSTAGRAM . . . engage with our followers and see what's happening in Oxford.

Cynthia went to White Marsh Elementary School in Trappe and she attended the Robert Russa Moton School in Easton for Junior and High School. She left Oxford to pursue her undergraduate and graduate degrees—Coppin State College in Baltimore to receive a bachelor's degree in Special Education and George Washington University to receive a master's degree in Education and Human Development.

Cynthia's degree in Special Education took her to her first job in Chestertown, Maryland, to Chestertown Elementary School, to teach a class of 10 mentally challenged students. She also taught in Cambridge, Maryland at St. Claire Elementary School and Maple Elementary School. She stayed in the field of Special Education for 32 years. After retiring from teaching, Cynthia worked at the Easton Day Care Center and the Easton YMCA Children's Department

Actually, education was her second career, when Cynthia was about 14 years old she took care of neighborhood babies and she worked at Nollmeyer's Crabhouse at the end of Tighman Street, a few doors away. And at one time Cynthia worked at Friel's Cannery in Wye Mills, where she fed the corn machine!

Cynthia wanted a family and in 1984 she adopted a two month old little girl who she named Ingrid Genette. She cherishes and loves her daughter dearly. Cynthia raised her daughter Ingrid as a single mother and also helped raise her daughter's godchild, Sky Briannoe Robinson.

Cynthia loved to go to the beach. She enjoyed the Oxford Beach on the Strand and she remembers how she had so much fun with the children she grew up with in Oxford. They rode bicycles and roller skates, played hide and seek and played at the Oxford Hall on Tighman Street. Red-Light, Green-Light was a favorite among many other games. As a child Cynthia learned to swim, taught by the instructor from the YMCA in Easton. In Oxford, it was important to learn how to swim, living so close to the water. She loved animals too, and as a child she had cats, rabbits, goldfish, and turtles as her pets.

Cynthia loved the Oxford Park and would carry her daughter and then later her daughter's godchild to play in the park. She loved to ride the Oxford Ferry to Bellevue to visit family and friends.

Cynthia has lived on Tilghman Street her entire life and had made it a goal to build a new house where her old family house stood. "I told my grandmother, Lizzie Curtis, that I would build my own new family home. I love it here and couldn't wait to build my own home." In 1974, Cynthia built a new home for her Aunt Mary, Grandmother Lizzie, daughter Ingrid and other family members as they became sick and fell into her care, including Aunt Emma and Uncle Downes. Caring deeply for her family, she became known as "The Shining Light" to everyone who met her.

Not many Blacks are left in Oxford. "Oh, there used to be so many Blacks and they all have passed on, leaving behind many, many memories. The children still try to keep in contact with each other. We were very close and raised together. We all loved Oxford—that was our home."

Thank you for shining your light with us, Cynthia.