

# Ile of Kent - 1631

*"To Discover, Identify, Restore and Preserve the Heritage of Kent Island"*

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE KENT ISLAND HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC. ■ SUMMER 2007

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## President's Message

THE SOCIETY HAS BEEN BUSY!

By the time you receive this newsletter the heating and air conditioning units will have been installed at the Kirwan House and Store Museum and the electrical systems updated. Slowly, but surely, the store is being restored again after the damage that was caused by the burst frozen water pipes last February.

At long last work has begun on the restoration of the caboose at our Stevensville Train Station. "The Caboosters" held their first meeting on Monday, Aug. 6, and are busily working to accurately restore the 1929 caboose.

Our Walking Tour brochure has been reprinted with a monetary grant from The American Legion, Kent Island Post 278. We are tremendously appreciative of their beneficence. The signs that correspond to that number in the brochure narrative have also been refurbished.

A KIHS Website is currently under development and is expected to be up and running in September. You will be able to "Google" us for up-to-date information on activities. Our thanks to Thomas Associates, Inc., for helping us in this effort.

I have recently chaired three meetings with the Queen Anne's Historical Society and ESHI (Stories of the Chesapeake) concerning the need for an historic preservation ordinance in Queen Anne's County. With guidance and help from The Maryland Historical Trust, we will continue to refine an eventual

*Continued on page 3*

## KIHS (First Annual?) Picnic at Kirwan House

Instead of seeing just the usual suspects at quarterly meetings, Kent Island Heritage Society officers and directors hope that the prospect of free food will entice so many Society members to attend that the event will require name tags. As President Nancy laments, "We only know some of you as names on our membership list."

They have planned this "old-fashioned" picnic as a family event. So bring 'em all. Kids, in-laws, neighbors, the new best friend you just met.

The society will provide fried chicken, hot dogs, iced tea, lemonade and dessert.

There will be hay rides, horse shoes, board games, children's games, music (no rap, no punk), demonstrations and displays.

They ask in return only that you:

- RSVP to Carole Frederick at 410-643-3776 (email: cpfred@verizon.net) or complete and return the form on the bottom of the enclosed flyer,
- Bring a covered dish to share
- And you might also want to bring lawn chairs for anyone in your party who may want to sit.

### Mark Your Calendar

**Kent Island Heritage Society**

**Invites You To A**

**PICNIC**

**(instead of a general meeting)**

**Sunday, September 23**

**1:00 to 5:00 p.m.**

**Kirwan House**

**See enclosed flyer for details**

# Kent Islander Profiles

From Kent Island Historical Society's oral histories project

Gil Dunn **By**  
Brent Lewis

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Mary White

### Audit

Lynne Riley-Coleman

### Scholarship

Nancy Cook

### Social

Janet Denny

### Cemetery Identification & Preservation

Lora Lake

### Editor

John Bonner

Gil Dunn tells great stories. Here's one of his all-time best:

"Back then every boy had a major league baseball hero. Mine was Jimmie Foxx. I followed his career, but only got to see him play once. Baltimore, where I lived, was a minor league town. I saw him play in an All-Star game in Washington. I was ten-years old, and I knew he was born in Sudlersville and Sudlersville was on the Eastern Shore.

"When I [grew up and] moved down to Kent Island, I didn't have the vaguest idea I'd ended up in the same county as Sudlersville.

"Little League had a game in Sudlersville and I couldn't wait to get there. I asked the man sitting next to me to tell me something about Jimmie Foxx. He said, 'Who wants to talk about that guy?' I said what are you talking about, he's a great ballplayer.

"I couldn't believe it. I said, this doesn't sound right. I'm going to start a little museum to give this man some recognition."

The unbeliever at the little league game pointed at a house across the street and told Gil that Foxx's aunt lived there. She gave Gil the old power-hitting first baseman's Florida address.

Gil wrote a couple letters, told Foxx about the museum, and requested something of a personal nature from his hero. A glove, a cap, part of a uniform, anything. There was little positive response. Then one day, Jimmie Foxx showed up the drugstore with a trunk-load of baseball history.

"He told me, 'They didn't seem to want it down in Sudlersville, you may as well take it,' and Bingo, he hands me all this memorabilia. Didn't charge me a plugged Nickel. Just gave it to me!"

Gil sounds like he can still hardly believe it. Longtime Island residents remember Gil Dunn's Kent Island Pharmacy with great fondness, and one of the main reasons is that amazing shrine to baseball, heroes, and honorable intentions he shared with the public in the northeast corner of his store.

Among the collectibles entrusted to Gil was a uniform that Foxx wore when he played on an All-Star team that included Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig and barnstormed Japan before

World War II. Probably one of sixteen ever in existence.

He lent those treasured textiles to the Babe Ruth Museum years ago. He shrugs his shoulders, holds up his hands, and laughs, "And they're still borrowing it!"

\* \* \*

Gil Dunn graduated from a city high school where he admits, with a combination of glee and regret, he wasn't a very good student. "I wasn't dumb. I just didn't try." He went to work for Bethlehem Steel for a while, but the job didn't quite fit. He moved on.

Gil met Florence Handford, the New York girl that would become his wife.

He started attending Loyola College and enlisted in the Air Force for three years. The military let him continue his education by assigning him to Military Intelligence. One of Gil's duties was to observe immigrant students from Germany and Italy for signs of anti-American, pro-Axis sentiment. "Rooting for Hitler," he says.

At Loyola, Gil was determined to become a better student.

"I didn't intend to play any sports. Some of the fellows who'd played with me on the sandlot wanted me to play baseball. I told them I was here to devote my time to learning, getting some knowledge.

"The coach talked me into playing in a practice game, and I hit the first pitch, bam! Second one, bam!"

"Next day they said, you're on the team." Big smile. "Played three years."

No comment on the academics.

Soon after Loyola, a sales manager wanted Gil to come work for pharmaceutical distributor Eli Lilly. The glitch was they were only hiring registered pharmacists. "Next day I went to [University of] Cincinnati to become a pharmacist."

Here he finally started getting those A and B grades. He also learned more about the drug industry and decided his leanings were more toward manufacturing than marketing. The Lilly representative lost out. After graduation Gil went to work for medical research giant Merck & Co.

But then Merck developed Cortisone. And the company's president George Merck (one

time head of Fort Detreck's germ warfare program) announced they were going to keep this breakthrough medicine instead of selling it off. They required supplier Sharpe & Dohme. Set up their own distribution. Gil could see he was headed for a life of what he'd tried to avoid by not signing with Lilly.

In 1952, a friend told him they were looking for a pharmacist on Kent Island. Gil asked where the heck that was. The friend told him to "go across that bridge they just built. When you get off the bridge, that's Kent Island."

Gil said, "I think I'll try that" and quit Merck.

When he got here he saw the possibilities. The Bay Bridge was new and Route 50 was something Islanders were starting to get used to. Housing opportunities and community needs were growing. Just off the westbound highway they were starting construction on the brick and block shopping center known as the Nichol's Building. There was going to be a new supermarket there and a Fox Brothers department store. Gil Dunn's Kent Island Pharmacy opened in 1953 and became a fixture at the 'Shopping Center' for more than forty years.

Gil says back then Kent Island "was a whole lot different. Slower paced. Quieter. Nobody locked their doors. Everybody was cordial."

He and his family felt welcome from the start. They noticed Kent Islanders waved at anyone passing, no matter if "They don't even know who you are!"

Gil and Florence found this a great place to raise their five children — Cathy, Gil Jr., Susan, Bucky and Mary.

Over the years, Gil has been involved with numerous civic organizations. He's a past president of our Kent Island Heritage Society and started the Kent Island Band.

His dedication to the local little league is something many locals remember.

"When we came to Kent Island, there was only one team for young players, in Marling Farms. If you didn't make that team you were out of luck. I helped start the Lions Club team, not so much to compete with Marling Farms but to give other boys a chance to play."

The league went on to expand and

grow, yet Gil's simply stated goal speaks to his inclusive personality. Always energetically friendly, Gil Dunn wants everyone to feel welcome. You get the sense he understands, and has a lot of love for, people.

And if they're up for trading a few well told tales, so much the better.

## Welcome New Members

- ☐ Nick and Gisela Blades  
Chester, Md.
- ☐ Kenton and Joni Kilgore  
Stevensville Md.
- ☐ Faye Councill Polillo  
Stevensville, Md.
- ☐ Cameron Kersey Sewell  
Stevensville, Md.

## President's Message

Continued from page 1

presentation to the Planning and Zoning Board and to the County Commissioners. This is sorely needed so that homeowners can qualify for tax deductions and the county can take advantage of available grants. This effort will take a long time and will involve the public at some point.

Our historic sites have been visited by four tour buses. These tours really keep our docents busy, thus we are always in NEED OF DOCENTS. Scripts are available, and training is ongoing. **YOU ARE WANTED AND NEEDED.**

You are invited to join us on Sept 23 at our picnic at Kirwan House [see enclosed flyer]. We would like to meet and greet our members, many of whom we know only as names on our membership list. We hope to see you there.

*Nancy M. Cook*

## Publications For Sale by KIHS

<b>Of History and Houses A Kent Island Heritage</b> <i>Mildred Schoch</i>	\$20
<b>The Forgotten Seven: The Decoy Carvers of Kent Island</b> <i>Hugo Gemignani</i>	\$15
<b>The Isle of Kent - The 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary A Commemorative History</b>	\$5
<b>Burial Permits - 1900-1922 - Kent Island</b> Cause of death and burial site data compiled by <i>Mary White</i> ; prepared for publication by <i>Mary Jane and Josuha Leaverton</i>	\$10

Plus tax, shipping and handling.  
Call 410-758-2502 for information.

## In Memoriam

**MRS. BARBARA KETTLER MILLS**

**MRS. MERNA FOSS PELSAR**

*The society is very thankful for and will miss the interest and support shown our organization by these members. Continuing our shared mission honors their memory.*

# Sarah Scharnus Awarded KIHS 2007 Scholarship

*The Society is pleased to announce our scholarship recipient, Sarah Scharnus, daughter of Kent Island-born parent Joseph Scharnum and native grandparents Ben and Elaine Scharnus. Sarah was awarded the scholarship during the 2007 Senior Awards Ceremony held at Kent Island High School on May 30 and again was recognized during our June general meeting. Here is her essay:*

My name is Sarah Scharnus. I am 17 years old and have lived on Kent Island my entire life. In 2000, my family of five moved from Cloverfields into my Grandmother's house on Thompson Creek Road, Stevensville, Maryland. My father calls it "The Home Place" because it was originally his grandmother's home. My father is Joe Scharnus, fourth child born to Ben and Elaine Scharnus, who lived on Love Point Road in 1955.

I am a true native of Kent Island and feel very proud to be a part of its heritage. I have been raised on the importance of family, heritage, and history. I enjoy stories about the yesteryears of Kent Island. I, the youngest of three girls, attended the Christ Church Play School, which dates back to 1880. I attended Kent Island Elementary and the Bayside Elementary Schools. I followed my grandmother through Stevensville Middle School, which was Stevensville High School when she was in school in the 1940s. My grandfather, Ben Scharnum, later taught at the school and also gave name to the middle school mascot, the "Stevensville Middle School Pirates." He was also well known as a coach to many different recreational sports teams on Kent Island.

I love looking through Nick Hoxter's books, "A Walk Back In Time" and "Growing Up On Kent Island" and finding my grand mom and grand pop's names in print. There



is even a picture of my great grandparents, Ethel and Al McCoubrey, standing in front of their family-owned restaurant, the White House Restaurant.

As you can see, I am truly connected to Kent Island and believe in preserving its heritage. I feel privileged to be part of Kent Island's unique community. I am thankful to the generations before me who took the time and energy to preserve the memories for me and future generations. I hope to carry on this

same tradition, as I believe it is very important to know your family history and understand where you come from.

Lastly, I would like to share this memory of my grandmother with you. I clearly remember her advocating against the K-Mart coming to Kent Island. She would say, "I will never shop here." She is gone now, but I loved her for her commitment to the community. She felt she was being true and loyal to the local store-owners and businesses at that time. I do shop at the K-Mart (don't we all on Kent Island), but I imagine that some day even the K-Mart will be remembered as a cornerstone of growth and development on our Kent Island, rich in heritage and prosperity.

## Isle of Kent

John Bonner, Editor

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