

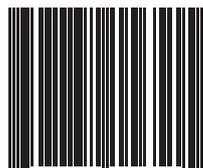
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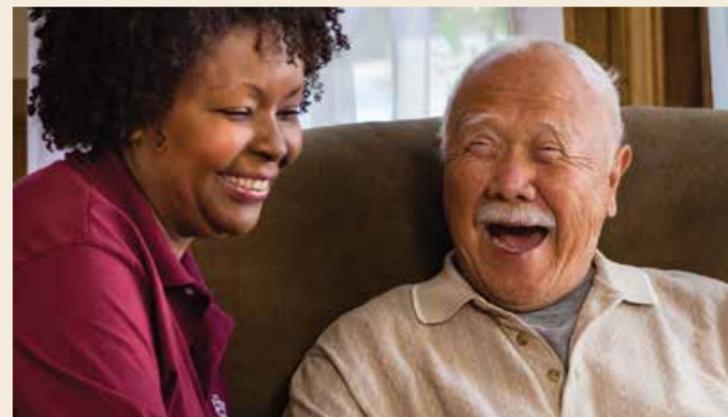
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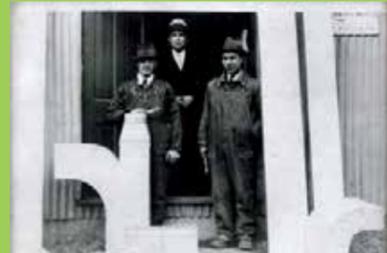
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### Ask the Undertaker

~ by Ryan Helfenbein ~

I received a very interesting call from a gentleman regarding the topic of cremation. He began by saying how surprised he was that "cremation" cost so much through his hometown funeral home. How that his brother in law pre purchased "cremation" for \$1,600 and his aunt was cremated for even under that out West. He then went on to say how his eyes were opened when he began investigating why there is such a price difference, and that it all comes down to proper oversight and care – or what some may define as value.

I compare his realization to that of the hotel industry. While we can all agree that any hotel will provide a bed to rest in, each brand provides a different level of value. For example, the value of a Ritz Carlton vs. a Red Roof Inn will vary greatly and therefore the expense will differ significantly as well. The question truly lies in what level of value you prefer in your time away from home. This same question is true when it comes to the cost of cremation in the death care industry. What experience do you want your family to have when it is time to plan a final farewell?

To go back to the conversation with this gentleman, he explained that when he looked into his brother in-law's "deal" of \$1,600 he learned that the crematory to perform the cremation was not even affiliated with the "cremation company" his brother in law had met with. As a matter of fact, in addition to the cremation being done by a third party, transporting a deceased at the time of death will not be done by the company he had planned with either. That, too, was brokered out to a third party. He went on to tell me that there is obviously minimal oversight in their process of cremation, transportation from wherever death may occur, and overall assistance provided to the family. He stated that his family will be left to get their own death certificates and determine what they will be needed for. Just when he thought that was bad enough, he investigated his aunt's cremation service, which was even more of a "deal", he found that the cremation company only does cremation when they have collected 6 bodies. He also learned that his family wanted the cremated remains back much sooner, and after pressing hard enough with the cremation company, the family received a box filled with something that had the aunt's name on it. And much like that of the cremation service selected by his brother in law, there was no oversight or assistance for the family once his aunt was taken from the place of death. He went on to tell me that after this realization, he understood why cremation assistance with funeral homes cost what they do. It is the added value in the peace of mind knowing the cremation process is overseen by licensed individuals, ethical standards are apparent and most important to him, his wife would receive the guidance necessary after his demise. The cost quoted to him by the area funeral home which owned a crematory, was double that of what his brother in law had told him, however, that became very reasonable after doing his homework.

Often, after a loss, families not only cope with an unexpected level of grief, but an administrative nightmare of trying to notify certain organizations, companies and obtaining benefits. All the while, the bills continue to roll in. These creative price point cremation providers in the death care industry never advertise what they won't do. For example, can family members call with questions after hours? How long will family members need to wait before obtaining death certificates? Do they need to get them on their own? If so, where? What exactly will they be needed for? What steps should be completed first? Therefore, we find licensed funeral homes, that own a crematory, provide more than just "cremation". Undertakers today wear a laundry list of hats to give families the guidance they need after experiencing a loss. Undertakers today are not there to just care for the deceased, but also serve the immediate family and friends effected by that loss. As my father has always said – "We need to help families heal through life's worst problem – losing a loved one."

Speaking with this gentleman for several minutes revealed how his eyes were opened regarding the differences in 'cremation'. He said to me that he now understands that the wrong question would be "What is the cost of cremation", and that he should be asking "What is the funeral home going to do for my family." He obviously was much more educated on the scary reality of cremation today. Fortunately, he learned this on his own, by simply asking the right questions and a thorough investigation. He drilled down on what exactly is being done and now understands the difference of complete oversight vs. third party assistance and the difference of cremation companies and funeral homes that own a crematory. When it comes to the death care industry, there's onetime to get it right. Spending a little bit more might make the difference between an ok experience and an exceptional one.

For more information, including pre-planning and other options, please call your nearest FH&N Funeral Home.

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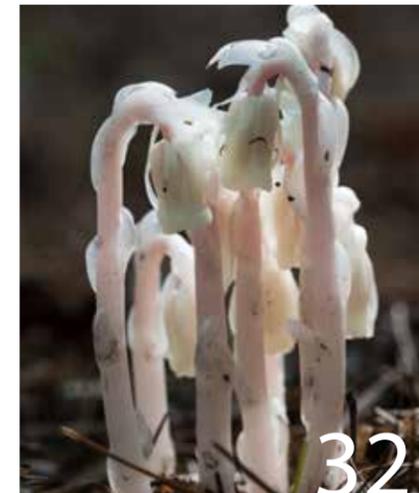
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## ANNIVERSARY

**T**wo years ago, a group of people came together to develop a new publication that would tell authentic stories about the people, places and culture of the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

The founding *Shore Monthly* editorial team worked hard to launch the magazine and to ensure that it stayed true to their vision.

Since that time, our team has grown and changed, and we remain committed to telling stories unique to our region. On this, our second anniversary, it seems appropriate to delve into our past both as a region and as a publication.

As contributing writer Andrew Scott Pyle writes in this month's *Taste Buds*, "I would not want to live in the past. I don't believe that's a healthy thing to want. If you should find a door to the past, don't go through. If you're ever offered a trip to the past, in a flying blue telephone box or a discontinued sports car with funny doors, just say *NO*, that's my policy. Yet sometimes, it's handy to brush up against the past, make sure it's still there, just as a reminder that you're not flailing around untethered in the world, you came from *somewhere*."

As we move into our third year of publication, we would like to hear from our readers about what you enjoy in these pages and what more we could bring to you. See page 66 for some questions to inspire you.

Thank you for reading and engaging. Happy anniversary to you!

Sarah Ensor  
Editor



EASY-LIVING, CASUAL ELEGANCE

# SHORE MONTHLY

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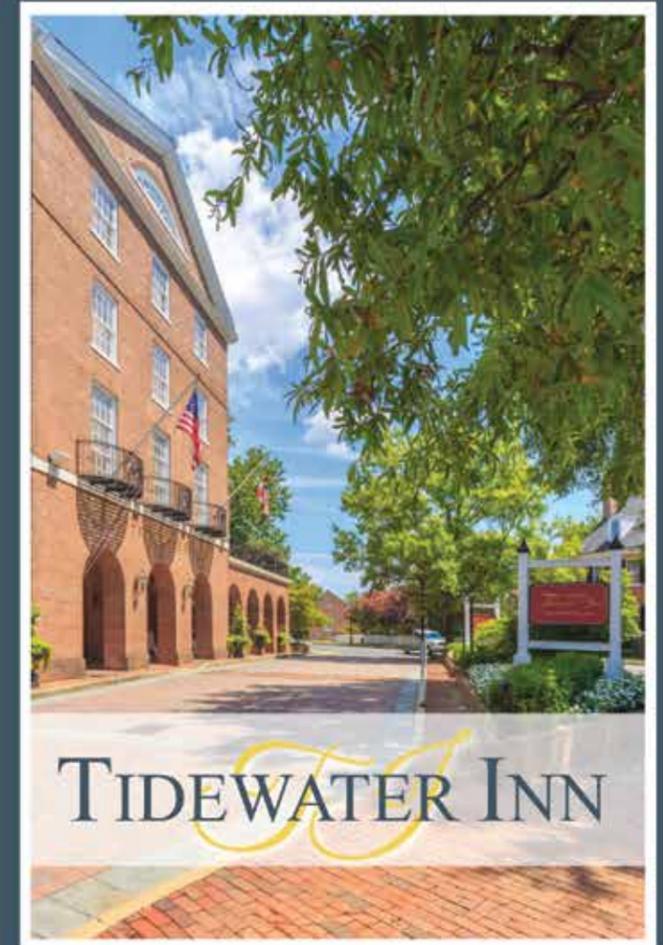
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In October 1989, an amazing substance abuse prevention program launched in Centreville, called "The Haunted Crack House Project," which told the tale of Liz, a 16-year-old entangled in the web of addiction. After worldwide replications of the project, The Queen Anne's County Drug Free Coalition is bringing the incredible presentation back to the community in which it was created—for a 30th anniversary edition centered on the current opioid crisis.



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Maryland  
QUEEN ANNE'S  
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# Ghost

& GOODIES AT THE  
VICTORIANA INN

Story by Jennifer Martella | Photos by Caroline J. Phillips

The house on a slight rise at the end of Cherry Street on St. Michaels' harbor was originally known as the Henry Clay Dodson House. It is a landmark in St. Michaels for its French Second Empire style with a remarkable mansard roof covered by deep gray fish-scale patterned slate shingles. Between each arched roof dormer window is an unusual painted accent shingle with a gray center surrounded in white. Other period details include the Ionic columns that support the one-story porches.

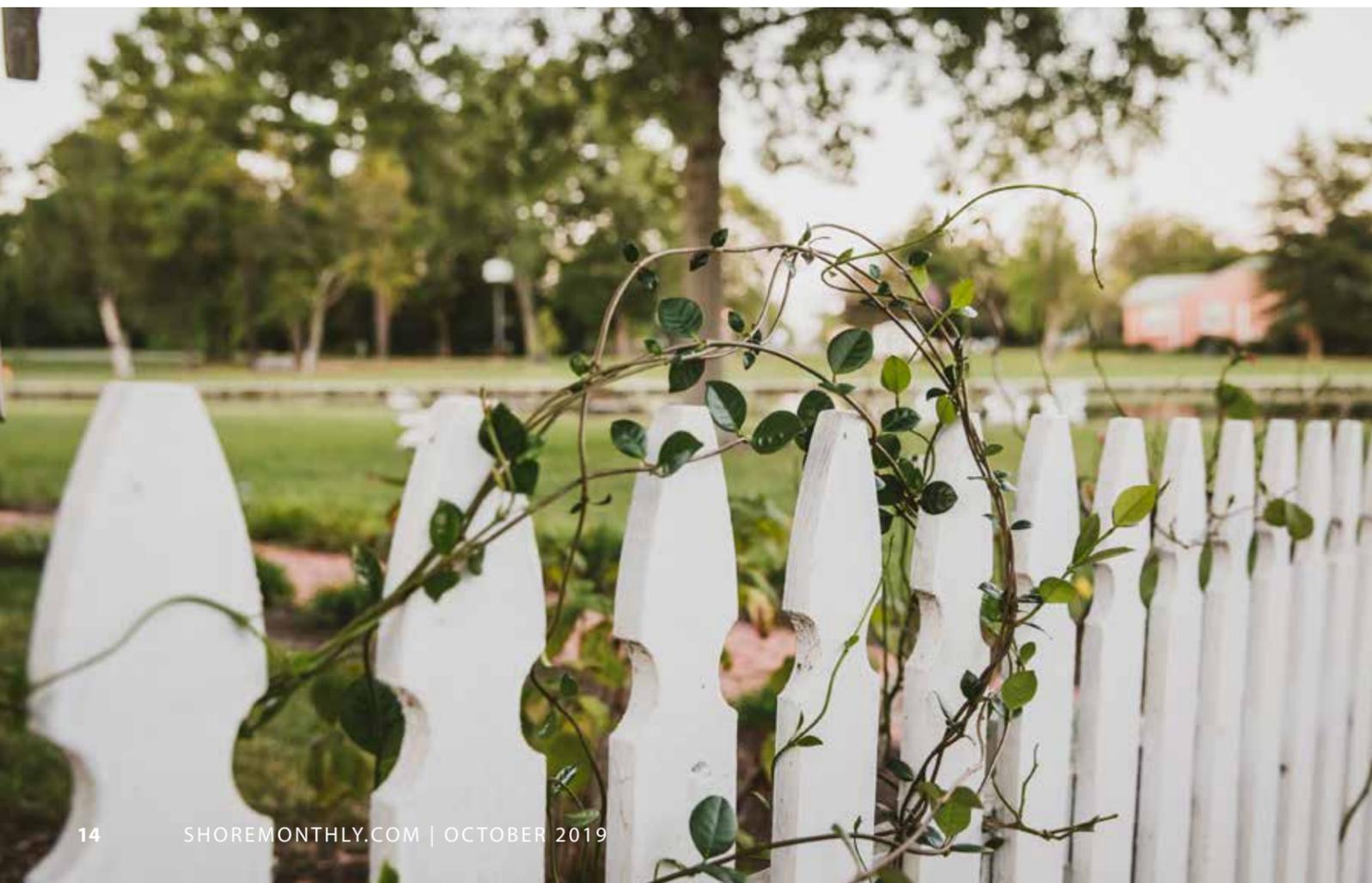
This distinctive house is now the Victoriana Inn. The inn has welcomed many guests over the years, including one ghost. This

benevolent ghost was a young man who appeared troubled when he checked into the inn one evening. When Innkeeper Aida Khalil Trissell pointed out the brochures of local attractions, he thanked her and said what he needed was a quiet weekend to himself.

He later sought out the innkeeper in the kitchen and appeared anxious to pay his bill in advance. The innkeeper assured him her policy is for guests to pay at checkout and encouraged him to relax and enjoy his stay. Very early the next morning the man's wife called the innkeeper and was very upset. She had tried several times to reach her husband since he had not answered her texts that morning. The innkeeper

went upstairs and knocked on the door several times. There was no response nor could she hear any noise inside the room. She reluctantly opened the door slightly and saw the guest lying on the bed. She was very distressed to see he was clearly not well. When the innkeeper and another staff member went inside the room to the guest's bedside, it was clear the guest had passed away.

The innkeeper then called the guest's wife, told her the very sad news and made arrangements for the guest's body to be transported to her. The innkeeper then closed the door to the room. She later removed all the furniture and arranged for the walls to be painted and the floors to be refinished.





When the innkeeper returned from a trip, she went to the room and saw three pennies on the floor of the empty room. She was puzzled because no one had been in the room since the renovations had been completed. She picked up the three pennies and put them in a drawer. After the new furnishings were installed, she inspected the room again and found three more pennies in the exact location as the first ones.

Later that day, the innkeeper was conferring with the cook about the next day's breakfast menu and told her about the curious appearance of the mysterious pennies. As they were talking, they heard three more pennies roll off the kitchen table onto the floor. They turned around to see that the pennies fell at the exact spot where the guest had stood when he asked about paying his bill in advance. The innkeeper and the cook looked at each other in disbelief and were speechless. The cook surmised the guest was trying to communicate with the innkeeper to say he was sorry he had not paid his bill for his overnight stay.

The significance of three pennies has been the source of much speculation. Whatever his intent, he took his secret to his grave. In the years since the first pennies appeared, more pennies have been found, and the innkeeper keeps them in the same drawer where she stored the first ones. She wonders if the pennies will stop appearing when the amount of the bill is paid. She also remembers the guest telling her he wished he could never leave.

Besides its benevolent ghost, the Victoriana Inn is also known for its gracious hospitality and delicious cuisine. During the month of October, the inn is decorated for Halloween. Stop by for goodies such as the holiday treats displayed on these pages. Who knows, you may hear more pennies fall onto the floor for the innkeeper's collection. 🍪

*The story of the Victoriana Inn's benevolent ghost is featured on the St. Michaels Ghost Walk, part of the Chesapeake Ghost Walks offered from April through November. For more information, visit [chesapeakeghosts.com/st-michaels/](http://chesapeakeghosts.com/st-michaels/).*

*The Victoriana Inn is located at 205 Cherry Street, St. Michaels, MD 21663. For reservations, please call 410-745-3368 or visit [www.victorianainn.com](http://www.victorianainn.com)*

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# The conjuring of *BIG LIZZ*

By Kristina Gaddy

In the marshes and swamps around Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, a ghost lurks. Or so local lore would have you believe. To find her, drive south from Cambridge on Bucktown Road, through flat farmland and patches of woods for about ten miles, until you arrive at the narrow Decoursey Bridge Road.

The actual bridge isn't long, just enough to get over a narrow strip of the Transquaking River. At night, the river is black and the surroundings dark. The marshy Green Brier swamp isn't suitable for buildings, and there's not a house in sight when you stand on the bridge. But here you'll find the home of Big Liz.

FOLKLORE



*“Who doesn’t want to see if they can conjure a ghost on a dark and foggy night, driving on desolate backroads?”*

Sit in your car in the darkness of the bridge, flash your lights, and honk your horn, and she may come greet you. She’ll emerge from the darkness, in the figure of a large, African American woman. As she gets closer, you notice she doesn’t have a head on her stooped shoulders. Instead, it’s tucked under her arm. Her eyes glow red like two burning coals. When you start the car to get away, your engine stalls. She shuffles, soundlessly, closer and closer, before you can finally get the engine going and speed away.

Although she may be Dorchester County’s most famous ghost, Matt Lake writes in *Weird Maryland*, “there’s no solid historical evidence to back [the story] up.” Unlike some ghost stories that are based on real people or events, no one has been able to track

down when or if Big Liz (alternatively spelled Bigg Lizz) was actually killed in the swamps. However, the big framework of the story is usually consistent: Big Liz is headless, large, and African American. She was enslaved, and her owner took her out to a spot in the marsh to bury a treasure. She buries it, he beheads her, and she haunts the area thereafter.

One of the more popular versions of the story tells Liz as an enslaved woman belonging to a Confederate sympathizer. She

is a Union spy and he has gold he’s trying to conceal to support the Confederate Army. When her owner discovers what he considers to be her disloyal spying, he demands she bring the treasure chest out to the marsh where he forces her to bury it. He beheads her, only to be tormented by her ghost. One version says those

who might look like the enslaver should be the most worried, which may be why one Charles Jackson died of a heart attack after running out of the woods in the Green Brier swamp. Most folklorists and newspaper reporters agree that teenagers and ghost-chasers have become the ones keeping Big Liz famous around Cambridge. Who doesn’t want to see if they

can conjure a ghost on a dark and foggy night, driving on desolate backroads?

If you want to see Big Liz for yourself, you may have trouble conjuring her. Accounts in books, tourism booklets, websites, and newspapers all have curious parties giving different combinations of honks and lights to make her appear: honk six times, flash your

lights three times; flash, honk, and shout her name three times each; or just honk three times. Then, there’s also the debate about where to look for Liz. While most stories say to drive to the Decoursey Bridge, George Carey in *Maryland Folklore* says she also appears in the Gum Briar swamp, while another account in *Weird Maryland* says you need to look for her in a

graveyard next to a swamp, and she'll appear with a rush of wind and a bright light after you summon her.

But even though Big Liz has become famous, part of the reason her story can't be substantiated might be because it falls into the category of folklore tale, rather than ghost story. Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft & Rootwork compiles African American folklore collected between 1936 and 1940 through interviews with 1,600 people in twelve states, including Maryland. Harry Middleton Hyatt, an Anglican minister and amateur folklorist, found two folklore tales of a black man beheaded by a rich white man after they promised to guard a treasure, one in Florida and one in New Orleans. Hyatt also collected a story of a female headless ghost in New York.

Perhaps Big Liz is a combination of these tales, with a unique Maryland twist. The treasure legend might be combined with the idea of another famous Dorchester County woman and Union spy, Harriet Tubman. The backdrop of the Civil War and Maryland's status as a border state might also make the Union vs. Confederate story the most compelling version. And although most

accounts say the legend dates to at least the Civil War, if not the Revolutionary War, without any real history, that's hard to substantiate. According to Elias Jones in the 1902 book History of Dorchester County, Maryland, "The worst and most injurious branch of folklore, very prevalent in Dorchester County, is the telling of ghost stories in various forms in the presence of children." Although he mentions other ghoulish stories, like a Dorchester man dying after a witch turned him into a horse and rode him through the night, he unfortunately decides, "As there are no ghosts we must not write false tales to excite fear in the young or gratify the curiosity of the superstitious." Many other written sources don't start mentioning the lore of Big Liz until the 1960s, but Big Liz is now ingrained in Dorchester County culture. The Heart of the Chesapeake Country Heritage Area includes the Decoursey Bridge in a list of landmarks in the county, and RAR Brewing in Cambridge named a specialty Harvest Ale made with Butternut Squash "Big Lizz." If you conjure her, she may appear as a warning not to seek treasure created by trauma. 🍊



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# AXE YOURSELF

*Do you have what it takes to hit the target?  
Test yourself at Delaware's competitive  
axe-throwing venue, Battle Axe.*

Story by Jerisha Parker Gordon  
Photos by Caroline J. Phillips

“

If you want to survive the zombie apocalypse, this is definitely one of the best training centers



Interested in learning a new skill this fall? Maybe you want to prepare for a zombie apocalypse or whatever other ghosts and goblins your imagination conjures up this Halloween. If so, axe throwing is definitely for you.

Battle Axe, Delaware's first competitive axe throwing establishment — just a short drive from the Shore in Newark, Del. — promises to help you unleash your inner Viking or at least help burn off a few calories after eating too much candy corn.

“If you want to survive the zombie apocalypse, this is definitely one of the best training centers,” says Battle Axe owner Mike Evans.

Originally a mobile axe throwing business, Evans traveled to local breweries as far as Rehoboth Beach before finding a permanent location that was easy to get to and

offered plenty of parking.

“We very rarely have anyone leave here without a smile on their face.” Evans says, before tossing an axe down an indoor lane at one of the targets he built in the year-old space.

Over the chatter of other excited patrons, axes whiz through the air before landing with a thud into the wooden walls. Victories small and large are celebrated with cheers and laughs. With so much excitement for the unknown, axe throwing is also the perfect night for people just getting to know each other.

“We get first dates all the time and they love it,” Evans says.

For some, the art of axe throwing might appear scary or even a little intimidating, but thanks to Evans' kind and patient staff, the most novice of throwers are throwing



and hitting targets within minutes.

After guests pay a fee, sign a waiver, and make sure feet are safely covered in closed-toe shoes, it's time to throw. Battle Axe staff lay down the rules, assign guests to their lane, and finally bestow upon them an approximately one-pound axe, similar to what you could easily find in a hardware store. Staff are always on hand to teach tips and tricks, and to ensure everyone is safe and having a good time.

Depending on the time of the year and its growing popularity, Battle Axe can see anywhere between 40 to 300 guests in one evening.

For the more serious axe thrower, Battle Axe has recently joined the International Axe Throwing Federation, and even offers a Sunday axe throwing league which allows axe enthusiasts of all abilities the chance to compete against each other and other axe throwing leagues.

If axe throwing isn't your thing, but you still want to have some fun, Battle Axe also offers archery. Another skill to keep in mind in the event you run into a vampire while out trick-or-treating. Budding archers are provided with their own bow to use and some of Evan's handmade arrows.

Evans, a keen marksman, has been making his own arrows for his English longbow for about 10-15 years. As the only archery instructor onsite, an archery session must be booked in advance.

Whether your skills are in archery or axe-throwing, a session at Battle Axe will more than prepare you for whatever this haunted season may bring. 🍀

\*For the entire month of October, Battle Axe will sport festive decor and offer Halloween-themed events that promise to delight and fright. To learn more about Battle Axe, their schedule, upcoming events, and to book your lane, visit [www.battleaxewilm.com](http://www.battleaxewilm.com).



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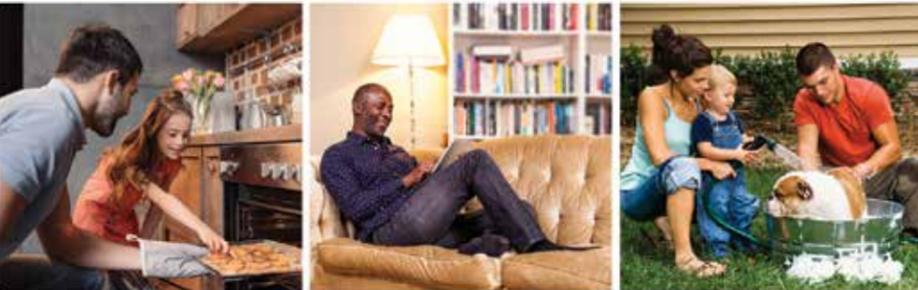
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# STALK AMONG US

By Joan Tylecki

*deadly nightshade / belladonna*  
(*Atropa belladonna*)

Legend has it that belladonna was one of the ingredients in the special ointment witches produced to grant themselves the ability to fly. Whether this actually meant physical or psychotropic flying has been a matter of historical and moral debate for centuries. What we now know is that belladonna contains numerous powerful phytochemical alkaloids which profoundly alter central nervous system function. Two of its tropane alkaloids, atropine and hyoscyne, induce hypnotic, hallucinogenic, and narcotic effects. Thus, a person consuming pharmacologically active doses of belladonna, witch or not, would exhibit uncoordinated movements, incoherent

speech, disorientation, delirium, and restlessness. The herb can even cause the user to enter a state of reduced brain function in which they dream vividly without actually entering a state of deep sleep. Imagine the tales that would arise, both from someone emerging from the grip of belladonna and as a bystander witnessing someone under its effects.

This is a powerful plant that does have numerous medicinal uses, however it ought never be used without consulting a properly experienced practitioner. It is toxic, even at very low doses, and its overuse can lead to circulatory system collapse, coma and death. And, yet, another of belladonna's

tropane alkaloids, scopolamine, was used by physicians in the 1940s to 1960s. The drug-like doses of this plant chemical were dispensed to “assist” laboring women through childbirth. In practice, this meant they were tied into bed, dosed with scopolamine, and left to labor alone. While the goal may have been a painless labor, scopolamine did nothing to dull the actual pain. In reality it merely erased the memory of the experience and produced women who wondered why their wrists and ankles were rubbed raw and families in waiting rooms who wondered what all that screaming had been about. Spooky indeed.

*ghost pipe / corpse plant  
/ ice plant / Indian pipe  
/ ghost flower*

(*Monotropa uniflora*)

Be extremely cautious if you spot this delicate ethereal beauty. While wild stands of it exist in our area, its existence is threatened and it's quite vulnerable to overharvesting. This special herb is unique in that it is almost entirely white, owing to a lack of chlorophyll. Yes, folks, it's a non-photosynthesizing plant with no green pigment. It's able to survive this way because its roots maintain a close relationship with fungi, allowing it to obtain nutrients from the roots of neighboring trees. The trees don't appear to obtain anything in return, making ghost pipe a bit of an herbal vampire, too. Each translucent stem ends in a single flower likened by some to a small deathly hand emerging from the soil. And, since they grow in clusters, the effect can unnervingly evoke a teeny tiny underground ghost army surfacing from beyond.



*wolfsbane / aconite*  
(*Aconitum napellus*)

Aconite is another plant that, while medicinal in action at miniscule or homeopathic doses, is considered a deadly serious poison. Enough early cultures coated their arrow tips with its toxic juices, that its scientific name, *Aconitum*, derives from “akontion,” the Ancient Greek word for dart or javelin. For being a powerful enough poison to take down a wolf in its prime it was given the common name “wolfsbane.” A mythological work of the Roman poet Ovid claims this herb originates from the saliva of Cerberus, the three-headed hound

guarding the gates of the underworld. Clearly, cultures throughout humanity have acknowledged it as a powerfully dangerous herb. While you might be tempted by its stunning appearance to plant it in your garden, wolfsbane isn't great for that purpose. It's actually an important one to stay away from because even topical contact can create dangerous responses within the body. Despite the fact that it might send werewolves or other full moon prowlers to their graves, it could send you there, too. Beware.

## *witch hazel*

(*Hamamelis virginiana*)

This native to our area is much loved for its strange behavior. Amidst a sea of brethren whose foliage dies back each fall to concentrate energy in their roots to overwinter, *Hamamelis* also drops its leaves. But what it does next is unusual. It sends curling, yellow witchy finger-like flowers springing to life out of season, livening up an otherwise bleak landscape. You can find them from September through December, popping out after frosts – this plant really does require death as a catalyst for life. Its powerful beauty is a standout in the autumn woods. Beyond its unique flowering pattern, witch hazel is believed to be a choice plant for divining the location of



underground water sources. It's said that following the pull of a y-shaped section of its branches will lead to where you need to dig, a process known as "witching for water."

## *marigolds & mums / las flores de los muertos*

(*Tagetes* spp. & *Chrysanthemum* spp.)

The approach to All Saints Day (November 1) and All Souls Day (November 2) is viewed by many as a time where the veil thins between the living and the dead. Mexican and Mexican-American cultures commemorate this time by honoring loved ones who have passed on with vibrant "Day of the Dead" celebrations. Central to these rituals are copious quantities of vibrant golden flowers known as *las flores de los muertos*. The exuberant color of these "flowers of the dead" is believed to entice ancestors out of the dark spirit world so their families can honor them. We know these flowers as marigolds. These hearty flowers also adorn the deceased in Hindu cultures, but their use is believed to have originated in ancient America when an Aztec sun god reunited a pair of grieving lovers by turning one into a hummingbird and the other into a marigold powerful enough to draw the lover-bird back from the dead. Similar in appearance, but belonging to a different plant family, chrysanthemums (*Asteraceae*) are considered the French "flower of the dead." A similar association with death is conferred to mums in Polish and Spanish cultures. They're traditionally given both at funerals and during All Saints Day and All Souls Day to remember those who have passed on.



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# Hebron

# Lights

Recounting the occurrences of lucid phenomena  
around the Hebron region over the years

Story by Kristina Gaddy

**O**n the horizon, a light appears, glowing and neon. Something about the quality of the light makes it seem unnatural and foreign. What appears is not a headlight, not a flashlight, not a plane, not a lighthouse. The light dances about. It races forward at an incredible speed. It flickers off and disappears. This seems like a scene from the 1977 Steven Spielberg film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, but it is also a real event that took place in the summer of 1952 in Wicomico County.

The state police outside of Salisbury had gotten the call before. Residents around Hebron off U.S. Route 50 saw, "A weird ball of light that glows like an automobile headlight but cavorts about and vanishes before anyone can approach it," according to a report by the Associated Press. Even Trooper Robert Burkhardt had seen the light for himself in the woods, on the night of Friday, July 4: Around midnight as he was driving on a sandy road towards Route 50, the bright light came toward him. He realized it was too big to be a car headlight. He turned off his headlights and slowly drove forward. Then, the light began to fade. "It faded slowly into a reddish glow which finally went out," he later told a reporter, "just like a neon tube." As he sat in his car contemplating what he'd seen, the light appeared behind his vehicle. He got out of his car and went to look for the source of the light but found nothing.

On the night of Wednesday, July 9, some of the other officers wanted to see it for themselves. They probably wanted to solve the mystery, to put residents at ease, and maybe even catch a prankster. Troopers Burkhardt and C. Edward Bracy made their way to a secluded section of West Church Street about a mile outside Hebron. Folks in the area claimed to have seen lights appearing in the woods for at least fifty years, with ghost stories to account for the lights' origin.

That Wednesday, the sun went down around 8:30 p.m., and darkness began to envelope the fields and forests around Hebron. Around 10 p.m., the troopers saw the mysterious light. Burkhardt thought it was about as high as a car headlight, and about as bright, but much larger, about as large as a wash basin. They knew it couldn't be a headlight, though. "The phantom light danced around the wooded road, bounced into the wood on one side and crossed into a nearby field," the newspaper reported Burkhardt saying. And it moved with speed, upwards of fifty miles an hour, much faster than someone with a flashlight could run.

Burkhardt and Bracy jumped into their vehicle and drove after the light for half a mile before it disappeared into a field.

that the light was marsh gas, “generated by decaying vegetable matter” that seeps up to the surface of the swamp and can spontaneously ignite. That explanation didn’t satisfy many people, since the light seemed to move at such fast speeds. No one has yet to offer a better explanation. In fact, over the past 60 years, the mystery has deepened.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Michael A. Frizzell of The Enigma Project started looking into what became known as the Hebron Light and other mysterious lights on the Eastern Shore, including Elsey’s Light in Crisfield and Cal’s Light in Andrews. To Frizzell’s disappointment, the paranormal researchers couldn’t see any of the lights; most of the sightings stopped in the 1960s. Frizzell was fascinated by how close all of the sightings had been, all within about ten miles of one another, he says. Frizzell tracked down Burkhardt for an interview in lieu of seeing the lights himself. He told Baltimore magazine that Burkhardt was reticent to share too much of those strange weeks in July but, “I was able to ... discuss the situation, and there’s no doubt in my mind that he saw something very peculiar out there.” Like Burkhardt, Frizzell thinks the light is too complicated and too long-lived to be a hoax. So if you’re on the dark roads of Dorchester, Wicomico, or Somerset counties, keep your eyes out for the unexplained lights of the Eastern Shore. 

They called Lieutenant C.C. Sherman and Trooper Robert Weir to describe what they’d seen, and the two officers soon joined them in another patrol car on the road. They sat in their cars, about 100 yards apart, watching the light appear and disappear for the next two hours, even when a rainstorm passed through. When they tried to get closer, the light disappeared. They couldn’t explain what they had just seen.

The fact that four state troopers had seen the light piqued

the curiosity of residents. Newspapers reported that nearly 300 people, “some bringing beer and sandwiches,” camped out on following nights to catch a glimpse of the light. It didn’t reappear.

After the night of July 9, Burkhardt didn’t think they were dealing with a prankster, but he also didn’t believe in ghosts. “It must be some kind of natural phenomenon I’m not acquainted with,” he said. A few days later, an unnamed Johns Hopkins University professor told a reporter



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TASTE BUDS



# BEATEN

*by biscuits*

Story by Andrew Scott Pyle | Photos by Roxanne Doster Watts

*"I recommend three Maryland beaten biscuits, with water, for your breakfast. They are hard as a haul-seiner's conscience and dry as a dredger's tongue, and they sit for hours in your morning stomach like ballast on a tender ship's keel. They cost little, are easily and crumblessly carried in your pockets, and if forgotten and gone stale, are neither harder nor less palatable than when fresh. [...] Few things are stable in this world. Your morning stomach, reader, ballasted with three Maryland beaten biscuits, will be stable."*



These lines are from page 53 of the Anchor Books edition of "The Floating Opera" by John Barth. The speaker is Todd Andrews, lawyer, addressing the reader as he takes his morning walk on a hot June day in 1937. This may be the last morning of his life. He has explosive plans for the coming evening, which I wouldn't dare spoil.

I bought my copy at the Washington College bookstore, at the end of August 1996. Reading it for the first time, I already had an idea of Maryland beaten biscuits. I grew up on Kent Island. My family's roots are in Queen Anne's, Kent, and Wicomico counties. I knew about Maryland beaten biscuits. I agreed with what Todd Andrews had to say about them. Except, maybe, for the recommendation.

Washington College in 1996 had a mandatory two-year course of study for all students, called CNW, or "Community Nation World" — the upshot of this was that every student's first semester would include a class with some aspect of Eastern Shore life and culture as its subject matter. My high school diploma from the county across the river did not exempt me from that requirement, as I half-thought it should. So, I took a class on the works of John Barth. This turned out to be a wise decision.

I met my best friend in that class. She and I traveled together through "The Floating Opera" and "The End of the Road," Barth's first two novels. "Opera" takes place in Cambridge, while "Road" plays

out in a lightly disguised Salisbury and environs (no beaten biscuits in that one, but there *is* a trip to Ocean City). That's a brisk, compact pair of novels, especially compared to what we saw each other through next — the full, considerable, mammoth-as-heck length of “The Sot-Weed Factor,” a comic monster of a book set in late-17th-century Dorchester County, written in period English. A brilliant book, but good *Lord*, there's a lot of it.

I don't recall any specific mention of beaten biscuits in “Sot-Weed,” yet any story involving Colonial-era sea travel can't help but evoke them. Beaten biscuits are descended, not so distantly, from ship's biscuit, otherwise known as hard tack. When you attempt to sink your teeth into a beaten biscuit, it's easy to imagine you're eating a thing baked circa 1691, given a tough hide by the mist and brine of an ocean crossing. Hard stuff, very hard. The sort of thing Blackbeard would dunk in his coffee, if he were a coffee drinker (this coffee would be hard, too). If Davy Jones' locker were a cookie jar, the cookies inside would be Maryland beaten biscuits. Another friend of mine, one I met long after the Barth class, calls them “beatin' biscuits.” I can't argue with that.

I was hooked on Barth that fall. I went off-syllabus to read “Giles Goat-Boy,” his other insane, complex, incredible door-stop from the 60s. I grabbed up as much of the rest of his bibliography as I could lay my hands on, short-form and long. And I enjoyed watching my new friends from the western Shore and points

beyond as they encountered my peculiar home country through the spyglass his words made for them. One cold night we took a class field trip to Cambridge, with a bus tour of “Floating Opera” locations and dinner in a restaurant very near to where Todd Andrews takes his breakfast walk on page 53, up High Street to Long Wharf. No beaten biscuits were had on the premises, though the Old Bay was plentiful.

Two decades and some change later, most of that time spent hundreds of miles from the Eastern Shore, many things have changed. I have a small human and animal family of my own in Georgia, where the biscuits are flaky, gilded, kissed by buttermilk, practically a religion unto themselves. My library has grown by an order of magnitude since I lived in a dorm. Barth still occupies a place of honor on the shelf. In a shelving system that makes sense only to me, his current neighbors are Saki, Neil Gaiman, and another literary Marylander with ties to Chestertown, James M. Cain. And when my eyes pass over the spine of “The Floating Opera,” which they do several times daily, my inevitable thought is *Maryland beaten biscuits*.

Of all the elements of the man's work to leap out at me again and again, why does it have to be the biscuits? Why do they have space in my head? Why would they have space on anyone's table, for that matter?

Is it tradition alone that drives people to eat them? Tradition does make us believe, behave, and dine in ways that defy logic and good sense. For years it



drove me to eat one beaten biscuit *per annum*, just one and no more, under the most traditional of circumstances.

In the case of twenty-some years of Thanksgiving dinners at my dad's family home, I have a distinct set of memories that will never leave me: a set of glassware painted with perching

birds, from the blue jay to the Baltimore oriole (Pop-Pop loved birds, and carved exquisite ones out of wood); paper cups of vegetable juice and cranberry juice handed around as alcohol-free *apéritifs*; the applesauce, deliciously doctored with cinnamon and vanilla, that Mom-Mom served with every dinner, holiday or not; and



those dense, pale, un-biteable dough-objects my dad and others would eat with obvious pleasure. As if they were sharing an oblique joke that I was too green to understand.

The secret to beaten biscuits is right there in the name. To make them properly in the time-honored way, you have to beat them. You prepare the dough, and then you beat it. Beat it with a rolling pin, or a hammer, or the broad side of a hatchet, or a standard kitchen brick. You could beat it with a candlestick in the conservatory like Mrs. Peacock, if you wanted to. How long do you beat the dough? Anywhere from

forty-five minutes to four months is recommended. The recipe hails from a time when bakers did not have ready access to ingredients like leavening, butter, or joy, and the stuff they baked needed to last a good while — that prolonged beating annihilates the gluten in the dough, which lets the biscuits stay nice and sturdy in the hold of your pirate ship. They won't rise as dramatically as a biscuit of the non-beaten variety. They will, however, gain character from the beating, like the face of a bare-knuckle boxer.

To release any lingering air bubbles that you may have beaten in before baking, it's

customary to prick a design in the top of each rolled and formed biscuit with a pin, or with a special biscuit pricker. The biscuits of my memory are tattooed with horseshoes. With the ends pointed down, so the good luck falls out. Or maybe they were omega symbols, not horseshoes. Omega, the end of the Greek alphabet. The end of the meal. The end of everything.

I always took a biscuit when the basket came to me, having been brought up right, and found a place for it on my crowded plate. What to do with it next was more of a puzzle. How to eat it? Butter didn't help, I'd learned that lesson. Turkey gravy didn't help, either, though it did provide a bit of warmth. I have been told that eating a beaten biscuit fresh and hot from the oven does make for a different experience. I wouldn't know. Ours at Thanksgiving were bought ready-baked by the bag from the supermarket, and good luck finding any there now. Even my nearest and dearest who loved them didn't have the time to apply extensive blunt-force trauma to a wad of dough. You can make a reasonable facsimile of beaten biscuits by accident, as my family learned much more recently — just mix up a batch of regular oughta-be-flaky biscuits using expired Bisquick, and *voilà*.

Every year I took a beaten biscuit out of a sense of ... cultural responsibility, I guess. Respect for tradition. And every year it sat on my plate through the meal to be consumed last, smooth and pale as puffball fungus on a lawn. I would

end up washing down bites of it with mouthfuls of the house wine, strong iced tea sweetened with Equal. Sometimes the foods adjacent to the biscuit on the plate would have left traces of themselves on it, like the whole block pitching in to heighten a downtrodden neighbor's curb appeal. A smudge of green bean casserole, a strand of sauerkraut, a magenta *schmear* of strawberry-pretzel salad. It must be said, none of this decoration made the biscuit taste any worse. Then dinner would be over, at least until we did it again later in the evening with my mom's family, elsewhere on the island. No beaten biscuits there. No need for them there, not on my account. I had eaten my one for the year. I had paid my dues. I had rendered homage to the Eastern Shore.

I don't want to give the impression that I'm totally negative about the foodways of the place that raised me. Because that, as they say, ain't it. I have an ideal Eastern Shore menu, in fact. I've had it ever since I moved away. Some of the courses on it are easy enough to get, while some can only be tasted in memory. All are outstanding and delicious.

Crabs, naturally. My Eastern Shore menu must include at least one form of crab. My preference would be for a fried soft crab, on a plate or on a roll, I'm fine either way. Failing that, a crab cake, as long as it's all crabmeat, with a generous proportion of backfin, and not fuffed around with breadcrumbs, minced herbs, *aioli*, or what have you.

There's oyster stew, specifically as it's brewed at Fisherman's Inn in Kent

*“I wouldn’t kick  
Island cake out  
it’s time for*

Narrows. I have the restaurant’s official cookbook, and when I get the craving (and can afford to buy that quantity of oysters in north Georgia), theirs is the recipe I make.

I’ve only eaten shad roe once in my life, ordered out of sentimental curiosity on my birthday. I’d been told it was a favorite of someone I loved very much, even though she had died before I was born. It was incredible. I have been yearning for a repeat ever since.

Though I bought a skillet when I moved away, and took notes from my mom, I still haven’t mastered what I know as the Eastern Shore fried chicken technique - seasoned and floured rather than battered, browned quickly over high heat and then covered to fry gently in its own steam until done, leading to a lighter, crispier, more delicate dish than the deep-fried Georgia variety (which is its own kind of perfect food).

There should be tomatoes from a farm stand, sliced thickly and piled redly next to that fried chicken, or maybe tucked into a sandwich (on white bread with mayonnaise, salt, black pepper, and not a thing else). Let’s throw some corn on the cob next to that chicken, too, while we’re at it.

I wouldn’t kick a piece of Smith Island cake out of bed when it’s time for dessert. A teacher at Stevensville Middle School once told our class, with great gravity, that the chocolate milkshakes at Holly’s Restaurant in Grasonville were the best in the world. She wasn’t wrong. But, since Holly’s is gone now, the cake will have to do.

These are the things I’m hungry for when I miss the Eastern Shore. Here’s the weird part, though - I’m also hungry for Maryland beaten biscuits. I want to find a place for them on the menu, bland and claylike as they are.

*a piece of Smith  
of bed when  
dessert.”*

It can’t just be that my palate has matured. There are plenty of things I enjoy eating now that I wouldn’t have messed with twenty years ago. Things like kale, Brussels sprouts, butter beans and corn, anchovies. But I’ve had opportunities in those twenty years to taste and reevaluate all of these. They have crossed my path, and my plate. Not so for beaten biscuits. They’re only a memory. A dry, thick, forbidding memory.

And yet, here we are. The biscuits have beaten me. I fought the biscuits, and the biscuits won. I miss them. Lately I’ve been craving the things. Marcel Proust would understand, I think.

Maybe you’ve read some Proust, maybe you haven’t. More people haven’t read him than have (though I’d bet John Barth has). Suffice it to say that Proust wrote a very, *very* long series of novels under the collective title “In Search of Lost Time” about, among other things,

the way that memories of the past can rise up around us, alive with scents and tastes and vivid emotions, when some trivial thing we encounter in the present evokes them. And the sensation that starts the narrator on his journey is the taste of a madeleine, taken with tea, at the end of a miserable day.

A madeleine is a whirlwind of flavor next to a beaten biscuit, but on its own merit it’s nothing to write home about, taste-wise. Its most notable quality is its seashell shape, formed in a special fluted mold. Beyond that, it’s a sponge cake. Simple, inoffensive, sometimes given an extra *quelque chose* with lemon or lavender, its dimensions perfect for dunking into a teacup. Yet the taste of one is enough to project the narrator back into his childhood, if only for a moment. In *Search of Lost Time*, all 750,000 nautical miles of it, is about those moments when the past

reaches out to us in the present, through a cookie, or a spray of flowers, or a flight of birds, and gives us something we need. A foodstuff that doesn't satisfy your taste buds might touch a deeper part of your brain and satisfy a different hunger.

I would not want to live in the past. I don't believe that's a healthy thing to want. If you should find a door to the past, don't go through. If you're ever offered a trip to the past, in a flying blue telephone box or a discontinued sports car with funny doors, just say *NO*, that's my policy. Yet sometimes, it's handy to brush up against the past, make sure it's still there, just as a reminder that you're not flailing around untethered in the world, you came from *somewhere*. Less a door into the past than a window on the past. It may be the kind of window you can peek through to observe how things used to be. Or perhaps it's the kind you can open up and stick your head through for a draft of cool air when things are stifling. Or why not both?

I have a suspicion that a beaten biscuit could do that for me. I know the mere thought of one can get me part of the way there — what might the actual *taste* of one do?

It might project me backwards into a period of time when everything was not necessarily happier, not always, but surely simpler. A time when I was unaware of many things, unconcerned about many others, interested mainly in inventing stories, making friends,

avoiding math, and conquering video games. This stretch of years would culminate in my freshman year in Chestertown, when I had nothing to do but build friendships, go to classes I had chosen for myself, and learn to be an individual under the invisible protective dome of a college campus.

Shortly thereafter, several circumstances would collide to complicate my life enormously, as so often happens at college. Many things became clouded, and the road ahead had a few sharp turns that were hard to see in the fog. We would call that *becoming an adult* nowadays. Tasting a beaten biscuit, one "easily and crumblessly carried" in my pocket, might remind me of where I was, of who I was, when I read about them in "The Floating Opera," before all of that. That book compared them to ballast, and what happens to a ship with no ballast?

That's the oblique joke I could never get. That's what my older relatives around the Thanksgiving table knew as they ate biscuit after biscuit. Traditional foods are ballast. Ballast keeps the mast pointing at the sky and helps Captain Nemo cruise the *Nautilus* through squid-infested seas. Life is rife with opportunities to capsize. We all need as much ballast as we can get.

It's tough for children or young adults to get their heads around the restorative power tradition can have, at the table and away from it. You need some years in the rear-view mirror, and some miles on your soul, for that to make sense.



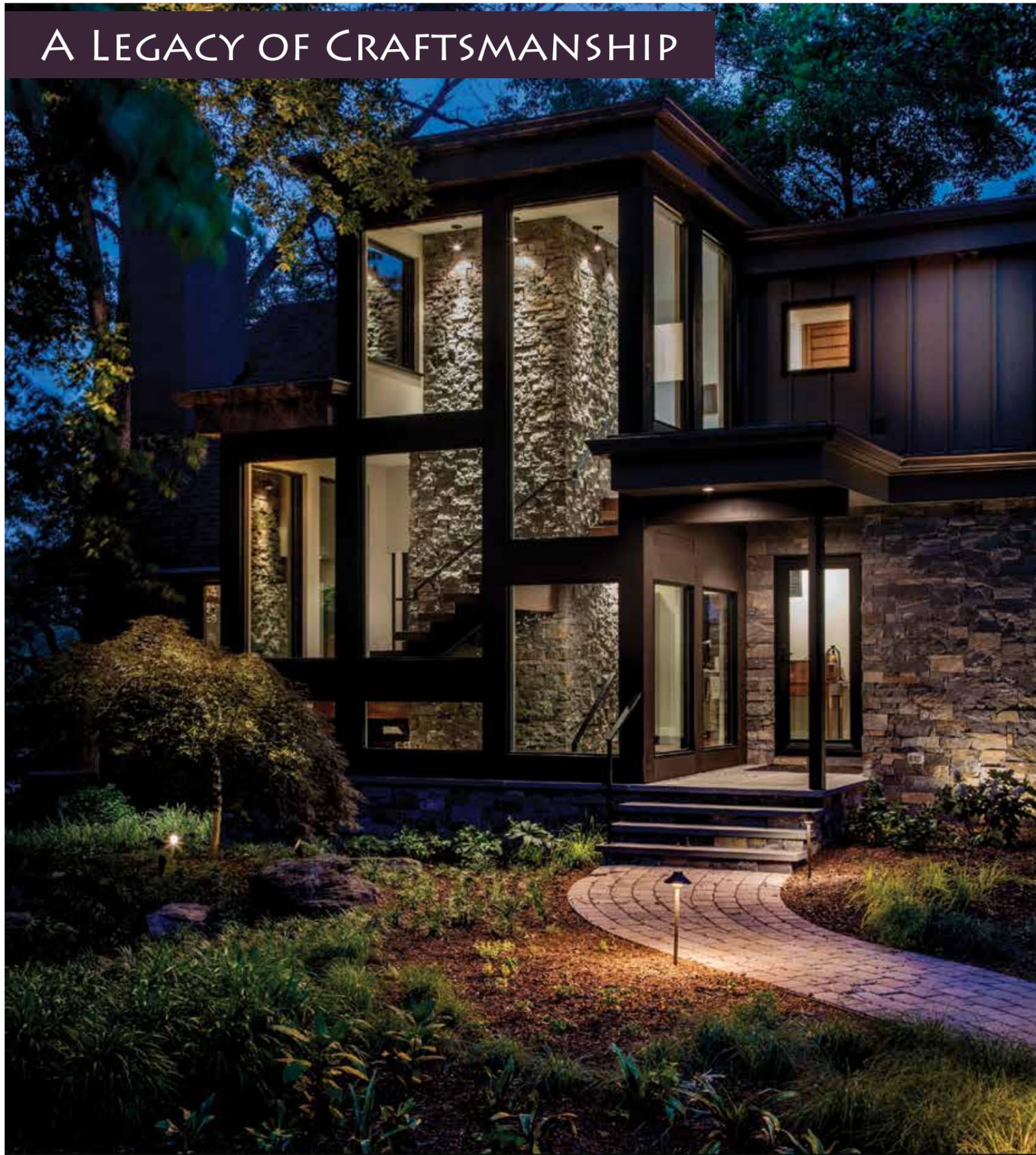
I needed some personal experience of the world as a place where few things are stable, in order to appreciate the stabilizing influence of what used to be, to my eyes, off-white racquetballs daubed with margarine.

During the writing of this piece, something amazing happened: down in Florida, after years of no beaten biscuits, my dad found the right recipe and cracked the code. Previous recipes hadn't done the job. This one? *Nailed it*, he said. So far, I've only seen a picture, but I have to agree. And it turns out that you don't even need to get after the dough with a polo mallet anymore.

For excellent results, use a food processor to handle the beating. That's what I'd call that better living through technology. Also, use lard. Shortening might be better for you, but it just won't get the job done right. Lard's not as easy to find as it used to be, which is better for everyone's aorta. But for some things, there is no substitute. And if you look for *manteca* in your grocery store's Latin American section, you'll find what you need.

I should be getting down to Florida for a visit soon. Might do some baking. Might make life more stable for an evening. You never know. 

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# 5 TIPS

TO LIVE IT UP LIKE A LOCAL AT  
DOWNRIGGING WEEKEND

Story and photos by Kate Livie

There are signs of autumn on the Eastern Shore that tell us the seasons are unmistakably changing — the widening vees of south-bound geese, the ghostly mists that form over cool morning coves, the scores of woolly bears hustling plushly across the road. On the Chester River, fall is heralded by the arrival of tall ships, sails bellied full as they head to Sultana's annual Downrigging Weekend Tall Ship and Wooden Boat Festival.

Now in its 18th year, Downrigging is a celebration of the majestic, timeless beauty of tall ships, but it has grown to encompass much more. Today, this three-day weekend event incorporates live music alongside the river cruises, and visitors are encouraged to wander away from the waterfront to explore a packed schedule of maritime-inspired events, activities, lectures and exhibits in Chestertown's walkable historic district. So this November 1-3, set sail for the docks and brick sidewalks of Chestertown, where everyone from salty sailors to stalwart landlubbers will be living it up at Downrigging.

EVENTS



## To the River!

Whether you know your mizzenmast from your mainmast, there's plenty of waterfront action at Downrigging for everyone. Throughout the weekend, there are multiple opportunities to enjoy the crisp breezes and fall colors of the river onboard ships of all sorts. Whether you score a sail on the more spectacular ships (we're looking at you, Kalmar Nyckel), or go for a more intimate experience onboard Lady Maryland or Sigsbee, the four cruises throughout the weekend provide a time-travel experience to the Chesapeake's golden age of sail. Looky-loos can get in on the action, too, during the morning open houses, when the tall ships and visiting wooden boats are open to the public. Stroll along the docks for a close-up look at carved figureheads and gilded trailboards, and cross catwalks for a quick tour of wooden boats both big and small. And classic boat enthusiasts will geek out on Saturday and Sunday over

the gorgeous Chris Craft eye candy at the Antique and Classic Boat Society exhibit at the foot of High Street.

## Trip the Light Fantastic

Downrigging doesn't stint on spectacles, and whether you're an ardent shutterbug or a photog just doing it for the 'Gram, you'll find plenty of fantastic material in the weekend's festivities. The best shots come courtesy of the Chester River Bridge, which affords a birdseye view of the waterfront packed cheek-to-jowl with dozens of schooners, skipjacks, and other iconic watercraft. The ships are illuminated during the festival each evening at 6 p.m, so prepare to post up for a prime spot on the bridge's south-facing sidewalk — especially for the fireworks on Saturday evening that, combined with the river's reflection and the glowing forest of rigging, are truly an unforgettable sight.



## Blue Grass + Wooden Boats = <3

If tall ships don't float your boat, there's plenty of other Downrigging entertainment to enjoy. Local secret — Downrigging is the best lowkey bluegrass festival on the Eastern Shore. The festival's organizers have been steadily adding to the list of performances over the years, and 2019's event boasts a full music village with 12 different bluegrass acts from the local favorites the High and Wides to regional acts like Caleb Stine, Betty and the Bullet, and the Dirty Grass Players. Music can be enjoyed all weekend long, with an all-access weekend pass setting you back only \$20 for the early bird rate. True diehards can also stick around for a Saturday late-night bluegrass show at the historic Garfield Theater, where the Dirty Grass Players and the High and Wides will team up for an epic evening of finger pickin' and foot stompin.' Be sure to reserve your tickets in advance — seats to this will go fast.

## The Bay's boats, by book and by brush

Downrigging is all about boats — and that extends to events and exhibits in Chestertown proper, too. Fans of regional artist Marc Castelli should stop by Massoni Gallery on High Street to see this year's annual exhibit, "Kings Tide," and to rub elbows with the artist, known for his sensitive documentary watercolors exploring watermen's work and the Chesapeake environment. On Saturday afternoon, maritime history fans have plenty of fodder. Check out a talk by author Brian Hope on his new book, "Bay Pilots — A History of Maryland Pilots Association," hosted by cult classic bookshop, The Bookplate, at 1 p.m. Afterward, head down to Sultana Education Foundation's Holt Center for two maritime-inspired back-to-back talks at 3 and 5 p.m. Jim Tildesley, former director of the Scottish Maritime Museum, is on first discussing his new book about the life of Admiral John Inglis (who, spoiler alert,

also happened to be captain of the original Royal Navy schooner Sultana). Stick around for a talk by Chesapeake writer Tom Pelton, discussing stories from his new book, *The Chesapeake in Focus*.

## Go With the Flow

When attending Downrigging, keep an open mind about how 'maritime' can be interpreted. Chestertown enthusiastically embraces Downrigging by weaving in all sorts of spirited events that vary in their relationship to the water, creating a festive and motley atmosphere in keeping with the town's eclectic vibe. On Friday night, check out the free student art exhibit at the Chestertown Marina Office. Hosted by the Kent County Arts Council and Arts-in-Motion, the mixed-media works exhibited were created by 8th grade public and private Kent County students, inspired by African-American maritime history during the Revolutionary War. The next day, runners can join a 5k or 10-mile Run for Clean Rivers to benefit ShoreRivers at 9 a.m., but make sure to keep up your pace so you don't miss the 10 a.m. Chestertown Halloween Parade. Grab a coffee and stake out a spot on the sidewalk for a slice of Americana as nostalgic as pumpkin pie. The event runs for several blocks down the middle of High Street and concludes at the waterfront. 📍

## If You Go:

Tickets to sail on the ships and attend the bluegrass village need to be booked in advance at: <http://downrigging.org>. The event will continue rain or shine, but sails may be affected by strong storms or dangerous inclement weather, so follow Sultana Education Foundation on Facebook for updates, or sign up for their e-news.

The full event schedule is also online at: <http://downrigging.org>. Attendees should be prepared for some walking, as Chestertown's downtown area encompasses the waterfront and several blocks of storefronts, parks and homes.





Photo by Mary Claire Carter



Photo by Wendy Garner



Photo by Judith Lappen

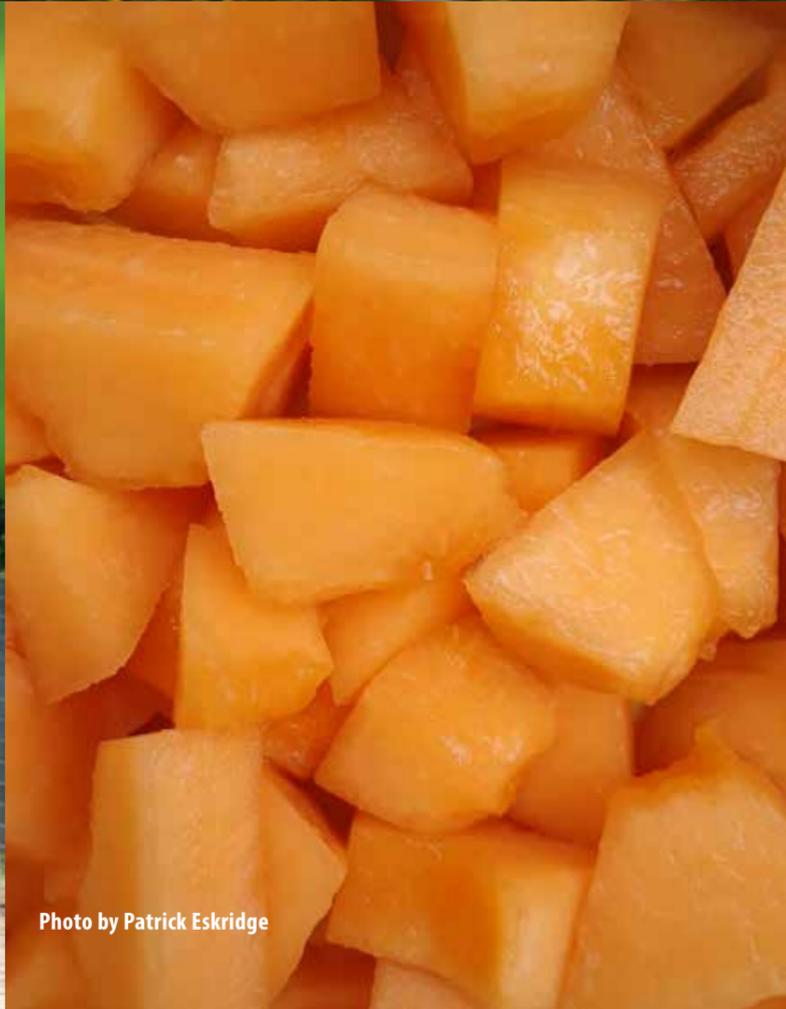


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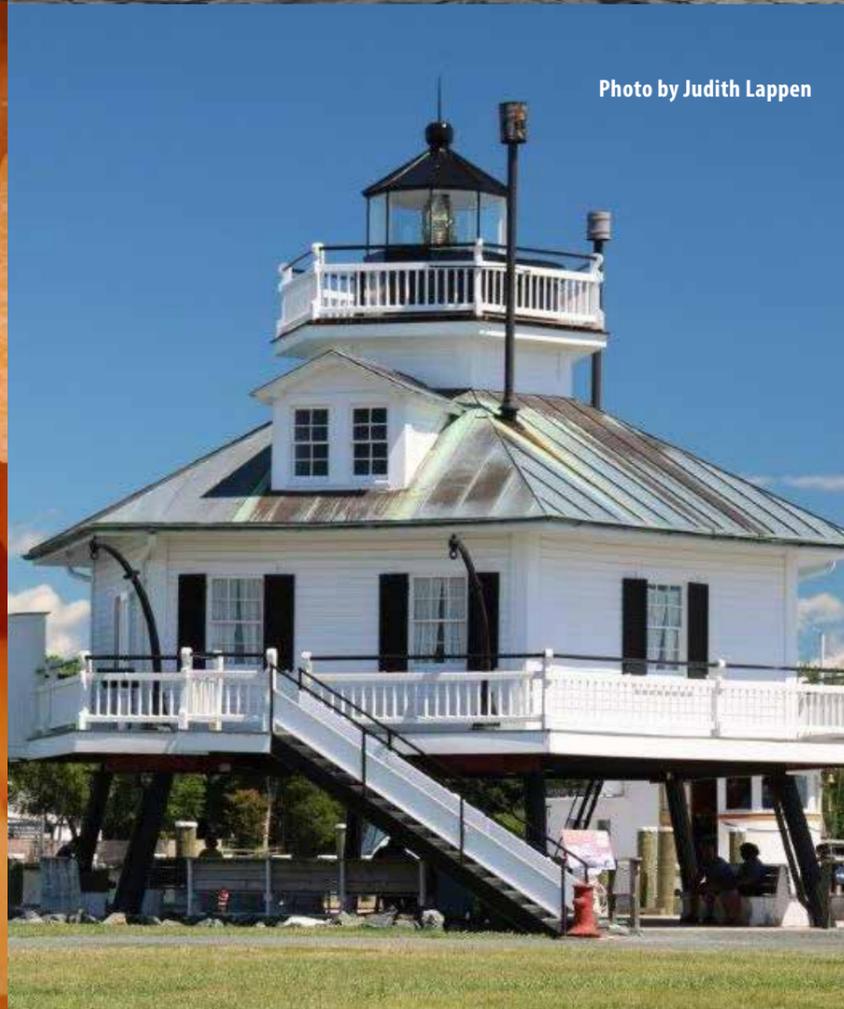


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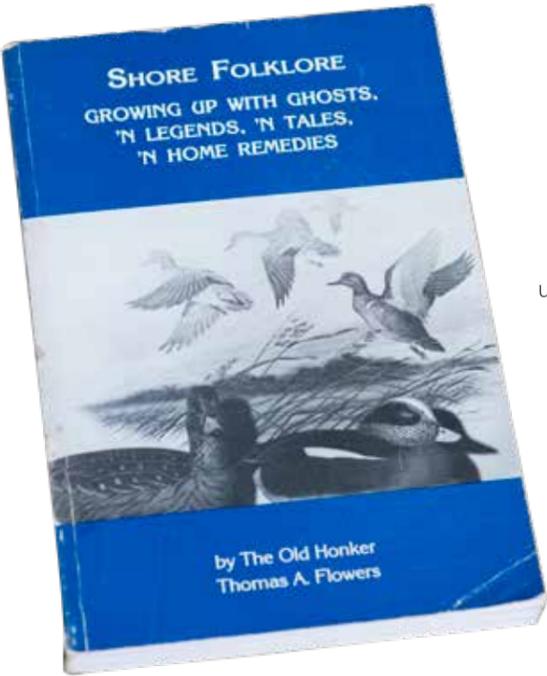
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*Shore Monthly* celebrates its second anniversary with the publication of its October 2019 edition. We want to know what you like. What moves you? What have been your favorite stories, covers, photographs? What would you like to see more of in *Shore Monthly*? Do you have a great story? Have you always been curious about something on the Shore you'd like to see explored in these pages? Drop us a line at [submissions@shoremontly.com](mailto:submissions@shoremontly.com)

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St. Michaels**  
October 4, 5

**Apple Festival, St. Luke's United  
Methodist Church, St. Michaels**  
October 5

**Casino Royale, Oxford Community Center**  
October 5

**Easton Beer Fest**  
October 5

**Jayne Dingler Concert, Oxford  
Community Center**  
October 11

**Academy Art Museum Craft Show,  
Easton**  
October 11-13

**Second Saturday Art Night Out,  
St. Michaels**  
October 12

**10th Annual Fall Italian Wine & Food  
Celebration, St. Michaels**  
October 12

**Harvest Hoedown, Pickering Creek,  
Easton**  
October 13

**Tilghman Island Day**  
October 19

**Fall Into St. Michaels**  
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