

Mathews County Historical Society, Inc.

Summer 2023 Newsletter

P.O. Box 855 | Mathews, VA 23109-0855

mathewscountyhistoricalsociety.org | info@mathewscountyhistoricalsociety.org



CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE PAST

Out of the Mathews Archives - Milton Murray II Collection

The Mathews County Historical Society Archives has recently cataloged a slide collection of Mathews County landmarks that were photographed by Milton Murray II between 1967 and 1970. The collection of 237 color slides includes structures that are identified and unidentified. Becky Barnhardt, Mathews Memorial Library's Head of History & Genealogy, compiled an index to the slide collection, which is organized by number, the structure's name (if known), and date (if the image was dated).

Mr. Murray, a founding member of the Mathews County Historical Society, was an avid collector of Mathews County memorabilia and an avocational genealogist. His extensive collections include store accounts and promotions, deed and land tax records for the Tompkins Cottage and the Glebe land, genealogy charts for assorted Mathews County families, and newspaper clippings of historical interest.

The Mathews Archives collections, located at the Mathews Memorial Library, are available to the public during regular library hours. The collections are searchable at www.mathewslibrary.org.



Old Brooks Homestead, near Bethel Beach, Onemo. At the time this photograph was taken the quaint old cottage was owned by James Grayson Brooks and George Enos Brooks. The former lived at his ancestral home, which was presumed to have been built by the Brooks' great-grandfather.

The main house consisted of four rooms, two downstairs and two upstairs. A separate kitchen was located 100 feet southeast of the main house. Numerous outbuildings were once close by, but at the time of the photograph, only the barn, cider house and tumble house remained. *Color slide; dated September 1967.*

President's Message

Reed Lawson

Summer is here – we've hit the ground running!

The Board of Directors is in the process of creating a Strategic Plan that will enable us to improve how we fulfill our mission and increase our membership. We hope to be finished by the end of the summer.

MCHS has been funded by the Mathews Community Foundation for updated interpretive signage for the James Store. The enhanced signage will enable us to tell a more complete story of Mathews County's history and its people.

The society and the Mathews County administration are working together to secure grant funding that will elevate the Tompkins Cottage above the flood zone. A grant will also be sought to make necessary repairs to the chimneys and to address interior damage. Martha McCartney and Tim Morgan are spearheading this project.

The MCHS hosted Mathews Elementary School second-graders for a morning of age-appropriate history and fun at the Tompkins Cottage and Put-in Creek Pavilion. After the children toured the cottage and learned about its history, the Fairfield Foundation worked with them on pottery-mending and artifact washing. Our thanks to Terri Hyman and Mike Miskovsky from the society, Jerry L'Happy who just happened to be close-by, and Fairfield Education Coordinator Rachel Boyd and her volunteers Lori Black and Tom Karow.

Many thanks to Summer Solstice party hosts Keith Lowe and Dee Bane for welcoming us on June 17th. And to Trish and Tom Reed for making it all happen. A large, lively crowd enjoyed a perfect afternoon on Stutts Creek.

The Gwynn's Island Festival is just around the corner, as of press time. MCHS will be on hand to promote its mission and to sell its publications and ornaments. Amy Baker, Ray Stubblebine, Janice Phillips, Martha McCartney and Lynn and Fred Lyon will be manning our booth.

Tompkins Cottage Curator Becky Barnhardt is inviting area historical interest groups to join us on Market Days. Please consider volunteering those two days – September 8 and 9. We need you!

Save the date! MCHS is planning to sponsor a bus trip to Stratford Hall Wine and Oyster Festival on September 16th. What a stress free way to tour an historic site and have fun! Stay tuned for details!

The VA250 Committee is gearing up for the 2026 celebration. To date, society members Fred Lyon, Martha McCartney, Sandy Warhol and I have joined the group. Becky Barnhardt has submitted her paperwork to the county for confirmation. More help is needed!

As always, my thanks to the membership for your continued validation of society efforts to tell Mathews County's unique story!

MCHS BOARD

President: Reed Lawson

Vice President: Martha McCartney

Secretary: Trish Reed

Treasurer: Hunt Thompson

Class of 2023

Amy Baker

Marsha Carlton

Reed Lawson

Trish Reed

Class of 2024

Mike Miskovsky

Ray Stubblebine

Hunt Thompson

Class of 2025

Liz Bateman

Terri Hyman

Martha McCartney

Tim Morgan

Standing Committees

Building & Grounds: Marsha Carlton

Education: Terri Hyman, Martha McCartney
& Mike Miskovsky

Governance: Tim Morgan

Market Days: Becky Barnhardt

Membership: Hunt Thompson

Programs: Becky Barnhardt, Terri Hyman
& Trish Reed

Publications: Liz Bateman, Trish Reed

Publicity: Becky Barnhardt, Martha
McCartney

Ad Hoc Committees

Editorial Board: Martha McCartney

Finance: Hunt Thompson, Marsha Carlton,
Tim Morgan

Highway Cleanup: Bobbi Hatton

Nominating: Trish Reed, Hunt Thompson

Special Events: Ray Stubblebine

Social: Trish Reed

Positions

Archivist: Reed Lawson

Curator, Tompkins Cottage: Becky Barnhardt

Curator, James Store: TBD

Docent Coordinator: Terri Hyman

Newsletter: Becky Barnhardt

Newsletter Distribution: Terri Hyman

Registered Agent: Hunt Thompson

Webmaster, FaceBook Admin: Becky Barnhardt

The Haunting of the Hudgins House - An Ever Evolving Tale

Benn Trask

October 19th @ 7 pm

Mathews Memorial Library @ 251 Main St. Mathews, VA

Sponsored by Mathews County Historical Society and the Mathews Memorial Library

In the fall of 1882, lighthouse officials in Baltimore granted Assistant Keeper Augustine F. Hudgins of the Wolf Trap station a leave of absence to tend to an unusual family matter. The issue reportedly involved a malicious spirit that was tormenting the lighthouse keeper's wife and children, who were living in the family home near Diggs. Despite the keeper's best efforts, the family's ordeal continued. On December 9, 1882, The *Baltimore Sun* reported that the ghost "was so unruly that the keeper had to resign." The newspaper stated that, "Mr. Hudgins declared that knocks and other noises were heard all over the house." The Hudgins family's story received national attention and changed with each reprinting. By the early twentieth-century, newer versions of the tale involved witches, vultures, pastors, spells and counter spells. The Hudgins House remained in the hands of the family for more than a century and so did this "ghost story" which passed to each generation. Come learn about the ever-evolving saga that is still remembered by county residents.



In Memoriam

The society was saddened to learn of the passing of several longtime and esteemed members.

John I. 'Jack' Caldwell III passed away Tuesday, April 18th in his home in Bavon. Jack, with his background in architecture, was intensely involved with the Building and Grounds Committee overseeing the Tompkins Cottage from the early 2000s until 2015 and the Thomas James Store during the early years of its ownership by the society. Besides these two historic buildings, Jack was passionate about sailing and all things Chesapeake.

Capt. William F. 'Will' Story, USN (Retired) died Monday, May 8th, a day before his 83rd birthday. Will had a distinguished Naval career and upon his retirement to Mathews, continued his interests and love of learning and meeting and cultivating thoughtful, fascinating people.

William A. 'Roney' Leitner passed away Monday, May 15th at the age of 97! He and his late wife Doris were instrumental in restoring historic homes in Portsmouth, Va. as well as in Mathews. Their home in Hallieford, King's Gift, was featured in the 2009 MCHS Mathews Historic Homes Tour. Locally, Roney was a driver for Meals on Wheels and served as the official egg cracker for the American Legion Mathews Post 83 World Famous Breakfasts.

Our heartfelt condolences to all the families – Louise Caldwell and her daughters and families, Martha Story and her daughters and families and Roney's nieces and nephews. *Pax vobiscum.*



Jack Caldwell



Will Story



Roney Leitner

The Battle of Gwynn's Island

A Singular Moment in Mathews County's History

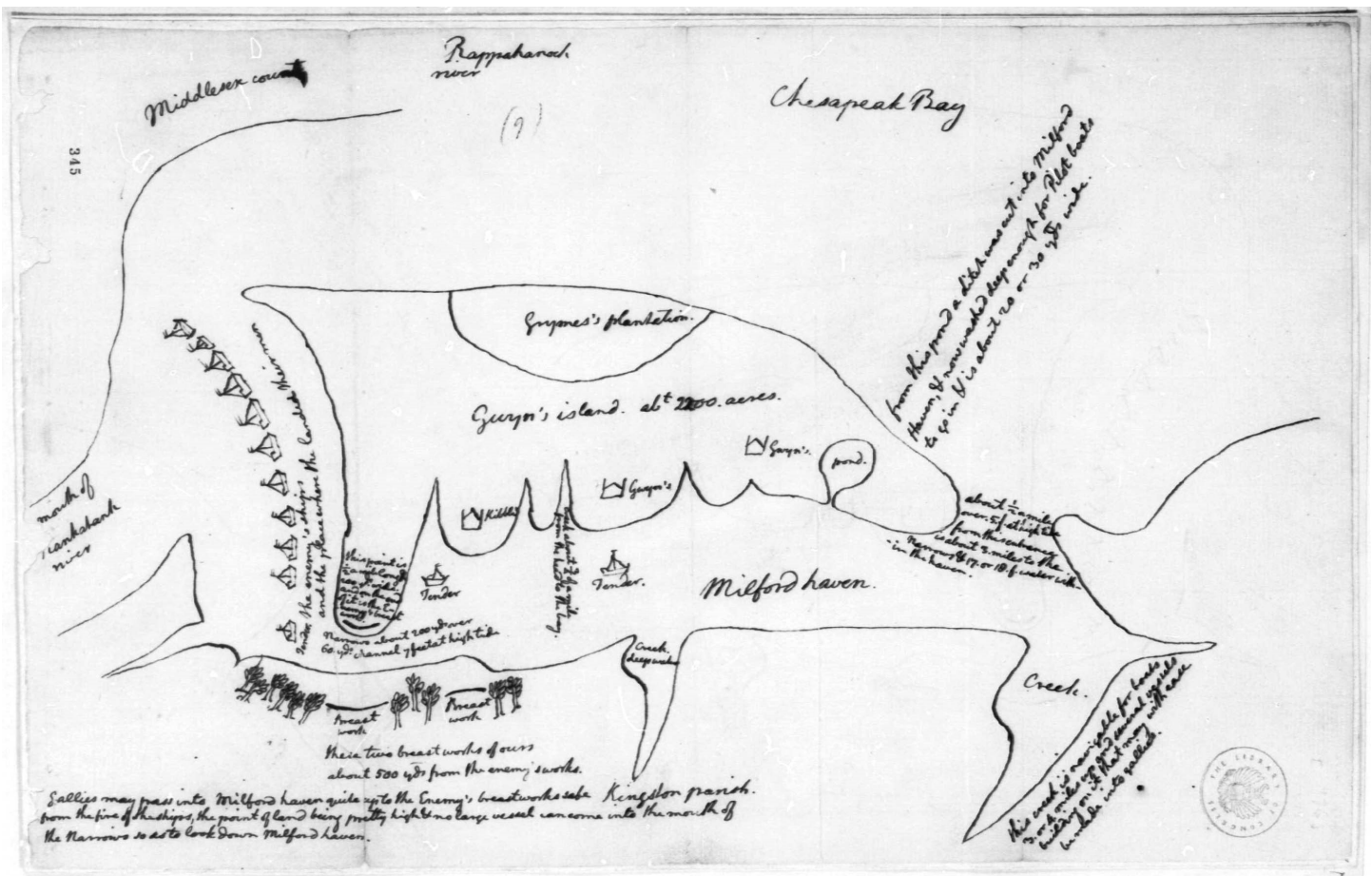
The British Move to Gwynn's Island and Fortify

In January 1776 when smallpox appeared in Lord Dunmore's army, it was very virulent and spread quickly. Most of the British troops had been vaccinated but the black men in Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment and those he had recruited in Virginia, and the family members that accompanied them, had not. Dunmore thought that if he moved his base to Gwynn's Island, his surgeons could inoculate his recruits *en masse* and the sick could be isolated. The situation was dire and most of the ships in Dunmore's fleet threw dead bodies overboard every night.

Dunmore had heard that Gwynn's Island had plenty of fresh water and a good harbor and knew that John Randolph Grymes, a British loyalist, had a plantation there. With these prospects in mind, Dunmore and his fleet of 60 to 80 vessels set sail from Norfolk. When they arrived at Gwynn's Island on May 26, 1776, approximately 800

people came ashore. They included men from Lord Dunmore's 14th Regiment, royal marines, seamen, loyalists from Norfolk, seamen, and approximately 300 formerly enslaved African American men, women, and children.

Lord Dunmore had his men erect a breastwork and four embrasures on a small point in the western end of the island, overlooking Milford Haven and Hills Bay. He also had them build two batteries and a stockade fort in the southeastern tip of the island, where they could keep the Americans from slipping ashore. He stationed British ships where they could secure the approach to the island and had some of his men construct flimsy huts that could shelter the sick. It appears that Dunmore was planning to have his people spend the summer at Gwynn's Island, where they could recover their health.



Virginia governor Thomas Jefferson made a crude sketch map of Gwynn's Island, probably based on the intelligence data he had received, perhaps from General Lewis. *Library of Congress.*

The American Response

Lord Dunmore's decision to land so many people on Gwynn's Island caught the Americans by surprise. General Andrew Lewis, who frankly admitted that he had never heard of the island before, deployed four companies of men from his Gloucester County battalion to throw up some earthworks on the mainland, across from the British position. Lord Dunmore dismissively called the Americans mere "crickets" and it is on account of that soubriquet that the Americans' fortifications became known as Fort Cricket Hill. Carpenters from one British ship found a flat, outfitted it with a cannon and oars, and used it to harass the Americans.

On July 8, General Lewis sent men from Gloucester County's 1st and 2nd Regiments to procure cannon for the American earthworks and he summoned reinforcements, experienced troops capable of confronting Dunmore and his men. The next day, when Lewis arrived on the mainland across from Gwynn's Island, he saw that the British had several hundred men bivouacked in tents at the western end of the island. He also learned that they had erected an artillery battery at The Narrows and that a ship and several tenders were stationed in the channel near Narrows Point.

The next day, Lewis observed that the ship *Dunmore*, which had changed positions, was exposed to two of the 18-pound cannon that the Virginians had been able to move into place. He seized the opportunity to attack and at ebb time, ordered his gunners to open fire. The *Dunmore* was hit a dozen times and Lord Dunmore was wounded. Although the *Otter* came to *Dunmore's* defense,

it too was struck by cannon fire and sustained serious damage. During the melee, three of the four British tenders that were in the channel ran aground and were burned and a fourth was captured. The next day, the HMS *Logan* and two more tenders were burned and the British battery's 6-pound cannon was silenced permanently.

Lord Dunmore, who realized that the Americans lacked boats, knew that he had about 48 hours to leave Gwynn's Island. However, a storm unexpectedly swept in while the British fleet was preparing for departure and some of Dunmore's vessels were lost or driven ashore. Nonetheless, by July 13th, the British withdrawal from Gwynn's Island was complete. Aboard the departing ships were an unknown number of local men, women, and children, who had thrown off the yoke of slavery. At least two former slaves joined the Royal Artillery Department and three others settled in Nova Scotia.

Aftermath

When the Americans went ashore on Gwynn's Island, they encountered a gruesome sight, for the ground from the British battery to Cherry Point was strewn with the bodies of the dead and the dying. According to an eyewitness, there were at least 130 graves, many of which were large enough for mass burials. The Americans, fearful of contamination, burned the flimsy brush huts that were sheltering the dead and dying and then left. Thus ended Mathews County's best-known moment in the American Revolution.



John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore.



Flight of Lord Dunmore.

SNAPSHOTS

We've been busy over the last few weeks! Our volunteers have picked up trash along Tabernacle Road, provided an educational experience for Mathews Elementary School second graders, and during May Faire, we invited Fairfield Foundation archaeologists to hold a public archaeology dig at the Tompkins Cottage. Recently we held a Summer Solstice picnic for our members and their guests.



Mathews County Historical Society Membership Application
A friendly reminder - Our membership dues are renewable January 1st of each year!

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email _____ Date _____

Annual Membership:

- _____ Individual, \$35
- _____ Couple/Family, \$50
- _____ Active Duty Military, \$15
- _____ Student (under 18), FREE
- _____ Lifetime Membership, \$500

Preserve the county's past:

- _____ Researcher, under \$100
- _____ Friend, \$100
- _____ Benefactor, \$250
- _____ Patron, \$500
- _____ Historian, \$1000

Support MCHS projects:

- _____ Mathews Archives Fund
- _____ New Point Comfort Lighthouse Fund
- _____ Thomas James Store Fund
- _____ Publications Fund
- _____ General Fund
- _____ Tompkins Cottage Fund

\$ _____ TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED

Thank you for your interest and support of the Mathews County Historical Society. Please make your check payable to MCHS and submit along with this application to:

Membership Chair | Mathews County Historical Society, Inc. | P. O. Box 855 | Mathews, VA 23109

INVITE YOUR FRIENDS TO JOIN MCHS OR GIVE THE GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

MCHS is looking for dedicated individuals to join us in our mission.

Board Members • Membership & Program Chairs
Tompkins Cottage Museum Docents
Special Events • Community Outreach


JOIN NOW

info@mathewscountyhistoricalsociety.org



VIRGINIA
ASSOCIATION
of MUSEUMS

Mathews County Historical Society, Inc.
P. O. Box 855
Mathews, VA 23109-0855



Have you paid your
Yearly **Dues** yet?
Not sure? Call Hunt
@ 804-384-6430.

2023 Mathews County Museum Calendar

Gwynn's Island Museum

Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays, April – October
1 p.m. – 5 p.m.

Mathews Historical Museum

Saturdays, Markets on Main and for Special Events

Mathews Maritime Museum

Fridays & Saturdays, May – November
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Thomas James Store

Saturdays, April – October
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Tompkins Cottage Museum

Saturdays, April – October
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Holiday Open House

Saturday, November 18th &
Saturday, December 9th
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

2023 Mathews County Events Calendar

Mathews Market Days

Friday & Saturday, September 8th & 9th
9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Thanksgiving Market

Saturday, November 18th
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Christmas Farmers Market

Saturday, December 9th
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Mathews Christmas Parade

Saturday, December 9th
1 p.m.