

# Mathews Historical Museum Newsletter

## Travel Through Time in Mathews

Volume 3, Number 1 • Spring 2021

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Perspective view of the front of the planned Mathews Historical Museum.

## From our chairman, John A. Caramia Jr.

It has been over a year since our last newsletter. The Covid -19 Pandemic has brought a number of changes in each of our lives and to our plans for the Mathews Historical Museum (MHM). We had to cancel a number of our programs and events beginning with our St. Patrick's Dinner planned for March 16, 2020 and May Faire 2020 which was to be held the first Saturday in May. Over the past several years, May Faire has been our major fundraising activity for the museum. In fact, we have had to cancel May Faire again this year. We hope in 2022, we can once again have May Faire which will "Celebrate Our Mathews Water Heritage." The last major event we had to cancel in 2020 was our Christmas Bazaar which had been so successful in 2019. If all goes well, we would like to have the Christmas Bazaar this year. During 2020 we were able to have a

number of small events, food sales and a raffle. We also have a museum shop full of donations from the Mathews community. All of these provided some funding for keeping the building open and helping us to continue to move forward with our plans to renovate and restore 200 Main Street.

Our building is a contributing structure to the recently created Mathews Downtown Historic District. As such it is now on the National Register of Historic Buildings. In planning for the restoration of the building, it is important to understand the history of the building. It was built in 1936 by Paul Hobday for George Philpotts, a Texaco distributor from Mobjack. The first business in the building was the Fox Motor Company, a Dodge and Plymouth dealership operated by E.C. Fox, who also sold Texaco gasoline  
**(Continued on the next page)**



## OFFICERS & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair: John A. Caramia, Jr.  
Vice President: Edith Turner  
Treasurer: Hugh Turner  
Secretary: Elsa Verbyla

### CLASS OF 2021:

Gaylen Davis  
Katherine Davis Small  
Jim Pavik  
Edith Turner  
Sandy Warhol

### CLASS OF 2022:

Barbara Bass  
John A. Caramia, Jr.  
Gregg C. Faulkner, Sr.  
Josie Thorpe  
Elsa Verbyla

### CLASS OF 2023:

Alexis Foster  
Tom Karow  
Dr. Steven A. Forrest, Sr.  
Cindy Roman  
Doug Wilton

## Happy Birthday!

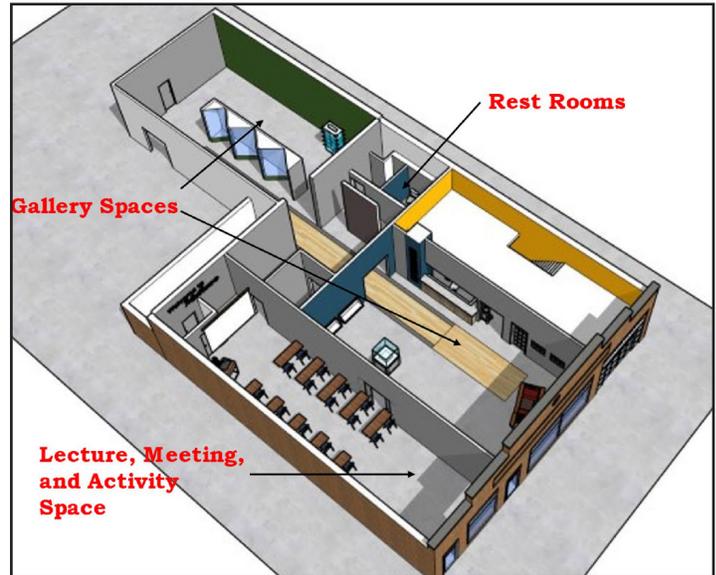
The museum will host a major 6th birthday event, date TBD, to celebrate the progress and successes that we have experienced since our founding. The event, a wine tasting, will be held at the Museum and will feature community business involvement and a superb offering of Silent Auction items. Further details to come.

**FROM THE CHAIRMAN**  
**(Continued from the prior page)**

and Havoline Motor Oil. In May 1939 R.A. Bertschy, proprietor of the Be-Jo Theatre, announced that he had leased the building with plans to remodel and enlarge it for a bowling alley. Four alleys were installed and Be-Jo Bowling opened July 4, 1939. In January 1942 Bertschy added a pool room. East Coast Utilities announced the opening of their Mathews office in September 1945, located in the building occupied by R.A. Bertschy's bowling alleys. By September 1949 Bertschy had closed his bowling alley and pool room. In January 1950 VEPCO took over East Coast Utilities and continued having an office in the building to serve its Mathews customers. VEPCO closed its Mathews office in June 1955 when they moved to their new building in Gloucester. E.R. Bassett, of Bassett Music and Gas Company, announced in September 1955, the opening of his new furniture store in the building previously occupied by VEPCO. Bassett continued operating the store until October 1961 when he moved to his new store next to the Mathews Esso Station and across from the Mathews Ice Company. The building stood vacant for a few years until Catherine and Elwood Brooks Jr. moved their Craftsman Shop into the building. The Brooks began their business in a shop at their Onemo home in 1951. They did upholstery, made custom slipcovers and draperies and sold fabrics and sewing materials. They bought the building in May 1966 from George Philpotts and operated the Craftsman Shop for the next 34 years. Catherine Brooks closed the shop at the end of October 1998 and sold the building to Victoriana Company. Several years later Karyn Austin, owner of the Dilly Dally Emporium, located behind Linda's Diner on Rt. 14, purchased 200 Main Street from the Victoriana Company and moved her business to Main Street Mathews. She continued in business until 2018 when it became the home of the Mathews Historical Museum.

The Museum Operations Committee, one of the standing Board Committees, has been overseeing the work necessary for the restoration and renovation of the building. We have had a structural analysis done which pinpointed several items that need to be repaired in order to maintain the historical integrity of the structure. We have also worked with the Commonwealth Preservation Group (CPG) to develop a vision for the museum that encompasses the historical integrity of the building and creates a space that

meets modern museum standards. CPG also provided several perspective views of the new museum so that we can better visualize the new museum. The view below shows what the interior will look like. It includes the removal of several walls to create a large lecture, meeting and activity room and the moving of the restrooms to create a large gallery space in the rear of the building.



The next two perspectives show the gallery spaces. The first view is as one enters the building from Main Street and the other is of the gallery in the back of the building.



Views of front gallery, above, and back gallery, below.



**(Continued on the next page)**



## USS Mathews Mug A Hit

Gloucester resident, Buck Smith visited the Museum earlier this year and was pleasantly surprised to find a supply of USS Mathews mugs on sale for \$6 at the Museum's Retail Shop. Smith, a Viet Nam veteran, served on the Mathews in the 1960s. The ship was launched in 1944 and named for Mathews County men—mostly merchant mariners—lost at sea during WWII. Known as “AKA-96,” the cargo ship remained in the Navy for 25 years, seeing action in Viet Nam. The ship was in Long Beach, California, for a period of time, when Smith was assigned to it. “There was a crew of 150 on the ship, and I was in charge of the anti-aircraft gunnery,” said Smith. “Then they decommissioned her in 1969 and turned her into razor blades.”

## FROM THE CHAIRMAN (Continued from the prior page)

The next perspective is of the Lecture, Meeting, and Activity Room.



Lecture, meeting, and activity room.

The final perspective, spreading across the bottom of this column, shows the Country Store Exhibit and the new Museum Store. Our largest collection comes from the estate of Tommy & Doris Hunley. It consists of a number of objects Tommy collected from numerous country stores in Mathews including several wooden display cases and the post office boxes from Diggs Post Office. For a number of years, Tommy displayed his collection in an old building behind his home on Church Street. It will be the Hunley collection that will be highlighted in this exhibit.

We have just hired Frances Hudgins of Hudgins Design Collaborative, to review our plans and to provide design services and construction drawings needed for the project. As

that work is being completed, we are developing our Capital Campaign to be launched later this year.

To make the Museum a reality we need your help, ideas and participation. We hope you will support our activities throughout the year, become part of the museum family by volunteering to help with special events and May Faire 2022 and consider becoming a member. Your financial help is needed if we are going to fulfill the mission of the Mathews County Historical Museum to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Mathews County. Through relevant displays, collections, and educational and experiential programs, visitors will be able to gain an understanding and appreciation of the county's past and present and begin to contemplate the future of the county and its' people.

In closing I would like to thank the board members for all of their hard work in helping the museum develop. And I thank all of the volunteers who have helped make our special events and activities successful. Without their hard work we would not have accomplished all that we have been able to do.



Country store and retail area.

# Museum Hosts Covid Inoculation Site

In the spirit of community, in mid-March the Museum hosted the use of its space for area COVID-19 inoculations. The event, sponsored by the Mathews Branch of the NAACP, was aimed at inoculating residents aged 65 and older. A total of 150 vaccines was administered by the Three Rivers Health District with help from area volunteers.

The event was arranged through the assistance of Edith Turner, Mathews NAACP President, and vice president of the board of the museum.

The museum appreciates the opportunity to work with the community and will continue to open our door when asked.

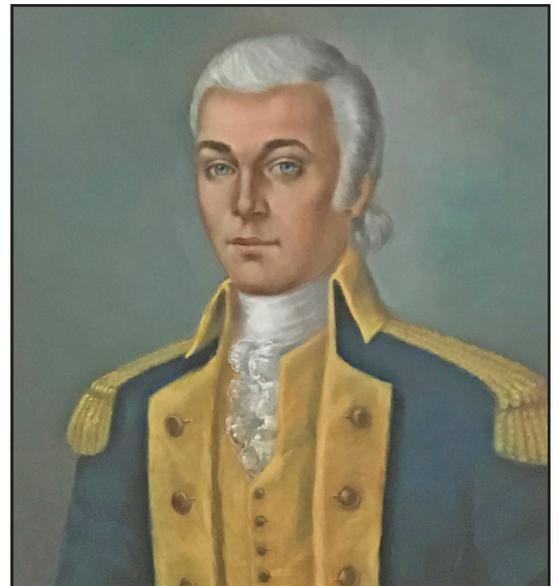


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## Mathews County Visited by Descendants of General Mathews

Museum volunteers were pleasantly surprised earlier this year when the Gaffney family of Raleigh, North Carolina, descendants of General Thomas Mathews, dropped by to research their forebears. They received a private viewing of an oil painting of Mathews which is in the Museum and yet to be displayed as we await our reconstruction. The portrait is a gift from the estate of Emily Nimmo Trant Burgwyn, a direct descendant of Thomas Mathews. She commissioned the painting in the late 1960s / early 1970s, and the portrait is signed by the painter Louis Mesa.

Mathews County is named after Thomas Mathews who was a general during the Revolutionary War and was the 7th Speaker in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1782 - 1793.



This is a photograph of the Thomas Mathews portrait. The photograph was taken by John A. Caramia, Jr.

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**We are online: Visit us at [www.mathewsvamuseum.org](http://www.mathewsvamuseum.org) and at Facebook.**

## May Faire 2021 Succumbs to Covid-19

At a daylong Board retreat in January, MHM Board members met to discuss plans for the remainder of 2021, through to 2022. The Board decided that because of Covid circumstances, our County Heritage event, May Faire, should be rescheduled to launch again in 2022, with the same theme, "Celebrate our Mathews Water Heritage" The Board discussed the financial challenges ahead, given the cancellation of two consecutive years of May Faire and the accompanying decline in income, as May Faire has been the Museum's largest source of revenue. The Board approved a calendar of smaller events throughout the remainder of the year, which will enable us to offer programs and events, albeit on a smaller scale. We will keep you up to date with notices of upcoming events.

## MHM to Host Christmas at the Museum Indoor Mall Shopping

Once again the Museum supports the community through use of its facilities. Building upon last year's success with our indoor bazaar which featured local artisans (masked, sanitized and Covid-distanced!), the Museum will again offer its space to tradespersons, artisans and foodies! Christmas at the Museum Indoor Mall Shopping is set for Dec. 10 and 11.

We welcome vendors, who should watch our website for a signup form. Chaired by board member, Barbara Bass, who has been doing this type of organization for years in Mathews County, the Museum anticipates having a "full house of of booths with food, entertainment and art," says Bass.



Nancy Twigg, left, and Cindy Roman greet customers at the 2020 Christmas shopping event.

## MUSEUM CALENDAR

MAY-JULY



### PEONY FESTIVAL MAY 11-24

\$10 a dozen at Moughons to benefit MHM; donated by Sandy Warhol.

**Saturday, May 15, 10-1:30**

Hot Dogs—Take out or eat in!

**Saturday, May 29, 10-1:30**

Hot Dogs—Take out or eat in!

**Monday, May 31, 10-1:30**

*Memorial Day*

Featuring the Wall of Remembrance, with photos of Mathews men and women who serve and have served

**Saturday, June 5, 10-1:30**

Hot Dogs—Take out or eat in!

**Saturday, June 19, 10-1:30**

Cake baking contest and sale  
Hot Dogs—Take out or eat in!

**Saturday, July 3, 10-1:30**

Hot dogs—Take out or eat in!

**Saturday, July 17, 10-1:30**

Hot dogs—Take out or eat in!

*\*Raffle tickets for "Wines Around the World" will be available each Saturday at the Farmers' Market. Raffle winner to be announced at the Museum, July 3, 1:30 pm*

**Wanted:** We are searching for a desk for administrative use at the museum. If you have a desk you are willing to donate, or know someone who has one, please let us know.

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## ALSO OF INTEREST



### Clean out your closets!

MHM is always in need of gently used items for our RETAIL SHOP as a fundraiser. We are appreciative of the community support and the lovely contributions to the Retail Shop that continue to pour in. Thank you. For all donations and item inquiries, please email: [mayfairemathews@gmail.com](mailto:mayfairemathews@gmail.com).

### Help us with a Smile

Designate Mathews County Historical Museum as a recipient of donations with Amazon Smile. As of March this year, the museum has received \$110.98 from participating friends.



### Round the World

MHM announces its new raffle basket, designed by local residents Elisa and Erik Provensen and Janet Gallegher. This year they decided to create a wine basket, "Around the World with Wine and Cheese," containing wines and accompanying cheeses from "places you can't go because of Covid," says Raffle Basket Chair, Lisa Provensen.

### Soup sale

A pre-St. Patrick's Day celebration at the Museum on March 13, with takeout corned beef soup, sprays of freshly picked pussywillows on sale and the Mathews mugs, marked another milestone in the Museum's history. The event featured sweets and pastries homemade by the Woman's Club as well as a plethora of items newly added in our Retail Shop.

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## Puzzle for the month:

What started out in 1936 as a car dealership, became a bowling alley, a pool hall, a utilities building, a movie theater, VEPCO, a Bassett furniture store, The Craftsman Shop and then the Dilly Dally Emporium? Our very own Mathews Historical Museum!



## DONATION

Cindy Register of Mathews has donated to the museum this model of a mid-1800s clipper ship made by Capt. Vernon James during World War II. The model was presented to Cindy's father James R. Lewis, who was a pharmacist and owner of Hudgins Drug Store. It stands in a wooden case 48" (L) x 18" (w) x 36" (h).



# Mathews Historical Museum

## Membership Application

### (2021)

**Become a Member of Mathews  
Historical Museum**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

**I am interested in the following membership:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual, \$25, per year

\_\_\_\_\_ Family / Couple, \$35 per year

\_\_\_\_\_ Active Duty Military, \$15 per year

\_\_\_\_\_ Student (under 18), FREE

\_\_\_\_\_ Lifetime Membership, \$500

**I would like to make an additional gift to support the work of the Museum in the amount of: \_\_\_\_\_**

**I would like to make an additional gift to the Capital Campaign in the amount of: \_\_\_\_\_**

**I am interested in participating in the following activities:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Collections      \_\_\_\_\_ Special Events      \_\_\_\_\_ Retail

\_\_\_\_\_ Membership      \_\_\_\_\_ Fundraising / Grant Writing

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please state)

**We will contact you with regard to your interests. Thank you.**

**Thanks you for your interest and support of the Mathews Historic Museum. Please make check payable to Mathews Historical Museum and submit along with this application to Membership Chair / Mathews Historical Museum / P. O. Box 634 / Mathews, VA 23109.**