

HALE BYRNES NEWSLETTER

Winter 2015-2016



Audrey's Red Canoe. En Plein Air artist, Margarete Noesner. 2015.

2015 was an exciting year for Hale Byrnes House! We had large numbers of new visitors, with our American Revolution Round Tables, Emily Reed's *En Plein Air* Group, annual Lafayette's Birthday, Holiday Open House and other special events bringing 746 people through our doors. Special thanks are due to our membership Chairman Kathleen Desimone and her committee, including Mary Kastner, Carla Stone and Kim Burdick. Our membership is growing nicely and we hope you will invite all of your friends and colleagues to join us as well!

We kicked off January 2015 by hosting the first Brainstorming Session for Preservation 50 and will be following up with a new Sunday afternoon series based on the National Trust's theme, "This Place Matters." Madeline Dunn, Jr. will open this 2016 on Sunday April 17, 2016.

Of particular interest to those of us also wearing environmental hats was a spring 2015 field trip to the site of Daniel Brynes's mill dam which is located on the golf course of Delaware Park. We thank Jerry Kauffman for arranging for a procession of golf carts to take us out there to see it. Known as "Dam #1" Water Resources has carefully broken into the old dam (which was NOT in good shape) to allow shad to swim more freely upstream. Byrnes's dam is the first in a series of old and no longer functional dams which are being modified in this way. (For more on this effort please visit the History Page of our web site at www.Halebyrnes.org where there are links to related articles). As we have done for many years, we were a host site for Christiana River Clean-

up and plan to do so again in 2016. A big thank you to Rodney Hammond and Nancy Parker for their good work.

It is always a treat to have Professor Audrey Sawyer and her hydrology students here. Audrey is now teaching in Ohio so we were especially glad to have her home again for the summer. The students are measuring the interaction between tides and ground water behind the House, where Red Clay, White Clay and the Christiana Rivers converge. Their youthful enthusiasm as they bang along in their red canoe each morning is great fun to see, and we always miss them when the summer is over. *

A major highlight in June 2015 included a visit by, and reception for Les Amis de Rochambeau, a French group visiting the United States in conjunction with the tall ship l'Hermione which had sailed from Rochelle, France to Yorktown, Virginia and left from Castile, Maine later in the summer. Among those French visitors was Mme de Gouberville, a direct descendant of General Rochambeau who was so instrumental in the American victory at Yorktown. In 1781, Hale Byrnes House had been on the route of march of the allied French and American troops when they marched from Dobbs Ferry, NY to Yorktown.

A few years earlier, on September 6, 1777, Lafayette had attended a Council of War at Hale Byrnes House and we continue our tradition of celebrating Lafayette's twentieth birthday on that day. This year seventy-one people attended our Lafayette's Birthday Party, featuring noted scholar Laura Auricchio, author of the 2015 book, "The Marquis: Lafayette Reconsidered."

Other American Revolution Round Table speakers included Nancy Webster, John McCarthy, John McLaughlin, Tim McGrath, Christian McBurney, and, in conjunction with the Delaware Huguenot Society, Jude Pfister of NPS-Morristown who spoke on John Jay: An American Huguenot. Especially well-received but with sadness, was a talk by our youngest Board member, Nicole Belolan who left the Board to pursue her PhD. Nicole's talk, "Navigating Disability in Early America" was superb. We wish her all the best in her doctoral work and hope she comes back to us soon and often. In October our annual membership meeting (which had not been held since Barbara White's day!) was very well-attended. President Nancy Parker gave a very thorough update on our activities and presented Beth and Cathy Gray, our intrepid volunteer archivists, each a "Volunteer of the Year" certificate. Well-deserved, ladies! You have made those old files SO much more accessible! Following a short coffee break, Kim Burdick, advisor Emeritus to National Trust for Historic Preservation and Chairman of Preservation 50 Delaware, gave a talk on "Saving This Old House: Story of the Hale Byrnes' House."

In November, continuing a long-term partnership with People-to-People Delaware, we hosted another Circles of Understanding, this time featuring Rose Ihedigbo, author of "Sandals in the Snow," a compelling look at Nigeria and Dr. Rose's experiences in becoming an American. This was one of the finest Circles we have hosted, and thanks to Dr. Rose, we feasted on Nigerian food and the audience stayed long into the evening. Special thanks to member Michael Lynch for bringing her to Carla Stone's attention!

Craftspeople at our annual December Holiday Open House included the remarkable blind craftsman and author, Fred Noesner, who makes superb powder horns; Dick Niekamp, colonial

musket-making demonstration, Lois Niekamp knitting fingerless mitts and Laurel Haring demonstrating the spinning of flax. Bryan Draper, a conservator was a special guest who talked about paper and leather conservation and presented out 1790 Isaiah Thomas Bible, which he had beautifully restored back to the House, with a special tip of the hat to Lois, who had raised \$350 towards its preservation by carefully showing it, year after year, to visitors who normally contributed a dollar or two towards the effort! A special shout-out to Board Member Michael McDowell and his wife, Libby, who introduced Bryan and also played beautiful 18th century Christmas music twice that afternoon. The house was beautifully decorated in a Williamsburg-colonial revival mode by Nancy Parker, Mary Torbey and Debbie Poffenberger and looked splendid. The evening program was also well-attended, and featured Gene Pisasale in his new guise as Alexander Hamilton. Gene, as always had done careful research and was an engaging and popular speaker.

Of enormous importance is the good work the State is doing to remedy a number of serious structural and safety issues related to maintaining an 18th century house. Nancy and Kim met with Lynn Riley, Cherie-Dodge Biron and Manny Carrar in New Castle last winter with a check list of bricks and mortar issues. To date the State has put in a new septic tank and leach field, repaired rotten floor boards in the attic, installed a handrail along the north cellar stairs, and built new steps and a board walk leading up from the parking lot to the front yard. The State has contracted with Bernadon-Holloway to coordinate a plan to restore the crumbling bricks in the gable ends of the house and repair the brick wall out front. Recently Tim Slavin and Lynn Riley met at the House with Senator Karen Peterson, Kim Burdick and Board members Glenn Pusey, Mark Campbell, Carla Stone and Donna Draper to discuss the next steps.

Nancy and Kim attended an applicants' seminar with Longwood Foundation this past spring, and Kim has begun drafting the grant proposal for the next funding cycle. We will need all your help in raising some matching funds towards grants to help the State accomplish these goals. If you have not yet become a member or paid your dues for 2016, please do! Membership forms are available online at www.halebyrnes.org. We have gold star status on Guide Star and your contributions are tax deductible.

We welcome our new cohort of Board members, Mark Campbell, Judith Jennings, Esq. and Glenn Pusey and look forward to working with them for the next three years, and beyond.

Please visit us on facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Hale-Byrnes-House-476535632378537/> and on the web at www.halebyrnes.org. Looking forward to seeing you on Saturday, April 9 at 7:30 p.m. when Don Hagist, well-known Revolutionary War author, and editor of the Journal of American Revolution, kicks off our year with a talk on his newest book, "Wives, Slaves, and Servant Girls: Advertisements for Female Runaways in American Newspapers, 1770–1783."

Thanks for all you do!

*(For more information please see:

http://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=ees_etds)