

SCUTTLEBUTT

In Memory of **Suzanne Brittingham Hurley** **January 25, 1937 – April 5, 2016**

By Gordon Katz

Suzanne B. Hurley, long-time curator of the Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum, passed away on April 5, 2016. Known simply as “Sue” to her many friends and acquaintances, her stewardship of the museum from its founding in 1978 until her retirement in 2010 provided Ocean City with a treasure that has been enjoyed by thousands of visitors over the years.

Sue was born in Ocean City in 1937, the oldest daughter of John W. Brittingham (1911 – 1968), a Sussex County, Delaware native, and Grace Cropper Brittingham (1915 – 1994), the daughter of Ocean City fisherman Lyle Cropper and Grace S. Cropper. Her father moved the family two years later to a 53-acre poultry farm in West Ocean City that he purchased with the help of a loan from Minnie Hearne Jones, the proprietor of The Belmont Hotel on Dorchester Street. The business was not successful, and the family eventually relocated to a house on North Division Street in Ocean City. Sue graduated from the Ocean City High School in 1954, and was also the May Queen that year..



**Suzanne Brittingham in her
 May Queen portrait 1954**

While working a summer job as a waitress near the Boardwalk, Sue met her future husband, the late George M. Hurley, who was employed as a beach boy nearby. Sue recalled George showing up at her family’s house on Sunday mornings to accompany her to the Presbyterian Church across Baltimore Avenue at North Division Street. Her mother would send them off together only after eliciting assurances that they were in fact going to attend the church service. Sue and George were, however, able to slip out during the sermon for a little time alone. They married on November 10, 1956, the day after George’s discharge from military service.



**(L to R) David, Johnny, Betty and Sue Brittingham
 pose for a family photograph at their home in
 West Ocean City.**

Following a brief residence in Baltimore, where Sue worked as a nurse, she and George moved back to Ocean City. Sue took a job with the Bank of Ocean City as a teller. One of her memories from that time was the smell of “chicken money” brought in by some local farmers for deposit. The money had been earned from the black market that developed in Worcester County and elsewhere on the Eastern Shore for poultry during the meat rationing years of World War II. The bills were stashed in the chicken houses for safekeeping, thus acquiring their unique odor.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Spring is coming - I think. Our flower pots will be out shortly....and hopefully the sun!

After much deliberation I am happy to report that we have a new logo. You will find it on the back page of this newsletter.

At our last Board meeting it was decided to look into the possibility of an on-line art contest featuring activities of the surfmen. Hopefully details will be worked out for our next Board meeting and become a reality for early Fall. This will broaden our visibility and add another dimension to the Museum. Please put your artist friends on notice!

Bob Rothermel's son William has completed his Eagle Scout Project posting six historical signs in downtown. One is located at the original location of the Life-Saving Station on Caroline St. Be certain to take a look the next time you're downtown. We were happy to be a sponsor along with the Optimist Club, the Hotel Motel Restaurant Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the Ocean City Downtown Corporation and the Rothermel family.

Our third annual Storm Warriors 5K race/walk will take place Saturday, November 12. Registration at www.octrirunning.com will be up and running very soon. Please let all your friends know.

As I reported in the last Scuttlebutt our main objective this year will be to crystallize the efforts to build an annex. For many years valuable display space has been used for various purposes: offices, restrooms, storage, gift store, etc. This prevents us from telling our story in the most complete way.

In addition, - our devoted staff - Sandy and Diane - are crammed into less than adequate office space. It's almost a case of one having to exit the space for the other to enter! And I hate to think of the safety issues we are dancing around.

Two years ago the City came to us with a proposal to add a staircase and elevator to the east side of the building - a bump out, as it were. Well, when presented with the cost there was a collective gasp.....

So, your Board thought if we're going to spend that much for stairs and an elevator why not parlay that into an annex - something that would include all those non-museum uses and add a multipurpose room for Museum related activities. The annex would be a stand-alone structure just north of the life-saving station with a connecting hall. We have conceptual drawings provided by Jack Graham. We have put out feelers and the response by all has been positive. We need the community and elected officials (City, county and State) to buy into the concept.

So now the fun begins and this is where you come in. As a member of the Museum Society you have shown your appreciation and support of what we do. Now we need a few more tangible examples of that support. In a short while you will receive a survey asking about your 'use' of the Museum. PLEASE respond. It won't be lengthy. We NEED your thoughts.



**Museum Society President,
Nancy Howard**

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100 Years Ago

From the *News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), Saturday, May 20, 1916:

OCEAN CITY WILL SOON HAVE RIVAL Cold Harbor, a New Resort in Worcester County, Will be an Attractive Place.

Berlin, Md., May 20. – Worcester County soon will have another pleasure resort, Cold Harbor, between the Atlantic Ocean and Sinepuxent Bay and five miles south of Ocean City, which it is expected to rival. Cold Harbor, containing 800 acres of land, recently was purchased from the Ocean Beach Land Improvement Co. by the Atlantic Realty Co. It has four miles of beach, two on the ocean and two on the bay. The ocean is in front and the bay in the rear. Cold Harbor adjoins Sandy Point, and a bridge will connect them. A road to be constructed from Sandy Point to the highway leading to Berlin will enable motorists to reach Cold Harbor without going through Ocean City. The erection of a hotel, cottages and bungalows at the new resort will begin immediately. A boardwalk also is planned. Pastimes at Cold Harbor in the summer will include sea and still water bathing, sailing, rowing, and canoeing and sea and bay fishing. In the fall duck shooting will be an attraction.

→ *Curator's note: The northern boundary of Cold Harbor was located about 6 1/2 miles south of the present day inlet in Ocean City. A Worcester County farmer named James C. Jones (the uncle of future Ocean City mayor Clayton J. Purnell) patented Cold Harbor, which was actually 400 acres not 800 as reported above, in 1876. The tract was most likely named for the Civil War Battle of Cold Harbor, Virginia, the site of the last successful defensive stand of the Confederate Army in 1864 against Union troops led by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. The bridge from Sandy Point was never built, nor were any of the projected structures erected. The land was annexed to the platted resort called "Atlantic City, Maryland", which also failed to materialize.*

WELCOME ABOARD NEW MEMBERS!

The President and Board of Directors take great pleasure in welcoming the following new members:

SUPPORTING

Danny Bowden
Chincoteague, Virginia

FAMILY

Jay & Sandy Pahl
Balitmore, Maryland

INDIVIDUAL

Thomas Barnhart
Hanover, Pennsylvania

Coltin Strahl
Emporium, Pennsylvania

STUDENT

Kristen McCown
Baltimore, Maryland

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

This will go before the City Council in the future. If you are local we will call on you to come to a meeting or two to show your support. We will give you plenty of notice.

And, as you know we have created a fund at the Community Foundation. We can't rely solely on government. Please visit our web site www.ocmuseum.org to make a donation or go to the Community Foundation site www.cfes.org to donate directly to the fund.

This is going to be so exciting. Please join in making the annex a reality. Questions or comments don't hesitate to call me - 443-235-4405

Finally, our Board, the Museum and the City have suffered another loss. Sue Hurley has followed George on to another, greater adventure. We miss both of them. With the blessing of the family, the Board has renamed our scholarship the George and Suzanne Hurley Scholarship. The Scholarship Committee - Shirley Moran, Bob Rothermel and Daphne Hurley have written requirements and we are awaiting applications. Details are on the Museum website.

IN MEMORY.....CONTINUED

Sue and George had four children who occupied most of her time, but she was still able to help George with managing their rooming house on Caroline Street. The first time I met Sue, she shared this personal story about raising her children. In the early 1970s, Ocean City families were concerned about the arrival of Hare Krishna society members, who had opened a temple on Talbot Street in 1971, fearing that their children would be lured in by the group. Sue noticed that her sons were not coming home for lunch as usual, and one day she asked one of them where he had been. He told her he had been with some of the Hare Krishna members. When she asked him why, he told her, "Mom, they have better food than you do." After she finished telling her story, she gave me a wry smile that said, "Now I've told you something you didn't know before." I would see that smile quite often after that.

Sue and George enjoyed traveling, whether it was with George at the controls of his plane or on a trip abroad to places like China, Pakistan, India and France. Certain trips required a little more in the way of advance planning on their part. Before embarking to Islamic countries where alcohol was forbidden, they mixed a batch of Manhattans that they bottled and asked a doctor to label as "medication". According to Sue, the medication was truly needed.

In the late 1970s Sue opened a store in the Shantytown complex in West Ocean City called "Country Kitchen", where she sold anything you could ever want or need for a kitchen. But I believe she found her true calling when she was asked to serve as the first curator of the Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum. Following the museum's dedication on December 25, 1978, she set about tracking down items for exhibits and initiating programs designed to attract summer vacationers. The exhibits and programs reflected her keen eye for items of historical importance as well as activities and displays that would draw visitors to take a closer look at the fascinating stories of the U.S. Life-Saving Service and of Ocean City's past.

Sue was most interested in the life stories of the people from the past. She possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of local Worcester County families, easily relating who was related to who and how. During our conversations about one person or the other, she often commented, "I would have loved to have met that person and look them in the eyes." I can only imagine that some of those people would have wilted under that look.



Sue and George Hurley planting the flower boxes on the Boardwalk outside the Museum in May of 2010

50 Years Ago

From *The Daily Mail* (Hagerstown, Maryland), Saturday, May 7, 1966:

State Loan Will Provide Convention Hall

ANNAPOLIS – Gov. Tawes signed Friday a bill which Mayor Hugh Cropper says will enable Ocean City to better compete with other resorts for large conventions.

It authorizes a state loan of \$1,250,000 to establish a convention hall at the Maryland resort and creates a five-member commission to plan and operate it.

Cropper and Del. Russell O. Hickman, chief sponsor of the legislation, were present for Tawes' signing of the bill.

"Russell and I have been working for 15 years to get this," the mayor said.

Cropper said the largest convention Ocean City can handle at present is about 400 to 500 people. They meet in hotels. As a result, large groups from Maryland have been going to Atlantic City and other areas.

The proposed new convention hall, which Cropper hopes to see completed some time next year, could seat up to 3,500 and have banquet facilities for up to 1,500 under the legislative intent expressed in the act.

Ocean City is to supply the land for the building, and Cropper said it is hoped about 15 acres can be acquired in order to assure adequate parking.

The five-member commission to be named by the governor after June 1 will be a tax-exempt organization. It will repay the state loan through fees charged for use of the facility. Members will be appointed for five-year terms.

→ *Curator's note: The town acquired the former Surf Side Inn property, located on the south side of 41st Street and fronting 500 feet on the west side of Coastal Highway, as the site for the new convention hall in March 1967. Maryland Gov. Spiro Agnew was the keynote speaker at the groundbreaking ceremony held on June 7, 1968. A dedication ceremony was held on April 18, 1970, at which Gov. Marvin Mandel was the principal speaker. The final cost of construction was nearly \$3 million.*

IN MEMORY CONTINUED

Sue enjoyed looking at old photographs and identifying the people and places depicted in the frozen moments in time. She and George occasionally disagreed about the who or the what, but in the end George usually (but not always) conceded that Sue was right. Sue told me that before the two of them began work on their seminal book, "Ocean City: A Pictorial History", she already knew exactly which pictures she wanted to include. While I was working on my book some years later about the Atlantic Hotel Company and its stockholders, she kept after me to "find out who those people were, and tell their stories before they are completely forgotten." But she also had these admonitions about what to include: "We never speak of the living" and "Whatever you learn about someone, Gordon, have a heart for their families."

The passing of both George and Sue Hurley within a short period of time leaves a large void in the collective memory of Ocean City and its history. We should be grateful that they preserved much of that history, in their books, in their conversations and correspondence, and in the museum. Nothing can replace their personal touch, however, and that will be greatly missed.



The Times and Tides of Ocean City, Maryland

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Ocean City Museum Society is to inspire and support the interpretation and appreciation of the cultural and natural history of Ocean City, Maryland, the Worcester County coastal region, and equally, the historical role performed by the United States Life-Saving Service, and to preserve with subsequent mandate the 1891 structure that once served as the Ocean City Station.

Vision Statement

The Ocean City Museum Society will be the premier organization dedicated to the preservation, education and research of the history of coastal Worcester County, Maryland.

Please Visit Our Website!

www.ocmuseum.org

CURATOR'S CORNER

As I write this the Springfest tents are going up at The Inlet Parking Lot which can only mean one thing.....summer is just around the corner! After Springfest will come many more events here at our end of town before the season really gets started. The Museum is now open daily from 10am to 4pm and we will be hosting an Open House again on Wednesday, May 18th in celebration of International Museum Day.

Our new temporary exhibit; "The Stormy Sixties" is near completion and should be opening soon. It will take visitors back to a time of segregation, riots, severe storms, surfing and some really groovy happenings. There will be a slide show of many photographs and postcards of that era highlighting businesses, politics and recreation of the 1960s.

We will be offering our Free Summer Programs again this year beginning on July 5th and running for eight weeks with the conclusion on August 27th. Subjects covered will include Ocean City History, Beach Safety, Knot Tying, Sharks and Aquarium Feedings. There will be something a little different on Fridays this year. The staff of Assateague Island National Seashore will present a program entitled "Assateague Island Critter Meet and Greet!" which is a puppet show that will introduce the audience to animals that live on the island.

Children's Day on the Bay will be returning on Sunday, August 7, 2016. It is hard to believe that this will be our sixth year hosting this family friendly event at Sunset Park. There will be lots of activities and with several organizations participating and it is all free to the public. We will need lots of help to make this event a success so if you are interested in volunteering please contact me or Diane Knuckles by phone: (410) 289-4991 or email: Sandy@ocmuseum.org or Diane@ocmuseum.org.



**Sandy Hurley
Curator**