

# SCUTTLEBUTT

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**Nancy Howard**  
**President**

2017! Whew. We have a clean slate. Such opportunities await us. But let's review some of what has happened since our last visit.

We are fortunate to have added John Fager to our Board. He has already immersed himself in our plans for an annex and has offered some innovative actions. John has been a "fixture" in Ocean City for many years and we are delighted he has joined us.

Our Storm Warriors 5K grew yet again. We had 151 participants this year. It was a crystal clear day—chilly but sunny. OC Tri-running did their usual outstanding job. Tom Perry and Larry Noccolino manned the water station; Sandy Hurley signed up day-of participants; Diane Knuckles worked the gift shop; Amanda Cropper helped out with processing registrants and passing out t-shirts. Again, we are indebted to our sponsors—thank them if you have the opportunity: Greene Turtle, Bank of Ocean City, Calvin B. Taylor Bank, Seacrets, American Legion Post 166, Elks Lodge 2645, Faw, Casson & Co., Farmers Bank of Willards, Knights of Columbus, Quillin Founda-

tion, Dunes Manor, Chip Gordy, Bouas Enterprises, and Walmart. With their help we made \$6,000. Photographs by OceanCityCool.com of this event are on following pages.

The Museum looked beautiful for the holidays—inside and out—thanks to the lovely decorating done by Sandy Hurley, Diane Knuckles, Mabel Rogers and Amanda Cropper. We have some very talented folks associated with our Museum.

The Downtown Association is working to bring more of the holiday spirit downtown. The Museum was happy to be part of the Light Up Downtown Festival. Hundreds of visitors browsed the merchants' tents, visited Santa at Harrison's Harbor Watch, enjoyed fun and games in Trimper's Inlet Village and toured our Museum. This event is expected to grow and offers even more exposure for the Museum.

Your Board participated in a Strategic Planning session. Brainstorming resulted in a long list of priorities. This was whittled down and combined to a manageable five. Of course the expansion was number one. In the coming months we will be working on expanding our membership and increasing its involvement, clearly defining our relationship with the City, securing grant funding and broadening our Board membership. Many of you commented on these issues when you responded to our Survey Monkey questionnaire. PLEASE continue to let us know your thoughts.

Question: When was the last time you visited our website or our facebook page? We're always open to suggestions. Is there anyone out there with a burning desire to help us with our social media? If so, speak up!

D3 Corp is finalizing a website for the proposed on-line art contest. We believe this will be yet another way to involve different segments of the population. History and art have always been a compatible venture.

We have a lot of work to do—so let's get going!

# 3RD ANNUAL STORM WARRIORS 5K NOVEMBER 12, 2016 PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT J. BANACH

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**Amanda Alexander placed 2nd for females 40—49**



**Thomas Wit placed 1st for males 14 & under**



**Linda Tice of Timonium, Maryland came in 1st for females 60 & over**



# OCEAN CITY, MARYLAND – *THEN & NOW*

## LOTS 34 and 37 – “The Isle of Wight Cottages” and the “Mount Vernon Hotel”

By: Gordon Katz

The Isle of Wight Cottages were the first structures erected along Talbot Street between the Boardwalk and Baltimore Avenue, on lot 34 and lot 37 on the north side of the street. The two men who drew the lots at the Atlantic Hotel Company stockholders' meeting held on August 31, 1875, Simon Ulman from Salisbury (lot 34) and Moses Johnson from Philadelphia (lot 37), both sold their vacant parcels to Anna B. Showell in December 1889.

Anna was the wife of Lemuel Showell, III, the man who spearheaded the formation of the Atlantic Hotel Company in the early 1870s and the opening of the Atlantic Hotel on July 4, 1875. A wealthy man at that time, he was forced into bankruptcy in 1887 and left penniless. Anna, however, held on to her property, including land holdings in North Carolina passed on to her by her father, Curtis Washington Jacobs. Anna purchased the two lots on Talbot Street for a total of \$100, and then borrowed \$2,000 from Baltimore real estate developer Daniel W. Cameron to finance construction of a boarding house on the site. She called it the “Isle of Wight Cottage”, most likely because Lemuel had pushed hard to name the Maryland resort “Isle of Wight City” rather than “Ocean City”.

The Isle of Wight Cottage was opened to guests in the late summer of 1891. An advertisement placed in *The Baltimore Sun* on September 26, 1891, pitched the cottage's attractions: “OPEN ALL THE YEAR. Accommodations First Class. Terms Moderate. This is the season for shooting and fishing. Drum fishing on the beach. Duck and quail shooting in season.” Anna Showell has the distinction of being the first woman to build and operate a lodging establishment in Ocean City, a trend that would continue and grow over the next thirty years.

The Sanborn-Perris Map Company of Ocean City prepared in September 1897 shows three buildings situated on lots 34 and 37: the two-story main building identified as the “Isle of Wight Hotel”, occupying most of lot 34 and a part of lot 37, with a dining room and parlors on the first floor; a two or three-story building west of the main building (later called the “annex”), with a sitting room and office on the first floor; and a two-story building with attic labeled “kitchen” directly behind the two structures that fronted on Talbot Street. The latter two buildings were added around 1894. The main building and annex, variously called the “Isle of Wight Cottages” or “Hotel” or “House”, reportedly accommodated up to 75 guests.

There is a local urban legend regarding the annex that has persisted for years. The story goes that a later owner of the property, John Dale Showell, Sr., built the annex after George and Susie Rounds developed the Avondale Hotel next door in 1915. Mr. Showell was supposedly angry that the Avondale blocked his guests' view of the bay, so he allegedly built the annex to prevent the Avondale's guests from having an ocean view. Consequently, the annex came to be called the “Spite House” by local residents. Although untrue, the story has managed to stick around.

Anna and Lemuel defaulted on their mortgage after the 1896 season. William Sidney Wilson, a Snow Hill attorney and former Mayor of Ocean City, conducted a public sale of their property, including the Isle of Wight Cottages and three other properties the Showells owned along Talbot Street, on April 19, 1897. John T. Ensor, a Baltimore real estate investor, was the high bidder for the Cottages property. Ensor engaged a series of managers over the next few years to operate the hostelry, but the operation was not a financial success. Perhaps thinking that a new name would attract more guests, he affixed the moniker “Mount Vernon Hotel” to the former Isle of Wight Cottages/Hotel/House in 1903. In the spring of 1904 Ensor put the hotel up for sale.

### WELCOME ABOARD NEW MEMBERS!

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

### SUPPORTING

**Steve & Cathy Markardt**  
*Warrenton, Virginia*

**Helen Ball Williams**

*Richmond, Virginia*

### FAMILY

**Helen Tarchalski**

*Annapolis, Maryland*

### INDIVIDUAL

**Peter Bloom**

*Fairfax, Virginia*

**Hailey Bowden**

*Berlin, Maryland*

**Donna Greenwood**

*Ocean City, Maryland*

**Mary Ellen Gunther**

*Ocean City, Maryland*

**Emily Messick**

*Whaleyville, Maryland*

### STUDENT

**Mary Beth Tierney**

*Berlin, Maryland*

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## THE YEAR WAS ...

1927

From *The Baltimore Sun*, Sunday, August 14, 1927:

### “Joe’s” First Fish



Having caught what Ocean City fishermen say is the largest flounder taken from the Sinepuxent Bay in more than twenty years, Joseph Talbot Kummer, 7-year-old son of Frederic Arnold Kummer, nationally known novelist, and Mrs. Kummer, 2 St. Martin’s road, Guilford, is the proudest boy at the Eastern Shore resort.

Ever since he could toddle “Joe” has been after his father to take him fishing, but the paternal parent always deferred action because of his son’s youth. Last Monday “Joe” insisted on a fishing trip in the bay before the family returned to Baltimore. With his father, his brother, Fred, Jr., and several friends, “Joe” went to the inlet in one of Captain Bunting’s powerboats.

With the tide against it the party returned to Ocean City empty handed. “Joe” insisted luck was with him and the same journey was made the next day. A few minutes after one of the Bunting boys had baited “Joe’s” hook and it was cast over, “Joe” let out a yell. Something was on the end of his line. It was “Joe’s” first fish.

When the flounder was pulled over the side it was found to weigh exactly 10 pounds, a weight too great for “Joe” to handle. Landing at Ocean City, “Joe” insisted on having his picture taken with his first catch. He didn’t care for his other two fish, the successors of his triumph. Their total weight was nine pounds.

“Joe’s” party brought back 30 pounds of flounder with them. “Joe’s” progress down the boardwalk toward the Plimhimmon Hotel was a triumph for the youthful fisherman. He was stopped by everyone and congratulated. “Joe,” however, continued his stroll to a cottage next to the Plimhimmon, where he deposited the 10-pounder at the feet of the mother of a little girl with whom he has been playing daily.

Mr. Kummer said he must watch the results. There may be a plot hatching for a new novel, he “Joe” Kummer, age 7 explained.

*Curator’s note: The photograph accompanying the above account shows that the fish was nearly as big as the fisherman! Joe’s father, Frederick Arnold Kummer, was born in 1873 in Catonsville, Maryland, at that time an enclave for wealthy Baltimore suburbanites. His father sent him to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York, at which he earned a degree in civil engineering. A business setback in 1907 led him to abandon the engineering field for a career as a writer. Although mostly unknown today, Frederic was a prolific and highly popular author, publishing more than twenty works of fiction that often sold out quickly. Many were subsequently adapted into stage productions. He moved his family to the fashionable Guilford neighborhood of Baltimore in the 1920s after speculators and developers subdivided large parcels of land in Catonsville for the construction of new housing. Frederic passed away in 1943.*

*Joe Kummer earned a degree in chemical engineering from Johns Hopkins University in 1941. He served in the Merchant Marine during World War II, and then returned to Hopkins to complete his Ph. D in 1945. He began his career in scientific research at Mellon Institute in Pittsburgh, from where he moved on to Dow Chemical in Michigan before landing a position at the Scientific Research Laboratories of the Ford Motor Company. From 1960 to 1984 he conducted groundbreaking research in the areas of automotive emissions, solid-state materials, internal combustion and electrochemistry.*

*An article published in 2011 provides this biographical sketch: “Joe dressed modestly, and his material demands were minimal. It was quite a sight to see him shoehorning his 6’8” frame into a Ford Escort. He raised a family of three sons, two of them engineers, and the third in medical records. His daughter is a physician. Early engineering activities often entertained five grandchildren with fond memories. Two great-grandchildren did not have the time to know him. His wives Elizabeth and Phyllis preceded him in death. Joe Kummer died in retirement in Ypsilanti, Michigan, on June 27, 1997.” We wonder whether he ever shared this “fish story” with his grandchildren.*



**Joe Kummer in the 1980s**

## THEN & NOW CONTINUED



**The Mount Vernon Hotel and annex ca. 1910.  
Courtesy of Bunk Mann.**

Elizabeth W. Showell, the wife of John Dale Showell, purchased the Mount Vernon Hotel, including furniture and contents, from John Ensor in 1904 for \$2,000. John, a cousin of Lemuel Showell, III, and Elizabeth had begun their hospitality careers in Ocean City in 1897, managing the Ocean Swell Cottage (later known as “The Fenwick”), located on the southwest corner of North 1<sup>st</sup> Street and the Boardwalk, for Berlin builder David J. Adkins. In 1902 the couple moved on to open their own business, constructing the Oceanic excursion pavilion and bath houses on a large parcel of land they had acquired one block south of the Ocean Swell at North Division Street. Upper floors with hotel rooms were added to the Oceanic in 1903. After acquiring the Mount Vernon Hotel in 1904, Mr. and Mrs. Showell operated their two hotels jointly until 1923, when they conveyed the Mount Vernon to their daughter, Elizabeth Showell Strohecker.

Elizabeth Strohecker was an active businesswoman in Ocean City. She was already operating two boarding

houses on Baltimore Avenue at 5<sup>th</sup> Street when her parents turned over the operation of the Mount Vernon Hotel to her in 1923. After her father passed away in 1947, Elizabeth and her brother, John Dale Showell, Jr., assumed control of the family’s businesses in the “Showell Block”, which occupied most of the boardwalk block from Caroline Street to North Division Street. She leased the Mount Vernon to various operators during her half century of ownership. One of those operators, Mary B. Clogg from the Hamilton section of Baltimore, marketed the hotel as “The Tides” from 1945 to 1954.

Elizabeth sold the Mount Vernon to Kathryn Jones Brasher (later known as Kate Bunting) in 1973. The Art League of Ocean City opened its “Art and Cultural Center” in the old hotel in the spring of 1977. Following the Art League’s move across the street to the Talbot Street Café, Mrs. Bunting redeveloped the hotel in 1981 into a restaurant, “Kate Bunting’s Seafood House”, described this way in an advertisement from 1986: “Oldest hotel in Ocean City converted into a crab house with outside patio for steamed crabs and inside dining featuring seafood, steaks and chicken.” The hotel annex, which Mrs. Bunting rented out for shops, was briefly converted in the summer of 1984 into a newspaper office for the filming of “Violets Are Blue”, starring Sissy Spacek and Kevin Kline. A new restaurant, A. T. Lantic’s Food & Spirits, moved into the former hotel in 1990, operating there for about four years.

Mrs. Bunting transferred the Mount Vernon, along with other properties she owned along Talbot and Dorchester Streets, to the Kate Bunting Family Partnership in 1995. After Mrs. Bunting’s death in 1997, the family eventually decided to redevelop most of the properties held by the partnership as the “Belmont Towers” condominium. Construction of the nine-story building was completed in 2007. As part of the overall development plan, the more than a century old Mount Vernon Hotel and annex situated across the street from the new condominium were torn down in 2005.



**The former Mount Vernon Hotel, now operating as A. T. Lantic’s Food & Spirits, and the annex in the 1990s.  
From the Ocean City Museum Society archives.**

Ocean City  
Life-Saving Station  
Museum

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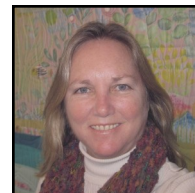
We're on the  
Web!  
[ocmuseum.org](http://ocmuseum.org)

*The Times and Tides of  
Ocean City, Maryland*



## CURATOR'S CORNER

I hope that everyone has enjoyed this issue of Scuttlebutt. As always, Gordon Katz's contributions have made it an interesting and informative publication. Although you may not be aware of it, he is to be credited for articles such as "The Year Was...", "Then & Now", and "Reader's Forum." We truly appreciate his dedication and we are grateful to him for sharing his many talents.



**Sandy Hurley**  
Curator

Recently the Archives Committee met at our storage facility in West Ocean City to discuss items that have been stored for many years with no plans of displaying them in the future. In an effort to divest of some of the artifacts that do not fit our mission we have been trying to find new homes for them. Many of the very large items include parts of the USS BLENNY, a navy submarine that was sunk off the coast of Ocean City in 1989 to become an artificial reef. Fortunately, we made contact with members of the USS Cod Submarine Memorial (SS 224), docking in Cleveland, Ohio. The Cod was a squadron mate of the Blenny in WW II and the Blenny rescued six Cod crewmen in August, 1945 when they got stranded aboard a junk in the South China Sea. We sent them the name plate of the BLENNY and a torpedo igniter stowage unit. They plan on visiting mid-March to look at what is left and possibly taking it back to Cleveland.

We are in the process of putting together the new exhibit scheduled to open in June this year. "Native Americans: First Contact" was developed by Salisbury University's Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture. Using prints, first-hand accounts and other items, the exhibit shows how area Native Americans lived and worked at the time of their first contact with Europeans. It also depicts ways in which Native American life changed shortly thereafter, including a loss of freedom, environmental alterations, continually shrinking territory and the establishment of reservations.

Many Museum Society members are making available to us, Indian artifacts such as arrowheads, axe heads, and grinding stones that have been in their collections for many years. Chief Norris Howard, Sr. of the Pocomoke Indian Nation has met with us and has offered to loan us a few items for the exhibit. It is not too late to add to this display. If you have any Native American artifacts that are specific to Lower Delmarva, we would love to hear from you!

Please call me at (410) 289-4991 or email [Sandy@ocmuseum.org](mailto:Sandy@ocmuseum.org)

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## READER'S FORUM

Q: When was the first boardwalk built in Ocean City? I've seen all kinds of dates given for that, ranging from 1892 to 1900. Exactly how long has the boardwalk been a part of Ocean City's attractions?

A: Board member Gordon Katz's book "102 Gentlemen & A Lady" provides the answer to this often-asked question. The first "board walk" along the oceanfront, a half mile in length, was built in the spring of 1879 at a cost of \$600. The walk at that time was not a fixed structure as it is today. As has happened with some frequency over the years, that first walkway was destroyed in a storm in August of that year. The first "permanent" boardwalk, fixed to pilings driven in the sand, was constructed in 1885. The boardwalk was completely rebuilt prior to the opening of the 1892 season to a length of nearly two miles. Lights were added in 1893. The famed walkway has been repaired or rebuilt many times since then, often due to storm damage. The present length of the boardwalk, from South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to 27<sup>th</sup> Street, was set in 1962. Mayor Harry Kelley briefly promoted a plan to extend the boardwalk all the way up the beach to the Delaware line in the early 1980s, but failed to win support for the idea.