



# The Laurel Light

May 2014  
Volume XV, Number II  
The Laurel Light  
Published Quarterly by:  
The Laurel Historical Society, Inc.  
817 Main St. Laurel, MD 20707-3429

## News and History from the Laurel Historical Society

*The mission of the Laurel Historical Society, Incorporated is to encourage the understanding and preservation of the history and cultural heritage of Laurel.*

### **A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

This spring the Laurel Historical Society became ensnared in an issue we had not anticipated taking on. I noticed that we were being carbon copied on a series of letters between the Mayor and the Library authorities on the issue of keeping the "Stanley Memorial" name on the library. I believed it seemed like a great opportunity for us to support the City, which does so much for us, and it seemed like a straightforward enough issue; keeping a name of historical significance on buildings. With the approval of the Executive Committee, I wrote a Letter to the Editor and a Letter of Support in the hopes of keeping the "Stanley Memorial" name on our library. As a group we were so confident that this was an easy issue, we did not do any further research on the family or person in question.

Many of you may have seen the mess that came along in the wake of our mistake. Facebook posts, phone calls, further Letters to the Editor, and even television coverage followed. What we found out was that Charles Stanley, of the Stanley family, was a Confederate soldier. In a town with significant Confederate leanings (we know, we did the exhibit!), it's not unusual to find Laurelites that served on that side during the war. Many people condemn anyone who served on that side during the war but others would disagree.

One concerned Laurel citizen pointed out that it was the proximity of the Library to

Emancipation Park that caused the most concern. How could we honor a Confederate soldier next to a park dedicated to celebrating Emancipation? I found this was the most important question; it went to the root of how we choose to honor and celebrate our past for future generations. It brought up conversations related to history that people felt SO strongly about and for me, that was a victory; seeing people directly engaged with history.

However, one of the most disturbing parts of the entire process was being publicly accused of deliberately hiding history that was not pleasant. Personally for me, this was one of the most hurtful things that could be said of me as a professional and as a person. I have dedicated myself to the field of history because I believe it has the power to change the world and I definitely don't think hiding the difficult parts will help anyone. At the LHS I've found myself surrounded by volunteers who seem to share this belief, and for every exhibit we do, we share the painful parts of our past, whether it's child labor in the mill, slaves sold into military service during the Civil War, or the KKK activity that has shaken Laurel. Each time we find something difficult, we find a way to display and interpret it, because we believe this is how we can make our future together better.

What I immediately realized is that the person who thought we had deliberately hidden Stanley's past assumed that we knew more than we actually did. This is a common

misconception about us; many people think because we work to preserve and interpret Laurel's past that we have the monopoly on all of the information. Unfortunately (or fortunately), that is not the case. There is MUCH we don't know about Laurel's past, which is why we so often look to our members, volunteers, and visitors to better understand what has happened. After talking with the party who had learned more about Stanley's past, we quickly learned we had a lot in common. We talked about the difficulty of being responsible to our audience while there is so much we don't know and how we are always looking to learn as in this case. Well, we learned a couple of things:

- 1) There are certain things in history that will always be a flashpoint. I'm not sure there's always a right or a wrong answer on these issues. Perhaps more importantly for us is to realize that people who feel passionately about these issues are engaged in history in a very important way. They are engaged on an emotional, real level that means history really matters to them.
- 2) People will always assume that the LHS knows more than we do. And that is a GREAT problem; we love that you look at us as your community resource for Laurel's history. But, it is impossible for us to know everything unless you continue to help us preserve the stories of our past. So, when you find out something new about Laurel, please share that information with us; we'd love to hear it!

So, what's next? We're looking to plan a program for the summer/fall with the City on what we've found about Stanley. We have found some really interesting things, both good and bad, that indicate history does in fact live in a grey area. And it's in that grey area that we all begin to better understand our past and how we can use it to make a better future together.

Lindsey Baker

### **A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD**

We held elections for Officers and Board members at our Annual Meeting. Those newly elected will take office on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

The new officers are as follows:

Steve Hubbard, President  
Abram Fox, Vice President  
Marlene Frazier, Recording Secretary  
Amy Junewick, Corresponding Secretary  
Jim McCeney, Treasurer

Other Board Members include:

Re-elected for 2014 – 2016

Mike Boivin  
Frances Brooks  
Jhanna Levin  
Karen Lubieniecki

Elected for 2014 – 2016

Lisa Everett

Our appreciation and thanks to Regina Mima for her four years of service on the Board and as Corresponding Secretary, and welcome Amy Junewick and Lisa Everett as new members of the Board. Terms run two years and approximately half the board is due for election each year.

Jim McCeney

### **BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE**

LHS Board meetings are held the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each January, April, July, and October. The next meeting is July 24, 2014. Members are welcome to attend. They are held in the Pool Meeting Room at 7:30 PM.

**THANK YOU FROM THE LHS  
FOR THE GALA DONATIONS  
FROM THE FOLLOWING  
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BUSINESSES!**

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**AUCTION ITEM CONTRIBUTORS:**

A. M. Kroop and Sons  
Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre  
Baltimore Ravens  
Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

Bra La La  
Brunswick Columbia Lanes  
Brunswick Heritage Museum  
Byrd Aire  
Calvert Marine Museum  
College Park Aviation Museum  
Kathleen Dalphonse  
Executive Electrolysis  
Barbara Feagin  
Abram Fox  
Friends of the Greenbelt Museum  
Friends of the LHS  
Fulton Station Jewelers  
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Doug Humphrey  
Jewish Museum of Maryland  
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Maple Lawn Grill  
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Transportation, Inc.  
Newton White Mansion  
Pat's Hallmark  
Office of the Mayor – City of Laurel  
The Pearl Spa  
Gertrude L. Poe  
Prince George's County Library System  
Ranazul Restaurant  
Joan Ratigan  
Red, Hot & Blue  
River Hill Garden Center  
Sandy Spring Museum  
Six Flags America  
Sovereign Service  
Sports Cards Heros  
Tampico Tex Mex Grill  
Total Wine  
The Walters Art Museum  
Wegman's  
Weis Markets  
Woodhall Wine Cellars

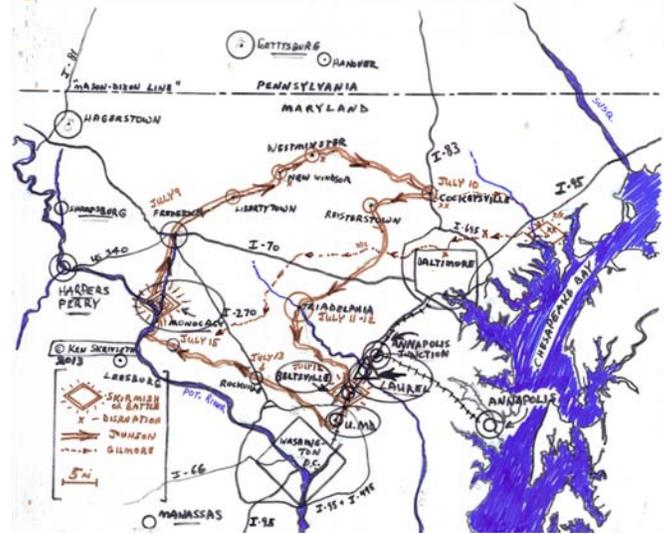
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Sport Automotive, Randy Anastasi  
Toucan Taco

We would like to give a particular thank you to Richard Friend for his immense help with the current exhibit and his help with the gala booklet and décor'. Richard's fabulous book "Lost Laurel" is available for purchase in the Museum Shop.

**PLEASE PATRONIZE OUR SUPPORTERS!**  
**July 11-12 1864: Laurel**  
**Escapes a Civil War Battle**

By Ken Skrivseth & Karen Lubieniecki



In 1864 the Civil War fighting came within three miles of Laurel. In July Ulysses Grant and others were concerned that plans for a new invasion were underway. Confederate General Jubal Early defeated General Lew Wallace at the Battle of Monocacy and advanced to Washington, DC, where he ultimately reached Fort Stevens, on the outskirts of DC. Confederate Brigadier General Bradley T. Johnson, part of this effort, was assigned the task of freeing prisoners at Point Lookout and destroying the Union railroads. He started for Laurel, an important railroad bridge crossing point.

Reports suggest that on July 12, Johnson got within three miles of Laurel. But scouts reported that the railroad there was too strongly guarded with possibly 500-600 troops. Johnson turned and headed instead for Beltsville, where his troops were able to cut eight telegraph lines, and torch twenty gondolas, ballast cars and other railroad property. They also repulsed some Union cavalry who advanced from Fort Lincoln. Ironically, the Laurel based troops had

already been moved further north to avoid being overwhelmed by Johnson's forces and Laurel was spared.

Later that day, about 400 Confederate soldiers led by Johnson stayed on the grounds of Maryland Agricultural College (now University of Maryland). A local legend claims that soldiers were "warmly welcomed" by then University President Henry Onderdonk, a Confederate sympathizer, and that the cavalymen were thrown a party on the campus nicknamed "The Old South Ball." Late that evening or the next morning the soldiers rode off to connect with Confederate forces that were opposing the Union at Fort Stevens near Tenlytown in Washington, DC. Though there are conflicting narratives, the above "dinner" was no doubt after and not before the Laurel/Beltsville raids, since Johnson was coming in from the North.



## **MUSEUM NEWS**

New items are always being donated to the Museum. One recent item, a wedding gown and a man's wedding suit worn by Stella and Frank Hance in 1906 were donated by Beth Elliot, their grand daughter. The gift included not only her grandparents dress & suit but Stella's petticoats, shoes and gloves.

Also donated were a late 19th century calico bonnet, a turn of the century women's walking suit and a beautiful dress. The Hance sisters ran a store on Main Street and the vegetables they sold were raised on their brother Frank's farm. Stella and Frank's daughter and Beth Elliot's mother, Elizabeth Lammers, volunteered in the early days of the Museum. What a priceless piece of Laurel history from a Laurel family!

Now available in the Library for genealogy research are three volumes titled "Freedom & Slavery Documents of the District of Columbia". These include the years 1792 to 1822 and are a record of bills of sale, certificates of freedom, certificates of slavery, emancipations and manumissions recorded in the District.

*Lost and Found Laurel* runs until December 21, 2014. The Laurel Museum is open Wednesdays and Fridays 10 AM - 2 PM, and Sundays 1 - 4 PM and is free. Visits by school groups and tours over 10 people can be scheduled on other days by appointment. The John Brennan Research Library is open Mondays by appointment. For more information visit [laurelhistoricalsociety.org](http://laurelhistoricalsociety.org).

## **MEMBER NEWS**

Members are the life-line of our organization. Look for your membership renewal soon and please consider becoming a Life Member. Many of your friends and neighbors have done so and their dedication is appreciated. Please renew today!

### **Please welcome our new members:**

Daniel Chandler  
Karen Eaton  
Donald Eddins  
Gary Fitzgerald II  
Linda Houck  
The Reverend Dr. Sheila N. McJilton  
Michaëlle Pascale  
Dorothy Sullivan  
Justin Towson  
Maria and Phil Wilder

We are happy to have you!

### **Please welcome our new volunteers:**

Frances Fliss

THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING! We are happy to have you.

## **Volunteers Needed!**

The Laurel Museum needs volunteers for Fridays (10 am - 12 pm and 12 pm - 2 pm) and Sundays (1 pm - 4 pm). Volunteers are needed to serve as docents and handle shop sales. Training is available. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Monica at [assist@laurelhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:assist@laurelhistoricalsociety.org) or 301-725-7975.

## **Volunteer Luncheons**

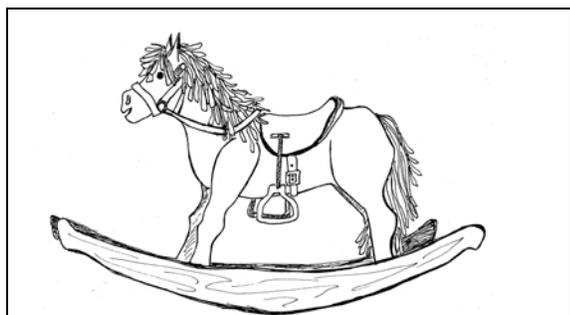
Please consider joining other volunteers for our monthly luncheons at local restaurants. Dates and times are emailed to volunteers. Bon appétit!



Photo by Monica Sturdivant

## **Members of Diven family visit Diven's Den**

Two members of the Diven family recently visited the Museum and visited our children's mascot, Diven, whose iron likeness was cast by one of their relatives in his Laurel Foundry. They visited the Museum to research the family's history in Laurel. The Diven Foundry straddled the land on what is now 347-349 Main Street (C Street didn't exist). The foundry is rumored to have supplied ornamental ironwork to the White House Conservatory!



### **Children's Corner**

We will be holding a Science in the Summer Camp from August 4-8. If you are interested in helping with the program or volunteering at the Museum during program hours, please call the Museum!

### **LET'S TAKE A WALK PART IV** **Childhood Memories of Main Street in the 1930s**

*Submitted by Elizabeth Lee Miles Compton*

*CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS LAUREL LIGHT newsletters...*

*The history of the 414 Main Street home begins with those who lived across the street. My father, Clyde L. Miles, Sr., was born on 10<sup>th</sup> and Montgomery Streets in 1898. Along with his parents, my father, his brother, and his six sisters moved to 415 Main Street when he was about 14 years old. They leased with expectation to buy the big frame house and land that went down to the river. He related stories of happy times spent there where there was space for a*

*large vegetable garden, chicken yard, barn and horse and wagon. As a boy he occasionally traded an egg with the nearby bakery for a sweet roll.*

*When the owner of the property delayed his decision to sell, Dad's father built a stone and frame home across the street at 414 Main in 1924. Soon after that my father also built a stone and frame house at 416 for his bride. My mother told of moving there upon their return from their honeymoon on April 18, 1925. A young neighbor girl placed apple blossom branches on the front steps to welcome the newlyweds. I was born in that house on April 8, 1926 as was my brother Clyde L. Miles, Jr. on July 19, 1927. The next home is "Harmony House". No one is certain why it has been called that through the years. One tale is that the family, in its early days was so noisy that it acquired this label.*

*Proceeding westward next door is the original Sadler Pharmacy, another historic Laurel Building. It was also the home of Doctor Sadler's son Robert Sadler who was Laurel's well-known photographer. His images are the nucleus of the photographic history of Laurel at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and are now available at the Museum. These brass plates were stored in the McCeney's attic for years.*

*Next door the enlarged First United Methodist church now graces the rest of the block to Fifth Street. In the 1930s the Laurel Presbyterian Church was on the corner next to the Methodist church. In the early 1960s the Methodist's purchased the land and the frame structure, and the Presbyterian Church then moved to build on Sandy*

*Spring Road. The lumber from the demolished church lay in place for anyone who needed it to haul away. Gertrude Poe, a lifelong member of the Methodist congregation, commissioned her friend and amateur artist J. Richard Compton, MD to create an oil painting of the original 1842 quarried stone church, once on 9th Street. One small, clouded photograph and a salvaged amber glass window frame preserved in the Museum were the only guides. Dr. Compton often visited the site during his production of the picture. A dedication for the picture was held in the church. Miss Poe made a generous donation to the Laurel Museum for the painting. It now hangs on the wall in the First United Methodist Church Social Parlor.*

*Cross 5th Street and you will see the baker's home on the corner. The bakery is next door. We would stop there on the way home for fresh rolls for Sunday dinner. Years later in 1948 my mother and I chose the size of the pans for my wedding cake in the Cordelia Bakery there. The O'Brien building and a fruit and vegetable market follow. Two private homes are seen before the beautiful stone 1848 St. Philip's Church. In addition to its most important function, my religious education, many happy days of Strawberry Festivals, church music and events were spent there with family and friends. My mother taught Sunday school, was an Altar Guild member and active in other church organizations.*

*Now cross 6th Street to view two homes and a wooded section before the large 1870 stone Foundry building. I am not sure if it was occupied in the early 1930s but in the late 30s or early 40s*

*small trees or shrubbery could be seen growing through its windows. (See previous article entitled "Firm Foundation: A Story of Solid Stones"). Tall hemlock trees grew between it and the Millard apartments next door on the corner of 7th and Main Streets. After you cross 7th you will see the "Lovely Old Ladies of Main Street," so named for c 1840 stone homes built for the mill managers. The 7th Street block is filled with these stone homes. At 8th Street one can see the 1843 St. Mary of the Mills Catholic Church to the south. St. Mildred Hall was on the southwest corner of 8th and Main Streets. Its first floor was used for many community events. My brother and I were sent there for dance lessons. I can still see my brother in his white satin shirt and black velvet short pants tapping away at the recitals. All our relatives gathered to cheer. I had a light blue tutu and white satin ballet toe shoes. I could use just a little of that balance now.*

*Walk up the hill and cross the street where we begin to retrace our steps down the north side of Main Street. We are now at the site of the Laurel Mill. Ninth Street extended past Main to the Iron Bollman-Truss Bridge across the Patuxent River from Prince George's County to Howard County. The loud clatter of the wooden planks of the bridge as automobiles traversed it could be heard for many blocks. The flooding caused by Hurricane Agnus in 1972 washed away the historic bridge. Both of the metal plaques denoting the date and those responsible for its construction were saved from the rushing waters by local citizens. They are stored in the Museum. On the northeast corner of 9th and Main Streets is one of the c 1840 mill*

*workers brick houses. The house opened in 1996 as the Laurel Museum. That is another story.*

*On both sides, southward from 9<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> Streets, are located the granite mill homes. In the 1930s, 7<sup>th</sup> Street began at Main Street. The C. Philip Nichols Memorial Bridge was not built until 1960. The 6<sup>th</sup> Street block on the north side held some small frame mill houses intermingled with private homes. One of these was reputed to be a cotton picker's home where raw cotton was delivered to the home to be "picked" of its debris. The occupants were paid by the weight or batch of cotton cleaned. Two attractive houses in this block were occupied by the Gosnell family and one by our Laurel Librarian.*

*On the north side of Main Street where 6<sup>th</sup> Street ends, the Town Tavern sat. It was once the Laurel Trolley Station until 1925. Ever since it was rotated 90 degrees to make its long side parallel with Main Street it has been a tavern. In 1959 when we moved back to Laurel, Mr. McCahill, owner of the tavern, called on us to welcome us to Laurel in his dark suit, tie and rose in his lapel.*

*Several homes are in this block including Judge Ogle Marbury's big residence with its deep front yard off Main Street. The back yard extended down in the rear near the Patuxent River. More homes dot the area until we come to the Tapscott House. It was originally a bakery. I always enjoy its charming windowed extension in front and still visualize the goodies that could have been displayed there. Many of us remember Mr. Tapscott; we often went to him for stories of "Old Laurel." The nearby Odd Fellows Hall with its*

*Pre Civil War architecture is noteworthy. It is one of the historic buildings mentioned in the Maryland Historic Trust Inventory. Wherein is stated that Laurel has the greatest concentration of historic buildings in Prince George's County.*

*Several homes fill the next area including the one previously mentioned where my father's family lived at 415 Main Street. Eastward were attached offices including on for the Marshall Insurance Company. On the northeast corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Main was the home and dental office of Dr. Gibbons. When I was about 11 I accompanied a cousin to her dentist appointment where I heard a cry of pain. It was not my cousin...it was Dr. Gibbons. My cousin had bitten him.*

*Cross 4<sup>th</sup> Street to the Laurel Furniture Company. Years later when I returned to Laurel in 1959 I made a purchase there. The next day I received a phone call informing me that I had not signed the check I had written. The instructions were to stop next time I was "downtown" to finish it. I was probably distracted by the newsy visit with the shop lady bringing her up to date since leaving home to go to school in 1943. The adjacent small stone building was the early Laurel Building Association.*

*Just east of it was the shop affectionately known as "The Greeks." In 1910, Speros Gavriles came to Laurel to set up an ice cream and candy store at 355 Main Street. He and his wife Anna had seven children. Christina, Pete and Nick helped in the store when they added tasty lunches. It was a favorite gathering place especially for those who worked on*

*Main Street. To the delight of children and adults alike, their homemade candy Easter eggs were a tradition. It was a thrill to receive a beautiful chocolate egg decorated with colorful flowers with your name embellished on it. I was told that my elderly paternal grandfather, who was very deaf and used a "horn" held loud conversations with Mr. Gavriles who spoke mostly Greek. They somehow communicated cheerfully each day.*

*Next is Hance's shop. We bought school supplies and candy there. Miss Hance, a sweet, gray haired lady in her long, flowered, cotton dress and high button shoes, welcomed her young customers as if they were very important. A double brick building next door held an office on one side and the Kaiser Funeral Home on the other. Next was a frame and stone home/business of Cemetery Monuments. Many samples of their wares filled the front lawn of the house. One could not miss them passing by.*

*Avondale Street was the next intersection. On its northeast corner was Block's Department Store. It had occupied the site since 1897. Most local people's clothing, shoes and other necessities could be met by shopping in this establishment. Mr. Block and his friendly efficient employees welcomed many regular and new shoppers. In the next block one would have seen the new Laurel Leader building appear in 1938. Snyders Laundry and Dry Cleaners was in this area. Nearby is the famous boot maker Kroop family's business. This company, which has been in Laurel for generations, has a reputation in the horse racing world for hand made high quality jockey*

*boots and other fine shoes. On the northeast corner of C and Main Streets was another grocery. That made three in one and a half blocks. All seemed to prosper or at least survive in spite of the Depression years.*

*This block held the Sussman Store that stocked fine shoes and other items in an attractive shop. Mr. and Mrs. Sussman and daughter Joan lived upstairs. Mrs. Ruth Sussman made history by being elected the first woman to the Laurel City Council. She served illustriously. Somewhere in this block was a Chinese laundry. I took my grandfather's detachable collars there to be stiffly starched. I remember the clouds of steam creeping out of every orifice as I approached the building.*

*At the end of the block stood Ellis Market, a busy grocery especially on Saturday nights when shoppers gathered to visit. Across B Street was the first generation Finskelstein Shoemaker. Many residents walked on expertly repaired shoes by Mr. Finkelstein. To the east was the Athey and Harrison Feed Store with its frame front little changed from its original 19<sup>th</sup> century appearance. It sold feed to the Laurel Race Track for their horses and to rural customers.*

*The Laurel Hotel dominated the northeast corner of Main Street and Route 1 in the 1930s. Its frame structure with big front porch was on or near sites of previous inns where the stagecoach stopped midway between Baltimore and Washington. The hotel was owned by the Levin family. When I visited their daughter Ann I had my first taste of gelfite fish.*

*We have now walked a mile westward up Main Street and down the south side. We then turned around and came eastward down Main Street on the north side encompassing the commercial and residential mix of Laurel's Main Street in the 1930s. On November 1, 1932, a Silver Cup was awarded to Laurel by the Bicentennial Commission of Washington for the "Best Looking Town" in Prince George's and Montgomery counties in the contest for best lawns and plantings.*

*This is the Laurel I remember.*

I breathe the air You give to me  
I enjoy the bright sunshine  
I see the beauty of the town  
The Home, The Folks, I Pine

Time seems to pass so quickly now  
There's a slowness to my pace  
But Laurel always fills my soul  
And brings a smile to my face

(Adapted from a poem by Barbara Million)

Elizabeth Lee Miles Compton

#### **Laurel Historical Society**

#### **Major Donors and Sponsors**

January 1-December 31 2013

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# Laurel Historical Society Calendar

## June 2014 – November 2014

For more information visit [laurelhistoricalsociety.org](http://laurelhistoricalsociety.org)

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June 12 6:30 PM Friends and Family Picnic Laurel Museum Grounds	August 4-8 Science in the Summer Camp Laurel Pool Room	October 17 Historic Haunt
July Fine Wine Tastings Snow Hill Manor	September 11 Singing Laurel's History Laurel Museum Grounds	October 19 Community Curator's Event for Kids Laurel Pool Room
		November 2

Taste of Laurel  
Laurel Pool Room