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MONTGOMERY HISTORY
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The County's Historian: The Montgomery County Historical Society at 75 Years

By Sarah Hedlund

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Montgomery History envisions an active intellectual life rooted in an understanding and appreciation of our individual and collective histories. Its mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and share the histories of all of Montgomery County's residents and communities.

The Montgomery County Story, in publication since 1957, features scholarly articles on topics of local interest. It is the only journal solely devoted to research on the rich and colorful past of Montgomery County, Maryland.

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The County's Historian:

The Montgomery County Historical Society at 75 Years

By Sarah Hedlund

Montgomery History's logo, updated in 2015 and inspired by a patchwork quilt design, evokes the idea that, like a cherished family quilt handed down through generations, our collective history is also passed from one generation to the next. It must be valued as both a link to our history and a gift to the future. Quilt construction can also be a metaphor for the growth of the Montgomery County Historical Society (MCHS). A patchwork quilt is both designed and planned, yet also subject to change as fabric fades and falls apart. Similarly, Montgomery History at 75 years can be viewed as an enormous quilt that has grown with the ideas and contributions of the myriad individuals involved over three quarters of a century, each adding unique scraps of fabric to form the whole. We are still creating that quilt today--retaining the central core, adding new sections that contribute vibrancy and, at times, trimming off segments that no longer serve. The title of this publication embodies the core of our mission, to tell The Montgomery County Story. Looking back during this anniversary year, we will tell our story, where we started, where we've been, and where we're going today.

The First 20 Years

When Historical Society founder Lilly Moore Stone was born in 1861, the Civil War had just begun, and most of agrarian Montgomery County consisted of small towns scattered between swaths of farmland and rocky woodlands. Within her lifetime, which spanned a few months shy of 100 years, an unfathomable amount of societal change occurred: transitions from carriages to jetliners, telegraphs to television, and farm to suburban life. As a business owner, land owner, farmer, and mother, since her youth Stone demonstrated a commitment to industry and pride in community. In 1914, she became the first woman to deliver a talk to the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore;[1] she was also an active member of the Clan Gregor Society and the Daughters of the American Revolution (Janet Montgomery Chapter), which she joined in 1910. She witnessed the fade of rural Montgomery County farms, including hers, as they became less sustainable. In 1924, at the age when men generally retired and women rarely worked outside their homes, the new widow opened and operated a quarry on her farm. By 1944, she had passed management of Stoneyhurst Quarries to her son, Dunbar, and was living with his family in the newly renovated Glenmore, the Cabin John (now Bethesda) home that her parents purchased when she was a child.[2]

We are unsure of what prompted Lilly Stone that year, at age 83, to initiate a society for those fascinated by history. Perhaps by the 1940s and World War II she felt history was becoming increasingly imperative to preserve.[3] Her lifelong interest both in history and in her own genealogy had already spurred a desire to connect--intellectually and socially--with those who shared that interest.[4] The 100th anniversary of the Maryland Historical Society, also in 1944, combined with intense regional pride, may have inspired her to ensure Montgomery County had its own chapter in the state's historical narrative. Whatever her motivations, Stone assembled a nucleus of like-minded people at her home on June 29, 1944, including U.S. Senator George Radcliff, then-president of the Maryland Historical Society, and its director Dr. James W. Foster, along with some 20 other friends and neighbors. On a motion by Mrs. Jesse W. Nicholson, they voted to form the Montgomery County Historical Society as a local branch of the Maryland Historical Society.[5]

Lilly Stone, with the County flag she designed, at first meeting in 1944. On left, Senator Radcliff; on right Dr. Foster.

Speakers at the second meeting in August[6] again included Sen. Radcliff and Dr. Foster, as well as opening remarks by U.S. Rep. J. Glenn Beall, and Regents from three DAR chapters: Byrd Belt of Chevy Chase, Mrs. Richard Cunningham of Col. Tench Tilghman, and Lilly Stone's daughter-in-law Katherine (Pool) Stone of Janet Montgomery. Dr. Harry Byrd (president of the University of Maryland) gave the keynote speech on the history of Maryland. Officers selected were a president, multiple vice-presidents, recording and corresponding secretaries, treasurer, and chaplain. The organization retained this structural format for several decades, with the eventual addition of a historian, curator, and librarian, among others. Membership dues started at $5 (split 80/20 between Maryland Historical Society and MCHS), and the Constitution and bylaws of the parent organization served their purpose temporarily until MCHS approved its own documents the following year. Subsequent meetings were held in public buildings in Bethesda, including the elementary school, the County building, and the community center. Occasionally, members opened their homes to the Society, including Gilbert and Elsie May (Bell) Grosvenor, who hosted a meeting at "Wild Acres," and Edwin and Dorothy Davis, owners of what would later be called the Beall-Dawson House. Newspapers consistently covered MCHS activities, and members recruited friends and colleagues. Attendance at monthly meetings ranged from 10 to 30, expanding ten-fold for special speakers and events. Membership numbers varied with the times, the accuracy of reporting, and precisely what defined a member.

The format of these meetings bore similarity to that of a group named "The Fortnightly Club," in which Stone had been a member in the 1890s,[7] and also contained traces of "love for God and country," as taught in *The Manual of Patriotism* in the late 19th century, ideals revived in post-WWII American society.[8] Meetings opened with a recitation of "Salute to the Flag" (now Pledge of Allegiance) and an invocation by the chaplain, followed with a performance by local musicians, group singing of patriotic songs, and finally a presentation on an historical topic--often related to national or state history, though local topics were encouraged and more frequent by the 1950s. Meetings concluded with refreshments and socialization "enjoyed by all."[9] Early speakers on historical topics included former State Senator Blair Lee, Baltimore Mayor Theodore McKeldin, John Clagett Proctor (editor of *Washington Past and Present* and contributor to *The Evening Star*), and the Rev. Joseph T. Durkin (Georgetown University).[10]

Edwin Davis, laying bricks near the arched entrance to his home, 1940s.

Members of MCHS gathered at the Crommelin House at Great Falls, July 1951.

Members began contributing objects of historical note to the Society. Typical donations consisted of antiques, such as copies of 18th century newspapers, legal documents, Indian artifacts, and historic currency.[11] A notable early gift with local provenance was a portrait of Dr. William Waters, along with his surgical instruments and diplomas. Mrs. Julian C. Wallace soon donated a large desk to hold materials, kept at the new courthouse in Rockville; objects were also stored in the Rockville home of Mrs. W. Randolph Talbott.[12] Partly out of need for a safer place to keep this growing collection, Society member (and later president) R. Bentley Thomas took on the task of finding a home for MCHS. He suggested the Brookeville Academy building, discussing potential terms of use throughout 1946 with the church that owned it, but soon the Society was offered storage and exhibit space in the newly restored Crommelin House (later called the Tavern at Great Falls). There, MCHS exhibited uncurated displays of eclectic artifacts, such as Indian arrowheads and furniture with unsubstantiated connections to historical figures. By 1951, MCHS offered a more permanent exhibition in that space, depicting the typical living quarters of a lock-keeper in the early 19th century, which remained on display until 1954.

A core group of members emerged, willing to promote historical awareness. In 1952, Stone organized individuals who wished to do more than attend meetings and pay dues into the Historical Projects Committee.[13] Consisting initially of Stone, Martha Sprigg Poole (historian/librarian), Edward Dunlap (curator/archivist), Dr. Henry DeCoursey Adams (curator), and Eulalie MacEachern (chronicler), it later became the Historian's Active Group. One of its first tasks involved identifying locations for historical markers in Montgomery County; markers were placed at St. Peter's Church in Poolesville, the Hungerford Tavern site, Fort Sumner, site of the Daniel Carroll house, and Brookeville Academy. Advocating for site markers involved correspondence with the State Roads Commission; in 1953, MCHS suggested six locations for County road markers, but none was selected that year.

Unveiling of the historical marker commissioned for the Hungerford Tavern site, September 6, 1951. Pictured are Mrs. William T. Jarvis (program chairman), Mrs. James B. Patton and Janet Wilcox (DAR), Sen. George Radcliffe, Gov. Theodore McKeldin, and Mrs. Jesse W. Nicholson (MCHS President).

The Active Historians also identified historic places in need of preservation; in addition, MCHS Presidents Col. Grady Gore and Robert C. Jones frequently advocated for preservation of various historical sites when asked to weigh in.[14] MCHS supported protection of the C&O Canal against the 1956 plan for the George Washington Memorial Parkway--a case the group monitored for years--as well as advocating on local issues such as saving "The Woodlands" home of Francis Clopper near Gaithersburg, supporting a continued billboard ban on Rockville Pike, and opposing change of the Pike's name to Wisconsin Avenue north of Bethesda in 1960.

Martha Sprigg Poole, of old line Montgomery families, was credited later by Dr. Alexander Casanges as the one who "kept the Society going" during these early years with a variety of projects.[15] She collected gravestone inscriptions, answered questions from school children, clipped newspaper articles, copied documents for research, and started a photograph collection.[16] Her work formed the nucleus of MCHS' eventual research library collection. She also organized "Pilgrimages," available to members at a reasonable fee, which involved day trips to regions of Montgomery County (such as Brookeville, Darnestown, or Poolesville), where participants would visit historic houses and receive information on them provided by Poole. She also established and edited the *Montgomery County Story*, a quarterly publication focused on topics specific to County history, beginning in 1957. She frequently contributed articles, along with Roger Brooke Farquhar, Jr., Mildred Getty, and Henry DeCoursey Adams (who penned the first history of the Society in 1959).

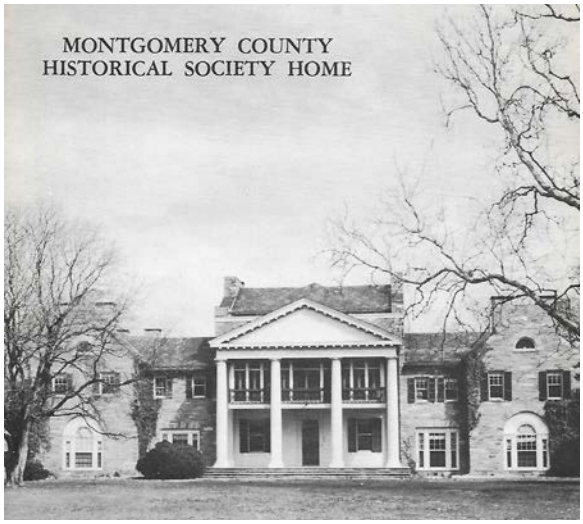
Adams was a vocal critic of the Society's practices in both acquisition and stewardship. Archivist Edward T. Dunlap had established a collection plan in 1955, prioritizing items with Montgomery County provenance to be collected first, followed by objects with Maryland provenance and those related to early American history as second and third priorities. The collection was growing beyond members' ability to maintain it. Adams wrote: "Unfortunately the cause of preservation has been sometimes clouded by the sentimentalists out to save everything, regardless of significance. The mere antiquity is not sufficient basis for selection of an item for permanent preservation." In the January 1958 minutes, he lamented that the desk installed at the courthouse in the 1940s, along with all objects in it, were "lost";[17] however, they were recovered from an unused room inside the courthouse building in 1959. That year, the members approved a budget of $800 to care for and organize the Society's collections, which then numbered approximately 300 objects.

Martha Sprigg Poole and Alexander Casanges share a moment, 1960s.

During the 1950s—the decade in which the Society was led by Mrs. Jesse (Mollie) Nicholson—more meetings were held in exclusive private homes, coinciding with growing attendance and maintaining the interest of leading County families. To manage activities, MCHS formed committees, which at this time included Membership, Program and Yearbook, Library, Hospitality, House, Finance, Archivist, Publicity, Radio, and Advisory Committees.[18] Speakers at monthly meetings continued to present topics, the majority now focused on Montgomery County history. In 1951, Nicholson, an active member of numerous local civic and political organizations,[19] presided over measures such as initiating MCHS' first black tie Annual Meeting (held at the Naval Officers Club); starting a building fund for a permanent MCHS home as well as (unsuccessfully) petitioning the County for use of the Poor Farm property; overseeing installation of the Great Falls Tavern exhibition in June, incorporation of MCHS in October, and increasing membership to more than 500 people.

The new charter, dated October 5, 1951, officially separated MCHS from the Maryland Historical Society. It described MCHS as a "voluntary association" that could collect objects and disseminate information, honor those who contributed to the "upbuilding and preservation of Montgomery County, its institutions and ideals," and to "erect, purchase, and maintain buildings, museums, monuments and memorials" that pertain to the history of Montgomery County.

During her second term as president, Nicholson led the fund-raising effort to secure MCHS' first real home, "Glenview," updated by Irene and James Lyon in 1926 from a farm that once belonged to Judge Richard Johns Bowie.[20] The stately mansion on 28 acres near Rockville Cemetery was purchased by MCHS in 1954 with a $40,000 down payment, raised by almost 1,000 donors. A brochure created to raise $60,000 described the property as "more than an elegant estate.... a living monument of practical usefulness to our heritage.... and a civic center for all people to enjoy.... Here, the student of Montgomery County history can hold the County's past in his hands and peer into the future for 'tis said that 'our past acclaims our future.'.... THIS, MONTGOMERY COUNTIANS, IS YOUR HOME."[21]



MCHS fundraising brochure for Glenview Mansion, 1954.

Lilly Stone (center), at Glenview c. 1955. On left, Judge Stedman Prescott; on right, Robert Jones and wife.

Society interest increased after the purchase, with the enthusiasm of meetings and collections moving into the new space, but quickly fell off. The large membership anticipated easily covering mortgage payments and expenses never materialized, and MCHS found itself in a financially precarious situation within months of its triumphant acquisition. Among other cost-cutting and fund-raising measures, the Society leased the majority of the house to Montgomery County Public Schools from 1955 to 1957 for use as grade school classrooms, alleviating temporary overcrowding at Twinbrook Elementary School.[22] By 1956, fewer than half of MCHS members had paid their dues, and the Executive committee (by now under the leadership of Dr. John Steelman) resigned itself to selling the property while the organization was still solvent. The City of Rockville purchased Glenview on February 5, 1957, for $125,000, allowing MCHS to retain use of a room on the second floor for meetings and some storage space.[23] The potential financial crisis successfully ended with MCHS acquiring a nest egg, while re-evaluating its building needs.

Honorary President Lilly Stone's death in 1960 was a loss for the Society. MCHS had come through its first 15 years with a purpose both defining and ambitious. The organization drifted through the early 1960s with its usual activities, but seemed to have lost its focus along with its founder. By 1963 the City of Rockville needed more space at Glenview (now known as Rockville Civic Center), and President Thomas Anderson, Jr. and his successor Dr. Alexander Casanges made finding another home the priority for MCHS. Dorothy Davis--a long-time Society member along with her late husband--wanted to sell their lovingly restored home in central Rockville, a grand house built by Upton Beall in 1815. Forming an alliance, perhaps as a nod to their mutual arrangement at Glenview, MCHS and the City of Rockville each fronted a portion of the purchase price. The City retained ownership, leasing the property long-term for MCHS use;[24] this arrangement continues today. Signing the deal in June 1965, MCHS moved into the Beall-Dawson house at 103 West Montgomery Avenue in November. To celebrate, the Society hosted a Christmas party for members in its new space, beginning a tradition of seasonal events that continued for the next half century.

Deciding to become a "historic house museum" at Glenview and then at Beall-Dawson were choices that held enormous implications for MCHS–in terms of focus, operations, interpretation, collecting, engagement with the public, as well as financial. Moving into the Beall-Dawson house began a new era for the 20-year-old organization.

MCHS members tour the Beall-Dawson House prior to purchase in 1965. Congressman Gilbert Gude is descending the stairs; others pictured unknown.

1965-1974: Stewardship and Scholarship

Historical Society members, energized by their acquisition of the elegant Beall-Dawson House, commenced immediate activity on the property in 1966. That same year, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation to allocate to MCHS $2 of every fee charged for performing a marriage ceremony at the courthouse.[25]

The Federal-style Beall-Dawson House was built in 1815 by Upton Beall, second clerk of the Montgomery County Court. It exemplifies the style of early 19th century brick houses in Montgomery County and stands as a rare extant reminder of the history of the County seat. The Bealls, a prominent and widespread family in Georgetown and Maryland, kept the house (through the related Dawsons) well into the 20th century. Under the Historical Society's stewardship and financial commitment of the City of Rockville, many architectural and restorative projects were undertaken over the years, supported by research and scholarship on the house and its inhabitants, including enslaved families.

Though the Davises had been excellent caretakers who contributed to the stability of the structure, Edwin Davis died before completing his planned renovations. Most pressing was the shabby appearance of the front façade; Davis had removed the anachronistic full-length veranda added in the early 1900s, but the brickwork remained marred.[26] The front steps, in poor repair, were replaced in 1966, followed by restoration of the brickwork and trim painting on both interior and exterior of the house in following years. The City installed attractive brick walkways to the street and around the front of the house.

Curator Robert Braunberg and President Alexander Casanges view recently renovated front steps at the Beall-Dawson house in 1967. Sign on door reads "Wet Paint."

To ensure security, and to allow members and neighbors easy access to the space, the Society arranged for Irene Vaught to live in a few rooms of the house and provide tours of the public space 4 to 5 days a week. Raymond and Mabel Turner replaced her as resident hosts in 1972. While members addressed the aesthetics of the Beall-Dawson House, MCHS began to consider uses for the rooms and outbuildings. To interpret the building as a museum, President Casanges and newly-appointed Curator Robert Braunberg began acquiring 19th century furnishings, most of which were purchased from, loaned, or donated by the Maryland Historical Society.[27] Braunberg also set his sights on the frame 1940s garage, and with Thomas Anderson, Jr., began converting that space to display museum objects. Because the property was historically a slave-holding plantation, Braunberg also began to collect 19th century farm implements. The converted garage-museum space opened in late 1970, coinciding with completion of a small parking lot for visitors.[28]

Meanwhile, the Society carried on with traditional activities, also adding some new ones. An official newsletter created by 1970 augmented the quarterly publication of the *Story*.[29] In 1967, local resident Jane Chinn Sween agreed to write an article for the *Story* on her home town of Dawsonville and subsequently continued to volunteer for MCHS.[30] By the early 1970s, book and paper collections created a small library, located in a second-floor room of the house, with Sween working as Librarian, assisted by Mary Gordon Malloy and Marian Jacobs.[31] Once or twice a week, year round, individuals would assemble around the huge table to expand the research conducted at MCHS. The intensity of these tasks was frequently interrupted with exclamations of Listen to this! Did you know that...? How shall I respond to this inquiry? Please help me find this... What if....? Historical Society files swelled with newspaper clippings, family charts, photographs, tombstone inscriptions, and research papers.

Researchers and library volunteers Marian Jacobs and Mary Charlotte Crook at MCHS 40th Anniversary Gala, 1984.

Rockville newcomer and history teacher Eileen McGuckian joined MCHS in 1967, assisting her neighbor Bob Braunberg with the Society's museum collections.[32] She became interested in the history surrounding the Beall-Dawson property, writing an article for the *Story* in 1972 about Jerusalem M.E. Church, the first research published by MCHS on black history.[33] Members established new events in addition to the annual meetings and the Garden Tea organized in the 1950s, including Candlelight Tours, a member reception, and a Village Shop, all taking place in December. Miss Kitty and Miss Martha (the Poole sisters) were active historians at the start of the decade, writing articles, arranging Pilgrimages, and answering questions from the public. Their historical research and educational activities were soon carried on by Mayvis Fitzsimons, Mary Charlotte Crook, and E. Guy Jewell. Other projects undertaken by Society members included using MCHS photographs to create slide shows on County history (shown in the schools), microfilming unique County records, conducting oral history interviews, and arranging archaeological digs on Beall-Dawson grounds.

In the early 1970s, the historic preservation movement gained popularity nationwide, particularly in nearby Washington.[34] When the imminent demise of historic properties in Montgomery County was brought to their attention, representatives from MCHS (especially Casanges and Braunberg) bolstered the practice of supporting preservation with resolutions and statements. During this period MCHS, alongside others in the community, advocated for preservation of the Red Brick Courthouse, the Confederate Statue, National Park Seminary in Forest Glen, and other sites. Congressman Gilbert Gude spoke frequently supporting preservation efforts in Montgomery County.[35] In 1973, the Beall-Dawson House was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and included the following year in one of the first three Historic Districts designated by the Mayor & Council of Rockville.[36]

Concurrent with this sharp increase in wider preservation activity, including formation of Peerless Rockville and other preservation nonprofits in the County, MCHS focused inward on preservation needs and maintenance of its property. In 1971, the Rockville Volunteer Fire Department donated a one-room structure originally the medical office of Dr. Edward Elisha Stonestreet. After his death in 1903, it served as Rockville's first public library. In the 1940s it moved to a location near Richard Montgomery High School, then moved again to the Montgomery County Agricultural Fairgrounds for use by the Fire Department,[37] and finally to the Beall-Dawson property for interpretation in 1972. By then, the frame walls had been covered in stucco and the roof was so damaged that it arrived covered with a tarp. Fundraising paid for the move and renovations on the tiny structure; preservation architect Glen Little designed the project in consultation with Dr. William Linthicum, a grandson of Dr. Stonestreet. A photograph of the building in its original location aided in restoring the exterior to its mid-19th century appearance.[38]

June 1974 marked the 200th anniversary of the locally famous Hungerford Resolves, signed in the crossroads village even before Montgomery County was formed. MCHS held a commemoration event, for which they hired pianist Leonard Meads. During the evening, the 77-year-old Meads revealed that his maternal grandmother Catherine Smith was once enslaved by the Beall sisters and born in the Beall-Dawson House, his mother Rose worked in the house, and that as a young man, he played piano "for the dancing school Miss Dawson conducted."[39] At this time, Society leaders were starting to understand the intricate connections among communities, families, buildings, and their shared ties to the past. Soon a nationwide event would propel historical and genealogical scholarship forward, both locally and across America.

Dr. Stonestreet's office, traveling down Montgomery Ave. as workers lifted power lines along the route (photo by Eddie Brinson, 1972).

1975-1979: Bicentennial Boon

By 1975, long-planned festivities to celebrate the American Bicentennial had begun. In addition to the big-city events that garnered national attention, many American communities conducted their own local events. Bicentennial activities in Montgomery County included commissioning a commemorative coin, publication of a pictorial map of historic buildings drawn by artist Carol Stuart Watson, an oral history program organized by Kensington Woman's Club, "The Great American Scene" festival with 800 participants held at Montgomery Mall/Cabin John Park, a parade in Gaithersburg, a commemorative session of the County Council and County Executive, and design updates for the County Flag, Seal, and Coat of Arms.[40]

MCHS participated in production of a film called "Montgomery County: Then and Now," and publication of *A Grateful Remembrance*, the first comprehensive narrative history of the County. MCHS jointly published the book with County government, and also arranged for researcher and co-author Richard MacMaster to live at Beall-Dawson while he wrote.[41] Ray Hiebert, a professor at the University of Maryland, was added as editor and co-author. In 1975, researcher Linda R. Burgin proposed herself as author of a companion book on black history in Montgomery County; historian Sharyn Duffin was suggested as co-author. MCHS president and Director of Public Libraries Gerry Wooldridge floated the idea to several funders, but could not generate support for the project.[42]

Bicentennial celebration at Beall-Dawson, 1976. Blair Lee III (far left) and Elizabeth Scull (far right) hold A Grateful Remembrance. Also pictured are Bill Hussmann (second from left), MCHS President Gerry Wooldridge (center), and Dickran Hovsepian (second from right).

The Bicentennial influenced MCHS and the subsequent direction of its mission, programming, and activities. The Board, led by President James Scull, placed more focus on research (historic and genealogical), collecting, and preservation, through committees formed in 1978: Mary Charlotte Crook, later *Story* editor, was in charge of the History Committee (which included oral histories, the library, and the "graphics" collection); Eileen McGuckian and Robert Braunberg led the Preservation Committee; Mary Gordon Malloy headed Programs and Hospitality; and Betsy Brunett chaired the Museum Committee.[43]

Hired as Librarian in 1976, Jane Sween became the first paid employee of the Society. Her *Guide to Montgomery County Records*, co-authored with Malloy, helped many genealogists and historians conduct their research. The library's collection had grown beyond the weight capacity of the Beall-Dawson parlor ceiling,[44] and the former museum space in the converted garage underwent another renovation (1975-1977) to house the research library. New volunteers arrived to catalog existing collections: Janet Manuel worked on photographs and slides; Mark Walston catalogued artifacts in the museum collection. Mrs. Turner moved out of the host rooms in 1977 following the death of her husband. After John and Martha McBryde completed their tenure as live-in hosts in 1979, Walston moved in briefly while museum docents were trained; he became the last person to live in the house. Volunteers in period dress led tours of the museums and rotating exhibitions. A Docent Committee formed to provide continued training and monthly activities for these specialized volunteers.[45]

Interior of the MCHS Library, c. 1986. Photo includes Jane Sween, Millicent Gay, and Mary Kay Harper.

As a result of the collecting of objects and information during the Bicentennial era, space in the Beall-Dawson and Stonestreet buildings was utilized for storage and exhibitions, the newly renovated library being devoted to research and scholarship. The Museum Committee planned exhibitions to feature MCHS collections, such as the popular dollhouses, displayed annually for five years starting in 1977. In 1978, Society member Ann E. Brown formed a committee on genealogy, which soon became known as the Genealogical Club of the MCHS.[46] Notable events hosted by MCHS included the Candlelight House Tour, started in 1976 as a joint venture with Peerless Rockville, and a chamber music series in the parlor called Arts by Candlelight, sponsored by the Arts Council of Rockville. MCHS celebrated its 35th anniversary in 1979 with a garden party planned by GoGo Kiplinger, who arranged several successful fundraising events over the next few years.[47] Later in 1979, the Dawson family held a reunion on Beall-Dawson grounds, for which pianist Meads was again engaged to provide musical entertainment.

In 1978, MCHS hired its first Development Director, Peg Williams. First, she obtained a grant through the American Association for State and Local History for a comprehensive study to assess the structure and operations of MCHS. The Porter Report, as compiled by consultant Daniel Porter in 1979, recommended that MCHS make changes in operations, expand its physical facilities (to allow for better care of collections), and appoint an administrator.[48] One result of the Porter Report was commissioning plans for a Research and Heritage Center to replace the library building on the Beall-Dawson grounds, but Williams left her position before fundraising efforts began. Also, following multiple Bicentennial collaborations, the Society petitioned the County government to invest in the operations of MCHS, highlighting its desire to hire an Education Director and establish a budget. The County Council approved a $20,000 grant that year,[49] and funding for MCHS as part of the annual County budget--albeit in different forms and at varying levels–continues today.

1980-1989: Professionalism and Identity

Civil War reenactors pose on the front steps of Beall-Dawson, 1986.

The 1980s saw a resurgence of interest in genealogy research as well as in Civil War scholarship. These particular interests were likely a carry-over from the publicity of the Bicentennial[50] as well as the cultural phenomenon caused by "Roots," a popular television miniseries that aired in 1977. In Montgomery County the Geneaology Club quickly took center stage in MCHS programming, holding monthly meetings with speakers on varied topics in addition to instructional classes that included research in County records. Charles and Marian Jacobs, veteran members of MCHS, formed a Civil War Roundtable which partnered with the Society to hold Civil War Encampments on Beall-Dawson grounds 1982 to 1987. This involved reenactors, horses, tents, campfires, marches, and various activities for the community to view or take part in. During these events, the Stonestreet museum featured Dr. Terry Hambrecht portraying Dr. Stonestreet to interpret Civil War-era medical practices.[51] For many years, the Montgomery County Civil War Roundtable met at MCHS.

During the 1980s, care of objects and interpretation of the house museum became the primary mission for Society volunteers and visitors. This followed the City of Rockville's commission of a detailed five-year restoration plan prepared by consultant J. Richard Rivoire in 1977.[52] The Beall-Dawson House, its main floor now bedecked in period furnishings with a few upstairs rooms devoted to rotating exhibitions, opened to the public five days a week, with an army of docents 30 to 40 strong, decorated every Christmas, and host to a year-round gift shop (organized by Mary Kay Harper, Betsy Brunett, and Maureen Altobello) that was a stable revenue stream. In 1986, MCHS became the destination for 650 children bussed in for school tours coordinated by docent Nancy Dodson.[53] Events, such as the Garden Party fundraiser, participation in the Maryland House and Garden Pilgrimage, an Arts By Candlelight concert series, and a new First Sunday lecture series, took place on Beall-Dawson grounds, while the Pilgrimages once arranged by Martha Poole morphed into bus trips to Montgomery County destinations with historical lectures provided.[54]

Docent Mary Lou Luff greets school children at the door to the Stonestreet Museum of 19th Century Medicine.

Stories like Meads' piqued the Society's curiosity about the history of its home. The Board, led during this era by Nancy Hafer, Genevieve Wimsatt, and Rex Sturm, made it a priority to research Beall-Dawson and its occupants in order to provide docent-led tours and educational programming. They contracted in 1986 for Jean Russo, a professor at the University of Maryland, to perform in-depth research on Upton Beall and his family.[55] Inventories of Beall's estate at the time of his death revealed the existence of "thirty yellow chairs" that she presumed were used in the parlor for concerts, arranged in the hall for guests, and moved about the house for various uses. Creating replicas of these chairs became important. Assistant Dee Dee Allen received an

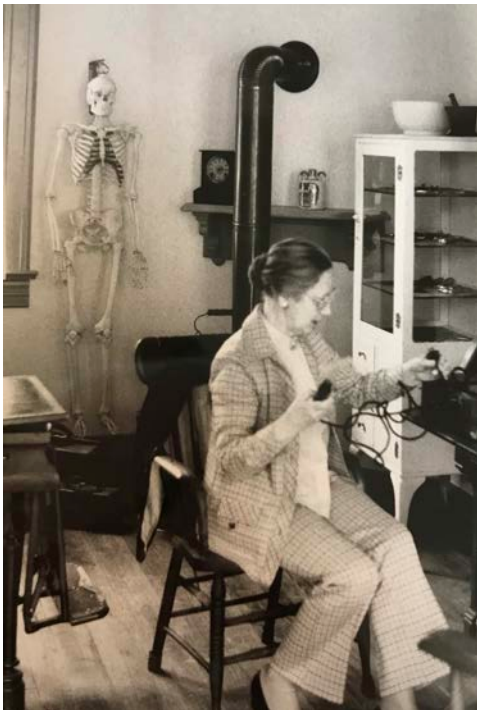
unexpected surprise when Irvin Brooke--a descendant of the Dawsons--sent her a sketch of one of the yellow chairs, on which he remembered sitting while living in the house as a child.[56] When long-time Museum Curator Brunett died in 1982, the exhibition space in the second floor bedroom was named in her honor and the chairs commissioned in her name.[57] Another bedroom had previously been named for Mildred Getty. The chairs, their design based on Brooke's sketch, were paid for, fabricated, and delivered in November 1989.

In 1987 MCHS and the City completed renovation of the lone extant outbuilding on the grounds, which researchers determined was a dairy or spring house. A necessity before refrigeration, the small brick structure was designed to allow cool spring water to be piped into a large trough, where jugs of milk and other perishables were kept during summer months.[58] MCHS removed stored objects, trash, and leaves from inside the dairy, replaced the door and repaired window fittings, and installed interpretive props.[59]

MCHS' ongoing custodial responsibilities to the historic house involved remediation of recurring roof leaks and insect infestations. Investment in a paint analysis led to repainting several rooms in period-appropriate shades as well as faux-marble patterns applied to the baseboards and stair lifts by volunteer artists Jeanne Gearin and Carol Martell.[60] The absence of tenants in the upstairs rooms, followed by relocation of offices,[61] allowed interpretation of what had been the house slave quarters during Upton Beall's time. Too many structural changes made in the past did not permit complete restoration of the rooms (such as removal of walls and reconfigured floor space), but this allowed the Society to include the lives of enslaved people within the story of the house.[62] At this time, re-interpretation was based on input from Michael Trostel of Baltimore; later interpretations were based on research done by Diane Broadhurst.[63]

Irvin Brooke's sketch of the yellow chairs he recalled as a child. This sketch was used to recreate the Beall family chairs.

The focus of MCHS on its museums led to additional projects and activities, carried out by volunteers. Peg Lucas and later Sally D'Albora and Peg Sante headed the Textile Committee,[64] which amassed a collection of period clothing and quilts, most with Montgomery County provenance; a highlight was the donation of the Woodbourne quilt in 1985. They featured these objects frequently in the temporary exhibitions.[65] Millicent Gay acted as Curator for the newly-opened Stonestreet Medical Museum, now fully restored and containing 19th century medical books and equipment.[66] The herb garden and sundial area near the Dairy House were planted in 1981, a gift from siblings Gilbert Gude and Elizabeth Doonan.[67] A medicinal garden to support interpretation of the Stonestreet museum sprouted on the terrace between the Beall-Dawson property and the back yard of 111 West Montgomery Avenue. In 1982, one of the few pieces original to the Beall-Dawson House was returned when Thomas Anderson, Jr. donated the tall case clock crafted by Jesse Hayden c1805 and once owned by Upton Beall.[68]



Curator Millicent Gay examines new acquisitions at the Doctor's desk, c. 1981.

MCHS gradually became more professional, hiring paid staff members to manage day-to-day operations instead of officers of the Board or volunteers performing those duties. However, museum-related tasks continued to rely heavily on trained volunteer docents and curators. Still using the Porter Report for direction, in 1981 the Board hired Mead Karras as Administrator of MCHS;[69] by 1985 this position was expanded to Executive Director. Freed from the hands-on management responsibilities of previous decades, the 1980s Board began long-term planning, targeted programming, and public relations initiatives, forming task forces and holding retreats.[70] It created a separate Board of Trustees (with former Congressman Gude as President), charged with increasing the long-term financial stability of MCHS through cultivation of community donors. Development Director Sylvia Jones set up new MCHS membership levels and business donation/membership models in 1986. During this time, MCHS maintained a paid staff of four part-time employees–Executive Director, two Executive Assistants, and the Librarian–and a full-time Development Director. In 1988, the Board hired Lesley van der Lee as its first full-time Executive Director, as well as the first paid staff member with a professional background in museum studies.[71]

Director Lesley van der Lee poses with Rockville Mayor William Hanna, who models the Montgomery County t-shirt, 1988.

A meeting of the Board of Directors, 1985. Pictured: Arria McGinnis, Rex Sturm, Dick Hartfield, Mary Kay Harper, Jane Sween, and Mead Karras.

This photo was taken at the first meeting of the MCHS Board of Trustees, established in 1987. The Hayden clock, donated by former President Thomas Anderson, Jr., sits on the landing above. Pictured are 12 members of the original 24-member Board: Brendan O'Neill, Dr. Stephen Cromwell, Edward Day, Edward Offutt, Genevieve Wimsatt, George Kephart, Moran McConihe, Austin Kiplinger, E. Brooke Lee III, Valentine Wilson, Gilbert Gude, and Samuel Riggs IV.

Eventually, growth required additional space, an enormous challenge for MCHS. Volunteers worked on numerous projects, new staffers required offices, and the collections required more storage space. The house could not hold all this activity, especially when so much of its square footage hosted public exhibitions. The library was growing too, both physically–accumulating donated books and archival documents, plus research materials generated by library volunteers and the Genealogy Club–and in reputation. Jane Sween produced *Montgomery County: Two Centuries of Change* in 1984, complementing the Bicentennial history with photographs and town histories to summarize the breadth of change in Montgomery County over 200 years.[72]

MCHS' next attempted to address its space issue in 1982, when the Board hired Barbara Heyman to initiate a fund-raising campaign for the proposed Research and Heritage Center recommended by the Porter Report and approved by the City of Rockville in 1979.[73] The Board added a committee chaired by Rex Sturm, which organized a Gala fundraiser in April 1984. Funds received were modest, concerns arose about continued viability of the original plans considering current space needs, and the project stalled. The following year, the County announced plans to renovate the Red Brick Courthouse and to offer space to local organizations. Simultaneously, owners of the neighboring house at 111 West Montgomery Avenue offered it to MCHS. The Board saw an opportunity to alleviate space issues by moving offices from Beall-Dawson into Bryan and relocating library collections to the Courthouse. MCHS purchased the Bryan house in 1986,[74] gradually abandoning the difficult proposition of redesigning and funding the Research

and Heritage Center. The library's move to the Courthouse seemed assured at the start of 1986, but renovation took much longer than promised. By the time the County offered space for the Society's library in 1990, MCHS budget constraints made it impossible to afford the rent.[75] The library would remain on Middle Lane. When longtime MCHS Board member and Treasurer Edward P. Offutt passed away in March 1989, the Bryan house was officially renamed the Offutt Administration Building in his memory and the Genealogy Club donated a plaque to ensure his legacy. Before his death, Offutt had donated generously toward an endowment to support the conservation and acquisition of MCHS collections.[76] That gift is still viable today, designated as the Offutt Fund and sustained by additional donors.

MCHS changed its logo in 1988 from a pen-and-ink drawing of the Beall-Dawson House to a depiction of the sunburst interior architectural detail.[77] Reflecting a shift in institutional mindset, the Society transitioned from the initial thrill of owning a large historic house to an understanding of the inner lives of the house's inhabitants, and a desire to bring those stories to light. Pursuit of property and collections had culminated in a quest for historical knowledge with which to contextualize those collections. MCHS positioned itself to move away from strictly serving as a house museum to more effectively sharing that knowledge with the broader community.

Celebrating the purchase of 111 West Montgomery Ave., 1986.

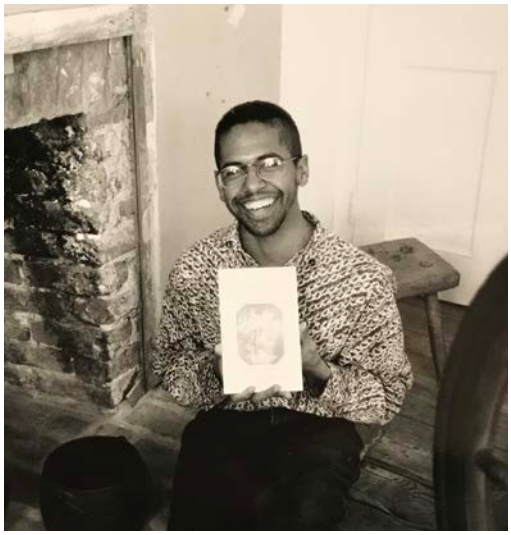
1990-2008: The Mary Kay Years

Lesley van der Lee resigned at the beginning of 1990,[78] with Assistant Director Mary Kay Harper taking her place. Challenges included losing the space at the Courthouse, miscommunication with the City of Rockville over funding for a grounds-improvement feasibility study, and neighborhood criticism of the City's aggressive pruning of historic boxwoods in front of the Beall-Dawson House.[79] Harper and her staff gradually created distinct outreach programs and events for MCHS, some lasting for decades. She brought a stronger focus on education to MCHS, using information on County history: stored objects, books, research materials, and the combined knowledge of people to share this knowledge with the public more directly.

Mary Kay Harper convinced the Trustees to fund a year's salary for Jane North as part-time Development Director. She also hired former intern Karen Yaffe Lottes as Education Director.[80] The three "made a great team,"[81] showing particular skill at creating popular programming, identifying and obtaining grant funds for basic operations as well as specific projects, and making use of local connections to receive services for free, or at reduced rates. In 1991, the gift shop–transported by volunteers to three different expositions that fall–pulled in more than $25,000 of income and a peer group award.[82] Board leadership in this decade started with Rex Sturm as Board President, followed by Philip Cantelon, Ann Brown, and Mary Anne Touhey. Gradually, the financial crunch of recent years waned.

The library, which Harper believed a unique aspect of MCHS,[83] lacked space for both storage and research activity. Jane Sween and her volunteers had worked steadily for decades to increase researcher access to Montgomery County records, by creating genealogy files with elaborate cross-referencing, abstracts of church records, birth, marriage, and land records, documentation of research projects, and other valuable resources. In addition, the Montgomery County Public Library in Rockville had dismantled its local history room in 1991, donating much of that collection to MCHS.[84] It had developed into a local treasure trove filled with unique information (such as WWI service records and maps showing early land patents), but conditions were unsustainable. Not only was the space overcrowded, but it also had poor climate control. Wall units provided minimal heat and cooling to the first floor, while the second floor remained unfinished, with bare wood walls and open planks for stair treads.

Nina Clarke, local author and guest curator for "The Enduring Communities of Martinsburg and Sandy Spring," portrait 1990s.



Author Anthony Cohen poses in the old kitchen of the Beall-Dawson House with his new book on the Underground Railroad, 1994.

Archaeology volunteers search for evidence of a windmill that once stood on the Beall property, 1990.

In 1992, MCHS arranged a loan agreement with the City to accomplish a comprehensive renovation of the former garage on Middle Lane.[85] Volunteers packed up and shifted the contents of the library to a downtown storefront, where it remained open for business during construction. Board member Brendan O'Neill, a local contractor, led the renovation, which included a centralized HVAC system and rear addition, finished second floor, and new interior walls.[86] O'Neill, his son Brendan, and subcontractors completed the project on time and within budget, serving as an example of a public-private-nonprofit partnership. The newly renovated MCHS library opened to the public in 1993.[87]

While genealogy and the Civil War were popular historical topics of the 1980s, the 1990s engendered public interest in black history, the Underground Railroad, and archaeology, for which MCHS provided content. In 1991, Nina Honemond Clarke, a Poolesville native and teacher/principal in segregated as well as integrated schools and author of two books on local black history, set the stage for more in-depth exploration of African American history. Her guest-curated exhibition on the communities of Martinsburg and Sandy Spring and accompanying lecture on these enclaves, one post-Emancipation and the other late-18th century,[88] were well received, and Clarke later became a volunteer docent at the Beall-Dawson House. Anthony Cohen, who conducted extensive research to uncover evidence of Underground Railroad activity in Montgomery County, wrote a book on his findings in 1994, which MCHS published. The popularity of the subject matter dominated the Society's programming over the next few years: Cohen led multiple tours of Underground Railroad sites and participated in book signings along with fellow local history authors Susan Soderburg, Jim Johnston, and Bill Offutt.[89] A frequent speaker at MCHS events, Cohen also directed MCHS' first History Camp for middle schoolers in the summer of 1995.[90]

MCHS invited community members to participate in multiple archaeological digs between 1990 and 1994 on Beall-Dawson grounds. The first, led by volunteer archaeologist Ed Otter, searched for the location of a windmill noted near the dairy house on a 1903 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. Evidence of the windmill was not discovered, but enthusiasm for the digs increased, and eager volunteers had to be turned away from over-capacity events.[91] An unexpected find in 1994 was a trash pit found beneath the Stonestreet building when MCHS corrected its sinking foundation, revealing a cluster of sub-surface artifacts. Project staff surmised these items had been tossed by former inhabitants into the cellar of an ice house once on the property, unused after refrigeration in the early 20th century, and subsequently filled with trash. Dr. Stonestreet's office moved yet again, this time 30 feet south onto MCHS property, in order to accommodate further research on the uncovered site.[92]

Many familiar MCHS programs and events trace their beginnings to Heritage Days (first called History Day, then History Tour, then in 2004 turned over to Heritage Montgomery), and a celebration of the anniversary of the County's formation in September 1776, known as "Happy Birthday, Montgomery County."[93] This day-long event held on Beall-Dawson grounds included the appearance of local officials, games and activities for children, history talks, musical performances, book signings, and demonstrations of traditional arts, as well as birthday cake. Another key MCHS program debuted in 2007; originally designed to give volunteers in cultural heritage organizations a forum in which to share ideas and problem-solve, the annual Montgomery County History Conference introduced the general public to speakers and panels discussing historical topics.[94] Other community outreach included a booth at the County Fair, and a Halloween event created by Lottes called "In Search of Ghosts" for which costumed characters related local stories by candlelight.[95] For its members, MCHS provided multiple volunteer appreciation events, bus tours, walking tours, Christmas events at Beall-Dawson, the Holiday Fete, and a tree lighting ceremony at the Waters House in Germantown.[96] Fundraising activities such as the book sale and gift shop were held over the years, further providing the community with a sense of tradition associated with MCHS. The Society's new fundraising motto, present in all newsletters, at all events, and on the donation box, was "It takes Cents to make Sense of History."

MCHS received a crucial windfall in 1998 when the estate of Katherine Thomas was settled. Thomas, a long-time resident and owner of hundreds of acres of farmland west of Rockville, willed proceeds from sale of her property to be split among eight local organizations–including the Montgomery County Historical Society–amounting to approximately one million dollars. Board members Terry Beaty and John McGraw set up an endowment for the Society, stipulating that no more than 5% be drawn annually. This largest single donation (until 2018) provided MCHS with the ability to plan for long-termfinancial support.[97]

Longtime Board President Terry Beaty (center, with microphone) speaks at Happy Birthday, Montgomery County in 2002. Director Mary Kay Harper is on his left.

Director Harper placed strong emphasis on educational programming, hiring more part-time staff, writing grant proposals, and raising funds to support education for all age groups. As an anomaly in Maryland, MCHS supported History Day–the local component of National History Day, an annual research and presentation competition for secondary students. In-house, MCHS provided History Camp–historically themed sessions of day camp held during the summer for middle schoolers and, for elementary age children, school tours of the museums.[98] Created by School Program Coordinator Emily Correll and Education Director Lottes, one program named "Changes" was targeted at 4th and 5th graders, with education packets provided to teachers ahead of a field trip to the museums. They frequently altered the subject matter and format of the tours, depending on the age of children attending and the amount of time spent on local history. Correll also started programs specifically for Scout troops, who could earn badges for special projects. For years, these programs were the bread and butter of MCHS.

*Education Director Karen Lottes (left), with intern Beth Hickey, prepares quilts for "Stitching Heirlooms" (*Gazette *photo, March 12, 1999).*

Educational programming extended to adults, also. Lectures in the community on County history accompanied by slides (eventually developing into Speakers Bureau talks), and frequent workshops offered in topics about the decorative arts and other handcrafts, often accompanied a current MCHS museum exhibition. Starting in 2000, MCHS partnered with County Cable Montgomery to create a documentary program called *Paths to the Present*, featuring 20-minute episodes on places and events from County history, produced by Barbara Grunbaum and hosted by Gail Street.[99] The program drew strongly on interviews with local history experts, many associated with MCHS, as well as the extensive photographs and archival material in the Society's library collection.

Philip L. Cantelon, former president of MCHS and a professional historian, pushed the Board and staff to reconsider the Society's focus on the Beall-Dawson House and Civil War and to create programs that would include 20th century development in Montgomery County. Emphasizing the change in demographics as more ethnic groups settled in the County, he noted the switch from an agricultural economy to one focusing on health and service with the presence of National Institutes of Health, National Bureau of Standards (later NIST), Federal Drug Administration, and Atomic Energy Commission (later Department of Energy). The development of new areas of Chevy Chase and Silver Spring in the first third of the 20th century and boom in suburban living brought by growth of the Federal government during and after WWII, Cantelon argued, had changed the County more in the past half century than at any time since its founding in 1776. The seed for what later became the Mary Kay Harper Center for Suburban Studies was planted.[100]

Amidst this new activity, volunteers continued to collect objects and exhibit them. In the 1990s, MCHS mounted exhibitions on baseball, scientific innovation, doll houses, art glass, and other topics. A Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission grant-funded traveling exhibition with accompanying symposia called "Changing Faces, Changing Places" debuted in 1994; an exhibition and lectures focused on the year 1944, in conjunction with MCHS' 50th anniversary that year.[101] Later exhibitions featured the quilt collection and its impressive variety of wedding dresses.

In 1998, Harper learned that the house next to the Offutt Building at 113 West Montgomery Avenue would come up for sale. She applied for a Maryland Bond Bill and held a fundraising drive to cover some of the purchase,[102] and Board President Terry Beaty provided matching funds.[103] The new property primarily became collections storage and exhibit staging. When Collections Manager Joanna Church was hired that year, part of her salary included rent-free rooms in the house, where she lived as resident Curator.[104] MCHS had benefited from the expertise of a museum specialist before, under Lesley van der Lee's leadership, but Church was the first professional hired exclusively to manage the museum collections. Creative and prolific, she soon curated four exhibitions per year--two installed at the Beall-Dawson House in Rockville and two at the Waters House in Germantown, often with special events and activities linked to each. Her exhibitions instructed while making use of a wide variety of objects. She blogged about objects she encountered, called "A Fine Collection," and set up a collections database using Past Perfect Museum Software, photographing thousands of MCHS objects, and creating individual digital records for those objects.

Other critical staff changes occurred around the turn of the 21st century. Sween retired after 25 years as Librarian, and the library was christened in her honor at a ceremony in 2001. Stepping up to this position was Patricia Andersen, longtime Genealogy Club member and president, who had assisted in the library since 1996.[105] Andersen's 20-year tenure was marked by collaborations with local researchers, also subsequent publication of numerous additional resources interpreting County records. Andersen's own publications on land records are especially valuable to those researching African American genealogy in Montgomery County.

Clarence Hickey joined MCHS in 1995 as a volunteer docent in the Stonestreet Museum of 19th Century Medicine, learning the history of medical practice from previous interpreters, the scope of collections from Millicent Gay, and the art of docenting from Karen Lottes.[106] Hickey soon began to portray

Dr. E. E. Stonestreet in period dress, greeting visitors of all ages at his office. In addition to duties as the good doctor, Hickey began to coordinate events for the Speakers Bureau, promoting local experts (some of them in character) to present talks on increasingly varied Montgomery County topics and historical figures to interest groups and venues throughout the County. In preparing for his own presentations and docent material, Hickey conducted independent research on the life and career of Dr. Stonestreet, authoring *Send For the Doctor* in 2010.

In 2002, MCHS took a large step to expand its mission when it opened a second facility near Germantown called the Research Center at the Waters House at Pleasant Fields. Board and staff agreed on the need for an up-County presence, to better serve all Montgomery constituents. This new space in a historic building featured a second research library, gift shop, exhibition space, and collections storage. The former estate of Dr. Washington Waters, a physician and land owner, the house had been preserved within an impending development when the County purchased it and began renovations in 1993.[107] Though the finished product was earmarked for use by multiple non-profits, by the time renovations finished in 2001, MCHS was the only interested party willing to invest. A few years later, tenancy extended to other heritage organizations including King Farm Dairy MOOseum, Heritage Tourism Alliance, and Lincoln Park Historical Foundation.[108] In 2007, MCHS initiated a Request for Proposals to renovate the large barn on the property into space appropriate for a permanent museum exhibition on the history of Montgomery County; however, by 2009 changes in funding and complications with construction made this project unfeasible.[109]

The Waters House at Pleasant Fields: up-County MCHS research center, 2002-2010.

During this time, the Historical Society also took over stewardship of the Montgomery County Archives, established by Director of Montgomery County Public Libraries Agnes Griffin in 1985, managed for the next 15 years by History Associates, then intermittently closed or minimally staffed for lack of County funding. Since 2003 under the auspices of MCHS,[110] the County Archives was housed in the lower level of the Red Brick Courthouse and staffed two days a week by volunteer Rob Jenson. Jenson returned to graduate school for his MLS and in 2006 was hired as MCHS' second Archivist when Alida Freidrich left the newly created position after one year.[111]

Director Mary Kay Harper, with Board President Jack Devine, prepares to cut the cake at her retirement party in 2008.

Mary Kay Harper's tenure as Executive Director was defined by traditional events, distinctive educational programming, ambitious construction projects and property acquisitions, successful fundraising initiatives, strong Board leadership, and increasingly professional staffing. Her retirement in 2008 left a hole in MCHS operations that took years to fill. To honor her legacy, former president Terry Beaty led creation of an endowment to support a new educational study branch of MCHS named the Mary Kay Harper Center for Suburban Studies, dedicated to the more recent history of suburbanization in the Washington metropolitan area.[112]

2009-present: The Future of History

The first Executive Director to succeed Mary Kay Harper, Deborah Rankin, was a capable leader, but an economic recession meant MCHS flagship programs and revenue streams had begun to run dry. The once-lucrative gift shop and book sale became less profitable, and even popular events like Happy Birthday, Montgomery County and the student outreach provided by History Camp and school tours declined. Memberships and donations were down from previous years.[113] Jane North retired a decade earlier; the education team of Lottes and Correll had departed the organization by 2009. Many MCHS initiatives as well as staff positions had been funded by project grants or private donations that dissipated with the change in management. The County, which had already significantly lowered MCHS funding for FY2010 in response to the recession, reduced this funding by another 50% the following year and closed its Archives at the Courthouse, removing the records to storage.[114]

The Board voted to withdraw MCHS presence from the Waters House; all collections, library materials, and the gift shop were packed up and moved into storage by September 2010. Library and museum hours were reduced, the Story's publication schedule changed from quarterly to biannually, and MCHS drew from its endowment to meet financial obligations. The Board dismantled the Trustees and initiated long-term strategic planning, which included a Museum Assessment Program (MAP) and follow-up self-assessment. Early in 2011, Rankin took another position. Abruptly adrift, the Board asked longtime Society supporter Eileen McGuckian to serve as interim Director and keep the organization afloat while it conducted a comprehensive Executive Director search.[115]

Collections Manager Joanna Church, with a Montgomery Connections banner, 2011.

Meanwhile, MCHS continued its work on an important Institute of Museum and Library Services grant-funded project started in 2009 called "Montgomery Connections." Produced in three languages--English, Spanish, and Chinese--this immersive and interactive program combined visually compelling historical images on banners and advertisements (placed at bus stops and other public spaces) with cell phone downloads and website materials on thematic topics including slavery, abolition and segregation, agriculture and industry, transportation, immigration, and suburbanization.[116] Although delayed by staff changes, the project was completed on schedule by August 2011. Montgomery Connections was the first MCHS attempt to engage with the County's growing immigrant population. The most compelling piece of the outreach--multi-lingual recordings that told the stories--depended on the user calling by cell phone; although the cell phone interface was quickly obsolete, the content remains invaluable and able to be repurposed for other educational programming.

The Board, led since Harper's retirement by Jack Devine, hired Thomas Kuehhas in 2012 as the new Executive Director. Kuehhas brought experience as a museum director and historical society professional to the position.[117] During this time Collections Manager Church carefully deaccessioned elements of MCHS collections, in order to bring more focus and a higher level of care to those objects most relevant to the group's mission. She also continued mounting modest exhibitions in Stonestreet and Beall-Dawson, along with small-scale traveling exhibitions set up around the County, several of which she later converted to the

first online exhibitions. Although programs for kindergarteners and Scout troops were scaled back, History Day competition continued, and the Speakers Bureau blossomed under the volunteer leadership of Clarence Hickey. The Montgomery County Archives, removed to storage in 2010 due to structural issues at the Red Brick Courthouse, reopened in the County Records Center in Gaithersburg, with Linda Kennedy serving as Archivist.[118]

By mid-2014, Kuehhas, Church, and Office Manager Jennie Cottrell had all resigned to take other positions. Mark Ohnmacht was brought in as interim Director, and volunteers and Board committees stepped up once again to maintain basic programming and operations. In 2014, MCHS hosted a commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Emancipation Day, which occurred on November 1, 1864, after Maryland became the first state south of the Mason-Dixon line to emancipate slaves by popular vote. Organized by volunteers, activities in the Beall-Dawson House involved re-enactors interpreting historical figures, performance of traditional African American songs, and stories from descendants of people once enslaved in Montgomery County.[119] Warren Crutchfield's connection to the Beall-Dawson property, where his ancestors were owned by the Bealls, carried echoes of Len Meads' story 40 years earlier and served as a powerful reminder of many stories to tell about the lives of Montgomery County residents.

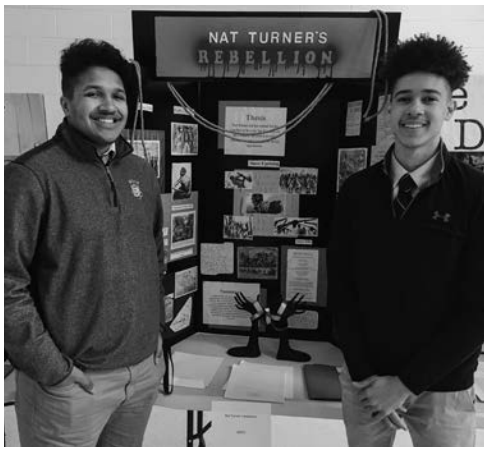
Scott Sedar as Abraham Lincoln at Maryland Emancipation Day, 2014. On the stairs are the Washington Revels Jubilee Voices.

Executive Director Matt Logan, photographed in 2019 by Bill Kamenjar for Montgomery Magazine.

Matthew Logan was hired as Executive Director in November 2014.[120] With master's degrees in environment/land use planning and U.S. History, his expertise is in building the capacity and effectiveness of small nonprofit organizations in the Washington metropolitan area. Logan's previous experience with the Potomac Conservancy, where he served as president, and later as president of the C&O Canal Trust and Potomac Riverkeeper, both of which he also founded, made him well suited to the challenges facing MCHS at this trying time.[121]

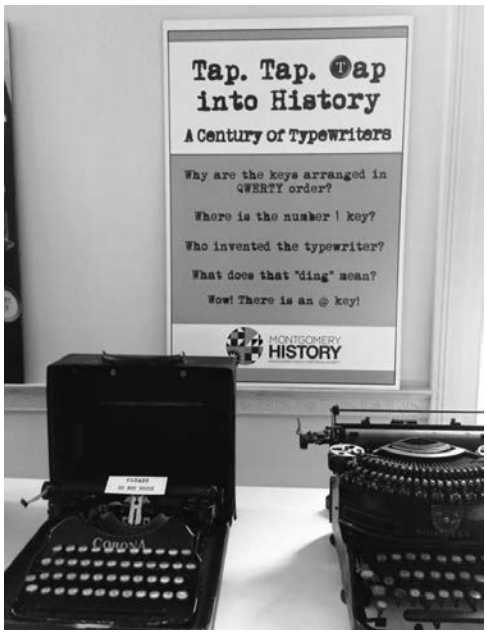
Logan began by undertaking an extensive "listening tour" with all of the Society's stakeholders (Board, staff, members, elected officials, neighbors, and partners) to obtain a sense of community perceptions about the organization and its value, and to help provide needed direction after a period without strong leadership. What he heard during this tour has guided virtually everything else going forward, particularly the need to make history relevant, inclusive, accessible, and engaging to meet the expectations of a sophisticated and diverse 21st century audience.

As part of a strategy to update the image of the Historical Society and remove connotations of exclusivity, Logan soon revised the organization's name to Montgomery History (MH), commissioning a more colorful logo and uniform branding on all publications, including a new website platform and layout.[122] MCHS had embraced website use in 1997 to highlight Society activities and information, with periodic updates to the layout.[123] Within two years of taking over, Logan increased MH's online presence with a new biweekly e-news vehicle and expanded social media engagement, also raising the professional standards of both exhibitions and publications. While MCHS' sunburst logo of the 1990s had been replaced in 2001 with a green-theme abstract logo,[124] the new Montgomery History logo featured a dynamic orange, blue and white geometric pattern evocative of that found on quilts, radiating an energy that would be reflected in streamlined, complementary programming and a focus on outreach and community engagement.



Students present their History Day project, 2018.

Pat Andersen retired from Montgomery History in 2017, after which Archivist Sarah Hedlund assumed the role of Librarian.



Montgomery History's first Pop-Up Exhibit, 2016.

Over the years, the Society had concentrated primarily on its museums, providing exhibitions and programs that essentially interpreted its own collections. Focused on telling larger stories that impacted all of Montgomery County, Logan also encouraged the development of multi-faceted experiences to augment traditional museum exhibitions. In 2017, Collections Manager Elizabeth Lay curated the "Cocktails, Lipstick, and Jazz" exhibition in the Beall-Dawson House, accompanied by a Roaring 20s cocktail party coordinated by Program Manager Amy Baker, and a 1920s fashion show in conjunction with the Art Deco Society of Washington, DC.[125] For 2018's programmatic theme "BOOM: the 1950s in Montgomery County," new Librarian/Archivist Sarah Hedlund created online presentations to complement the museum exhibition and 1950s-themed events. Oral histories from the library's special collections illustrated the local impact of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decree that mandated school desegregation; another, created with the Center for Suburban Studies, explored the suburbanization and shopping culture of 1950s Montgomery County.[126]

Montgomery History began to re-focus on the sustainability of the Beall-Dawson House and the welfare of its historical collections, using funds from another generous bequest specifically to support the house and grounds. Left to MCHS in 2018 by Kathryn Brooke in memory of her husband Irvin Brooke's connection to the Dawsons, this gift supports "preservation and maintenance" of the Beall-Dawson property, ensuring that piece of history is cared for into the future.[127]

In addition to aligning exhibitions and programs to Montgomery History's mission, Logan emphasized public access to primary historical records. Collections Manager Lay created a popular Textile Conservation Lab, which invited guests to observe and participate in the conservation of pieces from the collection each week.[128] She also initiated the first hands-on "pop-up" exhibit brought to various events and locations throughout the County, featuring usable typewriters so the public could engage with historical objects.[129] Hedlund and library volunteers built on the work started by Joanna Church, to increase online accessibility to MH's 12,500 photographs and making the library's special collections, oral histories, and other resources visible online by creating descriptive content in hundreds of new database records.

Not long after joining the Society, Logan stepped into the debate involving Montgomery County's monument to the memory of soldiers who fought for the Confederacy, erected in Courthouse Square in 1913. Amid nationwide controversy over removal of public-art statues venerating historical figures that represent antiquated ideals, in 2015 County Executive Isiah Leggett ordered the statue removed from public property.

Beall-Dawson Park was considered as a new site, where MH could employ interpretive signage and historical context, but after much debate the monument was relocated to private property near White's Ferry in 2017. This particular situation in Montgomery County reflected a national cultural shift toward addressing issues of social justice and equity, a development embraced by Logan as it has compelled heritage organizations to examine traditional narratives and their impact on all of the residents of this diverse community.

Director Matt Logan and Curator Liz Lay (left) at the 2019 History Conference, accepting Council member Will Jawando's donation of the traditional Nigerian agbada he wore at his inauguration in 2018.

Clarence Hickey portraying Dr. Stonestreet and assisted by Kevin Liu. Heritage Days, 2016.

Montgomery History began its 75th year strongly positioned to continue and expand its mission. The Speakers Bureau, under Hickey's leadership, has evolved in the past decade into the most visible program offered by the organization. By 2019, its 40 volunteer presenters provided 150 programs each year to an audience of 5,000 all across the County. The Mary Kay Harper Center for Suburban Studies, led for the last several years by steering committee chair Bob Bachman, has funded exhibitions, lectures, publications, and research projects related to the study of mid-to-late 20th century growth and development in Montgomery County. For 2018, the Montgomery County Public Schools wrote History Day into the curriculum for 7th grade accelerated learners; within a few years, students in all 40 middle schools will be participating. The History Conference has nearly doubled in size, serving not only as an important forum for history education but also as a place for discourse on current topics with historical context affecting multiple communities. Meanwhile, Logan's work to make Montgomery History's mission more relevant to the concerns of decision makers, elected officials, and other community leaders as well as residents who have been historically underrepresented has helped to forge connections with new audiences.

Those who love history recognize one essential theme: patterns of change over time. The Montgomery County Historical Society, created primarily as a social club for history buffs, has repeatedly redefined itself as its membership and leadership dovetailed one generation into the next. Once an organization of ardent scholars and collectors of information, it evolved over 75 years as well-meaning Boards, staffs, and volunteers determined focus, use of resources, and current needs of the Montgomery County community. Local issues and national trends also influenced organizational decisions and through time shaped the interpretation of cumulative knowledge about County history and also affected the MCHS mission. This anniversary marks a transition from the traditional narrative and model of historical societies to something different–something yet to be fully defined, but characterized by MH's desire to make local history accessible, inclusive, engaging, and relevant.

We are still creating that narrative quilt together. As the demographic fabric of Montgomery County has changed dramatically over the last 75 years, so Montgomery History will continue to adjust our patterns to reflect that change and include new stories. The patchwork threads of our past, the contributions of each individual, and the chaotic beauty of the unexpected connections we find in the past tie us together in the present and carry us into the future. The pieces of Montgomery History's story are stitched into the history of Montgomery County.

About the Author

Sarah Hedlund is the Archivist/Librarian for Montgomery History's Jane C. Sween Research Library and Special Collections. Previous to 2016, she worked for Ellis Conservation and the Town of Glen Echo, Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, and as a professional violinist and music teacher. She holds a Master of Library and Information Science from the University of Maryland with a specialization in archives and digital curation.

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MCHS Presidents

1944-1946	Lilly M. Stone
1947-1949	R. Bentley Thomas
1949-1951	William S. Parkins
1951-1953	Mollie Davis Nicholson
1953-1955	H. Grady Gore
1955-1956	Robert C. Jones
1956-1957	Dr. John R. Steelman
1957-1959	Judge John R. Reeves
1959	Judge Stedman Prescott
1959-1961	Thomas Anderson, Jr.
1961-1963	Frank Malcolm White
1964-1971	Alexander Casanges
1971-1974	Thomas Anderson, Jr.
1974-1976	Gerry Wooldridge
1976-1978	Judge Thomas Anderson, Sr.
1978-1979	James H. Scull
1979-1982	Genevieve B. Wimsatt
1982-1986	Nancy Hafer
1987-1991	Rex Sturm
1991-1995	Philip L. Cantelon
1995	Ann Brown
1996-2000	Mary Ann Touhey
2001-2005	John T. “Terry” Beaty
2005-2008	John McGraw
2008-2015	Jack Devine
2015-2016	Kevin O’Keefe
2016-2018	Robert Bachman
2018-present	Larry Giammo

MCHS Executive Directors

1981-1988	Mead Karras
1988-1990	Lesley van der Lee
1990-2008	Mary Kay Harper
2009-2011	Deborah Rankin
2012-2014	Thomas Kuehhas
2014-present	Matthew Logan

The MoCo Story Editors

1957-1972	Martha Sprigg Poole
1972-1975	Mayvis Fitzsimons
1975-1989	Mary Charlotte Crook
1989-2003	Eleanor M.V. Cook
2003-2006	Diane Broadhurst
2007-2010	Maureen Altobello
2012-present	Eileen McGuckian

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