

# 2022 Annual Report

## of The Lewes Historical Society

As the Lewes Historical Society reflects on the past year, we recognize 2022 as the start of a new chapter for the organization. The Society's professional team has evolved over the course of the year, welcoming a new Executive Director in May, joining a team of new and veteran employees. Over the course of the year, the Society cultivated stronger partnerships while working towards ensuring the fulfillment of our mission with a focus on both inclusivity and community.



### **The Vision of the Lewes Historical Society:**

*To preserve and share the diverse history and heritage of the greater Lewes region.*

### **The Mission of the Lewes Historical Society:**

*Promotes and advocates for the preservation, Interpretation, and cultural enrichment of The Lewes region, through museum exhibits, Educational programs, historical research, and publications.*

## Preservation

As the Society celebrated its 60th Anniversary, ongoing preservation efforts remained a core focus throughout the year.

The continuing preservation efforts at the Ryves Holt House progressed over the course of 2022 with the use of, and guidance from, the Historic American Building Survey. Work performed included the removal and replacement of cedar shake roofing, removal and abatement of asbestos roofing, and interior pipe insulation. Repair and replacement of shake siding on the front elevation, masonry repairs to the foundation and chimney, scraping and painting of exterior elevations and trim, as well as installation of reproduction shutters and related hardware were completed. Additionally, electrical upgrades throughout and a new HVAC system was added to the second floor for future storage of historic artifacts and potential working space. The building was also returned to an historically accurate color with exterior paint based on period paint samples. The preservation work at the Ryves Holt House is set to be completed by April 2023 for a grand reopening.

After the completion of the restoration of the Ryves Holt House, the Society's focus will shift to the restoration of both the Cannonball House and the US. Life Saving Station Boathouse in 2023.

The Menhaden Fishing Net Reel has been successfully preserved, moved, and secured at its final location on the Society's Historic Shipcarpenter Street Campus. The diverse history of the Menhaden industry has now been incorporated into the same context as our other historic structures on the campus.

## Interpretation and Cultural Enrichment



As stated by renowned pioneer of cultural interpretation, Freeman Tilden, "Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based on information." Adhering to this objective, the Society's interpretive programming continued to grow and inspire "revelation based upon information" throughout 2022.

Our interpretive team's ranks were bolstered by a bevy of new volunteers, aiding in new programs and contributing to another banner year for historical interpretation. In an effort to serve the greater Lewes community, all of the buildings on the Historic Shipcarpenter Street Campus were open to the public in 2022, staffed by interpreters in period attire.

New in 2022, *First Fridays* proved to be a roaring success, welcoming over 4,500 guests to the recreated Sussex Tavern. Society staples such as the *Meet the Past* and *Tavern Talks* welcomed hundreds of guests to sold out performances at both the Lewes History Museum and Rabbits Ferry House/ Sussex Tavern. In April, our new living history program, *Hearty in The Cause*, ushered visitors back

to Revolutionary Lewistown, immersing 800 guests in the community's revolutionary heritage. *Hearty in the Cause* will return in 2023 as an annual program.



The Society's interpretation crew took our programming to the water as a hybrid crew of volunteers and employees rowed 15 miles from Milton to Lewes in a reproduction ship's cutter and in the town's July 4th boat parade. Highlighting Lewes' historic and cultural relationship with the sea remains an ongoing goal.



Over the course of 2022, interpretation has proved to be extremely effective in sharing the diverse history and heritage of the greater Lewes region.

## Museum Exhibits

At the 60th Anniversary Celebration of the Lewes Historical Society, the Society opened a unique exhibition, celebrating this historic milestone. Incorporating rarely seen items from the collection, this boutique exhibit offered visitors the opportunity to peer into our archives. Many items, such as the Rowland family sea-chest and Anne Burton's 1820's sampler, sparked nostalgic memories for visitors of all ages.



The Society's curatorial team also worked diligently to re-install and expand the *Leadership in Lewes* Exhibition at the Lewes History Museum, with new additions focusing on George H.P. Smith and Leah Burton Paynter.

With the tavern-focused programming at the Rabbits Ferry House, the curatorial team also worked to replicate a true tavern experience in

eighteenth century Lewes. In addition to furnishing our replica cage bar, tavern tables, staved barrels, period stoneware and reproduction lanterns were incorporated into the existing space, elevating the historic ambiance. In early 2023 the interior will be re-painted, based on extant 18th c. paint found in the building, thus completing its transformation to the *Sussex Tavern*.

The Children's Discovery Center's renovation work continued, opening for our Second Friday Speaker Series in late 2022. The new Family Learning Center's grand reopening is scheduled for March 2023.

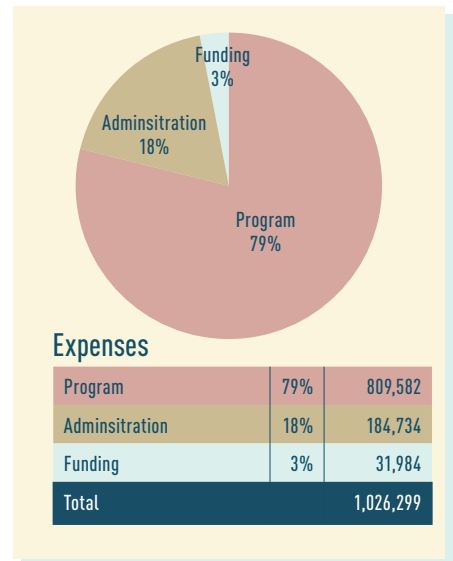
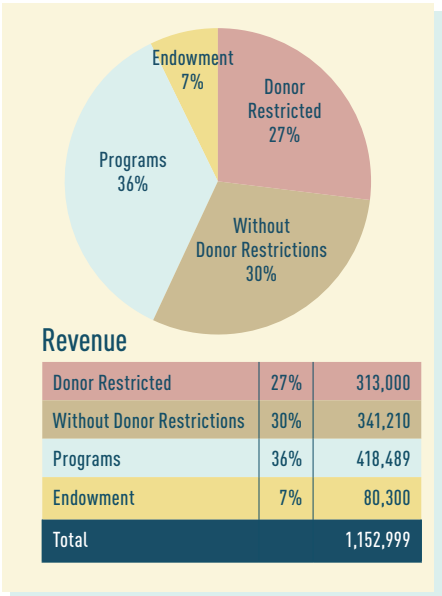
## Education

As the world began to navigate a society with decreased covid restrictions, the Lewes Historical Society took this opportunity to reinvigorate its educational initiatives.

In 2022, Field Trips once again returned to the Historic Shipcarpenter Street Campus. Outreach initiatives shared Lewes history with our community partners and beyond our shores to Maryland, Virginia, Missouri, and Iowa. In preparation for the grand opening of the Family Learning Center, new

lesson plans and activity sheets were developed over the course of the year, directly connecting with featured exhibitions in the Lewes History Museum.

Additionally, the Educational Department worked towards its goal to share a more inclusive narrative of Lewes' past, working directly with the African American Heritage Commission. *Finding Their Voices: African American History & Legacy of Lewes* walking tour was launched in 2022. This tour, along with our



regularly offered Architectural, Maritime, and Legends tour welcomed 930 visitors to historic Lewes.

Finally, our new oral history project, *In their Voices*, began in 2022. Again, working with the African American Heritage Commission, twenty interviews were conducted, recording the memories of Lewes' African American Community for generations to come. In 2023, these oral histories will be incorporated into a travelling exhibition, *Voices Heard*.

## Historic Research

The Society provided researchers with access to primary sources from our archives as they investigated a wide range of subjects, including family genealogy, business enterprises in Lewes, shipbuilding, railroad expansion, early settlement, schools, and social activities. The resources we shared include merchant ledgers, pilot logs, municipal records, letters and diaries, event programs, photographs and maps.



Historical Research serves as the foundation in all that the Lewes Historical Society does to fulfill its mission. In addition to sharing our research with the greater Lewes

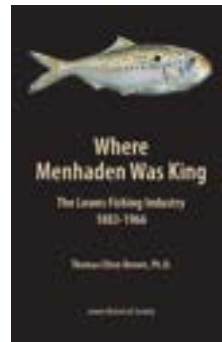
community, archival research is regularly integrated into our publications, exhibitions, interpretation, preservation, and educational initiatives.

## Publications



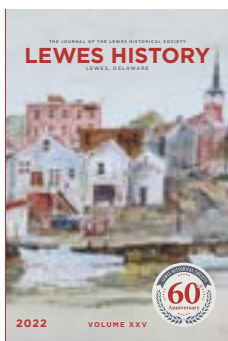
Recognizing the importance of scholarship in fulfilling our mission, the Lewes Historical Society published four unique books over the course of 2022. Coinciding with the seasonal opening of the Ryves Holt House, the Society released *Jacob Jones: A Boy's Life in Lewes During the American Revolution*. Written by LHS volunteer

William Manthorpe, with the story by LHS editor Bill Meehan and illustrations by Randi Meredith, this young adult's publication shared stories from Revolutionary Lewes through the eyes of a young Jacob Jones. This story was designed to engage a younger demographic with an interest in history.

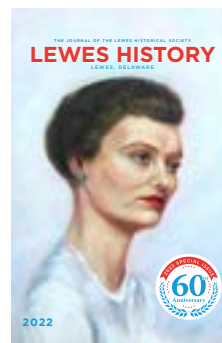


*Where Menhaden Was King: The Lewes Fishing Industry, 1883-1966*, written by previous LHS Board member and volunteer Thomas Elton Brown, PhD, was released in 2022 and featured at the Lewes History Book Festival. Offering the first comprehensive history of this crucial industry, Brown's publication fills a void in

existing scholarship, and makes connections with a not so distant past that once established Lewes as the largest commercial seafood port.



The 2022 edition of *Lewes History: Journal of the Lewes Historical Society* is now available, featuring 156 pages of content and 21 unique articles—a publication worthy of our 60th Anniversary.



Additionally, a special edition of *Lewes History* was published in 2022 dedicated to, Lewes historian, Hazel Brittingham. Hazel co-founded *Lewes History: The Journal of the Lewes Historical Society* in 1998. This special journal, featuring a stunning portrait of Hazel on the cover, contains each article written by Hazel, and featured in *Lewes History* over the past 25 years.

## How are we able to fulfill our mission?

Thankfully, in 2022 the City of Lewes, our visitors, and employees moved to return to a normal schedule of activity. The Society faced the challenges of reopening our buildings, tours, and activities for “in person” experiences while continuing our emphasis on preservation and restoration for all our properties in 2022.



Our Interpreter team was up to the challenge as we opened all of properties for visitation and tours for five days a week, helping to bring Lewes' history to life. Our groundbreaking walking tour: *Finding Their Voic-*

*es: African American History & Legacy of Lewes*, debuted in 2022, highlighting the local history and African American culture of Lewes to an enthusiastic response. While restoring and rehabilitating the Ryves Holt House, we were still able to remain open to the public. The Historic Shipcarpenter Street Campus witnessed unprecedented levels of visitation with walking tours focused on architecture, social, and maritime histories as well additional evenings of the innovative *Tavern Talks* series and *First Fridays*.

The Society monitored local commercial and residential development and advocated for the protection of Lewes' historic and cultural assets. The Society continued the tradition of presenting the Historic Preservation Awards to three Lewes residents. We also provided collections based factual research about Lewes' buildings and neighborhoods to assist in private preservation and restoration projects in Lewes.

The Lewes Historical Society continued to engage visitors through

arts and cultural events on our main campus. The Sea Glass Festival saw historic visitation; our Holiday House tour, (returned to an “in person” event this year), saw over 1400 people touring the homes of Lewes and the Holiday market on the Main campus to celebrate the Holiday Season. These events help support the mission of the Society, allowing us to raise the funds necessary to maintain our historic properties appropriately.

Finally, 2022 was a banner year for the Society as we were able to celebrate the 60th anniversary of our existence with a party held at the Lewes History Museum (Rollins Center). The Society was recognized by the state of Delaware and state elected officials for the mission fulfilling work we have done for the past 60 years. Additionally, the Society's cultural impact was further recognized by both the Dutch & Swedish Embassies, with letters of congratulations and recognition for all the Society has done to preserve history for the past 60 years.

## 2023

2022 proved to be monumental year for the Lewes Historical Society, coinciding with the celebration of our 60th Anniversary, yet it was also a year of transition...

With a new team, re-established community partnerships, and a refined focus, the Lewes Historical Society enters 2023 with redoubled efforts to preserve and share the diverse history and heritage of the greater Lewes region.

**Preservation** In early 2023, the preservation of the Ryves Holt House is set to be complete, with a grand opening of The Ryves Holt House Museum and Mercantile Exchange (Both the museum and re-envisioned 18th c. mercantile shop) scheduled for April 15th. Upon completion of this project, preservation efforts will pivot to both the Cannonball House and the USLSS Boat House.

**Interpretation** The Society's interpretation team will build on the momentum of 2022 with new programming. The popular *First Fridays* at the Sussex Tavern will continue year-round, as will the Second Friday Speaker Series at the Lewes History Museum. *Tavern Talks* will again be offered with a new script focusing on the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793. *Hearty in the Cause* will return for its second

year this April, coinciding with the grand opening of the Ryes Holt House Museum and Mercantile Exchange. New programming in 2023 will include *Voices from Revolutionary Lewistown*, offered quarterly beginning in February, and the soft opening of Mary Hugg's Tea & Coffee Shop on the Historic Shipcarpenter Street Campus.

**Cultural Enrichment** In November the Lewes Historical Society will host its Second Annual Symposium, focusing on Delaware Maritime Art and Artists, with a slate of speakers representing cultural institutions throughout the state. In an effort to reach an expanded demographic, new signs will be installed at each of our properties in the spring. These will share the robust history of each of our buildings in both English and Spanish and offer an audio narration.

**Exhibitions** The Family Learning Center at the Lewes History Museum will have a grand reopening on March 24, once again welcoming families to the museum. Additionally, the rotating exhibit gallery at the Lewes History Museum will feature a new exhibition entirely focused on Lewes Maritime Art, opening on May 20th. Working with our colleagues at the Lightship Overfalls, a new exhibition celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the *Overfalls* will open at the Cannonball House in Spring 2023. As we continue to strive to be more inclusive, oral history recordings from *In Their Voices* along with historic photos from the Lewes-based Daisey family will be incorporated into a new travelling exhibition, *Voices Heard*, opening in June 2023.

**Education** New curriculum and lesson plans will be released in conjunction with the opening of the Family Learning Center in the Spring. After a 3 year break due to covid, Summer Camps will again return to the Historic Shipcarpenter Street Campus in July. Additionally, the ever-popular Family Boat Build will again return to the canal front in June.

**Publications** As the Society continues to serve as a leader in regional history and scholarship, we will be publishing Volume XXVI of *Lewes History: Journal of the Lewes Historical Society* in late 2023. As the Society moves forward with new exhibitions, a unique catalogue will be published and released. A catalogue on Lewes Maritime Art will be published in the fall, with a long-awaited publication, *Breaking Britannia's Grasp: Lewes, the Royal Navy, and the Bombardment of 1813*.

As the Society enters this new year, The Lewes Historical Society Board of Trustees will be launching a new strategic plan. As the stewards of Lewes' history, we have a moral obligation to ensure the sustainability of the organization for generations to come. This strategic plan will help guide us over the next three years.

As we recognize the successes of 2022 and prepare for an ambitious 2023, we recognize that the Lewes Historical Society would not be in existence without the dedicated support of the community, our membership, donors, and our remarkable team of volunteers. Only with the steadfast support and advocacy of these groups can the Lewes Historical Society *preserve and share the diverse history and heritage of the greater Lewes region.* 🍷

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