Captain Gene Herbert, Stevensville's Oldest Man, Looks Back At Past Days

From Great-Grandfather On, Family Followed The Water. Freight Rates Better In Old Days. Made Record From Baltimore To Shipping Creek

Captain Eugene Herbert, better known to the residents of Stevensville as Cap'n 'Gene, was born on Kent Island in 1853. He was born of a sailing family, his great-grandfather, his grandfather, and his father all being sailing men. He is the oldest man in Stevensville and second oldest person of the town, his age being surpassed by Mrs. Richard Baxter who is just two years older than our subject.

Captain Gene attended school on Kent Island little one-room schoolhouse located in what was then known as Middle District. At the age of eighteen, Captain Gene stopped school and went sailing for his father. However, he hastens to assure us that he knew how to sail long before this. During his sailing career, he has sailed from the rockbound coasts of Maine to the sunny coast of North Carolina. During this time, he was captain of more boats than he can remember, some of them being vessels of a hundred and fifty tons.

In speaking of the boats which he captained, Captain Gene fondly recollects one boat, a bugeye, in which he made a record trip from Fort McHenry in Baltimore to Shipping Creek. "I remember," smiled Captain Gene, "that the wind was blowin' a gale and I had to have a tug to take us from our pier to Fort McHenry. As the tug cast us off, I recollect looking at my watch. We sailed down the Chesapeake, rounded Kent Point and anchored in Shipping Creek. After anchoring and fixing the sails, I happened to look at my watch as I was going down into the cabin. We had made the trip in three hours and fifty-five minutes by the clock, which I believe is a record for that trip. At least, I have never heard of any other boat beating her time."

Freight rates were much better when Captain Gene was sailing. At least they were better for the freightors. Boats were always loaded going and coming from Kent Island and Captain Gene can remember when the freightors received a dollar and a half a ton for coal, phosphate and lime while the farmers paid six and seven cents a bushel to have their wheat carried to Baltimore.

Captain Gene has now retired from sailing and lives with his wife in Stevensville. They have one daughter who lives in Washington. It is this daughter, Eugenia, who so remarkably resembles Mrs. Roosevelt and has often been called "the second first lady of the land."

Captain Gene, being the oldest man of Stevensville and probably the oldest man on Kent Island is able to tell us many interesting stories of their development. He told us of many things which happened before he was born but of which he had heard his parents and grandparents speak. One of the first questions we put to him was the inquiry as to why Kent Narrows, the site of the bridge to the mainland, was often referred to as "the ferry." According to Cap'n Gene, many, many years ago, long before he was born and probably before the birth of his grandfather, the only means of reaching the mainland was by an old scow ferry which was pulled from shore to shore. This was the original ferry of Kent Island and the name has stuck to this location all through the ages. No one seems to know just when the first bridge was built across Kent Narrows. In the book, "Kent Fort Manor" which is written about this home when it was first built early in the sixteen hundreds, the fact is mentioned that there was a bridge at this site. We do know that the first bridge was a solid one. A race was constructed and a grist mill was built on the mainland. The race may still be seen around the pier of Mr. Will King's oyster house. This bridge was soon torn down due to its hindrance to navagation and a piling bridge was constructed. It was at this time that Talbot and Queen Anne Counties had the channel dredged through the Kent Narrows.

Amnog the first houses on Kent Island were the Kent Fort Manor about which books have been written, the most famous being "Richard Carvel" by Winston Churchill. This building was constructed early in 1600 and still stands. The other old building of Kent Island is the Old Point Manor, built about the time of the settlement of Maryland. This home, also is still standing and is owned by Mr. Oscar Johnson.

Captain Gene tells us that among the old landmarks of the Island was an old tavern which was kept at Broad Creek. The owner is unknown before the settlement of Stevensville it was one of the most important spots of the island. It was through this tavern that all the mail of the Island came. The building was located on property which is now owned by Dr. Theodore Cook. However, it has been destroyed although bricks from the building may still be found on its site. It was at this tavern that the first known murder of the Island occurred. A man by the name of White was beaten to death here. The two murderers put the victim in his carriage and the next morning he was found at his home. The only witness to the crime remained silent until the two murderers had died but at their death confessed that he was hidden in a tree when the murder occurred.

The old Episcopal Church was probably the next landmark to be established. Although the building is in ruins now, from dates on the tombstones in the churchyard, the building must have been constructed before the year 1720. It was located near the main highway at Matapeake on the farm now owned by Dr. Charles E. Snyder. The church was near a small river which has now been filled in by the ages but legend has it that the Indians used to come up this creek in their canoes and go to this church.

About the next date of importance was the War of 1812 in which Kent Island figured. This story came to Cap'n Gene indirectly but is supposed to have originated from a Mrs. Porter who was an ancestor of the present Captain Harry Porter of Kent Island. The British had moved from Washington into the mouth of the Patabsco in preparations to attack Baltimore while they were encamped here, a boy from an advantage point in the top of a tree, shot and killed the British General Ross. The boy was captured and executed while the Britsh General was carried to a battleship. The boat, bearing his body landed near Stoney Bar in Broad Creek on Kent Island and it was here that the British General was buried. While on the Island, it is told that the British took all the cattle, sheep and other food they could find. On September 13, 1814, they returned to the Patapsco and attacked Fort McHenry. Francis Scott Key, a thirty-fvie year old American lawyer visited this British Fleet in order to secure the release of a friend of his and was held prisoner during the bombardment of Fort McHenry and it was at this time that he wrote the "Star Spangled Banner" the national anthem of the United States, although it has never been officially adopted as such by Congress.

Another incident of interest is said to have occurred just about this same time. Piracy was not uncommon around the Atlantic Seaboard at this time and naturally pirates ventured up the Chesapeake. It is reported that the British apeake and one of the poor devils was captured some pirates on the Chesimprisoned in a cage resembling and over-sized bird cage and hung up a tree at Kent Point at the extreme end of the Island. The pirate was left alone to starve to death.

Probably the next incident of importance to occur on the Island was the beginning of Stevensville. The exact date of the beginning is not known but it is thought to have begun as a town somewhere about the year of 1861. According to Captain Gene, Stevensville was once two farms, the property of Charles and James M. Stevens. From these two men the name Stevensville was probably derived. These two men are the ancestors of the present Charles Stevens living in Stevensville. Cap'n Gene's story goes on that these farms were sold to Dave Jones, Caleb Legg and Hugh Legg. The said Caleb Legg had the present main street of Stevensville constructed, upon ownership. The same Mr. Legg interested a Mr. Tuck of Annapolis in his property. Lots were laid off along the street which was constructed. Mr. Tuck then put up the money for and had most of the homes constructed which now border the main highway through Stevensville to Matapeake. The lumber for these homes was grown and cut right on Kent Island. Most of it came from the farm now owned by Dr. Charles E. Snyder and was cut by Mr. John Gibson. Some of the later homes along this same street were constructed of the lumber from the Johnstown flood.

Contrary to the belief of many of the natives of Stevensvile, the store long owned by Mr. George Calloway was not the first store in Stevensville. In fact there were three stores before this. Some of the owners of these stores was J. M. Stevens and J. H. Tolson. A Mr. Willis who later moved to Baltimore was one of the most prosperous storekeepers. At first, Mr. Willis kept a store or warehouse as it was known then, near Matapeake at the site of the present Grover Clough Filling Station. In 1860 he moved his store to Stevensville at the site of the present store owned by Mr. Earle Long. About this same time, there were approximately three saloons in Stevensville. One was at the site of Mr. Archie Legg's home and was the same building in which Mr. Samuel Bullen dwells at present. A man by the name of Blake kept this saloon. Aonther saloon was in the same site of the IGA Store in Stevensville run by Mr. Addison Frampton.

Among the first homes built in Stevensville was the home of the Crays just off the main street. This building is still standing and being use as a home for the same family.

About this time, Cap'n Gene tells us of another murder which occurred on Kent Island. Strangely enough, this murder also occurred near Broad Creek but was probably after the time of the tavern. The murder concerns two negroes. It seems as though there was a broken back negro whose name has been forgotten by our narrator. Evidentlybroken-back was seeing too much of Robinson's wife, the negro concerned. Under the cover of night, Robinson met Broken-back and killed him with a terrible blow of a club. Robinson buried his victim in the woods on the farm of Mr. Charles Paca. Later, the body was discovered by dogs and Robinson was taken to court in Centreville but nothing could be proven on him and he was consequently freed.

About this time, 1864, the Civil War was in full swing. Stevensville was in sympathy with the South and a few of Kent Island's sons joined the Confederacy. About all Stevensville and Kent Island saw of the Civil War was a few deserters who escaped from Baltimore, crossed the bay and escaped into Queen Anne's county, skirting the edge of Stevensville.

During the beginning of Stevensville, Kent Island was not inclined to "follow the water." Most of the inhabitants were farmers. On a low tide, farmers would take their ox carts down on a bar and rake up the oysters in a pile and take them home. These would be stored away and kept for about a month until a new store could be gotten. The first oyster house on Kent Island was established at Kent Narrows by a man name Stranahand from Baltimore. Naturally, the means of production were very different from present day methods. Howere, one of the most interesting things was the way in which ice was obtained. All this ice used in the production of oysters was brought from Baltimore by steamboat. This ice, strange as it may seem, was imported to Baltimore from Maine by sailing vessels.

The next construction of importance to take place in Stevensville was that of the Methoidst Episcopal Church which was built in Stevensville on the road to Kent Point. This building has since been converted into a moving picture parlor. It was built about the year of 1849 and was converted into a moving picture parlor in 1925.

Now we come to the Stevensville of the early twentieth century. The town was much changed. Stores flourished and population had increased considerably. In the year of 1900 Stevensville boasted several high class stores, a hotel, and all other little shops needed for such a town. One of the most important stores of the town was Kemp's Pharmacy which was established in 1902 with Dr. John C .Norris as the druggist. Previous to this Miss Lucy Denny ran an apothecary shop which was called the drugstore by the townspeople. However, she was not a licensed druggist. In 1907, Dr. Norris bought the drugstore from Dr. Kemp. Dr. Norris installed a soda fountain in his store which was then the only one on the Island and still is the only one. All ice cream served at this store was made on the site. The ice used was imported via the Love Point steamer from Baltimore. All syrups used in the preparation of drinks were also made at home.

Dr. Norris tells us of an interesting occurrence. In 1924, when the sale of alcoholic beverages was first prohibited by law, he was the only druggist on the Eastern Shore of Maryland allowed to sell them. In order to get liquors from the druggist, one had to get a prescription from his doctor at one dollar per prescription. One pint was allowed to each person. Consequently, a person wishing more than one pint had to have several prescriptions and each had to have a different name to it. Subscriptions were so numerous that people ran out of names so towards the last, subscribers visited cemetaries ininscribing upon their prescriptions, names which they found on tombstones and some went so far as to use the names of their horses.

At present, Kent Island is one of the most thriving districts of Queen Anne's county. There are three ferries to and from Kent Island. One from Love Point to Baltimore, another from Romancoke to Claiborne and a third from Matapeake to Annapolis. These ferries pour hundreds of thousands of cars on Kent Island yearly.

And so we have seen Kent Island go through the various stages that all localities must go through to reach the high point of civilization and luxury that it has obtained.

WHEAT THRESHING IN QUEEN ANNE'S

Above is a busy scene often repeated on Queen Anne's farms in late June and July as the grain is shaken from golden sheaves of wheat to bring a stream of other gold into farmer's pocketbooks.

It is a cheerful scene as the chief rises against a blue summer sky in a smoky stream from the pipe. All day long the straw stack rises until its size dwarfs the men who make it, while one by one bags are filled from the river of golden grains shaken from the sheaves.

Use of the combine which cuts the wheat and threshes it in a continuous operation is not too common in Queen Anne's as yet. One or two operate but most farmers are content to cut their wheat, stack it and await their turn on the "run."

Raising wheat is a task and a gamble with weather yet the farmer's hardest problem comes when the wheat is threshed. Day by day he has been studying quotations from the city and from buyers as he ponders whether to sell his wheat from the thresher or wait for possible high prices. Queen Anne's farmers usually sell it at the thresher, take their money and relieve themselves of further worry as to when to sell the crop. Some few carry their wheat over if prices are low.

The average yield in Queen Anne's is about sixteen bushels per acre, although in recent years it is rising a trifle. Yields as high as thirty-nine or forty bushels have occurred in the last few years. The 1939 crop is only a two-thirds one, with low ground wheat badly damaged by standing water in the early spring and injured by a late frost in April.

Oddities At World's Fair Will Hold Interest

Man-made lightning—10,000,000 volts of it—in a spectacular discharge.

A floor made of cotton.

A trumpeter sounding the Polish "heynal" from a tower every noon to commemorate the slain bugler who warned Cracow against the approach of Genghis Khan 700 years ago.

A waterfall cascading from the roof of a high building.

A city entirely populated by midgets.

Fireworks set to music; also a singing fountain.

TWILIGHT

From sundown on, we left the windows wide,
And night was like a perfume drifting in.
One bird kept murmuring: "Why sleep, why sleep?"
But, even so, we lightly took the stairs,
And paused a moment at the top to see
The darkening west held in a window-frame.

—Anneke Van Zindran.

THE RECORD-OBSERVER HAS MADE PROGRESS AND SO HAS THE TELEPHONE

Many Happy Returns of the Day to the Record-Observer

The Record-Observer was already a powerful force for good when the first telephones were installed in Centreville—and it has continued to grow in that regard. It is a leader in all county and civic activities. We take special pleasure in extending our congratulations on its 115th anniversary.

The telephone system in Queen Anne's County also has grown. The handful of crude instruments installed in 1901 has grown to more than a thousand modern telephones, over which about 3,000 local and long distance calls are made daily.

We look forward to many happy returns of this day, and will work with the hope of being able to say again with the Record-Observer that we have grown in usefulness to the people of Queen Anne's County and Maryland.

THE CHESAPEAKE AND POTOMAC TELEPHONE COMPANY OF BALTIMORE CITY (Bell System)

It Costs Little To Telephone To Other Cities

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NEW YORK, N. Y.	.45
PITTSBURGH, PA.	.55
ATLANTIC CITY, N. J.	.35
NEWARK, N. J.	.45
ST. LOUIS, MO.	1.55
ATLANTA, GA.	1.05
CHICAGO, ILL.	1.15
NORFOLK, VA.	.45
FREDERICK, MD.	.35
BOSTON, MASS.	.75
DETROIT, MICH.	.85
WHEELING, W. VA.	.60
WASHINGTON, D. C.	.35
OCEAN CITY, MD.	.35

RATES FROM QUEENSTOWN to	NIGHT AND SUNDAY RATES
PHILADELPHIA, PA.	.35
NEW YORK, N. Y.	.45
PITTSBURGH, PA.	.55
ATLANTIC CITY, N. J.	.35
NEWARK, N. J.	.45
ST. LOUIS, MO.	1.55
ATLANTA, GA.	1.05
CHICAGO, ILL.	1.15
NORFOLK, VA.	.45
FREDERICK, MD.	.35
BOSTON, MASS.	.75
DETROIT, MICH.	.85
WHEELING, W. VA.	.60
WASHINGTON, D. C.	.35
OCEAN CITY, MD.	.35

The above are station-to-station rates which go into effect every night at 7 and remain in effect all day on Sundays. For other rates just ask "Long Distance."