



Kent Island Train Depot

By Judy Colbert



Carole Price Frederick grew up on a farm on Love Point Road and remembers watching the handcar "going by in front of their farm. It kept the track clear and in good repair. There was not much excitement on Kent Island in the 40s. That was rather exciting."

Excitement was not the only thing the Queen Anne's Railroad (and subsequent owners) brought to the Island. "For the first time," wrote Brent Lewis in a 1992 report about the station depot for Kent Island Magazine, "any number of items from letters to livestock, could go from Stevensville to Lewes, Delaware, in two hours. Phenomenally, newspapers printed that day in Baltimore could be delivered on an Eastern Shore front porch before dark. Almost every aspect of local residents' daily lives became easier with the train's presence." Besides goods being shipped to the Island, the abundant seafood and produce (particularly peaches) could be shipped to markets beyond the land's end.

The train arrived in 1902. Business thrived until the early 1920s. By then, automobiles were becoming more popular and reasonably priced. The trains stopped passenger service in 1938, and by 1956, freight service had ceased. The 1952 opening of the Bay Bridge "was the final defeat for the local railroad system," says Lewis. "The trains and everything connected to them had become obsolete. America had reached a crossroads, and they were paved, not railed."

A fascinating museum at the Stevensville Train Depot tells the train's story. The two-room 12' x 32' building is the only remaining structure of the Island's four stations. Once the railroad stopped, a family lived there for a while, then left. As can be expected, the abandoned property became overgrown, and the depot slipped into oblivion.

Then, Skip Morgan decided to build an auto body repair shop. The depot was in the way. A friend, local artist Barbara Koenig, recognized the dilapidated structure, and they contacted the Kent Island Heritage Society with Chas. G. (Gil) "Doc" Dunn as the Society's president, decided to buy, move, and restore the building. It took five years, but by June 1992, the building and some railroad tracks were placed at the

site on the Cray House property, and once again welcoming guests. A 1920s caboose was added in 2006.

John Conley, the Depot docent, captivates museum visitors with stories about how things were. "The museum shows a painting of Baltimore harbor above a diorama of the Island," he says. "There are display cases with materials from the Love Point Hotel, an old stove used to heat the depot, and photos of how people were dressed to ride the train." He also shows a photo of and talks about President Theodore Roosevelt and his whistlestop tours.

He tells about the telegraph that "reflects on my years as a radioman in the U.S. Navy, 100 years ago." He'll ask someone's name, key it to one telegraph, and watch the amazement as the message is received at the other one. Children, such as the 120 fourth graders visiting in May, are astonished at this mechanical magic. The 45-star flag (1896-1908) was used when the depot opened.

Over the years, the building has deteriorated and been repaired. A recent donation from Geoffrey and Ashley MacLeay of the MacLeay Family Endowment enabled the Society to provide current necessary renovation to the depot. Conley says, "The platform in front of the station was getting wobbly but has also been repaired. The next projects are to replace the roof and repair the caboose. Both will be expensive."

There are remnants of the train. Parts of the railbed are used in the Cross Island Trail. And, according to J. Coursey Willis of Historic Kent Island, some swear they hear a ghost locomotive whistle, said to sound like a Mac truck air horn, periodically, through Stevensville. Conley says he suspects it's "a local legend to explain fog horn sounds from passing ships."

The Kent Island Train Depot and Museum is located at O Cockey Lane, Stevensville, Maryland. Visitors are invited for docent-led tours between noon and 4 p.m. on the first Saturday of the month between May and October and by appointment. There's no admission charge, but donations are accepted. <https://kentislandheritagesociety.org/train-station-caboose>

Judy Colbert is the author of *It Happened in Maryland*, and *It Happened in Delaware*, Globe Pequot Press.