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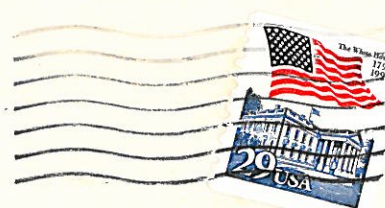
Mrs. Naomi Petrash

EDITOR'S NOTE

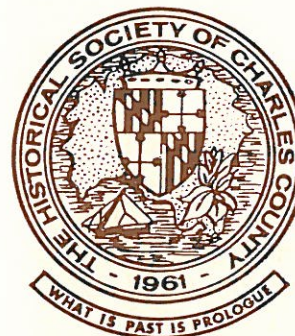
Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are requested for possible publication in future issues of **The Record**. Please send your typewritten manuscripts to: Publications, **The Record**, Box 261 Port Tobacco, MD 20677

The Historical Society of Charles County

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 Port Tobacco, Maryland 20677



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The RECORD

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ADMIRAL FRANK JACK FLETCHER

By Garth Bowling, Jr.

Many famous individuals who helped shape our nation have lived in Charles County over the past three centuries. People like John Hanson, Thomas Stone and Matthew Henson are examples of Charles Countians who played a significant role in our country's development. None, however, were more instrumental than Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher.

He was born in Marshalltown, Iowa, and graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1906. His military career spanned nearly fifty years, ending in 1947 when he retired.

In 1935, he and his wife, Martha, purchased property in Charles County called *Araby*, which was the colonial home of George Mason, the author of the Bill of Rights. The Fletchers, however, did not reside at *Araby* full-time until 1944.

When he died in April, 1973, Admiral Fletcher was one of the most decorated military heroes of modern American history. He first distinguished himself in 1914 when President Wilson sent the United States military to Mexico to occupy Vera Cruz. As a young man in his twenties, he commanded the U.S.S. *Esperanza*. While under heavy enemy fire he rescued over three-hundred and fifty refugees. His ship was struck more than thirty times, but he successfully placed all refugees safely on board.

Afterwards, while in charge of a train transporting refugees under a flag of truce, he was praised for getting so many people from the interior of Mexico to Vera Cruz. He was successful with this rescue primarily due to the friendly relations he had established with the Mexican soldiers. For his heroism, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

A few years later, when World War I began, Admiral Fletcher served as Commander of the destroyer U.S.S. *Benham* and was charged with

protecting convoys through waters infested with German submarines. For this he was awarded the Navy Cross in 1918.

He worked at a variety of assignments between the two world wars, including helping to outfit ships at the San Francisco Iron works and serving three years at the Bureau of Navigation in Washington, D.C. After being assigned for several years to the Navy Yard, he attended the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, and the Army War College. In addition to serving as Chief of Staff to the Asiatic Fleet, he was an aide to the Secretary of the Navy for three years.

The greatest challenge of his career occurred during World War II. In a recent biography of Admiral Fletcher, *In Bitter Tempest*, by Stephen D. Regan, the preface states:

"In its most desperate hour of World War II, the United States searched for a leader to guide its remaining warships in the Pacific until the nation was strong enough to pursue a powerful offensive . . .

Faced with insufficient numbers of sailors and ships, many of them unseasoned, Nimitz looked for the most combat-experienced officer in the Navy. He wanted the one officer who had the best reputation in the service for ship handling, leadership, and political savvy The one officer who fit this order and understood the Japanese military mind was his former assistant, Frank Jack Fletcher."

Admiral Fletcher was made Commander of Task Forces of the Pacific Fleet, and as a result, was credited with defeating the Japanese in 1942 and restoring the balance of Pacific naval power. He received the Distinguished Service Medal for service during the Battle of the Coral

Sea in May, 1942 and, the next month, in the Battle of Midway, where he inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

He later commanded two of the three task forces during the Guadalcanal-Tulagi landings in August, 1942 and participated in actions in the Eastern Solomons. He was again decorated for the part he played in the North Pacific and for several victories in that area.

After the surrender of the Japanese, Admiral Fletcher stated the following in a final speech to his men:

"Recalling the rape of Nanking, the treachery of Pearl Harbor, the Death March of Bataan, and the murder, torture, and starvation of our comrades in arms, ours will not be an occupation in the Japanese manner. We have shown the Japanese and the world the superiority of our arms. We must now demonstrate to the world and the Japanese people the superiority of those standards of justice and decency for which we fought."

On May 1, 1947, Admiral Fletcher retired. His ribbons included the Medal of Honor, Navy Cross, Distinguished Service Medal, Purple Heart, Mexican Service Medal, World War I Victory Medal, Tangtze Service Medal, American Defense Campaign, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Navy Occupation Medal, the Sulu Mindanao Campaign Badge, the Medal of the Imperial Order of the Dragon of Annam, and the Medal of the Order of the Bath.

His years of retirement were spent in Charles County, and both he and Mrs. Fletcher were tremendous assets to their community. They were particularly interested in historical preservation. Not only did they restore *Araby*, but they were charter members of the Smallwood Foundation, which was responsible for the restoration of General Smallwood's home. The admiral was also a charter member of the Historical Society of Charles County and a member of its first board of directors.

The Fletchers were well known for their interest in flower gardens, and together they reorganized the Charles County Garden Club with its annual spring flower show. They were also charter members of the Hawthorne Country Club.

The Charlotte Hall Military Academy was pleased that Admiral Fletcher agreed to be a

member of its board of trustees, and he was eventually appointed chairman. He took the education of the young men seriously and read a number of books on the English education system, sharing his opinions regarding the educational process.

Admiral Fletcher loved farming, and *Araby* was operated as a three-hundred and sixty-six acre dairy farm for a number of years. He could always be seen at the annual Charles County Fair, helping in any way he could, especially when the task involved animals.

Frank Jack Fletcher died four days before his eighty-eighth birthday at Bethesda Naval Hospital on April 25, 1973, and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Mrs. Fletcher died a year-and-a-half later.

Few men loved their country and community more than Admiral Fletcher. He devoted his time, talent, and energy to Charles County with the same fervor that he provided military service to his country. Charles County was fortunate to claim Frank Jack Fletcher as a loyal citizen.

In his bibliography, *In Bitter Tempest*, the author concludes with this quote from a historian who talked with Admiral Fletcher.

"(Fletcher) was a full admiral who had served his country heroically in World War II but who showed not the least element of false pride, arrogance, presumption, or braggadocio. He was a modest, humble, sympathetic, warm, and understanding as some of the old friends of my father."



Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher

Newly Published Biography of Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher

In Bitter Tempest: The Biography of Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, by Stephen D. Regan, Iowa State University Press, 1994 can be ordered through the C. C. Community College bookstore.

GENEALOGY QUERY Goodrich Family

I need information on parents of Laura Virginia Goodrich, b. 12 Oct. 1860, married 17 Sept. 1885 to Edward Henry Swann by Rev. Reed. The death certificate did not give parents names.

My grandfather, Eduard Henry Swann, is buried in the Swann family plot at the Oldfield Chapel Cemetery, Bryantown, Maryland.

Any assistance will be greatly appreciated. Send to:

Mrs. Ethel S. Windsor
600 N. 35th St., U803
Morehead City, NC 28557

Membership Committee Report

The Historical Society welcomes the following NEW MEMBERS:

Mr. Robert W. Cook, Bryantown, MD
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur F. Krueger, Accokeek, MD
Mr. & Mrs. Barrow Frere Neale,
Queenstown, MD
Mr. Charles Waltham, Faulkner, MD
Mr. Lawrence Cox, Rockville, MD
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Knecht, La Plata, MD
Mr. William C. Fields, Jr., Memphis, TN
Ms. Patricia T. Ralston, Columbia, MD
Mr. Ken Craft, Jr., Norcross, GA
Mrs. Francis E. Farr, Ocean City, MD

Now is the time for all good members of the Historical Society to mark their calendars for that very special day—June 19, 1994—our annual, summertime, extravaganza, the Afternoon Tea. This year it will be held at Mt. Zephyr. Details will be mailed with the invitations in mid-May.

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

In accordance with our By-Laws, anyone who has not paid their dues by March 31st will be assessed a late fee of \$5. And, if dues are not paid by June 30th, they will be dropped from the list of active members. If a red dot (•) appears next to your name on your newsletter address label, this applies to you.

To be re-instated as a member please submit the following amount, at our address, c/o Membership Chairman:

Family \$12. + \$5. late fee = \$17.00
Single \$10. + \$5. late fee = \$15.00

The Price of Nationhood:

The American Revolution In Charles County

By Jean B. Lee

We see the American Revolution as a formative event, but it was also a shattering one to those who experienced it. Charles County, situated on the Potomac near Chesapeake Bay, long enjoyed the prosperity of a rich soil and thriving overseas trade. Its social order—white planters at the top, enslaved blacks at the bottom—was stable. Its politics were local.

This world was swept away by Independence and the war with Britain. Led by its accustomed elite, the county entered the maw of Revolution, fought battles local and distant, and emerged part of a nation, its society admitting greater degrees of freedom, but now a backwater, impoverished, depleted, its impulse gone. Along the way this book rewards us with history at ground level, rich with the smell of the earth in eighteenth century seaboard Maryland.

(448 pages, \$29.95)

The author will be at the Fine Arts Center, C.C.C.C. on Friday, Sept. 30 for an evening program co-sponsored by the Historical Society. More information to follow in *News & Notes*.