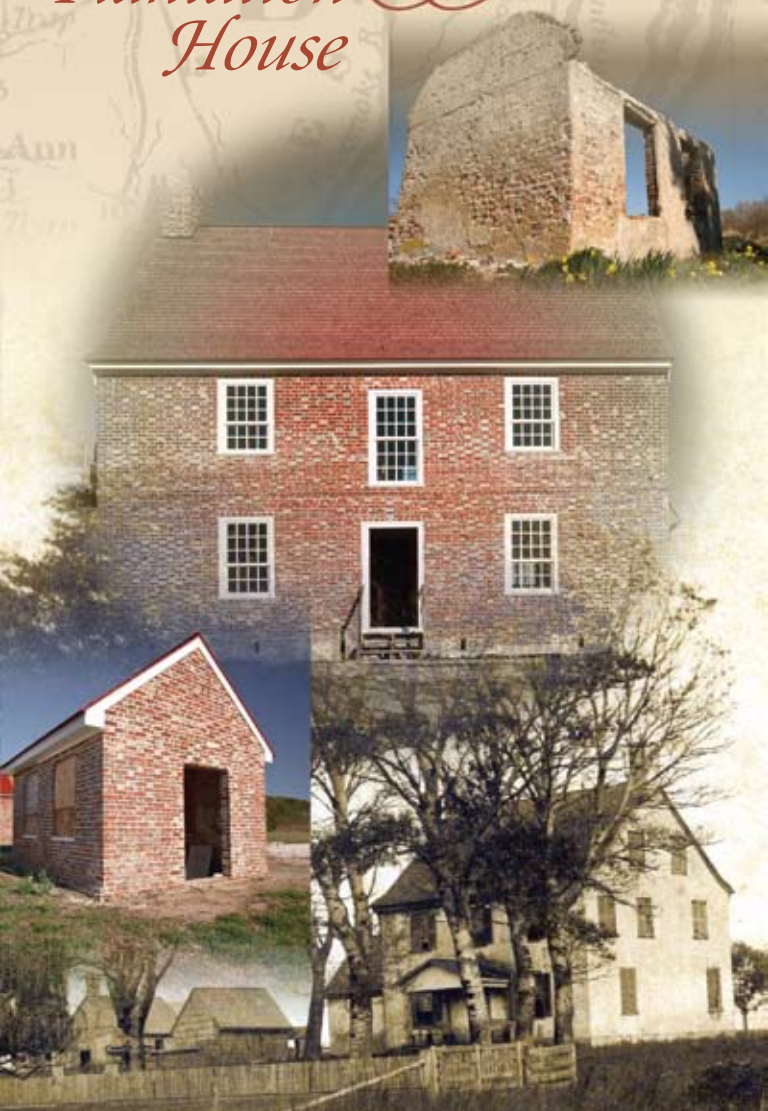


# *Rackliffe*

## *Plantation House*



*SAVING A COASTAL JEWEL*



# *Historic Preservation or Economic Development? ...BOTH*

A Sense of Place imbued with the continuity of historical forces is one reason for the preservation of Rackliffe Plantation House as the jewel of the Coastal Heritage Center on Sinepuxent Bay.

Why do many of us choose to visit and reside in locations that have preserved legacies of long-standing tradition rather than in areas characterized by encroachments of random development? Culturally-distinct Paris, London and Rome, or ecologically-rich coastal regions, each in its way enriched by a glow of recognition on our part; these top our list of destinations and create economic benefits for the local tourism industry.

The Maryland Seaside is such a place, a narrow watershed, packed with stories of a rural past, an endangered heritage, a threatened Sense of Place. Yet traces remain and upon one of those traces the Rackliffe House Trust has forged its mission. We are drawing a line in the sand on behalf of what seaside life means, telling the story of coastal plantation life so that our children, and their children, will truly know what is special about this cradle of American cultural development.

*Rackliffe Plantation House, constructed in the 1740s, is believed to be the only property of its vintage and early Georgian character along the Mid-Atlantic coast, with sublime ocean and coastal bay views, to regularly open to the public.*

# “Land of Plenty”

In 1679 two brothers-in-law, Charles Rackliffe and Edward Wale, were granted 2200 acres in South Point. They divided the land between them, and the Rackliffe portion played its role as a cradle of seaside civilization. For the next three centuries these lands remained with the original families...until 1939. The estate sale was reported in the former *Eastern Shore Times* with an editorial comment:

“A short time ago there was a story in the *Times* on the sale at the southern end of Synepuxent Neck. It was interesting to readers whether they lived in Worcester County or New York, because it was a chapter in the saga of America. It was about ‘people;’ the homes they established in settler days, the farms they carved out and the buildings they built.

“What stories it would have to tell could the soil and timbers talk. Nothing in all the world is more absorbing than the tale of life—birth and deaths, romance and tragedy, lean years and fat ones, wars and peace, and progress. What proud landmarks the tract still boasts...

structures of Pre-Revolutionary pattern and spots where great events occurred. Now quoting from the *Times* story...”

“The waterfront along the Synepuxent Bay was a Land of Plenty. The families were of pure English stock and followed the customs of the Mother Country. Business necessities (eventually) carried the original families into the towns and cities in search of a livelihood.



RackliffeHouse 1904

“The land will (now) be developed into waterfront estates. Already plans are underway to run telephone and electric lines down the shore. Tractors and a crew of men will be put to work immediately...”

“The march of evolution and progress never ceases. May it be the ‘land of plenty’ again.”



A visitor to the site in early 2006 would not recognize Rackliffe House today, even in its partially-restored condition. From ruin to signs of return to its 18th century grandeur, this early Colonial home, like the legendary Phoenix, a golden-winged ancient bird of great beauty that was consumed by fire but rose again from its ashes, will once again be young and beautiful with a promising future.

After a consuming fire in 1928, the original gabled roof with its graceful flared eaves was replaced by a squat, ungainly and historically-inappropriate hip roof. The interior and the kitchen wing were also destroyed, replaced in 20th century-style. Finally, two decades of vacancy and the inexorable forces of nature and vandalism completed the tragedy. When the Rackliffe House Trust took this project on, we knew it was not just a “fixer-upper.”

Future publications will update this pictorial story until restoration is complete and the welcome mat is out again, planned for fall, 2010.

## 2008 Summer Solstice Celebration

By the Summer Solstice, progress at Rackliffe House was so encouraging as to demand a celebration at the site. The fundraiser was planned and managed by Board member Joan Jenkins and her enthusiastic team of volunteers.

While grants from government agencies and other organizations have contributed substantially to meeting campaign goals, such financial aid has been made possible only by matching donations from the community. Every privately-donated dollar has leveraged many additional dollars in grant funds.

Now the Trust's goal is to begin raising funds to open the doors, create exhibits and continue the restoration of other historic attractions that will enrich the Rackliffe Plantation House experience. We're well on our way, but much remains to be done.



Hayride at Summer Solstice 2008

# Coastal Heritage Center Plans

Planning to “tell the story” of early coastal plantation days is underway, with the aim of appealing to every age group, to visitors from around the globe and to do so with relevance to 21st century life.

The Coastal Heritage Center Planning Committee is chaired by Linda Ayres, a native of Berlin, Maryland who brings experience as a senior director at Mount Vernon to the coast.

Exhibits and programs in early planning stages include:

- Revealing the story of prehistoric hunting and fishing activities of Native Americans on the property or nearby,
- Explaining the role of the merchant-planter as an early model of “sustainability,”
- Discovering the Colonial African-American heritage of the coastal region,
- Describing the historic importance of coastal resources and livelihoods,
- Rebuilding and operating the original open-pan salt works, a significant early economic resource at Rackliffe Plantation House, and
- Surveying and displaying the important prehistoric and early plantation artifacts uncovered by ongoing archaeological efforts.



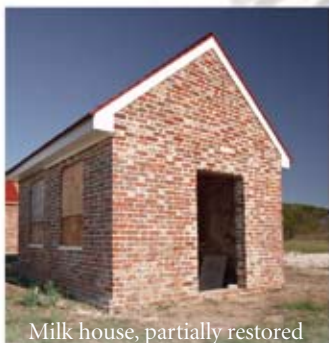
Rackliffe House, 2009

# Restored Salt Works on the Drawing Board

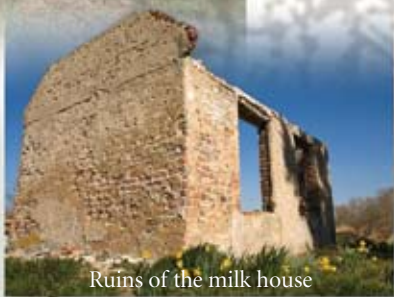
Rackliffe Plantation was one of three known sites of local salt manufacture in Colonial times. Throughout history, the search and battle over sources of salt have shaped civilizations in every corner of the world, the east coast of Britain's American colonies being no exception.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, British blockades of the coast threatened the supply of salt from the Caribbean. Locals took up production of the salt so essential to food preservation. One of those salt works was at Rackliffe Plantation House.

An important part of the interpretation of Colonial activities at Rackliffe House will include the replication of the original open-pan saltworks, based on period drawings and the few remaining examples of similar operations.



Milk house, partially restored

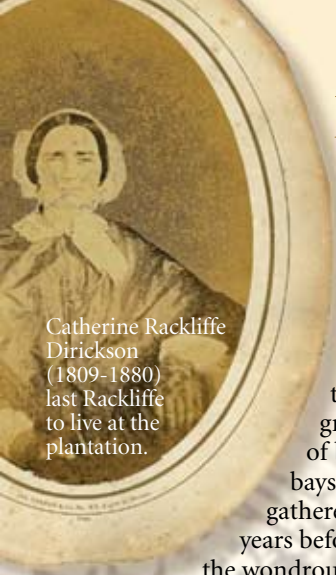


Ruins of the milk house



Catherine Rackliffe Dirickson (1809-1880) last Rackliffe to live at the plantation.





Catherine Rackliffe Dirickson (1809-1880) last Rackliffe to live at the plantation.

# Digging Into Prehistory

Some 10,000 years ago a small band of Native Americans came, somehow, from a foreign continent to settle along the seaside that was gradually evolving into a network of barrier beaches and inland coastal bays. A primitive culture of food gatherers developed here thousands of years before the great Egyptian pyramids or the wondrous Indian temples of Latin America were ever conceived.

The Rackliffe property was formerly one of the earliest fishing and hunting sites of these first inhabitants, usually referred to as Assateague Indians. Even after the so-called First Contact with European settlers, the tribe still maintained an extensive campground here to fish and hunt along the coastal bays and to use the coastal waters as the best means of transportation between kindred bands of seaside Indians.

Artifacts of this poorly understood and under-studied culture survive below the surface of previous farmland, present-day golf course, and presumably around the immediate grounds of Rackliffe Plantation House. This is an archeological opportunity surely to be explored.

This ghosted image depicts an open-pan saltworks of 1776



*Our Gratitude to The Funders of Preserving*



**RACKLIFFE  
PLANTATION HOUSE**

**"Save America's Treasures"- National Park Service**

**State of Maryland Bond Fund**

**Maryland Heritage Areas Authority**

**Worcester County**

**France-Merrick Foundation**

**National Trust For Historic Preservation:**

**Bartus Trew Providence Fund**

**Preservation Maryland**

*And to Our Local Community of Family Foundations,  
Businesses & Individuals Who Have Made This Project Possible*

*Maryland Department of Natural Resources*

## *MISSION*

Rackliffe House Trust, a private non-profit foundation, has entered into a long-term lease with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources for the purpose of restoring the notable 18th century plantation house overlooking Sinepuxent Bay...and upon completion of reconstruction to open the property to the public as the Coastal Heritage Center, focusing on the life and times of the early seaside "merchant-planters."

Rackliffe House Trust

P.O. Box 561

Berlin MD 21811

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e-mail: [henrysmill@beachin.net](mailto:henrysmill@beachin.net)

Modern photos: Robin Harrison & Jerry Gerlitzki

Design by Gerlitzki Design

# HELP OPEN THE DOORS OF RACKLIFFE PLANTATION HOUSE

*& Inaugurate the  
Coastal Heritage Center*



You can help bring to life the stories of a Golden Age in the settlement of Maryland's coastal bays and Assateague Island. Exhibits and programs are in the planning stages. Now we need funds to turn exciting ideas into a finished product at Rackliffe Plantation House.

YES, I would like to donate \$\_\_\_\_\_ to support the creation of Coastal Heritage Center exhibits and programs. (Please feel free to specify any preference for exhibits and/or programs that you would be most likely to support.)

Check enclosed • Please charge to  VISA  MasterCard

Account # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

I would be most interested in supporting \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to Rackliffe House Trust, or make your donation by credit card, and mail with this form to:  
Rackliffe House Trust • P.O. Box 561 • Berlin MD 21811

*THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING  
RACKLIFFE PLANTATION HOUSE*



## *NON-CASH CONTRIBUTIONS TO RACKLIFFE HOUSE AND THE COASTAL HERITAGE CENTER ARE WELCOME*

The mission at Rackliffe Plantation House is to interpret coastal plantation life in the prehistoric era, and the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, bringing those pioneering years to life not only with modern technology but also by including the implements, tools, dress and furnishings that would have been commonplace centuries ago. If you have a collection of historical material, artifacts, period furnishings, tools, farm equipment, colonial kitchen implements and other memorabilia from the early days, things that would enhance the “living history” mission, and you would like to share them with visitors to Rackliffe House, we would like to know about it. Please contact us for information on how your treasures can delight a wider audience as they have delighted you.

E-mail: [dbrewster@aol.com](mailto:dbrewster@aol.com) or [henrysmill@beachin.net](mailto:henrysmill@beachin.net)

