

Curtis J. Badger
For Shore First
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At long last, a Home for Eastern Shore History

In the fall of 2010, Kirk Mariner, Brooks Miles Barnes, and I got together for lunch at Annie's Restaurant in Parksley. I had just joined the foundation board of the Eastern Shore Public Library, and we were about to embark on a mission to raise funds to build a new library. I was clueless when it came to raising money, but I knew the Eastern Shore needed a new library.

Libraries have changed a great deal over the past few decades. Today, books are only part of the mission. Libraries are woven into the fabric of a community, touching many lives in various ways. My interest was in local history, and I wanted to know what role Kirk and Miles envisioned for a new library.

Miles had been the librarian for many years, and Kirk, a retired Methodist minister, had written widely about local history, especially as it pertained to the church. His book, *Revival's Children*, is an Eastern Shore classic.

We were all about the same age, and all three of us shared a common concern. We were nearing the time in life when we think about estate planning. What is going to happen to all the flotsam and jetsam that has attached itself to us as we wandered through life? Kirk was a collector of all things Eastern Shore – books, post cards, maps, photos – you name it. If it was Eastern Shore, Kirk collected it.

Miles, through the library, had worked with the University of Virginia to create a web site called *The Countryside Transformed*, an amazing online collection of documents, maps, photographs, periodicals, and other material dealing with the railroad era on the Shore from roughly 1870 to 1935.

I had been photographing the Shore since I was in high school at Onancock and writing about the natural history of the Shore for nearly as long.

The common question was: What is going to happen to all the stuff we collected and created when we are gone? There was no easy answer.

We had wills dealing with the usual dispersal of real property, but we sensed that many of the things we had created or collected were not intended to be handed down to relatives. Years of research create a body of knowledge that becomes part of the community, not something to leave to the next of kin. It should be built upon by others, expanded, enhanced, and shared with anyone who desires it.

Kirk knew more about the history of the church and racial relations on the Shore than anyone I know of. What will happen to the documents he researched, created, and left behind?

Unfortunately, there was no easy answer. The Eastern Shore had several wonderful museums, but there was no facility where important documents, books, and photographs could be stored under proper archival conditions and shared with future generations of residents and researchers.

Over lunch at Annie's we talked about the Eastern Shore Room, which was part of the old Accomac library. We thought that construction of a new library would present the perfect opportunity to take a good idea, enlarge upon it, and create an expanded Eastern Shore archive that would capture our unique heritage.

In the past, collections of locally generated research material and documents had gone to either the Library of Virginia in Richmond or to the Nabb Center at Salisbury University. Both are admirable institutions, but in either case the material leaves the Eastern Shore, likely never to return. For all practical purposes, it would be lost to future researchers.

The new library would give us a chance to right this wrong.

And so, thirteen years later, seeing for the first time the sign "Eastern Shore of Virginia Heritage Center" gracing the façade of the handsome new building in Parksley brings great pride, tempered with a bit of sadness. Kirk Mariner's collections will be among the first items to be cataloged.

It is a shame Kirk couldn't be here to see it.