

2023 Annual Report

Friends of Chapman State Park

March 21, 2024

The 2023 Annual Report showcases the efforts of the Friends of Chapman State Park to preserve and provide programming for the Chapman State Park, its nature trails and the historic manor house, Mount Aventine.

The officers of the Friends of Chapman State Park in 2023 include: Sheryl Elliott; President, David Chapman, Vice President; Linda Dyson Treasurer; and Carole Schnitzler, Secretary. The elected members at large of the board of directors include: John Anderson, Margit Besseney (honorary member), Jennifer Bryant, Richard Cook, MD, Mike Callahan, Chris Dudley, Vicki Marckel Fields, Bob Lukinic, Bob Maclay, and Nancy Megas. At the 2024 Annual Meeting of the Friends of Chapman State Park, a new board of directors and officers will be elected by the organization's members. The board met every other month from March through October for meetings and special subcommittees met on separate occasions.

As of December 31, 2023, the reconciled bank balance of the organization indicates a positive cash balance of \$16,314. This balance is encumbered by a donation for a memorial park bench and also by the Charles County Arts Alliance grant match.

The 2023 activities of the Friends of Chapman State Park included 32 Sunday Open Houses from April through October. The Open Houses often included programs of special invited guest speakers, musical events and F & B refreshments. Members of the board of directors who volunteered as docents for the Open Houses include: John Anderson, Linda Dyson, Margit Besseney Williams, Richard Cook, Jennifer Bryant, Carole Schnitzler, and Sheryl Elliott. Coordinating this effort is board member, John Anderson.

The main annual event for the Friends of Chapman State Park is the Yuletide two-day Open House which is held in conjunction with the Charles County Holiday Trail program. Committee chair for the event was board member, Bob Lukinic. The house was decorated with holiday décor, refreshments were served, gift items were available for purchase at the gift shop/visitors center, creative crafts were available for "kids" of all ages, and musical entertainment was provided each day. The event netted approximately \$1000 after expenses and had approximately 200 visitors attending the festivities. Many board members of the Friends of Chapman State Park volunteered for this event including: Bob Lukinic, Linda Dyson, Mike Callahan, David Chapman, Margit Besseney, John Anderson, Carole Schnitzler, Chris Dudley, and Sheryl Elliott. There were also many other volunteer members of the Friends of Chapman State Park who committed time and energy for this event, particularly, Dottie Lukinic, who created the foyer holiday decór and Carrie Staples who organized creative crafts each day of the event.

A Plein Art Painting event was held on Saturday, May 6, featuring the Friends of Chapman State Park board member, Vicki Marckel Fields, as the artist instructor. A Holiday Crafts program was held on Sunday, November 12, featuring craftsperson, Carrie Staples. The program highlights included making ornaments for the Mount Aventine tree as well as the personal trees of the attendees. Carrie Staples was also the featured guest/artist in an earlier similar program, "Christmas in August," on Saturday,

August 26. Refreshments and music were provided for both events. Coordinating the arts and crafts events was board member, Linda Dyson.

On May 25, 2023, the launch of a new national heritage area that celebrated the designation of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, was held at Piscataway Park in Accokeek, MD. Board member, John Anderson, represented the Friends of Chapman State Park at the event and setup a tent and table with informative materials that highlighted some of the organization's program activities. The United States Congress passed the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act on December 22, 2022, and it was signed into law by President Joe Biden on January 5, 2023. Keynote speaker for the widely attended event was Maryland Governor West Moore. Many cultural and conservation organizations had informational tables set up for the event.

Each year the Friends of Chapman State Park hosts a variety of sponsored programs, such as the Potomac River Cleanup on January 1, 2023 and the Spirit Investigation event held on March 15, 2023 at Mount Aventine. The latter event raised \$517 for the Friends of Chapman State Park and was coordinated by board members, Carole Schnitzler and Mike Callahan.

The grants completed in 2023 included the Maryland Heritage Area Authority FY 2023 grant award, "Making Mount Aventine Accessible for All." The grant received was for \$7750 for a total project cost of \$15,500. This grant required a dollar to dollar match. The project included the design and estimated costs of an accessible bathroom as well as a pathway and accessible lift at the rear porch area of the house. In addition to the technical landscape and accessibility drawings, the project included architectural specifications, a site survey and costs for the proposed construction as well as a "life safety" code study. Letters of support for this grant were received from the Charles County Board of Commissioners, the Town of Indian Head, MD, and the Southern Maryland Delegation. Coordinator for this grant was board member, Sheryl Elliott and former board member, Joe Plenzler.

A FY 2023 grant received from the Charles County government was entitled, "Keys to History: Discover the Past throughout 19th Century Doors and Windows." The grant award was for \$2000, with a total project cost of \$3440.61. The deliverables for this grant included a new viewing platform in the "West Wing" for the 19th century construction exhibit. The project also entailed relocating a bathroom door in the "West Wing" to its original place in the hallway connecting the "West Wing" to the main house on the second floor. As part of the grant, paint was stripped on two "West Wing" 19th century windows (first and second floors) and also on the transom above the original entry door (first floor). One unintended discovery during the paint removal process was finding a skeleton key that was hidden behind the transom window above the original door. Considering the apparent and visible age of the key, it is thought to be perhaps the original key to the cottage entrance door of what is now known as Mount Aventine's "West Wing." Finding the possible original key to the "West Wing" as part of this project gave new meaning to the "Keys to History" interpretative theme that was first introduced by the Friends of Chapman State Park in 2020. As a final deliverable of this grant, 1,000 copies of a brochure, "Mount Aventine Keys to History: 19th Century Doors and Windows" was created and printed for distribution. Coordinators for this grant were board members, Sheryl Elliott and John Anderson.

Friends of Chapman State Park board member, Richard Cook, was instrumental in writing and receiving a grant of \$750 in 2023 from the local chapter of the Sierra Club for an educational outreach project. The intent of the grant is to further minority students' understanding of the Mount Aventine plantation and its history. The project included an educational scholarship award of \$500 to a student who was a

descendant of someone who had been enslaved or had tenancy at the Mount Aventine plantation. The actual awarding of the scholarship has been delayed until 2024 because of scheduling problems. This grant required no dollar match.

The Friends of Chapman State Park also received in 2023 a grant of \$500 from the Charles County Arts Alliance to cover the cost of musical performances and art supplies for events at Mount Aventine. This is a dollar for dollar matching grant for a total project cost of \$1000. Coordinator of this grant was board member, Linda Dyson.

In November 2023, the Friends of Chapman State Park submitted a "letter of intent" for a grant from the Maryland Heritage Area Authority for the FY 2024 grant round. The grant project title was: "Commemorating African American History at Mount Aventine." The request in the "Letter of Intent" was for a \$90,000 capital grant. MHAA grants require a per dollar grant match for a total project cost of \$180,000. The Charles County Board of Commissioners have indicated interest in providing the match for this grant. A formal presentation to the Board of Commissioners will be made in 2024. The letter of intent was submitted by board member, Sheryl Elliott.

In June 2023, the Friends of Chapman State Park, submitted a grant request of \$3000 (for a total project cost of \$4500) to Charles County for their FY 2024 grant round. The project title was: "Keys to History: Mount Aventine—Dichotomy of a Prosperous Plantation and Enslaved Labor." No response was received from the county on this grant which was written and submitted by board member, Sheryl Elliott, on June 16, 2023.

The Friends of Chapman State Park received a letter of support in July 2023 by the Charles County Board of Commissioners for a seed grant from the Southern Maryland Heritage Area for the project "Windows on Mount Aventine: Chapman's Point Fishery and Chapman's Landing." While the grant request of \$1500 for a total project cost of \$3025.40 was ready for submission by the Friends of Chapman State Park, the Southern Maryland Heritage Area never released information on the seed grant money becoming available. No reason was given as to why this occurred. The grant application was prepared by board members, Sheryl Elliott and Linda Dyson.

The Friends of Chapman State Park continued in 2023 to work with the Maryland Park Service to maintain trails and keep them open, assist in the management of park by alerting the MPS of issues, assist in the control of sapling invasion, and provide ongoing interpretation through signage. Many members of the Chapman State Park board of directors are involved with this project, including, Linda Dyson, Bob Lukinic and John Anderson.

Mount Aventine requires continual cleaning and the rearrangement of furnishings to accommodate new donations and décor. For the 2023 Yuletide event, a professional cleaning service was contracted to clean the house on December 1, 2023. Periodic general cleaning is done by the volunteers who serve as docents for the Sunday Open Houses. Additional effort is often required to maintain the house, such as removing hornet nests from windows, repairing locks, boarding up broken windows, cleanup of the basement and third floors, and removing storm damage debris. Board members who have been involved in this effort include: John Anderson, Bob Lukinic, Carole Schnitzler, Linda Dyson, and Sheryl Elliott.

In 2023 the Friends of Chapman State Park embarked on researching and writing two draft booklets on subjects that had not been fully explored by the organization. The two draft booklets are entitled: "Mount Aventine: A Prosperous Plantation and Enslaved Labor" and "Chapman's Point Fishery & Chapman's Landing Ferry." The booklets are still in their draft stages, but the research, to date, has been useful in identifying information on how people who were enslaved were part of the Mount Aventine culture and economy, both as field workers and also workers who were essential to two business operations at Mount Aventine, the fishery and the ferry service at Chapman's Landing. It is hoped that this research and draft booklets can be connected to the FY 2024 MHAA grant request. The research, writing and editing of this project included board members: Sheryl Elliott, Linda Dyson, David Chapman, and Jennifer Bryant.

The Friends of Chapman State Park has also help facilitate a grant received by St. Mary's College Maryland by the Maryland state legislature in 2023. The grant project was entitled: "Documenting, Interpreting and Commemorating African American History at Mount Aventine." Board members John Anderson, Linda Dyson, Jennifer Bryant, Richard Cook, and Sheryl Elliott met with the St. Mary's College team; members provided access to the property and documents, shared information, and assisted in surveying the property. The grant's Principal Investigator for St. Mary's College is Dr. Julia King, and the Assistant Investigator is Ed McMullen. According to Dr. King, 85 to 90% of the grant fund will be for labor. The main deliverable from the project will be a report which the Friends of Chapman State Park hope will be useful in the organization's future programming efforts.

The Friends of Chapman State Park continue to manage and maintain social media accounts for their overall marketing program. These include managing and maintaining a website, Facebook account and Instagram account. The Friends of Chapman State Park also maintains on a Google drive a distribution list for marketing as well as database for the organization's accession and deaccession program. The Friends of Chapman State Park liaise with other organizations like the Charles County government and the Maryland Park Service in marketing the park and Mount Aventine programming effort through various communication vehicles. The Friends of Chapman State Park's website has been maintained by former board member, Chris Platt, for many years. He has made continual updates to the website, adding new technology features, and also covering the annual domain costs of the site.

One notable donation for 2023 was a collection of photographs of Greg Adams (family Chapman member) which were framed by the Friends of Chapman State Park for display at Mount Aventine. There was also a significant private cash donation made by Friends of Chapman State Park members and board members throughout 2023.

The 2023 Annual Report highlights how the Friends of Chapman State Park continue to create a special window on the Potomac for the park, in compliance with the goals set forth in the "2004 Governor Parris N. Glendening Natural Environment Area Land Unit Plan" prepared by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (page 21):

"Integrate cultural and environmental themes to tell the story about the cultural landscape - interpretive and educational programs also should capitalize on explaining and interpreting the interrelationships between the diverse cultural and natural resources on the property. Some examples of other interpretive themes include: the historical importance of the Potomac River as a natural resource; the role and history of African Americans in Charles County and the issue

of slavery at Mt. Aventine; and the role and importance of the Potomac River in early American commerce."

Questions remain, though, as to how the Friends of Chapman State Park will work with the Maryland Park Service in making Mount Aventine a rental venue that can create a revenue stream to assist in associated costs with the park. It is noted that the 2003 Land Unit Plan called for "*strategies to manage, protect, and conserve its [the park's] significant cultural and natural resources, while allowing opportunities for appropriate public use and access.*" The Land Unit Plan particularly notes the goal of partnerships (page 14):

"It is recommended to establish a formal partnership with one principal, nonprofit entity or private organization (The Partner) to help manage the property, and fund site operations, maintenance and programs, in cooperation with the State Forest and Park Service's land unit manager. . . Establish partnerships with other entities to help leverage resources and expand site programs and activities and support operations. There are limitless possibilities to form the partnerships to implement the planning recommendations. For example, The Partner and DNR could contract the services of a catering company or a facility rental manager to manage Mt. Aventine for events and private functions."

The Land Unit Plan recommends to renovate and operate Mount Aventine for adaptive use:

"Mt. Aventine will require substantial amounts of outside funding to pay for annual operating costs, including utilities and maintenance. The mansion is a major focal point for public use and it will be used for interpreting the history and evolution of the property through a variety of educational and interpretive media, including mobile exhibits, self-guided brochures, and guided tours. The house also will help generate revenue through building rentals for small meetings, conferences and weddings. Fees from facility rentals will be reinvested into operating and maintaining Mt. Aventine."

The Friends of Chapman State Park have fully renovated Mount Aventine and are certainly providing a substantial programming effort through their interpretative exhibits, brochures, signage, tours, and events. However, whether the Land Unit Plan recommendation of making the house a rental venue can be realized is unclear. A meeting on February 26, 2024 with the Friends of Chapman State Park and the Maryland Park Service brought some additional clarity regarding this issue, but to date, making Mount Aventine a rental venue is still unresolved.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheryl Elliott, Ph.D.
Friends of Chapman State Park
Board of Directors, President