

# DECK LOG

*Dahlgren Heritage Museum*

## 10 Years Ago...



## Transformation: Visitor Center to Museum

*By Rob Gates*

There were a number of things to be done at the beginning of the museum project – forming a leadership team, gathering funding, and, most importantly, finding a location. Ed Jones described the beginning of the journey last month.

Late in 2012 it was time for the next step – the transformation of the closed Potomac Gateway Visitor Center to the Dahlgren Heritage Museum. The first steps were taken – the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) repaired the restrooms, and we removed wall-mounted brochure racks, painted, and replaced the rug.

NSWC Dahlgren Division gave us permission to use their “Decade Charts” – a series of posters that

Michael Remorenko of Design 3 in Orange, Virginia, looks over design plans.

depict Dahlgren history decade by decade. They would hang on our walls and provide a chronological structure for our exhibits. The Dahlgren History Project, headed by Wayne Harman and Robin Staton, saved many historical Dahlgren artifacts and helped select items to be displayed under each of the decade charts.

The final ingredient was signature exhibits. Carlton Middlebrook loaned us the propeller from the first unmanned, remote-controlled airplane that took off, maneuvered, and landed in 1924, as well as a Norden bombsight of World War II fame. Both were developed at Dahlgren. A member of our board, Tim Carsola, built a model of the IX inch Dahlgren gun and donated it to the museum.

The next step was harder since none of us knew the first thing about museum or exhibit design! So, I did what the Navy had taught me to do – research vendors, prepare our requirements, and request *[continues]*



Fabrication was done and installation was scheduled for the end of September and early October. Everything was finished to our satisfaction and the museum was ready for the big day – our Grand Opening.

But that was only the beginning. In the last ten years we've added exhibits, including a new signature item - a working model of the 7 inch tractor gun that fired the first shot at Dahlgren in 1918 (built for the museum by Tim Carsola). We've also featured "Dahlgren Pioneers" in special exhibits and expanded our virtual presence as we move towards the next step in our evolution – a museum without walls.

proposals. I identified two or three firms that might be interested in a small job like ours and contacted them. We evaluated the responses and selected Design 3 in Orange, Virginia, to do the job. I represented the Board and worked with Michael Remorenko over the next six months as we progressed to a final design, fabrication, and installation.

I provided artifact dimensions and photographs and answered Michael's questions. Inevitably, our original plan changed as the project progressed and the Board reviewed the proposed changes that Michael and I developed. I also wrote all of the descriptive signs that identify the artifacts on display. When Michael saw the high ceiling in the museum, he proposed developing a series of banners with Dahlgren highlights organized by decade. We liked the idea and several of us – old Dahlgren hands all – chose the highlights for the banners.



## Please Think of us on Giving Tuesday

**Topside Federal Credit Union will match the first \$2,500 in donations made to the museum through its Topside Cares campaign!**

**Donate by December 31, 2023, at:**  
<https://app.giv.io/campaign/559/>

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(L-R) Cathy Binder, Rob Gates, Ed Jones, docent Harry Black, and museum board member Gary Kendrick.

## Open House

On October 21st, a beautiful fall day, the Dahlgren Heritage Museum held an open house to celebrate the tenth anniversary of its opening to the public at its current location at the foot of the Nice/Middleton Bridge.

The last base tour of the season departed shortly after 11 a.m. with 18 guests, Dahlgren Heritage Foundation Vice President Rob Gates, President Ed Jones, and the bus driver.

After their return, Cathy Binder, Shiloh District Supervisor for King George County, presented Dr. Gates with a written resolution from the King George County Board of Supervisors recognizing the museum on the occasion of its tenth anniversary.

Then came the event for which several had been waiting. Member and docent Tim Carsola not only crafted the historic gun models in the museum, but he also demonstrated the firing of one of them. It had taken him over 800 hours to build the replica of the first gun fired at Dahlgren, a 7-inch, 45 caliber tractor mount gun. (Find out more about it at <https://www.dahlgrenmuseum.org/featured-artifacts>.) Among the fascinated onlookers were several King George County firefighters. Carsola gave Dr. Gates and Jones the honor of firing a shot each. Let me tell you: that little cannon can create a mighty big boom!



(Above, L-R) Tim Carsola prepares the model for firing as Rob Gates and Ed Jones look on.

(Below) For a small gun, it puts out noticeable smoke and sound.



Emily Genter uses simple items to demonstrate STEM concepts to a visiting family.

For the rest of the day, visitors were free to examine the exhibits, enjoy light refreshments, and visit the STEM tent, where local student Emily Genter led interactive demonstrations about speed, velocity, and resistance.



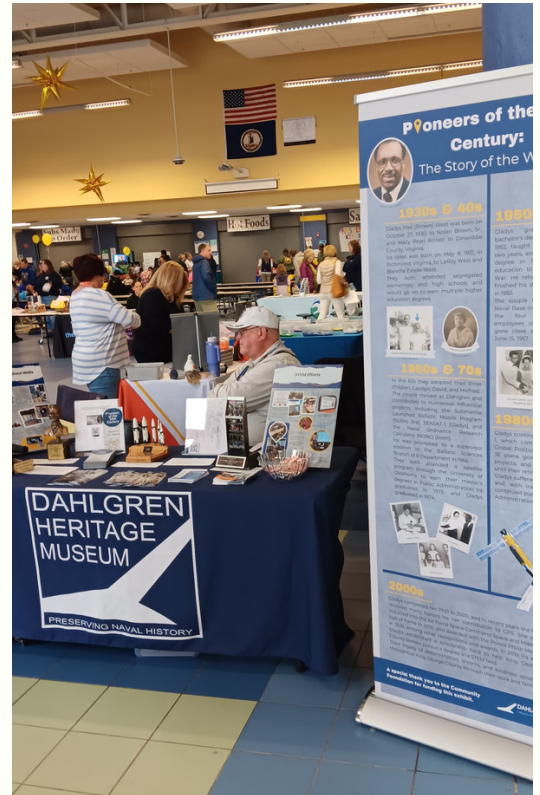
Dahlgren Heritage Museum board member Johnny Ashton is ready to tell King George County Fall Festival visitors about the museum.

## Around the Community

For the second year in a row, the Dahlgren Heritage Museum sent representatives to two local events to increase awareness of the museum's existence and to let participants see a small sampling of what the museum has to offer.

Docent Tim Carsola, Dahlgren Heritage Foundation Vice President Rob Gates, and board member Johnny Ashton manned a table at the King George Fall Festival on Saturday, October 14.

NSWCDD's second annual Dahlgren Downtown event took place on Friday, October 20, at the Silk Mill in Fredericksburg. Despite the occasional rain, Dr. Gates and docent Haley Drake covered the museum's table as part of the afternoon's outdoor exhibits. A bus full of high school students visited



the booth. There was a lot of interest in the models on display.

That evening at the black-tie dinner inside the Silk Mill, Foundation President Ed Jones had the opportunity to tell the attendees about the subject of our current Pioneers exhibit at the museum — the esteemed and remarkable mathematician, Dr. Charles Cohen. Music was provided by the Dahlgren Band, with museum docent Mike Barker on the drums.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT DR. CHARLES COHEN

Visit <https://www.dahlgrenmuseum.org/sound-bytes-of-history> to hear Julia Snow's memories of Dr. Cohen from a niece's perspective in the current Dahlgren Reflections podcast.





# “The Navy Lands at Dahlgren” Exhibit is on the Road Again

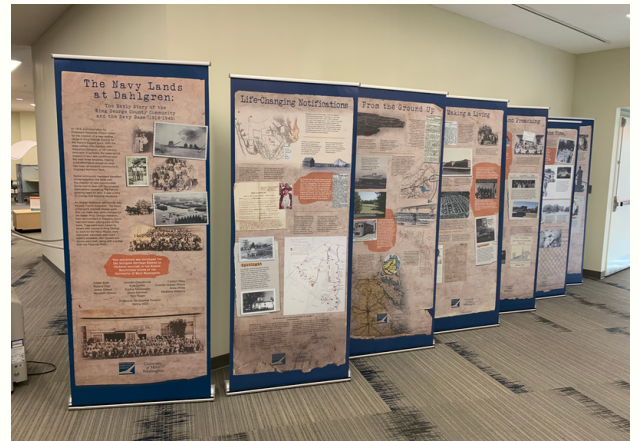
By Alan Dean

The Dahlgren Heritage Foundation (DHF), whose mission is to tell the “Story of the Navy Base at Dahlgren” believes in partnerships — with history organizations, civic organizations, educational institutions, and other players. It’s a way of broadening our perspective and building valuable relationships.

During the spring semester of 2022, a small group from the DHF board, led by the author, worked with Professor Cristina Turdean, chair of the Historic Preservation Department, and her exhibits class at the University of Mary Washington to create “The Navy Lands at Dahlgren.” This exhibit was created as a follow-up to a public forum the DHF held at UMW Dahlgren several years ago — “Seized Land: Challenges & Opportunities.”

The exhibit tells the story of the Navy’s need for land to establish the base in 1918 and to expand over the following two decades. Long-established farming communities were moved. It was a time of dislocation in the community, and yet a great opportunity as well. New jobs were offered at the Navy base, roadways were improved, and educational opportunities multiplied.

The students worked on everything from developing the storyline of the exhibit, to panel designs, to historical research to support the story. The students and Professor Turdean created an informative 7-panel exhibit that shares this part of the story of Dahlgren. The exhibit is designed to be a mobile display traveling to venues in the county and region. It was first displayed at the UMW Dahlgren Campus, then moved to the King George High School Library, and then to the L. E. Smoot Memorial Library. Working with Angie Kemp, Head of Special Collections & Digital Scholarship at



**“The Navy Lands” Exhibit at the Hurley Convergence Center at UMW.**

UMW’s Simpson Library, the 7-panel exhibit has moved again and is on display on the third floor of the Hurley Convergence Center near the connection to the Simpson Library. Come and learn a little bit about the area and how it was affected in those early days of Dahlgren. The exhibit will remain on display until the end of the semester.



**Visit us on the web at  
[www.dahlgrenmuseum.org](http://www.dahlgrenmuseum.org)**

**Look for us on Facebook and  
Instagram too!**



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WWW.DAHLGRENMUSEUM.ORG

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Thank you for your support of the Dahlgren Heritage Foundation! With your help we are educating the community on the Dahlgren story, running a museum, and working towards hosting more interesting and exciting events. We wouldn't be able to do any of this without you. We look forward to another great year, and we are thankful for your membership. Donate by mailing a check to: P. O. Box 816, Dahlgren, VA 22448 or visit [www.dahlgrenmuseum.org](http://www.dahlgrenmuseum.org) and click the "Support" tab.

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