

# MARYLAND WOMEN'S HERITAGE TRAIL

## WORCESTER COUNTY

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### AYRESBILT AND LANKFORD HOTEL I-19

8th Street and the Boardwalk • Ocean City, Maryland 21842

The Ayresbilt Apartment complex, named for Virginia Dale Ayres Swindler (1845-1964), is part of the Lankford Hotel complex. This hotel is one of the best preserved of the old hotels to remain in Ocean City. When Virginia Dale Ayres Swindler was widowed and became the sole support of their three children, she moved to Ocean City and began her career in real estate, an occupation mainly held by men. Ocean City, having a full-time population of under 1000, was a quiet retreat for tourists and the sales market for beach properties was limited. Virginia placed her emphasis on beach property rentals and claimed to be the first realtor on the beach. She helped form the nucleus of the huge empire of real estate as it now stands in modern Ocean City. Virginia was often seen walking the

Boardwalk with a large key ring looped over her arm. The keys to almost every apartment in town were on this ring. Additionally she helped to organize the Ocean City Women's Club and served as its first president. Virginia was the first president of the Coastal Realty Board and was instrumental in its growth and success.



*Anna Adkins Burbage*

### BURBAGE FUNERAL HOME I-21

108 William Street • Berlin, Maryland 21811

Anna Adkins Burbage (1893-1985) began her professional career as a manual arts instructor at age 16. She was perhaps the only female teacher of this type in the State, working in Berlin, Pocomoke and Stockton. It was at this time that she became interested in aiding children, which continued throughout her lifetime. From 1927 until 1944 Anna and her husband John operated the family-owned business, The Burbage Funeral Home, established in 1810 (oldest in Maryland). Upon her husband's death Anna managed the business. For more than 30 years Anna also provided life-saving care and services to the needy of Worcester County. She bought and maintained the only ambulance in Berlin, the only oxygen tent, and donated other medical equipment to the community. She will always be remembered for her compassion as well as her personal and financial contributions to her community.



*Myrtle Ashburn Polk*

### COSTEN HOUSE J-18

Pocomoke City, Maryland

Costen House was built by Dr. Isaac Costen shortly after the Civil War and was lived in by members of his family for over a century. He became Pocomoke's first Mayor in 1888. Myrtle Ashburn Polk was responsible for preserving the Costen House. She began her career in Maryland politics in 1948, where she won a seat on the Pocomoke City Town Council, becoming the first woman to serve in that position. In 1950 she ran for the House of Delegates, representing Worcester County. She was elected for two terms. She sponsored many progressive bills during her tenure, fighting to abolish segregated restrooms in public places and for jury service for women in Worcester County. Myrtle worked to develop the first Worcester County Garden Club, Worcester County Historical Society, and the first



## MARYLAND WOMEN'S HERITAGE TRAIL



local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She also served on several Governor's Commissions and participated in the National White House Conference Commission on Education. In 1991 ( at age 91) she was honored by Gov. William D. Schafer as one of 'Maryland's Most Beautiful People.'

*Costen House*

### DUNES MANOR HOTEL **I-21**

2800 Baltimore Avenue • Ocean City, Maryland 21842 • 410-289-4991

The Dunes Manor Hotel is a Victorian hotel which recaptures the charm of Ocean City's early seaside hotels. Mrs. Thelma Conner and her husband Milton bought the nearby Dunes Motel in 1965. It had been their life-long dream to build a hotel which was gracious, genteel and flavored with old-fashioned hospitality. Milton died in 1979, but their dream lived on. Mrs. Conner, at age 74, opened the doors of Dunes Manor Hotel in 1987. This was the first full-service hotel in that part of Ocean City. A tradition of serving 'Afternoon Tea' everyday began in 1987 and continues today. Mrs. Conner was the gracious hostess, pouring tea for her guests for eleven years, until her death in 1999. Thelma C. Conner was often referred to as Ocean City's "First Lady." She was an astute businesswoman, a civic leader, an educator, and a contributor to numerous community organizations and charitable events.



*Thelma Conner*

### FURNACE TOWN **K-19**

Worcester County • Old Furnace Road and Millville Road • Snow Hill, Maryland 21863 • 410-632-2032 • [www.furnacetown.com](http://www.furnacetown.com)

This educational site features the local natural and cultural history of 19th century life in Snow Hill. Exhibits reflect lives of women.

### ZIPPY LEWIS LOUNGE **I-21**

Dunes Manor Hotel • Ocean City, Maryland 21842

Zipporah ("Zippy") Lewis (1813-1879) is one of Ocean City's most colorful characters from the past. Zippy's husband, a sailor, was lost at sea shortly before the Civil War began. Awaiting his return, which was never to be, Mrs. Lewis became a lonely recluse, taking residence in a shack that she built in North Ocean City, where it is believed that she raised wild cattle. Legend has it that Aunt Zippy lived by foraging the beach, even replenishing her supplies and foodstuffs from the flotsam of shipwrecks. During a shipwreck in the 1820's a ship laden with coins foundered in a storm off the coast of Ocean City. For many years after, storms would wash the coins upon the beach. It is said that Zippy collected them and could be seen driving her ox cart between Berlin and Bishopville, where she visited the stores and exchanged the coins and cattle for merchandise. Her legend lives on at the Dunes Manor Hotel in the Zippy Lewis Lounge where there is a painting of her, dressed in a linsey-woolsey dress, wearing an apron, fit for gathering treasures.



*Zippy Lewis*



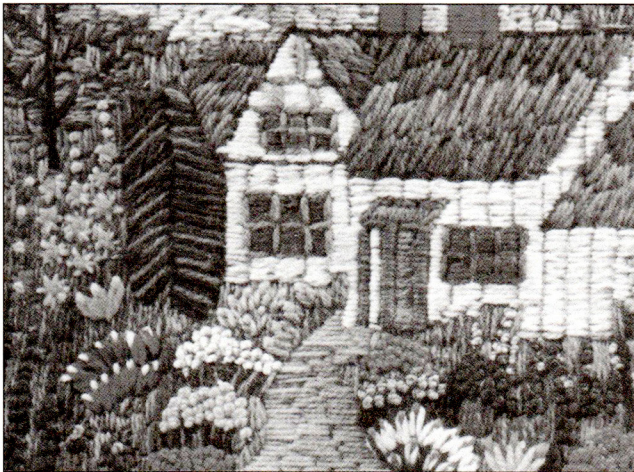
## MARYLAND WOMEN'S HERITAGE TRAIL



### OCEAN CITY LIFE-SAVING STATION MUSEUM **I-21**

South End of the Boardwalk at the Inlet • Ocean City, Maryland 21842

In 1977, at a time when whole blocks of older buildings in Ocean City were being demolished to make room for more modern structures to accommodate the growing number of visitors, Thelma Conner was instrumental in the preservation of the U. S. Life-Saving Station. The old building had played an important role in Ocean City's early history and is one of its oldest structures. Built in 1878 at Caroline Street and the Boardwalk, it was moved in 1977 to its current location. It serves as a municipal museum with exhibits on shipwrecks and rescues on the Eastern Shore, and has many changing exhibits. (Also see listing for "Dunes Manor Hotel.")



### JULIA PURNELL MUSEUM **K-19**

208 West Market Street • Snow Hill, Maryland 21863

Throughout her entire life, Julia A. Lecompte Purnell (1843-1943) was a vital and active women, serving as a storekeeper, wife and mother. After a disabling fall at age 85 she began to create needlework canvasses depicting the architecture of local Snow Hill buildings. During her lifetime she crafted over 1000 pieces of needlework art. Receiving awards both locally and nationally, Julia earned the nickname "Grandma Moses" of Needlework. In 1941 (at stage 98) she was inducted into the National Hobby Hall of Fame. That same year she was honored as Snow Hill's Outstanding Citizen.



## MARYLAND WOMEN'S HERITAGE TRAIL

In 1942, Julia and her son William founded the Julia A. Purnell Museum, utilizing their home to exhibit her scenic needlework canvasses, as well as a vast collection of artifacts depicting early Worcester County life. After her death, William continued his mother's legacy, and ultimately over 10,000 Worcester County artifacts have been accumulated and are currently housed in a cottage-style gothic building originally built as Snow Hill's First Catholic Church, St. Agnes. The Museum stands as a tribute to a women who documented the past through her simple hobby and also as a tribute to the town and people she loved.

### STURGIS ONE ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE MUSEUM J-18

209 Willow Street • Pocomoke City, Maryland  
21851 • 410-957-1913 • www.onthebeach.com

This is the only African American one-room school in Worcester County that retains its original structure. Used from around 1900-1937, it was restored in 1996 under the leadership of two local women, Carolyn Jones and Annie Oliver. It contains information about educator Annie Octavia Brown Downing, who had a career that spanned 41 years. She served as a teacher, a principal, and later the first and only African American woman to serve as the county's Supervisor of Elementary Education. In the principal and supervisor capacities, Annie made use of her excellent teaching skills to observe, train and nurture African-American teachers in the school system. She also gave abundantly of her time and money for missions and programs in her church, and in the community, she reached across racial lines, working with other churches and on community projects. Annie received as much of her primary education as possible in Worcester County. At the time of her education, high school training was not offered to African-Americans. In 1912 Annie was sent to Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, to complete high school house where she earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education. Sturgis One Room School is an example of the type of facility where Annie would have received her primary education.



Annie Octavia  
Brown

### CALVIN B. TAYLOR MUSEUM I-21

Baker Street • Berlin, Maryland 21811 • 410-641-1019

Berlin's history is presented in exhibits depicting life from the early 1800's to the present day. Local antiques, artifacts and written histories allow visitors a glimpse into the lives of many who left a mark on local history and modern culture. An exhibit paying tribute to Rozelle Purnell Handy was created and is maintained by the Calvin B. Taylor Museum. At this time the display is part of the 'Traveling Museum,' which is taken to museums and locations throughout Worcester County. Rozelle began collecting books, magazines and other papers which augmented an already established family library. She built shelves on the large front porch of her residence to accommodate this collection, which she made available for anyone to borrow. Additionally, she would take the reading material to the people, by means of a horse-drawn buggy. She laid the groundwork for what is now the library system of Worcester County.