

HOME



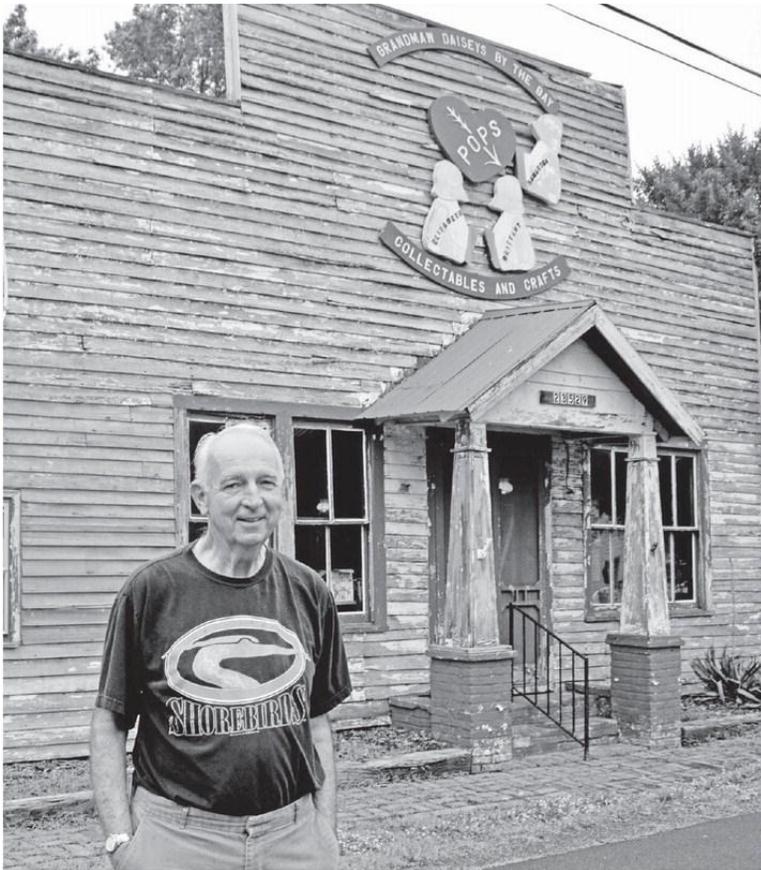
AT LAST



STAFF PHOTO BY BRUCE STUBBS
Jack Willing, owner of the former Corbett Store in Charco, has refurbished the original doors to the 100-year-old building that will serve as headquarters for Skipjack Heritage Inc. Willing saw the 1920s scene with his 204 eyes. "They are the same screen doors on the front that were on there when I was a boy."

After patiently waiting for 50 years, Skipjack Heritage members rehab country store to serve as first headquarters

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Jack Willing, executive director of Skipjack Heritage Inc., is shown in front of a former county store in Chance that will serve as headquarters for the organization. For 50 years they have been looking for a home.



“I don’t know if this will be our permanent home, but it is finally home for now. It is a great location, because everyone going to the island has to pass in front of this place.”

MILTON “BUNKY” CAREW,

Skipjack Heritage president



Myron Webster removes a section of “rotted” tin from the ceiling of the former John Corbett country store in Chance. Along the walls are horizontal strips of light colored paint. They are the ghosts of the shelves that once were loaded with country store grocery inventory. Webster and others are working to have the building ready for the public to tour by Labor Day.

STAFF PHOTO BY BRICE STUMP



Granville and Lillian Webster, with an unidentified clerk, are shown in the country store they operated in Chance from 1931 to 1945. The store will serve as headquarters of Skipjack Heritage Inc.

SKIPJACK HERITAGE IMAGE

By Brice Stump Staff Writer It's weathered, sagging and in rough shape, but to some members of Skipjack Heritage Inc., the former country store along Deal Island Road, it's a beautiful gem. After 50 years of looking for a home, the group has finally found one, thanks to Jack Willing of Chance.

"If you want the building, I'll buy it for ya," Willing told Heritage members before he purchased the building, at 23530 Deal Island Road, in June.

"Skipjack Heritage, a group created through the Deal Island-Chance Lions Club, has been around more than 50 years. Been with them all those years," said Willing, 74, executive director of the heritage organization. So, too, have Robert Shores, treasurer, and William Wheatley, director. The three have waited 50 years to find a place to call home.

"Our organization wanted the building, but they didn't have any money to buy it, so I bought it with the idea of letting them use it," Willing said.

"Our original goal was to get a piece of property over by the Deal Island Harbor, off to the right when you cross the bridge to the island, and across from Scott's Cove Marina. We wanted to build a big museum over there, somethin' really nice," he said.

Willing said a number of attempts have been made to build at the site throughout the years, but

without success.

The group needs a facility in which to display the numerous artifacts related to the maritime heritage of the area. During the past five decades they have obtained photos, documents, gear and items they want exhibited to the public.

The 1950s through 2014 eyes

Willing talked about the history of the store he recently acquired, which catered to the community of watermen and their families.

“Larry and Daisy Stewart, they live across the road, they’re the ones I bought it from,” he said. “Paid \$20,000 for it. I guess I was weak that day,” he said with laughter. “Not been anything done to it for more than 20 years. Building looks pretty sound to me.”

Willing also bought an adjoining lot. “I don’t think all of it together is half an acre.”

“I bought the store and never come in here to look at it,” he said. Getting the old building spruced up and open by Labor Day includes removing a head-scratching oddity from the roof. Willing noted the chimney on the roof has no presence on the inside of the wooden structure. “It’s setting on the ceiling,” he said.

“Some time back a truck ran into the corner of the building. I heard the big bang late one night. Danny Ray Webster come knockin’ on the door tellin’ me they wanted me to come up there and look and see if they could pull the vehicle out without the buildin’ fallin’ down. The driver cut the whole corner right out. Took out the whole works and the outside was inside. He cut the chimney out of the middle of the floor, bricks everywhere. I couldn’t see what was holding the ceiling up and the rest of the chimney was still up on the roof. And it’s still there with nothin’ holding it up. Must weigh a ton, and there’s a little sag in the roof. Building must be pretty strong. We are goin’ to take it down now,” Willing said.

“I don’t know how old the store is, but I was told, when I was a boy, that it had been an Odd Fellows Hall. Then in the 1920s it was used as a church hall for Rock Creek Methodist Church. I remember it as a country store,” he said, as he walked among the leftover inventory from when it was last used as a consignment and antiques shop. “Back here is where they used to have the meat case,” Willing explained, “and the original old wooden counters are still here.” In his mind he saw the store of his youth as it appeared more than 65 years ago.

“It was Mr. Willy Corbett’s store at one time. He sold groceries and in a building on the side he built boats, pretty wooden boats. Good carpenter. John Corbett was his real name, but we called him ‘Mr. Willy’ and he cut hair in here. There was where he had his barber chair and that’s where he laid his barber shears. He cut my hair in the 1950s with hand clippers. Got electric clippers later on and had a rig up here where he plugged his clippers in. That receptacle right there is where he got his electric from in the 1960s,” he said, pointing to a vintage receptacle.

Willing looked and saw the 1950s scene with his 2014 eyes. “They are the same screen doors on the front that were on there when I was a boy.”

Willing has refurbished the original entry doors and screen doors. Even the period hardware has been cleaned and repainted.

“There are places on the ceiling where the tin has ‘rotted,’ but under that is the original tongue-and-groove woodwork,” Willing said. “We are goin’ to leave it original like it is.”

Along the walls are horizontal strips of light colored paint. They are the ghosts of the shelves that once were loaded with country store grocery inventory.

“Use to have wooden benches and a woodstove in here. They lived there, too, with a room built off to the side with a kitchen and dining room, and in back a bathroom and couple of bedrooms that was later torn off, but we want to put those rooms back.”

It was just one of several general stores in the vicinity when Willing was a boy.

“There’s a lot to do before Labor Day”

Though it is just several feet from the busy road outside, the only road leading to and from Deal Island, the old store has a distinctive feel when the traffic noise vanishes. The place just feels so laid back, so timeless and comfortable.

“This is a temporary thing. Maybe we can have some skipjack pictures hangin’ on the wall and some models sittin’ on the counters. But what we want to have in here is a computer system in here so that people can come in and look up the history of the skipjacks and their owners. And we will be hooked up with the Nabb Research Center at Salisbury University,” he said.

“There’s a lot to do before Labor Day. We got a fan in here to circulate the air a little bit. We are trying to get it open for the Labor Day Skipjack Races. It won’t be fixed like we want it, but it will do for the time being. Maybe put some paint on the outside.”

For Milton “Bunky” Carew, president of Skipjack Heritage, the store provides the group with a much-needed home.

“I don’t know if this will be our permanent home, but it is finally home for now. It is a great location, because everyone going to the island has to pass in front of this place.”

Since Carew has been president for more than two years, the organization’s membership has skyrocketed from eight to about 100. “My first objective when I became president was to revitalize the organization,” he said.

With that behind him, Carew has his eye on the future.

“Now that we have the building,” Carew said, “we can focus on fundraising, obtaining grants, the establishment of a watermen’s memory garden at the site, and even erecting a large pole building in which to house a skipjack. This isn’t just for our local skipjack heritage. It’s about boosting the local economy and remembering the many watermen who have come and gone.”

“We are all glad Jack helped us find a home. It really was a lot to do with the money situation,” he said. “This has helped us considerably.

“I’m glad all this happened as it did, when it did, because William Wheatley and Robert Shores, who have been on the original committee when it formed 50 years ago, finally get to see things coming together,” Carew said. bstump@dmg.gannett.com

