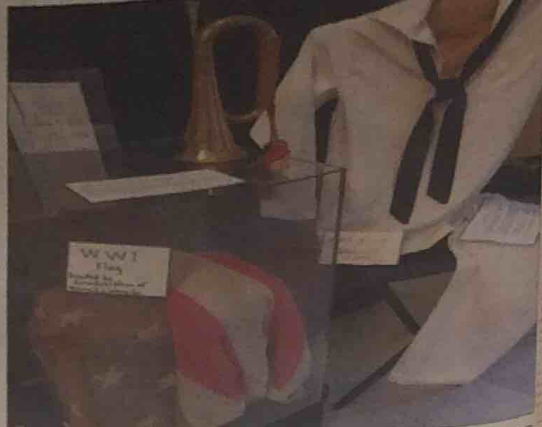


Ed Boas and Rebekah Ragan are heading a project to archive the entire collection held by USNTC Bainbridge Museum in Center Square in Port Deposit.



This represents just a few of the thousands of World War II-era items in the collection of the USNTC Bainbridge Historical Association and on display the Bainbridge Museum in Port Deposit.

# Volunteers work to archive Bainbridge Museum collection

**BY JANE BELLMYER**  
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As the museum's collection grows, two volunteers are working to archive everything the museum holds. And that means everything.

"This is not a start and end project," said Ed Boas, owner of International Computer Associates Inc. in Chesapeake City, who's working on the archiving. "It's a start and perpetuate project."

Focusing mostly on yearbooks and long roster lists of names from the U.S. Navy, Boas and Rebekah Ragan, a former student in Boas' computer classes at Cecil College, are building a massive database on behalf of the museum, operated by the USNTC Bainbridge Historical Association, and located in Center Square in Port Deposit. As this four-year-long and counting task continues, other volunteers are working on the displays that will be set up inside the Tome Gas House Visitor Center and Towson University Research and Education Center for the Northern Map Turtle, a step officials hope will bring renewed visibility to the museum.

Archiving all the museum's contents has proved to be a monumental task, to say the least.

"The museum did not have an inventory of its newspapers, documents, notebooks. They had stuff," Boas said.

The pair worked to first record all the items already in the museum's collection. It took three years to inventory the contents of the museum itself, Ragan added. That included artwork, uniforms, memorabilia and photographs donated to the museum. Some of the

photographs in the collection include pictures of the base hospital, which had 1,000 beds as well as the 1,000 soldiers. When those they expanded, there were more to the base which, in its heyday, boasted 50,000 people and was considered the largest town in Cecil County.

Ragan said this meant entering the names of hundreds of thousands of sailors and WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), who trained and served at Bainbridge from 1942 until the base was decommissioned in 1976. Bainbridge was first shut down in 1947, but reopened in 1951 to train recruits for the Korean War.

"We physically went through every single book of recruit records," Ragan said, noting she has already entered more than 20,000 names onto the list, which is on the museum website under "archive."

Sometimes that information was in the form of a paper list and sometimes it was a roll of microfilm, Boas said. But the database is being built in such a way that it is searchable.

"We had two rolls of microfilm at first," Boas said. "We now have actual service records and blueprints of the base."

To cover some of the archival costs, the museum board secured a \$2,500 grant from Cecil County's Local Impact Fund, which allowed the museum to buy software, other technology and a good quality camera for the project.

Boas and Ragan also took a trip to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., which yielded more than just personnel information.

"We had pounds and pounds of data on the meals," Boas said, noting that the people in charge of mess halls kept meticulous

records. "We had cost per serving, nutritional value," Ragan estimates she spends about 30 hours per week entering information into the database. This is in addition to a full-time job and classwork as she pursues her master's degree.

Ragan said she started building the entries one way, then another. Now more than four years later, she said the system basically did the work for her.

"The records have almost told me how to present them," she said, adding she feels almost like she has met some of these men and women. "The fun has been (discovering) how to preserve the data, but not lose the story behind it. You can see this person, connect that person who served here with their records. It's added a whole other element to the site."

"An absolute gold mine" Looking ahead, Wayne Hill, president of the USNTC Bainbridge Museum board of directors, said he hopes the displays at the Tome Gas House will give more people the opportunity to view one of the largest naval collections in the region.

"The Tome Gas House is an absolute gold mine," Hill said.

That partnership allows the museum to say it is open at least five days per week, a requirement to get the Maryland State Highway Administration to erect signage pointing tourists to the museum's door.

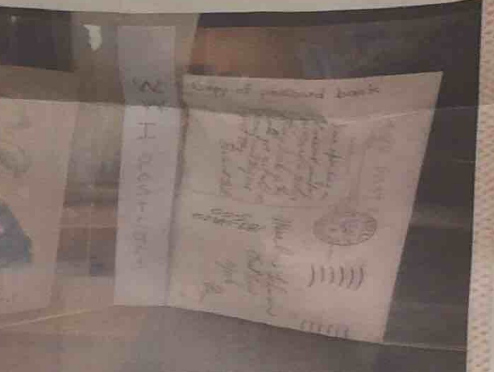
"If someone is at the Gas House and wants to come here, we all have a key," Hill said.

He figures the Gas House will become a focal point for visitors and members of the Bainbridge Museum want to be part of that attraction.

"I mean, look at this. The building is beautiful," he said of the Gas House, which was built in the mid-1800s for famed Port



Although the United States Naval Training Center at Bainbridge was open from 1942 to 1976, there are a few items on display at the USNTC Bainbridge Museum which are from World War I.



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Deposit industrialist and philanthropist Jacob Tome, who also has a connection to Bainbridge through his original Tome School for Boys that later became the Naval Academy Preparatory School in the World War II era. "You have all this frontage, all the bridges and the sunsets. It's breathtaking."

At the Gas House, Bainbridge volunteers will change the displays monthly. Hill also hopes the museum can obtain a sturdy computer to make the web-based database available to the public at the museum and perhaps at the Tome Gas House too.

"We depend totally on donations," he said, adding the nonprofit operates with a budget of about \$10,000, most of which goes to rent and utilities.

Cecil County Memorial VFW Post No. 6027 in North East also donated wooden tables and glass display cases holding model ships.

"They offered us two of them," Hill said, adding that one will go to the Gas House while the other will reside at the museum. "At some point, we'll have a model of the USS Bainbridge."

Like any other local nonprofit, Hill said the USNTC Bainbridge Museum needs volunteers to help with the Gas House operation, at the museum in Center Square and to perform data entry for the archive project.

"The town will manage the Gas House Wednesdays and Thursdays. Other organizations will take it the rest of the days," Hill said, adding he has committed to one of those days each week.

Bainbridge Museum is also in the process of starting a naval arm of the Boy Scouts of America called Sea Scouts, which will be chartered by the museum. And even as work on

archiving the current contents continues, volunteers believe there's still more out there. Last year, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimated that 620,000 World War II-era veterans were still alive in 2016. Sailors who served in Korea and Vietnam also passed through Bainbridge's doors.

"This is a preservation piece," Ragan said. "If there are people with connections, who have records or photos they want to share, we can take it."

Hill noted this is all in keeping with the motto of the museum: "Taking Bainbridge into the future." Doing that means saving as much of the past as possible before all those original sources pass on.

Ragan said it's about helping people know their history.

"We want the families to have these memories," she said.