

# PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2019

*Serving the Port Penn Area Community since 1981. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, care for, maintain, instruct and encourage public interest in all matters, facts and things of any nature relating to history.*

Dear Friends,

“The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.”

This was Abraham Lincoln in 1863 at Gettysburg, speaking about the recent battle. Our efforts in our community are perhaps not so grandiose as those of the men who fought to preserve the Union but I think our goals are similar: to do our part to keep alive the history and traditions for the future generations to do what they will with them.

We are beginning a new membership year and I invite you to attend a membership meeting or contact us so that we can hear your ideas for projects and events. As always, your dues help support our annual budget used for our projects and events; it would be impossible to carry on without your help.

During the past year:

- The Society held the second Wetland Festival at Grass Dale Center. Once again a good crowd braved the weather (rain this time instead of heat) to see and learn about marshland crafts and folkways. We are looking forward to the next festival in 2020 (maybe we'll be plagued by locusts then).
- We hosted our 2018 Fall Fest at the Members' Event at the new Ashton Tract – Augustine Wildlife area off Thorntown Road. We made some new friends and learned about the Ashton Historical site.
- Installed new banners throughout the town honoring local veterans. These were all sponsored by local businesses, families, or individuals. They will alternate with our summer and winter banners.

As we move into 2019 we will be busy in Port Penn:

- We have kicked off our Historic House project in Port Penn. We will be working with residents to identify houses with markers bearing the “historic” name of the house and the year built.
- We will continue to work on the Stewart cemetery. We are designing a brochure to document the Stewart family and all who are buried there.
- Our Waterman statue is in desperate need of repair – exposure to the elements has taken its toll over the past few years. We have contracted with a local woodworker to perform the restoration.
- Members' Event – our annual Spring Fling is coming up soon, just in time for good weather. Join us at the Port Penn Interpretive Center on May 5, 2019. Look for details on our web site.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your continued support, and invite you to become a hands-on member. Throughout the year there are opportunities to volunteer. Please contact 302-834-7525 or email [portpenn@gmail.com](mailto:portpenn@gmail.com) if you are interested, or check out our website at [www.portpenn.org](http://www.portpenn.org).

Regards, Wes Jones, President

## *Historic House Markers for the village of Port Penn*

If you haven't already heard, this year the Port Penn Area Historical Society will be funding a Historic Marker Program for each of the historic homes within Port Penn as listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The program will be of no cost to the homeowner nor will it have an impact on the exterior of the house. Keep an eye on your mail for further details or even better, I hope to see you in person once the weather breaks!  
~ Jennifer Naylor

MARY STEWART COX  
HOUSE  
IS LISTED IN THE  
NATIONAL REGISTER  
OF HISTORIC PLACES  
BY THE UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
C.1792



## **2019 Dates To Remember:**

**Annual Member's Event  
"Spring Fling",**

**Sunday, May 5th  
1:00-3:00 PM**

at the

**Port Penn Interpretive Center  
More information to come**

## **Historical Society Quarterly Meetings**

Port Penn Interpretive  
Center @ 7:00 p.m.

- **June 6th** •
- **September 5th** •
- **December 5th** •

**Open to the public~  
PLEASE JOIN US.**

Visit:

**[www.portpenn.org](http://www.portpenn.org)  
for upcoming events and  
more information**

E-mail:

**[portpenn@gmail.com](mailto:portpenn@gmail.com)  
302.836.5880**

# RUNAWAYS, HOUSES OF ENTERTAINMENT, AND FRENCH ROYALTY IN PORT PENN

By: Laura Lee

A look at 18<sup>th</sup> century newspapers reveals quite a colorful view of Port Penn. The website *newspapers.com* provides a wealth of information that is both interesting and alarming. The earliest articles appear in the 1760's, and topics range from property sales, new stores, to runaway servants and slaves. Later 18<sup>th</sup> century stories even mention French pirates, and privateer ships, and even a ship docking en route to New York with no other than Jerome Bonaparte (younger brother of Napoleon I) and his American bride.

In September of 1764, the earliest article I found, Harry Forster advertises a new "House of Entertainment". Before one jumps to any lurid conclusions, this usually denoted an "ordinary" or inn. Forster advertised in the Pennsylvania Gazette that he had "opened a House of Entertainment at the new Town, called Port Penn; and as its Situation is often very convenient for Seafaring Gentlemen, as well as other Gentlemen Travellers, he will take particular Care in providing things agreeable and convenient, and will be greatly obliged to them for their Custom."



Derham & Craven advertised their new business in the June 1764 Gazette as well. "Having opened a Store at the new Town, called Port Penn opposite to Reedy-Island, have to sell the following Goods, Wholesale or Retail: Wines, Rum and Jamaica Spirits, Shrub, Molasses, Loaf and Muscovado Sugars, Green and Bohea Teas, Coffee, Chocolate, Allspice and Cloves, Mace, Cinnamon, Nutmegs, Currants, Raisins, Cheese, Soap, Candles, Bristol and Dorchester Beer, Taunton Ale, London Porter, an Assortment of Nails and dry Goods, and Earthen and Tin Wares, which will be sold very cheap for ready Money or Country Produce".

In 1766 the Stewarts, town founders, grew impatient with those who 'entered their name for lots in PORT PENN' and called on them to pay up. "John Stewart, and David Stewart, junior, desire all persons who entered their name for lots.... To comply with the conditions, and secure them before the last day of June next, or they will be disposed of to the first who may apply after that date. The doubt of the Title is effectually removed by a decision of the court."

The next decade reveals a plethora of articles regarding lost horses, extremely descriptive notices of escaped slaves and indentured Irish servants, and even a mention of war ships. In May 1771 William Hall was looking for a horse "Strayed or stole, a brown or dark bay Gelding, 14 or 14 and a half hands high....with short blackish mane and tail, paces and trots light...whoever takes up the said horse and brings him to the subscriber shall have Twenty Shillings reward." Just under two weeks before July 4, 1776, the Purdies Virginia Gazette reported "Wilmington, 2 o'clock pm, Tuesday: There are now in sight of Port Penn two ships of war, one topsail schooner, and three smaller, supposed to be tenders. P.S. we have heard above forty guns fired, but know not from which vessel."

A month later, William Kerlin issued a seven pounds reward for "John Dillis, about 25 years of age, born in New-England, a stout well built fellow, about 5 feet 10 or 11 inches, with dirty coloured hair, his fore teeth wide apart; says he belongs to the Row-gallies,

and has been seen about Port-Penn; had on white shirt & trousers, a red under jacket, without sleeves, no shoes or stockings; he is fond of strong drink and company, and a very great liar."

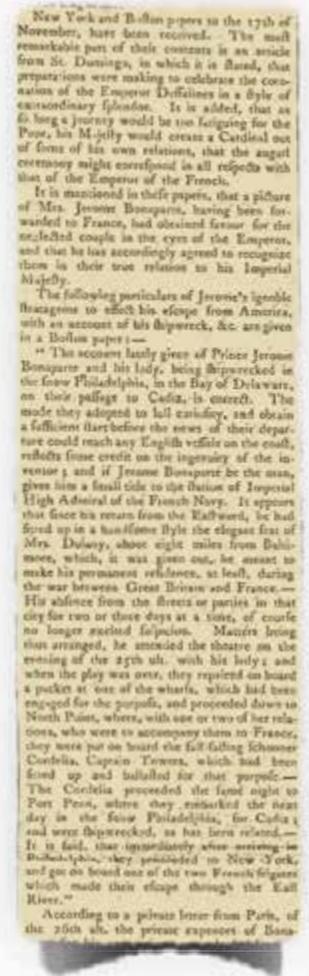
Peregrine Ward of Cecil County sought a runaway slave named George who had been seen in Port Penn. He described him as "a Negroe man, he is a slim made fellow, about 5 feet 8 inches high, about 38 years old, is black and has small legs; he is talkative, sprightly, and very artful. He took with him a variety of clothes, a green cloth coat, a red waistcoat, two homespun ditto (coats), two hats, one covered with squirrel skin.... He wears a silver brooch on his shirt bottom... he crossed from Port-Penn to Jersey in the character of a freeman, and calls himself William Harris. Despite the five pounds reward and several publications of the announcement, it appears George's artfulness paid off.

In 1784 "a certain man, who called himself Major Jacob Deer, called at the subscriber's house at Port-Penn Neck and borrowed of him a 11 year old Mulattoe Boy, named DICK, to go with him to Philadelphia, to ride up a young horse, and promised to send the boy home on the Wednesday following, but the subscriber has not seen him." He went on to say, "from what he learned the man's real name is Levergood." Was Levergood an early Quaker abolitionist or did DICK just find his freedom? We will probably never know.



The most interesting article I found in my perusal of the newspapers was an 1804 mention (in many newspapers) of the visit of the ship Cordelia to Port Penn. It was carrying Prince Jerome Bonaparte, youngest brother of Napoleon I. A quick scan of the Internet reveals Jerome traveled to America and against family wishes at age 19 he married Elizabeth Patterson of Baltimore on Christmas Eve 1803. "Betsy" was the 18-year-old daughter of a ship-owner and merchant William Patterson. A year later almost to the date, he was passing through Port Penn with his bride. The article stated, "The Cordelia passed from Philadelphia.... To Port Penn.... To New York. Jerome later reigned as Jerome I, King of Westphalia but not before his brother Napoleon, after an unsuccessful attempt to have Pope Pius VII to annul the marriage, annulled it himself by a French imperial decree. Eventually Elizabeth and their child Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte returned to America.

So there you have it- royalty in Port Penn!



# ASHTON TRACT

By: Wes Jones

Just north of Port Penn, at the intersection of Rt. 9 and Thorntown Rd., lies a relatively unexplored and unchanged farmland that stretches back nearly to the first settling of our state by Europeans. It was highlighted by three early houses (two of them still standing), and while the name Ashton no longer shows up, all these houses have connections to Port Penn today. The following is by no means an exhaustive study but just some highlights to pique your curiosity.

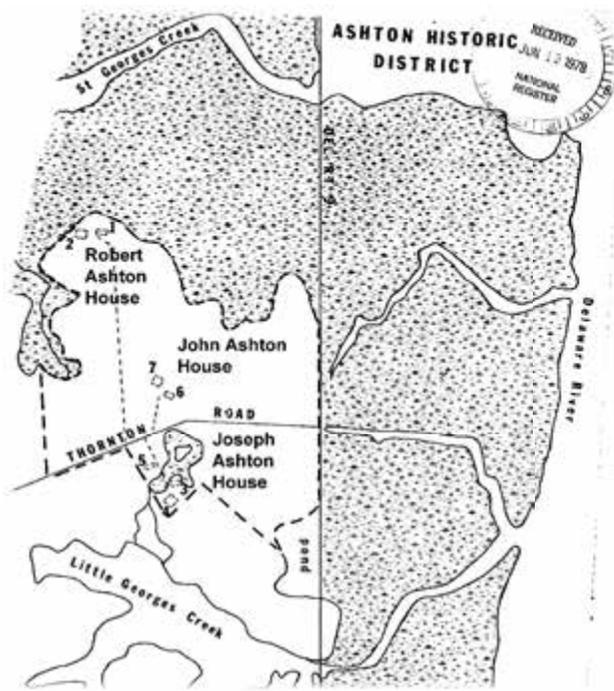


Figure 1: The Ashton District showing the location of the three houses [2]

The history of European settlement of Delaware involves many claims and conquests. Forget Columbus – in 1492 he was way south in the Caribbean. The first known European to visit North America since the Vikings was an Italian named Giovanni Caboto (anglicized as John Cabot); his 1497 visit was commissioned by Henry VII of England. [1] Thus the English established their claim to our area (Thomas West, 3rd Baron De La Warr, was the first governor of Virginia from 1610 until 1618). The Dutch thought they also had a claim, based on the 1609 explorations of Henry Hudson; they established Zwaanendael, now Lewes, Delaware, in 1631. In 1638 the Swedes established a trading post at Fort Christina, now in Wilmington. The Dutch built Fort Casimir, now New Castle, in 1651; the Swedes captured the fort in 1654, the Dutch got it back in 1655, and finally the English ousted the Dutch in 1664. The Dutch influence is seen for generations around Port Penn in family names (Alrichs, Vandergrift) and architectural details.

In 1686 Robert Ashton, an Englishman and Quaker, and said to have been a cousin of William Penn, settled on 300 or so acres with his wife, sons, sister and brother-in-law. Ashton built a frame house near to the marsh, or possibly moved into an existing house. According to Scharf “A portion of the territory originally owned by Alrichs was covered with a swamp, extending from St. George’s Creek and known as Doctor’s Swamp. In this vicinity, before the land was re-surveyed to Alrichs, certain other persons settled and took up land. On May 28, 1675, there was surveyed for Dr. Thomas Spry (who was also a lawyer, and the first one admitted to practice in the courts of New Castle), a tract of one hundred and

sixty acres. It was known as ‘Doctor’s Commons,’ and was on a creek called ‘Doctor’s Run,’ now entirely dried up and forgotten. On February 2, 1680, he sold it to Henry Vanderburg, who conveyed it, March 11, 1688, to Robert Ashton, who had lived on it for some time. On the 24th of December, 1703, he received a warrant for nine hundred acres, lying between Little St. George’s and St. George’s Creeks, with Doctor’s Run and Doctor’s Swamp in the rear.” [6]

Robert Ashton was involved in his community. He “...was commissioned a justice for New Castle County in 1690 and served in the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1692. A member of the Society of Friends, he was one of the first early patent holders in St. Georges Hundred to actually occupy his grant and, in 1704, obtained twenty-five acres for the construction of a meeting house in St. Georges Hundred.” [2]. This George’s Meeting did not survive the 1750s and merged into Appoquinimink Preparatory Meeting in the later 1700s. However at George’s Meeting on Port Penn Road the cemetery remained and is now Hickory Grove Cemetery. Reportedly old stones from the meeting house still stand in the woods. [4]

Robert Ashton died in 1706 and his eldest son John inherited the house and land north of Thorntown Road, while the other son Joseph got land south of Thorntown Road. John Ashton (or possibly his son, also named John) built a large brick house on his land, as did Joseph Ashton on his (Fig. 1). The Robert Ashton house (Fig. 2) is known locally as the Yearsley house or Yardley Dale. It



Figure 2 The Robert Ashton House. [3]

was most recently the home of Dorothy and Mac Yearsley. The house is located at the end of a long lane leading north from Thorntown Road. The house is a five-bay (doors or windows) structure with a gambrel-roof and shed-roofed dormers. The location of the chimneys suggests that originally it was four-bay and the western bay was added later. It is not known if Robert Ashton built this house, or it was built by Swedes or Dutch before his arrival. It has, of course, been heavily modified over the years to keep it livable. Under the aluminum siding and windows there is probably a foundation and timbers dating from the late 1600s.

Despite the modifications to the house “the setting is much the same as when the house was first built, and the absence of significant ground disturbance or erosion indicates that it should be possible to design an archaeological investigation to study all phases of the site’s occupation.” [2] Even today a stone foundation of an outbuilding is located in the woods near the house.

Continued on page 4



Figure 3 The John Ashton house. [3]

The John Ashton house (Fig 3) is known locally as the Carey House. This is where Myrtle (née Bennett) and Hampton Eaton lived. The farm had been owned by Myrtle Bennett's father. Myrtle married Hampton Eaton around 1941 and Hampton farmed the property. Hampton was Samuel Eaton's and Patricia Schaeffer's grandfather. His son and their father was Carl. When Hampton died Myrtle married Hubert Carey, who was related to Harper Carey. Harper had a house and store in Port Penn, located on the corner of Market and Stewart Streets. The store is gone and has been replaced by a parking lot. A local resident reports that during World War II, German prisoners from Fort DuPont picked tomatoes on the farm. They were provided two meals a day and were paid either 25 cents per day or 25 cents per basket. [5]

The John Ashton House consists of a brick, early-eighteenth-century main block and a frame wing. The original structure is a two-story, three-bay, hall-and-parlor-plan house with bricks laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers, with interior end chimneys in both gable ends. Attached to the west gable end is a five-bay, two-story frame wing at a lower level than the original structure. A chimney divides the wing into a three-bay section and a two-bay section.



Figure 4 The Joseph Ashton House [3]

The Joseph Ashton house (Fig 4) is now gone. This house, located on the current site of the Brandywine Hundred Rod & Gun Club, was owned in the 1920s by Abram and Carrie Jones. They had five daughters: Dorothy, Marion, Beatrice, Catherine, and Eleanor. Marion was married to Reverend Carl Taylor, a lay minister for St. Daniels United Methodist Church in Port Penn. The Taylors were the

most recent residents of the house. Dorothy was married to Dewey Townsend and Dorothy's son, the late James Jones, was married to Ruth Ann Jones who lives in Port Penn today. This house was burned in the 1980s.

From Figure 4 it is apparent that the Joseph Ashton House comprised three distinct structures. The earliest was an early eighteenth-century two-story, three-bay, hall-and-parlor-plan brick structure with two chimneys. The front brick facade was laid in a Flemish bond and glazed header pattern, with English bond used on the rear and gable end walls. Attached to the west gable end of the original structure, and entered through a door between the staircase and the fireplace, was a late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth-century brick wing consisting of a two-story, two-bay section at a slightly lower level than the original house, and a one-story, two-bay kitchen section at ground level. These two sections were built as a single unit.

The Ashton holdings and the houses have passed through many hands over the years. The 1868 map of St Georges Hundred [7] shows that the Robert Ashton house is now called Yardley Dale and is owned by J. Longland. The Joseph Ashton house is owned by the Wm. Kennedy Est., and the John Ashton house is owned by Lawrence Bassett and Fogg. This latter group probably comprises members of the Bassett family of Salem NJ who also settled in Delaware. [8]

The Ashton Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. From the application: "... is particularly significant because it offers a unique opportunity for an interdisciplinary study of the early colonial period and the social and economic changes which occurred in the second quarter of the eighteenth century in Delaware, probably as a result of the shift from a tobacco economy to a wheat economy. The association of the group with historically important settlers, the clear illustration of the shift in settlement pattern, and the significant architectural features of the Joseph and John Ashton House combine to produce a rich association for further study." [2]

#### References:

1. John Cabot - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Cabot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cabot) (retrieved 02/02/2019).
2. National Historic Register - [https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/78000903\\_text](https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/78000903_text) (retrieved 01/15/2019)
3. National Historic Register - [https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/78000903\\_photos](https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/78000903_photos) (retrieved 01/15/2019)
4. Personal communication from Karen Wood.
5. Personal communication from Pat Schaffer.
6. Scharf, J. Thomas "History of Delaware 1609-1888 Volume Two - pp. 981-1015. Chapter L St. George's Hundred" [http://alan.marvelfamily.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/History\\_of\\_Delaware\\_\\_\\_1609\\_1888\\_\\_Local\\_h.pdf](http://alan.marvelfamily.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/History_of_Delaware___1609_1888__Local_h.pdf) (retrieved 02/02/2019).
7. Delaware Hundreds map - <https://www.dgs.udel.edu/delaware-1868-hundreds-maps> (retrieved 02/02/2019).
8. Basset family - [http://genealogytrails.com/njer/salem/FenwicksColony\\_bassett.html](http://genealogytrails.com/njer/salem/FenwicksColony_bassett.html) (retrieved 02/05/19)

# Port Penn Programming 2019 Season

Port Penn Interpretive Center Rt 9 and Rt 2 (Port Penn Road), Port Penn, Delaware 19731 • 302.836.2533

All programs are offered free of charge & meet at the Port Penn Interpretive Center.

Call (302) 834.7941 for more information or e-mail: jacob.miller@delaware.gov

**The Port Penn Interpretive Center tells the story of the historic wetland communities along the shores of the Delaware.**

The Center is open from 10am to 4pm Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day.

**The Center's opening day is Saturday May 25, 2019 • The center will be open for the special events listed below!**

## Explorers' Walk (NEW)

Saturday, March 9, 2:00 P.M.

Kids, did you know adventure waits in your own backyard? Let's go exploring! Who knows what natural treasures we might find!

Delaware has the benefit of a great location along bird migration routes. This makes it an excellent place to see birds as they fly through the region. Join us at Port Penn this spring for our NEW birding hikes series! Bring your own binoculars, and wear waterproof shoes.

## Waterfowl Walk

Saturday, March 23, 8:00 A.M.

For this program, we will head into the wetlands for our final look at the winter waterfowl before they head north. Some of our target species include Northern Shoveler, Green-Winged Teal, and Hooded Merganser. We will meet at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. All ages and skill levels are welcome!

## Sandpiper Stroll

Saturday, April 13, 8:00 A.M.

Migration is starting to pick up speed! Come out and join us on a guided bird walk to see what a perfect layover spot the Port Penn wetlands are for migrating sandpipers. Our target sandpipers include Dunlins, Least sandpipers, and Greater and Lesser yellowlegs. We will meet at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. All ages and skill levels are welcome!

## Warbler Walkabout

Saturday, May 4, 8:00 A.M.

And so, the magic finally begins: the warblers are starting to arrive! The iconic bright-colored little songsters are popping up in Port Penn, so come join us as we search for Common Yellowthroats, Palm warblers, and Pine warblers. We will meet at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. All ages and skill levels are welcome!

## Historic Town Tour

Saturday, June 8 and November 2, 10:00 A.M.

Join us for a walk through historic Port Penn. Learn about the buildings and their historical significance, and how the people living in them helped shape the community. Kids, answer the questions on our scavenger hunt sheet to win a prize!

## Lantern Tours of Port Penn

Saturdays, August 31 and September 7, 7:30 P.M.

Visit Port Penn by lantern-light! Come hear the stories of the town and the people who built it and make it special.

## Port Penn Christmas Open House

Date and Time TBD

Celebrate the holidays at the Port Penn Interpretive Center! The museum will be open for visitors, and we will have light refreshments. The Center will be all decked out for the holidays.

## Private Town Tours

Can't make it to any of our scheduled town tours or wetland walks? Call our office to schedule a private tour for your family or group. See the picturesque village of Port Penn at a time that is convenient for you! Cost is \$2 per person. The maximum is 15 people per tour. Call 302-834-7941 to schedule a time!

**TENTATIVE PROGRAM:** Kayaking Tour around Reedy Island To be held sometime in September if we can get the correct permissions, etc.

Be on the lookout for more information in the summer guide (should come out in March or April).

Check out our program guide and our website for other programs!

## *2019 Membership Application (annual membership)*

Please return this form and check to:

Port Penn Area Historical Society • P.O. BOX 120 • PORT PENN, DE 19731-0120

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Categories: Individual \$15.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Joint \$20.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Family \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Life Membership \$200.00 \_\_\_\_\_

2019 WATERMAN APPEAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I/We would like to volunteer to help with PPAHS events.

The Port Penn Historical Society is interested in your comments and ideas.

Please contact us at the above address or send us an e-mail: info@portpenn.org



## **WE NEED YOUR HELP!**

### **Our “Waterman Statue” is in need of repairs....**

In 2007, The Port Penn Area Historical Society commissioned Jacquin Smolens to carve The Waterman Statue. After 12 years, the statue is in need of some care and restoration. It will be removed and restored in the woodshop of John Ringer, local carpenter and custom cabinet maker, with the help of Richard King, waterman and boat builder.

We are seeking funding through donations and grant requests that will go toward the cost of the restoration. Any help you can give will be greatly appreciated. We have included the **2019 WATERMAN APPEAL** on our membership application form.

Thank you ~ Julie Harrington, Executive Director

