

## Uncle Otis and Taxes

*By Marie O'Donnell*

I really love the look of the mansion with all of that white paint off of it. I used to go out on the front veranda, which was tiled in terra cotta tiles, and pretend I was dancing at a ball. I would dance around with my prince charming to beautiful music. The mansion was like a fairy tale place, and I had the run of it. Uncle Otis had the most beautiful paintings and he had many bronzes that I used to examine inch by inch. My favorite was a draft horse with full harness. It was so detailed; I was fascinated by it.



I recently finished a cross-stitch of the statue of the three servicemen that stands near The Wall in D.C. It took quite a few sessions of working on it and putting it aside to get it finished—over two year's worth. But, I finally got it done. It's a gift for the members of the local Vietnam Veterans Association chapter. In 2006 the Air Force identified the remains of my brother, Staff Sergeant Calvin C. Cooke, who was killed when the C-130 that he served on as loadmaster was shot down while providing emergency supplies to surrounded troops in An Loc, South Vietnam. That was 1972, and we waited 34 years to bring him home. When the family was notified, the funeral was scheduled for June 20, 2006, I wrote to the local VVA group and asked if they might be able to have a representative attend, as I didn't know anyone in any of the D.C. chapters. Not only did they respond, but an entire busload of members joined our family as we laid my brother to rest near our parents and grandparents in Arlington National Cemetery. This was also one of those "small world" moments, as well, when I found out that one of the members of Cumberland Chapter 172 was also a loadmaster at the time and was serving on the C-130 that was used to replace my brother's plane after it was shot down. He only lives about 10 miles from me and has for all of these years. We have become good friends since then and he has filled me in a lot on what it was like being over there. I wrote a thank you letter to the VVA chapter to present with the picture, explaining that each of the stitches was a thought and a prayer for each of them and for all of the other service members who made sacrifices to make possible the life that my family and I enjoy today.

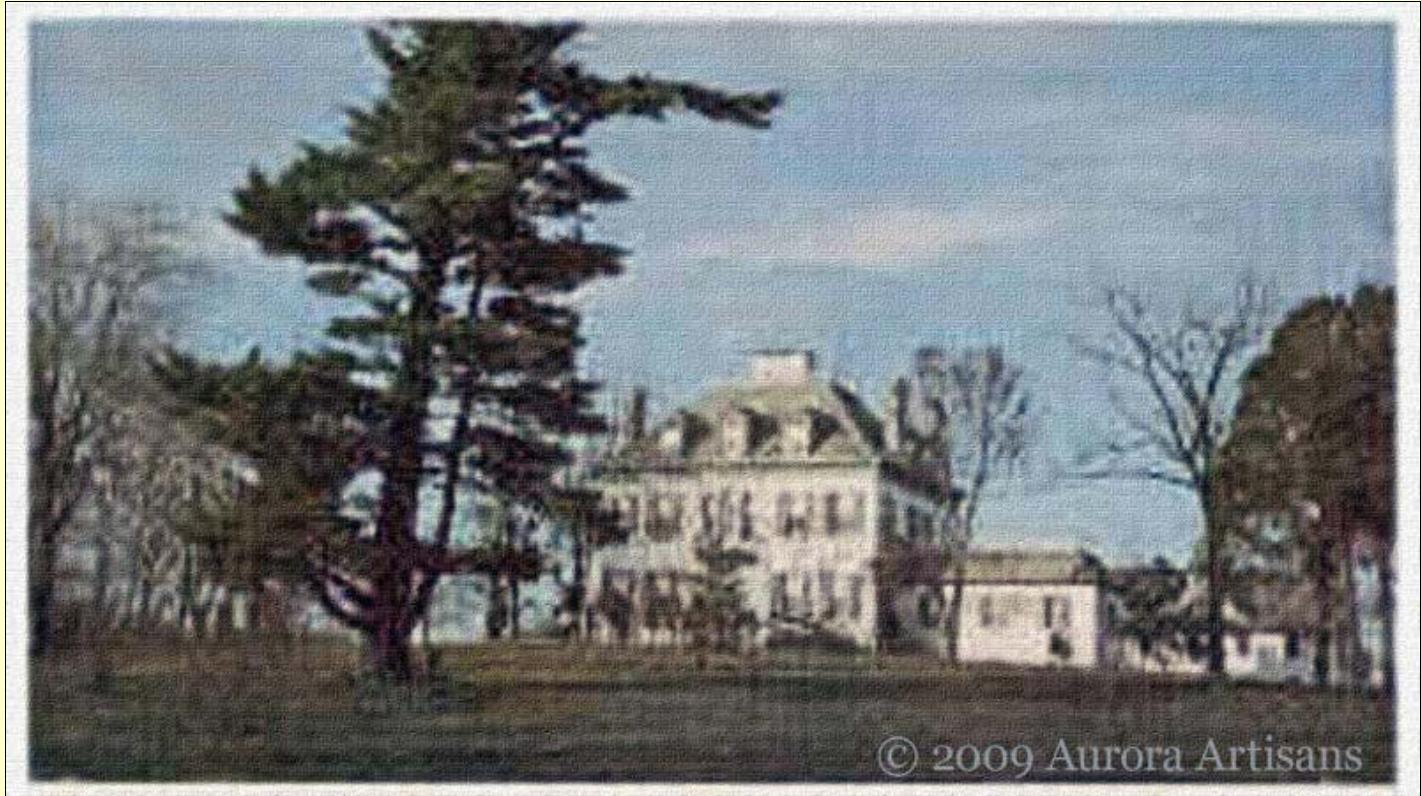
I thought you might wonder about how I ended up living with my grandparents, and, in turn, at Kentland Farms. My dad was badly wounded in World War II near Pisa, Italy. He stepped on a land mine and was in and out of the hospital for operations and rehabilitation that spanned several years. My mother was very young and had my brother and me to take care of, as well as trying to help my dad and also to work. So, when I was ten months old my grandparents took me to live with them for a while. By the time my dad was able to come home, my grandparents and I had become so attached to each other that when my mother tried to get me to move back with them I would become hysterical and cry until I made myself ill. My mother let me stay with my grandparents because she felt it would be too traumatic for me to be separated from them. It made for some interesting situations growing up, as you can imagine.

This reminds me a lot of how it was as the Rockville-Gaithersburg-Shady Grove areas started becoming developed as "bedroom communities" for the District. The taxes shot up and all of those families who had owned the many beautiful dairy and commercial vegetable farms in the area were forced to look at selling the lands that had been in their families for generations. They did get some tax breaks, but any bad year of crops or dairy production could put them in a terrible situation quickly. I remember when the revenue tried to force Uncle Otis to pay higher taxes on his property because they considered it a "hobby" rather than a working farm. He fought the case, and won. Little did they know that his REAL hobby was taking on the establishment, and winning!!

Yes, he was most tender in his feelings for animals and a few selected people, including my grandfather, grandmother, and me. I never wanted for anything during the time we lived at Kentland. If I wanted it and my grandparents wouldn't get it for me, Uncle Otis did. I lived like a princess, and many times he would tell me that was exactly what I was. He had it all planned that when I got married we would set it up so I would come down the main staircase and the front veranda would be beautifully decorated, and that's where the ceremony would take place. I think it's so wonderful that now many brides are able to realize the dream that I used to have.

About the property deeded to National Geographic: There was a deal worked out with the man who owned one

of the orchards in Three Churches. Somehow his orchard and the Geographic property were "traded." Uncle Otis worked it out to avoid some of the taxes. I'm not sure now exactly how it was worked out, but I think Tom Machamer, who owned the orchard, traded it to Uncle Otis for the Geographic Property. Then Tom was to donate it to National Geographic for a tax write-off that would cover the capital gains from the trade. As I told you when I first started writing, Uncle Otis spent practically every waking hour trying to figure how to legally avoid paying any taxes he didn't have to. I'll have to think about this one a little more and see if I can remember more about it.



The years at Kentland were some of the happiest, most carefree years of my life. Memories are souvenirs of our journey through life; like post cards...you sort through them and you see a picture or a note that recalls the feelings, smells, surroundings, and what was going on with you at that time. You gather lots of souvenirs, but, as with anything, you have your favorites. The others get packed away until one day you open a box or envelope, and there you are. The years have melted away and the past is the present for a few brief moments.