



ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY
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NEWS RELEASE *for Immediate Release*

No. 2025 – 077

April 7, 2025, 10 a.m.

**The Black Diamond Disaster Event, an American Civil War Commemoration,
to be Held at St. Clement's Island Museum to Remember the Forgotten
Tragedy on the Potomac during the Hunt for John Wilkes Booth**

LEONARDTOWN, MD – On the **April 26–27, 2025**, St. Mary's County Government's Museum Division will remember the 87 lives lost in a tragedy during the American Civil War on the Potomac near St. Clement's Island during the hunt for presidential assassin John Wilkes Booth.

Activities will take place at **St. Clement's Island Museum** from **10 a.m. to 5 p.m.** on both days, including free museum admission and boat rides, a folk concert, famed magician Peter Wood, and a military ceremony, featuring remarks from the Naval Air Station Patuxent River Commander and a commemorative wreath laying on the waterfront. This year's keynote speaker is Clara Barton as portrayed by Maryland actress Mary Ann Jung. This free event is open to the public and is an opportunity to learn more about one of Maryland's worst nautical disasters and other information about St. Mary's County during the American Civil War.

In April 1865, following the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, the Quartermaster Corps sent the barge *Black Diamond* to the lower Potomac to stand on picket duty off St. Clement's Island. Her main job was to keep John Wilkes Booth from crossing the Potomac River. Meanwhile, the steamer *Massachusetts* headed for Fortress Monroe out of Alexandria, Virginia. In a tragic turn of events, the *Massachusetts* struck the *Black Diamond* in the darkness, sinking her in under three minutes. 87 lives were lost off the shores of St. Clement's Island that night.

The public can enjoy free water taxi rides to St. Clement's Island (the final water taxi will leave at 3 p.m.) and free admission to the St. Clement's Island Museum. There will be special exhibits on the Black Diamond story and more.

Local artist, Angela Wathen, has created an original painting depicting the collision of the *Black Diamond* and the *Massachusetts* on that fateful night, which will be on display during the event. This artwork is the only known portrayal of this event, based on an actual photograph of the *Massachusetts* and an image of a coal barge thought to be very similar to the *Black Diamond*. The artist has generously donated the piece to the museum's permanent collections.

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Wathen's artwork is also included in *Shipwreck on the Potomac: Disaster in Pursuit of Lincoln's Killer*, a new book about this historic event, written by Museum Division Manager, Karen Stone. The book will officially debut during the Black Diamond Disaster weekend. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet both the author and the artist, who will be available for book signings.

Following the 2 p.m. ceremony on Sunday, there will be a reception featuring a free, family friendly outdoor concert on the waterfront lawn of the museum by the Sibling Rivalry Fiddle Band, a four-sibling folk band playing Civil War era music and other American folk tunes. This extremely talented group of teenage siblings are Fredericksburg natives, and their instrumentation includes fiddle, bodhran, tin whistle, and mandolin.

On Saturday only, famed traveling Magician Peter Wood will be on site at the museum from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., offering 19th century sleight of hand and other feats of magic (free for all). Later, he will present an interactive stage show from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Potomac Gardens; [this is a ticketed event](#).

Additionally, the 2025 Dinner and a Cruise Series kicks off on April 27, 2025, highlighting the theme, "The Civil War and St. Clement's Island" as part of the weekend's events. While the entire weekend is free and open to the public, the cruise requires prior reservation as only [20 tickets will be sold](#).

For more information on the event, or to reserve your ticket for the cruise, please call St. Clement's Island Museum at (301) 769-2222 or follow them at [Facebook.com/SCIMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/SCIMuseum).

About the St. Mary's County Museum Division

The St. Mary's County Museum Division was established by the Commissioners of St. Mary's County to collect, preserve, research, and interpret the historic sites and artifacts which illustrate the natural and cultural histories of St. Mary's County and the Potomac River. These sites include St. Clement's Island Museum, Piney Point Lighthouse Museum, the Old Jail Museum, and the Drayden African American Schoolhouse. With this as its charter, the Museum Division serves as a resource, liaison, and community advocate for all St. Mary's County public and private cultural assets. For more information, please visit: museums.stmarysmd.com.

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