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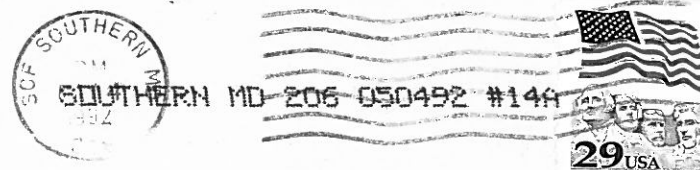
Mrs. Naomi Petrash

## EDITOR'S NOTE

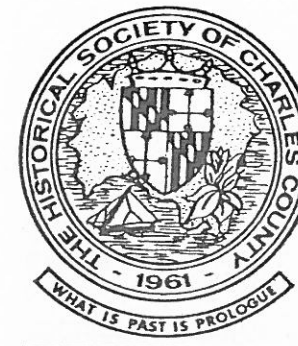
Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are requested for possible publication in future issues of *The Record*. Please send your typewritten manuscripts to: Publications, *The Record*, Box 261 Port Tobacco, MD 20677

## The Historical Society of Charles County

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## The RECORD

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Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr., President

Mr. Garth E. Bowling, Jr., Editor

A Reflection On Life In Southern Maryland  
Just Prior To The American Revolution

By W. Ralph Gardiner, Jr.

After 1730 there were great changes in the condition of society in the tidewater areas of the lower Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac. There was an advancement from frontier conditions to those of security and from a population of less than 35,000 to one of more than 100,000.

Previous living standards had been low enough. A visitor from England spoke of half-naked Indians, bears and wolves as familiar in the lower counties. The usual diet consisted of venison, wild turkey, hominy, a little beef and pork and, sometimes, vegetables. The visitor saw little difference between those of the gentility and the lower class. Although those of more affluent means had servants, a better house, tools and utensils, both the high and low spoke and acted the same.

One Ebenezer Cooke spoke of planters gathering to watch as he put ashore at Piscattaway on the Potomac:

"Where soon repaired a numerous crew,  
 in shirts and drawers of scotch-cloth blue,  
 With neither stocking, hat or shoe;  
 These Sot-Weed Planters crowd the shore,  
 In hue as tawny as a Moor;  
 Figures so strange no God designed  
 To be a part of human kind:  
 but wanton nature, void of rest,  
 Moulded the brittle clay jest."

The scotch-cloth referred to in Mr. Cooke's rather demeaning description of Southern Marylanders is a material which was woven of nettle fibers and was quite inexpensive. Clothing of the era was largely homemade for working purposes, but the cloth may have been imported as the better clothing most assuredly was. The gentry

attempted to reflect the fashions of London and Paris, but were usually two years out of date. This was caused by the slow transportation system of the time as well as the out of date periodicals which made their way to these shores. Good clothes of silk, linen, cambric, etc., were reserved for important occasions for church on Sunday. Clothing, even though well worn, was mentioned in wills and passed down from one generation to the next. Servants and slaves often wore used clothing, most of which was made locally.

In the 1740s another verse writer satirized the Southern Marylander as follows:

"Our fires are wood, are houses as good,  
 Our diet is sawney and hominy,  
 drink, juice of the apple, tobacco's our staple,  
 Gloria tibi Domine."

As the Europeans had been using coke and coal for heating for many years, and stone and brick to build with, the use of wood for fuel and for building construction was considered primitive. The diet referred to as "sawney and hominy" reflects on what overseas visitors saw as low class eating indeed. "Sawney" is a derogatory term for Scotsman and what the English viewed as poor food. Hominy, as it is today, was made from corn which was plentiful locally, but not thought well of in Europe at that time. In fact, hominy to this day has not caught on in Europe!

Tobacco was the staple and the Maryland monetary system was expressed in terms of pounds of this commodity. Ships from England regularly called on ports on the bay and large rivers, particularly the Potomac and Patuxent. For



many years, planters on the Eastern shore were forced to bring their crop to a port on the Patuxent in order to ship it to England. Large plantations had agents in England to convert the money paid for tobacco into goods to be shipped back to Maryland. It can be easily seen that an honest, knowledgeable agent was vital indeed!

Larger planters would often purchase crops from smaller farmers and would import goods to be sold or converted to more tobacco. As the economy depended almost solely on the money paid for tobacco, market price fluctuations could be ruinous. On occasion, the price paid in England would not even cover the shipping costs, and the unfortunate planter would be billed for the difference. In order to profit from farming, planters were forced to plant larger and larger tracts of land in tobacco which required more and more labor. Some planted corn and other grains to be made into whiskey which cost less to ship and found a market within the colonies. Timber was an important business in some areas, but also required a large amount of labor.

In the thirty years prior to the Revolution, large numbers of convicts were transported from England to Maryland. This caused considerable damage to the reputation of the servant class as people tended to identify the two groups as one. Many convicts were skilled in various trades and were valued employees, gradually working their way up the social ladder as small businessmen. There are several prominent families who can trace their lineage back to their convict forefathers, (and mothers!).

The practice of leasing land was universal in the lower counties. Large land owners leased out portions of their properties to those who could not afford to purchase lands of their own. The term "lease holder" was quite common. Many of these lease holders were able to eventually purchase the lease hold and became land owners in their own right.

The established church was the Church of England, and Roman Catholics were forbidden to hold office or practice public worship, although many private homes contained chapels where Sunday Mass was celebrated. In Southern Maryland, the practice of prohibiting Catholics from public office was not always enforced. A tax was established to support the state church

and as the population increased quite rapidly, there were many of the clergy who sought posts in Southern Maryland. Alas, many were simply not qualified or drunkards, or worse, so parishes were often seen dismissing one who had been recently hired.

With the Revolution, the state church was abolished and the now self-supporting Episcopal Church saw a steadily decreasing number of clergy as there were no bishops to perform the rites of ordination. This condition was relieved by the selection of Bishop Claggett. It is interesting to note that the first Episcopal bishop and the first Roman Catholic bishop, (Bishop Carroll), were both from Southern Maryland having been born in Southern Prince George's County.

Illness and epidemics were the common lot during this period. One spoke of each household as a virtual infirmary with a household member constantly ill with something or other. Childhood diseases took their toll and many women died in childbirth. It was not uncommon for a man to have three wives with children by all three. On the other hand, many women had more than one husband as illness, hard work and injuries took their ravages. Doctors were few and far between, their knowledge limited and medicines were ineffective. The first established sanatorium was at "Ye Cool Springs," Charlotte Hall, and the first medical school at Great Mills. Early court records of Prince George's County show that the family of an elderly woman was made to pay her room and board at "Ye Cool Springs" while there to "take the waters."

All roads led to Port Tobacco with links to the Western County area, South through Newport to St. Mary's and North to Piscataway. Rain and thaw made these roads almost impassable at times and made carriage travel out of the question. The rivers were used for transportation of goods to market and people travelled to the State Capital and Baltimore by ship. The main villages of Charles County are non-existent today or mere dots on the map. The big town of Waldorf was not yet born and neither was La Plata. Beantown, Middletown and Newport were all important trade centers.

The hardship of life in Southern Maryland served to toughen the individuals and to instill in

him the love of freedom and independence. These qualities manifested themselves in the patriots who fought in the Battle of Long Island and thereby gave continued life to George Washington's Continental Army which was saved to eventually win the war and make possible the realities of freedom and liberty. Our ancestors had stood the test of a fragile life, seasoned in the crucible and tempered by all that fate had served. It should come as no surprise that they were found not wanting when faced with the ultimate test.

#### References:

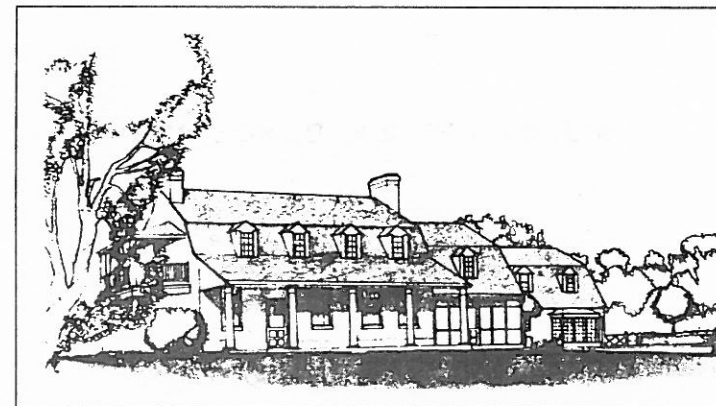
*Chronicles of St. Mary's*  
*The Founding of Maryland*  
*Religion in the Revolution*  
 Court Records of Prince George County

The Board of Directors of the Historical Society of Charles County is pleased to announce  
**The SOCIAL EVENT OF THE SEASON**  
**THE FIRST ANNUAL AFTERNOON TEA**

At  
 Historic Westwood Manor  
 SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 1992  
 From 3 to 6:00 p.m.

The invention of afternoon tea came about when Anna, 7th Duchess of Bedford, grew tired of the sinking feeling which afflicted her every afternoon round about 4 o'clock, in the long dull space of time between meals. In 1840 she plucked up courage and asked for a tray of tea, bread and butter, and cake to be brought to her room. Once she had formed the habit she could not break it, so spread it among her friends instead. As the century progressed, afternoon tea became increasingly elaborate. By the 1900s ladies were changing into long tea gowns for the occasion, appetites sharpened by the customary afternoon drive in a carriage.

Afternoon tea has still not lost its symbolic or emotional status in England. Whenever anything momentous occurs, whether matter for celebration or tragedy, a pot of tea is produced. When friends meet unexpectedly, they exchange news over tea. There is a calming element of ceremony about the whole affair which is too valuable to lose. Afternoon tea is still a graceful event, and brings people together for a brief hour's pleasure and refreshment.



Westwood Manor, granted 1651

Situated on a hill overlooking the Wicomico River valley, this house occupies land granted to Thomas Gerrard by Lord Baltimore in 1651, the fifth grant in what is now Charles County. The main section is believed to have been built in 1739 possibly incorporating an earlier house. As it stands today, it combines Colonial and Greek Revival as well as contemporary architectural styles.

Invitations will be forthcoming