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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*, P.O. Box 2806, La Plata, Maryland 20646.

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The President’s Message

In our last newsletter I reported that for the second time in history a major tornado struck Charles County. Well, as you know the tornado went through the center of La Plata and ruined the major part of the business district along with many houses in Quailwood and Clarks Run subdivisions. Many other houses were severely damaged in the County and other parts of La Plata. I am glad to inform you that most of the houses have been restored or are being rebuilt. Also, most of the businesses are up and running and their buildings either have been restored or are being rebuilt. By this time next year I expect all houses and buildings to be complete. The major problem we are now fighting is the reforestation of the path the tornado took. This thing stayed on the ground for about 26 miles. A lot of the trees will be removed

or burned this winter and new trees will be planted this fall and next spring but it will take many years for them to grow. I hope that any of you affected by the tornado are alright and your properties are restored. I am having all screens replaced because of the hail associated with the tornado and will be replacing four roofs in October that were damaged. We are fortunate that our lives were spared and school was closed when the storm leveled Archbishop Neale School. I hope to see you at our October meeting but if you can’t make it then have a wonderful and safe Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Wayne Winkler
President

Coming Events

JANUARY 18, 2003
Speaker: Jennifer Pitts
Topic: The Southern Maryland Studies Center (SMSC)
Location: Christ Episcopal Church
Time: TBA

MAY, 2003
Speaker: TBA
Topic: TBA
Location: TBA
Time: TBA

Native American Indians

The Piscataway Tribe

Our upcoming meeting of October 19th features Dr. Gabrielle Tayac, herself a native American Piscataway Indian, who will speak to us about the Piscataway Tribe. Dr. Tayac is a Museum Specialist for the Smithsonian Institution.

I found this to be an exciting topic when I set out to find the appropriate materials for this article. To my delight, I had no trouble finding wonderful materials on native Americans in Maryland in general and Southern Maryland native Americans in particular. All of the materials reviewed are given credit at the end of this article. These materials are so informative and so rich in their presentation that I can only wish that this article provides you with some feel on the topic that Dr. Tayac will present on October 19th.

Background

In the early part of the 17th century the Piscataway "Empire" or Confederacy occupied the western part of the western peninsula of Tidewater Maryland as far north as the Falls of the Potomac, including the valleys of the Port Tobacco and Wicomico Rivers, Piscataway Creek, Port Tobacco River and the Wicomico River. These waterways were open to shipping in Colonial times but have now largely silted up.

The impression of an early visitor to the Potomac is quoted from the Brief Relation of Maryland by Father Andrew White written in 1635:

*"This is the sweetest and greatest I have seene, so that the Thames is but a little finger to it. There are not marshes or swampes about it, but solid firme ground, with great variety of woode, not choaked up with undershrubs, but commonly so fare distant from each other as a coach and fewer horses may travale without molestation."*¹

A long succession of Indian peoples occupied the Tidewater Region going back to at least 3,000 B.C. From about 1300 A.D. Indian tribes of Algonkin stock have occupied the area.

At the time of European contact, the Indians on the Virginia side formed the powerful confederacy

governed by Powatan. In Maryland, there were several more loosely organized groups, the principal ones of which were the Nanticotes on the east and the Piscataway on the western peninsula.

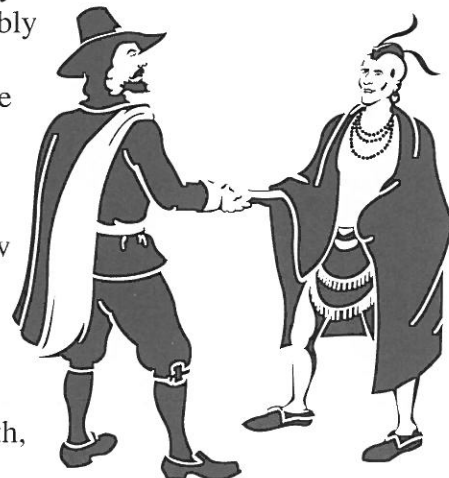
The Nanticotes were exposed to invasion by the Susquehannocks and during the first half of the 17th century were forced to migrate westward across the bay where they came in conflict with the Piscataways. At the time of the Maryland settlement in 1634, the Susquehannocks had already occupied part of the shores of the Chesapeake as far south as the mouth of the Potomac. A further complication was introduced by the raids of the Seneca tribe, a member of the powerful Iroquoian Confederacy of the five nations, whose home ground was in the northern New York State but whose raiding ranged as far west as the Mississippi and as far south as Florida.

The Piscataway "Empire"

The Piscataway Indians had probably lived in western Maryland since the 14th century or before. Their principal town on the Potomac below the mouth of Piscataway Creek, called "Moyaone" by Captain John Smith, may have been in existence 300 years before Smith's visit in 1608.

The Piscataway population was estimated at about 3,000 by Smith, half of whom lived in stockaded villages. The Piscataway and their associated tribes formed a loose federation. Individual towns were governed by chiefs called Tayacs. On the death of an emporer, the title passed to the next eldest brother, or to the son or to the son of a sister. Women occasionally held the office of Tayac.

The Piscataway lived a sedentary life in permanent villages, situated close to a river or stream



navigable for canoes and bordered by cultivated fields. In 1635, Father White described their houses:

*"...in a halfe ovall forme 20 foot long, and 9 or 10 foot high with a place open in the top, halfe a yard square, whereby they admit the light, and let forth the smoake, for they build their fire, after the manner of ancient halls of England in the middle of the house, about which they lie to sleep upon mats spread on a low scaffold halfe a yard from ground..."*¹

The houses were "warm but very smoakie" and were crowded with as many people as they could hold and served as food storage in addition to sleeping and cooking quarters. The Piscataway were primarily agriculturists growing tobacco, corn, beans, melons, pumpkins and squash. Succotash, hominy and cornpone are Indian contributions to our diet and were greatly appreciated by Colonists.

Crop failures due to drought were partly made up by fishing and hunting. Excavations of refuse pits reveal that clams and oysters were a major source of food even though game was abundant. The refuse pits also contained bones of animals not now known in Maryland including the eastern bison, elk, bear and wolf.

Stone axes were a common tool. Small tools such as awls and needles were made of antler and split bone. Sea shells were used for money. The bow and arrow were the principal weapon although the spear was also used. European tools were eagerly sought after and gun powder was made available to the Indians prior to 1700.

The Piscataways were described by Father White as "proper and tall men". The people lived to a considerable age prior to the introduction of smallpox, syphilis, measles and rum. Dress was a deerskin mantle or cape over the shoulders and a girdle or apron of deerskin around the waist.

Decorations were elaborate. Paints mixed in bear grease were done in great variety. Shell bead necklaces were common as well as animal teeth, eagle talons, eagle wings, wolf heads, bear heads and scalps of slain enemies.

The females did all of the domestic work of the village, making pots, preparing hides, grinding corn, cooking and the like. They also seem to have done

most of the work in the fields, though assisted on occasion by the men.

The men, whose primary duties were hunting and fighting, made the canoes and the bows and arrows. They practiced assiduously with bow and arrow from early boyhood. Older boys underwent a period of apprenticeship before they were accepted as hunters or warriors.

Religious practices seemed to vary between a divine worship based on fear to the recognition of a beneficent Supreme Being. Idols were few or none and those selling superstitions were few.

Piscataway burial customs followed those characteristic of the other Indian tribes of the region. First exposure or individual burial and then final burial in a single pit or ossuary. The final burial was apparently concealed from the settlers as in Father White's detailed accounts of Indian life, he says nothing about burial customs.

Concluding Thoughts

The books and articles I reviewed for this article were:

- Narratives of Early Maryland
- The Piscataway Indians of Southern Maryland
- The History of Charles County, Maryland
- New Identity for Maryland's Indians
- Unexplained Wesorts Still Insist They're Different
- Clannish Brandywine People Isolated by 3-Race Heritage
- Colonial Piscataway in Maryland
- The Piscataways
- Tides of Change
- The Maryland Mission

All of these items are available for review through the P.D. Brown Library in Waldorf. Most of the material used in the article was from The Piscataway Indians of Southern Maryland by Alice L.L. and Henry G. Ferguson.

For those interested, I recommend that you read these materials for yourself as they are much richer and more detailed then I could capture here. Narratives of Early Maryland is a must read because of the fact that it documents so much of what actually happened in the years 1633-1684 and does it in a captivating and beautiful way.

1. Taken directly from Narratives of Early Maryland.