



The RECORD

Publication of The Historical Society of Charles County, Inc.

No. 48 April 1990

Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr., President

Mr. Garth E. Bowling, Jr., Editor

The Cornwallis Or Mattawoman Neck, 1608 - 1890

by Joseph Y. Rowe

Editor's Note: This is the centennial year of the town of Indian Head. With this in mind, Mr. Rowe has produced this well researched article in an effort to give us a wider perspective and appreciation for the Indian Head area. Mr. Rowe is an active member of the Historical Society and serves on the Program Committee.

The first white man to visit this peninsula was Captain John Smith.⁽¹⁾ He includes the Mattawoman Neck in his 1608 map. Following closely on the heels of John Smith was Henry Fleet,⁽²⁾ who was both an explorer and a trapper. These two men separately explored and mapped most of the Chesapeake area.

Probably no one will ever challenge the fact that Smith and Fleet were the first Europeans to set foot on the Mattawoman Peninsula, but it is entirely possible they were not. In the years 1565-1585, the Spanish established a mission in Prince William County⁽³⁾ just across the river in Virginia. It is conceivable they hunted and fished here. This area was easily accessible to them by the river.

It was not until 1654 that any thought of colonization of the Mattawoman Peninsula was made. In that year, the second Lord Baltimore, Cecilius Calvert, made a manor grant to his friend and council member, Thomas Cornwallis. This grant embraced 5,000 acres.⁽⁴⁾ It was bounded by the Potomac River and the Mattawoman Creek. The third boundary or the land boundary was disputed from the outset; however, a reasonable approximation of this boundary is an extension of the western border of Chapman's Landing from the Potomac River to the Mattawoman Creek (see map). Thus, the grant included not only present day Indian Head, but also Glymont and Potomac Heights. The area was henceforth known as Cornwallis Neck as well as Mattawoman Neck.

Cornwallis accepted the grant, but he never

established his residence there. Like so many English gentlemen of this era, he came to America for adventure and for wealth. The most lucrative occupation in seventeenth century Maryland was fur trading. Cornwallis became deeply involved in the fur trade.⁽⁵⁾ He maintained his headquarters in St. Mary's where he had extensive land holdings including his home, the 2,000 acre estate of Cross Manor.

In the year 1665, the governor of Maryland set aside all that land lying between the Mattawoman and the Piscataway Creeks as an Indian Reservation.⁽⁶⁾ This, of course, included the Cornwallis Neck. This might have been a further reason why Thomas Cornwallis did not establish a residence there; but at the same time it gave him almost exclusive rights to the fur trade in that area.

Cornwallis died in England before 1688. His entire estate, including the Cornwallis Neck, was left to his wife, Penelope.⁽⁷⁾ Penelope, in turn, conveyed the property to Captain Edward Pye. This was the beginning of a dynasty that would dominate the peninsula for almost two centuries. Edward died in 1696 and according to English laws of primogeniture extant at that time, the entire 5,000 acres was left to his eldest son, Charles.⁽⁸⁾

Charles Pye then was the third owner of the Mattawoman or Cornwallis Neck. While one can infer with near certainty that neither Cornwallis nor Edward Pye established residence there, it is quite possible that Charles did. The fact that his brother, Walter, held his power of attorney and negotiated many of his business deals⁽⁹⁾ suggests Charles had other preoccupations. If Charles did establish residence on the peninsula it was surely at the Glymont end. Indians were at the other end and there was a law, though much violated, which stated white men could not establish resi-

dence within three miles of an Indian settlement.

Charles Pye decided to put his land to work. He leased tracts of land not only to his two brothers but to seventeen other families.⁽¹⁰⁾ Among these families we find names still prevalent in the area today, viz: Clements, Gardiner, Farrall, Welch, Edelin, Manning, Thomas, Gough and Simms.⁽¹¹⁾

These leases⁽¹²⁾ were for as little as 50 acres and as much as 125 acres. The rent was 1,000 pounds of tobacco due May 1, one or two bushels of wheat due September 1, one fat turkey at Christmas and six fat chickens in mid-summer. All buildings and fences became property of the landlord. Leases ran for the life of the tenant, his wife and children.

In 1736, Indian George Williams⁽¹³⁾ filed a complaint against Charles Pye for using his land in violation of the Indian Reservation Agreement of 1665. This was carried to trial and the decision was made in favor of Charles Pye, who pointed out the grant to Cornwallis of 1654 predated the Indian Reservation Agreement.

At the time of the first settlement at St. Mary's there were an estimated 8,400 Indians in Southern Maryland.⁽¹⁴⁾ By 1720, there were fewer than 200 and probably no more than thirty in the Cornwallis Neck. Where had they gone? Most had died of diseases, introduced by the white man, to which they had no natural immunity.⁽¹⁵⁾ Many had been killed in wars with the Susquehannocks. Still others had left in anger caused by broken treaties. Treaties were indeed broken, but by the red man as well as the white man.

In 1748, all of the land west of the Mattawoman was returned to Charles County.⁽¹⁶⁾ This land, which included the Cornwallis Neck, had been the property of Prince George's County since that County was established in 1696.

By 1750 Charles Pye had died.⁽¹⁷⁾ The entire 5,000 acres was left to his eldest son, John H. Pye. John continued the property leases established by his father. John H. Pye died in 1772.⁽¹⁸⁾ Here for the first time, the Pye estate, and in particular, the Cornwallis Neck, saw divisions. To some extent these divisions have obtained down to modern times. One third of the peninsula went to his wife, Henrietta. His three daughters, Ann, Margaret and Mary Clare, each received 500 acres. His two sons, Charles and Edward, divided the remainder of the land.

The demise of John H. Pye was the precursor to the demise of the Pye empire. The division of property following his death would beget further divisions, not only through inheritance but through the sales outside the family as well. By 1890, there would be no property left in the name of Pye in Cornwallis Neck.

The 1800 census shows that Charles, son of John H. owned 30 slaves.⁽¹⁹⁾ This suggests a very large estate even after the six-way division of 1772. Charles is also remembered as the man who built the church. Public Roman Catholic worship was prohibited by law between the years 1692 and 1776. It is entirely within reason to assume that during these years Mass was said in the private Pye chapel for the Catholic residents of the peninsula. In the year 1800, Charles gave (or sold) land to the church⁽²⁰⁾ and erected a chapel there which he modestly named St. Charles.

It is noted that Edward⁽²¹⁾, the other son of John H. served as a First Lieutenant in Captain Stonestreet's Fourth Cavalry during the War of 1812-1814. He and the Captain were probably kinsmen as there were several marriages between the Pye and the Stonestreet families.

In 1814, the British marched on Washington, burned the city, and quickly retreated to the Patuxent where their ships were waiting for them. As land troops attacked Washington from the northeast, the British Navy was in the Potomac at the southwest for support if needed. As the British Navy withdrew and sailed down the Potomac, the American Navy set up gun batteries along the Virginia and the Maryland shores. Commodore Oliver Perry⁽²²⁾ commanded a battery on the high bank above the Potomac at Indian Head. This may be the first time the words "Indian Head" were used in any official way.

The Civil War came and found not only Cornwallis Neck but all of Southern Maryland occupied by Federal troops. Thirteen thousand Union⁽²³⁾ soldiers were stationed on the Maryland shore between Ft. Washington and Cedar point. These men were under the command of General Joseph Hooker. There were no actual encampments on Cornwallis Neck, but there were Union Camps at nearby Pomonkey and Mason Springs⁽²⁴⁾. Batteries of guns were set up at both Glymont and Indian Head. The one at Glymont was directed at High Point, a Confederate battery directly across the Potomac in Virginia.⁽²⁵⁾

The native Southern Marylanders assisted the Confederate war effort by smuggling. Objects smuggled were mainly food, drugs ⁽²⁶⁾ and messages. Every creek along the Potomac, this included the Mattawoman and Pomomkey, had a number of small boats which participated in this activity nightly. Many young men escaped across the Potomac to enlist.

The guns from the Battles of the First and Second Manassas could be easily heard on the Cornwallis Neck. ⁽²⁷⁾ Stories about this were still being told by area old folk as late as the 1930s.

It was previously noted that beginning early in the 18th Century, land was farmed and tobacco was the principal crop. By the middle of the 19th century, this land was worn out. The farms were sold and subdivided and the wealthier farmers moved away. Fishing then became the principal livelihood of the few who remained. Two of the principal fisheries were Mt. Pleasant and deep Point (see map). Their markets were mainly Alexandria and Washington, but people came from all over Southern Maryland ⁽²⁸⁾ to Indian Head (as it was beginning to be called) to buy fish.

Land transfers during the 19th century were frequent. In 1772, Ann Pye, daughter of John H. Pye, inherited the Mt. Pleasant Farm. Ann married Robert Doyne Simms. This land remained in the Pye-Simms family until 1816 when it was sold to Joseph Watson. In 1834, Watson divided the farm into two parts (see map) Mt. Pleasant and Mt. Pleasant Farm and Fishery. ⁽²⁹⁾ Mt. Pleasant was sold to the Irwin family who in turn sold the property to the U. S. Government in 1891. In 1835, George Smoot bought the Mt. Pleasant Farm and Fishery. In 1890, this tract of land was purchased by the U. S. Government. ⁽³⁰⁾

The Farm and Fishery became the Naval Proving Ground, the golf course and officers housing area. Mt. Pleasant, better known as the Irwin Farm, became the area devoted to Federal housing for civilian employees of the Navy.

John H. Pye, in 1772, left his son, Edward Joseph Pye, three farms (see map): Six Chimneys, Hopewell and Kenwood. Edward married a Mitchell as did his daughter. ⁽³¹⁾ Six Chimneys remained in the Pye-Mitchell family until 1871. It was sold to the U. S. Government in 1919.

The Hopewell Farm remained in the Pye family until 1861 when it was purchased by John W. Jenkins. It remained with the Jenkins family until 1890 and was sold to the U. S. Government in 1918. ⁽³²⁾

The Kenwood tract stayed in the Mitchell family, descendants of Edward J. Pye until early in the 20th century. It was sold to the U. S. Government by 1920. ⁽³³⁾

The final piece of land as far as purchase by the U. S. Government is concerned was the old Jenkins

Farm. This was left by John H. Pye in 1772 to his daughter, Margaret. She died a spinster and the property was purchased by Dr. James Edelin in 1796. ⁽³⁴⁾ In 1819, it was bought by Charles Jenkins. It remained in the Jenkins family until 1879 and was sold to the U. S. Government in 1890. ⁽³⁵⁾ This property is significant as it was the site of the Naval Powder Factory established in 1900.

These six parcels of land, all ultimately purchased by the U. S. Government, amount to just over 2,000 acres. The Cornwallis Neck contains yet another 3,000 acres. In the Will of John H. Pye in 1772, his daughter, Mary Clare, received 500 acres; his wife, Henrietta, about 1,500 acres; and his son, Charles, about 1,000 acres. These properties were sold, divided and mortgaged a number of times so that the Pye family had completely disappeared as land owners by 1890.

There were many who purchased parcels of this land. Perhaps the largest single buyer was Leonard Marbury and his son, Addison. Others who became large land owners on the Cornwallis Neck were: William Barker, Samuel H. Cox and John W. Waring.

While the Proving Ground, Powder Factory and later the N. O. S. became the destiny of the lower end of the Cornwallis Neck, the development of Glymont was an important happening in the upper end. The principal seat of the Pye family seems to have been on the Potomac River at the end of the present Cedar Lane. The Pye family had a landing there and with the advent of the steamboat this landing became a steamboat landing. When Leonard Marbury built his landing just up the river from the Pye Wharf, the two together made the largest river port in Charles County. ⁽³⁶⁾

The name, Glymont, was introduced by the Washington Fruit Growers Association in 1850. ⁽³⁷⁾ It was a part of a promotional scheme to attract Washington residents to take summer excursions there.

After the Civil War, the village of Glymont began to emerge. As early as the 1870s, George Hunt, Sylvester Smith and David Ivins were operating businesses with this address. By 1880, James Cooke and William Henry had joined them. Mr. Smith now had a post office in the rear of his store. Dr. Nathaniel Chapman took care of the medical needs of the community, Marcellus Cox was their only lawyer. ⁽³⁸⁾ At this time, two saloons appeared on the scene: one run by Richard Knott; the other by David Ivins.

In 1889, the Upper Glymont Excursion and Improvement Co. purchased the Marbury Wharf and combined the two into an attractive river resort replete with hotel. In that same year, Joseph Carter and George Swann opened a race track. Jousting was also a feature.

The 1880 village had only 75 residents, so one

might easily infer these businesses catered largely to the steamboat patrons.

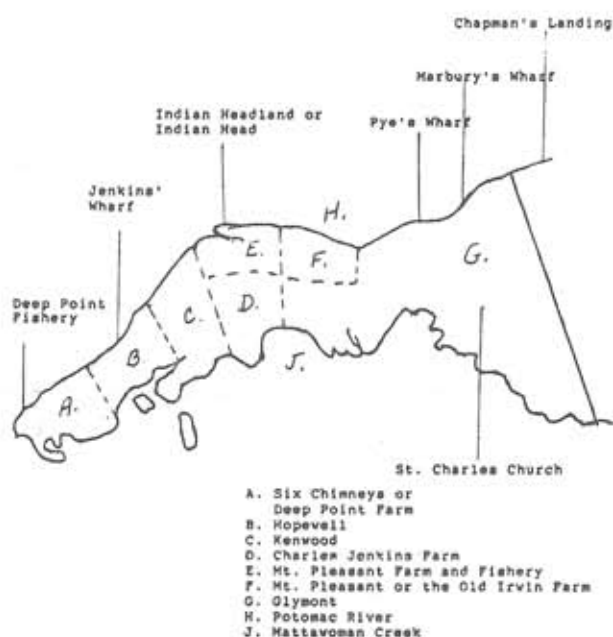
A history of the development of the Cornwallis Neck prior to 1890 would be incomplete without some mention of the origin of the name "Indian Headlands".⁽³⁹⁾ As the entire lower end of the peninsula was once an Indian Reservation, the Indian portion of the name needs no further explanation.

Webster's Dictionary defines a headland as a promontory or high piece of land extending into a large body of water. This definition exactly fits the piece of land on the far side of the valley at the old dock or at the end of Dashiell Road.

The name Indian Head is used in both War of 1812 and Civil War records in referring to this particular point and the area nearby. As early as 1859 Indian Headlands appears on a map⁽⁴⁰⁾ and by 1864 maps were using the name Indian Head. Both maps place the name at this particular point.

It was here that Ensign Dashiell landed in 1890. It was at this point that Ensign Dashiell built his proving ground. As the naval installation grew and the town developed, the name Indian Head became indelible.

Cornwallis or Mattawoman Neck



Cornwallis or Mattawoman Neck

END NOTES

1. Papenfuse and Coale, *Atlas of Historical Maps of Maryland, 1608-1908*, (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1982) p. 1.
2. Frederick Tilp, *This Was Potomac River* (Alexandria: published privately, 1978), p. 8.
3. R. Jackson Ratcliffe, *This Was Prince William* (Lynchburg: Potomac Press, 1978), p. 1.
4. Charles County Land Records, Liber A, B, and H, Folio 401.
5. Raphael Semmes, *Captains and Mariners of Early Maryland*, (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1937), pp. 74, 102-105.
6. William P. Barse "A Preliminary Archeological Reconnaissance Survey of the Naval Ordnance Station," (unpublished, 1985), p. 31.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
9. This fact is made clear in the many land leases Charles made. One example is the lease to Benjamin Gardiner in 1739, Charles Co. Land Records, Liber Y, Folio 173.
10. Barse, op. cit., p. 20.
11. Charles Co. Land Records, Liber T, Folio 707; Liber Y, Folios 173, 192, 221, 228, 231, 381.
12. Barse, op. cit., p. 20.
13. Louise Joyner, *Prince George Heritage* (Maryland Historical Society, 1972), p. 35.
14. Joe Dent, "Amerends of the National Colonial Farm Region" (unpublished, 1980), p. 9.
15. Barse, op. cit., p. 16.
16. Joyner, op. cit., p. 44.
17. Charles Co. Land Records, Liber G #13, Folio 283.
18. Barse, op. cit., p. 20.
19. "Charles Co. 1800 Census," (Maryland Geneological Society Bulletin 1967).
20. Tilp, op. cit., p. 158.
21. William M. Marine, *The British Invasion of Maryland, 1812-1815* (Baltimore: Geneological Publishing Co., p. 411.
22. Walter Lord, *The Dawns Early Light* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1972), p. 209.
23. Tilp, op. cit., p. 177.
24. William T. McGuigan, a local Civil War fancier, told me this and has shown me the encampments.
25. Mary Alice Wills, *The Confederate Blockade of Washington, D. C. 1861-1862* (Parsons, W. Va., McLain Printing Co., 1975) p. 96.
26. Wills, op. cit., p. 47.
27. Twice told tales from my childhood.
28. My grandfather told me of coming from his farm near Aquasco to Indian Head by wagon once a year to buy enough fish for his family and tenants to last all winter.
29. Barse, op. cit., p. 20.
30. Charles Co. Land Records, Liber JST #4, Folio 308.
31. Barse, op. cit., p. 21.
32. Charles Co. Land Records, Liber JST #3, Folio 291.
33. *Ibid.*, Liber WMA 36, Folio 638.
34. Barse, op. cit., p. 21.
35. Charles Co. Land Records, Liber JST #3, Folio 291.
36. Tilp, op. cit., p. 313.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
38. Charles Co. License Records.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
40. Papenfuse, et. al., op. cit., p. 76.

— Attention Members!! —

The Charles County School naming committee nominated our own Colonel William Dent of Friendship House for the second new elementary school to be built in Charles County. In addition to Colonel William Dent, Admiral Raphael Semmes was also nominated for the next elementary school to be built. The school board has to make a decision on all nominations and your input is greatly needed!!!! Their decisions will largely be due to the input from the public. Therefore, **WE ARE URGING EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU TO PLEASE WRITE THE BOARD OF EDUCATION IN SUPPORT OF THE TWO HISTORICAL FIGURES NOMINATED BY THE SCHOOL NAMING COMMITTEE: COLONEL WILLIAM DENT AND ADMIRAL RAPHAEL SEMMES.** Please do your part to help get our schools named for these persons. The Board of Directors of the Historical Society took formal action at their March 21, 1990 Board Meeting in support of these two and have sent their letters of support. **Your help can make a difference!** Please send your letters to:

Mrs. Linda Creason, Chairman
Charles County Board of Education
P.O. Box D
La Plata, Maryland 20646

Charter Days

Bring the whole family to a Birthday Celebration for Charles County!

Saturday, May 12, 1990, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. at the Government Building in La Plata.

"Dixie Ramblers" Bluegrass Band. Colonial Craft demonstrations. Free balloons. John Hanson Fife & Drum Corps. Sponsored by The Charles County Tourism Advisory Board. For more info. call 934-9305.

Tour Guides Needed At Friendship House

One of the Historical Society's most prestigious accomplishments is the rebuilding and furnishing of Friendship House. Today it stands ready to welcome visitors to Maryland's colonial past. Costume docents (guides) will greet tourists and explain how a colonial family might go about its daily life in a house of this period.

Our 1990 Tourism Season will begin Sunday, May 13th and will continue every Saturday and Sunday from 12:00 to 4:00 p.m. through September 2nd. A Docent orientation meeting was held on April 14th and due to the many responses a number of dates on our calendar of docents have been filled. However, we still need more help, especially in the month of August.

Kindly consider signing up as a docent tour guide for the house at least one day this season. We train our guides and because of a grant from the Charles County Tourism Advisory Board are able to pay a \$5.00 per hour stipend. We sincerely need your help. For information call:

Anita Wood at 934-4289 or Sally Barley at 934-2251 (ext. 610).

Projects

In cooperation with Donna Burch, Clerk of the Court and Charles County government, the Historical Society has agreed to undertake a project extracting names of individuals from volumes of the early Court Proceedings Records. This should prove to be a most interesting and valuable project to both genealogists and historians.

As these records will soon be sent to the Maryland State Archives, our project will help to preserve the names of those listed in the records. Anyone interested in working with this, please contact Sally Barley at 934-2251, ext. 610.

Membership News

The Historical Society would like to Welcome the following new members:

Mr. & Mrs. T. W. Karwasinski, Welcome
Ms. Susan Jackson, Forestville
Mr. A. Russell Slagle, Baltimore

In addition, we would like to acknowledge the following new **LIFE** Members:

Mr. & Mrs. Warren E. Barley
Mr. & Mrs. John Candland
Mr. & Mrs. Edward C. Turner
Mrs. Anita Wood
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Schaumberg
Mr. A. Russell Slagle

Early Land Records Donated

The Board of Directors of The Historical Society has voted to accept twenty-two bound volumes of photocopies of Charles County's earliest Land Records, 1658 to 1790, from the Clerk of The Court, Donna Burch. The volumes will be housed in the reading room of The Southern Maryland Studies Center and will be available to all researchers.

----- clip ----- and ----- mail -----

to: Anita Wood, 233 Heather Court, La Plata, Maryland 20646

I am interested in being a tour guide for Friendship House

Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____



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not pictured: Shirley H. Schindel, Ruby Dyson.

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The Historical Society of Charles County
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