Seventeenth-Century Ghost Towns of the Patuxent River

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The perceived virtual absence of cities and towns in the colonial Chesapeake region has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry. The resulting interpretation usually relegates urban centers to a minor, almost microscopic role in colonial Chesapeake society, explained largely by a combination of environmental and economic factors — easy water access and the benefits of tobacco agriculture — that allowed establishment of an efficient, waterborne trade network. The staple crop of tobacco could be transported directly from individual landings, with merchandise being delivered in the same way, thus bypassing the necessity for a middle staging point — a role traditionally played by towns. Recent archaeological and documentary research pertaining to several seventeenth-century towns in Calvert and St. Mary’s counties, however, suggests that this traditional view of the role of towns on the early Maryland frontier needs to be re-examined.

The first new evidence suggesting that towns served a more important role in early Maryland than previously believed was the recent rediscovery of a survey plat of the town of Calverton, Calvert County’s first county seat, located at the juncture of Battle Creek and the Patuxent River. The town was laid out in 1668 by county deputy surveyor Charles Boteler, but a resurvey of the property was made in 1682 as a means of resolving a property dispute. The resulting plat shows the town location, but, most importantly, it also gives the town layout — being the only known surviving plan for a seventeenth-century Maryland town. When the plat is added to other documentary evidence, it points to a number of towns actually having existed in seventeenth-century Maryland.

In addition to Calverton, the town of St. Leonard is another for which much information regarding layout is available. St. Leonard was first located at the mouth of St. Leonard Creek on land that is now the property of the newly-created, state-owned Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum. An archaeological survey conducted in 1981 located ten seventeenth-century sites there. Two of these sites appear to predate the town of St. Leonard, while the remaining eight date to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries — the period of the town’s existence at that location. Another early town, Harvington, was located across the river to the southeast at the mouth of a deep water stream, virtually identical in siting to St. Leonard and the other Patuxent River towns. Harvington is known to have housed an inn and a gun maker.

The main thrust for the creation of these towns was to establish ports of entry in order to regulate and encourage trade — hence, Calverton and the others were first and foremost envisioned as commercial trading centers, and that appears to

Locations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century towns:

1. Calverton
2. St. Leonard (1st site)
3. St. Leonard (2nd site)
4. St. Leonard (3rd site)
5. Harvington
6. Herrington
7. Huntingtown (1st site)
8. Huntingtown (2nd site)
9. Lower Marlboro
10. Prince Frederick

Attend the museum’s WATERSIDE MUSIC FESTIVAL — 1985! Details on Page 5.
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have been the major function they performed. Support for this view is provided by examining the town locations: all were sited on navigable waters, at protected inlets where tobacco ships could anchor in safety, thus giving them a comparative advantage over other landing points. Furthermore, while the data are admittedly largely incomplete, at least two of the towns are known to have had merchants — Michael Tawney at Calverton and Samuel Chew at Herrington (a town on the Chesapeake Bay near Herring Bay).

By the first quarter of the eighteenth century, all of these towns appear to have died out at their original locations, with four new towns or new locations for old towns being established. Three of the four were located along the peninsula’s central spine, with Lower Marlboro being the only town still located on the Patuxent. The relocation of these settlements — in effect creating a second generation of towns — seems directly linked with population growth and the resulting development of an internal road network, and this points to their evolving role as service communities.

The second generation towns all were located on that road, signifying the increased importance of land travel. Lower Marlboro was located on the Patuxent, but it also served as a key ferry point on the road. St. Leonard and Huntingtown, located at the heads of their respective streams, along with Lower Marlboro, continued to serve as tobacco trading points as well. Prince Frederick was established as the county seat by 1725 because the “Court House already built at Battle Creek [Calvert] is very old, decayed, and inconvenient to the greatest part of the inhabitants of the said County.” Thus, by that time, because of population growth into the interior, the need for a centrally located county seat was recognized, and land travel was well enough advanced that the government could be removed inland.

After the raids of the British on the Patuxent River in 1814, in which Huntingtown and St. Leonard were particularly hard hit, the economy of the river valley was slow to recover. It appears that only after a period of years were Huntingtown and St. Leonard rebuilt, and each was rebuilt in a different location, both slightly north of their former sites, away from their respective creeks, and along the main road. Hunting and St. Leonard creeks both remained shipping ports throughout the century, but the relocation of Huntingtown and St. Leonard meant that the towns themselves no longer served in that capacity. Instead, their primary functions were as service centers for the surrounding areas.

Thus, the first towns served primarily as tobacco trading ports, representing the first step toward centralized marketing. Their appearance seems to have been largely a consequence of population increase and the resulting inadequacy of the direct trade method previously used. Since they served as such, the ports’ locations at good harbors were crucial. With continued population growth and spread to the interior, however, the towns relocated and took on additional functions related to that growth, with the original town sites lapsing into disuse or continuing simply as landings and warehouse facilities. The last decades of the seventeenth and first years of the eighteenth centuries have been identified by scholars as a period of the appearance of socio-economic sophistication in the Tidewater Chesapeake, when society reached a certain level of complexity and maturity. The development of this second generation of towns may be seen as both an outgrowth and an indicator of this process. In the early nineteenth century, the towns took the final step away from their earlier water-oriented tobacco trading function, thus completing their evolution into central places serving defined community needs. Over the next 100 years, these towns did not increase much in either size or diversity, again reflecting the area’s socio-economic condition — economic stagnation and a virtually static population.

Part of the seventeenth-century survey plat of Calverton made by Charles Boeteler. Calverton is sometimes identified as Calvert Town or Battle Town.
BOTANY ALONG THE BOARDWALK:
The CMM Marsh Exhibit

What do people see when they look at the vegetation that rings the southern end of CMM’s boat basin? A tangle of weeds? A promise of "tamed" wetland as yet unfulfilled? Despite a few setbacks expected to occur whenever an attempt is made to order nature (in this case, to reproduce a "natural" marsh), a year after it was planted, the CMM marsh is beginning to acquire the appearance of a naturally-occurring habitat.

Tidal or salt marshes border most estuaries in temperate parts of the world, and are extremely important to the health of an estuary, such as the Chesapeake Bay. Although these marshes might appear as "wasteland" — a waving stand of grass with little plant diversity — they are in fact a complex of distinctive and clearly-defined plant associations. Twice a day saltmarsh plants on the outermost rim of the marsh are submerged in salty water and then exposed to the full force of the sun. Even the soil in which the plants' roots extend is salty to some degree. Only plant species with a wide range of salt tolerances can survive such treatment.

Distinct zones of vegetation can be seen in most tidal marshes. Closest to the open water is a fringe of saltmarsh cordgrass, *Spartina alterniflora*. The ability to live semi-submerged and a high tolerance for salt water makes this the dominant species between mean low water and mean high water. It grows from three to six feet tall and has big, coarse leaves. A short, yellowish form of *Spartina alterniflora* may dominate the lower reaches of the marsh behind the taller form, but in many areas the next distinct plant zone is occupied by saltmarsh hay, *Spartina patens*. A fine, small-leaved grass, stalks of this *Spartina* have a tendency to bend at their bases, producing a flat, swirled pattern appropriately called a "cowlick."

Where the land rises several additional inches above mean high water, and if there is a fresh water source available, the *Spartinas* may be replaced by several rush species (*Juncus roemerianus* and *J. gerardi*). These grass-like plants are eventually replaced by shrubs, including marsh elder (*Iva frutescens*) and groundsel tree (*Baccharis halimifolia*), bayberries and shining sumac (members of the “dunefield” community), and finally, holly and black gum — species common in the "maritime forest" — the most stable of all coastal communities.

The marsh at CMM contains practically all of the plant species mentioned above. A narrow ring of *Spartina alterniflora* is bordered by a wider band of *Spartina patens*, with a few clumps of rushes along the edges. Lining the woodchip path are two species of bayberry, and one each of sumac, holly, and black gum. Because of the high incidence of fresh water in this area, however, our marsh has "attracted" a number of freshmarsh species, including arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*), seedbox (*Ludwigia alternifolia*), dwarf St. John’s worth (*Hypericum mutilum*), and a host of sedge species. Altogether, these plants produce an outdoor exhibit which is both attractive and appropriate to CMM.

Aesthetics aside, salt marshes are extremely important to man. The salt marsh and its associated estuary make up one of the most productive of all ecosystems in the world. Tides continually carry out waste and bring in nutrients. The convergence of fresh and salt water traps and concentrates nutrients in the marsh, increasing natural fertility. Because of this, marshes provide a nursery for a number of fish species, a feeding ground for waterfowl, and a source of shellfish — all of which may be of significant economic value.

Marshes also help to control floods that come from the sea, by taking the brunt of the force delivered by storm waves. Finally, marshes help to trap sediment and chemical wastes produced by land development and agricultural runoff. Thus it can be seen that salt marshes are neither unattractive nor useless. The CMM marsh exhibit was planted in part to enhance the museum grounds. But, more importantly, with the help of our interpreters, it is there to teach visitors about the need to appreciate and protect these valuable ecosystems.

— Scott Rawlins

REFERENCES:


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Smith, Robert L., *Ecology and Field Biology.*

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*Available for reading in CMM library.*
**Fossil Facts**

by Sandy Roberts

**Editor's Note:** In the Spring 1984 issue of *Bugeye Times*, Dr. Daryl Damning wrote an extended article about the dugongs and manatees, both fossil and living. In this “Fossil Facts,” Sandy Roberts offers some help in identifying the fossils that might be found at Calvert Cliffs. A publication on dugong fossils, with photographs, may be consulted in the museum library.

Fossil hunters searching the cliffs and slumps of Calvert Cliffs occasionally find the fragmented bones of that “mermaid” of folklore, the dugong or sea cow. Distant relatives of the elephant, the family Dugongidae (from the Malay “duyong”) first appeared during the Eocene epoch, and having disappeared from North Atlantic waters by the end of the Miocene, survives today only in Indopacific seas.

The appearance of the Miocene dugong can only be conjectured, but to judge from a comparison of fossil bones with those of the modern dugong, the earlier dugong would have been a bulky, slow moving animal with a hairless, whale-shaped body ending in a notched, horizontal tail. The paddle-like flippers would have been without nails and the head grotesque, with small eyes and huge, mobile lips fringed with bristles. Able to live in both fresh and salt water, its habitat could have been either a river flowing into the sea or a warm, brackish bay with a preferred water depth of around fifteen feet. Almost exclusively a plant eater, the dugong would have been distinguished by its teeth. The male probably would have had two tusk-like incisors above, while the four or five cheek teeth in each jaw would have lacked enamel or any demarcation between root and crown. The large molars, superficially resembling those of a pig, would have had two transverse, curved crests and a wrinkled surface complicated by numerous small, knobby cusps.

Most dugong fossil remains have been found in the Calvert formation which has produced the several species— or perhaps genera— of dugong known to exist in the Calvert Cliffs. The largest and most commonly found bones are those belonging to *Metaxytherium calvertense*, an animal that reached an estimated length of about ten feet. The fossils have a heavy, dense quality. Ribs and vertebrae are most often found; teeth are rare. The ribs are identifiable by their density and a rounded, banana-like shape. Cross sections appear solid, lacking any indication of marrow. Vertebrae may also be recognized by their density and, in particular, by their unusual heart-shaped centra or body sections.

The museum is interested in learning of any significant dugong fossils. A skull fragment found last summer near Little Cove Point was indicative that dugongs also occur in the St. Mary’s formation.

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**Chesapeake Bay Ecology Camp 1985**

The Southern Maryland Audubon Society, in cooperation with CMM, is offering again in 1985 the Chesapeake Bay Ecology Camp, June 30 through July 12 at St. Mary’s College. Participants gain “hands-on” experience in natural history and marine and estuarine biology through a variety of activities, including a three-day trip down the Bay aboard a research vessel. The camp is limited to thirty-five adults, eighteen or older, registered on a first-come basis. Total cost of the camp is $625, which includes food, lodging, and all trips. Two semester hours of undergraduate credit may be earned from the college ($80 additional). For information and/or reservations write the Chesapeake Bay Ecology Camp, Southern Maryland Audubon Society, P.O. Box 181, Bryans Road, Maryland 20616.

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**Summer Program**

Using the historic J. C. Lore Oyster House exhibit as a focal point, a two-week summer program is being designed which will allow fifteen to twenty young people to explore the estuarine environment and the maritime industries of southern Maryland. Participants will also have the opportunity to practice a number of maritime skills, including shaft tonging, fish net repair, and crab picking.

This program is being made possible through the generosity of the Town Creek Foundation, Inc. As plans are completed, an announcement will be made in the *Bugeye Times* and the local newspapers.

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**Editor's Comments**

Two errors occurred in the “Selected Acquisitions” article in the previous issue of *Bugeye Times*: Mrs. Jefferson Patterson donated the watercolor by John Whorf; Lawrence Lipscomb’s name was misspelled. These errors are regretted.

In the article on the return of the *Louise Travers* to Solomons, the statement was made that the *Travers* is the only Marsh bugeye known to exist. Since the article appeared, the museum has been informed that the *Little Jennie*, a Marsh bugeye built in 1884, is in the process of restoration in Centerport, New York.
Calvert Marine Society members who attended either the membership lawn party last summer or the December yule party could not help but be impressed by the pleasant setting created by the new boat basin. These members, and those who have not yet enjoyed the boat basin for social functions, will have three opportunities during the 1985 WATERSIDE MUSIC FESTIVAL in June and July to enjoy musical programs in this setting. The scheduled dates are Saturday, May 25; Thursday, June 20; and Friday, July 5.

Performances will be held “rain or shine” and will begin at 7:30 p.m., but the museum grounds will be open at 6:00 p.m. for “bring-your-own” picnics on the grass or around the boat basin. Beverages and desserts will be available for purchase. There will be model boat demonstrations in the boat basin prior to the concerts, and the museum gift shop will be open.

The program on Saturday, May 25, will feature John Jackson, internationally acclaimed blues and folk singer. Mr. Jackson is a self-taught musician who has appeared frequently in the Washington area, including Wolf Trap Farm and the Smithsonian’s “Folklife Festivals.” He has given concerts throughout the world and has recorded several albums. His personality and music will appeal to all ages.

On Thursday, June 20, the performance will be by the Tidewater Chamber Players of the Tidewater Music Festival, presenting a program from the classics. The Tidewater Music Festival has a fourteen-year history of performances of chamber music by young American artists, with programs presented throughout Southern Maryland and broadcast on National Public Radio. The Festival – affiliated with St. Mary’s College – has received three awards from the American Federation of Music Clubs for its presentation of American music. On June 20 the group will perform Stravinsky’s “The History of the Soldier.” (For further information on the Tidewater Music Festival call John Lawton on 301-863-7100, ext. 383.)

Performing on Friday, July 5, will be a folk music group, the Southern Annex, which describes itself as a “not-quite-traditional string band.” The group will present a collection of New England dance tunes, English ballads, sea chanties, and songs of modern balladeers. Those participating include Elgin Perry (fiddle and guitar), Suzan Gungalus (recorder and mandolin), Lianne Mullen (guitar), and John Whitten (bass).

The museum’s 1985 WATERSIDE MUSIC FESTIVAL has been planned by the Capital Campaign Committee of the Board of Governors as part of the effort to raise funds to improve further the museum’s facilities. To help achieve this goal, the performance costs are being underwritten by three local institutions: the Maryland National Bank, the Calvert Bank and Trust Company, and the Maryland Bank and Trust Company. Receipts for the concerts, therefore, will go entirely to museum support. Don’t miss this excellent opportunity to enjoy a most pleasant musical evening and at the same time to support the museum.

An order form for tickets for the WATERSIDE MUSIC FESTIVAL is included with this issue of the Bugeye Times.
CMM CLUB CORNER

The Patuxent Small Craft Guild is planning several projects for the spring. Restoration work continues on the spars, rudder, and rigging of the skipjack Marie Theresa. The fourteen-foot skiff, finished last fall, will be painted and launched. New construction will be started, possibly on a Patuxent sailing skiff. Most of the guild’s projects will benefit from the new small craft workshop near the boat basin, since the shop provides better work space and a secure storage area. Activities to support the guild’s work include participation in special events, such as the Maryland Day weekend at Historic St. Mary’s City in March, during which tee-shirts and booklets were sold, and another raffle of a beautiful cypress skiff built to paddle or pole. Interested CMS members are invited to join the guild.

George “Rip” Van Winkle
1912 - 1985

On March 7 the museum lost one of its most valuable and devoted volunteers when Rip Van Winkle died suddenly at his home. It is most difficult to express the effect of the loss of this fine gentleman on his many friends and on the museum, since his contributions were so varied and were carried out with such quiet competence. Rip first volunteered his services to the museum in 1975 when he helped install the “Life of the Watermen” exhibit, later participating in its dedication on July 4, 1976, by cutting the ribbon. He also played a significant part in installing the “Fossils of Calvert Cliffs” exhibit; in fact, he assisted in some way in every museum exhibit during the past decade. His current project — the completion of the oyster shell crushing mill at the Lore Oyster House — was of particular interest to him because of his engineering experience.

Rip’s contributions to CMM, moreover, went far beyond exhibits. In January 1976 he began service on the museum Board of Governors, a relationship that continued until his death. From November 1979 to November 1981 he was chairman of that group, and since 1981 served as treasurer. In addition, he was treasurer for ten years of the museum’s Southern Maryland Shipcarvers’ Guild. Most of all, however, Rip was known to everyone at the museum; he was always willing to help when and wherever he could. The museum is indebted to George Van Winkle and his legacy.

To recognize Rip’s contributions to the museum, a fund has been established in his memory. Donations to the George “Rip” Van Winkle Memorial Fund may be sent to the Calvert Marine Museum.

GIFT SHOP

The museum gift shop is having a sale to reduce present inventory before spring ordering, with reductions of 40 to 70 percent. Suggestions are solicited from the members for items to be carried in the shop. Volunteer salespersons are needed for the shop, with on-the-job training provided. Call Dee Danzig at 326-2042.

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