



OLD KENT

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The Early Indians of Kent County

by Elizabeth G. Duvall

All of the American Indians are believed to have come from Asia by way of the Bering Strait and to have spread over North, South, and Central America during millions of years. It is now believed that they began coming long before the land bridge was formed, probably over the ice during the Ice Age, and that they went back and forth for long periods. By the time of Christ, Indians were in Maryland. At the time that the Indians lived in Kent County, the county included the whole Eastern Shore.

The parent tribe on the Eastern Shore was the Nanticokes. The Nanticoke tribal tradition tells that they came here from "the land of snow and ice," through the Ohio Valley, and migrated to the shore from the Alleghanies in the 14th or 15th century A.D. They had been in New York, New Jersey, and New England centuries earlier. The Nanticokes were part of the Algonquin Nation, as were many other tribes, and although their languages were all derived from the Algonquins', each dialect became very different. The story of the Nanticokes was long preserved in the "Walum Olum", a series of pictures painted on flat sticks, each stick being the "page" of a book; it ran into at least five books and was translated into a text by a Dr. Brinton. It is probable that the sticks no longer exist.

The first discovery of the Delmarva Peninsula by Europeans was in 1524 when Verrazano, an Italian sailing under the King of France, landed in present-day Worcester County, and saw and chased two Indian women with three children

each. He and his men were able to capture one small boy, who they took back to France to amaze the court. Captain John Smith, exploring the rivers of the Chesapeake Bay in 1608, came next, and because he left good records, we are indebted to him. The next whites to arrive were William Claiborne and his settlers who established a trading center with the Indians on Kent Island in 1631, and who also were given lands for plantations.

When Lord Baltimore came and established the colony of Maryland in 1634, friendly relations with the Indians prevailed. The Indians were most helpful in showing the new colonists how to clear and establish fields for planting, how and where to catch fish and fowl, and of course, how to bury a fish beside a hill of corn as fertilizer.

The Nanticokes had been on the Eastern Shore for several centuries when the white men came. Captain John Smith gave the only reference to the Kent County area that can be found. In 1608 he made his second voyage into the Bay, with the specific purpose of exploring the rivers for the colony of Virginia. The Indian name "Chesapeake", spelled in various ways, meant "great shellfish bay", and "Nanticoke" meant "those who ply the tidewater streams." Captain Smith eventually reached the upper Bay, and near the mouth of the Sassafras River, met a dugout canoe with four Indians who had been fishing in the Bay. They were friendly and led him to their village of Tockwaugh, seven miles up, near Georgetown on the Sassafras River. This was a village of one hundred men,

probably three hundred persons in all, living in a cluster of wigwams with a palisade fence around the whole village to keep out wild animals and unfriendly Indians. They had dogs as pets and as watch guards. They were most hospitable to Smith and his crew; they gave them food and water and entertained them with music and dances. The other tribe in this area that Smith mentioned was the Ozinies, named for the river which is now the Chester. This tribe was smaller, with about sixty men or about one hundred and eighty persons. Both tribes were Nanticokes and were part of the Algonquin nation. Indians in this area had contact with, and probably some mixture with, the Delawares, from the northern part of Delaware, and the Lenni Lenapes from New Jersey. The latter were called "grandfathers" by the Nanticokes. Not all of the Indians were friendly, however; there was an Indian massacre on the banks of Swan Creek in Kent County in 1663.

(cont. p. 2)

DUES ARE DUE

Those members who have not yet paid their dues for 1987 are urged to do so as soon as possible to avoid being dropped from the mailing list. Please double check your records, and if you have not yet paid, do so now. Annual dues are \$8 for a single membership and \$12 for a family. Thank you.

Candlelight Plans Set

Fourteen buildings, including three first-time offerings, will be featured on the 1987 Candlelight Walking Tour of Historic Chestertown, set for Saturday, September 19 from 6 to 10 p.m.

According to tour chairman Alexander H. (Sandy) Hoon, seven eighteenth-century houses will be open including the Customs House, the Geddes-Piper House, 117 High Street, Hynson-Ringgold House, River House, Wickes House and Widehall. The Buck-Bacchus Store, the White Swan Tavern, and Emmanuel Church will also be open this year. Three nineteenth-century houses will be featured this year, including the Rhodes House, Fort Belvedere, and 407 High Street; the second two houses have been recently restored and are being featured on the Tour for the first time this year. Christ United Methodist Church will also make its debut on the Candlelight Tour in 1987.

Light refreshments will be served at the Geddes-Piper House all evening, and other snacks will be sold elsewhere along the tour route. Music will be provided by the Tench Tilghman Fife and Drum Corps. Dinner will be served at Emmanuel Church by reservation only.

Tickets for the 1987 tour will be available August 1 at the Geddes-Piper House and at the Rhodes Shop on High Street. They may also be ordered by mail by writing the Historical Society at P.O. Box 665, Chestertown, MD 21620. Prices are \$15 for the general public, \$12 for Society members, and \$10 for students.

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NEW OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS ELECTED AT MAY 14 DINNER MEETING

The Historical Society of Kent County held its annual Dinner/Business Meeting at Emmanuel Church on Thursday, May 14. During the business portion of the meeting, officers and directors for the 1987-88 year were elected. Returning to office for a second term will be President Robert Tyson, Vice-President Carrie Schreiber, Recording Secretary Beverly Birkmire, and Treasurer Roger Brown. Jane Fallowfield was

elected as Corresponding Secretary for the coming year.

Virginia Speiden was elected to serve a three-year term as a director. Thelma Vansant and John Sprinkle were both reelected to serve second three-year terms. Continuing in their posts as directors for 1987-88 will be Sue Merrill, Mackey Streit, Margaret Payne, Eugene Johnstone, Joanne Revie and Albert Wharton.

Indians of Kent County (cont. from p. 1)

Thanks to Captain John Smith, there is much information about the Nanticoke tribe on the lower Shore, and one can assume that much of it applies to the Kent County region also. The largest settlement was on the Nanticoke River at a town called Chicacone where Vienna is now located. Subordinate tribes included the Assateagues, the Accomacks, the Accohannacks, the Choptanks, the Pocomokes, the Wocomissas, and the Tockwaughs and Ozinies. In all, Smith listed two hundred villages on his map which was completed in 1612.

The wigwams of the Nanticokes were unlike the familiar ones of the Plains Indians, being one-room, round or rectangular, wooden structures, with domed or arched thatched roofs. The sides were made of saplings planted in the ground with smaller branches, ferns, and leaves interwoven to form the walls; they were finished off with mats and reeds on the inside and bark shingles outside. Poles were inserted in the walls and also put across the ceiling for the hanging of clothing and food, and often for hanging a papoose bound to his flatboard. Wooden benches or platforms with mats for sitting and sleeping were placed against the walls. Animal skins were used for cover and clothing. In the summer the men wore only loin cloths, and women wore short skin skirts. Leggings and tunics were worn in the winter. Sewing was done with bone needles and thread spun from thistles and other grass fibers. Family life, including cooking, took place out of doors except in severe weather when a fire was made in the center of the wigwam, and the covering flap was

removed from the roof to allow the smoke to escape.

There was no metal and little stone in this area. Cooking pots were made of clay or soapstone with a design pressed on from leaves, grasses, flowers, etc. The bottoms of the pots were rounded and propped in the fire with stones. Baskets were woven for carrying and for storage. Food was abundant; deer roamed in large herds; wild fowl were everywhere, as were wild fruits and berries, such as blackberries, wild cherries, plums, strawberries, grapes, and many kinds of nuts. Some roots, such as wild carrots, were eaten, as were some leaves, such as dandelion and poke greens. The women planted fields of corn, squash, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and beans in the clearings. Corn was a mainstay; it was used fresh, dried, or pounded into a meal used to make ash cakes, johnny cakes, pone, and hominy grits. Wooden bowls and clamshell spoons were used for eating.

Fires were made by twirling a stick in a wooden hole until a spark came and ignited grasses and twigs. Flints were in short supply, but were sometimes used to strike a spark. The men made canoes, using fire to fell trees and to burn out the center of logs; deer bone scrapers were then used to smooth the finish. Men also did all the hunting and fishing. Seafood was often a larger item in the diet than meat, although both were plentiful. Both were smoked for the winter months and for travel. Women cleaned the animal hides with deer jawbones with the teeth still intact in order to scrape off the fur. The men were the warriors, defending (cont. p. 5)

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF KENT COUNTY
REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES
YEAR ENDED APRIL 30, 1987**

REVENUE	\$36,139.89
EXPENDITURES	\$27,025.54
EXCESS OF REVENUE OVER EXPENDITURES	\$9,114.35

Indians of Kent County (cont. from p. 2)

the villages from enemy tribes, particularly the Iroquois who came down the Susquehanna River in their canoes on frequent raids. Each raid had to be avenged by Nanticoke raids in return, so feuds often went on for generations.

The Nanticokes traded widely, especially with the Indians of the Ohio Valley and the Lenni Lenapes to the north. Prized trading items were the beads made from shells by both Nanticoke men and women; the purple ones brought a higher price. Another trading item was a vegetable poison, the recipe known only to the Nanticokes.

Bears were the largest animals native to the Shore and were plentiful. Their skins were valued for covers, wraps, clothing, and for trade. Local skins were of high quality because of the abundance of animal food, the favorable climate, and the prevalence of heavily wooded areas. Bear grease was used by the Indian men to coat their skins in summer as protection against insects as they ranged through the forest, and by women to make their hair shine. The Nanticokes had the same high regard for the Canada goose that we do. They called them "Cohunk" because of the sound of their cry. When it became necessary for the Indians to take surnames, Cohunk was a popular choice in this area.

Only the old men let their hair grow long. Perhaps for convenience in the forest, or perhaps in imitation of the Iroquois to the north, the young men shaved or pulled out their facial hair and part of the hair on their heads to create a variety of styles — a Mohawk, a top knot, one side of the scalp bare, etc. They used clam shells to shave, and two shells as tweezers. (A "midden" of shells was found at the mouth of Fairlee Creek; there are many middens on the Shore.) Tooth decay was the norm, probably because of

sand and ash in the Indian foods. For decoration the men tattooed their faces and bodies with sharpened clam shells and vegetable dyes. One custom that has lasted to modern times was to flatten infants' heads on a board for the first three weeks of life, thus enhancing their beauty.

The Nanticokes had an unusual burial custom. After death, probably after some months of burial in a seated position with knees and elbows flexed, the flesh was removed from the bones, and the bones were kept in a sacred spot. Bones often traveled with a tribe on hunting or fishing expeditions. When they accumulated, the bones were all buried together in a pit. Several of these ossuaries have been found; one near Cambridge found in 1897 had more than one hundred disjointed skeletons.

The Nanticokes believed in a Great Spirit, the Manitou, but also believed in good and evil spirits found in trees, rocks, etc., as well as in wandering spirits. They were governed by elected chiefs, and the whole Nanticoke nation was governed by an elected "Emperor."

Nearly all of the Indians had disappeared from this area by the end of the 17th century, having been pushed northward to New York and then to Ontario by the white men. But, there were a few stragglers who held on and even increased. The census of 1980 listed Indians in every county in Maryland; two hundred and eighty-six were located on the Eastern Shore, twenty-one of them in Kent County. Cecil County had seventy-five and Wicomico had sixty-seven. Talbot with eleven had the fewest. On the Indian River near Millsboro in Delaware there is a "Nanticoke Tribe Association," formed in 1922, where Pow-wows are held every September. This has developed into a tribal meeting and a festival of

New Loan Policy Adopted

The Acquisitions Committee of the Board of Directors has decided to discontinue the Society's policy of accepting items "on loan". If you have loaned an item for display at the Geddes-Piper House and would like to donate it, the Society would be most appreciative. If you would rather retrieve it from the house, please call the office to make arrangements to pick it up. Thank you.

Constitution To Be Studied

The Historical Society of Kent County and Chesapeake College are co-sponsoring a program commemorating the 200th anniversary of the signing of U.S. Constitution entitled, "An Eastern Shore Study of the U.S. Constitution." The program, which is being funded by the Maryland Humanities Council, is scheduled for September 17 at 7 p.m. in room H-117 at Chesapeake College. Participants include Mr. Conway Gregory, Associate Professor of History/ Political Science at Chesapeake College, Mr. William Reynolds, Professor of Law at the University of Maryland School of Law, Dr. Robert Fallaw, Professor of History at Washington College, and Mr. Robert Crooks, Social Studies teacher at Kent County High School and Adjunct Instructor of History at Chesapeake College. Kent County residents are encouraged to attend this program, the first of five in the 200th anniversary series to be held at Chesapeake College in the fall of 1987.

SUMMER HOURS

The Geddes-Piper House opened May 1 for the summer season. From now through October, guests may visit the museum and library on Saturday and Sunday afternoons between 1 and 4 p.m.

dances, costumes, foods and, of course, souvenirs. There is still an Indian Reservation and a native Indian Church (Methodist) there. The largest tribe in Maryland now is the Piscataways, cousins to the Nanticokes; all members live on the Western Shore and in Southern Maryland.