

# **RIVER AND MOUNTAIN, WAR AND PEACE**

## **ARCHEOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION STUDY OF CHESAPEAKE & OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK HANCOCK TO CUMBERLAND (MILE MARKERS 123 TO 184)**

### **VOLUME I**

#### **Final Report**

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## FOREWORD

This is the first of three volumes reporting the results of a three-year archeological survey of the upper 61 miles of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park (C&O Canal Park) carried out for the National Park Service (NPS), National Capital Region, from 2008 through 2010. This study was the third of a series that together made up a nine-year study of the entire park, from Georgetown to Cumberland.

Even before the nine-year study began, more than a hundred archeological sites had been recorded in the C&O Canal Park. This number makes it seem as though much work had been done, but this was not really the case. Most of those hundred sites had been recorded by amateur collectors, and little was known about them. Much of the park remained unexplored. Since the park borders the Potomac River, the archeological potential of its 13,000 acres is enormous. To learn more about the archeological resources of the park, and to assist the park in managing those resources, funds were devoted to implement the Systemwide Archeological Inventory Program (SAIP) in the park. The SAIP was developed to address the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act (specifically Sections 106 and 110), Executive Order 11593, and the Archeological Resources Protection Act. The lower 59 miles, from Georgetown to Sandy Hook, were explored in 2002 to 2004 (Fiedel et al. 2005). This segment covered the Piedmont zone, from the falls of the river to the Blue Ridge. The central segment, comprising 64 miles between Sandy Hook and Hancock, spanned the Great Valley. Work on the central segment was carried out in 2005 to 2007 (Bedell et al. 2008). The final, upper segment spans the Appalachian Mountain zone, from Hancock to Cumberland (Figure 1).

To address multiple audiences most effectively—the general public, park staff, NPS, review agency staff, and the archeological community—this report is organized in a way that differs from the standard cultural resource study. This volume (I) presents a narrative, designed for the general public, of the prehistory and history of the Potomac in the Appalachians, based on the archival and archeological field investigations; it is intended for the non-technical reader and does not contain specific information about site locations. In order to avoid excessive repetition, this volume treats briefly some topics that were extensively discussed in the reports on the lower and middle segments of the park. Volume II provides a technical description and assessment of the project's research goals, methods, and findings, and concentrates on a presentation of the prehistoric research. In organization and content, it more closely follows the professional standards of the cultural resource management industry and is intended for distribution only within the professional community. Volume III, also intended for limited distribution, contains additional technical materials and appendices, including artifact inventories, a summary list of radiocarbon dates, and transcripts of the archival documents that are most important to the historical narrative contained in Volume I.



FIGURE 1: Map of the C&O Canal Park from Hancock to Cumberland

SOURCE: NPS

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## MOUNTAIN AND RIVER

The Potomac River rises in the Appalachian Mountains, fed by the frequent rains and snows of the misty highlands (Figure 2). At first both the North and South branches of the river flow southwest to northeast, following the grain of the mountain ridges. Most of the tributary streams also follow the valleys, entering the river from the southwest or the northeast. At Cumberland the river turns east, cutting across the grain through one mighty ridge of hard stone after another until it finally breaks through Catoctin Mountain into the gentler Piedmont beyond. Nobody knows why the river does this mysterious thing, but geologists suspect that the river is even older than the ancient mountains. When those mountains rose, in the time of the dinosaurs, the ancestor of the Potomac was already there, flowing eastward toward a sea full of giant reptiles, and it wore down its track through the ridges faster than they rose upward. To behold the river as it flows through gorges at Spring Gap, Sideling Hill, and Harper's Ferry is to look on a surviving remnant of a distant age.

The stretch of the river from Cumberland to Hancock therefore has an alternating character. As it cuts through a mountain ridge, it is confined within a steep canyon, bordered only by narrow terraces that provided little space for people to live or camp on. But as it crosses the wider valleys it has more room to expand, and in these places it is bordered by wide, level floodplains or large expanses of ancient terraces with room to live, to farm, and to build (Figure 3). Although the land here is steep, the riverbed is not, so the water flows by in a rather gentle way. Much of it can be traveled by canoe. The sheltered valleys within the Appalachians caught the imagination of early European settlers, who remarked on their green beauty and thought they would be wonderful places to live. When he first saw the valley of the South Branch, frontiersman John Van Meter called it "the finest body of land which he had ever discovered in all his travels" and later urged his sons to take up land there (Kercheval 1975).

Life in the mountains has its hardships, though. For Indians, the long, snowy winters meant a real danger of hunger in the first moons of spring. Our evidence of ancient, hunter-gatherer Indians is rather thin and seems to track the climate. During warm, dry eras the mountains supported many bands of people, but when the climate turned cold, the mountain bands moved down to the lowlands or south toward the sun, leaving the mountains to the deer, the wolves, and only a few hardy men and women. Indians did not escape from this dependence on the climate until they introduced agriculture based on corn and beans to the region about a thousand years ago. The fertile valley floors made for bountiful crops that could be stored all winter. The Potomac is lined with large village sites of that era, showing that it was a busy and productive place.

Life was also hard for the first European settlers. Much of the land was either too steep to plow or in danger of flooding, and it was difficult to ship produce out over the mountains or to bring in supplies. Nonetheless the settlers came, cleared land, and built homes. The population remained thin, though, and most of the people who came through moved on farther west. The rising population in the Ohio Valley made transportation across the Appalachians a major national priority. Thus were born the schemes to build canals along the Potomac and many other rivers, only one of which — the Erie Canal — actually reached the west before the railroads did the job with steam and iron. The rise of steam power made coal the next great commodity, and the great

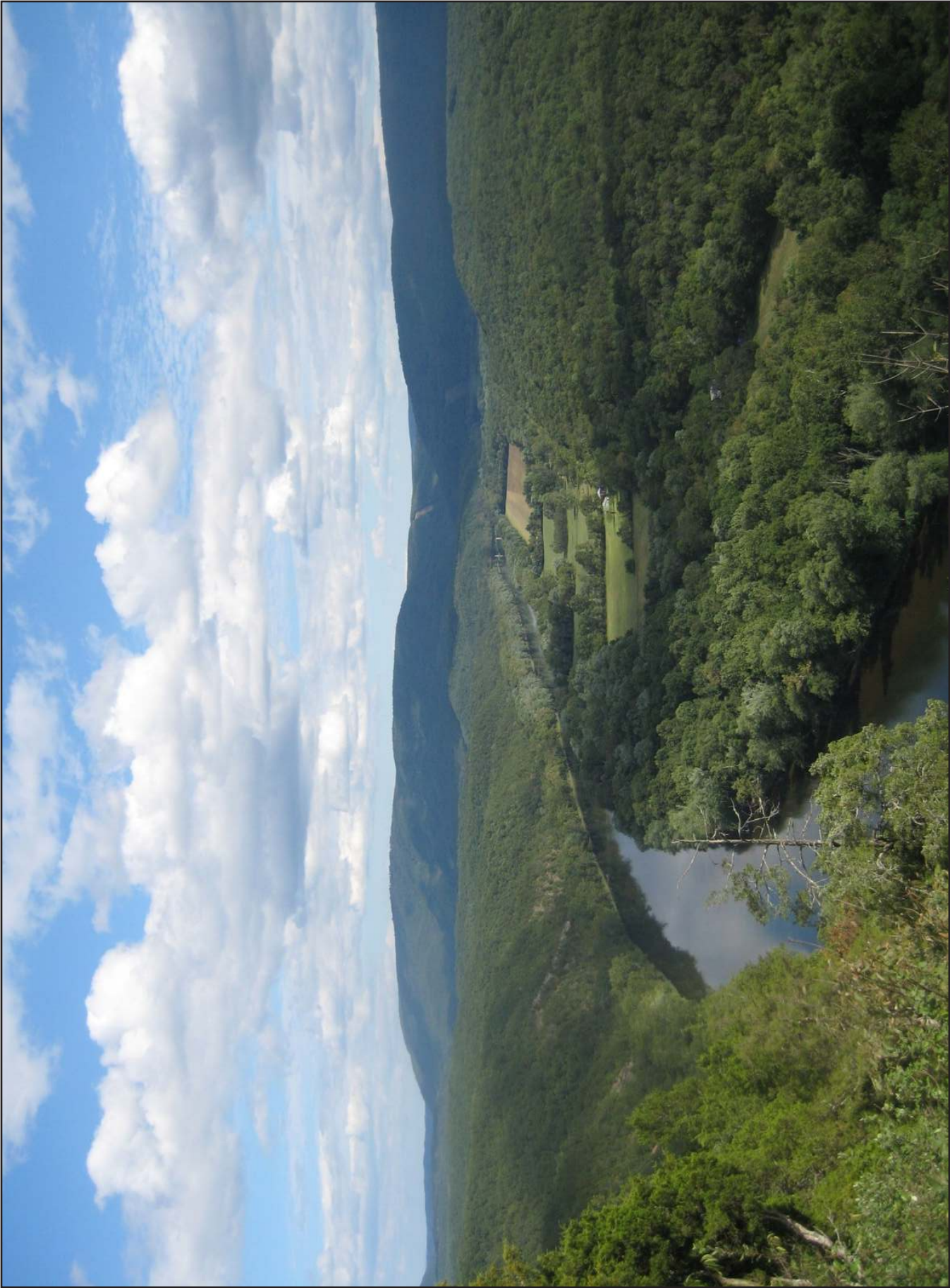


FIGURE 2: The Potomac River Southwest of Hancock





FIGURE 3: Archeologists Working on a Broad Terrace of the Potomac, Near Oldtown

seams of black stone launched a new Appalachian economy. The canals that had been intended to carry grain across the mountains, but had fallen short of that goal, gained new life carrying coal from the mines down to the cities where it heated homes and powered industries, allowing factory towns like Cumberland to grow up in mountain valleys.

The Chesapeake & Ohio Canal was built through the mountains in the 1840s. Gangs of Irish workers dug through the earth with shovels and blasted through stone with explosives, when they weren't protesting or even rioting to get pay that was often months behind. The canal reached Cumberland in 1850. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had years before beaten it to the great Midwestern river that was part of both their names, and the canal went no farther. The canal never made its investors a cent but it continued in business all through the nineteenth century. A way of life grew up on the canal, and many people made their livings from the canal's slow-flowing water. In Cumberland were the yards that built the canal boats from oak beams and pine boards; in Georgetown the canal's waters powered flour and paper mills. In between, canal boat captains with their families plied the 184-mile canal from end to end, staying in business by carrying coal and lumber a little more cheaply than the railroad could. Lock keepers tended each of the locks, and other businesses, like coal yards, lumber yards, and mills, were drawn by the water power and the convenience of being able to tie up canal boats at their doorsteps.

The canal closed for good in 1924, after a terrible flood. Its physical structure remains, however, forming an easy route through the mountains. As a National Park, the canal has been reborn. Its old towpath makes a great way for walkers and bicyclists to travel easily through the mountains, passing the great ridges of stone in the gorges carved by the river hundreds of millions of years ago. The route of the Potomac from its sources to the sea still calls people to travel this most ancient path, as Indians did for thousands of years, as European settlers did, as the soldiers of two wars did, as the canal workers did, and as the canal boatmen did for nearly a century in what we call the Canal Age.

## HUNTERS AND GATHERERS OF THE MOUNTAIN LANDS

### *A Band of People Spread Thinly Across the Land: the Early and Middle Archaic Periods*

The first known inhabitants of the Potomac Valley were ancient hunters whom archeologists call the Clovis people, who spread across North America 13,000 years ago. At that time, though, the world was still warming from the Ice Age, and the mountains were too cold to invite human settlement. Stray spearpoints from that distant time are occasionally found in the mountains, showing that people passed through, but there are no large sites of this early period in the Appalachian region.

Evidence of human settlement in the upper Potomac first becomes common in the Early Archaic period, around 11,000 years ago, or 9000 BC. By that time the Ice Age animals of North America were extinct, and the main game animal was the familiar white-tailed deer. Spearpoints from this period are commonly found on the high, ancient terraces of the river, and also near small streams and even on mountaintops. At that time the human population was small and widely scattered. All of the land drained by the Potomac from Harper's Ferry westward was probably within the territory of a single band of 150 to 300 people. These people traveled widely in search of game, wild plants, and stone to make tools. They preferred to make their tools from glassy, flintlike stones we call chert or, if red, jasper. These types of stone are common in the mountains, both in outcrops and in the cobble beds of the rivers.

The population of the region grew much larger in the following Middle Archaic period, after 7500 BC. Around that time new types of stone tools appeared along the Potomac, and indeed throughout eastern North America. The Middle Archaic period roughly corresponds to the warmest and driest part of the modern era, known as the Altithermal or Hypsithermal. During that warm era the mountains were more welcoming to human settlement than they would be again for thousands of years.

The main hunting weapon of Archaic peoples was the thrown spear or dart, probably thrown using an *atl-atl* or spear thrower. The bow and arrow was most likely not known in the New World until around AD 700. Therefore the best-made stone tools of the Archaic period were not "arrowheads," as people sometimes call them, but spearpoints or dartpoints. The most distinctive artifact of the Middle Archaic is a dartpoint with a split or "bifurcate" base (Figure 4). Several different bifurcate types have been named (LeCroy, St. Albans, Kanawha), but all date to between 9,500 and 8,000 years ago (Egloff and McAvoy 1990). The function of the split (bifurcated) base on these points has never been explained, but their distinctiveness makes them very useful for dating sites because nobody before or after that period made anything quite like them. Bifurcate points are very common along some of the wide river terraces east of Cumberland (Figure 5). A large collection of stone tools from the mountaintop sites of Boone County, West Virginia, has been carefully studied, and it shows the large increase in population in that period. The collection contains seven Paleoindian points, 87 Early Archaic points, and 442 Middle Archaic points (Wilkins 1978).



FIGURE 4: Bifurcate Point, about 8,500 Years Old

The growing human population adapted to the changes in rainfall and seasonal differences by developing new ways to collect and process food and other essentials (what archeologists call “subsistence patterns”). Middle Archaic sites are larger and more numerous, and their more diverse toolkit implies more different ways of getting food, than in the Early Archaic. Because of changes in the resources they used, Middle Archaic people camped in areas that had been previously ignored, such as upland swamps and interior ridges and mountaintops, but their base camps were still located mainly in the floodplains of major streams. New tools were specifically designed for wood-working (axes, adzes, and mauls), seed-grinding (groundstone slabs), and nut-cracking (pitted stones). These tools suggest that people were relying more on plant foods for basic subsistence needs.

Middle Archaic tool-makers still used jasper and chert when they could get it, but they often settled for locally available stone, such as quartz and quartzite. Along the upper Potomac chert is quite common, so most Middle Archaic points we find are chert. Another noteworthy change in the Middle Archaic toolkit is the replacement of the carefully made Early Archaic endscrapers with roughly shaped stone flakes (Figure 6). These “expedient” tools work fine for most purposes despite their lack of elegance. The difference between cutting with a misshapen but sharp rock and cutting with a carefully made stone knife is not in the cutting but in the attitude of the cutter toward his tools. Many Stone Age people invested their stone spearpoints and knives with a great deal of symbolic meaning and used them to display their group identity or their status. They may have also considered their tools beautiful or spiritually potent. People who cut with broken rocks are probably not investing those rocks with much symbolism. When we see changes in the degree of care that people put into making and caring for their stone tools, something important may have changed in the culture. Perhaps they have shifted their spiritual emphasis away from material objects and toward music or astronomy. On the other hand it may be dangerous to speculate too much on the basis of stone cutting tools, since people made many other things that do not survive out of materials such as wood, cloth, or feathers.

#### *The Late Archaic: The Mountains as a Place Between*

From any point along the upper Potomac, there are two directions in which ancient people could have moved easily. They could follow the river upstream or downstream, traveling roughly east-west. To the east they could follow the river down through the Piedmont and past the falls to the coastal plain. Westward they would run up against mountains, but through trails long laid out they could cross without much difficulty to the Youghiogheny River and follow it down to the Ohio. Or, cutting loose from the rivers, they could follow the curve of the mountains toward the south or northeast.



FIGURE 5: Points from Oldtown

As North America grew more crowded and people roamed less widely, the peoples of the different regions developed more distinctive ways of life. By 4000 BC, which some archaeologists call the beginning of the Late Archaic period, the people of the lower Potomac and the Chesapeake Bay had a culture distinctly different from that of people in the Northeast or the Ohio Valley. Which way did the people of the upper Potomac look, and whose culture did theirs most resemble?



FIGURE 6: Scraper and Flake Tool

The stratified sites excavated along the Upper Potomac date mainly to the Woodland period. In some places buried layers have been found that probably date to the Late Archaic, but no spearpoints or other datable artifacts were found in them. So the Archaic artifacts available for studying the people of the Upper Potomac come mostly from surface collections. The evidence is not ideal, but it serves the purpose: the Archaic artifacts from the upper Potomac region resemble those from the Northeast, not those on the lower Potomac. It seems that from 5000 BC on, this region was most closely connected to a culture that extended along the Appalachians from southern West Virginia to central New York.



FIGURE 7: Brewerton Point, about 6,000 Years Old

Collections of stone tools from the upper Potomac contain many small dartpoints of the type known as Brewerton (Figure 7). Brewerton points date to the period from about 5000 to 3500 BC. These points were the most common type in the sites excavated for the building of the federal prison near Cumberland, and they are the most common type in a collection of points from mountaintop sites in southern West Virginia. Brewerton points were also found during test excavations at three small Archaic sites along Town Creek (Kavanagh and Ebright 1988). During the current study they have been found at several sites from Williamsport westward. These points have notches on their sides for attaching to a dart shaft, and they are usually made of black or gray chert.

Brewerton points are only one of several different point types made in the Late Archaic period. Populations continued to grow in the Late Archaic period, and Late Archaic sites are found widely distributed across the landscape: by rivers and marshes, on hilltops, along tiny streams in level areas barely big enough for two or

three people to camp. The people of the Late Archaic were masters of their environment (Mouer 1991). They knew how to hunt all the animals of the forest, where to find all the edible plants, and how to make edible food from many other plants that were unpleasant or even poisonous in their natural forms. They learned how to store surplus food for lean times in pits lined with grass or moss. They seem to have pushed toward the maximum population that was possible for hunters and gatherers in the eastern Woodlands. Populations did grow larger later on, but only after new ways of living had been discovered.

### *Broadspears and Migrations*

Across the whole period from 9000 to 2200 BC, the culture of the mountain people changed very gradually, and we have no evidence of large-scale population movement. The people who lived in the region in 2200 BC were, so far as we can tell, the direct descendants of the people who lived there in 9000 BC.

Around 2200 BC, however, there is a major change in the archeological record. Instead of the many small sites scattered across the whole environment, we find fewer, larger sites, most of them along rivers. Instead of the small spearpoints or dartpoints found earlier, we find large, wide, carefully made points known as broadspears (Figure 8). Depending on the details of the shape, the points are called Savannah River, Susquehanna, Lehigh/Koens Crispin, or Perkiomen. This new period, which lasted from about 2200 to 1350 BC, is called by archeologists the Terminal Archaic (McLearen 1991; Mouer 1991). In this period people began to carve large stone bowls out of steatite or soapstone. Soapstone bowls could be used to cook food over a fire, but they were very heavy and could be moved long distances only by canoe.



FIGURE 8: Savannah River Broadspear, about 4,500 Years Old

The different placement of camp sites in the Terminal Archaic indicates a different way of living. Terminal Archaic people spent much of their time in their large “base camps” along the rivers and less time in upland areas among the nut trees and deer herds. Many sites have been found along the Potomac that date to this period, including stratified deposits at the mouth of a stream not far from

Williamsport and just west of Hancock (Figure 9). West of Hancock a broad, nearly level, dry terrace extends along the river for more than two miles. Archeological sites were recorded there many years ago, when this land was still farmed. Now it is covered by mature trees, and archeologists have had to explore the sites there using shovel tests (round holes about 18 inches in diameter, dug with a shovel). By excavating these holes and sifting the dirt through a screen, archeologists are able to find artifacts in places where the ground is hidden under grass or leaves, and also to reach artifacts buried up to three feet below the surface. In the shovel tests west of Hancock, the archeologists found artifacts in two layers. Near the surface they found Indian pottery and flakes of black chert. The pottery shows that this material dates to the Woodland period, after 1350 BC (see below), and the black chert is the kind of stone that we would expect on sites of that age. Two to three feet below the surface, they found artifacts of a different type. There was no pottery at this depth, and most of the flaked stone was rhyolite. Rhyolite is a kind of metamorphosed lava found, in eastern North America, in only in a few places, one of which is the Blue Ridge range. Rhyolite quarries are known on Catoctin Mountain and South Mountain in Maryland, and northward across Pennsylvania. Rhyolite was used throughout the Archaic period and in some parts of the Woodland, but it was most sought after during the Terminal Archaic and the Middle Woodland. This far from the quarries, we would expect a deposit of rhyolite flakes to date to one of these two periods. We know that the rhyolite flakes from the Hancock sites do not date to the Middle Woodland, since they are below the depth of (earlier than) pottery. These large sites therefore probably date to Terminal Archaic times.

Besides rhyolite flakes, the main thing found in the Terminal Archaic layers around both Hancock and Williamsport was fire-cracked rock. Fire-cracked rock is just what it sounds like: rock — usually river cobbles — that has been broken by heat. Where there is a lot of it, we infer that people often built fires in stone-lined pits or on platforms made of cobbles. The leading theory on why they did so relates to the question of why so many Terminal Archaic sites are along rivers. They may have depended on the annual runs of fish in the rivers — herring and shad in the spring, and eels in the fall — which they caught in large numbers and smoked or dried to preserve some of the catch for leaner seasons. Shallow rivers throughout eastern North America are interrupted at intervals by the remains of stone fish weirs Indians built to trap running fish, and the first of these may have been built in Terminal Archaic times. There are 17 such weirs along the Monocacy River in Maryland (Guzy 2001). The fire-cracked rock may come from fires built to smoke fish, and so it may be a clue to how people along the Potomac lived 4,000 years ago.

Terminal Archaic people may also have depended on the plants they found along the river. Historic Indians harvested large quantities of marsh plants (“tuckahoe”) and dried their roots in the sun to neutralize the unpleasant taste; the dried roots could be stored in pits and then added to soups or stews. Historic Indians also harvested small-seeded annual plants, such as goosefoot and sumpweed, that grow in river floodplains. Stands of these plants can still be seen on large sandbars and other active parts of the Potomac floodplain. Another difference between Terminal Archaic and earlier sites is the presence of more woodworking tools, such as adzes and gouges, some of which may have been used in making dugout canoes.

Because Terminal Archaic people lived differently from their predecessors, archeologists wonder whether they were immigrants to the region from somewhere else. The first broadspears may have been made along the Savannah River in Georgia, around 2500 BC, and they seem to have





FIGURE 9: Bank Cut Unit near Williamsport

spread northward from there. Did they spread by the exchange of ideas, or because they were carried by invaders? Both theories have their followers among archeologists. Because Terminal Archaic people lived in such a dramatically different way, we suspect that the broadspear users were immigrants, and therefore that the mountains were home to new peoples in this era.

### *Pots and People*

Around 1350 BC the Indians of eastern North America began to make pottery. Archeologists use the first appearance of pottery to mark the beginning of the Woodland period, which lasted from 1350 BC until European contact in the late 1500s. In much of eastern North America, the use of pottery does not seem to mark a dramatic cultural change, and life went on in the Early Woodland period (1350 to 500 BC) much as it had before. This seems to be true in the Potomac Valley. Sites of the Early Woodland period are in the same kinds of places as those of the Terminal Archaic, often the same places, and some of the same styles of spearpoints were used in both periods. One important point about pottery is that, among Indians, it was almost always made and used by women, and therefore it offers us a new way to recognize and understand the activity of women, and to identify sites that were used mainly by women or by men. A site used by an all-male hunting or war party might have stone tools but no pottery, whereas a site used by women to collect and process roots or nuts might have pottery but no spearpoints or arrowheads. A site used by family groups, or by a whole band, should contain both. Near Oldtown in the C&O Canal Park, archeologists recently excavated a test unit that reached an Early Woodland level buried 4 feet below the surface. Radiocarbon dating showed that the occupation took place around 1200 to 1100 BC (Figure 10). The artifacts in this zone consisted of 83 pieces of pottery, no stone tools, and only four stone flakes (Figure 11). This seems to have been a women's work area. There was a fair amount of charcoal in the soil and 32 pieces of fire-cracked rock. Whatever the women were doing, fires were certainly involved.

An important site of the Early Woodland period was excavated in the late 1980s near Front Royal, Virginia, on the floodplain of the Shenandoah River. The 522 Bridge Site was radiocarbon-dated to about 1000 BC, and it gives us a glimpse of how people of the region lived at that time. The site contained storage pits, pieces of burnt daub (from house walls made of branches coated with clay), and the floors of nine oval houses. The pottery was a type called Accokeek found from the coastal plain westward to the Appalachians. The storage pits contained charred seeds of several species of wild plants that had been collected by the villagers: walnuts, grapes, violets, knotweed, purslane, wild mustard, and several other more obscure herbs. Several seeds of pokeweed were found; poke berries are not edible, but they can be used to make a dark purple dye. The 522 Bridge Site seems to represent a semi-permanent village in the floodplain. Smaller sites of the same period are found in the uplands nearby, and they seem to be foray camps, used while harvesting nuts and hunting deer and turkey (McLearn 1991).

After about 800 BC the long stretch of the river from the falls west to the mountains seems strangely empty of people. Sites dating to the period from about 800 BC to AD 100, the end of the Early Woodland period and the beginning of the Middle Woodland period, are not common in the Piedmont or Great Valley (Bedell et al. 2009; Fiedel et al. 2005). During a careful survey of the Monocacy Valley, very little material was found dating to the centuries just after 800 BC



FIGURE 10: Excavating at the 999 Levee Site



FIGURE 11: Sherds from the 999 Levee Site

(Kavanagh 1982). Many small sites dating to a slightly later period were discovered, but pottery was found only at a very few of them. The situation is the same in the Great Valley. It seems that those areas may have been used as hunting territories by groups whose main settlements were below the falls. All-male hunting parties would not have brought pots with them, so we do not find pottery at these sites. A few pieces of Middle Woodland pottery were found a few years ago at a site on the Potomac near Fort Frederick, and these sherds were types made in the coastal plain. These potsherds lend more support to the theory that the middle Potomac was mainly visited by groups of people who lived below the falls.

We are not sure why the population along the river shrank so drastically, but it may be related to a change in the weather. In trying to understand the changing temperatures of our own time and the possible threat of climate change, scientists have lately been giving a lot of attention to the climate of the past. They have discovered that around 2,800 years ago the climate in North America turned dramatically cooler and stayed that way for about 500 years. This period was similar to the “Little Ice Age” of AD 1300 to 1850. This cooler weather might have made it much more difficult for hunter-gatherers to live in the mountains. Not just along the Potomac but

across most of eastern North America, there is evidence of shrinking human populations or the abandonment of formerly inhabited areas during that time (Fiedel 2001).

The history of western Maryland seems to be similar to that of the middle Potomac, or at least archeologists have yet to find much evidence of settlement during the 800 BC to AD 100 period. Much more has been found from the later Middle Woodland, from AD 100 to 900. A large camp site on the site of the federal prison near Cumberland contained several small pits full of Middle Woodland pottery, and one of these pits was radiocarbon-dated to around AD 200. Working in the Great Valley not far from Williamsport, archeologists discovered rich Middle Woodland deposits buried directly underneath Late Woodland deposits dating to after AD 900. The Middle Woodland remains probably date to the AD 500 to 900 period (Figure 12). A large camp, or possibly a small village, near the Paw Paw tunnel has been radiocarbon-dated to AD 700 to 1000 (Bedell et al. 2010; Kavanagh 1984; Wall 1993).



FIGURE 12: Sherds from a Site Near Williamsport

These large Middle Woodland sites were probably semi-permanent villages like the Early Woodland 522 Bridge Site. The people probably raised native crops, such as sunflowers and sumpweed, harvested fish and eels during the annual runs, and hunted and gathered in the valleys and mountains all around. They made and used a great deal of pottery, including some very large pots — one from a site at the mouth of the Conococheague, excavated in the 1930s, measured 8 gallons (Stewart 1997). Although they probably competed for territory, there is no sign of large-scale warfare.

## *Mound Builders?*

The upper Ohio Valley was just a few days' walk from the upper Potomac. This fact of geography would lead to the building of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, and it may have also been very important in Early and Middle Woodland times. In the Ohio Valley in the years after 1000 BC, a striking Indian culture arose called the Adena. Adena people are commonly known as "mound builders" because they raised large mounds of earth or stone over some of their burials. In these tombs Adena people placed collections of remarkable artifacts made of stone, bone, and shell. Archeologists have discovered that the Adena people practiced a form of agriculture based on native North American plants, such as sunflowers, grown for both seeds and roots, and small-seeded annuals like sumpweed and goosefoot. Around 100 BC the Adena culture was replaced in the Ohio Valley by the even more spectacular Hopewell culture. Hopewell people built vast systems of earthworks aligned with the moon and the stars and buried their leaders with ceremonial objects even more elaborate than those used by the Adena, such as stone pipes carved in the shapes of animals and striking images cut from sheets of mica.

How much impact did the mound builder cultures of the Ohio have on their neighbors along the Potomac? A number of artifacts have been found along the Potomac that can be connected to the Ohio country. A broken gorget — a small, ornamental stone breastplate — found near Cresaptown many years ago looks like an Adena artifact. Several Hopewell-style stone dartpoints were found on a Middle Woodland camp site near Cumberland, on the site of the federal prison (Wall 1993). One of these points was made of Flint Ridge chert from Ohio. A dozen or so stone flakes of the same Flint Ridge chert were also found. Most intriguing were seven "bladelets" made of the same imported stone. These small, straight-edged tools are characteristic of the Hopewell culture. The pottery found at the site, radiocarbon-dated to around AD 200, also looks like Ohio Valley pottery. These finds tell us that some people from the Ohio Valley probably visited the upper Potomac. The occasional presence of Adena and Hopewell people along the upper Potomac may help explain why so little has been found in this area dating to the time of their power. If hunting parties from the Ohio Valley regularly visited the Potomac, they may have driven other people out of the region to keep its resources for themselves.

But did they build any mounds?

Indian mounds are known from the upper Potomac, and they are even more common in the Shenandoah Valley. Most mounds that survive in the Potomac region are made of stone and are rather small, no more than 10 feet across. The mounds that have been excavated in western Maryland all seem to date to the Late Woodland period; however, some of the Shenandoah mounds seem to date to Middle Woodland (that is, Hopewell) times, so it is possible that there is a connection. Neither group of mounds contained spectacular burials like those of the Hopewell and Adena heartlands, just a skeleton and a few everyday objects. These mounds seem so different from those of the Adena or Hopewell heartland that there is probably not a close relationship, but the idea of mound-building may certainly have spread from the Ohio Valley eastward.

## THE COMING OF MAIZE AND VILLAGE LIFE

### *The First Farmers*

The Indians of the early historic period were farmers, and their main crops were first domesticated in Mexico: maize (corn), beans, and squash. These plants and the knowledge of how to grow them must have come to the Potomac from the southwest. Were they brought in by migrating peoples, or did locals learn to use them? The evidence suggests that these farmers were immigrants from the Ohio Valley. We call the period from the introduction of maize in about AD 900 to the start of the fur trade with Europeans the Late Woodland period.

Sites dating to the time of Maryland's first farmers, around AD 900, are common along the upper Potomac. At least two different types of pottery are found. Page ware, dated to AD 1000 to 1200, is tempered with limestone. It resembles pottery used in the Ohio Valley from AD 800 onward, so its users may have been immigrants to the Potomac. Page ware is found from the Cumberland area down to the Piedmont. This pottery is found in large sites on the broad floodplains of the river, for example, at the Barton and Cresaptown sites southwest of Cumberland and at two sites on the Potomac in Frederick County, Noland's Ferry and Kanawha Springs (Slattery and Woodward 1992). These are large sites but they do not seem to have been villages in the usual sense. Instead of a tight cluster of houses surrounded by open space, what we find at these sites is a spread of artifacts and small pits across dozens of acres. These remains could result from people living in dispersed communities, each house surrounded by an acre or so of fields and gardens, but still very much part of a single community. Or, since the remains might have accumulated over 200 years, they might have been produced by people who lived in scattered households, one or two on each archeological site, moving around to different sites over the decades.

Other sites of this period yield pottery tempered with crushed dark rock — sometimes chert, sometimes shale, sometimes a mix of the two. This pottery closely resembles the Buck Garden type found in West Virginia, and it is also somewhat like the Clemson Island pottery of central Pennsylvania. Along the upper Potomac this pottery has so far been found at smaller sites, not large villages. At the Frog Run Site near Spring Gap, archeologists excavated a trash deposit or midden dating to the Late Woodland period (Figure 13). The midden was more than a foot thick and stratified, that is, it was built up in layers over time, so that the lower part should be older than the upper part. The pottery in the lower layers is mainly limestone tempered, and that in the upper layers is tempered with dark rock (Figure 14). Radiocarbon dates for the upper and lower parts of the midden came out the same, AD 1030 to 1160, so the makers of the two pottery types lived on the site within a century of each other. At other sites, such as Paw Paw and Williamsport, pottery tempered with crushed dark rock dates to the late Middle Woodland. It seems that people making the two types of pottery shared the valley in the AD 900 to 1200 period.



FIGURE 13: Excavating the Midden at the Frog Run Site





FIGURE 14: Artifacts from the Frog Run Site

### *The Villagers*

Around AD 1300 a new people entered the Potomac Valley. We call them the Luray culture, after village sites in the Shenandoah Valley. Other villages have been found in the Monocacy Valley, along the Potomac in the Piedmont, and the Great Valley of Maryland. But they seem to have come from the west, and their sites are most common in the upper Potomac Valley. Large villages of the Luray culture have been found at the Barton Site, at two sites near Oldtown, and several sites along the South Branch in West Virginia. Their most characteristic artifact is a type of pottery called Keyser ware, which is tempered with crushed shell. The material culture of the Luray complex was so similar to that of the Monongahela people of western Pennsylvania that they have sometimes been seen as an offshoot of that culture.

### *The Moore Village*

Luray people lived in round or oval villages surrounded by wooden palisades. The Moore Village Site at Oldtown, radiocarbon-dated to around AD 1450, measured about 350x260 feet (Pousson 1983). It is on a high terrace set well back from the river. The site was discovered by amateur collectors decades ago, but it was first investigated by professional archeologists in 1976 (Handsman 1977). The artifacts from the 1976 testing have never been cataloged, but they include thousands of potsherds and dozens of triangular arrowpoints (Figure 15). Another group



FIGURE 15: Arrow Points from Oldtown

of archeologists returned to the site in 1982 to learn more. During the 1982 testing 148 triangular arrowpoints were found. All but three were chert of varying colors. At least 24 drills were found, along with several drill tips. Formal scrapers were also common, including large, well-made endscrapers, small “thumbnail” scrapers, and rather indifferently made sidescrapers, most of which were large flakes that were shaped only enough to prepare a functional edge. Even more crudely made flake tools were found, along with anvil stones that were possibly used for crushing nuts.

The more than 9,000 sherds of pottery recovered from the site consist almost entirely of shell-tempered, cordmarked Keyser ware. The identifiable vessels ranged from 7 to 17 inches in diameter. The only evidence of decoration was found on rims. This included incised lines, punctations (small punched holes), and notches made by pressing the cord-wrapped paddle at angles across the rim. One lug handle was found.

Bone tools were recovered from the site, including fragments of turtle carapace cups, antler flakers, bone awls, and antler projectile points. The faunal remains were quite diverse and included several species of fish, bullfrog, turtle, duck, goose, passenger pigeon, squirrel, raccoon, black bear, and elk. White-tailed deer accounted for most of the identifiable mammal bones and most of the meat represented by the collection. The charred plant remains include one corn kernel and one bit of corn cob, four plum pits, and numerous hickory shell fragments.

### *Shawnee Oldfields*

The Shawnee Oldfields Site is located east of Oldtown on a wide, level terrace near an ancient ford over the Potomac. It was identified by amateur collectors in the 1950s, and some of these collectors showed their finds to archeologist Henry Wright. The artifacts Wright saw included both Indian-made pottery and stone tools and European pottery and glass beads. Wright identified the site as the location of a Shawnee town of the early 1700s, King Opessa’s Town (see below). But Wright did not have time to carry out more than a cursory examination of the site himself.

The first professional investigation of the site was carried out in 2009. The archeologists began by reviewing all the available aerial photographs of the site. Some of them seem to show not one but two villages, visible as dark rings in Figure 16. The site is now a hayfield, and no sign of the archeological site was visible through the dense grass. The testing of the site was therefore planned according to the aerial photograph and Henry Wright’s old field notes. Lines of shovel tests were laid out parallel to the river bank, crossing both of the dark circles shown in the aerial photo. These shovel tests showed that the layer containing most of the artifacts is buried a foot or more below the surface, showing how much sediment has built up on the site since it was abandoned. Almost every shovel test produced some artifacts, including pottery dating to the Late Woodland period. Not a single artifact dating to the 1700s was found, so we do not think this is the site of the Shawnee town from which the site takes its name.

The archeological testing showed that the two dark rings in the aerial photo are two separate Indian villages, both built by Luray people. Radiocarbon dates on the villages were the same, corresponding to a date between AD 1490 and 1550. It is tempting to think that one Luray tribe



FIGURE 16: 1961 Aerial Photo of Shawnee Oldfields, Showing the Dark Rings that Mark the Location of Indian Villages SOURCE: Maryland Geological Survey

lived along this stretch of the river for a century, first at the Moore Village, then at one of the two villages at Shawnee Oldfields, and then at the other. During the test excavations a rich midden deposit was found in the East Village. From this the archeologists recovered numerous artifacts, including arrowheads, potsherds, and a bone bead (Figure 17). In the west village one test unit was dug into an old pit feature, possibly dug for storage, measuring 3.5 feet across and about a foot deep. The feature contained more than 40 small pieces of daub, three triangular projectile points, a large piece of elk antler, 234 pieces of chert debitage, 12 small pieces of fire-cracked rock, and 60 pieces of animal bone (Figure 18). Sixteen pieces of bone can be identified as white-tailed deer, seven pieces as turtle, and the rest are unidentified. A 2-liter soil sample from the feature was analyzed by paleobotanist Justine McKnight, and she identified hickory and oak charcoal, hickory nut shell, three fragments of maize, and a sumac seed.



FIGURE 17: Stone, Bone, and Ceramic Artifacts from Shawnee Oldfields

Using a high-tech device called a high-resolution magnetometer, which measures minute variations in the earth's magnetic field, geophysicist Dr. Timothy Horsley recently made a map of the site (Figure 19). The map clearly shows multiple palisades around the western village as well as traces of a palisade around the eastern village and a suggestion of another palisade around a smaller area near the center of the site. The map shows hints of possible houses within the western village. The map also shows that the site as a whole extends well beyond the limits of the two villages. Many of the widely scattered features across the site are probably associated with an earlier occupation. Pottery tempered with various types of crushed rock was found



FIGURE 18: Artifacts and Animal Bones from Feature 1 at Shawnee Oldfields

scattered across the site. This pottery is probably related to that found at the Frog Run Site and was radiocarbon-dated to around AD 1150. In one part of the site, the rock-tempered pottery was found in a buried layer beneath the layers containing shell-tempered pottery, confirming that it is older.

The rich archeological record of the Luray culture tells us much about how these people lived, even though we do not know what language they spoke or what tribe they belonged to. They lived in villages surrounded by palisades, showing that they inhabited a violent world and feared a sudden attack by their enemies. They placed those villages on level lands near the river, where they had access to rich farmland. They raised corn and other crops. They hunted a wide variety of animals, from salamanders to turkeys, but most of their meat was deer. They fished in the river. They cooked in clay pots. They were attached to their traditions, making their pots and arrowheads in the same way as their ancestors had for generations. They made jewelry and ornaments from animal bones, and probably also from feathers and skins. From old excavations at the Keyser Site, we know that they buried their dead with care. And then, rather mysteriously, they disappeared.

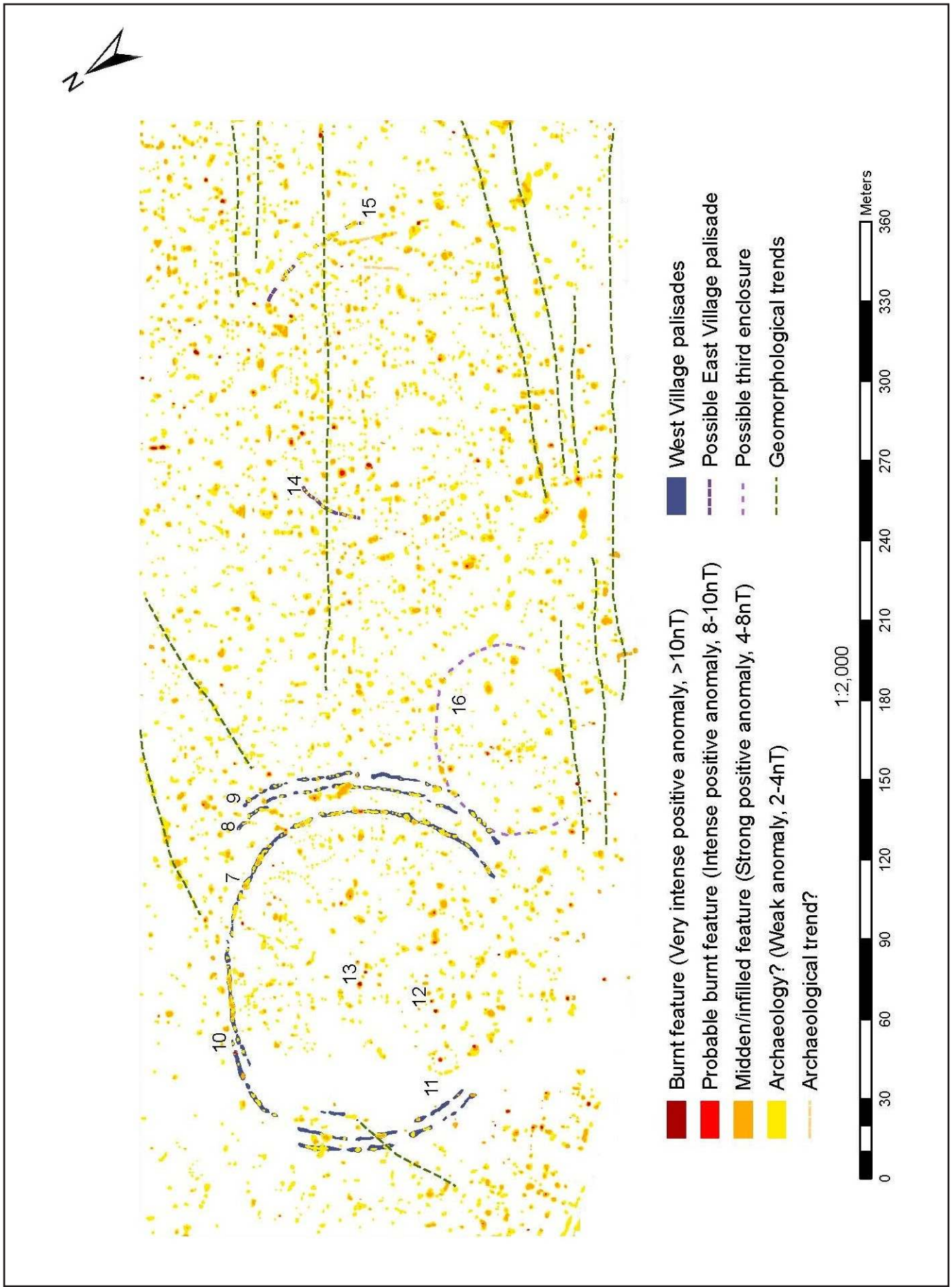


FIGURE 19: Magnetometer Map of Shawnee Oldfields

## REFUGEES COME TO AN EMPTY VALLEY

### *The Luray People Vanish*

The Luray culture, which had been so successful throughout the lands drained by the upper Potomac, disappeared some time in the 1500s. European artifacts have been found at only one Luray site, the Keyser Farm Site in the Shenandoah Valley. Since the fur trade was well under way in North America by 1575, spreading European goods like glass beads and steel knives across the continent, most of the Luray villages must have been abandoned by that time. John Smith reached the falls of the Potomac in 1608, and he did not hear of any villages upstream from that point. We do not know what happened to the Luray people. No European explorer seems to have met them. Perhaps they fell victim to an early wave of European diseases (Dobyns 1983), although there is no unambiguous evidence of such diseases in this region before 1600. More likely they were driven out by Iroquois warriors from the north. These warriors could have been either Senecas from the Five Nations league or Susquehannocks. In early historic times we find both the Five Nations and the Susquehannocks claiming ownership of the upper Potomac, and both were warrior peoples who raided widely and sought to control territories where they could get furs for the thriving trade with Europeans. But wherever the Luray people went, the Potomac valley did not remain empty for long.

### *The Susquehannocks*

In 1889 a great flood raged along the South Branch of the Potomac, caused by the same rains that broke the South Fork Dam and caused the famous flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The flood washed the soil off wide areas along the river, exposing archeological artifacts that had long been buried. Archeologist Warren K. Moorehead of the Smithsonian Institution explored the area, picking up artifacts and buying others from local collectors. At the Herriot Farm and Pancake Island sites, the artifacts included both native pots and European trade goods (Wall and Lapham 2003). Archeologists were startled to discover that these artifacts were identical to those found at sites of the Susquehannock Indians along the river to which they gave their name. The Susquehannocks made very distinctive pottery unlike anything else in the region, so there does not seem to be any doubt that Susquehannocks had somehow made their way into the upper Potomac.

The Susquehannock Indians were a powerful tribe that lived originally along the upper reaches of the Susquehanna River (Figure 20). They spoke an Iroquoian language but became the enemies of the Iroquois of the Longhouse League or Five Nations (Jennings 1978). In late prehistoric times they worked their way south onto the lower Susquehanna, and in the 1500s their main villages were in the vicinity of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (Kent 1984). John Smith met them around the northern end of the Chesapeake Bay.

In the Susquehannock homeland the sequence of pottery styles made by successive generations of women, as they moved from one village to the next over the years from 1550 to 1630, has been very precisely dated. The shell-tempered, incised pots found on the South Branch sites closely resemble Schultz phase Susquehannock pottery from Pennsylvania; some of the design





FIGURE 20: Portrait of Susquehannock Indian from John Smith's Map of Virginia SOURCE: Smith 1608

elements seem to be derived from earlier styles of several areas: Keyser (upper Potomac), Shenks Ferry (central Pennsylvania) and Quiggle (northwestern Pennsylvania). If these had been found in central Pennsylvania, they would have been dated to before 1590. On the other hand, the glass trade beads recovered from the South Branch sites suggest a date of about AD 1610. These Susquehannock villages seem to have been abandoned around 1620. None of our European sources clearly identifies the people of this area, but they do tell us a few things about the Indians of the interior that can help us put the puzzle together.

#### *Just Beyond the Reach of History*

We get a glimpse of events along the upper Potomac from the accounts of English fur trader Henry Fleet. In June 1632 Fleet sailed up the Potomac to the foot of the falls, near present-day Georgetown. He attempted to establish direct trade in furs with Indian groups who lived much farther upriver, whom he called the Massawomeckes, thereby cutting out the Indians of the coastal plain who had been serving as middlemen (Scharf 1879). Fleet sent his brother and two Indian guides upriver to make contact with the chiefs of the Massawomeckes.

This powerful tribe had four villages, Tonhoga, Mosticum, Shaunetowa, and Usserahak, and Fleet had been told that they had a population of over 30,000 and a rich supply of beaver pelts. It took Fleet's brother 20 days to reach the Massawomeckes, trade, and return. He is said to have taken seven days for the upriver voyage and five days to come back (presumably by canoe). Experienced paddlers can do about 20 miles per day, maximum. So, the four Massawomecke nations could not have been more than about 100 to 140 miles northwest or west of Little Falls. Plotting this distance on a map puts them somewhere in west-central Pennsylvania, western Maryland, or West Virginia.

This location gives some reason to equate the Massawomecks with the archeologically well-known Monongahela culture of southwestern Pennsylvania (Johnson 2001; Lapham and Johnson 2002). This culture was closely related to the Luray culture of the Potomac Valley, but numerous finds of European goods at Monongahela sites show that it lasted longer, until about 1635. The

disappearance of Massawomeckes from colonial archives after 1635 coincides nicely with the demise of the Monongahela culture around the same time.

Another possibility to consider is that Fleet's four nations were culturally and linguistically affiliated with the Susquehannocks. It is very clear that the Massawomecks were not *politically* allied with the Susquehannocks; the early historical accounts always describe them as mortal enemies of each other. But it should be recalled that other Iroquoian-speaking tribes that were closely related culturally were political adversaries, for example, the Huron and the Five Nations. Fleet's village names — Tonhoga, Mosticum, Shaunetowa, and Usserahak — resemble names of the five "nations" of the Susquehannocks, mentioned in a treaty they signed with the governor of Maryland in 1661:

Ohongeoguena  
Unquehiatt  
Kaiquariegahaga  
Usquqhaga  
Sconondihago

Another tribal name that appears in our sources is the Minquas. In general, Minqua (which comes from an Algonquian word for "snakes") seems to be another name for Susquehannock. Dutch and Swedish sources divide the tribe into the Black Minquas and the White Minquas, and Augustine Hermann included a note on his 1670 map of Maryland and Virginia (Figure 21) describing the destruction of the Black Minquas:

And as Indians report from the other side [of the mountains] Westwards doe the Rivers take their Originall issuing out into the West Sea especially first discovered a very great River called the Black Mincquaas River out of which above the Sassquahana forts meetes a branch some leagues distance opposite to one another branch out of the Sassquahana River where formerly those Black Mincquaas came over and as far as Delaware to trade but the Sassquahana and Sinnicus Indians went over and destroyed that very great Nation and whether that same River out into the Bay of Mexico or the West Sea is not known [Hermann 1670].

The Black Mincquaas River certainly sounds like the Ohio, or one of its major tributaries. The Black Mincquaas settled around it could therefore be the Monongahela culture, and therefore also the Massawomecks.

The confusion in our sources reflects a confused time in Indian history. Many tribes disappeared in the seventeenth century, victims of disease, warfare, or a combination of both. Some of the surviving tribes expanded their power, seeking to control the uninhabited lands and the rich store of furs they contained. Large-scale wars were fought over the hunting territories in the Ohio Valley. These wars involved the Five Nations Iroquois of modern New York, the Shawnee and Miami of modern Ohio, the Cherokee and Catawba from the Carolinas, and many other tribes. Battles were fought between bands of warriors who had traveled hundreds of miles from their homes. It is therefore hardly surprising that English and Dutch writers on the coast were uncertain about the names and locations of people in the interior, or that they give us garbled accounts of events in places they had never seen. The archeology gives us some secure anchors



FIGURE 21: Section of the Augustine Hermann Map of Virginia and Maryland, 1670, Showing the Potomac River

for all this speculation: the disappearance of the Keyser people from the Potomac Valley by around 1550, the appearance of people related to the Susquehannocks around 1590 and their disappearance around 1620, and then the disappearance of the Monongahela culture from southwestern Pennsylvania around 1635.

After about 1635 the upper Potomac seems to have been largely uninhabited until after 1700. Two groups of refugee Indians settled lower down on the river for a time. In 1697 some of the Piscataways or Conoy from eastern Maryland settled on Heater's Island, near Harper's Ferry. They remained there until around 1712, when some moved to Conestoga in Pennsylvania and the rest scattered. In about 1713 the Tuscaroras were driven out of the Carolinas after a bitter war with South Carolina settlers and their Cherokee and Catawba allies. Some of them settled near Tuscarora Creek, and stayed until about 1720. But nothing is known of any Indians living above the mouth of the Shenandoah from the departure of the Susquehannocks until the arrival of the Shawnee.

## THE SHAWNEE

### *The Shawnee Arrive in the East*

In August 1692 it was reported to Maryland's governing council that a band of "strange Indians" had arrived at the head of the Chesapeake Bay. The Indians were accompanied by a mysterious Frenchman (Archives of Maryland Online [AM] 8:345,517). The Indians were said to number 72 men and 100 women and children. The council immediately launched an investigation. The Frenchman was arrested — "taken up for a spie," the record says — and he, the chief of the "strange Indians," and some friendly Susquehannock Indians were brought to Annapolis for questioning.

Wild rumors at first identified the strange Indians as Penobscots and the Frenchman as "Casteene," that is, as Jean-Vincent d'Abbadie de St. Castin, a young French aristocrat who had settled with the Penobscots and married several daughters of the Penobscot chief, Madocawondo. St. Castin and the Penobscots had recently staged a raid on Schenectady in New York, so their possible presence in Maryland caused great alarm (AM 8:459). When questioned, however, the Frenchman proved to be a renegade trader named "Martin Shortive." The Susquehannocks explained that the Indian strangers were not Penobscots but "Stabbernowles" who had come from the south, not the northeast. So the initial alarm dissipated.

We can identify the Frenchman "Shortive" as Martin Chartier, and the "Stabbernowles" as Shawnee. At that time the Shawnee seem to have pronounced their name as "Shawanwa" or something similar, and this name was rendered into English and French with a bewildering variety of spellings (although it must be said that "Stabbernowles" is an odd rendering even by the standards of the seventeenth century).

Under interrogation Chartier offered a fascinating account of his life over the past decade. He had, he said, worked for three years as a house carpenter's assistant in Canada. He had been jailed in Canada for pursuing the beaver trade without the governor's permission, but had escaped into the woods. Since 1684 he had been living as an Indian trader, mainly at Fort St. Louis at Starved Rock in what is now Illinois. Fort St. Louis had been established by René-Robert Cavelier, the Sieur de La Salle, in 1682. Here, along the Illinois River near modern La Salle, he gathered around the fort seven villages of Indians. These were a diverse group of tribes allied to the French, including Illinois, Miamis, and Shawnee. La Salle hoped to use the fort and his Indian allies to solidify French control over the lands between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes. Many Indians came to Fort St. Louis seeking protection from the Iroquois, who had been waging a long, bloody war against the Shawnee and the Miamis for control of the same region.

Chartier was telling the truth when he said that he had been with La Salle in Illinois; however, he did not mention that he had been part of a mutiny staged against La Salle's right-hand man, Tonti, in 1680, or that he had been part of a plot aimed at killing La Salle later that same year (Hanna 1911:132). These facts can be found in the French records, and they help to explain how Chartier ended up in Maryland. Having thrown in his lot with La Salle's enemies, he was in a dangerous position when La Salle defeated the mutinies. Chartier's "arrest" for trading seems to be fictitious. Perhaps he dreamed it up to explain why he was no longer welcome in Quebec.

Chartier was clearly very familiar with Fort St. Louis and the nearby Indians, so his claim that he had been there from 1684 to 1688 may be true. Certainly he was not in Quebec or Montreal, where he would have left some trace in the records. La Salle himself was not in Illinois after 1684, so perhaps Chartier was able to make himself useful enough to the French authorities in those years to avoid arrest for his actions against La Salle.

According to Chartier, a band of 172 Shawnee left Fort St. Louis in 1688. Chartier did not go along on this first journey, but later decided to follow them. He took a canoe and traveled 300 leagues, a 40-day trip. He was welcomed by the Shawnee when he caught up with them. A 300-league journey down the Illinois to the Mississippi and then up the Ohio would have taken Chartier to somewhere around present-day Cincinnati, Ohio (Figure 22). But given the imprecision of such an estimate, Chartier and the Shawnee could have been almost anywhere along the Ohio. In 1692 this same band moved on to Maryland. Chartier did not explain why they made this move, and the Maryland records give no clue about their motives. When they reached Maryland, they settled on Bohemia Manor, the property of Casparus Herrman. Herrman was the son of the famous trader, diplomat, and map-maker Augustine Herrman. The younger Herrman was primarily a planter, but he probably kept up his father's contacts with the nearby Susquehannock Indians and was surely willing to do a little trading with them. One assumes that the Shawnee knew how to make themselves welcome among white men and brought along furs to trade.

The result of these initial contacts was that the Shawnee were welcomed by both the Maryland authorities and the Susquehannock Indians. The Susquehannocks had once been a powerful tribe, ruling most of the lands drained by the Susquehanna River; however, defeated in wars by the Iroquois League and the colony of Virginia, they had accepted tributary status to the Iroquois and settled at Conestoga along the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. By 1697 many of the Shawnee had joined them, moving from Maryland to a village called Pequea just a few miles from Conestoga. Another band of Shawnee settled along the Delaware River at Minisink, near a village of Delaware Indians. This village, confusingly for us, was also called Pequea.

One group that was not happy with the arrival of the Shawnee in Maryland and Pennsylvania was the Five Nations of the Iroquois League. Both the Susquehannocks and the Delawares were tributary peoples of the Five Nations, but those tribes seem not to have consulted the Five Nations before welcoming the Shawnee. Fighting in the Ohio Valley between the Iroquois and the Shawnee died down after 1690, but as far as the chiefs of the Five Nations were concerned, the war was still going on. Peter (or Pierre) Bizaillon, a French fur trader, reported to the New York authorities that "he had heard those of ye Five Nations who intended shortly down this way, had a design of carrying off the Shawanah Indians, both those settled near Conestoga and those near Lechay, they being colonies of a nation that were their enemies" (Hanna 1911:136). The New York provincial authorities and even the British army got involved. The alliance with the Five Nations was crucial to the defense of British North America, and war between the Five Nations and Indians under the protection of Maryland and Pennsylvania would have been disastrous for British interests. The Province of New York and the Five Nations therefore sent a joint mission to visit the Shawnee settlement on the Delaware.

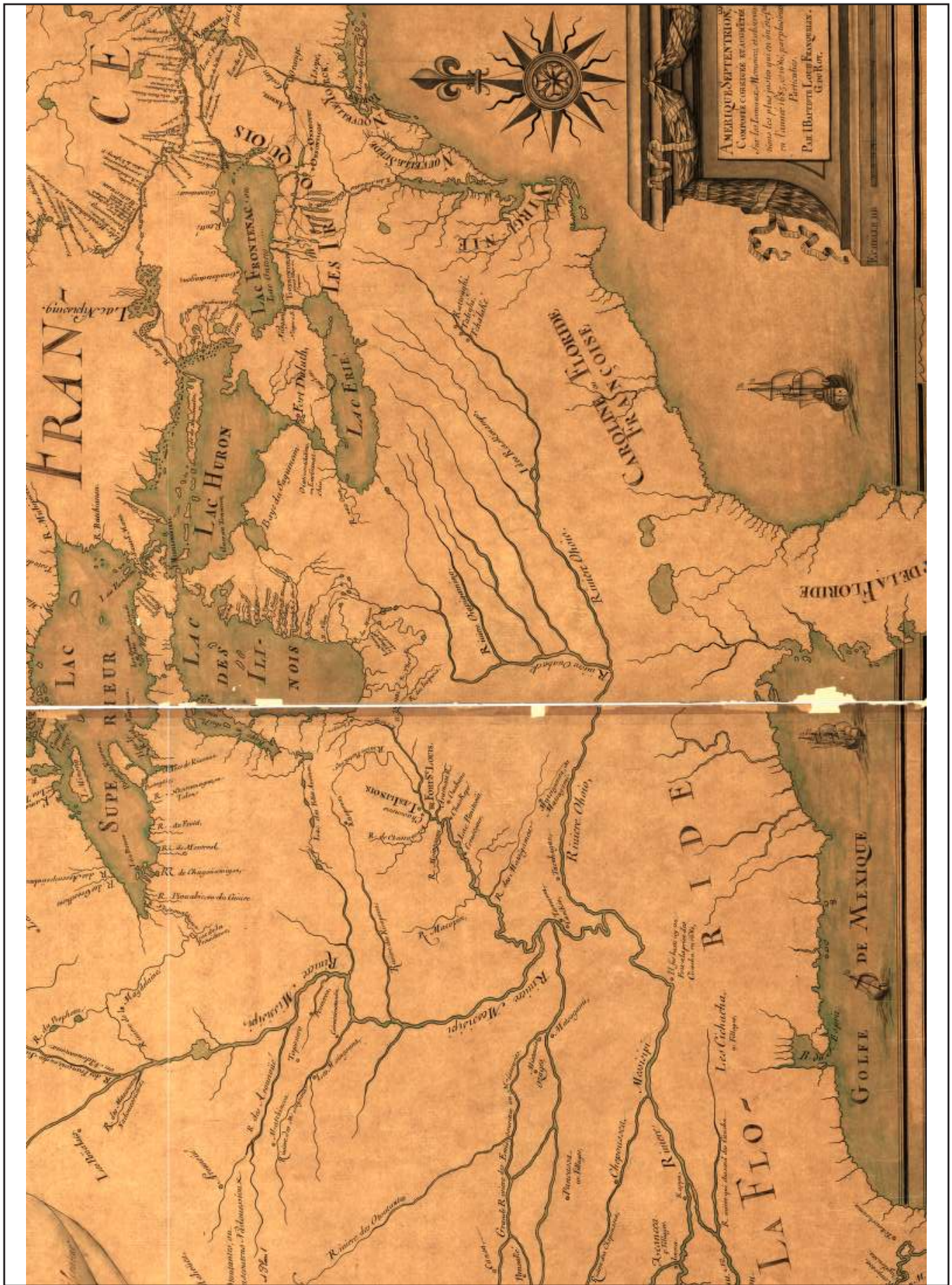


FIGURE 22: Franquelin Map of North America, 1686, Showing the River Route from Fort St. Louis to the East SOURCE: Franquelin 1686

From the records of this embassy, and French records of events in the Illinois country, we can piece together how this band of Shawnee came to be living in Maryland and Pennsylvania. It seems that in about 1689 a party of Indians from Minisink journeyed to Fort St. Louis and, under the noses of the French, offered a home in the east to any Indians who were not happy with their situation (Hanna 1911:138; Jennings 1984:197). Minisink was a community of Delaware and Mahican Indians. The leader of this expedition was named Matasit, who is described in various sources as both a sachem (chief) of the Delawares and a Seneca (Hanna 1911:138). It is possible that he was both, since the Minisink village was under the authority of the Five Nations and chiefs from the Five Nations sometimes assumed leadership roles among their allied tribes. If Matasit was a Seneca, Matasit cannot have been his given name, since the Iroquois languages do not have the “m” sound. Whoever he was, Matasit does not seem to have been taking orders from the Iroquois leadership. As we have seen, the chiefs of the Five Nations were alarmed to discover Shawnee bands arriving in territory they thought was under their control. Matasit must have been a renegade, acting on his own agenda. Perhaps he sought to strengthen the Minisink community by an addition of warriors, either to better defend their lands against white encroachment or to achieve a greater degree of independence from the Five Nations. Or perhaps his presence among the Delawares was a sort of exile, and he sought by his maneuvers to embarrass his enemies back in Seneca territory. Whatever his motives, his mission to Illinois was the immediate cause of the Shawnee’s arrival in the east.

Matasit could not claim to be the sole reason for the Shawnee’s migration, however, for the whole Shawnee tribe had been on the move all across eastern North America for many years. From careful study of their language and traditions, historians believe that before AD 1600 the Shawnee lived somewhere southeast of Lake Michigan, most likely in western Ohio. But by the time they enter written history, they had scattered far and wide. Some had migrated southeast, giving their name to the Savannah River in Georgia and the Suwannee River in Florida. One band joined the Creek Confederacy in Alabama. Other groups seem to have settled on the lower Ohio, on the Cumberland River in what is now Tennessee, and, of course, at Fort St. Louis on the Illinois. This was not some frightened dispersal of small refugee bands. Wherever they went, the Shawnee kept their own identity and language, maintained the division of the tribe into five clans, and stayed in touch with the other branches of their people. We do not know why the Shawnee dispersed in this way. It has been surmised that they were driven from their homes by the Iroquois. Fighting between the two peoples was documented by the French and mentioned in later Indian councils. But the Iroquois never claimed to have driven anyone from Ohio, and they were certainly not averse to boasting about their victories, so recent historians of the Iroquois League have dismissed this theory (Jennings 1984:200).

An alternative theory would focus on the arrival of European disease. Archeological evidence points to a great disruption in the native cultures of southern Ohio between 1600 and 1625, timing that fits this explanation well (Drooker 1997; Henderson 1992). A devastating epidemic could have made their old homeland seem less desirable to the Shawnee. For whatever reason the Shawnee became a dispersed and wandering people, and they continued to move frequently until they eventually settled down in Oklahoma, many decades and many wars later. As one of the Shawnee chiefs at Starved Rock said to Matasit, according to Matasit’s account, “We have been everywhere, and could find no good land. Where is your land?” (Hanna 1911:138).



### *The Shawnee at Pequea*

The result of the negotiations arranged by the New Yorkers was that the Shawnee accepted tributary status to the Five Nations, and the Five Nations accepted the presence of Shawnee bands in their territory. By 1697 the Shawnee were peacefully established at Pequea on the Susquehannock River, and for the next 30 years they appear regularly in the Pennsylvania and Maryland records. From their base they traveled extensively through the surrounding region. There are numerous Shawnee place names along the Susquehanna River, especially the West Branch. Place names in central Maryland, north and northwest of modern Baltimore, suggest that in the early 1700s the Shawnee regularly hunted in that direction. A 1720 land grant along the upper Patapsco was called the Shewan Hunting Ground. Several grants of the 1720s and 1730s refer to a tributary of Gunpowder Falls as the “Shawan Cabbin Branch,” and others to a large clearing called the “Shawan Glade” (Marye 1935b:133-135). Shawnee are also recorded along the Potomac; for example, two young Shawnee men were witnesses to the murder of an Iroquois hunter killed by Indian Trader Edmund Cartledge at the mouth of the Monocacy River in 1721.

When the Shawnee leaders were summoned to a meeting with Maryland authorities in 1697, their chief was still the “aged” Meauroway, who had led them from Fort St. Louis. He was accompanied by what the record calls “his coadjutant, Penascoh,” which most authorities think is a rendering of Opessa (AM 19:574). The Shawnee language did not have a simple “s” sound, and Opessa’s Shawnee name was probably more like Opeththa. By 1700 Opessa had apparently become their sole chief. Opessa seems to have had a close relationship with the French trader Martin Chartier. Chartier married a Shawnee woman and their son, Peter Chartier, later became a chief of one Shawnee band. Since a chief’s power among the Shawnee was partly hereditary, we can assume that Peter Chartier’s mother was a woman of high status, and it has often been speculated that she was a sister or daughter of Opessa.

In 1701 Opessa was designated “King of the Shawnees” in the records of an important council held in Philadelphia (Memoirs of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania [MPC] 2:14-17). At that conference the Susquehannocks, Shawnee, and Piscataways settled around Conestoga agreed that they would not allow any strangers to settle along the upper Potomac without the permission of the Pennsylvanians and the Five Nations. The Shawnee were therefore associating themselves with the Susquehannocks in the claim the Susquehannocks had long made to ownership of the upper Potomac valley.

In June 1707 Opessa received the Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania for a council at Pequea. Opessa said that he and his people were “happy to live in a country at peace, and not as in those parts of the country where we formerly lived, for then, upon our return from hunting, we found our town surprised, and our women and children taken prisoners by our enemies.” As if to underscore the king’s point, during the governor’s visit several men came in from the Shawnee settlement near Carolina, saying that their town had been besieged by the Catawbias and probably taken (MPC 2:388-389)

In October 1714 a delegation of Susquehannock chiefs from Conestoga reported, since “they had always hitherto made it their practice to inform this Govmt. of all things of moment that past amongst them,” that

Opessah, the late king of ye said Shawanoise, having absented himself from his people for about three years, and upon divers messages sent to him still refused to return to them, they have at leangth thought it necessary to appoint another in his stead, and presented the person chosen, by name Cakundawanna, to the board, as the new elected King of the Shawanois, Desiring the approbation of this Govmt. of this their proceeding [MPC II:574].

This statement implies that Opessa left Pequea in 1711. The chiefs offered no explanation of why Opessa “absented himself from his people.” However, in July 1720 the chief of the Shawnee still living at Pequea told James Logan, the Secretary of Pennsylvania, “That when their King who was then living, Opessah, took the Government upon him, but the People differed with him; he left them, they had then no Chief...” (MPC 3:92).

No record from the 1710s says where he went, but in 1722 Philemon Lloyd, the Secretary of Maryland’s governor, made reference to a “large town” of the Shawnee on the upper Potomac that he called “Opessa’s town” (Marye 1935a:7). The testimony of the Shawnee chief in 1720 seems to imply that Opessa was already dead by that time (“their King who was then living”), but the garbled syntax of this sentence suggests problems with either the translation or the transcription (or both), so the inference is hardly certain. At any rate, sometime between 1711 and 1722, Opessa moved to the upper Potomac. Since the town bore his name throughout the 1720s, he probably either founded the settlement, moved it to a new location (the possibility that there were two separate Shawnee towns on the upper Potomac is discussed below), or presided over a major transformation of the community.

Why did Opessa leave? The phrase “the people differed with him” could cover a multitude of issues, since the Shawnee at Pequea faced an array of challenges: relations with the whites, relations with the Five Nations, relations with their neighbors (Susquehannocks, Piscataways, Delawares), not to mention finding food to eat and furs to trade. Charles Hanna suggested that part of the reason might have been a dispute that enters into our records through the report of Pennsylvania Governor Gookin’s visit to Conestoga in 1711. According to the Seneca chief who was speaking for the Indians, Maryland trader John Hans Steelman was angry because Francis de La Tore (or LeTort, as this family’s name is more often spelled), his apprentice, had run away and taken with him valuable furs. Steelman went to Opessa at Pequea and offered a reward for the return of La Tore and his companions, dead or alive:

therefore he desired him forthwith to send some of his people to bring them back or kill them, and take goods for their trouble. At which motion, Opessa, being surprised, told him that he ought by no means to discourse after that manner before young people who were going to the woods and might by accident meet these people; and therefore ordered him to desist, utterly denying his request [Hanna 1911:165].

It seems that La Tore was killed by young Shawnee warriors, so the Seneca orator’s story might not have been entirely accurate. But if it was, might Opessa have felt angered or humiliated by the young men’s defiance, and announced that if he could command no respect, he would not take responsibility for the welfare of his people?

### *King Opessa's Town*

Our only certain evidence of the existence of King Opessa's Town dates to the 1720s. Most historians date its founding to not long after 1711, when Opessa left Pequea on the Susquehanna River. Some historians have thought that the Shawnee town on the upper Potomac had actually been founded several years earlier, in 1697 (Marye 1935b:127-128). The source for this theory is a small group of ambiguous passages in the records of the Maryland Council. The first comes from February 1697, when James Stoddert reported that 16 Indians "that live, as I understood them, near the mountains," came to his plantation on the Anacostia and traded furs (AM 19:522). Since communication between Stoddert and his visitors was mostly by signs, we can wonder how fully they understood one another; however, there are other notices of so-called "mountaine Indians," including a mention of "Strange Indians that are at the head of Potomocke neare the mountains" and a speculation that they were related to the "Indians which live at the head of the Bay" (AM 19:521, 574). In May 1698 the council summoned the kings of the Susquehannock, Delaware, and Shawnee Indians to set the matter straight. The preamble to this order states,

This Committee are informed that the strange Indians that are at the head of Potomocke neare the mountains do belong to and are part of the nation of Indians at the head of the Bay of the Susquehannahs who are in peace and Amity with us.

Therefore we propose that caution may be given to that King either to call in them Indians or to be accomptable and answerable for them in case of any Injurys [AM 19:574].

At the meeting the Indians did not confirm that the mountain settlement was of their own people. The king of the Susquehannocks flatly denied that they were of his tribe. The Shawnee in attendance were Meauroway, their aging leader, and "his coadjutant, Penascoh" (perhaps Opessa). As William Marye noted, the Shawnee leaders were not asked if the mountain Indians were of their people, and they volunteered no information. Marye takes their silence as an admission of sorts that the mountain Indians were Shawnee; after all, the Conestoga Susquehannocks claimed ownership of the upper Potomac Valley, and it seems very peculiar that they really did not know more about Indians settling within their lands. They were probably playing some kind of diplomatic game.

Marye's evidence is by no means conclusive. One can imagine many reasons why the Susquehannock and Shawnee chiefs might not have wanted to discuss the mountain Indians with the Maryland authorities. Perhaps they were carrying out negotiations of their own, or perhaps they were trying to keep knowledge of this settlement from the Five Nations. The mountain Indians may have been Shawnee but they could equally well have been Miamis. The Miamis (alias the Twightwees or the Naked Indians) appear occasionally in reports from Maryland's frontiers, and the Susquehannocks stated at the same meeting that one of their great men had recently been taken captive by them (see also AM 23:431). Perhaps this Susquehannock chief had gone to the mountains to find out for himself who these interlopers were, only to saddle his people with the burden of ransoming him from a Miami war band. The situation along the frontier was so confused in this period, and so many Indian tribes had been scattered, that the mountain Indians could have belonged to many groups. Even if there was a small settlement of

Shawnee along the upper Potomac in 1697-1698, we have no evidence that it endured, since there is no further mention of such a town between 1698 and 1722.

Opessa's decision to move to the upper Potomac had serious consequences for the people who followed him. They probably gained greater freedom of movement in a land with more game to hunt, far from the confining fences and garden-destroying livestock of the Pennsylvanians. On the other hand, European goods would have become more expensive and harder to obtain. More seriously, they lost the safety from attack that Opessa had cited in 1707 as an important benefit of life at Pequea on the Susquehanna. King Opessa's Town was directly between the homelands of the Five (later Six) Nations Iroquois and the Catawbas, at a time when they were fighting a decades-long war.

For example, in July 1717 the Conestoga chiefs complained in Philadelphia that a son of the Delaware chief Ovwchela had been killed on the upper Potomac by a party of "about Thirty Christians, armed Horsemen, & about as many Indians, from whom they retired" (MPC III:20). Investigation showed that this attack was made in revenge for an attack by Seneca Indians on some Catawbas near Fort Christanna in Virginia. During the ensuing negotiations the Shawnee revealed that they held one Catawba prisoner, but they declined to return him, saying "that they had taken him several years agoe, when he was but a little Lad; that he had now forgot his Native Language, & spoke theirs" (MPC III:28). In 1729 Captain Civility, one of the chiefs of the Susquehannocks at Conestoga, wrote to Governor Gookin and told him that "the Southern Indians [i.e., the Catawba] killed and took nine of the Shawaners, living on a branch of Potomac, near the Great Mountains; the which impute to their own fault, for settling so near their enemies" (Hanna 1911:156).

The precarious situation of King Opessa's Town is emphasized by the 1722 Treaty of Albany, between the Five Nations of the Iroquois League and the British Crown. That agreement fixed the Potomac River as the boundary between the Iroquois and Catawba spheres of influence:

And the Five Nations have in like manner solemnly agreed . . . that none of them without having a Pasport shall on any Account whatsoever pass to the Southward of the River Potawmack, which they call Kahangorouton, nor to the Eastward the great Ridge of Mountains, or in case any of them or you shall pass the Boundaries on any account whatsoever without a Passport produce, such Indians shall be put to Death . . . [MPC III:210].

The location of King Opessa's Town on this contested frontier takes us back to the question of how and why it was founded. Opessa must have had the permission of the Five Nations to settle on the upper Potomac. In that exposed location neither the colonial authorities nor the Conestoga tribes could protect him from Iroquois attack; in fact he would have needed Iroquois protection from attack by the Catawbas and Miamis. Extending their protection over such an isolated settlement would have been risky for the Iroquois, and they would not have given their protection without a good reason to do so. We can therefore assume that the settlement on the upper Potomac was an element in the strategic calculations of the Iroquois chiefs. Perhaps Opessa suggested the idea to them, or perhaps they suggested it to him, but either way there must have been agreement between Opessa and the leadership of the Five Nations before Opessa made his move.

The presence of Opessa's settlement on the frontier of the Iroquois sphere of influence highlights the temporary alliance that the Shawnee and the Five Nations seem to have made in this period. The move of Mearroway's band from Fort St. Louis, which was serving as the capital of an anti-Iroquois, anti-British alliance, to territory under British and Iroquois control can be taken as the beginning of this *détente*. One reason for the change may have been Shawnee dissatisfaction with their place in the French system, where they had much less importance than the Illinois, Miamis, and some other tribes. As Matasit reported, they may have been dissatisfied with the land they were offered in Illinois. Another factor was probably conflict between the Shawnee and the Catawbas. As the Catawbas and Cherokees used their alliance with South Carolina to consolidate their power in the southeast, they drove out tribes opposed to them, including the Shawnee who had been settled for decades on the Savannah River. Many of those Shawnee, as we have seen, migrated northward and settled in Pennsylvania under Iroquois protection. This Shawnee/Iroquois alliance dissolved in the 1730s, but it was an important political fact during the time when the Shawnee resided in Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Another detail about King Opessa's Town that points out its special status is the name by which the settlement was known. Almost all Shawnee settlements were called by the name of the tribal division that predominated in them — the names of two divisions give us the many settlements called "Pequea" or "Pickawillany" and "Chillicothe." Besides King Opessa's Town, the authors know of only one other Shawnee settlement that was known by the name of a person: Prophetstown, the settlement founded and led by Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, and composed mostly of his religious followers. True, the name Opessa's Town is attested only in the records of colonial governments, but those same governments had no trouble getting the names of many other Shawnee settlements right, even in the midst of war, so it seems unlikely that they invented the name. If the name was used among Indians, it hints that the town was not a normal Shawnee settlement but the product of the agreement Opessa made with the Five Nations to set up a post on their frontier. It may also imply that the settlement had residents of different tribes, as one might expect at a frontier post. It may reflect Iroquois practice, since their towns often bore the name of the greatest chiefs residing there. Or it may simply be an acknowledgment of the crucial role Opessa played in establishing and maintaining the town that was "Commonly called Opessa's Town."

### *Runaway Slaves*

The 1722 Treaty of Albany included a clause, inserted at the insistence of Governor Spotswood of Virginia, requiring the Iroquois and all their allies to return any runaway slaves in their towns. As the Governor of Pennsylvania told the Conestoga chiefs:

I must also further inform you that the Five Nations have agreed in the same Treaty, that neither they nor you shall receive or harbor any Negroes on any account whatsoever, but if any of them be found by the Indians in the woods, they shall be taken up and brought to the Governour that they may be returned to their masters, for you know the Negroes are slaves. But now some of these Negroes having runaway from their masters in Virginia, are said to be entertained by some Shawanese on the Patowmeck; Therefore, Colo. Spotswood sends a Belt which is now to be delivered to you that you make take up these Negroes, and he desires that they may be delivered to Col. Mason on Patowmeck in

Virginia, who will give Persons who will bring them to him, one Good Gun and two Blankets for each Negro [MPC III:211].

The colonists wasted no time in trying to put this agreement into practice. On October 18, 1722, during a council held at Philadelphia, trader James LeTort brought responses from the Conestoga chiefs to questions from the governor, and he read a letter from “the Shawanna King” concerning runaway slaves who were sheltering in his village (MPC II:215):

From the Shawanna King to his Excellency Sir William Keith, Bart. Governour of the Province of Pennsylvania.

These are to acquaint you Brother concerning these Negroes Slaves belonging to Virginia, now at or amongst the Shawannoos at Oppertus. I will go my own self and take assistance where they are not exceeding the number 10 as directed. And as soon in the Spring as the Bark will run, We will lose no time to perform the taking of them according to Direction, for now they are abroad a hunting, so it can be done no sooner; besides, there will be Hazard in Seizing them, for they are well armed, but we must take them by Guile

I am yr. Excellys most humble Servt.  
THE SHAWANNA KING

But it seems that the Shawnee leaders never followed through on this commitment, and throughout the 1720s the governors of Maryland and Virginia made repeated inquiries to the Shawnee about runaway slaves (AM 35:200, 206, 505, 562; 36:583). In 1722 the Maryland Council sent Indian trader Charles Anderson, then based on the Monocacy, to ask that slaves be returned:

You Charles Anderson by the appointment of the Governor and Council of this province are to repair unto the Shawan Town upon Potomack with all Convenient speed and there to call together Pockaseta and Oneakooa and make them the present to each of them of a Stroud Match Coat and a pair of Silk Stockings on Behalf of the Lord Baltimore and Charles Calvert Esq. present Governor of this province . . . . That as soon as you perceive an Inclination in those Indians to Surrender up the Negro Slaves that are now among them unto the English that you propose to them that such of their Indians as will bring them down to Annapolis shall there receive for every such Slave two Stroud Match Coats & One gun... [AM 25:395].

Pockaseta and Oneakooa also appear in the Pennsylvania records as the leaders of the settlement in the 1720s. In 1725 the Maryland Council tried again, sending trader John Powell to “the Shuano Town on Potowmack (Commonly called Opessas Town)” to summon the Shawnee leaders to a meeting at Charles Anderson’s house (AM 25:443). The reason the Shawnee chiefs refused the bribes offered them to return slaves is probably related to their precarious position on the frontier of the Iroquois sphere: because of the threat of violence and the depredations of European diseases, the Shawnee needed every able-bodied man to defend their town. The presence of Africans at King Opessa’s town raises again the question of who else might have lived there. If there were Africans in a “Shawnee town,” then surely there could have been Delawares, Susquehannocks, Piscataways, Iroquois, and members of many other groups. The Shawnee had close relationships with European traders, as already seen with Martin Chartier, and there could also have been European or mixed race people at King Opessa’s Town. Then

again, the dispute over these runaway Africans is the only evidence we have of non-Shawnee people at King Opessa's Town, and we have other evidence indicating that the Shawnee preferred to live with their own people. They set up their own villages rather than joining the existing Indian communities at Conestoga and Minisink, and their later towns in Ohio and Kentucky were spoken of as if they were purely Shawnee settlements. They chose for themselves to leave their eastern settlements and go back to the Ohio Valley. So the question of whether, and to what extent, King Opessa's Town was a multi-ethnic community remains open.

### *The End of King Opessa's Town*

King Opessa's Town was abandoned in 1731 or 1732. In September 1732 two Shawnee chiefs named Opakethwa and Opakeita — one of these names is probably an alternative rendering of Pockaseta — attended a council in Philadelphia. Asked why they had moved beyond the Alleghenies,

They answered, that formerly they lived at Patowmack, where their King dyed; that having lost him, they Knew not what to do; that they then took their Wives & Children and went over the Mountains to live [MPC III:460].

These same chiefs admitted that they had visited Montreal at the invitation of the French governor, but they denied any hostile intent toward the English. During this trip to Philadelphia, two of the Shawnee contracted smallpox, "tho not one Person in the City was then known to have that distemper," and Opakethwa died of the disease (MPC III:463). The "king" whose death the chiefs mourned was not named, and the question of his identity raises some problems. The only king who ever resided at King Opessa's Town, so far as we know, was Opessa himself. Since Opessa probably died before 1720, it seems a bit of a stretch to claim that his death was the reason the Shawnee abandoned the settlement 11 years later. Perhaps Opessa was the king they intended, but perhaps it was a king who resided at one of the other Shawnee settlements. Although the timing of these events is obscure, the Shawnee also abandoned their settlements on the Susquehanna and at Minisink on the Delaware around that time. Some of the Shawnee from Pequea had been moving farther up the Susquehanna since 1718 (Jennings 1966:421), leaving a series of Shawnee place names along the West Branch. The leader of that group was Peter Chartier, the son of Martin Chartier and his Shawnee wife, and Chartier was certainly never called "king." The Shawnee at Pequea had recognized Cakundawalla as a king for a time, but he makes no appearances in the records after 1722. Kakowatcheky, who resided at Minisink, was the only leader of the Pennsylvania Shawnee called "king" in the 1720s, but it is hard to see any strong connection between him and the Shawnee on the upper Potomac. In fact the Shawnee left Minisink in the summer of 1728, after several fights with white settlers, and Kakowatcheky became one of the founders of the settlement of Logstown on the upper Ohio (Witthoft and Hunter 1955:48).

At a series of councils in 1732 and 1733, the Conestoga chiefs and representatives of the Six Nations (as they had become by 1724 with the inclusion of the refugee Tuscarora) promised to try to bring the Shawnee back over the mountains, but to no avail. They remained at their settlements on the Ohio and the West Branch of the Susquehanna River, or drifted even farther west. By the time their famous wars with the United States government began in the 1790s, they were mostly back in Ohio and Kentucky.

We have no information on why the Shawnee chose to move back westward. It was reported at the time that there had been a falling out between the Shawnee and the Iroquois, but the colonial authorities did not take this reported breach seriously, and the leaders of the Six Nations did not give public expression to any such quarrel (MPC III:329). Probably the Shawnee's desire for independence from both the Iroquois and the British was a key reason. In the 1790s we find Shawnee leaders proudly asserting both their own independence and even their right to lead other Indians, so they cannot have enjoyed accepting tributary status. The Shawnee leader Black Hoof told Charles Trowbridge in 1824 that the Great Spirit so favored the Shawnee over other Indians that he had given them a piece of his own heart, which made them brave (Trowbridge 1939:61). The Shawnee reputation was summed up by two modern historians:

The Shawnee, with their history of erratic movements, appeal to the student in much the way that they appealed to other Indians in the eighteenth century and later. They were desperate people, courageous even among Indians, self-assured and at home anywhere, defiant of authority, always ready to remove to some distant part. Of all our eastern peoples, the Shawnee held best to certain ideal Indian patterns of behavior: fearlessness; contempt for property and comfort; arrogance toward Whites; disregard for authority; reserve; unbridled, forthright expression of aggression and other emotions [Witthoft and Hunter 1955:43].

### *Searching for King Opessa's Town*

Where was King Opessa's Town? Two kinds of documents give us hints. Winslow's map of 1736 notes "Shawnee Old Fields Deserted" at two places, one near Old Town and one a few miles west of Cumberland along the North Branch. Both locations are mentioned in early colonial property deeds, which describe grants as so many miles above "the lower Indian Town" or the "Upper Indian Town." It seems, therefore, that there were actually two Shawnee towns along the Potomac. One may have been earlier than the other, or they may have been occupied at the same time; we simply do not know. Around Old Town most of the good land near the Potomac is within the C&O Canal Park, and archeologists made an intensive search for the Lower Town. It was not found. The most likely location for the Upper Town is at the Barton Site, which has been explored by archeologists for many years, but the only evidence found there that may relate to the Shawnee is about 20 trade beads dating to the early 1700s.

The missing Shawnee towns are an archeological mystery. Dr. Robert Wall, who has directed excavations at the Barton Site for many years, suggested to us that the Upper Shawnee settlement was not a town but a wide scatter of separate cabins. This seems unlikely to us, for two reasons. First, the colonists always referred to the site as a "town," and second, the town was on the military frontier between Iroquois and Catawba territory, where violence was a real danger. Surely any major settlement in such an exposed position would have been protected by a palisade. Whatever the settlement looked like, the difficulty of finding it tells us something about the culture of the Shawnee. After so many moves across so much of eastern North America, they seem to have travelled light. Pottery is the easiest way to find American Indians in the archeological record, and if the Shawnee at King Opessa's Town made pots, we should be able to find them through their potsherds. We cannot, which probably tells us that they did not make pottery. They must have switched over to cooking in copper or iron pots they obtained through



trade. But they must not have been very rich in trade goods, either, since these are also easy for archeologists to identify.

It is worth pointing out that the home sites of the first European settlers on the frontier are also very difficult to find. Frontiersmen lived without many of the civilized comforts, like ceramic teacups and earthenware butter pans, that we find around farms in more settled districts. It may be that the people of King Opessa's Town were also part of this frontier culture, perhaps even pioneers in developing a way of life less dependent on owning things and more on mobility and wits. In later years, around 1800, the Shawnee came to be divided into people who adopted European ways and those who resisted this assimilation. One party began living in European-style log houses, farming in the European way with plows and cattle, and using all the tools and refinements of the colonists. Others remained attached to Indian traditions.

The Shawnee who opposed the white man's way found a leader in Tecumseh, who tried to organize a coalition of Indian tribes to resist white expansion. Tecumseh was openly scornful of material goods. He mocked those Indians who traded their traditions for log houses, wool clothes, leather boots, and all the other paraphernalia of the European way of life (Calloway 2007). Perhaps Tecumseh's attitude had a history among the Shawnee that went back to the years of their wandering, in the late 1600s and early 1700s. Maybe it was his great-grandparents' generation who slowly shed their old village culture in favor of a lifestyle more like that of a hunting camp. They adopted a few of the most useful European inventions — guns, metal cooking pots, steel knives and hatchets — but otherwise resisted accumulating possessions, whether native or imported. They moved so frequently, across such long distances, that acquiring material possessions seemed mainly an annoyance. If this is true, it may explain why King Opessa's Town has proved so difficult to find.

## THE COLONIAL FRONTIER

### *Frenchmen and Swedes on the Fur-Trading Frontier*

The first Europeans who settled along the upper Potomac were not English or German but French Canadians or else Finns and Swedes from the former Swedish colony on the Delaware River. The most important asset for a fur trader was good relations with Indians, and the French and Swedes were on much better terms with the Potomac Indians than the English. After all, it was the English who kept taking more and more Indian land. The activities of these traders were covered in detail in the first of our C&O Canal reports (Fiedel et al. 2005), and we will give only a summary here.

French Canadians, as we saw in the case of Martin Chartier, had ties with the Indians throughout the Great Lakes region and the Mississippi Valley. When the Shawnee settled at Pequea, Chartier became connected with the Indian trade network operated by Jacques LeTort. In 1685 William Penn had granted 30,000 acres to Dr. Daniel Coxe, Matthias Vincent, and Major Robert Thompson to set up a trading post on the Schuylkill River, near present-day Phoenixville (Jennings 1984:231). The partners hired Captain Jacques LeTort and his family, Huguenot refugees, to operate the post. Around 1687 to 1678 LeTort undertook a canoe voyage westward; the details were concealed as a trade secret, but historian Edward Jennings (1984:231) believes that the expedition traveled some distance up the Missouri — more than a century before Lewis and Clark.

LeTort developed a relationship with the extensive trans-Appalachian trade network operated by the Bisailon brothers out of Canada. One of the brothers, Pierre, moved to Pennsylvania to join the LeTort organization. Pierre Bisailon is referred to in various sources as Bazaillon, Bezaillon, Brazailion, and still other spellings. His tombstone in Chester County, Pennsylvania (dated July 18, 1742), names him as Peter Bezellon. He had arrived in Canada around 1680. Bisailon joined LeTort around 1690, after a failed trading expedition down the Mississippi. He became closely associated with the Conoy or Piscataway Indians, who were also settled on the Susquehanna; his Indian wife, Marie Therese Osunesa, may have been Conoy. He also spoke Delaware and was occasionally employed as an interpreter by the Pennsylvania government in negotiations with the Delawares. In June 1708 James Logan, William Penn's secretary, wrote to Penn in defense of Bisailon, whose goods had been confiscated by the Admiralty Court in Philadelphia. Logan had conducted much business with Bisailon and his partners, and he regarded him as "very faithful . . . useful and accounted very honest" (Bisailon 2001).

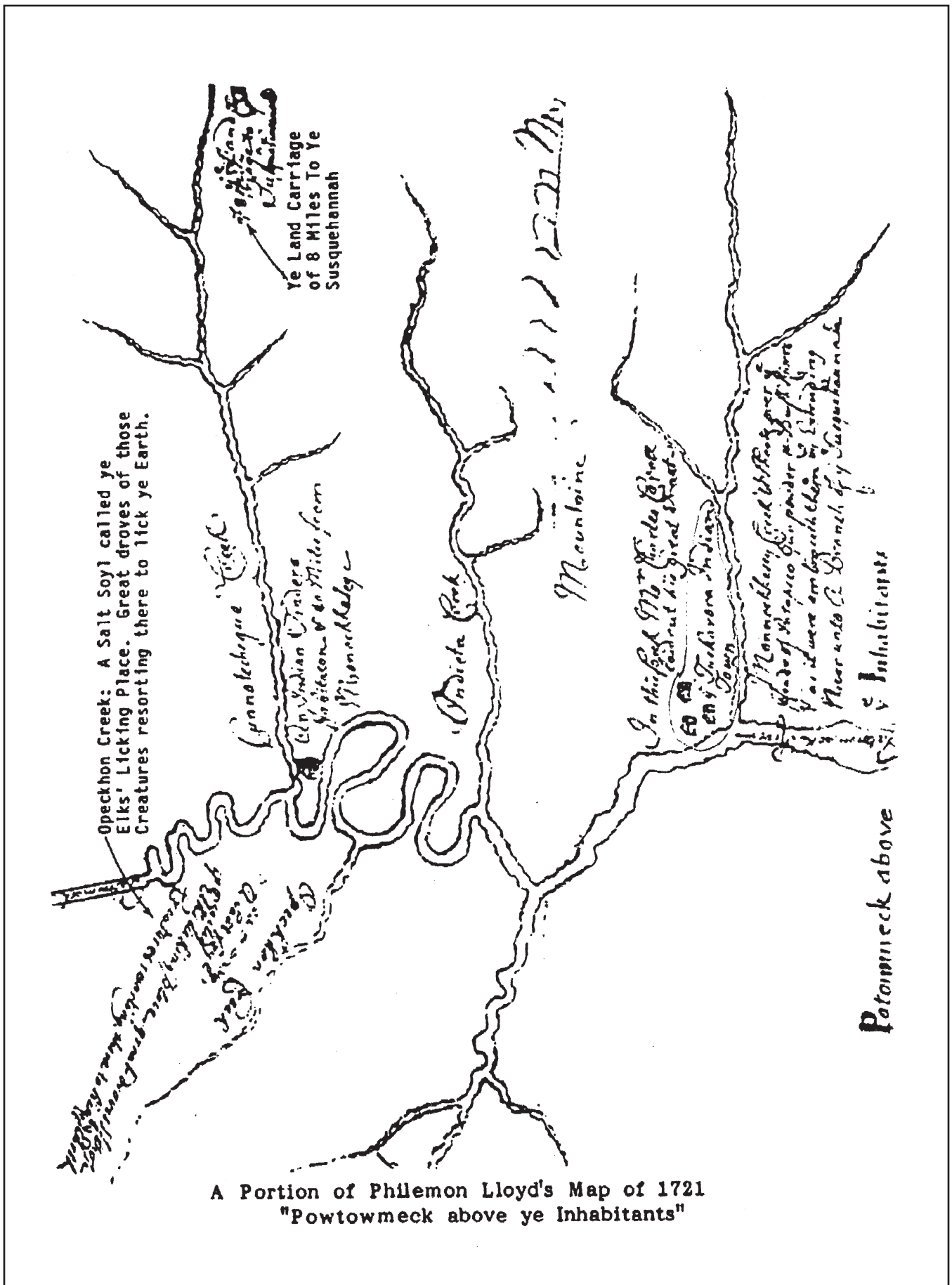
With the backing of Logan, Bisailon, LeTort and their allies developed a near monopoly of the Indian trade in Pennsylvania, and their trading posts marched steadily westward into the mountains along the West Branch of the Susquehanna (Jennings 1966). But the trade along the Potomac River was mostly developed by Swedes and Finns. The story of how the Swedes came to dominate the Potomac fur trade goes back to 1645. In that year the colony of Maryland fought a war against the Susquehannock Indians. The Susquehannocks did very well in this war, with the help of their new allies, the Swedish colonists. The Swedish colony was conquered by the Dutch in 1655, and then absorbed by the English in 1664, and the Susquehannock nation was

defeated in two wars in 1675-1676 and lost its political independence. Nonetheless the alliance between Swedish settlers and the Susquehannocks endured for decades. As we have seen, the Susquehannocks had an old claim to ownership of the upper Potomac, dating back to the time around 1600 when there were Susquehannock settlements along both the North and South branches. Even after they had submitted to the Iroquois League and become a tributary people, they continued to be active along the upper Potomac and to assert ownership of the region. This included control of the fur trade along the river. As business partners in this trade, they naturally turned to their old allies, the Swedes.

We already saw that Swedish trader Charles Anderson was based on the Monocacy by 1722, when he was asked to approach the Shawnee on behalf of Maryland's governor. Anderson had been involved in the Indian trade since at least 1712, when documents show that he was trading at Elk Landing in Maryland with his partner Andrew Friend (Craig 1993). Friend was another of the Delaware Swedes, who had taken an English name to help his business. Another member of what became a sizable Swedish settlement at the head of the Chesapeake Bay was John Hansson Steelman, who, along with Charles Anderson's older brother, Christopher Mannson, served as translator at a meeting of Maryland colony delegates with the "kings" and "great men" of the Susquehannocks, Shawnees, and Delawares in 1700 (AM 25:104). Andrew Friend's son, Israel, was delegated in August 1725 to invite the Shawnees to attend the next assembly meeting in Annapolis on October 5 (AM 25:450-1). Steelman had attempted to set up a trading post at the forks of the Delaware in 1701, but he was blocked by agents of John Logan; Steelman carried on a feud with the LeTort family, one of the results of which was the murder described above in the discussion of the Shawnee.

In 1721 Philemon Lloyd, the Secretary of Maryland, drew a map of *Ye Potomack above ye Inhabitants* (Figure 23). The map shows "An Indian Traders Habitacon at 40 Miles from Monokkasey" at the mouth of Conococheague Creek, in modern Williamsport. This is presumably the man credited by Lloyd as the source for many of the stream and place names on the map (cited by Marye 1935a:4). There are good reasons for thinking that this trader was Andrew Friend. By 1736 his son, Charles Friend, was living just across the creek, and in 1739 he laid legal claim to this land. His patent for this 260-acre tract was called "Swede's Delight."

Charles's brother, Israel Friend, was the first white man to claim land along the Potomac west of the Blue Ridge. On January 10, 1727, Israel Friend purchased a tract at the mouth of Antietam (Andahetem) Creek from six chiefs of the Susquehannock Indians residing at Conestoga. This seems to be one of only two Indian land purchases ever recorded for the mid-Potomac. The deed has several fanciful details, including measuring out the parcel as so many arrow "shoots" — the distance an arrow flies when shot from a bow — and one might guess that the deed was a forgery; however, a letter written to the Maryland government on January 12, 1731/1732 by Captain Civility, a Susquehannock chief, states ". . . We have give no body Land yet but Israel Friend at the mouth of Andahetem . . ." (AM 20:10). The letter was co-signed by another Indian chief, Toyl Hangué, whose name, along with Captain Civility's, also appears on the deed. In the letter the chiefs say they represent "all the five Nations"; in the deed they are similarly styled as "Kings and Rulers of the five Nations." If the deed is not genuine, it seems that a very similar document must have recorded the deal between Friend and the Susquehannocks.



A Portion of Philemon Lloyd's Map of 1721  
 "Powtowmeck above ye Inhabitants"

FIGURE 23: Lloyd Map of the Upper Potomac, 1721

Charles Anderson was one of those frontiersmen who refused to settle down but kept moving farther west as long as he lived. In 1734 he had land surveyed on the Potomac River in Frederick County, Virginia (now Berkeley County, West Virginia). Shortly after acquiring the land, Charles turned it over to his son, Joseph Mounts, and moved upriver to present-day Oldtown, Maryland, where he lived for the remainder of his life (Craig 2002). He had settled on the site of the Lower Shawnee Town within a year or two of the Indians' departure. He and his sons continued to be active in the western movement of the frontier, and they gave their name to two land grants along the North Branch, Anderson's Cabin and Anderson's Bottom. Anderson and men like him were driven ever westward by a restlessness that left them ill-suited for settled life.

*Settlement*

When the sixth Lord Fairfax arrived in Virginia in 1735, he was not pleased to learn that lands in western Virginia he had thought were his property by inheritance were being settled, illegally in his view, by the German pioneer Jost Hite and others. The Hite-Fairfax legal battle would rage in the courts for 40 years. In 1736 Fairfax sent out a survey party under Colonel William Mayo to clarify the property boundaries. Surveyor Benjamin Winslow drew an accurate map of the Potomac that provides us with a snapshot of the settlement pattern at this early stage.

**Table 1. Locations of Early Settlers' Residences on the 1736 Winslow Map**

MM*	MAPPED NAME
125.00	Cha. Poke (Polke)
125.20	Capt. John
125.50	Thos. Hargass
126.00	Thos. Wiggon
167.00	Cha. Anderson

\*Mile Marker

Winslow's 1736 map (Figure 24; Table 1) depicts residences of five named settlers along the Maryland bank of the upper Potomac River. Winslow depicted Charles Anderson's place adjacent to the recently abandoned fields of the Shawnee. Four other men are shown along a short stretch of the river southwest of modern Hancock. Two of these men, "Capt. John" and Thomas Wiggon, are unknown to history. They appear

in no other document we have been able to find from Maryland or Virginia. Thomas Hargis (Hargass) appears in only a single record we have seen, a Maryland land patent for a 225-acre tract of land called "Darlings Delight."

Charles Polke, on the other hand, is very well known. Polke is shown on Little Tonoloway ("Toonaloway") Creek, which flows just west of modern Hancock. He was born about 1703 to William and Nancy Knox Polke. He was the third born in a second generation of Polkes that lived in Dame's Quarter in Somerset County, Maryland. His grandfather, Robert Pollock, was an Ulster Presbyterian who had served in the army of Oliver Cromwell. After the restoration of the Stuarts to the throne in 1660, restrictions on the Presbyterians in Ulster had mounted (Kester 1995). Robert and his family, including William, came to America before 1680. William Polk received several grants for land in Somerset County between 1725 and 1735 and eventually inherited the family home, White Hall.

Sometime in the 1720s Charles and his older brother, William, left the Eastern Shore and set out west, arriving in the vicinity of present-day Carlisle, Pennsylvania, near the Susquehanna River. Charles Polk's name appeared on the 1724 and 1726 assessment rolls for Conestoga Township,

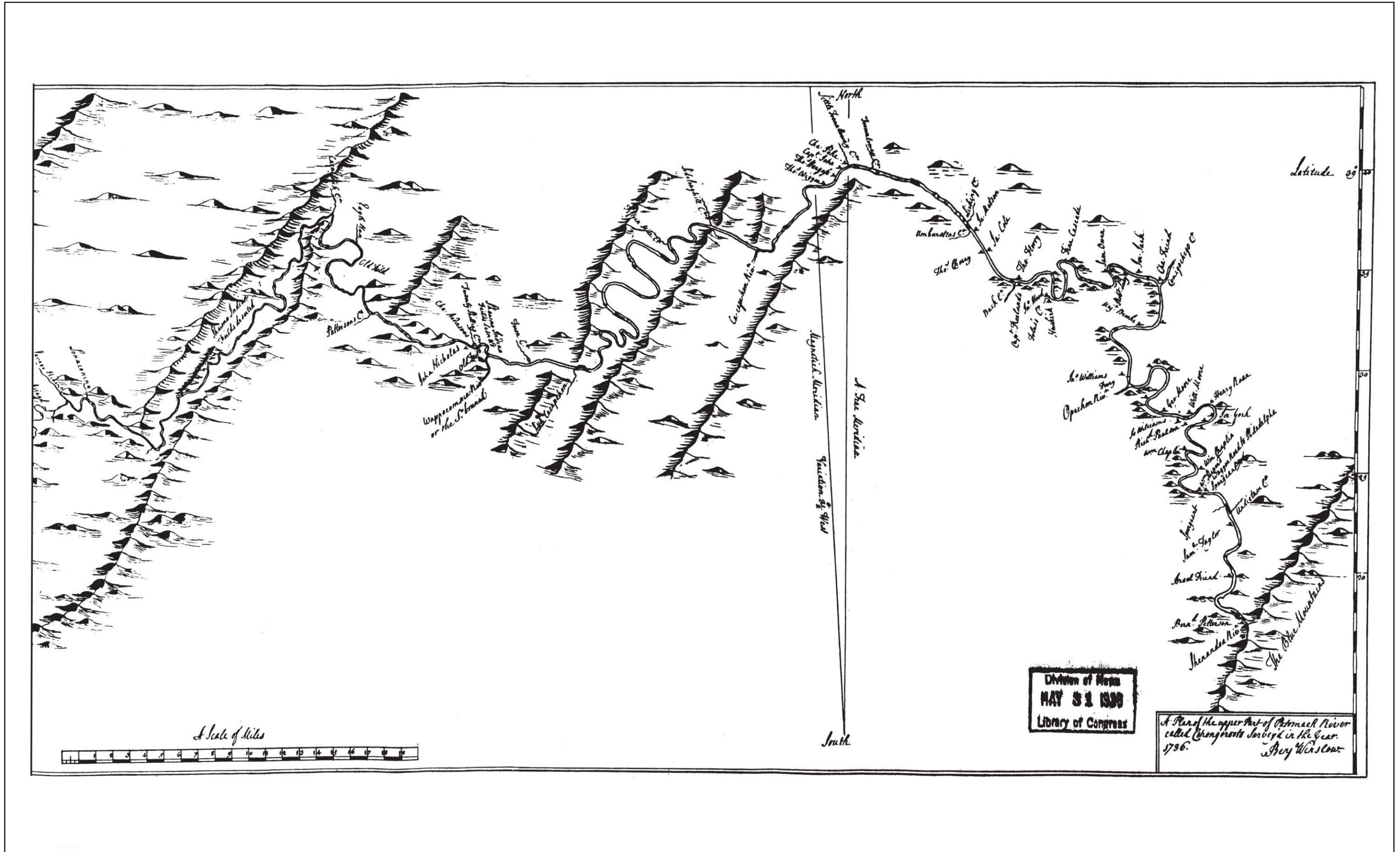


FIGURE 24: Winslow's 1736 Map of the Mid-Potomac River

SOURCE: Winslow 1736

which became part of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 1729. On August 4, 1734 Polk married Christiana Cartledge at the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania Archives 1880). Christiana was the daughter of Edmond and Ann Cartledge (or Cartilage), Quakers from Pennsylvania. Both Charles and Edmond were Indian traders in western Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Charles and Christiana Polk had settled in western Maryland by 1736. Although the 1736 Winslow map is the earliest documentation of Polk's living in western Maryland, he likely settled in the area several years before. In 1746 Charles legally acquired the land he and his family had been squatting on for the past decade. That year he purchased the 100-acre parcel, "Hawthorn's Rest," from John Hawthorn of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Charles had a residence and trading house on the property and for years engaged in trading with the Indians in western Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Ohio (Polk 1912). Polk's territory extended to the west side of the Appalachians, down the Monongahela valley, and probably into what became Ohio and perhaps also Kentucky (Kester 1995). Reference is made to the Polk house in a 1747 journal entry by 15-year-old George Washington while on a survey expedition for Lord Thomas Fairfax:

Sunday 20th. Finding the River not much abated we in the Evening Swam our horses over & carried them to Charles Polks in Maryland for Pasturage till the next Morning.

Monday 21st. We went over in a Canoe & Travell'd up Maryland side all the Day in a Continued Rain to Collo. Cresaps right against the Mouth of the South Branch about 40 Miles from Polks I believe the Worst Road that ever was trod by Man or Beast [Toner 1892].

The Polk house appears to have been a stopping place for travelers. The same year a number of German Moravian missionaries sought shelter at the Polk residence on the North Bend. One of them wrote of their visit in March 1747:

In the evening I came to the last house, that of an Indian trader [Polke], beyond which there was no house for forty miles. It was a very disorderly house. The man was not at home. I asked the Lamb to protect me and it was done.

On March 15-26, I arose early, being very glad and thankful to the Lord for having delivered me from this house. The Saviour gave me grace to speak to several people, who had conducted themselves very badly the night before [Kester 1995].

Another pair of Moravians, Brothers Leonhard Schnell and John Brandmuller, also recorded their impressions of Charles Polk's home while staying a night in October 1749:

In the evening we arrived, cheerfully, at the house of Carl Bock, with whom we stayed over night. An English schoolmaster was also there who was especially friendly... Otherwise there was much confusion in the house during the whole night, because all kinds of young people were there, among whom whiskey circulated freely [Schnell 1749, in Hinke and Kemper 1903].

After many years of traveling among the Indians, Polk learned the languages and became trusted among some tribes. This trust and fluency in language is attested to in one of Capt. Christopher

Gist's journals during his trip down the Ohio River in 1751-1752, when Gist met Polk in the Delaware and Shawnee settlement of Logstown in southwestern Pennsylvania:

Set out W 6 M and went to an Indian Camp and invited them to the Treaty at the Loggs Town at the full Moon in May next, at this Camp there was a Trader named Charles Poke who spoke the Indian Tongue well, the Indian to whom this Camp belonged after much Discourse with Me complained & said 'my Friend You was sent to Us last year from the Great Men in Virginia to inform Us of a Present from the Great King over the Water, and if You can bring News from the King to Us why can't you tell Him some thing for me? The Proprietor of Pennsylvania granted my Father a Tract of Land beginning eight Miles below the Forks of Brandy Wine Creek and binding on the said Creek to the Head Fountain. The While People now live on these lands, and will neither let Me have Them, nor pay ME any Thing for Them. My Father's Name was Chickoconnecon, I am his eldest Son, and my Name is Nemicotton. I desire that You will tell the great King of it, and he will make Mr. Pen or his People give Me the Land or pay Me for it. This Trader here Charles Poke knows the Truth of what I say, that the Land was granted to my Father, & that He or I never sold it,' to which Charles Poke answered that Chickoconnecon had such a grant of Land, & that the People who lived on it could get no Titles to it, for that it was now called Mannor Lands. This I was obliged to insert in my Journal to please the Indian [Darlington 1893].

Polk's dealing with the Delaware and Shawnee often kept him away from home, leaving Christiana to carry the business of the trading post as well as manage a household of five boys and one girl. When home, he kept himself busy with improving the western frontier. In 1742 Polk signed a petition seeking the creation of Frederick County, Maryland, through a division of Prince George's County. After Frederick County was created in 1748, Polk was appointed the constable for Linton Hundred (Russell 1998). A year later he was appointed to oversee the construction of a road from Fifteenmile Creek to Great Tonoloway Creek.

In the spring of 1753, Charles Polk died, leaving Christiana and their six children. Named as executors of his will were his wife, Christiana, and neighbor, Ralph Matson (son of another earlier settler, James Matson), who lived just downriver from the Polk house. In the will Charles leaves his wife a third of his possessions and the plantation, as long as she remains a widow. The rest of the goods were to be split among his underage children. If Christiana were to marry again, the plantation was to be sold and the proceeds also split among the children. Christiana did marry again: by 1754 she had married Ralph Matson.

Local tradition maintained that Charles Polk's house was in the same location as a nineteenth-century house built by Thomas Brent, on the bluffs overlooking the Potomac some distance southwest of Hancock. This seemed a plausible interpretation of the Winslow map, so we carried out a thorough archeological survey of the Brent House and its surroundings. The Brent house is now in ruins. A standing brick chimney marks the location of a stone-lined cellar hole, partly filled in with old appliances and other twentieth-century trash. Sixteen shovel tests were dug around the yard, and more than 200 artifacts were found, but all of them date to the period after 1793. Several other promising locations were checked on the bluffs southwest of Hancock, but no trace of Polk's home was found in any of them.



### *Thomas Cresap and Oldtown*

The pace of patenting land west of the Blue Ridge sped up after 1736 in response to generous terms granted by Lord Baltimore. One of the first to patent land west of Hancock was Capt. John Charleton, who submitted a warrant in 1739 for a parcel of land named “Indian Seat.” The warrant indicates that “Indian Seat” was located “at the Old Indian Town upon Potomack whereon a Certain Charles Anderson made some Cultivations” (Maryland Warrants, Liber L.G. No. A, folio 71). The Patent Certificate marks “Indian Seat” as beginning from “a bound Spanish oak standing on the side of the Potomack river about a mile above the mouth of the south branch or south fork thereof the place being known by the name of the old Town” (Maryland Patent Certificate 1144). Thomas Cresap had taken over this grant by 1746, and it was here that he established his cabin, fort, and trading post.

Prior to arriving in Oldtown, Thomas Cresap had earned a reputation in Maryland and Pennsylvania as a “border ruffian” and was given the title of “Maryland Monster” by Pennsylvanians. Cresap was born in Skipton, Yorkshire, England, around 1694 (the actual year of his birth is uncertain). At the age of 15, he came to America, settling in Maryland near Havre de Grace. By 1729 Thomas Cresap had become a central figure in Maryland’s border dispute with Pennsylvania.

Known as Cresap’s War (or the Conojocular War), the Maryland/Pennsylvania dispute was largely contested on unsettled lands west of the Susquehanna River, in present-day Lancaster and York counties, Pennsylvania. In order to press his claim to the land, Lord Baltimore granted Thomas Cresap 500 acres called Pleasant Garden near Blue Rock, 5 miles south of present-day Wrightsville, Pennsylvania. Cresap served as a land agent, persuading German immigrants to purchase parcels of Pleasant Garden, thus gaining title from Maryland. Cresap collected quit-rents from the settlers, further establishing Lord Baltimore’s claims over the lands. He also went into business for himself, operating a ferry.

These advances by Cresap did not go unnoticed by the Pennsylvania Assembly. As tensions between Marylanders and Pennsylvanians grew heated, violent and bloody collisions took place (Darlington 1893). On November 24, 1736, Cresap’s house was surrounded by an armed company of 24 Pennsylvanians, lead by the Sheriff of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Cresap was captured only after sheriff’s men set his house on fire. He was taken to Philadelphia and imprisoned for two years on the charge of murdering a Pennsylvania colonist (Handsman 1977). This conflict between the two colonies, each represented in Britain by one of the great English families, drew the attention of King George II. The Calvert and Penn families agreed to rein in their partisans and await a judicial verdict on the boundary between their domains, and as part of this settlement both sides released all of their prisoners. Cresap regained his freedom in 1738 after more than a year of confinement.

Upon leaving Philadelphia, Thomas Cresap moved his family west, securing a land patent for a 500-acre tract called Long Meadows, near Antietam Creek. Cresap built a large stone house over a spring, which eventually became known as “Old Castle Cresap” (Handsman 1977). Thomas attempted to engage in the fur trade with local Indians and amassed a good number of pelts. Unfortunately for Cresap, his first shipment was on a vessel that was seized by a French ship on

its way to England, thus leaving him deeply in debt to his financial backer, Daniel Dulaney (Wroth 1914). To pay off his debt to Dulaney, Cresap had to give up his property and house. Again Thomas collected his family and moved farther west, this time settling in the area that would become Oldtown.

Thomas Cresap acquired “Indian Seat” from Charleton on May 20, 1746; however, he may have been residing there for some time, since the 1744 Treaty of Lancaster mentions his residence. In this treaty the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederation relinquished their rights to land west of the Allegheny Mountains and south of the Ohio River and also agreed to relinquish all their rights to western Maryland to Lord Baltimore:

as far as two miles above the uppermost Fork of the Potomac or Cohongoronto river near which Thomas Cresap has a Hunting or Trading Cabin, in consideration of £300 payable in goods [Treaty of Lancaster, 1744, in Darlington 1893].

Upon arriving in Oldtown, Cresap went to work constructing a strongly stockaded house and trading post. Cresap’s home at Oldtown was located on a fordable section of the Potomac River in an area of lowland surrounded by the Allegheny Mountains. For the Iroquois and other Native groups, this area was a well-known crossing along the Warrior’s Path and therefore an ideal place for a trader to settle. In 1749 Thomas Cresap had Indian Seat resurveyed. The outcome of the survey resulted in the patenting of the 200-acre Indian Seat along with an additional 220 acres of unclaimed land that Cresap named “Good Hope.”

The first tract of land actually owned by Cresap in the area was “The Indian Fields.” The Indian Fields tract is located downstream from Indian Seat on a wide floodplain beginning a short distance above the mouth of the South Branch of the Potomac and extending eastward along the river to some distance below the mouth of Town Creek (Marye 1939).

Over the years Cresap’s cabin at Oldtown became a landmark and waypoint for Europeans traveling in western Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. In 1747 15-year-old George Washington journeyed to Cresap’s cabin while on the survey of Lord Fairfax’s western lands. From his journal it is possible to gather a glimpse at what life was like for Thomas Cresap in Oldtown. Over a period of five days, Washington remained at Cresap’s home, trapped by heavy rain and the high waters of the Potomac. On his third day Washington wrote:

Wednesday 23d. Rain’d till about two o’clock & Clear’d when we were agreeably surpris’d at the sight of thirty odd Indians coming from War with only one Scalp. We had some Liquor with us of which we gave them Part it elevating there Spirits put them in the Humour of Dauncing of whom we had a War Daunce. There Manner of Dauncing is as follows Viz. They clear a Large Circle & make a great Fire in the Middle then seats themselves around it the Speaker makes a grand Speech telling them in what Manner they are to Daunce after he has finish’d the best Dauncer Jumps up as one awaked out of a Sleep & Runs & Jumps about the Ring in a most comicle Manner he is followd by the Rest then begins there Musicians to Play the Musick is a Pot half of Water with a Deerskin Stretched over it as tight as it can & a goard with some Shott in it to Rattle & a Piece of an horses Tail tied to it to make it look fine the one keeps Rattling and the other Drumming all the While the others is Dauncing [Toner 1982].

The map produced during Washington's survey shows Cresap's cabin some distance above the south fork of the Potomac River, near its commonly accepted location near Mill Creek, in Oldtown (Figure 25). Since he did not own the land until 1746, it is likely Cresap was squatting at Oldtown for several years before he was able to purchase the property from John Charleton. Some later maps, like the Fry and Jefferson map (1751), place Cresap's home on the east bank of Twenty Shillings Creek (present-day Seven Springs Run) (Figure 26).

By 1749 Cresap was a member and agent of the Ohio Company of Virginia, serving as trader and speculator in their newly acquired lands in the Ohio Valley. Virginia's original grant extended to the Pacific Ocean, and the colony claimed vast lands in the Ohio Valley. The Ohio Company was a group of wealthy Virginians determined to get control of some of that bounty. Of particular interest to the Ohio Company were the lands at the confluence of the Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio rivers (present-day Pittsburgh). Thomas Cresap was charged with the clearing of an Indian trail that ran from the Potomac River in Maryland to the Monongahela River in Pennsylvania. From 1749 to 1750, Cresap and the Delaware Sachem, Nemacolin, cleared the rugged 60-mile trail through the Laurel Highland Mountains beginning at Wills Creek (present-day Cumberland, Maryland) and concluding at Redstone Creek (present-day Brownsville, Pennsylvania). Over the years the trail would come to be known by several names, including Nemacolin's Trail and Braddock's Road.

The first part of the 1750s was a prosperous time for Thomas Cresap. With the clearing of the Nemacolin Trail, the path west was made easier for English settlers trying to reach the Ohio Valley. Before the Ohio Company established storehouses at Wills Creek, many settlers would find rest and resupply at Cresap's house. In 1750 Christopher Gist, another agent for the Ohio Company, was making his way to survey locations for possible settlements in the valley. On his way west he, like many others before him, stopped at Cresap's before taking the newly cleared road through the mountains:

Wednesday Octr 31.—Set out from Col. Thomas Cresap's at the old Town on Potomack River in Maryland, and went along an old Indian Path N 30 E about 11 Miles [Darlington 1893].

The following year Gist was again ordered to venture into the Ohio Valley. As in the previous year, Gist stayed at Cresap's house at the beginning of his journey:

After You have returned from Williamsburg and have executed the Commission of the President & Council, if they shall think proper to give You One, otherwise as soon as You can conveniently You are to apply to Col Cresap for such of the Company's Horses, as You shall want for the Use of yourself and such other Person or Persons You shall think necessary to carry with You [Darlington 1893].

As his trading post prospered, Cresap continued to speculate in land. By 1755 he had patented approximately 1,500 additional acres of bottom land along the upper Potomac River, not to mention the patents he held near Conococheague and Antietam creeks. Some of his patents near his home in Oldtown include Good Hope (1750), Bloomsbury (1751), Boyles Cabin (1752), Devils Hole (1752), Dispute (1753), and Crabtree's Folly (1755). Several of these patents were sold immediately to interested parties while Cresap held others for several years. By the outbreak



FIGURE 25: Section of the Survey of the Northern Neck of Virginia, 1747

SOURCE: Warner 1747



SOURCE: Fry and Jefferson 1751

FIGURE 26: Section of the 1751 Fry and Jefferson Map of Virginia

of the French and Indian War in 1754, Thomas Cresap had established a name for himself as a frontiersman.

Although tensions between French and English grew steadily between 1750 and 1754, the conflict had not reached Cresap in Oldtown until the defeat of Lt. Col. George Washington at Fort Necessity in May 1754. Alarmed by the defeat of Washington and the earlier fall of the Ohio Company's fort at the forks (present-day Pittsburgh), Maryland Governor Sharpe commissioned Thomas Cresap as his agent and scout. By October Governor Sharpe occupied himself with strengthening the garrison at Fort Cumberland. Cresap purchased heads of cattle, salted meat, and flour and brought them to the depot at Cumberland (Wroth 1914). From the fall of 1754 until General Braddock's arrival in the summer of 1755, Cresap served the crown chiefly in the capacity of commissary. While helping strengthen the defenses at Cumberland, Cresap also took to improving the defenses at his own house in Oldtown.

By May 1755 Braddock's army had reached Cresap's cabin. A contingent of the army crossed the Potomac River a few miles below his house and encamped on or near his property. One of Braddock's officers kept a journal of the campaign in which he describes his short stay in the hospitality of Col. Thomas Cresap:

May 8<sup>th</sup>. Ferried over the River into Maryland; and March'd to Mr. Jackson's, 8 Miles from Mr. Coxs's where we found a Maryland Company encamped in a fine Situation on the Banks of the Potomack; with clear'd ground about it; there lives Colonel Cressop, a Rattle Snake, Colonel and a D – d Rascal; calls himself a Frontiersman, being nearest the Ohio; he had a summons sometimes since from the French to retire from his Settlement, which they claim as their property, but he refused it like a man of Spirit; This place is the Track of Indian Warriours, when going to War, either to the No'ward, or So'ward. He hath built a little Fort round his House, and is resolved to keep his Ground. We got plenty of Provisions. &ca. General arrived with Captains Orme and Morris, with Secretary Shirley and a Company of light Horse for his Guard, under the Command of Capt. Stewart, the General lay at the Colonels [Wroth 1914].

Following news of the defeat of General Braddock's army on July 9, 1755, the whole frontier was thrown into a state of alarm. Lacking trained troops and adequate fortifications and supplies, frontier residents were not ready to withstand the onslaughts of the French and their Indian allies (Powell 1998). Cresap's stockade at Oldtown served as a haven for the refugees fleeing the Ohio Valley and western Maryland:

Many Families from the back Settlements, are come in as far as Col. Cresap's, where they are fortifying themselves against the Indians. That among the many Murders committed by the Indians, one was within three Miles of Fort Cumberland [*Maryland Gazette* 1755a].

Within months the conditions in western Maryland had deteriorated drastically. Reports from the western settlements continued to reach Annapolis telling of wholesale destruction and abandonment of settlements. One such story appeared in the *Maryland Gazette*, written by an anonymous person returning from Colonel Cresap's fort. He reported:

That last Wednesday, in the Morning, the Indians had taken a Man Prisoner, who was going to Fort Cumberland from Frazier's, and had also carried of a Woman from Frazier's Plantation, which is four miles on this side of Fort Cumberland. The same Morning, they fell in with a Man and his Wife, who had left their Plantations, and were retiring into the more populous Parts of the Country; they shot the Horse on which the Man rid, but as it did not fall immediately, he made his escape; the Woman, it is supposed, fell into their Hands, as neither she nor the horse on which she was riding, have been seen or heard of. The same Party of Indians have also killed or carried off Benjamin Rogert, his Wife, and seven children, and Edward Morle, of Frederick County [*Maryland Gazette* 1755b].

Early on in the conflict, Cresap's defenses at Oldtown were one of several stockades or blockhouses located up and down the Potomac River in western Maryland. As the war continued, settlement after settlement along the upper Potomac was raided and burned by Indian parties aligned with the French. Those that were not yet destroyed were often abandoned. By October 1755 reports from the frontier said that the settlements at Patterson's Creek and Tonoloway Creek (present-day Hancock, Maryland) were vacated either by abandonment or Indian attack. By the winter of 1755, only Cresap's fort at Oldtown remained. Aware that he was alone and vulnerable, Cresap removed his family to his son Michael's plantation on Conococheague Creek.

By the spring of 1756, people on the frontier had begun organizing to repel the Indian attacks. Many frontier colonists formed their own ranging parties for the defense of their homes. These parties were usually led by a commissioned colonial officer and consisted of a handful of local farmers and tradesmen. These "rangers" served as the garrisons of blockhouses and tracked Indian raiding parties that threatened the local farms and towns. Colonel Cresap organized such ranging parties near Conococheague Creek and Oldtown.

On July 8, 1756, Colonel Cresap wrote the *Maryland Gazette* describing an encounter his party had with a group of Indians very close to Oldtown:

Yesterday about 11 o'clock as myself and 12 more men were on our Way down when we got as far as the End of the Fence below the Saw Mill, by which the Men, who were before following one another, got all standing together, and while they were in that Posture were fired on by a Party of Indians. Two of the Men who were behind in the Road, fired and kill'd one of the Indians on the Spot, another says he fired at 3 Indians who stood together... I immediately muster'd up about 20 Men, and went to the Place of Action, where we found a Indian lying dead, together with the three men before mentioned; we scalp'd the Indians, and found several things belonging to them, such as Wampum, Silver Wrist-bands, Ear-Rings & a French Gun, together with our own Mens Guns. Our Dead we brought home [*Maryland Gazette* 1756].

It appears that Cresap's primary business during 1756 was the waging of war against the raiding Indians (Wroth 1914). In one of his encounters, Cresap had set out with a company of men along with his eldest son, Thomas. During the course of the skirmish, his son was fatally injured (Wroth 1914). Even after his loss, Colonel Cresap remained on the frontier while practically all the rest of the western settlers had fled east of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Following the fall of Fort Duquesne in 1758, which ended the fighting on the upper Potomac, Thomas Cresap returned to his home at Oldtown. Based on Maryland Land Records, Thomas picked up where he left off, selling and trading tracts of land along the upper Potomac River. In fact, by 1765 his son, Michael, had joined his father as a land speculator and broker. In October 1765 Michael had surveyed 1,706 acres north of Oldtown. A few months later, in March 1766, he patented the land, calling it “Seven Springs.” Within a year of the patent, Michael and his father advertised that they

have a piece of ground at the Old Town commodiously situated for a town, and lying on the main road that leads to Pittsburgh and Redstone from Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania [*Maryland Gazette* 1767].

The advertisement goes on to explain that the Cresaps intended to sell or rent the lots in half-acre increments. Other land was advertised to sell as 5-acre lots, and even other land was said to be good meadow that subscribers would lease for the term of 21 years.

In the 1760s Cresap became involved in politics. He opposed the new taxes imposed by the Crown in 1765. This move cost him the support of his former friend, Governor Horatio Sharpe, whose letters at this time become decidedly negative about Cresap (Wroth 1914). Cresap complained that he had not been paid money owed to him for service in the war, a grievance that added to his opposition to new taxes. In October 1765 the two houses of Maryland’s government split on the question of whether to collect the new Stamp Tax. Word reached Annapolis that 300 to 400 men were arming in Frederick to march on the capital and prevent acceptance of the tax. Among their leaders was Col. Thomas Cresap, who had said in passing that “no other means but this would serve.” The dispute was settled by the withdrawal of the tax before violence actually broke out.

Little more is known about the last years of Thomas Cresap’s life. His name appears infrequently during the Revolutionary War in various records of the Maryland Council of Safety; however, it seems Cresap aided the Revolution in some capacity. On May 17, 1783, the Council of Maryland awarded Thomas Cresap 40 pounds, 14 shillings, and 3 pence. For the remaining seven years of his life, Thomas Cresap appears to have spent much of his time in Oldtown, lending his support to various plans for the creation of a land or water route that would further open western Maryland to settlement. Thomas Cresap died at Oldtown in 1790 at the age of 96.

### *Cresap’s Fort*

Because Cresap’s Fort was such an important historical site, many people have tried to find it, and there have been several theories as to where it might have been. One contribution of the recent archeological study was to confirm that one of those theories was right (Figure 27). The fort was in a hayfield south of Oldtown, on a high terrace about a thousand feet from the river. Test excavations here produced more than 200 artifacts dating to 1740 to 1770 (Figure 28). The artifacts include oriental porcelain, Delftware, white salt-glazed stoneware, brown stoneware, Rhenish blue and gray stoneware, coarse red earthenware, olive wine bottle glass, case bottle glass, white clay pipe stems and bowl fragments, a gunflint of English flint, two lead shot of about .30 caliber, a small lead shot, hand-wrought nails, and a substantial amount of window glass. Especially intriguing is a single paste gemstone, probably once part of a button, cufflink,





FIGURE 27: Excavating at Cresap's Fort



FIGURE 28: Artifacts from Cresap's Fort

or shoe buckle. This is by far the largest collection of colonial artifacts from anywhere in western Maryland and indicates that this site was a major settlement, which can only be Cresap's Fort.

The artifacts found on the site include a great many nails and a few bricks. The brick is probably from the hearth of the chimney; since there was not enough brick for a complete chimney, the rest of it was presumably built of logs, lined with mud. Log houses could be built with very few nails, so the nails from this site must mean that the original log house was added to or modified over the years. Many pieces of broken bedrock were also found across the site. Bedrock is buried deeply enough beneath this part of the terrace that these rocks were probably not turned up by the plow. The rock is mostly in pieces fist-sized or smaller, but the rock is soft and was easily broken with a shovel. Most likely this stone is the remains of the foundations of log structures, including Cresap's house.

## PEACE AND SOME PROSPERITY

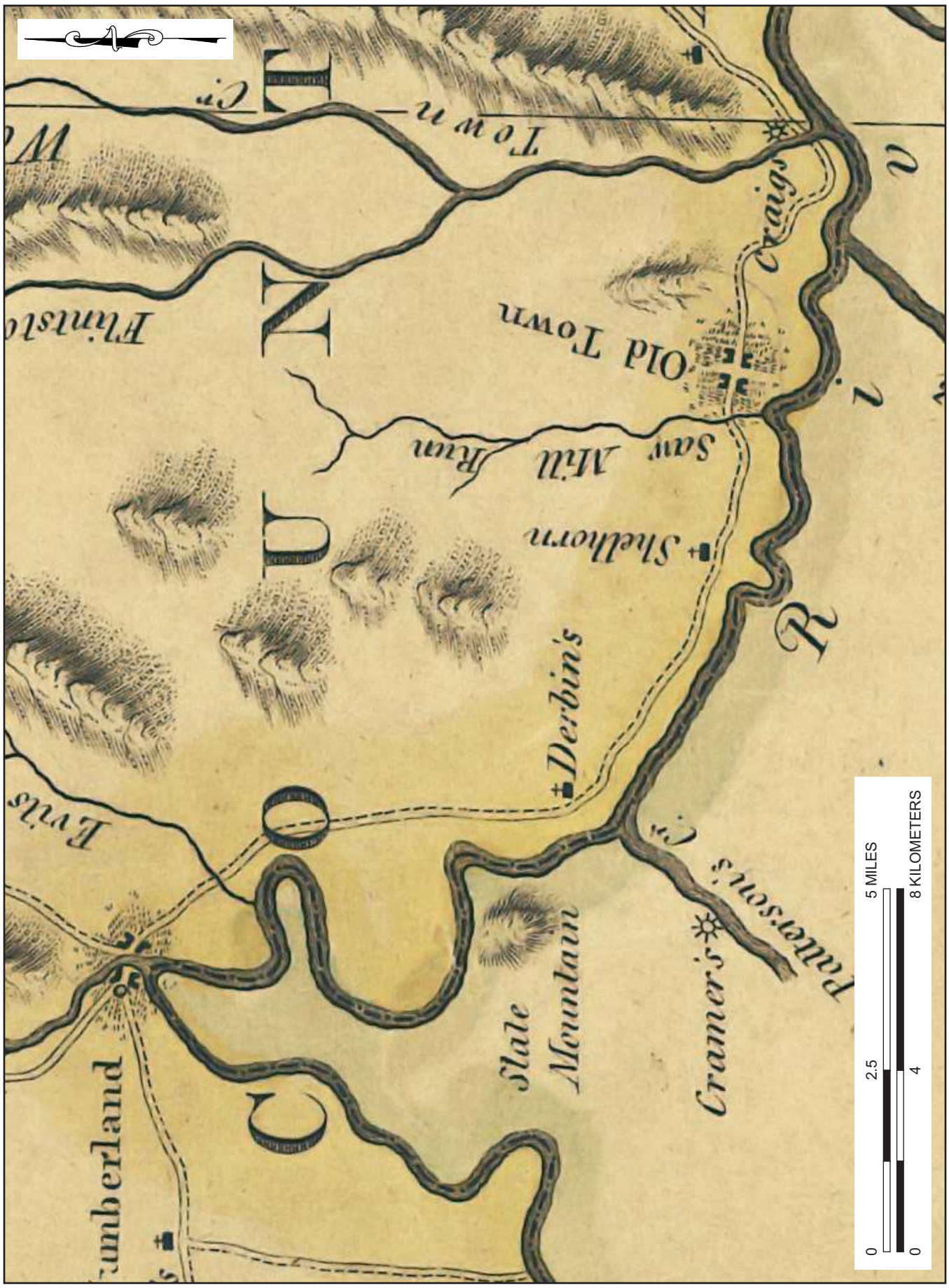
### *Revolution and Resettlement*

The French and Indian War (1754 to 1763) and Pontiac's Rebellion (1763 to 1764) all but cleared the upper Potomac Valley of European settlement during the mid-eighteenth century. But after the British emerged victorious from both wars, the way was open for European settlement as far west as the Ohio Valley. By the late 1760s there was a slight boom in land speculation along the Potomac River as several individuals patented tracts between the Great Tonoloway (present-day Hancock, Maryland) and Fort Cumberland. Some, like Thomas and Michael Cresap, resided in the area prior to the conflicts and continued to expand their prewar holdings in the area. Others, like Isaac Collier and Thomas Prather, came between 1763 and 1775 looking for economic opportunities. Still others, like John Ridout and John Hawkins, patented large tracts of land with the intention of parceling off lots for sale or renting them out to tenant farmers.

Following the Revolutionary War the upper Potomac Valley received greater numbers of settlers. In 1787 the Federal government provided lots west of Cumberland, Maryland, to veterans of the Revolution. Settlers moving west from Pennsylvania and eastern Maryland settled in the region in the late 1780s with the intention of establishing farms and industries along the river. By that time the population in the region was nearing 5,000, and in 1789 Allegany County (present-day Allegany and Garrett counties) was created from the western portion of Washington County. The town of Hancock (originally Hancocktown) was established around 1792, and Cumberland was built over the site of Fort Cumberland around the same period.

Hancock began as a stop on the National Road, which ran from Baltimore to Cumberland and from there over the mountains to the Ohio. Another landmark on the same road was the Shelhorn Tavern, which is shown on the 1795 Griffith map of Maryland (Figure 29). John Shelhorn was born in 1761 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and he served as a soldier in the Revolution (DAR 2008). After the war John and his wife, Nancy, moved west to Allegany County, Maryland. In 1789 they began patenting land, eventually claiming three tracts with a total area of more than 300 acres. One of their properties was "Resurvey of Choice," which was said to be "standing on the Bank of the Potomac River...about a mile above Sideling Hill and about three miles and a half above the old town" (Allegany County Deed Book B, folio 85). This is the approximate location of the tavern shown on the Griffith map. It happens that there is a set of foundations in a wooded part of the C&O Canal Park near that same location, and some people thought that was the location of the Shelhorn Tavern (Hahn 1997). Archeological testing showed, however, that these foundations date to the late 1800s or early 1900s, and no evidence of occupation before the Civil War was found around them. A search of the surrounding area also turned up no evidence of the Shelhorn Tavern, so it must have been outside the Park.

There was better luck finding the home of the Shelhorn's neighbors, the Prather family. The Prathers, for whom Prather's Neck is named, were a large clan of German settlers who claimed land at several points along the Potomac from Williamsport westward. The family's first claim west of Hancock was made in 1747 by Col. Thomas Prather, a tract of 185 acres called "Choice." In 1765 he resurveyed the property, expanding the Prather holdings near Oldtown to 223.5 acres,



SOURCE: Griffith 1795

FIGURE 29: 1795 Griffith Map

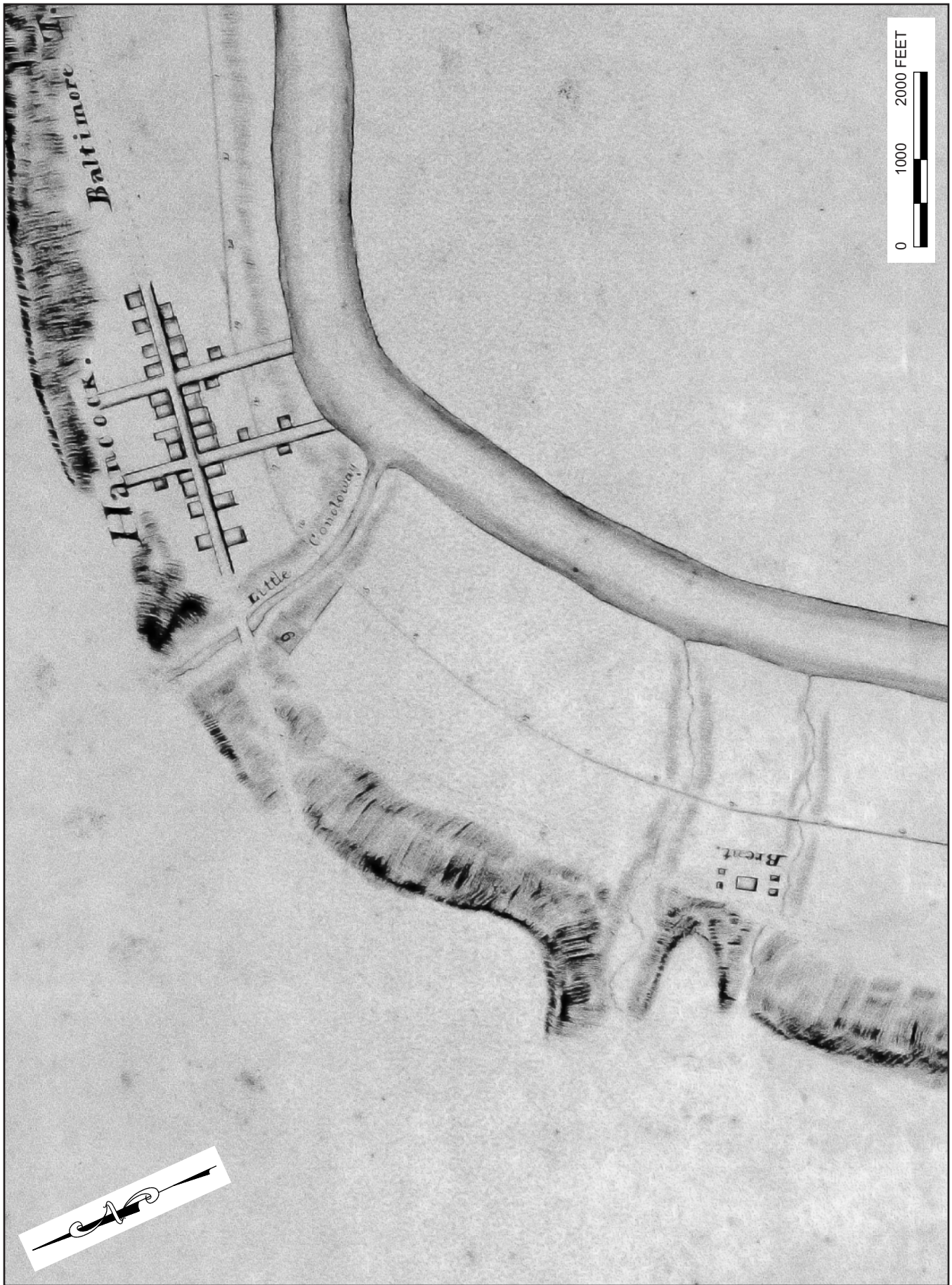
renaming it Resurvey of Choice. (Part of this property ended up belonging to the Shelhorns, as described above.) Thomas Prather probably never lived on the tract, but he passed it to his son, Capt. James Prather, Sr., who was born in 1736. Captain James served in the Frederick County militia during the Revolution, just as his father had during the French and Indian War. James was probably living at Resurvey of Choice by 1790, when the census recorded him living in Washington County with his wife, four children, and two slaves. The property remained in the Prather family until after the Civil War. The Prather farm was depicted on several nineteenth-century maps, including the Abert (1825) and Geddes and Roberts (1827) maps made during planning of the C&O Canal. The location of the Prather farm, or at least a Prather farm, had never been lost, and there is still a large barn foundation at the site. This foundation was probably built in the later 1800s. Nearby are the disturbed remains of a stone house foundation. Shovel tests dug around these foundations produced mainly artifacts dating to around 1900, but enough earlier material was found to show that this is probably the Prather farmstead set up back in the late 1700s.

The Geddes and Roberts map set, drawn in 1827, provides a good picture of settlement along the Potomac at that time. Within the project area (from Hancock to Cumberland, Maryland) the map shows 46 residences or other structures along the canal route, 21 with an associated name. The area had become a lot more crowded since the 1730s (Figure 30).

#### *The Harkins-Boxwell Tenancy*

The best-preserved house site of this period in the Park was found near the Paw Paw Tunnel, and archeologists did some test excavations. The site centers on an old cellar hole that was visible to the archeologists as they were walking by down the towpath, but it took quite a bit of work to figure out who had lived there and when. The property was part of a 200-acre patent called “Round Bottom Amended” that was surveyed for David Mitchell in 1785. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company bought part of the property from John Mitchell in 1828, possibly David’s son. Neither Mitchell lived at the site, though, so it was presumably leased to tenants. A clue to who they might have been was found in the estate papers of David Mitchell. Those papers say that Daniel Harkins owes the estate for “rent due for 1797 on Round Bottom” (Allegany County Inventories Book A, folio 72). According to the 1790 United States Census, Harkins was living on Round Bottom in Washington County (now Allegany County) with his wife, seven children, and three slaves. Harkins continued to rent the property at least through 1800. The census for that year lists him living on the property with his wife and seven children. By 1800 Daniel Harkins no longer owned any slaves. The Harkins family appeared to have left Maryland by 1810, probably moving farther west to Ohio.

A clue to the next resident of the tenancy was found on the 1825 Lt. Col. J.J. Abert map of the projected route of the C&O Canal. The map shows a dwelling labeled “Boxwell” in the vicinity of the site. Census records show a number of Boxwells living nearby and across the river in Morgan County, Virginia (now West Virginia). In 1818, 61-year-old Pvt. Robert Boxwell moved to Allegany County, Maryland. He wrote to the government pension office to have his pension transferred from Virginia to Maryland (Pension Certificate S.34658). Boxwell declared that he was enlisted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Regiment under Capt. Kirkpatrick from 1781 until 1782. The



SOURCE: Geddes & Roberts 1827

FIGURE 30: Geddes & Roberts Map of Hancock

1820 census places him in the area. He is described as a farmer, and although he did not own his home, he did own a small amount of property.

Robert Boxwell died in 1825. According to an inventory made at the time, his possessions consisted of “a mare, five cows, four yearlings, two heifers, nine hogs, a harrow, an old barshear plow, two old shovel plows, three old hoes, three old axes, two old mattocks, three pair of horse gears (much worn), a chest and table, half dozen chairs, one dung- and one pitchfork, cupboard and dough trough, old maul and iron wedge, three buckets, kitchen furniture and old side saddle, and debts totaling \$200” (Pension Certificate S.34658).

That same year his nephew, 24-year old Moses Boxwell, married Catherine Fogwell in Morgan County, Virginia (Dodd et al. 1990). Shortly after the wedding, Moses and his wife moved to Allegany County, probably living in their uncle’s old house. The 1830 pension application of 77-year old Joseph Boxwell, Moses’ father, declares that he moved from Virginia to Maryland because his son “rented a place in Allegany County and he wished to be with or near him” (Pension Certificate S.34659). The Boxwells seem to have left the area by 1850, following the Harkins family and thousands of others toward the west.

### *Excavating the Tenancy*

The archeological exploration of the site began by digging shovel tests at selected locations across the property. The artifacts they found dated to the Harkins-Boxwell period, from 1790 to 1850 or so. Two 3x3-foot test units then provided a bigger sample of the artifacts. The unit in the cellar was dug to a depth of 2.5 feet before it was blocked by large stones. So much stone was found in and around the cellar hole that the house was probably built of stone. The nails were mostly machine-cut and therefore made after 1790, which probably means the house was also built after 1790. The second unit was dug into a trash midden that spread down the slope from the house, and it produced hundreds of pieces of ceramic and other artifacts (Figure 31).

Many more artifacts were found at the Harkins-Boxwell Tenancy than at Thomas Cresap’s Fort, even though Thomas Cresap was a prominent man who owned hundreds of acres of land. Between 1745 and 1820, the material lives of people in western Maryland were transformed by two historical developments. The frontier was tamed, and what had been a violent, thinly settled borderland became a developed agricultural region with regular transportation routes to the coastal cities. Also, the early stages of the Industrial Revolution made certain goods much cheaper, especially ceramics, glass, and nails, all of which are commonly found on archeological sites. The first nail-making machines were introduced in America in the late 1780s, turning what had been hand-made hardware into something so cheap ordinary people could use thousands in their houses and barns. British and American potters learned to mass-produce attractive dishes so cheaply that they drove pewter and even wooden vessels off the market. By the 1790s even poor tenant farmers in the Appalachians had sets of decorated plates and teacups that they used for guests and showed off on specially made wooden “dressers” or “sideboards.” During the very limited testing at the Harkins-Boxwell Tenancy, the archeologists found 452 pieces of pottery, 347 of them from refined tableware. There are at least 30 different types or styles of decoration in the collection. Such an array of decorated plates and teacups was beyond the reach of all but the richest Americans in 1750, but by 1840 it could be found in the homes of humble tenants.



FIGURE 31: Excavating at the Harkins-Boxwell Tenancy



## THE CANAL ERA

### *Building the Canal*

At the time of the seventh Annual Meeting of the stockholders of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, in June 1835, the canal was open for business from Georgetown to Dam No. 5, a distance of 110 miles. The funds generated by the company's original stock offering had long been spent, but the decision was made to raise more money to continue construction. The board instructed Chief Engineer Charles B. Fisk to revise the location of the line of the canal from Dam No. 5 to the Cacapon River and prepare detailed plans for completing the canal to Cumberland. Construction contracts were issued for several segments. Then in 1836 Fisk gave the board the bad news that his new estimate for the cost of the canal from Dam No. 5 to Cumberland was much greater than any former estimates. After receiving Fisk's estimate, the board decided to suspend all contracts for all sections above the Cacapon River with the exception of the deep cut at Oldtown, Locks 54 and 55, and the Paw Paw Tunnel. Work therefore continued but at a slower pace than planned (Unrau 2007). In May a major flood struck the canal, causing great damage to the canal below Dam No. 5 and hampering operations above that point. Navigation from Georgetown to Dam No. 5 was not fully restored until early July, and projects above the dam were delayed for over a month.

Since the start of construction on the canal, the rising cost of labor and materials had placed the contractors in a difficult position. Often they ran out of money to pay their laborers and were unable to secure additional funds until after the project was complete. Left with few alternatives, contractors often abandoned contracts mid-project, leaving both the company and laborers in a difficult position. Recognizing this issue, on August 20, 1837, Fisk proposed increasing the estimates of 18 contractors by 8 percent, and the board quickly adopted his recommendation.

By April 1837 construction was almost complete up to Dam No. 6, and the canal board was anxious to begin operations on the last 50 miles between the dam and Cumberland, Maryland. The company was insufficiently funded, however, and this led to conflicts with contractors and especially with the laborers building the canal. Most of the work was being done by Irish immigrants, and they had organized themselves into secret societies in an attempt to raise their wages and keep the limited amount of work available on the canal for themselves. There had been several riots between different factions of workers during the construction of the canal around Williamsport. Some contractors responded by trying to use non-Irish laborers, but this only led to further violence. In 1834 Irish laborers attacked German workers near Point of Rocks, Maryland. The disturbance resulted in up to three fatalities and was put down by the local militia. Another similar attack occurred in April 1836, when a workforce of German and "country born" laborers was attacked and dispersed by Irish hands.

Although attacks on non-Irish workers were driven by ethnic animosities, they were fueled by concern over a stable income. Barred from many jobs by "No Irish Need Apply" signs, Irishmen badly needed the employment offered by canal construction, and they were willing to fight to keep it. This brought them into conflict with contractors determined to keep wages down and to keep control of their own construction sites. These tensions erupted into a major incident during

the winter of 1837-1838 at the Paw Paw Tunnel. A Methodist parson and contractor, Lee Montgomery, had been overseeing the construction of the Paw Paw Tunnel. Previously he had built a tunnel 729 feet long on the Pennsylvania Union Canal. The Paw Paw Tunnel would require Montgomery to cut through 3,118 feet of solid rock, a major engineering challenge. In the spring of 1837, he imported 40 miners from England, both for their skill and to keep the Irish from his section. Harassment by Irish workers, and the lack of regular pay, caused most of the English workers to leave the canal, so Montgomery had to fall back on the Irish he despised. By the end of December 1837, Montgomery, who had not been paid by the company, reached a crisis point and could no longer pay his workers. On New Year's Day 1838, 400 men from the tunnel gang, unpaid for a month, descended on Oldtown looking to celebrate in a fitting fashion. The laborers ransacked several buildings before the Cumberland militia intervened and jailed 10 ringleaders (Way 1989, 1993).

This holiday riot was just a warm-up for a much more serious incident in February 1838. Montgomery had not paid his laborers since December. In no position to pay them and fearing for his safety, Montgomery fled to Washington, D.C. The laborers, agitated by Montgomery's absence and by reports of defaults by other contractors along the line, were unwilling to wait for the possibility of eventual future payment. In a February 15, 1838 letter to the company, Chief Engineer Charles B. Fisk tried to impress on the board the gravity of the situation:

I have received intelligence of the most alarming character from the tunnel. Mr. Morris writes:

Mr. Dugan reports that a mob of laborers surround the Office at the Tunnel as he penned yesterday. The miners were threatening to quit and rumors has this moment reached my ears that his [Montgomery] store was some time after Mr. Dugan came by, broken & robbed and that threats were held out by the men that they would destroy certain parts of the work...

I will merely say further that if Mr. Montgomery appears again at his work without the pecuniary means necessary to satisfy the just claims of his workmen for labor done there is reason to believe that his life itself would not be safe from those exasperated men [NARA 1838a].

The rioting workers persisted for three days, but they were finally pacified by a company agent who assured them that Montgomery would soon have the money they were owed. Despite the agent's promises, however, Montgomery was unable to pay the workers until mid-April, when the C&O Canal Company advanced him \$25,000.

That was the only payment Montgomery received in 1838, and by the spring of 1839 he had to lay off most of his men so he could buy the gunpowder necessary to blast the tunnel. The out-of-work Irish laborers responded by riotously marching up and down the line. The trouble was momentarily averted when the company secured the needed money and rehired the workers. By August, however, a rumor spread that that the company was planning to suspend parts of the work and cut the number of laborers employed on the line. The Paw Paw Irish decided to preempt the company by walking off the job.

On August 11, 1839, about 100 armed Irish from the tunnel marched on German laborers downriver near Little Orleans. *The Daily National Intelligencer* reported:

## OUTBREAK and BLOODSHED ON THE CANAL

Hagerstown, (MD) August 23.

On Saturday last, a messenger arrived in this place with a requisition from the civil authorities of Allegany county on General Williams, requiring him to order out a military force from his brigade to “suppress an insurrections or riot proceeding from armed bodies of laboring men, amounting to about 100, who, with guns, clubs, and other deadly weapons, came to section 293, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, and broke open all the shanties occupied by Germans, destroying all their property, beat men with great violence, and threw one of them in the fire, several of whom are not expected to live; they then went to section 281; and pursued the same course of cruelty, and plundered and destroyed property to a large amount” [*Daily National Intelligencer* 1839].

The violence carried out that day caused a priest, Father Guth, who ministered to the German laborers, to confess in a letter to Chief Engineer Charles Fisk, “...were I superstitious I would really believe they [the Irish rioters] are incarnate Devils.”

The events of August 11 marked a breaking point for the canal company. For too long the company had allowed the laborer societies to operate along the canal. Chief Engineer Fisk, with the aid of the state militia, sought to end the influence of the Irish societies (Way 1989). The Washington and Allegany county militias, led by Colonel Thruston, swept down the line and over the next five days were involved in rounding up rioters and weapons.

On Tuesday Morning, the 27<sup>th</sup> August, colonel Thruston moved from Cumberland with a force of about 80 men, composed of captain King’s, Haller’s, and McCulloch’s volunteer companies, in the direction of Little Orleans, where he arrived at 12 o’clock the next day, and found all the laborers at work, without any suspicion of his approach. He captured all the men on the section, picked out such as could be identified as rioters, disarmed them all, destroyed the arms, and moved up the line...

...They were joined by col. Hollingsworth’s and Major Barnes’ cavalry; destroyed 40 or 50 shanties and shops; took and destroyed 120 guns and pistols, and captured 26 of the prominent leaders, who are now in Cumberland jail. The troops were actively engaged for five days, and performed a march of 81 miles...[*Niles’ National Register* 1839].

The success of the militia could be attributed to the German priest, Father Guth, who provided the company with a list of labor leaders. In addition to the 26 they captured, the militia was also responsible for the injury of eight to 10 resisting laborers, one of whom died. On the orders of Fisk, the militia destroyed the laborers’ shanties and grog shops. In all, around 30 to 50 buildings were destroyed, mostly around Little Orleans.

During the 1830s the use of the militia following a riot or labor uprising was quite common. It was also common to have ringleaders rounded up and carted off to jail. The events at Little Orleans caused a shift in how the company dealt with the riotous groups. Previously the militia would arrest the leaders, a period of quiet would descend on the line, and the leaders would be released from jail without prosecution. Such treatment did not deter conflict in the long run, and authority on the canal continued to shift out of the hands of the company and into those of the secret societies. Chief Engineer Charles Fisk was determined not to make that same mistake this time. James Finney served as a laborer spy for Fisk and collected evidence against the riot

leaders and on the secret societies after the events of August 11, 1839. The evidence and the testimony of Finney led to the conviction of 14 laborers with charges ranging from riot, robbery, and arson to assault with the intent to kill. They were sentenced to the state penitentiary for five to 18 years. Nine others, convicted on lesser charges, were given fines and short prison terms. Four others were acquitted. For his service to the company, James Finney was awarded \$100. The swift and savage repression of the August disturbance and the harsh prosecution of labor leaders upset the organization of the Irish societies and served to undermine what power they had acquired (Way 1989). As a result wages fell from the high of \$1.25 to 87.5 cents a day.

Firmly dealing with the secret labor societies did not solve the financial problems of the C&O Canal Company. Labor unrest lessened after 1839 but never completely disappeared. Severe financial problems after 1839 forced the company to cut back on construction and its labor force. Unemployed laborers straggled off the line to find work elsewhere. The organization that the laborers had built up on the canal over the previous 10 years was broken down more by the rhythms of the labor market than by the “union-busting” techniques of the canal company (Way 1989).

From the summer of 1840 until late 1845, construction on the canal remained at a standstill as canal officials sought to secure adequate funding. After investigating a number of possible avenues, they turned to the Maryland Legislature, which passed a bill authorizing the company to issue \$1,700,000 in preferred construction bonds. After another year of negotiations, an agreement was reached whereby a group of 29 capitalists in New York, Boston, and Washington took \$500,000 of the bonds and subcontractors in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the District took a combined \$600,000 (Unrau 2007). Work on the line resumed on November 18, 1847.

At the twentieth annual meeting of the canal company stockholders on June 5, 1848, the company president informed the group that work on the waterway was progressing rapidly and that the canal was anticipated to be complete to Cumberland before October 1, 1849. His prediction did not come to fruition as a number of work stoppages caused by further financial insolvency slowed the progress of construction. On October 10, 1850, the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal was formally opened for trade at Cumberland, Maryland, after 22 years of intermittent enthusiasm and despair (Unrau 2007). In the end the canal was built at a total cost of \$11,071,176.21, five times more than the cost originally estimated during the early 1820s.

#### *The Paw Paw Supervisor's House Site*

Throughout the nine-year archeological survey of the C&O Canal Park, the archeologists have searched for evidence of the camps where the canal workers lived. No definite examples of such camps have been identified. Even where documentary evidence points to the exact location of a camp, for instance at the mouth of Antietam Creek, the number of artifacts found has been too small to prove the presence of canallers. It seems that the canal workers did not have many ceramic dishes, glass bottles, or other artifacts of the types that survive in the ground.

A different kind of evidence of canal construction was found in the yard of the Paw Paw Supervisor's House, near the north (upstream) end of the tunnel. Excavations here showed that the ground across much of the lawn here is full of brick fragments. These date to the construction

of the canal. The inside of the Paw Paw tunnel is lined with millions of bricks, and records of the canal company tell us that contractor Lee Montgomery initially tried to make his own bricks on site (Hahn 1997). At that time the usual way of making bricks was to build the kiln, or clamp, out of the bricks to be fired, forming a large pile of bricks with frequent channels running through the pile. Charcoal fires were built in the channels, and those fires, fanned to high heat by air flowing through the channels, fired the bricks around them. The archeologists uncovered the foundations of Montgomery's kiln, a flat layer of bricks on which others were stacked. The bricks still bore the marks of the last firing, a visible black stain showing where the charcoal fire had burned (Figure 32).

Nearby, the archeologists found evidence of a large building. A shovel test came down on top of a foundation that lay 1.8 feet below the surface. This foundation consists of three courses of carefully laid brick, the bottom course resting on subsoil 2.9 feet below the surface, surmounted by a two layers of flat, roughly shaped stone (Figure 33). One brick was resting on top of the stone, but it was not mortared into place. No sign of a builder's trench was noted. The only artifacts recovered from the unit were nine badly rusted nails, probably cut, a single small sherd of whiteware, and a fragment of clear bottle glass. The wall runs roughly east-west, perpendicular to the river.

The foundation was then traced using narrow shovel tests. This testing showed that the wall measured 70 feet in length. Limited excavation around both ends did not produce any evidence that the wall turned either to the north or to the south.

The foundation is at approximately the same depth below the modern ground surface as the floor of the brick kiln, and the scatter of brick rubble seems to be above it. So it dates to the canal construction period. Although a perpendicular wall was not found, the existing 70-foot wall suggests the structure was quite large. Very few domestic artifacts were found around it. It was most likely a workshop and storage shed related to the construction of the Paw Paw Tunnel.

The near absence of domestic artifacts in the deposits dating to the canal construction period is an important point. Certainly the contractor, Lee Montgomery, lived in this area, and probably the company's agent, and possibly also some of the workers. But these men did not leave much evidence in the form of glass, ceramics, or other artifacts.



FIGURE 32: Brick Kiln Exposed in a Test Unit at Paw Paw



FIGURE 33: Stone Foundation at Paw Paw

## THE CIVIL WAR

During the Civil War the Potomac was part of the boundary between the North and the South. Two vital supply lines for the Union capital ran along the river, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the C&O Canal. This frontier was therefore the scene of much action. Confederate raiders made numerous attempts to disrupt the navigation of the canal to prevent its use by the Union army. Often these attempts were made along the section of the canal between the Monocacy River and Dam No. 5, although occasionally the Confederate army made forays to destroy key sections of the canal between Cumberland and Hancock.

The first of the Confederate raids on the upper Potomac River occurred on October 23, 1861. The battle was triggered when Confederate forces attempted to destroy the South Branch Bridge. Six companies of Union troops engaged the enemy and drove them off. The Union victory on the South Branch forestalled the intent of the Confederates to destroy Dam No. 6 (Unrau 2007).

The next attempt by the Confederate army came almost a year later, in October 1862. Early that month they staged two raids to harass General McClellan's depot at Harper's Ferry as well as destroy the Union supply lines. The first raid was carried out by 900 Confederate soldiers led by Col. John D. Imboden. On October 4 they attacked an entrenched camp of Company K, 54<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, at the mouth of Little Cacapon. After forcing the Union forces to surrender, they burned the encampment and the Baltimore and Ohio bridge that crossed the Little Cacapon. Following the events at Little Cacapon, a Confederate cavalry battalion was sent across the Potomac into Maryland to cut off the escape of the Union soldiers at Paw Paw. Moving down the canal towpath, the Rebel horsemen forced the encampment of Company B, 54<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, located some 500 yards from the Paw Paw Tunnel, to surrender (Unrau 2007). As the Confederates destroyed the captured Union camp, they learned that their base camp near the Cacapon Bridge had been scattered by Union cavalry. This news caused Colonel Imboden to abandon any further disruption of the supply line and withdraw from the area.

In June 1863 a small Confederate force under Lt. Col. Elijah V. White made a series of raids along the Potomac River. The first two occurred near the mouth of Catoctin Creek, and the third was launched against the Cumberland Division of the canal between the Paw Paw Tunnel and the "Narrows" during several days in late June. The only available information about the raid appears in a letter from Superintendent Lowe to Clerk Ringgold on June 20, 1863 (Unrau 2007). One or two lock gates were damaged in the raid and the waterway was cut just below Lock 67 and between Locks 71 and 72. Luckily for the canal, the breaches were not too severe and were repaired quickly at a cost of about \$600.

Despite the occasional attack and destruction of several sections of the canal by Confederate forces, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company saw record earnings from 1863 to 1865. In July 1864 local valley residents requested that the canal board grant them permission to build warehouses, groceries, and feed stores along the waterway to take advantage of the increasing traffic. Before any action could be taken on these proposals, the canal again became the scene of military activity (Unrau 2007). In June 1864 Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early was sent to clear Union forces from the Shenandoah Valley and draw some military attention away from Richmond.



Having accomplished his task, Early was ordered to cross the Potomac River with his 14,000 men and advance toward Washington in an effort to draw off Union soldiers from the siege of Petersburg, Virginia.

During the march on Washington, Early sent a number of Confederate raiding parties out to wreak havoc on the canal (Figure 34). As a result bridges, lock gates, and canal boats were burned. The majority of damage occurred on the Monocacy, Antietam, and Williamsport divisions of the canal. The Cumberland Division received some damage during the raids, primarily near Lock 68. The wood pivot bridge over Lock 68 was burned and the masonry and gates partially damaged. The Confederate raiding party also captured 14 canal boats in the vicinity of Lock 68. The horses and mules were unhitched from the boats, and the craft, most of which were loaded with coal, were set on fire (Unrau 2007). Early's raiding parties also reached farther up the north branch of the Potomac. The Patterson Creek railroad bridge was burned as was a temporary bridge over the canal. Although Early's raids greatly damaged the canal, the severe drought that summer was even more devastating, preventing the passage of boats that displaced more than 4 feet of water.

General Early continued to harass the C&O Canal in late July 1864. He sent 3,000 men under Brig. Gens. John McCausland and Bradley Johnson back across the Potomac River at McCoy's Ferry. Marching directly on Clear Spring, the Confederates drove a 400-man Union cavalry unit back toward Hagerstown. On July 31 McCausland marched on Hancock, Maryland, and demanded a ransom of \$30,000 and 5,000 cooked rations from the town.

Union cavalry under Gen. William Averell were in close pursuit, and McCausland left Hancock and proceeded up the Baltimore Pike northwest toward Cumberland, Maryland. The following day the Confederates were confronted by Union lines under General Benjamin Kelley (Figure 35) The Union forces stretched along the heights 2 miles east of Cumberland near Folck's Mill (Unrau 2007). The Confederates took cover behind a bridge and the mill buildings but were held off by artillery and rifle fire for the rest of the day. Fearing pursuit by General Averell's cavalry, the Confederates abandoned the field and proceeded downstream 20 miles to Oldtown.

The next day the Confederates found the river crossing at Oldtown blocked by 250 men from the 153<sup>rd</sup> Ohio National Guard (High 1997). Under Col. Israel Stough, the Ohioans took up positions on Alum Hill, a narrow hill between the canal and the river south of Oldtown. Stough's men also burned the bridges across the canal. Gunfire was exchanged between the two forces until some of the Confederates managed to cross the canal upstream by destroying a building near the canal that had been left unguarded by Union troops. They used the timbers from the building to construct a bridge over the waterway and quickly turned Stough's flank by marching down the towpath side of the canal. Stough's troops retreated across the Potomac River and resumed their defense, using a convenient blockhouse and the support of a B&O Railroad train outfitted with several ironclad cars (High 1997). The Confederates brought up their artillery and made short work of the Union force. After destroying the train, the Confederate artillery scattered the Union troops along the railroad embankment. After another hour's exchange of gunfire, Stough and the 80 men still in the blockhouse surrendered.



SOURCE: Harper's Weekly 1864

FIGURE 34: Illustration from Harper's Weekly of General Early's Men Wreaking Havoc on the C&O Canal

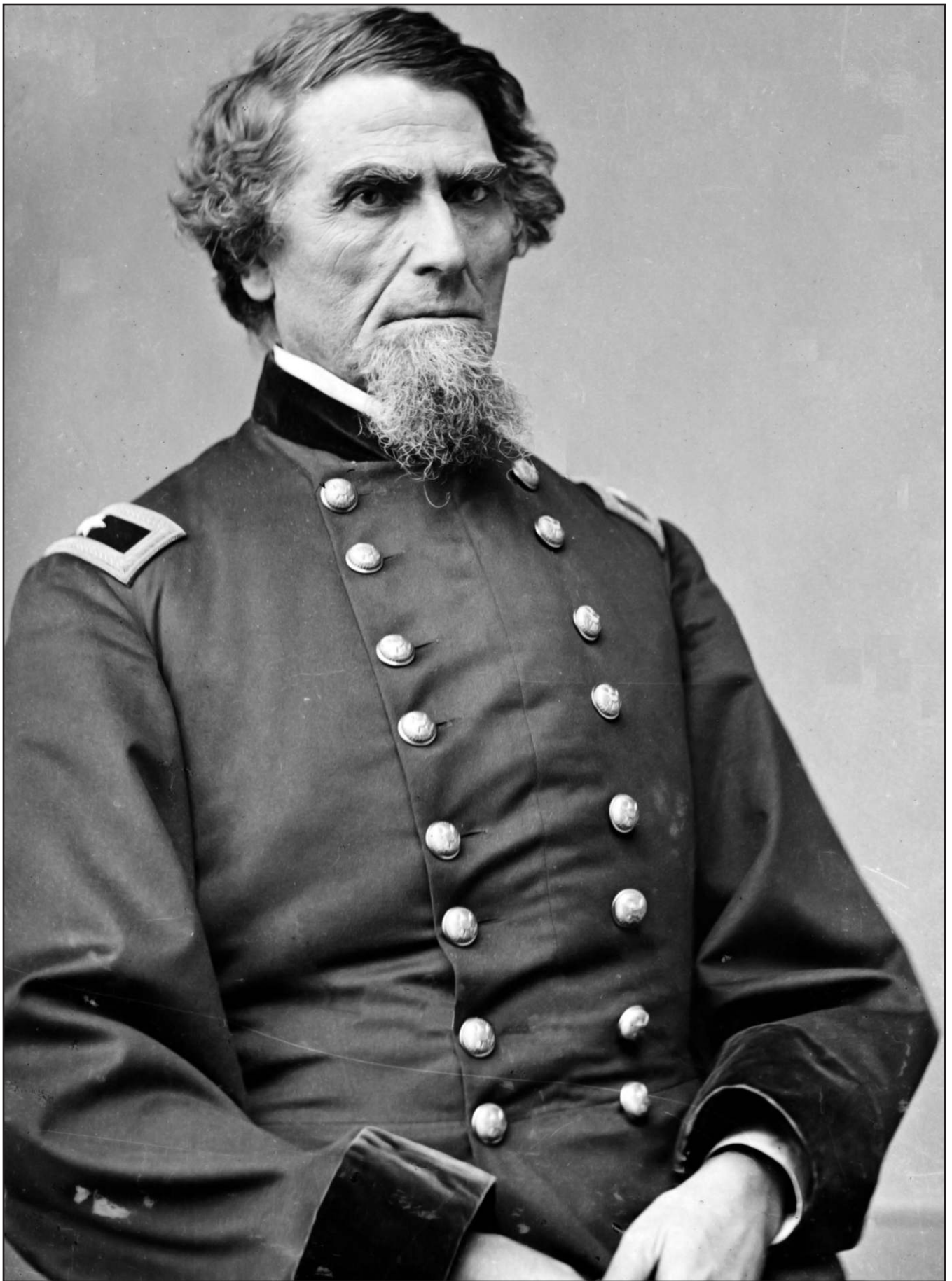


FIGURE 35: Portrait of Gen. Benjamin F. Kelley

SOURCE: NPS

The Confederate raids into Maryland and the Union attempts to quash the guerilla movements took their toll on the trade of the waterway (Unrau 2007). The misfortune for the canal was further exacerbated during the winter of 1864-1865. The severity of that winter closed the canal to navigation earlier than usual in December and forced repairs to be put off until the thaw of the following spring.

Residents along the upper Potomac River were further concerned and alarmed by a daring raid on Cumberland in late February 1865. On the night of February 21-22, approximately 65 Confederates known as McNeill's Rangers crossed the Potomac into Maryland near Brady's Mills. Jesse McNeill was a lieutenant in the Confederate Army and the leader of the Partisan Rangers. McNeill had harbored resentment against Union Gen. Benjamin Kelley for sending his mother and sister off to an Ohio prison under the accusation of being Confederate sympathizers (High 1997). McNeill's men entered Cumberland, Maryland, while 8,000 Union soldiers were encamped in the city. After destroying the office of the military telegraph, the Confederates captured Gens. Kelley and George Crook while they were asleep (Unrau 2007). From Cumberland they took the two generals down the canal towpath to Wiley's Ford and crossed into Virginia. A Union cavalry company pursued the kidnapers to Romney, West Virginia, where a skirmish occurred, but by that time the prisoners were on their way to Richmond.

The canal saw little other action related to the war in 1865. The canal did not commence operation until April 1, after the severe winter weather eased, and eight days later General Lee surrendered at Appomattox. Unfortunately for the canal, the end of the war meant the reduction of government contracts for manufactured goods. This was reflected in a decrease in the amount of coal required from the Cumberland coal fields. Ironically, despite the interruptions caused by the occasional military activity, the war years were the most profitable time in the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal's history.

## THE LATER YEARS OF THE CANAL

The Canal was intermittently profitable through the 1870s, but revenues began to decline thereafter. In 1889 a devastating flood closed the canal and forced the company into bankruptcy. The B&O Railroad took over the canal company and made major changes in its operations. The canal continued to operate, losing money most years, until 1924, when another major flood closed it for good.

For this last period of its history, the historical sources on the canal are very rich. Numerous photographs survive that show the canal, canal boats, lock keepers' houses, the port facilities at Cumberland and Williamsport, and other aspects of canal life (Figures 36 and 37). Many buildings of the canal era are still standing, especially lock keepers' houses. Archeological remains of this period are also abundant, including canal boats buried in Cumberland and trash middens around lock keepers' houses (Balicki and Corle 2007). A series of fascinating interviews has been recorded, many in the 1970s, with people who grew up along the canal. They describe a life of hard work that began at a young age, with children as young as seven guiding the mules that pulled the canal boats, sweeping out the boats, and helping with other chores. Boogie Grove, an old canaller interviewed by Susan Fauntleroy (1992) of the NPS, remembered his childhood on a canal boat like this:

Sometimes you'd run all night. Boated all night. There's a lot a boatsmen on there boated night and day. But I never got to that. We boated till about 9:00. Tied up. But you wouldn't more than get in bed. 'Fore you was up. Soon as you pull them harness off them mules, let 'em down and let 'em roll, they was ready to go! Us kids would no more than get to sleep, you'd hear our daddy say, "All right, boys, let's go!" Bout 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. Sometimes we'd run till 11:00 or 12:00 at night.

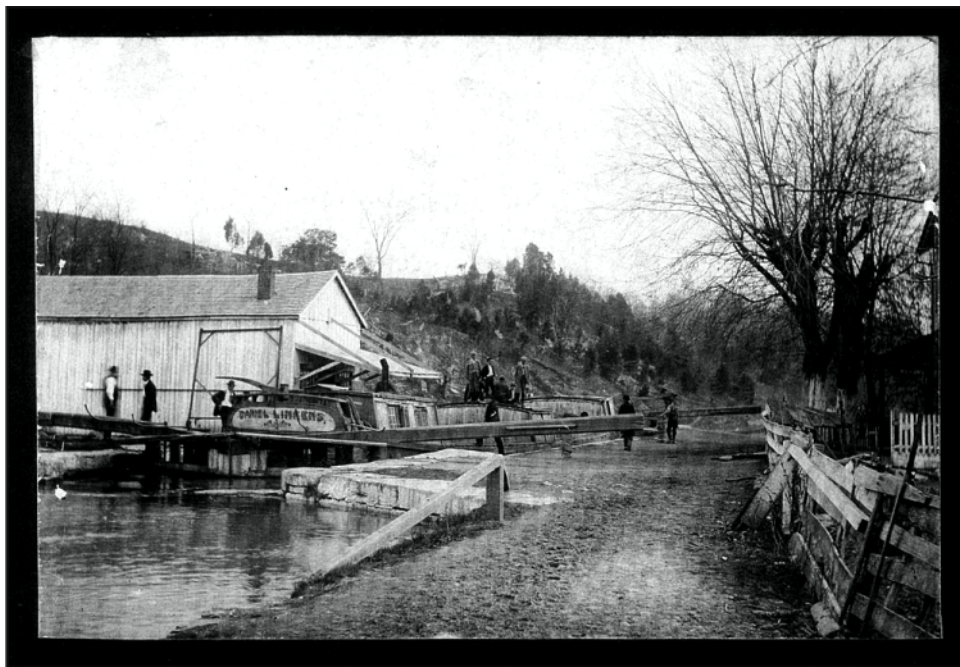


FIGURE 36: Lock 44, Near Williamsport

SOURCE: NPS



SOURCE: NPS

FIGURE 37: A Canal Boat

His friend Lambie Bennett recalled,

My daddy used to make us ride the mules at night and sing so he knowed we didn't go to sleep and fall overboard . . . . You see they was so close to the canal that if you fell off the mule on the inside you went in the canal! And he used to make us sing so he knowed we was still down there.

The canallers were, by our standards, poor, and the interviews describe the ways they scrimped and saved to make ends meet. People remembered sweeping up the little pieces of coal left in the boat's hold after it had been unloaded, to burn in their own stoves, or collecting stray grains of wheat off the ground to feed to the mules (Kytly 1983). But they had some excitement and movement in their lives, and they knew they were a special sort of people. Decades later they were proud to have "walked the whole hundred and eighty four miles" (Kytly 1983:189).

The lives of the lock keepers were also full of hard work and economizing. Harvey Brant, the last keeper of Lock 44 below Williamsport, spoke of all the different ways he found to supplement his meager pay from the Canal Company: catching eels, breeding dogs, collecting coal that fell off the boats, buying bread from a bakery in town and selling it to the crews of passing boats. Archeologists have excavated around the lock keeper's house where Brant lived, and they have found artifacts just like the ones found around the houses of other ordinary folks at the time: painted ceramic plates and teacups, glass bottles, buttons, children's toys like marbles and little tin mule carts. Brant thought he had it easier than some other lock keepers because he could walk to town and see people, so his post was not so lonely: "Locktenders a way out from town, they never seen anybody except when a boat went through" (Kytly 1983:204).

When the canal closed, a way of life ended, too. But walking along the canal we can still see some of the things that the canal folk saw, and feel the towpath under our feet as they did. We can even see some of the things people saw in the centuries before the canal was built: the river rising and falling with the rain and the seasons, the great gorges where the river cuts through the mountains, flocks of birds, forest full of deer, fields of crops, and over it all the sun and the moon that shine on us as they have on all the people of the river for 13,000 years.

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