

History of Tracey's Landing—1651-2006

Ruth Hazen

The property which became the port at Tracey's Landing is located on Herring Bay, near the entrance to the present-day marina, Herrington Harbor North. It was first surveyed by Robert Clarke, Maryland's surveyor from St. Mary's City, on October 24, 1651. During that week in 1651, Separatists seeking religious freedom, who had recently relocated from Virginia to Maryland, had Mr. Clarke survey most of the land bordering Herring Bay. The majority of those settlers would not live on their new property, but would sell the land to others. Edward Selby "laid out" 300 acres on the west side of Herring Creek, just to the north of *Marshes Seat*. Before long, Selby sold these 300 acres to George Pascall, and they became known as *Pascall's Purchase*. Pascall sold the southern 100 acres adjoining *Marshes Seat* to his nephew, James Pascall, who sold it to Abraham Naylor. In 1682, Christopher Vernon, Anne Arundel County lawyer and court clerk, purchased Naylor's property, which became known as *Barwell's Plantation*. Several years later in 1701, Vernon also purchased and moved to *Marshes Seat*.¹

George Pascall sold the northern 200 acres of his property to William Sivick, an ancient inhabitant of Herring Creek. When Sivick died, he left his land to his only son John, who married Susannah Carr, daughter of Wallis Carr of Herring Creek. John and Susannah Sivick were childless, and when John died, Susannah inherited the tract. Susannah then married Augustus Hawkins. While married to Hawkins, a fire destroyed their home. Following Hawkins death, Susannah sold 85 of her 200 acres to Anne Arundel County planter, John Wilson. In January, 1701-2, she married carpenter, Thomas Tracey, at St. James Church.²

In early 1669, at the urging of the King of England, Maryland's legislature began establishing official towns and ports. Herrington, located near today's Town Point, was one of the earliest of these designated towns. By 1683, Maryland required all shipping to take place at one of its designated ports. A small settlement was established at Herrington, and presumably its port was the only local port until early in the eighteenth century. When Christopher Vernon married Lucy Evans, he obtained the land surrounding the town of Herrington, which had belonged to his wife's first husband. Beginning in 1699, Vernon gradually purchased all of the lots in Herrington, until by late 1702 he owned the whole town. The next year, Susannah and Thomas Tracey sold Christopher Vernon 30 acres of their property located on the bay. Perhaps at this point, Vernon established a port on Herring Bay named Tracey's Landing, after Susannah and Thomas Tracey. In 1705, Samuel Chew I appealed to the county court for permission to build a rolling road, so he could get his tobacco to port at Tracey's Landing. That road to Tracey's Landing remains, and roughly follows present-day Maryland Rt. 256.³ (See Fig. 1).

After about 2 ½ years of marriage to Susannah, Thomas Tracey disappeared, leaving his wife with several small children and no money. To make ends meet, Susannah first sold forty acres, then another twenty-one acres of her land to Jonathan Jones. After that sale took place, John Wilson had his property re-surveyed and realized he was 40-50 acres short, so he sued Susannah Tracey for the "defect". By then, Thomas Tracey had been missing for eight months, and Susannah had already sold to Jones the land which could have been used to make up Wilson's

“defect”. Desiring to give Wilson “honest satisfaction”, she allowed her lawyer, James Heath, to give a portion of his own land to Wilson, and then she signed over the remainder of her property to Heath as compensation. Susannah Tracey left the area, perhaps for northern Anne Arundel County. Two years later, at the end of 1707, the General Assembly finalized the deal, discharged Susannah’s bond, and released Heath from any liability to Susannah or her former husband.⁴

Fifteen years later in 1722, Christopher Vernon had purchased Heath’s property. Vernon leased what was then called *Heath’s Landing* to Anne Arundel County merchant, Nathaniel Chew. The rental agreement included the 138 acres granted to James Heath of Cecil County in 1707, five acres called *Heath’s Purchase* south of that property, as well as the 30 acres which Vernon purchased from Thomas and Susannah Tracey in 1703.⁵

In 1734, David Weems purchased *Marshes Seat and Barwell’s Plantation*, including the port at Tracey’s Landing. The Weems families were shippers, and in the 1760's, David Weems II had an ocean sailing vessel built at Tracey’s Landing. Ships captain, William Weems, inherited *Barwell’s Plantation* in 1779 from his father, David. In 1783, the inhabitants of St. James Parish petitioned for a tobacco inspection station at Tracey’s Landing, but it was granted instead to Pigg Point at Bristol on the Patuxent River. This loss would have led to the decline of Tracey’s Landing port, as all tobacco shipped would first have to be inspected at Pigg Point. When the William Weems’ property was advertised following his death in 1795, one of his homes stood next to the Tracey’s Landing Warehouse. On October 27, 1814, during the War of 1812, the British took possession of Tilghman’s Island, apparently to set up winter quarters. They sent a force of four ships, a brig and two schooners across the bay, and came ashore at Tracey’s Landing. This British attempt to carry off tobacco and demolish the houses was stopped by a small party of militia, who chased the robbers back to their vessels. The tobacco warehouse is said to have remained as late as 1875. In 1919, a Mr. Isaac Allison bought some property near the location of the old warehouse. While excavating for the cellar of his home, he found lime and coal which had been buried beneath the ground. He also found a large brass key which he believed to be a key to the warehouse.⁶

The Tracey’s Landing Post Office was established shortly before July 1, 1804 with Robert B. Betta as the first postmaster. Over the years, the post office changed locations several times, causing the boundaries of Tracey’s Landing to be somewhat uncertain, as all those who received mail at the Tracey’s Landing Post Office were said to live in Tracey’s Landing. At the turn of the twentieth century, U.S. Postal Service efficiency purposely dropped the apostrophe in Tracey’s, and the “e” was dropped accidentally. Although map makers followed the post office’s lead, the county Board of Education remained faithful to the original name, calling the local school Tracey’s Elementary School.⁷

Tracey’s High School was completed and opened to both high school and elementary students in September 1920. Although the Lothian area would have been closer to the center of population, no land was available in Lothian at the time. Mr. Thomas Hall III of Tracys Landing gave four acres of his property on which to locate the building. The first high school class consisted of thirteen students, four of which graduated in 1924. Since there was no transportation for students, a few children walked to school, and the others drove horse carts or rode horse back. A fifteen-

stall stable was built on school grounds to shelter the horses, and during lunch hour the students would feed and water their animals. Students brought their lunches in tin pails, syrup buckets and boxes, and ate outside under the trees in good weather. While the school was originally equipped with electric lights and central heating, water was obtained from a hand pump behind the building. During very cold weather, it occasionally became necessary to set up wood burning stoves in some of the rooms to assist the furnace.⁸ As the years passed, Tracey's High School was moved first to Lothian on the grounds of the present Middle School, then to Harwood where the present Southern High School now stands. The 1920's high school was torn down to build Tracey's Elementary School, which in 2006 is undergoing extensive renovations and additions to accommodate a still growing school population.

Weems Chapel was a little Methodist Church located in a grove of trees near the original port of Tracey's Landing. St. Mark's Chapel, a branch of St. James Episcopal Church, stands on that spot today. It is said that Bishop Asbury of the Methodist Church preached at Weems Chapel around 1789. Members of the Weems family who lived at *Marshes Seat* and *Barwell's Plantation* are buried in the cemetery at St. Mark's Chapel, the earliest graves dating to 1842 and 1845.⁹

In 1941, Tracys Landing had a population of 65, a post office and a school. In 1952, it occupied about 7 square miles, with a population of between 75 and 100.¹⁰ In 2006, Tracys Landing still has a church, a post office and a school. Its largest employer is Herrington Harbor North Marina, which offers not only boat storage and dock rental, but a number of marine-related businesses for boat building, repair and sales. In addition the marina offers a restaurant, recreational facilities for its patrons such as picnic tables and a swimming pool, and has a small outdoor museum located on the grounds. Although several small home-based businesses are located in Tracy's Landing, the town is primarily a residential community. In addition to the older homes and farms, there are three communities of about a dozen new homes each. Tracey's Landing, Tracey's Overlook and Tracey's Creek by the Bay have all been constructed and occupied since the 1985.

Tracys Landing has always been a small rural community. Its residents depended on the land for farming and on the water for seafood, trade and transportation. Tracys Landing today remains rural, although some land has been divided for housing developments. The port is still an important feature of the community. In the past it served ocean going vessels transporting tobacco to England and returning with household necessities. Today it serves the recreational boater.

Endnotes for Tracey's Landing

¹ A.A. County Rent Rolls #1, 1651 ff., (Herring Creek Hundred), *Pascall's Purchase*: 8.
Land Records, Anne Arundel County Court, Liber IH#1 (1662-1703): 159.
Land Records, Anne Arundel County Court, Liber WT#2, part 1, 1-356 (1703): 267,268.
Land Records, Anne Arundel County Court, Liber WT#1 (1699-1702): 322-325.

² Rent Rolls #1: 8.
Land Records, Anne Arundel County Court, Liber WT#2, part 1, 1-356 (1703): 115-118.
Edith Stansbury Dallam, *St. James Parish, A History 1663-1799, Including Copies of the Original Records of the Parish Vestry Minutes and Register of Births, Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials* (Port City Press, Inc., c. 1978): 1, 85. Maryland Testamentary Proceedings, Lib. 14 (1688): 441.
Resurvey Plats, A.A. County, 1778, Portfolio No.17, (*Pascalls Purchase* shown with *Heath's Purchase* and *Heaths Landing*, Resurveyed 1705).

³ WT#1: 43-45, 325, 327, 328.
WT#2: 115-118.
Rent Rolls #1: 3.
William Hand Browne, Ed., *Archives of Maryland, Proceedings of the Council of Maryland 1667-1667/8*, Vol. 5 (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Soc., 1887): 45.
Dallam, Vol. 1: 85.
Anne Arundel County Plats, Hagner Collection, 1854, Microfilm #MdHR M877, No.17.

⁴ WT#2: 267, 268.
William Hand Browne, Ed., *Archives of Maryland, Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly of Maryland, March, 1707--November 1710*, Vol. 27 (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1907), 470.
Owings, Helen B., *Discovering Our School Community* (Tracy's Landing, MD: Tracy's School, grade 5, 1951-2): 4,5.

⁵ Land Records, Anne Arundel County Court, Liber RCW#2, (1722-1724): 47-50.

⁶ Land Records, Anne Arundel County Court, Liber RD#2, (1733-1737): 42.
A.A. Co. Proprietary Rent Rolls Liber 15 #5 (1733-1773): 8.
Mrs. Elizabeth C. Williams, "The Weems Family of Maryland," *Maryland Gazette*, (December 1, 1927):8.
Maryland Gazette, August 27, 1795.
Maryland Gazette, September 4, 1783.
Dallam, Vol. 1: 77.
John L. Shepherd, "Pigg Point", *The Capitol, South County News* (8/7/1997).
Maryland Historical Magazine 28 (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1933), 267.
Niles Weekly Register (Baltimore), 10/29/1814.
Owings: 4,5.

⁷ Owings: 1, 14, 15.
M. Keith Ellingsworth, "Capital Query", *The Capital* (Sept. 9, 1999).
Thomas John Hall, III, *The Hall Family of West River and Kindred Families* (Denton, MD: Rue Publishing Co., c. 1941): 1.

⁸ Owings: 17-20.

⁹ Owings: 16.
Gravestones, Weems cemetery.

¹⁰ Archives #478, *Gazeteer of Maryland* (1941): 213.
Owings: 1.