

HISTORY OF COLONIAL BEACH INFORMATION AS REQUESTED BY THE COLONIAL BEACH PLANNING  
COMMISSION 2019 – FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR 2019

Colonial Beach AKA: “Playground on the Potomac” “Little Las Vegas” “Gateway to the Historic Corridor”

Slogan: “The Sun Rises and Sets on Colonial Beach”

**The Town Name(s)**

The town was officially named “**Colonial Beach**” by Henry J. Kintz when the original acreage was platted in 1882 on the former White Point Farm. This information comes from several sources and despite local lore appears to be the official source of our town name. The town was already a popular resort area prior to 1882 and may have already been referred to as “Colonial Beach” in the 1870s.

Former Name: During the 1800s the beach and shoreline area from Bluff Point to Gum Bar Point was known as: John L. Cox Fishery. “The only activity in the early 1800s along our beaches from Bluff Point to White Point to Gum Bar point was that of profitable fisheries.” This information is from “This was Potomac” by Frederick Tilip. According to a “Potomac Fisheries of 1853” report: “Master Fisherman J.T. Wareham used a force of 50 men and 3 horses. Their one-haul seine was 5100 feet and the length of rope was 10,200 feet, with the depth of the seine 24 feet. The fishing season for shad and herring began March 22 and ended May 28”. What was done with the gigantic fish haul is not reported.

The question about the “naming of the town” is not an easy one as it has been called by the various points on the water for many years and those names are still used. Newspaper ads and posters distributed after 1860 used various names to advertise parts of our area. The area was often called White Point Farm well after 1882. White Point Farm was a portion of town purchased by Kintz but it was originally patented by William Botham in 1655.

Kinsale Plantation or Farm seems to have been named by Samuel Bonum on July 4, 1653 when he patented 300 acres below Attopin/Attoppan Creek which is also known as Rosier Creek. (The actual Creek is not be confused with the area of land which was also called Rosier and even Rosier Creek.) The portion of land called Rosier was a 1657 patent by John Rosier of 1450 acres and later 130 acres became part of Colonial Beach. That same land was owned by Andrew Monroe (1750) and then by Gen. Henry Lee (1799) and eventually by James A Clark of Washington D.C. between 1882 an 1887. Clark officially named that area Classic Shores and even today it is sometimes called by all three names.

Newspaper articles and ads in the 1980s also use the names Bluff Point Farm, Irish Neck, Gum Bar Point (also Ghost Point), Winkedoodle Point, Monroe Bay, Church Point Bay, Wilkerson’s Creek, Wilkerson’s Beach, Potomac Beach, and Robin’s Grove Point often referring to areas that extend far beyond those actual locations.

## Indians in the Area

The simplest response to questions about Indians in the Colonial Beach area is to respond that there were few visible Indians in our area after the 1700s. This is contrary to some local lore but there seems to be no evidence of these presence.

For the longer answer to the request regarding a history of the Indians who used the lands and waters here is yet to be determined. No one actually knows when the first Indian entered Virginia but it was probably 15,000 to 20,000 years ago. <http://www.virginiaplaces.org> The total population of Paleo-Indians in all of Virginia by 8000 BC was sparse

It is presumed that the Indian population in Virginia was probably migrating for many centuries in family groups seasonally following food for many centuries. The population probably spent warmer months near bodies of water and the Potomac probably attracted them. They also needed to be near small quarry areas where they could find the materials for tools, and they eventually hunted animals small and large with those tools

At least by the 1500s, Indians lived in our area along the Potomac and its tributaries for a part of the year probably only when weather was warm and fish and oysters were plentiful. Finding proof of this is not easy. Some of their sites near the Potomac may be under water because water levels have changed greatly over the years. At times the river level here would have been much lower BC but it may been higher as well. It known that the Potomac water level was much higher in the 1600s and much lower in the 1890s.

People are often confused about Indian tribes. Identifiable tribes, such as the Pamunkey, probably did not evolve until Indians began to cultivate land for food. At that point, perhaps about 1000 years ago, Indians began to create some semi-permanent "towns" or group areas. A few groups became less nomadic but some continued to move seasonally seeking food.

There seem to have been three major language groups in Virginia by the late 1500s. As Europeans began to "interrupt" the lives of the Indians in the 1500s more individual tribal identities probably emerged. These tribal identities and the languages were most likely fluid and dynamic like those of every culture.

Prior to 1608 some Indians began to live in more permanent villages in the Westmoreland County vicinity. By 1608 when Captain John Smith was in our area, he reported that he found Indians living in the area of what is now Westmoreland Co. None of these "villages" were identified in the immediate area of Colonial Beach.

The Indians that Smith met spoke a language derived from Algonquin. They had been part of the Algonquins at some point but had wandered away to begin their own community and were no longer considered part of Chief Powhatan's community. The Westmoreland Indians that were identified lived in longhouses along river banks or streams where they raised crops such as maize, beans, pumpkins and

tobacco. It is known that there were small gatherings of native people living along Nomini Creek and some near Leedstown. It is unknown if any were living along the river near Colonial Beach. Some evidence suggests that Indians were probably fishing and eating oysters in our vicinity perhaps coming only seasonally.

As part of a peace treaty with the Indians In 1646 Virginia had promised not to settle the Middle Peninsula or the Northern Neck area, yet some white settlers had already claimed land and had begun to live there. By 1648 Virginia had already broken the promise. Disgruntled persons fleeing from Md areas of Kent Island and St. Mary's County had come to settle in the area. Persons fleeing that area of MD were our first settlers in the area became known as Westmoreland County in 1653. Colonial Beach area was a part of that "land grab".

After numerous altercations between those very early white settlers and Indians of Westmoreland County over a fairly short period of less than 50 years, many Indians (Wicocomica, Lower Cuttawomen, and Sekakawon) who remained living anywhere in the Northern Neck area were forced into a 4,400 acre reservation in Lancaster Co. VA during the years 1655 and 1656. This reservation land was eventually sold in 1696 "to Europeans". It is known that some native people managed to leave the reservation and be "assimilated" into the general population, but the numbers are unknown. Many residents of the reservation died and some managed to leave Virginia.

### **Who Did Live in the Colonial Beach area during the 1600s?**

Historical information about the poorer residents is sparse. There were many more males than females living in the Westmoreland area in the 1600s. In addition to those from MD seeking religious freedom, some indentured servants were freed, and a number of males came off boats for various reasons. Some just left the boat, some were delivered here. There were a few free blacks. Those who were not indentured servants or slaves were often living in poverty conditions with few ways to make a living. They would grow small crops, trap, fish and hunt. Some would find employment on farms or plantations but had to work for very low wages or room and board because they were competing with indentures and slaves. It is unknown exactly who was living in what is now the Colonial Beach area but it is likely that some of these poorer folks were here. Most preferred living near the river or tributaries because it was a food source and their only means of transportation was walking or boating. In the late 1600s there was major unrest with this poorer population who did live in Westmoreland.

Westmoreland County (1600s) was originally settled by some relatively wealthy planters who could afford land and indentured servants from Britain. If the "indentures" survived their employment, most of these indentured people were eventually given their freedom though often not nearly as soon as scheduled. Their employers (owners of their indentures) could take them to court in Montross, claim that they had broken the contract with their employer in some way and have years added onto the indenture as well as physical punishments to the servant. Some stayed in Westmoreland after they were freed as they had little choice. They often walked away at the end of the indenture with just the clothes they were wearing. Some of the early indentured males sent to the Westmoreland area were taken from

British prisons or sent in lieu of prison. They could not return to Europe even if they had any funds. Most of those indentured did not choose to be, so there were runaways or escapees. Some of them went into Maryland and then tried to get to a new area in the Colonies where they might not be recognized. This was one factor that encouraged the slavery of blacks. They were more easily recognized.

As soon as the first Europeans began to travel from Britain to the New World, rich persons and land speculators in Britain wanted to obtain land. The English who settled in Virginia from 1607 on asserted that they owned the Virginia land. During the colonial period, individual colonists (and some who never left Britain) acquired real property in a number of ways first through grants by the Virginia Company, then through headrights, treasury rights, and military warrants. Land was awarded to British nobles by Kings as well.

Here in Colonial Beach most of the land was acquired between 1650 and 1670 as part of a big Virginia "land grab". This was the beginning of Virginia land speculation. Attached is a page of a historical atlas showing the land patent holders in our area in the early 1600s. Many of our British land owners did live in Virginia at least for a time. Some quickly resold their land and purchased more. The Westmoreland Deed Book I is a local record of the land purchased around 1650 and after. There is also a State Land Office in Richmond where transactions should have been recorded though some were not. The land which was to become Colonial Beach was occupied by large farms or plantations during the 1600s and probably some smaller farms or acreages where poorer people lived.

Andrew Monroe was a Kent Island inhabitant who fled. He was a master seaman who surrendered his ship and joined the MD rebels. He eventually owned a number of pieces of land within what is now Colonial Beach. In 1650 and 1652 he patented land later known as Monrovia. He became a Vestryman along with John Washington in 1661 and died in 1668. He was the great grandfather of President James Monroe. Andrew was one of our earliest settlers.

Nathaniel Pope also fled Maryland, patented land and began a trading post in Westmoreland Co. Eventually he owned a plantation in Westmoreland Co. He befriended John Washington who eventually married Pope's daughter. John had arrived via a boat on which he was employed. He was the great grandfather of George Washington. John Washington died in 1667.

John did not live in the area which would become Colonial Beach, but he built a mill on Rosier's Creek in 1662 fairly near Colonial Beach located at what is now the boundary between Westmoreland County and King George County on Rt. 205. It was called Washington's Mill but there are several other mill locations called Washington's Mill. This Washington's Mill remained in the Washington family until 1808. It was probably the first mill in Westmoreland and was certainly one of the earliest. This mill was later called Baber's Mill, Garnett's Mill, and Bristol Mill. The remains of the Washington's Mill on Rosier's Creek were destroyed in one of the highway improvements of Rt. 205. There should be a highway marker in that location.

## **Some of the Poorer People Rebelled**

In **1676** Nathaniel Bacon led a rebellion in Virginia called “**Bacon’s Rebellion**”. The reason presented at the time was because Indians were committing thefts and murders against poorer Virginia settlers who were often living alone or with a few people and who could not defend themselves against a sudden group of invaders. Small bands of Indians were raid the farms, take the animals, and burn down the homes. The British government had a profitable business with the Indians and they wanted to maintain it. They were not interested in defending the poorer settlers. Most wealthy planters, including those in Westmoreland County, supported the British as they didn’t want the small settlers claiming land. Some of these raids did occur in Westmoreland. It is possible they occurred in the Colonial Beach area.

Bacon accused the British Government of protecting the Indians by allowing pillaging and deaths of settlers on small properties in Virginia. Westmoreland area was sparsely settled at that time but the poorer settlers and small landowners of Westmoreland joined in the rebellion fighting for their own right to safety on their own lands. At one point unhappy indentured servants helped those rebelling take over Stratford Hall and set fire to the home. Eventually many Virginia men (Bacon’s followers) were imprisoned and hanged for taking part in this rebellion. Some of the men who were hanged lived in Westmoreland County. It is not known if any lived on the land that is now Colonial Beach.

Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 was the first uprising in the colonies against Virginia Gov. William Berkeley, representing the British monarchy. While Bacon may have been leading the rebellion for his own interests in a commission and in fur trading and may have manipulated some Indian groups into fighting each other, the real end result was that the poorer people had united, including the free poor with enslaved and indentured servants. They had demanded that males without land be allowed to vote which frightened the British governor and rich landowners. The rebellion ended quickly but the roots of rebellion were sown including here in Westmoreland County.

## **The Dangers of Water Transportation and Living Near the Water**

If one had access to transportation on the river or tributaries via a sloop which was the main source of transportation in our area from the 1650s to well into the 1700s, it was necessary to pay attention to any other vessels on the water near you. During the time period of 1662 to 1666 there were a number of Dutch “privateers” on the Chesapeake Bay and various rivers and tributaries. The Rappahannock was known to be a dangerous river and there were “pirates” on the tributaries.

By 1684 the privateers or pirates were outlawed, but a number of Virginia “gentlemen” private citizens continued to support privateering through investing in and financial supporting them. Privateering did not stop. Between the years of 1770 to 1780 the Chesapeake Bay was a highly dangerous place. Privateers were back, plundering ships supposedly for the British. They went up and down the Eastern shore and into the Patuxent River stealing, burning homes, taking over ships, and killing people whose homes were along the river and bay.

The majority of people in the Colonies had settled along the water, so these were highly populated areas. Eventually some of the privateers or pirates did not discriminate between Brits and Americans; they plundered indiscriminately. Some of the pirates took on former slaves, both by kidnapping them when stealing animals and goods or by recruiting them. Some of the British took on former slaves while fending against the pirates. Those slaves taken on board by either were often not free to leave, so the former slaves sometimes fought viciously for the British only to find that they were now slaves aboard a British ship. The same happened on the pirate ships. While there seems to be no evidence that the pirate ships made their way up the Potomac as far as Westmoreland Co., they were at least as close as Point Lookout MD. Privateers ravaged and terrorized residents of St. Mary's County MD. The terrorizing attacks from various privateers from various countries continued for more than one hundred years. After 1780 new governments made it difficult for them and most of them became Pirates of the Caribbean.