



## COVE POINT BEACH: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Cove Point Beach's history stretches deep into a past that touches our lives today. Almost every day, residents of Cove Point walk the beach, heads down, skimmers in hand. They are reaching back 17 million years, searching for remnants of life that existed here in the Miocene Epoch. Nestled in our sandy shore are fossils, sharks' teeth, coral and bones. Over the course of millions of years, the margins of the sea fluctuated. After the last ice sheet slipped away, the present Chesapeake Bay emerged exposing the roughly 24 miles of the Calvert Cliffs. Spanning from Chesapeake Beach to Drum Point, these cliffs soar up to 100 feet. While the cliffs of Cove Point Beach have reached their angle of repose and are now forested and protected from erosion, much of the cliff range is collapsing into the water. As they erode, they shed hidden treasures that wash up in the tide.

Some residents have discovered arrowheads and artifacts, as well. These were left by the indigenous people who populated our neighborhood for over nine thousand years. Historians believe these Native Americans were Algonquians, particularly of the Patuxent chiefdom. In 1608, John Smith may have encountered this tribe while mapping the Northern Chesapeake Bay.

The Patuxent tribe grew corn and tobacco. Their farmland became very attractive to the colonists who began settling the area between 1637-1642. Cecil Calvert, Second Lord Baltimore, established Patuxent County in 1654, which was renamed in his honor in 1658. By 1670, four plantations were carved out in the Cove Point area. It is believed that one of these was "The Great Eltonhead Manor," with 5000 acres that included our marsh.

The county was part of the Maryland Colony and benefited from the Maryland Toleration Acts, granting freedom of conscience to all Christians. This attracted additional settlers who were fleeing religious persecution from England. As their presence increased, the native population began to flee, freeing up land for the expansion of tobacco farming. Cove Point became a port of call for freighters sailing up and down the Bay bringing goods to the residents and taking tobacco and other produce to the world.

In 1828, a lighthouse was built to mark the shoal extending out into the shipping channel. Keepers and their families lived at the lighthouse keeping watch and exacting records which tell tales of shipwrecks, rescues and friendship. One story describes a ship captain who knew his lighthouse keeper friend enjoyed few luxuries. Once, upon passing Cove Point, he sounded his whistle and threw a whole stem of bananas overboard. The keeper rowed out to retrieve the rare treat.

After the Civil War, the tobacco trade diminished, as did the packet ships docking at Cove Point. While tobacco continued to be a large cash crop, residents also turned to the fertile fishing grounds of the Chesapeake Bay. This led to the demand for shipbuilding. By 1880, 500 vessels plied the waters around southern Calvert County and Cove Point.

In the early 1930's, Route 497 (Cove Point Road) was completed. At this time, State Senator Joseph C. Webster saw an opportunity to develop a "high class" community along our shores. Webster purchased land and began developing housing. Knowing government workers enjoyed regular pay checks and higher than average salaries, he targeted US government employees with his marketing. Federal employees from Agriculture, Archives, Library of Congress and State responded.

The 1940s brought World War II and Cove Point Beach played an important role. Our community was transformed into an amphibious attack training facility. Our beach, with its sandy shore and forested cliffs, resembled the terrain at the French coastline. This made it the perfect spot to rehearse for the invasion of Europe. This effort required sacrifices from our residents. Fishermen abandoned their territories in our coastal waters. Residents leased their homes to the government and only visited their properties when permitted. They endured hundreds of military personnel overcrowding our community and endless shortages until victory arrived.

Columbia Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) Corp. developed a facility to the north of Cove Point Beach to receive imported natural gas during the 1970s. The plant fell into disuse until 1994 when it was transformed into a storage facility for domestic natural gas. In 2013, the owners of the plant at the time, Dominion Energy, proposed an expansion to export liquid natural gas. The plant – now Cove Point LNG – was redesigned and expanded to send natural gas to countries around the world.

Although the history is always with us, Cove Point Beach continues to change with the times. As a vibrant, ever-evolving community, we balance the changing weather and tides, the Critical Area restrictions, and ongoing development with the immense pleasure of living in our uniquely beautiful waterfront community.