

West Point's History Begins Almost With the Founding of Nation

By ELIZABETH STUART GRAY

IN 1607 Captain John Smith with several of his companions was captured by Indians near Jamestown and taken by boat on exhibition throughout the Tidewater section of Virginia to all the Indian tribes and villages, as a prize captive. Very likely the captives were taken to the Indian town of Cinquotek, where the rivers the Indians called Mattapanient and Youghtanund met.

Cinquoteck was the chief town of the Indian Chief Opechancanough, and one of the important towns of the Powhatan confederacy.

In 1608, according to Smith's Journals, after his release from captivity (through the legendary efforts of Pocahontas) Smith paid another visit to Cinquotek, this time voluntarily, in order to negotiate a trade for some corn to feed the hungry settlers at Jamestown.

"... wee anchored at Cinquoteck," Smith writes, "the first twaine (town) above the parting of the river where dwelled two Kings of Pamaunke, Brothers to Powhatan; the one called Opitchepan, the other Kata-tough. To these I went ashore, who kindly intreated mee and Maister Scrivener, sending some present aboard to Captaine Nuport, whilst wee were trucking with these Kings . . . Opechancanough, his wife, women and children came to meete me; with a naturall kind affection hee seemed to rejoyce to see me."

"The next day till noone we traded," Smith continued, "the King feasted all the company and the afternoon was spent in playing, dauncing and delight. By no meanes hee would have us depart till . . . he had feasted us with venison, for which he had sent. The next day he performed his promise, giving more to us three than would have sufficed thirty and in that we carried not away what we left, hee sent it after us to the pinnis. (The Pinnis was their ship.) "With what words or signes of love he could express, wee departed."

So far as we know, this is the first account of the first voluntary appearance of white men in West Point, called by Captain Smith "Pamunkee Town," in the area known to the white men as "Pamunkey

Neck." This latter territory comprised all the land between the two rivers we now call Mattaponi and Pamunkey, corresponding with the present King William County.

For the next forty years known facts about this area are few.

In 1623 Captain Tucker and twelve other Englishmen shot down forty Indian warriors and three chiefs at "Pamunkey Town." In 1629, Colonel William Claiborne, near the seat of "Pamunkey Town," defeated the Indians at Candyack.

In 1634 Colonial Virginia was divided into eight shires. One of these was named Charles River, so called after the river in honor of King Charles--this included the present York and Pamunkey rivers. The Indian name of the whole river was "Pamunkee," which meant in their language "where we took a sweat." In 1642 the name of this shire was changed to "York County" and the river was called York River.

There was constant friction and warfare between the Indians and the white settlers, which was climaxed in 1644 by the bloody massacre instigated by the wily old Opechancanough, at Cinquotek. No doubt all his plans for destruction were sent out from this point.

After the massacre Governor Berkeley arrested the old chief, who was then blind, and took him to Jamestown, where he was killed.

That year, 1644, Colonel William Claiborne again came to Pamunkey Neck and landed his army at "Romancoke," to help quell the Indian rebellion. For his success in these efforts he was, in 1653, given the patent to 5,000 acres of land, including "Romancoke."

Most of "Pamunkey Neck" above "Romancoke" was subsequently regarded as a "reservation" wherein the Indians had exclusive rights. Later, these rights were confirmed by a formal treaty, in 1646. After the massacre of 1644 the Indians were confined to the regions "north of the York and south of the Blackwater." Any Indian venturing beyond there "except as an envoy duly marked with a badge was liable to be shot on sight." At that time the York and the present Pamunkey were regarded as one continuous river, the Mattaponi as its tributary. Therefore, "north of the York" would also mean north and northeast of the present Pamunkey. The upper Pamun-

key was designated as the "freshes" or "Narrowes" of the York.

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On March 6, 1653, Governor John West patented 3,000 acres of land, including the old town of Cinquotek, the extreme eastern tip of the Neck where the town of Delaware was 50 years later to be laid off. West's grant is described as follows: "Beginning at the mouth of tanks (i. e. "little") Mattedequin, running north to Warranucock path thro George his field to a flashy vally & west to head of creek issuing into Mattapony west ½ point north 360 perches thence north by east 500 perches to the mouth of a great creek next beneath the ancient Indian Ferry on the Mattaponi and thence east and south to the point severing the Mattapony and York rivers, thence north and west up the York to the beginning. The said land being due John West 850 acres in the olde book and 2490 acres (thereby?) and for the transportation of forty and nine persons to the colony." This was the "West Point Plantation," without the marsh lands, from the upper boundary to the point.

John West had served the colony of Virginia as Governor from 1635 to 1638, and was thereafter a member of the King's Council, and most highly regarded in the colony. His first home was at Chiskiack, or Kiskiack, in York County, on the York River, from which he moved in 1654, and it appears that he was thereafter living at the West Point plantation, probably the first white settler in Pamunkey Necke. In 1654 New Kent County was formed from York County, and included Pamunkey Neck.

The site of West's home was probably located about two miles from the present town of West Point, up the King William Road and on the Pamunkey River. At this place there is still evidence of a house spot and a few glazed bricks. The spot juts out into the Pamunkey like a balcony. Under the high bank is a marl shelf, the wharf for the West plantation.

John West was the younger brother of Thomas West, Lord Delaware, first governor of the Virginia colony. John was called Captain West. When he came to occupy his land in Pamunkey Necke in 1654, the Indian village of Cinquoteck undoubtedly had been deserted since Opechancanough's

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death. The Indians had retreated under the treaty made in 1646 further up the Necke (then New Kent County). It was a wilderness of timberland, with a few spots of open lands here and there where the Indians had cultivated corn and tobacco. Naturally, Governor West wanted to establish himself near the river, with an adequate wharf, and at the same time with good fortifications against any possible Indian uprising.

Captain John West died in 1659, leaving an only son, John, II, who was the first white child or Christian born on the York River. (He was born at Kiskiack). This second John West was, in 1659 or 1660, accorded official exemption from taxation for life, because of "the many important former services to the country of Virginia by the noble family of West, predecessor of the John West, the now only survivor." John, II, inherited all of the "West Point Plantation."

At that time, as we have seen, Pamunkey Neck was a part of the original New Kent County. Colonel John West, II, was a member of the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, from New Kent County. He married Ursula Croshaw, and had four children, John, III, Nathaniel, Thomas and Anne (who married Henry Fox).

Colonel West was a loyalist—that is, loyal to the crown of England—and he aided Governor Berkeley in his fight with Nathaniel Bacon. It is known, however, that Bacon had a base of supplies at West Point, and George Milner, one of Bacon's followers, was at West Point when the base surrendered in January, 1677. Legend has it that another of Bacon's men was hung from a mulberry tree at West Point by the Royalists, and that the tree was standing until recently.

Colonel John West, II, died in 1689. He and his father, Governor or Captain John West, are both almost certainly buried at West Point, though their graves have not been found.

John West, III, inherited the West Point plantation from his father. He also was a member of the House of Burgesses from New Kent, and he became the first sheriff of the new county of King and Queen in 1691, when the county was formed from New Kent, and included Pamunkey Neck.

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The act, dated April, 1691, which established King and Queen County from New Kent County, stipulated "the town lands were set aside at West Point in Pamunkey Necke." The act also gave the procedure of acquiring land for the town—by purchase or condemnation, and the land to be held by three trustees.

This is the first mention of an English town at the Point.

Apparently John West, III, and his brothers and sister conveyed to King and Queen County the lands to comprise the new town, for the purpose of establishing a port. The act set forth that 50 acres of

land would be the amount required for a port. The wharf or key was on the Mattaponi. The wharf at West Point had been designated to be used exclusively by the upper parts of the York, which most likely included the Pamunkey, as we have noted. The establishment of the town lands and wharf was done at the cost of the whole county of King and Queen and paid for by a special levy of tobacco.

The act establishing this town, called Delaware, was passed in August, 1701. The first trustees of Delaware Town were John Waller, Thomas Carr and Philip Whitehead, all men of prominence in "Pamunkey Necke" and members of the court.

Ferries crossed here at the Point, and it was undoubtedly a small trading place, but isolated on account of the rivers. Pamunkey Neck was so thinly settled in 1696 that a petition from its inhabitants to form a separate county was rejected. In 1701 a check was made and the committee found there were only eighty-nine freeholders in Pamunkey Neck.

A fort was established at West Point in 1702 to defend the upper country against the enemy. John West, III, also called Colonel West, was the command-in-chief of the York River. In 1698 he had married Judith Armistead, and they had one son, Charles West.

King William County was constituted in 1702 from the part of King and Queen

described as Pamunkey Necke, and the Parish was named St. John's. The lands for the town at West Point were to be assumed by the new county, and the portion of cost to the old county of King and Queen were to be returned by the new county of King William.

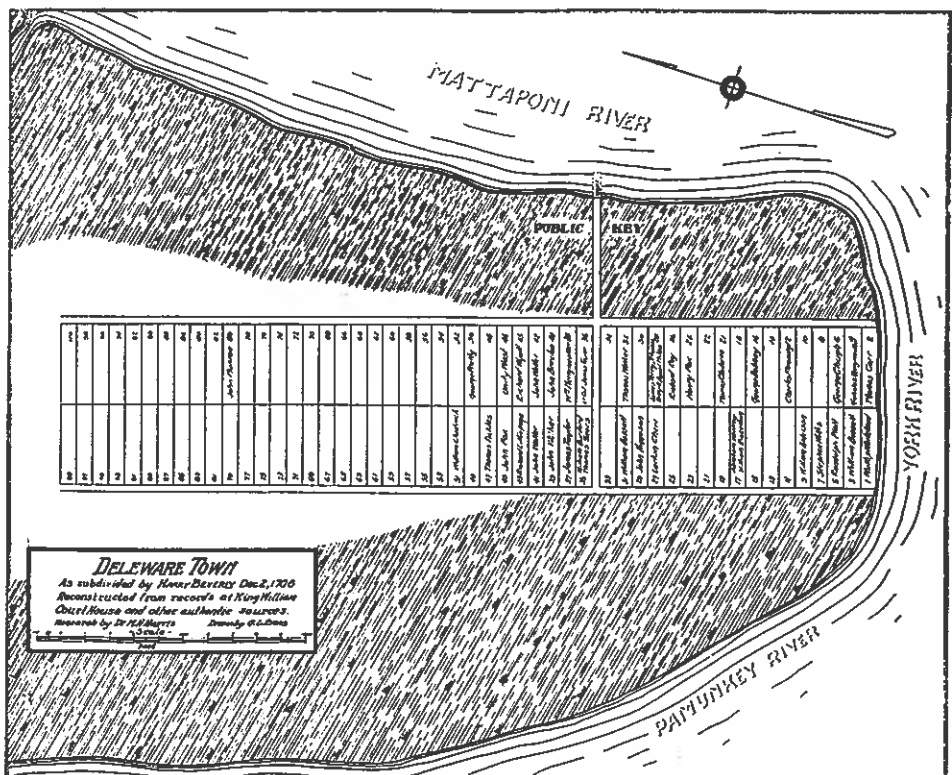
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In 1704 the General Assembly of Virginia in Williamsburg enacted a general law establishing towns. This re-established the town at West Point, to be called Delaware. Market days were appointed to be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the second Tuesday in September and four days thereafter were set aside for the annual fair. The King William Burgesses present at this session were John and Nathaniel West. Colonel John West was made commander of the militia, and was "of the quorum" in the new county of King William.

In 1706 Harry Beverley made a survey of the town and "laid it out" in the required half acres as lots. His plat was recorded, but has been lost in the several fires to which the county records have been subjected.

Fortunately, there have been records of a number of deeds preserved, showing who the first purchasers of lots in Delaware town were. These deeds are all given under date of June 20, 1707, and set forth that each grantee shall pay the trustees the sum of four hundred and eighty pounds of sweet scented tobacco, and pay an annual rental on October the tenth of each year, of one ounce of flax seed and two ounces of hemp seed, and build one good house 20 feet square in one year from the date of deed or forfeit the right of sale without consent of the trustees.

The rents are set forth in the original act establishing the town as well as the general charter provisions of transfers, officers, etc. A tract of fifty acres, provided in this act, was likely in outline congruent with the first fifty acres laid out in 1691 for a port,



and later made the town lands of King and Queen County.

The deeds and transfers of record now available give a key to the probable location of lots in the original town, and the accompanying sketch of Delaware Town has been reconstructed by Dr. M. H. Harris and Mr. G. L. Evans from these records. The "Public Key" was the wharf, where the ferries landed, and evidence of the road across the marsh was in existence recently, approximately at Fourth Street in the present town. The lots all faced on the two streets paralleling the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers. These streets are also shown on the map drawn in 1781 by the French. (See illustration.)

Apparently nothing was done to develop the town. It is certain that it did not grow, but the records do not show how soon it lost its early impetus.

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St. John's Parish had formerly lain on both sides of the Pamunkey, and when King William County was formed it was the only parish within the bounds of the new county. It is reasonable to believe that an English church stood within the boundary of Delaware town, but when the church was built has not been ascertained, nor how long it stood there, if there was one. The church now standing about ten miles above West Point known as Old St. John's was not the original parish church. Traditionally the original church stood on the site of the present West Point Baptist Church. On that site in recent years have been found several tombstones. One was inscribed as follows:

*Though Borea's blasts and Neptune's waves
Have tossed me to and fro
In spite of both by Gods decree
We anchor here below
Here now do I at anchor lie
With many of our fleet
Yet once again we must set sail
Our Saviour Christ to meet*

It is said by those who saw the stone before it crumbled, when the inscription was entirely visible, that the date on it was between 1600 and 1700 A. D. There is no mention of a name on the stone.

Another slab tombstone was found in the same place, marked as follows: "Here lyeth the body of George Merrideth the son of George Merrideth who departed this life the 21 day of April 1728 aged thirty years." The old churchyard was apparently in the center of the town. It may have been here that Parson Munro, the John Monroe, clerk, who purchased lot 80 in the town, had troubles with his vestry and where they "board up the chappel to keep out the cattul." At an earlier date Rev. Andrew Munro was parson at Pamunkey (as suggested by Capt. John Smith) and it may have been here that he preached.

After the death of Col. John West, III, his widow, Judith Armistead West, married John Butts, who was sheriff of King William 1727, and who died in 1728 and was buried on the West Point plantation, at a point supposedly 300 yards from the West House. Sheriff Butt's tombstone was found in a graveyard at the back of the present Dansey property in Port Richmond, under two large oak trees. In 1931 his tombstone was removed to the yard of Old St. John's Church. The inscription reads

*Here lyeth the Body of
John Butts Born the 2nd of
August 1690 and departed this life
the 7th of June 1728.*

In 1734 Charles West, son of John, III, died unmarried, and left the West Point plantation to his cousin, Thomas West, a son of Thomas and Martha West.

March 18, 1738, John Waller advertised in the Virginia Gazette that he would conduct the Ferry called Graves at Delaware town, formerly run by Mr. Robert Willis. He also advised the public of the fact that he employed four able bodied men, and a good boat, and could give entertainment.

Thomas West married Mary Cole and they had one son, John West, IV, who married Elizabeth Seaton. Thomas died in 1758, and his widow, Mary Cole, married Ferdinando Leigh of King and Queen County.

This Ferdinando Leigh had a son who was born at West Point in 1748 or 1749, named William Leigh, who was a student at William and Mary in 1763 through 1769, then studied at Edinburgh University, and was ordained a minister in the Church of England in 1772. He had two parishes in Chesterfield County, and was one of the 13 ministers who signed the Association with members of the House of Burgesses on May 27, 1774, in protest against the closing of the Port of Boston. This is mentioned because apparently there were people of means and influence living at West Point besides the West family at that time, although the community had no particular significance as a town.

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John West, IV, inherited the West Point plantation upon the death of his father, and there is of record a petition for relief filed by him, stating there were 450 acres in King William under the will of his father.

Three years later, in 1761, the same John West, in another petition, wished to dispose of 4,000 acres "contiguous to the town of

Delaware, commonly called West Point, in order to support the younger children."

In 1775, this John West petitioned the House of Burgesses for the right to "dock the entail" on the West Point plantation, stating he had two sons. This indicates that the title was yet in the West family. Some writers state that Col. John West removed from West Point in 1771 to be rid of his rebel neighbors, he being a tory. He was appointed to provide clothes for soldiers in 1777 with Bernard Moore for King William County.

Immediately after the Revolution, "soon after the Capitulation of Yorck (town) M. de Rochambeau sent the artillery of his Army to West Point, as the area most susceptible of defense." This was in 1781. French troops were stationed on the point and fortified it with heavy artillery both before and after the surrender at Yorktown. The French maps of "West Point du Sud" give further evidence of old Delaware Town. These maps were made in 1781, and show the "West Point" plantation as "Brackson's plantation."

Carter Braxton was then living in Delaware town at what is now approximately 7th and Main Streets, (taking the French map of 1781 and the present town map and adapting the two to a common scale). It remains to find some records of how he came into possession of the "West Point Plantation." The site of his plantation is believed to be the site of the "West Point" seat of the Wests. It is known that Carter Braxton was looking for a place to live, in the spring of 1781. In the summer or fall of the same year he is shown to be established at Delaware town and West Point.

After the French troops moved out and the revolution was over, the town apparent-

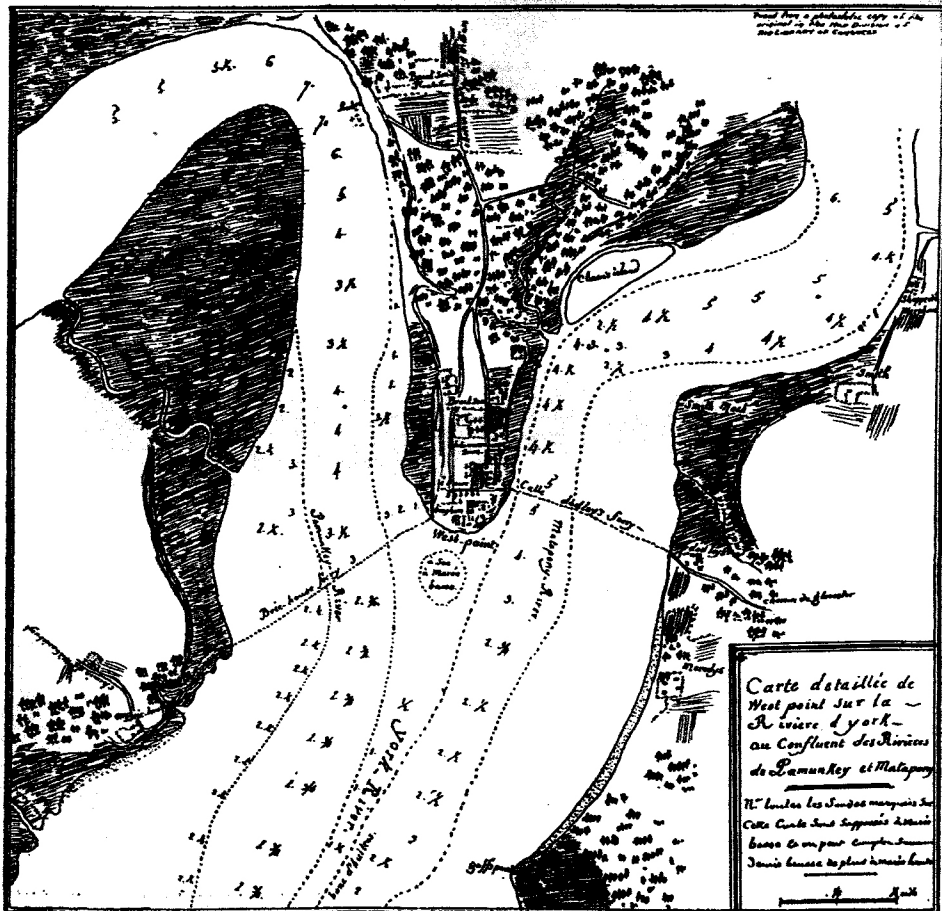




Photo by Homer Humphreys

Progressive merchants line both sides of Main Street, one of the principal business thoroughfares of West Point. Shoppers find these and other stores of the town provide a wide range of merchandise and services, sufficient to meet their every need.

ly again succumbed to the plantation. Braxton's estate was heavily involved. A mortgage on his plantation was held by Charles Carter and a Mr. Fitzhugh, and when the plantation was sold, they bought it from the Braxton estate.

King William tax returns for 1805 show that Charles Carter owned 3,601 acres of land—probably the West Point plantation. The same year Stephen Bingham paid tax on 4 ferrymen at Delaware.

In 1806 lot owners in Delaware town paying taxes were Richard Bingham, Stephen Bingham, Carter Braxton, Mary Dickenson, A. Kennedy, J. J. Otter, and William Toler, a total of 36 lots. There is no evidence of anyone living on any of these lots, however. Tax returns for the same year, 1806, show the Carter estate to have been transferred to John Taylor of Caroline. He paid tax on 2,401 acres of land (West Point). In 1810 Taylor purchased additional land, being charged with 2,834 acres. His purchase also included the lots originally owned by Braxton in West Point.

On October 1, 1811, a deed was recorded at King William Court House transferring from John Taylor and Lucy, his wife, to their son, William Penn Taylor, of Caroline: "the land called West Point in the fork of the Pamunkey and Mattaponi rivers, purchased by the said Taylor of Carter & Fitzhugh and confirmed by the Richmond Court of Chancery containing 3,027 acres and 31 negroes." In 1818 tax returns show that Taylor had purchased the lots held by Braxton, Dickenson and Adams in Delaware town. The Braxton house noted on the French map corresponded to the residence of William P. Taylor.

In 1820, tax returns show lot owners in Delaware town to be Lucy Adams, Elizabeth Bingham, Ann Bingham, Thos. W. S. Gregory, John J. Otter, Elizabeth Sullivan, and William P. Taylor. Taylor owned 29 lots and one house, valued at \$850.

In 1839, Taylor acquired 44 additional lots in Delaware. There was one house listed on one of Taylor's lots, in the tax book of that year, valued at \$500. This probably was the house valued at \$850 nineteen years before.

Between 1839 and 1850 the once colonial town of Delaware had again been absorbed by the West Point plantation. Once con-

sidered as a site for the capital city of the colony of Virginia, it had lost by a small margin in the House of Burgesses, and was doomed to oblivion. For a time, at least, it had passed back to the state of a plantation, now known as the "Taylor Farm."

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On January 18th and 19th, 1855, the stockholders of the Richmond and York River Railroad Company convened in Richmond by order of the Board of Public Works for the purpose of selecting the route and eastern terminus of their railroad. At that meeting, Lt. Matthew Fontaine Maury, U.S.N., made a lengthy report on the navi-

gale advantages of the York River and West Point as a deep water terminal for the Richmond and York River railroad. He concluded by saying: "West Point, with its accommodations and capacities, stands, in the language of your engineer, 'premier,' and it would be a singular oversight to ignore those capabilities of meeting all of the emergencies which its own success and the business of trade may call for."

Originally the tracks of the railroad led only as far as White House on the Pamunkey. The line was extended to West Point in 1859.

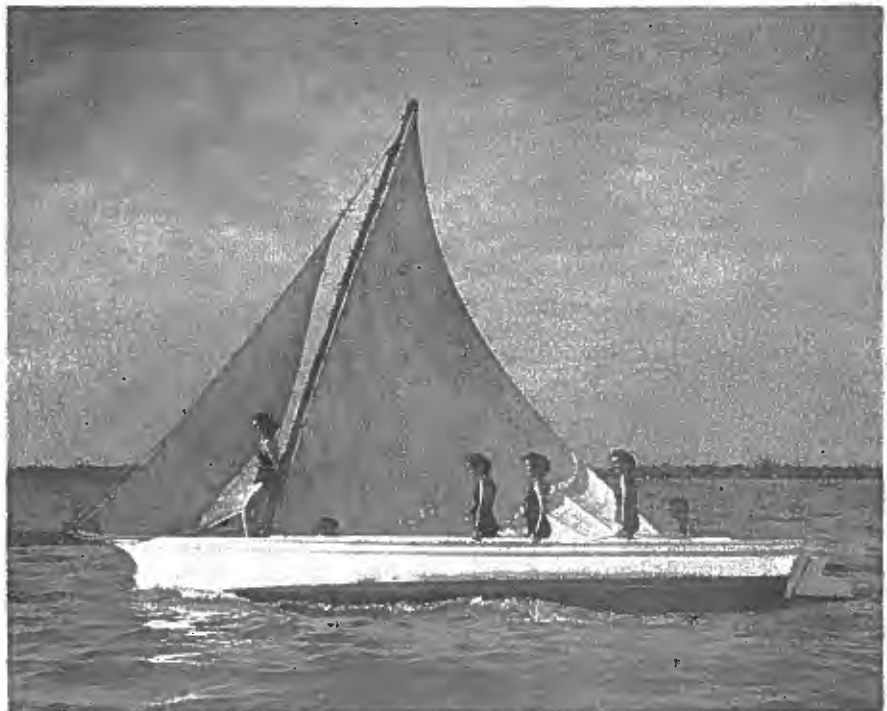
In 1855 or 1856 the Richmond and West Point Land Company was formed, and 500 acres of land were purchased from William P. Taylor, to be divided into lots and sold to incoming settlers when the railroad built its new terminus at West Point. Alexander Dudley, a prominent lawyer of King and Queen County, was first president of the company. In 1888 James H. Dooley, of Richmond, was president and Thomas B. Henley was the agent in West Point for the land company.

In 1856 a Captain Glass had a Marine Railway established on Glass Island. This was in successful operation until Federal soldiers destroyed it during the Civil War. James M. Daniel, surveyor, laid out the present town, in 1860.

Early in the Civil War Confederate troops were stationed in West Point under Major H. B. Tomlin. This was in 1861. In 1863 Federal gunboats landed troops in the town. They erected extensive fortifications near the point. A powder magazine was built by Union Soldiers at about the present Eighth and Kirby Streets.

The Reconstruction days left their mark upon West Point as upon other locations throughout the South. Many tales of terror are told by older residents of the town in their memoirs. Immediately after the war there were only a handful of houses in the town.

When the town of West Point was in-



Virginia Chamber photo

Young people (and older ones, too) find sailboating on the salty waters of the York River off West Point a delightful sport. The warm breezes are invigorating. Back from his first trip in the sunshine, one finds the beginning of a nice coat of sun tan.



Photo by Homer Humphreys

St. John's Episcopal Church, West Point

incorporated in 1870 the population was 75, by census. The first Mayor was John Whitbeck. The first town council was composed of E. W. Massie, Wm. E. Hort, Bolivar Stark, C. T. Whiting and A. T. Cavan. Hansford Anderson was appointed sergeant by the council at its first meeting. The next three succeeding mayors were A. Robinson in 1874, John S. DeFarges in 1876, and E. Wilkinson in 1878.

By census the population of West Point in 1880 was 650. In 1885 it was 2,000; in 1888 it was 3,500, and still growing. This rapid influx of population was accounted for by the fact that finally the plans for the railroad to make West Point its deep water terminus had materialized. The Richmond and Danville Railroad had purchased the old York River line about 1880, and the system of railroads which later became known as the Southern Railway System was shipping heavily through West Point.

A booklet published in 1888 about West Point and King William County by Thomas P. Bagby, attorney-at-law, states:

"The great feature of West Point is its magnificent terminal facilities, and the tremendous amount of shipping that is done here. The place is the terminus of the Piedmont Air-Line, a system of roads controlled by the Richmond and West Point Terminal Railway and Warehouse Company and the Richmond and Danville Rail-

road Company. This system of roads extends from Atlanta to West Point and permeates every section of the South and Southwest. It pours into the lap of West Point an immense amount of cotton and miscellaneous freight, that is handled and reshipped here for northern and foreign ports.

"Nobody coming to West Point can fail to be impressed with the magnificent WHARVES, DOCKS AND SHEDS which this company has built here for the handling of freight. In the place of the little wharf, silent and deserted, which the writer found here twelve years ago, we now have wharves almost defying description. Certainly no company in the United States has any to surpass them. There are six large wharves, all covered in, extending up the Pamunkey river. These sheds average not less than four hundred feet square. Besides these, there is connected with each shed, and separated from them only by a railroad shed, platforms along the shore equally as large as the docks themselves, used for storing and handling freight.

"The largest ships that float the seas can come without trouble to these docks and lie alongside. Besides this, the company's increasing business demands more room, and they are yearly adding more docks. The company has recently bought the entire town frontage on the Pamunkey side, ex-

tending a mile and a half up the river. All along this frontage, but a short distance from the shore, there is from thirty to forty feet of water."

Freight to and from various ports handled through West Point in 1887 amounted to 791,047 tons—which included 22,892 tons for foreign ports. Other ports served through West Point were Baltimore, New York, Providence and Philadelphia. There were daily ships to and from Baltimore, ships three times a week to New York and Providence, and one or more foreign ships were constantly loading at the docks.

The principal article of commerce was cotton. Ships from foreign countries bearing salt and other commodities and merchandise would deposit their cargoes here and load cotton for export.

Prior to this time small ships had gone as far up the Pamunkey as White House Landing, where the railroad ended. After the railroad was extended, much larger ships could be accommodated and boats docked from the end of Main Street on the York River on around the point along the various wharves up the Pamunkey. The railroad at that time ran all the way down to First Street and across the town.

Two large cotton compresses were located in West Point, and in 1887 they put up not less than 120,000 bales, valued at \$8,000,000. Over 400,000 bales in all were handled in West Point in 1887, making it the fifth cotton port in the United States, being surpassed only by New Orleans, Galveston, Savannah and Norfolk.

The town's business center was located along "Railroad Street," where the cotton compresses, stores and warehouses were built. Many retail and wholesale stores enjoyed a great business in the days while West Point was a shipping center. Industries developed rapidly. Saw mills, oyster houses, canning factories, a marl factory producing fertilizer for farmers in the vicinity, a cotton hosiery factory, a broom factory, brick yards, a wooden box factory, dry docks, and a "cornstalk factory" were all operating in West Point at one time or another between 1870 and 1895. The "cornstalk factory" was the predecessor of the modern cellulose plants. There were several hotels and innumerable bar rooms. On Saturdays and even during week days, particularly when the foreign ships were in port, there would be drinking and fighting with knives and pistols, and many killings were reported. Ladies would confine themselves to their homes unless it was broad daylight or they were accompanied by a gentleman. It was hardly safe for anyone to be out alone in the early days after the War.

There was a wharf bell which rang the hours and the fire alarms. Gas lights in the streets were replaced with electricity by about 1885.

Educational facilities in West Point were particularly well supplied by private schools. Mrs. W. R. Broadus opened the West Point Female Seminary in 1886. In 1887 the Virginia Female Seminary opened with Rev. John Brandt, pastor of the Disciple's Church, as its first principal. In 1888 the Tidewater Commercial College for young men and boys was opened.

In 1888 or 1889 telephone lines were installed, connecting the town with surrounding counties.

Recreation centered around the "Grove Hotel." This was the building referred to earlier, which was said to have been the original Braxton house. In any event, the original building was standing at the time that William P. Taylor purchased the lots in Delaware Town. It had apparently

been remodeled a number of times. It was located on the west side of the present Main Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets. It was scated in a grove of locust and mulberry trees, and in 1860 it had the appearance of being an ancient dwelling. Dr. M. H. Harris reports that this building, as renovated, was described by one of its last residents as "having a half basement, walled with brick and sand marl, the walls half out of the ground; the first story consisted of a very large room in the north end and two rooms at the south end separated by a hall. The stairway to the second story ran up on one side, crossed at the end and completed the ascent to the upper floor. The upper floor consisted of a number of smaller rooms. One of the earlier inhabitants states that the house had been torn up in remodeling, and this is quite likely, for it accounts for the second full story and the numerous rooms. It was in all probability a story and half, with dormer windows, as typical of the period. It was a frame house and had large chimneys at the ends."

The hotel was popular with excursionists and as a summer resort. There were dances and tournaments and concerts held there from the end of the Civil War all during the period of West Point's shipping days. It was also used as a gathering place for many public purposes in the early beginnings of the present town. Worship services were held there before the churches were built, and later on the post office was there, as well as the hostelry.

Churches, of course, were organized and built as the town developed. First a "Free Church" was built in 1869. The Methodists bought this building in 1870, and the Baptists built their church in 1875 and 1876, other denominations soon following. Most of these denominations are worshipping in the same spots if not in the same buildings, today.

Occasionally there would be a severe winter in the "Seventies" and "Eighties," with heavy snowstorms, or the rivers would freeze over so that teams of horses and wagons could drive across them, and people skated for miles up the Mattaponi and Pamunkey. This was exceptional, however, as the winters were generally mild and the rivers free of ice. Many times when the harbors north of the Potomac would be closed by ice, ships would be driven to West Point to unload their cargo because the York was not frozen.

Ferries connected the town with King and Queen and New Kent Counties, as they had done since Colonial times. These were row boats until 1888 or 1889 when the demand for improved transportation for the heavier traffic became greater, and "chain ferries" and motor ferries were added.

A disastrous fire about 1890 wiped out most of the business section of the town along "Railroad Street" and the owners then moved their mercantile and other offices to the present business center of West Point.

In 1895 the Southern Railway moved its terminus from West Point to "Pinnars Point" at Portsmouth. This was a blow to the town from which it did not recover for nearly thirty years. A mass exodus of employees of the railroad and shipping companies took place. Real estate dropped in value, homes and business houses were abandoned. There was no more of the hustle and bustle and activity of the busy town. West Point had once more apparently been doomed to oblivion. A few families who had been here for one or more generations, or who had their entire assets

tied up in West Point property, stayed on, but the population dropped again to a few hundred, and much of the property was neglected, and it became a "sleepy little Southern town."

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The Terminal Hotel, "a large and elegant structure," built in 1887 on First Street between the present Main and Lee Streets, overlooking the York River, proved to be the salvation of the town after the shipping terminus was abandoned. This hotel, which had been known as an excursion center and summer resort for people from Richmond, Baltimore and other localities, continued to draw many holiday folk. The artesian water for which West Point has always been justly famous was a great

drawing card. Dancing pavilions, a swimming pool, band concerts and amusements of all kinds were offered. Excursion trains came down from Richmond every day during the summer, bringing hundreds of vacationers. There were several other hotels, including the Grove Hotel, and many bars about the town. Sail boats and row boats, fishing and crabbing, picnicking and musical entertainment made West Point a mecca for the city folk on hot summer days and evenings.

Livery stables, dry goods and hardware stores, ice cream parlors and the usual lumber yards, oyster business and dry docks enjoyed good businesses during the "Gay Nineties" and just after the turn of the century.

In May, 1903, another disastrous fire

Hospitality Is An Art Coke Makes It So Easy



COCA-COLA BOTTLING WORKS

C. A. LONG, *Manager*

URBANNA, VIRGINIA

broke out, destroying most of the business section of the town. Fifty-two buildings were burned, including homes, churches, business houses, and hotels. At that time, the old Grove Hotel was also destroyed, and West Point lost its last building connected with the colonial town of Delaware.

Fortunately, the Terminal Hotel escaped the fire, as did a number of other buildings and homes, and the burned out section of the town was soon rebuilt and replaced with more modern facilities. The town continued for a while to play host to hundreds of excursionists and vacationers in the summer months. There were excursions of the colored people as well as the white, and large church gatherings of the colored population. These gatherings were always as well behaved if not more so than the white excursions.

The J. W. Marshall Oyster Packing plant was the biggest industry in the town, having survived the "Pinners Point Exodus" and both of the great fires. The lumber and saw mill business was still a large one in the town, with a number of operators in that industry; and the Denmead Dry Dock, which was established in 1887 to succeed the old Glass Dry Dock on Glass Island, was still operating.

The Chesapeake Steamship Company operated steamers between West Point and Baltimore, which connected with the trains from Richmond, although the service was chiefly for passengers rather than freight as in the 1880's. These steamers continued to operate until July, 1942, when they were taken out of service during World War II, and the docks at West Point were subsequently dismantled. Passenger service had by then dwindled into insignificance and again freight was their chief cargo.

* *

In 1910 The Old Dominion Industrial Corporation was formed by Crosby Thompson, who had purchased the Taylor Farm (the old West Point Plantation), and the O. D. I. Corporation, as it was called, became a self-appointed "Chamber of Commerce" for West Point and the vicinity. Every effort was made to bring into the town and community new businesses and new settlers.

In 1913 and 1914 two events of significance to the development of the town took place—the Gresham bridge across the Mattaponi River was built, and a pulp mill was built on the marshes of the Pamunkey River where the old "cornstalk factory" had been. Both of these developments were the result of the efforts of the O. D. I. Corporation, which gave many timber lands to the Chesapeake Pulp and Paper Company, and which financed the bonds for the new bridge.

The Gresham bridge across the Mattaponi was opened in 1914. This bridge went from Denmead's Dry Dock on Glass Island to the same point where the present bridge reaches in King and Queen County. It was a toll bridge until 1929.

The Chesapeake Pulp and Paper Company, which began operations in 1914, was in 1918 taken over by The Chesapeake Corporation, and since that time the mills have been the impetus for the growth of the present town. In 1921 Richmond and West Point interests gained control of the stock of the company and it has steadily expanded in production and importance to the present time. The stock of the company, now named "The Chesapeake Corporation of Virginia," is listed on the New York Stock Exchange, and is held by nearly

(Continued on page 13)



Virginia Chamber photo

"Elsing Green" was built by Colonel William Dandridge in 1717, uncle of Martha Washington, and was once owned by Carter Braxton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. It was restored by Beverley D. Causey in the 1930's and is now the property of Edgar R. Lafferty, Jr.

Historic Homes, Estates, Churches Dot Landscape Of King William County

LISTED below are some 125 homes, estates, farms and sites which have played important roles in the long and honored history of King William County. Many were parts of larger plantations which were subsequently divided. Some were the homes of persons famous in American history as well.

Each of these places has been marked for the celebration, so they may be properly identified to visitors. Not all of the places are open to the public. The map reproduced in this publication indicates those places which will be open to the public.

The list includes the name, location by highway route and a very brief sketch to indicate its historical significance.

ON ROUTE 30

WEST PLANTATION: Settled by Capt. John West about 1654. Residence of Wests until Revolution. (Port Richmond.)

WEST CEMETERY: John Butts was

buried here in 1728. Tombstone now in St. John's Churchyard. (122)

CLAIBORNE CEMETERY (Romancoke): Lt.-Col. Thomas Claiborne was buried here in 1683. Stone removed to Hollywood Cemetery. Other Claibornes, including Secretary William Claiborne, were probably buried here, also. (120)

MOOREFIELD: The site of Moorefield, home of Col. Thos. Moore, is near Mattaponi River. It was standing at time of Revolution. (119)

ROMANCOKE: The home of Mr. and Mrs. Elis Olsson. It was long the home of Capt. R. E. Lee, and had been owned by Custis, Moore and Claiborne. The present house was built by the Olssons about the Lee home. (121)

CHELSEA: Erected in 1707 by Augustine Moore. Noted for its beautiful gardens, and setting on the Mattaponi. (118)

KENTUCKY: Home of Col. Holt Richeison. (Secondary route 634.) (114)

SEATONS: Home of Augustine Seaton and Lipscombs. This was once owned by Capt. John Fox, and was probably the site of the old Fox home called Brickhouse. (Secondary route 634.) (112)

CUSTIS MILL: This mill was won by

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Miss Gray

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two thousand owners scattered all over the United States. The pulp, paper and paper-board produced here are shipped all over the world. The company owns a subsidiary box plant in Philadelphia and has part ownership in a paper converting company having plants in Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles.

While the mills were growing, the town was gaining new life. A pickle factory and a furniture factory, a glove factory and a miniature pool table factory were all operating at one time or another during the 1920's and 1930's.

Lumber continues to be one of the largest businesses in the area. Several saw mills and large lumber and piling companies have come to West Point and many are still in operation.

In 1916 another effort was made by Crosby Thompson and the O. D. I. Corporation to develop West Point into a deep-water terminal for Richmond, but the effort failed. In the meantime, the town of Port Richmond and its subdivision, Euclid Heights, adjacent to West Point, were incorporated. These were on the site of the old West Point plantation. During World War I a large shipbuilding yard, the York River Shipbuilding Company, was located on the Mattaponi River in Port Richmond. When the plans for developing Port Richmond into a port failed, the community became chiefly a farming area, and many of the men living there went to work for the pulp mills.

In 1925 plans were made to build a bridge across the Pamunkey River at Sweet Hall, but these plans were later changed and it was decided the bridge would be located at West Point. When it was opened in 1927, it was a toll bridge. This marked the end of the old ferries, by which the Mattaponi and Pamunkey were crossed since colonial days. New roads were laid along old road beds, and hard surfaces were laid on them. With the improvement of the automobile and growth of extensive travel, West Point became easily accessible by motor from North, East and West.

In 1927 the Terminal Hotel, which had then been for a decade or more an apartment hotel, was destroyed by fire, and this marked another end of another era, when West Point was a summer resort.

* *

Meanwhile, the new paper mill was added to The Chesapeake Corporation's pulp operations in 1929, and this gave new impetus to the town's industrial growth and expansion.

The old Gresham bridge across the Mattaponi was replaced in 1945 by a splendid new concrete span and new roads approaching it on both sides of the river.

Four major oil companies now have storage tanks along the Mattaponi River at West Point. There are agencies for all makes of automobiles in the town; also, a frozen foods processing and storage plant. An airport built by the Federal Government during World War II on property donated by The Chesapeake Corporation in King and Queen County, about four miles from town, is now municipal property, and is frequently used by local pilots.

West Point is a trading center for the surrounding area and has a diversification of retail stores and wholesale distributors.

(Continued on page 41)

York Supply Company, Inc.

West Point, Virginia

* * * *

BUILDING MATERIALS

Millwork

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Hardware

Insulation

Electrical Supplies

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Yellow Pine Lumber

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* * * *

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West Point, Virginia

* * *

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Agent

CITIES SERVICE OIL COMPANY



GASOLINE — KEROSENE — FUEL OIL — ACCESSORIES

Phone 161

West Point, Virginia

Miss Gray

(Continued from page 13)

Annually at the West Point Airport there is held the Tidewater Eight-County Fair, attended by approximately 15,000 persons, which is indicative of the market area population served by West Point.

The Southern Railway still has a terminus at West Point, and its chief client is The Chesapeake Corporation of Virginia, which ships out an average of twenty-five carloads per day of pulp and paper. Pulpwood is brought in by rail in large quantities, as well as by trucks and river barges to the mill, employing nearly two thousand people indirectly and directly.

The 1950 population of West Point, by census, was nearly 2,000. This does not include the many who live in the "suburban" communities across each of the rivers, and the large Port Richmond population, who do business in West Point daily.

A community house used by all civic and church organizations is located in the center of the town; an attractive and modern country club with a nine-hole golf course serves the area, and is located about four miles from town in King William County; a modern Armory and Recreation Center which has just been built on the outskirts of the town houses the National Guard Unit, and will serve as a recreation center for West Point, Port Richmond and the vicinity.

Construction of a sewage disposal plant is now under way at a cost of nearly a quarter of a million dollars. It is hoped that water purification will enhance the recreational possibilities as well as the restoration of the oyster industry in West Point.

Any history of West Point would be incomplete without mention of its colored population. Many colored families have been established here for several generations. Nearly half the population of the town is colored. They operate a number of businesses, patronized by both white and colored. Race relations are at their highest level in West Point. The town is blessed by a respected leadership in well-educated colored families whose contributions as high type citizens of the area are many. Good schools, attractive homes, profitable businesses, well attended churches, and friendly neighborliness characterize the colored population of West Point.

One may stand at the beach at the head of the York River, where Main Street appears to go right down into the river, and on a clear day see five counties—King William, King and Queen, Gloucester, New Kent and James City. (One might venture to say even York County is visible, or the tops of the trees which grow down there.) And as one stands there reflecting on the exquisite sunrise or the magnificent sunset, caressed by the cool summer breezes, or whipped by the cold winter spray of the surf, one can almost picture old Captain John Smith and his party landing there in the Pinnis, being welcomed by the Indians, and feel a real thrill with the men of 345 years ago in the marvels of this beautiful Tidewater Virginia.

There are many gaps in the known history of our little community. It is hoped that these will some day be filled in, and



THIS PICTURE OF WEST POINT FIRE COMPANY TAKEN IN 1905. Front row, seated: J. W. Owens, president; W. L. Kirby, chief; Buck Gary, assistant chief. Middle row: "Chick" Hayes, Newbill Hudson, "Pike" O. I. Chilton, Vivan Curle, J. L. Mosby, Jim Denmead, "Bill" Mowbray, Waller Ware, J. J. Moore, William J. O'Connor. Back row: John Wills, John Cousins, John Knapp, George Thacker, Rev. Sullivan, Peter Shelton, Pat Moran, Jim Thacker and R. B. Edwards, sergeant.

that all the inaccuracies of this brief account will some day be corrected.

The author wishes to acknowledge her debt of gratitude to the following sources from which the material for this article was gathered: Dr. Malcolm H. Harris, *The William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*; Miss Elizabeth Hawes Ryland, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*; Mrs. H. I. Lewis; Mr. W. C. Gouldman; Mr. George Borum, publisher of *The Tidewater Review*; Mr. Thomas P. Bagby's booklet on "West Point, Virginia, and King William County" published in 1888; Mrs. Mary C. Lipscomb's "Recollections," a booklet on King William County published by the County Council in 1925; "King William Invites You," published by the Ruritan Club in 1951.

CAMPAIGN OF 1781

About one mile south Lafayette placed in camp the Light Infantry of his command, consisting of Muhlenberg's and Febiger's commands, August 13, 1781. The troops had just

been brought across the Pamunkey at Ruffin's Ferry, from New Castle, to observe Cornwallis, then entrenching at Yorktown. Within six weeks the Yorktown Campaign in which these troops took part, opened.

King William County: Seven miles northwest of West Point.

YORK INN

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