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HERRING BAY: LANDSCAPES AND LEGACIES

Herring Bay's crescent shoreline draws us in from the larger Chesapeake; a protective arc of marsh and sand framed by hills and forests. Its landscapes have been shaped by human and natural forces over thousands of years. Forests and wetlands gave way to farms and resorts, which in turn evolved into new forests and coastal communities. Our stewardship of this heritage is our legacy to future generations.



-  Parker Estate - 1651
-  Herrington - 1669
-  Town Point
-  Leitch and Crandall Farms - 1800s
-  Waterfront Cottages - 1922

-  Ayres Estate and Cove - 1651
-  Chew/Ayres Estate - 1700s
-  Fair Haven Hotel 1839 - 1923
-  Waterfront Cottages - 1928

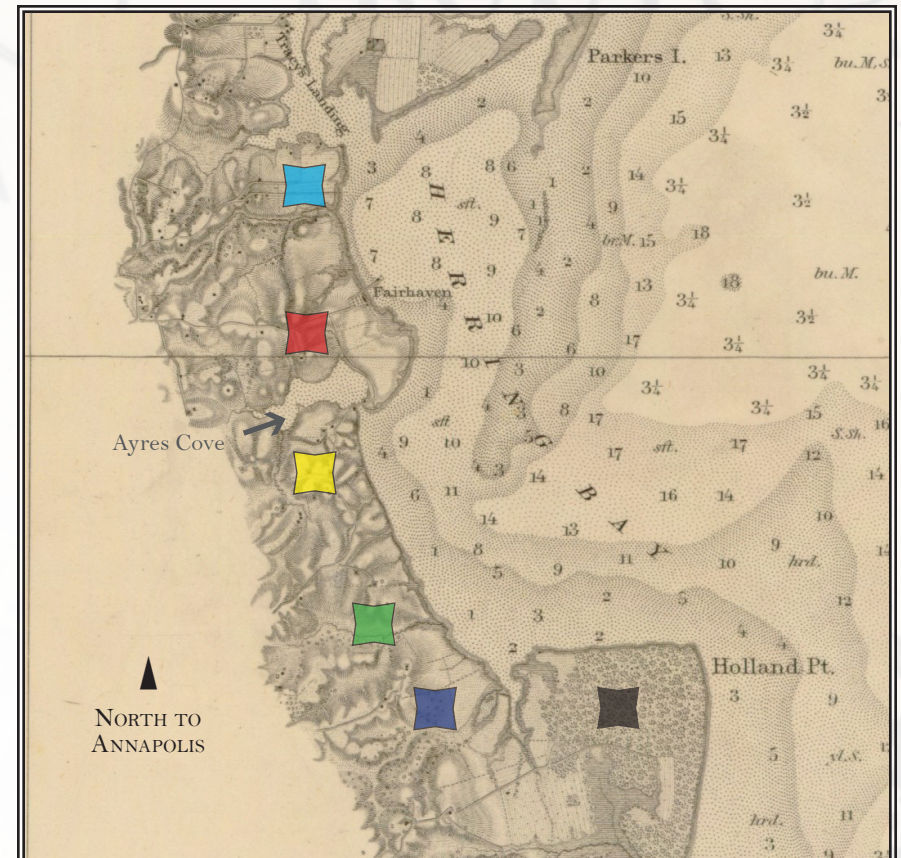
-  Carter Estate - 1651
-  Mt. Joy Farm - 1800s
-  Waterfront Cottages - 1924-26

-  Carter-Bennett Estate - 1651
-  Old Colony Cove Farm - 1800s
-  Waterfront Cottages - 1925

-  Holland Estate (Holly Hill) - 1663

-  Bennett-Holland Island - 1651
-  Holland Point Farm - 1800s
-  Waterfront Cottages - 1922

Photo credits (top to bottom): KG, KG, JDB, JBB



Map courtesy of NOAA

Herring Bay: Landscapes and Legacies

This booklet covers the span of Herring Bay from Town Point to Holland Point. This 1862 map by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey includes notations showing the approximate locations of certain historic properties.

Herring Bay: Shaped by Nature and History

Herring Bay is situated on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay along the Coastal Plain, about 20 miles south of Annapolis in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Its diverse geological history gave rise to fossil-rich cliffs and steeply sloped hills carved by streams. The creeks and wetlands in lowland areas supported maritime and agricultural commerce. The bay's life-sustaining features continue to evolve, shaped by the elements and human activity.

Indigenous Inhabitants: 8000 BCE–1600 AD



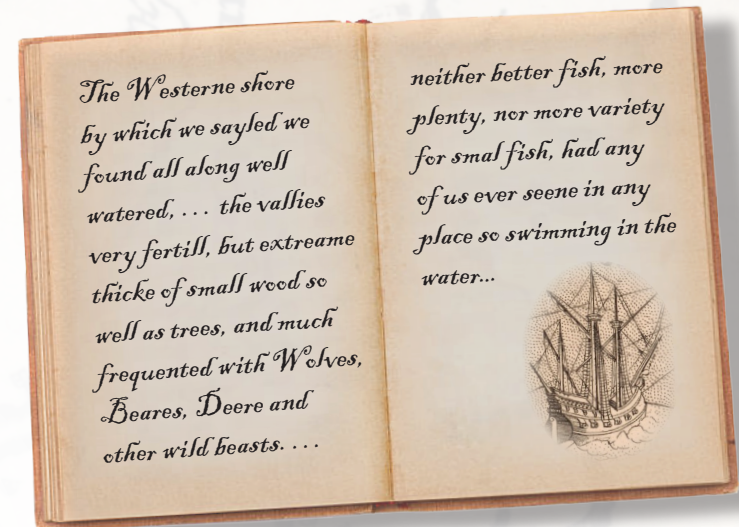
Archaeological excavations in Fairhaven and Rosehaven have unearthed artifacts of stone, pottery, and repurposed fossil shells produced by indigenous peoples from the Archaic period dating back 13,000 years.¹ Algonquian was the dominant tribal language. Communities held ceremonial gatherings and feasts in the fall when seafood and wild foods were most abundant. Large tracts of buried oyster shells (middens) have been found near the shore, including one measuring 2,000 feet long by 300 feet wide.

Images of artifacts courtesy of Anne Arundel Cultural Resources Division. Illustration details from historical maps in Library of Congress Geography and Map Division.



From Indigenous Communities to Colonial Settlements

English explorer Captain John Smith anchored his ship overnight in Herring Bay in June of 1608. During his journey he noted:



Travels of Captaine John Smith, Volume 1, 1608, Library of Congress

Herring Creek Hundred: Land Grants in the 1600s

Lord Baltimore awarded land grants in the Herring Creek Hundred beginning in 1651 to a handful of prosperous families. A 'Hundred' is an English term for an administrative division of a larger geographic area. Herring Creek referred to the confluence of three waterways known today as Rockhold and Tracys Creeks and Trotts Branch.

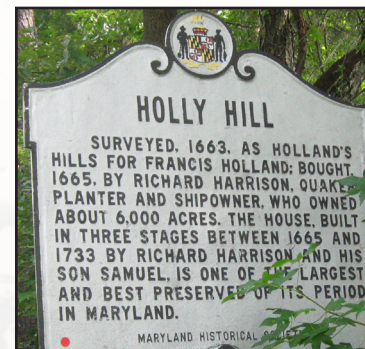


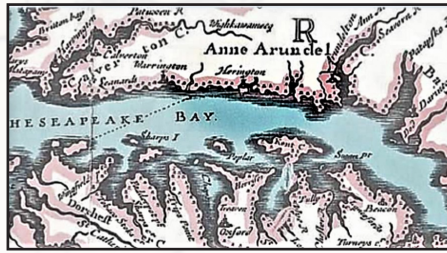
Photo credit: MH



Detail from 1685 map by Robert Morden UMD Libraries Digital Collection

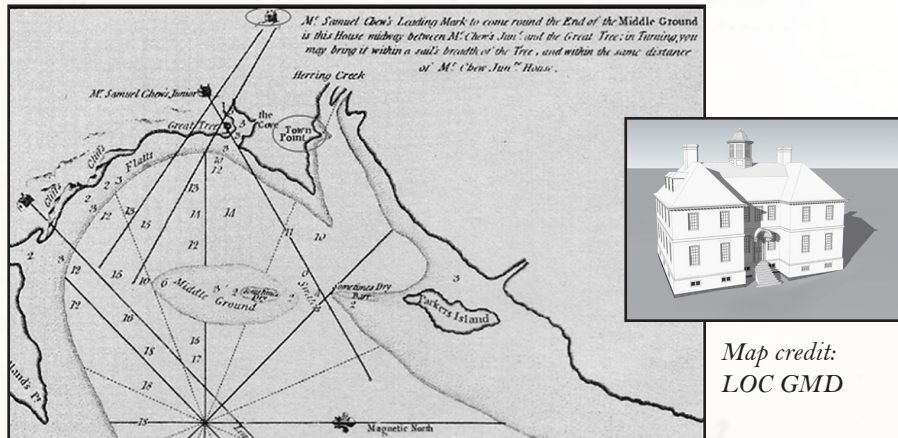
Town of Herrington

Herrington became an official port to control transatlantic trade in 1669 and is depicted on this 1670 map by noted mapmaker Augustine Herrmann. In 1683, the Maryland General Assembly established three formal 100-acre towns in Anne Arundel County, including Herrington, London Town, and Arundelton (later Annapolis) to the north. The last legislative action involving the relatively short-lived town of Herrington was in 1707.²



Map credit: UMD

Samuel Chew, Sr., and his wife, Anne Ayres, were among the founders of Herrington and leaders of a local Quaker community. Their stately 14,000 square foot home was slightly larger than the Governor's house in Williamsburg, Virginia.³ It was so large that it was used as a navigation marker in Hoxton's 1732 inset map of Herring Bay.



Map credit:
LOC GMD

In 1776, Robert Sayer and John Bennett also published a map with an inset featuring Herring Bay and the Chew Plantation. RenderSphere, LLC created a 3-D model of the Chew mansion based on archeological discoveries by county historians and research by experts at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Plantation System

Plantation owners along the Chesapeake Bay initially relied upon the labor of indentured English and Irish servants. However, towards the end of the 17th century, large planters—including Quaker families like the Chews—depended on the labor and skills of enslaved Africans. Maryland's Quaker community disavowed the practice in the 1770s. Across Southern Maryland, enslaved people comprised nearly a quarter of the population by 1710, up from 3 percent in 1658. George Hogarth, who posted the ad here, included provisions in his will to free people he had enslaved and made some of them the beneficiaries of his estate.⁴



Maritime Trade

Landings built along Herring Bay provided maritime access to domestic markets, as noted in the 1824 ad below. Circa 1819, Baltimore merchant James Harwood built a wharf to serve his tobacco plantation, which he named Fair Haven.⁵

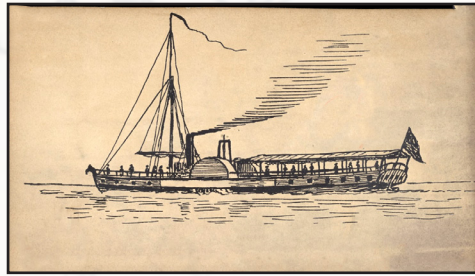
MARYLAND GAZETTE
November 4, 1824

Notice of sale by the estate of George Hogarth:
being 800 acres of valuable land in Anne Arundel county, situated upon Herring Bay, about 20 miles from Annapolis, 50 from Baltimore, and adjoining the village of Friendship.

It has the advantage of an excellent landing, whence the greater part of the produce of Calvert County and of the lower parts of Anne Arundel, is shipped for the Baltimore market, to and from which, two packets run regularly twice a week. The land is of excellent quality, well adapted to the growth of fine tobacco, grain, and clover...it abounds with valuable timber of every description....

The Fair Haven Hotel, 1839–1923

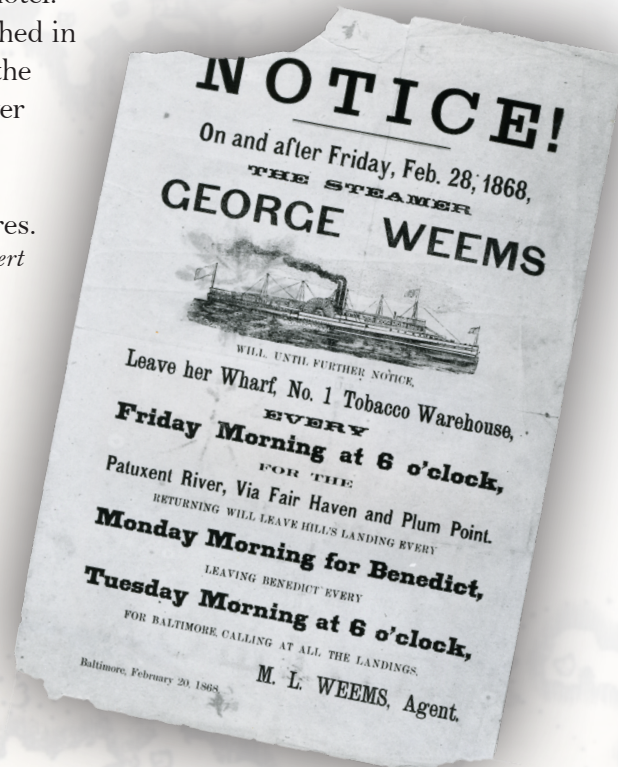
In 1828, local shipmaster George Weems purchased 21 acres in Fair Haven, building a house, wharf, and a three-story hotel that opened in 1839. His steamboats ferried tourists from Baltimore to the hotel. Weems was an owner and shipmaster of the *Eagle*, the first steamboat to run from Baltimore to Norfolk.



Paddlewheel Steamer *Eagle*
Courtesy of Mariners Museum and Park

During the Civil War, Weems' vessels were pressed into Union service. Fair Haven was the site of two skirmishes when Confederate sympathizers attempted to seize Union steamboats moored near the hotel.⁶

The resort flourished in the decades after the Civil War, and, over time, the Weems property grew to more than 400 acres. Image courtesy of Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, MD



FAIR HAVEN SUMMER RESORT.

The fourth Season of this delightful Bay-side Retreat will open on **MONDAY, June 16th.**

The magnificent Steamer **THEO. WEEMS**, Capt. Wm. B. Kirwan, will leave Pier No. 8 Light-street wharf, foot of Conway, daily, (except Saturday and Sunday,) at 8.30 A. M., remain at the Resort four hours and return at 8 P. M. Will also leave every Saturday afternoon at 2 o'clock, remain sufficiently long to partake of an elegant supper and return at 10.30.

The large and fast Steamer **MATILDA** will leave same wharf every **MONDAY AFTERNOON**, at 2 o'clock, and return at 10.30. To accommodate any number, Supper will be furnished at the Hotel and on the Steamer every Monday. Parties going down on the "Weems," Monday morning, can remain all day at the Resort and return on the "Matilda" in the evening.

The Steamboat Company has entire management of every department.

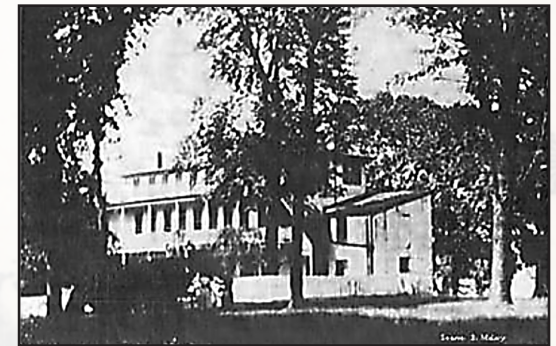
Professor Itzel's Band will furnish music on the Steamers and at the Hotel daily.

Tickets for the Round Trip \$1. Children and Servants half price. Je 9-1m

This advertisement for steamboat excursions to Fair Haven appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper in July 1873.

Starting in 1900, the Fair Haven hotel faced competition from a new amusement park in Chesapeake Beach that was served by Baltimore steamships and a 28-mile railway to Washington, DC. The Sinyard House in Holland Point was a popular boarding house and restaurant that catered to beachgoers.⁷

Rather than compete with Chesapeake Beach, the Weems family made a deliberate choice to preserve the bucolic setting of the Fair Haven hotel. The hotel closed in 1923, and the family sold the estate in 1928.



Fair Haven Hotel Image Credit: BM

19th Century Vignettes

As a child, Lucy Brooks was enslaved on a farm on Fairhaven Road. In a 1936 interview conducted by the Federal Writers Project she recalled when the British paddlewheel passenger steamer *Great Eastern*, later famous for laying the first lasting transatlantic telegraph cable in 1866, arrived in the bay. Lucy said the household and “all the white folks” went down to the Fair Haven wharf to see it.



1859 Currier and Ives Lithograph, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

When asked about her childhood duties on the farm, Lucy Brooks described picking up feathers from “a powerful lot of geese.” She said she mostly ate clabber (a form of fermented milk), cornbread, and fish, noting that they got “plenty of fish” from the bay.⁸



View of farms from hill at Town Point, circa late 1800s

Photo courtesy of Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, MD

Windmills and Wheelboats

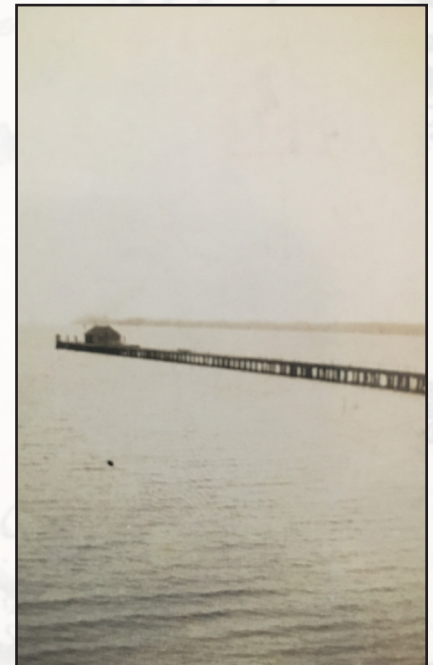
In the 18th and 19th centuries, wealthy landowners built grist mills, harnessing the wind to grind their grain. Use of windmills along Herring Bay continued well into the 1800s. The Town Point Windmill, shown here, was an English post-style windmill. The entire structure could be rotated into the wind.



Photo courtesy of Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, MD

Long-time wharf agent Harry Wilkerson recalled that in the 1890s, “when Baltimore boats were making regular stops at Fair Haven, farmers for miles around could frequently be seen on a hot summer’s day driving their plodding ox carts, loaded with peaches or some farm products over the crooked, dusty roads to the old steamship wharf for a trip on the bay to Baltimore.”⁹

This photo shows the shipping pier off what is now Claggett Ave. The pier serving the Fair Haven hotel was near Genoa Ave. Photo credits: CMM, MH



From Ox carts and Paddlewheels to Tractors and Automobiles

With the advent of the Model T in the 1920s, Herring Bay attracted tourists from Washington, DC, and its suburbs. Starting in 1922, the rim of the waterfront was subdivided into tiny lots stretching from Town Point to Holland Point. By the early 1930s, a ribbon of summer cottages dotted the shoreline of Herring Bay.

At first, the summer cottages had no electricity or running water. Early residents shared community wells, dug cesspits, used iceboxes to preserve food, and used kerosene for lighting and cooking.



**Holland Point Farm:
Holland Point, 1922**



Mt. Joy Farm: Owings and Fair Haven Cliffs, 1924, 1926



Weems Farm: Fair Haven on Herring Bay, 1928

Photo Credits: HL, VG, RW

The Impact of Agriculture

1920 census records indicate that most year-round residents were farmers or oystermen (tongers). The lighter areas in this 1938 aerial image show how much of the land in the Herring Bay watershed was cultivated for tobacco and other crops. Holland Point was an exception. Its interior was dominated by wetlands and woods that were logged periodically.



U.S. Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service, 1938.
Johns Hopkins Sheridan Libraries Collections

The Bay's Bounty: from Abundance to Scarcity

In the 1930s, a group of friends built the “Cove Club” in the marsh grasses across from the beach that was east of the bridge on Fairhaven Road. The building was demolished in 1977. That beach and much of the marsh vegetation are gone, replaced by a concrete seawall.



In the 1940s, Holland Point residents would dig for oysters that were exposed during blow-out tides.¹⁰ From 1980 to 2008 the oyster harvest in Maryland waters declined 88 percent due to environmental degradation, disease, and overfishing.¹¹



Until the mid-1990s, families and communities held crab feasts throughout the summer months. In 1995, Maryland began limiting recreational and commercial harvests in response to a steep drop in the crab population. Reducing water pollution and restoring seagrasses and oyster reefs helps support more sustainable fisheries.

Photo credits: BBS, CW, CF

Shaped by Nature: the Power of Water, Wind, and Ice



1955: Hurricane Connie



2003: Hurricane Isabel



2003: Hurricane Isabel



1977: Winter the bay froze

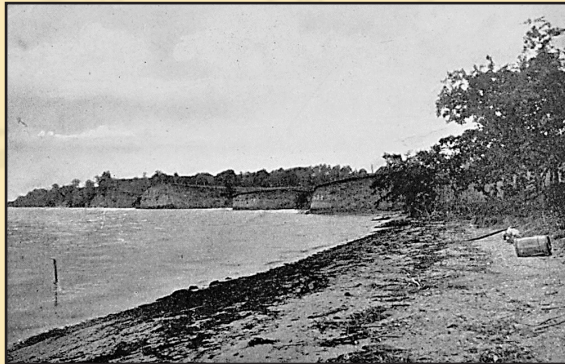


1994: Snow and ice storms

Photo credits, top to bottom: VG, MB, RG, BBS, BBS

Evolving Shorelines

1904:
Maryland
Geological Survey
Miocene Cliffs, Fair
Haven segment
of Calvert
Formation¹²



2021: The collapse and retreat of the cliffs results from wave action and the freezing and thawing of water permeating loose layers of rock. The contours of the cliffs are less visible as trees replaced farmland.

Circa 1920s:
Ebb Tide Delta
between the Cove
and Bay



2021: Sediments moved by storms and ebbing tides between the cove and the bay alter the land features. The open channel shown on maps through 1900 filled with marsh grasses by the 1920s. Much of that shoreline was washed

away in the 1950s by waves and flooding from hurricanes.

Circa 1930s:
Arkhaven Beach



1976: Nor'easters and hurricanes erased many of the beaches that once ran from Town Point to Holland Point, leading some residents to fortify their shoreline with materials like rip-rap that can withstand most of the impact of waves from across the bay.

Holland Point

Photo credits this page: MGS, MH, RT; next page: RCG, JDB, JBB

Evolving Habitats



Changes in farming practices have profoundly affected Herring Bay's habitats. Forests reclaimed tobacco fields when demand for that crop declined and subsidies ended. The 1972 ban on the pesticide DDT led to a rebound in Herring Bay's eagle and osprey populations.



Herring Bay communities also are working to preserve habitats. Private property owners' easements on nearly 700 acres of land (yellow on map) will permanently protect forests and wetlands. Oysters are being planted in the Herring Bay Oyster Sanctuary and native plants grown in yards and meadows.

Herring Bay remains a magnet for recreational boating and fishing. Schooners and steamships have given way to powerboats, sailboats, kayaks, and paddleboards. Local marinas have expanded their size and services to meet the growing public demand for access to the bay. *Image courtesy of Herrington Harbour*



The Ebb and Flow of Water and Woods

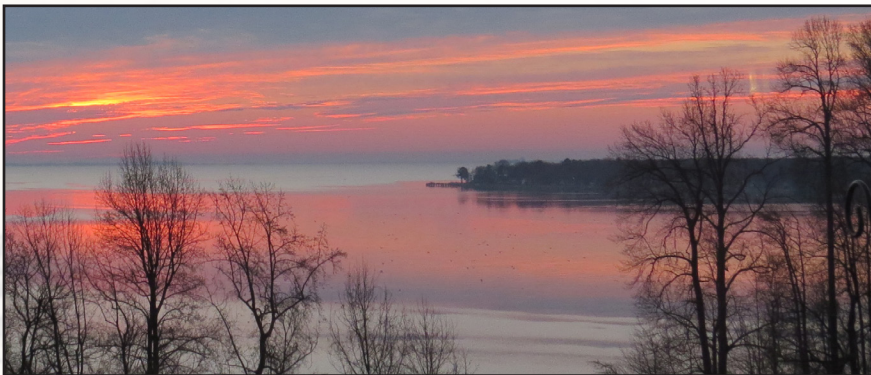
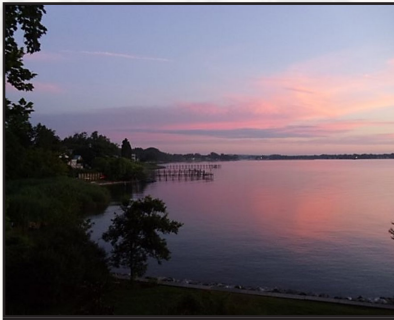
Herring Bay's shoreline has receded over time, especially areas comprised of geologically young lowland deposits, such as Holland Point. The blue outline in the map below, which was developed by the State of Maryland, illustrates the estimated contour of the shoreline from 1841–1861.

After studying the Herring Bay watershed in 2018, Anne Arundel County designated its steep slopes and healthy forests a top priority for preservation, along with Holland Point.¹³ The ecosystem services provided by those habitats—reducing air and water pollution, supporting wildlife, providing drinking water, and sequestering carbon—were worth about \$2,000 per acre per year in 2020.¹⁴



Photo credits opposite page: MB (eagle), KG (barn), MB (osprey), MD DNR GIS App (map), RS (oyster boat)

Preserving Our Heritage



Herring Bay has drawn people to its shore for thousands of years. Natural forces and human enterprise have affected its evolution and tested its resilience.

Those viewing the arc of Herring Bay's shoreline today can observe much of the wildlife seen by John Smith 400 years ago—deer and foxes in forests; otters and beavers in wetlands; horseshoe crabs and herons on its beaches; frogs and toads in its streams; and eagles, osprey, tundra swans, and terns aloft in azure skies.

With our help, the quality of the water also is improving, offering hope for a return of the rich diversity of aquatic species of the past and a sustainable future for Herring Bay.

Photo credits: AS, DW, MB, MF



Photos by Mike Brewer and Lynn Strauss

Acknowledgements

Scenic Rivers Land Trust and the Advocates for Herring Bay (AHB) are deeply grateful to the Anne Arundel Arts Council for its encouragement and for the generous grant that made this booklet possible.

In producing this brief history of Herring Bay, AHB drew on the work of researchers at the Anne Arundel County's Cultural Resources Section (in the Office of Planning and Zoning), the Lost Towns Project, Inc.; Calvert Marine Museum in Solomons Island, Maryland; Mariners Museum and Park in Hampton Roads, Virginia; Holland Point Citizens Association; and Deale Area Historical Society. We are indebted to all of them for sharing their knowledge of local history and for granting permission to publish certain images from their collections. The booklet also benefited from materials at the Library of Congress, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), University of Maryland, Johns Hopkins University, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and local newspapers.

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Finally, our heartfelt appreciation goes to Randy Goguen and Philomena Gorenflo for the exceptional skills they brought to the editing process and to the booklet's design.

About the Authors



Founded in 1988, Scenic Rivers Land Trust is dedicated to permanently protecting the forests, farms, wetlands, and other open spaces of Anne Arundel County.



Founded in 2005, the Advocates for Herring Bay are dedicated to preserving, restoring, and enhancing the ecosystems of the Herring Bay area in collaboration with our communities.

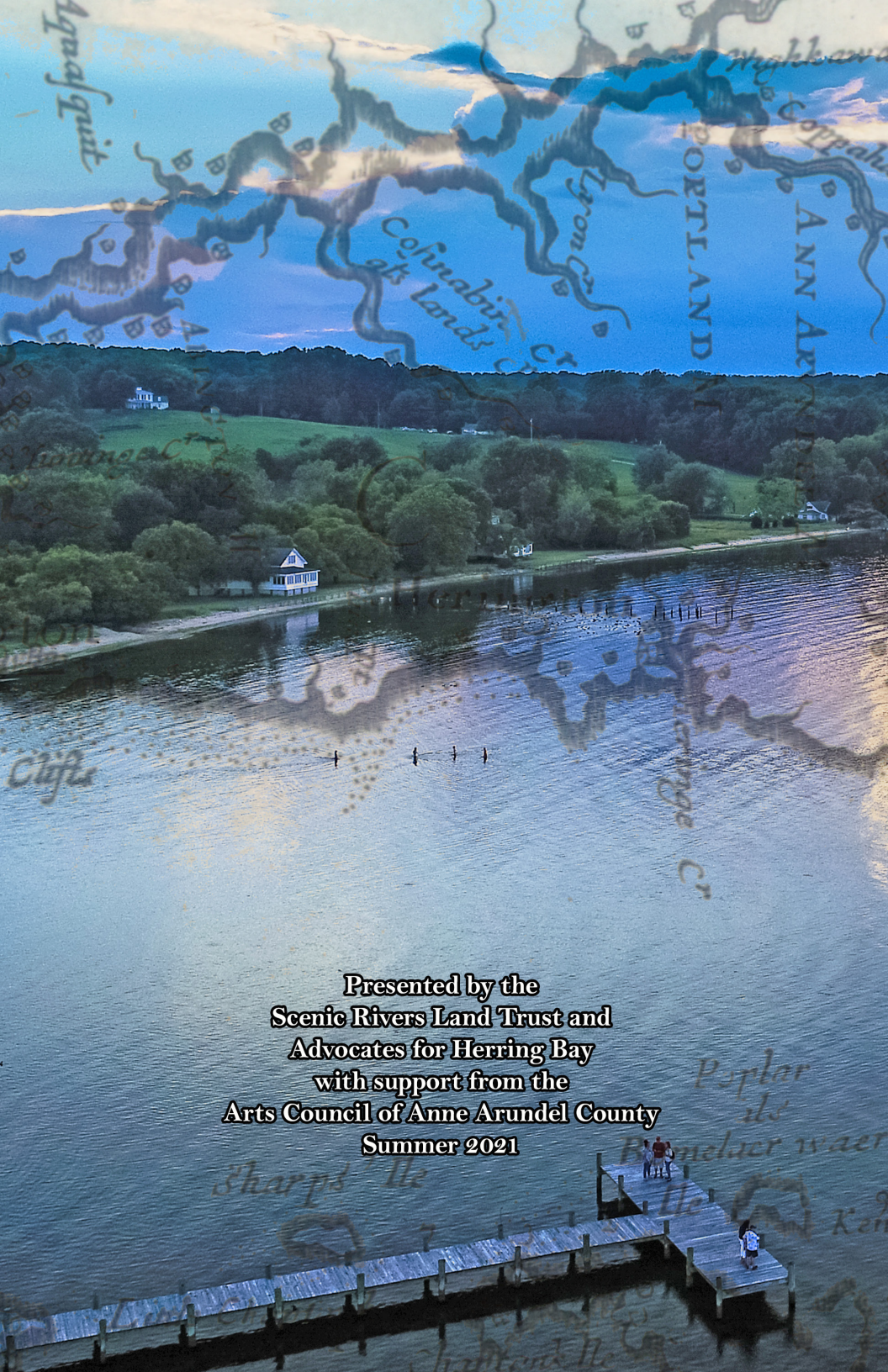
Key References and Photo Credits

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14. Maryland DNR *Greenprint Ecosystem Services Assessment*, extracted 2021.

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Cover photo of Herring Bay by Angel Beil: Old Colony Cove on Herring Bay, which is permanently protected by an environmental and historic easement.



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