

THE PEOPLE OF RIVERLEIGH
WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL
APRIL 25, 1977

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INTRODUCTION

Riverleigh is the modern name given to the land surrounding the oldest frame structure in Somerset County, the "Renshaw House". It got its name when my father and my uncle bought the land and held a contest to choose a new title. Before this, it was known by many other names; "Father's Care:", "Lott's Wife:", "The Lott", and briefly as "Grave's End Town".

Many different people have lived here over the years, and in the pages to follow I have given what I believe to be an accurate account of them and their changing life styles.

THE PEOPLE OF RIVERLEIGH

- I "LOTT'S WIFE"

- II THE INDIANS OF RIVERLEIGH
 - A - THEIR WAY OF LIFE
 - B - THEIR TECHNOLOGY

- III THE RENSHAW HOUSE OWNERS
 - A - LEVIN DENWOOD
 - B - LEVIN DASHIELL
 - C - ROBERT DASHIELL

- IV GRAVE'S END TOWN

- V THE STEAMBOAT WHARF

THE PEOPLE OF RIVERLEIGH

"Lot's Wife" was turned into a pillar of salt because she looked back at the destruction of the City of Sodom.¹ Her curiosity was her downfall.

I had curiosity about another "Lott's Wife", and have found it to be very interesting. My interest in "Lott's Wife" began in 1964, when my family moved into our present home, on the southside of the Wicomico River. Not too far from our house stood a brick frame structure dating from a much earlier period. Infact, it was the oldest frame structure in Somerset County. The view from it's front yard was fantastic. From the hill, on which it stood, you could see the little river town of Whitehaven. Whitehaven was settled in 1663.² At one point in time, Whitehaven was a port of entry for ships arriving from foreign ports. To the west, the river opened to it's full beauty, on the edge of Monie Bay and the Tangier Sound.

To satisfy my curiosity, I explored the old house many times. It was built from heavy timbers that were cut with a broad-axe. It had old cables and was made of bricks imported from England on sailing ships. There were two large fireplaces in the basement that would have been perfect for a hunter, of olden times, to dry his skins. It seemed to me that the man who built this house had put it in the perfect place. He had good soil to raise crops, plenty of seafood in the river and a forest nearby to get the wood needed to keep his family warm. This old, six fireplace home, held together by homemade nails, wooden pegs and mortised joints, was referred to as the "Renshaw House".

1. Holy Bible: Genesis 19:26

2. Rollie H. White, Jr.: Lower Eastern Shore Portrait, p. 10

What was this original homemaker like, who was he, and why did he pick this area to make his home? To answer these questions I checked the Somerset County Land Records. The first recorded deed to the property reveals that the land was originally owned by William Thomas. He moved to this area from the Western Shore of Virginia and was granted a patent by the Colonial Governor of Maryland. The patent consisted of 1000 acres and was referred to as "Lott's Wife". The date of this patent is 1664.³

The first patent in this county dated from 1663.⁴ Before this there were no white permanent inhabitants in this area. In 1673 the property was conveyed to Francis Roberts, by deed from William Thomas.⁵ Both of these conveyances contain, as a place of beginning, the following description, "Lying on the east side of the Chesapeake Bay and on the east and southeast side of the Wicomico river, beginning at a cedar oyster shell point, opposite to a great marsh, adjoining the lands of Thomas Shiles."⁶

The referred to cedar oyster shell point, with cedar trees and oyster shell mounds were clearly visible to me. It was situated in my front yard. This made me realize that the Thomas and Roberts families were not the first humans to inhabit the spot where I now lived. People had lived there years before, but how long before, what were they like, how did they live? True, I knew they were Indians, but I wanted to know more.

3. Land Office at Annapolis
4. Clayton Torrence: Old Somerset On The Eastern Shore of Maryland, p.98-99
5. Records of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Somerset County, Liber M. Folio 70
6. Ibid

The only links that I had with these original occupants, other than the deeds, were a few arrowheads, pieces of pottery, spearheads and other Indian artifacts I had found in exploring the area. I knew that these pieces of evidence of early Indian occupation would reveal much if I could extract the information from them.

Discussions with Mr. Tyler Bastian, State Archologist, and Mr. David Taylor, Mr. Elmer Jones and Judge William Yates, all amateur archologist, revealed much and provided just the information I needed to understand more about these people. These men examined my evidence, submitted them to chemical tests to determine their age, dug into and measured the surface area and depth of the shell mounds, and from their findings we were able to piece together much of the early history of the Indians of Mt. Vernon, and the area between my home and the river in particular.

History and research show that the first Indians moved into the Chesapeake Bay area of the Eastern Shore about 3500 B.C.⁷ The Indians settled first near the mouths of our main rivers, because food was easier to find and for protection. Later they moved further into the interior of our peninsulas. We must remember that all the tools that they had for protection, food gathering, or survival in general, were very crude. Bows and arrows did not come along until about 1500 B.C.

The Indians' only means of transportation was on foot or by small, crude dug-out canoes. Since no tools were available for construction of boats, fire was used to shape the hull and cut out the interior. This was very important because they had no horses until the Europeans brought them, about 1550.

7. Interview with Mr. David Taylor. Most of the information on the next few pages came from this source.

The Indians, prior to the coming of the white man, had no names for their groups. The names, as we know them, such as the Wicomicos, Manokins, Nanticokes, Choptanks, etc., were given to them by the white man. The names were taken from the rivers along which they lived.

All the Indians living in this general area were of the same "stock". A stock is a subdivision of a race. No "tribes" existed on the lower Eastern Shore. In the 1600's the dividing line between the organized and unorganized groups was the Nanticoke River. North of the Nanticoke they were organized.

The Indians of this area were not warlike. This was one of their major mistakes. Due to this, they allowed themselves to be pushed out of their territory by the white man. First, they were forced to migrate into the area now known as Pennsylvania, and then farther into the interior as the white man continued to takeover.

Up until 1500 B.C. to A.D. they survived by "gathering"; that is to say, they gained their food supplies by picking up edible things that could be found such as, berries, wild fruites, grasses, shellfish and the like. Before that time they had no containers in which to collect, cook or store their food. Therefore, they were nomadic. They moved from one area to another as their gathering exhausted the supply of available food. It was about this time, 1500 B.C.-A.D., that their technology advanced to an extent to change their way of living. Because this area was isolated advanced technology was later in coming.

The invention of pottery permitted the Indians to have pots for cooking and storage of food. With this they did not need to migrate from one area to another to find food. Due to this, also, farming came into existence. This gave them

more time to advance their technology, to improve their skills, and to create larger and better homes. They also had more time for trading and for religion. However, their religion, at this time, is unknown.

The spear, as their primary weapon, gave way to the bow and arrow. This weapon had an effective range of about fifty feet. With the advanced technology, the communities moved inland, away from the rivers, as they depended more on agriculture and less on seafood for food.

In other parts of the country the dead were placed in burial mounds. Not so on the lower Eastern Shore. No burial mounds have been discovered in this area. If the dead were buried their skeletons rapidly deteriorated because of the high moisture content and low lime content of the ground. It is generally believed that the bodies were thrown into the rivers, and in later years they were burned near the homesite.

The local Indians had no fancy clothes made of brightly colored feathers, as they did in other parts of the country. Clothes had to be made from materials locally available. Therefore, most of the clothes were made from skins of animals native to this area. Bones found in the excavation of homesites tell us that these animals were mostly small game, the same small game that exist here today; rabbits, squirrels, foxes, raccons, wolves, opossum, etc. Few large game were present. The most abundant large game was deer and they were in short supply. No large, brightly colored birds existed for them to make the fancy headdress and other garments used by tribes in other areas.

Food for the local Indians consisted mainly of oysters, fish, turtles, clams, small game, corn, squash and other vegetables. Food was no real problem.

One problem they had, however, was insects, mainly mosquitoes. They also experienced problems in finding good fresh water, and in contending with bad weather.

Most of the food that was not eaten raw was stewed, baked or eaten as a mush. The introduction of pottery permitted food to be prepared in these ways, but there was no such thing as fried food. There were no utensils that could be used for this purpose. Most of the food was cooked in pots, with the fires located behind the Indian huts. Pits were used for cooking, with pots placed in them and fires built around them, or stones were heated to a high temperature, placed in a pot with the food and the entire thing was then buried in the ground. Sometimes food was cooked on an open fire or in hot coals. Corn cakes were often baked on flat rocks. Below is a drawing of what a buried cooking pot looked like.



The study of the "oyster shell mound" referred to in the abovementioned land description indicates that the site was a permanent settlement, about one acre in size. Spears found here and pictured on the next page, date back to about 3000 B.C. Therefore, we have good reason to believe that Indians were living on this exact spot about the same time that Sodom and the land supporting it were destroyed by fire.

All indications show that this did not become a permanent settlement until about 2000 B.C., and it ceased to be such about 1650, due to the arrival of



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Scientific tests have been run on these artifacts to determine their ages and purposes. These are the results:

- 1 and 2 Two Popular Island spear points. Classified by "Ritchie of New York" as being found on the East Coast between New York and Virginia, mainly along the Chesapeake Bay. They were used during the period of 5000 to 2500 B.C. These particular ones were made about 3000 B.C. (Remember arrowheads came along much later.)
- 3 A Stubenville Lance. Classified by "Richie of New York" as existing between 2500 B.C.-A.C. This particular one was estimated to have existed about 2500 B.C.
- 4 An unclassified weapon point. Tests indicate it dates back to 1000B.C to 100 A.D.
- 5 A Humpback Scraper. The flat side was used to scrape and prepare hides. This is supposed to be a good example of this type of tool. Dates to a period of about 100 A.D.
- 6 A broken pitted hammerstone. A tool used to open shells and perform other functions where tools such as hammers are used. They date back to the period of 100 to 1000 A.D.
- 7 and 8 An unclassified type of arrowhead. The period is between 100 - 800 A.D. This particular one dates to about 500 A.D.
- 9 Small Levanna type arrowhead. Usually found in the Pennsylvania area. The large ones date to about 2000 B.C., but technology slowly improved to the point where by 800 A.D., date of this particular one, smaller ones with better craftsmanship were available.
- 10 An excellent example of a Brewerton corner notched arrowhead. Made between 1000 - 1600 A.D. This one dates to about 100 A.D. Note how technology improved. They are becoming smaller and better designed as history advances.
- 11 An unclassified type native to this area around 1400 - 1600 A.D.
- 12 and 13 Pottery from cooking containers native to this area around 800 - 1000 A.D.

white settlers. This was just shortly before William Thomas and his family moved to this area.

The depth and size of the oyster shell mounds cause the Archelogist to believe that the site was populated by a few small families occupying about fifteen huts, most of which were found along the river. A few were located in what is now an open field, a short distance from the main site. Their huts were made of small trees, limbs, branches, and grasses. These were used instead of teepees because they had no large skins with which to make them and because they didn't need to be portable.

The huts were of one room design. The entire family carried on all family activities in this one room. The buildings were rectangular in shape with straight sides and a rounding roof. The door was found in the south end.

In addition to the residential area along the shore, there was a clear space, five to ten acres in size, located south of the village. This area was farmed for food, producing mainly corn and squash. The corn, unlike what we have today, consisted of ears about six inches in length. Because of their nearness to the forests and river, these Indians had easy access to almost everything they needed. All of the Archelogist talked with agreed that they had a good life here, for that period of history.

When excavating a small area of the mound, about eight years ago, a pottery pot was found buried about eighteen inches deep. The pot appeared to have been about one half gallon capacity and contained several stones, each about the size of a baseball, and several bones. It seemed as though the hot stones had been placed in the pot, with some parts of a wild animal, for cooking and, for some

reason, abandoned. The pot, damaged in recovery, is now being restored to its original size and shape by an Archelogist. Chemical tests are being run on the stones to determine the period when the heat was applied to them. Tests are also being run on the bones to determine their origin.

Due to all the evidence given to this point, we have good reason to believe that land conveyed in the "Lott" patent has been occupied continuously since about 2000 B.C., a period of almost 4000 years. Although the Indian village vanished in about 1650, plans for a new village, at the same location, were not long in coming.

The individuals that have resided on this property played leading parts in the development of the area. Some of them were to be social, political and religious leaders of the new area.

Levin Denwood purchased the property in 1685, from William Wright.⁸ He seems to be the first owner to play a significant roll in the development of what is now Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester Counties. He and his wife, Priscilla,⁹ moved here from Accomac County, Virginia, in 1665, when he was 17 years old. His father was known, in Virginia, as a "man of means" and "high social position". Denwood, a staunch Quaker, crossed over into Maryland because the Virginia Colony was not friendly towards Quakers. He came here for religious freedom and was¹⁰ not long here before he became recognized as a man of "substantial means".

8. Somerset County Land Records - Liber MA, Folio 736

9. Torrence, Op. Cit., pg. 98-99

10. ibid



The Indian Village area as it looks today. Facing southwest.

He was prominent in the affairs of the Monie meeting house and was soon the Quaker leader of the area, giving much of his land and money to that cause. The history of the "Society of Friends" (Quakers) reveals that Thomas Chalkley, a great Quaker Missionary, visited at the home of Levin Denwood and later Thomas Stary, another great Quaker Missionary, traveling with friends on the Eastern Shore, recorded a visit to Levin Denwood's home in 1699.¹¹

When the General Assembly of Maryland met, October 2 to November 6, 1693, town building in the province became a vital question. An Act For The Advancement Of Trade was passed "providing for the erection of towns, ports and places". The act directed that five towns be constructed in Somerset County. These towns were to be the locations "where all goods shipped into the province could be unloaded, the traffic in them be conducted, and from which all tobacco, goods, wares and merchandise of the growth, production and manufacture for trade and export". The act provided that each town consist of at least 100 acres. It was to be laid off into streets, lanes and alleys, with an open space for a Church and the rest of the land was to be divided into 100 lots. The purchase of a lot was required to erect a 20x20 foot house on the property. The towns were permitted to elect delegates to the General Assembly. The act provided that a commission be named to carry out the provisions of the act. Levin Denwood was a member of the commission.¹³ The first location designated as a town in Somerset County was on the south side of the Wicomico River, to be located at a place called "Lott's Wife", on the land

11. Ibid p. 101

12. Ibid p. 101 and 102

13. Ibid p. 413

of William Wright. In April, 1685, the General Assembly approved the construction of a town on, or near, a tract of land called "Lott's Wife", on the land formerly owned by William Wright. Levin Denwood was then the owner.

The town, named "Grave's End Town", was laid out and several lots were sold. The old Renshaw House was built on one of these lots and its dimensions were such as to conform to the requirements of the act. The deed from Levin Denwood to Thomas Dashiell, in 1700, describes the house then existing and the description is that of the "Renshaw House".

In addition to serving on the town commission, Levin Denwood served the County as a member of the Grand Jury (March 1671-72), as overseer of highways, and as "pressmaster". In the latter position he furnished provisions for the militia.

His niece, Sarah Covington, married another great patriot, Major General Edward Lloyd, of Wye, Talbot County. Lloyd became Governor of Maryland, and served from 1709 to 1713.¹⁴

After Denwood, the property was owned, for a period of time, by the Dashiell family.

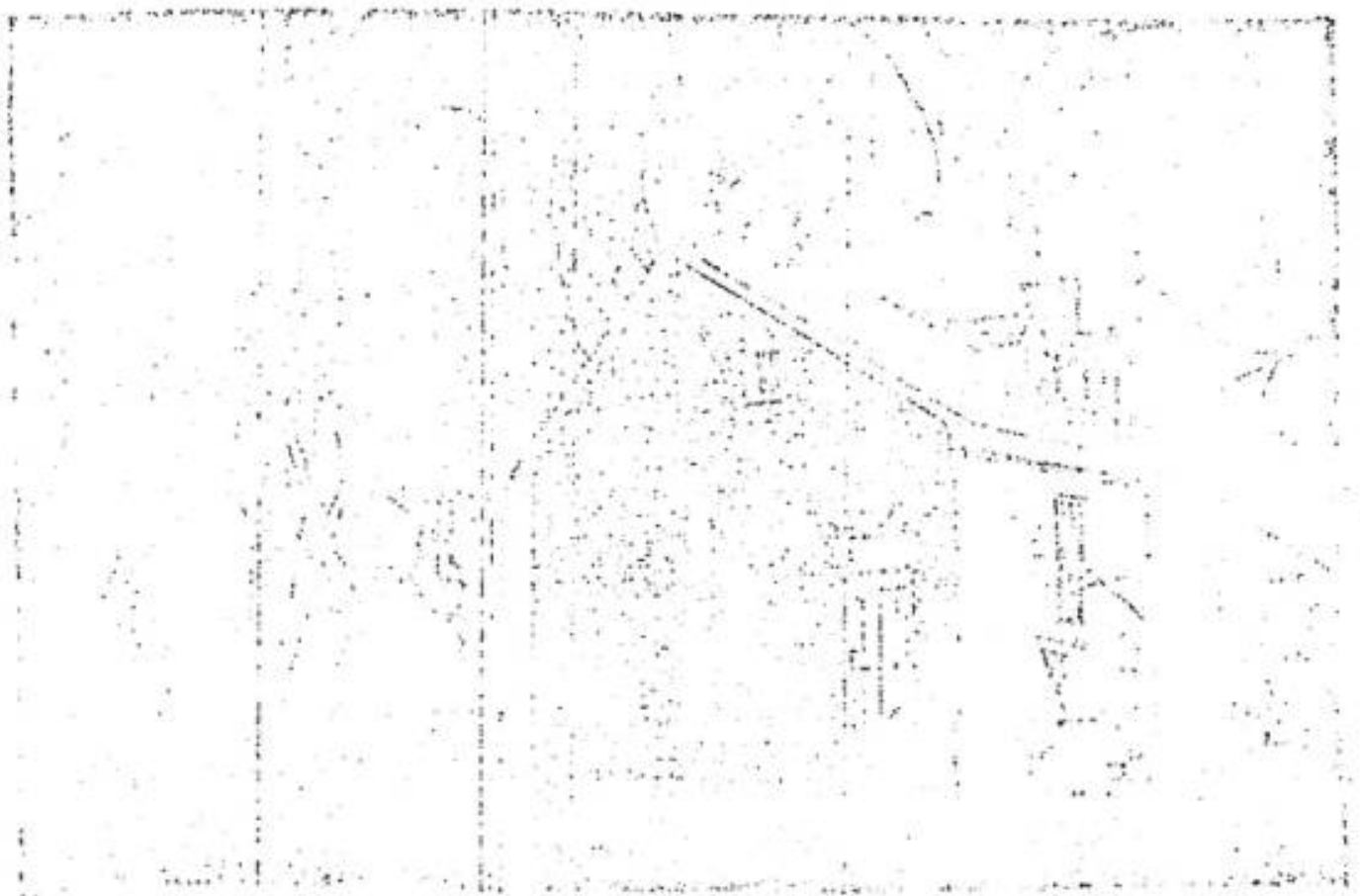
Levin Dashiell, who sold the property in 1770, had his home burned by British troops in 1780. During that year, Colonel George Dashiell informed Governor Lee that Somerset County rivers were blockaded by eight armed British ships to prevent supplies and army stores from being sent to Washington's troops at the "Head of Elk", (now Elkton). He also said that one ship had sailed up the Wicomico River and put ashore marauders who burned the home and tenant houses of

14. Ibid p. 439



"Lott's Wife" and part of "Hazzards" as it appears today, facing northeast.

THE RENSHAW HOUSE



Basement fireplace and Back stairs
of the old house



Shows perpendicular staircase
leads to second floor.



This is one of the two ancient cellar fireplaces in old house.

Levin Dashiell. British ships often came up the Wicomico River and other county rivers during the Revolutionary War, plundering, pillaging and taking hostages. The area was a large supplier for beef, grain and lumber for our government during that war. Levin Dashiell remained a patriot in this area at a time when most of the people here were loyal to the British Crown.

In 1770, Robert Dashiell purchased "Lott". His interest in the Revolution was such that in 1781 he and three others gave to the Maryland Navy, a new armed barge, the "Protector". The "Protector" was of 54 foot keel and 14 foot beam, capable of carrying a six pound cannon; six to ten swivel guns and having 32 oars. Built of thirty two native oaks, it was described as being one of the sturdiest vessels afloat.

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Before the end of the war, this ship was to give a good account of her capabilities, ending her career as the victim of one of the bloodiest battles fought, considering the number of men involved. This, the last naval engagement of the Revolutionary War, was fought in Tangier Sound. The Maryland force consisted of five barges and the British of six. The "Protector" was the American command ship. Captain Robert Dashiell of "Lott" was Captain of the "Terrible", of the Maryland Fleet. The date was November 30, 1782. The "Protector" went into battle near Smith Island, with a crew of sixty-five men. Eleven escaped injury. Twenty-five were killed and twenty-nine others were wounded, some of whom later died.

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Although "Grave's End Town: never became the center of import and export, as originally planned by the General Assembly in 1683, it did become such almost 200 years later. In 1852 steamboat service was inaugurated between Baltimore

15. Charles J. Truitt: Breadbasket of the Revolution p. 129

16. Ibid p. 169

17. Ibid p. 183

and the Wicomico River. The first boat to make the trip was the 258 ton paddle steamer "Wilson Small".¹⁸ This service was to continue for over 100 years. About 1877 the Maryland Steamboat Company opened the Wicomico River to service by larger steamboat. Seven steamboat wharves were situated on the Wicomico River. The first one, as you enter the river, was at Mt. Vernon, on the property formerly known as "Lott's Wife", and about 250 yards east of the Renshaw House. The last wharf was in the City of Salisbury.¹⁹ With the introduction of this service the Mt. Vernon terminal became the distribution center, both passenger and freight, for the northern portion of Somerset County.

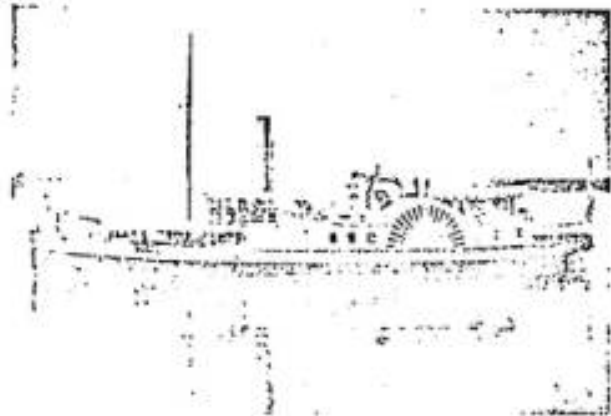
The first large steamboat to make the run with the "Kent", a sidewheeler, in 1883. As the boat landings were constructed along the river, the trade prospered. To accommodate the increase in the business the sidewheeler "Enoch Pratt" replaced the "Kent". The steamer left Baltimore three days each week bound for Salisbury, and three days each week it left Salisbury for Baltimore. Therefore the wharf at "Lott" was the center of boating activity six days a week. In 1903 the larger steamer "Virginia" was built especially for the Wicomico River run. She continued to make regular runs until 1929, when steamboats left the river for good.

The wharf at Mt. Vernon, part of which still exists, was a covered, one story structure. It consisted of an office for the wharfmaster, a large area for protected storage of freight, a pound area for animals and a waiting room for passengers.

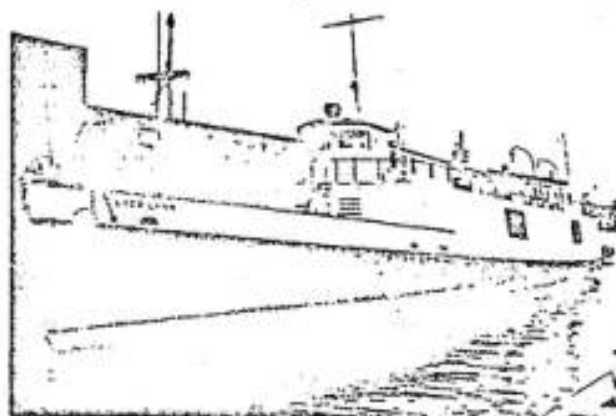
18. Robert H. Burgess: This Was Chesapeake Bay p. 85-86. Some information from above and below from same source.

19. Interview with Lloyd L. Simpkins.

STEAMBOATS



Lighthouse tender *Jessamine* was converted into the power freighter *Victor Lynn*. Photo: The Mariners Museum.



The *Victor Lynn* at Pier 4, Pratt Street, Baltimore. Photo: Author



The *Virginia* at Baltimore shortly before being cut down to a barge in 1936. Photo: Author

"Such steamboats were the main means of transportation from this area to Baltimore. The boats had very plush furnishings. There was a piano that anyone, who wanted, could play. The passengers would all stand around and sing to the music, or just talk. There were many interesting people from all walks of life on these trips."

"The fares were cheap, about \$2.00, cabins were provided in the price of a ticket, but most people would get a stateroom. This, and your meals, cost extra. If you didn't want to buy a meal you could carry your own. The boats had chambermaids that brought ice water and wash water to the staterooms. They would also bring your meals to your room, if you wanted. If you ate out front, there were tables set up. The greatest honor was to be asked to eat at the Captain's table. These steamboats were three stories high and looked like a paddlewheeler. You could walk outside on the deck, like on a paddlewheeler. Cattle were carried on the boats also. At night you could hear them.

A steamboat would leave Mt. Vernon at 2 P.M. From there it went to Deal Island, then to Roaring Point and finally out to the Bay and on to Baltimore. After a fifteen hour trip, longer, depending on weather conditions, you arrived at your destination. Usually about 7:00 A.M. Anyone who wanted to, could come back the same day.

The Victor Lynn Lines continued to operate freight boats on a regular schedule between Baltimore and Salisbury until December, 1954.

20. Telephone interview with Mrs. Mabel Wilson

21. Lloyd Simpkins, Op. Cit.

22. Ibid

This company operated two boats on this particular run; a boat would leave Baltimore about 6:00 P.M. each day, arrive at Mt. Vernon wharf the next morning. Another boat would leave Salisbury about 6:00 P.M., stop at Mt. Vernon about 8:00 P.M., then arrive in Baltimore about 6:00 A.M. the next morning. These boats carried no passengers.

In its many years of existence, the area surrounding the "Renshaw House" has been known as "The Lott", "Lott's Wife", "Father's Care", and "Riverleigh", its present name. It has seen Indians, whitemen and negro slaves, and it has seen transportation progress from hollow canoes to steamboats, to oil tankers. This land has been a witness to all kinds of things and it has a great story to tell. True, it has undergone a great many changes, but one thing that has remained the same through the years is that it is still a good, and beautiful place to call home.

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