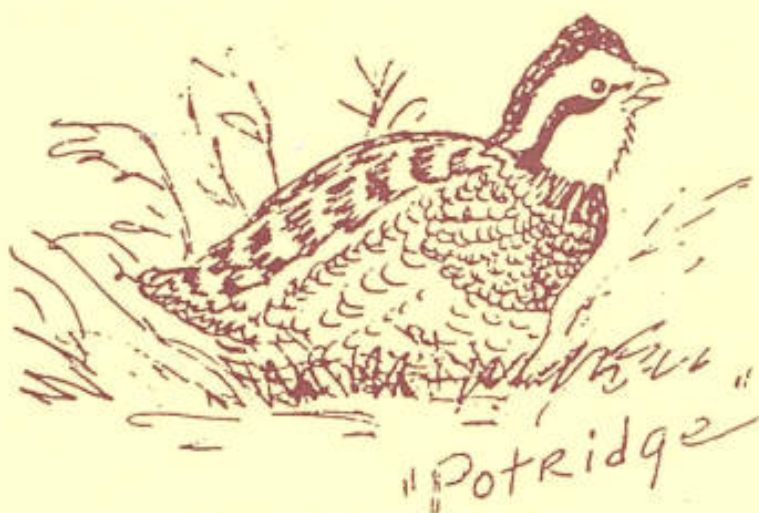


Eastern Shore Wordbook

by
Arthur King Fisher



A compilation of

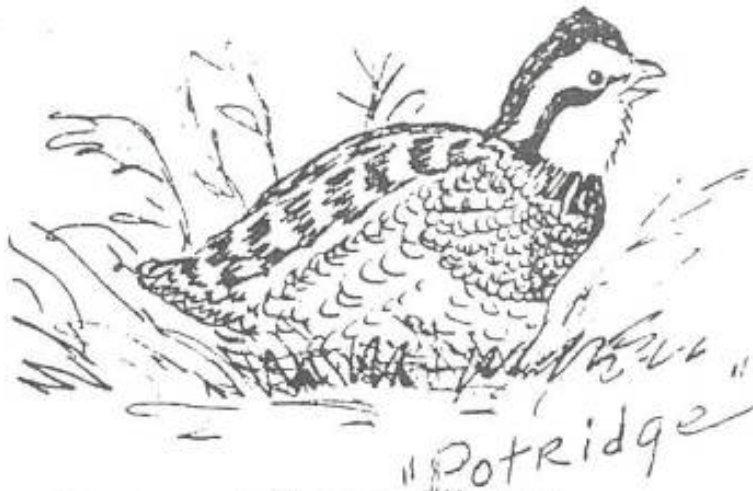
- 167 words and expressions
 - Eastern Shore folk cures
 - Pronunciation of certain surnames
 - Folk meteorology and horticulture
- Plus an essay on Eastern Shore speech
-

Illustrated by
Frances Scott Stevenson

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Foreword

I have compiled this information for three groups. It will be useful to newcomers and visitors to the counties of the Eastern Shore of Virginia and the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Secondly, I feel it will be a delightful experience for long-time residents to hear again words and expressions heard frequently years ago. Further, I hope it will help young Eastern Shoremen to become familiar with things that are a part of their cultural heritage.

No one person ever used all of these expressions. However, all have been used on the Shore in the second half of the twentieth century. Some are dictionary words that are seldom used.

Roger Shuy, professor of linguistics at Georgetown University, says: "Revel in the differences. Speech is a paradox. We have to speak enough like one another to be understood, but different enough to preserve our humanity. If we all started speaking the same way, life on this planet would be pretty dull."

I agree.

I wish to thank the following persons for reviewing the list of words and expressions: Mrs. E. Almer Ames, Jr., William S. Nicholson, Mrs. Jean T. Sadtler, Mrs. Nora Miller-Turman, Mrs. Nell D. Watkinson, Daniel Hartnett, and Cindy Doerzbach.

The illustrations are the work of my cousin, Mrs. Frances Scott Stevenson of Pocomoke, Maryland.

I dedicate this work to my wife Rachel Hall Fisher, who, like me, is a lifelong Eastern Shoreman.

Arthur King Fisher
September 24, 1986

Words and Expressions

A a

across the bay—refers to the part of Virginia west of the Chesapeake Bay.

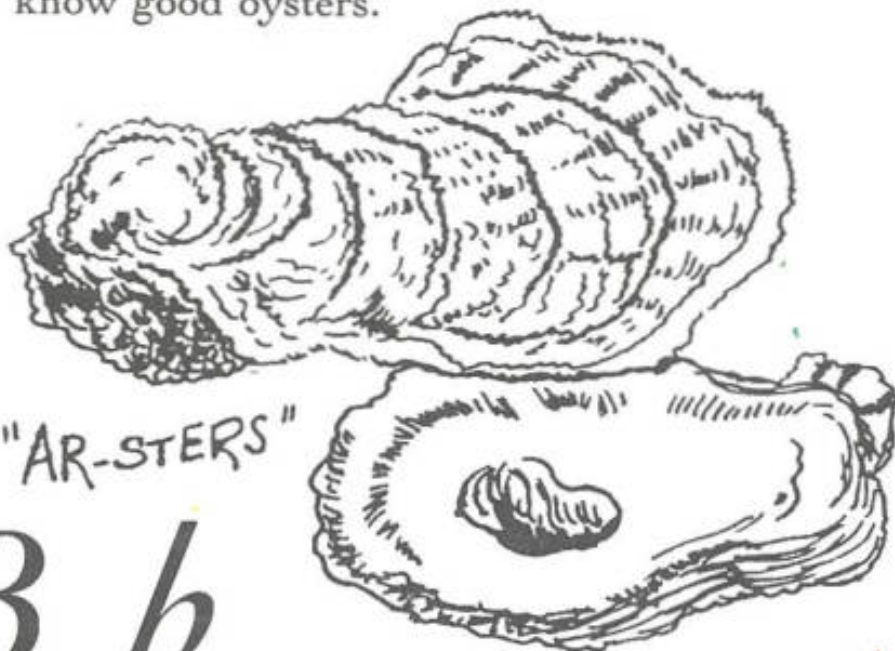
afagan—an afghan.

after—concerned with. "I'm not after those presidential debates."

airish—a cold and windy day. "It is airish out there."

all the go—fashionable. "Short skirts were all the go that year."

- ° **arsters**—a pronunciation of *oyster*. Those who say it know good oysters.



B b

- ° **back house**—a privy.

bandanna—head scarf.

bay—short for *baby*. A term of endearment on Chincoteague.

baysider—an Eastern Shoreman who lives on the west side of the railroad tracks.

been here—a native of the Eastern Shore.

- ° Denotes illustration.

° **bidly**—chick.
belong to—supposed to. "They don't belong to block this street."

big day—family dinner.

bimeby—by and by.

black gum against thunder—irreconcilable differences.

blue hen's chickens—a wild youth. "He's one of the blue hen's chickens, he is."

bomb—pronounced as *bum* by some older Eastern Shoreman.

box—boxwood bushes.

broke—physical deterioration or aging. "She has broke since the last time I saw her."



C c

calm—pronounced to rhyme with *Sam* when it means water free from agitation.

Cap'n—an honorific applied to a respected elderly Eastern Shoreman whether or not he worked on the water for a livelihood. Compare with a Kentucky colonel.

carry—escort. "Who are you going to carry to the prom?"

catabiased—crooked or not parallel, usually applied to the placement of furniture.

catacasnared—catty-cornered.

° **chimley**—chimney

chunk (n.)—piece of wood used in a fight. "He picked up a chunk of wood and started toward me."

chunk (v.)—to throw. "We chunked snowballs at the teacher."

chinchy—stingy.

clean—completely, all the way. "It rained clean across the porch."

cold enough to freeze brass monkeys—cold indeed.

come down—resident of the Shore who was born in the North.

come here—person not born on the Eastern Shore.

coming appetite—good appetite.

creppa bone—coccyx.

cubbay—a very young calf.



D d

D. P. store—David Pender Grocery Company, predecessor of Colonial, Big Star, and some Meatland stores.

dear—expensive.

disfurnish—to take an excessive amount. "Thank you for bringing me these clams, but I don't want to disfurnish you."

dofloppy—whatshisname.

dog—pronounced to rhyme with *vogue*.

dotty—senile. (Pronounced to rhyme with *boat*.)

down the county—south of where the speaker lives.

drene—drain.

drudge—waterman's pronunciation of *dredge*.

drum up business—solicit business. The old name for traveling salesman was *drummer*.

drunkards—fruit flies.

E e

eating his white bread—indicates a time in a child's life when his problems are relatively simple and his material needs are being taken care of by others.

either one—not a one. Question: Did you catch any fish? Answer: "Not either one."

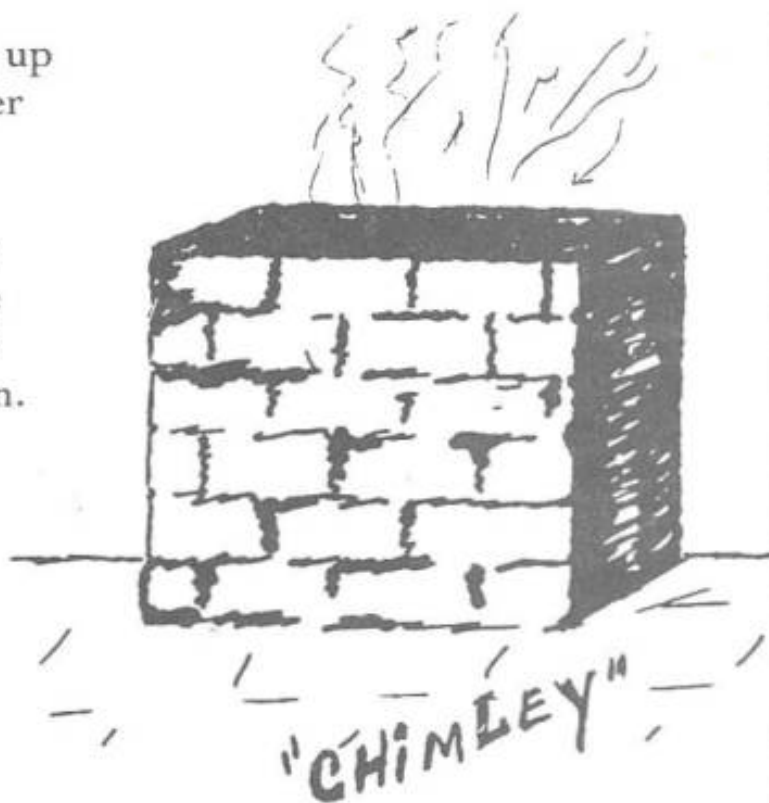
F f

falling out—a quarrel.

fat back—a small fish. "Let's go fat backing tonight."

fog—pronounced to rhyme with *vogue*.

foreigner—a person brought up somewhere other than on the Delmarva Peninsula. This term was in use before *come here* became common.



G g

galing—dating. Usually applied to a widower.

gamemake—a mimic.

German police dog—German shepherd.

get shed of—get rid of.

get up with—contact. "I have been trying to get up with an electrician for three days."

glut time—waterman's expression meaning *bonanza*.

go by me—listen and heed. "If you'll go by me, I'll show you how to kill a deer."

going to haul—weather is going to change. "She's going to haul about 8:30."

gone to Canaan—euphemism for pregnant.

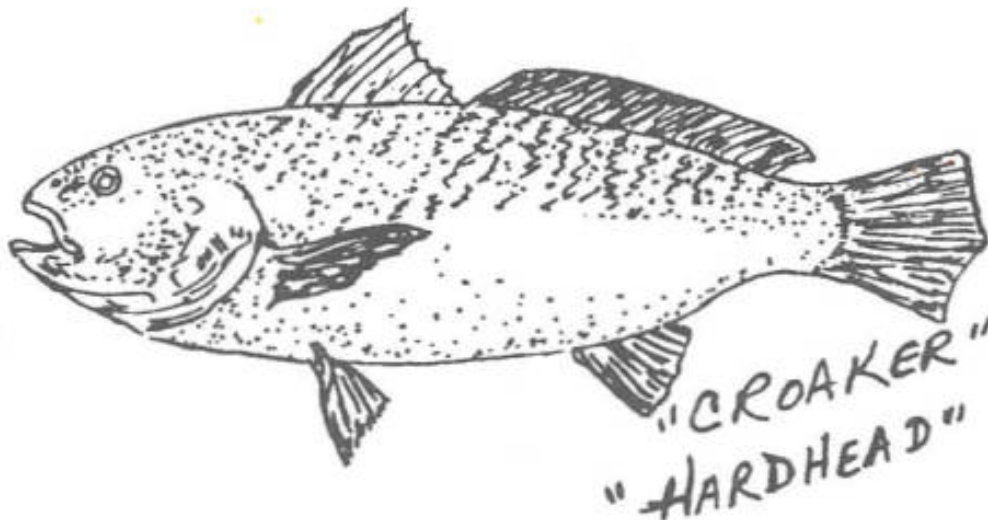
good liver—moderately prosperous person.

gussed up—dressed finely. (Accent is on the second syllable.)

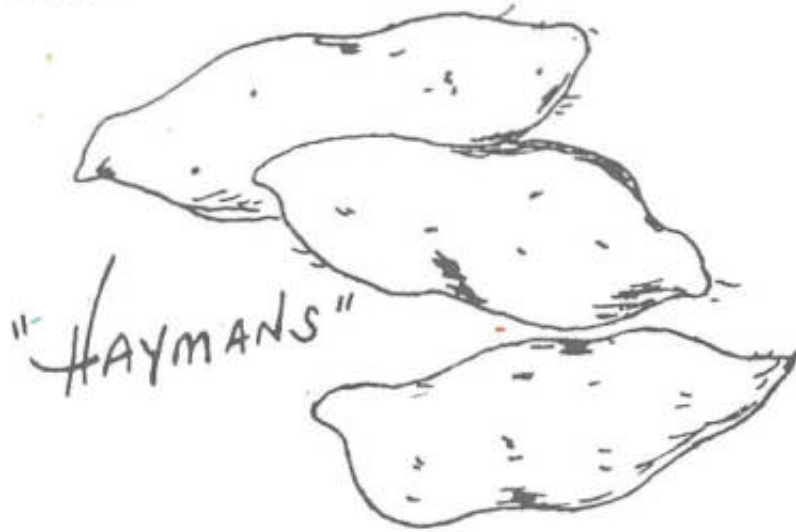
H h

had a bad go—suffered misfortune. "That was the year I had a bad go: I broke my arm."

◦ **hardhead**—a croaker



- having a smother**—taking an alcoholic drink.
- **Hayman**—a kind of sweet potato. Most Eastern Shoremen consider Haymans the best tasting of all potatoes.

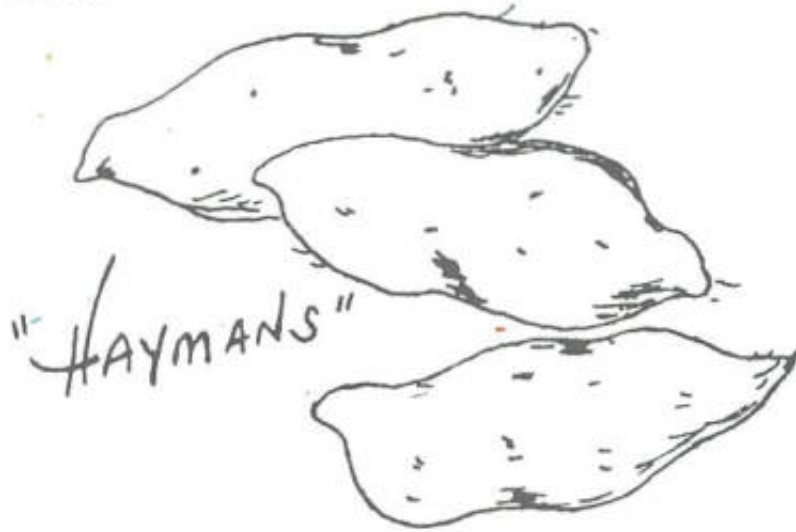


- high as quinine**—expensive.
- hog**—pronounced to rhyme with *vogue*.
- honey**—term of endearment, used between members of the same sex also.
- **horse hopper**—a praying mantis. A Tangier expression.
- huck**—grime. Usually on the neck or back.

J j

- jag**—a big catch of oysters.
- Jimmy crab**—male crab.

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K k

kaflugie—indefinite distance.

"I could throw that to kaflugie." (Soft *g*)

Kitty, bar the door—an argument. "When those two started talking about child custody, it was Kitty, bar the door."

kofered—a warped board. A Tangier and Smith Island expression.



"MANTIS"
"HORSE HOPPER"

L l

leave it go—let it alone.

° **little nicks**—small clams.

log—pronounced to rhyme with *vogue*.

losing flesh—losing weight.



"LITTLE NICKS"

M m

make a die of it—means an elderly person's imminent demise.

make over—having a lot to say to somebody.

mana tide—extremely low tide.

° **mananose**—a clam with a snout.

Marylandmen—one of the names Virginia watermen use to refer to Maryland watermen.

maw—stomach. "Throw that into your maw."

mother—thick substance which forms on paint left in a can for awhile.

mustered out—discharged from the armed services.



"MANANOSSES"

N n

noth-easter—nor'easter.

nummy—numb

O o

of a mind—just you wait. "Of a mind, I'm going to switch you when I get you home."

Old Christmas—Epiphany or Twelfth Night.



P p

palm—pronounced so that the *l* is heard, as it was centuries ago.

pavement—sidewalk. (An example of the continued use of a British expression on the Eastern Shore.)

peeler—a crab shedding; used for bait.

pint—pronunciation of *point*, as in "plow pint."

pip ginny—a pimple.

pitch—to land. "The airplane pitched at Princess Anne."

pitch pole—to fall head over heels.

play pretty—a toy.

° **potridge**—a quail.

pound (n.)—enclosure for farm animals.

pound (v.)—giving a minister gifts other than money. "We are going to meet at the church Wednesday and pound the preacher."

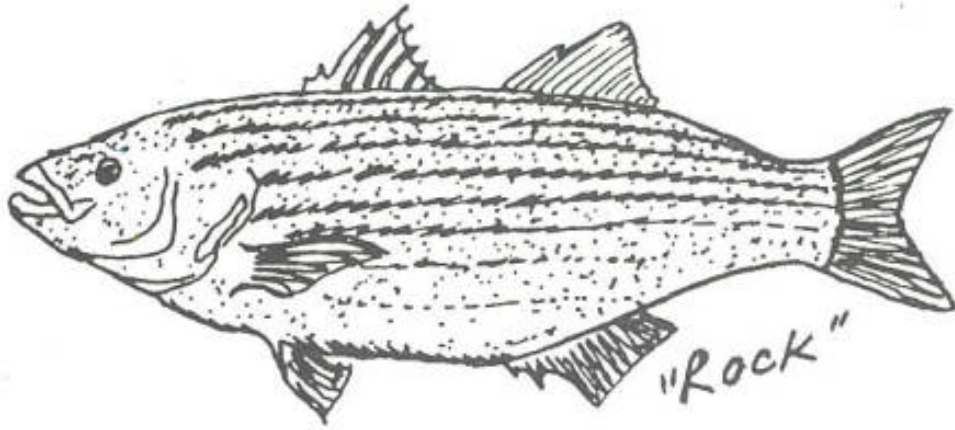
pret near—almost. "Dinner is pret near ready."

protracted meeting—a church revival.

pruzing—ransacking. "I found this when I was pruzing through the attic." The word comes from *perusing*.

puncheon—a short post.

purchase—ability to loosen or unscrew a top. "I don't have enough purchase to open it."



R r

° **rock**—striped bass.

run ashore—finished eating a big meal. In response to a question whether a diner might want some more of a certain dish at a holiday meal, he or she might reply, "No thanks, I've run ashore."

S s

Sarday—pronunciation of Saturday.

scase—scarce.

Sea Sider—an Eastern Shoreman who lives on the east side of the railroad track.

second day dress—dress a bride wore the day following her wedding.

serenade—boisterous reception often involving tin cans that greeted newlyweds the first night after their return from the honeymoon.

set out—a family dinner on a holiday.

seven ways from Sunday—idle threat of a hard slap used with children and pets. "If you don't move, I'll knock you seven ways from Sunday."

shadders—pine needles. (Also pronounced as shatters.)

shan't—shall not (said defiantly). "I shan't sign that petition."

shats—pine needles.

slacked sheet nor tack—full force. "Ignoring the stop sign, he never slacked sheet nor tack." These are nautical terms.

sick as two dogs—illness involving nausea.

simlans, or cymlin—Patty Pan squash, apparently the first squash grown on the Shore.

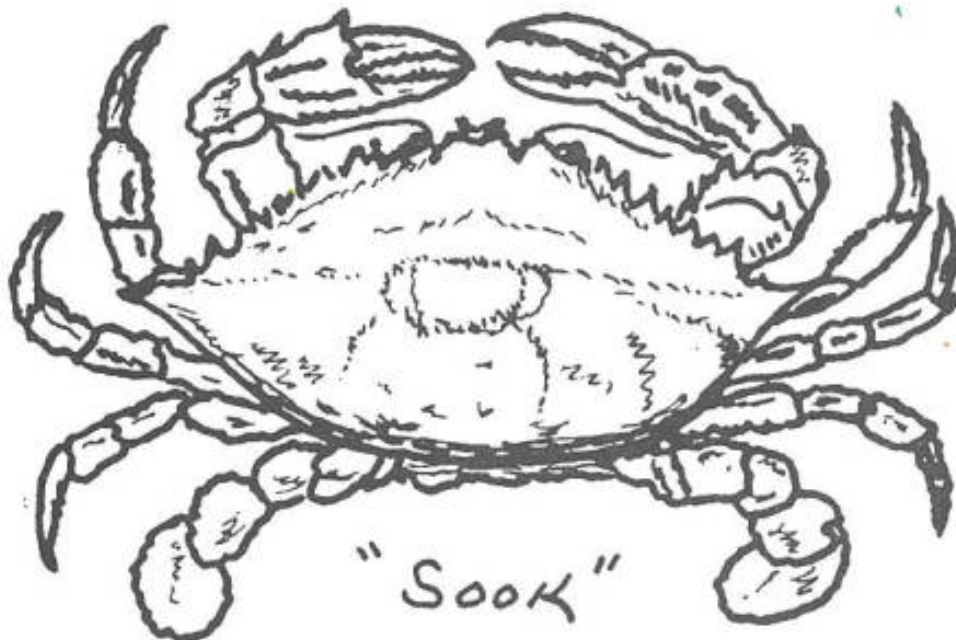
sixteener—synonymous with *teenager*. An old man might say, "I feel as well now as when I was a sixteener."

skin a louse for its tiler—extreme frugality. *Tiler* probably comes from *tallow*.

sojas—old name for soybeans.

* **sook**—female crab. Also called sooky.

sparking—dating.



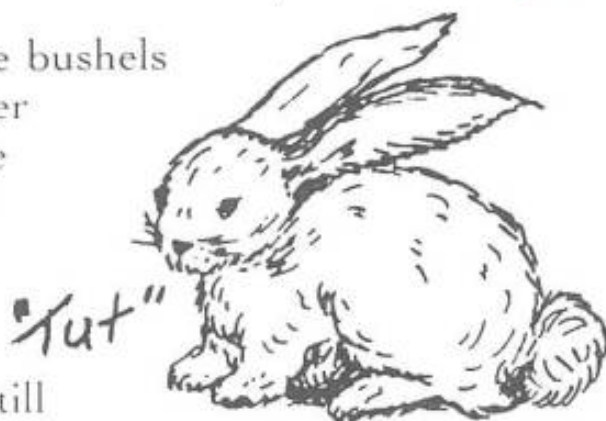
- **spider**—a frying pan.
- spitting fire**—extreme anger. "By the time I got there, she was spitting fire."
- squall**—thunderstorm.
- squit**—an adolescent girl who affects adult airs.
- stands in with**—to know an influential person well.
- stewer**—a complainer.
- stob up**—secure. "Stob up the cow."
- Stone Road**—original name for U.S. Route 13.
- stove up**—confined by illness. "That fall kept me stove up for weeks."
- superannuated**—retired with a pension. For years the only persons with that status were railroad workers, Methodist ministers, and Coast Guardsmen.
- sure as gun's iron**—a certainty.



T t

- taken short**—need to go to the bathroom. "I was taken short on the Ferris wheel."
- tater corn**—corn harvested from a plot where potatoes had been planted.
- taut as a tick**—feeling of fullness after a big meal.
- team**—an intransigent person. "She's a team, she is."
- tedious**—pronounced "te jus." This is another example of the continued use of a British pronunciation.

- terectly**—means something to be done in the near future. "I'll tend to that terectly."
- that out**—surely. "That out Dukakis will never run for office again."
- that won't last a good high water**—something worthless or of a very temporary nature.
- thick**—close relationship. "She and the doctor's wife are thick."
- this time**—second greeting. Used when a Shore person sees and greets somebody for the second time in the same day.
- through the rubs**—a period of hard luck.
- tickly bender**—dangerous. A Tangier expression. "It's tickly bender crossing this ice."
- time enough**—it is early. When a hostess tells a visitor, "It is time enough," it means, "Don't hurry."
- token**—an omen.
- ton crack**—to inflict or sustain a heavy blow. "He hit me a ton crack." "The plumber struck his head a ton crack when he was under the sink."
- tough as a boiled owl**—inedible meat.
- tough as whitleather**—tough indeed.
- tump**—slight elevation in a marsh. Elderly residents of Chincoteague say affectionately of their island, "I've lived on this tump all my life."
- turn**—a heavy load. "Let me open the door for you since you are carrying a turn."
- turn to**—to work hard or with a purpose. "If we don't turn to, we won't finish before nightfall."
- turned on**—succeeded. "The Washington Redskins really turned on last Sunday."
- * **tut**—a rabbit
- two to two**—twelve bushels of oysters. Another example would be "three to two" or 17 bushels of oysters. An ancient means of measurement still used in the Bay Country.



U u

ugly enough to stop an eight day clock—epitome of ugliness.

up a gum—temper tantrum.

up the county—north of where the speaker lives.

V v

Virginiamen—one of the names Maryland watermen use to refer to Virginian watermen.

W w

waver—to waver to. "She wavered to me to come over."

well to the northard—a strong alcoholic drink.

Western Shore—term that Eastern Shoremen use to refer to the rest of Virginia and Maryland.

wheel—bicycle.

who laid the rail—with great zeal. "He was beating his wife for who laid the rail."

whole nother—entirely different. "What she told was a whole nother story."

window light—window pane.

wouldn't go a peg—refused to exert any effort. "I wouldn't go (the length of) a peg to see a horse race."

Z z

zinc—sink.

Eastern Shore Folk Medicine

These examples of Eastern Shore folk medicine were given to the author by the late F. James Barnes, II and the late Avalon Drummond Bodley. These "cures" are included here because of their historical value only. If the reader is suffering from any of these complaints, he or she should consult a medical doctor.

Arthritis—Wear a copper bracelet on the arm.

Asthma—Apply poultice of fried onions on the chest.

Biliousness—Drink sassafras tea.

Bleeding wound—Apply spider web or soot.

Boils—Apply fat meat.

Bone felon—Stick finger in raw egg.

Bruise—Rub on fat meat.

Burns—Hold white potato against the burn.

Colds—Drink horehound tea.

Colic—Administer spoonful of warm catnip tea.

Cramps—Tie dried eel skin around area of discomfort.

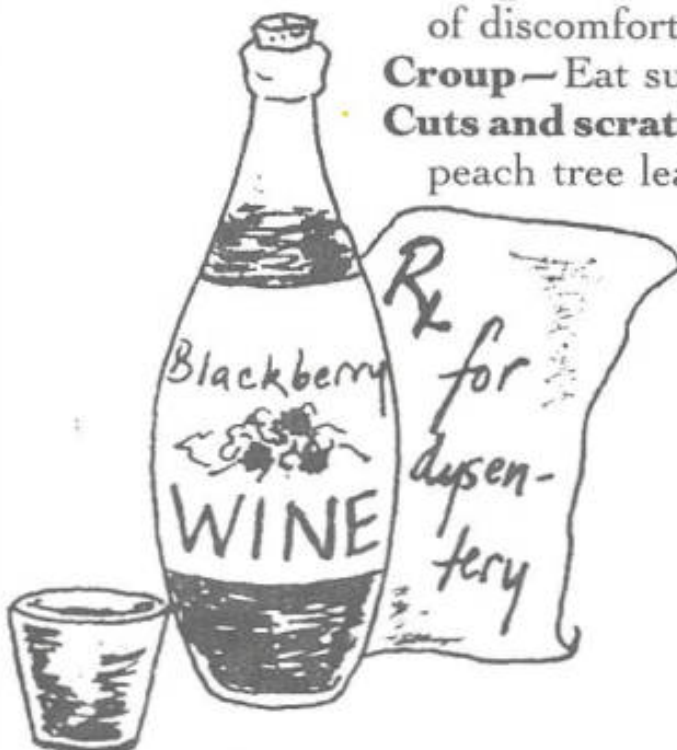
Croup—Eat sugar and lard.

Cuts and scratches—Apply poultice of peach tree leaves.

Dysentery—Drink blackberry wine.

Earache—Pour boiling water over pine shats and blow steam into ear.

Hemorrhoids—Apply lard and grated nutmeg.



Hiccups—Eat some plum preserves.

Itch—Apply sulphur and lard.

Mote in the eye—Insert flaxseed.

Muscular pain—Rub on coal oil (kerosene).

Night sweats—Put pan of water under the bed.

Nose bleeds—Drop a key down the back.

Rheumatism—Put nutmeg on a leather string and tie around the neck.

Ring worm—Soak copper penny in vinegar and rub affected parts.

Sore throat—Rub on goose grease.

Spring fever—Ingest sulphur, molasses, and powdered egg shells.

Stomach ache—Drink calamus tea.

Tape worm—Eat pumpkin seeds.

Toothache—Apply cloves.

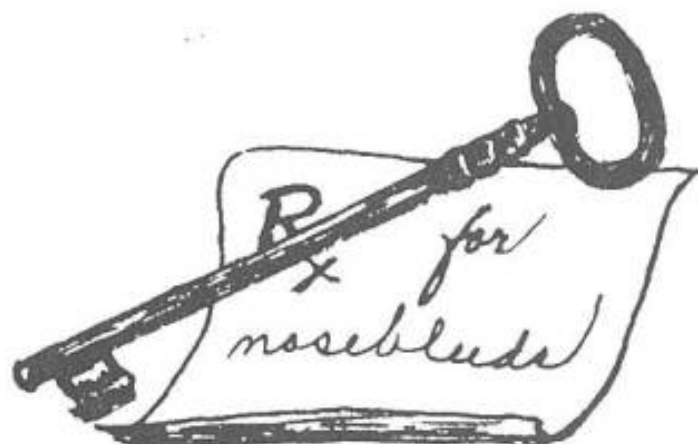
The following home remedies were provided by Adrian Mears of Hunting Creek:

Burns—Douse with beer.

Earache—Place a piece of onion in the ear.

Nose bleeds—Wet a piece of tissue and place it under the bottom lip.

Scald—Douse with vanilla extract to prevent blisters.



A Note on Surnames

For many years Eastern Shoremen pronounced certain surnames as their ancestors had in the eighteenth century. The trend is to pronounce these names as they are spelled. This makes for simplicity but is somewhat less interesting.

Here is a list of some of these names.

- Andrews**—Formerly pronounced as *Andress*.
- Bagwell**—The last syllable is pronounced *w'l*.
- Brittingham**—Some families say this as if the last syllable were *bum*.
- Colonna**—This name was formerly pronounced *Culanie* with the accent on the first syllable.
- Crowson**—The first syllable always rhymes with *Dow*.
- Doughty**—The first syllable always rhymes with *cow*.
- Fosque**—Traditionally this was *FOS key*. Now sometimes it is *Fos Q*.
- Gillespie**—Usually pronounced with the accent on the first syllable.
- Groton**—First syllable is pronounced as if it were spelled *Growthon*.
- McCready**—Second syllable is always pronounced to rhyme with *red*.
- Nottingham**—Often the last syllable is *bum*.
- Onions**—This name has in most cases become *Owens*.
- Outten**—Some families prefer the older *Ooten*.
- Pennewell**—Usually the last syllable is *w'l*.
- Pusey**—The *s* is pronounced as if it were *z*.
- Rowley**—Used to be pronounced with the first sound rhyming with *Dow*.
- Scarborough**—Originally and usually *SCAR bro*. Some families call it *SCAR BORO*.
- Sherwood**—Used to be pronounced *Showard*.
- Tilghman**—Always said as if it were spelled *Tillman*.

- Toadvine**—Accent is on the first syllable. Second is pronounced to rhyme with *sin*.
- Tolbert**—Always said as if it were *Tallbert*.
- Townsend**—The family name is accented on the first syllable. The village is pronounced with the accent on the last syllable.
- Twyford**—The first syllable rhymes with *sigh*.
- Watkinson**—Used to be *Watt* *kiz'm*. Now it is said as it is spelled.
- Wescott**—The second syllable is *CUT*.
- Widgeon**—Rhymes with *pigeon*.
- Wimbrow**—Pronounced as if the last *w* were not there.
- Winder**—The first syllable rhymes with *sin* in Virginia and with *mine* in Maryland.

Folk Meteorology and Horticulture

In the horse-and-buggy days, a farmer who wanted to know what the tide was had a means of finding out without making a long trip to the creek. All he had to do was pick up a cat and look straight into the cat's eyes. If the pupils were straight up and down, it would be high water. If the pupils were round, it meant it was low water.

If you dig a post hole and have dirt left over, the moon is growing. If you dig a hole and lack enough dirt to fill the hole of the same size, this is because the moon is decreasing.

"Pink sky at night; sailor's delight
Pink sky in the morning, sailors take warning"

Any baysider knows that three days of wind from the northeast, followed by a shift to the northwest, will cause one extremely high tide.

A divining rod made of coat hangers will serve as well as one made of wood.

Red oak rots quickly; white oak lasts a long time.

Plant a seed twice the width of the seed. Most of a gardener's problems are caused by planting seeds too deep.

Never plant a garden if the wind is from the east. Foliage will not be affected, but the yield will be reduced.

To plant your vegetable garden in harmony with the moon, plant seeds of crops that grow above the ground during the *light* of the moon. Conversely, if plants grow below the ground, plant during the *dark* of the moon.

The writer is grateful to T. Hallett Badger and Adrian Mears for assistance with this section.

How Different Are Eastern Shoremen?

Even the Indians on the Eastern Shore were different. Though held in a loose confederation by Powhatan, they did not seem to be in step with Indian policy toward the white and black settlers.

They were different and we are different because we live on a peninsula. We Seasiders and Baysiders are different because our shores are washed on both sides by waters teeming with deliciously edible marine life. We are different because our soils will grow almost anything growable at this latitude. (Marketing it is, alas, another matter.)

Our isolation has made us a kind of deep freeze for old British words like *pavement* (sidewalk), *sitten* (sat), and *token* (omen). Our pronunciation of some words is similar to the Cornwall and Devon counties our ancestors left behind more than three hundred years ago.

All who come here come because they like the pace of life here. And if they stay—and most do (just look at the “railroad families”), they become assimilated and are shortly calling the next wave of newcomers “come heres” or foreigners.

It should be noted that intelligent Eastern Shoremen do not use “come here” as a term of opprobrium. Rather it describes a stage, much as a crab must of necessity go through stages. We are enriched by the newcomers but never overpowered.

Eastern Shoremen are in reality no more different from our cousins on the Western Shore than the residents of the Upper Peninsula are from other residents of Michigan, and not nearly so different as Charlestonians are from other South Carolinians.

Massachusetts pronounces *Harvard* as if it had no *r*'s. Residents of St. Louis call their state *Missouri*; whereas the people in Kansas City refer to it as *Missourab*. Every area has its distinctive pronunciations, although unfortunately these are being broken down by television and by the increasing mobility of the population.

There is a Tangier dialect. Its principal characteristic is the diphongizing of certain vowels. For example, *high tide* is pronounced as "hoy toyd." There is a musical almost lilting effect to the Tangier speech.

However, in reality there is no distinct Eastern Shore accent. There are two or three accents among native Eastern Shoremen. The accent south of Painter, Virginia, is much like that of Tidewater Virginia. North of Painter what one hears is similar to what is spoken at least as far up the Delmarva peninsula as Georgetown, Delaware. What unites Eastern Shoremen is not their accent but their common understanding of and use of the words and expressions listed in this booklet. That is what makes Eastern Shoremen different.

We enjoy being different; nay, we revel in it, else why all the local history courses and the books about the Eastern Shore such as the one the reader holds?

Our differentness is not born of exclusiveness nor sustained by snobbery. Our differentness is a kind of hobby. A collectible. We bring it out and burnish it periodically and derive satisfaction from it.

For we have roots and most of America does not. We know about 17th century local powers such as Colonel Edmund Scarborough and William Stevens, whereas in most cities the citizens cannot name their last mayor. *We* are aware of the words we use and which we hear used while most Americans listen to television newscasters without even being aware of the practised blandness.

In these and many other ways we are different.
Enjoy.

About the author...

Art Fisher, an English teacher at Broadwater Academy, holds two earned degrees from the College of William and Mary and has studied at Salisbury State University and the University of Virginia.

He is a native of Accomack County and has collected Eastern Shore expressions for thirty-five years during his work as a teacher, school administrator, college supervisor of student teachers, stockbroker, Executive Director of the Delmarva Advisory Council, Accomack County Administrator, and observer of humankind.

Fisher says, "I thank God that I was born on the Eastern Shore."

He and his wife Rachel, and his daughter Susanna reside at Maxwell House in Parksley. Fisher would like to hear from all persons who love language and who are interested in localisms; his mailing address is P.O. Box 466, Parksley, VA 23421.



Can you translate this?

"You had better go by me," my wife said.
"You don't belong to be out on an airish day
even in the pound."

For awhile it was who laid the rail; sure
as gun's iron. But she got over it and gave me
one well to the northard.

I was stove up all weekend; but at
breakfast Monday morning I put some
Haymans in my maw, and I felt like a sixteenner.

So I planted some sojas and simlans. I
stayed out so long that it was black gum against
thunder when I got home even though she had
gone to Canaan.

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