

*From the Commission's
Cockpit Point
File*

76-302

CHAPTER II
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
HISTORY OF THE CHERRY HILL AREA

The history of the Cherry Hill Peninsula is tied closely to the colonial history of Prince William County and the development of the Town of Dumfries, located immediately southwest of the study area. Due to its location, on the neck of land bounded on the north by Powell's Creek, on the south by Quantico Creek, and on the east by the Potomac River, plantations were established along these watersheds before the end of the seventeenth century.

The earliest land grants on the Cherry Hill Peninsula were to Richard Hawkins in 1654 and Christopher Harris in 1658. The Hawkins land grant was composed of 500 acres located in the angle formed by Quantico Creek and the Potomac River. It later passed to the Bullitt family in the 1700s. Available information for this area of the peninsula indicates that a structure, occupied by the Bullitt family, known as "Mount View", was built as early as the 1700s on high ground overlooking the mouth of Quantico Creek.

About one half mile upstream on Quantico Creek, west of the "Mount View" site, is the location of "Wickliff" (Figure II-1). This is the site of the eighteenth century home of Robert Wickliff. "Tebbsdale", the Colonial and ante-bellum home of the Tebbs family who occupied this site from the early 1700s, is located still further upstream. Between "Mount View" and "Tebbsdale" was the site of a house and the 3,000 acre property owned by Confederate Captain Charles Stone who had inherited it from his father. The structure was standing until about 1925.

Christopher Harris patented 2,000 acres bordering on Richard Hawkins tract. This property extended north along the Potomac to Powell's Creek. The Harris tract was declared deserted by 1663 and a new grant was issued to Daniel Wild and Francis Kirkman. By 1717 this tract, plus additional tracts, were in the possession of the Codsford family. Their 2000+ acres tract was known as "Cherry Hill". An eighteenth century road may have connected "Cherry Hill" and Possum Point the site of the "Mount View" plantation. Such a road has been seen on historical maps since the Civil War period.

The first commercial venture in this area was a water powered grist mill on Quantico Creek at Dumfries. The tobacco economy developed and spread some fifty miles into the wilderness. By 1731, when "Old Prince William County" was established from part of Stafford County, Dumfries was already a thriving port. The Town, which was laid out on 60 acres belonging to John Graham, was chartered in 1749.

There were no towns in Prince William County until Dumfries was chartered in 1749. The development of the river front plantations near Quantico Creek began before 1690 and a water powered grist mill was built at the head of the creek in 1691. A tanyard, the location of which has not yet been found, is also reported to have been built at the mouth of the Quantico, on lands owned by Rice Hooe. The General Assembly authorized the construction of a tobacco warehouse on Quantico Creek, on land belonging to Robert Brent. This was destroyed by fire soon after it was built. In 1722, it was replaced by another located at the head of Quantico Creek on Richard Brit's land. Little more is known about the settlement until the 1740s, when it was petitioned that a proper town be laid out at Dumfries. By 1749 the Town of Dumfries was officially established and within a decade it was the social, economic and political center of Prince William County.

In 1787 the Town of Newport (Figure II-1) was authorized and laid out on Bullitt lands on Possum Point, at the mouth of Quantico Creek. A ferry had been running from this area

since 1757. Because of the silting of Quantico Creek, which threatened the commerce of Dumfries, it was hoped that Newport might attract the river trade. In 1788 warehouses were established in the Town of Newport, but the project failed to materialize and the Town did not continue to develop.

During the Civil War the mouth of the Quantico was transformed into a major Confederate supply center, and there were Confederate batteries of heavy artillery at the mouth of Quantico Creek, at Cockpit Point, on the Potomac, and at Freestone Point on the mouth of Neabsco Creek (Figure II-1). After the war, farming activities dwindled, but logging, and commercial fishing were still pursued. With the introduction of steamboat traffic along the Potomac, attempts were also made to establish resorts along the Potomac River, but this was not a successful venture.

The railroad, a single track, reached Quantico Creek from Alexandria in 1872. In 1885, a wooden bridge was built across Quantico Creek to Shipping Point on the south side. By 1912 a double track was laid with a depot called Myron located south of the approach to the bridge crossing Powell's Creek. Another depot was located at the foot of Bullitt's Hill. Later, after the Myron depot burned, a new one was established at the end of Cherry Hill Road.

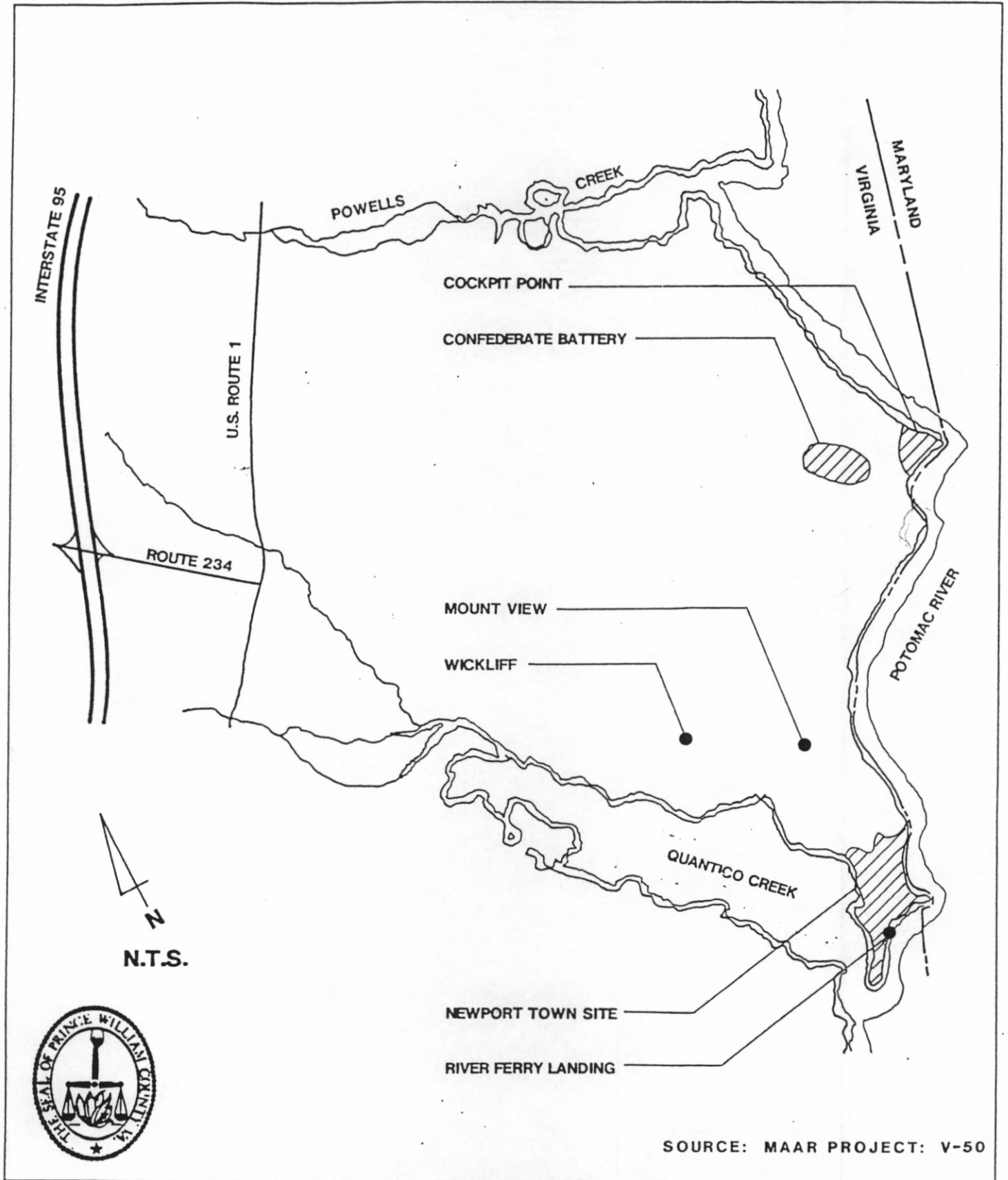
In 1885 the Barrow Land Company undertook efforts to establish a manufacturing city at Possum Point. Iron ore was transported over a narrow gauge tract from the Cabin Branch mines west of Dumfries. Wood logged on the peninsula and fish were also shipped from this location. When the mines ceased production in the 1930s the site was no longer used for shipping.

Early in the twentieth century, there were only about a dozen names in the Cherry Hill area on a map of Prince William County. The District of Columbia garbage disposal plant soon was operating at Cherry Hill, and on the hill overlooking the plant, was where government employees established residences. At one time there were three stores, a post office and a local school associated with the community.

Today, we see that elements of the early history of the Cherry Hill Peninsula are continuing. The most notorious characteristic of the Cherry Hill Peninsula remains to be directed toward the Potomac River. As the cover of the Comprehensive Plan indicates, marine related resources remain an important part of the Cherry Hill Peninsula. Fishing eels for export to Japan and France is today the most characteristic activity on the peninsula. Efforts in future plans on the peninsula should be made to retain the marine character of the Cherry Hill Peninsula.

POTENTIAL HISTORIC SITES

FIGURE II-1



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