

VIRGINIANA FILE

PWC - Historic Sites
(Prince William
Forest Park)

PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK
(Formerly Chopawamsic Park)

by

Dr. Charles W. Porter

Assistant Regional Historian, Third Region

December 28, 1935

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Manassas, Va.

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This Park lies in Prince William and Stafford Counties, just to the left of Dumfries and Quantico. The outer boundary includes about 15,000 acres of rolling land divided into four principal ridges and drained by three clear, fast-flowing streams, viz. the North Branch of the Quantico, the South Branch of the Quantico and the upper portion of Chopawamsic Creek and its branches, from which the Park takes its name. The Park also extends along both sides of Quantico Creek for a distance of about six hundred feet. The village of Joplin, which is in the center of the area, is not considered to be a part of Chopawamsic Park, but forms a sort of enclave.

The word Chopawamsic is an Indian place name used to designate an Indian village once situated near the delta or island dividing the two mouths of Chopawamsic Creek. The meaning is said to have been "by the separation of the outlet." Quantico, which means "by the long stream", was the name given to a neighboring Indian settlement. (1)

Fire and war have played such havoc with the records of Stafford and Prince William Counties that a continuous historical account of any given piece of ground is well nigh impossible. However, the Patent Books in the State Land office in Richmond afford ample evidence of the importance formerly attached to Chopawamsic by the great landed magnates of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Thanks to this source, we have been able to glean some interesting facts about the early history of the Park area.

The first people to take up land along the Chopawamsic and along the Quantico already had comfortable homes in the more settled portions of Virginia. One can only guess at their reasons for adding to property holdings which were even then extensive. Perhaps they coveted land for their younger sons or envisioned still other prosperous homes and plantations along the hills overlooking these beautiful navigable creeks. Some of these great proprietors seem to have been animated by a speculative urge; others just found their land hunger hard to satisfy. Be that as it may, one fact stands out clearly whenever one examines the list of early patentees; The Chopawamsic hills and ridges were regarded as highly desirable farm land and the most influential persons in the Virginia colony hastened to get a share of this valuable territory.

The first magnates to get a slice of soil along the Chopawamsic were Captain Peter Knight and Captain Baker Cutts. Captain Knight, before the expiration of many years, was to represent Gloucester and Northumberland in the Virginia House of Burgesses. The joint Knight-Cutts Patent of

1350 acres bordered upon the Potomac and upon the Chopawamsic Creek, but does not seem to have extended into our park area. It is mentioned here simply because of the fact that the patent is the first known document to refer to "Chopawamsic" Creek and because it seems to have inaugurated a rush for property along that stream. (2)

Colonel Samuel Mathews, on November 23, 1657, took out a patent for 5,211 acres lying between Little Creek and Chopawamsic. The recorded document speaks of him as "the Present Governor of Virginia." Although most of this 5,211 acres lay along the lower part of Chopawamsic Creek, a repatent and survey of 1715 (with plat) shows that two of the western corners of the property extended well into the park area. (3) Since this is perhaps the most historic of all the park property, it is only right that something more should be said about Samuel Mathews. He came to Virginia about 1622 and a year later we find him a member of the highly aristocratic Virginia Council. He became an Indian fighter of some renown and in 1635 we find him again coming into prominence as one of the leaders who brought about the deposition of the "tyrannical" Sir John Harvey. From 1652-1657, he was in England carrying on an unsuccessful battle to secure the ancient boundaries of Virginia as over against the claims of Maryland. Shortly after his return to America, he became Governor of Virginia. It was not long before he quarreled with the House of Burgesses. He was deposed but, being wise enough to submit to the Burgesses' claim that supreme power lay in the House as the representatives of the people, he was reelected to the gubernatorial post which he continued to hold until his death in 1660. His chief residence was "Danbigh" in Warwick County. His wife, Frances, whom he married about 1629, was the widow successively of Lord Delaware's brother and of Abraham Piexsey, who has "the best estate ever known in Virginia." (4) Governor Mathews was still in possession of his Chopawamsic estate upon his death in 1660. From him the property descended to his son John and to his grandson Samuel Mathews, Gentlemen, of King and Queen. Then, on June 14, 1715, John Holloway, Esquire, of Williamsburg, by virtue of a deed from Samuel Mathews, took out a repatent for the 5,211 acres, less 2,000 acres previously sold. (5)

This John Holloway had served in the army in Ireland in the beginning of King Williams' reign. Later he had been an attorney in the Marshalsea Court, but having turned "projector" and having ruined himself, he came first to Maryland and then to Virginia, where he practiced for thirty years in the General Court. Sir John Randolph says that, as a lawyer, Holloway displayed "much artifice and cunning" and that his authority was so great that he often swayed the court, even when he had the wrong side of a case. Since he was able to browbeat the judges and the juries, his services were universally in demand and this gave him an opportunity to exact excessive fees which he always did whenever the value of the thing involved would allow it. Apparently he was more feared than liked, being haughty, insolent, passionate, peevish, a stranger to hospitality, and fickle in his friendships. He died on December 14, 1734, at the age of 69, "after having languished about ten months with a sort of Epilepsie at certain times of the moon, which has much impaired his memory and understanding." (6) According to Randolph, he was little lamented, yet he had been more than just one of the leading

Virginia attorneys. He was the first Mayor of Williamsburg under the Charter of 1722. Moreover, he was Speaker of the House of Burgesses for fourteen years and Treasurer of the Colony for eleven years of that time. (6)

It has been said that the Mathews-Holloway tract finally came into the possession of the most prosperous landed proprietor of the day, namely, Robert ("King") Carter, who, in the course of a long career, enjoyed the offices of Treasurer, Councillor, and Acting Governor of Virginia. A clause in the "KING'S" will suggests that the Holloway interests in Stafford County may have been a part of the Carter Domain of 300,000 acres but the writer has not yet found conclusive evidence on this point. (7)

Captain Nicholas Martian or Marteau, on October 25, 1654, patented 2,000 acres of land lying between Quantico Creek on the north and the Mathews property on the south. The tract extended west and northwest into the woods from the head of Quantico Creek and so the western portion of this grant was in the Park area. (8) This gentleman arrived in Virginia before 1620 in 1632 had the distinction of being the first man to represent the first York River Settlement in the House of Burgesses. He was also distinguished as one of the leaders in the popular protest against the tyranny of Governor Harvey. He became an ancestor of George Washington through the marriage of his daughter, Elizabeth, to Colonel George Reade. (9)

Captain Marteau died in 1657 and on March 3rd of the same year, his son-in-law, Colonel George Reade, repatented the 2,000 acre tract mentioned above. (10) George Reade came to Virginia as early as 1637. On August 27, 1640, the King in Council appointed him Secretary of State for Virginia during the absence of Richard Kemp. After having successively represented James City and York County in the House of Burgesses, he was elected to the Virginia Council in 1659. Upon the restoration of the King, he was reappointed to the Virginia Council by Royal Commission. He died in 1671. As we have seen, he was an ancestor of George Washington. (11)

On September 6, 1654, another ancestor of our first President, Lieutenant - Colonel Nathaniel Pope, patented 1,000 acres upon the north and south sides of Chopawamsic Creek. Part of this tract lay south of the Mathews plantation; the other part lay back of the Mathews grant near the head of the creek, i. e. in Chopawamsic park. (12) On March 15, 1657, Major James Goodwin, who seems to have been a Royalist refugee, repatented this same land in his own name, (alleging that Pope had deserted it). (13) The Major was a man of considerable prominence inasmuch as he was a Justice of the Peace for York, a county which he represented in House of Burgesses the next year. (14) However, Lieutenant-Colonel Nathaniel Pope was able to renew his grant five months later (August 31, 1657), at which time he not only repatented the original 1,000 acres but added to it 500 acres in the park area. (15) Lieutenant-Colonel Pope had settled in Maryland or before 1637 and had served in the General Assembly of that Colony. About 1648 he removed to Virginia and in 1651 established a new house in Westmoreland County upon a tract of land which later became "Stratford", the home of the Lees. He became an ancestor of George Washington through the marriage of his daughter, Ann Pope, to Colonel John Washington. (16)

Upon the head of Chopawamsic Creek and lying "southeast upon the land of Mr. Nathaniel Pope" was a 500 acre tract of land patented by Colonel Walter Broadhurst, September 4, 1655.⁽¹⁷⁾ The Colonel was one of the most prominent men in the Northern Neck. In addition to serving as a member of the House of Burgesses in 1653, he had held the office of high sheriff of his county. His chief residence was Chatham Plantation in Westmoreland. His wife, Anne, was a daughter of Colonel Thomas Cerrard, one of the founders of Maryland. After the death of Colonel Broadhurst in 1659, she was twice married, her third husband (1669) being Colonel John Washington, ancestor of the President.⁽¹⁸⁾ However, Colonel Washington never possessed the Chopawamsic Estate, which passed in 1662 to Cerrard Broadhurst, son of Walter and Anne Broadhurst, and in 1665 to Colonel Peter Ashton, member of the House of Burgesses for Charles City County, 1656, and for Northumberland, 1659, 1660.⁽¹⁹⁾

On November 24, 1658, Giles Brent, patented 1,000 acres described as beginning at the headline of Colonel Walter Broadhurst's tract and extending northwest and northerly up the North Branch of Chopawamsic Creek. The greater portion of this plantation was therefore within the boundaries of what is now Chopawamsic Park. The patent was renewed on November 29, 1662, at which time the patentee was referred to as "Captain Giles Brent".⁽²⁰⁾

Colonel Giles Brent, as he was called in later life, came of a fine old Catholic family in Somersetshire. He emigrated to Maryland about 1637 and, being a man of ability and energy and a close relative of Lord Baltimore, he held the high offices of Commander of Kent Island, Member of the Council, Treasurer, Chief Justice and Deputy Governor of the Colony. Then, having married an Indian girl, the daughter of the "Emperor" of the Piscataways, and having laid claim to a large part of Maryland, he quarreled with the Baltimore family and came to Stafford County, Virginia. His new homes were given picturesque names, the best known being called "Peace" and "Richland." He married as his second or third wife, Frances Whitgreaves, widow of Dr. Jeremiah Harrison, and sister of Thomas Whitgreaves who saved the life of Charles II after the battle of Worcester, 1651.⁽²¹⁾

Colonel Giles Brent died in 1671 and his property along the Chopawamsic passed to his son Giles, who as Colonel Giles Brent, raised 1,000 to 1,200 men to help put down Bacon's Rebellion - an enterprise which resulted in failure because the troopers deserted long before they came within sight of the rebel leader.⁽²²⁾

Meanwhile, on September 4, 1655, John Harrison had a patent for 1,000 acres between the heads of Aquia and Chopawamsic Creeks. A portion of this tract was therefore in the Park.⁽²³⁾ John Harrison having died without heirs, the same property was granted to his sister, Mrs. Frances Harrison, widow of Dr. Jeremiah Harrison. We have already noted the fact that she was a sister of Thomas Whitgreaves, who saved the life of Charles II in 1651. Mrs. Frances Harrison having in turn died without

children, the 1,000 acres was granted in 1666 to Captain Giles Brent, her second husband, who survived her by at least five years. (24)

In addition to the celebrated persons mentioned above we can place the land of two other gentlemen who owned property in what is now the Park area. One was William Martin, "Gentleman", who in 1657 had a patent for 1,000 acres on the southwest side of Quantico Creek behind the land of Governor Samuel Mathews, (25) and the other was a certain Captain Burr Harrison, who took out a grant for 195 acres in 1739. (26)

How many of these early patentees built houses in what is now the Park it is impossible to say. As we have seen, practically all of them already had comfortable homes in the more settled parts of the Colony. The most prominent person to call himself "of Chopawamsic" was Colonel Thomas Harrison (1665-1746) who was County Lieutenant of Prince William and member of the House of Burgesses, 1741-1742. Oddly enough, the boundaries of the extensive land holdings of this Thomas Harrison and his family were so vaguely expressed that the writer has been unable to determine whether or not any portion of their plantations extended into Chopawamsic Park.

Certainly, it is to be forever regretted that the loss of the county records keeps us from knowing the names of other distinguished persons who may have acquired land along the Chopawamsic. Yet, despite the absence of this information, we have a list of names which stirs the imagination, particularly when the data is presented in summarized form. Could a more aristocratic group be found than those just mentioned in this sketch? We have recorded as the early owners of our park property -

1. Colonel Samuel Mathews, Colonial Governor of Virginia
2. John Holloway, Esquire, Speaker of the House of Burgesses and Treasurer of Virginia.
3. Captain Nicholas Martian or Marteau, formerly burgess for York County and an ancestor of George Washington.
4. Colonel George Rade, Member of the Virginia council, Secretary of State, and ancestor of George Washington.
5. Lieutenant-Colonel Nathaniel Pope, ancestor of President Washington.
6. Major James Goodwin, who subsequently was burgess for York County.
7. Colonel Walter Broadhurst, who had represented Northumberland in the House of Burgesses.
8. Anne (Gerrard) Broadhurst (daughter of Colonel Thomas Gerrard, one of the founders of Maryland) widow of Colonel Walter Broadhurst. She subsequently married Colonel John Washington.
9. Colonel Peter Ashton, who had represented Charles City County and Northumberland in the House of Burgesses.
10. Colonel Giles Brent, formerly Treasurer, Chief Justice, and Deputy Governor of Maryland.
11. Colonel Giles Brent, son of the earlier Giles Brent and a figure of prominence during Bacon's Rebellion.

12. Mrs. Frances Harrison, widow of Dr. Jeremiah Harrison and sister of Thomas Mitgreaves who saved the life of Charles II, 1651.
13. William Martin, "Gentlemen."
14. Captain Burr Harrison. 1739.
15. Possibly Robert (King) Carter, at one time Acting Governor of Virginia.

- REFERENCES
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 2. State Land Office, Richmond, Patent Bk. III, 228, IV, 103-104, Tyler, L. G. "Peter Knight". in Encycloedia of Virginia Biography, vol. I; Harrison, op. cit., I, 43-44.
 3. State Land Office, Richmond, Patent Bk. IV, 158. Northern Neck Grants, (Hereafter to be cited as N.N.) Bk. V, 86-87 (Plat, 1715.)
 4. Tyler, L. G., Enc. of Va. Biog., I, 48-49.
 5. N.N. Bd. V, 86-87 (with Plat.)
 6. Biographical Sketch by Sir John Randolph (a contemporary) in Virginia Historical Register, I, 119-122.
 - 6a. Tyler, I, 299.
 7. Harrison is sure of the identification, op. cit., I, 53 but see Carter's will in Virginia Magazine. V, 411 and 416.
 8. Patent Bk. III, 312.
 9. Tyler, L. G., Enc. of Va. Biog., I, 284.
 10. Patent Bk. IV, 371.
 11. Tyler, op. cit., I, 123-124.
 12. Patent Bk. III, 279.
 13. Patent Bk. IV, 279
 14. Tyler, I, 244.
 15. Patent Bk. IV, 293.
 16. Tyler, I, 306; Patent Bk. IV, 51 (Pope); Westmoreland County, Va., Deeds and Wills. Bk. K, 115-116.
 17. Patent Bk. IV, 553.
 18. Tyler, I, 196; 353; Eubank, H. R., Historic Northern Neck of Virginia, 45-48; Westmoreland County Deeds, Wills and Patents Bk. 1653-59, p. 121 and Bk. 1665-77 p. 49.
 19. Patent Bk. V, 494; Tyler I, 174.
 20. Patent Bk. IV, 441; 553; V, 149.
 21. Tyler, I, 193; Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XVI, 96-98; Harrison, I, 43; 52.
 22. Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XVI, 99.
 23. Patent Bk., III, 391.
 24. Ibid., III, 319; 391; V, 652.
 25. Patent Bk. IV, 234.
 26. N.N. Bk. E., 1736-42, p. 118-119.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles W. Porter
Assistant Regional Historian
Third Region