

CHAPTER IV.

BACKGROUND OF ELTONHEAD MANOR

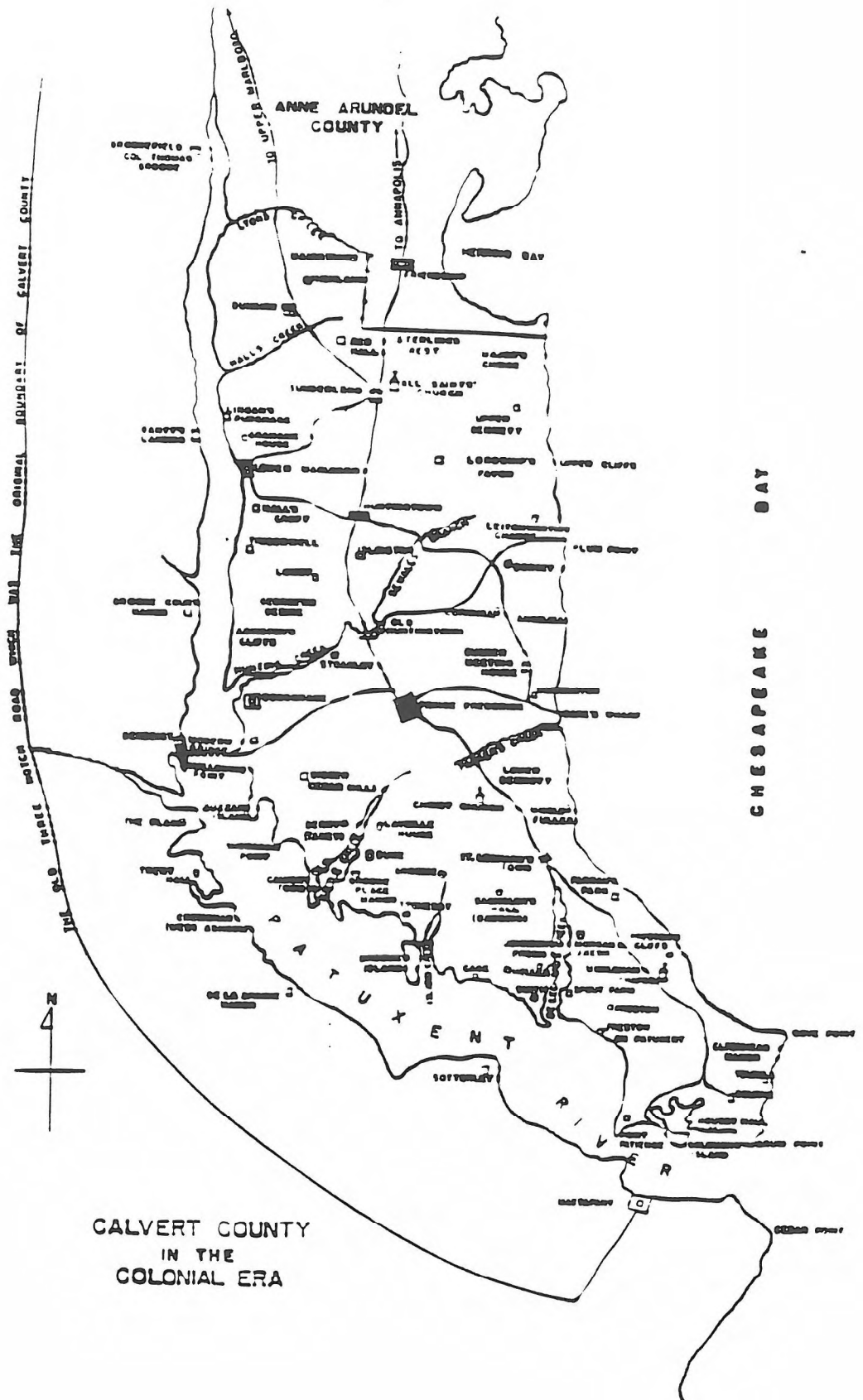
One of the paradoxes in Stein's (1976) history that puzzled us from the first time we read it, is that despite his statement that **The Goare** was at Cove Point, the dust cover of his book (Fig. 6) clearly designates the area as being part of **Eltonhead Manor!** At first we were skeptical that **Eltonhead Manor** actually extended as far north as Cove Point. Since all the information from the original patents indicated that **The Goare** was actually located inland, **Eltonhead Manor** became the new focus of our research. When it was first surveyed, this 5,000-acre tract was the largest Manor the Calverts had yet granted in Maryland (Owings 1938). Cecilius Calvert's original plan of political organization for the Province in 1634 called for the land to be broken up into numerous manors, controlled by gentry who had the right to hold Courts Leet and Baron, as in Old England. This means the Lord-of-the-Manor could organize a small claims court, and administer justice for petty offences independently of proprietary control (i.e. The Lords Baltimore). In practice, few manors were granted and fewer actually functioned according to any semblance of the feudal ideal. One exception was Thomas Gerard's **St. Clements Manor** in St. Marys County (Carr et al. 1991).

The lack of success of the manor system stemmed from the relatively high cost of transporting and outfitting servants for the original investors (or adventurers as they were known in the early 1600's) in England. In 1632, when Maryland was first granted to Cecilius Calvert, he stipulated that 5 persons needed to be transported to obtain a manorial grant of 1,000 acres. As more and more immigrants came into the province, the headright was reduced over time from 200 acres per person to 50 acres per person. Eventually the Lords Baltimore would be repaid for their initial generosity by an annual quitrent which was levied on the basis of size of the landholding. The headright was dropped altogether after 1680 by the third Lord Baltimore (Skordas 1974). By this time Charles Calvert required sterling or its equivalent in tobacco for a patent. Since they still collected an annual quitrent on every patent they had issued, the Calvert family grew quite wealthy.

The patent we are concerned about, **Eltonhead Manor**, was first surveyed by Robert Clarke on May 24, 1652, who reported he had:

Laid out for the hon. Edward Elton Esq. a tract of land lying on the north side of the Patuxent River beginning at a marked oak standing near a marsh by the river side, the said oak being the bound tree of land formerly granted unto John Abington of this province gentleman, Bounding on the west with the said Abington's land for the length of five hundred perches to a marked oak and with

Figure 6. Calvert County in the Colonial Era (from Stein 1976).



a line drawn north from the said oak for the length of one thousand perches on the north with a line drawn east from the end of the north line into a great swamp or moor called Eltonhead's Moor being near the coves of the said river on the east and south with the said river containing and now laid out for five thousand acres more or less. (MD Patents; Liber Q, folio 21)

The above description is somewhat typical for the day in terms of vagueness. It presents us with an initial discrepancy in that Robert Clarke used Elton instead of Eltonhead for his client. The only Elton recorded in Maryland at or before this date is Ann Elton, who was transported as an indentured servant in 1638 (Skordas 1974). It is also surprising how little the original survey actually describes the boundaries of such an important tract. Considerable sleuthing was needed to arrive at its boundaries. The first problem in locating **Eltonhead Manor** is obviously the starting point. Robert Clarke referred to the first bounded oak tree on John Abington's land. However, a search of the patent indices for Calvert County at the Maryland Hall of Records revealed that the only tracts associated with John Abington in Calvert County were located upriver on the Patuxent in the vicinity of what is now Holland's Cliffs. Another problem with the Robert Clarke's survey of **Eltonhead Manor** is that after he turns to the East he should be on a course to the bay not the river. Also, in closing the plot he should again be on the bay going down toward Drum Point. Either the survey was performed by an apprentice surveyor for Clarke or maybe this was not really a bayside patent! Our job was to make some sense out of it and we went on with no small trepidation.

Let's go to the last mentioned problem in Clarke's survey. When he turned to the east, he mentions the river instead of the bay. This seemed very strange until several months into the project, when we were perusing Augustin Hermann's 1673 Map of Maryland (Fig. 7). It dawned on us that looking at the configuration of land forms on the map, the mouth of the Patuxent should be drawn from Cedar Point on the south to Cove Point on the north (instead of Drum Point which we use now). "The Cove" south of Cove Point then becomes part of the river, as does the shoreline south of Cove Point. Thus, Robert Clark or his apprentice may have been following common practice when the survey was made. This explanation for Clarke's terminology seems plausible, but the ambiguities of the original survey must have been apparent even in the 1600s. The next survey of **Eltonhead Manor**, in 1664 by Jerome White changed "Coves by the River" to "Bay", indicating that this was indeed a bayside patent (MD Patents; Liber 7, folio 527-529).

Our first attempt at interpreting Robert Clarke's survey of **Eltonhead Manor**, (assuming that the first boundary ran north for 500 perches and then due east for 1,000 perches to the bay) indicated that Cove Point lay considerably north of **Eltonhead Manor**. Another more careful reading of the description of Robert Clarke's survey, and a putative plotting, put a 1500-perch line northward from the Patuxent River and

Figure 7. Portion of Augustine Herman Map of Virginia and Maryland, 1673 (from: Papenfuss and Choale 1982, p. 13).



another 533 perches eastward to the bay (which would yield a rectangular plot of approx 5,000 acres). Using this approach, it then appeared that **Eltonhead Manor** indeed encompassed the present position of Cove Point and at least a portion of the Columbia LNG facility. However, we were still a bit tentative in our new found knowledge.

We eventually did manage to anchor down the beginning point of **Eltonhead Manor**, but it wasn't without a bit of good luck. As mentioned above, the Hall of Records Patents Indices didn't yield any Abington property in Calvert County (as mentioned in the **Eltonhead Manor** survey). To our surprise the St. Mary's County Indices proved more fruitful. Stein (1976) emphasizes that the land on both sides of the Patuxent River was first part of Calvert County, which may account for the shuffle in the card catalogue.

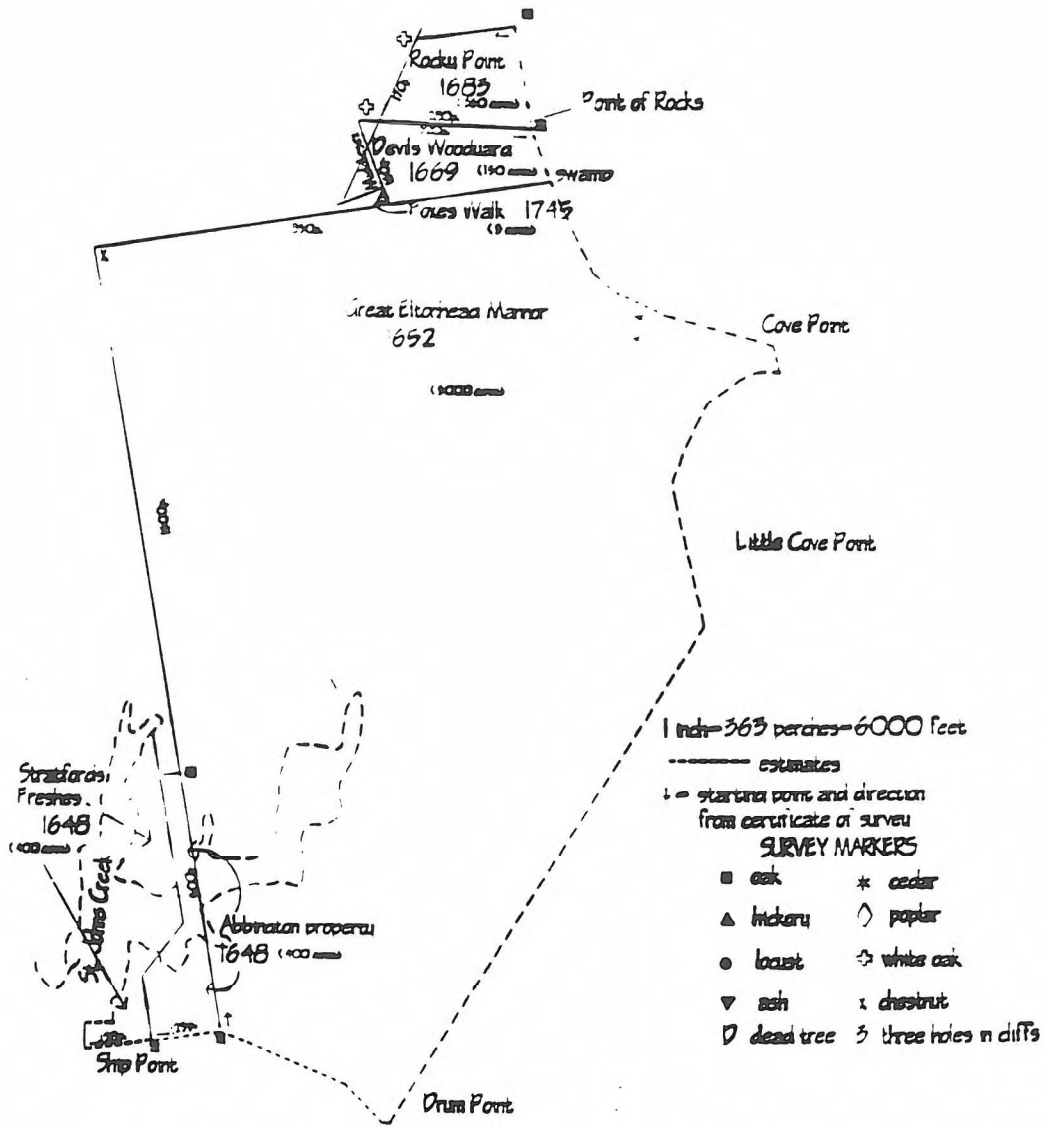
Laid out for John Abington Gent a parcell of land lying on the north side of Patuxent River beginning at a marked Oak being the bound of Anthony Rawlin's land and running East by the River side for the length of one hundred twenty and five perches to a marked oak bounding on the East with a line drawn North from the said oak for the length of five hundred perches on the north with a line drawn West from the end of the former line into the land of Anthony Rawlins on the West with the said land on the south with the said River containing and now laid out for four hundred acres more or less. (MD Patents; Liber AB&H, folio 220)

Laid out for Anthony Rawlins a Parcell of land called Stratford's Freshes lying on the north side of the Patuxent River and bounding on the South with the said River for the length of one hundred twenty and eight perches on the north and west with a creek called St. Johns Creek on the East with a line drawn North into the woods from the end of the first line next to the River for the length of one hundred twenty and five perches and with a line drawn from the end of the former line North east for the length of one hundred twenty and five perches then with a line drawn north from the end of the former line into St. Johns Creek containing and now laid out for four hundred acres more or less. (MD Patents; Liber AB&H, folio 54)

The **Stratfords Freshes** survey begins at the mouth of St. Johns Creek, which is the present day Ship Point. By moving eastward from Ship Point, we were able to establish the 1500-perch western boundary of **Eltonhead Manor**. When the line is extended eastward to the bay, it measures to 850 perches, making the original **Eltonhead Manor** a tract of land comprising approximately 8500 acres (Fig. 8).

In order to solidify the linkage between the Columbia LNG property and **Eltonhead Manor** we decided to see if we could establish a clear chain of title. We

Figure 8. Great Eltonhead Manor Plus Devils Woodyard, Rocky Point and Foxes Walk Land Surveys.



hoped that going backward through time would eventually lead us to a reference in the deeds to the original patent. Normally this would be routine. However, we knew that the 1882 fires in Prince Frederick had consumed virtually every extant land record originally housed in the Calvert County Courthouse (Stein 1976). The likelihood that original patent might be mentioned after the fire seemed remote. By that time the names of the first patents had faded in importance due to the cycles of tract fracturing and subsequent re-consolidation which inevitably led to resurveys with new (and less romantic) names. Thus we did not have high expectations we would gain much from this search.

The main Columbia LNG deed is a complex document, involving seven separate parties and four original tracts that were consolidated into the first 1017.05 acres acquired by Columbia LNG Company. The largest by far (727.7 acres), designated as Tract I, was part of the property that was willed to Sarah Catherine Glasscock by her father Joseph C. Webster (Calvert Wills; JWH No.2, folio 190). Joseph C. Webster had died in 1939, leaving 32 tracts of land totaling almost 5,000 acres (Calvert Orphans Court, Estate Folder #151 in Appendix). Thus Joseph C. Webster, or "Cook" Webster as he was commonly known, is of prime importance to us in our search for Eltonhead roots. We know from the Christ Church Records that he had married Sarah Elizabeth Saunders on May 15, 1899 (O'Brien 1992 p. 56).

Usually searches involving land and lineage can be a bit dry. Seldom can we flesh out the personality of the people behind the records. Fortunately, Footner (1939) in his book Charles Gift, has left us an indelible caricature of Cook Webster. Hulbert Footner was an outsider who in 1908 had first come to Solomons Island at the mouth of the Patuxent River. He settled down in a colonial house he called Charles Gift (really Preston on Patuxent) and eventually married Gladys Marsh (daughter of the Doctor at Solomons) and wrote several books in which he used Calvert County Society as backdrops.

"On the island itself, the man I liked best was Cook Webster, the storekeeper, a smallish fellow of a dry leathery aspect, whose age is impossible to guess. When he died a short while ago it turned out that he was only a few years older than myself, yet when I had first come he seemed almost middle aged. In thirty years he changed scarcely at all. He was always dressed in a full suit of store clothes and a derby hat. He loved to drive a sharp bargain, and was gleeful when he succeeded in overreaching you. The prices in his store were all but confiscatory; all these years we have been roaring with pain under his exactions--yet we never traded anywhere else. On the other hand he had the kindest heart in the world; in times of stress on the island, he "carried" the entire village, until the oystering or tourist trade looked up again. For this reason, nobody has ever been able to compete successfully with his store.

He always had a cigar in his mouth but I never saw him smoking it. The cigar was an index to his feelings. When he was elated it pointed heavenwards; when he was discouraged it

dropped: when he was excited it went round in circles. Always when the cigar finally disintegrated, he flung it on the ground in a rage, and stuck another in his mouth. This hot temper of his often exploded with absurd effect. Starting out on a ducking expedition one winter morning, he was unable to make the engine in his motorboat turn over. Snatching up his gun in a passion, he shot the engine.”

(Footner 1939 p. 77&78)

Ah yes, a man we could admire! But we wished Cook Webster hadn't been quite so acquisitive in terms of land holdings. Instead of a laborious tracking of each of the 32 properties listed in his inventory (Appendix B), we took inspiration from Cook Webster's life and cut to the chase. We decided to search only those tracts explicitly mentioning Cove Point. Tract No. 4, consisting of 1,002 acres called "Cherry Lane" which was then farmed by a tenant, James Fowler, especially caught our eye because it was less 70 acres in "Cove Point Beach". This meant that 70 acres had been lopped off earlier, no doubt to establish the original Cove Point subdivision which Cook Webster was in the process of developing at his death. These acres were designated separately as Tract 29, and were consolidated with two acres from the United States (next to the Cove Point Light House) along with 25 acres of Hagelin property. The remaining 25½ acres of the Hagelin property was designated as Tract 30. This sent us back to the dreary work of searching the land records at Prince Frederick. From the inventory prepared after Cook Webster's death, we already knew that the "Cherry Lane" property had been obtained from Harry M. Benzinger on October 15, 1913. The actual deed (Appendix D) between Henry M. Benzinger and Joseph C. Webster (MD Deeds; Liber GWD #14, folio 194) states that the property had been deeded to John Parran by Charles S. Parran in February of 1859. To our delight this tract was described as part of **Elkonhead Manor**, an obvious corruption of **Eltonhead Manor**! We finally had what we thought might not exist -- a concrete connection in the land records between Cove Point and **Eltonhead Manor**.

What we now needed to verify was how far north **Eltonhead Manor** might have extended. A similar search was made of the land records of Calvert Cliffs State Park immediately north of the Cove Point LNG property. We did a chain of title on the largest parcel (412.52 acres) and discovered that it had been deeded to the state for ten dollars from the Enterprise Land Co. (MD Deeds; Liber J.L.B. #81, folio 133&134). This company had acquired it from Bedford Cook Glasscock and his wife Judith in 1961 (Calvert Co. Deeds; Liber J.L.B. #40, folio 521). Bedford Cook Glasscock is the grandson of Joseph Cook Glasscock, lives on the Patuxent River near Solomons and may be able to confirm some of the details of this transaction. However, when we traced this land as far as we could go in the 1800's in the Calvert County Court House, no mention was made of **Eltonhead Manor**. Although this suggested that it could have been the original northern boundary of **Eltonhead Manor**, no other original patent was mentioned either. Thus our probe in this direction remains inconclusive. While this was

discouraging, the search of the records of the Calvert State Park, did yield some interesting information.

We fortuitously found a 1961 deposition from Wilbur T. Grover who was then 71 years old (Calvert Co. Deeds; Liber J.L.B.# 40, folio 528). Wilbur Grover swore that he had been in the lumber business and had cut timber in that area for Cook Webster. Mr. Grover also mentioned that he lived on Cove Point Rd., and almost certainly must have managed the forests which now comprise the present LNG facility in the 1920's and 1930's. He is also mentioned as the long-term farm manager of Strathmore Farm near Solomons (Dodds 1995), which was owned by Cook Webster (Appendix B). A search of the records (O'Brien 1992, p. 257) indicated that Wilbur T. Grover was born October 2, 1889 and died October 9, 1974. He was buried at St. Paul's Methodist Church in Lusby (at the Corner of Trueman Parkway and Cove Point Rd).¹⁷

We left the search for modern records in the Calvert Court House to another day and re-focused on the history of **Eltonhead Manor**. It now became important to search for clues about the shoreline in this region and we felt an urgency to know every detail we could glean from the records. Although Stein (1976) made numerous references to **Eltonhead Manor**, he covered the Eltonhead family and their land holdings only obliquely in his History of Calvert County, giving no family synopsis in the back of the volume. He seems to have reserved this section for families who had more staying power in the county. The most concise description of **Eltonhead Manor** is found in Stein's (1976) summary of the Bourne family (who stayed long enough to be at the root of many prominent Calvert families):

"Edward Eltonhead, as a reward for his services to Lord Baltimore in the Puritan Wars, was given a grant of 5000 acres of land extending from Drum Point to Solomon's, the largest estate ever created in Calvert County. He returned to England in 1658 and allowed the patent of the Manor to lapse, as he was unable to fulfill the required conditions that he transport fifty persons to Maryland at his own expense, one person for each hundred acres of land. Later Henry Sewall, Secretary of the Province conveyed the eastern half of the Manor to Samuel Groome of Middlesex, England. The western half was acquired by John Rousby. Groome seems to have been a speculator in Maryland lands, and he sold his portion of the Manor to Capt. Samuel Bourne, who came from England and settled there in 1680."

Although we were understandably a bit reluctant to accept Stein (1976) at face value, in view of the wild goose chase he had gotten us into with **The Goare**, we at least had some information with which to start our search. Even so, little discrepancies

¹⁷ Wilbur Grover and his wife, Eva, had three girls: Edith May, Martha Lucille, Sarah Lee (O'Brien 1992 p. 118). One of these might be still living and be able to give more details of the Cove Point LNG property and their father's occupation. They might even remember Cook Webster, since they were probably in their teens when he died in 1939.

were evident to someone familiar with Maryland history. For example, the Puritan War mentioned by Stein (1976) culminating in the Battle of Severn, actually occurred three years after the surveying of **Eltonhead Manor**. How could this grant be a reward for loyalty, if it was surveyed before the Puritan uprising? More probing brought a host of other problems. Among them was the lack of evidence that Edward Eltonhead ever tried to claim a headright for transporting himself in the proprietary land records. If he had to prove he had transported fifty people, it is strange that he would not have at least taken credit for his own transportation, as was customary. This raised the questions: Did Edward Eltonhead really ever come to Maryland? If not, who actually was behind **Eltonhead Manor**? Was this one of the earliest (and largest) Chesapeake Bay land scams? We tried to get the story straight ourselves and probed more deeply into the Eltonhead family in Maryland. We needed a better understanding of the early history of **Eltonhead Manor** in order to throw some light on its sketchy boundaries. We were especially hoping for more detail of how the large tract was broken up after patenting. One of our goals was to map the tree species at bounded corners as the tract was reduced in size by subsequent transfers. Robert Clarke's survey had left us with precious little to go on but two oak trees and a moor (and these were quite a distance from Cove Point). This was scant information for the Circa 1650 vegetation map we wanted to create!