

APPENDIX F

**MISCELLANEOUS MANUSCRIPTS
AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES**

Speech by Hamilton Owens
Before Calvert County Historical Society
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One of the first Calvert county stories I ever heard was told by the late Dr. Taylor, whom many of you will remember. He was born, as you know, in Anne Arundel and spent most of his life practicing medicine in and around Annapolis. When the time came to retire, he, like many a Marylander before him, chose quiet, peaceful Calvert as the ideal place. So he bought himself a small parcel of land over on the river and settled down, as he thought, for a happy old age.

There weren't many roads in those days so access to his new home was over the land of the farmer from whom he bought his place. Just about this time, his neighbor shifted from tobacco and corn to cattle, which meant fences and especially, gates between fields. So every time Dr. Taylor went in or out, he had to stop and open and then close gates. He didn't like this much, a dispute ensued and finally the matter came to court.

Both men were looking for witnesses to support their position. The neighbor approached a friend and asked him to testify that the gates were essential and so on and so on. The friend listened not too sympathetically. Finally he said, "Well, I'll testify for you because you are an old friend. But it serves you right for selling land to a damn foreigner."

If Dr. Taylor, who came from Annapolis, was a foreigner how can you describe the man before you who comes all the way from Baltimore county? Indeed, I wonder at my own temerity at thus appearing before the representative citizens of the closest knit county in all Maryland. You know everything about Calvert. I know almost nothing. The only excuse I can give is that my many short visits to the county - or to that part of the county which lies south of Cove Point on the bay side and St. Leonard's Creek on the river have covered a period of what will soon be half a century. That period, you will agree, has seen dramatic changes hereabouts, most of them for the better - in an economic sense anyway.

In my earliest youth, all I knew of the county was what could be seen from various wharves. My grandfather lived over in St. Mary's and the steamboat was the only way to get there. After leaving Herring Bay, we stopped successively at Plum Point, Dare's Wharf, Governor's Run, Cove Point and Solomon's. Once or twice as I recall, we put in at the little wharf at Drum Point, long gone. But with all these stops it was not possible to see very much. Most of them were made during the night.

Still, even when I was a small boy those cliffs fascinated me. So, when I was old enough, a friend and myself organized a real expedition. With knapsacks on our backs, we came by train to Chesapeake Beach, via Washington, of course, and started to walk down the shore. Often, when the tide came in we had to scale the cliffs and make our way through the tangled underbrush along the brink until the tide receded and we could safely walk the beach again. We felt like true explorers.

Where we spent the first night I can't remember. But by the second day we approached Governor's Run. The stream was high and we flung our knapsack across and then waded and swam to the other side. That night we spent with a family called D'Arcy, a name which, I have been told, is the equivalent of the better known Dorsey, of Anne Arundel and Howard counties. One gets a feeling of history out of such details.

The next day was the most exciting of the journey for, just below Governor's Run, where the cliffs seem higher than ever, we found our first fossils. We picked up dozens, even hundreds of shark's teeth and, of course many different kinds of fossil shells. About twenty feet above the beach, there was a layer of such things and by digging a bit we found the ribs and one or two vertebrae of what must have been a gigantic sea animal.

Late that afternoon we came to Cove Point. This wasn't a summer colony in those days. Instead the old lighthouse stood bleak and bare with only the keeper's house at the bottom. He said that we could not spend the night there but there was a deserted house only a mile or two away where it would be all right for us to sleep. He gave us careful directions but the way was difficult, what with fallen trees, green brier and all the usual impediments of Calvert county woodlands and it was nearly dark when we reached the little old house with its view of the bay.

I hardly know how to describe the effect this structure had on me - and on my companion, though perhaps to a lesser degree. We cooked ourselves a meal in the fireplace and then, with our flashlight, examined the place in which we found ourselves. It was obviously very old. The paneling in the little room had been painted many times, but we could see that it was of white pine and that it had been designed by an artist. There was a little built-in china closet in one corner. A stairway, gracefully proportioned, led to the tiny upper story. The adjoining room on the first floor was smaller and had no paneling but its fireplace had a fine mantel and a well fashioned chair-rail surrounded the room. It was clear at once that, a century or two before, this house had been the property of a family of taste and refinement. So at that moment, before going to sleep on the floor, I knew that one way or another I must acquire that house and at least the long slope lying between it and the shore.

The next day, we made our arduous way around Little Cove Point, a forbidding headland, explored one or two coves and found paw-paw apples just ripe enough to eat, passed a little grave with a wooden marker, announcing that the body of some unknown sailor had been washed ashore at that point and so came eventually to the Drum Point Light.

The light house keeper there was a grand old gentleman named James Locke Weems. His wife, a sprightly and communicative old lady of breeding, was more than hospitable. They couldn't put us up for the night but suggested that we might have better luck at what she called "the Big House". Most of you remember that House. It had been erected by the Baredas, a rich Spanish-Peruvian family which had made large sums out of the guano business and invested some of it in Calvert. They believed that the mouth of the Patuxent was destined to be one of the

world's great ports and they spent much money trying to persuade somebody to build a railroad to it. If their schemes had materialized, their vast estate would have been a thriving city.

Mr. and Mrs. Weems told us some of all this, so we went to the Big House and rapped on the door, not knowing what might be our reception. An old colored woman opened the door. We asked to see the head of the house and in due course Robert Barril appeared. His full name, in case you have forgotten, was Roberto Jose Jesu Maria de Barril y de Bareda, but of course we didn't know that at the moment. He studied us carefully and then went to the foot of the broad stairs -- I should say here that we were already somewhat overawed at the size of the house and beauty of the furniture which was in the hall -- and called "Gertie, Gertie". Gertie was his clever wife. She decided we were not bandits and took us in.

Never before or since have I experienced hospitality given so spontaneously to utter strangers. Never has the conversation at dinner and afterwards been so stimulating. That man was almost a genius, though perhaps a lazy one. Actually he and his wife charmed those two intruders until four o'clock in the morning. What a night!

The next morning, or rather later that same morning, I found courage to mention the old house in which we had spent the previous night. Imagine my surprise to be told that it was the property of old Mr. and Mrs. Weems who had been so kind to us. So we hastily paid another call on them and I disclosed my sudden love for their place. They had a little motor boat and said they would like to show it to us by daylight. So we all piled in and chugged the five miles up the bay to the little indentation and went ashore.

By full daylight, the place was even more entrancing. But as we approached the house a curious thing happened. Out of the door bounded a strange figure. It was an old man with long white hair and almost equally long white beard. He took a look at us and started to gallop away like a frightened deer. Mrs. Weems called after him to come back, that she wanted him to meet her friends. So he stopped, and with a kind of shy dignity, -- indeed he still remains in my mind as one of most dignified men I have ever met -- came toward us with his hand outstretched.

"My name, sir," he said with complete formality and ease, "is Benjamin Franklin Catterton. And yours?"

Later we got to be great friends and took many walks together. One evening, I remember, we walked through the woods and came upon a little log cabin. I recall it had a sandstone chimney. Mr. Catterton lay his hands on it caressingly and with his customary formability said proudly:

"This cabin, Mr. Owens, is the house in which I was born. They say that George Washington was born in a house such as this."

Well, anyway, Mr. and Mrs. Weems and I finally came to an agreement. She would hold the place for me if I made a small down payment and pay the rest in five years or thereabouts. So, for the first time in my life I became a landed proprietor. I hadn't the slightest idea what I would do with the place and still haven't. All I know is that no great nobleman ever got more delight out of his vast acres than I got out of acquiring what the late Cooke Webster used to call "that useless little spit of land."

This is turning into more of a personal record than I intended when I sat down to compose my thoughts for tonight's meeting. But I should include here, I suppose, some of the facts or legends about that little place, which were given me over the years. In the first place, it was the original house of what was called Greater Eltonhead Manor. Apparently it was granted not very long after 1650 to Edward Eltonhead, who seems to have come from Lancashire, England. There were in fact, two Eltonheads, William and Edward. William also had a grant from the proprietor, but his was called merely Eltonhead Manor. The grant along the bay was Great Eltonhead and presumably the little house we are talking about was the first county residence of Edward.

He and his brother were both men of importance in the colony. William was a member of the Council and Edward a Master in Chancery. Edward apparently died without issue, as genealogists say and, by some method, Captain Samuel Groome, of London, received the whole tract by grant in 1664.

Please don't think that I am posing here as an authority. Most of the research on Eltonhead was done by my old friend, Mr. William B. Marye of the Maryland Historical Society, who is an expert genealogist and occasionally works at that science professionally.

Anyway, this Captain Groome sold Eltonhead in 1680 to one Major Samuel Bourne, who had apparently borrowed the money from his father, Thomas, a London Quaker. There may be some political significance, also, in this exchange of owners. The Quakers were just beginning to come to power in this State at that time. But Major Bourne died in 1694, still owing his father, who naturally took the place over and came to Maryland to inspect his possession. He died here in 1704, leaving everything to his wife Mary. Two years later she died in turn. Twenty-five hundred acres were sold for her estate, but she was a kindly mother-in-law and left 500 acres to her son's widow, Mrs. Elizabeth Bourne. This lady died in 1720 and now we fall into obscurities.

One tale says that George Bourne, presumably the grandson or great grandson of the first London Quaker, sold 131 acres to one Benjamin Traverse, of Dorchester. To that we shall come back.

But a strong local tradition says that during the Revolution the house was occupied by a Dr. Wyville, physician. Dr. Wyville's son was killed in that war, according to this local account,

and the old gentlemen was so depressed that he moved back to Baltimore, shaking the dust of Calvert from his feet. I cannot substantiate that tale, but it is pleasant to think about, anyway.

Mr. Marye could find little or nothing about that man from Dorchester who is supposed to have bought 131 acres but there is proof that the property was acquired in the early 19th century by a man named Benjamin Keene, also a native of Dorchester. It seems to be historically true that the men of Dorchester gaze across the bay and look longingly at the higher lands of Calvert. Benjamin Keene brought his young wife over and settled in the old house. But not for long. Some disease overtook him and he died.

If you search carefully you will find a burying ground not too far from the house. It is grossly overgrown and one cannot find the tombstones unless one stumbles upon them. The largest of all, lying flat, tells the brief story of Benjamin Keene. I like the inscription:

Here he lies, o could I once more view
Those dear remains, take one more fond adieu,
Weep on that face of innocence and save
One darling object from the noisome grave.
Vain wish! E'en now that form of love
Decay unseen -- but not forgot above.

By his wife.

You can understand from what I have said why, when Mrs. Owens deigned to marry me, we arranged to spend our honeymoon in such a legend-laden house. Soon after, we had to leave Baltimore and spent nearly ten years living in various places. When we finally came back -- that was in 1922 -- one of the first things we did was to come down to the new Calvert that had developed during our absence. The difference in the house was shocking. Someone had taken most of the panes of glass out of the windows and even carted away a door or two. Shutters had either rotted or been carried off.

That was the time when a group of wealthy Baltimoreans had just organized the Baltimore Museum of Art. It seemed to us that the little paneled room, at least, should be saved from imminent collapse of the house, so I brought two of the trustees down and showed it to them. Their enthusiasm was as great as my own; so, with many a wrench, I gave them the room. Some of you have seen it in its quiet dignity in the great building the museum now occupies. About ten years ago a large tree blew down on the house and its ancient timbers broke into small pieces, leaving only the chimney standing. But at least the little room, monument to what must have been the good days of colonial Calvert, can still be seen.

Two more things about the house should be mentioned. During the negotiations about moving the room, Mr. John H. Scarff, the distinguished architect, became interested -- he had visited the place with me once or twice -- and under his own steam and at his own expense made a complete set of drawings of the building, showing in detail the type of construction, the

paneling and all the rest. With a set of those drawings it would be possible to reproduce it almost down to the last hand wrought hinge. Nor is that all. Sometime in the thirties, someone in Washington became interested and insisted that a set of the drawings be placed in the National Archives. So, if you want a copy of them, you can apply to the national archivist and build yourself an Eltonhead Manor of your own.

Finally, I can repeat something that you already know. When World War II began, the U.S. Navy asked if they might lease the land for some secret purpose. They said that the lease would not prevent its civilian use. Acting on that assurance, we sailed down the bay in a friend's yacht and saw perhaps a dozen Navy transports anchored a mile or two out in the bay. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of small boats were shuttling back and forth between the ships and our shores. Before we were able to get close enough to see what it was all about, a [p.10>] police boat came out and ordered us, in effect, "to get the blankety-blank out of there". Nor would they listen to my effort to explain our mission. It wasn't until later that I learned that these were Marines, practicing for the landing they were soon to make on Guadalcanal. The old place was still playing its part in history.

So much for Eltonhead Manor. The land still lies there. The great trees on the hillsides still flourish. From between the chimneys that mark the site of the old house, one can still see the sparkling bay -- in the winter time, anyway -- and on the rare occasions when Mrs. Owens and I manage to fight our way through the jungle to it, that same sense of remoteness, of peace and of mystery overtakes us.

So you see we have known that little bit of Calvert for close to half a century. In those early days, it was poor region -- almost poverty stricken, I should say. I can remember farmers saying that they could get only four cents a pound for their tobacco. There were no roads worth the name and I heard of only one man in Solomon's who owned a Ford. Once I had to go to Baltimore in a hurry, located that man and had him drive me to Annapolis over what was hardly more than a deeply rutted mud track. He charged either six or eight dollars and the trip took many hours.

After the Weemses and the de Barrils, Cooke Webster was the first person we got to know -- for obvious reasons. You all remember him -- another foreigner, from Dorchester. The next person was Bernice Bowen. Now he and his descendants run a little hotel in Solomon's. But in that far off time, he was skipper of a schooner that plied the bay. We met him when he was loading timber at Cove Point and he invited us aboard. That schooner was perhaps the best found and most ship-shape in these parts. The brass was polished like that on a naval captain's gig.

Naturally enough, it wasn't long before we met Hurlbert Footner, a writing man, like myself, and visited him at Charles Gift or Preston. His house was larger and handsomer than mine, but mine was older. So the two of us organized the Society of Owners of Seventeen Century Houses and took in several members from other parts of the county. The society never

had a meeting. The Footners, Bill and Gladys -- her father, Dr. Marsh, was another Dorchester county man, by the way -- soon came to be among our closest friends. Bill died several years ago but we saw Gladys on New Year's Eve. She is now married to Admiral Hall, a retired Coast Guard Officer.

Of course, being far off the beaten track -- they tell me that part of the county was historically known as Purgatory but it has always seemed much closer to Heaven to me -- we didn't meet too many of what I suppose are called the "County Families" but we did come to know a Parran or two, a Gray or two, and of course Tommy and Anne Turner who said they were going to be here tonight.

Would it be fair, would it be polite, I wonder, if before sitting down I were to make a few generalized observations? As I have said, I have been cognizant, in a small way, of Calvert County for a good many years. It is certainly true that in 1910 and for years thereafter, this was the poorest county in the State. Geography was against it. You and I like it because it is off the beaten track, as the beaten track existed in those early days. Despite the efforts of local people, that Drum Point Railroad was never built. The great port never materialized. Tobacco cultivation, the main source of wealth, became less and less profitable. One farm after another was deserted outright, sold for debt or tax delinquency, whatever may have been true in a few choice neighborhoods along the river, along the backbone of the county and along most of the bay shore, the old houses were allowed to fall to pieces. Those that were inhabited were rarely painted. The population grew hardly at all. The proportion of Negroes regularly increased. On that memorable six or eight dollar trip to Annapolis, the first I ever took, the houses lining that so-called main road were almost all in a deplorable state. The schools, save for one close to Prince Frederick, were little better than shacks. One passed many ox-carts, with their two or three hogsheads, but only a few horses and buggies, and so far as I recall we did not see a single automobile or truck.

How different the situation today! I can drive from my house in Baltimore county all the way to Cove Point in a little over two hours -- in the non-rush hours, of course. The roads are all but perfect and getting better every year. That bridge across the river (built by the way against the wishes of the Road Commission) brings Washington within an hour of this spot. Along the river one place after another has been sold to Washington officials with rich wives who now take their places as residents of the Maryland Free State, living as lords of the manor. Almost all of the bay front has been taken over by developers and sold to other Washingtonians by the front foot. I suspect that Calvert has never had it so good, in an economic sense, anyway. The signs of affluence are on every hand.

And now I come to my point. For generations Calvert County has been subsidized by the rest of the State. Because even valuable land here is still assessed at very little more than in the depths of the depression, Calvert does not contribute even its small share to the cost of running the whole commonwealth. Nearly every year when my tax bill has come for Eltonhead, I have paid it with a sense of shame. Never mind how much I pay, it still isn't a fair share. The land is

assessed too far below its rural value. Of course, in so far as county expenditures go, that is corrected by adjusting the tax rate per hundred dollars. But that low assessed value means that the State's small take is down almost to the vanishing point. Calvert shares in all the State's undertakings. In some recent respects it has got more than its share, thanks to the aggressiveness of your representation in the General Assembly. But wouldn't all of us property owners here feel a little better in our conscience if our land were assessed at least up to the general average of the other counties. I know I would.

With that sour note , I conclude.

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THE MARYLAND GAZETTE: MAY 2, 1799

A very unfortunate accident took place last week at Calvert county court, of which we have received from a gentlemen who was present the following account:

On the evening of Saturday the 27th ult. after the court had broke up, those who had been attending it were preparing to depart, and were waiting at the tavern till a gust should be over which appeared to be ceasing.

On the moment the wind reached the house it blew with such violence that the whole frame immediately gave way from the door, and the sides and the roof were blown to the ground.

Nearly twenty persons were in the house who had barely time to get out of the door on the leeward side, and were caught in situations more or less dangcrous. Some escaped unhurt, others were considerably bruised, and four persons were killed. One immediately, and the others dying soon after they were taken out from under the pieces which had fallen on them. Every possible exertion was made for this purpose, but owing to the darkness of the evening, and the noise and confusion that occurred, it could not be effected in time.

Mr. Stone, the chief Justice of the district, had got some distance from the house and was knocked down by a piece of timber, and considerably hurt, but is hoped not dangerously.

The wife of the tavern keeper was coming down stairs when the accident commensed and had her arm broke.

The kitchen also blew down, in which two negro children were killed, and four of the grown negroes had their limbs broke.

A number of persons (among them were two of the judges of the court and from the bar) were in the adjacent house, the roof of which was blown off, but without doing them any injury.

Some of the gentlemen of the bar had left the bar before the storm began, and two of them were in the house, and went out in the same manner as the rest did, escaped any injury.

The house was an old wooden one, with a stone and brick chimney, the former of which blew in.

It seems equally fortunate and surprising that so many escaped, but as it was, the scene was truly a distressing one. The persons killed were Mr. Jesse Bourne, Mr Allen Roberts, Mr. John W. Simmons, Mr. Thomas Bowen, all residents of the county, and all married men with families.

The wind did some damage to the doors of the court-house, and blew down several tobacco houses, chimnies, fences, & c. in the neighborhood.