

The History of Cresaptown

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PREFACE

Our History of Cresaptown is being written by the Citizens of Cresaptown in response to a desire by members of the Cresaptown Community Council to share some interesting facts about the people and events that are a part of our American Heritage.

It is our hope that this initial and unpretentious effort will motivate the readers to do some research and add some personal data to our collection of stories and facts. As we share our past we shall enjoy the present and prepare for the future with better understanding.

OUR FIRST INHABITANTS - THE INDIANS

To create an appropriate background for our history of Cresaptown perhaps we should begin with some facts about the first inhabitants, the Shawnee Indians. This tribe migrated to our area about 1694 from South Carolina where they had not been treated kindly by the English settlers nor by the Catawba Indians and were forced to leave.

The Shawnee were well satisfied with the forests, the land, and the streams in this area. The forests provided them with food and materials for making their clothing and homes. The land near the streams was fertile, the water was clean and the fish were plentiful.

The Indians built their villages along the river for protection and convenience. One of their larger settlements was located near the Potomac River where the Cresaptown Sewage Treatment Plant is now located.

Our first inhabitants lived a busy and contented life in this village, but they had problems and responsibilities quite different than ours today. In the summer and fall they could find raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, huckleberries, cherries, hickory nuts.

THE SHAWNEE INDIANS

Each family had a garden in which they raised corn, beans, pumpkins, squash, and watermelons. While the women and children were doing the farming and food gathering the men of the tribe were hunting deer, bear, wild pigeons, turkeys, and pheasants.

Preparing this food for winter storage was an important job for the women and children. The women spread beans, berries, and pieces of squash and pumpkins in the sun to dry. Ears of corn were husked and braided into bunches to be hung in the wigwams. Fish and strips of meat were hung across a pole over a low fire to dry. They called the dried meat "charqui". The word "jerky" comes from this Indian word.

The Shawnee had a unique way of storing their food. The dried food was put in covered bark baskets, deerskin bags and clay jars. Storage pits were dug and lined with bark.

The food containers were then placed in the hole and covered with dry grass and bark to keep them dry. Heavy branches were laid over the top of the hole and dirt was piled over the branches until a mound was made. The mound of dirt would keep the food from freezing and would also mark the storage place.

Food was prepared for eating in a variety of ways. Some foods were boiled in clay pots over a small fire in the ground. Another way of boiling food, especially meat, was to put it in bark baskets filled with water, then drop in hot stones from the fire. This was called stone boiling. Most of the time deer and rabbit meat was broiled on sticks stuck in the ground and leaned toward the fire.

There were other interesting ways of preparing food. Vegetables, fish, and meat were baked in an oven, which was just a hole in the ground. The women built a fire in the hole and when it became very hot, it was raked out. Then the food, which had been wrapped in leaves or wet clay, was quickly put in. This was covered with a layer of earth, ashes and hot embers. The Indians liked beans and corn on the cob cooked this way. The women also baked corn bread and corn cakes. The dough was first wrapped in leaves, then laid in an ash bed and covered with hot ashes. Sometimes the corn cakes were baked on flat stones, under which was a slow even fire.

The animals of the forest furnished the material from which the Shawnee Indians made their clothing. The women wore a deerskin Skirt and a loose deerskin blouse. In winter the men wore long deerskin leggings. Sometimes they wore a deerskin shirt. During warm weather the Indian men wore a breechcloth. All of the family wore robes of either woven rabbit skins, bear skin or other animal hides. Everyone wore moccasins of deerskin, tied around the ankle.

For many years the Shawnee lived a happy and peaceful life in their village along the Potomac until they heard that the Englishmen from the land near the "great water" were coming. The ancestors of this tribe had been ill-treated by the white men before and these stories had been told again and again. It was only natural that they became angry and apprehensive when they learned that they were again being forced from their land.

So, about 1730 most of the Indians deserted their villages here. Most of them went across the mountains to the Ohio River country near where the city of Pittsburgh is located. They joined other Shawnee tribes who were already established there. Only a few of the tribe remained to greet the white men.

THE CRESAP STORY

Our story about the Cresaps will include some interesting facts about three generations of this important pioneer family. Most of our information is about Thomas Cresap, a few facts about his son Daniel, and a short story about Daniel's son Joseph, for whom Cresaptown is named.

The most important and best-known of all the Cresaps was Thomas who was born in Skipton, England about 1700. Historians have mentioned his birthdate anywhere from 1692 to 1702. Most of these writers agree that he came to America at the age of fifteen.

His first few years in America were spent in Harford County, Maryland. While living there he worked as a carpenter. Records show that he married Hannah Johnson in April, 1727. During these years in Maryland he was considered a very poor man.

To make a better life for his wife and to satisfy his desire for adventure Mr. Cresap left Maryland for a short stay in Virginia. Here he made friends with the Washington family and rented a farm. The story is told that the families living near his farm did not like their new neighbor so they confronted him to express their dislike.

The group thought they could frighten Cresap and he would leave the area. However, they underestimated the temperament and fighting ability of Thomas who grabbed a double-bit axe and attacked the entire group of about six teen men. During this melee one of the men was killed and the rest of the group retreated. About two weeks later Thomas was influenced by his wife to leave Virginia.

We next find the father of the American Cresaps involved in the border dispute between Maryland and Pennsylvania. Soon after leaving his rented farm in Virginia he settled in Wrightsville, Pennsylvania. It was here in York County about 1730 that he kept the pot boiling by stressing the fact that this was Maryland territory.

The governor of Maryland encouraged Cresap to lead the Marylanders in their fight for more land by issuing him a license to operate a ferry across the Susquehanna, by giving him the power of a magistrate, and making him a Justice of the Peace. The land dispute was finally decided by the surveying team of Mason and Dixon.

Again it was time for Mr. Cresap to make a move to a new location. For his efforts in the border conflict he obtained some land at Antietam which is about two miles from what is now Hagerstown. At this location he built a log and stone house. He stayed at Antietam only a short time.

The feats and adventures for which Thomas Cresap is best remembered occurred after he left the Antietam home. In 1742 he moved about fifty miles westward to an abandoned Indian village known as Shawneese Oldtown. Here along the Potomac he built a small stone house or fort. Cresap called the settlement Skipton of the Cravan after his English home. However, the name did not stick and the name Oldtown remains with the town today.

His house was a rendezvous for the Indians and the white settlers on this western frontier. Many Indians moving north and south made his house a stopping place. Cresap kept a pot of soup ready for these visitors and was soon known by the Indians as "Big Spoon" because he served them generous portions.

Among the famous Americans who were visitors at Cresap's Oldtown home was our first president, George Washington. In 1747 he was entertained while enroute to what is now Cumberland by Thomas Cresap who engaged a group of Indians to perform a war dance.

From 1740 to 1758 Thomas Cresap was the chief personage on Maryland's western border. He was an important part of a trading group called the Ohio Company. He was assigned the important task of making a road from Cumberland to Redstone. This road, about sixty miles in length, was proposed to make travel between the Potomac and Ohio Rivers easier.

With the help of his Indian friend, Nemaocolin, the road was surveyed and constructed. The name of the road has been changed many times. It has been known as Nemaocolin's Path, Gist's Trace, Washington's Road, Braddock's Trail, and the National Pike. It was an important gateway to the west.

We would be creating a false impression of Thomas Cresap if we failed to mention some of the hardships and dangers that he had to deal with while living at Oldtown. All of the Indians were not friendly and many of them threatened the life of Cresap and his family.

His home was often used as a protective fort for the white settlers who were chased from their own homes. Bands of Indians sometimes raided his barns and fields to satisfy their desire for food or for revenge.

While Thomas Cresap was involved in the early development of this area he was also involved in raising a family of five. Daniel was his oldest son, he was born in 1728.

Thomas, his second son, lived only 23 years; he was born in 1733 and died in 1756. His two daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah, were born in 1737 and 1740. Michael, his fifth child, was born in 1742 and died 1775.

Cresap's eventful life as a planner, a surveyor, a carpenter, a farmer, a fighter, a protector, a frontiersman, an engineer, and a father came to an end in 1790. This thumbnail sketch of one of America's great pioneers only furnishes motivation for further research into the days and deeds of The Cresaps.

DANIEL CRESAP

Daniel Cresap was the first child born of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Cresap in the year 1728. His boyhood had to be one of excitement and danger as he moved with his father from Maryland to Virginia, then to Pennsylvania, back to Maryland and the western frontier. When his father built the house at Oldtown Daniel was just twelve years of age.

Daniel left his imprint in history in the mountains of western Maryland. The story is told that while hunting with an Indian friend he climbed a tree standing at the topmost part of the mountain to capture two bear cubs. In the process a limb broke and Daniel fell to the rocks below.

The mountain bears his name because he later lost his life on it in an encounter with an Indian. Cresap and the Indian fired at the same time and both were mortally wounded. Dan's Rock and Dan's Mountain were the hunting areas for the Cresap family.

Daniel was known as the poor man's friend. His farm in Rawlings was a meeting place for many of his friends. He was the father of seven sons and three daughters. Joseph was his third son.

JOSEPH CRESAP

Joseph Cresap was born in 1755 at Rawlings, Maryland. He was one of many grandsons of Thomas Cresap. At the age of 19 he was fighting in Dunmore's War. His occupation was listed as a farmer and sometimes as a minister of the Methodist denomination.

He was very popular in Allegany County and was elected to the state senate as a Federalist. Joseph was married four times and the father of eleven children. He was probably the first settler and landowner in what is now Cresaptown. From recorded history we find that Joseph built a stone house in this town in 1792. This house was a two story building located near what is now Darrow's Lane. This house was destroyed by fire in 1929.

It is also recorded that Joseph Cresap built a log house in 1801. This house has been sold several times and is now in very good condition. This landmark is recorded in the Historical Trust Records. The house is now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Arden Varner.

Before Joseph Cresap settled here this area may have been called Upper Oldtown. However, since Joseph was one of the early landowners, it has been called Cresap-burg and Cresaps Town.

THE CUSTER STORY

Mr. Melvin Riffey, who is very interested in the history of Cresaptown, has furnished us with the following story.

On December 17, 1830 John Custer, the father of Emanuel Custer was found frozen to death on the Cresaptown Road. Emanuel Custer had a blacksmith shop beside his father's store which was located on Virginia Road (now Winchester Road) between River Road (now McMullen Highway) and the first little bridge over Warrior Run.

Soon after his father died Emanuel moved his blacksmith shop to Clarysville where traffic was heavier, and his services would be needed more often. Later on Emanuel moved to Rumley, Ohio where a son by the name of George was born December 5, 1839. This son became General

George Custer who fought in the Civil War and who later was killed by the Indians at the Battle of the Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876.

Court house records show that Emanuel Custer bought a number of lots from Joseph Cresap in 1805 and 1806.

BRADY'S CROSSING

A specific area in Cresaptown that should be listed as an important historical landmark is the site on which the sewage treatment plant is now located. At one time this spot was known as Brady's Crossing, Brady's Mill and Brady's Station.

In the early 1700's this area was the site of the Shawnee Indian Village. The water level of the river at this point was generally low and therefore a good place to ford. The land near the river was fertile for easy and productive farming. The river contained many fish and could furnish a good supply of food and drink. For these reasons the tribe established their village at this particular spot.

The white settlers did not settle here until the main body of the Shawnee tribe moved westward. From records we find that Joseph Cresap built a two-story house not far from here in 1792.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which was built through this area in 1849-50 located a station here which was known as Brady's Station. The road leading to the station was known as Brady Road. It is now called Darrow's Lane.

In 1861 Samuel D. Brady, who had bought land from Joseph Cresap several years earlier, built a mill near this same spot and in the process of excavation uncovered remains of an Indian burial ground.

During the Civil War Brady's Crossing was again in the news. It was here that McNeill's Rangers crossed the river on February 22, 1865 and captured the Pickets on duty there. After a rest period and a review of their strategy they proceeded to Cumberland where they captured General Crooke and General Kelley.

SOME EARLY SETTLERS

One hundred years ago Cresaptown was a thriving community containing familiar names of families engaged in a variety of occupations. From an 1877-78 Allegany County Directory we find the following residents and the work in which they engaged.

Basil Athey	farmer
John C. Brady	farmer, drover, butcher
James Cecil	farmer
William C. Darrow	farmer, general agent
M.G. Darrow	farmer
W. A. Darrow	farmer
Michael Daugherty	farmer
Robert Deremer	carpenter
Frank Elliott	farmer
William C. Hammock	pastor of Methodist Church
William Hemming	farmer
John Hutson	general merchandise
Lavena Long	dressmaker
Upton Long	farmer
Charles McKenzie	farmer
David McKenzie	farmer, stone mason
Richard McKenzie	farmer
Thornton McKenzie	farmer

Martin Roman	lime manufacturer
Samuel Seckman	general merchandise
Jacob Shuck	carpenter
Elijah Wigfield	flour and saw mills
Elijah Winters	millright, gunsmith
John Winters	blacksmith
William Sites	farmer
J. Morgan Stottler	farmer
Shobe Thrasher	farmer

Perhaps there were others in the community about this time who were not listed in the county directory who did odd jobs such as shoe repairing, general hauling, housework, and handyman chores. This list gives us an indication of the variety of jobs and the interdependence of the citizens in the area.