

WEST VIEW SHORES - A GLIMPSE AT OUR PAST

The community of West View Shores in Cecil County, Maryland, stands on what used to be known locally as "The Beach Farm", owned by Reginald Constable of Elkton since July 14, 1914 and by his parents, Albert and Elizabeth Constable, before him since 1903. A working dairy farm where corn and wheat were the primary crops in addition to milk, it consisted of 479 acres and was purchased from the estate of John C. Groome in 1903 for \$10,205. In 1937, part of the farm was condemned by the United States Government and taken and combined with similar parcels from neighboring farms to make the Pearce Creek Disposal Area as it exists today.

Mr. Constable never worked the land himself. For many years up to the time the farm was sold for development, the resident farmer was Marion "Shep" Pearce, and before him it was his brother. One of his daughters, Anna O'Neal of Earleville, told me of the big field and surrounding marsh that was taken by the government. That marsh had beautiful, big black muskrats, "as black as coal," she said. She used to dream of one day having enough of those muskrat skins to make a beautiful fur coat for herself, but that never happened. The Pearce family have roots that go back to the mid 1700s, when an ancestor was one of the three men sent here to care for the Church of England in this part of the colonies. It is from this family that Pearce Creek, which separates White Crystal Beach from the government land, takes its name. Some 19th century maps call this St. Alban's Creek.

The history of this farm prior to the twentieth century needs much more research. We do know that John C. Groome who owned it until his death in 1866 and whose heirs eventually sold it in 1903 was a very prominent lawyer and extensive landowner here in Cecil County. His brother was a former Governor of Maryland and John served as Secretary of State in 1838. Later he was elected to the State Senate. Maps of this Pond Creek/Pearce Creek area made in the mid-1850s indicate two houses on this Beach Farm with the name of John C. Groome. One was probably the farm house which no longer exists and the other the so-called "tenant house" which is between West View Shores and the government land. This property was recently acquired by Jim and Cindy Marsh who, in the process of renovation, discovered that under the wallboard are log walls, very accurately notched and pegged together. Cindy, a keen history buff, is researching everything she can in order to date their home. Perhaps her work will someday give us new insights about life on this land in days gone by.

On December 7, 1946, Paul A. and Nell V. DeTamble acquired the Beach Farm which by then had been reduced to 265 acres. West View Shores began to take shape on paper, with plans for 234 building lots surrounding a proposed "yacht basin" and "community park" plus a proposed clubhouse, stores, and gas station to be built where the barn and farmhouse stood. Early on, Charlie Raech became DeTamble's assistant. He and his wife, Ruth, and their family moved into the farm house which then stood on the high rise

of ground across from McCormick's house on Bluff Rd. The DeTambles lived in the tenant house. In the early years, DeTamble not only sold lots but he and Charlie did much of the actual construction of the first homes. Probably 15-20 homes in our community today were built by Charlie Raech. His widow, Ruth, and son, Bill, now reside in the remodeled barn. The farmhouse burned sometime in the 1960s and was demolished. The tenant house of the farm is the home now owned by the Marsh family.

Beautiful dreams are not easily turned into reality, as DeTamble soon learned. In the expensive process of dredging for the yacht basin, severe storms filled up with sand all that he had excavated until it must have seemed like pouring money into a bottomless pit. Bankruptcy was the final result, followed soon after by the tragic suicide of Mrs. DeTamble. With nothing left of his dream, Paul DeTamble disappeared from the area. On August 16, 1955, a public sale was held and Everett Walls acquired 180 acres of undeveloped land for \$28,500. The following year he deeded this to the Bay View Realty Co. and began developing Bay View Estates. The remaining unsold lots, roads, and basin area in the developed 85 acres known as West View Shores was acquired by Bernard Segal of Elkton.

Some haziness surrounds the origin of the West View Shores Civic Association, but the consensus of old-timers suggests that it began in the early 1950s. An undated copy of what appears to be the original By-Laws and Constitution indicates that the member fee was \$5.00 per property annually. In 1958 this was increased to \$25. In 1965 the Civic Association contracted to have our gravel roads tarred and chipped at a cost of \$15,050. This was funded by some accumulated money in the treasury plus interest-free loans provided by 44 of the property owners. Bernard Segal who owned the road system contributed \$2,500 and gave the right of first refusal to the Civic Association should he ever decide to sell his ownership of the roads. It was also in 1965 that our first boat ramp was installed. It consisted of a steel mat like those used for aircraft landing strips during wartime laid across the sand on the beach. Our present boat ramp was installed in the Spring of 1973.

Later in 1973, Segal informed the community that he wanted to sell the basin area for development. Feeling that this would be detrimental to the privacy of our community, it was decided to try to raise the \$60,000 he was asking for the land by asking each property owner to buy a share at \$600. The process of raising this money was progressing nicely when suddenly a crisis occurred in the third week of June, 1974. Segal notified the community that he had a buyer. But since we had negotiated the right of first refusal on this land a few months earlier, he asked for our deposit of \$6,000 if we wanted to exercise that right.

At this point, five interested persons from West View Shores stepped forth and personally paid the money and took the initial actions to form a corporation to purchase the property. They met

in the office of attorney William G. Kemp in Elkton and named the following temporary officers of what became the West View Shores Environmental Preservation Association, Inc.: Frank Cross, President, and John Callihan, Linn Henderson, Alex Shaw, John Houser, James Scherer, and Charles Safka. Their hasty action to assure our acquisition of this land was fueled by the rumor that the developer who wanted to buy it was going to install a trailer park like that at Buttonwood Beach. The sales agreement conveyed not only the basin property but also the rights/title to the roads in West View Shores and the riparian rights to the entire waterfront. The total cost, including fees and legal work, was \$61,729. At the settlement, this \$61,729 cost was financed by 73 property owners who purchased 103 2/3 shares at \$600 per share.

In the 10 years that followed, some confusion was experienced between the Civic Association and the Environmental Preservation Association over issues of responsibility and authority. Finally in 1985 under the leadership of the two presidents, Vincent Sakovich and Frank Cross, the two groups were merged. The merger terms stated that the Civic Association would buy out the assets of the Environmental Preservation Association in the following manner: all property owners who owned shares in the Environmental Association would turn in one share and receive a new share in the Civic Association; those who had not yet purchased a \$600 share were expected to do so as were all new property owners coming into the community, unless they had received a share with the purchase of their house; those who had purchased more than one share in the beginning were to be repaid for their additional shares. Only share holders in the West View Shores Civic Association are now entitled to vote on stock asset decisions of the community.

The first cottage on this land predates West View Shores by more than a decade. It was built by Dr. Vallett, a Wilmington physician. It was later purchased and remodeled by Dr. Harry Carl, an early resident of W.V.S. After more than 40 years of gradual development and growth, it is not surprising that many properties remain in the families of those who first bought into the community. But whether long-time residents or newcomers, all of us can relate to the joy and fun of the Pearce children and grandchildren who loved picnics and play-times along the beach in the first half of this century as we do today. What we sometimes call "our community" really has deep roots in history, in the experience of generations who have lived here before us going back to the native Americans who once roamed these shores. What a beautiful gift to be cherished by us and passed on to others.