

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE NATIVES, NEO-NATIVES AND FURINERS  
OF THE EASTERN SHORE  
by James Dawson

There are three classifications of people associated with the Eastern Shore of Maryland: Natives, Neo-Natives and Furiners. A quick look at the lives and habits of these totally dissimilar fauna is a great aid to their identification.

Note: some dates are given in Bay years as minus or plus years relative to the base year 1952, which was the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. For good or ill, its effect on 'Shore life cannot be underestimated. For instance, in Bay years the date 1929 would be written as the year 23 BBB (Before Bay Bridge) and, following the custom of not having a year numbered zero, the year 2005 would be the year 54 ABB (After Bay Bridge).

**Natives:** In BBB times, an individual was considered a Native is all of his or her ancestors were born on the Eastern Shore. "All" meaning just those from the past few hundred years, and "here" meaning all of those counties except for Cecil, that poor orphaned county left in a basket up there at the head of the Bay, half on the Western Shore and half on the Eastern Shore, claimed by neither.

By about the year 20 ABB however, one could be considered a Native merely if all of his or her parents and grandparents were born here. All of them. If one "Pop-pop" or "Ma-Mom" was born off 'Shore, then their ancesto-meter would be reset to zero and good luck to that person's great grandchildren. Having just one off 'Shore grandparent meant that their bloodline was tainted and it would take at least one more generation to dilute the alien corpuscles down to tolerable levels.

Natives have a sixth sense about such things. There is no known incidence where a newcomer has been able to pass off a nonnative ancestor as Native. Even efforts by professional genealogists have met with failure.

There are two subspecies of Natives: marshy and upland. Upland or upper shore areas are defined as those visible both at low and high tides, while the inhabitants of lower marshy areas need to haul in dirt to dig a well. Since elevation is something that the Eastern Shore does not have in abundance, altitude is measured in inches and the term is understood to be a relative one.

For convenience, the Choptank River is often used as a divider between these two populations which are also called Upper Choptankians and Lower Choptankians. These two groups have different cultures and traditions, although this difference is seldom noticed by outsiders.

These indigenous groups are identified by differences in plumage, calls, breeding range and nesting habits. All are clannish. Islanders are suspicious of mainlanders with their decadent, highfalutin' ways and mainlanders look down on the islanders and suggest that some of them have webbed feet and speak with a honking sound. Upper 'Shore natives look down at those from the lower 'Shore. Lower upper 'Shore look down on upper lower 'Shore who in turn look down on middle lower 'Shore and so on. It is said that those from Talbot County look down on everybody.

Language: Upper Choptankians often experience difficulty communicating with Lower Choptankians, and vice versa. For instance, the name of the rubber part of an automobile wheel is usually called a "tar" below the Choptank, but a "tire" above it.

A researcher in the field reported an encounter in the year 37 ABB somewhere in Lower Choptankia when she pulled into a automobile service shop and asked for a new tire. This was met with much head shaking and confusion by this Native even though he was the proprietor and his shop sold tires. It was only when she remembered where she was and asked for a "tar" that she got what she wanted.

This is not to suggest that those from Lower Choptankia are of lesser intelligence than Upper Choptankians, which is not the case at all. It's just misplaced vowels.

While both Natives and Neo-Natives used the same transportation vehicles called cars, each group used diametrically opposing phrases to describe problems when these machines would no longer function. Upper Choptankians and outsiders normally use a non specific description coupled with a downward direction to indicate problems, i.e. "My car broke down." On the other hand, a Lower Choptankian would use a term relating to a specific part coupled with an upward direction, thus: "My transmission went up."

Natives were the dominant species for hundreds of years, but in the last 50 years or so, the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and the dualization of Rt. 50 provided convenient access and an apparent welcome mat to what some Natives considered an invasive new species: Neo-Natives.

**Neo-Natives:** This is a term coined by a researcher to describe those residents not from around here. They are occasionally tolerated if in residence long enough, but never completely accepted by the Natives.

For example, there is the case of a woman who had lived on the Eastern Shore for 89 1/2 of her 90 years, her parents having moved here from Baltimore City when she was six months old. Despite being a respected member of the community for nearly a century, when she died the local paper titled her obituary "Native of Baltimore Dies on 'Shore'". Foreign birth was never forgiven or forgotten. Ever.

Many of this new species were an offshoot of the migratory exotics seen only between Memorial Day and Labor Day and viewed by the Natives as a summer nuisance particularly on their favored migration routes to the ocean numbered 50 and 301. These were often called beach people and occupied temporary or summer nests within sight of the ocean. Occasionally, these migratory exotics became lost and ventured inland.

As BBB years turned into ABB years, flocks of resident exotics, or Neo-Natives, were seen here in ever increasing numbers. First in summer and then year 'round. This new group usually nested within sight of tidal waters, eventually taking up permanent residence. This attractive new territory coupled with stress from overpopulation in the western and northern zones, caused more and more these exotics to molt into Neo-Natives.

The bold, bright colors of some of these exotics first caused some researchers to believe that they were from the tropics and had been blown here, perhaps by some storm. Their colorful plumage was in great contrast to the more earthy tones of the Natives and made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to blend in with the native reeds and grasses.

Neo-Natives soon gave up on being accepted by the Natives and avenged themselves by building larger, more elaborate houses for purposes of display. Cottage sized at first, but as the decades passed, each successive wave built houses on an ever

increasing scale. Even those seemingly past the breeding age, with no obvious need for such oversized nests, frequently built the largest and most ostentatious structures of all. Researchers have noted that the gaudiest pavilions are usually built on the deepest of waters.

House size may also be an attempt by some Neo-Natives to demonstrate to each other which had been the most successful in their former working lives. Some of these structures are large enough to be mistaken for hotels or institutional buildings. Natives term them trophy houses or McMansions and say they are constructed in a pseudo-style they derisively call Colonial-Victorian.

A graph (see fig. 1) has been prepared that incorporates key events effecting the influx of Neo-Natives to the 'Shore, including the construction of Rt. 50 in 1947 and the publication of Michener's *Chesapeake* in 1978, and suggests that the square footage of these houses has been increasing by an average of 1,000 square feet for each decade since 1950. Using this projection, by the year 2052, one hundred years after the construction of the Bay Bridge, the average Neo-Native house will be 12,000 square feet in size and have its own zip code.

Those Neo-Natives raising their young here often made daily migrations to their work or jobs on the Western Shore over the dreaded Chesapeake Bay Bridge, while Natives seldom if ever venture over this span, fearing the unknown. Many Natives frequently spend their entire lives only a few miles from the place where they were born.

Diet: while the Neo-Natives thrive on native foods like crabs and oysters, they have also introduced foreign foods like pizza and sushi. Natives love their pizza, but although they have used raw fish for hundreds of years, they call it by another name. Bait.

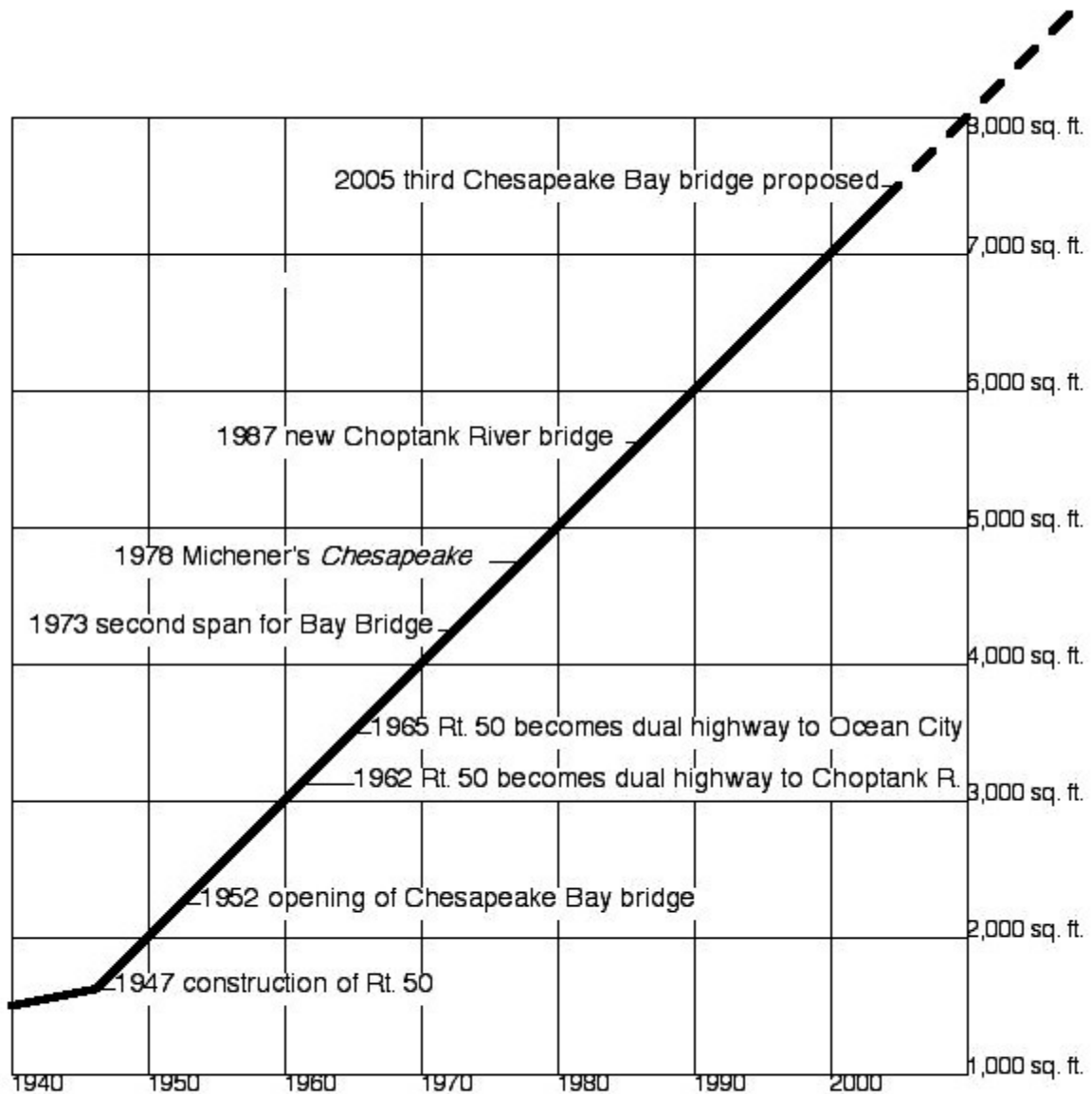
**Furiners:** everyone else.

**Summary:** Once dominant, Natives are now a threatened species and are fast becoming endangered. The annual head count held each January has recently shown a dramatic increase of the Neo-Native population and predictions are that it will soon outnumber the Native population, if it has not already. Alternate terms for Neo-Natives and Natives are come heres and from heres.

One other forgotten population group, the Native Americans first occupied the 'Shore until the 17th century when the new Natives moved in on them. Thus these so-called new wave Natives who came in the 1600s were once Furiners and Neo-Natives themselves.

Incredibly, even the Native Americans first started out as Furiners and Neo-Natives, having arrived here a mere ten thousand years ago from somewhere else, probably Asia. Longer than the recent "Natives", but still transplants nonetheless. Everyone who has ever lived on the Eastern Shore is a Neo-Native, it just depends on how you look at it.

**Fake Disclaimer:** the above is a work of fantasy intended for amusement only and obviously bears no relation to any area or group of people living on the Eastern Shore past or present.



**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARRIVAL OF NEO-NATIVE  
AND SIZE OF HOUSE  
with important dates**

This article was first printed in the Aug. 2005 issue of the *Tidewater Times*, David C. Pulzone, Publisher and Anne B. Farwell, Editor, P.O. Box 1141, Easton, MD, 21601, (410)-226-0422, [www.tidewatertimes.com](http://www.tidewatertimes.com).

The *Tidewater Times* is practically a local institution and has published many great articles on Delmarva in its 54 year history. Thanks, *TT* for letting me use this one.