

ISLAND CREEK NECK, TRAPPE, MD.  
by Wilson M. Tyler  
from the Easton Star Democrat Oct. 1, 1927

“ISLAND CREEK NECK A REGION OF CHARM  
An Autumn Spent in This Favored Section is One  
That Will Linger Long in the Memory

When the literature of Talbot County is rolled into a scroll and tucked beyond the archives of memory; when the hills will have become eroded to levelness, and the verdant forests cease to put forth foliage; when the contours of civilization are erased as pencil marks upon paper—still will the endless turns and twists of the shore line of its numerous headlands reveal the tracks of the last glacial period which some fourteen thousand years ago pushed these jutting peninsulas southward and seaward.

In another fourteen-thousand year period, probably, the scientists declare, will be ushered in the midwinter of another glacial period, doomed to obliterate all that civilized and savage man has accomplished since the last glacial season. It takes, they say, some twenty-eight thousand years to bring the recurrence of the glacial cycle, seven thousand years to the “season”, and that now we are in the midsummer of that season.

But the present is ours, and this beautiful country is ours to enjoy. We read its geological history as we read a book by turning the pages backward. What has gone before is revealed. The mysteries deepen as we advance, wonderment piles upon wonderment as depths in the stratified soils reveal the beds of ancient seas and lands, possibly laid upon each other as the layers of a cake because of the rotation of glacial cycles.

And the question arises, why the rotation, why the necessity? Those mills of the gods grind slow, but grind exceeding fine. Nature obeys its own laws. The law of expansion, of contraction by the absence of heat, will forever hold good. The law of universal gravitation will never be abrogated while matter exists. The swinging cycle of the axle of the earth around a vast cycle, producing the procession of the equinoxes accomplished in the thousands of years mentioned, accounts for periods when ice covered the areas now habitable, and when polar regions were permitted to bring forth semitropical verdure.



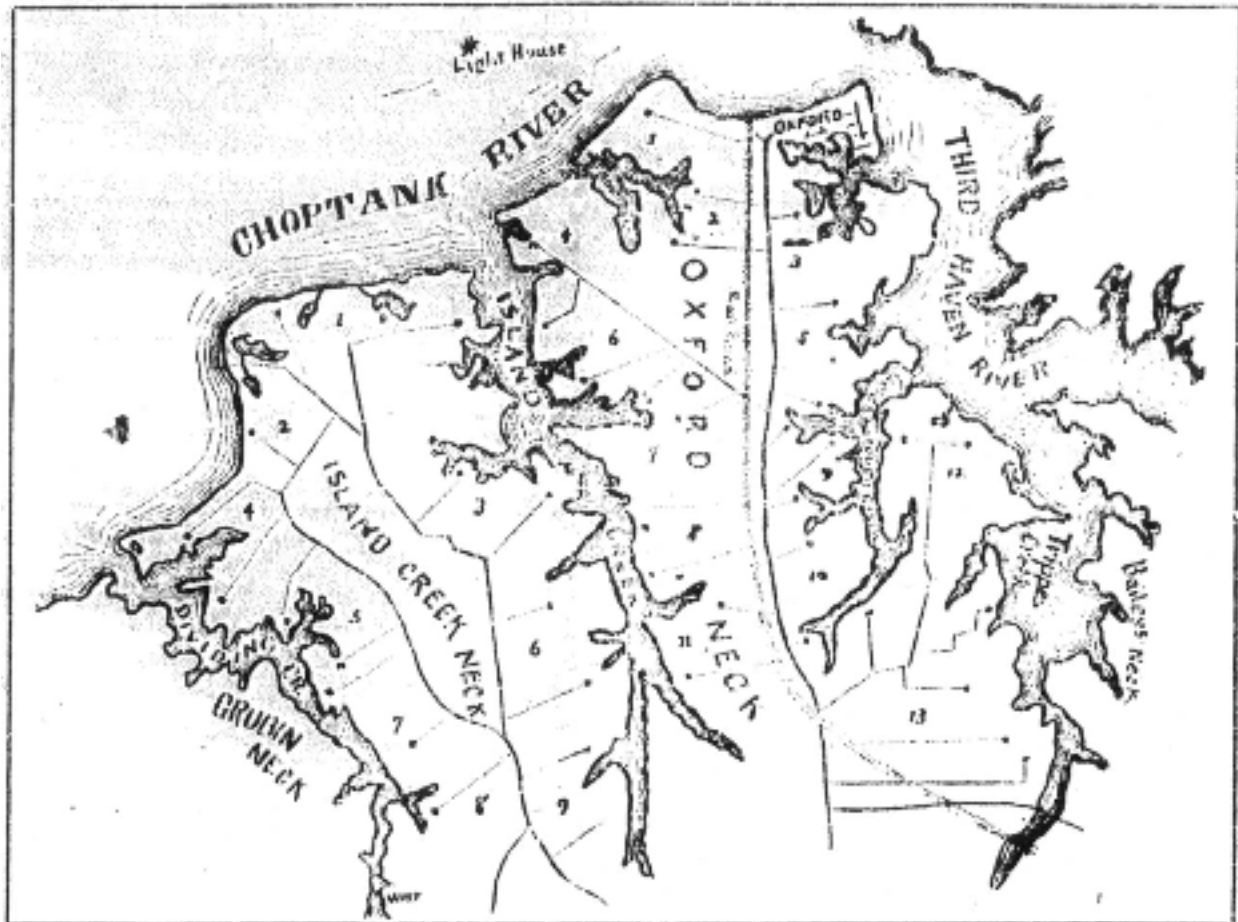
The John K. Caulk Home.

But all this is irrelevant to the present beauties of Talbot County. The map will give a sample of the why the lands, locally known as "Necks", broaden out as they approach broader water. Looking at the two Necks here illustrated, to an imaginative person, they disclose two large outlines of animal heads facing each other-the Island Creek lioness snarling at the more composed countenance of the Oxford Neck lion, placidly looking out upon the Choptank. It is fitting that the "heads" should be placed on "necks". This writeup will deal especially with Island Creek Neck.

This Neck contains some eight square miles or 5,000 acres of land, wooded, tillable, fertile, and what the agriculturalist calls "kind". It returns value received in way of attention. When man is idle and forsakes the fields they bring forth grasses and paint themselves with wild flowers. The golden rod and purple asters are now in their glory, bedecking the roadsides.

Two highway arteries of travel divide the Neck into north and south side, with large wooded tracts in the middle. From these highways, through wood and field, water-ward, lead the private roads to the abodes of peace and plenty, be they the homes of the so-called wealthy or the residences of simpler folk "to the manner born"; for these two "p's", peace and plenty, are synonymous with Island Creek Neck.

Here, on "Hampden", used to stand the oldest house in the county, built of imported brick. Much has already been written of this, and much has also been printed of "Wilderness", that princely estate of Mr. J. Ramsey Speer, and much has been published from time to time of other noted places within the borders of this Neck. It is not the purpose of this review to repeat the story that has often been told, but rather to vary the fame and introduce other highlights to the picture.



The aviator, soaring two thousand feet above Island Creek Neck, sees beneath him a gorgeous panorama bordered by silver, sky-reflected waters. The creek itself takes the shape of a spike-tailed dragon with horny angles, and the wood-bordered headlands and cleared fields near the water front,

those assemblages of farming buildings and cleared fields, together with the spot one could pronounce "home" with a capital H. These families are a community of interests. They enjoy a partial insular life as far as intrusion from the outside is concerned, and at this same time partake of all that makes life generous in the great outside world. It was aptly remarked by an observer of Talbot's wonderful topography that the name of the "necks" of Talbot were all unknown to some of the people of Talbot as are unknown the depths of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Those within the necks come out, but comparatively few go in, because of the semi-insular contour and the lack of necessity for the visit.

To the auto tourist the well-rounded cart roads offer no obstruction. He can regale him self with the placidity of rural life, the peaceful browsing of cattle in the pastures, or the gabble of domestic geese mowing the field in solid phalanx. In contrast to the hurly-burly get out of the way city tour, one's nerves experience a relaxation, and one's mind enjoys a thrill of purely natural life that beggars description.



A Vista of Island Creek.

Here we come to the parting of the ways. One can take either road at the fork and return by the other. But pause a moment to note the remains of the old Island Creek Neck School, once the center of juvenile activity, but now even unworthy the description of the poet who said,

Still sits the schoolhouse by the road,  
A ragged beggar sunning;  
Around it still the sumachs grow,  
And blackberry vines are running.

Within is no "master's desk" or "battered seats" with "jack-knife's carved initials. for these have vanished. Scarcely the weather boarding remains sufficient to show where windows once admitted light, and the whole is partially obscured by the close-growing wildwoods.

No saddened thoughts need intrude. The times have changed, and changed for the better of all concerned.

Touring through the Neck one sees no vine-clad, whitewashed cottages of the New England type by the roadside. The "houses by the road" are not there. The well-kept front yard flower garden is conspicuous by its absence. Instead, the tourist is in the heart of natural scenery, for stately pine and white oak and maple, together with the density of undergrowth greets this eye. A squirrel darts before his car, and the alarmed crow calls him an intruder. He enjoys a different picture from the aviator. He sees no

water. He wonders if the "natives" even heard of a sailboat. We see a wood road and wonder where it leads to. His curiosity gets the better of him and he yields to the temptation to follow it, and behold he emerges into a clearing where a beautiful farm occupies a headland, bordering upon water. Water, saline from the broad bay laving usually three sides of the farm; water where the wild duck and the brant and the swan love to spend the winter; water that the oyster never forsakes nor the diamondback turns his back upon. He sees the little boat lazily lolling at the end of a rudely provided wharf; or, perchance a powered boat, capable of distance and with comforts anchored nearby-all a part of the home with a capital H.



Oldest Brick House In Talbot County.

Here we are at the "jumping off place", but we decide not to jump. Here at the extreme northwest corner-and the nose of the lioness referred to-is a headland on which stands the ancestral home of the Willis family there living. It is the abode of Charles Willis. Perhaps it can be said that for unique interest, for priceless antiques, for curios which admit of no duplicates, for a well-stocked brain of information concerning them, for general lack of "pomp and vain display", no Talbot County home can measure up to it.

Quite a different type of architecture may be seen in the ivy-hugged mansion of Mr. John Caulk. One can almost see its owner in past generations standing in the doorway with welcoming hands extended to the approaching guest; can almost hear the orders given to the willing servants to build a fire in the front room, or for another to go to the creek and fetch up a good lot of oysters; and hear added orders from the hostess to the cook to have a nice pan of hot Maryland biscuits for supper. The house itself with stately grandeur still reflects a hospitality akin to that of other days.

Inviting as might be the opportunity to make a descriptive visit to the twenty or thirty farms in Island Creek Neck; to portray the activities of each; to explore the unwritten history which clings to many of its mansions; to take a flashlight into reputed dungeons; which legends declare lie behind some cellar walls in one or two very old houses; to read on neglected tombs in family yards, where repose the remains of long-forgotten worthies, some of the quaint epitaphs-the pleasure must be denied.

The present community of interests which inhabit the Neck is thoroughly up to date in this commercial and quantity-producing age. Owners of lands that modern methods of tillage prevail, and, if tenanted, that proper oversight is given. Dairy farming is one of the later tendencies and "Clora's Point Dairy farm" had a reputation second to none, with its altogether modern equipment. Growing factory produce supplants the hay, wheat and corn income, and contiguous waters fill in many a needed demand.

Isolation is not known or felt. Prosperity and happiness are not strangers to this favored region. The children of Island Creek Neck ride to school in well-appointed conveyance at public expense, and the school they attend in Trappe has achieved a reputation for turning out well equipped students which any school could be proud of. Home folks can "stand by" in the evening and enjoy a Metropolitan opera song,

listen to the Marine Band, hear a dissertation on Economics, or attend the Dempsey Turney tournament without being being crushed by the crowd. O yes. Island Creek Neck is a good place to live.”

[*Easton Star Democrat* Oct. 1, 1927 and reprinted Sept. 5, 1931]

Editor’s note: the old Island Creek school mentioned was located in the triangle of land between the fork that leads to northside and southside Island Creek Neck roads. It dated from pre-1877 and was replaced about 1884 by a new school building located farther down the Neck.