

THE ARCHEOLOG

PUBLICATION OF THE SUSSEX SOCIETY OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORY



Ellis Grove School
circa 1908

Was located near Mt. Pleasant Church on the Laurel-Sharptown highway. Last Delaware school before the Maryland line. Was moved to West Laurel and used as a dwelling for many years. Photograph courtesy Mrs. Mattie Phillips of Portsville who was a former teacher in the school. Notice the horse and buggy in stable to left of school

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WHO WERE THE CHOPTANK INDIANS?

Perry S. Flegel

This paper in no way resolves the position of the Choptank Indians with respect to other tribes and sub-tribes that roamed the Delmarva Peninsula at the coming of the white man.

The meager information available from historic sources, as well as the infinitesimal amount of pre-historic material gleaned from the few middens that have been excavated in recognized Choptank lands is far from complete. Much more investigation is needed before the story of these people can be better known.

The writer is indebted to C. L. W. Stein and Irene M. Harper, for their untiring efforts in delving into early records of Choptank and Nanticoke Indians. Without their comments and suggestions much of the following story might not have been written.

The first reference to the word Choptank was in a statement given by Thomas Youall, an interpreter, from Kent Island, Maryland, and was taken May 29, 1640 (Maryland Archives Vol.V. pp. 189-190). He describes his experience with some Indians at, "Choptank". It appears that he is at a trading post, town, or village, and is not a reference to a tribe of Indians.

William B. Marye in his book, "Indian Paths of the Delmarva Peninsula," writes that since the name "Choptank" has a locative ending, it most probably was the name of a town, and the name of a town or place was in use for such a purpose before it was given to a river, and often a people, who were later named for it.

We know of no attempt to discover the metes and bounds of the Choptank Indian lands. All that is known that they inhabited were the southern shores of the Choptank river. How far inland they claimed the land has never been established. (Land records of property transfers in south Dorchester County to white settlers from Choptank Indians are noted.) However, it could not have been far since Swanton in his book, "Indian Tribes of North America," (pp. 59-60.), states that the Nause tribe inhabited the southern part of Dorchester county, Maryland. These people also had a village, in Dorchester county, at the mouth of the Nanticoke river, on its northern shore. This is Dorchester county.

How far the lands of the Choptank people extended up the river with the same name is not known. A treaty in 1669 gave them a reservation which extended along the southern shore of the river to the mouth of the Secretary creek. (Jones, pp. 172-174.) From the mouth of this creek to the northern part of the Chicoan Indian Reservation of the Nanticokes is less than five miles.

There is no record of any Indian tribes living on the northern banks of the Choptank river yet artifacts abound in the region and there are many indications of middens being present. The closest people living to the north of the Choptanks were the Ozines and the Wicomesse. The latter of these is not to be confused with the Wicocomoco in Somerset county, Maryland. The Ozines and the Wicomesse were 36 to 40 miles away and lived between the Wye and the Chester rivers.

Captain John Smith, in his travels up the Chesapeake Bay, did not enter the Choptank river, and gave no report of its existence nor of any people who might have occupied the area. (Marye, Part II.).

If he did explore the region he made no mention of it. Reasons for not taking note of it are speculative. Did he pass the mouth of the river during the night, or was it early in the morning before the river fog had burned off? Was the weather such that a heavy rain made visibility difficult, or a gale blew his ship past the mouth of the river and his attentions were needed more to the ship than to the leeward? Was he on a tack which drew his attention to other places than the mouth of a river, or did he really find it but thought it was not important enough to investigate?

But the Choptanks, by what name were they known before they were given a name with a locative ending which refers to a town? Many authorities regard the Choptank as a Sub-tribe of the Nanticoke Indians. Swanton (p.60.) alludes to this classification. Weslager in his treatise, "The Nanticoke Indians," depicts the Choptank as a separate entity, "-----and not closely allied politically", with the Nanticokes. (Swanton p. 24.) Other authorities (Speck p. 31.) refers to the Choptanks as Conoys, and to Annokokassimon as a, "Choptank Nanticoke Chief." He also refers to Ababco and other Choptank chiefs as Nanticoke chiefs.

Again, Swanton lists the name of Ababco as that of a Choptank town. It is also the name of a Choptank chief, or great man. Ababco was one of several chiefs who signed a treaty with Governor Fendell of Maryland. (Maryland Archives, Vol III, pp. 362-363.).

Ababco's son, Wynecaco, was also a Choptank chief. He was not a descendant of any of the Nanticokes or their "Royal Families." Since his heritage is not from the Nanticokes we might assume that neither was Chief Ababco's. Weslager states that he has traced Wynecaco's lineage to establish this fact. (Weslager p. 98.) Since Wynecaco was not a Nanticoke, nor descended from one, but referred to as a Choptank, it is unfortunate that his lineage was not otherwise identified. Remember that the name Choptank is a word with a locative ending and not especially the name of a tribe of Indians

The language of the Choptank Indians stems from an Algonquain source. If they are of Algonquain linguistic stock and not a sub-tribe of the Nanticokes, they may have reached the Delmarva peninsula from the western shore of Maryland. Maybe an independant group related to the Conoy or Powhatan crossed the Chesapeake Bay since it is much quicker and shorter that way than to travel up and around the head of the bay, passing through territory of other tribes, and then down the peninsula. Pottery remains seem to indicate that the Nanticoke people were here a long time before the Choptanks. The Nanticokes arrived on the Peninsula about the same time as the Delaware Indians. (Swanton p. 60.).

The Delaware's-----? We know that the classification of this Indian tribe is one of the few that was given an European name, and that De La Ware, the second governor of Virginia (1610-1611) came to this country long after the Lenni Lenape which is the true name of these people. As Thomas West he became Baron De-la-warre, or Lord Delawarre. How did it happen that the name of the Lenni Lenape was changed, and given to this tribe of Indians who roamed areas south and east of what is now Philadelphia, New Jersey and Long Island; to the name of a title of Thomas West's in far away Virginia?

The only tribes of Algonquistic stock across the Chesapeake Bay from Choptank lands were Conoy, and probably the Monacan, The Monacan name causes some questions since the name itself is of Algonquain derivation meaning "digging stick", but the tribe was of Siouan linguistic stock. (Swanton p. 63.).

All of the other tribes along the western shores of the Chesapeake Bay are either Siouan or Iroquoian linguistic stock people. The Manohoac, Saponi, Nahysson and Occaneeem were Pohatan sub-tribes of Siouan Linguistic Stock. The Nottaway, Menerran, are also Powhatan sub-tribes but of Iroquoian Linguistic stock (Swanton.)

It would be interesting to know how the Siouan and Iroquoian peoples reached the western shores of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, and why the Conoy's crossed over to the eastern shore of the bay and they did not.

It has been stated that no references have been found wherein the Nanticokes, in anyway, claim that the Choptanks were a sub-tribe of theirs. This might be a negative approach to the question. It is also true that the Maryland authorities, in the early years, treated them as separate peoples especially with respect to their territories, and it was not until the treaty of 1705 that the Choptank, Nanticoke, and Assateagues were included in a single treaty.

CHOPTANK AND NANTICOKE POTTERY DIFFERENCES

Choptank and Nanticoke pottery construction and design may reveal some differences. Enough Choptank material has not been collected as of this date to draw any definite conclusions.

Thousands of shards from more than sixty Nanticoke Indian middens have been examined from these excavations. Only nine Choptank pits have been opened and the shards from but three of these pits have been studied and recorded.

In no way can pottery from a mere three pits, containing a limited number of shards serve as an example of wares ascribed to a specific group of individuals. Some observations are pointed out below from an examination of these Choptank shards, but until additional material is available, specific traits in pottery design and construction must wait for denial or confirmation of differences.

The shape of the pottery from both tribes varies but little. The Delmarva Peninsula has produced only three or four flat bottomed vessels so far recorded. One from the Choptank area, of reddish clay, shell tempered and with no base or foot; one from Nanticoke lands, of yellow clay, steatite tempered, and with a pronounced foot. The others were from the Delaware area. All the others had conical bases of varying depths and angles. Most of the vessels, from both tribes, were of varying sizes, with and without neck constrictions, and moderate wall thicknesses. There were no lugs found on any vessels.

Of the more than 270 Choptank rim shards studied, outward flaring was not as common with the Choptanks as it was with the Nanticoke vessels. The use of an applique of clay at the rim of the Choptank vessels was not found. Some swelling was observed on the rim shards but nothing else. This feature was quite pronounced, and in some instances, very detailed especially with Nanticoke pottery along the Marshyhope creek.

Many of the Choptank bowl rims had overlapping of pottery body paste on the outside. It gave an appearance of careless work on the part of the pottery maker. This feature has rarely been found on Nanticoke vessels. (Flegel, I, II, III.).

All the pottery found in lands that were occupied by Choptank people consisted of shell, hole or sand temper. The sand as temper may have entered the clay at the time of manufacturing of the bowl and not put into the matrix purposely. The hole pottery is, of course, that in which the shell has been dissolved.

Since no other temper has been found in Choptank pottery but varying sizes of crushed oyster shell, it was made not much

earlier than 1000 A. D. Shards from the region along the Marshyhope Creek, where the Nanticoke inhabited, contained hornblend, steatite, mica, fired bits of clay pots, crushed quartz and crushed shell. Most of this tempered material is not found in isolated spots along the Creek but is indigineous to the entire length of it, up to Federalsburg, Maryland.

The following table relates approximately to the time when the various types of pottery, on the Delmarva Peninsula, were in use. These types have all been found in Nanticoke lands, but only the Townsend ware has been found in Choptank Territory.

Date of Use	Pottery Type	Temper Used	Design
900 - 800 B.C.	Dame's Quarter	Hornblend	Cord & Plain
750 B.C.	Seldon	Soapstone	Cord
500 B.C.	Wolf-Neck	Grit	Net & Cord
375 B.C.	Coulbourne	Clay "Pot"	Net & Cord
200 B.C. to 300 A.D.	Mockley	Shell	Net & Cord
640 A.D.	Hell Island	Quartz	Fabric & Cord
1000 A.D. onward	Townsend	Shell	Fabric

Table showing dates when pottery types, temper, and various exterior treatment was used on the Delmarva Peninsula.

From another viewpoint; one might contend that the low lands of southern Dorchester county, which embraced the territory of the Choptanks, might not have had enough exposed quartzite on the surface available for use as pottery temper and; the Choptanks may have been here before 1000 A. D.

It is true that much quartzite is available along the shore lines of Dorchester county in the form of small pebbles. This is so even today. Some large stones (quartzite) are being unearthed in gravel pits which have come into production lately. Stones such as these were almost impossible for Indians to recover.

But thought along this line reveals an obstacle which can hardly be over looked. The absence of net and cord impressions in the Choptank pottery such as found in the Mockley and Wolf-Neck types, which closely underlie it, rather discourages this approach.

Two bowls presented a type of sgraffito. One is shown in the three matching rim shards below, Fig. 1. Until more Choptank incising has been recorded we cannot say if such a treatment of pottery surfaces presents a trend or not. Such markings have not appeared elsewhere on any Choptank or Nanticoke pottery. The shards below came from a vessel $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and 7 or 8 inches in depth. The rim and the lip were both incurving. The vessel was coil manufactured and the clay tempered with finely ground shell. The clay was gray-black in color. The surface of the pot was smooth, its texture of medium quality with no visible signs of paddling. (Flegel I. p. 90, 114.)

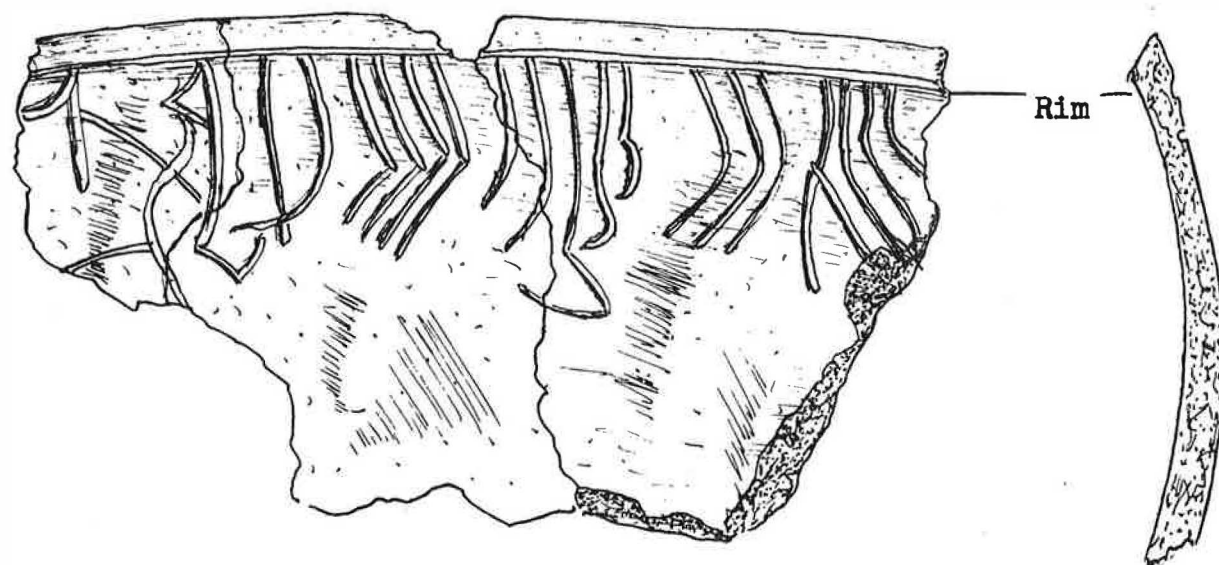


Fig. 1. Full Size

It would have been interesting to know what the inscriber had in mind, if anything, when he placed upon the following shard the lines shown in Fig. 2. It appears to be an attempt to convey a message of some sort in terms of an alphabet with which we are familiar. Clearly shown are the letters "V", "T", another "V", an "A" and maybe an "N". What continued past the breaking of the shard? While it appears that the incisions form some elements of a written language, it is most doubtful that they could be since this pit was opened and closed about 400 years before the first European we know set foot upon this soil.

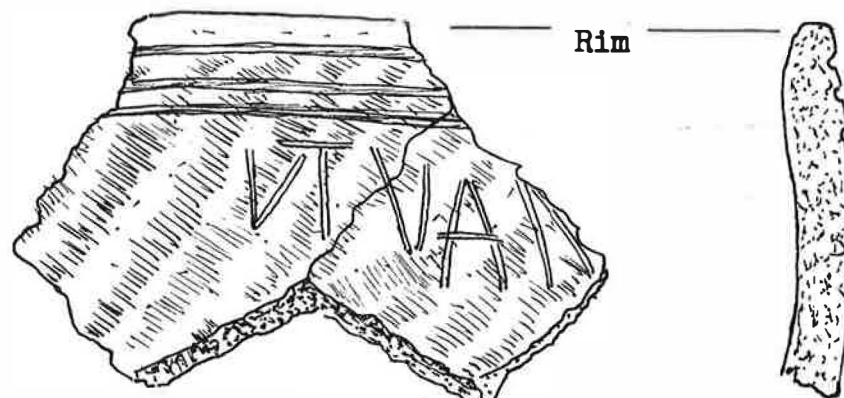


Fig. 2. Full Size

The shard in Fig. 2. came from a vessel that had a ten inch diameter. Its depth could not be estimated. The rim had a slightly outward curve and its lip was flat. Coiling was used in its manufacture and the light-brown clay was tempered with finely crushed shell. The surface was gritty to the touch and the texture of the clay was fine. Very faint cord-wrapped paddled lines appear on the outer surface. The three parallel lines around the rim were made with a woody stem. (Flegel I. p. 144.)

Another design variation, whown in Fig. 3. is the only attempt, found by this writer, to convey other than straight-line geometrical incising. This deviation from the conventionality of the Nanticoke pottery decor, which conformed to rigid specifications may also present a trend. (Flegel I p. 80.)

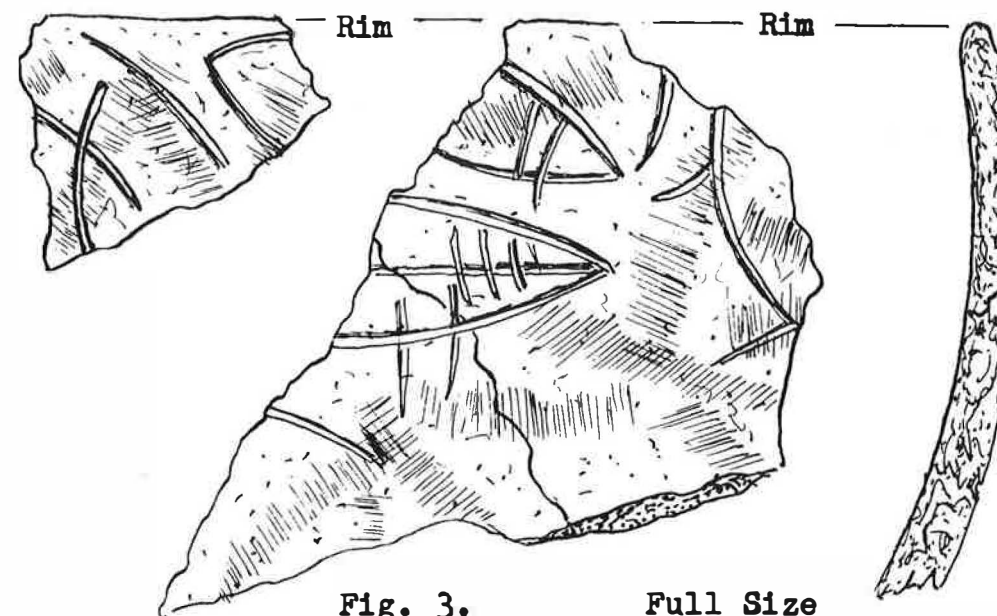


Fig. 3. Full Size

This vessel had a diameter of 14 inches and was estimated as being about 16 inches deep. The rim was straight but tapering slightly being somewhat flattened at the lip. It was coil manufactured, tan in color, and shell tempered. The clay was of medium texture, its surface smooth with faint cord-wrapped stick impressions.

Only two shards from two separate bowls were found with cord impressions. One was a double twisted pair of coarse strands running diagonally downward from the rim, with no apparent design. (Flegel, III. p. 43.). The other (of which two body shards were found) appeared to be lines of delicate, small bead-like impressions placed between rows of paddling (?) perpendicular to them. (Flegel. I. p. 154.).

Choptank middens produced no pottery with net impressions. This feature again seems to confirm the thought that the Choptank people may have arrived in this area much later than the Nanticokes.

This writer has been unable to detect any impressions which might positively indicate the use of fabrics on the pottery surfaces. There were a few that were questionable, but large enough shards were not available for conclusive evidence.

Practically all of the Choptank pottery was incised with some kind of a reed or woody stem. Plant stem incising was indicated by the numerous striae running parallel within the incised marks. These striae are produced by the tougher fibro-vascular bundles that extend throughout the stems of monocotyledonous plants that were used to mark the clay. Up to seven and nine of these lines could be found within the incised marks.

Very few shards from Nanticoke middens produced incisions made with woody stems. This may have been due to the flora of the Marshyhope Creek. Plants like the sedges, pickeral weed, and others are not as common along the Creek shores as they are in the more saline areas of lower Dorchester county, Maryland.

There were a number of shards observed with incisions made with a smooth rounded tool. The incisions invariably show short marks cleanly rounded at both ends. (Flegel, I. p. 96,127,191.).

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An Oral History of Education in SUSSEX COUNTY

One very interesting project which came out of the work of the Sussex County (Delaware) Bicentennial Committee, was an Oral History of Education. The Project Director was Dr. William H. Williams. Working with Dr. Williams as an interviewer was Dana Lynch, a young student at Delaware Technical and Community College. All of the tapes were transcribed by Elizabeth S. Higgins.

This project focused on four educational experiences on the Sussex County schools from 1900 and before to 1966:

1. Rural white, of which twenty interviews were done.
2. Town white with eleven interviews.
3. Fourteen blacks, which included country and town experiences.
4. Five interviews with Indian, which included one husband and wife team.

The formula used in asking the questions was formulated before the start of the project, but was kept flexible. Basically the subject matter included a discussion of the physical plant, the school house construction, size and furnishings; the teachers, their education, qualifications, teaching ability; the subject matter, extra curricular additions to basic teaching; discipline, including methods; routine; the nature of students, and comparison to those of other schools; and an evaluation by the interviewee of his own personal educational experience.

Both Dr. Williams and Miss Lynch attempted to determine the differences, if any, between the educational experiences of the four types of interviewees and also to determine if experience in rural or one-room type schools produced education of comparable type to that obtained in larger or town schools. Also some attempt was made to establish poor treatment or substandard conditions in the schools of the minority groups.

Classifying according to age: 2 females, one black and one Indian, were interviewed on the 30 year bracket; 2 females, one black and one white; and four males, 2 black, one white, and one Indian in their forties; the fifty year olds included 2 females, 1 black and 1 white, and five males, two black, two white, and one Indian; 6 females, four white and two black, and five males, two black and three white were in their sixties; 7 females, all white were in their seventies as six males, two black and four white; and the last category included 7 females, six white and one Indian and three males, two white and one Indian, all over eighty years of age.

Classifying according to sex, twenty-seven women were interviewed and twenty-three men.

The educational experience of the interviewees varied from elementary or Junior High School to Advanced College Degrees. Some of those who seemed to suffer the greatest handicaps to receiving an adequate education were among the most prominent and respected members of their communities.

One-room schools that were mentioned were Columbia, near Delmar, Millville, the Nanticoke Indian School, Bunting's College (someone had a sense of humor,) Cedarville, Tulls, Concord and Piney Grove. None of these schools had indoor plumbing facilities or running water and most of them were heated by wood heaters. Most of them had 8 grades, 1 teacher. Two room schools included Wesley, Trinity, Midway and Lincoln. Most of these also without any conveniences. Primarily, they consisted of two grades, two teachers. Indian children had eight grades locally, were unable to attend the local segregated high schools and went where they could attend an Indian High School. By the time most of the interviewees were ready to do this, they had accepted this procedure as a matter of course.

All schools were segregated until court-ordered to integrate.

A white, rural female, over 80 years old, did a good job of describing one of these schools:

Millville School - the original - was a little 1-room school. The desks were all just wooden desks, made of wide boards, and some of them were wide enough that four of us sat in a row. In the back of the room was a place for our lunch boxes, and a stove to keep us warm in cold weather. There were three windows on each side of the building and in the later days of the building, some of the boys had poked the plaster through so that we could throw our scrap paper through in there without having to take it out... All of the blackboards were just plain boards painted black.

A white, rural female, about 73 years old talked about a larger school at Lincoln:

I can remember that the two rooms downstairs, they each had three grades - that would be in the 1st room, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd and in the 2nd room, the 4th, 5th and 6th. You went up this great flight of stairs for the third room ... I can remember well the building. It was just weather-boarding painted white with green shutters. Each room had a what we used to call potbellied stove operated by coal. Each teacher took care of the ashes and bringing in the coal and we girls would stay after school and help clean the room.... help get the room all tidied up for the next day.

Although there were several mentions of coal, wood was by far the most common fuel used.

A description of a black school was given by a black male and this is the only reference to a lack of electricity in the schools, although none of the schools had electric until the Rural Electrification Act was passed by Congress in the late 1930's. During the years that followed the huge task of bringing electricity into the rural areas and country schools slowly proceeded.

This was a two-room school. The toilet facilities were inside. At the time that I first started, there were kerosene lamps. They had to be cleaned and oil put in them. Boys and girls had the job of cleaning them and also keeping the building clean.

There were no cafeterias, even in the town schools. Those who lived too far away to walk, brought a lunch, except in rare cases. The above speaker, continuing his discussion, goes on to say:

Much of the food was prepared by the teacher. Parents would send different canned vegetables and things to school and one or the main diets would be soup. We could always mix up everything with it.

In a question as to what the teacher cooked on, he replied:

This was not a cook stove, as such, most of the cooking was done on the top of the same round heater that was used to heat the building.

A rural female Indian replied to the same question:

We cooked our own hot lunches. The oldest girls took turns going in town and buying things and then the state had surplus food which we got - mostly some butter, turkeys, dried milk and some sort of beef - about like the surplus foods they have now. Some of the mothers would cook the turkeys. The only thing we had to cook on was a hot plate. We had plenty of dried beans and Koolade. We planned our meals ahead...

Later in this interview, she enlarges on this:

...the bigger girls, the ones that weren't helping teach, would be getting the lunch prepared. Everyone had turns... they'd get the plates out and took turns washing dishes - everybody took turns - boys and all and they didn't appreciate that and we didn't appreciate their cookin' either.

A white rural male, remembers a different lack of facilities:

...our interior lighting was rather sad, those long things that hung down from the ceiling with a glass globe on them with one bulb in, on winter days, you could just hardly see at all... We had, in the entry hall, a pump bench and that was the sole source of water in the schoolhouse. And the entry hall was not heated unless we left the school room doors open - you really got a cold drink out of that pump... It had to be primed and we used to line up there and one would pump - the pumper was designated every day just like the board eraser and one would pump while the crowd washed their hands before lunch.

This was between 1939 and 1944!

Much more could be said about facilities, but in general the country schools had less in the way of conveniences, and things improved in all schools as time went by. Most of those interviewed seemed to remember the inconveniences with pride in their own fortitude and with nostalgic feelings for a day long past.

Teachers were remembered with respect and affection, and practically the whole group were in agreement that the specific teacher that he or she had was of outstanding excellence.

As one white male very sagely reported:

The whole thing hinged, as an educational endeavor, on the individual teacher. There was no moving from room to room, and the teaching staff out there was generally superior. I heard one of the teachers say that when she left Stockly and came to Georgetown, she was amazed at the amount of stuff she didn't have - not enough books around-....

He goes on to say later:

We had a piano and these teachers in the country schools had to be able to play the piano.

A Black female from Millsboro reports:

There was someone there who had musical ability because I recall having piano lessons in about the 4th grade.

A white female, town, says:

I think there are some excellent teachers now but I do think that the majority of the teachers of that period were rather dedicated individuals. They seemed to put their teaching careers before any thing else and they were very good disciplinarians.

A white female from Georgetown stated:

I felt all during my school years that we had very excellent teachers...They were dedicated and they were women who may not have had a college education, but most of them

had been to normal school, which was the basis for a two-year teacher's training....

Pinned down with a question about discipline in the school, the concensus of opinion seemed to be that a pupil had better behave because if you got a licking at school, you also would get one when you went home. There were no color or racial barriers on this answer, as black and white and Indian alike agreed. Also in agreement on the greater degree of strictness or sternness which was shown by the teachers at that time, were most of the interviewees, with the possible exception of a female Indian, who reported:

...we were more of a family group, well, we had to be, because, like the kids who went to these other two schools we all lived in the same neighborhood, and they sort of picked on us and that's what made us all stick together. We always wanted to be so much nicer, so much better than they were and to get as much out of school as we could, I don't remember her (teacher) having any problem. I don't know whether it was she didn't call for such a lot of discipline, like maybe some teachers did. You know, she was sort of free, too... I remember one girl being punished she was a biter.

Also when a group answer is totalled, there did seem to be more female teachers than male, but the little old lady, prim and prissy, old maid school teacher type appears to be totally missing. Almost all of the teachers are described as being young and many times as pretty. At times, there was a male Principal, or a female Principal, but in some one-room, one-teacher was the sole person in charge.

Not mentioned in this survey, but of common knowledge at that time was the fact that the State School Board worked very closely with the individual schools and kept superintendents in the field to help with any problems. Also, state guidelines aided in keeping the schools fairly uniform in their practices; for instance throughout the interviews, school time is given as 9 o'clock in the morning and 4 o'clock for letting out in the afternoon.

There was agreement that parents were behind the teacher and that there was good cooperation. PTA's were mentioned in many cases, several cited homework to be turned in, and there was certainly no TV to keep a child from lessons.

A black male says:

By and large, the parents were very cooperative with the school program. We had a PTA organization and we worked at that and it was very successful. There wasn't any gap between the school and the parents.

Walking was the popular way to get to school, whether you lived across the road or two or three miles away. School busing was not dreamed of, but sometimes a horse and buggy or wagon and sometimes a bicycle was a conveyance. Some mention of cars was made by the youngest members surveyed. Buses were much later and were not available to town students, and they

may have been available to white students first, as is indicated in an interview with one black interviewee.

Recess was a happy time, with an hour taken for lunch, regarded as a third recess by some. One unfamiliar game told about by a rural white was:

...a game we called "Annie, Annie, Over." This was played by about one half getting on one side of the school building and half on the other and throwing the ball over the building, catching it on the other side, running around with it and trying to tag someone with it.

Obviously, a schoolhouse over which you could toss a ball was a very small schoolhouse indeed! Softball and baseball are among the games mentioned, dodgeball for the girls seemed popular and soccer was played at some schools. Often mentioned were foot races, one man mentioning that they would run to Millsboro and back from what was evidently quite some distance.

One person's reaction was just a little different when asked about his favorite sport:

...hug on the girls...we were large enough to know that a girl was a girl and we would hug them every time the teacher wasn't looking.

Tag was a universal game, wrestling was a favorite trial of strength, but no matter what the sport or exercise, it was all done without supervision, direction, or organization. Equipment also had no part in the play or recreation, as all schools lacked the basics.

Again, subjects covered indicate that at a very early time, there was a continuity and direction to the subjects taught and at the level at which they were taught. However, in very early times, subjects were a little different or else they had names unknown later. For instance, a rural white female, 88 years young says:

We had Rhetoric and Latin and German and Algebra and Science, in addition to the Principal's room - we went in there for Physics - and Elocution, too.

Hygiene was a subject mentioned, Geography, History, Oral Reading, in addition to the "readin', writin', and rithmetic". One person said:

They didn't call it writing, they called it penmanship.

Physiology was a subject mentioned several times.

Drill was the order of the day and there was emphasis on the fact that the basic subjects were very important. Most people quizzed felt that they got a better grounding in the reading and math than is evident today and regarded this as a big help in later life.

The town school, whether black or white, apparently had all grades in one building. Assemblies for all grades are mentioned. Many schools had only eleven grades so that it became a necessity for students to obtain their diplomas elsewhere. For blacks this meant Howard High in Wilmington or Delaware State which carried high school courses. Later, the Jason High School at Georgetown was cherished with pride by Sussex County blacks, as it was a new modern, segregated high school, with more modern equipment than any other in the state at that time. Speaking of Jason, one black female says:

..re high school subjects
Foreign languages, for one. Chemistry and basic high school courses that they have now - trigonometry, music, choir....
..re labs for chemistry, etc.
We had very nice labs - very nice
..equipment supplied by the state
The state supplied all the equipment...

One of the aspects of teaching that seemed to puzzle out two interviewers, Dr. Williams and Miss Lynch, very much was one teacher could teach eight grades every subject, every day. Time after time, the question was posed and the answer was given. A rural white female explained:

Usually the reading classes came first while those who were in their seats were given some special assignment to do. And the reading classes were not by grades but by the readers you were using. You had a First Reader and a Second Reader and so, and in Millville, the readers went up as high as the Fifth Reader.

To the question: How did the teacher teach reading to the first grade and keep the Eighth grade interested in what they were doing (?) one person said very simply:

It didn't seem like no trouble to her. She was just one of those kinds who could really do it. You learned from her - you had to...

Another described it in a different way:

Because of the peculiar construction of our work day there at school, a lot of times you were doing something else. You went up in groups to the front room. In a little circle there'd be four or five or six or seven of you that went up for one grade - for your reading, your math, your this, that or the other and you worked at the board while you were up there with your teacher or you read to her. Then you had something to do and you went back to your seat, and if you had a problem while she was having her next group, you went up to her and she helped you with it.

Actually, the intermitted periods of recital and study seemed to work out very well, with each student learning a routine which he thereby held to throughout some months. Although there was supposed to be work going on at the seats, the little groups of four or five reading or doing arithmetic were inspired to do their best, with a captive audience, no matter how indifferent. Also long before a child finished the First Reader, he knew that one by heart, and had a good idea of the ones used on the other groups.

Questions concerning integration found many were out of school and involved only as spectators, with some few advancing ideas both pro and con. A black female says:

It has some disadvantages and advantages. I still say it has some disadvantages. It really does.

A different note was struck by a rural white who when she was asked if it seemed odd to her that blacks and whites had separate schools and blacks went to their own. She said:

We never thought but what they would.

Another white female gave a considered answer:

I don't think that the average boy or girl who attended school at the same time I did, I don't think we gave it much thought. It was just something you grew up with, knowing that they had their school and that they had their Principals and their teachers and their facilities and that they were getting an education in their schools. I didn't feel any different about that than I attended the Methodist Church and that one of my friends attended the Catholic Church. It was just the same thing to me. I chose to be a Methodist. He was a black boy or a black girl and he chose to go to his school and that was all. And I never heard any of my friends give it enough thought to even discuss it.

A black man said that he went to Philadelphia and was put in an integrated school and a friend of his family persuaded them to take him out and put him in an all black school. He said in response to a question that they thought it was wrong for the two to be together.

To a question asking him if he felt second rate and if he felt apprehensive at having to compete with whites, one black said:

If possible, I felt just the exact opposite. We felt that we had as much in potential as they did. It gave us the drive and determination to achieve, and we often competed with them. And wanted to compete with them... It never bothered me that I could not go to their schools.

He goes on to say in answer to further comments:

Even in the years when we were segregated, there were so many opportunities, so many doors open for you, if you were willing to step through.

But the feeling of most, both black and white, was expressed by a white female, 82 years old when she said:

We just never thought about it. We had been brought up that way and it was just our way of life at the time and we just never considered it. In my home, the colored women's daughter, Annie, was born and she lived there and we played with the colored when we were children... of course, that association ended...

For an evaluation of the education received, contentment seemed to be the order of the day. A black female feels :

I do know that some of the children that come out of the schools today more or less are on the 9th grade level. I don't think they know as much as we did when we came out.

A black man, town, reported:

...I think that the education obtained depended on the individual - as he applied himself during class. I can't really say about the white school, because I never attended the white school. There were some black and some white who seemed to be better prepared than I was.

One white man seemed to express the majority opinion when he said:

To tell you the truth for good sound education, I believe that it was just as good as it is today.

Another white, from a different section of the county, said this:

It was quite a jump scholastically from a graduate of a high school around here to a Freshman at the University of Delaware. It was quite a jump. First of all, I was not a very good student. Now for some of the students who applied themselves better and were more apt students, quick to learn - well, I was never considered a very good student, because I was just not very studious, but to go to the University of Delaware from here was quite a jump.

However, this man must have taken that jump very well, as he later graduated from the University.

Another point on which black students agreed was the importance of an annual sports competition called Field Day, during which county schools competed with one another in jumping, running, dodgeball, pole vaulting and other sports basics. Points determined which school program won, and the individual winners of the county then competed with winners from other counties.

The students at the white schools had the same sort of county competitive program and statewide competition.

However, this was a segregated event, so that at no time was the competition one of blacks and whites in the same events at the same time. On the other hand, that there was interschool competition and cooperation is brought out by one black who remembers playing with the white high schools on some of their teams.

Each race seems to think that segregation was its own idea.

Much more could be said about this Oral History. For those of us involved in it, there were some surprising disclosures, putting some of our previous ideas completely in the wrong. It was a very worthwhile project, with much input from those interviewed, who tried to be completely honest, definitely made a supreme attempt to be objective, and accurate. There was an outstanding amount of memory at advanced ages for some participants and generally much effort to put feelings into words - thoughts and feelings which had not occurred to the interviewees and were taken out and examined for the first time.

Fifty people were interviewed, fifty stories were told, fifty reactions to the questions asked were recorded - but what about all of the Sussex Countians who were not in the survey? We are sure that each could tell another and another and another different stories, as each of the experiences recorded were different, each recounting his or her own educational background but also feelings of ambition, of frustration, of love, of hate, of desire to better oneself, of a wish that things had been different or better, or in many cases, nostalgic contentment with the way "Things were then".

It is our intention at this time to continue from this introduction to a series of the actual interviews with some attempt at interpretation of results, but for the most part letting the participants speak for themselves. We think that there is valuable information and examination of present day viewpoints in comparison to those expressed from a different era. We hope that this will be of interest to our readers.

Another facet of this project which was not brought out by just interviewing with an eye on the past, is just what education did to prepare all of these fifty people for life. As our tapes are transcribed into the subsequent Archeologs, we will make some attempt to evaluate the present status of the interviewee. Was he really prepared for life? How successful has he been? Has color, race, sex, era, or size of school - that is, one-room as opposed to larger, better equipped schools - had an influence on his progress in later life?

We hope you will find our results of this project as interesting as our present explanation and summery has seemed to us.

Elizabeth S. Higgins



A former school for many active youngsters. Located about five miles from Seaford, it originally had eight grades. It is now a community center.



Neal's School, near Atlanta, is scarcely recognizable with a second story, a picture window, a front porch and other additions.

Sussex Society of Archeology and History
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