

Historical Notes on William Parker

By Stephen Stec

In April 2016, the ACLT hosted a British visitor named Stephen Stec and his children Riley and Kaidi. Stec is an heir of William Parker, and he has spent a great deal of time researching the Parker lineage and land holdings. He was pleased that the ACLT executive director Greg Bowen was able to show him the land that Parker obtained along Parkers Creek in the 1650s, and very happy to learn that it had been protected. After the visit, Stec offered to write a few words about Parker and the family connection. Stec's article is followed by an afterword from ACLT member Carl Fleischhauer.

About the visit

Our recent visit to the American Chestnut Land Trust had special meaning for my family and me. Like most Americans not interested in gardening, I've taken to exploring my family's history. A breakthrough a few years ago established our family's roots in Calvert County – among our ancestors are the Wilsons of Newington, formerly a plantation near Kings Landing. Even earlier, we could trace our connections via the Kent family to one William Parker. The fact that there were three William Parkers in the area was confusing at first, but delving further into original records available through the Maryland Archives, and with the help of many kind folks, we established the link with the William Parker for whom Parkers Creek is named.

The next step was to locate the various tracts that he was associated with. This brought us to the search for Parkers Creek. Imagine my delight when up popped an image on my computer of an undulating creek seemingly untouched by human hands. For someone used to finding out that a former family home is now an industrial park in Beltsville or a railroad right-of-way, this was nothing short of miraculous. Not only could we walk in the footsteps of our ancestors, we could also peer through their eyes at a landscape much the same as the one that they had seen.

Although I grew up in Maryland, we've been living in Hungary for quite some time and don't get back often. With this new discovery, a visit to Parkers Creek on our trip this year seemed like just the thing, especially for our kids, Riley and Kaidi, aged 10 and 13. Joyce Baki of the County Department of Economic Development put us in touch with Greg Bowen, who was very welcoming and intrigued by the historical connection. So on April 1 of this year we made a special trip to visit the ACLT. It was a great time of year to get a sense of the land, as we could view the creek and Bay through the just-budding trees. While brisk, the weather held out and we returned to the center with a much richer appreciation of the lives of the Parkers and Kents. It was certainly one of the highlights of our memorable trip.



It just goes to show that preserving land for future generations has unpredictable resonances and unforeseen benefits besides the value in its own right. We are so grateful to the ACLT not just for conserving the American chestnut and maintaining habitat but also for preserving the sense of timelessness and wonder that can breathe new life into stale histories. As nature takes back an environment that briefly provided sustenance and good fortune to our ancestors, it's fascinating to think that somewhere, perhaps under the Beaver Pond, there might be a trace of our distant forebears. Our only regret was coming too early for canoeing season, but we hope to come back this way another time!



Riley Stec looking across Parkers Creek, named for one of Riley's distant family connections.

About Wm Parker

William Parker was a mover and shaker, a sponsor of Puritan settlement first in Virginia in the 1630s and then in Maryland in the 1650s. Born about 1604, he probably belonged to the English Parker family of Great Bloxwich and St. Antholin's – known for being prominent Puritans, rich merchants, and generous benefactors. From his base at Stepney – now part of London's East End – William Parker's interests ranged far and wide. He owned shares in ships hired by the English Merchant Adventurers of Hamburg for their journeys the world over, including one called the *Richard and Martha*. The main focus of his enterprise, however, was the Chesapeake. It's possible he served a sort of apprenticeship there as early as the 1620s. Certainly by 1636 he had set up a trading enterprise in merchandise and tobacco near Virginia's Dumpling Island, in the Nansemond River.

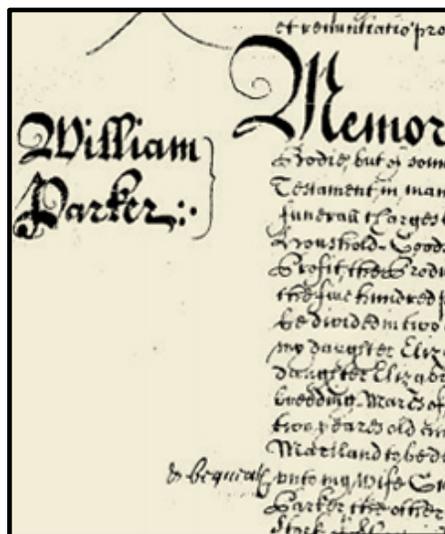
Thanks to the tobacco trade, the Nansemond Puritans prospered until 1649, when the English Civil War came to the Chesapeake. The Royalist Cavalier government in Virginia targeted the Puritans, limiting the practice of their faith and their ability to hold office. Lord Baltimore, desperate for settlers to build up his fledgling colony, invited the Puritans to take up unsettled lands in Maryland and guaranteed them religious freedom through the Act on Toleration. An

odd mix of Lord Baltimore's Catholic friends and anti-Catholic Puritans – William Parker among them – organized flotillas to bring the settlers and their families up the Bay.

Like most of the Puritan vanguard, Parker settled first along the Severn River, patenting 200 acres at what is today known as Ridout Creek. As a major sponsor of the migration, he received headrights for additional lands, including an 800-acre survey on the Patuxent Cliffs immediately adjacent to Richard Bennett's Upper Bennett plantation. For unknown reasons he swapped this survey on June 25, 1652 with Col. Thomas Burbage and Maj. John Billingsley for the rights to 600 acres of land, which he then seated further south along the Cliffs, naming his tract "Parkers Clifts." The creek that entered the Bay within the southern part of the grant became known as Parkers Creek. He probably set his indentured servants to clearing the land and cultivating tobacco and set up members of his family to oversee plantations. By this time the Parker community consisted of a variety of laborers, his several daughters by his unknown first wife, two stepchildren belonging to his second wife Grace (the widow of Francis Mauldin), and the two children they had together including his only son William Jr.

After the Battle of the Severn, when the Commonwealth's representatives, Richard Bennett and William Claiborne, briefly ousted Lord Baltimore from power, William Parker was named one of the ten Commissioners that governed the Province. He was also a member of the Commission that negotiated with the Indian emperor.

After peace was restored in the mid-1650s, William Parker focused on developing his plantations at the Cliffs, selling his Severn River home in 1660. He continued to ply his merchant's trade, while his only son William – known as William Parker "of the Clifts" – and son-in-law Henry Kent maintained the plantations. William eventually returned to England, dying at his home in Stepney in 1673. Grace, twice widowed, became married for a third time, to Edward Lloyd. She outlived her third husband and died near London in 1701.



Excerpt from William Parker's will, courtesy of the National Archives of the United Kingdom.

William Parker Jr. "of the Clifts" died childless soon after his father. The other early Parkers of Calvert County, including William "of Herring Creek" and the lawyer George Parker, seem to

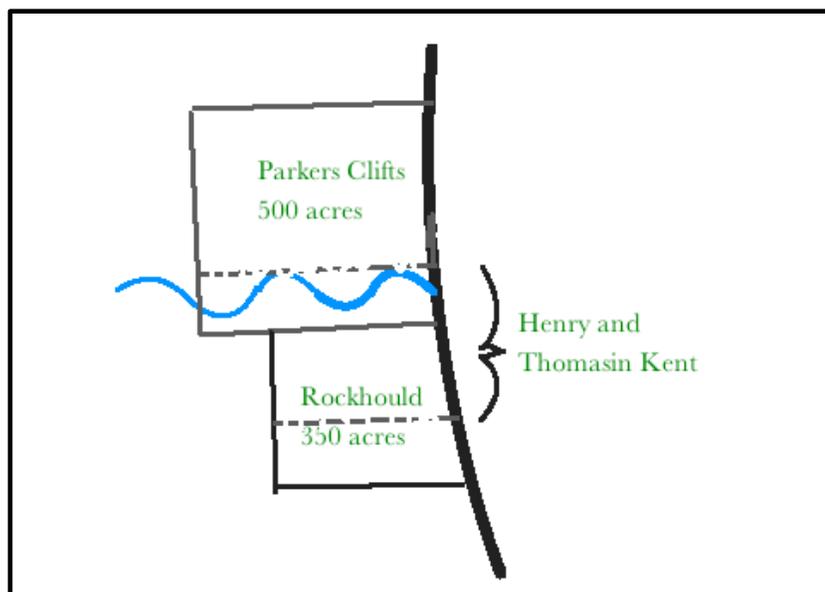
have been related in some way to William Sr. but are not direct descendants. William Parker's daughters married into several prominent Quaker families including the Halls, Edmondsons and Whittles. His descendants include William Paca, the signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Joseph Kent, who was a Congressman, Governor and U.S. Senator.

Incidentally, "Rockhould" – the tract to the south of "Parkers Clifts" – was granted to another member of the Puritan vanguard, Robert Rockhould, together with a partner. Rockhould was a gunsmith, whose skills were very important to the Puritan victory at the Battle of the Severn in 1654. He was third in command of the Puritan forces, but died shortly after the battle. Rockhould's minor sons remained in Anne Arundel County and their guardians probably rented out "Rockhould" until, around 1672, the Rockhoulds sold the tract in parts. Henry Kent, son-in-law of William Parker Sr., purchased 250 acres of the tract.

The Stec family connection to Parkers Creek

In 1649, Lord Baltimore invited Puritans persecuted in Virginia to come into Maryland. He rewarded the sponsors of the migration with land rights, among them William Parker Sr., described in the preceding section of this document. As early as 1652, Parker seated a 600-acre tract called "Parkers Clifts" on Parkers Creek and the land to the north along the Bay. William eventually returned to England, leaving his only son William "of the Clifts" and son-in-law Henry Kent "of the Clifts" in charge of his Maryland plantation.

William Sr. died at his home in Stepney (now in London's East End) in 1673, leaving all his lands in Maryland to his only son. William "of the Clifts" then sold the southernmost 100 acres of Parkers Clifts – those around the Creek – to Henry Kent. Henry Kent had married Thomasin, one of the five daughters of William Parker Sr. Through her father's will, Thomasin received £100 in Hamburg Company bonds. The Kents then purchased an adjoining 250 acres south of the Creek from the tract called "Rockhould." When William Jr. died childless, his sister and heir, Elizabeth Buckerfield, conveyed the northern 500 acres of "Parkers Clifts" to their stepbrother, Francis Mauldin (see illustration).



The Kents' 350 acres covering the Creek and the land to the south remained intact until after Thomasin's death in 1694, at which point it was divided into four parcels allocated to Henry Kent's four sons and their heirs: Absalom, John, Richard and the heirs of Henry Kent Jr. The creek itself came under Absalom's part, which he swapped with brother John, who then sold this section in 1708 to the Quaker Richard Johns, of the family of Johns Hopkins. The descendants of Henry Jr.'s three daughters, with names including Stallings, Games, Freeman, Ferguson, Rhodes and Howerton, continued to reside on the southern portions of Rockhould for some time longer.

Our branch moved gradually west – ancestor Absalom Kent moved to “Timberwell” (west of Huntingtown) after he married Mary Wadsworth, the only child of William Wadsworth. Absalom and Mary's daughter Priscilla married Thomas Willson of the neighboring “Newington” tract on Kings Landing Road by 1717. The Willsons first settled in Prince Georges County roughly where the New Carrollton Metro station is today, then moved further up the Potomac Valley.

Their son, Joseph Willson (ca 1719-1791), developed lands in today's western Montgomery County, then bought a plantation near Rockville in 1771. Joseph's daughter Mary (1750-1814) married Leonard Davis (1745-1808), whose forebears were from the South River in Anne Arundel County. Leonard Davis operated the tavern in the heart of Rockville where the first court for Montgomery County was held, but the business was unsuccessful. In 1786, Joseph Willson bailed out his son-in-law from his debts and sent him and his family to live on Willson's farm across the Potomac near what is now Shenandoah Junction WV. A few generations later, my great grandmother, Mary Anna Florence Davis, was born in that part of West Virginia.

The Parkers Creek Neighborhood in the Late 1600s

Afterword by Carl Fleischhauer

The ACLT is grateful to Stephen Stec for the account of his family's visit to Parkers Creek, reminding us of its value as a cultural as well as a natural resource. It has always been difficult to find information about Maryland's colonial period and every new insight--like Stec's summary of his primary source research--enriches our understanding.

Those of us who (mostly) rely upon secondary sources have long tried to sort out the identities and circumstances of the people and land near Parkers Creek in the colonial period. The residents include the English settlers about whom Stec writes, their indentured servants (also mentioned, presumably from the British Isles), as well as enslaved Africans, who first arrived in St. Mary's City in the 1640s. Meanwhile, we reckon that, by and large, Native Americans lived along the Patuxent to the west, as indicated by John Smith's 1612 map.

Calvert County secondary sources include Charles Stein's *A History of Calvert County* (1976) and articles in the *Calvert Historian*, a journal published by the Calvert County Historical Society. For this topic, the most relevant article is Ailene W. Hutchins's "Ancient Graveyard at Gary's Chance" (*Calvert Historian*, fall 1995).

Stein's book makes clear that, on the Bay side of Calvert, Parkers Creek was an important cultural dividing line. He cites several colonial-period references to properties on the *Upper Cliffs* north of the creek and others on the *Lower Cliffs* to the south. Stein also highlights the importance of Puritan settlers (like Parker) and Quakers (like members of the Hance, Harris, and Johns family, who lived in the vicinity at the time).

The colony of Maryland was established during a turbulent time in England, marked by the English Civil War, the Restoration of the monarchy, and the renewal of the established Church of England. This context helped motivate Puritans, Quakers, and others to migrate to North America. The Maryland colony took shape under the guidance of its Roman Catholic "proprietor," Cecil Calvert, the second Baron Baltimore (1605–1675), who supported increased religious toleration, at least for all faithful to the Christian Trinity.

Stein and Hutchins generally agree with Stec's findings pertaining to the 600-acre property named *Parker's Clifts* (or *Cliffs*). Stec reports that William Parker (1604-1673) exchanged another tract for this one in 1652. Stein describes the acquisition as a 1651 land grant, presumably from Cecil Calvert. In Stein's slightly ambiguous account, *Parker's Cliffs* is characterized as lying north of the creek. Stec's information indicates that about 500 acres of *Parker's Clifts* lay north of the creek with the remainder to the south. Both writers state that the property passed to Parker's son and segments were later sold to others.

Sorting out the facts for the colonial-period bayfront land south of the creek is more difficult. Both Stein and Stec highlight the transfer of land to the Kent family. Stec reports that 100 acres on and/or south of the creek, part of Parkers Clifts, were sold to Henry Kent, the first William Parker's son-in-law, adding that the Kents then purchased an adjoining 250 acres south of the Creek from the tract called Rockhold (sometimes Rockhold).

Stein's discussion of the Kent family is similar: "John Kent [Henry Kent's uncle], acquired part of Rockhold, a tract near Lower Bennett, part of Parker's Cliffs and Hawk's Nest, a tract of 173 acres adjoining Rockhold, patented by him in 1694. John Kent probably was a Quaker. The Kents of Rockhold belonged to the Quaker settlement on the Lower Cliffs for several generations."

So far so good: these accounts are reasonably well aligned. However, Stein's book and Ailene Hutchins's article present us with a genuine puzzle: what seems to be a competing colonial claim on the same land. Stein writes, "John Gary, one of the early Puritans, settled in Calvert County in 1651. His landed estate of 600 acres, called Gary's Chance, was situated on the Bay front, just below Parker's Creek. John Gary became a Quaker, and meetings were held regularly at his house until after his death." Hutchins adds that Gary (sometimes Garey) patented the land in 1666.

Following Stein's and Hutchins's leads, the ACLT has always associated Gary's Chance with the Warrior's Rest property (state-owned, managed by ACLT) and with the Hance-Chesley cemetery (on ACLT-owned land), both thought to stand on land formerly part of Gary's Chance. Does Stec's account indicate that this is incorrect? Yikes! We will all keep an eye out for more evidence.