

## Looking Back at Marlbank

Marlbank Cove lies in a fascinating historical area. The area had been long inhabited by native Chiskiack-Powhatan Native Americans before the arrival of English settlers following the establishment of Jamestown colony in 1607. Before Jamestown, Spanish explorers had sailed the Chesapeake Bay and its river tributaries in the early 1500s, and in 1570 Spanish Jesuit missionaries attempted to establish a mission on the York River. Although the location of this ill-fated effort is undetermined, one candidate site is on Queen's Creek on the grounds of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station.

The first English settlers of the area started a village in the early 1630s on the northernmost branch of what is now Wormley Creek, near a small fortification named York Fort by its founder, Captain Nicolas Martiau. Martiau was a refugee French Huguenot who came to the Virginia colony in 1620 (the same year the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts), and is George Washington's first known forebear in America. That original village and fort were on the grounds of what is now the Coast Guard's Yorktown Training Center. The creek was first named for Sir John Harvey, who was Governor of Virginia from 1628 to 1635 and who held a land grant in the area. Sir John was suspended and impeached by the Houses of Burgesses and returned to England. Although the King restored his post the following year, in the meantime Captain Christopher Worsley had come to York in 1635, having been ousted from his position as Governor of the Island of Tortuga when the Spanish captured the island in 1635. Wormley was appointed as Justice of the newly established "Charles River Shire" (changed to "York County" in 1642), and later to the Virginia Council. In 1638 he received a 1,420 acre land patent, which included the eastern side of Harvey Creek. The creek subsequently came to be called Worsley's Creek.

The current Marlbank Cove and Farms area was assembled into "Wormley Creek Plantation" in the mid-and late-1600s by the Carter family—Charles Carter (perhaps related to Robert "King" Carter of Carter's Grove in Williamsburg) and his descendants. It was assembled from three previous landowners, one of whom was Lawrence Smith who laid out the Town of York. In 1770 Carter sold the 800-acre plantation to David Jameson, who named it "Church Fields."

On October 19, 1781, some three miles away, at the Yorktown Battlefield the decisive victory in the Revolutionary War occurred, assuring American independence. The area that now contains Marlbank Cove and Marlbank Farms saw the foraging of George Washington's men as they searched for wood, game, and other foodstuffs during the siege. Washington was back on the grounds that his first American ancestor had walked some 150 years prior.

Upon his death in 1794, Jameson left his plantation to Richard Garrett. When Garrett died in 1802, he left tracts to this family members, one portion of which had been named "Marlbank," referring to the layer of marl (a conglomerate of mud, shells, and clay) that lies below the soil surface along the York River. Early settlers at Yorktown used marl as construction material, as can be seen today at Grace Church in Yorktown village, built in 1697.

In 1837 the Garrett family built the Marlbank Farm manor house, which still stands today. A portion of the land was later sold to Christopher Stedman who operated a mill there. The remains of Stedman's Mill dam can be found today at the lower end of the creek, which runs through the woods between Tides Run and Old Wormley Creek Drive. Before passing the land to Tom Clark of Delaware prior to the Civil War, the Garrett family had increased the plantation's size to 1,100 acres.

In the spring of 1862, the plantation, then known as "Clarks Farm," was the base for Union forces under General George McClellan, who were establishing another siege of Yorktown, this

time again Confederate forces protecting the Peninsula approaches to Richmond. Period maps of the siege show the manor house serving as a Union field hospital, and McClelland's headquarters standing to the east, near where McClellan Court now lies. Prior to occupying that site, McClellan had set up camp in lower York County. As he advanced toward Yorktown, he built a road, which came to be dubbed "McClellan's Road," originating near the current intersection of Waterview and Hornsbyville Roads (north of the T-intersection of Hornsbyville and Wolf Trap Roads), passed through what is now the Old Wormley Creek Road area, and over a "swamp-gully," possibly utilizing the remnants of the Stedman Mill dam, coming into the Marlbank Cove area near the current intersection of Tides Run and Lookout Point. Traces of the road can be seen in aerial photography taken in 1937, but by 1953 the trace is no longer visible from the air. When Marlbank Cove was developed, it was very common to find artifacts of the Civil War such as buttons, belt buckles, and so on. One home site near the McClellan's Road track has a large pit in its backyard believed to have been a field "refrigeration" site.

After the Civil War, the plantation reverted by default back to the Garrett family. It was sold to William Hughes in 1879, who sold 550 acres to L.R. O'Hara in 1945. O'Hara restored the manor house, named Marlbank Farm, and developed Marlbank Farms subdivision beginning in the late 1940s. The O'Haras or their descendants lived in the house until 1988. The manor house was sold and refurbished in 1988, and the newest homes in Marlbank Farms were built in its immediate vicinity. A few years before, the Marlbank Cove subdivision began in 1985 and it occupies part of the original plantation area and Stedman property.

### **Cove Trivia**

Q: Which street has the most residences?

A: Tides Run with 60 (next is Marlbank Drive with 50)

Q: Which street has the fewest residences?

A: Heron Court with 5 (next is Osprey Court with 7)

The main entrance "boulevard" is part of Tides Run—not a continuation of Battle Road off Highway 17

The "Cove Loop" consists of Tides Run and Marlbank Drive and is just shy of 1.5 miles—ideal for exercising and meeting the neighbors!