

STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL:  
THE NANTICOKE INDIANS  
IN A HOSTILE WORLD

by

George Brauer  
Department of Anthropology  
Rutgers University

ABSTRACT

Although scholars have long been aware of the presence of remnant Indian communities along the Atlantic seaboard of the United States, the tendency has been to erroneously assume that because many of these groups are the product of miscegenation, they also lack a sense of identity separate from those whose genes they have incorporated. This is clearly not the case. Ethnohistorical and field data indicate that despite economic and social integration into American society, one group, the Nanticokes, maintained community and individual identity.

The survival of Indian culture east of the Appalachian Mountains is notable for its rarity. In view of the extensive toll of the aboriginal population caused by disease, massacres, expulsion, and discrimination, the survival of any tribal unit in this grisly context is a remarkable achievement (Crosby 1972). These Indian survivals especially intrigue geographers who visualize them as small spatial islands amidst an alien White culture (Price 1953). Fried (1952) suggests that these residual groups survived because of a combination of land tenure, geography, and ecology. The key to their survival has been indeed the adoption of White land tenure systems and the protection of marginal environments, but the strategies for survival — as is illustrated by the specific case of the Nanticokes of Maryland and Delaware — are far more complex than has been recognized. Their travail of three centuries is a heroic epic of purposeful action, conscious choice, and wilful resistance to tribal destruction.

After their initial contact with western civilization, the Nanticoke Indians attempted to accommodate the continued presence of an intruding culture in several fashions. This paper attempts to discern and analyze the strategies whereby the Nanticokes were able to survive and maintain their Indian identity. Two of the major contentions are, 1. the Nanticokes purposely selected a marginal environment as their habitat to prevent the continued encroachment on their land by Whites and reduce the contact between the two cultures; and 2. perceived as mixed-bloods or mulattoes the Nanticokes experienced the same cultural and spatial segregation and treatment accorded to Blacks, which resulted in the formation of a distinct community.

The identification of the Nanticokes has been somewhat obscured by the generic application of the term to all tribes residing on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and by their presumed affiliation with the Delaware Indians. John Heckewelder, in his *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Tribes*, stated that the Nanticokes referred to themselves as *Nentego*, a variant of the Delaware *Unechtgo* or *Unalachtigo*, meaning Tidewater people. C. A. Weslager has clarified this confusion by demonstrating that the *Unalachtigo* were not the Nanticoke known to modern Delawares as the *Winetok*. Furthermore, the colonial authorities of Maryland readily distinguished as separate entities the Nanticokes, Choptanks, Assateagues and other tribes (Weslager 1942, 1944, and 1975). The Nanticoke proper occupied the territory bounding the drainage system of the Nanticoke River.

In their adaptation to the natural environment of the Eastern Shore, the Nanticokes had devised a pattern of human settlement dependent on seasonal migration to food resources. The subsistence strategy of the Nanticokes and other Algonkian tribes reflected an economic adjustment to differing ecological niches. Thomas, et al. (1975) and Griffith (1976), analyzing the Indians' environmental adaptation to Delaware's Coastal Plain, identify six micro-environments: 1. poorly drained woodlands, 2. transitional woodlands, 3. well-drained woodlands, 4. tidal marsh and estuarine, 5. permanent fresh water, and 6. salt water bays and oceans. After the associated flora and fauna used as a foodstuff and their seasonal fluctuations were determined, Griffith, employing archaeological data, postulated four possible types of settlement required to exploit these ecological niches: 1. seasonal camps, 2. permanent camps, 3. semi-permanent camps, and 4. transient camps. Early visitors to the environs of the Chesapeake Bay region noted this specific pattern of seasonal movement to food resources. Sir Richard Greenville, who visited Virginia from 1585 to 1586, observed that "the Savages disband into small groups and disperse to different places to live upon shell fish. Other places afford fishing and hunting while their fields are being prepared for the planting of corn" (Greenville 1965). Captain John Smith (Arber 1910) vividly described this seasonal subsistence strategy.

*The Nanticoke Indians in a Hostile World*

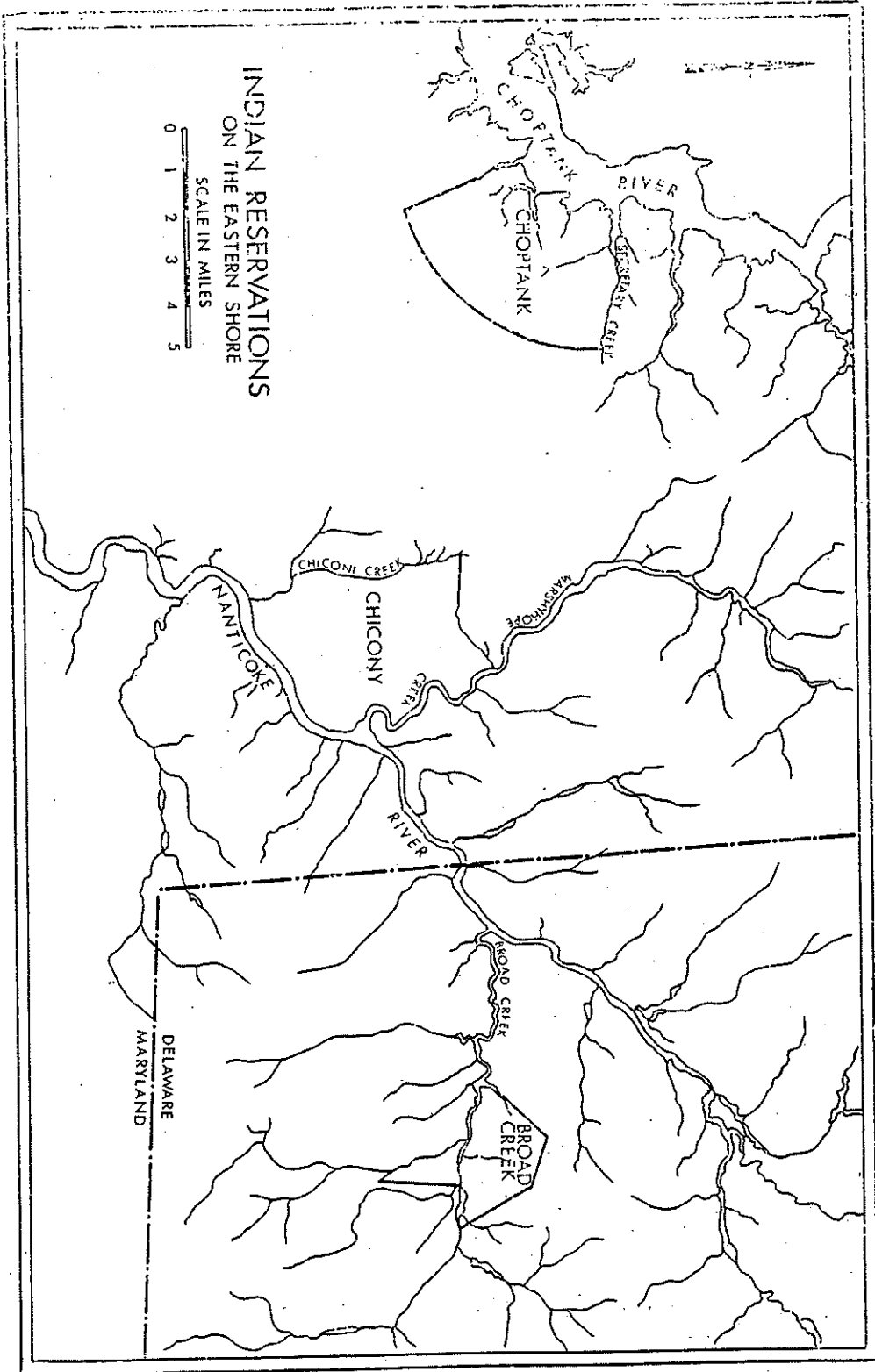
In March and April they live much upon their fishing, weares; and feed on fish, Turkeys and squirrels. In May and June they plant their fieldes; and live most of Acornes, walnuts, and fish. But to mend their diet, some disperse themselves in small companies, and live upon fish, beasts, crabs, oysters, land Torteyeses, strawberries, mulberries, and such like. In June, Julie, and August, they feed upon the roots of Tocknough, berries, fish and green wheat.

The continued success of the Nanticoke in their subsistence efforts depended entirely upon freedom of mobility and access to these micro-environments.

A major problem which confronted the Nanticoke after their contact with Europeans was encroachment on their land. The prolific slaughter of fur-bearing animals and the constant clearing of woodland for agriculture created a shortage of plant and animal food sources so vital to the seasonal subsistence strategy of the Nanticoke. As a result they became increasingly more dependent on European trade goods: food, clothing, utensils, and weapons. The colonial authorities of Maryland sought at an early date to protect the Indians by cautioning their inhabitants to respect the Indians' "Privileges" of hunting, fishing, and crabbing. Such admonitions went unheeded, and the early disturbance of the subsistence base of the Nanticoke can be evidenced by the numerous complaints registered against their killing and stealing domestic hogs and cattle. In 1666 an Indian named Mattagund appealed to Maryland officials to "Let us have no Quarrels for killing Hogs no more than for the Cows Eating the Indian corn. Your hogs & Cattle injure Us You come too near Us to live & Drive Us from place to place. We can fly no farther let us know where to live & how to be secured for the future from the Hogs & Cattle" (*Archives of Maryland* 1883:2:15). A half-century later similar complaints were still reaching the Maryland Assembly.

Exasperated by the loss of their land, and as a means of accommodating the permanent presence of the White settlers, the Choptank, and later the Nanticoke Indians, requested the Maryland authorities to provide them with tracts of land legally established by a grant from Lord Baltimore, the Proprietor of Maryland. The Maryland Assembly responded with the establishment of the Choptank, Chicone, and Broad Creek Reservations (see Figure 1). The provision of reservations, while serving to ease the difficulties arising from land encroachment, further undermined the seasonal subsistence strategy of the Nanticoke. Two critical problems emanated from permanent residence on the reservations: the disruption of the ecosystems of the Nanticoke's habitat and the misunderstanding associated with the clause, "so long as they shall occupy and live upon the same." In 1711, less than a decade after removing to the Chicone Reservation, the Nanticoke bitterly complained that their lands were worn out and insufficient for their use. They requested additional land, which was granted to them with the erection of Broad Creek Reservation. An equally grave crisis which continued to plague the Nanticoke was the "repeated and

Fig. 1



excessive trespass" on their reservation land by the White settlers. Once again the Maryland Assembly sought to stave off these offenses by assuring the Nanticoke of their "free and uninterrupted possession of the tract lying between the North Fork of the Nanticoke River and Chicucone Creek . . . so long as they or any of them should think fit to use and not totally desert and quit the same." As a final precaution, the Nanticoke were prevented from the right to sell or lease their land (*Laws of Maryland* 1765; Kilty 1808; Hutchinson 1961).

Despite these protective measures, the abuse and disregard of the Nanticoke's right to occupy the reservations continued. In some instances diverse "Trespassers and Wasters" destroyed Indian land "by falling, mauling, and carrying away the Timber off from such land, and refus/ing/ to pay and satisfy the said Indians for the same" (*Laws of Maryland* 1765). In complete violation of the laws passed by the Maryland Assembly, some people rented and settled on Indian land, and then failed to pay the agreed-upon rent. While certain individuals clandestinely purchased the land from the Indians and built farmsteads, others simply were squatters on the land and assumed ownership by right of occupancy. In 1759 a delegation of the remnants of several tribes assigned to reservations on the Eastern Shore informed Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland that they were severely reduced in number, suffering from a shortage of food, and being violently forced from their land. The Indians appealed to Sharpe to consider their "Pitiful Scituation and Condition" (*Archives of Maryland* 1883:31:356). "There is but a Spot laid out for us not enough for Bread for us Indians," they complained, "and hard is our Condition if we cannot have the freedom and Privilege which we were allowed of in Antient Times." Although they tried to reside within the confines of the reservations, the Indians were thwarted in their efforts by land-hungry Whites. While venturing forth into the woods to hunt and build cabins for shelter, the Indians recounted, "some of the White People when we go out of them will set them on fire and burn them down to the ground and leave us Destitute of any Cover to Shelter us from the weather" (*Archives of Maryland* 1883:31:356). The argument repeatedly advanced by the Europeans to justify their actions was that the Indian land appeared to be deserted and abandoned. The terms of the reservation grants stipulated that the land reverted to Maryland as soon as the Indians ceased to occupy it. In actuality, the Nanticoke had not abandoned the land but were merely following their traditional subsistence strategy of seasonal migration.

Beginning in the early 1740s several groups of Nanticoke abandoned their homes on the Eastern Shore and emigrated to Pennsylvania. An attempt by the French to unite the various tribes in Maryland and Pennsylvania in an uprising against the English settlers prompted the Nanticoke to move. In 1742, after a century of abuse, hostility, and misunderstanding, the Nanticoke

agreed to participate in this revolt. The Indians of the Eastern Shore congregated in a swamp called Winnasocum along the Pocomoke River to join in a war dance. Fortunately for the Maryland settlers, a Choptank Indian informed the authorities of the pending uprising, and the plot came to an abrupt end. The Maryland Assembly severely reprimanded the Nanticokes for their part in the conspiracy and warned them that "We have it in our Power to take all your Lands from you, and use you as your ill Designs against Us have deserved . . . but We are rather desirous to use you kindly like Brethren in hopes that it will beget the same kindness in You to Us." Unmoved by this empty overture of friendship, a delegation of Nanticoke Indians appeared in 1744 before the Maryland authorities and requested permission to leave the province and live among the Six Nations of Iroquois (*Archives of Maryland* 1883:28:257-270, 338-339; Weslager 1948). By 1748 a majority of the Nanticokes had removed to the Juniata River and Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania, while another group established a village at Chenango near present day Binghamton, New York. Soon after constructing a village at Juniata, delegates from the Nanticokes and several other tribes complained to the Governor and Council of Pennsylvania that Whites "were Settling & design'd to Settle the Lands on the Branches of Juniata." The delegates insisted on their removal because this was the hunting ground of the Nanticokes and other Indians living along the Juniata. The Nanticokes shortly moved to Wyoming Valley only to be forced out in 1755 with the outbreak of hostilities during the French and Indian War. By 1765 they had temporarily resided at Oswego, Chugnut, and Chenango in New York. Later in the century the Nanticoke settled in Canada and came completely under the dominance of the Six Nations, becoming virtually "denationalized" by the Iroquois (Johnston 1964:xl, 52, 203n, 281, and 307; Speck 1927). Nanticoke efforts to accommodate the White settlers in Maryland had proven to be unsuccessful (Porter 1979).

Although a majority of the Nanticokes had emigrated from the Eastern Shore, a small remnant group (the exact number is not known) remained behind, adopting specific strategies to survive and maintain their Indian identity in the presence of the numerically superior Euro-Americans. A significant key to understanding the successful survival and persistence of the remnant Nanticokes that chose to remain on the Eastern Shore lies in an analysis of the family hunting territory system more typical of Algonkians further north. The family hunting group occupying such a territory was first defined by Speck (1915:290) as a "kinship group composed of folks united by blood or marriage, having the right to hunt, trap, and fish in a certain inherited district bounded by some rivers, lakes, or other natural landmarks." The family hunting territory was often known by certain local names identified with the family itself. These territories had not only ties of kinship, but a community of land and interest. The dispersal of small family hunting groups promoted "family isolation and a

certain degree of permanency of residence in a particular territory" (Speck and Eiseley 1939:279). Speck and Eiseley further argued that for the Algonkian hunting territory system to function, there should be a highly localized and constant fauna to be exploited. Such a situation would limit the number of suitable sites available. Although much of Speck's data were derived from Subarctic Algonkians, he contended that all of the linguistically related Atlantic Coast tribes maintained the same institution (Speck and Eiseley 1939:279-280). MacLeod (1922), utilizing primary sources in the form of land deeds, demonstrated "the positive existence of the hereditary Family Hunting Territory as the basis of social organization among the tribes of the Delaware River Valley." De Valinger (1940) hinted at the presence of the family hunting territory in Delaware when he argued that the Indians exercised authority within the bounds of their "kingdoms." Weslager, Editor of the *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Delaware* in which de Valinger's article appeared, suggested that these "kingdoms" were in fact family hunting territories. Weslager, re-interpreting de Valinger's data, extended the existence of the family hunting territory system southward into Kent and Sussex Counties (de Valinger 1941). Whether or not these hunting territories were prehistoric is another issue. Certainly they reflected a relatively stable adjustment during the early 18th century.

The post-contact disruption of the Nanticoke habitat along the Nanticoke River jeopardized the food resource base of a number of the family units; and made impossible the continuation of their traditional subsistence strategy. While some Nanticokes could depend upon the generalized reciprocity of those families still able to subsist within their habitat, such a situation would soon deplete the remaining resources. In all probability, it was those family units whose hunting territories were disturbed that initially chose to migrate to Pennsylvania. However, it can be demonstrated that several individual Nanticoke families remained on the Eastern Shore in 1749. Representatives of the Six Nations of Iroquois, speaking on behalf of their "Couzins," the Nanticokes, informed Pennsylvania authorities that Maryland was preventing further removal of the remaining Nanticokes: "You know that on some differences between the People of Maryland & them we sent for them & placed them at the Mouth of Juniata, where they now live; they came to Us while on our Journey & told us that there were three Settlements of their Tribe left in Maryland" (Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania vol. 5, 1851:401-402). In 1761 spokesmen of the Nanticokes and Conoy again requested permission to remove some of their brethren still remaining in the province of Maryland (Stevens and Kent 1943:158, 161). A similar complaint was voiced in 1776 (Roger 1948:5).

Although specific observations of the behavior of the Nanticokes during this critical period are lacking, several early references to Indians in Sussex

County, Delaware, and descriptions of comparable groups in Maryland and Virginia strongly suggest that these small family units did disperse to isolated and remote sites within or near their traditional habitats. The Reverend George Ross, who had been enjoined by the Methodist Church to preach to the Indians, complained bitterly of his task because "the Indians have their abodes a great way back in the Woods, so that we seldom see or converse with one another, unless it be when leaving their Winter Quarters they straggle up and down among the English plantations and villages to meet with a Chapman for their Burthen of Skins, or with a meal of Victuals" (Perry 1878:21-22). In 1715, John Fontaine, while traveling from Williamsburg to the German colony on the Rappahannock, encountered a remnant of the once powerful Virginia Indians (Maury 1853:264):

We see by the side of the road an Indian cabin built with posts put into the ground, the one by the other as close as they could stand, and about seven feet high, all of an equal length. It was built four-square, and a sort of roof upon it, covered with the bark of trees. They say it keeps out the rain very well. The Indian women were all naked, only a girdle they had tied around the waist, and about a yard of blanketing put between their legs, and fastened one end under the fore-part of the girdle, and the other behind. Their beds were mats made of bulrushes, upon which they lie, and have one blanket to cover them. All the household goods was a pot.

The Reverend David Humphreys observed that the number of Indians in Sussex County "did not exceed 120, who had a small Settlement on the utmost Border of the Parish, where it adjoins to Maryland; they were extremely barbarous and obstinately ignorant" (Humphreys 1730:159-168). Lewis Evans, who wrote a brief account of Pennsylvania in 1753, remarked: "The Remnants of some Nations in Subjection to the six Nations & which they have not quite extirpated wander here & There for the Sake of making ordinary wicker Baskets & Basons, within a few miles of the Town, but have no Land of Their own or fixt Habitations; What they get for their Work, they spend in Rum & their food They beg" (Evans 1753). In 1759, Andrew Burnaby's description of a remnant group of Pamunkey Indians illustrates the significant degree of acculturation experienced by these "isolated" family units (Burnaby 1775:40-41).

A little below this place stands the Pamunkey Indian town; where at present are the few remains of that large tribe; the rest having dwindled away through intemperance and disease. They live in little wigwams or cabins upon the river; and have a very fine tract of land of about 2,000 acres, which they are restrained from alienating by act of assembly. Their employment is chiefly hunting or fishing, for the neighboring gentry. They commonly dress like the Virginians, and I have sometimes mistaken them for the lower sort of that people.

A small number of Delaware Indians left Bucks County, Pennsylvania in 1775. Those who remained, did so because they were often unable to leave. For instance two Indians, Indian Billey and his wife Polly, being too old and



lacking children to care for them, were left behind. They were given a room in an old house on William Worthing's property near Mill Creek below Wycombe where they supported themselves in part by making baskets which they sold (Woodman 1917:673-674). They were typical of others. George H. Loskiel (1794), in his *History of the Mission of the United Brethren Among the Indians in North America*, stated that these "detached Indian families living among the white people on the banks of rivers, and on that account called River-Indians, are generally a loose set of people, like our gypsies. They make baskets, brooms, wooden spoons, dishes, &c. and sell them to the white people for victuals and clothes." In 1797, an anonymous author noted the vestiges of several Indian towns, and interviewed an old Indian who called himself Will Andrew. Andrew was a survivor of an unidentified tribe of Eastern Shore Indians (Anonymous 1948-49:136-137).

I once owned all this land about here. Come, said he; I will shew you where my father lived: I walked with him about two hundred paces to an eminence about three hundred yards from a creek, where I saw a large quantity of shells. Here said he, stamping with his foot, is the very spot where my father lived.

Significantly, these observations indicate not only that small, dispersed groups of Indians had remained on the Eastern Shore, but that they had adopted many of the outward accoutrements of the White society. Furthermore, they were quite accustomed to fishing, trapping, and hunting for their White neighbors, as well as manufacturing various domestic utensils to be sold. Material culture change may help to explain the paucity of observations about Indians on the Eastern Shore during the 19th century.

Once the natural resources upon which the remnant Nanticokes depended became scarce their only alternatives were either to emigrate to Pennsylvania and New York to join their relatives who had left earlier or to enter White society as landowners and farmers. In all likelihood emigration no longer loomed as an attractive or viable solution to the intrusion of Whites. The earlier difficulties which had confronted the Nanticokes as they moved from village to village throughout Pennsylvania, New York, and into Canada were known to their relatives who had remained in Maryland and Delaware. Migration into new areas had shown that there was no guarantee of security on reservations.

Initially, these remnant Indians chose to reside in remote, isolated places — usually swamps, islands, or out-of-the-way necks of land. Marye (1944:456) has demonstrated that such locations were quite similar to the sites chosen for quackeson houses, structures which contained the bones of the dead Nanticokes. Gilbert (1946, 1949), in his study of surviving Indian groups in the eastern United States, argues that these small local groups appear to have survived in rather forboding environments. After years of exposure to harsh Euro-American treatment, it makes sense that these remnant Indian groups

would have chosen sites which would afford them minimal contact with the outside world.

These settlement sites would have been perceived by contemporary European standards as marginal (unfit for large-scale commercial agriculture and lacking satisfactory transportation links with tidewater ports). Mid-18th century descriptions indicate that such areas were unmapped and were "thought to be of little value" (Anonymous 1948-49:135). In 1753, Lewis Evans described the shores of Delaware Bay as "low, flat Marshes, void of Trees & lie mostly unimproved." Evans went on to describe much of the Eastern Shore as undesirable for habitation. Although he clearly exaggerates the question of actual occupation of the land, Evans points out several of the problems which plagued those European families who attempted to establish residences there (Evans 1753:161-162).

All the creeks on Delaware, the Verges of the Sounds, which extend along the Sea-coast, and some Creeks in Virginia, and towards the Head of Chesopeak on the West side are bordered with Salt Marshes, some a Mile or two wide. The first Settlers of America, for the Sake of the Grass for the Winter Support of their Cattle, fixing their Habitations along these Places, were infested with Muskitoes and Intermitting Fevers, gave the Foundation for supposing America unhealthy . . . /and/ were it not for the Scarcity of Fresh Water in some Parts of the Eastern Shore, would be as pleasant a Country as Imagination could well represent.

The geographic position and physical environment of Kent and Sussex Counties were not attractive to the Swedes who made their first permanent settlement at Wilmington in 1638, nor to the Dutch who later obtained control of the Delaware Valley because the character of the terrain was low, flat, and in many places very marshy. Furbearing animals were not numerous, beavers being rare. In sum, the land served no strategic purpose (Weslager 1941:17). Those White settlers who did occupy the land exhibited a widely dispersed settlement pattern. John Oldmixon stated that "Sussex is not full of Townships, but like Kent, is inhabited by Planters, scattered up and down, as they thought best for their Convenience. The Inhabitants here live scattering generally at ½ a Mile or Miles distance from one another except in Lewes where 58 Families are settled together" (Hancock 1962:115-151). And yet this area contained a sufficiency of resources to meet the needs of the Nanticokes.

Between 1800 and 1830 the Nanticoke land tenure system underwent a period of gradual change. Unlike those western tribes who were confronted with the rapid changes stemming from the allotment system, the Nanticokes, by attempting to maintain their family units in their traditional habitats, were permitted as individuals to make free choices and slow adjustments to American society. In making this transition the Nanticokes initially were squatters who exercised their traditional means of exploiting the land for foodstuffs, but this ability diminished as the number of White settlers increased and as more land was cleared for agricultural use.

One of the first steps on the part of the Nanticokes in their move towards participating in the European form of land tenure was to become tenants on the land. In such a situation, William MacLeod contends, these remnant Indian groups scattered throughout the Eastern seaboard, ultimately becoming "mixed-blood" populations. "Many of them have absorbed considerable negro blood," he argued, because "Freed negroes found a haven of rest in these little islands, intermarried, and thus acquired land. Having been trained to labour, and in European agricultural methods, these ex-slaves and their mixed descendants made for intemperance and industry on the Indian reservations" (MacLeod 1928:391-392). William Byrd of Virginia, while describing such a mulatto family, depicts a similar but harsher situation. "We found time in the Evening to walk near half a Mile into the Woods," he stated, "There we came upon a Family of Mulattoes, that call'd themselves free, tho' by the Shyness of the Master of the House, who took care to keep least in Sight, their Freedom seemed a little Doubtful." Their "righteous Neighbors" failed to disclose their presence because they settled such fugitives on "some out-of-the-way corner of their Land, to raise Stocks for a mean and inconsiderable Share." Aware of their precarious situation the mulattoes were compelled to submit to any terms (Bassett 1901:47). Unfortunately too many scholars have accepted without question that the Nanticokes became a tri-racial isolate (a presumed admixture of Indian-White-Black genes), and have advanced unwarranted arguments to explain how they became a functioning segment of White society. Whether or not the Nanticokes are a tri-racial isolate is less important than the issue of how they came to form a coherent community, thus preserving their identity.

Through the institution of private property obtained through the acquisition of legal title to land, the Nanticokes established and preserved themselves as a community. This property afforded the Nanticokes a base upon which the community would in time develop. In order to reconstruct the evolving system of land tenure in which the survivors of the Nanticoke tribe participated, the researcher is totally dependent on the data contained in the early land records, wills, inventories of estates, and real and personal tax lists. Several factors account for the paucity of evidence concerning the land tenure system of the Nanticokes. First, these sources contain gaps. Second, during the 19th century no precise criteria existed for determining the racial status of the Nanticokes. The records fail to indicate a designation for Indian. Instead, local tax assessors, census takers, and other public officials classified the Nanticokes as being either mulattoes or "colored" people. Third, many land transactions were oral agreements that were never recorded; and presumably, most of the Nanticokes at this date were illiterate, which explains the absence of private papers. Fortunately, in the specific case of the Nanticokes, two men, Levin Sockum and Isaac Harman, were significant in the establishment of a new land base. The records of the acquisition of land by these men is relatively complete, but

more important is the fact that Harman and Sockum were the first Nanticokes to become landowners and through their estates they endowed parcels of land to their heirs, thus increasing through time the number of landholders. In addition to the land records, the wills and inventories provide information on how the material wealth of these families was gradually accumulated.

Significantly, Isaac Harman and Levin Sockum were related by marriage. Harman's wife, Sarah, was the daughter of Levin and Eunice Sockum. Isaac and Sarah had eight children who reached adulthood, and who inherited the Harman estate accumulated by their parents during the 19th century. According to informant testimony, as a young man, Isaac earned his initial capital by going to sea in a sailing vessel. Isaac's brother, Charles Ephraim, was a boatman in Philadelphia and may have been instrumental in this decision. Isaac purchased his first land, a seventy acre tract, for \$250 in 1848. "He seemed to have an obsession for owning property," states one member of the community, "it is told that he would drive his buggy to Georgetown /Delaware/ barefooted in order to record the purchase of another parcel of land" (Pinkett n.d.:3). Harman rapidly accumulated land and increased the assessment value of his real and personal property (see Figure 2). In comparing the Assessment

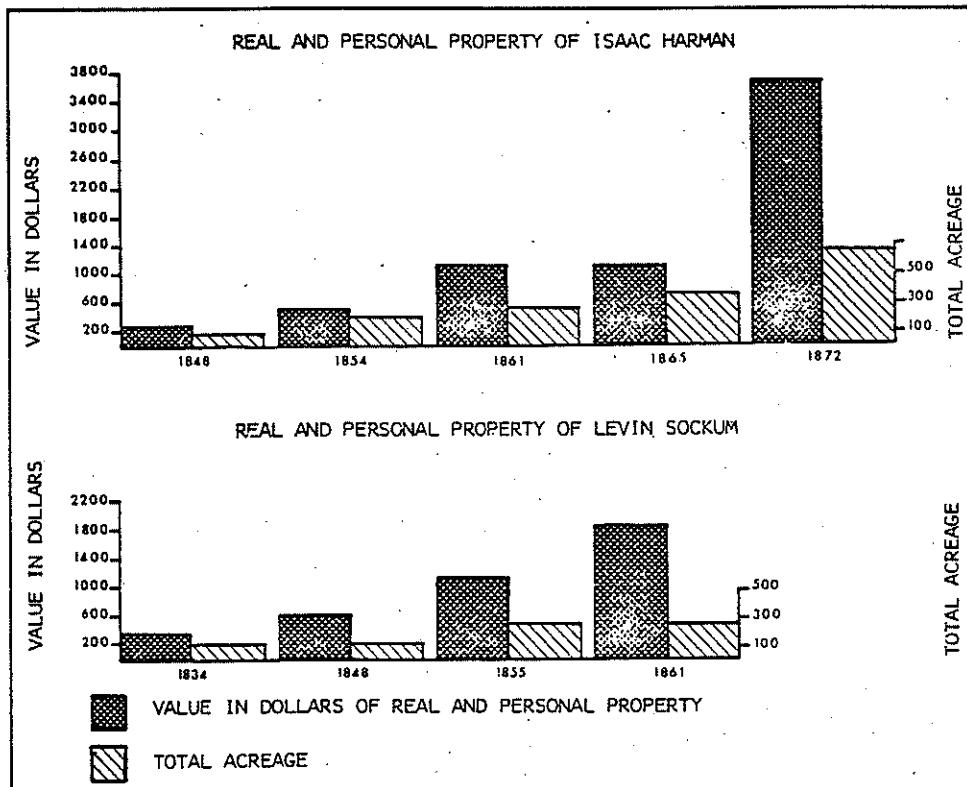


Fig. 2

Lists of 1861 and 1872, it is evident that Harman's personal property was increasing along with his real estate. The 1861 assessment indicates that in addition to holding 147 acres of land, Harman possessed an "old" horse, one pair of oxen, one cow, and five shoats. In the 1872 assessment, Harman had increased his landholdings to 357 acres, and owned a "mansion," one pair of mules, one yoke of oxen, two cows, one yearling, nine sheep, one sow and shoats.<sup>2</sup> By 1872 Harman had become one of the largest landowners in the area. His estate included most of the land bordering on the northeast side of Indian River from Rosedale Beach to Riverdale: his estate extended over approximately the same region as does the Nanticoke community today.

Levin Sockum followed a similar pattern in the acquisition of land. In 1834 he had been assessed \$307 for his personal property. By 1854 Sockum's real and personal property assessment had increased to \$1174, placing him among the wealthiest men in Indian River Hundred. In addition to his real estate, Sockum owned and operated a general store at the head of Long Neck on the north shore of Indian River. The 1861 Assessment List credited Sockum as owning 244 acres of land, and possessing two horses, one blind horse, one pair of oxen, four cows, seven yearlings, two sows, and six shoats.<sup>3</sup> Sockum, like his son-in-law Harman, experienced a steady increase in his real and personal property (see Figure 2). Sockum's material wealth surely would have continued to increase, but shortly after 1861 — because of his involvement in two court cases which questioned his racial status — he migrated to Gloucester, New Jersey.

Beginning in the early 1830s, through the gradual purchase and accumulation of a significant amount of land and personal property, the Nanticokes began to develop a community at Indian River. According to Beer's *Atlas of Delaware* (1867), in 1867 only two Nanticokes were landowners in Indian River Hundred: Ephraim and Isaac Harman (see Figure 3). However, the Assessment Lists indicate that a substantial number of Nanticoke families, many of whom were related to both Levin Sockum and Isaac Harman, were in fact tenants and were amassing an impressive amount of personal property, most of which pointed towards agricultural activity. In time these families either inherited property or purchased land. The majority of these families resided in and later owned property within the confines of the current Nanticoke community (see Figure 4).

Despite their material success, a prejudicial attitude emerged towards the Indian River community based on their skin color and physiognomy. This external pressure further strengthened the social bonds of the community. Nevertheless, during the 19th century, and perhaps earlier, some of the Nanticokes intermarried with individuals outside of their tribe and community. Consequently, the Nanticokes were labeled "colored persons" and/or mixed-bloods. Accorded the same treatment as Blacks, they were segregated socially and spatially from White society. Physical, cultural, and spatial separation

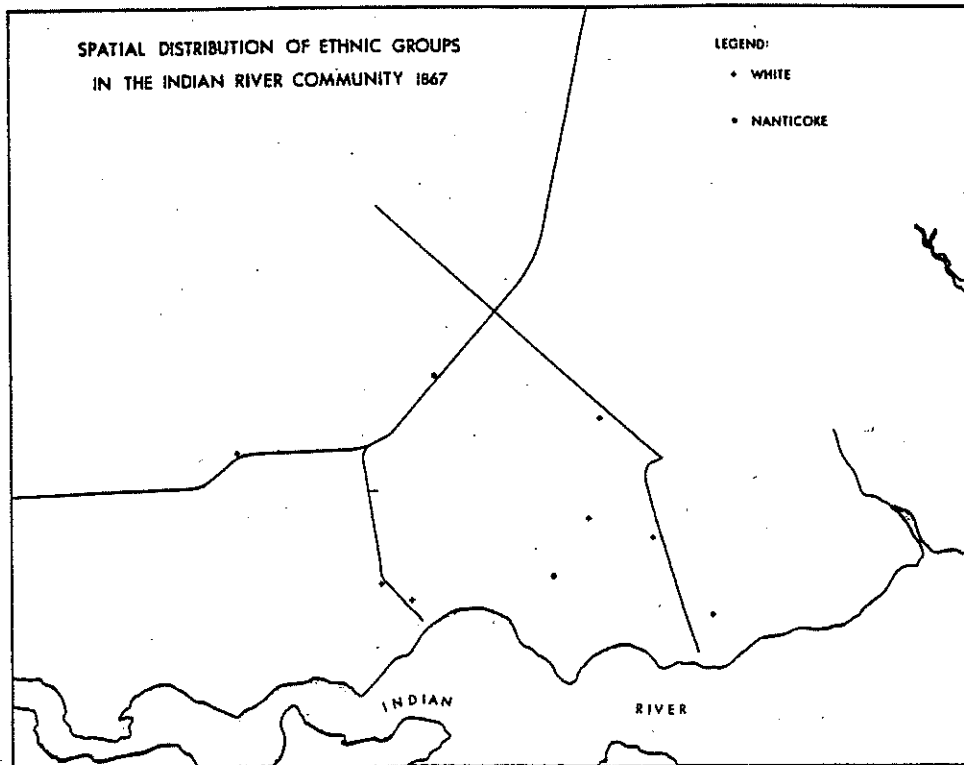


Fig. 3

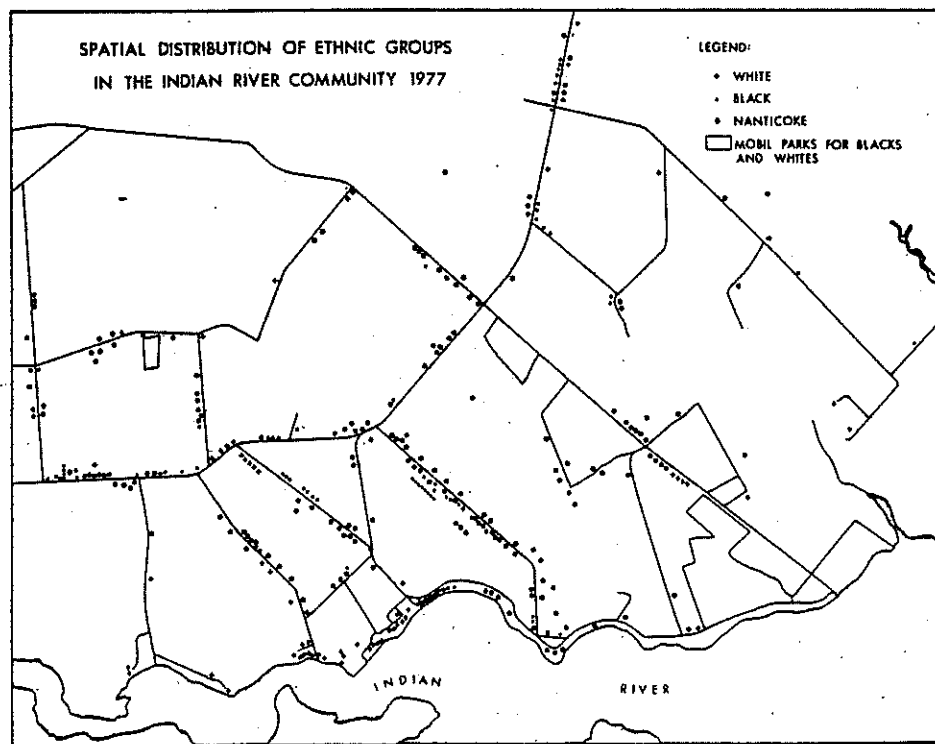


Fig. 4

from the broader White society during the 19th century allowed the Nanticoke to acculturate gradually by selectively integrating specific new traits, material and non-material, into their changing sociocultural system.

In periods of relative social stability attitudes towards race and physical traits are often well-defined, whereas during times of change these factors become significantly more visible and assume a position of greater importance in individual perception and behavior. An important issue involves the terms by which Whites and non-Whites elect to reside within the same habitat.

Prior to 1830 no overt signs of racial prejudice or hostility towards the remnant Indians in Delaware were evident. In 1831, however, Nat Turner led a slave revolt in Virginia. Throughout the South, Whites feared that such incidents would lead to a violent confrontation with the non-White population; and so many of the states invoked an unprecedented system of slave control by revamping the slave code, enacting repressive legislation to regulate the free Black and slave population, and revitalizing the patrol. The reaction in Delaware to the Nat Turner insurrection clearly conveys the phobia associated with potential slave revolts. Shortly after the slave revolt in Southampton County, Virginia led by Turner, Whites became extremely suspicious of the Blacks. "Rumor made herself exceedingly busy in spreading false alarms throughout the land, of plots and conspiracies, forming and in progress, and soon to break out against the white population," stated the Editor of *The Delaware Register and Farmer's Magazine*, "While the public mind was in this feverish state of excitement, some mischievous persons, in cruel sport, laid a plan to bring it to its utmost height." A general election was scheduled for October 1831, the same day on which it had been previously reported the Blacks were to rise. A group of men assembled on the banks of the Nanticoke River, within sight of the town of Seaford and divided into two parties. One contingent appeared to be firing on the others, some of whom fell, pretending to be shot. Others ran into Seaford and reported that the Blacks had landed, had killed several Whites, and were preparing to march through the country for purposes of destruction. "Consternation for the moment seized upon all," exclaimed the Editor. "The fearful ran and hid themselves in the woods, while the stout hearted flew to arms" (Huffington 1838:318-319). A messenger was sent to Kent County who arrived at the nearest election ground just as they were tallying the votes. He shouted to the assembled crowd that 1500 Blacks had landed on the Nanticoke River from Maryland and were marching up the country. Panic and confusion completely disrupted the election, and one of the clerks in his fright ran off with the ballot box, and was not found until the alarm had partially subsided the following day. Within hours it was discovered that all the reports were totally without foundation; and yet the people throughout Kent and Sussex Counties remained suspicious. When the legislature met the next January, a bill was introduced into the House of Representatives to disarm the free Blacks and

mulattoes; to prevent their holding religious or other meetings unless under the direction of "respectable" White people; and to forbid non-resident free Blacks to preach or attempt to preach, or hold meetings for such purpose. Although the bill was not enacted, such uncontrolled fear resulted in stringent efforts to keep the Blacks "apart as a separate and distinct class of beings" (Huffington 1838:319).

Much of the racial prejudice directed at the Nanticokes stemmed from their skin color. The contemporary literature — diaries, travel accounts, journals, and published histories — continually refer to the dark complexion of the Indians (Jordan 1968). Robert Beverley (1947:159) in 1705, in his history of Virginia, stated: "Their Colour, when they are grown up, is a Chestnut brown and tawny. Their skin comes afterwards to harden and grow blacker." Loskiel (1794:12) described their skin as a "reddish color, nearly resembling copper, but in different shades." Some are of a brown yellow, not much differing from the mulattoes. Henry Ridgely of Delaware witnessed President Andrew Jackson's interview with Black Hawk and his Indian delegation. Ridgely expressed his disappointment because Black Hawk was "small, unimpressive except for a fine forehead, and reminded him of some elderly Negro" (de Valinger and Shaw 1951:290). In 1840 Samuel J. Levick, a Quaker from Philadelphia, asked a chief of the Onondago tribe whose people were being forced to emigrate from New York, whether he preferred to come under the control of the British government or the United States. The chief replied: "Americans treat Indians so bad. They hate Indians. White men think they got better color than Indians, so they want Indians away" (Levick 1896:388).

In Sussex County the remnant Nanticokes were considered by the Whites as a "class of colored people commonly called yellow men, and by many believed to be descendants of the Indians, which formerly inhabited this country. Others regard them as mulattoes, and still others claim that they are of Moorish descent" (Scharf 1888:1270-1271). Among the White population there clearly existed considerable confusion about the origin and identity of the Nanticokes. One of the first episodes to draw attention to their status at Indian River materialized in 1855 when Levin Sockum, the successful landholder, was accused of violating a Delaware law which prohibited the sale or loan of firearms to a Black or mulatto when he sold a quarter-pound of powder and shot to Isaac Harman who as it will be recalled had been stereotyped as a mulatto. Because Sockum had admitted to selling the powder and shot to Harman, George P. Fisher, the prosecuting attorney, had to demonstrate that Harman was indeed a mulatto. It is significant to note that none of the court's witnesses were able to establish the ancestry of Harman. Fisher finally placed Lydia Clark, a blood relative of Harman, on the witness stand. Clark testified that before the American Revolution an Irish lady named Regua (a corruption of the name Ridgeway) purchased and later married a "very tall, shapely and muscu-



lar young fellow of dark ginger-bread color." The offspring of this union intermarried with the remnant of the Nanticoke tribe. This testimony established to the satisfaction of the court that Harman was a mulatto. Not only was Sockum found guilty and fined twenty dollars, he was brought into court on a second charge — possession of a gun. The court accepted testimony that Sockum was also a mulatto and fined him an additional twenty dollars (Fisher 1929). This despite the fact that Fisher described Harman as a "young man, apparently about five and twenty years of age, of perfect Caucasian features, dark chestnut brown hair, rosy cheeks and hazel eyes." Furthermore, Fisher observed, "of all the men concerned in the trial he was the most perfect type of the pure Caucasian, and by odds the handsomest man in the court room, and yet he was alleged to be mulatto." It would appear, as Fisher himself later admitted, that "Sockum's case originated in the private spite of envious Caucasian neighbors" (Fisher 1929; Weslager 1943:31-37).

The verdicts rendered in the Harman and Sockum trials cemented the racial status and classification of the Nanticokes. In time the White population came to regard the Indians in the same manner as the Blacks in the Deep South, subjecting them to segregation in schooling, religious practices, residence, and social intercourse. Delaware history is replete with literature which focuses on the controversy over the origins of those individuals claiming Indian ancestry. At the state level, the presence of the Nanticoke has been reflected in the controversy over educational facilities for "colored" people (which included Blacks, Indians, mulattoes, and Moors) and Whites. Within the Indian River community this resulted in the construction of separate school facilities for Blacks, Indians, and Whites. In 1875 the Legislature of Delaware enacted a law entitled "An Act to Tax Colored Persons for the Support of Their Schools." This legislation stipulated that an assessment of thirty cents on every one hundred dollars of property be levied on all Blacks for the erection and maintenance of separate schools. Unwittingly, the legislators classified the Nanticokes as Blacks, thus legally requiring their children to attend school with Blacks. The Nanticokes resisted, organized, and hired a lawyer to exert pressure on local politicians to exempt them from this tax with the condition that they erect and maintain their own school. In 1881, the State legislature acquiesced and authorized them to construct and support two schools of their own, Harmon School and Hollyville School. Johnson School was to be attended by Blacks. However, when Blacks began to attend the Harmon School, despite assurances against such an event contained in the recent legislation, the Nanticoke withdrew their children and built, at their own expense, a one-room frame school which became known as the Indian Mission School (Weslager 1943:112-127; Porter 1977:2-3).

At the community level, this conflict between Indians and Blacks was also expressed in their attendance of different churches. The Indians had

attended their own church until this building was destroyed by fire in 1867. A new church was built and a White pastor was engaged, but the congregation objected to him, and requested a pastor of their own "color." When a new minister was hired part of the congregation withdrew, claiming that the man was a Black. In 1888, the dissentors began holding services in private homes, and soon after constructed a new church. Today, this church is known as the Indian Mission Methodist Protestant Church, whereas the church from which the dissentors withdrew became known as the Harmony African Methodist Episcopal Church. Both churches are still active within the community and continue to reflect the division between Indian and Black (Weslager 1943:124-127; Porter 1977:2-3).

During the 19th century the question of the identity of the Nanticokes was brought to the fore on several occasions, forcing the Indian River community to define itself officially or lose its separate status forever. The Nanticoke's struggle for ethnic identity, in spite of repeated legal and other attempts to classify them as Blacks, became more intense after the mid-19th century. Their struggle for recognition as a separate Indian group can be contrasted to their almost complete economic integration into the prevailing rural community of the period. The formation of the Indian River community was influenced by a complex set of internal and external forces. The internal forces were, in part, residual culture traits from an earlier aboriginal period. Specifically, the strong desire to remain in their traditional habitat and maintain close kinship ties served to keep the remnant Indian population socially and spatially intact. Fortuitous external pressures re-enforced this social cohesion. Primarily, the subjection of the Nanticokes to the social status and classification of "Negro" or "colored people" strengthened and further hastened the development of the Indian River community due to the residential separation enforced by the White population, and the creation of separate social institutions — particularly the church and school. The basic social institutions which were created during the middle decades of the 19th century have persisted, with the exception of the separate educational system, to the present (Porter 1978, 1980).

*The Nanticoke Indians in a Hostile World*

2. "List of Names of the Taxables and Assessments of the Real and Personal Property in Sussex County, 1861;" "Assessment of the Real and Personal Property of Indian River Hundred, 1872." Hall of Records, Dover, Delaware.
3. "A List Containing the Names and Rates of the Several Hundreds of Sussex County for the Year 1834 for the Auditor of Accounts;" "Abstract of the Return of the Assessors of Sussex County, 1854;" "List of Names of the Taxables and Assessments of the Real and Personal Property in Sussex County, 1861;" and "Assessment of the Real and Personal Property of Indian River Hundred, 1861." Hall of Records, Dover, Delaware.

REFERENCES

Anonymous

1948-49 Descriptions of the Cypress Swamps in Delaware and Maryland States. *Delaware History* 3:11-20.

Arber, Edward, Ed.

1910 *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith*. Edinburgh: John Grant.

*Archives of Maryland*

1883- Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society.

Bassett, J. S., Ed.

1901 *The Writings of Colonel William Byrd of Westover in Virginia, Esqr.* New York: Doubleday, Page & Co.

Beers, D. G.

1868 *Atlas of the State of Delaware*. Philadelphia: Pomeroy & Beers.

Beverley, Robert

1947 *The History and Present State of Virginia*. (Edited with an Introduction by Louis B. Wright.) Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Burnaby, A.

1775 *Travels Through the Middle Settlements in North-America*. London.

Crosby, A.

1972 *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. Westport: Greenwood Pub. Co.

de Valinger, L.

1940 Indian Land Sales in Delaware. *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Delaware* 3:29-32.

1941 *Indian Land Sales in Delaware with Addendum A Discussion of the Family Hunting Territory Question in Delaware*. Wilmington: The Archaeological Society of Delaware.

de Valinger, L., and V. E. Shaw

1951 *A Calendar of Ridgely Family Letters 1742-1899 in the Delaware State Archives*. Dover: Hall of Records.

Evans, L.

1753 *A Brief Description of the Province of Pennsylvania, 1753*. In Lewis Evans (by L. H. Gipson). Philadelphia, 1939.

Fisher, G. P.

1929 *The So-Called Moors of Delaware*. Dover: Archives Commission of Delaware.

Fried, M. H.

1952 Land Tenure, Geography and Ecology in the Contact of Cultures. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 11:391-412.

Gilbert, W. H.

1946 Memorandum Concerning the Characteristics of the Larger Mixed-Blood Racial Islands of the Eastern United States. *Social Forces* 24:438-447.

1949 Surviving Indian Groups of the Eastern United States. *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1948*. Washington: Government Printing Office, pp. 407-438.