

## **Section 5: Key Themes and Interpretive Structure**

### **Telling the Southern Maryland Story**

The Southern Maryland Heritage Area Steering Committee hosted a series of public workshops in November and December of 2001 in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties. At each workshop, community organizations and county residents were invited to participate in discussions of what key heritage themes best told the "story" of Southern Maryland. Participants were divided into work groups to brainstorm ideas, and responded with dozens of major and minor storylines. The majority agreed that nature or eco-tourism, colonial settlement, agriculture/tobacco, war and conflict, maritime history, religion, native American and African American history are the predominant elements of the region's identity and that all three counties have an abundance of significant resources to support these as key heritage themes for the region.

These resources reflect Maryland's beginnings, from 17th-century European settlement and the earliest footholds of religious freedom, to the booming prosperity of 18th- and 19th-century tobacco plantations and the unique culture of the Bay's watermen and boat builders. Visitors to this region can trace Maryland's beginnings through these resources, as well as the prehistoric culture of the Chesapeake Bay region.

While many of the Southern Maryland Heritage Area key themes have formed the backbone of the region's heritage tourism development programs in the past, some of these themes, notably nature tourism and African American history, offer opportunities for new initiatives to support growth in heritage tourism. Each theme represents an important component of the region's history and development and serves as a basis for formulating the wide range of projects and actions to be taken to promote heritage tourism in the region that are identified in later sections of this plan. A brief discussion of each of the key themes that will be used to tell the Southern Maryland story follows.

- **Colonial Settlement: Maryland's Beginnings**

The Southern Maryland Region, and in particular St. Mary's County, holds the distinction of being the point of the first European contact and settlement in Maryland. The Ark's and the Dove's landing at St. Clement Island marks Maryland's beginnings. This very significant event had an impact on the Native American culture and population as settlement expanded. Settlement of Maryland under Lord Baltimore was based on religious tolerance, and the subsequent building and preservation of churches and their impact on early colonial government is part of the Colonial Settlement theme. A number of existing resources and interpretive venues in the region tell the story of colonial settlement. They include St. Clement Island, St. Mary's City, Sotterley Plantation, Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, Port Tobacco, and Thomas Stone National Historic Park.

- **Native American Heritage**

Fossil records and archeological traces, dating as far back as 10,000 B.C. provide evidence of the Paleo-Indian, the Early, Middle and Late Archaic periods of human occupation in Southern Maryland. The Piscataway Tribes which occupied the region during European contact and settlement offered much support to the colonists, yet suffered displacement as colonization progressed through the 1600's. The Woodland Indian Hamlet at Historic St. Mary's City and Piscataway Indian Museum near Waldorf, and exhibits at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum are key interpretive venues that explore this theme. The Town of Indian Head and other places along the shores of the region's tidal waters feature archeological sites which provide information about the culture and impact of these first inhabitants of Southern Maryland. Descendants of these early native Americans continue to reside in the region today.

- **Agriculture/Tobacco Culture**

Agriculture and many years of a tobacco-based economy have shaped the Southern Maryland cultural landscape as we see it today. A few village centers, large plantation tracts with water access, and the many tobacco barns that dot the region are all part of the rural landscape of the region. Most of the plantation house museums of the region interpret components of the era of the tobacco based economy, including Friendship House, General William Smallwood House Museum, the Thomas Stone National Historic Site, and Sotterley Plantation. Calvert County has highlighted its tobacco barns by publishing a brochure identifying the basic barn types represented in a Tobacco Culture Survey, the documentation for which is stored at the Calvert Marine Museum. A 19<sup>th</sup>-Century tobacco barn houses the Information Center at the Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant Visitors Center. Opportunities remain, however, to better promote this theme and to better link these interpretive facilities to enhance the visitor experience. The need for protection of tobacco based resources as a key component of the landscape will represent a challenge to the region in the face of the industry's demise and the State's buy-out program.

- **War and Conflict**

Southern Maryland was greatly affected by the American Revolution and the War of 1812. For almost the entire period, the British Navy controlled the waters of the Chesapeake. British war ships first appeared in 1774 off of Point Lookout, heading for St. George's Island. Trade became a high risk activity and because of Southern Maryland's accessibility, surrounded and intersected by the waters of the Potomac and Patuxent rivers and the Chesapeake Bay, vessels made easy prey for British ships. The region contributed not only supplies but also men, who acquitted themselves with pride from the "Battle of Long Island" in 1776 to the "Battle of St. Leonard's Creek" in the summer of 1814.

During the Civil War, Southern Maryland landowners sympathized with the Confederate cause—in large part because the agrarian economy was more closely allied to the economy of the

South. Slaves in the three counties constituted more of the population than did the land owners. While the Civil War interrupted commerce and industry throughout the state, its affects were devastating on Southern Maryland's way of life and its economy.

The theme of war and conflict is limited to the interpretive programs of several museums, including the General William Smallwood House, Calvert Marine Museum, the Naval Air Test and Evaluation Museum, and Point Lookout State Park, location of Fort Lincoln, a reconstructed Civil War fort. Portrayal of this theme is currently not a strength in the heritage region. The Maryland Historical Trust (Exhibit Services Program) has developed a list of sites and identified the historical events that will interpret the War of 1812 by presenting individual stories in a connected fashion. Supported by the three counties, the Maryland's Office of Tourism Development has placed a high priority on this initiative.

- **Maritime Culture**

The maritime theme reflects the tradition of the waterman's life from the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century peak of the industry to the dwindling fisheries industry of today. Maritime communities such as Broome's Island, Benedict and Piney Point form an essential part of the area's heritage. The Calvert Marine Museum in Solomons has a special focus on maritime history and estuarine life. The museum operates cruises on the Chesapeake Bay bugeye, the "William B. Tennyson" and interprets the Drum Point and Cove Point Lighthouses. The Joseph C. Lore and Sons Oyster House features artifacts of the seafood industry. Piney Point Lighthouse Park and Museum on the Potomac River, the Chesapeake Bay Lab on St. George's Island which operates cruises on an authentic skipjack, and Naval Air Test and Evaluation Museum on the Patuxent River bring the interpretive stories of Southern Maryland's maritime heritage resources into the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century. Mallows Bay is renowned as the largest ship graveyard in the U.S. Maryland's first historic shipwreck preserve of a German U-boat at Point Lookout is open to the public under a joint, state, county and U.S. Navy program.

The maritime culture is portrayed through a number of special events in the region including seafood festivals, waterfront tours, naturalist led fossil hunting expeditions along creeks, and a fall foliage boat tour. St. Clement's and Solomons hold an annual Blessing of the Fleet. The Calvert Marine Museum holds "Patuxent River Appreciation Days" and St. Mary's County holds an annual National Oyster Festival, while Solomon's Island hosts a bike and hike event. Opportunities need to be pursued to interpret the importance of Steamboat Landings and wharves which dotted the region's landscape in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and broaden interpretation of the many lighthouses in the region.

- **Religion**

Religion and religious conflict are key elements in the cultural and political history of Southern Maryland. The careful separation of Protestant and Catholic traditions of worship on the voyage of the Ark and Dove and during the earliest years of colonial settlement in Southern Maryland were crucial to the formation of St. Mary's City as the capital of the new colony and to the survival of the colony itself. These efforts and the challenges that continually threatened them are well documented in exhibits and interpretive programs at both Historic St. Mary's City and the St. Clements Island/Potomac River Museum. In Charles County, St. Ignatius Church and Mt. Carmel Monastery are significant landmarks of the establishment of the Catholic Church in Maryland. The histories of the churches that were founded throughout the region in this time period (1634-1694) have been documented by numerous regional interpretive facilities and educational institutions, and by the churches themselves, and have been integrated into existing visitor support materials, including brochures that map and describe historic religious structures and sites, religious-theme driving tours, and interpretive roadside markers located at historic churches and church sites.

Further interpretation of the role that religion played in Southern Maryland, particularly in the time period when its most significant effects were felt, has also been woven into regional exhibits and events that depict 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century colonial life, as one facet of the social and cultural world of Maryland's early settlements.

Although religion is a key theme and important part of the Southern Maryland story, the substantial amount of existing interpretation of the religious history of the region precludes the need to develop significant new projects to address this facet of colonial life. Consequently, the religious-theme projects that have been developed in the Management Plan are designed to enhance the existing religious-theme interpretive programs and projects that are already in place in the region, and have been proposed within the context of other themes, including Colonial Settlement, Maritime, and Culture and Entertainment. Each of these themes address some aspect of religion's role in Southern Maryland history. Therefore, religion does not appear as a 'stand alone' theme in the proposed projects identified later in this plan but rather is incorporated within several themes.

- **Nature and Eco-Tourism**

Natural areas where experiential tourism can offer growth in heritage tourism abound in the Southern Maryland Region. State and Federally owned lands as well as substantial growth in lands protected by easement in the region assure protection of key natural resources, which in turn, provide substantial opportunities for growth in nature tourism in the region.

Southern Maryland contains a number of natural resources that are ranked nationally as significant habitat areas. Nanjemoy Creek is home to the largest Great Blue Heron rookery on the east coast north of Florida, and the State's second largest population of Bald Eagles. Zekiah

Swamp has been recognized by numerous authorities as one of the most significant ecological areas in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Wicomico River, a designated State Scenic River, provides vital habitat for many finfish and wildlife species. The river is also recognized as one of the most productive oyster grounds in the state of Maryland. Battle Creek Cypress Swamp contains the northern most stand of bald cypress trees in the United States. The swamp is estimated to be 10,000 years old; some of the cypress trees still standing in it today are over 1,000 years old. These waterways are accessible to kayakers, birdwatchers, and general nature enthusiasts for self-guided tours, and present many opportunities for guided tours as well as educational and experiential programs.

The presence of a significant Bald Eagle population is one of the region's biggest assets. Washington D.C., located less than an hour away, is visited by millions of travelers each year seeking a connection with the nation's heritage. Southern Maryland is positioned to offer these millions of visitors an opportunity to experience the natural (contrasting with human) history that shaped and fashioned the founding of our nation, while featuring the Bald Eagle, recognized by both domestic and international visitors as a symbol of America.

Nature tourism is a very promising growth industry based on all published studies and reports citing trends in recent years. It was also identified by the region's residents as a theme most supported for development among all themes that can support growth of the heritage tourism industry in the region. Some 25 projects are identified in later sections of this plan that are designed to promote growth in nature tourism opportunities.

- **African American Heritage**

The Southern Maryland Region has lengthy African-American history, which presents many opportunities for historical, education and cultural interpretation. African American figures have been prominent in the history of the region from the arrival of the first settlers on St. Clements Island with Mathias De Sousa, the first African-American elected to serve in a State legislature. The African-American story is also told through life on the tidewater plantations for in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Underground Railroad network and Camp Benedict, a training camp for the U.S. Colored Infantry regiments during the Civil War, and Point Lookout, where colored troops were assigned to guard Confederate prisoners.

The region's current interpretive offerings regarding this theme are somewhat limited to the "African-American Heritage Society's Museum and Cultural Center" in La Plata and to Sotterley Plantation, which is recognized for its programs in African-American history. Substantial opportunities exist to broaden interpretive offerings in support of this theme such as exhibits to interpret standing structures such as Drayden African-American Schoolhouse, and the lives of historic African Americans in the region, including Mathias De Sousa, Matthew Henson who accompanied Admiral Peary in 1909 during his expedition to the North Pole, and Josiah Henson (escaped slave and author born in Charles County who served as inspiration for Harriet Beecher Stowe's internationally acclaimed book "Uncle Tom's Cabin"). Many of these new interpretive

initiatives are identified in later sections of this plan.