

Curtis Bay (Baltimore)

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Maryland Special V. F.

# Curtis Bay and Its Story

## This Suburb of Baltimore Has Had a Remarkable Growth

CURTIS BAY, to a stranger, would signify a body of water.

Curtis Bay, to a Baltimorean, means both the body of water by that name and the settlement that landlocks it.

Another peculiarity about this section is that it never has been legally named—usage is responsible for the name of the bay and also for signifying that of the settlement which has grown up around it.

Curtis Bay, therefore, is both the branch of the river by that name and the community, both of which are on the north side of the Patapsco just a few miles from the downtown section of Baltimore. This settlement has become one of the most important of the land developments of Baltimore city. The great plants there represent many millions of dollars; they embrace fertilizer, oil, chemicals, alcohol, ship building and other industries on a huge scale.

An outstanding feature at Curtis Bay is the largest and most modern coal pier in the world and still another is Davison City, a whole community in itself, which is being developed by the Davison Chemical Company.

The amazing growth of Curtis Bay, from farmlands to a group of tremendous industries in comparatively few years, is due to its landlocked harbor, extensive water front, suitability for manufacturing purposes, its proximity to the heart of the city and its depth of channel, these points referring both to the land settlement and the body of water.

While the name Curtis Creek is mentioned in legal transactions as early as the Seventeenth Century there has been no legal sanction for applying the name Curtis to the land development. The post office address was South Baltimore, Anne Arundel County, but general usage led to the settlement also

getting the name of the water-body. This usage has extended to the post office sub-station, now Curtis Bay, the telephone exchange,—Curtis, and banks and industries have also adopted the name.

About sixty years ago, a group of Baltimore capitalists realized the possibility of development of the section and formed the Patapsco Land Company, Inc., for this purpose. This organization was taken over in 1882 by the South Baltimore Harbor and Improvement Company and active development of Curtis Bay began.

The largest and most advanced scientific fertilizer plant in the United States was built at that part of this community known as Hawkins Point, in 1883, by the owners of the Chappell Fertilizer Factory on Hughes Street, in Baltimore, which had been destroyed by fire. This was the beginning of the fertilizer industry in this community, the property was later bought by The Davison Chemical Company, which has continued expansion at this point.

Transportation to the community was, at first, by a passenger short line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Then the electric line came in and expansion rapidly followed of many plants.

Another forward step in expansion at Curtis Bay was marked by the beginning of the World War, and demands in many industrial lines led to development of the industries already there and the start of new ones. One of the largest of the war-time develop-

ments was that of the United States Industrial Alcohol Company, of West Virginia, which bought more than 30 acres and on this tract put improvements costing \$500,000. The United States Industrial Chemical Company, another industry capitalized at \$24,000, took over the old sugar refinery.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, by recognizing the advantages of the port as an export center for its West Virginia Coal Fields, erected in 1916 the largest and most modern coal pier in the world there.

Petroleum, distributed by tank cars, after arriving by ship from the West Coast of Mexico and other Latin American countries, is an important part of the traffic of the Baltimore and Ohio. Lumber, in large lots, is also received from the Pacific Coast, and sent, on flat cars, to the Michigan furniture centers. Nitrates and guano, sent from South American countries by ship, are manufactured into fertilizer, which goes by rail to all parts of the United States. Materials for a large tannery is brought from all parts of the globe, special sand used in the manufacturing processes of a large paint concern comes from Asia and Africa to Curtis Bay, which is thus in contact with all ports of the world.

Drydock and ship building industries find the 35-foot channel and protected harbor an ideal place. At Curtis Bay there are thirty large industries, in those lines already mentioned, and

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"Part of Our Harbor Fire Patrol"

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in others. In normal times, these plants employ an average of 12,000 men.

The future industrial possibilities of Curtis Bay, with the return of normal conditions, promise even greater growth and development than in the past, both in national and private enterprises. The United States Government has long had a Coast Guard Station and an Army Ordnance Depot there, and shows its belief in the future by designating, in the latest Government Relief Bill for Unemployed, the expenditure of a large amount to deepen and widen the channel at Curtis Bay.

MD. V.F.

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# Day By Day

By CARROLL DULANEY

Two interesting letters anent D. Fred Crowley's reminiscences of Curtis Bay and Curtis Creek, published in this column:

Mrs. John M. Weaver, 1831 West Pratt street, writes that she knew most of the people named by Mr. Crowley. She said her father took her from the Eastern Shore in a buggy to carry produce for Harry Cromwell, on Curtis Creek, when she was six years old and from that time until she was twenty-four she lived on a farm there.

~~BALTIMORE NEWS-POST~~  
Her father, she says, worked at one time for Frank and Sam Chairs, whose farm was where the Davison Chemical plant is now. The Baltimore Yacht Club was nearby, and Jack Flood's Park was across the creek.

Mrs. Weaver says she has sailed on the Eli B. Henkel many times, and that Captain White and his mate, Mickey, used to bring her and her brother candy from the city. She attended school at the little, one-room schoolhouse at Hawkins Point road, near Fort Armistead, where there were many soldiers in their natty blue uniforms, with red stripes on their trousers.

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## 'PEACH KING'

Eli Stallings was the "peach king" of Curtis Bay. His farm was where the Quarantine Station is now, and the quarantine tug, the Hogue, used to bring mail and

newspapers to the residents. She says she knew Arthur Thornton and saw the first horse race at Curtis Bay, between Thornton and Stallings. A mile was measured off from the schoolhouse to Curtis Creek Bridge and the horses were attached to sulkies.

Mrs. Weaver says she was on the first seven-master, square-rigged ship ever built, when it visited Curtis Bay for a load of sugar. She also saw the start of the Coast Guard Station and used to watch the cadets drill on the old shell road. Their training ship was the Colfax. Many, many times, she says, she paid three cents' toll to walk across the Curtis Creek Bridge. There were two toll masters—Phelps and Jenkins. And many times, she says, she drove the late Frank Revell to the station when he was Shell Fish Commissioner.

She knew Jim and Tom Benson and George Solley. Miss Ella Solley was her Sunday School teacher at Marley Neck Church.

Later, Mrs. Weaver says, she lived on the farm of John Hammond, which was where the Ordnance Depot is now. She says she has gathered holly and chestnuts in every woods from Curtis Bay to Rock Creek and knows every foot of the land.

## THE OLD LIGHTHOUSE

There used to be a lighthouse near the Quarantine Hospital, the

## OLD DAYS OF CURTIS BAY RECALLED BY WRITERS

keeper of which was Harry Rabb. Often, she says, she and Mr. Rabb's daughter, Mary, would climb the steps and light the lamp to guide ships into the harbor. She used to go with her brother when he hauled corn to the old Waterford Mill on the Annapolis road. The miller got no money, but received one half of the meal for his pay.

The other letter is from George M. Solley of Solley, Md., who writes that he is a nephew of the George Solley who owned the Fanny, one of the fastest boats on Curtis Creek.

Arthur Thornton, Mr. Solley tells me, married a cousin of his, and Mr. Solley still operates a grocery store which his father, James W. Solley, founded in 1892.

## CURTIS BAY MEMORIES

Recent articles in this column on old days at Curtis Bay have stirred the memory of Mrs. William Gregory Smith, 7907 York road, Towson. Mrs. Smith writes:

"The names mentioned are familiar to me. Eli Stallings was famous for his fine watermelons, as well as for his peaches. I spent many happy hours with the family."

"My grandfather, the late Thomas Henderson, was keeper of the Leading Point Lighthouse until his death and his son, my father, John W. Henderson, was marine observer at the Maritime Exchange for 50 years."

"The Quarantine Hospital was next to the lighthouse, and the physician in charge was the well-known Dr. Monroe Heiskell. Many times I have watched the doctor's boat bring in the yellow fever patients. Some died and were buried there, and as children my cousin and I used to put flowers on the graves." **DEC 15 1945**

"The Quarantine boat was the Hygeia, Capt. Sam Crawford, which brought supplies and mail to the hospital."

"The watermelons from the Stallings farm were carried to Light street in a bug-eye sailed by Capt. Grif Garner and his mate, Bud Sokey."

"On the other side of the lighthouse was an old windmill that housed a family named Beasley."