



An American Tour: 128



Maryland's *Port Tobacco*

Port Tobacco, officially Port Tobacco Village, is a town in Charles County, in southern Maryland. The population was 13 at the 2010 census, making Port Tobacco the smallest incorporated town in Maryland.

At the time of European exploration, this coastal area along the Port Tobacco River was the territory of the Potapoco, an Algonquian-speaking tribe. They called their settlement Potapoco. Later, the English adapted the Potapoco name as Port Tobacco. Its name also referred to what became the colony's chief export commodity crop. The town grew as it became a major port for the tobacco trade, with exports transported by ocean-going sailing ships. During the late 17th century, Port Tobacco became the second-largest river port in Maryland.

For two centuries, Port Tobacco area residents assumed important roles in state and national history. John Hanson was elected first President by the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation before moving to Frederick, Maryland. Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer was a signer of the U.S. Constitution; and Thomas Stone signed the Declaration of Independence.

Port Tobacco started declining as erosion from excessive agricultural use and poor soil conservation caused significant siltation, decreasing its navigability and ultimately cutting off the town from access to Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Larger merchant vessels were unable to use the former seaport; as a result, commercial activity at the port had dwindled by the time of the Civil War. The decline was exacerbated by the completion in 1873 of a nearby Baltimore and Potomac Railroad line to Pope's Creek which bypassed Port Tobacco. A small portion of the town's square incorporated in 1888 as Port Tobacco Village.

The remains today are identified as Port Tobacco Village. Because of the town's abrupt decline and silting of the river, many archeological sites were preserved, making it one of the richest areas for studying the mixed history of Native and colonial cultures, including that of enslaved Africans. In 2007, the Port Tobacco Archeological Project began as a partnership among the Archaeological Society of Maryland, the Society for the Restoration of Port Tobacco, the Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium, Preservation Maryland, and Preserve America. It has encouraged participation by the community, with an Internet blog and regular chances for volunteer participation at many levels.

Visitors may see the reconstructed Port Tobacco Courthouse, furnished as it may have appeared in the 19th-century, even as of the day of Booth's escape. The second floor has exhibits on tobacco culture, as well as archaeological finds which reveal early colonial and Native American life. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Tobacco_Village,_Maryland#History]

