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Book Reviews

Powhatan Indian Place Names in Tidewater Virginia. By MARTHA W. MCCARTNEY and HELEN C. ROUNTREE. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company. 2017. Pp. xi +130. $22.00 (PB), ISBN: 978-0-8063-2062-5.

To fully appreciate the significance of this comprehensive compendium of eastern Virginia place names, one needs to know something about the people, their language, and the geographic area where they were and are now located. The Powhatan were an indigenous Algonquian people of Virginia that numbered somewhere between 14,000 and 21,000 at the time of the Jamestown settlement in the early seventeenth century.

Their language is one of the Algonquian languages, which could at one time be found from the east coast of North America to the Rocky Mountains. Sometimes called Virginia Algonquian, Powhatan is a branch of Eastern Algonquian, distributed from North Carolina to Maine and spoken by several dozen separate tribes in Tidewater Virginia. While the language itself disappeared toward the end of the eighteenth century, being supplanted by English, its evidence remains in the place names where the ancestors of the present-day Chickahominy, Mattaponi, Pamunkey, and Rappahannock tribes once lived.

The term *tidewater*, when referring to a region, rightly describes the low-lying Atlantic coastal plain that extends from northeastern North Carolina to southeastern Virginia, southern Maryland, and the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. Generally, it is applied to any area where the water level in streams, creeks, and rivers is affected by the rising and falling of the daily Atlantic tides. In Virginia, in specific, tidewater is the land east of the Appalachian fall line, extending northward from Hampton Roads to the Virginia Peninsula, the Middle Peninsula, the Northern Neck, and the Eastern Shore.

The authors, Dr. Helen C. Rountree and Martha W. McCartney, were eminently well qualified to undertake and successfully complete a project of this sort. Dr. Rountree, Professor Emerita of Anthropology at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, initiated her research in native place names in Virginia in the 1970's, and her earlier publication, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia* (1990), ably examined the tribe's economic, political, ritual, and social life. Her co-author, historian Martha McCartney, is a specialist in seventeenth-century Virginia history and ethnohistory.

For their sources, the authors drew material from government records, land patents, and public and private archives, as well as various collections of historical maps. To ease the identification of these sources in the text, the references cited section has been placed at the beginning of the volume rather than the end. The cited sources include all abbreviations that refer to either persons or works found in the text, lists of the extensive cartographic works that were accessed, and any and all manuscripts and miscellaneous published sources that were used.

Each separate place name appears in alphabetical order, using its "modern equivalent or most common spelling" (i). Then it is followed by any and all variant spellings, listed in chronological order of the sources that were accessed, allowing subsequent researchers to track the changes in names over the years. Spelling often varied from document to document and even within a single document since those who recorded them, whether government officials or cartographers, were understandably unfamiliar with the sounds of the native languages.

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For each named place, the authors clearly designate the specific type of place to which it refers, but these names can, and often do, refer to more than one political or geographic feature. Also, each type of place and/or variation in spelling is accompanied by the abbreviation for the document in, or name of the map on, which it was found and the date of that resource.

With respect to water, for example, a name might have been attached to a bay, branch, brook, creek, ferry, ford, inlet, marsh, river, run, shoal, spring, or swamp. Land designations include cliffs, island, neck, path, point, or ridge, and places of habitation could be a former community, fort, native town, or parish.

Many present-day tidewater residents might well assume that the towns and cities in which they live were named after early settlers or later prominent citizens rather than a former Powhatan village. A case in point might be Dogue, which is found in what is now King William County, formerly Stafford, where it is listed in various documents between 1664 and 1672 as *Doegs*, *Doagge*, *Deeds*, *Doeggs*, *Doogs*, and *Dogi*.

To assist readers in locating places along Tidewater waterways, the authors have used the terms *left* and *right* to designate the northerly or southerly sides, respectively, as the water flows from its source toward its mouth. *Upstream* and *downstream* are also employed to add specificity.

Indices for all Powhatan place names, as well as all indigenous peoples mentioned or referred to, are provided, for the Powhatans were not the only natives who lived in the region. At the time of initial European contact, three major tribes inhabited what is now Virginia, the Powhatan, Monacan, and Cherokee, speaking three distinct languages, Algonquian, Siouan, and Iroquoian, respectively.

Today Virginia claims eleven separate tribes. As of January 2018, the federal government officially recognizes seven of them. They include the Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Pamunkey, Rappahannock, Nansemond, Monacan, and Upper Mattaponi ("Virginia Indian Tribes").

The book is a more than useful resource for anyone living in Tidewater Virginia who might be interested in or curious about the plethora of what appear to be unusual names on the current landscape. More important, however, it will be extremely valuable not only to historians but to any and all those who research the indigenous peoples, culture, and languages of Virginia.

To some degree, the book is already proving beneficial to members of the Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical & Historical Society, one of a growing number of organizations founded "to encourage and enable African Americans to research, document, and publish their family histories and genealogies" (MPAAGHS). Working at times from only oral histories in an attempt to locate places where their ancestors lived and worked can be daunting at best, particularly without written records, the presence of wide variations in pronunciation and spelling for even a single location, and a progression of names that have been changed or dropped completely from more modern maps.

Works Cited

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McDaniel College PRISCILLA A. ORD