

Colonial and Post-Colonial Period

Colonial Period

Europeans began to settle along the Patuxent River in the late 1630s. The first person to own the property that became JPPM was Governor William Stone, who patented the parcel he called “St. Leonard” sometime between 1648 and 1652. The famous “Act Concerning Religion,” which attempted to legislate religious toleration, was passed during Stone’s tenure as colonial governor. In 1652, St. Leonard was acquired by Stone’s son, Thomas. While it is not clear if the Stones resided on the property, there must have been buildings here, since during the 1650s the Maryland General Assembly, Lord Baltimore’s Council of Maryland, and the Provincial Court all met at St. Leonard on occasion.



In 1663, Stone sold the plantation to Richard Smith Sr., who had been the first person appointed to the newly-created office of Attorney General for Maryland in 1657. St. Leonard stayed in the possession of the Smith family for almost 150 years. It was a large farm during that period, dependant on the labor of many enslaved Africans for economic success. Richard Smith Sr. built a house in the vicinity of where the JPPM administrative offices and the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory are today. After he died around 1689, his son Richard Jr. inherited the property, and built a new house a short distance to the north. JPPM archaeologists excavated the site of this house in the 1980s. It is known today as King’s Reach, and is an outdoor interpretive site for visitors.



Richard Smith Jr. was a supporter of Gov. Charles Calvert, the Third Lord Baltimore. A militia captain, he was one of the few Protestant leaders to remain loyal to the Catholic Calvert during the 1689 revolution that overthrew his government. Being on the wrong side of the rebellion, Smith was arrested and incarcerated. It was only through the efforts of his wife, Barbara, who traveled to England to appeal to the Crown for his release, that Smith regained his freedom. He was later appointed Surveyor General for Maryland. In 1711, he built a new house at the south end of his plantation, on a point overlooking the mouth of St. Leonard Creek. Archaeologists excavating this site named it “Smith’s St. Leonard.” Richard Jr. lived there until he passed away in 1714.

Walter Smith inherited the property after his father’s death. He was a major in the militia and a longtime member of the General Assembly. He stayed at Smith’s St. Leonard until his death in 1748. By 1754, the plantation was in the hands of his eight year old grandson, also named Walter Smith, who continued to own it until his death in 1804. However, Walter’s father had lived a few miles away on Parker’s Creek, and there is no evidence to suggest that young Walter ever moved to St. Leonard. As an absentee landlord, Walter did probably arrange for tenants or slaves to live and work on the property. Walter also produced perhaps the most well-known family member, his daughter Margaret Mackall Smith, who married Zachary Taylor and became First Lady of the United States. In 1809, St. Leonard passed out of Smith family ownership.

Post-Colonial Period (post-1775 through 19th century)

In 1834, Capt. John Peterson purchased the old Smith plantation. For four generations the property stayed in the Petersons’ possession. They built a house on a hill overlooking the mouth of St. Leonard Creek, probably near where the American cannon were situated in the War of 1812. When it burned in 1904, they constructed a new house on the same site. Dr. George Peterson conducted his medical practice at that house, while tenants, particularly the Fowler family, ran the farm. In 1932, Jefferson Patterson purchased the Peterson property to create his Point Farm estate.

Among the tenants on the Peterson farm were three remarkable women who had once been enslaved there: Sukeek (the only name we have for her), her daughter Rebecca Coats, and her granddaughter Jane Dawkins Johnson. After the Civil War, some, if not all, of these women lived in a house a short distance from the Peterson home. Some of Jane Dawkins Johnson’s descendants, members of the extended Gross family, told JPPM staff about the ruins of this house and the people who lived there. With their assistance, archaeologists excavated the site, known as Sukeek’s Cabin. Visitors to JPPM can see the ruins and learn more about the site from the interpretive signs located there, and elsewhere on the property they can discover the central role that African Americans – both enslaved and free – played in the history of this place. [Click here to view web-site created on Sukeeks History.](#)

