

# Treasure Diaries

THE SECRET OF  
SARAH'S CREEK

M.B. OWENS

HELLGATE PRESS



ASHLAND, OREGON

**TREASURE DIARIES**

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*Dedicated to my father*

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# Introduction

*A treasure hunt through the centuries...*

**B**EFORE YOU IS A REAL life odyssey depicting lost riches and forgotten American history in Gloucester, Virginia, and the communities across the dividing river, named York. These nearby towns of Yorktown, Jamestown, Williamsburg, Newport News, Hampton, and the many hamlets—collectively referred to as the Virginia Peninsula—are names that resonate through American lore. Besides proximity, they have all been tied together by people and events for nearly half a millennium.

This is not a trek that can be told through a single generational experience, but through many, including my generation, from a young boy into adulthood. I did not realize I was a part of the story until later in my life. Underlying all the coincidences that I discovered is a particular secret of a family's heritage that includes mysteries of hidden fortunes interwoven into the fabric of history.

This land is not only where the Nation began, but where it evolved to become the envy of the world. If you are an American, the history that took place in this geographical area impacts every aspect of your life. Even if you are not, it influences your world.

When viewed in totality, the chronology of what happened within this twenty-five-mile radius is astonishing. Even as I write, the archeological veterans who helped raise the USS *Monitor* and uncovered the wreckage of the RMS *Titanic*, are investigating more than forty lost ships sunk in the York River, between Gloucester and Yorktown—where during a siege in 1781, Americans, French, and even some Spanish converged to trap British troops on either side of the river,

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changing the course of human history. Only a small number of sunken artifacts and pieces of ship skeletons have ever been recovered, some now on display at the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown.

The United States Park Service recently purchased the Werowocomoco Indian Village property occupied in 1607 by Powhatan, his daughter Pocahontas, and their tribe, who both befriended and battled the first permanent English settlers in America. Archeologists are in the process of excavating this property on the riverbanks of Gloucester, as well as many other archeological digs underway in the County, plus Jamestown, Yorktown, Williamsburg and adjacent communities. However, these are just the tip of the iceberg of what lies in these hallowed grounds. The question must be raised as to why it took so long for historians to begin looking closely at these fabulous historical gems? Why were they so hidden that they were only whispered about within the local communities? Why have you not heard of them? Why are they often missing from history classes and books?

Discovering the answers to these questions is part of this story.

• • •

As a boy, inspired by my family, I began to keep a journal. I used this record of my experiences, as well as stories told to me by my great-grandfather (a former sailing ship captain), family documents, family letters, and research, both written and spoken, to write of events impacting the lives of my ancestors and others over centuries. The odyssey reveals amazing facts and deep secrets of what went on in the history of Gloucester, York River, and the surrounding areas of Virginia. There were rebellions, massacres, pirates, hangings, battles between naval fleets, army combat, cavalry engagements, multiple invasions by land and sea, and—hidden treasure. And within the midst of it came principles, documents, and actions that created a country.

The founding fathers, both mine and the Nations, were right here in the middle of the happenings. Though the history you will find in the following pages seems fantastic, it is true. The book



inspiring the first blockbuster—though now controversial—silent movie, *Birth of a Nation*, was written more than a century ago at one of the land's plantation houses. Even Shakespeare was influenced when writing one of his famous plays using a tragic and temporarily interrupted voyage here in 1609. The drama was performed in London before the Royal Court of England nearly a decade before the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock. It was called *The Tempest*. The events involving the actual incident impacted the Colony of Virginia, including Gloucester, and resulted in life-changing happenings, including marriage, the birth of a child (considered Royal), and eventually death for its most famous maiden.

Of importance to the overall journey before you, are intertwined happenings in Europe, the West Indies, North Africa, and the American colonies through nearly half a millennium, setting the stage for incredible events—resulting in treasure in Gloucester County and nearby communities.

Gloucester's history, involving Europeans, began with the founding of the first permanent English Colony in nearby Jamestown. The Powhatan Indians' main village, which was sometimes friendly and sometimes adversarial to the settlers, was initially located here, just off the York River. By the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Indigenous people were gone, and the land had become one of the most populated and wealthiest locations in the Colonies. It almost became the capital of Virginia, with a who's who of early American founders and many of the "First Families of Virginia." Even though Williamsburg became the capital in the late 1600s, the two communities were tightly tied together with the rest of the region. The magnificent homes and plantations lining its shores were the envy of the growing empire, many still standing and even occupied today. Its ships traded regularly with the West Indies, Africa, and Europe. Most of the trade was sanctioned, but a lot was not. Smuggling and dealings with pirates and privateers were a big part of the way of life for everyone, as it was throughout all the eventual thirteen Colonies.

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The communities in America were greatly impacted by the waterways that surrounded their shores, none more so than Gloucester and the nearby localities. These passages connected the land and its people to rivers, tributaries, bays, and oceans around the globe and became known as Hampton Roads. Those who commanded a ship could go virtually anywhere and find what they wanted. Sailing was preferred because going by land was difficult. There were few roads to make travel convenient and, of those, most were very rugged—often nothing more than Indian trails.

Within the local waterways, sailors could easily reach Gloucester, Yorktown, Jamestown, Williamsburg, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Isle of Wright, and Eastern Shore. (Localities received names at different times in history.) People in these locations were neighbors, friends, and business partners. Especially convenient for the time was traveling from the York County area to Gloucester and Tyndall's Point (later called Gloucester Point). This was due to an established ferry transporting people, horses, and carts, tying in Jamestown, Williamsburg, and the rest of the Peninsula to Gloucester by the 1640s. Close enough for easy access and far enough away to hide from prying governmental eyes, it became a coffer for storied riches along with its neighbors.

Once dotting the waterfront of the York, Gloucester Town had homes of the wealthy, flourishing with Williamsburg and the James River Plantations. Many of the "First Families of Virginia" had homes in the town and throughout the County. Some of these prominent families lived on their estates and plantations in Gloucester for generations, including George Washington's and Robert E. Lee's ancestors.

The Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean permitted anyone to sail to New York, Boston, Charleston, or anywhere they wanted to go. This also allowed the West Indies and Europe to shop or deliver their goods in the 17th, 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries.

Pirates and privateers roamed these waters and land from the very beginning of settlements in Virginia, sometimes targeting and attacking the shores, rivers, and tributaries. They came from Europe, the Indies, and even other colonies to engage and take anything of value they could. Dutch, Ottoman, Spanish, French, and eventually, English ships came at one time or another to dwell on the residents and merchants of the Chesapeake Bay, its rivers, and tributaries.

But it was not a one-way street.

Pirates and individuals sometimes becoming privateers themselves, living around the York and Hampton Roads, built their ships and outfitted them for their escapades—launching expeditions from these shores. During the centuries, not a few, but thousands, sailed from here looking for an easy profit, even if placing themselves in dangerous situations. Many were very successful. They went after vessels of Spain, Portugal, France, Netherlands, Denmark, and other countries. A ship carrying the flag of a nation that was at war with England, and thus colonial Virginia, was usually all that was needed to be a target. Of course, this completely changed in the 1770s when English ships became the tyranny of Virginia and the other twelve colonies.

The seafarers who roamed these waterways seeking fortunes were not necessarily the scourge many have portrayed them to be. Some were supported by monarchs, governors, government officials, and prominent investors. They preyed on the enemies of the state when at war and were given an official letter of marque and reprisal, permitting them legally to pursue other nation's riches in vessels and lands. This practice paid a great part of the cost of the American Revolutionary War. Hundreds and hundreds of American vessels sailing as privateers participated. And the British did the same to American merchant ships. Gloucester and Hampton Roads, always a strategic focus, was in the middle of it all.

Many participants were wealthy and educated men, some were full-time seamen, others were farmers and tradesmen trying to

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make a quick return on their effort. Investors in the ships and crews included some of America's founding fathers. Countless seamen and investors became rich beyond their wildest dreams because of the privateering ventures. Their wealth was often passed down from generation to generation.

Since it was not smart for them to leave their riches for others to find, much was hidden from prying eyes. Gloucester and nearby areas were often the safest places for hiding wealth in the early centuries of America.

• • •

What you are about to read involves an incredible story of a place and its people that only Hollywood could dream up, except for one thing—it's true—much of it to be found in history books and documents if you look. Clues abound everywhere, yet history has forgotten about it! This book includes many elements—people, places, events, and historical accounts—all coming together to tell the story. But there is one element that should not be overlooked—time. This book spans generations. It is part of the story. The past comes to life in the here-and-now. It is through this timeline that the secret unfolds to impact current events happening today.

The depictions in this experience are graced with a lifetime of discoveries and ancestors' experiences as expressed in their letters, ship logs, and diaries as interpreted in translation to the twenty-first century. These selected and thematic perspectives are sometimes presented separately and sometimes interwoven together to tell the intricate story and better explain histories' influences on a special place, its people, and its hidden treasures to reveal—the Secret of Sarah's Creek!

## PART I

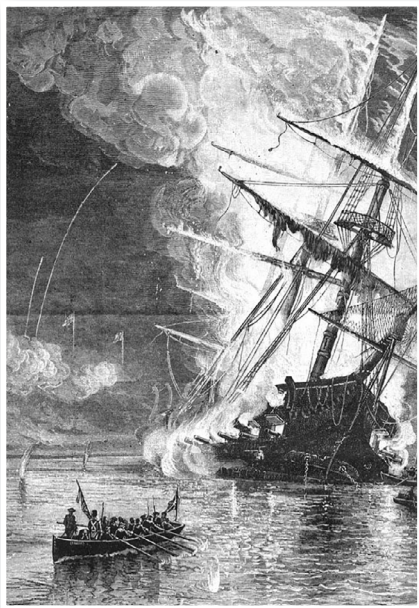
# Discovery

*Find this tale in the years that sail to wantonly prevail.  
Wondrous and true wrapped forever in blue...*

*The two brothers sat camouflaged among the trees near the York's edge, about a tenth of a mile from the mouth of connecting Sarah's Creek where the plantation home, called Sarah's Creek House, is found. With rifles at their sides, they were observing enemy movements occurring on the fluent water in front of them. Their eyes could make out masts of recently sunken sailing vessels protruding from the River's surface. The air was beginning to cool among the bristling leaves just commencing a change in color, offering a brisk smell of autumn to fill the siblings' nostrils. As twilight began to replace the light of day both could feel the ground faintly tremble as cannons were roaring in the distance.*

*Looking across the river in the direction of the town of Little York the siblings could make out a floating image emanating flashes coordinated with booms. What had been flying dark bands in the sunlight, were now red streaks arching through the dimming light. Some of them were striking the reciprocating ship of war, the HMS Charon, causing flames to leap high in the ever-blackening sky through the thickening smoke. The two watched as the fire*

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Destruction of the British frigate  
Charon in the York River.

spread and began to consume the floating silhouette. Human forms could be seen in small boats with oars rowing, desperately seeking escape from the expanding purgatory. Suddenly a tremendous explosion shook the water, earth, and trees as a great ball of fire devoured the night air, lighting the River as if it were the day for a brief moment. The detonation caused the two startled observers to flinch as they realized gunpowder had detonated on the burning figure. Both young men observed the fireball turn into a bellowing cloud soaring into the sky, which soon began to drift across the water toward them. The slowly wandering vessel began to mingle with other silhouettes, and they too began to ignite into wicks of expanding fire – one, then another. Gradually the aroma of burning timber and materials quietly enveloped the observing pair as they watched part of the River evolve into a massive inferno.

After reaching a peak, the flames began to slowly diminish in the ever-darkening arena. In time the first vessel's form began to recede into the diminutive rippling waves, until the last of the engulfing flames were gone. Then another silhouette, without detectable sound, disappeared. And soon a third presented only blackness where it once floated –

*eventually sinking to the bottom where it and the others were not to be disturbed again for more than two centuries...*

• • •

One of those Patriot observers to an incredible moment in history was my 5th great-grandfather huddling not far from his home (then occupied by Colonel “Bloody” Tarleton’s British invaders). He was still mourning the recent death of his father, my 6th great-grandfather. At nineteen years of age, he was alert for any movement or noise behind him, particularly in case dragoons were on patrol and pillaging for food and plunder. Everyone knew that Lord Cornwallis’s commanding cavalry officer and forces had been very successful in pillaging and plundering their way across the Carolinas and Virginia in their protracted march from Charleston.

My 5th great-grandfather later wrote in his log that during the sinkings, “I felt a sense of elation that migrated into a feeling of sadness as I watched something magnificent become lost forever.”

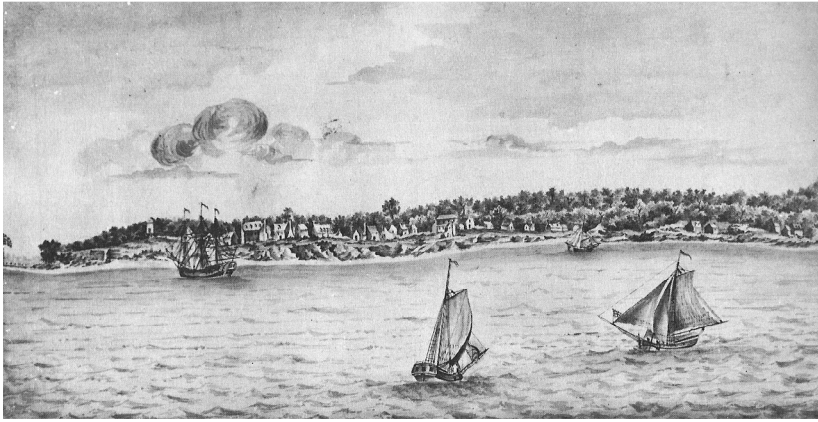
I did not know, until later in my life, that my ancestors were involved in the siege of Little York, popularly known today as Yorktown, and that their own home’s location was in the once flourishing Gloucester Town, directly across the York River. Not only were my ancestors part of this historical occasion, but they were also participants in virtually every major war and momentous event occurring on Virginia’s soil because of where they lived. There was no escape for them from all the trials and tribulations occurring over the centuries. They resided in the epicenter of American history.

What follows is the history of discovery, wrapped within many stories, of what went on in Gloucester and the surrounding areas, not in one lifetime, but over many.

For me, it all began with a short trip—as a child...



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View of Gloucester Town from Yorktown, 1755.



Map of Gloucester County, 1757.



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Trip

*One day, when you least expect it,  
a great adventure finds you...*

**T**HE JOURNEY STARTED ON A brilliantly sunny and breezy autumn day just after breakfast in 1957. My dad, mom, sister, and I had set out on an hour and a half automobile excursion to visit my great-grandparents at their home in Gloucester, Virginia. The mid-century was an exhilarating time of fun for a boy, aged seven, and a sister three years younger. Though I didn't know it at the time, this excursion would be an experience that I would remember till this day, many decades later.

My dad was at the steering wheel of our new green two-tone Dodge with what looked like sloping wings in the rear. As we drove down Ocean View Avenue in Norfolk with the windows of the vehicle down, the warm wind whipped across my face and blustered past my ears. In front of me was my mom with her long, flowing, red hair blowing in the wind while dad's short, curly, jet-black hair seemed to barely move. My pretty (so everyone said) little sister sat to the right of me in the back seat. All of us still had our tans from the summer months, except for mom. She did not like to be in the sun for long without her wide-brim straw hat to shield her fair skin. I noticed that even with the windows down I could still get a scent of the new car smell.

As we went whizzing along the road, the shingled house to the right blocked my view for a moment, then for a few seconds there

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was a clear space exposing nearly 200 yards of sand, with bushes spread about, and beach stretching out toward the Chesapeake Bay. Soon another house appeared, again blocking my view, then a space exposing sand and water, to be repeated again and again. As our road trip proceeded, out of my window on the left I could see Willoughby Bay and miles in the distance a formidable U.S. Navy aircraft carrier sitting side-by-side other warships docked at the Norfolk Naval Base. We continued traveling on the Avenue for about fifteen minutes until we made our way to Willoughby Spit, a strip of land partially created by numerous hurricanes from the 1600s and 1700s, finalized by both the destructive and formative winds of the Great Hurricane in 1807. Growing closer in front of us was Hampton Roads, named for the many rivers and tributaries that spawned about for ships and boats to traverse. And straight ahead was a ferry dock and our first stop.

We pulled in behind a dozen or so cars to wait for the coming vessel to dock. Directly in front of us was the convergence of the Hampton Roads harbor. Off to the left was the Elizabeth River, and to the right was the Chesapeake Bay that stretched as far as you could see, meeting the Atlantic Ocean off in the distance. Looking closely at the land across the way, I could make out the mouths of numerous other rivers and small bays. The blue luminosity from the sky and water enveloped everything.

The ferry was in the distance, maybe 1,000 yards, heading in our direction across the rippling waves lapping at her metal hull. In about five minutes the ever-approaching ferry's speed was noticeably decreasing and then suddenly its engines were thrown into reverse. White water was churned up all around as the craft's metal hull pushed against some of the large wooden poles bundled together in the water on either side. The poles were moved away in a jolting fashion until the ferry made an incredibly soft stop against the final bumpers of the dock. The ferry was then tied to steel bollards by men using massive ropes. A large metal ramp was moved by others to give smooth access to land for the cars sitting

with their motors running and ready to disembark. After a minute or so the chains blocking the cars on the ferry were removed and followed by cars and trucks streaming off one by one onto the wooden platform projecting from the mainland.

After what seemed like an eternity to a boy like me, all the cars were finally off the ferry. A man in front of the ferry motioned for the cars and trucks waiting to embark to move forward. The first car in front of the line started up and slowly moved forward bumping up and down, making a lot of metallic noise while moving onto the ferry. More cars and a truck moved on to the ferry while other vehicles, including ours, were motioned to form rows by one of the crew. After a few more vehicles embarked it was finally our turn and my father started the car and drove across the wooden platform onto the ramp, onto the steel deck of the vessel, and then parked three cars from the stern.

The ferry could take on no more cars and the flow of vehicles stopped. Eventually, the ramp to the dock was removed and thick chains were pulled and locked by hand across the entrance. In a few minutes, there was a jerk as the ferry moved forward. The massive wooden posts slid back in the waters as we moved past. The smell of sea, crabs, and fish permeated the air, mixed with diesel fuel.

We waited in the vehicle and looked at the water outside our window and off in the distance, as far as you could see, toward the Atlantic Ocean. It was impossible to tell where the Bay ended, and the Ocean began.

In front of the vessel, we could see the Peninsula's Old Pointe Comfort in Hampton, close to our ferry's destination, approximately three and a half miles away. Old Point Comfort got its name from the first permanent English settlers who were making their way to what would become Jamestown. After a four-and-a-half month voyage, the English settlers stopped to anchor at Old Pointe Comfort before continuing to their final destination, a relatively short sail away up the James River. The King of England, at the

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time of the settlement, was named James I, and the reason for the name of the river and settled land.

After watching the pilings move past us and seeing no more dock, my dad uttered, "Let's get out." My parents opened their door and slid out while my sister and I followed out the back. Stepping and moving around a few cars we went up to a metal railing near the rear of the ferry. I could feel the movement and vibration of the ferry's engine, but no humps of the waves. The smell of fuel began to fade, but never completely.

The seagulls hovered in the air behind the boat, dipping down one-by-one into the water to grab anything edible the hull and propeller might churn out. Their calls continuously pierced the air.

My mom reached into her purse and grabbed a partially used bag of Mary Jane white loaf bread that was a little stale. She handed a slice of bread to my sister and me. We each tore off small pieces and threw them up into the air away from the stern. The gulls, many seemingly hanging motionless, quickly dived down and grabbed each piece before it hit the water. Their calls, heard above the engine of the ferry, were a continuing chorus. Not a single morsel of bread ever got wet. In each moment they came within feet of our faces.

I could feel the mist off the salty water as the wind blew against my face and into my dark brown, curly hair that began to kink up into small circles due to the mist. It felt wonderful! We stood there feeding the seagulls until we ran out of bread. Then the four of us walked single file between the parked vehicles until we reached the bow. Off in the distance, I could see the City of Hampton approaching and our destination dock. Seagulls continued to fly along the side railing dipping down to look for fish or bread that they may have missed. At the front of the ferry, the smell of salt air was still strong, but without the mixture of fuel oil. Off to the side, we could see men and barges at work building a bridge and tunnel system to replace our fun ferry rides. When the span is finished this experience will be forever gone.

As the dock got closer and closer, my dad motioned it was time to go and we turned and began our walk back to the car.

The docking near Old Point Comfort was the reverse of the embarking scene. We sat back watching everything transpire. Finally, the chains, clanging together, were removed, the ramp was placed on the dock and the vehicles began to move off one by one. My dad turned the car on, put it in gear, stepped lightly on the accelerator and we made our way, with a few bumps from the uneven deck, off the ferry.

As we drove down Route 60, I noticed the new highway, Interstate 64, that was about to open and would connect the bridge and tunnel system across the span of water we just crossed. Off to the right were Old Point Comfort and Fort Monroe whose moat was constructed, in part under the direction of Robert E. Lee, one hundred and fifty years ago to help defend the harbor. I gazed to the left at the Hampton River and Blackbeard's Point, named for the pirate's severed head that had been placed there almost three hundred years before.

We kept driving about fifteen minutes, then turned right onto the George Washington Memorial Highway or Route 17, as some called it. As we drove about ten minutes past the lines of trees, I caught for a glancing moment the sign that indicated we were entering Yorktown. About fifteen minutes later we came to the York River and a new bridge. Off to the right on the shore and up a sloping hill were the shops and homes—a hundred years or more in age, mostly built of brick—of the quaint early American village of Yorktown. It took just a few short minutes to get to the crest of the bridge. There were trees and buildings to be viewed more sparingly than in our trip across Norfolk and the Peninsula. Off to the right was the mouth of an inlet—it was named Sarah's Creek.

Looking right, down the York, I could see off in the distance the expansive Hampton Roads Harbor with boats sailing and motoring on the river, while buildings lined both sides of the shore. Then looking to the left, I could also see inlets jutting in and out. One,

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on the Gloucester side, was where the Powhattan Tribe once had a large village at the time Christopher Newport came with his settlers to Jamestown in 1607. This was the same area where Pocahontas lived and saved Captain John Smith's life soon after the colonists' arrival. After crossing the other side of the bridge, we were back on the George Washington Memorial Highway.

In three-minutes we continued a few miles to Tidemill Road and took a sharp right. The two-lane road had older shingled homes on each side until we approached the flat bridge going over Sarah's Creek northwest branch. Weathered piers were extending out near the right side of the bridge originating from the shore. They were lined with wooden fishing and crabbing boats that are used in the Creek, River, and Chesapeake Bay.

We drove over the bridge, with wooden rails on each side, and soon made a turn to the left up a gravel and dirt driveway. The white two-story house built in the early part of the 1900s stood tall on a small rolling hill. Not far off was a general store, also painted white, run by some of my distant relatives. My dad drove up and stopped in the driveway. We all eagerly climbed out at the same time and headed to the screened-in front porch.

My silver-haired great-grandparents got up from their chairs and stood on the porch waiting to let us in the screen door. All of us stepped in and hugged them, while I wasted no time going into the main door. I was in the parlor before taking a left into the living room where my eye caught a glimpse of an old piano against the left entrance wall.

I immediately darted over to the wooden bench, sat down, and placed my fingers firmly on the white keys. Thud! They were duds—no musical sound. Then I tried the upper black keys. Same result. I wondered why my great-grandparents would keep a broken piano in the room. But then I found out that it was a player-piano, an instrument I didn't quite understand, which was why the keys didn't play when pushed. Somehow you turn it on, and it plays itself. After puzzling over the noiseless instrument for a few moments, I decided to move on to the kitchen.

My dad's parents, also from Norfolk, were sitting at the kitchen table. They had been cracking pecans for a future pie. Both stood up and hugged us one-by-one telling my sister, my parents, and me how great it was seeing us. My grandfather, balding with freshly cut white and grey locks on the sides and back of his head, and my grandmother with a full head of well-groomed silver hair, were somewhat aristocratic in their manner. They had a knack for making my sister and me feel special.

They moved into the living room and while listening to the grownups talk for a few minutes, my sister and I eventually slipped out the back door and began to roam the more than two-acre yard. We looked at the chicken coop and the chickens inside clucking away, though there were not as many chickens as I expected to see. Then we checked out the shed with kindling for the iron cook stove in the kitchen. Lots of things to see and explore.

We walked around the shoreline of Sarah's Creek marshy areas which outlined the side and back parcels of the yard. There were plenty of trees to run between in the front, back, and side lawn. In the distance, we could see my great aunt and uncle's home across the water. My sister and I made a quick detour using a half run to the nearby bridge. Looking over the side to the bottom of woodpiles under the bridge and adjacent piers, I could see blue crabs hanging on the timber. There were a lot of them. I figured if I had a crab net they would be easy to catch.

I could see why the area was called Tidemill. The water in the creek was flowing rapidly. It reminded me of a wave crashing ashore, going in a few yards up the incline of sand, then reversing and streaming back out to the ocean. I found out that there used to be a mill here that used the current to grind grain, but the building had been completely removed years before I was born.

Back to the yard, we went and, of course, the two of us had to investigate the no longer used wooden outhouse. Taking a step up I scuttled inside. Not much room. I leaned over the wooden frame—over the opening in the seat and looked down. It was too dark to

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see the bottom. I probably didn't want to anyway. When I finished looking, I turned, opened the door, and jumped out to the ground. My sister made the mistake of going in after I came out. After she entered, I held the door shut so she could not get out. She screamed! I opened the door and she jumped and chased me for a few seconds around the yard.

After about twenty-five minutes of exploring, my sister and I decided to go back inside the house, primarily due to the delicious aroma emitting from the kitchen door. We could tell lunch was not too far from being ready.

Fried chicken, crab cakes, and oysters on the half-shell, corn-on-the-cob, green beans, candied yams, plus cornbread, were some of the items laid before us. There would always be oysters during most seasons since my great grandfather had his beds in Sarah's Creek. I was told you could walk out in the water and pick them off the bottom—not something I would do. And, of course, for dessert, was homemade peach cobbler and chocolate cake. The peaches came from the trees across the street.

My great-grandmother, Banny, and great-grandfather, Pappy, had raised three daughters. One was my grandmother, my dad's mother. Her sisters were Aunt Maywood, who had the house across the creek, and Aunt Helen, who lived in Chicago. Banny raised a family, took care of the house, cared for the chickens, the large garden, and cooked unbelievable meals three times a day. When she was younger, she had helped Pappy in his shipping business. But he was retired now.

Banny didn't have the luxury of retiring. Though, when in her own home, she loved to cook—so much so that she made it an art form. She had a wood-burning stove, which looked to be made of heavy cast iron, and an electric stove along another wall in the kitchen. There was no need for the latter. "It doesn't cook as well," Banny often explained. I never saw it turned on. Everything was cooked on the woodstove, or in it. My great grandfather split logs with his ax for the fuel. There was never a short supply as the pile



was near to the fifteen-foot ceiling of the large woodshed in the backyard.

Pappy, called Captain Eddy by people in the community, in his younger years had three sailing ships, the largest being a 130-foot schooner. He sailed mostly on the Chesapeake Bay, including to and from Baltimore, to carry goods and pick up other items. Seafood and various vegetables were often part of the cargo. Sometimes he had business that took him into the Atlantic to both northern and southern ports. He sold items to merchants, farmers, and people in his community. Sometimes he was hired to carry cargo to different ports and to pick up goods. I honestly never understood everything he did. You know how it is—when you are younger you think everything will stay the way it is, so you don't ask questions. However, as you get older, you look back and realize that you should have asked those questions. I've had many days like that.

Pappy was a very handsome man when he was younger with dark black hair. Even in his eighties, he was distinguished-looking with a full head of grey hair.

In the evening he and the adults would sit around and tell stories and talk about recent events. The locals, including my great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, talked with a distinctive Old English accent.

I never could get all the relatives straight, especially in how I was related to this one or that one. Once my grandmother told me we were related to George Washington, but I never understood how. Many years later this began to make sense when I discovered that Washington's great-great-grandparents' and great-grandparents' estate were only a few miles away from Pappy and Banny's house. The estate even had the same name as my great-grandfather's family in its title, Warner Lewis Hall, since the Lewis part of the family inherited it through a daughter when the last Warner son died.

My great-grandfather and uncles from down the road would tell stories of the old days, wars, and treasures. The treasure and pirate stories were always my favorite.

## *Treasure Diaries: The Secret of Sarah's Creek*

There were also talks of sailing on the Chesapeake in Captain Eddy's schooner, Indians, privateers, and pirate stories that all took place around here. As a boy, the stories they told were always exciting and fun. I didn't understand how these incredible stories were a part of American history that happened right around here! It was years before I began to comprehend, bit-by-bit, how remarkable it all was. But one topic I always remembered was "treasure" and how I wanted to go find it. That was something a kid held on to for a lifetime!

Our supper was as good as lunch. Roast beef, fried softshell crabs, corn on the cob, butter beans, mashed potatoes, hot biscuits, apple pie, and ice cream.

After dinner, I was back outside with my sister. We walked along the shore surrounding the house. Sometimes I would step through the tall shoreline grass to the muddy sand and put my foot in it. My sister would do the same. Our feet would sink a couple of inches. This concerned me enough that I wouldn't take a second step. There were all kinds of things to pick up, but mostly shells. We could see them out a few feet in the water. Now and then we would see a blue crab scurry off at our approach. I was always surprised at how fast they could move.

After about an hour (and after the kitchen had been all cleaned up), my dad called my sister and me to come and say our goodbyes. Soon after we were back in the car and on the way home. It was beginning to get dark.

Sitting in the back seat, I closed my eyes and thought about the stories of pirates and treasure. In a few minutes, I was sound asleep. There is no better place to sleep than the back seat of a car with the roar of the engine and vibration of the road. I don't even remember getting in bed that night.