

## History, BRYAN Family, Southern Maryland

What you are about to read is a brief history of the **BRYAN** family. This family occupied the land where Cosca Regional Park is currently located. The original land tracts of the 1700's have been subdivided, added to, taken from, and otherwise united to form new tract names.

One of the earliest Maryland **BRYANS** was **JOHN BRIANT** who arrived, 1634, at St. Clements Island in St. Mary's County. Shortly thereafter **MATHIAS BRYAN** arrived and settled near Tinkers Creek in Prince George's County. He owned a 200 acre tract referred to as "Dublin". These early **BRYANS** were mostly tobacco growers, some were constables, jurists, lawyers, one was the winner of the 1876 Centennial jousting tournament, and one served on the Maryland Legislature. Traditions still prevail as one local **BRYAN** descendant, **MIKE MILLER**, is currently (1977) serving as a Maryland Senator.

By 1920 the name **BRYAN** was mostly a memory in the minds of old-timers. Today they are almost non-existent in their ancestral lands, but for those of us who keep alive lost memories, the **BRYANS** will always be here.

### "THE BRYANS": THE HISTORY OF COSCA PARK

It was June 18, 1853 a patriarch name **WILLIAM PAIGE BRYAN** of Richmond, VA, had unexpectedly fallen into the hands of death. His stately wife, **SUSANNAH PAIGE LANHAM** was nearing 45 years of age. Before the was was over, their son **RICHARD** would also die. **WILLIAM** had no idea of the trials and tribulations that would follow in the next 40 years.

**WILLIAM PAIGE BRYAN** was born on Dec. 9, 1786, the first child of **RICHARD BRYAN** and **ANN BUSEY BALL**. The **BRYANS** lived on the same 200 acres of land owned by **RICHARD**'s father. It was part of two tracts of land referred to as **LUSBY**'s Discovery and Mistake. **WILLIAM** Thomas had sold the land to his three sons, **RICHARD BRYAN**, was the eldest of **WILLIAM**'s five children with George, Thomas, Rachel and Amelia completing the family. **RICHARD** pledged his oath of fidelity during the Revolutionary War. By today's standards these early **BRYANS** are by no means wealthy. They were farmers and planters, and owned little more than was needed to stay alive. Among their belongings were 7 old rush chairs, 2 working wheels, tea cittle, cyder casks, 57 hogs, 9 cows, 2 bulls, 2 sheep, one clock, a claw hammer, and 7 old knives and forks.

After his fathers death After his father's death **RICHARD** lived at the homestead with his sisters and their housekeeper **DRUSILLA CLARVOE**. There is some speculation as to other possible children of **WILLIAM BRYANT**. He very possibly had five other children whose records are quite difficult to substantiate. It was not until January 17th 1786 that **RICHARD BRYAN** married a local girl **ANN BUSEY BALL** they were married for 33 years during which time and gave birth to four children **EDWARD HENRY**, **SAMUEL HENRY**, **WILLIAM PAIGE** and **ELEANOR**. Local church records mention a son **RICHARD** who must have died during infancy the old wooden frame house that **RICHARD** was used as a boy and young man soon became obsolete for his family either from wood deterioration or mere desire for a larger house **RICHARD** elected to construct a more suitable dwelling. The new house, completed in 1816, measured almost two and a half

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times larger than the earlier wooden frame house and was a full two and a half stories tall with 10 foot high ceilings and had two large chimneys the chimneys opened into fireplaces in four of the houses 10 rooms **RICHARD'S** enjoyment of his dream house was short-lived as he died three years later at the age of 61 it is unknown how much longer his wife lived or resided at the homestead.

**RICHARD** and **ANNE'S** youngest son **SAMUEL** died in 1833 not yet of manhood age. His sister **ELEANOR** married a cousin of the family **OSBURN BRYAN**. **OSBURN** was the son of **RICHARD'S** brother **THOMAS BRYAN**. **SAMUEL'S** other brother, **WILLIAM**, being the eldest child, took over his father's estate period although all the children owned the land, **WILLIAM** seemed to take the strongest interest in his father's affairs. Like his father, **WILLIAM** was a farmer and a planter. When **RICHARD** died he had 13 slaves, who probably had done his cooking and tobacco work. Two of the three, **WILLIAM**, **SLY** and **SAM BRADLEY**, were sold to **WILLIAM** who subsequently gave them their freedom in 1844. The remaining 11 or divided among **RICHARD'S** other children.

The Piscataway-Hynson election District had undergone several changes since Williams grandfather first settled on **LUSBY'S** Discovery in 1761. It was raw Frontier then, with just Legends of long ago Indians. The Piscataway Indians had been driven from the area, but their trails to and from seasonal home sites still remain. These Trails now formed the bulwark of Piscataway Road system in the early eighteen-hundreds "Piscataway Road", and the town "Piscataway" are the only traces from this past.

**WILLIAM PAIGE BRYAN** increased his father's land holdings of 430 acres in 1816, to nearly 2,301 Acres at the time of his own death in 1853. He added some property to the Potomac River directly opposite Mount Vernon. Land Deeds referred to it as Shore Gind, part of Bell Mount or Bon's Retreat. Today, 1977, it is called **BRYAN'S** Point Road. It was out of this site that **WILLIAM** established a Herring fishing industry. Catching the herring was somewhat easier in Williams time, then for current fisherman. It seems the shoreline near the fishing Wharf has been receiving at an enormous rate since these early fishing days.

On February 28th 1827 **WILLIAM** pledged his marriage to his neighbors daughter **SUSANNA PAIGE LANHAM**. Before his death in 1953 **SUSAN** and **WILLIAM** would have 9 children: **RICHARD**, **ELEANOR**, **EDWARD**, **PLINY**, **REBECCA**, **JAMES F. S.**, **SOPHINIA**, **ROBERT E. S.**, **JOHN H. B.**, and **WILLIAM PAIGE**.

**SUSAN** and **WILLIAM** probably begin their marriage in the house where **WILLIAM** was born this rustic setting just off Piscataway Road was often called Sister's Delight. After **WILLIAMS** death it was referred to as Cedar Grove, because of an abundance of those trees. Still later descendants called it the plantation or **BRYAN'S** Hall. By the mid-1840s **WILLIAM** had accumulated 33 slaves to help manage his growing a state. Several large tobacco barns were constructed, as were slave quarters, and a blacksmith shop. Travel in those days was still by horse and buggy, so several riding horses were kept on hand. The livestock was free to roam the woods and Fields growing fat on the

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abundance of acorns and grasses. Sheep, cattle, and chickens also were kept in abundance on the farm. Oxen and horses were kept for much of the field work. The male cattle of the shorthorns and herefords are often were called oxen. This led to some confusion over the term oxen.

During the years of the Great War, 1860 - 1865, Prince George's County remained somewhat partial to the Confederacy. In fact, President Lincoln only got one vote from Prince George's County residents in the 1861 election period as a consequence, several **BRYAN's** pledged their faith to the South. **REBECCA's** husband, **WALTER P. GRIFFIN** and her brother **PLINY BRYAN**, dealt with some espionage. Much of **WALTER's** work was accomplished out of the fishing landing property near Mount Vernon. The extent to which **WALTER's** work was involved in the Confederacy is unknown, but it is likely his role was minor - perhaps blockade running across the Potomac River. It included the transportation of troops, bandages, quinine, chloroform, or even other agents. The **BRYAN's** fishing wharf offered an ideal site for such activities.

**EDWARD PLINY BRYAN's** role in the Confederacy was much more complicated than that of his brother-in-law. A pointy as he was known, was a member of the Maryland legislature until 1861. In July of that year he became openly involved with Confederates. He volunteered for Duty as a signal officer with special services. The services he offered or the construction and implantation of torpedoes ore mines in the rivers and harbors of the South. Operating mostly out of Charleston, South Carolina, Pliny often worked in Savannah, Georgia and Pocotilago, Florida. While constructing Torpedoes in Charleston, he became ill with yellow fever, and died several days later on September 30th 1864. The Confederacy had lost a very intelligent and laborious worker. Ironically, in 1890, Pliny's brother, **WILLIAM P. BRYAN \***, was chosen to conduct a survey of the surviving wives and Union Soldiers of the Civil War.

\* **JOHN H. BRYAN's** father

With the close of the Civil War in 1865 , and the earlier issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation, many Prince George and lost considerable wealth. **WILLIAM P. BRYAN's** wealth was centered around his 33 slaves. After their freedom, the **BRYAN** estate dropped tremendously in value. The resulting years became even tougher for **SUSANNA BRYAN**. In 1860 only five of her children were left at home: **EDWARD PLINY**, **WILLIAM P.**, **ROBERT E. S.**, **SOPHINIA**, and **JOHN H. B.**, **EDWARD PLINY** and **WILLIAM** often accompanied accompanied their mother to the nearby Surratt's Tavern. As of 1862, all three had accumulated a total of \$119 in unpaid bills. By 1870 **SUSANNAH** was at home with **WILLIAM P.**, and **JOHN H. B. BRYAN**. 10 years later it was **SUSANNA**, her son **WILLIAM P.**, his wife **CATHERINE** and their five children.

Since **SUSANNA's** husband died without a will the court decided ownership of the 2,300 Acres the acreage was found in eight different Farms, but the courts divided it into five farms with confusing boundaries. This is **BRYAN** remain on the home Plantation of 796 Acres. Tax assessments of the 1870s called the property "**BRYAN's Hall**" during the years 1870 - 1885, excluding a

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few years, **SUSANNAH LANHAM BRYAN**, being even poorer, failed to pay taxes on her land. The back taxes amounted to \$1,362.90. A complaint was registered with the courts by **CHARLES CLAGETT**, et al. Requiring her to pay the back taxes or sell the property. Unable to find that much money, the property, all her belongings, and improvements went up for sale. At public auction on Saturday morning at 11:45 A. M., February 2, 1889, the property was sold to **SYDNEY E. MUDD, SR.** The price, a mere \$1,600.00. The sale became permanent three years later on January 25, 1892. Thus ended a reign of the **BRYAN** dynasty in Prince George's County. **SUSANNAH** died in obscurity on July 20, 1895 somewhere in Washington, D. C. Most of her children left the Poscataway area, but 82 years later there are still a few great grandchildren living within 10 miles of "**BRYAN's** Hall".

Some people say the **BRYAN** estate is haunted by the ghost of **WILLIAM P. BRYAN** of **RICHARD**. Sad and strange happenings occur as different owners take over the colonial site. **SYDNEY MUDD, SR.**, unable to maintain the farm, mortgaged it late in 1892 to his friends **SKIPWITH WILMER** and **JAMES T. PERKINS**. Seven years later it was mortgaged to Robert Poole. One year later it was mortgaged to **SYDNEY MUDD, JR.** Then on April 18, 1914 Mrs. **REBECCA BERGER** of Pittsburgh paid off all outstanding debts and became the sixth owner since 1892. "Aunt Becky", as she was called, was the widow of a wealthy Pennsylvania steel owner. She had no trouble maintaining the property, however, she died around 1939, and left the land to her son. Unfortunately he showed little interest except for occasional summer visits. The property went from this son to a split ownership. The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Board of Education. The Board of education owned the tract where the **BRYAN** house once stood. It was passed from their hands to the Prince George's Community College, its current owner. Now even the college is abandoning its operations at the homestead. One might guess that the ghost of **WILLIAM BRYAN** wants a **BRYAN** back at the home! We may never know the truth.