

The Steamboat Wharf at Governors Run, Maryland, 1871-1925

Parkers Creek Heritage Trail Research Report

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October 5, 2025

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Overview/Summary

This research report was prepared for the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail project, an activity of the American Chestnut Land Trust. The project documents the history of the area around Parkers Creek and Governors Run, two streams that flow into the Chesapeake Bay in central Calvert County, Maryland. •

The Governor's Run¹ Wharf Company was incorporated in 1871 to build a commercial dock along Calvert County's shore of the Chesapeake Bay in the vicinity of Fraziers (or Frasers) Landing. The wharf was in use by September 1871 when the Weems Steamboat Company advertised it as a scheduled stop along its Patuxent River Route.

The new wharf was a boon to passengers and shippers in the area, providing a vital link to Baltimore. Regularly scheduled steamboat service provided a reliable and predictable means of transport that benefitted farmers, tobacco planters, and the growers of fruits, vegetables, and livestock who shipped their products. In addition to scheduled service, steamers landed at the wharf to collect and discharge passengers for special excursion cruises.

• This report provides additional information about topics introduced in "Governors Run: Farm to Market, Schooners, Steamboats, & More," <https://www.pcheritagetrail.org/governors-run>. The home page for the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail project is <https://www.pcheritagetrail.org/>.

A store, oyster house, and boarding houses were established near the wharf. Commercial watermen fished, oystered, and crabbed in the adjacent bay. The area also attracted folks interested in fishing, crabbing, bathing, and other forms of water-based recreation.

Lacking natural protection, Governors Run Wharf was subject to the forces of nature. Local newspapers reported repeatedly on the vulnerable bay wharves sustaining damage from the effects weather. The wharf was repaired, rebuilt, or replaced as needed to keep it in service. As early as 1874, marine contractor Nathaniel Clow completed a wharf that may have been a replacement for the 1871 structure. An October 1878 hurricane washed away about half of the wharf's trestle and it was repaired the following May.

In 1888, the company hired Clow to replace the aging wharf structure. The following year, an April nor'easter damaged its warehouse. In 1893, a late season hurricane swept away about 500 feet of its trestle. Drifting ice seriously damaged the structure in 1904 and 1912. In June 1919, the pier head and warehouse burned, but were repaired that December. The following February, drifting ice carried away 300-400 feet of its bridge. Maintenance, repair, and rebuilding the wharf were conducted as ongoing activities to keep it in operation and the structure may have sustained instances of damage that went unreported in local newspapers.

Due to the improvement of land transportation routes, shipping and travel by steamboat became less vital to the economy of the region. By 1924, limited steamboat service and decreased revenue caused the Governor's Run Wharf Company to announce its closing. After another disappointing season, the company was dissolved and its wharf property was sold in 1925 to the adjacent land owner, William Dorsey. At that time, the wharf was described as "in bad condition." Without a company to meet the expense of maintaining the wharf, it soon fell into disrepair and ceased being used.

Epigraph

While the bay shore of Calvert offers no harbor for small craft there is a wide curve in the shore line sweeping westward and off Governor's Run Wharf schooners anchor in the bay and load wood and other material to be freighted elsewhere.²

Part 1. Governor's Run Wharf Company of Calvert County

Following the destruction of circuit court records by fire in 1882, the Articles of Incorporation document for the Governor's Run Wharf Company of Calvert County was rerecorded on March 5, 1885. The original document had been signed December 16, 1870, and recorded January 3, 1871. The corporation was formed to:

Construct, purchase, buy or lease a wharf or warves (sic), pier or piers, on the waters of the Chesapeake Bay adjacent to Calvert County aforesaid at or near "Governor's Run" in said county...

Capital stock in the company was \$25,000, consisting of 250 \$100 shares. The document named the five incorporators of the company as Octavius C. Bowen, George W. Dorsey, William P. Dorsey, John Parran, and Henry Williams. Further, it specified that four of the incorporators,

Williams, Parran, and the Dorsey brothers, would serve as directors until the first Monday in January 1872. At that time, a meeting of stockholders would elect a new board of four directors and thereafter would meet and elect directors annually.³

The incorporators of the Governor's Run Wharf Company included men from prominent Calvert County families who were well connected. Henry Williams, for instance, was a lawyer from Prince Frederick and a son-in-law of Mason Locke Weems of the Weems Steamboat Company. In 1875 he became the general manager and president of the Weems Line.⁴ Williams was also already one of the founding directors of the Chesapeake Wharf Company⁵ and later became one of the incorporators of the Dare Wharf Company.⁶

Incorporator George W. Dorsey was a physician and farmer who owned several properties in central Calvert County, including 83 acres of Lower Bennett, a bayside farm that he purchased from Charles Frazier in 1843.⁷ Governors Run Wharf would be built in the bay adjacent to Dorsey's Lower Bennett property at or near the site of the former Fraizer's Landing.

In May 1871, the *Baltimore Sun* printed an item from the *Calvert Journal* stating that the Governor's Run Wharf Company had "made a contract for the erection of a pier and wharf on the bay, near Port Republic, to be constructed at once."⁸ When the Weems Steamboat Company placed an advertisement in the September 14, 1871, edition of the *St. Mary's Beacon* for its Fall Arrangement, Governors Run was listed as a scheduled steamboat stop along its Patuxent River Route.⁹

When Governors Run was added to the Weems Company's schedule, it joined Plum Point to become the second steamboat shipping point along the bay shore of Calvert County. A wharf was under construction at Plum Point in 1855¹⁰ and it was listed as a regularly scheduled stop on Weems' Patuxent River Route by April 1856.¹¹ In 1868, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that the Plum Point Wharf Company planned to build a new wharf there, suggesting the former wharf had deteriorated or been damaged.¹² In 1871, Governors Run, with regularly scheduled steamboat service, opened another bayside section of Calvert County to communication with Baltimore.

Part 2: Businesses at Governors Run

Given its increased importance to local shipping, the wharf at Governors Run became a hub for commerce and communication. In June 1875, the *Baltimore Sun* included an advertisement for a new storehouse and dwelling:

FOR RENT--The new and commodious DWELLING and STOREHOUSE at Governor's Run wharf, Calvert county: the Steamboat agency nearly cover the rent: possession given at once. For terms apply to DR. G.W. DORSEY, Port Republic, Calvert county

The same ad was still being published that September.¹³ Other businesses would later develop in the vicinity of the wharf.

Governors Run Post Office was established in 1878 and received its mail via Weems steamers. Its first postmaster was John Sedwick who is listed as a merchant in the 1880 census. He was succeeded by Thomas Young in 1882. From 1883 through 1886, Governors Run storekeeper

William A. Peterson held the position. He resigned in December 1886 and recommended W.A. Dorsey as his replacement.¹⁴ From 1887 through 1893, William A. Dorsey was postmaster. His wife, Mary Dorsey, became postmaster in 1894.¹⁵ When steamboat service was suspended for an extended period by winter weather in February 1895, Alex de Barrill, the postmaster at Drum Point, traveled to Baltimore aboard the steam tug *Templar* and brought the mail to Governors Run and other bayside wharves.¹⁶

In 1898 the *Calvert Gazette* reported an amusing story about W.A. Dorsey repaying a Baltimore wholesale grocer an \$11.00 debt by sending a cigar box weighing several pounds that was filled with pennies. The newspaper speculated it was likely that the pennies came from the sale of postage stamps.¹⁷ Mary Dorsey served as postmaster until March 15, 1908, when the Governors Run Post Office was discontinued and the mail was sent to Port Republic.¹⁸ The closing of the post office may have occurred as a result of a transition from delivery of mail by steamboat to the use of land routes.¹⁹

Due to its proximity to the steamboat landing, the Governors Run area attracted commercial activity. In 1886, William A. Peterson operated the store at Governors Run and was engaged, with Joseph P. Sollers, in marketing a variety of fish they caught with their haul seine.

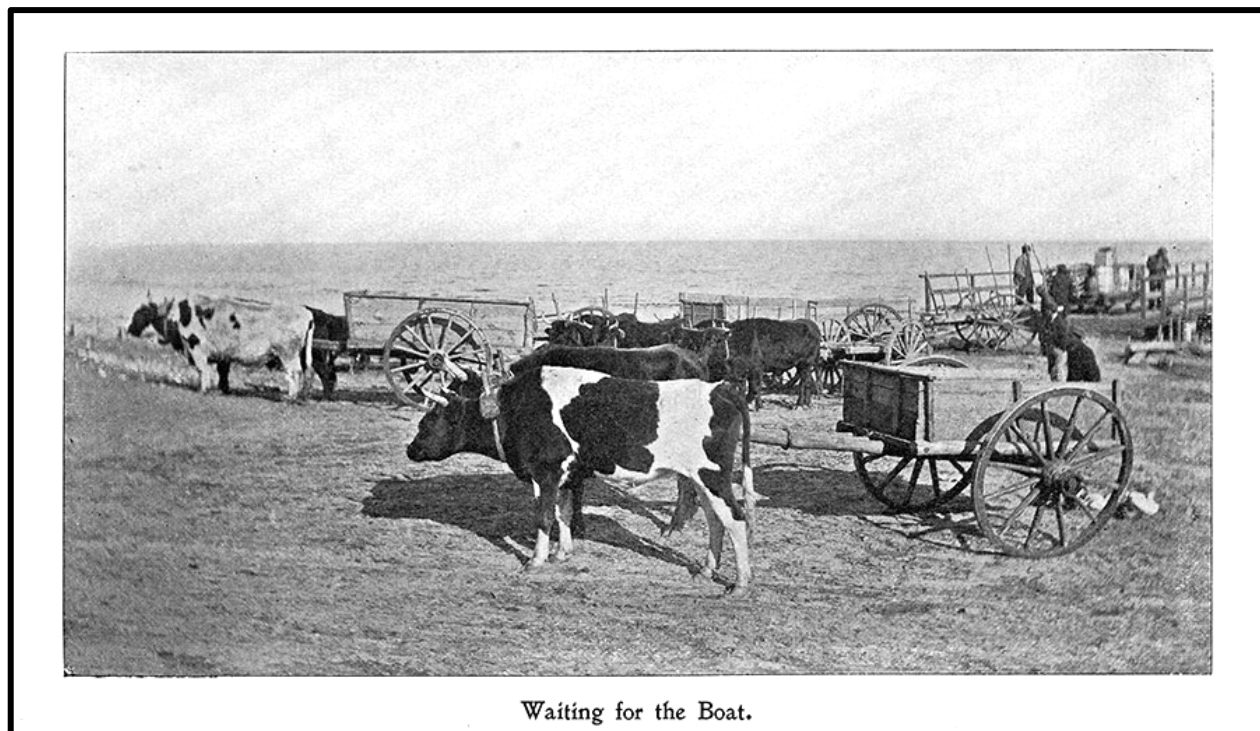
Where to Get Fish.-Messrs. Joseph P. Sollers and W.A. Peterson having recently purchased a large seine and engaged in catching fish at and near Governor's Run, desire to give notice that they are prepared to supply fresh fish to all who desire them at Mr. Peterson's store, Governor's Run. Whenever the weather will permit, their seine will be hauled every morning, and persons coming or sending for fish will always find a supply on hand in the afternoon. Recently Messrs. Sollers and Peterson have been catching some very fine taylors, rock, trout and crocus.²⁰

A November 1886 news item reported "Mr. William Bafford has opened an oyster house at Governors Run and is doing a thriving business. The bivalves obtained from the bay are particularly delicious this fall."²¹ A few years later, Perry S. Ross had several dredge boats at work in the vicinity of Governors Run and was shipping two grades of barreled oysters, "selects and cullings," from the wharf to Philadelphia in 1890. "The Philadelphia Commission House that handles these oysters writes Mr. Ross that the Governor's Run oysters are the best on the Philadelphia market."²²

Pound net fishermen also operated in waters off Governors Run. In April 1889, Joseph P. Sollers was catching "a plentiful supply of fish" from his pound nets at Governors Run.²³ That season, his pound nets were damaged by a violent storm.²⁴ Edward Humphreys caught a seven-foot sturgeon in his pound net there in 1892.²⁵ When a law was passed in 1894 requiring a license to fish commercially in the bay,²⁶ Humphreys and Sollers were among nine men who purchased commercial Chesapeake Bay fishing licenses in Calvert County.²⁷

In 1893, George W. Dorsey sold 82-acres of Lower Bennett, adjacent to Governors Run Wharf, to his son William A. Dorsey.²⁸ A few years later, a photograph published in a Weems Steamboat Company booklet and tentatively identified as Governors Run depicts a busy rural shipping wharf. Titled "Waiting for the Boat," it shows drivers with several yokes of oxen and empty oxcarts awaiting freight deliveries. Only a section of the shoreside part of the wharf is

visible, but it shows a substantial structure and a rail car loaded with freight awaiting the steamer.²⁹



Drivers, oxen, and ox carts at Governors Run Wharf. Note the rail car loaded with freight on the wharf in the right background. (Source: Calvert Marine Museum)³⁰

Part 3: Bayside Resort

Governors Run was also considered a bayside resort area with two houses that took in summer boarders. Mrs. W.A. Dorsey and Mrs. J.S. Talbott advertised for summer boarders in the *Baltimore Sun* in the late 19th century. Mary Dorsey's house was on the bay just northwest of the steamboat landing. Talbott's house also fronted the bay and was southwest of the wharf.

HAVING A PLEASANT HOME ON THE CHESAPEAKE BAY, high and healthy, with plenty of shade, 60 miles from Baltimore, daily mails, fresh milk and butter, and fruit plentiful, would take a few BOARDERS for the summer months. Terms reasonable. Apply to MRS.W. A. DORSEY, Governor's Run, Calvert County, MD.³¹

In 1897, Mrs. J.S. Talbott advertised her boarding house at Governors Run in the *Baltimore Sun*:
BOARDING on Bay Shore at reasonable rates; large, airy rooms; bathing, boating, fishing and crabbing; daily communication by boat, Weems' Line, pier No. 8. Lightstreet.
MRS. J.S. TALBOTT, Governor's Run, Calvert county, Md.³²

The same edition of the *Sun* carried an advertisement by Mrs. W.A. Dorsey for her boarding house:

WANTED - BOARDERS at Country Home, directly on Chesapeake bay with fishing, crabbing, boating and lovely bathing all free. ADDRESS MRS. W. A. DORSEY, Governor's Run, Calvert County, Md. Baltimore reference given.³³

Mrs. Dorsey ran similar pieces advertising the summer season at her "Country Home" from 1895 through 1899.³⁴

In 1897, both boarding houses at Governors Run were included in the booklet titled *Summer Homes and Historical Points Along the Routes of The Weems Steamboat Company*:

A Country Home, situated directly on the Bay, with Fine Bathing, Fishing, Crabbing, Rowing and Sailing, free. Table furnished with Oysters, Fish and Crabs, Fresh from the Water; and an abundance of Fresh Milk, Poultry and Ice. Large and Comfortable Rooms.

Mrs. W. A. Dorsey, Rates on application. Governor Run, Calvert County, Md .

Governor Run, Delightfully situated on the Chesapeake Bay; Good Fishing, Crabbing, Boating and Bathing.

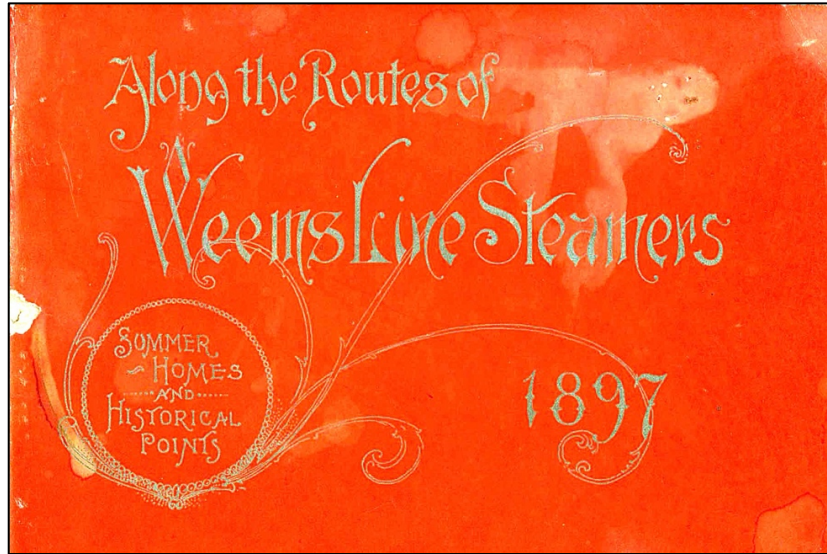
Mrs. J. S. Talbott, Rates on application. Governor Run, Md .³⁵

The following year, the Weems Line published a similar booklet titled *Along the Routes of Weems Line Steamers*. According to a review in the *Calvert Journal*, the pamphlet "is gotten up for the benefit of tourists, and should be had by everybody who plans to make a summer outing."³⁶

Advertisements for Talbott's boarding house continued to be placed in the *Baltimore Sun* into the early 20th century.

A FEW Summer Boarders can be pleasantly accommodated at a Country Home, immediately on Chesapeake bay; location high and healthy; bathing fine. For full particulars address MRS. J.S. TALBOTT, Governor's Run, Calvert co., Md³⁷

COOL PLACE ON THE BAY, CALVERT HEIGHTS Bathing, Fishing, Boating, Crabbing; shady lawn; large porches. Address MRS. J.S. TALBOTT, Governor's Run, Calvert co., Md³⁸



Cover of *Summer Homes and Historical Points Along the Routes of The Weems Steamboat Company*, 1897. (Source: Calvert Marine Museum)³⁹

Part 4: Social Gatherings and Recreation

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Governors Run was a social gathering place for the surrounding community where dances and tournaments were hosted. For instance, in August 1889, about 30 “young ladies and gentlemen” from lower Calvert County came to Governors Run and enjoyed a picnic and boat rides before going to the Grange Hall to dance. “The most interesting feature of the evening was a car ride on the wharf in which all took part.” It may be inferred the “car ride” was aboard the wharf’s freight rail car.⁴⁰

In 1900, a masquerade ball was held at Governors Run.⁴¹ Another dance was hosted in July 1902 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. William A Dorsey. Lasting from 9:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m., music was provided by a pianist from Baltimore. The lawn was decorated with Japanese lanterns and the dance was held in the Dorsey’s parlor and long rear porch.⁴² In August 1903, a jousting tournament featuring seven knights was held at Governors Run, followed by a “delightful dance” at the home of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Dorsey.⁴³

In September 1904, Governors Run was the site of a tournament and ball for the benefit of Christ Church.⁴⁴ Eighteen knights entered the contest and prizes were awarded. A band from Baltimore played at both the tournament and the evening dance. The dance was held in the warehouse on the wharf “where a floor had been especially constructed for the occasion, and the place tastefully decorated and illuminated.”⁴⁵

The Governors Run Wharf was also used for other recreational pursuits like fishing and crabbing. According to an August 1886 account:

Fine Sport.--The steamboat wharf at Governor's Run affords an opportunity for the enjoyment of fine sport at this time. The fishing and crabbing there are both excellent, and on any good day hundreds of corks may be seen bobbing up serenely in the hands of as many nimrods of the Chesapeake, from the young and festive "kid" to some who have long since turned the three-score-and-ten point. Crocus are caught in great numbers,

although rock, green fish (or taylor), brim and eel are by no means scarce. One day last week Mr. William A. Bafford caught two fine sheepshead near the pier, the first, it is said, ever caught at Governor's Run.⁴⁶



Men passing the time on Governors Run Wharf, ca. 1920s (Source: Calvert Marine Museum)⁴⁷

In 1911, a 65-page promotional booklet contains a section on the Maryland, Delaware and Virginia Railway Company's Patuxent River Line trip. It promoted the area as a good place to get away from the city. After describing Fair Haven, Plum Point, and Dare's,

The next stop is Governor's Run, another popular summering place, to which many summer boarders are attracted by the excellence of the boarding-houses and good bathing. Soon after leaving Governor's Run, the steamer begins to "haul in" for the mouth of the Patuxent River at Drum Point...⁴⁸

Part 5: Forces of Nature Took Their Toll

The wharf at Governors Run was in an exposed position and, extending from the shore some distance to the deeper water needed for safe docking of steamboats and other vessels, it was vulnerable to natural forces. Instances of damage to the wharf structure from storm driven winds, waves, and ice were reported regularly in the local newspapers. Ongoing maintenance and repairs of the wharf were needed to ensure it remained a reliable shipping point. The Governor's Run Wharf Company arranged for the maintenance of the structure.

The *Annapolis Republican* printed an item that credited marine contractor Nathaniel Clow with completing the contract for building the wharf at Governors Run in August 1874.⁴⁹ Since the

wharf was already operating in 1871, it is likely that Clow's 1874 work was to rebuild or replace a damaged structure.

The September 23, 1876, edition of the *Calvert Journal* contains an account of a severe storm from the northeast with heavy rains and wind. The wharf at Plum Point was severely damaged with two-thirds of its structure "swept away." Meanwhile, "Governor's Run Wharf was only slightly damaged." The newspaper reported that the Fair Haven Wharf in Anne Arundel County, another stop by Weems steamers plying the Patuxent River Route, was demolished by the same storm.⁵⁰ The limited damage at Governors Run may relate to it having been rebuilt in 1874.

An October 1878 hurricane caused extensive damage in the bay region, including washing away about half of the bridge at Governors Run Wharf.⁵¹ The following May, repairs were underway when

...the boat to which the steam pile driver is attached, was driven against the wharf at Governor's Run by the storm and was damaged to such an extent that it soon after sunk. A supply of coal, which was to be used in the work of repairing the wharf was washed overboard. The work on the wharf will be somewhat delayed on account of this accident.

The unfortunate owner of the pile driving rig was Baltimore marine contractor Henry Vogler.⁵² The wharf was still listed as a scheduled stop on the Patuxent River Route during early 1879, so some accommodation was apparently made to transfer passengers and freight between the shore and the dock before repairs were completed.⁵³

Severe winter weather also took its toll on the wharf at Governors Run. The February 13, 1886, edition of the *Calvert Gazette* reported that ice had carried away about 75 feet of the wharf in January. The article stated the wharf was again surrounded by ice and speculated that heavy winds might sweep away the remainder of the structure. Until the weather became more favorable and repairs could be made, it was reported that "passengers and freight will be conveyed to and from the pier in small boats."⁵⁴ By early May, the marine contractor Nathaniel Clow had begun repairs.⁵⁵ A week later, it reported the repairs had been completed. The report confirms that during the months after the wharf was damaged, "a small boat has been used to transfer freight and passengers from the shore to the pier-head--a great inconvenience, and rather dangerous transportation in rough weather."⁵⁶

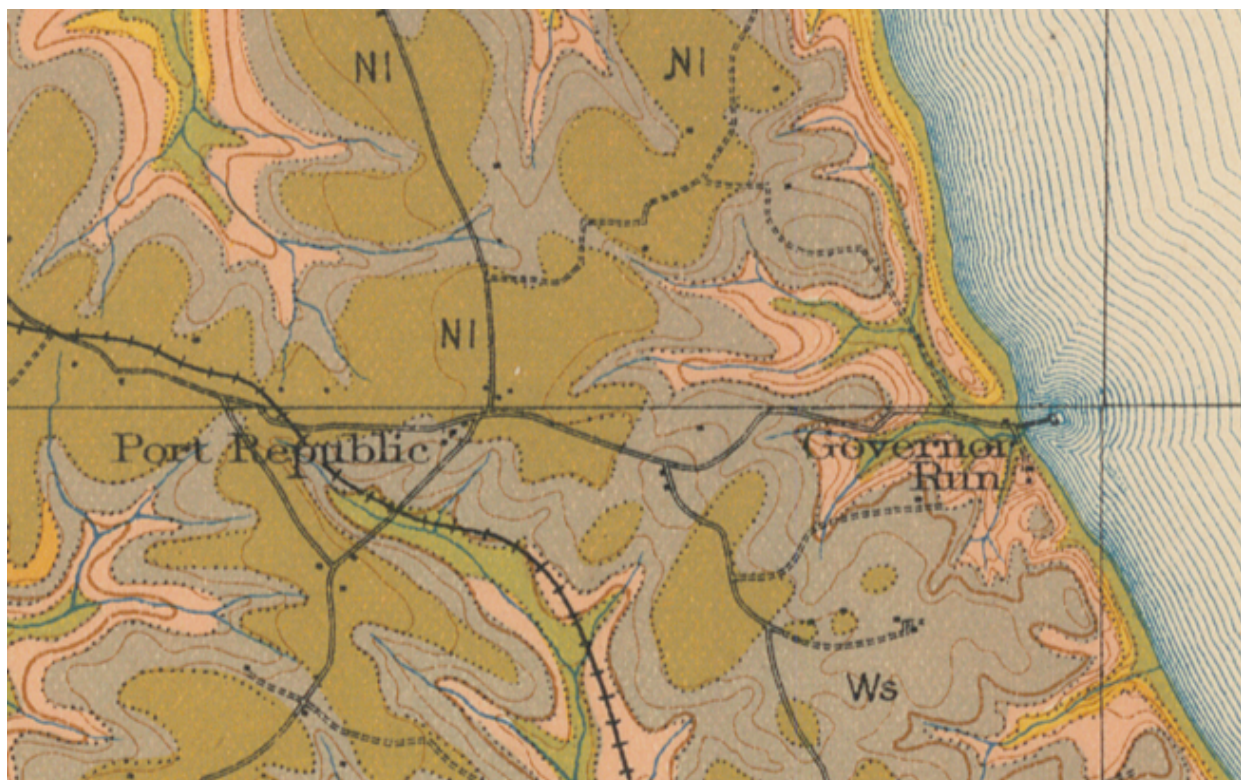
In 1888, plans were announced to replace the aging wharf at Governors Run. In April, it was reported that 100 piles had been delivered by George P. Ross and John W. Howard with additional piles furnished by John P. Gray and Otis P. Talbott. The steam sawmill of Jones and Grierson was supplying stringers, decking, and other lumber.⁵⁷ In 1886, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that W. Frederick Grierson was the proprietor of a steam sawmill at Holly Hill.⁵⁸

In July, 1888, the *Calvert Gazette* provided a detailed account of the new wharf construction: Governor's Run Wharf.--The new steamboat wharf now being constructed at Governor's Run will, when completed, be one of the finest structures of its kind on the bay. The material used is of the very best, and the work is being done in a thoroughly workmanlike manner. A new departure has been made in using sawed piles on the shore end of the wharf. The piles are cut square, about 8x8 inches, and are driven to a depth of three feet.

The portion exposed to the action of the water is first given a coating of tar and then covered with sheets of zinc. The stringers used are of Georgia pine and the flooring was furnished from the mill of Messrs. Jones & Grierson. Mr. N. Clow of Annapolis, is the contractor, and has a large force employed on the work.⁵⁹

Relying on informants to supply accounts of storm damage, the local newspapers did not always agree in their reporting. For example, in the Spring of 1889, the *Calvert Gazette* underestimated the damage caused by a nor'easter, stating the storm "caused slight damage to Plum Point and Governors Run wharves, the heaviest loss being sustained by the latter. The damages, however, are not sufficient to interfere with shipments from those points."⁶⁰ By contrast, the *Calvert Journal* reported "Governor's Run and Plum Point wharves were also severely damaged by heavy wind and waves during Saturday storm."⁶¹ At the April stockholders meeting, the directors voted to repair the Governors Run Wharf that had been "quite severely damaged."⁶² A month later, the *Calvert Gazette* reported: "The warehouse on the wharf at Governor's Run has been thoroughly repaired by Mr. W.A. Dorsey, it having sustained considerable damage by the late heavy northeast storm."⁶³

An August 1893 hurricane caused a "remarkably high tide" that submerged the wharf making the steamer *St. Mary's* abandon an attempt to dock. A number of cattle intended to be loaded onto the steamer were left on Governors Run Wharf.⁶⁴ A late season hurricane in October of 1893 caused damage to wharves and buildings throughout the region. "At Governor's Run, about 500 feet of the bridge, beginning at the shore, were swept away."⁶⁵ Work was undertaken to collect pilings and lumber to make repairs to the wharf.⁶⁶ In late October, Nathaniel Clow was repairing the damage.⁶⁷



Detail of 1902 Calvert County agricultural soils map showing vicinity of Governors Run and Port Republic.

In February 1904, the *Calvert Gazette* reported a nor'easter forced floating ice against the wharf, causing extensive damage.

Wharf Wrecked .—The wharf at Governor's Run on the bay was seriously damaged the latter part of last week by masses of floating ice driven against it by the strong northeast winds, it is thought the damage is quite beyond repair and a new wharf will have to be built. The shore end of the wharf is intact. A small section in the bay remains and the warehouse is still standing but the fender piles are lifted high above their usual position and are likely to be swept away at the coming of another ice strain.⁶⁸

Reports regarding the repair or replacement of the wharf were not found in local newspapers. Interestingly, just a few weeks later, when the Weems Steamboat Company advertised its spring arrangement in effect March 19, 1904, Governors Run is listed as a scheduled stop on the Patuxent River Route.⁶⁹ That fall, when Governors Run hosted a tournament and ball, a dance was held in the warehouse on the pier.⁷⁰

In February 1905, freezing winter weather prevented the Baltimore steamers from reaching wharves so they resorted to unloading freight and passengers on the ice miles offshore. It was reported to be the most severe conditions since the winter of 1856.⁷¹

The area's newspapers, relying on local informants, did not always report on storm damage to wharves. When they did, they sometimes disagreed on the extent of damage. For instance, in January 1912, the *Calvert Journal* reported "Governor's Run wharf was somewhat damaged this week. When the ice left this shore it carried off several of the piles."⁷² By contrast, the *Calvert Gazette* reported ice "carrying away fully one-third of the structure"⁷³

In April 1912, a tornado caused widespread damage in the vicinity of Port Republic and Governors Run, including the property of the Talbotts and Dorseys:

During the storm of Tuesday afternoon a terrific tornado passed over and across the county . . . Perhaps the greatest sufferer was Mr. Otis F. Talbott, near Port Republic. His kitchen was torn loose from his dwelling and with his barn, ice house roof and other outbuildings was carried several hundred feet and demolished. His tobacco crop was ruined, and cooking utensils and kitchen furniture were scattered over adjoining fields. His orchard and shade trees were uprooted and wrenched off and the place practically devastated...The dwelling of Mr. Peterson Dorsey, a bungalo [sic] located on the bay bank near Governor's Run, with all the contents, was swept into the bay. Fortunately Mr. Dorsey and his wife were away from home. Mr. William A. Dorsey also lost a barn in which a horse belonging to Mr. Benjamin Laveille was killed. One of the most unfortunate and regrettable effects of the storm is the destruction of the grand old oaks around Christ Church.⁷⁴

That July, a wind storm damaged the porch of William A. Dorsey's residence at Governors Run.⁷⁵

Although storms and drift ice damaged wharves and affected steamboat service at Governors Run, fire was also a concern. Governors Run Wharf was damaged by fire in June 1919. The fire was detected by wharf agent William Dorsey in the early morning hours. The pier head, warehouse, and some items of freight were destroyed, but the long bridge was saved by cutting it away from the dock. Steamboat service to Governors Run was suspended until repairs were made in December.⁷⁶

In late January, a local newspaper reported that an ice blockade had prevented the steamboats from reaching bay or river wharves for two or more weeks and many merchants were running short on supplies.⁷⁷ A February 1920, gale forced drifting ice to the western shore causing damage to the Governors Run Wharf again. Recently rebuilt, Governors Run initially fared better under the force of the heavy drift ice than other bayside wharves. However, on the second day of the storm, a 300 to 400-foot section of its bridge gave way.⁷⁸ As a consequence, service was curtailed, and Governors Run was open only to light freight. As the *Calvert Journal* summed up: “It will take a considerable time to put all the damaged wharves in shape.”⁷⁹ The *Baltimore Sun* reported on the damage to Calvert County wharves, but also reported “The ice pack for miles along the bay shore presents a scene of unusual grandeur.”⁸⁰



Men rolling tobacco hogshead onto steamboat, possibly at Governors Run Wharf, undated. (Source: University of Maryland Hornbake Library, Amoss Collection)⁸¹

Part 6: Wharf Business: Directors and Stockholders

The Governor's Run Wharf Company held a stockholder's meeting each year to elect a board of four directors. A notice of the time and place of the of the planned stockholders meeting was printed in local newspapers. Results of the elections were also reported in news items, although not all election results are known.

The board of directors approved any necessary expenditures for maintenance and upkeep of the wharf and appointed a paid agent who oversaw the day-to-day operations of the facility. The company's revenue was earned by wharfage fees charged to shippers of freight. Depending on income and expenses, the directors determined if the revenue allowed the company to pay shareholders an annual dividend.

Early directors from 1872 through 1887 are unknown, but several remained longtime board members. In 1889, for instance, the stockholders meeting was announced for April 9 at the law office of John P. Briscoe in Prince Frederick. The notice was signed by sitting directors Henry Williams, John B. Gray, John P. Briscoe, and George W. Dorsey.⁸² The sitting directors were reelected to another term in 1889.⁸³ Two of members of the board, George Dorsey and Henry Williams, were founding directors in 1871.

In 1895, the annual meeting was held in January at the law office of John B. Gray and the stockholders elected Henry Williams, president; Dr. George W. Dorsey, treasurer; John B. Gray, secretary; and John Sedwick.⁸⁴ One of the founding directors, George W. Dorsey, died in 1901. In his Last Will and Testament, he bequeathed nine shares of capital stock in the Governor's Run Wharf Company to his son William A. Dorsey and eight shares to his daughter Mary Wheeler Brooke Peterson.⁸⁵

In 1903, the stockholders selected John A. Sedwick, president; John B. Gray, secretary and treasurer; Henry Williams, and William A. Dorsey.⁸⁶ In 1905, John A. Sedwick was reelected president and John B. Gray continued as secretary and treasurer. W.L Rothstein, and William A. Dorsey were also elected to the board.⁸⁷

Representing the Weems Steamboat Company as a director of the Governor's Run Wharf Company, Henry Williams also served on the boards of the Chesapeake Wharf Company and the Dare Wharf Company. After he resigned as president of the Weems Steamboat Company in October 1904 as part of the consolidation of Weems and other companies under the Pennsylvania Railroad, he stepped down from the boards.⁸⁸ William L. Rothstein, representing the interests of the Maryland, Delaware and Virginia Railway, replaced Williams on the boards of the three wharf companies.⁸⁹

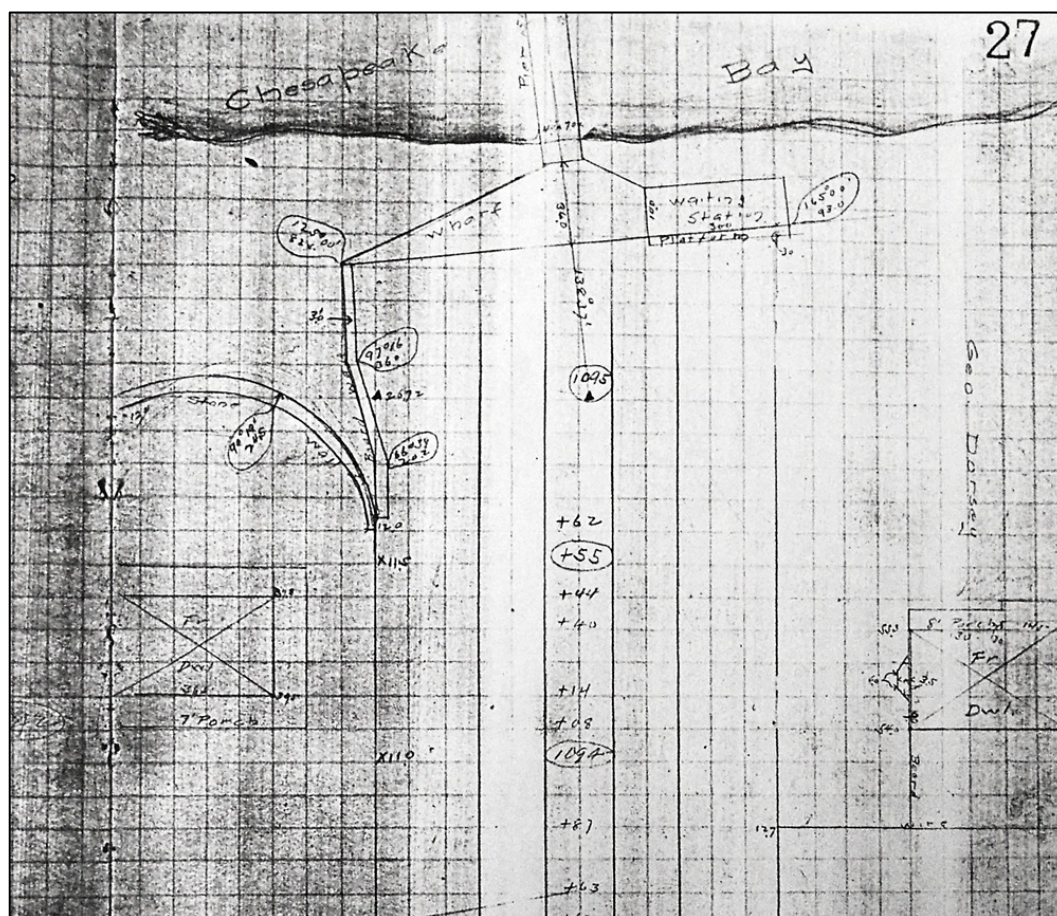
In 1907, Governors Run Wharf generated \$2,472.00 in local freight, \$56.74 in through freight, and \$3,240.83 for passengers, for a total revenue of \$5,769.57.68 for the Maryland Delaware & Virginia Railway Company. Of the wharves along the Patuxent River Line, based on the steamboat company's revenue totals, Governors Run was the third busiest after Solomons Island (\$9,039.02) and Millstone Landing (\$6,462.15). In terms of revenues from passenger services,

Governors Run generated \$3,240.83 for the steamboat company, second only to Solomons Island.⁹⁰

The same board of directors elected in 1905 was reelected through 1915.⁹¹ The board approved an 8% dividend to be paid to stockholders in 1911 and 1912.⁹² A change in makeup of the Governors Run Wharf Company board occurred in 1916 when John Sedwick declined to serve another term as a director. The new board consisted of William A. Dorsey, president; John B. Gray, secretary and treasurer; W.L. Rothstein, and John B. Latimer. The board approved an 8% dividend be paid to stockholders in 1916.⁹³ The directors were reelected in 1917 and approved another dividend of 8%.⁹⁴ The board was reelected again in 1918.⁹⁵

Part 7: End of an Era

A 1916 survey plat of the area near the terminus of Governors Run Road shows the configuration of the shoreside end of the wharf and adjacent structures. It depicts a large platform on the west end of the wharf that has a “Waiting Station” on its south end. On the north end of the platform is a boardwalk leading to a stone wall. To the west of the wall is a frame dwelling with a seven-foot-wide porch on its west side. South of the road is labeled George Dorsey. It contains a frame dwelling with an eight-foot-wide porch on its east side facing the bay. West of the dwelling are a chicken house, carriage house, and corn crib.⁹⁶



Detail of 1916 road survey plat showing vicinity of terminus of Governors Run Road. Note Governors Run Wharf platform and waiting station. (Source: Maryland State Archives)⁹⁷

In the early 1920s, the frequency of scheduled steamboat service along the Patuxent River Line decreased, making shipping and travelling by water less reliable and more difficult. With decreased steamer service, shippers increasingly relied on trucks to transport perishable freight to market and former passengers turned to travel by private automobile or buses. By 1924, only one steamboat stopped at the wharf twice a week. The return trip to Baltimore landed at Governors Run on Friday night. John B. Gray, one of the wharf company stockholders, wrote a letter to the *Baltimore Sun*, pointing out that there was no market for “cattle, poultry, or other produce” in the city on Saturdays.⁹⁸ The letter also signals Gray's awareness of the diminished importance of steamboats, calling for the construction of a railroad to serve Calvert County.

Due to limited steamboat service and decreasing revenues, on January 5, 1925, the board of directors met to vote on the dissolution of the Governor's Run Wharf Company. The directors at the time were William A. Dorsey, president; John B. Gray Sr., secretary; James B. Latimer, and John B. Gray Jr. They advised the dissolution of the corporation. In the meeting held on January 26 in the office of John B. Gray, a majority of the stockholders, representing 35 of the total 50 shares in the company, voted in favor of dissolution.

Gray petitioned the court to grant him permission to spend corporation funds for temporary repairs to make the wharf safe for use during the summer of 1925. He stated “there is great demand in the neighborhood of Governor's Run that the wharf be kept open for the summer season.” He speculated that revenue from wharfage fees from the summer season would amount to between \$300 and \$400. The court approved the expenditure of company funds to keep the wharf open for the 1925 season.

From April 1 to November 3, 1925, only \$292.18 was earned from wharfage fees at Governors Run. Among the expenses incurred in 1925 were \$64.61 for wharf repairs paid to George D. Turner and \$50 paid to wharf agent J. Latimer Ireland.

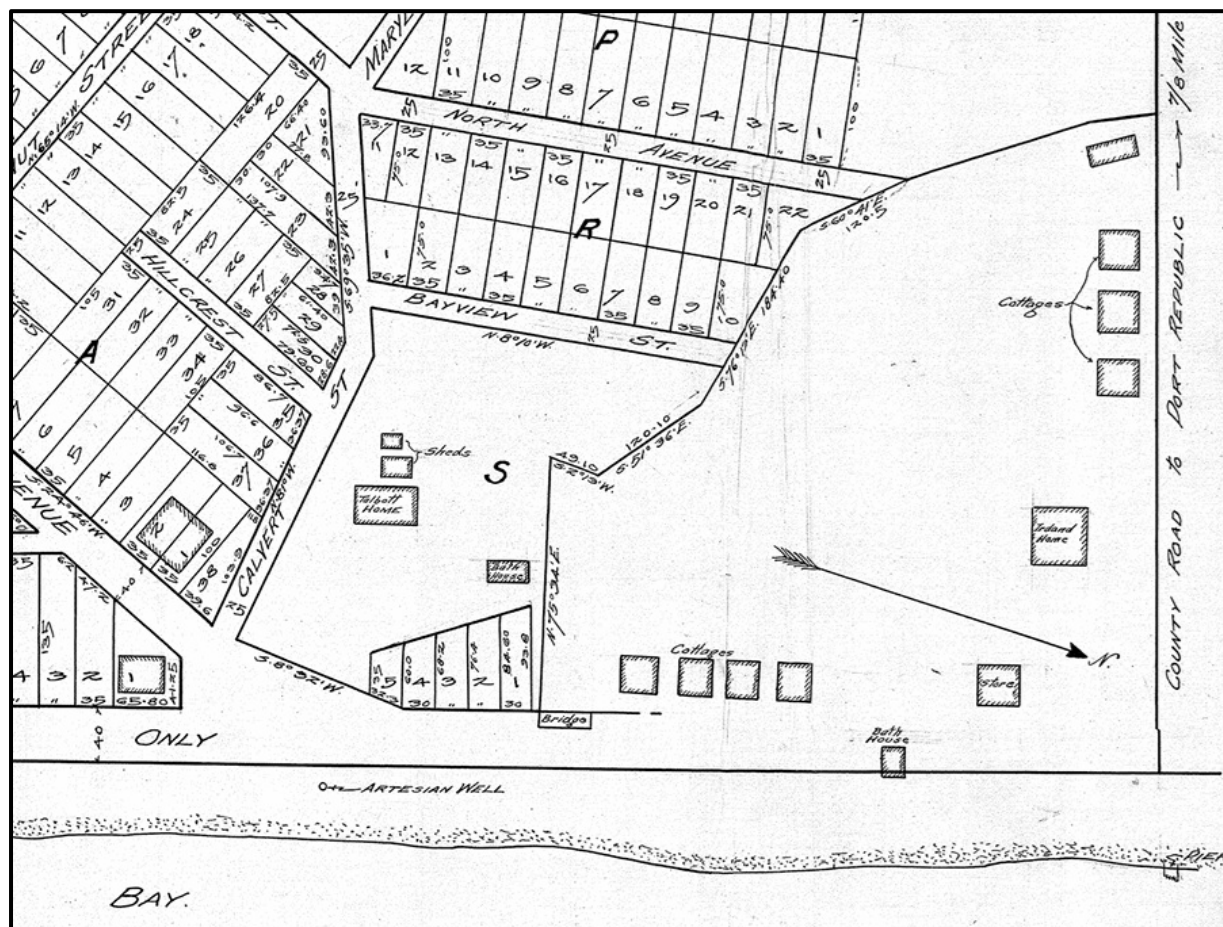
Gray, in a petition to the court, cited unsatisfactory steamboat service, poor patronage by the local community, and disappointing income as his rationale for closing the wharf and liquidating the company assets in 1925. At the time of dissolution, the corporation included 12 stockholders. They were: William A. Dorsey (9 shares); Mary W.B. Peterson Estate (8 shares); the Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia Railway Co. (7 shares); John Sedwick Estate (6 shares); John B. Gray (5 shares); John B. Gray, Jr. (3 shares); William L. Rothstein (3 shares); Olive D. Smither (3 shares); John T. Hutchins Estate (2 shares); Mary K. Leason (2 shares); Rosa Sollers Estate (1 share); and James B. Latimer (1 share).

After John B. Gray, receiver, successfully petitioned the court to allow the Governors Run Wharf to continue operations during the 1925 summer season, the balance of the company assets amounted to \$8,757.03. A distribution of \$95.23 per share was made to stockholders. On February 1, 1926, the final order was made in Equity Court. Exhibit Number 3 in the Equity Case Number 729 listed among the assets of the company “One Wharf in bad condition extending from Governor's Run, Calvert County, Maryland, into the Chesapeake Bay and one waiting room at the shore end of said Wharf.” An advertisement for the November 17, 1925, public sale of the wharf property was published in local newspapers.⁹⁹ The Equity Case reports

the property was purchased by William A. Dorsey for \$150. Dorsey already owned the land adjacent to the wharf.

Given its “bad condition” cited in the Equity Court case and its exposure to the forces of nature, it is unlikely the steamboat wharf at Governors Run continued in use after 1925 due to maintenance issues. Subject to the damaging effects of storms and ice throughout the 54 years it was in operation, the wharf required capital investment to ensure it was repaired, rebuilt, or replaced to remain safe and serviceable. It is possible William Dorsey may have used the wharf to some extent after purchasing it, but with the phasing out of scheduled steamboat service and the dissolution of the commercial wharf company that had maintained it, the old structure soon fell prey to the effects of nature.

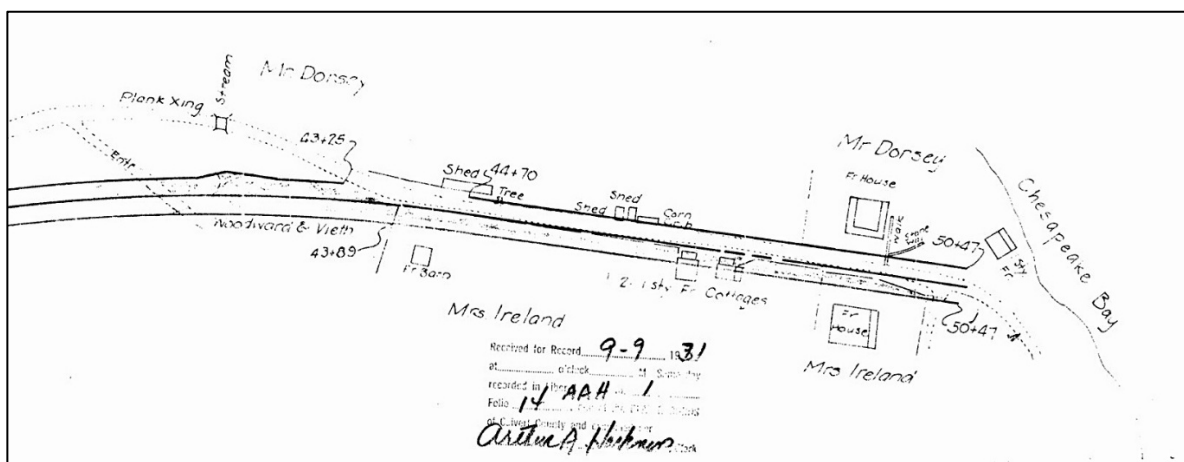
The 1926 subdivision plat for a new bayfront community at Governors Run called Kenwood Beach notes a “pier” at the terminus of the road at the bay and depicts a number of structures south of the county road at that time. Nearby are structures labeled Ireland Home (J. Latimer Ireland and wife Mary purchased the land from George W. and Ellen B. Dorsey in 1923)¹⁰⁰, store, bath house, sheds, and several cottages. South of the bridge spanning the creek are more structures including cottages and the Talbott Home and sheds.¹⁰¹



Detail of 1926 subdivision plat of Kenwood Beach showing area south of Governors Run Road terminus. Pier is noted at beach in lower right corner. (Source: Plats.net)¹⁰² The land

south of Governors Run Creek was purchased by Washington, D.C. residents William Woodward and Kenneth Veith from William and Elva Talbott of Baltimore City in August 1925.¹⁰³ The name Kenwood was derived from the new owners' names.¹⁰⁴

The 1931 plat of the road leading to Governors Run notes adjacent landowners and shows the configuration of buildings in the immediate vicinity of the roadway near the bay. South of the roadway is a frame house with a porch on its east side on Mrs. Ireland's property, two cottages facing the road, and a barn. North of the roadway is a frame house with porches on the east, south, and west sides, labeled Mr. Dorsey, and a series of sheds and outbuildings along the roadway to the west. A stone retaining wall, a walkway, and frame structure are noted east of the Dorsey house. No pier of wharf is shown at the terminus of the road. The site of the Dorsey house may be in the same location that became The Cliffs Hotel.¹⁰⁵



Detail of road plat showing vicinity of terminus of Governors Run Road, 1931. (Source: Plats.net)¹⁰⁶

The last mention of the remnants of the old wharf at Governors Run is a newspaper item from 1930. After experiencing engine trouble, the 36-foot motor cruiser Patricia anchored in the bay off Governors Run. As storm winds increased over night, the boat dragged anchor and “crashed into old pier piles about a quarter mile offshore.” As the boat sank, the four men abandoned the vessel and managed to swim ashore.¹⁰⁷

The August 1933 hurricane wreaked havoc throughout the tidewater. At Governors Run, nine rental cottages belonging to George W. Dorsey were swept into the bay and many pleasure boats were destroyed.¹⁰⁸



Rental cottages at Governors Run, ca. 1920s (Source: Calvert Marine Museum)¹⁰⁹

Endnotes

¹ The name *Governors Run* often appears in historical accounts as the singular possessive form *Governor's Run*, and occasionally as *Governor Run*. In this document, the historical form is used in contemporary quotations or when referring the formal name of the Governor's Run Wharf Company. Otherwise, it will be expressed as *Governors Run*, as requested by the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail (PCHT) project. The PCHT follows the *Principles, Policies, and Procedures of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names*: "Apostrophes suggesting possession or association are discouraged within the body of a proper geographic name (Henry's Fork: not Henry's Fork)."

² Swepson Earle, *The Chesapeake Bay Country*, Thompson-Ellis Co., Baltimore: 1923: 171

³ Calvert County Circuit Court, Articles of Incorporation, liber SS1, folios 0341-0342)

⁴ "Mr. Williams Honored," *Calvert Gazette*, 05/25/1901: 3

⁵ Calvert County Circuit Court, Articles of Incorporation, liber SS 1, folios 0222-0224

⁶ Calvert County Circuit Court, Articles of Incorporation, liber SS 6, folios 0477-0480

⁷ Calvert County Circuit Court, liber SS 1, folios 0070-0071

⁸ "Maryland Affairs," *Baltimore Sun*, 05/24/1871: 1

⁹ "Weems' Transportation Line Fall Arrangement," *St. Mary's Beacon*, 09/14/1871: 3

¹⁰ "Postponed Trustee's Sale of Valuable Real Estate on the Chesapeake Bay, in Calvert County," *Baltimore Sun*, 05/07/1855: 3

¹¹ "Classified," *Baltimore Sun*, 04/29/1856: 2; "Resumption of Travel," *Baltimore Sun*, 03/03/1857: 4

¹² "Affairs in Calvert County," *Baltimore Sun*, 10/28/1868: 3

¹³ "For Rent," *Baltimore Sun*, 06/15/1875: 3; 09/16/1875: 3

¹⁴ "From Washington," *Baltimore Sun*, 12/22/1886: 1

¹⁵ "Calvert County, Maryland, Tercentenary Edition, 1654-1954," *Calvert Independent*: 216

¹⁶ "Mail Delivery by Steamtug," *Calvert Gazette*, 02/23/1895: 3

¹⁷ "A Cigar Box Full of Cents," *Calvert Gazette*, 02/19/1898: 3

¹⁸ "Calvert County, Maryland, Tercentenary Edition, 1654-1954," *Calvert Independent*: 216

¹⁹ "Strikes at Bay Trade," *Baltimore Sun*, 01/25/1908: 7

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- ²⁰ “Where to Get Fish,” *Calvert Gazette*, 08/28/1886: 3
- ²¹ “Oyster House,” *Calvert Gazette*, 11/27/1886: 3
- ²² “Best on the Market,” *Calvert Gazette*, 03/29/1890: 3
- ²³ “Fresh Fish” *Calvert Gazette*, 04/13/1889: 3
- ²⁴ “Saturday’s Storm,” *Calvert Journal*, 04/13/1889: 3
- ²⁵ “Local Brevities,” *Calvert Gazette*, 10/15/1892: 3
- ²⁶ “Chesapeake Bay Fishery Law,” *Calvert Gazette*, 05/21/1904: 3
- ²⁷ CMM Fish & Fishing vertical history file: “Chesapeake Bay Fishing License, 1894: 89
- ²⁸ Calvert County Circuit Court, liber TBT 2, folio 119
- ²⁹ *Summer Homes and Historical Points Along the Routes of The Weems Steamboat Company*, Williams & Wilkins Company Press, Baltimore: 1897: 40, CMM MS 037, Box 1 Folder 1
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ “Country Board,” *Baltimore Sun*, 06/28/1889: 3
- ³² “Country Boarding,” *Baltimore Sun*, 06/16/1897: 3
- ³³ *ibid.*
- ³⁴ “Country Board,” *Baltimore Sun*, 06/27/1895: 3; (“Country Board,” *Baltimore Sun*, 06/16/1897: 3; (“Country Board,” *Baltimore Sun*, 06/20/1898: 3; (“Country Board,” *Baltimore Sun*, 05/27/1899: 3
- ³⁵ *Summer Homes and Historical Points Along the Routes of The Weems Steamboat Company*, 1897: 55
- ³⁶ “A Nicely Arranged Pamphlet,” *Calvert Journal*, 06/18/1898: 3
- ³⁷ “Country Board,” *Baltimore Sun*, 06/17/1901: 3
- ³⁸ “Country Board,” *Baltimore Sun*, 07/02/1902: 3
- ³⁹ Williams & Wilkins Company Press, Baltimore: 1897, Calvert Marine Museum Archives, CMM MS 037, Box 1 Folder 1)
- ⁴⁰ “Picnic,” *Calvert Gazette*, 08/17/1889: 3
- ⁴¹ “On The Chesapeake: A Mask Ball and Other Gayeties at Governor’s Run,” *Baltimore Sun*, 08/07/1900: 8
- ⁴² “Dance at Governor’s Run,” *Calvert Gazette*, 07/19/1902: 3
- ⁴³ “Tournament at Governor’s Run,” *Calvert Gazette*, 08/08/1903: 3
- ⁴⁴ “Tournament at Governor’s Run,” *Calvert Journal*, 09/03/1904: 3
- ⁴⁵ “Tournament and Ball,” *Calvert Journal*, 09/10/1904: 3
- ⁴⁶ “Fine Sport,” *Calvert Gazette*, 08/28/1886: 3
- ⁴⁷ Calvert Marine Museum Archives, CMM P-10603
- ⁴⁸ “About the Patuxent,” Baltimore, Chesapeake and Atlantic Railway Company and Maryland, Delaware and Virginia Railway Company, 1911: 54-57
- ⁴⁹ “Creditable,” *Maryland Republican*, 08/15/1874: 3
- ⁵⁰ “Severe Storm,” *Calvert Journal*, 09/23/1876: 3
- ⁵¹ “Dreadful Marine Disasters,” *Baltimore Sun*, 10/25/1878: 4
- ⁵² “Damaged by Storm,” *Calvert Journal*, 05/24/1879: 3
- ⁵³ “Weems Line of Steamers to the Patuxent River, Winter Arrangement,” *St. Mary’s Beacon*, 03/13/1879: 4
- ⁵⁴ “Governor’s Run Wharf,” *Calvert Gazette*, 02/13/1886: 3
- ⁵⁵ “Governor’s Run Wharf,” *Calvert Gazette*, 05/01/1886: 3
- ⁵⁶ “Wharf Improvements,” *Calvert Gazette*, 05/08/1886: 3
- ⁵⁷ “Local Brevities,” *Calvert Gazette*, 04/28/1888: 1
- ⁵⁸ “Maryland Items,” *Baltimore Sun*, 08/30/1886: 3
- ⁵⁹ “Governor’s Run Wharf,” *Calvert Gazette*, 07/28/1888: 3
- ⁶⁰ “Saturday’s Storm,” *Calvert Gazette*: 04/13/1889: 3
- ⁶¹ “Local Damage by the Storm,” *Calvert Journal*, 04/13/1889: 3
- ⁶² “Meeting of Stockholders,” *Calvert Journal*, 04/13/1889: 3
- ⁶³ “Local Brevities,” *Calvert Gazette*: 05/18/1889: 1
- ⁶⁴ “Monday’s Storm,” *Calvert Gazette*, 09/02/1893: 3
- ⁶⁵ “The Great Storm,” *Calvert Gazette*, 10/21/1893: 3
- ⁶⁶ “Local Brevities,” *Calvert Gazette*: 11/04/1893: 1
- ⁶⁷ “Local Brevities,” *Calvert Gazette*, 11/25/1893: 3
- ⁶⁸ “Wharf Wrecked,” *Calvert Gazette*, 02/20/1904
- ⁶⁹ “Weems Steamboat Company Spring 1904 Arrangement Patuxent River Route,” *Calvert Gazette*, 03/12/1904: 3
- ⁷⁰ “Tournament and Ball,” *Calvert Journal*, 09/10/1904: 3
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- ⁷² “Local Briefs,” *Calvert Journal* 01/20/1912: 1
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- ⁷⁴ “Terrific Tornado,” *Calvert Journal*, 04/06/1912: 1
- ⁷⁵ “Damage by Wind,” *Calvert Journal*, 07/27/1912: 1
- ⁷⁶ “Wharf Destroyed by Fire,” *Calvert Gazette*, 06/21/1919: 1; “Local Brevities,” *Calvert Gazette*, 12/06/1919: 1
- ⁷⁷ “The Ice Blockage Hampered Business,” *Calvert Gazette*, 01/31/1920: 1
- ⁷⁸ “Bay Wharves Damaged by Storm,” *Calvert Gazette*, 02/07/1920: 1
- ⁷⁹ “Many Wharves Damaged,” *Calvert Journal*, 02/14/1920: 1
- ⁸⁰ “Calvert County Wharves Wrecked,” *Baltimore Sun*, 02/07/1920: 2
- ⁸¹ University of Maryland Hornbake Library, Amoss Collection, #12311; Calvert Marine Museum Archives, P-11974
- ⁸² “Meeting of Stockholders,” *Calvert Journal*, 03/16/1889: 2
- ⁸³ “Meeting of Stockholders,” *Calvert Journal*, 04/13/1889: 3
- ⁸⁴ “Election of Directors,” *Calvert Gazette*, 01/12/1895: 3
- ⁸⁵ liber VCC 1, folio 301
- ⁸⁶ “Officers of Corporations,” *Calvert Gazette*, 01/10/1903: 3
- ⁸⁷ “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/07/1905: 3
- ⁸⁸ “New President for Weems Line,” *Baltimore Sun*, 10/13/1904: 7
- ⁸⁹ “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/07/1905: 3
- ⁹⁰ *Maryland Delaware & Virginia Railway Company Annual Report*, Statement of Freight and Passenger Revenue by Wharves for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31st, 1907. Original in private ownership, copy deposited in collections of Calvert Marine Museum.
- ⁹¹ “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/06/1906: 3; “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/12/1907: 3; “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/11/1908: 3; “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/09/1909: 3; “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/08/1910: 3
- ⁹² “Local Briefs,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/07/1911: 1; “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/06/1912: 3; “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/11/1913: 3; “Local Briefs,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/10/1914: 1
- ⁹³ “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Gazette*, 01/03/1916: 1
- ⁹⁴ “Officers of Corporations,” *Calvert Gazette*, 01/06/1917: 1
- ⁹⁵ “Stockholders Meetings,” *Calvert Journal*, 01/12/1918: 1
- ⁹⁶ MdHR T-1211, Box 8, 1916 Survey Record: 27
- ⁹⁷ Maryland State Archives, MdHR T-1211, Box 8, 1916 Survey Record: 27
- ⁹⁸ “LETTERS TO THE EDITOR,” *Baltimore Sun*, 02/28/1924: 10
- ⁹⁹ “Public Sale of Wharf Property,” *Calvert Gazette*, 10/31/1925: 1; 11/07/1925: 1
- ¹⁰⁰ Calvert County Circuit Court, liber AAH 8, folio 0282
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- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*
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- ¹⁰⁴ Betsy and Don Kehne, “Bay Summers Cast Long Memories,” *New Bay Times*, 09/07/1994: 12-13
- ¹⁰⁵ Calvert County Circuit Court, Plat Book AAH 1, folio 0014
- ¹⁰⁶ Road plat AAH 1/14, Governors Run Road, 1931
- ¹⁰⁷ “Four Quit Boat in Bay Sorm; Swim Ashore,” *Baltimore Sun*, 11/05/1930: 26
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- ¹⁰⁹ Calvert Marine Museum Archives, CMM P-10607